

Condominiums: From Ancient Rome!



By Brian Madigan

As just about everyone knows condominiums had their origins in ancient Rome. In fact, you can find that type of reference on just about one half of the brochures for new condominium developers.

So, I suppose the question is: ***is this true?*** Did condominiums come from ancient Rome? Well, perhaps it's half true. The word "condominium" is a Latin word. However, it is like the word "webominium" which means that you own a small part of a larger website. Now, when it comes to the Romans they didn't really have webominiums or for that matter condominiums either.

Since so many people simply *KNOW* that it's true, why do I say otherwise?

In 1961, Charles Ramsey commented on new trends in Co-Op's, and he wrote the following:

"There has recently appeared in the United States a new word to describe an ancient concept of ownership of real property. The word is "condominium," and while it is new to us in the sense that it is not found among the pages of our numerous treatises on the law of real property, the concept of property ownership to which it pertains is literally as old as the hills—the hills of ancient Rome, where it is said to have had its beginning."

You might think that Charles Ramsey was a Professor of ancient history at Harvard or Yale. But, you'd be wrong. Mr. Ramsey was a Clerk (title officer) for the Chicago Title Company and he was asked by his employer to write a short pamphlet about condominiums. Like most people, he thought that the word "condominium" sounded rather like a Latin word. Not being much of a scholar, when it came time to quoting his source he simply commented "where it is said to have had its beginning." So much for historical scholarship!

As time went by, the Chicago Title Company underwrote condominium title policies, their pamphlet was widely distributed and Mr. Ramsey was promoted. Within a few short years he became known as an expert in the field. And, because he was such an expert, no one challenged his theories about ancient Rome. He made speeches about condominiums and began to add some embellishments to

the story, but again he never provided any sources.

However, you really should know:

- There were no condominiums in ancient Rome
- There was nothing like the horizontal ownership of real property
- No Latin scholars have found original sources to support the theory
- This type of property ownership was not used in the middle ages when Roman Law was the trend in Europe

So, the interesting question remains: Is this false advertising?

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