

# Myers Park, Grand Suburb for Charlotte

## CHARLOTTE:

Charlotte already had a walkable town center similar to Nolen's vision. So he turned his attention to planning wise growth at the city's edges:

- A system of belt-roads and greenway parks, beginning with Independence Park (1905), to draw all people together.
- The Myers Park neighborhood (1911), a model for residential districts designed with nature.

"Is Charlotte to lead or to follow?"

- John Nolen's challenge to the city



"It is pleasant to talk with Mr. Nolen. He lives close to nature. His ideas and ideals are fresh and clean. In his mind's eye he is always looking at the woods, the field, the flowering shrubs, and all the beauties of nature... and better still, he possesses the faculty of making others see as he does."

- Charlotte Observer, 1906



• Nolen's 1917 Charlotte Plan shows greenways. The meandering green band on the right side of the drawing is Sugar Creek Greenway - finally under construction today!

## INDEPENDENCE PARK AND A CITY PLAN:

Charlotte built John Nolen's Independence Park, but did not heed his call for a system of parks and boulevards. Today the city is rediscovering Nolen's wisdom.

- On Nolen's 1917 city plan, note the network of greenways along creek-beds, uniting all neighborhoods. Charlotte is now building a greenway system.
- Note also the "Boulevard" circling the city's edge. Nolen envisioned tree-lined "belt roads" - an idea ignored until construction of (much less elegant) I-277 and I-485.



• None of Nolen's drawings survive for Independence Park. Shown here is a 2005 view from Hawthorne Lane, between 7th Street and Presbyterian Hospital.

"Country Homes and Country Air, Twenty Minutes from the Square"

- Myers Park sales brochure, 1910s

Charlotte, a fast-growing little cotton and banking town of barely 20,000 people in 1900, had leaders with vision.

They brought John Nolen down from Massachusetts to plan the city's first public park. He returned again and again, ultimately creating the landmark suburb of Myers Park starting in 1911.

With real estate developer George Stephens, Nolen transformed 1000 acres of almost treeless fields into a tree-shaded neighborhood of lasting beauty.

## ✿ Designing Myers Park



In the 1912 aerial drawing of Myers Park, above, note that most of the land was open fields!

### Can you find:

- Queens (Presbyterian) College, left?
- Providence Road, lower edge?
- Queens Road (with streetcar line in black), winding through the center?
- Parks?
- Small shopping center (never built), lower left?

Myers Park, begun in 1911, became one of Nolen's most influential successes. Its curving streets harmonized with nature, a model for hundreds of later neighborhoods in Charlotte and across the South.

"Myers Park, adjoining Charlotte, NC, is a new suburb created along distinctive lines, designed aright from the first, and influenced only by the best in modern town planning."

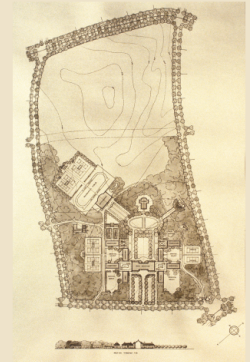
- John Nolen, "New Towns for Old"



## QUEENS COLLEGE:

In the heart of Myers Park, John Nolen planned a handsome campus for Queens College (far right). He arranged the buildings in an "H" shape - creating a front quadrangle and a rear quadrangle.

Later at UNC Chapel Hill in 1918, Nolen used the double-quadrangle idea again (top) - proposing a new rear quadrangle anchored by Wilson Library (building A, top).



"In Myers Park, John Nolen discarded the old Charlotte grid, which he termed 'unnatural checkerboard streets on an undulating surface.' He abandoned geometry altogether and instead drew gently curving avenues that followed the land."

- Mary Heall, "Legacy: The Myers Park Story"



## LOST?:

Why do Myers Park streets seem so confusing?

John Nolen intentionally created a street system that welcomed residents but kept non-residents away.

Later engineers routed traffic through Myers Park - something Nolen never wanted.

"A network of residential byways fed into a 110-foot-wide grand boulevard named Queens Road, the neighborhood's spine. Its grassy median ... carried the tracks of the electric streetcar line. Nolen planned Queens Road in a huge loop ... to put mass transit within two blocks walk of every house."

- Myers Park Historic District, National Register of Historic Places



## ALL THOSE TREES:

Hard to believe today, but tree-shaded Myers Park was originally a tree-less cotton farm!

Millionaire James B. Duke (founder of Duke Energy) loaned



carts and crews to help Charlotte's Harkey Nursery move mature trees to line the avenues.



# JOHN NOLEN: Neighborhood-Maker

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