

## TRANSCRIPT

**SCRC Series:** Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

**Field Notes:** William Malloy Arnold, Jr. (compiled October 27, 2008)

**Interviewee:** WILLIAM MALLOY (“BILL”) ARNOLD, JR.

**Interviewer:** Yona R. Owens

**Interview Date:** Tuesday, September 9, 2008

**Location:** Sanford, North Carolina

**Length:** Approximately 19 minutes

This interview for the Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project was conducted at Bill Arnold’s home office. Arnold has had a long career as a land developer at Carolina Lakes, Southport, and others. Lewis Clarke did master plan work for Arnold.

YO: Okay, this is an oral history with Bill Arnold in September 2008 at his home at Carolina Trace in Sanford, North Carolina. And Bill, I’d like to start off with our standard first question: tell me a little bit about where you’re from and how you got interested in real estate development.

BA: Well, Yona, I was born about six miles from where we’re sitting in the town of Jonesboro, North Carolina, which was annexed into the City of Sanford in 1947. I was born at home in my mother’s bedroom in 1933, March the sixteenth. So I’ve been from this area all my life. I got interested in real estate with a friend named Truby Proctor and we did several small real estate projects. Then I got into a specialty contracting business. In 1965, my company was installing irrigation systems in golf courses and I traveled North, South Carolina, and Virginia primarily, looking for work for the company and getting things lined up. I saw projects, larger projects and began to think about the property that I had back here back in Lee County that I knew that I could build a sizeable lake on the property. I saw, particularly one project that I remember was called Lake of the Woods and it was probably about twenty miles west of Fredericksburg, Virginia. They had about a four hundred acre lake, had put in a golf course and were selling lots. So this is sort of how I got interested in doing a larger size subdivision.

YO: So, it was on your own property that you built your lake?

BA: I had, by the time I started Carolina Trace, accumulated six hundred and thirty-four acres of land and I got other people that owned property to go in with me and, and some put in land and some put in money. So that’s the way that I got started here.

YO: So whenever we look back to before it was Carolina Trace there was no lake?

BA: No, no lake, just a big farm that I lived on. I built my first house in this area in 1956 and it was a log cabin. I built about four to five acre pond and the log cabin was on that pond.

YO: Is it still around? The log cabin?

BA: Yes, it's, it's still there. It's within the subdivision now.

YO: No kidding.

BA: Yep.

YO: I didn't know that. Well, how did you meet Lewis Clarke?

BA: I think it was in 1968, I was out trying to meet prospects that were building golf courses and I was at an old hunting camp on Hilton Head Island. I think the man that I met there I believe his name was White. I can't remember a first name but I, of course, was talking to him trying to learn more about the possibility of my company getting the contract for the irrigation system on that golf course. This man began to tell me about this man from Raleigh named, Lewis Clarke. He was doing the overall land plan for a project that became known as Palmetto Dunes. So that was the first that I had ever heard Lewis' name mentioned. And I knew a lot of the golf course architects at this time that were working over the southeast and—

YO: What were some of their names?

BA: Well, there was Mr. Ellis Maples, a Mr. Cobb—they're the two that come to mind right off. So then I knew of this land planner. So as Carolina Trace got started —the actual beginning was on March the twentieth, 1969— we started with about eleven hundred acres. And in just a short time maybe six months we had about seventeen to eighteen hundred acres. Then somewhere along the line we made contact with Lewis and he came down and he was real excited about doing the overall land plan for the job.

YO: What did you think of him when he came up with some of his first ideas?

BA: Well, they were real interesting to me. No one had ever suggested, even thought about building anything of such magnitude within this county. I, of course, had seen what was being done at Palmetto Dunes in South Carolina and other places around the country. So I was real interested in him.

YO: And, and did your other investors buy into some of his ideas?

BA: Yeah, they all sort of went along with me and we ended up hiring him with the stipulation, I think, that fifty percent of his pay would be issued in stock in the development corporation. So we hired Lewis as the overall land planner and then hired a golf course architect also.

YO: And which, which architect did you hire?

BA: Robert Trent Jones. He has a son living now that's still in the business, but this was the old man.

YO: How did you get Robert Trent Jones interested in a golf course in Lee County?

BA: At that time there were two other courses in North Carolina that Robert Trent Jones had done. One was at Duke University and one was somewhere in Charlotte. I think Lewis was possibly more responsible than anyone else for getting Mr. Jones to come in and do it.

YO: Because he's like number one golf course design man, right?

BA: Yeah, yeah. So Mr. Jones also took half of his fee in stock in the development corporation.

YO: Well, from the time that you started in 1969 how long was it before you were built out?

BA: I believe that would be 1987 that the corporation finally discontinued operation here in the project.

YO: That's quite a lifetime.

BA: Yep.

YO: Did you ever think that it would end or did you see it lasting out that long?

BA: Well, I just didn't really have any idea what it was gonna take. I didn't know.

YO: How many residences are there now?

BA: Last I heard there's one thousand six hundred and twenty something, which is about three thousand people and Carolina Trace is now twenty four hundred acres. So there's still sixty-seven hundred lots in the project to be built on.

YO: Now how does Carolina Trace differ from Carolina Lakes?

BA: Well, Carolina Lakes is not quite as big. They both have a golf course. They both have a lake, and they both have a club house for the people that live there, and they're both gated communities. So there's not a lot of big difference in them.

YO: And did the same investors that did Carolina Trace do Carolina Lakes as well?

BA: Part of them did. Some of them did that and some of them, some of them did not.

YO: How many acres are the lakes?

BA: I don't remember. The lake at Carolina Trace is just a little over three hundred acres. I don't remember the lake at Carolina Lakes how big, I don't think it's quite as big.

YO: But the important thing to know is that they're manmade lakes?

BA: Yes.

YO: Makes me wonder where did all the water come from?

BA: Well, now the water in the lake at Carolina Trace comes from Upper Little River. It flows through the property. It's a small river so that's dammed up to form this lake.

YO: Well, it's just truly beautiful. It's something else to see. What makes Carolina Lakes different from other planned communities?

BA: Yona, I don't know that it would be different. I don't see a difference.

YO: It was one of the first ones though in the area, isn't it?

BA: Carolina Trace was the first one and then Carolina Lakes came along a few years after that.

YO: So it was like the template that everybody was following that came after that right?

BA: I don't know whether they were following it or not. I don't really know.

YO: Well, Carolina Lakes has a premium position in the planned communities and the recreational communities around golf courses. You mentioned Palmetto Dunes that there were a lot of innovations done there, but Carolina Lakes excuse me Carolina Trace stands out at this point of being one of the premium recreational residential developments in the Southeast. It's up there in the top. Sometimes we get so close to it we forget where it stands in things. What other projects did you work on with Lewis?

BA: Well, the next one that I did after the Carolina Trace project was a coastal marina in Southport, North Carolina. The marina was owned and operated by the North Carolina State Ports Authority. They were having problems there and —let me back up a minute and say that I got interested in, in boating, but I got interested in boating through, through Lewis. He had a beautiful boat called *The Happy Days* and I spent several weekends with him on his boat. Then I got a boat and got interested in boating and kept my boat for a while at Southport and saw what was going on there, and saw an opportunity. And Lewis helped me with that. He came up with some real interesting designs and even down to a brochure. He helped me write a brochure for the area and things of that nature. With his drawings of what we could do with the marina, I went before the State Ports Authority and displayed these drawings and showed them what we had in mind and, and they agreed to lease me the property for thirty years. I think what really sold them on it was the drawings that Lewis had done showing what we could do with the property and what we could turn it into. So it worked real good for me and I operated it for ten years and then sold the corporation that owned the lease on the marina. I sold it to a Mr. Benson from Raleigh and he continued on for nine more years until his death and then his family kept it for the rest of the twenty years.

YO: Did Lewis' ideas affect other projects that you were involved in?

BA: Oh, it sure did. The one project that he worked with us on was in Santee, South Carolina and we never did get that one off the ground. But it would have been a beautiful project. I still keep

the business plan on that project and, and some of the drawings on it and look at it many times and wished we could have gone forward with it.

YO: What was that project about?

BA: It was on a large lake, Lake Marion. It was right beside Interstate I-95 and it was about hunting and fishing and we were going to cater to the fisherman and to the hunter and do a multitude of things there.

YO: That one just hadn't got off the ground yet, right?

BA: Well, we never could get it off the ground so we got out of it.

YO: What's an important thing to know about Lewis Clarke?

BA: What's an important thing to know? Well, he's got ideas that you won't see anywhere else and he can certainly come up with plans. I call him a visionary. He's able to look at something and able to draw a picture of it and envision things that can be done with it.

YO: Did you ever run into anybody else that could do that?

BA: Not, not like he could, no.

YO: That's pretty remarkable, right?

BA: Right.

YO: What's an important thing to know about Bill Arnold?

BA: Well, I reckon that's just for me to know.

YO: Okay, well, that's my last question. Is there anything you'd like to add?

BA: Well, Lewis did help me a little bit with some other projects, but it was just more or less in referrals to me and things of that nature. He was retired. So I did some other things and, and some of the people that used to work with him did the work for me. But Lewis—I certainly will say that Lewis will be one of the most unforgettable characters I've ever met.

YO: Well, Bill, thank you for your time today. I appreciate it.

BA: Alright, thank you.

Transcriber: Jennifer Curasi

Date: December 7, 2008