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Skinner family shaped the city

Tradition of development touched Jacksonville

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In between the birth of the city of Jacksonville in 1822 and the first powered aircraft in 1903, the first car hit the road thanks to Karl Benz, Alexander Graham Bell patented the first telephone, and Arthur C. Skinner moved from Georgetown, South Carolina, to Jacksonville.

It's difficult to go almost anywhere in Jacksonville without running into something the Skinner family has touched. A. Chester "Chip" Skinner III said his father, who died in 2020 at 98 years old, was the "family historian," but he recalled some of the Skinners' history in Jacksonville.

The great-grandson of the Richard Green Skinner said his great-grandfather worked in timber and was searching for pine trees for the business when he arrived in Jacksonville.

Though he had less than a \$1,000 in his pocket, according to a Times-Union story written in 2000, he was able to create his empire of pine trees south and east of the St. Johns River.

After he and his wife died less than a decade later, the seven sons they left behind, who all worked in the family business, were given different parcels of land in Jacksonville.

The oldest was only 24, and four of the brothers were still in school at the time, but the seven children each inherited a piece of land that became intertwined with Jacksonville's history.

A history of development

Each of the seven family units had their own portions of land all over the southside of Jacksonville — 50,000 acres spanning from Dupont Avenue almost to the intercoastal.

The largest sections of land went to Arthur Chester Skinner Sr. and to Richard Green Skinner Jr. Most of the land remained in the hands of those two family units of the Skinner family until the late 20th century, eventually being sold off.

Different portions of the land became many things over the course of time — including two dairy farms, Meadowbrooks Farms and Skinners Dairy — and as the decades passed and new generations took over land, it shifted more.

The Skinner family donated portions of land, too, from rights-of-way on J. Turner Butler and Southside boulevards to almost 800 acres at the University of North Florida to Baker Skinner Park.



Jacksonville philanthropist Arthur Chester Skinner Jr. passed away in 2020 at age 98. PROVIDED BY THE SKINNER FAMILY

"We have always tried to work with the state and city in [development]," Skinner said. "We've always had very good relationships with everyone."

Skinner said it's important to know how things evolved and who was able to make it happen.

Portions of Skinner family land also are at the foundation of St. Johns Town Center as well as nearby commercial developments — and more is still to come.

A little over 1,000 acres are left from the original land holdings from Skinner's great-grandfather, Skinner said. All other properties are gone now through various sales or donations over the decades.

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Skinner family shaped the city (continued)

The first sale of Skinner land was in 1993, Skinner said. It could be another 10 or 15 years before the last of it is all sold, and then it will need to be developed.

Generations of Skinners have been about helping to develop the community and meeting their “responsibility to the city.”

“Our land represented our family,” Skinner said.

What’s yet to come

ICI Homes and David Weekley Homes are using the land to develop Seven Pines, a master-planned community of about 1,060 acres in the southeast quadrant of Butler Boulevard and Interstate 295.

Seven Pines is named for the seven brothers and the pine trees that were

originally so important to the Skinner family and Jacksonville’s history. The tagline for the community, “a legacy of gathering,” is meant to symbolize the importance of people coming together, Skinner said.

Once completed, Seven Pines will include 1,600 single-family homes, apartments, more than 1 million square feet of commercial and retail space and a 34-acre park with a lake.

Mori Hosseini, chairman and CEO of ICI Homes, said he has known the Skinner family for about two decades.

“The Skinner family wants their legacy to be one which leaves an indelible mark that will have a positive impact on the Jacksonville area for generations to come,” Hosseini said. “In 43 years in business, I’ve never seen a

family that was so detailed on what they wanted to see in the master plan.”

Hosseini said the family took at least a year to work on the master plan for Seven Pines and most of the family members showed up to meetings on a weekly or every-other-week basis to go through the steps together.

“They’re a fantastic family,” Hosseini said. “They have a huge impact in Jacksonville.”

Residential areas are going in with home sales starting now at Seven Pines, and commercial development plans will follow.

“We’re hoping to see a community here,” Skinner said. “We would like to think we’ve been a big part of Jacksonville’s history.” •

