

Benjamin Franklin Burdett, the founder of Brookwood Hills, was born on January 23, 1861 in Sandy Springs, Georgia, known then as Oak Grove, Georgia (he passed in 1935). He was the first son born to Samuel Ike Burdett, who served in the Confederate army. Benjamin's schooling during the Reconstruction period after the Civil War would have been limited as children needed to help on family farms. Their schooling would at best be the equivalent of a six-grade education.

This 1871 photo shows Benjamin Franklin Burdett (center) with his brothers, all dressed in their Sunday best. Benjamin's left arm is held in an unnatural way, with a strange bending position and gloved hand. This may have been an attempt to disguise a disability. There is no oral history on what happened to his arm, only conjecture. Whatever the cause, photos taken in 1910 show clearly that his left arm had been amputated. His lack of his arm and a formal education did not hold him back: it appears to have given him a strong drive to succeed.

At age 21 in 1882, Benjamin married Arminda Millie Spruill, whose family lived on an adjacent Oak Grove farm. Once again, he suffered hardships of the time. He and Arminda lost their first daughter at eleven months. Their second daughter passed away at birth, and Arminda died four days later in 1884.

At age 24 in 1885, Ben Burdett then married Jennie Angeline Reed (1867-1927), who was a first cousin of Arminda Spruill. Their marriage produced nine children; their first child was named Arthur Clinton Burdett.

By the turn of the century, Benjamin had established a career in land appraisal and real estate. Now known as B.F. Burdett, he was highly successful. His connection to the Spruill family, who were very prominent in Sandy Springs, likely assisted with his early real estate dealings in the area.

In 1900, he and Jennie built a large brick mansion with several porches on 400 acres in Sandy Springs. Their home had architectural flair, and was beautifully landscaped with oaks, flowering trees and shrubs. This was the start of his lifelong passion for gardening and landscaping. In 1903 he added on responsibilities serving on the executive committee of Oak Grove/Sandy Springs.

In 1904, B.F. purchased the namesake natural spring of Sandy Springs. The spring had long provided recreation for its adjacent communities. B.F. likely had a great appreciation for what a swimming amenity could add to a community's quality of life.

In 1909, B.F. Burdett relocated his real estate business from the Sandy Springs area to Atlanta and his son Arthur had joined the business. In 1910 he purchased a Hansen Six automobile, the first car purchased by a resident of Sandy Springs. This facilitated his commuting to Atlanta and efforts to build business there.

In 1912, B.F. Burdett and E.F. Chambless purchased 40 acres of land from the A.J. Collier Estate. This first tract of land would become the cornerstone of Brookwood Hills. In 1916 Arthur Burdett became the sales manager of the firm.

In 1917, B.F. and his wife sold their family homestead in Sandy Springs and moved with their five still-at-home children to an established farmstead at 1857 Peachtree Street, very close to today's Brookwood Hills.

In 1920, his son Arthur bought out the Chambliss stake from the Collier Estate and helped broker a second tract of 25 acres for Brookwood Hills. By 1922, B.F. had finished the plan for an enclave neighborhood, similar to Druid Hills, and hired O.F. Kaufman, a civil engineer to design its lot and street layout. For early sales, B.F. drew attention to the area by holding automobile auctions at the site.

In 1922, construction began on Brookwood Hills. In 1925 a last tract was purchased, known as the Brookwood Hills Extension as the Burdett partnership merged into a corporation with officers, with B.F. serving as President and A.C. as Executive Vice President. The corporation officers included several family businessmen.

There are many aspects of the Brookwood Hills design that reflect the imprint of Benjamin Franklin Burdett's experience of growing up in the hamlet of Oak Grove. Among them are a family-focused community, a water amenity in a gathering place, and the extensive use of oak trees as a landscape feature.