Chapter III

An Overview of Post-World War II Housing and its Significance in Newton, Massachusetts

by Neil Larson

The following text was written as a part of a 2001 study of The Demolition Delay Ordinance and post-World War II Housing in Newton, Massachusetts, funded by a CLG grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, with the intention that it will serve as a stand-alone essay for purposes of public education about the historic resource this housing comprises.

A Brief History Of Post-World War II Housing

More houses were built in Newton in the years immediately following World War II than in any other city in the Commonwealth. In 1950, more new houses were constructed in Newton than in any single previous year. This is according to the narrative description contained in the National Register Nomination Form amending the Newton Multiple Resource Area for the period of significance 1908-1940.

City records show that nearly 4000 additions were made to the city's housing stock in the decade 1950-1959, again more than any previous decade. From this information, it is evident that the post-WWII Era (1945-1960) represents an important period of development in Newton. And in this way, Newton convincingly illustrates the patterns of growth, innovative designs and methods of construction, and domestic reform distinctive to this historic period of American community building and architecture. Because of the relatively recent and revolutionary nature of this phenomenon, it is only now that histories and critical assessments are emerging by which Newton's post-WWII-era resources can be effectively contextualized and evaluated for significance.

Newton reflects the broader conditions that existed nationwide in suburban residential communities at the close of World War II. There was a tremendous housing shortage. A pent-up demand for single-family houses, created by a scarcity of building materials during the war, was greatly exaggerated when ten million American service men and women were discharged in 1945 and 1946. Two and one-half million reunited families and recently married couples moved in with relatives. The National Housing Agency estimated that five million new housing units were needed immediately with 12.5 million required over the next decade. War veterans returned to their hometowns with a very different outlook than when they left. They had lost their youthfulness and were intent upon claiming their part of the American Dream as reward for their sacrifices overseas. They wanted good jobs, security for their families, and homes to own. Many were starting from scratch. And the nation was committed to meeting their needs. In so doing the conception and design of houses and communities, as well as the pattern of domestic life, were transformed forever.

The United States government played a pivotal role in the housing boom of the post-WWII era. This was largely the result of the Veterans Administration's decision in 1944 to issue mortgage guarantees for discharged servicemen. The VA-backed mortgages provided 30-year loans for 85% of the cost of a new house, which represented an extraordinary reform of traditional mortgage practice. Prior to this, banks would seldom make a loan of more than half of a house's value and then for only five years or less. In addition, because of the government's insurance of mortgages to veterans, interest rates dropped considerably. This mortgage financing was administered by the Federal Housing Administration, and their concern for economy precipitated direct governmental involvement in the design and construction of housing under their jurisdiction. President Harry S. Truman signed the Federal Housing Act into law in 1949 to achieve "the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." Since the FHA would only insure mortgages granted on single-family homes in suburban settings, they essentially dictated the kind of housing that would proliferate under the Federal housing program. And because they desired to keep housing costs low (while material and labor costs were increasing), the FHA favored the construction of small, stripped-down houses, the value of which was determined by the size of the monthly payment veterans were able to afford.

What emerged was a new architecture that was distilled from progressive domestic plans, traditional wood construction methods and a fascination with modern technological conveniences and then reduced and compressed to meet a predetermined limited cost. Compromises were made with the satisfaction that a more universal need was being met and with the expectation that these were "starter homes" that the ambitious new owners would gradually expand and improve. (One historian has noted that 70% of new homeowners had money saved for immediate improvements to their houses.) To meet a sales price of $8,000 - $10,000, which included the expenses of site purchase and improvement, meeting municipal zoning codes (water, sewer, roads, utilities), landscaping, providing kitchen appliances, advertising and sales, and some profit for the builder, drastic reductions in space and labor were necessary.

The first traditional house feature to go was the basement. Most of the original FHA-supported houses were built on concrete slabs. The slab was as much a technological innovation as a cost-reducing reality. By the twentieth-century, the suburban house basement represented wasted space occupied by furnaces, coal bins, cisterns and kitchen storage areas outmoded by new heating and kitchen technology. Additionally, the slabs contained a grid of copper tubing that provided radiant heat for the house and removed the need for dust-catching radiators modern homemakers had denounced in numerous magazine surveys. Second floors were also removed from the plan of the post-WWII-Era house with all domestic zones arranged on one level. Early "Slab Capes" had sufficient headroom in an unfinished attic (no floor even) for the homeowner to expand habitable space, but the flatter roof of the more ubiquitous Ranches provided no such opportunity. The dining room was also removed from the 800 to 1000 square foot houses, to the expressed dismay of housewives, but kitchen improvements and open planning of kitchen and living spaces mitigated the disappointment. Two tiny bedrooms and a single bath were the norm, but they were generally adequate for the young, small families moving in. Clearly, the veterans' families were enthusiastic partners in the ideological process of creating a new, affordable single-family house. With their alternative being a tenement apartment or urban multi-family house, homebuyers were

extremely optimistic, appreciative and resourceful. While critics condemned these houses and their communities as slums-in-the-making, the veteran families were committed to making them work. There was a sense of privilege in these communities, a feeling of being in the now and part of a trail-blazing endeavor that consoled them. And, ultimately, they came to vastly outnumber (and outlive) their detractors.

In the interest of protecting its investment in these mortgages, the FHA was very conservative, almost capricious, in the house types it would accept. Simple, modest established forms were favored over the cornucopia of modernist house designs that were produced in the era. Thus, Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian houses were rejected, even though he demonstrated their economy, and the Cape and Ranch were written into the FHA guidelines. The federal bureaucrats were decidedly anti-intellectual in their approach to affordable housing; no architect made his fame or fortune from post-WWII housing. They may have also underestimated the taste of their buyers, but the borrowers weren't complaining. The FHA justification was that they wanted designs whose popular appeal would last the life of the mortgage. They did not wish to risk their investment on ephemeral concepts. Who knows what would have happened if the Usonian house replaced the Cape or Ranch as the national norm. One result was that homeowners were provided with a much more architecturally-neutral house that they could adapt and personalize freely.

With the proliferation and repetition of standardized house plans with no complexity or frills, the architect's role in the home-building process was insignificant, and if it existed at all, it was through providing ideas and innovations in professional and popular house magazines. The principal player in the new housing game was the merchant builder. The term "merchant" has been applied to the builder in the post-WWII Era to indicate that the traditional architect-builder-client relationship in custom house construction had evolved, at least in the case of the mass-produced housing development, to a situation where the house builder controlled all aspects of the relationship, including marketing a finished, manufactured product. Some of these builders had been establishing themselves prior to the war in upper middle-class suburban subdivisions on the outskirts of major urban centers. Many more were small contractors attracted into the merchant builder business by this unprecedented, tremendous demand for affordable housing.

Profit margins were minimal on FHA-supported house construction and the bureaucratic hoops were numerous: the merchant builder had to be a master of efficiency. Any unanticipated costs or delays could upset the delicate balance of the complex economics of constructing even a simple house and wipe out the builder's share. Builders vertically integrated into all aspects of producing the house from site acquisition to brokering mortgages to preserve their control of projects and ensure that they would profit something in the end. Planning became a critical factor in house construction.

Of course, one significant way to economize was by spreading land, site development and design costs over a large number of lots and houses. In this way, the post-WWII Era ushered in the large-scale planned communities and mass-market building industry that Americans now associate with suburban development. Prior to the war, suburban subdivisions and house construction were separate transactions. The owner of a parcel would make lot subdivisions and provide roads and services required by the municipality, often gradually. Individuals would purchase a lot and arrange with a builder to erect a house. (Land developers were very

seldom builders.) There were often deed restrictions limiting lot uses and building size and placement to ensure some consistency to the development. Higher end subdivisions incorporated more stringent lot and design restrictions into the deeds. It would usually take some years to build out these plans; some of them were never fully realized. Many subdivisions were quite informal with lots being combined and houses constructed in a wide variety of sizes, styles and periods. This was particularly the case in the earlier working- and lower-middle-class "street-car" subdivisions that were appended to the periphery of small cities.

At times, builders would purchase a small series of lots and market them with house plans to potential buyers. This is why small numbers of houses with identical or similar thematic designs are visible in many early-twentieth-century neighborhoods. However, the restrictive mortgages of the period did not allow much flexibility for the builder or the buyer. Building houses on speculation was not something banks would support. The post-WWII housing crunch mobilized the federal government and the banking establishment into facilitating home construction: the FHA mortgage insurance program reduced the risks of lending, which made the banks more willing to extend seed money to builders. This allowed merchant builders to conceive projects involving the construction of hundreds, sometimes thousands of houses—or in the case of some like the Levittowns, tens of thousands of houses.

The City of Newton is one of many municipalities where veteran housing projects were created following the war. Even in the absence of an adequate contextual understanding of the post-war housing boom in New England, based on the distinctive characteristics of the plan and architecture (Slab Ranches) of Newton's Oak Hill Park, it can be viewed as the epitome of a veteran’s housing project. The wider extent of this phenomenon has yet to be identified, much less quantified, in Massachusetts or any other state, yet it is evident that it was quite large in scope. (For example, a large development of attached homes—Hancock Village—was constructed in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1946-49.) Huge FHA developments, such as Panorama City in California (3000 identical Ranch houses), Oak Forest near Houston (5000), Park Forest outside Chicago (8000), and the Levittowns in New York and Pennsylvania (17,450 houses in New York alone), have been described and analyzed in recent dissertations and publications, but the significance of the smaller, locally-significant projects like Oak Hill Park (412 houses) have yet to be adequately examined.

The construction of moderate-cost housing was also booming in the 1950's. Veterans able to afford higher monthly payments could also receive FHA-insured mortgages on larger, more expensive homes. (FHA funding was also available for home improvements.) Sometimes these houses were constructed as part of planned developments by merchant builders, other times they were built on a more individualized basis. Colonial and Ranch types remained the norm; flagrantly "Modern" designs were still discouraged. Floor area increased with rooms more spacious overall. Rooms excluded from the basic plans were restored, such as the dining room, and more bedrooms were added. In the process, the Cape evolved into a Two-Story Colonial and the Ranch expanded in all directions. To raise a Ranch to two stories would belie the type; however, in larger versions, part of the floor plan was bumped up a half-story above a sunken basement and/or garage to accommodate more space. This variant of the Ranch became known as the Split-Level house. Other characteristic features of the Ranch were preserved, such as the low-pitched gable or hipped roof, deep overhangs, varied window sizes, and innovative siding materials. The larger, more expensive houses were more

consciously designed and individualized to their buyers. Architectural details and materials were carefully selected, and the increased house prices reflected this luxury. The houses may have been the first houses constructed by their owners, and like their more economical counterparts, certain construction jobs were undertaken by owners to keep costs down.

The fundamental design unity of the simplified types, forms and materials of post-war housing presented a jarring contrast to the existing residential architecture in older suburban communities where they were often introduced, whether at the lower or upper ends of prevailing house values. In truth, the design of these houses (or lack thereof) clashed with the picturesque designs of their predecessors and their cheapness offended the bourgeois Victorian sensibilities that had spawned the suburbs. Even the more progressive house types introduced in the era just before World War II, such as Bungalows, Four-Squares, and Colonial Revival houses, bore little resemblance to the unpretentious Ranches and Split-Levels. Post-WWII house design represented a radical departure from the established suburban ideal. The machine had definitely invaded the garden.

In most cases, the new houses were constructed in peripheral or marginal areas of towns where house construction had been avoided in the past. The inferior status of these areas resulted in lower land costs land for merchant builders and contributed to the success of projects. Municipalities would be more likely to support development proposals that improved a poor existing condition. Less desirable property along rail lines, highways and industrial zones were also developed during the housing shortage, particularly in communities that were reaching their development limits. But these locations also served to reinforce the second-class status affordable housing endured in established suburban communities. Fortunately, these were owner-occupied homes housing war veterans and their families; communities were more accepting of the newcomers that they might otherwise have been.

The role of the automobile in the history of post-WWII Era housing cannot be overstated. With car ownership fairly much the norm for middle-class families, development of areas some distance from commercial centers and mass-transit lines became possible. The lower land costs of these remote properties, many of which were peripheral farms that had ceased operation during and since the Depression, were crucial to the success of the merchant builders' delicate, low-budget formulas. It was the post-war housing projects that came to define what are now known as automobile suburbs. Houses were sited in relation to intricate road systems with driveways and garages as integral parts of the landscape. In some cases, such as at Levittown, carports were built instead of garages as a further cost-cutting measure. Garages were an option for home-buyers in Newton's Oak Hill Park. Eventually, garages were made a part of the house. The houses were born from the same infatuation with technology and mass-production affordability that characterized the automobile trend. Both were tremendous agents in the democratization of home ownership and suburban living in the United States.

Post-WWII Era houses quickly claimed a substantial piece of suburbia and caused a revolution in the previously accepted practices of house design, construction and financing. The generation of veterans wanted a place in the suburbs but, by-and-large, could not afford it. They were also directed away from the conventional affordable housing in the cities by urban and racial prejudices. Whether they grew up in the city or the country, they were attracted to the idealized zone in between, and new space had to be made for them. The

government, the banks and the housing industry were determined to capitalize on the economic and social benefits of the situation. The housing explosion that followed the Second World War completely redefined the suburbs both in their physical appearance and social composition. The multitudinous Capes, Ranches and Split-Levels interspersed in older suburbs are landmarks of this important moment in time and the transformations it irrevocably fomented.

And then it was over. By 1960, the production of affordable housing went in a completely different direction. As material and labor costs continued to escalate (and the veterans were suitably housed), the home building industry experienced a recession in the late 1950's. Demand had not totally diminished, rather a coherent, long-term plan for financing and constructing housing that would meet the needs of lower middle class families never materialized. The lack of a national housing policy seriously curtailed the expansion of the single-family housing boom into other segments of the population. To respond to the prevailing entry-level housing needs, merchant builders returned to the multi-family form, with the garden apartment emerging as a characteristic type.

Post-World War II Housing In Newton

A windshield survey of houses built between 1945 and 1960 conducted in the development of this report has revealed some distinctive conditions in Newton. (This survey attempted to cover all residential areas of the city where concentrations of buildings built in that time frame were indicated on a map generated by the Newton GIS.) Consistent with broader patterns of development, Newton's post-war housing stock is principally concentrated in previously undeveloped or underdeveloped areas in the northern and southern zones of the city, notably along the Waltham town line and in Oak Hill, where the greatest concentration of houses built in the 1945-1960 period are located. In addition, there are numerous small subdivisions scattered around the city where smaller parcels of underdeveloped land existed. Many of these parcels were likely older residential properties and contained houses and/or outbuildings that were demolished to maximize the value of the real estate. (This situation continues today.) New houses built in existing neighborhoods generally correspond to their neighbors in scale, design quality, materials, and value. Few, if any, areas of the city have been seriously compromised by the introduction of post-WWII houses other than by the contrast in taste they represent. The principal exception appears to be when a spacious house lot is parceled out and presents a visible contradiction in the streetscape. This intensification of density began occurring in Newton long before the Second World War, however.

The catalog of post-WWII-era house types is limited, and the examples that distinguish Newton's building record are no exception. Within these limited types, there is a wide range of examples that represent design and cost alternatives. Five types are described below. The distinctive characteristics of Newton's documented veterans' housing project are described independently.

Photo 1 - 182 Adams Street

The Cape

The Cape is a 20th-century suburban house type that is rooted in New England's traditional architecture. The one-story box form with tall gable roof punctuated with a center chimney and dormers was a popular, inexpensive small house form that appealed to the popular Colonial Revival taste. While examples appear nation-wide, the Cape was appropriately much more prevalent in New England where it was a modern, industrial-age paean to an enduring regional house form. It was adopted by merchant builders before the Second World War and became one of the first house types that the Federal Housing Administration approved for mortgages. The Cape proliferated in cities like Newton after the war largely because it qualified for long-term, affordable loans.

Photo 2 -Albert Road

The Cape was also an effective do-it-yourselfer's house. In Levittown, New York, where around 6,000 Capes were constructed during the initial phase of the community, Capes were built on concrete slabs to reduce costs and attics were left unfinished and without floors. Homeowners quickly made their attic spaces habitable, particularly as the young families grew and more bedroom space became necessary. These houses were designed and built as starter homes, and as the years progressed, the quality of components and finishes were upgraded as they wore out befitting the success and taste of individual owners. Today, few "unimproved" Capes remain in the city creating a catalog of modifications that are significant architectural expressions of a new domestic culture.

Photo 3 – 23 Sylvester Street

There are literally hundreds of Capes in Newton. Most of them appear in newly formed post-WWII-Era neighborhoods with a mixture of other design options, notably Ranches and Split-Levels. Some streets display a mixture of Capes and Two-Story Colonials that indicate that there was a range in physical and economic scale for this inherently middle-class dwelling. The heterogeneity of the architecture in these small street developments also reflect the extent of the options available to individual lot owners as they contracted to have their houses to be built in the manner of a traditional subdivision. At the lower end, merchant builder would have favored more uniformity in type and appearance. There are few locations in the city, such as on Albert Road in Auburndale, where planned communities of Capes are evident. Another uniform neighborhood of Capes exists in Auburndale along Russell and Sylvester Roads. These buildings are additionally noticeable because they were constructed of oversize bricks (for economy of labor). Concentrations of Capes are also present in a number of "key hole" subdivisions that were created from older, larger house lots during this period.

Photo 4 – Fessenden Street

The Two-Story Colonial

As indicated by its name, the Two-Story Colonial is a larger and more elaborate house than the Cape, and it represents a more costly dwelling available to a smaller segment of the population. It developed out of the same historicist spirit as the Cape and in many cases shared a similar plan. However, the Colonial was twice the size and displayed more decoration than its one-story counterpart. Porches, sunrooms and garages were common appendages. Plans were spacious with stair halls, dining rooms and extra service areas on the first floor and three or more bedrooms on the second floor.

Hundreds of houses built between 1900 and 1960 at the higher end of Newton's real estate market can be classified in this way. Most of the houses built prior to World War II were architect-designed and as a group, display a wide variety of scale, materials and architectural embellishment. While those built after the war share an unmistakable resemblance and architectural legacy with these older Colonial Revival houses, they also illustrate the shift of house construction to the smaller, less embellished, lower-cost merchant builder homes typical of the period. A notable planned development of Two-Story Colonials is located on Fessenden Street in Newtonville.

Photo 5 - 192 Concord Street

The Ranch

The Ranch can be generally defined as a low, long, rectangular house with a shallow-pitched side-gable roof. It appeared on the scene in Newton and every other suburban community in the Northeastern United States in the housing boom that followed World War II. It is also characterized by the use of (what were then) new materials for exterior walls, windows and roofs. The Ranch epitomized what was new and modern in house design and in family lifestyles following the Second World War. It was the result of the Progressive Era prescriptions for more informal, open living areas in the house and Modern ideals of technological efficiency. What it lacked in the hard-edged refinement of the stark, rectilinear forms of Modern architecture, it made up for in popularizing its revolutionary design and social programs. Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the most visible and controversial public figures of the period, and images of his idealistic architecture were known to just about every house-builder and home-buyer. There was also great economy in the open plans and stripped-down efficiency of the Ranch. It was a form designed for mass-production.

The popularity of the Ranch originated in California before the war where the westward migration created a tremendous and continuous demand for house-building, particularly at the economical end. Once beyond the influence of the Eastern seaboard, established architectural traditions lost their importance and the Western climate inspired innovations. The Ranch was introduced to the East in the post-WWII-Era when the federal government's interest in single-family housing placed home-building in a national context. The Ranch presented a visible contrast to the existing housing in the Northeast in its form, scale and design. Even when compared to other affordable housing options, such as the Cape, the Ranch was an alien object. This was particularly evident in the more densely developed, nineteenth-century suburbs like Newton. Nevertheless, by virtue of their sheer numbers, the Ranch forced its way into older contexts and radically transformed them.

Photo 6 – Mary Ellen Road

In Newton, Ranch houses appear nearly as frequently as Capes and Two-Story Colonials, but they stand out more. Ranches and Capes often appear together in smaller street developments particularly in the southern part of the city, e.g. Oak Hill and Waban. Unlike Capes, there were many variations in Ranch design and it was a Modern house that appealed to upper as

Photo 7 – Swallow Drive

well as lower middle class families. Thus there are collections of small, modest Ranches, such as on Joseph and Edward roads in Newtonville, and spacious, elegant Ranches, such as on Ruane and Mary Ellen roads west of the cemetery in Newton Village. The Ranch usually invited some form of individualized design that set a particular house in a development apart from others, and there is a substantial range of examples spread throughout the City of Newton. One of the more distinctive of these can be found on Maynard, Emmon and Mossman streets in Newtonville where a collection of L-shaped frame houses with brick ends and integral garages are located. Houses on Swallow Drive in Newton Lower Falls represent a type of Ranch with attached garage that appears repeatedly in other parts of the city, and houses on Selwyn Road between Newton Upper Falls and Oak Hill with their metal frame casement and picture windows provide a distinctive manufactured appearance. Some developments are plainly idiosyncratic, reflecting the taste or wit of the merchant builder. The most extreme example of this situation can be found in a small group of houses with wild brick and stone masonry on Bencliffe Circle in Auburndale.

Photo 8 – 184 Paulson Road

The Split Level

Once the Ranch began to proliferate in communities across America following the Second World War, it began to evolve in form and scale, particularly at the upper end of the economic scale where homeowners did not need to sacrifice all space or decoration for the sake of affordability. As Ranches grew in size, their characteristic one-story, low-pitched-roof massing was stretched to the limit. One solution was to attach ells in L, T and H configurations, but limited lot sizes would often interfere with enlarging the footprint of the house in any significant way. As a result, the Split-Level house was introduced, which

elevated a portion of the house a half story above a sunken story that usually contained garages and other service rooms. The bump in the roofline, when combined with the other Ranch-like elements in the overall design, did not seriously affect the low, horizontal appearance of the type. Bedrooms were generally placed in the raised section to further isolate them from the public realms of the house. And incorporating the garage into the mass of the house, rather than simply appending it to one end, constituted no small change in itself. This condition continues to be a prominent feature in house design today.

Newton has its fair share of Split-Level houses, and they are located in many of the in-fill subdivisions in the historic core of the city as well as in Oak Hill where larger developments were undertaken on vacant land that still existed there after the war. Distinctive examples of the type are located on Paulson Road west of the Newton Cemetery and Bound Brook Road near Newton Upper Falls. The Paulson Road examples have in-line, side-gable roofs; the raised sections of the Bound Brook Road examples have front-facing gables that create an L-shaped roof. In a number of cases, such as on Bound Brook Road, the garage level of the two-story section is sunken into the ground to maintain the one-story Ranch appearance. Many Split-Levels are sited on hillsides so that the garage entry can be accessed from a lower elevation. The varying roof heights of the Split-Level invited more creative and Modern design treatments. Split-Level houses at 16 Selwyn Road and 46 Juniper Lane illustrate the use of long, sloping front-gable roofs with ridgelines skewed to one side, over the raised section of the house. While not uncommon, these more stylish houses represented only a small proportion of the Ranches and Split-Levels. The subdivision known as Esty Farm just north of Oak Hill Park is a rare example of an entire planned development of Split-Levels in a Modern design.

Photo 9 – Juniper Lane

The Contemporary House

The Contemporary House is one of a number of terms applied to the post-WWII house type, usually architect-designed, that more aggressively employed the Modern Period design program in a more doctrinaire manner. These houses were starkly rectilinear with flat wall and roof planes. Components were often segmented and staggered creating box-like forms. Porch roofs and overhangs were pierced, and there was extensive use of large fenestration. Interior plans were open and public spaces voluminous. There are a few such houses scattered among older residences in Newton's higher-end neighborhoods, since these were expensive houses to build. Generally, Contemporary Houses would be sited on larger and more dramatic lots than were available in the older suburbs such as Newton.

Veterans' Housing in Planned Communities

This house type is characterized by the small-scaled, simply designed, and economically constructed dwellings that were approved for FHA-insured mortgages in the 1940's and 1950's. The predominant house styles were Capes and Ranches, with the latter emerging as epitomizing the type. While one documented veterans' housing project took place in Newton in 1948, there are a number of other, smaller groupings and individual houses in the city where it is apparent that some FHA-approved model was utilized.

- Oak Hill Park: Oak Hill Park has already been recognized by the Newton Historical Commission as a distinctive component of the architectural and social history of the city. This 412-unit housing development ranks with the likes of Levittown as a textbook example of the design and planning of a Post-WWII housing project for returning veterans. Unlike Levittown, it is little known outside of the city. A different type of veterans' housing project was undertaken in Brookline, Massachusetts, where a large number of attached, townhouse units were built. Undoubtedly, other housing projects developed in the Boston area as well as in New England in the period following the war, but until a systematic survey is done, the extent of this phenomenon will not be known. This eventual knowledge will only enhance the significance of Oak Hill Park.

Photo 10 – 102 Hanson Road

The small Slab Capes that were "manufactured" on site in Oak Hill Park were very similar in plan and design as those erected in the more publicized communities. With three bedrooms, the Oak Hill Park model was larger than the two-bedroom Levittowner. The site plan of Oak Hill Park was also noteworthy in that it incorporated pedestrian amenities from earlier, Progressive-Era suburban models, such as Radburn, New Jersey, that were generally dismissed in FHA-supported communities. The core houses in Oak Hill Park are oriented towards pedestrian walks that link most of the community. The houses were sited so that their rear elevations faced cul-de-sacs that provided automobile service access.

Photo 11 – 88 Selwyn Road

- Other Developments of Veterans' Housing: Two additional developments utilize house types that suggest that they were planned FHA-backed projects. There are a few Ranch Houses on Edward Road in West Newton that appear to be identical to those erected in Oak Hill Park, although a number of lots on that street now contain new houses that apparently replaced more of them. While larger than those in Oak Hill Park, the Ranch Houses built on Selwyn Road between Newton Upper Falls and Oak Hill also appear to have been part of an affordable housing project in the era. Moreover, the identical brick Capes on Sylvester and Russell Roads in West Newton are of a scale and design that infers some form of government-supported project. Further research into the history of these developments, as well as dozens of others, is necessary to place them in historical contexts and evaluate their significance.

Other Planned Communities

There are scores of small planned developments throughout the city constructed during the 1945-1960 period. Most of the examples used to illustrate the descriptions of house types made above are parts of those communities. Each has its own particular history as well as a role to play in the context of post-WWII housing in Newton and the greater Boston area. In the absence of a survey, a map of the city with properties color coded to reflect the age of the houses thereon is a convincing document of the extent of post-WWII housing and its concentration in a multitude of groupings.

Significance Of Post-WW II Era Houses In Newton

In both of Newton's two large National Register multiple-resource nominations, it is prominently stated that the Massachusetts Historical Commission had determined that the city "retains the finest and most comprehensive collection of late 19th and early 20th century suburban residential architecture in the Boston area." Although systematic surveys of historic buildings built after 1925 have not been undertaken in Massachusetts, it can be inferred that this degree of significance would extend into the post-WWII Era as well, recognizing that more houses were built in Newton over those years than any other municipality in the Commonwealth. Yet, the form and design of this architecture is so visibly different from that built in the three preceding centuries that it continues to be considered non-historic, even though it clearly reflects design and historical contexts that are now in the past.

The significance of Newton's post-WWII Era architecture originates with affordable housing projects, large and small, designed to accommodate returning war veterans and their generation. It has already been stated that Newton contains an exceptional example of this in Oak Hill Park, where the city took part in this highly publicized project, but it is evident that many other projects were undertaken by merchant builders in the period to address this critical housing need. In every case, these developments possess important information about a nationally significant phenomenon in architecture and social programming. The significance of Oak Hill Park transcends the local context as a notable example of veterans' housing in the state and even, perhaps, as an exemplary federally supported project in a national context. Newspaper accounts of the opening of Oak Hill Park contain testimonies to the city's investment in the project as a memorial to the war veterans, which contributes another dimension to the sense of the project's significance. Additionally, the modest, economical houses of Oak Hill Park are as much relics of a historic architecture as any dwelling from the nineteenth or eighteenth centuries. The Ranch house continues to be a viable house type today, but the tiny, Spartan Slab Ranch built for war veterans and bought by them with FHA-insured VA mortgages existed for no more than a decade in the 1940's and 1950's.

The Ranch was ultimately built in a wide range of sizes and levels of elaboration from the no-frills Slab Ranch of veterans' projects to larger, one-of-a-kind, architect-designed homes for the elite. In the middle of this range, houses were still being constructed by merchant builders in planned developments. The more costly these developments became, the more diversified the designs of the houses that were offered, as the buyer became more involved in the conception of the house. There are quite a few of these types of developments in Newton. The significance of these more individualized ranches and their developments relies

increasingly on their distinction as architectural objects. As a home-owner's interest in architecture became more elevated, the house type described as the Contemporary House replaced the elaborated Ranch as a model. These houses were always architect-designed and built for the client. The few examples of the Contemporary House in Newton will be evaluated individually for their architectural significance.

Capes and Two-Story Colonials have proven to be far less ephemeral than the Slab Ranch; however, they have their own significance in the context of the city and the suburban history of the greater Boston area. Their design association with the historic architecture of the region provides them with a link to tradition that the Ranch does not enjoy, and this continuity imbues them with certain significance. As twentieth-century buildings, both types have histories that predate the appearance of the Ranch, but those examples built in the post-WWII Era acquire the added significance of being built in the context of affordable housing in that period. The Cape and Two-Story Colonial bridge the period so they do not have the rarity or time-bound significance of the Slab Ranch, nor do they epitomize the affordable house, even though the appearance of the Slab Cape predated the Slab Ranch at Levittown, Forest Park and other early veterans' housing projects. The Cape has been the affordable house in New England for centuries and is significant for that reason in any era. Likewise, the Two-Story Colonial is an indigenous New England house that has become the standard of suburban middle-class architecture across the nation.

Split-Levels are far less ubiquitous than Capes, Two-Story Colonials or Ranches. They are a single-family house type that evolved during the post-WWII Era to provide more space and architectural interest to the Ranch. They are often "Colonialized" in Northeastern towns like Newton, with the addition of features like shutters and clapboard, which amalgamates all these types into one hybrid form. Add the internal garage to this composition, a standard component of the Split-Level, and an ideal post-WWII Era suburban fusion is achieved, although often quite awkwardly. With all its extras, the Split-Level was not an entry-level house in the post-war market. It was a house option for families higher up in the ever-widening middle-class hierarchy. The popularity of the Split-Level was short-lived. Few are built today, having been replaced by the more spacious Raised Ranch house. The Split-Level is a distinctive post-WWII Era house type with a significance to consider in the Newton context, yet it is more an architectural than a historical object.

In each of these cases, the significance of the houses are going to be enhanced by their relationships to other similar houses in planned developments and their associations with builders and buyers who relate them to the social history of Newton during the period. Based on the current low level of documentation of this era in the city, determining the significance of individual examples of this architecture will be difficult, particularly due to their modest architectural pretensions. Until more comprehensive and detailed surveys are made of Newton's twentieth-century architecture, little more than a cursory review of public documents and visual assessments can be made. Yet, it is obvious that there are volumes to tell about the post-WWII Era history of the city. Planned developments, large (e.g., Oak Hill Park) and small, provide more definable entities to consider for significance; however, many will still be overlooked without the benefit of a survey.

Integrity

The integrity of historic form and materials plays the same role in evaluating the significance of post-WWII Era housing as it does with buildings of earlier periods with one important exception: the stripped-down, affordable houses built for the veterans' generation. Like the vernacular architecture of the lower classes in previous centuries (the vast majority of which has disappeared), these veterans' houses were rudimentary, standardized dwellings built by one class for another. The significance of vernacular houses relates as much to how they evolved to meet the changing needs and tastes of the people who resided in them as it does to their original form and design. So too with the identical and impersonal Slab Ranches and Capes into which veterans moved with their young families. The condition of the finished house that the veteran bought in Oak Hill Park was only the beginning stage in an on-going process of adjustment, elaboration and individualization.

Fifty years earlier, new home-buyers in Newton selected houses plans and designs that were tailored to their personal aspirations and tastes. If they bought a used house, renovations were inevitably made to physically and decoratively reorient the house to their preferred lifestyle. Sometimes this was simple; other times it was complex. In a sense, the veterans were buying somebody else's house, and they quickly adapted and elaborated them to make them their own. Thus the integrity of houses in planned developments, like Oak Hill Park, cannot be determined solely by the conditions that the merchant builders created; rather, integrity must include the conditions created by the new owners once they took possession and individualized them. Still a limit needs to be established, or perhaps better, a period of significance that encompasses the variables set by the first generation of residents.

More expensive Ranch or Split-Level homes built in the post-war period, where builders and clients had more direct relationships and the houses are distinguished by distinctive design features and materials, can be considered finished products when they were built. The impact of subsequent changes should be considered in that context. However, it must be cautioned that the norm is not the rule; many of these houses were also conceived to evolve over time with the sweat-equity of their owners. Capes and Two-Story Colonials have distinguishable forms that are inherent to their definition, no matter how plain or elaborate they may be. Alterations that noticeably change, obscure or dilute the integrity of those forms would affect the historic integrity of the house. Like with the Slab Ranches, the consideration of integrity of Capes that are the principal and repetitious house form in planned developments should be more flexibly applied.

When considering integrity of a particular post-WWII Era house, it should be first determined if it is a component of a larger planned development. In most cases it will be one of a number of houses, which will place the interpretation of integrity in a broader context. Where a cluster of similar house forms exists, the individual significance cannot be evaluated without reference to surrounding homes. In those remaining instances where the buildings are clearly isolated examples, the integrity test must focus on the determination of the house being a distinctive example of its type, period or method of construction. The level of alterations in many of these cases, will lead to the conclusion that sufficient integrity is not present for a determination of significance. However, conversely, if an intact example of a modest Cape, Two-Story Colonial, Ranch or Split-Level exists in isolation in the city, it should qualify as significant, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive survey.

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