THE HOUSES

Before 1915, there were approximately 36 houses and other buildings scattered through the area that comprises the present-day Town of Chevy Chase, according to a 1915 Caldwell Bethesda Directory map. They included a few houses and other buildings from the late 19th century, several commodious 20th century suburban houses along Connecticut Avenue and Bradley Lane, and a scattering of bungalows along Ridgewood, Maple, and Stanford—then called Elm.

By the early 1920s, a building boom was underway. Houses began cropping up like mushrooms after a rain. Factors contributing to this development were inexpensive land, pent-up demand after World War I, convenient transportation, standardization of building materials and methods, economies of scale in speculative developments, longer-term mortgages, and the continued stability and growth of government employment during the Depression.

By 1941, approximately 85 percent of the town's 1,000 houses had been built, according to Klinges' *Real Estate Atlas*.

The Chevy Chase Land Company, which sold lots on the eastern side of our town, promoted Chevy Chase as "the best suburb in the nation's capital," a place where one could "get away from the crowded sections of the city" and live "where light and air can be had on four sides," according to a 1916 real estate brochure published by their agents, the Thomas B. Fisher Company.

Offering both the privacy of single-family homes and the amenities of a planned community, Chevy Chase was designed "to meet the requirements of discriminating people—but that does not necessarily mean, in our opinion, people of great wealth." In 1916, lots in Section Four, "between the grounds of the Chevy Chase and the Columbia Country Clubs," were still available. It was also noted that living in Maryland gave residents the right to vote in national elections—a right then denied District residents.

The Chevy Chase Land Company promised that "every residence would bear a touch of the individuality of the owner," but property values would be protected "against the encroachments of undesirable elements by a blanket covenant which set minimum costs for houses, defined setbacks, and prohibited apartments and commercial buildings."

Covenants were commonplace in American suburbs. Their aim was not only to strike a balance between individuality and uniformity in architecture but also to govern who would live in these neighborhoods, according to Gwendolyn Wright in *Building the American Dream: A Social History of American Suburbs*. By setting minimum housing cost, the company's covenant automatically excluded low-income buyers. Furthermore, individual owners in the early days could insert

Tudor Revival style houses on Oakridge Avenue in the "Leland" subdivision, 1929 MONROE WARREN COLLECTION

additional restrictive clauses into deeds that excluded buyers on the basis of race, religion, and ethnic origin.

Architectural diversity was touted as one of Chevy Chase's "principal charms," and today almost every popular 20th century suburban style is evident: bungalows built in the late teens and early twenties; eclectic revivals of Georgian Colonial, Dutch Colonial, Neoclassical, Tudor, Spanish Colonial, Mediterranean, and Renaissance, built in the mid-1920s and 1930s; and contemporary, split-levels and ranch styles tucked into remaining lots after most development was completed.

Bungalow on Maple Avenue PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

Few of these houses are unique designs. Most are similar to the suburban house plans published in builders' catalogs, newspapers, popular magazines like *The Ladies Home Journal*, and mail order catalogs like Sears, Roebuck, Montgomery Ward's, and Aladdin. Building permits in town records from the 1920s and 1930s frequently list a single name for owner/builder/architect/contractor, suggesting that many were built on speculation.

The Bungalow: A Progressive House

Bungalows were the most fashionable houses built in America from 1900 to 1920. In Section Four, bungalows built in the teens and early 1920s occupy choice lots on Rosemary, Woodbine, Ridgewood, Maple, and Underwood Streets. Many were situated on the crests of the hills, probably to avoid the flooding that turned the low areas on Meadow and Oak Lanes into notorious mudholes after rain.

To the west of Section Four, bungalows were the first houses built by Monroe and Robert Bates Warren, the developers of "Leland," a 57-acre subdivision bounded by Bradley, West Avenue, the B&O Railroad, and Oakridge Avenue.

These two-bedroom bungalows were described as "compact and conveniently arranged so that one would not be embarrassed because of the shortage of domestic help immediately following the war," according to a 1929 advertising brochure.

The classic bungalow was usually a one-story house with a low-pitched roof, overhanging eaves, and exposed roof rafters. A front porch was often supported by heavy piers, and the exterior was usually covered with natural materials like shingles, with fieldstone foundations and chimneys. As the style became popular, the name was used to describe any small house.

Bungalows were designed for informal living. Foyers and formal entrance halls were eliminated. Open floor plans in which one room flowed into another were preferred. Built-in furniture, room dividers, and ceilings with dark oak beams gave interiors a rustic, masculine look.

Despite its quaint coziness, the bungalow was considered a modern house which reflected progressive social and architectural ideas. Gustav Stickley, a self-trained designer and publisher of *Craftsman* magazine, believed small, inexpensive, and unpretentious houses could remedy a variety of problems facing the family, including the shortage of domestic help or the rising divorce rate. "We don't believe in large houses with many rooms that are elaborately decorated," he wrote. "Living beyond one's means makes a man haggard with anxiety and might contribute to him becoming unscrupulous in business."

Moral imperative aside, people began building smaller houses for a variety of reasons in the early 20th century. Families were having fewer children. Indoor plumbing, central heating, and electricity were by then considered standard, and their cost was offset by building a smaller house. Specialized rooms such as rootcellers and coal

bins became obsolete through better food distribution, refrigeration, and central heating by oil or gas. With domestic help in short supply, a small, efficient house made good sense.

Eclectic Revival Styles

The most popular styles built in the 1920s and 1930s were the eclectic revival styles: Georgian Colonial, Dutch Colonial, and Spanish Colonial, as well as the Mediterranean and Renaissance Revival.

This trend began in the late 19th century, when European-trained architects began designing period houses for their wealthy American clients. Although these styles constructed of solid brick and masonry were too expensive for the middle class, a new technology for applying thin veneers of brick or stone over conventional wood frame became available in the early 20th century. A stylistic jacket could transform a standard wooden frame house into a picturesque English cottage, a prim New England colonial, or a romantic Mediterranean villa.

Dutch Colonial Revival on Virgilia Street
PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

Spanish Colonial Revival on Stanford Street PHOTO BY RICHARD RIVERS

Revival-style houses built in the middle-class suburbs were practical, comfortable, and stylistically restrained, according to Allen Gowens in *The Comfortable House*. They acknowledged both European roots and American history, engendering a sense of continuity with the past which has been important to all people in all times, and most especially to the upwardly mobile middle class moving to the suburbs.

In 1929, because of a "growing demand" for larger homes, M. and R.B. Warren began building "economical" three-bedroom, two-story houses with garages in either "English or Colonial design" in a development they called "Leland," west of Section Four. Houses were priced from $7,950 to $13,450. Terms were 10 percent down with the rest to be paid in monthly installments over a definite period of years, according to their advertising brochure. These houses were designed to "meet the needs and desires of the average salaried man, and [were] well within the reach of the young professionals, business executives, and employees of the Federal and District governments."

In the mid-1930s and 1940s, the Warrens also developed "Meadowbrook," an area bounded by East-West Highway, Meadow Lane, Aspen Street, and Maple Avenue. Sixty houses were built in "Colonial Federal Style" and priced from $10,500 to $18,500.

Italian Renaissance Revival on Connecticut Avenue
PHOTO BY RICHARD RIVERS

"Colonial Federal Style" houses on Aspen Street in the "Meadowbrook" subdivision, 1935 MONROE WARREN COLLECTION

Georgian Colonial

The Georgian Colonial, called the "pin-stripe suit" of Washington suburban houses by architect David Jones, is the most prevalent style in our town. This "ample, and even elegant, but not grandiose" house evolved in England during the 17th and 18th centuries as a dwelling for a new class of landed gentry that occupied a niche in the social hierarchy between the nobility and the yeoman, according to Mary Mix Foley in *The American Home*.

The English Georgian house, derived from the 16th century palaces of Palladio, was a radical departure from medieval architecture, according to Foley.

Georgian Colonial Revival, corner of Chatham Road and Aspen Street, circa 1935 MONROE WARREN COLLECTION

In the middle ages, buildings evolved over several centuries. Rooms were tacked on where needed, and windows and doors arranged according to necessity, accident, or whim. But the symmetry and balance of an English Georgian house, which was the result of a unified design where the parts were subordinated to an overall concept, reflected a Renaissance ideal—that man could impose reason and order on his world.

The suburban Georgian Colonial Revival house is often quite similar to the 18th century versions built by the English colonists. It usually retains an oblong shape, a gabled or hipped roof, and the symmetrical arrangement of windows. The center front door is frequently decorated with fanlights, sidelights, and classical architectural elements that were popular during the Colonial and Federal periods. The side porches common to the 20th

century revival of this style are a legacy of the Victorian period.

Tudor Revival

The Tudor Revival house was especially popular in the 1920s, and is nearly as prevalent as the Georgian Colonial Revival in our town. The suburban version often mixes elements from both high-style palaces and humble medieval cottages of the Tudor, Elizabethan, and Jacobean periods.

Steep-pitched, front-facing gables recall the picturesque rooflines of medieval houses. The front door is often shaped with a pointed "Gothic" or rounded "Romanesque" arch and is usually placed off-center, creating an asymmetrical appearance. The exterior is frequently a mixture of brick and stone. Strips of wood applied over stucco mimic visually, but not structurally, Elizabethan half-timbering. Chimneys are usually prominent and massive. Casement windows are often set with leaded glass.

Susan Goodman

Tudor Revival on Leland Street

PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

Tudor Revival on Meadow Lane

PHOTO BY RICHARD RIVERS