

Houses Chapter 4

Contributed by Administrator
Thursday, 31 May 2007

“The new ranch was a rebellion against the older compressed, boxlike bungalow house that dominated construction from the turn of the century until the 1930s.” - Clifford E. Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home 1800-1960* Significant Houses Part 4: The Post-War Suburb In the 1940s, the New William Penn Highway (US Route 22) was being constructed through Monroeville, and the road that was to define the commercial core of today’s Monroeville was completed in 1942. A few years later, the Pennsylvania Turnpike was being extended westward; with Monroeville designated as its Pittsburgh interchange in 1950. Now the possibilities of bringing the motoring public to Monroeville for shopping seemed intriguing to a group of investors who were to build a major shopping center on Route 22 -- The Miracle Mile. When it opened in 1954, the new shopping center was the biggest of its kind between New York and Chicago. Following the lead of Miracle Mile, other shopping centers sprang up along Route 22. It was a classic case of improved roads and greater access leading to commercial development that, in turn, fueled the need for more housing and better roads; a dynamic given further impetus when the Parkway East was completed in 1962. These developments brought a dramatic surge in population, and so Monroeville was poised to join in the national housing boom of the post-war era. With the end of WWII, crucial materials were freed up and made available for the housing industry, and builders scurried to meet pent-up demand. The modern house of the 1950s benefited from new construction methods and building materials. There was an increased use of exterior plywood, composition board and drywall, of glass, and prefabricated casement windows. And the era saw the advent of the large picture window. As time went on, smaller family homes like the older Cape Cods, might be expanded, upgraded with new building materials and labor saving devices. But the modern house of the 50s was to be the one-story ranch house with its low silhouette and rambling plan, its openness, and inviting picture windows. The openness of the ranch house brought with it the outdoor patio and increased attention to landscaping and gardening. As the housing boom gained momentum, builders searched for new ways to meet the soaring demand. They quickly found costs could be cut by greater standardization. A New Jersey builder, William Levitt, was one of the first to show how methods of mass production could be applied to housing. In the early 50s Levitt’s Long Island development, “Levittown,” was to become the first fully planned community complete with recreational and shopping facilities, and its own community center. The 2-bedroom houses were affordable, although the choice was limited to just two styles: Cape Cod and Ranch. Levitt’s construction methods were quickly copied as the idea of the planned community spread across the country. One of the first planned communities in the region, Garden City, opened in Monroeville in 1955. Garden City was an immediate success and other developments, such as Turnpike Gardens, and Alpine Village followed, helping to define Monroeville by creating neighborhoods.