

Published June 5th, 2013

## A Great Place to Stay: Orinda's Sleepy Hollow Neighborhood

By Cathy Dausman



With 150 years of Sleepy Hollow residency among them are, from left: Barbara Ward, Elva Rust and Andy Amstutz. Photo Cathy Dausman

There's something special about the Sleepy Hollow neighborhood so many call home. Barbara Ward, who grew up in Sleepy Hollow, attended Sleepy Hollow Elementary School, Pine Grove Middle School and Miramonte High School said, "I don't expect to ever leave." She moved away once, but is now back living down the block from where she grew up. Resident Andy Amstutz, who moved to Sleepy Hollow in 1968, put it simply: "We feel like we have roots here."

Well known neighbors have included the owners of Boysen Paints and Long's Drugs; even author Washington Irving plays a part. While other Lamorinda neighborhoods bear Spanish or nature-oriented street names, Sleepy Hollow residents live on Ichabod Lane and Crane Court, or Van Tassel Lane, Washington, and Irving Lanes, Sleepy Hollow, Van Ripper or Van Tassel Lanes. And the tree growth has transformed bare California hillsides into a forest glen.

Once, there was very little natural vegetation. In the days before central air conditioning "the hillsides were [originally] so barren and people were hungry for shade," said original owner Nancy Du Puis. Her family purchased their Sleepy Hollow home in the early 1950s. "Now, they

take out trees," she added.

Sleepy Hollow in its present form - 457 homes spread across 599 acres - was developed in the early 1950s. A private swim club and a public elementary school lie within its boundaries, and the Sleepy Hollow Book Club is still active after 60 years.

The neighborhood originally was called Sleepy Hollow Syndicate when developer John Allen began building in the 1920s. He placed stone gates standing 12 feet high at Miner Road and Lombardy Lane. Richard Rheem began buying Sleepy Hollow Syndicate land in the 1930s, when he and his brother noticed the area's seemingly perpetual sunshine. By 1937, Rheem owned at least 705 acres.

In the mid-1940s a new, lower set of stone gates marked the perimeter; those still stand.

Some Sleepy Hollow land was earmarked for recreational use. Du Puis said early residents talked the Rheems into setting aside a parcel for a neighborhood swimming pool. The Sleepy Hollow Swim Club was built on that land in 1955. Founding members and heirs were granted free membership, Du Puis said. She remembers a 1960s controversy over whether to add tennis courts on site. Members feared an increase in dues, but ultimately, the courts went in, and the club was re-named Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club.

Members recently celebrated the completion of a \$3 million revitalization project, including two new swimming pools and tennis court renovations (see related story, page A1).

Many Sleepy Hollow lots were zoned as one-acre or half-acre parcels until the late 1960s. "The [oversized] Boysen lot is now subdivided, after that terrible fire in which Mrs. Boysen and her father died," said Du Puis. The property still referred to as the Long's Estate was also oversized. Public records show the Long family trust sold the home in 2001. The estate was listed as an 8,470-square-foot home on a 12-acre parcel of land.

Sleepy Hollow Homeowner's Association co-president Wayne Hill said there is "a lot of new blood" in the development as original owners move out and sell to young families. The association is charged with promoting neighborhood communication; something they've done through the online website NextDoor. The association also participates in the Firewise program, training volunteers to inform neighbors about how to eliminate ladder fuels in their yards.

An annual neighborhood barbecue at Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club helps promote community involvement, he said.

Sleepy Hollow Book Club member Patty Moore said their club is one of the oldest in Contra Costa County. Moore joined when she started chauffeuring her mother-in-law to meetings. The group was originally composed of young mothers who were "short on time to read." They met mid-morning, once a month when kindergarten was in session, to hear a book review from one member who read one book. The club still adheres to that format and schedule.

Sleepy Hollow Elementary School, one of four Orinda Union School District elementary schools, is perched on a hilltop. Built in 1953, the K-5 school has a student body of 390. Principal Ken Gallegos said the current enrollment includes grandchildren and children of alumni, and students usually hear the story of Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" each October.

How perfect is that?

The next Lamorinda neighborhood featured will be Lafayette's Burton Valley.

To learn more about the history of the Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club, see the Lamorinda Weekly story, "Preserving a Community Gem - The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Continues," at [www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0616/Preserving-a-Community-Gem-The-Legend-of-Sleepy-Hollow-Continues.html](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0616/Preserving-a-Community-Gem-The-Legend-of-Sleepy-Hollow-Continues.html).



"We have neat street signs [in Sleepy Hollow]," said Sleepy Hollow Homeowner's Association co-president Wayne Hill. "They're not the traditional wooden ones but curved..." Photos Cathy Dausman



Reach the reporter at: [cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA