

Take a stroll down historic Bronson Boulevard, home to Kalamazoo's first 20th century suburb

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Bronson Boulevard winds for more than 2-1/2 miles through hilly terrain, the road following the valley and climbing up to the southwest. Homes here date mostly from the prosperity of the Roaring '20s or the explosive growth following World War II. This was a neighborhood that represented the city's first naturalistic 20th century suburb, laid out and paid for by developers waiting to plot the land and build homes.

Until after World War II, the city of Kalamazoo ended just a little north of Whites Road at a line that originally marked the southern edge of the "Indian Reserve." This rolling hilly area had few homes and few owners at the end of the 19th century. The quick growth of Kalamazoo after 1900 encouraged continuing interest in building new homes — and the profit that could come to developers.

In 1911, the city of Kalamazoo was approached by a group of developers including several prominent businessmen — the Kalamazoo Improvement Company with Charles Hays as well as Central Michigan Nursery and Nellie Myers, who owned much of the land. They proposed to build a road at their own expense through the hills at the south edge of the city as a connection between Crane Park and the Kalamazoo Country Club.

As the Kalamazoo Gazette reported on Feb. 20th in a front page story, "The new boulevard is to start at Maple Street at the base of South West Street hill and run southwesterly through a beautifully wooded glen with grades ranging from 2-1/2 to 4 percent up to the Whites Lake Road."

Work began during the summer of 1912, cutting through the trees and laying out a road 64 feet wide.

Many of the homes along Bronson Boulevard have a traditional Colonial influence in the architecture, with return cornices, strong symmetry and details like shutters even on some of the later ranch-style homes. The home at 3538 Bronson, built for [Dr. R. J. Hubbell](#), displays these architectural features, though the material was "thoroughly modern" haydite blocks and concrete construction that makes "the interior partitions non-load bearing." These materials also had the added benefit of being virtually fireproof. Jerry DeNooyer's home, built at 4030 Bronson Boulevard in 1946, used a similar construction, but the exterior was clad in bricks and three-sided bay windows.

Bronson Boulevard was the first naturalistic development after the turn of the century and it remains a pleasant drive through beautifully wooded glens.