BETWEEN CITY AND SUBURB:
THE NEAR URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD, TECHNOLOGY,
AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE AMERICAN HOUSE, 1914-1934

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Neal Vernon Hitch, B.S. Arch., M. Arch., M.A. History

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2005

Dissertation Committee:

Professor John C. Burnham, Adviser
Associate Professor Steven Conn
Associate Professor Kay Bea Jones

Approved by

Adviser
Graduate Program in History
ABSTRACT

This work offers a new perspective on the standard interpretation of suburbanization in the United States and provides a historical model within the literature of New Urbanism. The work investigates aspects of both the community and commodity of the “modern” home and what I refer to as the near urban neighborhood.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, there was a fundamental change in the nature of housing in the United States. This change resulted in a new residential streets developed to be both automobile- and pedestrian-friendly; a new floor plan, what I refer to as a box for technology; and the commodification of the American home, equated with items such as the radio and automobile.

The house itself, as it exists today, is a record of this change. In this study, architectural archaeology and an in depth investigation of one street in Columbus, Ohio, were used to gain historical insight about why the house changed. This study of eight primary artifacts (houses) was augmented by trade journals, plan books, and ladies’ magazines to show how the new house plan of the 1920s became standardized across the United States.

These investigations showed that by the 1920s: 1. The house sat on a street. The street connected the house to services, often technological. And the neighborhood connected the house to community; 2. The house was a box for technology holding the
appliances and artifacts connected to the systems on the street; 3. The box consisted of a series of rooms, each with its own technological appliances and devices; 4. Emergent middle-class families bought these homes.

Evidence suggested that changes in technology became the common thread in the development of the new house type. The technological change within the near urban home was not a slow, progressive transition. The change was fast and revolutionary. By purchasing a near urban home, the homeowner bought and embraced the entire package of twentieth-century technology and culture. The home had become “modern” in both its plan and conception. And, builders and owners tied the idea of the “modern” home directly to the technology within.
Dedicated to B. Blythe Hitch, my mother,
who, my whole life, has provided the model of dedication, sacrifice, and perseverance.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My life has been blessed by three people who have chosen to mentor me at the ends of their careers. My father, Dr. Rev. Francis Hitch taught me about faith. Leslie Zuba, R. A., taught me about historic architecture. And Dr. John C. Burnham taught me about history.

I have been especially privileged to work with Dr. John C. Burnham. As, probably, his last graduate student, I have had the time and the personal attention only dreamed of by most candidates. I am forever indebted to his patience and his determination to teach me how to write.

Two others have been instrumental in my professional development. Without the direction and the time spent with Travis McDonald at Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest Restoration Field School, I would have never been exposed to the particulars of architectural investigation, which has become my passion. I am also grateful to George M. Kane, R. A., Director of Facilities Management, Ohio Historical Society, who has provided a work environment that has supported and encouraged my development and specialization.

I would like to offer special acknowledgement to Rev. Glenn and Christina Perry, Jeremy and Cindy Search, Bob and Lisa Van Tillberg, Rev. Tim and Stacy Lee, and especially my brother and sister-in-law, James and Christina Sintz. These families let me
measure, poke around, explore, dig into, and, in some cases, tear apart their houses
without the slightest complaint or hint of annoyance. Without their tolerance over the
last five years, this study would have never been possible.

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Prof. Steven Conn, who has
provided the model of using one’s talents while balancing academic success with
community activism for historic preservation, and Prof. Kay Bea Jones, who has come
full circle as my first instructor in architecture. I would like to thank Dr. Ronald Dale
Karr and Dr. Margaret Crawford for reading and commenting on drafts of portions of this
work as part of conference sessions. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Morris, Dr.
Stuart Hobbs, and Ms. Cheryl J. Lugg, Curator of History at the Ohio Historical Society,
for their intellectual support and encouragement. All were colleagues at school who have
become indispensable colleagues in the field.

I would like to thank the Ohio Historical Society for providing support, both
financially, through providing me with a job, and materially, by holding the research
archives used for much of this study. I would especially like to thank Cynthia Ghering
and Duryea Kemp for providing assistance with images and other materials. I would also
like to thank Ben Helle who has been a very supportive in his efforts to keep me abreast
of possible research collections.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife and high school sweetheart, Deneen Hitch,
for putting up with what has been required to complete this work. I began the pursuit of a
new dream four months after we were married. Sixteen years, four degrees, three
children, and three careers later we have finally completed this portion of our life
together. I love you more than anything in the world, and I am looking forward to whatever comes next.
VITA

August 1, 1964……………….Born – Ft. Madison, Iowa

1993……………………………….B.S. Architecture, The Ohio State University

1995……………………………….M. Arch, The Ohio State University

1996……………………………….M. A. History, The Ohio State University

1997-present…………………….Restoration Coordinator, Ohio Historical Society

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
Minor Field: Architectural History
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of Housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Near Urban Neighborhood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Modern House Type</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The House as a Box for Technology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodification</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbanization</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives to Standard Suburbanization</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities, Communities, and Builders as a Focus of Research</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The House as a Focus of Research</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Culture Studies and Architecture</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Material Sources</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Specific Evidence and Argument</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The Material Record of a Near Urban Neighborhood | 40 |
   - Chase Avenue - Hilltop Addition, Columbus, Ohio | 42 |
   - Women Homeowners on Chase Avenue | 57 |

2. From Construction to Community | 60 |
   - The House as an Artifact | 64 |
   - The City of Columbus | 65 |
   - The Architectural Plan | 66 |
   - Chase Avenue and Architectural Style | 68 |
Technology as System ................................................................. 213
Technology as Material Culture ...................................................... 217
The Telephone .................................................................................. 219
The Telephone in Ohio ................................................................. 220
The Telephone in the Home ......................................................... 222
The Radio ........................................................................................ 227
Technology as Male Domestication .................................................. 229
Frank Conrad and the First Broadcast ............................................. 230
Listening .......................................................................................... 233
Electricity and the Modern Home .................................................. 238
Equipping the Home ...................................................................... 242
Technology and Laundry Work ....................................................... 248
Refrigeration .................................................................................. 255
Managing Refrigeration ................................................................. 260
Heating System ............................................................................. 265
Conclusion ..................................................................................... 271

5. The Rise and Fall of the Near Urban Neighborhood and the
Commodification of the American Dream ........................................... 273

Broadview and Westgate Additions .................................................. 280
Other Near Urban Neighborhoods in the Midwest ......................... 287
The Commodification of the House ................................................ 290
The Information Syndicate of Housing .......................................... 294
Government-Sponsored Voluntary Programs ................................. 296
The Own Your Own Home Campaign ............................................ 298
The Better Homes in America Movement ...................................... 301
The Architects’ Small House Service Bureau ................................. 303
The Home Modernization Bureau ................................................ 305
The New Deal and Modern Housing .............................................. 307
Modernization of Housing ............................................................ 308
Standardization of Housing ............................................................ 311
Conclusion: From Near Urban to Suburban ..................................... 314

Conclusion ..................................................................................... 316

Evidence ........................................................................................ 318
Consumerism and Technology ....................................................... 320
The Transition ............................................................................... 324

Bibliography .................................................................................. 327
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Residences by Family Structure on Chase Avenue</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Size of Nuclear and Extended Families on Chase Avenue</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Classification of Male Workforce on Chase Avenue</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Classification of Female Workforce on Chase Avenue</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Cost of “Popular Dutch Roof” House in Omaha, Nebraska, c1904</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Cost of a House Designed for the <em>Ladies’ Home Journal</em>, c1904</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Cost of a House as Published in <em>House Beautiful</em>, 1918</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Articles in the Kitchen, 1912</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Distribution of Rooms from 600 Plans Published 1917-1927</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Cleveland Seventh Home Inventory - Percentage of Electrical Appliances in 5870 Surveyed Home in 1939</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Cleveland Seventh Home Inventory - Percentage of Electrical Appliances in 5870 Surveyed Homes Prior to 1931</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Number of Electrical Appliances purchased in Muncie, Indiana, May-October 1923</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Percentage of Electrical Appliances in Homes Wired for Electricity, 1936</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Sales by Year of Refrigerators and Houses</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>View of Chase Avenue looking north from Grace Street, November 2004</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>View of Chase Avenue looking north from Steel Avenue, November 2004</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Image of Raymond Kuhn</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Detail of cutaway showing a piano under the living room window</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Original bathtub and flooring at 220 North Chase Avenue, 2004</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>The Hilltop Addition, showing lots developed by William Orebaugh and H. G. Butler</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Floor plans, 151 North Chase Avenue</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Front elevation, 151 North Chase Avenue, October 2004</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Interior, living room, 151 North Chase Avenue, February 2005</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Horse-drawn scoop excavating basement</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Unloading truck at a building site, West Side Lumber Company</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>House under construction, showing pine sheathing</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>House interior under construction, showing lath</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>Plan of 220 North Chase Avenue</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>Front elevation, 220 North Chase Avenue</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>Interior elevation, living room fireplace, 220 North Chase Avenue</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Interior elevation, front door and stair, 220 North Chase Avenue</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.19 Small kitchen showing open plumbing..............................................................165
3.20 Modern bathroom, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1923...........................................167
3.21 Basement floor plan, Arthur’s ideal plan .......................................................170
3.22 First floor plan, Arthur’s ideal plan ...............................................................171
3.23 Second floor plan, Arthur’s ideal plan ...........................................................174
3.24 Front elevation, Arthur’s ideal plan ...............................................................175
3.25 Front elevation, The Suburban, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924 .........................180
3.26 Floor plan, The Suburban, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924. Note bonus rooms...180
3.27 Front elevation, The Hudson, Aladdin Homes, 1918 ......................................182
3.28 Floor plans, The Hudson, Aladdin Homes, 1919..............................................182
3.29 Front elevation, The Huron, Montgomery Ward & CO., 1924 .........................183
3.30 Floor plan, The Huron, Montgomery Ward & Co., 1924 ..................................183
3.33 Advertisement, West Side Lumber Company ..................................................194
3.34 Isometric cutaway, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1923...........................................195
4.1 75 North Chase Avenue, Shetrone House, July 2005 ......................................201
4.2 Henry C. Shetrone, archaeologist for the Ohio Archeological and Historical Society, 1921.................................................................202
4.3 Henry Shetrone’s house on Cresent Avenue, Broadview Addition, ca1950 .......204
4.4 Telephone placed on the desk in a den of a Craftsman style home, 1905 ...........224
4.5 Advertisement showing telephone in kitchen....................................................227
4.6 Advertisement for the “real gripping thrills of Radio reception,” 1924 .................236
INTRODUCTION

Something happened during the twentieth century to the most fundamental environment with which Americans interacted: the house. Most historians believe that the American conception of the home transformed from an idealized Victorian house in a community to an idealized modern house in a suburb. This work examines closely the critical development that explains what this transformation consisted of and how it occurred.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, housing changed from an individualized expression of one’s wealth and position in society to a standardized commodity manufactured and sold to an expanding middle-class market. In the meantime, construction became the number one employer and a significant measure of the U.S. economy. During this process, the American dream of homeownership was born, and a burgeoning class of new housing professionals stood anxious to fulfill it.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF HOUSING

This work takes up two fundamental constructions. First, suburbanization was a result of a dramatic shift in the conceptualization of housing in America. Second, the individual house was the artifact of that shift. The process of this transformation is
documented by looking at the house as it developed between the urban model and the suburban model. The study utilizes significant aspects of material culture history applied to housing. This documentation, therefore, will be interdisciplinary in nature, with a foundation on urban history, material culture studies, the history of technology, and architecture.

The house in itself has little meaning. Fundamental to the idea of the “house” is the fact that someone built the house and someone lived in the house. To understand the house, these stories must be woven together. In this way, changes to the house as a structure can be studied as part of culture. The transformation in housing affected all areas of culture and society. In some aspects, the transformation embodied the conceptual change in ideas of house and home. In approaching what I have designated the near urban neighborhood, the story becomes the story of the builder and the homeowner.¹

The account that follows, therefore, examines the housing transformation during the early twentieth century, the transition between urban housing and suburban housing. It was in this in-between stage that real estate professionals, contractors, and savings and loan institutions worked out the process of modern housing delivery methods that would come to fruition during the postwar housing boom of the 1940s. During the 1920s, a critical mass of housing production, nearly a million houses a year, came at the

¹ During the 1920s, America underwent fundamental shifts in the growth of corporate power, the transformation of work, the emergence of a mass consumer culture, and changing values and behavior in sexual and religious life. These changes dramatically reshaped American life and formed the core themes of what has become known as “modernity.” For a discussion of these themes see Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), and Stanley Cohen, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York; Oxford University Press, 1991); see also Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
same time that housing professionals began to focus on a new middle-class housing market. This came before, but anticipated, the housing boom of the mid-twentieth century.

By the mid-1920s, the definition of “suburban” was a community, with a specific density of population, from which the heart of the city could be reached conveniently, quickly, and at a low cost. Contemporaries, however, understood the importance of the suburb not to be location, but to be the effect of the suburb on the individual. Real suburbs began, according to a 1925 eyewitness, when “land contacts have become strong and definite enough to make their impression upon daily life and thus to have a distinct place in molding the growing mind.” According to this expert witness, suburbanization did not occur in “working-man’s suburbs with eight or ten families an acre and only a patch of green grass around the semi-detached house.” Housing situated on lots approximately 40 feet by 120 feet, therefore, was too near to urban areas to be totally suburban. In fact, this expert drew “the line between city and suburbs at this point,” a point that will be referred to below as the near urban neighborhood.²

The argument that I make in this book is that during the 1920s three simultaneous events occurred that explain the transformation of people’s conceptions of the house.³ These three events are components of the framework within which the nature of the North American house changed.


³ “The house” as a concept is different from the ideal house and also different from a house in which one actually lived. “The house” functioned interactively with cultural entities such as family, community, identity, and personal needs.
1. What I refer to as the near urban neighborhood constituted a transitional zone between the urban and suburban.

2. In this critical period, the house became a box for technology that embodied the modern.

3. The end result of the housing transformation was the commodification of the single-family American home.

THE NEAR URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

The key to these changes was what I have called the near urban neighborhood. Near urban neighborhoods were not exceptionally special places. Everywhere one looks, in American metropolitan areas that were growing in the 1920s, one is likely to find the near urban neighborhood. Such a neighborhood is typified by residential streets lined with boxy, medium-sized houses, not quite four-squares and not quite bungalows, on lots with an average size of 40’ by 140’. Built in the 1920s, the houses share many characteristics. In some cities, the near urban neighborhood is easier to find than in others. In Martin’s Ferry, Ohio, there were only two periods of development, one during a boom in the 1880s and one during a boom in the 1920s. Owing to this timing, the near urban neighborhoods are plentiful. In St. Louis, by contrast, neighborhood development progressed consistently, and over time, so that the near urban neighborhood pattern

---

appears in very few areas. One new urban area, for example, included some streets in the area known as Dogtown.

The pattern, with many varieties of advertisement and promotion nationally, did not depend on population or even geographic area. Near urban neighborhoods existed in developments such as West Haven in Indianapolis, Indiana, Over-the Pike outside of Wheeling, West Virginia, and in Vernon Heights in Marion, Ohio. In Columbus, Ohio, they can be found in various places in communities such as those named Grandview, Clintonville, and the Hilltop.

Built during the boom of the 1920s, but many platted prior to that, near urban neighborhoods combined sidewalks and porches with alleys and rear one-car garages. These mundane, clichéd things are found to have had great significance when the material artifact is examined closely. With these elements, the street itself became a connector of community.5

A distinguishing characteristics of these neighborhoods became the fact that they were developed to be both automobile- and pedestrian-friendly. Streets in the neighborhood typically dead-ended into commercial corridors, and people living on the street worked at, or were patrons of, the services available and accessible at the end of the street. Early in the 1920s, often the commercial corridor also served a streetcar line. The street, in this case, connected the community with a larger work environment, while the

---

5 Robert Vickery, Jr., *Anthrophysical Form: Two Families and Their Neighborhood Environments* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972), 3, offers a unique methodology for the investigation of neighborhoods, suggesting that “physical design cannot exist independently from human need,” and that research on neighborhoods must be “conducted by someone trained in physical design.”
neighborhood still offered basic services within walking distance. In fact, a major selling point of these neighborhoods was this proximity to both services and public transport.\textsuperscript{6}

This study is therefore about detached, single-family residential structures. These are the houses that typically dotted the landscape in the United States in every subdivision outside of virtually every city. As I have noted, the conceptual change that occurred in the early twentieth century led to the postwar developments, but previous to those developments, a specific housing and development pattern began to appear along the fringes of the traditional Warnerian walking city in which a person could walk to work and services.\textsuperscript{7} These older neighborhoods, typically constructed between 1914 and 1927, developed outside of city incorporation boundaries but were platted as annexations. It is these annexed areas that can be considered near urban neighborhoods -- not totally outside of the city, but not quite suburban, in a later sense, either. As development types, these near urban neighborhoods preceded true suburbanization in both time and conception.\textsuperscript{8}

Many near urban neighborhoods fall into the category considered today as inner-ring suburbs. In city planning, a new model of metropolitan spatial structure

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} The West Haven subdivision in Indianapolis was built four blocks from the west Tenth Street Car line. Advertisement, “Some of the Homes in West Haven,” \textit{Indianapolis Sunday Star}, June 8, 1924.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Diane Shaw, in \textit{City Building on the Frontier: Sorting the New Nineteenth-Century City} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 3, reappraises the traditional archetype of the walking city in looking at cities founded and developed during the nineteenth century on the New York frontier. Shaw notes that these cities were “sorted” and developed into a series of districts according to “occupational segmentation.” In this model, “the shop, not the house, was the primary attribute that identified the district.” The near urban neighborhood was not a district, nor was it a streetcar suburb. The area functioned as a separate community, but it was expressly tied to the downtown business center. It is true that Midwestern cities developed in the nineteenth century under a different model than Boston, as described by Warner, but the
\end{itemize}
differentiates an inner-ring and an outer-ring of suburban development. The inner-ring areas were often early suburbs developed before post-World War II suburban development and are areas that today are experiencing neglect and decline. Not all inner-ring suburbs would be considered near urban neighborhoods, and not all near urban neighborhoods would be considered within an inner ring. In Martin’s Ferry, Ohio, for example, there are near urban streets, but postwar suburban development has never encircled the town. A key differentiation of the near urban neighborhood was that the developments extended the existing city fabric.9

There was a marked difference between these near urban neighborhoods and the typical postwar subdivisions. The biggest difference was that near urban neighborhoods were typically inclusive of both the automobile and the pedestrian. By 1924, however, new housing developments tended to eliminate the pedestrian in favor of the car. As historian Clay McShane, especially, has noted, one of the chief differences of the new automobile based suburbs is that they were exclusively upper-middle class, focussed toward those individuals who were buying cars.10 This new trend toward neighborhoods accessible only by automobile became the standard during the 1930s.

My research is directed toward specific events within the Midwestern regions of the United States. Many studies have been completed dealing with aspects of housing in

---


both New York and in California, but these special areas are not very useful when looking for standard development trends as accepted by the majority of the population. Even early studies by William Whyte or Herbert Gans suffer this limitation. Because these investigators looked at the largest or the first suburban manifestations of housing, they do not reflect a general acceptance or trend in housing developments. Robert Lynd’s and Helen Lynd’s *Middletown* presents a better model, drawing on the seemingly undistinguished town of Muncie, Indiana. The Lynds’ work has been continuously used as a resource for discovering middle-class values during the 1920s. When looking for conceptual change, regional areas that generally possess qualities of un-exceptionalism are the best candidates.

Research, reported below on a specific near urban neighborhood, will detail how early community development occurred and how this development came to shape the community. Newspapers and other forms of local resources, including the buildings themselves, possess the information from which to reconstruct the development process. These resources will show how, during the mid-1920s, builders and developers created small tracts of new speculative housing and attracted the new middle-class market.

Near urban neighborhoods did appear all over the United States during the 1920s. Occasionally, they have been written about as parts of studies with different foci.

---

11 William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967). Both of these books were very important in establishing the framework from which all other sociological studies of suburbanization have progressed. By looking at Oak Park, outside of Chicago, and Levittown, outside of New York, however, both studies take place within a context that is not typical of what most Americans have experienced in near urban or suburban neighborhoods. Other works, such as Michael Bennet, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1996) or Ned Eichler, *The Merchant Builders* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), are journalistic approaches that, while valuable, only transpose existing stereotypical interpretations of postwar housing.
Authors have looked at neighborhoods and houses built during this time period. Many of these studies, however, use housing developments that were not necessarily the standard then. Convenient sources exist for some types of housing developments, such as those found for company towns or communities constructed by one developer. These sources often determine the reason why various histories written about housing (although cited below) do not address typical housing development.

The recent resurgence of new works on mail order homes, especially from Sears, Roebuck and Co., can be seen as an example of historians trying to define typical houses of the 1920s. These studies contribute greatly to our knowledge of the cultural discourse about housing in the 1920s. Unfortunately, surviving descriptions of catalog homes do not tell us what was actually constructed.

It is the actual artifacts -- built homes -- that are the primary sources to add substantial depth to our understanding of what happened during the 1920s. To construct the typical, what is needed is a random sample from a nondescript street in middle America. This work therefore starts out with such a street, and most particularly, with the houses that constituted that neighborhood. Access to a significant sample of the homes on this street allowed questions to be asked and conclusions to be made -- questions like, why do all the houses look so much alike? Why do they all have front porches exactly

---


the same size? Who built row after row and street after street of them? Why does the street feel so comfortable when one walks along the sidewalk?

It turns out that in these houses it is possible to see the development of the near urban neighborhood and the processes of modernization and commodification. These processes resulted in the mass acceptance of a boxlike, one-and-a-half-story, or two-story structure with a front porch entering onto a new multi-use space, the living room. Both the typology and technology\textsuperscript{14} of the near urban house were conceptions in the minds of the people who built and bought the houses. It is ironic that the material artifacts of the houses serve as such vivid evidence of the immaterial fantasies of consumers.

Fundamental to this study, therefore, is the source material. The discussion of “the house” that will follow utilizes physical evidence left by the builders, developers, and realtors who created the neighborhood. The historical artifacts are the houses, and the research presented here begins with the stories of six of these houses constructed on one street, Chase Avenue, in one near urban neighborhood. In addition, two nearby houses have also been documented to validate the typicality of the houses on Chase Avenue. The remarkable access to these eight homes allowed architectural investigations that provide enough clues that we know what they actually looked like and how they were constructed.

That is, the houses themselves can be read as a text of the culture and society that created it, the lasting record of both the housing delivery system and the social history of the near urban neighborhood. The house itself, in fact, is the most reliable source from which to learn this story. Unlike pattern books, or utopian developments, or builder’s

\textsuperscript{14} See below for detailed discussion of these terms.
blueprints, the house as artifact tells the story of what builders constructed and what homeowners purchased.\textsuperscript{15}

**THE MODERN HOUSE TYPE**

In addition to what can be learned from looking at the house as an artifact and the house in a neighborhood setting, the house plan became important in the 1920s as the way in which people thought about the house. Traditionally, when architectural historians look at housing, they discuss the exterior style. In the 1920s, what was remarkable was the consistency of the house plan.

What these houses all had in common was a general interior configuration, or floor plan. This is the “house type.”\textsuperscript{16} It could be argued that this house plan was vernacular in form. I argue, however, that the typical house plan in near urban developments during the 1920s was a result of a careful restructuring of the housing delivery system, constituting a transition in the change from Victorian housing to a new, modern form of housing for the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{15} For a similar argument, see Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 4. Kelly observes that during the late twentieth century, the body of literature surrounding suburbanization remained rooted in archival sources, and “the scholars focused on what had been written about houses and housing, rather than on the houses themselves.”

\textsuperscript{16} Typological studies are those that classify and identify groups of artifacts by type. In architectural history, the term archetype often denotes a specific form that can be used as an example to classify or compare and contrast other similar forms. In this study, “house type” will be used to discuss the typological aspects of the near urban house that separated it from the Victorian predecessor and the postwar colonial dwellings that came after.
THE HOUSE AS A BOX FOR TECHNOLOGY

The near urban house came into widespread acceptance as a house type at the same time that technology began to change the functions of domesticity. This interaction both influenced and was influenced by the near urban house. Though technology had been changing the nature of housing since the late 1890s, the near urban house was designed to contain the new technologies associated with modern housing. In fact, contemporaries referred to the housing type as a six- or seven-room “modern.”

“Modern” was more a reference to all the “modern conveniences” built into the house than it was to any stylistic quality. When homeowners purchased the near urban house, they bought all the technology that came with it – an idea that will be explored below in several different contexts.¹⁷

Technological innovations also played another part in accelerating transformation. The introduction of electrical power tools aided changes, filling a void left by a lack of manpower during the late 1930s and 1940s. Within the timber industry, innovations resulted in the standardization of lumber.¹⁸

The technological aspects of the building industry have always been important to the history of housing. Within this framework, various authors have explored the house and other appurtenances as artifacts. In many cases, the homes, construction techniques, and the utilities that serviced them have become primary evidence of the culture in which


the inhabitants participated. An example of this is the technological development of balloon-frame construction. This innovation served as a major turning point ushering in the era of the Victorian style, a transition recognized by almost all scholars of housing.19 Other technological innovations such as electrical wiring, gas and electrical systems, sewers and plumbing, and road and highway construction have been explored by other authors as well.20

Several authors have produced works on major technological developments important to the housing industry. They have been successful in combining the history of technology with social history. In doing so, the history of technology has shifted away from determinism and toward an analysis of how different groups and organizations shaped technological advancement. The authors of new theoretical studies have focussed on how both technology and society shaped each other. Technological change, these


authors contend, cannot be separated from the competition between interest groups over the meaning, use, and conceptualization of new technologies. 21

One of the most notable authors is Mark Rose, who studied the rise of gas and electric companies and the distribution of these services in both Kansas City and Denver. Rose shows how technology changed everyday life and how the technology itself became an agent of cultural change. He argues that the employees of gas companies acted as agents of social change when they stepped out to sell gas and create markets. In a similar argument, Ronald Kline has shown how women became agents for marketing new technologies, and thus agents of cultural change. Kline pushes his argument of cultural change further by arguing that end users of new technology become agents of change themselves in some cases. Similar studies have been completed about the development of city sewer systems and household plumbing. 22

What these studies show is that technology shaped culture, but technology cannot be viewed separately from the culture that created it. Studies in the theory of technology suggest that artifacts themselves can have agency. 23 I contend that there is no

---


environment in which this occurs more than in the home. It is here, within the interaction between humans and artifacts, that most of the population came into contact with technology. In this model, technological artifacts became the interface of emergent cultural change as changes in housing during the early twentieth century embodied cultural change. The result was the familiar suburbanization in the United States.

COMMODIFICATION

In American culture, then, a variety of types of evidence shows that between 1914 and 1927 the conceptual understanding of the American single-family home was transformed from a hierarchical symbol of implied social standing to a consumer-based commodity. The American home turned from a place in which to live to a place to own.

Many scholars have focused on cheap available land and the acceptance of the automobile as the chief reasons for postwar suburban development. New highway systems allowed access to the hinterlands where rural property could be developed at low cost. The automobile mobilized the population, but it did not create housing availability or demand.24 A new conceptual understanding of the American home created suburbanization.


24 Mark Rose, Interstate Express: Highway Politics, 1939-1989 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990). Rose argues that suburbanization did not enter into the highway decision process, but rather private interests such as car manufacturers and oil companies pressured Congress to fund highways. Suburbs followed as an afterthought to highway construction. Mark Foster, From Streetcar to Superhighway: American City Planners and Urban Transportation, 1900-1940 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), argues that early developers financed the construction of roads into new
During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the ownership of a home became the primary goal of significant numbers of trend-setting middle-class Americans. Mere possession became more important than the quality, style, or location of the house. During this transformation, people came to understand and accept the social implications of home ownership. The transformation had a leveling effect on the segment of the population willing to invest in a new home. Indeed, it was as part of this process that the detached, single-family residential house became the essential understanding of the American Dream.25

Developments, but the federal government invested deeply in highway construction between towns and cities, favoring the use of cars over all other forms of transportation. The automobile was supposedly the chief mode of transportation for the suburbanite, but the government invested in highways as the chief mode of transportation for the military. Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), argues that FHA legislation in 1934 was the central cause of the rise of suburban America.

25 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, is often used as the reference for the vision of America as a country of property-owning, yeomen farmers. This has been co-opted as the American Dream of property ownership. Jefferson, however, is actually making an argument about the necessity for the American colonies to focus on settlement and agricultural development and not on urban manufacturing. Jefferson states “Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have a have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman…but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts...While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff...let our workshops remain in Europe.” Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey, 1825), 224-225; for a discussion of Jefferson’s idealism of property ownership as an argument for the beginning of government participation in private housing see Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 94-101; see also Loren Baritz, *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989). Baritz states: “Plowmen were builders whose determination and dreams formed the foundation of a new democratic society in whose prosperity all who were willing to work could share.”12. Baritz also states that “home ownership was the fulfillment of a dream,” 74; Janet Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt: The State and the Suburban Home Ideal,” *Journal of Policy History* 9 (1997), states that many observers viewed 1920s “suburban homes as a free expression of the marketplace and a reflection of supposedly deep-seated American longings to a scaled-down version of the idealized Jeffersonian middle landscape,” 184. Property ownership as the American Dream has become so ingrained that today it is used as a historical construction without question or notation, Regina Lee Blasanzyk, “No Place Like Home: Herbert Hoover and the American Standard of Living,” in Timothy Walch, ed., *Uncommon Americans: The Lives and Legacies of Herbert and Lou Henry Hoover* (Westport: Praeger, 2003),113, argues that that for Herbert Hoover, “the private home—a single-family dwelling on a suburban lot—constituted the cornerstone of the American Dream;” see also Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream*, 12; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), argues that product advertisements
The transformation from status to commodity did not take place in isolation. As the Victorian ideals of thrift and productivity gave way to mass marketing and consumption, players within the building industry promoted the buying, and specifically the ownership, of a house, in order to gain the largest expanding customer base for housing, the middle and working classes. Specific institutions within society orchestrated this transformation because they stood to gain from the associated boom in the housing industry.

Both the real estate and banking industries contributed to this change in the housing delivery system. Some historians have portrayed the control of markets by business as a search for bureaucratic order. The interaction of real estate and banking as cultural institutions complicates this scenario. Understanding the way in which these businesses contributed to housing makes the cultural and social events of the middle and late twentieth century much more understandable.

The delivery system comprises the manner in which a house is not only constructed, but is sold to a homeowner. Multiple actors were involved in the system in the 1920s. Originally delivered locally, the housing system gradually transformed to

“dramatized the American dream,” xviii, and that they were possibly “reflections of American culture,” xxi. Neither term is discussed or explained. From this work, the reader can be left with the impression that both the American dream and culture are about buying stuff. This can also be read into Kristin Hoganson, “Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920,” American Historical Review 107 (2002): 55-83; this article discussing interior design and furnishings does not mention the American dream until the last two words of the article. Peter Calthorpe, The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), argues that the suburb has been the driving force of American culture since World War II and that new urbanism can reshape the American dream. Wright, Building the Dream, comes the closest to actually articulating a definition for the American dream, stating that Americans “tend to connect that dream to certain kinds of houses – notably detached houses in the suburbs – and to the belief that those houses used to be available to anyone who worked hard enough.” xviii.

encompass a national system. Changes within the local building industry typically took several generations to become standardized within the delivery system. After 1929, the demise of small building contractors accelerated the acceptance of change with the building industry.

Prior to the institutionalization of local building practices in 1934, the local housing delivery system was in flux, changing from a producer-oriented system in which property owners would contract with a builder to construct an original house for them, to a consumer-oriented system in which builders constructed houses on speculation and buyers bought homes in a specific location. This dynamic also affected other commodities, specifically the introduction of the radio and the mass production of an affordable automobile as well as myriad other consumer items, including complete houses, available through both catalogues and new, large retail outlets.\textsuperscript{27}

The new consumer culture was financed largely through a new institution, consumer credit. For the middle class, credit entered mainstream culture after 1914 for the purchase of an automobile. By the 1920s, a young couple with steady employment could acquire a home, a car, and furniture, all for a small monthly payment. In this way,

\textsuperscript{27} The new consumer society is described by Warren Susman, \textit{Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., \textit{The Culture of Consumption} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); David Potter, \textit{People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). Daniel J. Boorstin, \textit{The Americans: The Democratic Experience} (New York: Random House, 1973), shows the popularity of both consumer catalogues and department stores in developing a consumer-oriented society. Lawrence B. Glickman, ed., \textit{Consumer Society in American History: A Reader} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999). Producer culture, based on idealism, where moral values are important, produced self-restraint that led to thrift and saving. Everyone was self-reliant. Consumer culture created a utopian vision. This ethic had produced abundance in America just as Americans were becoming more aware of themselves as a public. The timing of these two occurrences led the individual to accept the responsibility to consume. Consumer culture, therefore, is based on personality. This personality exists outside the self. The culture, based on the acceptance of the individual by others, rewarded self-gratification instead of self-restraint, and leisure instead of diligence at work. The consumer society
the establishment of credit went a long way in promoting the spread and sale of the near urban house.28

SUBURBANIZATION

Sociologists and historians have often characterized suburbanization and the transformation of American housing systems as a postwar phenomenon.29 The material that follows suggests that the basic transition occurred in the 1920s, two decades before the post-World War II housing boom.

I have already noted that much of the discussion of housing during the 1920s has taken place in the literature devoted to suburbanization. The work of Sam Bass Warner, Kenneth Jackson, Marc Weiss, and Clay McShane has laid the foundation for accepted and cohesive arguments concerning general patterns of suburbanization. Other authors have begun to look more closely at aspects of interwar homes. What they have found is that real estate and other hegemonic groups, as well as federal programs, had much more impact, or actual control, over development than previously noted.30

expected each individual to consume. It became a social responsibility to maintain a certain standard of living.


These new authors have stressed the importance of the 1920s and 1930s to the postwar housing boom. Carolyn S. Loeb has correctly argued that new housing developments in the 1920s were directly influenced by the real estate industry. Marc Weiss has shown that prior to the 1920s, the real estate industry sought professionalization as a way to control development. The same has been shown for modern city planning as well. Ronald C. Tobey argues that modern electrification had resounding effects on the suburban house, a direct result of New Deal programs. Greg Hise has investigated the suburban-styled perimeter developments around Los Angeles during the 1930s, maintaining that they are not a suburban phenomenon but should be looked at from an urban context, an expansion of the city.31

As early as the 1950s, historians realized that the suburbanization phenomenon had created new patterns of cultural development. The authors of contemporary sociological studies sought to show how this transformation had occurred in middle America and how the organizational characteristic of the period had affected the occupants of the new housing.32 Even in the face of such criticism, the success and popularity of suburban developments seemed unstoppable. It is clear from the literature

31 McShane, Down the Asphalt Path, 226-228; Loeb, Entrepreneurial Vernacular; Mansel Blackford, The Lost Dream: Businessmen and City Planning on the Pacific Coast, 1890-1920 (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1993); Radford, Modern Housing for America; Tobey, Technology as Freedom; Greg Hise, Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

that by the 1950s, suburbia had had a transforming effect on American culture. The transformation was not in the nature of suburbia itself but in a general cultural shift within the middle classes.33

During the 1980s, major works by Kenneth Jackson and Robert Fishman reinvigorated the suburban critique, the intellectual discourse about why suburbs were bad for America. A revival of interest in the history of suburban development ensued after the publication of these two books. John Palen’s *The Suburbs* has emerged as one of the best post-Jackson books. Much like that of the sociologists of the late 1950s, Palen’s work centers on the misconceptions of the suburb. He argues that the middle class did not flee to the suburbs based on a desire to escape the city and the crime, filth, taxes, and race differences ascribed by other authors. Rather, they desired to achieve the benefits of suburban living. Much like Donaldson before him, Palen asserts that the suburban myth of classlessness, conformity, and homogeneity is a false simplification of a complex and diverse social system. By Palen’s own account, it is in fact the

33 William Dobriner, ed., *The Suburban Community* (New York: Putnam, 1958); within this volume scholars began to show how suburbia was actually a mix of class and ethnicity in which people attained a sense of individuality. Dobriner followed up this work with another study in which he concluded that it was not the suburbs that created social change but that a large segment of society had already undergone a significant change due to factors such as increased marriage and birth rates, frustration with urban life, and wealth; William Dobriner, *Class in Suburbia* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963). The new suburbs were filled with a people from diverse segment of society who all shared common values and outlook. Sociologists were finding the same thing and labeling this amalgamation of society the “middle class,” where an acceptance of a set of social values was more prevalent than ethnical or economic factors. Mills, *White Collar*. The seminal work of this time period was the work of Herbert Gans, who followed Dobriner into Levittown and produced the classic study of suburbia. His conclusions reinforced Dobriner’s theories that social change came with the families as they moved into Levittown. Additionally, his work established that the suburbs were not as different from urban neighborhoods as one imagined, and that they created their own social and political institutions. The institutional thesis of Gans followed a similar thesis to Lewis Mumford, even though somewhat at odds, where civilization progresses through the involvement of people within institutions. Gans, *The Levittowners*; Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*; Scott Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
commonality of shared values and concepts that does differentiate the suburbs from the urban core. Palen argues that people embraced suburbia as a value.34

These works used history as a means of showing the cultural the impact of suburbanization. The tremendous growth of suburban development during the 1980s consequently led to even more scholarship arguing the negative impact of suburbanization, much of which was written for the popular audience and not for academic circles.35 The main proponent of this thought was James Howard Kunstler. His work has focussed on the loss of identity associated with suburbanization. His argument is that the geography of sameness has created generations of people with no connection to the community. Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk have similarly investigated suburban geography further in looking at the “house that sprawl built.”36

The institutional character of suburbanization did not end with the developments of the 1940s and 1950s. The discourse on suburbanization, and much of the historiography previously mentioned, emerged as a topic particularly during the 1970s as a direct result of inner city turmoil of the late 1960s. Much of the work on


suburbanization exists within the framework of architecture and planning and does not address issues such as racial boundaries, resulting urban decay, decentralization of industry, or government policy. To understand the broader picture, one must expand this historiography to include works outside the traditional understanding of the suburb.

Thomas Sugrue exceptionally illustrates the 1960s as the origin of urban crises. Sugrue argues that urban unrest resulted partially from unintended consequences of federal housing policy. Federal institutions caused the decay of inner-city housing by promoting and funding new single family housing built mostly in suburbs outside of existing urban areas.37

ALTERNATIVES TO STANDARD SUBURBANIZATION

Robert Fishman argued for a very specific definition of suburbanization, basically housing for wealthy white families connected to urban areas by transportation networks. Many current histories of suburbanization have begun to look at alternative suburbs for minorities, lower income, or working immigrants. Andrew Wiese is one of the leaders in the search for an expanded suburban interpretation. In Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century, he follows the work of other historians who have investigated individual minority suburban communities.38


38 Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 5-6, acknowledges the literal meaning of suburb as “beyond the city,” and thus the term is inclusive of industrial areas on the urban fringe. For the purpose of his study, however, he provides a precise definition of suburb as including only middle-class residences with the exclusion of “all industry, most commerce except for enterprises that specifically serve a residential area, and all lower-class residents.” Andrew Wiese, Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth
Other historians have begun to explore industrial and working-class suburban communities. Robert Lewis, in particular, has investigated housing developed around industry on the periphery of urban areas. His book of essays, *Manufacturing Suburbs*, illustrates the “diverse social and economic character of the ever changing North American urban fringe in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth.” The “industrial suburbs” that characterized cities like Pittsburgh, San Francisco, and Montreal certainly offer a different perspective of the urban periphery than the traditional concept of the white middle-class suburbs that offered an escape from the city.\(^\text{39}\)

**CITIES, COMMUNITIES, AND BUILDERS AS A FOCUS OF RESEARCH**

Many historians have begun to look at specific individual communities or builders of communities in order to develop a cultural understanding of housing. Many of these studies outline the general historical development of neighborhoods in large cities such as Baltimore and Boston. Others provide detailed histories of specific suburbs or

---

developers. Some of these findings indicate a gradual improvement in housing conditions for the working and middle classes during the twentieth century. 40

Joseph C. Biggot, in *From Cottage to Bungalow: Houses and the Working Class in Metropolitan Chicago, 1869-1929*, for instance, describes the widespread ownership of housing among working class families in Chicago, focussing on Polish immigrants in Hammond, Indiana. He shows that at first these houses were cheap cottages, but during the 1920s, new developers began marketing more spacious “modern” homes to the working class. Daniel Prosser provides additional examples of the growth of middle-class housing in Chicago. Janet Ore traces similar development in Seattle, detailing the history of one developer. 41

Using local studies like these, historians have shown how housing developments, suburbs, and neighborhoods have been planned, have been influenced by politics, have been shaped by geography, and have been transformed by technology. Suburbs and neighborhoods built during the late nineteenth century, based on rail connections and social connections, gradually gave way to the automobile and the separation of the family from the city. Historians have demonstrated various aspects of the changing community in New Jersey, Kansas City, Washington, Indianapolis, Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago,


and New York. Philadelphia alone has provided multiple examples of both urban and suburban community studies to show the transforming nature of housing from the city to the suburb.42

Other historians have focused on the builders of residential structures and the construction practices of the nineteenth century as a way to explore the development of the city and suburb. Mary Vill discusses builders who developed speculative row houses in Baltimore. She looks at 40 builders each of whom constructed more than 100 homes between 1869-1896. One of the keys to successful development was the use of “ground rents” with which the owner would contract with the builder to construct housing, and the

---

builder would not pay rent on the land until the houses were completed. Vill also
documents the professional designation of the builders before and after they began to
develop housing. Out of the total of 40 builders, 28 came from the building professions,
and out of these, six eventually became real estate brokers. Donna Rilling, in Making
Houses, Crafting Capitalism, narrates the stories of craftsmen as they move into the role
of master builders in the early-nineteenth century residential construction industry in
Philadelphia. Rilling also illustrates the use of ground rents in the building industry, but
she also skillfully details the actual construction process as well the process of attaining
building materials. Linda Clarke discusses the change in the building process from
master builder to contractor in England. Clarke uses a detailed narrative of a paving
contractor who moved into residential development. Mary Woods, in From Craft to
Profession: The Practice of Architecture in 19th Century America, suggests in the last
chapter that builders were better suited to produce speculative housing developments at
the turn of the century because they could better manage the risk, an argument that could
be supported by Rilling’s work. 43

Tarr, “From City to Suburb: The ‘Moral Influence of Transportation Technology,’” in Alexander B.

43 Mary J. Vill, “Building Enterprise in Late Nineteenth-Century Baltimore,” Journal of Historical
Capitalism: Historical Change and the Labour Process in the Production of the Built Environment
THE HOUSE AS A FOCUS OF RESEARCH

It is within the context of this insightful literature that I move on to argue that the key building block of the suburb was the individual house. Moreover, the community constituted the basic organizing structure of society. The single-family residential housing unit was the ideational unit in the social construction of a suburban neighborhood, and, thus, the community.

From John Locke to Lewis Mumford, it has been the position of many intellectuals that community described the basic organizational structure that defined civic life. Understanding the institutional changes within the idea of community is important in order to understand why American lived where they did.\textsuperscript{44} Within the


intellectual discourse of both sociology and history, there has been a growing consensus that the suburbs in which most Americans lived during the second half of the twentieth century resulted in the disintegration of community and civic values. Whether this landscape is called the geography of nowhere or suburban sprawl, it is the built environment that most of the population of the United States has called home. Within this cultural geography, most people continue live, work, play, and interact with social institutions that define their status and direction.45

During the mid-twentieth century, the house became the focus of a specific historiography. David Handlin and Alan Gowans brought the house out of the realm of architectural history and into cultural studies. Michael Doucet and John Weaver completed the first comprehensive look at how housing had been developed in North American cities. Both Richard Bushman and Thomas Schlereth produced work that focussed on the cultural issues of Victorian living within the house. Because of works like these, many aspects of housing are now seen through a social history model. The form and style of a house can be linked to cultural changes more than to aesthetic changes.46 Two related disciplines have played a key role in this model: the history of technology, discussed above, and material culture studies.

45 Robert D Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). Since he published an article of the same title in the Journal of Democracy in 1995, Putnam’s work has set the standard for both confirming and criticizing the argument that community is in decline. See also Kunstler, The Geography of Nowhere. Since the publishing of his book, Kunstler has become a national spokesperson for the problems associated with suburbanization. He argues that Americans have lost a sense of place and are no longer connected to a local community.

The idea of architecture as an artifact of style is not new, but architecture analyzed as an agent of culture brought the house into the realm of material culture studies. An outgrowth of cultural history, researchers used scholarly methods to investigate individual artifacts. The resultant historical discourse was also framed within a postmodern theoretical approach to text. These approaches emanated from the theoretical work and the social movements of the mid-twentieth century.

MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES AND ARCHITECTURE

During the 1960s, a revolution in attitudes toward the disenfranchised intensified the evolution of “social history” and “social anthropology.” These fields broadened the traditional scope of early American history to include more prominently the viewpoints of members of the lower classes, African Americans, servants, immigrants, and women. The linear Hegalian histories of the turn of the century had been broken by the progressive historians of the 1920s, but owing to late-twentieth-century intellectual shifts, the linear narrative became a spatial matrix in which multiple histories could be followed along each independent path selected by the individual scholar.47

__________________________

During the same period, following the European theoretical paradigm of structuralism, scholars began to view culture as a series of arbitrary signs assigned social meaning. This line of thought had a dramatic influence on the development of history, anthropology, and architecture, as common objects became imbued with significant cultural meaning. The Geertzian model of “thick description” and Robert Venturi’s “decorated shed” are typical examples of this period. The broadened field of subject matter coalesced with the power given to objects and artifacts as a way to express meaning. Out of this mix, several new subfields emerged, and scholars began to micro-interpret different aspects of early American culture. Scholars in new fields, such as material culture studies, historical geography, cultural studies, and historical archaeology, did not set out to reinvent history but rather tried to define small nuances of everyday life. The micro-histories that flowed from these specialized fields provided a vast amount of new, often localized, history, but very little synthesis.48

younger historians had problems reconciling the consensus theory or national progress of the Cold War historians such as David Potter and Richard Hofstadter with the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and feminist movements.

During the 1980s, post-structuralist or postmodern theory brought about yet another paradigm shift in various disciplines. Trailing the advances of deconstructivism as a new trend in literary criticism, postmodern historians began to question the nature of text. Text began to be seen as a fallible representation of fact instead of truth. Postmodernists became so preoccupied with their own reflexivity, so self-conscious of their own epistemology, that they began to read all evidence in terms of subjective consciousness. Once text became subjective, it no longer had value. Taking post-structuralist thought to this logical conclusion resulted in a backlash of value relationships. Instead of all text losing value, all data became text. In the new subfields of cultural studies, the value of a source of primary evidence no longer depended on an inherent ability to be buttressed by a written source, but new forms of data became primary sources of information unto themselves.49

In this context, housing and landscape became available for interpretation as a primary text. Within the context of colonial Virginia alone, it can be seen how new studies began to shape the direction of the historiography. Rhys Issac’s anthropologically-based history of Virginia’s transformation from frontier to established colony is one of the most influential books within this historiography. Richard Bushman provided an insightful description of patterns of gentility by in part utilizing furniture and architecture. Henry Glassie, Brooke Hindle, and Thomas Schlereth brought material culture to the forefront of cultural studies of the vernacular. These works sought to link

49 Kessler-Harris, in Foner, *The New American History*, see especially 239. Ross, “The New and Newer Histories,” 14, argues that the new social histories of culture, gender, and race shifted the alliance from the social sciences to the humanities. She also uses postmodern theory very broadly to include Geertz, Pockock, and Foucault together as forerunners of what she calls the “newer” cultural histories. I think that there is a defining difference between structuralism and post-structuralist literary theory. In practice, the theoretical positions of Geertz and Foucault produced very different results.
architecture and history within a larger discourse of material culture in which architecture, objects, and ritual are placed together within the framework of cultural history. Many of the historians working in this area came to material cultural studies from social history already influenced to focus on common people and everyday things. This work blends facets of traditional text sources with other forms of data.50

New scholarship has therefore emerged that begins to pull residential housing into the fold of American cultural geography and the spatial construction of history. This new scholarship creates an interdisciplinary model that goes far beyond traditional discourses of housing. The model has roots and background in the theory of structuralism in which individual artifacts are important as cultural signs and meanings. At the same time, historians have used new historical data to reconstruct the history of everyday people placed within the landscape.51


51 This can be seen in the reinterpretation of the early colonial vernacular housing. Architectural historians once interpreted early colonial as a mixture of salt boxes and large Georgian mansions, based mostly on the colonial buildings still standing in the early twentieth century; see Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1922). New scholarship based largely on new archaeological data has presented a different interpretation of an impermanent, post-in-ground vernacular style dominating the early colonial landscape; see James Deetz, In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977); Fraser D. Neiman, “Domestic Architecture at the Cliffs Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building,” Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine 28 (1978), 3096-3128; Cary Carson, Norman F. Barka, William Kelso, Gary Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton, “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies,” Winterthur Portfolio 16 (1981): 135-196. Dell Upton has been one of the leading scholars of the new interpretation of early domestic architecture and one of the first to point to its
The theoretical paradigms that brought material culture studies out of social history have also affected other disciplines. During the past few years, as I have already noted, several authors have investigated major technological developments important to the housing industry. Many of these works have been successful at combining the history of technology and social history. The history of technology has undergone a shift away from determinism to analysis of the way in which different groups and organizations shaped technological advancement. It is in this context that, as I noted earlier, the authors of new theoretical studies have focussed on how both technology and society shaped each other. Within this new paradigm, older assumptions have been dismissed, and technological change cannot be separated from the competition between interest groups over the meaning, use, and conceptualization of new technologies.52

52 See footnote 11.
The theoretical base previously outlined opens up new resources for investigating the changes in housing in the 1920s. An understanding of how houses were constructed, how they were lived in, and how they changed during the first two decades of the twentieth century can therefore be explored by looking at evidence left by local developers and builders, at individual neighborhoods, and at the houses themselves.

By looking at the records and products of builders and developers, then, it is possible to see how these individuals lived and worked within the communities they constructed. Historians have found that the true “community builders” existed at this local level and were not large development corporations that were platting land and prospering off the tide of the 1920s speculative land market. At the heart of this argument is the idea that local builders and developers were servants to the communities that they constructed. Often the builders and developers who constructed the early neighborhood developments also participated as community leaders. Some builders even financed the speculative houses that they constructed, creating further ties with the community that they served. These local individuals also participated in regional and in some cases national institutions through their association with building and real estate organizations.

---


One particularly important resource is the trade magazines used and published by the builders. These building serials offer the chance to track the beginning of change within the housing delivery system during the 1920s and the acceleration of change into the 1930s and 1940s. Authors described new methods and techniques of construction and management before they were widely practiced.

Printed sources served to change ideas about housing to create a desire for home consumption. These publications include magazines such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, mail order catalogues such as those of Sears, Roebuck, and small house plan books. The number of houses constructed from catalogues was small compared to the leveling effect that they had on the housing market. Yet these publications show the channels through which real estate leaders, builders, architects, and others pushed new ideas in housing into the mainstream. Authors of new historical work in this area stress that pattern books served to create hegemonic control of culture and life style by architects, but I shall show that pattern books served as a catalyst for change within the local residential delivery system.55

THE SPECIFIC EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT

Between 1914 and 1927, a dramatic shift occurred in the development of residential neighborhoods in Columbus, Ohio, traditionally understood as a typical “mid-American” city. The shift may seem slight, and at the time the shift did not elicit any

kind of acknowledgment. Through historical perspective, however, this period can be seen as the transition between urban and suburban.

The next five chapters will detail how the house changed from a community-based, neighborhood-oriented structure to a consumer item. The first two chapters will describe in detail near urban neighborhoods on the west side of Columbus, the area known locally as the Hilltop. This specific example can serve to document a distinct reconceptualization of neighborhood and community. The near urban neighborhoods, as well as the near urban house itself, existed on a street. Chapter 1 is about that street.

In Chapter 1, I shall make the first of two arguments that the material evidence on the Hilltop can show what happened and can lead to a new understanding of how people actually lived. Though the chapter is about abstract developments, it is based on real people. Concepts are explained by looking at what is left in the historic record. Newly available census material from the 1930 federal census will be used to complete a picture of what that one street in a near urban neighborhood was like. How did the street function as a neighborhood? What were the physical characteristics that made it spatially a community? By matching existing features on the street with historic sources such as city directories and the area Sanborn Map, a picture of what the street looked like and how it reinforced these ideas will be developed.

This book is also about housing, and what is left are the houses themselves. In Chapter 2, I shall discuss the typological aspects of the near urban house and the form that became the typical residential dwelling of the 1920s. By studying the characteristics of the typical house built during this decade, a distinct archetype becomes clear. The
1920s house type fits within the typology, the study of types, between the Victorian manse and the postwar suburban small home. This chapter explores how the house of the 1920s, as material artifact, explains the history of residential development.

Chapter 3 describes how the material artifact described in the first two chapters compares with what was published at the time about houses. What did all of the publications and the material artifact have in common? And how did the house differ from what came before and what came after? This all culminates in a new house type. Clearly there is a type associated with the 1920s.

The new house type embodied the acceptance of the integration of new technology into the home. Chapter 4 will show how the home of the 1920s became a modern box for technology. When the word “modern” was used to describe a house, consumers knew exactly what this meant. By buying the “modern” home, they were buying the entire package of technological change. The artifact clearly shows this. The material evidence is confirmed by the housing plans in Chapter 3.

Collaborating local forces created the near urban neighborhood on the Hilltop. Contractors, realtors, and lumber dealers all worked in what could be called a housing syndicate, and each was a separate part of the combined housing delivery process. At the local level, neighborhood development continued to be completed by small contractors working in concert with others in the community. The local housing syndicate drew from and absorbed national trends. This national-to-local connection will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company published maps, by individual city, for use by the fire insurance industry. The maps show individual lots and buildings, coded by construction type and use.
There were other national forces at work at the local level. The “Own Your Own Home Campaign,” the Architect’s Small House Bureau, and the Better Housing Program were all programs that sought to encourage modern housing throughout the country. Many of these organizations came about only when local grass roots people created or became a part of national institutions. A good example of this is Marriner Eccles, who came from a local banking and construction family in Utah to establish the Federal Housing Administration and a national mortgage lending system that dramatically affected the housing delivery system in the 1930s and 1940s.57

By the late 1920s, people were buying the idea of the modern house, which had become detached from the building and detached from the neighborhood. The house as personal commodity also changed the nature of how the neighborhood and street integrated families into the community. The comparison of the Hilltop Addition with the near urban neighborhoods that followed shows the transition of the house as it turned into commodity. The transitional nature of the near urban neighborhood, designed to be inclusive of both the pedestrian and automobile, could be sustained on the Hilltop for a distance of only several blocks. At this point, the walking distance became too great. The automobile won, and the porch and sidewalk lost. Three consecutive near urban developments constructed on the west side of Columbus between 1914 and 1927 show clearly the transformation between the city and the suburb. This is, consequently, the story of the rise and fall of the near urban neighborhood as technology and people interacted and as the house became a commodity.

57 See further discussion of Marriner Eccles below.
CHAPTER 1

THE MATERIAL RECORD OF A NEAR URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

The new type of housing established during the first two decades of the twentieth century is represented by countless rows of similar-sized homes with similar characteristics. The consistency of the development might imply a consistent developer, but investigation shows that the houses were brought onto the speculative market in a variety of methods by a variety of small builders.

Something else, therefore, contributed to the uniformity of housing during the 1920s. The people moving onto Chase Avenue, in Columbus, Ohio, represented a cutting edge of American consumers. The material artifacts that they left, the houses, attest to this. Chase Avenue can show us a segment of suburbanization that constituted that particular American phenomenon, the near urban neighborhood.

In order to find out the nature of the near urban neighborhood, we are, as promised in the introduction, starting with the material artifact, an unprecedented sample that provides an in-depth history of one near urban neighborhood in Columbus, and focuses on one specific street in this neighborhood. But it was such a street as could be found in many cities, all over the Midwest and elsewhere. The picture that emerges is that of the critical change that occurred in the 1920s.
First, I shall describe the street as it appeared in 1930. Evidence exists to evoke an image of the people and the place that made the near urban neighborhood a community. The street will be described in the context of both its architectural characteristics and the people who lived there.

The street can be reconstructed from various sources available. Sanborn Insurance maps for Columbus, R. L. Polk City Directories, and the Abstracts of Title for at least three of the houses all provide information. In April 2003, the census material for 1930 became available, allowing the other sources to be placed into the context of the community of individuals who lived in the neighborhood.¹

What one can see from this example is a new type of house with a consistency in character, form, and massing. Elements of the street, such as porches and sidewalks evoked neighborhood identity. The neighborhood, in fact, was a community made up of the families who lived in each house. These houses, unlike those in older neighborhoods down the street, were brand new. But there was more to this community than just new houses. The people on this street, Chase Avenue, all simultaneously embraced the same outlook that appears in the structures that are now left.

The housing on Chase Avenue was in transition. But the middle-class people who inhabited the houses were also in transition. As will become clear later, each of the residences on Chase Avenue interacted with a changing technology. Chase Avenue shows how the design of the houses interacted with the lives of the residents to reinforce

¹ Much of Chapter One utilizes the visual inspection of the houses that still exist on North Chase Avenue with the historical record from the Columbus City Directory (Columbus: R. L. Polk Company, 1930) and the Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Franklin County, Ohio, Enumeration District 25.
cultural consensus. Step by step, the homely, everyday details of the material artifact reveal a pattern of development that embodied the cultural changes of the 1920s.

CHASE AVENUE - HILLTOP ADDITION, COLUMBUS, OHIO

The Hilltop Addition is on the west side of Columbus, platted just west of Hague Avenue. When platted, the development was on the west end of the street rail line. The development was not special. Most of the farmland had already been altered into a residential grid pattern along the rail line. The Hilltop Addition was different, however, in the fact that housing contractors and residents developed the neighborhood with a true mix of pedestrian and automobile, and it came at a pivotal time in housing development, just at the cusp of the conceptual change in how buyers viewed the house.

The development of the Hilltop Addition followed the set pattern of near urban residential additions constructed throughout the early 1900s. The Hilltop Addition comprised an area of 51.35 acres and had four streets, each three blocks long. The neighborhood became the first housing addition on the Hilltop platted and annexed to Columbus outside of the city corporation limit that ended at Hague Avenue.

The land on which this development occurred, west of Hague Avenue and north of Broad Street, had previously been owned and farmed by the Bigelow family.

---

2 Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), developed this idea, using houses of a later date. Kelly, 18, is correct is stressing the importance of looking at houses that were actually constructed, because it is within the artifact of the home that culture and housing can be investigated.

prominent inn and tavern operated by the family, known as the Four-Mile House, occupied the site. Timothy Bigelow purchased the land and in 1862 built the 15-room inn from an existing log cabin. The establishment opened across the road from Camp Chase, a Civil War training facility, and often served Union officers.⁴

The inn and Bigelow farm survived until 1913, when the growth of Columbus began to promote large speculative land ventures. Francis Moffit, a local salesman, made contact with the heirs of the Bigelow property and established a relationship with the explicit purpose of platting and subdividing lots for a new addition. He bought the land from Timothy Bigelow, the oldest son of the original Bigelow, who was acting on the behalf of other heirs, for $54,000.00. Of this, Moffit paid $16,000 down and arranged a mortgage to Bigelow for $38,000. This mortgage was payable in installments of $5,000.00 over the next six years, with an additional $8,000.00 in year eight. Timothy Bigelow received two copies of the plat. He marked off individual lots as they were sold and conveyed a separate deed for those lots.

Moffit immediately turned the deed and the responsibility to plat the land over to the Van De Boe Hager Company, a corporation based in Cleveland with a Columbus office. J. A. Smith, who worked in the Columbus office of Van De Boe Hager, received the deed from Moffit the same day Moffit bought the property from Timothy Bigelow. Within one month, on April 23, 1913, the Hilltop Addition had been platted and approved by the Columbus City Engineer and the Director of Public Services. The farmland was platted and land set aside from the mortgage areas for “streets or highways.” As part of

the expense of platting the land, and for accepting city street engineering services, the land developer gave up the rights to all areas needed to be used for streets, without compensation. As part of this plat and subdivision, the Board of Education of the City of Columbus deeded a strip of its property along Hague Avenue in order to widen the street, which became a major north-south artery. This allowed the addition to sit adjacent to the major elementary school on the Hilltop.

In 1917, J. A. Smith deeded all of the land in the subdivision directly to the Van De Boe Hager Company. Development companies, such as Van De Boe Hager, commonly sold lots to “prospective homeowners, builders, and investors.” In any addition, lots increased in value as the streets began to develop. During the early phases of the development, lots were often purchased as investments, only to be sold later to builders and homeowners at an increased markup. By 1917, 64 lots had been sold, but no buildings had yet been built on the addition.\(^5\)

In 1920, W. P. Oliver, a toolmaker, built the first house, which was at 58 North Chase Avenue. A pioneer in the addition, his house sat alone in a muddy field until development of the street began in 1923. The building process along Chase Avenue started slowly, with only two houses constructed by the end of 1923. An additional 15 houses were built on the street the next year, and eighteen more the following year. The most rapid building activity took place in 1926, with 29 houses under construction. By 1927, most of the lots had been filled and the street achieved a maximum density. The

street had reached its capacity in a four-year building process, with an average of 17 houses constructed each year.\(^6\)

By 1930, the street contained 65 detached structures fronting the street with three additional one-story detached dwellings built on the rear of lots facing the alley. Eight of the structures were houses containing two living units side by side, called a double. The street had a total of 76 residences with 58 owners and 18 renters. The houses did not reflect high styles of architecture, though most, at the time, would have been considered Colonial Revival. Realtors and homebuilders, however, as I noted in the introduction, referred to them as six or seven-room moderns. The houses were very plain, but enough had stylistic elements to give the street character.

In 1930, Chase Avenue was a very typical near urban neighborhood street outside of a very typical Midwestern city. By buying houses on Chase Avenue, the occupants also bought into the cultural values of middleclassness and almost everything that came with that distinction. Residents on the street, however, were a mix of working class and professionals. Very few of the residents would be considered as the managerial class, but upon a closer look, the individuals formed a collective that was the upwardly mobile middle-class. This idea of class will be discussed below, but at its heart was the emergent class that Stuart Blumin has recognized.\(^7\)

The street can easily be described by taking an imaginary walk down the west side of the street as it appeared in 1930. North Chase Avenue, in Columbus, was three

---

\(^6\) Platt Record of Hilltop Addition, Book No. 10, page 132, Recorder’s Office, Franklin County, Ohio; Field Investigation of Hilltop Addition; \textit{Columbus City Directory}, 1920-1927. Figures calculated from the number of new residences listed on North Chase Avenue each year.

\(^7\) Stuart M. Blumin, \textit{The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
blocks long. The street, going both north and south, intersected Broad Street, the main axial street going west out of downtown Columbus. To the north, Chase Avenue was intersected by two cross streets, Grace and Steel, and terminated into a creek bluff dropping off approximately 25 feet. Standing on the corner of Chase Avenue and Grace Street, one could view the houses lining the street with a standard 30-foot setback and a continuous sidewalk. Smaller sidewalks extended to the front porches of each house.

Harriet F. Hicks owned the first home on the first block. She had a large house, built in the style of a Dutch Colonial Revival with a front porch supported by brick columns and brick half walls. Harriet lived with her sisters, all public school teachers. Next door to Harriet, Elliot Robinson and his family lived in a two-story semi-foursquare with a hip roof central dormer. The next two houses were very plain, nondescript doubles; the first one owned by Mae Stephens, who lived there with her four children.

The house at 43 North Chase typified the semi-bungalow style prevalent in the neighborhood; a two-story, side-gable with a shed dormer and roof eaves sloping into a shed roof over the porch. A claim agent for a railroad company, Harold Steinberger, rented this house and lived there with his wife and the rest of her family. As one continued down the street, a plain double sat beside two semi-bungalows followed by another double. Dr. John Craddock, a physician with his own local practice on Broad Street at the end of Chase Avenue, owned the second double. He lived in one side of this double and rented one side out.
Figure 1.1: View of Chase Avenue looking north from Grace Street, November 2004.

Figure 1.2: View of Chase Avenue looking north from Steel Avenue, November 2004.
A brick house sat on the corner lot of the first block. This lot contained a small brick garage on the alley but opening onto the side street. Henry Shetrone owned the house. Shetrone, the foremost archaeologist in the state of Ohio, had become the director of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society in 1928. On Wednesday evening, July 2, he had entertained the staff of the Society in his home. Many people had driven from areas around town and parked on the street. The living room, dining room and porch must have been filled with co-workers socializing into the night.\footnote{\textit{Museum Echoes}, Ohio Historical Society, 3 (1930): 39.}

The other side of the street contained ten homes. Four semi-bungalows with shed dormers alternated down the street with very plain two-story houses with front-facing gables. One lot in the middle of the block remained undeveloped. In the middle of this block, William Oliver and his family still owned the first house built in the addition, as noted above. Oliver lived with his wife, 20-year-old son, his married daughter, and three grandsons. The Olivers’ house looked different from the others on the street. The house was a two-story front-facing gable, but was very thin and very plain, looking like a self-built rural residence more than a near urban house. Another very plain double anchored the block on the corner.

The next block, between Steel Avenue and Grace Avenue, contained 24 detached residences and two doubles. Eleven of the houses had driveways extending from the street. The first corner lot had a one-story house facing the side street, Grace Street. The next house, a side-gabled semi-bungalow, belonged to George Knott. Like nine of the residents on the previous block, he worked for the steam railroad. Knott lived with his
wife and adopted son. He rented part of the house to his seventeen-year-old stepdaughter who had a second floor room with a separate entrance and a separate address.

Further down the block, the houses followed a similar pattern. Next door to the Knotts, Jacob Looker, who worked at the city waterworks, owned a front-facing gable with a gabled porch. Looker, at 103 North Chase, raised Rhode Island Red chickens in his back yard and sold both chickens and eggs to make extra cash. John and Hazel Burke lived in the next house, a side-gabled Dutch colonial. This house was the first of several houses with a porch roof supported by double pairs of wood columns with decorative lattice between and no porch rails. John Burke worked as a sales clerk at the local grocery, and his wife was a nurse at a hospital. Unlike most families on the street, the Burkes kept a live-in house servant. At 25, Margaret Davis probably watched their three-year-old son while both parents worked.

Another Dutch colonial sat adjacent to the Burkes’ home. This house was a double, the only double on Chase Avenue to posses any stylistic characteristics. Renters occupied both sides. Theodore and Irene Hazel paid $45.00 a month, one working as a brakeman for the steam railroad and one working as a bookkeeper for a creamery company. John Ester and his wife and daughter rented the other side. John worked as a superintendent for the Columbus Public Schools. The owner of the one-and-a-half story bungalow next door, Estey Johnson, owned his own barbershop, but both his wife and daughter worked in the cafeteria of a local public school. Three doors down from them, past two side-facing gabled semi-bungalows, another public school employee, a teacher,

---

9 Sometime after 1930, a brick house with a pyramidal hipped roof and a small entry porch was built on the fourth lot, now 42 North Chase Avenue.
owned a home with her husband, a sales manager for the Farm Bureau. At the end of the block lived Henry Kuhn, the owner of a restaurant located on Broad Street at the end of Chase Avenue. Next to the Kuhn’s house, on the corner lot, sat another plain double.

On the other, east side of the street, the houses all looked very much like those on the west side. At the head of the street, a 25-year-old divorced mother of two owned a side-facing gable semi-bungalow, where she lived with her mother and two brothers, both car salesmen. The next four houses also were semi-bungalows. At 116 North Chase, an insurance agent, named Charles Igo, owned a large pyramidal roofed house with a central attic dormer. Valued at $8000, this house was the most expensive house on this block. Along the rest of the street, the houses remained a mix of front-facing gables and side-facing gables. Two lots on this side of the street had not been developed. Thomas Engle, a roofing contractor with his own business, owned the last house on the block, a semi-bungalow.

The third and last block on the street began at Steel and dead-ended into the ravine and creek. This block contained 19 more houses. Six had driveways extending from the street. The first corner lot on both sides of the street held a side-gable semi-bungalow, the first one on the west side rented by Harvey Hobbs, an electrical contractor.

Neither of the next two houses matched the typical details of other houses on the street. Both houses had front entries with a stoop instead of a porch. One had a small porch accessed only from a second door off of the living room, and the other had a decorated arched hood with no porch at all. This house, with both Neo-Tudor and Colonial Revival elements, also had a front-facing gabled extension with a three-sided roof.

---

10 “For Sale,” *Hilltop Record*, March 26, 1925.
bay window. Lym C. Baker, a foreman at the West Side Lumber Company, owned the house. Valued at $8500.00, this was one of the most expensive houses on Chase Avenue. Baker, who was 40, lived in the house with his wife and six-month-old daughter.

The house next door to the Bakers was a typical front-facing gable with a shed-roofed porch and little detail or character. William Peqau worked as a manager at a factory that produced shoes. He rented the house with his wife and two-year-old daughter. The family also employed a live-in servant, a fifteen-year-old girl named Flora Tigmer.

The next house on this last block was not much more than a shack. The house had been one of the first three houses built on the street and was set further back on the lot so that it did match the houses on the street. Rhea Swicegood, who worked for a fertilizer company earning a living by mixing acid, owned the home and lived there with his wife and two infants. The one-story house had four rooms, and at $1,620.00, was the least valued home on the street. Unlike most of the other houses on the street, this house was typical of self-built working-class homes. The lot next door, however, was not developed, so the house appeared to have a large side yard.

The last four houses on the street were very typical of the near urban type. Two of the houses were front-facing gable, two-story homes. The other two were a two-story, semi-foursquare with a pyramidal roof and a central attic dormer, and a semi-bungalow with a second-story shed dormer and a shed-roofed front porch. The last two homes on the street were both owned by Columbus police officers, Charles France and Charles Cole. A third police officer, Ralph Phillips, rented a room from the Frances.
Directly across the street, the last house on the street was a two-story Dutch colonial. This house had been one of the last to be constructed on the street. Eldon Rowland owned the home and lived there with his wife and three small children. Rowland worked as a telegraph operator for the steam railroad.\textsuperscript{11}

\*
\* 
\*

Of the families living on Chase Avenue, 45 percent were living in a home with a father and a mother with one or two children. The majority of people on the street, however, lived in a variety of family arrangements as shown on the following two tables.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering 
\begin{tabular}{llr}
\hline
Type of Family & & \\
Nuclear & 41 & 57\% \\
Extended & 16 & 22\% \\
Two Person & 8 & 11\% \\
Nuclear with Boarder & 5 & 7\% \\
Nuclear with Servant & 2 & 3\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Distribution of Residences by Family Structure on Chase Avenue.\textsuperscript{12}}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{11} Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Franklin County, Ohio, Enumeration District 25. The date on the top of the census data sheets is April 16.

\textsuperscript{12} These tables, drawn primarily from the U.S. Census material for Chase Avenue, correspond to a large part to tables in Richard Sennett, \textit{Families Against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago, 1872-1890} (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 73-80, in order to offer the possibility of a comparison.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Family Members</th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Extended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%=51</td>
<td>100%=21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Size of Nuclear and Extended Families on Chase Avenue.

The homebuyers on Chase Avenue should fit into what is now considered the emergent professional or managerial class. Some historians have asserted that this class, or stratum of society, had actively changed the technological nature of the home and had pursued suburbanization as a way of combating the moral disintegration of the city. Though this may have been true for early, exclusive, planned suburban developments, looking at houses as actual artifacts suggests that on the Hilltop, a different conclusion is appropriate.14

Chase Avenue illustrates a transition that would not be complete until the late twentieth century when white-collar workers came to outnumber blue-collar workers. The near urban neighborhood, however, offered a pattern that was clearly different from a more radical suburbanization. The street offered urban amenities, but it also offered

13 Includes families with boarders and families with servants.

movement out of the urban core. The people who moved here, however, did have distinctive characteristics.

Of the occupations listed on the census for individuals living on Chase Avenue, many fit exactly into the emerging professional-managerial class. Others do not. Chase Avenue had a mix of residents with different social and economic positions. It is unclear to what extent they saw themselves as embodying the ideas of middle class. Yet, the fact that they had purchased or rented a new home in a near urban development shows that they aspired to middleclassness.15

The residents on Chase Avenue, then, typified the emergent middle class. The question can be raised as to what this class looked like. The average age of the homeowners on Chase Avenue was 43 years. The average age of people renting on Chase Avenue was just under 35. Within the 76 residences, 128 people worked at an occupation. This included 35 women. If the employed are be broken down into two general categories of working class and business class, roughly 20 of the men might be considered in the working class and 73 in the business class.16

15 Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown*, placed people in two categories: the Business Class and the Working Class. A 1907 advertisement for a new housing development in St. Louis labeled the area as suitable for the new “brain worker.” This is more descriptive of the type of person relocating to the new housing of the near urban neighborhood. C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*; Clark Davis, *Company Men: White Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000). Striving toward middle-class occupations was evidently taught in suburban homes. Contemporaries noted “the new suburban generation exhibiting a very one-sided approach toward life.” In one survey of 611 high school boys, 249 expected to become engineers and another 163 expected to become “other professionals,” listed as law, medicine, journalism, and architecture. Harlan Paul Douglas, *The Suburban Trend* (New York: Century Co., 1925), 228.

16 Mills, *White Collar*, 35-76, referred to the new emergent salaried class as the white-collar class. Mills perceived a relationship between the old middle class and the new middle class. He found a shift from entrepreneurial employment to the service industry, in which the middle class worked for “someone else on someone else’s property.” Of the new middle class, fifty percent were white-collar employees. These people were differentiated by a change in attire; they wore street clothes to work instead of a uniform or traditional work clothes designed for hard labor. Mills wrote that the three largest occupational groups of
Clearly, some of the male residents held occupations that one would consider professional or managerial. Ten residents worked in fields considered professionalized. This included two doctors, one minister, four men working in the field of education, an engineer, an auditor, and a real estate professional.

An additional six residents held jobs distinctly managerial. This included a manager at local shoe factory, a manager at an insurance agency, a supervisor at the telephone company, a sales manager working for the farm bureau, a credit manager at a clothing store, and the motor pool manager at a meatpacking plant.

Others, not directly called managers, certainly held jobs that put them in charge of others. Three worked as agents or foremen for the railroad, and another worked as a foreman at an oil warehouse. Others held jobs that directly supported rising business interests: nine residents worked as salesmen, four worked as clerks, and two worked as insurance agents. Eight other individuals worked in various fields of the construction industry. Two of these owned their own businesses.

The largest single employer on the Hilltop had typically been railroad companies. This was still the case on Chase Avenue in 1930. Of the people employed on Chase, 19 worked for the steam railroad and two worked for the interurban. Therefore, over 20 percent of the workforce on Chase Avenue worked for a railroad company. About one-third of these employees were business class, or white-collar workers, working in offices, as passenger agents, or as engineers. The other two-thirds, however, worked as brakemen or conductors, jobs still considered working class. In 1929, the average

the white-collar mass were schoolteachers, salespeople, and assorted office workers. The white-collar class did not necessarily reside on the top end of the new middle class, but white-collar employees maintained a great deal of prestige.
railway worker earned $1,647.00 a year and the average railway clerical worker earned $1,689.00 a year. Railroad labor, on the other hand, earned $696.00 a year, clearly demonstrating a differentiation between labor and managerial and clerical positions.\textsuperscript{17}

The federal or local government employed 11 of the residents, making government employees the third largest percentage of the workforce on Chase Avenue. Three residents worked for the post office, one as a mail carrier, one as a postal clerk, and one in the vehicle service department. Two other residents worked within the City of Columbus water department. Five residents on Chase Avenue worked as Columbus police officers.

Even though some of the residents on Chase Avenue did not fit into what would be considered a middle-class occupation, the middle-class value structure was not limited to people with financial and job security. People of meager means also accepted middle-class values. Historians have pointed out that the idea that one could improve economically dominated this value structure. One’s financial difficulties did not matter because success could always be attained tomorrow. The accumulation of objects, however, became the focus of everyone who shared middle-class values. The idea that certain consumer items had to be owned dominated the emergent professional class and those who accepted the value structure of that class.\textsuperscript{18} Buying a house in a near urban

\textsuperscript{17}William F. Ogburn, \textit{Social Changes in 1929} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 942-943; Mills, \textit{White Collar}, 72, suggests that the average white-collar salary was around $1,900.00 a year. “Buying Power of Wages,” \textit{Hilltop Record} August 6, 1922.

neighborhood could dominate notions of middle class held by such people as lived on Chase Avenue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of Male Workforce</th>
<th>Percentage of Male Workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Railroad</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesmen</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9% Mostly working class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: Classification of Male Workforce on Chase Avenue.

WOMEN HOMEOWNERS ON CHASE AVENUE

Six of the families living on Chase Avenue had female heads of households. All six women also owned their homes. Ruth Burkett, a 25-year-old divorced women with two children, owned a home valued at $7,500. Her mother and two brothers also lived with her. Genevieve Gilbert, a 62-year-old divorced woman owned a home she shared with her 32-year-old divorced daughter and her 28-year-old son. Dana Anderson, a 56-year-old widow, owned a home that she shared with her 20-year-old daughter. Mary Goulding, a 55-year-old seamstress at a department store, had remained single, but she shared her home with her 65-year-old widowed sister.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of Female Workforce</th>
<th>Percentage of Female Workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office Work</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/Education</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4: Classification of Female Workforce on Chase Avenue.

Two of the female homeowners offer a detailed look into two different models of home ownership. One owned a large house, did not work, and lived with extended family members. The other lived with her four children and owned a less-expensive double, worked full-time, and acted as a landlord. Both women serve to illustrate how female-headed households participated in middle-class housing culture.

Harriet Hicks, as already noted, owned the home at the head of the street. She had bought her home in 1928 from an owner who had been living there for four years. At 56, she had never married and remained single. Hicks did not have a full-time career. She shared her home, however, with her two unmarried sisters, both of whom worked as public school teachers. The three sisters also lived with Lester Easig, their 44-year-old widowed brother-in-law, who also taught in the public school system. Lester had two daughters, aged 8 and 10, and an 11-year-old son living with him. Hicks’s house was large for the street and was valued at $10,000.

Mae Stevens bought a home on Chase Avenue in 1924 when there were just sixteen houses on the street. She was 35 years old when she purchased the first double
constructed on Chase Avenue. Stevens lived in one side of the double with her four children and worked as a bookkeeper for a fraternal order made up of railroad men. All three of her male children also worked. Charles, her eldest son at 20 years of age, worked as a shipping clerk for a local creamery. Her seventeen-year-old son worked as a caddy at a golf course, and her twelve-year-old son worked the streets as a newsboy.

Even though a double, the home Stevens owned had half the value of Harriet Hicks’s home on the same block. Nonetheless, in 1930 Mae rented one side of the double to Frederick Harris, a 53-year-old electrician who had emigrated from England in 1883. Harris paid 43 dollars a month to live in the home with his wife and 28-year-old son. Considering that Stevens’ house had a value of $4,250.00, Harris’s rent should have almost covered the mortgage. Harris worked as an electrician for the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society, the museum and offices of which were located on High Street. He had just moved into the house in 1930.

Of the six female homeowners, all but two were unemployed. In 1929, women comprised approximately one-fifth of all employed persons and about half of this number were in the professions. This statistic owed to the increased employment of women as teachers. In 1870, 66.3 percent of all teachers were women. By 1920, the number of teachers who were women had risen to 81 percent. Of all the women who worked in the United States, only 23.4 percent were married.19

On November 18, 1925, Henry Kuhn bought a new house on the west side of Columbus in the Hilltop. He bought the home for $3,800 from the H.G. Butler Company. Harry Butler had built the house on speculation and did not have an intended buyer.

Henry Kuhn was born in 1876 in Norwich, Ohio. He grew up on a farm, the fifth child born to parents who had emigrated from Germany. By the time he was 32, he had moved to Dayton, Ohio, and had been widowed. Kuhn had three children who had moved to Columbus to live with his sister in 1911, after the death of his first wife.

In 1925, Henry married Hazel Wagoner. Hazel was sixteen years younger than Henry. She had also been widowed and had lived and worked in Henry’s home as a domestic servant. Hazel had a young daughter, Lena. They all moved into their new home in the Hilltop Addition. While the house was still under construction, the couple opened a restaurant at the end of the street. This restaurant, located at 2772 West Broad Street, was two blocks from their house.

Every day, Henry and Hazel, who worked as associate manager, opened their restaurant at 6:00 a.m. and served meals until midnight. They had a weekday dinner special for 35 cents and on Sunday they served a special dinner at noon and in the
evening for 50 cents. The restaurant was small, about 20 feet wide and 40 feet long, but it was at a good location near the corner of West Broad and Hague Avenue.

Kuhn was an active car enthusiast. Within a week of buying the home, Kuhn received a permit to tear down the existing one-car garage, built in August. Immediately he replaced it with a two-car garage.

The automobile brought both satisfaction and grief to Henry Kuhn. A year before Henry moved to Columbus, his 24-year-old son was killed in a car accident on Broad Street a mile from his new house. Raymond Kuhn lived on Broad Street with his aunt and brother, Clarence. On October 6, 1924, while motoring with four other young adults on the National Road, which was West Broad Street as it came out of Columbus, Kuhn’s automobile collided with two other cars. The accident resulted in three injuries, Kuhn was the only fatality. Perhaps Henry Kuhn moved to Columbus to be near his surviving son. He continued to keep two automobiles.¹

Figure 2.1: Image of Raymond Kuhn (Hilltop Record, Oct. 23, 1924).

¹ Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Franklin County, Ohio, Enumeration District 25. Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Franklin County, Norwich Township, Enumeration District 293. Department of Trade and Development, Columbus, Ohio, Building Permit Records. “Injured In Auto Accident; Dies,” Hilltop Record October 23, 1924.
This chapter will tell the stories of the builders and homeowners, like Butler and Kuhn, who made the near urban neighborhood possible. From the builders’ perspective, these new neighborhoods offered opportunity and profit in an area where homes and lots were desirable and marketable. From the homeowner’s perspective the neighborhood offered entry into the housing market at a median cost of $5,000.00. Additionally, with the purchase of a home came all of the modern conveniences that brought one entry into middle-class society.

This chapter uses the material evidence of eight houses, investigated, measured, and documented for this study. Six of the homes are located on Chase Avenue in the Hilltop Addition. One home is located on Powell Avenue in the Hilltop Addition. One house is on Binns Boulevard in the Broadview Addition. All eight houses will be used to illustrate different aspects of the near urban house. Four of the houses on Chase Avenue will be examined in depth to show the various ways near urban houses entered the market. One sample from another new-urban neighborhood, the Broadview Addition, will show how consistent the house type became. The other two houses will show the house type in general and will be used to illustrate specific evidence of technology or room variations.

Builders constructed houses, and homeowners lived in the houses. When looking at the history of housing these two fundamental facts cannot be separated. Even in the speculative housing market, the houses were constructed for someone. In the case of
Chase Avenue, the intended buyers were all upwardly-mobile, emergent middle-class people, and the houses they each bought were, in turn, very similar.

The homeowners on Chase Avenue were not just individuals. They were all members of a community. Although it is impossible to know what individual actors felt or thought, the material record indicates that they understood themselves to be part of a community.²

What follows below is a discussion of how the near urban neighborhood functioned from construction to community. It is in this connection that four houses will be discussed in detail. These houses include 151 North Chase, owned by Henry Kuhn, the restaurant owners; 180 North Chase, built by the owner, a local steam railroad employee; 217 North Chase, built by Orebaugh and Sons and bought by a local police officer; and 220 North Chase, built by the realtor, Harry Butler.

Each of these houses embodies to this day a distinct type, what I refer to as the near urban house. The first section of the chapter will describe a typical house, to show the features that each of the houses had in common.

Then, individual builders working on Chase Avenue will be discussed. Two builders in particular, Harry Butler and William Orebaugh, worked almost exclusively in the addition for three years. Another constructed only a single house. These three builders, one with a family construction business, one a realtor, and one an amateur builder constructing a house on his own, represent three different speculative operations

² The material record suggests that they did not yet see themselves as part of larger consumer communities as identified by Daniel Boorstin in The Americans: The Democratic Experience (New York: Random House, 1973).
of the housing delivery system in which individual houses were constructed and brought onto the market.

These three builders constructed houses with the idea that they would be purchased. This chapter will also tell the stories and describe the houses that four families bought from these builders. These families lived on Chase Avenue between 1924 and 1930 and can serve as illustrations of who bought and owned homes in the near urban neighborhood.

I shall discuss the typological aspects of the near urban house and the form that became the typical residential dwelling of the 1920s. The house, as the material artifact, will be used to explain the general concept of the history of residential development. The historical narratives of houses on Chase Avenue will complement drawings and diagrams to show exactly who built the near urban houses, who lived in them, what they looked like, and how they operated as the transition between urban and the suburban.

THE HOUSE AS AN ARTIFACT

The importance of viewing the house as an artifact has been discussed in the Introduction. What are the real-life implications of this? The primary architectural research on each house has been completed through a process referred to as architectural archaeology. Through this investigation, each house underwent a thorough inspection to locate evidence about what the house looked like in the past. This entailed looking at construction details such as the size and spacing of structural members, as well as measuring and recording interior woodwork details to compare the houses for similarities
and differences. The investigations also uncovered original finishes such as paint and wallpaper and verified missing details such as built-in cabinets and dining nooks that have long been removed.

THE CITY OF COLUMBUS

Columbus was a typical city expanding during the early twentieth century. Originally founded as Franklinton in 1797 by Lucas Sullivant, Columbus incorporated in 1812 when a group of entrepreneurs gave the state ten acres on the other side of the Scioto River for a new statehouse and petitioned the state legislature to relocate from Chillicothe. Until this time, Franklinton had been a small town, but owing to the presence of the capitol, the city gained importance and began to grow. It was not the biggest city in the state -- Cleveland and Cincinnati were larger in both size and population -- but throughout the nineteenth century, Columbus continued to grow at a steady pace, developing enclaves of working-class neighborhoods and large middle-class communities, Victorian in design. By 1914, Columbus was expanding beyond the city limits with clear examples of both suburban development and near urban neighborhoods, both competing for the right of acceptance as the legitimate form of residential development.³

³ Jacob Studer, *Columbus, Ohio: History, Resources, and Progress* (Columbus, Ohio, J.H. Studer, 1873); Alfred E. Lee, *History of Columbus, Ohio* (New York: Munsell and Co., 1892); Betty Garret with Edward Lentz, *Columbus: America’s Crossroads* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1980). There is a difference between the middle class who were building large Victorian manses along street-car lines in the late nineteenth century and the emergent managerial class who were buying homes in the near urban neighborhoods.
In Columbus, the near urban neighborhoods developed north and west, along the two main axial arteries, High Street and Broad Street, that extended from the city center. Today the areas north are known as Clintonville and those west as the Hilltop. By 1899, both areas had electric streetcar systems that ran along High Street and Broad Street, opening development into areas that had previously been farmland. Clintonville and the Hilltop had sections that were platted before the turn of the century, but the majority of building in both areas occurred during the 1920’s. The development process of the near urban community followed a typical pattern that can be seen in both areas: they contained commercial strips that radiated from the city, a primary school building before the major development occurred, and a central lumber yard locally supplying building materials. The same parent company, Doddington Yards, owned both yards, the West Side Lumber Company and the Clintonville Lumber Company.4

THE ARCHITECTURAL PLAN

The standard way in which architects, designers, the building industry, and housing advocates presented houses in printed images was through the floor plan. A plan is an illustrated, visual description of a house. The plan can be best understood as a drawing of the house, as seen from above if someone cut through the walls with a chain saw about three feet off the floor. There are standard conventions of how walls, windows and, doors are shown. Walls are shown with a double line indicating thickness, though

---

4 This information was taken from Baist Insurance Maps, 1890, 1904, and 1910, located in the Columbus Metropolitan Library.
the individual building components are not typically illustrated. Occasionally, walls are show in poche, with a solid color filled in the wall spaces. Windows are often shown just as a line indicating glass. Doors are usually shown with a thin line indicating the direction that the door swings open. Overhead architectural elements, such as changes in ceiling heights or cabinets are shown with a dotted line.

Generally drawn by architects, the architectural plan is one of the standard documents used to estimate and construct a building. In this format, the plan also contains notes about materials and details of how to construct specialized elements. Usually, an architectural plan is presented at a specified scale, where the plan will be drawn or printed so that \( \frac{1}{4} \) of an inch equals one foot of the actual building.

During the 1920s, and really for a decade before, the house plan became a fixture in publications of all types to describe new housing to prospective homebuyers. Not all houses were designed by architects, and not all had construction drawings. Many housing advocates, however, advised using architectural plans when constructing a home. They affirmed the “advantages of building in accordance with plans prepared by an architect” even for the “person who plans to build a small house.” During these decades, homebuyers learned to read floor plans. This was by no means limited to just males. One historian has pointed out that some home economics educators had the goal to train as many women as possible in house construction and planning. Indeed, training housewives how to read house plans was a component of most home economics programs.\(^5\)

---

A general house plan, as published in a magazine, was presented in order to allow the viewer to picture the house he or she might want to build or buy. Most of these plans followed typical conventions to make reading the plan easier. Often, plans were shown of both the first and second floors of the house, oriented so that the entry was at the bottom of the page and the rear of the house was at the top. Generally, room names were placed on the plan. Kitchen and bathroom fixtures, items that were provided with the house, were drawn in their respective places as well. In some cases, drawings of furniture were included in the plan so that a potential homeowner could visualize how to live in the house.6

CHASE AVENUE AND ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Individual houses on Chase Avenue fall into the general categories of revival styles typical during the 1920s. On this street, however, stylistic elements did not conform to what would be considered pure styles. The houses instead were more vernacular in nature.

As suggested by the exterior descriptions in Chapter 1, the houses on Chase Avenue fall into two basic types. One type was the boxy semi-foursquare. The second type was the lower-profile, semi-bungalow house type. The semi-bungalow was a house


6 This can be seen in most of the Sears, Roebuck catalogs issued between 1911 and 1942. See Chapter 3 for examples.
form that standardized the very popular bungalow style of the Arts and Crafts movement. The semi-bungalow took the basic elements of the Arts and Crafts bungalow and placed them on the façade of the near urban house.

Historically, these houses were called seven-room moderns. All of the houses have three main public rooms on the first floor and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. They were called modern because of the kitchen and bathroom and associated mechanical systems that allowed these rooms to function. Each of the homes on Chase Avenue has an additional bonus room that allows it to deviate from the standard. In this respect, the deviation itself was standard.

The defining feature of the near urban home was the front entry. Typically, the front door opened into a living room extending the entire length of the front of the house. The average size of the living room was 12'- 0” by 21'- 0”. In all of the houses in this

---

7 Stylistically, the Arts and Crafts, or Craftsman, style was part of the Arts and Crafts Movement popular between 1890 and 1910. The fireplace surround is the only stylistic piece in the house and may have been purchased as a unit. The Craftsman style is often linked to Gustav Stickly, a furniture manufacturer and publisher of the major voice of the movement, The Craftsman magazine. Many examples could be discussed; see David Cathers and Alexander Vertikoff, Stickly Style: Arts and Crafts Homes in the Craftsman Tradition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), for vivid visual examples of the style.


9 Newspapers from the period contain countless advertisements for homes in the For Sale section. For an example see “South Terrace,” Hilltop Record March 12, 1925: “Six-room modern with sleeping porch, double garage, oak floors and finish. It’s a beauty.” See also “For Rent,” Marion Daily Star, June 25, 1926: “Very centrally located seven-room modern dwelling.” The Hilltop Record, listed several houses under construction in 1921, including “a six-room modern,” “a 7-room modern,” and a “newly finished modern.” These were differentiated from a “recently finished cozy bungalow” and a “new 6-room bungalow,” “New Home Building,” Hilltop Record, August 6, 1921.
study, the living room was twelve feet wide and had a fireplace at one end. In the largest house, the width extends to 23 feet; in the smallest, 19 feet.

In all six homes on Chase Avenue, a five-foot opening connected the living room to the dining room. In three of the homes, double French doors filled the opening. One had an arched opening. One of the homes had a squared opening with no doors and no evidence of ever having portieres. The size of the dining room varied in all of the homes; 12 feet square, 13 feet square, or 14 feet square was typical.

Most of these houses had stairways located directly off of the dining room, providing access to the second floor. In some cases, the stairway sat along the living room wall separating the living room and kitchen. In two cases, the stair was located to the right of the front door, accessed off the living room providing the front door was closed.

All of the houses had a kitchen in the rear corner of the first floor. In five of the eight cases, the kitchen was accessed through a swinging door off of the dining room.

The houses on Chase Avenue had a front porch extending across the entire length of the house. Every porch on the street was eight feet wide. From the sidewalk, concrete stairs transitioned from the street level to the level of the yard. At the end of a small concrete sidewalk, another set of stairs allowed access to the porch, elevated three feet from ground level. On Chase Avenue, porch decks were either wood slats supported by wood joists, or they were four-inch poured concrete decks supported by 12” wood joists.
INSIDE THE NEAR URBAN HOUSE

The interiors of the Chase Avenue houses were constructed for the convenient placement of furniture. The contractors who built the homes also decorated them in a manner that evidently met with the satisfaction of the emergent middle-class people who purchased the home.

Windows in the living room were specifically installed to aid in the placement of large pieces of furniture. On the front wall, a large three-bay window looked out onto the porch (Fig. 2.7, 2.10). These three windows all had an operating sash. The central window was the largest, flanked by two smaller windows. The entire window contained five feet of open area. The wall opposite the fireplace had a window mounted 4’- 4” above the finish floor. The height of the window allowed the full utilization of the wall for the placement of furniture. Though occasionally referred to as a piano window, the outside wall was not a good location for the piano as the change in temperature on the wall surface was very bad for the instrument (Fig. 2.2). In the dining room, one outside wall had a window installed 4’-5” above the floor, allowing the placement of a sideboard.

Solid oak flooring, placed in two-inch strips and naturally finished, covered the floors throughout the living and dining areas. This was very typical, as one builder explained: “In practically every modern dwelling of the present day, a feature of the

---

10 Twice during the course of house investigations people mentioned being told that the high window in the living room had been called a piano window by their parents. Theoretically, the piano should never be placed on an outside wall because the fluctuation in temperature effects the tuning, and, in fact, the piano is rarely shown on an outside wall in house diagrams from the period. Figure 2.2 is one of the few images I have seen placing the piano here, but perhaps this was very typical. The wall with the high window would be suitable, as well, for a sideboard, bookshelf, or hallstand.
Figure 2.2: Detail of cutaway showing a piano under the living room window (Sears Modern Homes, 1923, 25).

principal rooms is the finish flooring, usually of thin oak strips laid over a substantial under-floor and having a polished waxed surface.” The finish was applied after the floor was planed and sanded. Typically, a Stanley No. 12 ½ steel scraper gave the best results for preparing the oak. Painting contractors finished the floor with a coat of paste wood filler, two coats of white alcohol shellac, and a finish coat of well-polished wax.11

At 169 North Chase, the dining room, stair, and second floor hall were originally wallpapered with an inexpensive, plain wood-pulp paper with a metallic gold figure resembling foliage. This paper did not have a ground coat. Typically, papers such as this cost 15 cents a roll. Evidently, the contractor chose the cheapest paper possible as a wall

cover in this room. Typically, contractors building on speculation provided wallpapers in all of the rooms. H. G. Butler allowed homebuyers to “select decorations and light fitments.”

The second floor of these near urban homes contained three bedrooms and a bathroom, all connected by a central hall. In several of the houses, the defining feature of the central stair hall was a diagonal wall separating the hall from the rear bedroom. Toward the front of the house, two similarly-sized bedrooms shared a central wall and were entered by side-by-side doors off the hall. One of these rooms contained the chimney on the outside wall. Twelve feet in the long dimension, each bedroom had approximately 100 square feet of floor space. Each room also had a double window looking toward the street. The rooms shared a bearing wall with the living room below. Both bedrooms contained one closet, usually shallow.

The fourth room on the second floor was the bathroom. This room was approximately 70 square feet and contained a bathtub, a toilet, and a sink. At 217 North Chase, the contractor installed an American Standard “Essex” tub sitting on a base, the same tub that was installed at 220 North Chase. At 180 North Chase and at 225 North Powell, a false tile wainscot had been created on the walls by incising tile lines into the plaster finish. Above this at 180 North Chase, the walls had been wallpapered with a red and black floral pattern over a white ground. The woodwork in the bathroom had been

---

12 “See Our New Homes,” Hilltop Record March 19, 1925. This was not uncommon; “East Side Homes.”
painted white. At 151 North Chase and at 225 North Powell Avenue, the bathtub had been recessed into the wall with a large built-in cabinet at one end.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Original bathtub and flooring at 220 North Chase Avenue, 2004 (photo by author).}
\end{figure}

THE SPECULATIVE HOUSING MARKET

Richard Harris describes three ways in which housing was delivered to the market between 1900 and 1970. The traditional way was for a contractor to work directly for a client, often in conjunction with an architect. The second way was for a builder to

\textsuperscript{13} The bathroom at 180 North Chase was investigated in 1999 when remodeled by the current owner. The scored plaster wall and wallpaper were located behind a sink cabinet. The house at 225 North Powell was investigated in March 2005 when remodeled by the author. The scored plaster still existed behind paneling and behind the bathtub surround.
develop housing on the speculation that someone would buy the home after it was built.

The third way was the amateur builder “who built for his own use.”14

The speculative housing market, therefore, was not new to the early twentieth century, but it did gain in importance in the standard delivery method of housing. As speculation became rampant in the buying and selling of property and housing lots, small contractors began to build houses in new developments knowing that a market existed and that buyers would move quickly into new additions to the urban fabric.

The following examples will illustrate the construction and description of four houses on Chase Avenue. Three of the houses are very typical of houses constructed in the Hilltop Addition. Two contractors, William Orebaugh and Harry Butler, constructed these houses, respectively. These two builders built a large percentage of the houses in the addition.

Local builders typically built housing in their immediate communities, erecting successive homes in new and expanding additions. From 1899 to 1924, local builders built the majority of the houses constructed in all of the residential housing developments on the Hilltop. The Hilltop Addition is particularly interesting in that two local builders began to build exclusively within the addition. Moreover, both builders constructed variations of a similar house design, both building this house on several lots within the addition. Orebaugh and Butler did not necessarily invent anything new, but they are key examples of how the house became conceptualized as a commodity.

---

In 1918, William Orebaugh and his family moved to the Hilltop from Winchester, Ohio. Orebaugh had been active in the community in Winchester, being elected Adams County Commissioner for two terms. At the age of 53, he and his son went into the contracting business, operating an office at 2341 West Broad Street. Orebaugh developed a business habit of building multiple houses in the same addition, and he quickly became one of the most prominent builders in the community. Between 1922 and 1929, Orebaugh and his son built 154 houses on the Hilltop, averaging 20 houses a year.\(^\text{15}\)

Between 1922 and 1923, Orebaugh built 11 homes in the Hillcrest Addition and three more houses in an adjacent addition. He reproduced the same design on several lots, with variations in the exterior detailing. Orebaugh often bought adjacent lots and constructed two or three units at the same time. In August of 1921, for instance, Orebaugh had “six-room moderns” at 182 and 186 Whitethorne about two-thirds complete and had started two more at 152 and 156 South Richardson.\(^\text{16}\)

Building multiple units of the same design allowed a contractor to increase output while decreasing the cost of production. Both Orebaugh and another builder, Harry G.

---

\(^{15}\) “W. H. Orebaugh,” *Columbus Dispatch* January 19, 1938. Franklin County, Ohio, deed records listing properties bought and sold by William Orebaugh between 1915-1933.

\(^{16}\) “New Home Building,” *Hilltop Record* August 6, 1921. In April of 1923, Orebaugh and Son had plans to begin eight six-room houses. The six-room two-story house may have been his specialty, much like the builder I. L. McPherson, who claimed to make “a specialty of a 5-room Bungalow at $2750.” Advertisement, July 9, 1919. See also “Real Estate,” *Hilltop Record* March 15, 1923.
Butler, used this formula in the development of the Hilltop Addition. In 1927, Orebaugh built 13 homes in the Hilltop Addition.

HARRY G. BUTLER, REALTOR AS BUILDER

Harry Butler moved to the Hilltop in 1915 at the age of 31. He worked as a printer, but he saw the potential to increase his income by selling real estate. He started his own realty company, Star Realty, in 1917. His business began with the sale of his own home, located at 71 North Burgess. Butler was quick to envision a full-time income from the profit made by speculative real estate. As a single man with flexible living arrangements, he bought and lived in houses on developing streets, moving from one new addition to another every two years. In 1919, he lived in one of the first four houses built in the Hillcrest Addition. That same year he advertised as H. G. Butler Real Estate, with “buyers waiting” and “quick action” for people who wanted to list their homes for sale. He sold his home again in 1920 and moved onto prestigious Eldon Avenue, a street on which other prominent contractors and realtors lived, including William Orebaugh.17

Butler began experimenting with building during the 1920s to cash in on the developing speculative housing market. He built his first speculative house in 1921, one of the first homes built in the Hilltop Addition. This house, a “pretty 6-room bungalow” fronting the West Broad school, was described by a journalist as a “very desirable home.”

---

17 The habitation and occupation pattern of H. G. Butler was researched through the Columbus City Directories 1915-1937 and deed records located at the Franklin County Courthouse; “Buyers Waiting,” advertisement, Hilltop Record May 8, 1918.
The home sold within a month of its construction. After this success, Butler began to build between six and nine houses a year.\textsuperscript{18}

Butler diversified his business by constructing homes, but he also continued to sell homes and housing lots that he did not build. During the first week of March 1923, Butler sold two housing lots in the Broadview Addition, placed a family moving from Circleville, Ohio, in a new house he had built on speculation, sold a home from one family to another in an older Hilltop neighborhood, and sold two lots in the Hilltop Addition and one lot in the Hill Crest Park Addition with contracts to build new houses. These houses were both to be built on Hague Avenue, the first street in the development. Butler had contracted to build a “double 6-room house” and another single-family “six-room house.” The latter house was being constructed for a Mr. Lauer, who had purchased the lot through his firm, the Godman Shoe Company, possibly as an investment.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1925, Butler incorporated into the H. G. Butler Company, going into business with a partner, Ray Zartman. A realtor, Zartman lived on Roxbury Avenue in Upper Arlington. His success as a salesman is evidenced by the fact that he put two daughters through college and a son through medical school. During the first year in business, the new company worked exclusively in the Hilltop Addition. Butler constructed homes, and Zartman sold them. They opened an office in a new building constructed on a

\textsuperscript{18} “New Home Building,” \textit{Hilltop Record} August 6, 1921. Realty companies began entering the housing market early in the century. By 1911, in Dayton, Ohio, the construction of houses for specific individuals was being “counter balanced by the larger number of residences being erected on the whole sale plan, by real estate dealers, to be sold on the installment plan.” “What Builders are Doing,” \textit{Building Age} 33 (1911): 398.

\textsuperscript{19} “Real Estate,” \textit{Hilltop Record} March 8, 1923.
commercial lot along Broad Street within the addition. Butler lived at the same address, 2642 West Broad Street, for the next eight years. In 1925, H. G. Butler Co. built 10 houses, all of them within a two-block area. In 1926, the company built nine more houses in the Hilltop Addition and 13 in the new Broadview Addition, located across the street, south of Broad.

THE BUSY BUILDERS

William Orebaugh saw the same potential in the Hilltop Addition that Butler had. Between 1925 and 1927, he and his son devoted over 30 percent of their capital and time to speculative houses in the addition. They also maintained an active schedule in other additions in the area. During 1926, their biggest year, they constructed 28 houses, advertising as “the busy builders.” In 1927, Orebaugh built four houses in the Hilltop Addition, all on adjacent lots.20

Between them, Orebaugh and Butler constructed 34 single-family residences in the Hilltop Addition. Their combined activity amounted to over 20 percent of the single-family homes built in the addition (Fig. 5). These two builders constructed very similar houses, but they incorporated their own trademarks into what would basically have been the same floor plan (Fig. 6). Butler added a small breakfast area and breezeway on the back of many of his kitchens, making his kitchen area very large by the typical standards

---

20 Advertisement, “W. H. Orebaugh and Son,” Hilltop Record February 23, 1923. Franklin County Deed records listing properties bought and sold by name for 1927.
Figure 2.4: The Hilltop Addition, showing lots developed by William Orebaugh and H. G. Butler
of the house type. Orebaugh often added a sleeping porch with wrap-around windows off of a back bedroom. In several of his houses they protruded over the back porch. The sleeping porch was an amenity advertised by the local lumberyard as the “single feature you can add to your home that will be enjoyed by the entire family.”21

There is no evidence that Butler and Orebaugh ever actually worked together on any projects. However, there is evidence that they maintained a working relationship. In 1925, Orebaugh sold one of his undeveloped lots in the Hilltop Addition to Butler, who built and sold a home on the lot that year.

In 1927, Orebaugh was still building on lots in the Hillcrest Addition where he had been living since 1918. The speed at which the Hilltop Addition was completed can be illustrated by the construction activity on Chase Avenue. Orebaugh and Butler constructed 26 percent of the homes built on North Chase Avenue, over half of the houses they built in the Hilltop Addition (Fig. 2.4).

151 NORTH CHASE AVENUE

In January, 1925, the H. G. Butler Company bought lot 112 from Russell H. Evans. Evans had most likely bought the lot from the developer strictly as an investment. The H. G. Butler Company paid the City of Columbus $12.77 in taxes on the lot and

---

21 Plat record of the Hilltop Addition, Book No. 10, page 122, Recorder’s Office, Franklin County, Ohio. Field investigation of houses on Chase Avenue. The history of Butler and Orebaugh was researched through the Abstracts of Title for Lot 112 and Lot 123, Hilltop Addition with information corroborated with Columbus City Directory (Columbus: R. L. Polk, various years 1915-1937), and deed records listing properties bought and sold by name for 1915-1933. West Side Lumber advertisement, Hilltop Record March 16, 1922.
$281.41 for the improvement of Chase Avenue. Butler filed for the building permit on July 14 and started building immediately.

The local builder served as a coordinator of tasks. The construction of the home required the services of at least seven subcontractors. Excavators, masons, tinsmiths, plasterers, glaziers, and painters had been the traditional trades of subcontractors. By the turn of the century, added to this list were electricians and plumbers. In Columbus, there could be as many as 68 total workmen employed in the construction of one house.22

Butler acted as the general contractor and oversaw the framing as well as the finish work. The first operation in the construction of the house was the excavation of a "cellar." A specialized contractor performed the excavation. Typically, a large steel scoop pulled by two horses provided the power. In at least one case, this work employed three people, one guiding the horse and two setting the scoop. The scoop would get a load of soil and dump this outside of the building area, one scoop about every two or three minutes. Rocks dug up in this process had to broken up by hand. In this way, excavation of the basement took the first week of construction.23

During this time, the sewage pipes would also be installed. By the end of the second week, the concrete block foundation and the poured concrete floor were completed. There were several masons living and working on the Hilltop, but only one "cement block" manufacturer. All of houses investigated on Chase Avenue were

---

22 "Little Chats with Big Builders: One of Columbus’ Oldest Contractors and an Active Member of the Builders and Traders Exchange," *Building Age* 34 (1912): 577-78. This small article discussed Festus Hague Nichol of Nichol and Carr. In the article Nichol stated, “I counted the other day the number of men working on a house I was completing and in all 68 workmen had been engaged in its construction.”

23 Harry Irving Shumway, “We Build Ourselves a House,” *House Beautiful* 43 (1918): 50
Figure 2.5: Floor plans, 151 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).
Figure 2.6: Front elevation, 151 North Chase Avenue, October 2004 (photo by author).

Figure 2.7: Interior, Living Room, 151 North Chase Avenue, February 2005 (photo by author).
constructed with the same concrete block pattern, possibly supplied by E. Richards at 20 South Oakley Avenue.\textsuperscript{24}

Butler began framing the house in late July, using planed dimensional lumber cut to length with a hand saw. The framing of the house required two to three competent carpenters who cut all of the framing lumber by hand. Historians specializing in woodcraft suggest that a carpenter using a properly tuned rip saw and crosscut saw, kept continuously sharp by a helper, could cut framing lumber faster than a modern electric circular saw.\textsuperscript{25}

Figure 2.8: Horse-drawn scoop excavating basement (\textit{House Beautiful} 43 [1917]: 19).

\textsuperscript{24} This information is from the \textit{Columbus City Directory} 1925.

\textsuperscript{25} This was claimed by Tom Clark, the cabinetmaker at the Ohio Village, an interpreted historical village operated by Ohio Historical Society, and I have seen it demonstrated.
Usually the builder employed the carpentry crew directly. In 1924 the average general contractor in Columbus employed 10.6 men. The pace at which the carpenters had to work reduced safety measures. Injury and death were not uncommon. In 1924, for example, a 54-year-old carpenter fell to his death while framing roof trusses in one Hilltop neighborhood. But the framing at lot 112 went quickly, with the house framed within three weeks. On August 18, the West Side Lumber Company delivered the exterior siding. By the end of August, the carpenters had begun framing the garage.\textsuperscript{26}

The West Side Lumber Company supplied the building materials for the houses on Chase Avenue. By 1923, the lumber company operated 22 trucks and 26 horse-drawn wagons. During February, the company stockpiled materials in anticipation of the building season. The lumberyard took advanced contracts from builders who expected early delivery. The company, therefore, had a limited capacity to deliver on demand. The contractor specified what materials were to be delivered and when. The usual arrangement allowed different items to arrive as they were needed. Typically, two men delivered materials to the builder at the site, dropping them in the yard at the front of the house.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} Department of Trade and Development, Columbus, Ohio, Building Permit Records. Date of siding delivery based on receipt from the West Side Lumber Company for “2300 feet of B B 103 Siding,” dated 8-17-25, found by the author stuck between two floorboards in the basement of 151 North Chase Avenue. Abstract of Title, Lot 112, Hilltop Addition. For statistics on contractors working in Columbus, see Ralph J. Watkins, \textit{The Construction Industry in Ohio: A Statistical Analysis of a Seasonal Industry} (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1926), which also lists the average number of employees for other construction trades as well. “Killed in Fall from Housetop,” \textit{Hilltop Record} November 20, 1924. Clemant Jordan, a carpenter living at 448 Westmoor Avenue, fell while building a house in the Westgate Addition.

\textsuperscript{27} An advertisement in \textit{Columbus City Directory} 1924, 134, showed a drawing of materials being delivered in a truck to a building site. The West Side Lumber Company receipt, found at 151 North Chase, listed the two drivers. “A Building Boom for the Hilltop,” \textit{Hilltop Record} February 23, 1923.
Figure 2.9: Unloading truck at a building site, West Side Lumber Company (Hilltop Record May 19, 1921).

Figure 2.10: House under construction, showing pine sheathing (House Beautiful 43 [1918]: 131).
After the house had been dried in, with the exterior shell completed, the carpenters started installing subfloors while subcontractors installed mechanical and electrical systems. A plumbing subcontractor roughed in water pipes and drains at this time, cutting holes through the framing by hand with a brace-and-bit. A cast-iron sewage stack placed in the rear corner of the house and connected to the drain serviced both the upstairs bath and the kitchen. Three plumbing contractors belonged to the Hilltop Chamber of Commerce in 1923. One of these, the Hilltop Plumbing Company, had several employees and advertised regularly, “Sewers built and repaired.”

The electrical work began after all interior partitions had been put in place. The electrical subcontractor followed the standard practice of one outlet per room. The process of running electrical wiring was tedious. The subcontractor had to hand-drill through every framing member to run the three-wire insulated cable. The service at 151 North Chase consisted of four separate fused circuits. At the end of the twentieth century, the one remaining original circuit connected the basement, living room, bathroom, and two bedrooms, linking all outlets, switches, and fixtures in every room.

After the completion of the electrical work, a separate plastering subcontractor returned to install wood lath. The plastering crew employed lath hangers and plasterers.

---


29 The brace-and-bit was a common tool used by contractors before electric tools became widely available. Shavings were found in several locations inside the framing during multiple field investigations of 151 North Chase Avenue, confirming the use of a bit-and-brace by both the plumbing subcontractor and the electrical subcontractor; “Hilltop Plumbing Co.,” May 2, 1922. For a good description of the brace-and-bit and its use, see Michael Dunbar, *Restoring, Tuning, and Using Classic Woodworking Tools* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1989), 230-233.
The workmen applying lath were often referred to as “bluelips” by other contractors owing to the color their lips turned from holding lathing nails between their lips.\textsuperscript{30}

The plasterer applied three coats of plaster to the lath, a scratch coat, skim coat, and a finish coat. The plaster required two weeks of dry time, during which time the hardwood floors were installed. Butler installed interior oak trim in a style typical of other houses on the street. A painting contractor applied stain and varnish to the trim and hung wallpaper on the interior walls.\textsuperscript{31}

Butler completed the construction of 151 North Chase Avenue within four months. This was the house sold to Henry Kuhn in November. Kuhn mortgaged the home through the Buckeye State Building and Loan Company. The H. G. Butler company built the house on speculation and did not have an intended buyer but was able to sell the house immediately after it was finished.

As constructed, the house had two full stories with a side-facing gabled roof and approximately 1400 square feet in total floor area. A front porch extended across the

\textsuperscript{30} A receipt for lath delivered to 245 North Powell on January 22, 1904, was found in a window jamb during a remodeling. Lath had been delivered to C. Meluish of Melluisha and Pymer plaster contractors from M.J. Bergin Lumber Co., who specialized in “Lath, Shingles, and Finishes of All Kinds;” \textit{Columbus City Directory} 1904. Bluelips came from Ron Herman, a contractor who, as a young contractor, heard the story from William Drake, a contractor building homes in Columbus, Ohio, during the 1930s.

\textsuperscript{31} The building process and schedule incorporates information from the construction specifications of a house designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and built at the Mohoning Creek Dam, Armstrong County, Pennsylvania. The documents, known as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Reports, Pittsburgh Division, 1520-03 Mahoning Dam-Specs-Damtenders Dwelling- Gamble & Gibson - W-1500, contain a Final Report that detailed the chronology of a house of similar size and features built in 1941. Lynd and Lynd, \textit{Middletown}, 107-109, give a brief and very general outline of the building process in Muncie, Indiana. Eugene Robinson, \textit{Domestic Architecture} (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923). This book is an architectural textbook and contains a chapter on house construction. The techniques and processes outlined in these works were verified by extensive visual inspection of the house at 151 North Chase Avenue.
entire length of the front elevation. Roof eaves came down both sides of the second story to become the porch roof, giving the appearance of a wall dormer. In this way the house had a slight resemblance to a bungalow, a semi-bungalow. The porch roof was supported by tripled four-inch by four-inch posts at each corner and a doubled set in the center. Between the posts there was a trellis of 2” by 2” slats. There were no rails on the porch.

The front façade was broken into a two-bay scheme with a front entry through one bay. Opposite the front door on the first floor was a seven-foot, double-hung, tripartite window. Two pairs of double-hung windows completed the bays on the second floor.
Three of the houses in this in-depth study had a street appearance similar to that of this house. 169 North Chase was similar except that the porch columns are metal and the second floor windows protrude into the porch roof. The house at 217 North Chase was similar except that the porch roof is supported by three wooden posts sitting on concrete piers.

At 151 North Chase, directly opposite the front door was a double French door entering into a 13’- 2” by 13’- 7” dining room. The 12’-3” by 22’-4” living room had a fireplace with a multi-colored, wire-cut brick surround and an oak mantle. On either side of the fireplace there were two half windows located at 5’-4” above the finish floor. The room had been wallpapered with a light blue-gray ground with a dark-green, almost black, figured pattern.

The kitchen was 12’- 9” by 11’-0”. On the north end was a 5’- 7” by 12’- 4” extension divided by a large segmental archway extending approximately four inches from the walls and ceiling. A small pantry cabinet was built into the east wall.

---

32 In this context, finish floor and finish ceiling refer to measurements as they actually are from the existing finished surface rather than framing dimensions which would have been on a construction drawing.

33 A small fragment of the original wallpaper was found behind the casing of the opening between the living room and dining room during the house investigation.
The H. G. Butler Company constructed the house at 220 North Chase, as well. A Dutch colonial revival, the house contained 1250 square feet.

Butler constructed a living room in this house with unique features compared to the other houses. Both the opening to the stair and the opening to the dining room were plaster arches. On one end of the room, Butler constructed a Craftsman-style fireplace surround with a glass bookcase on one side and a window seat on the other (Fig. 2.11, 3.8).34

Though very different in layout, these two Butler houses had very similar trim details. Both houses also had exactly the same front door, considered “Arts and Crafts” in style (Fig 2.12). The interior trim had the same profile and was stained the same color.

Butler bought the lot at the end of Chase Avenue from Halstead McElroy, who was living next door at 212 North Chase Avenue, one of the first three houses constructed on the street. McElroy had divided his larger lot in two and had sold a lot next door to his house. In 1926, Butler began building a medium-sized, Dutch-colonial house on the lot. He sold this house to Leslie and Elsie Weifel almost immediately when it was finished. The Weifels, who owned a car battery shop at the end of the street at 2785 West Broad Street, had purchased another house from Butler in 1924. The possibility exists that this house was constructed with them in mind as clients.

34 See footnote 7.
Figure 2.12: Plan of 220 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).
Figure 2.13: Front elevation, 220 North Chase Avenue (photo by author).

Figure 2.14: Interior elevation, living room fireplace, 220 North Chase Avenue (photo by author).
Figure 2.15: Interior elevation, front door and stair, 220 North Chase Avenue (photo by author).
William Orebaugh bought lot 123 on April 10, 1925, from the Van De Boe Hager Company. There were restrictions in the sale of the property that Van De Boe Hager platted. "No intoxicating liquors to be made or sold on said premise. No obnoxious business to be carried on. No house costing less than $2,000.00 or having less than 30ft. Court Yard to be erected. Said restrictions to run with the land and attached to all conveyances until July 1, 1938." The deed restrictions were attached in order to create a residential neighborhood that developed homogeneously in character and focus. They were very similar to many restrictions established in other suburbs.35

In 1924, lot 123 was valued for tax purposes at $750.00. The valuation of the property increased as soon as building began on the street. The increase in property values indicated the success of the community. This capitalization of the small home and the economic success of small additions also caught the attention of larger developers and financial institutions.

The sale of lot 123 was financed by the Columbian Building and Loan as a construction loan. A loan of $3,500.00 was secured on the property by William Orebaugh and his wife, Elizabeth. The mortgage was payable at $35.00 a month. The loan was secured on May 9, 1925, one day to the month after the sale of the property. The tax valuation for 1925 was still $750.00, indicating that the house had not been built and that

35 For more on deed restrictions, see Patricia Burgess, “Deed Restrictions and Subdivision Development in Columbus, Ohio 1900-1970,” *Journal of Urban History* 15 (1988): 42-68; see also Kevin Fox Gotham,
Figure 2.16: Floor plans, 217 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).

the mortgage from the building and loan was a construction loan. Orebaugh financed his building business through the savings and loan institution, so that less capital came directly out of his pocket. That is, he paid $35.00 a month for this construction loan. Considering an average construction duration of four months, he had a direct expense of only $140.00 to leverage the capital to sustain his home building business.

217 North Chase is a seven-room modern home with a second-floor sleeping porch on the rear elevation. The house is two stories with a side-gabled roof. A front porch extends the entire width of the house covered by a shed roof supported on wood posts on brick piers. Entry to the house is made up of three concrete stairs on the left side of the porch. A single front door leads into the living room.
The first floor interior contains two main living spaces and a kitchen. The living room is 12’-8” by 20’-4”, with a central fireplace on the east elevation. The fireplace is exposed brick continuing from the hearth to the ceiling. There are built-in bookcases on either side of the fireplace. Directly opposite the front door, a set of double French doors allowed entry to a 12’-0” by 12’-2” dining room. In the center of the east wall, a swinging door allowed access to the kitchen.

The kitchen in 217 North Chase Avenue is very small and compact. On the east wall there is eight feet of counter and a sink. The gas stove would have been located on the west wall, venting into a chimney stack located in the north west corner of the room. There is space on the north wall, between this chimney and the exterior rear door, for an icebox. On the south wall there is a small built-in cabinet for an ironing board. Next to this cabinet is a door providing access to the side entry and basement (Fig 2.15).

There are three bedrooms, a bath, and a sleeping porch on the second floor, all accessed from the stair located in the southeast corner of the dining room. The stair had a switch back, landing into a hall with the wall directly opposite the stair slanted at a 45-degree angle. There were two bedrooms at the front of the house. Both front bedrooms are 9’-1” by 12’-3”. The bedroom on the east, however, contains the chimney stack. There is a closet on one side of the chimney and a built-in window seat on the other side. The rear bedroom is 10’-5” by 11’-0” and is accessed through a door on the slanted wall. The sleeping porch, attached to the rear of the house, above a rear porch, was accessed through the rear bedroom.
On August 11, 1925, the newly-constructed home sold to Charles France and his wife, Sarah. Orebaugh built and sold the house within four months of acquiring the lot. Considering the loss of the first month before financing was acquired, the home was constructed within three months.

Charles France and his wife bought the house with a mortgage to William Orebaugh. They paid him $1,528.65 in August and received the deed with a lien from Columbian Savings and Loan for the original $3,500.00. Evidently, Orebaugh still held the original construction mortgage of $3,500.00 and financed the house for the Frances for two years. They paid a $35 a month mortgage directly to him. He paid the loan for 22 months for a total of $770.00, not including interest. The Frances secured a mortgage from the Continental Mortgage Company on March 31, 1927, for $4,200.00. On this date the original mortgage from Columbian Savings and Loan was released.
France was a 41-year-old City of Columbus police officer, as mentioned above. He lived in the house with his wife, his widowed mother, and a 28-year-old boarder, Ralph W. Phillips, also a Columbus police officer.

180 NORTH CHASE: THE OWNER-BUILT HOUSE

Lot 131 in the Hilltop Addition had the same beginning as the other lots within the subdivision. However, the construction of the house on the lot provides evidence of divergence from the delivery system that typified most of the house construction in the subdivision. The house built on the lot does not appear any different in plan or elevation from the other houses on the street. What makes the house at 180 North Chase different is that the owner of the house constructed the dwelling himself. With apparently no formal training or avocation in any building trade, an individual purchased the lot, constructed a house typical of others in the neighborhood, and then sold the house for profit. Investment and speculation in undeveloped suburban lots was very common, as discussed in the introduction, but self-built or owner-built speculative construction was unusual.36

The Van DeBoe-Hager Company platted the lot at 180 North Chase with the same restrictions that carried through the whole development, just as with 217 North Chase

above. According to the deed, any dwelling constructed on the lot had to cost more than $2,000 and had to have a setback of at least 30 feet. Additionally, no intoxicating liquor could be manufactured or sold on the premises. These restrictions were to be conveyed on the land until July 1, 1938. The development of lot 131 occurred during the height of construction on Chase Ave.

As mentioned above, the construction of the house on lot 131 offers a telling example of the various ways the local building delivery system worked. On September 2, 1924, Samuel V. Darling and Sadie Darling purchased the lot from the development company. Tax assessments on the lot estimated the value at $650.00. Within a week, Darling had secured a mortgage on the property from the Columbian Building and Loan Company for $3,000.00 as a construction loan to build a house.

There was nothing apparently special about Darling. In 1920, at the age of 27, he moved to Columbus from Ironton, Ohio, with his wife, Sadie, and two infant children. He worked as a brakeman for the railroad. His life, evidently, typified the working-class situation during the first two decades of the twentieth century. During the early 1920s, he had lived a few blocks east of the new developments in an area heavily populated by railway employees. This was a community of older working-class houses, occupied by working-class families with similar occupations. Caught up in the wave of progress and prosperity of the 1920s, Darling apparently looked toward speculative development as his way to achieve economic advancement.
Figure 2.19: Floor plans, 180 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).
Constructing one’s own home was not unusual. One couple published an account of how they drew up their own house plan after they had “worked and studied over plans, and finally decided on a Dutch colonial type.” They engaged the best contractor in town and constructed the house for $6,656.00. To the base price of their house they “added $100 for light fixtures; $25 for wall paint; $140 for material for the garage.” The couple had $500 in cash, borrowed $5,500 from a savings and loan, and the contractor took a personal note for the balance. They made a payment of $59.59 a month for the next year.
They then sold the house at a 110 percent profit. This means they had profited over $600 for their work designing and building the house.37

In another published account, an owner-builder, a printer making $100 a month, bought a 450-dollar lot by making a down payment with semi-annual payments of $66.66. He built a small two-room house at the back of the lot, paying for the lumber and labor using money he had been paying for rent. A couple of years later, he financed an addition on this house through a savings and loan. After completing a comfortable place to stay, he paid the first mortgage off and then financed a construction loan through a building and loan to build a large, ten-room house at the front of the lot. Sixteen years after building his first home, he moved into a large “attractive bungalow,” which he then sold two years later for $7,500. “Considerable work on both places was done by himself on his own time.”38

Darling evidently attempted to do something very similar. He left the neighborhood where he and his wife had lived and rented a structure with an address at 178 North Chase Avenue. This might have been a building at the rear of his lot, and possibly in the garage built before the construction of the house began.39 It is unknown


39 Darling is listed at this address in the 1925 Columbus City Directory. In 1926, 176, 178 and 180 are listed in the directory. After 1927, only 176 and 180 are listed. Both these homes exist next to each other today. Harris, “Reading Sanborns,” 259, 262, documents the practice of building garages as temporary residences in Flint, Michigan. A Canadian advertisement for a residential development showed that a one could build a small house on a lot in order to live while building a bigger house. This was stated in the copy of the ad: “Build a little place until you are able (with saved rent money) to enlarge it. If you cant build, put up a tent for the summer. What you save in rent builds you a little home in the fall.” This ad is on 126 of Ross Patterson, “Creating the Packaged Suburb,” in Barbara M. Kelly, ed., Suburbia Re-examined (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), 123-127. Similar findings, including an entire “garage suburb,”
whether Darling began construction that September, but four months later, on January 5, 1925, he secured a new loan on the property for $3,500.00. After paying off the previous loan, this gave him an additional $500.00 dollars of capital that he obtained for $35.00 a month. In June, Darling secured an additional loan of $900.00 on the property from Leonard Mohr, chief officer for the Columbus Securities and Realty Company, who served as the middleman for the Arra Mortgage Bond and Abstract Company. By January 1926, Darling had completed the construction of the house and had had the property re-appraised. The appraiser valued the land at $620.00 and the new building at $3,150.00.

Two days after the appraisal, Darling secured his fourth loan against the house. On January 20, 1926, the Citizens Trust Savings and Loan paid off the other two mortgages and gave Darling a loan of $3,800.00 at $38.00 a month. On September 10, 1926, Darling sold the property to William and Carrie Kunze for $4,500.00.

Between the purchase of the lot and the sale of the property, Darling spent exactly 24 months working on the development of 180 North Chase. The evidence supports the conclusion that construction on the house began in September, 1924, and was completed 16 months later. This would have been a lengthy construction process compared to the houses built by both Orebaugh and Butler. It is unclear whether Darling built the house to live in or built the house deliberately to sell. Within eight months, however, he sold the house. During the two years, Darling carried $4,700.00 worth of secured debt and lost $200.00 on the sale of the house. This loss does not include the taxes he paid: $10.33

---

Darling did not have a background in any of the building trades and certainly was not qualified to act as a general contractor. It would appear that four months into the project, he realized that he had underestimated his construction costs and had to go back to the Columbian Building and Loan for an additional $500.00. This occurred again five months later.

The house itself attests to the matter of his building skill as well. Darling would have been considered a “jerry builder,” someone with a limited understanding of the building process who constructs substandard housing. Evidently Darling followed a general plan during the construction of the house, but he did not have knowledge of or access to construction details. He built the extended bay window in the dining room with no foundation or cantilever. To construct the overhang, Darling toenailed two-foot-long 2x8s directly to the edge board above the foundation. The floorboards, cantilevered over this connection, provided most of the actual support. Eventually, the bay deflected almost two inches downward. He repeated a similar construction flaw on the front porch roof. Darling laid one-inch pine boards on all the unexposed areas of the roof and nailed beaded porch ceiling from the center of the first ceiling joist out 16 inches to the raking board on the front of the roof. This left the entire eave along the front gable of the porch roof, a 16-inch cantilever, supported by one nail every four inches with a bearing surface of three-quarters of an inch. This caused the front porch eave to deflect at such an angle that the front porch roof appeared to be sloped intentionally in two directions.
THE COST OF THE NEAR URBAN HOUSE

The sale of 217 North Chase Avenue offers a good case study to illustrate the cost and profit of building and selling the near urban house. Orebaugh sold the house he built to the Frances for $5,028.65 with a down payment of $1,528.65. He constructed and sold this house within four months of buying the lot. He then collected a monthly payment, which he used to pay his construction loan. The Frances refinanced the home, capitalizing the $700 they had paid to Orebaugh. By financing the construction cost through the savings and loan, and requiring the Frances to put $1,528.65 down on the house, William Orebaugh recovered the approximately $1,184.18 in expenses required to acquire and develop the lot. He also profited nearly $350 at the completion of the sale. He did all of this with limited capital investment. He was able to leverage this money with a risk loan of the original $3,500.00 that he carried for two years.\textsuperscript{40}

For these speculative houses, timing was everything. Orebaugh made money by renting the house immediately to someone who paid rent to cover the construction cost, allowing him to move on to another house. By waiting for a buyer for 24 months, Darling continued to lose money and eventually sold his house for $200 less than the amount of construction loans that he took out against the house. Darling’s total loss, including taxes and the original cost of the lot, may have been as high as $1,200. Presumably, however, Darling was living in the house, or at the back of the lot, which saved him approximately $850 in rent that he instead paid on a construction loan. Assuming these figures would leave his total loss on the project at $350.00.

\textsuperscript{40} Abstract of Title, Lot 123, Hilltop Addition
The difference between the two contractors was that Darling thought he could make money selling the house, while Orebaugh made money financing the house. It is not known whether construction costs exceeded the amounts of construction loans, but from the evidence it must be assumed that a house on North Chase Avenue cost approximately $3,500.00 to build.

A very popular book, the New Building Estimator, published the costs of several actual small house construction projects during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Though earlier than the houses on Chase Avenue, this source can provide some insight into typical construction costs. The author suggested that houses without modern improvements should cost approximately $300 to $350 per room. Houses with modern improvements, “and part or all hardwood floors, slate roofs,” should cost $450 to $700 per room.41 Typical of these costs, a cottage built in St. Louis, without modern improvements, cost $330 per room. Another house being constructed in Omaha, in 1905, “with everything modern” cost close to $600 per room.42 Detailed estimates show where these costs occur. Potentially, one of the new costs to modern houses such as these was the cost of the installation of modern mechanical systems and fixtures.

Historians have calculated that the cost of plumbing systems, electrical systems, and modern kitchens added 25 to 40 percent more to the average cost of constructing a house. Citing several home economists, one states in her footnotes that by 1904, each


bathroom in a $2,000 house cost $150-$300, and a heating system cost $400 plus $40 per radiator. When looking at the actual construction costs, however, it appears that the cost of plumbing added between 8 percent and 16 percent to the cost of a home.

A small square-plan house that had “appeared in several magazines,” and was “deservedly popular,” contained 675 square feet with “3 rooms on each floor, and a large hall on the first floor.” Amenities included a bath on the second floor and a large pantry and coat closet on the first. The house stood “high enough to show the cellar lights clear of the ground” and had a “popular Dutch roof.” This house would have been similar in style to the house at 220 North Chase Avenue and would have cost $2,000 in the town of Omaha, Nebraska.

Electrical wiring was not included in the above calculations. The author wrote that this house plan had been advertised as being built several hundred times for $1,125, “presumably including a good profit for the contractor.”

Another pre-World War I home designed by a contractor for a contest in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* consisted of ten rooms with two bathrooms. Construction estimates for the house were $4.14 a square foot, or $384 per room.


45 Arthur, *The New Building Estimator*, 388. One should of course here and elsewhere take into account the considerable inflation that occurred between the late nineteenth century and the 1923.

Between November 1917 and August 1918, the *House Beautiful* magazine published a series of articles entitled “We Build a House Ourselves.” The articles detailed every step in the construction process of a large Dutch Colonial house built in Massachusetts. Each month the magazine listed a cost breakdown. When compiled, these costs can be compared to the previous costs from 1909.47

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excavation</td>
<td>$ 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masonry</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millwork and Glass</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter Labor</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaster, 600 yds at 22c</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantel and Hearth</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1,697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Cost of “popular Dutch roof” house in Omaha, Nebraska, c1904.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Percentage</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excavation and Masonry</td>
<td>$ 492</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>13.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millwork and Glass</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>23.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter Labor</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>19.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastering</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>7.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating and Mantel</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>8.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL $3,387

Table 2.2: Cost of house designed for the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, c1904.\(^{49}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Percentage</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excavation/Foundation</td>
<td>$ 650</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement-Material</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumber</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpentry Labor</td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick, flue lining</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water from Street</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doors</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Wiring</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL $6,353

Table 2.3: Cost of house as published in *House Beautiful*, 1918.\(^{50}\)


\(^{50}\) Calculations based on Shumway, “We Build Ourselves a Home.” The total cost as listed in the article is $9058.76. The cost of the lot, of all taxes, and mortgage payments that are listed in the article have been left out of this estimate in order to provide a more adequately comparison to the other estimated costs.
The percentage cost of construction is very consistent between these published estimates.

CONCLUSION

These houses constructed by builders, realtors, and even private individuals without any prior building experience, followed a new house type. This house discarded Victorian ideals and construction methods, and began to embrace a new way of looking at the house.

We have just looked at house designs as they were actually constructed, bought, and lived in. What we have seen is the people who built these houses during the 1920s. One can read in the text, left by one author, about a home plan built hundreds of times all across the country. And one can read the rooms in that plan. Hundreds of plans existed with similar layout, similar rooms, and of a similar size.

The next chapter takes up the essence of these plans as they existed on the Hilltop in Columbus and as they existed all over the United States in the 1920s. We will discuss individual rooms, where they came from, and how they were furnished and used. This new plan became the “modern” house type of the 1920.
CHAPTER 3

THE 1920S HOUSE PLAN: THE TYPOLOGY OF A NEW STANDARD

The last chapter showed how a seemingly ubiquitous house was constructed by three individuals in three different ways on Chase Avenue. What is clear is that the standardization of homes did not owe to a single developer, a single builder, or a single plan. The development of this standardized house plan, the new 1920s house type, owed to a mass movement that permeated the housing delivery system during the first decades of the twentieth century and established what would be understood as the modern home.

As I indicated earlier, the new house type consisted of a nearly square plan with three basic rooms on the first floor and three bedrooms and a bath on the second. Approximately twenty-five feet by twenty-five feet, the plan had 525 square feet of living space on the first floor. The three basic rooms consisted of a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen.

Other historians have noted the new house type of the 1920s. One has concluded that the “ideal house” had a “simplified design and standardized layout.” Others have noted what they see as “modern, simpler houses.”

---

The significance of the new floor plan will be explored in this chapter. The small, square house plan revealed a changing culture in the United States, both in terms of consumerism and in the conceptualization of what the home had to offer the family.

For the most part, society and technology caused the changes to the floor plan. The Victorian house plan contained five to eight rooms on the first floor, each with a specific use. In the modern house plan, three rooms replaced those needed in the Victorian predecessor.

Though somewhat of a generality, the transformation of the house from the Victorian to the modern configuration resulted directly from the changes to individual rooms. The rooms and the plan of the modern house served technological systems. Technology, to a great extent, removed the specialized function of several nineteenth century rooms, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The near urban house served to usher in the modern era of housing. Rooms and their uses changed as Victorian culture gave way to the modern era of the automobile, radio, and telephone. By looking at the rooms, the twentieth-century house as a cultural object can be examined, and conclusions can be drawn about how the house both changed and was changed by the culture that surrounded everyday life. The near urban house had shaken loose the Victorian formality of hall and parlor, but how and why did this happen?

discusses the acceptance of the square plan by builders at the turn of the century using articles written by Frederick Thomas Hodgson in the National Builder and The Carpenter. He argued that these homes were part of the “drive for simplicity, regularity, and economy.” Janet Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt: The State and the Suburban Home Ideal,” Journal of Policy History 9 (1997): 186, reiterates this plan she calls the “popular suburban house for ‘modern living.’”
The central feature of the new house type was the living room. Typically the first room in the house to be entered, the living room faced the street and provided access to the rest of the home. During the 1920s, the living room became the center of family activities, replacing many of the special-use rooms of the Victorian house.

This new type of house and the new plan is what we have seen and documented on Chase Avenue. By the late 1920s, the plan was ubiquitous throughout the United States. Houses built on this plan filled communities like the Hilltop Addition.

Where did this new plan come from? This question could be answered in multiple ways, and they would all be correct. One could say that the new plan resulted from decades of advocacy by housing reformers. One could say that the new plan was the creation of architects, designing smaller homes for a new emerging market, the middle class. For the sake of this chapter, the new housing plan came from the advertising and boosterism of countless housing specialists who had a direct economic interest in the proliferation of the new house type.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, some people began to suggest that changes in the house itself were in fact responsible for cultural change. In 1921, a nationally syndicated editorialist wrote, “It is a pity that the real pleasures of the good old fashioned American home are being usurped by the fleeting mirage of excitement in the modern day method of living, for just as sure as the home loses its attraction to the individual the nation loses its impetus of progress and prosperity.”

---

2 Editorial Press Association to *The Bucyrus Evening Telegraph*, August 2, 1921. Inserted in this letter was a typical editorial by James Ashton Greig, “Make Yourself a Home!” Hopley Family Papers, MSS164, Box 13, file 1, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
The new house type can be broken into component parts of the house plan. The architectural plan came to dominate the discussion of housing during the 1920s. The components of the plan are, in fact, the rooms in the house. These individual rooms and their uses became a key feature in the development of the small house. How these took on a modern function and how they were furnished during this transition will be the focus of the first part of this chapter.

The next section of the chapter will discuss in detail how the components were formed into the whole in order to become the new typological modern house plan.

The new house type was consistent with house plans available through many sources and was widely circulated through housing catalogs and media outlets. In fact, the 1920s house type was so widely circulated that the average person in the United States had the opportunity to see a plan image several times a day. Various plans were published in ladies’ magazines, building journals, newspapers, books, advertising flyers, and business catalogs. Some of the companies involved in providing new housing are well known, and some are not. But all served to issue new plans and concepts of space and lifestyle.

There were several outlets for the promotion of housing styles and plans. Published plans, for the most part, presented very similar houses. Outlets for published plans included Savings and Loan offices, lumberyards and materials dealers, newspapers, plan catalogs, and magazines. Of the available outlets, much of the existing evidence for
the widespread dissemination of housing plans and styles is contained in retail catalogs and ladies’ magazines.³

For instance, between 1909 and 1928, Sears, Roebuck and Company sold 41,200 homes. During this same time Aladdin Homes, a rival, sold approximately 32,000 houses. These companies had an enormous impact on the housing market in terms of marketing and advertising.⁴

That is, the impact of advertisements for prefabricated housing far outweighed the number of houses actually bought and constructed. In 1906, the Gordon-Van Tine Company incorporated to sell prefabricated houses. The company allocated $50,000 and hired the Chicago advertising firm of Lord & Thomas to promote their new products. Within eight months, print advertisements had reached 40,000,000 households, just under half of the population of the country.⁵ The media blitz that accompanied the new modern house type established the small, middle-class house as the house type of the future.⁶

³ Few of the catalog companies have kept records of when and where their homes were built. Sears is working toward creating a database of existing catalog homes, but this is a time-consuming task. It is also unknown how many of the catalog homes sold in the United States were erected in rural areas. The catalogs themselves catered to the rural market by also offering barns and outbuildings.

⁴ Robert Schweitzer and Michael W. R. Davis, America’s Favorite Homes: Mail Order Catalogs as a Guide to Popular Early 20th Century Houses (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 14, 65. There has been a debate among authors about the number of Sears, Roebuck homes actually sold. Katherine Cole Stevenson, and H. Ward Jandl, Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986), 19, claim about 100,000 based on Sears, Roebuck figures. Schweitzer and Davis use numbers published in advertisements in 1928 to come up with 41,100. Daniel D. Reiff, Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 236, gives 45,900 as the number constructed between 1911 and 1929 from a Sears publication. During the housing boom from 1922 to 1929 nearly six million homes were constructed in the United States. The percentage of the marketplace that prefabricated housing commanded was slight, though the impact of the marketing of such houses cannot be overstated.


In the last few years, several authors have provided an immense amount of research and insight into the mass marketing of housing plans during the first half of the twentieth century. These books discuss style and exterior characteristics at length. Most authors working on the history of catalog houses in fact have done so from the vantage point of architectural history, with a focus on the aspects that make the houses different.  

More important than the differences between exterior elements are the similarities of the plans of the houses. The common use of interior spatial configuration shows a transformation from the Victorian home to the modern home. In many respects, this was a cultural transformation, but at the root of the transformation was technology.

PLANNING OVER STYLE

Some historians have suggested that style, such as the Arts and Crafts or the Colonial Revival, was not an important aspect of new housing during the early twentieth century. What they find is that writers of the day did not argue directly for any specific stylistic treatment, and therefore these scholars come to the conclusion that style was not as important as were model solutions for development practices.  

One must ask, then, if realtors, builders, and developers did not concern themselves with style, why did the

---


residential structures that lined the streets of near urban neighborhoods all over the country look the same? The case can be made that a general style, both in plan and elevation, can be attributed to house types during the 1920s.

For the most part, housing constructed in most Midwestern and other growing cities during the 1920s followed a very controlled stylistic pattern. Contemporary builders and suppliers labeled these “Revival styles” and understood them by their exterior appearance. Houses labeled as “New England Colonial, Dutch Colonial, Half Timber, Modern English, Italian, and Spanish Mission” all followed a similar massing, plan layout, and room nomenclature, but differed in exterior features, window placement, and, in a few cases, cladding. Individuals with the building industries did not adhere to any one particular list of styles. One commented that the “styles in a frame house are many – almost as numerous as the architects.”

The list of styles varied by advertisement copy and by the perceptions of individual builders. As early as 1910, builders could list the various styles as “Colonials, Queen Ann and Dutch Roofs of various brands; Swiss Chalets, Bungalows, Romanesque, Picturesque, Grotesque, Frontier, and many other kinds.” People within the housing network marketed the idea that if a house was to be “beautiful, symmetrical, of enduring charm and general appeal,” then it had to “observe certain fundamental principals and traditions.” These fundamental traditions, the public was told, had been the “results of

---

centuries of thought and experiment” by “architects and builders.” Both understood that various styles had appeal to the people buying and building homes.

THE 1920s HOUSE PLAN

As will be taken up below, the best material key to this discussion is the published work of a contractor, William Arthur. Arthur specified what the rooms should be in what he called the “modern home.” As early as 1910, Arthur was disseminating features of the new house type to builders and homebuyers.

As a contractor, Arthur completed over $500,000 worth of building contracts. As an “expert estimator, well known in the west” whose reputation extended “far beyond his home city of Omaha,” Arthur also published an important building trades manual. This book, “an encyclopedia, being packed as full as it will hold with hard facts and practical hints,” was first published in 1904 and subsequently went through several editions through 1913. The blurb noted that the reception of the book by the “building trade, the press, appraisers, insurance adjusters, railroad engineers, and others,” attested to “the convenient and serviceable nature of the book as a ready reference.”

---


After the success of his early work, Arthur published a series of handbooks aimed at contractors and homebuilders. In 1911, Arthur published a three-part book detailing the “Contractor as a Businessman,” the “Contractor as a Constructor,” and the “Contractor as a Taxpayer.” Arthur suggested that although there were more than 30,000 architects, draftsmen, and designers in 1911, there were between 600,000 and 700,000 carpenters, and “thousands of these men make plans.” This statement referred to a design-build concept whereby a contractor designed and drew his or her own set of building plans and documents from which to build houses and small commercial buildings. Arthur stated that “probably half of the active builders” made their own plans and construction documents “at one time or another.” In 1910 and 1914, Arthur published guides that would be helpful to “the man who is building his own home at as low a cost as possible.” Arthur suggested that homebuilders could “not always afford a competent architect, and often [lose] a hundred dollars in the effort to save five.” This book outlined what the typical modern house should contain and how it should be built.

1910 United States Census listed Arthur in Omaha as an estimator for the building trades. The Building Trades Employees Association Bulletin, published in New York, November 1904, identified Arthur as “an expert estimator.” This was quoted in an advertisement in the back of The Ideal City. Wright, Moralism and the Model Home, 191, 244, makes arguments similar to those made in this chapter using another builder, Frederick Thomas Hodgson, who edited the builders’ magazines the National Builder and The Carpenter.


Many of Arthur’s ideas have been discussed in connection with the houses on Chase Avenue. The publication of Arthur’s work in 1910, however, makes it an excellent example of the beginning of the transition from Victorian to “modern” housing types. Arthur represented a growing movement of housing advocates. He is important to this study in that he was not a domestic reformer, but a contractor writing to builders and homeowners about practices then current.

Arthur represents a transitional phase in that he discusses the planning of the house with a pseudo-Victorian nomenclature. According to Arthur, typical rooms in the “modern” house “costing about 2,500 upwards,” included a “hall, parlor or sitting room, dining room, kitchen and pantry downstairs; and three or four bedrooms and bath room upstairs.” A few sentences later, Arthur introduced his readers to the idea of “one large living room,” one of the keystones of the near urban house.\(^{14}\)

THE DESIGN OF INTERIORS

In looking at the house as an artifact, it is important to look at all aspects of the house exterior and interior. The transformation from Victorian to modern homes affected all aspects of the house. Market forces and consumer culture affected every aspect of interior design, though in many respects more slowly than corporate marketing departments would have liked.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Arthur, “Suggestions for Building a Modern Dwelling,” 147-148. This quote was also in *The Home Builders’ Guide*, 17.

\(^{15}\) Each of the rooms in the near urban house had functions that were fulfilled by certain groupings of furniture. Placement of this furniture followed rules as laid out by design professionals.
The design of houses, whether by an architect, a builder, or a realtor, took into consideration standard furniture styles and placement. House design and interior design were intertwined when it came to the act of living in the home. The homeowner could not separate the two facets. In fact, housing advocates recognized and articulated that “in decorating we have always to bear that main fact in mind – that a room is a background against which we live.” The purchase of the house was conditioned by how a family intended to use and furnish the structure, and these decisions impacted the size and types of rooms the family thought necessary.16

Interior design, as discussed in this chapter, therefore involved how the homeowner placed and exhibited furniture and decoration in each room. Interior design, as practiced by the upper half of the middle class in the United States, was disseminated particularly through monthly women’s magazines and journals. To what extent the homeowner in the near urban neighborhood listened to and followed this advice is not exactly known. Even at the time, design advocates understood that magazines were a little high-brow. In one article, Margaret U. Barton stated, “It is well-nigh impossible for the average of us to adopt these books and articles to our modest homes and incomes, and interior decorators we can’t afford.”17


By 1910, the idea of the “modern” had already begun to be the antithesis to the Victorian aesthetic ideal. “Modern,” however, was more than an aesthetic. “Modern” implied a particular set of technologies. As has already been shown in the houses on Chase Avenue, interior decoration did not necessarily match what would be considered a modern aesthetic. It is clear that as late as 1910 patterns of interior finishes still retained Victorian aesthetics, and yet the interiors of housing had begun to move into the modern. The Modern style was available to interior designers. A writer in the *Wallpaper News and Interior Decorator* reported in 1915 that “The Modern style which has developed in Europe has been seen in this country in photographs of interiors which have come to the attention of decorators and designers from time to time and at the St. Louis Exposition. Many interiors of this character have been illustrated in this magazine during the past twelve years or so. These photographs have exerted some small influence upon the decoration in this country, but the style was not represented by actual work in American interiors until recently.”

**INTERIORS AND INVESTIGATIONS**

Architectural investigations, as discussed in the previous chapter, are a necessary part of separating marketing from consumption practices. In 1911, one design advocate wrote that a “well-designed wood trim, a side wall of good proportions, windows and doors that fit and balance, a simple fireplace, sunshine and ventilation – these are usually

---

embodied in the modern living room.”19 The question can be raised, what is a wall of good proportions and how does someone show that a house constructed in 1911 had them?

Descriptions in magazines and journals, as I have suggested, cannot be construed as the actual design conditions in which average near urban families lived in. In fact, many design suggestions seem to have been aimed directly at changing common practice. In the case of the living room, design advocates suggested that “the more neutral the walls and the more restful the furnishings, the greater the beauty.” An advocate in a building journal stated that in a living room it is best to have a good plain paper “in a warm light-giving tone,” suggesting that “a striped paper in the self-tone, with a frieze in some harmonizing color is good.” Above all, the homeowner should “avoid figured wallpaper,” which had been used heavily for decades. Another design advocate stated that the living room “could stand a stronger color” than some other rooms, but “as a rule, it is best to have plain walls and plain upholstery for the furniture, leaving the decoration to the hangings.”20 These were all suggestions aimed at changing Victorian design sensibilities.

It is clear from the investigations of the houses on Chase Avenue that these design suggestions were not necessarily followed. As shown in the preceding chapter, three of the four living rooms in which original wallpapers were found had interior wall finishes almost opposite of what was considered good taste by interior design professionals. This

---


leaves large room for divergence between design advocates and design reality. By comparing various thoughts and ideas written about room use and design with pictures of actual houses, some level of understanding can be attained as to what the typical near urban house looked like and how it functioned -- and why.

ROOMS IN THE MODERN HOUSE

Throughout the history of housing, public rooms have been located on the first floor. Renaissance villas elevated public rooms to the piano nobile, the principal story of a house, elevated one story above the ground. This placement allowed circulation of air and openness to breezes, and kept the aristocratic occupants slightly above the filth and smells generated by the process of daily living.21

The earliest vernacular housing styles, however, placed public rooms directly at ground level. These post-in-ground dwellings filled the immediate housing need, but even by the sixteenth century, the English long-house, with a public multi-purpose hall, opening into other ground floor areas, signified the station of the landed gentry.

This English tradition of post-in-ground housing came to America in the seventeenth century. At first temporary structures, these houses served as the standard dwelling for the landed gentry in the New World. When more permanent housing

developed in the eighteenth century, this landed elite based their new residences on English examples, which were in turn based on Renaissance and Palladian precedents.\textsuperscript{22}

The Victorian dwellings of the nineteenth century established a house type for an emerging business elite in medium and small towns all over the United States. Though substantially flexible in plan and elevation owing to the new balloon framing techniques from the early-nineteenth century, these dwellings, too, had elements of traditionally aristocratic housing. These included the elevation of the principal floor with public rooms set aside for formal entertaining.\textsuperscript{23}

During the same time, the bungalow developed as a form of English military housing. A one-story residential structure, the bungalow is characterized by a large front porch and sweeping overhanging rooflines. Designed to protect residents from the unrelenting climate of the Caribbean and Indian colonies, the bungalow became a fashionable small house type by the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{24}

The Victorian house, as I have noted, had developed several specialized rooms, many with specific rituals. By the turn of the twentieth century, many of these rooms still


\textsuperscript{24} Kenneth Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 58; Crowley, \textit{The Invention of Comfort}, 247-249, discusses the Indian bungalow with a “verandah as its most impressive structural feature.”
served specific functions, but mainly in large, stately, architect-designed homes. These minor rooms included tea rooms, billiard rooms, smoking rooms, and libraries.

As late as 1923, L. Eugene Robinson, a housing advocate and architect, had written an architectural textbook suggesting that a parlor or a tea room should be located near the entry hall. Likewise, he wrote that an architect should locate a billiard or smoking room near the dining room. When used in houses, these rooms needed to be isolated from the living areas of the house but within proximity in order to receive visitors.25

As another example, many houses prior to the 1920s had libraries. Robinson suggested that since one person at a time normally used this room, the library also could be isolated. The room, however, needed to be located near the entry in case the occupants of the house used the room to receive callers. Music rooms, dens, offices, and art rooms were all similar to the library and therefore should be set “a little aside from the regular rooms.”26

In contrast to the Victorian standards of such writers, by the early twentieth century, elements, functions, and use of residential spaces had been reborn and transformed into the new house type, a typological development in many respects still present today. The public rooms were located on the first floor, elevated from ground level. The transitional space of the porch provided entrance to the house, and mediated both the elevation and the public nature of the street. The front door opened inward to

---


26 Ibid. Another housing expert argued that a room should not be called a library unless the room contained a collection of books large enough “to make the books the dominant note.” This was no less than four bookcases. Wright, *Interior Decorations*, 108.
the first room, the living room. This room became a multi-functional room replacing many of the rooms in the Victorian home. This new concept in living arrangement and attitude altered the foremost room of the house; the transformation from hall and parlor to living room had a dramatic effect on the social institution of the house.27

HALL, PARLOR, AND LIVING ROOM

In the earliest forms of detached residential housing, the hall served as the central public and familial room. Situated around the hearth, the hall became a multi-functional room providing the basic needs of shelter, warmth, and food. By the seventeenth century, specialized rooms had begun to replace the dominance of the hall. The parlor and chamber added spaces dedicated to entertainment and sleeping, and the hall began to serve the separate function of reception. Throughout the eighteenth century, the hall became the transitional area between a series of more intimate public rooms and, often, second floor bedrooms. The hall became an area dedicated to receiving guests who quite often were escorted into the parlor.28

The most important room in the nineteenth-century house, therefore, became the parlor. This room served as the social hub of a refined life. A parlor and a few good pieces of furniture were prerequisites even in the lower-income search for gentility.29


28 Crowley, Invention of Comfort, 14-16.

The parlor, located off of an entry hall, was set aside for the social visiting or calling of friends and for the exercising of civility and social graces.\(^{30}\)

The parlor was the outgrowth of a great cultural change that swept the United States during the nineteenth century. The active quest for gentility created new value structures. The spread and adoption of genteel values affected so large a percentage of the population and infiltrated so deeply into religion and the organization of the neighborhood that gentility shaped the very structure of society. This catalyst both shaped and was shaped by physical surroundings. Refinement became the outward expression of class, not in an economic sense, but in attitude. Manners and style of life in everyday exchanges led to interpersonal categorization even more than wealth or occupation.\(^{31}\)

The parlor became antiquated by the early twentieth century. A cultural change was occurring, replacing the genteel parlor culture with a culture that depended on material gain and personal expression. Reformers understood parlor culture as a gender and class-biased way of life that was in need of change. The fast pace of twentieth-century urban life needed a fast-paced physical environment. The need for casual visitation was replaced by entertainment outside of the home. Parlor reformers sought a change in the parlor from a place of entertainment to a room for living during the

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 447. Bushman describes the use of the parlor not only as a gathering spot but for gatherings used to train young adults in the finer aspects of genteel behavior. The parlor was the outgrowth of a larger cultural change. He writes, “We assume that house lots will have yards with lawns and shrubbery, that houses will make space for formal entertainment, that everyone will own books, take baths, carry handkerchiefs, eat with a knife and fork, forgetting that all this once had to be learned.”

As leisure increased, the role of the home changed. No longer was a parlor room necessary for tea and visitation during the evening. The living room became a multi-functional family space serving the needs of changing family functions. In an article in 1915, one author suggested that “the idea of furnishing for comfort was gradually applied throughout the entire house. The ‘parlor’ became a living-room and the idea of a house that could be ‘lived in’ from top to bottom has gradually superseded the more formal idea of furnishing, so that there no longer exists a necessity for a single room to be set apart as an environment of negligée comfort.”

THE MODERN LIVING ROOM

In considering the “Living Room,” Arthur, the expert on building houses, noted that “Some wit has said that women of our time are bent on knocking out all the partitions on the first floor of their home and calling it a living-room.” By 1910, the process of transformation from hall and parlor to a standard multi-purpose living room arrangement had become popular enough that it deserved comment. This popularization, however, began in existing housing. In remembering her Victorian home in Pittsburgh, Ethel Spencer recalled that in her parent’s house the “parlor went through many transformations and toward the end of our occupancy of the house it became a living room.” Toward the late nineteenth century, many families who set aside the formal

32 Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 270.

parlor used other rooms for daily family activities. Rooms such as the sitting room or back parlor could be filled with older furniture dedicated to daily family activities.34

At the turn of the century, rooms that had been the main public venue of the household began to be absorbed in favor of one larger living space. Arthur suggested that “the living-room may be made out of the hall and the front room, or out of two rooms only. The hall and the front room seem to make the best combination because the dining-room can then be shut off and treated by itself.”35

When the front room or living room was located off the main entrance of the house, the room served as entry hall, parlor, library, den, and music room. Robinson’s textbook confirmed that “in the ordinary house” the living room took the place of all the above named rooms. As designed, the room combined features of all the other specialized rooms. The author continued:

If in the house there is no library, a certain portion of the living room should be set aside in a cozy fashion containing bookcases where one may read comfortably. If in the house there is no music room, then an inside wall of the living room should be especially designed and reserved for a piano, and music cabinet. Since the living room is occupied for a large part of the day by the woman of the house, it may be well to fit a particular part of that room with the paraphernalia needed in

---

34 William Arthur, “Suggestions for Building a Modern Dwelling,” 148. Ethel Spencer, The Spencers of Amberson Avenue: A Turn of the Century Memoir (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 107. This is also quoted in Grier, Culture and Comfort, 65. Grier discusses primary sources about the use of other rooms as daily living areas on pages 84 and 85. Thomas Schlereth, Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915 (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), briefly discusses this type of catchall room for everyday family activities in Victorian manses. He suggests various names associated with the room such as “second parlor, the drawing room, music room, sitting room, or living room.” Schlereth, 122-124, does not specifically date the living room per se, but he discusses the transformation using sources between the late 1890s and 1913.

35 William Arthur, “Suggestions for Building a Modern Dwelling,” 148. Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 1929), 99, also noted this in their classic study of Muncie, Indiana. They observed a trend toward fewer and larger rooms. What they found was that “among the business class and in the case of the newer bungalows of the working class, the tendency is to throw together much of the lower floor by means of large double doorways.” Though Frank Lloyd Wright was exploring modern, open floor plans in his Prairie Style homes during the 1920s. The house plans from builders journals, plan books, and articles used in this study did not indicate any identifiable influence of his planning ideas.
ordinary sewing work, so that the room also becomes a sewing room. Sometimes a writing desk, or secretary, is desirable in a living room.36

At the heart of Robinson’s argument was his conclusion that “the living room should be a room in which to live in every sense of the word, the variations in its arrangement depending upon the other rooms in the house, and the habits of the family.”37

The same argument applied to interior decorating and furniture. Agnes Foster Wright, a housing advocate who published books and articles on interior design, suggested in 1917 that “Above all else, the furniture in the living room should make it livable.” In breaking with the Victorian tradition of bric-a-brac, modern decorators preached that “where the living-room serves the purpose of library, drawing-room, and a general family room, it should be simply treated as to furnishings and decorations.” The author even made a plea that the room would be as “free as possible from the purely useless things.38

The family hearth maintained a presence in the home. This fireplace, often became the central feature in the living room. In many houses, the fireplace and mantel, with built-in cabinets or bookshelves on either side, was the one stylistically designed area of the house. At 220 North Chase Avenue, as we have seen, the fireplace was

---

36 Robinson, Domestic Architecture, 62-64.

37 Ibid. 64; see also Mary Ormsbee Whitton, The New Servant: Electricity in the Home (New York: Doubleday, 1927); Clark, The American Family Home, 163, refers to the “ideal living room.”

38 Wright, Interior Decorations, 108; Wentworth, “The Living Room: How to Decorate and Furnish It,” 50-51; The advice against bric-a-brac is directly related to the decoration of the Victorian parlor. See Grier, Culture and Comfort, 64-116; See also Margaret U. Barton, “The Big Problem of the Little House,” Good Housekeeping November, 1921, 34, who implores readers to “not tolerate quantities of meaningless knickknacks, but let every vase and candlestick have for its purpose in being, real beauty or use.”
Figure 3.1: Living room, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1923
(*Sears Modern Homes*, 1923, 63).

Figure 3.2: Living room, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1927
(*Sears Modern Homes*, 1927, 65).
Figure 3.3: Living room, Montgomery Ward & Co. (*Wardway Homes*, 1924, rear cover).

Figure 3.4: Living room (Wright, *Interiors for Modern Needs*, 202).
Craftsmen in design with a seat on one side and bookcase on the other. At 169 North Chase Avenue, the fireplace contained a bookshelf on either side with Arts and Crafts style leaded glass doors. In the near urban house, the furniture placement in the living room would have been arranged around the hearth wall.

The typical living room in the “small house” contained a grouping of furniture considered the “main essentials.” At the minimum, the room included “a comfortable divan, a table large enough to hold books, magazines and lamps, and at least two comfortable, upholstered chairs and a smaller table.” This grouping of furniture was not necessarily exclusive, but these were the “certain pieces that [made] the living-room livable in any house.”

The question does exist as to whether the homeowners of new near urban houses bought new furniture in keeping with the new social housekeeping. Furnishing the near urban house could cost as much as $1000 to $3000 for a home costing $5000. Many homeowners, however, spent less than $500.00. An inexpensive, complete living room set consisting of an arm rocker, a library table, a large armchair, a sewing rocker and chair (without arms), a taboret, and book ends for the table could be purchased from

---


Figure 3.5: Colonial revival fireplace surround with seats (Wright, *Interiors for Modern Needs*, 115).

Figure 3.6: Craftsman-style fireplace surround showing leaded glass bookcases and a Craftsman chair (*Aladdin Homes*, 1918, 108)
Figure 3.7: Craftsman-style fireplace surround (Robinson, *Domestic Architecture*, 95).

Figure 3.8: Craftsman-style fireplace surround at 220 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).
Sears, Roebuck and Company for $27.85. Local furniture dealers sold higher quality at a much higher price. In 1926, a 3-piece Jaquard Velour living room suite consisting of an overstuffed couch and two armchairs sold in Marion, Ohio, for $230.00. Likewise, an eight-piece walnut dining room set, including a buffet, a table, and six chairs cost $254.00. A quality dining room table from Sears, Roebuck, on the other hand, cost $39.50.  

41 By the 1920s, an entire set of furniture could be purchased on credit. These sets included everything necessary for a new homeowner to furnish a new home and were often marketed to young couples who were first-time homebuyers. In Indianapolis, “young people” who were “planning for a new home” could “fit the home complete” at Hoosier Outfitting. In Wheeling, West Virginia, another store offered both cash and credit prices for furniture offering to “aid and co-operate with the young couples starting out in life” by offering to extend credit on “complete home outfits for a period of eighteen months.” Yet another store offered everything consisting of a living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedroom. At another store a couple could get everything they needed to furnish a “4 room home,” including carpets and oil paintings, for under $1000, all on account.  

Evidence shows that homeowners did, in fact, fill their homes with new suites of living room and dining room furniture. Of 5870 households inventoried in Cleveland, Ohio, 4537, or 77 percent, had purchased living room furniture between 1920 and 1939. Of these families, 67.6 percent had purchased an entire suite. The number of families who had purchased dining room furniture was more than half, at 2669, but 91.4 percent of these families bought an entire suite. Just under half had also purchased a complete suite of bedroom furniture.43

FURNISHING THE LIVING ROOM

By 1914, the primary piece of furniture in the living room group was a sofa. This piece could also be called a divan or a davenport. Interior designers preferred striped patterns, asserting that “a six foot sofa with a seat and back divided into three separate cushions, upholstered in a strie or wide striped velour is better than a sofa plainly upholstered.”44

The second most important piece of furniture in the room was a “long, narrow table –3x6 feet.” Often called a library table, this piece of furniture took the place of “the older fashioned, claw-footed center mahogany table.” Like the living room itself, the long table answered “the modern need” and served multiple uses. Family members could


44 Wright, Interior Decoration, 115.
“sit at it, as at a desk, and write and study,” or “three or four people could sit on one side of it.” The table also held “two lamps beautifully” that could shed “adjacent light on two groups.” In 1908, the Sears, Roebuck catalog did not contain long tables. By 1927 they commanded an entire page showing sixteen different styles, with both “library” tables and “davenport” tables.\footnote{Wright, Interior Decoration, 115-116. Joseph J. Schroeder, Jr., ed., 1908 Sears, Roebuck Catalog: A Treasured Replica from the Archives of History (Chicago: DBI Books, Inc, 1969 reprint[1908]); furniture is displayed on 438-455, 446-447, 450-451, or 453-454. The catalog shows full parlor sets on 452 and 455. Mirken, 1927 Edition of the Sears, Roebuck Catalog, 900-901.}

Housing experts were consistent on the placement and use of furniture in the living room. Typical decorator verbiage promoted the idea that the homeowner desired “restfulness, peace and comfort, but with life and individuality.” Housing experts believed that these ideas could be achieved by correct furniture placement. In 1922, one suggested that “in order to produce an impression of restfulness and space, the larger pieces of furniture should be placed parallel to the walls of the room.”\footnote{Edward Draton Holloway, “Furnishing the Small House,” House Beautiful 48 (November 1920): 374; Winnifred Fales, “A Simple Course in Home Decorating,” Good Housekeeping July 1922, 43.}

The transportation and communication revolutions had altered the activities of most middle-class Americans and contributed to transforming the function of the living room. In 1930, the author of a book on the history of American housing claimed that “entertainment, as a result of ease of transportation and communication, has almost gone from the homes of a large per cent of American families. They give dinners at clubs and restaurants and entertain at amusement places...The automobile has replaced the parlor.” The automobile changed the parlor-culture custom of visitation and opened up a wider
spectrum of leisure opportunities for family members. These leisure activities, however, no longer required intimate communication with other people in the community. The automobile transported the consumer to places such as parks, movies, or restaurants, large public places the commercial success of which depended on patrons who arrived by private transportation.

At the same time that the automobile separated many leisure activities from the house, the living room became the center of activity for those who stayed home. Many of those left at home were families with younger children. Advertisers recognized this and occasionally depicted ways in which the living room could be used. An advertisement for modern heating, published in 1915, showed a family at leisure in the living room. The family consists of a father, a mother, and a young boy, and a young girl. The father is reading the newspaper in a chair, the son is reading a magazine on the floor, the mother is knitting, and the daughter is plying the piano. The advertisement clearly showed a living room functioning as the leisure activity center for the whole family.

---


THE DINING ROOM

The dining room came into existence in America during the first half of the eighteenth century. As the hall became an area dedicated to the reception of guests, the dining room became the heart of the room. The room, always located on the first floor, served the multi-purpose function of storage, eating, and sleeping.50

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Victorian dining room lost the sleeping function and held furniture and decorations associated with imagery of hunting and gathering of food. Nothing symbolized this better than the overly ornate sideboards that

50 Crowly, The Invention of Comfort, 86-87.
began to be the most prominent piece of furniture in the room. The iconographic display of dogs and dead animals pointed to the masculinity of the room.51

Typically, the near urban houses on Chase Avenue were extended two feet past the foundation, creating what looked like a window bay from the outside of the house. One housing advocate suggested that bay windows were typical in dining rooms and could be used to good effect. As far as a foundation for the bay window, he suggested that “for the average bay window it is not really necessary to run the masonry of the foundation out, as the joists can be projected, and building paper or some other material used to keep out frost.” He did state, however, that it was better to run out the masonry but suggested that this added more cost, and it would be better to use the money elsewhere.52

Designers argued that in the dining room, decoration should follow the modern trend of light colors. “The dining room should always be done in light, cheerful tones,” wrote one designer. Wainscoting could be used in the dining room, but if not, “the lower part of the wall should be a perfectly plain paper in a lighter color.”53

51 Kenneth Ames, Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 73.


The dining room served as a multi-purpose space in many households. Families did everything from homework to dress making on the dining room table.\textsuperscript{54} The dining room also served, however, as the setting where the family defined the role of etiquette and social behavior and established a set pattern of social standards. By the mid-twentieth century, silverplate flatware became a standard possession of the middle class, and the standard way of eating with the same utensils became a defining characteristic of the community.\textsuperscript{55} In this way, the dining room had replaced the parlor for the ritualized instruction of etiquette.

\textsuperscript{54} Grier, \textit{Culture and Comfort}, 84; Schlereth, \textit{Victorian America}, 124.

The dining room also functioned as the setting for family rituals such as holidays. In this sense, the dining room served as a forum for cultural consumption. Here, many families embraced a mass consumer culture that during the 1920s ever increasingly marketed holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. \(^{56}\)

**THE DEN**

Historians have made the argument that the domestic reform movement divided the home into male and female spheres. Nowhere is this argument clearer than in the case of the room known as a den. One historian uses the bungalow style as an example to show that in space planning, the den became the masculine area of the house. By the late nineteenth century, the male resentment of the feminine parlor created a backlash of private male spaces in the domicile, and this occurred in a small room, usually located off of the living room. \(^{57}\)

Though the den appeared in several housing plans during the 1920s, the room was more suited for earlier Arts and Crafts homes. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the den was on the wane as a fundamental room in the modern house. As early as 1911, Ann Wentworth, another housing expert, published an article in *House Beautiful* entitled “The Passing of the Den.” She stated that few floor plans contained the “once-

---


popular room.” She goes on to say that with the removal of the den, “the gain in space makes possible a larger living room.” Wentworth suggested, however, that the den had served a useful purpose: a means to escape the “over-feminine parlors and reception rooms.”

In 1917, another expert, Agnes Foster Wright, wrote that “what used to be called the ‘den’ is now called a smoking room.” Here, as in the den, men escaped to participate in traditional masculine pleasures. Within this room, the man of the house indulged in hobbies as well as smoking. Wright suggested that the room was directly related to the library, only for men who didn’t like to read.

THE SLEEPING PORCH

A sleeping porch, with wrap-around windows off a back bedroom or sometimes protruding over the back porch, added a space for open air sleeping. Many cultural authorities held that sleeping in the open-air was important for one’s health. The standard personal hygiene text of the early twentieth century assured readers that,

---

58 Ann Wentworth, “The Passing of the Den,” *House Beautiful* 29 (1911): 127-128; in 1915, another article, “The Passing of the Den,” *The Wallpaper News and Interior Decorator* February 1915: 19, repeats this argument and shows a “typical den of fifteen years ago.” The den, according to the article, was a small room “set apart as a place where the man temperament could have full expression, where colored curtains were not affected by tobacco smoke,” 21.

59 Wright, *Interior Decoration*, 132-133. The den returned somewhat during the second half of the twentieth century. In an article written in 1938 concerning a national housing survey, architects and designers argued that “when the man of the family has good use for it, a den should be included off the living room;” See “Colonial Home is Most Popular: Country-Wide Survey Brings Much Information,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 26, 1938. This survey, conducted nationally, concerned houses costing $7,500 or more. A house at this price would typically be a larger house than the near urban home. Though the den appears again as a male dominated space in the 1940s and 1950s, it held a very small place in the design of the small house during the 1920s.
“outdoor sleeping increases the power to resist disease, and greatly promotes physical vigor, endurance, and working power.” Advertisements popularized this idea suggesting that “everybody knows now-a-days that the more fresh air we get into our lungs day and night the better off we are.” By the 1920s, the value of sleeping on a sleeping porch had “come to be widely recognized.” For health, the sleeping porch was used all year round, but builders and designers also recognized that few would “deny their desirability in summer at least, whatever his views on year-round outdoor sleeping.”60 Another equally valid selling point, then, was the fact that the well-ventilated sleeping porch was cooler than the bedroom during the summer. Sears, Roebuck and Company building plans noted that “in the hot, stuffy Summer nights” a sleeping porch would be “pleasant and healthful.”61

The ideal sleeping porch was constructed on the second floor, at the back of the house. This provided the most privacy, as sleeping porches on the first floor were “too hard to screen from neighbors and passers-by” and were “too open to dogs, chickens, and small boys.”62

---


The porch could come in many varieties. It could be located on a veranda over a porch, tucked under a dormer, in a gable, or off of a bedroom within the body of the house or on the corner. Often, sleeping porches had configurations of windows, which could be opened to allow in fresh air or closed to keep out bad weather. The real design solution was to incorporate the porch into the “characteristic features” of the house to “ensure good outward appearance, as well as comfort.”63

---

63 Riley, “The Sleeping-Porch Problem,” 183. It should be noted that the articles in *House Beautiful* and *Country Life* showcased sleeping porches on large, suburban estate homes. The Tachau article, 1917, and the Riley article, 1921, actually show a picture of the same house, a residence with a dormer style sleeping porch designed by Delano and Aldrich, architects.
Optimally, the porch would be placed on the southern or western exposure to avoid morning sunlight that might wake sleepers. Advocates called for the walls to be three or four feet high and topped by a low rail. Screens filled the area above this. In this way, sleepers received plenty of air while still completely private “from conscious or unconscious spying.”

In most cases, the floor of the porch was painted wood flooring. Some advocates suggested that the floor should “slant slightly, making of it a natural drain.” Others, however, believed that this was “usually found to be neither a necessity nor an advantage, since scarcely any rain ever gets in on the porch save in an excessively heavy storm.”

Advocates suggested that the sleeping porch furnishings be “simplified” as far as was “consistent with convenience.” This entailed a bed, a chair, a box for holding extra bedding, and a stand. The furniture needed to be “of a sort that rain [would] not harm.” The one “really essential piece of furniture” was a “cot, day-bed, or couch,” whichever the homeowner preferred. One lumberyard advertisement showed an iron day bed. The illustration for the Sears, Roebuck and Company Osborn Modern Home showed the sleeping porch furnished with a wicker rocker, wicker side table, a small chair, and a wooden bed with woven head and foot boards.

The sleeping porch was an amenity advertised as the “single feature you can add to your home that will be enjoyed by the entire family.” During the first decade of the

64 Moore, “How to Plan an Ideal Sleeping Porch,” 173.


66 Moore, “How to Plan an Ideal Sleeping Porch,” 173; Tachau, “A New Room in the House,” 63; West Side Lumber advertisement, Hilltop Record, April 22, 1926; Sears, Roebuck and Company, Honor Bilt Homes Catalog, 1919, 32.
twentieth century, builders and real estate agents equated the room with other modern technologies. The room could often be a selling point. A 1916 newspaper carried advertisement for a new home with a “furnace, electric lights, attic, breakfast, sleeping porches.”

THE BREAKFAST NOOK

The breakfast nook was “generally added to the smaller type of suburban home” where “the servant problem will be largely of a negative variety.” The room was closely associated with the dining room. A typical breakfast nook was a “tiny room, usually built off the kitchen” with a “built-in table, flanked by built-in benches or settles, either of painted wood or treated in some suitable informal style.”

Designed for practicality and the new speed of modern lifestyle, the breakfast room found a place in the new business culture of America. “Liberally lighted with windows and decorated and furnished in a bright and airy style,” the room offered a setting where the “unconventional meal” could be eaten informally. The table could be “kept set without inconvenience, in case the family’s breakfasting [was] irregular.”

Some breakfast rooms were large with multiple windows. These could be independent of other rooms. Experts suggested that the room “have a place in the sun.”

---


If the homeowner removed and concealed “china and table linen,” the room could “be used between meals as a sun-room.” In some cases, the room could actually “take the place of a regular-dining room.”

Breakfast rooms were often finished in very bright colors, offering a “welcoming cheeriness to the morning meal.” One such room, described in the *House and Garden* magazine, had plaster walls tinted “yellow orange” and a floor “covered with a black rug.” The room contained “green-blue painted furniture” against a backdrop of black cretonne curtains with green-blue and orange stripes.

---


On Chase Avenue, three of the six houses contained breakfast rooms. Two were placed into nooks off the kitchen, and another existed as an extension to the rear of the kitchen. This type of breakfast nook typified what was added to the near urban house as a room “regarded by homebuilders with much favor” as “a very desirable feature.”72

THE KITCHEN

The kitchen and bathroom embodied much of the modernization of the home.73 Though plumbing and sewing had been introduced into the home in the late nineteenth century, during the 1920s, domestic engineering and technological advances dramatically altered the impact that these two rooms had on daily life. Until the 1920s, when the radio and telephone became fully functional, when contemporaries wrote about modern conveniences, they were writing primarily about the technological advances that took place in these two rooms.74

---

72 “The Breakfast Room in its Variety,” 64.

73 Wright, Moralism and the Model Home, 239, discusses several turn-of-the-century sources, that “Every article or book on the home reiterated the point that the kitchen was the most important room in the modern house.”

74 A few historians have written good studies of nineteenth-century household plumbing systems. May N. Stone, “The Plumbing Paradox: American Attitudes Toward Late Nineteenth-Century Domestic Sanitary Arrangements,” Winterthur Portfolio 4 (1979): 283-309, has written about domestic systems and sanitary engineering during the 1880s and 1890s. She includes excellent images, especially of a “double boiler” water heater fed from an attic cistern, 299. Rebecca Davenport Symmes, “Sanitary Facilities in Nineteenth-Century American Domestic Architecture,” master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1983, has written a very thorough study of the “modifications in nineteenth-century American architecture that resulted from the adoption of the bathroom as a standard architectural element.” Maureen Ogle, All the Modern Conveniences: American Household Plumbing, 1840-1890 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), discusses the beginnings of indoor plumbing between 1840 and 1870, when plumbing was a matter of comfort and convenience and sewage was mostly dumped into a rear cesspool. A second part of her book discusses the “sanitary revolution” where ideas of cleanliness and health caused the establishment of integrated public systems, of which the house was a key component.
The kitchen and bath did add additional costs to the home. Some homebuilders constructed small houses without the technological amenities. These houses were often built in rural or economically depressed areas. For the middle-class, however, the acceptance of the small house depended on the inclusion of modern conveniences such as the kitchen and bath.

By the mid 1920s, the kitchen had achieved a standardized arrangement with elements that could be found in all modern homes. In 1910, Arthur suggested that the chief elements of the kitchen were the “sink, gas stove, cabinet, table and pantry.” With not much change, Robinson, the expert who wrote in 1923, suggested that the common elements included the “range, sink, work table, china cupboard, refrigerator, and service to the dining room”75. Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, the modern kitchen remained very consistent.

The arrangement had become set by the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1912, a study conducted by the American Statistical Association established a baseline of “articles for each room which would be necessary to carry on” the “fundamental household activities” in accordance with a “minimum standard of decency and comfort.” The table developed by the Association contained both articles that the “standard” required the household to have, as well as articles giving the room additional value. As described by the Association author, the value placed on the amount of the articles listed was equal to the Americanization of the family living in the home.76 According to the added value statistics, by 1912, a refrigerator77 added the most value to any kitchen.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin Closet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cupboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil Cloth on Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window Shades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washbasin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles that Added Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Stove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating Plant in Cellar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Articles in the Kitchen – 1912.78


77 See below for the meaning of “refrigerator.”

78 Perry, “A Measure of the Manner of Living,” 399.
Figure 3.13: Kitchen, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1927 (Sears Modern Homes, 1927, 53).

3.14: Kitchen, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1927 (Sears Modern Homes, 1927, 57).
Then, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, domestic engineering principles began to alter fundamentally the nature of the household kitchen. From the early nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, domestic engineers and housing experts argued for the creation of a kitchen where the fewest number of steps were needed to prepare meals. The texts and ideas of the many domestic housing experts, social reformers, and sanitarians have been taken up by many historians of housing. This message, reducing the size of the kitchen, was funneled down to builders through various trade journals and manuals.

When Arthur gave directions to builders and individuals wanting to build a home in 1910, he wrote of the kitchen:

In the old days this room was almost the largest in the house, but now it is often made the smallest. The theory is that the space can be used to better advantage in the dining-room or the pantry. Everything is so arranged with sink, gas-stove, cabinet, table and pantry, that a woman is supposed to take as few steps as possible. By standing in the center of her domain, as it were, she is almost able to grasp the handle of the particular machine she is operating by merely swinging her heel.

---

79 Strasser, Never Done, 185-196, discusses Catharine Beecher Stowe’s 1869 book, The American Woman’s Home, at length; Wright, Moralism and the Modern Home, discusses the reform work of Marion Talbot at University of Chicago, 158-163, the scientifically planned kitchen, 239, and business-like home management books, including influence of Frederick Winslow Taylor, 272; Clark, The American Family Home, discusses new standards for sanitation and the scientifically efficient kitchen, 155-163. Clark cites both Strasser and Wright in his notes; Clark includes diagrams of an efficient kitchen, 159, with the caption, “Only godliness and cleanliness were more important than efficiency to many house reformers.”

80 See for an example “A Five Room Bungalow: Showing How the Rooms Can Be Compactly Arranged to Save Steps of the Housewife,” Building Age 34 (1912): 277-278; See also Georgie Boyton Child, The Efficient Kitchen (New York: McBride, Nast, and Company, 1914). This book was reprinted in January 2004 by Gustav’s Library, Davenport, Iowa. This book, providing “definite direction for the planning, arranging and equipping of the modern labor-saving kitchen” was written from research conducted at the Housekeeping Experimental Station in Stamford, Connecticut.

81 Arthur, Home Builders’ Guide, 22. This same argument is made, although the text is slightly different, in Arthur, “Suggestions for Building a Modern Dwelling.” 148.
Figure 3.15: Floor plan, kitchen showing appliances (*Good House Keeping*, August 1922, 93).

Figure 3.16: Floor plan kitchen and pantry showing appliances (Robinson, *Domestic Architecture*, 77).
Figure 3.17: Kitchen showing Hoosier cabinet (Good House Keeping, August 1922, 93).

Figure 3.18: Kitchen showing Hoosier cabinet and furniture. Note phone on the right wall (House Beautiful 41 [1917], 340).
Robinson concurred and reiterated these arguments in 1923, writing:

The kitchen occupied by the housewife for a comparatively short time each day while she performs the light kitchen duties required in a little house may be very small indeed, and usually the smaller the better. In this type of kitchen the economic principles of kitchen design should be applied stringently, so that the range, sink, work table, china cupboard, refrigerator, and service to the dining room should have the proper economic relation. The saving of steps is especially important when the work of the house is done by the housewife herself.\(^2\)

Robinson does not discuss what size, a “smaller the better kitchen” should be, but in a large suburban house he specified that the kitchen should be thirteen feet square.\(^3\)

In 1922, *House Beautiful* published an article about “a kitchen planned by a housekeeper who is at the same time an architect.” With a built-in electric stove top and a built-in electric refrigerator, the room had been designed so that “the considerable mileage in a year” given over to completing tasks in the kitchen could be “performed by nothing more than a series of mere pirouettes.” This kitchen had been reduced to a 6’ x 8’ area.\(^4\)

---

\(^2\) Robinson, *Domestic Architecture*, 73.

\(^3\) Ibid., 74; Child, *The Efficient Kitchen*, 21, suggested that “Convenient dimensions for the average family are ten by twelve feet, or eleven by thirteen.” Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*, 239, states that the model kitchen was 11’x 11’.

THE PANTRY

According to design professionals, the pantry was intended to be more than just a storage area. The pantry was a connection between the food services of the kitchen and the dining room. Robinson, in *Domestic Architecture*, concluded:

Usually a service pantry is not desirable in a small house, a service cupboard opening from both the dining room and the kitchen being a great labor-savings device. The sink should be adjoining to the service cupboard counter, so that the dishes having been passed through from the dining room may be washed and replaced in the cupboard ready for the next meal with the minimum amount of handling. The drain should be at the left of the sink, with the china cupboard above and facing it, if possible. All of the kitchen equipment should be compactly arranged, with perhaps a small storage pantry in the rear of the rear.  

For a large suburban house, Robinson recommended a butler’s pantry, which he called a “pass pantry.” In this small room, argued Robinson, “a service cupboard may be conveniently used, so that dishes to be served on the table may be set inside it and taken to the dining room by the maid.” Robinson also indicated that “the pass pantry should have a sink for washing dishes, while the kitchen should have a sink for general purposes.” Likewise, William Arthur suggested that when entrance is made into the pantry from the dining room, a ”small sink is often put into the work table, so that the finer dishes need never be mixed with the others in the kitchen.”

Small house design eliminated many of the functions that housing experts sought, but alternatives were available. Arthur argued that “a small kitchen usually means a small pantry, but unless there is a storeroom in the basement a large pantry is desirable,

---

85 Robinson, *Domestic Architecture*, 74.
for there seems to be no end of material that should find a place in this room.” With the
addition of a small pantry at the rear of the kitchen, Arthur suggested a direct connection
between the kitchen and the dining room using a swinging door. In this way, the door
remained shut, keeping heat and kitchen odors from the rest of the house.87

MODERN HOUSEHOLD PLUMBING

Many aspects of technological systems had to be worked out though the process
of installation, use, modification, and reinstallation in newer homes. As mechanical
contractors learned how to install and perfect these systems, occasionally some became
better than others. Some of these contractors moved into the design and supply of
technological innovations. Other contractors became recognized as leaders in
incorporating technological features, and homebuyers therefore saw their work as more
desirable in achieving a “modern” home.88

Early installations of plumbing systems were often self contained, meaning the
house contained all of the elements to provide clean water and dispose of waste. These
elements included a cistern, a pressure tank, bathroom and kitchen fixtures, and a
cesspool where waste emptied. During the summer of 1889, Florizel Smith, an attorney-

order to save in construction the kitchen opens directly from the dining-room by means of a swinging door. It
is better, however, to have a small pantry between.”

88 Modern is perhaps somewhat of a misnomer. Many systems were “modern” when installed, but quickly
went out of date. At the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, a house museum operated by the Ohio Historical
Society in Dayton, Ohio, a modern bathroom consisting of a zinc-lined wooden tub, a hot water boiler
manufactured by the Dayton Manufacturing Co., a marble lavatory, and a flush toilet with a high tank were
installed in 1894. This bathroom was still being used in 1934 and still exists today.
at-law, began construction on a new home in Columbus, Ohio, and installed a very
typical early plumbing system. In October, Kelly and Company Sanitary Plumbing and
Gas Fitting, bid on a set of plans and specifications that Kelly obtained from Mr. Smith’s
architect. Kelly and Company’s estimate read as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We Propose to Furnish Material and Labor to Construct the Plumbing in your new Residence on E Town St. As Follows.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Place in the Kitchen one 20x30 Cast Iron Sink. Supplied with Hot and Cold water through Brass Faucets and wasting through Lead trap and Pipe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put in One Brass Cylinder Force Pump with Lead Suction Pipe to Cistern and Discharge. Pipe to Attic tank. Same to have patent Check Valve and Faucet Over Sink to Draw water direct from Cistern.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will also place in Kitchen 1 –50 gallon galvanized Range Boiler with Lead Connections and water Back Coupling ready to Connect to Stove. Same to have Brass Sediment Faucet to Drain and Clean out Boiler in Case of Repairs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath Room-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Place in Bath Room 1. Ohio White Water Closet with Oak [Cherry written and crossed out] Seat and tank Same to be Ventilated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Place one 20x30 White marble wash Stand Supplied with Hot and Cold water through Nickel Plated Basin Cocks and wasting through Lead Pipe and trap. Same to have Plug Chain, Chain Stay, White Bowl.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et [sic]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put in 1 – 6ft 12 oz Bath with Nickel plated Bath Cock. Shower Hose and Sprinkler Plug and Chain. Will put in 4 in Cast Iron Soil Pipe from Basement Run it out through Roof for Ventilation and put out Wire Vent Cap and Lead Roof Flashing. All these Fixtures to be Connected to Soil Pipe Will also Place in Attic the Lead Lining for Rain Water tank. 2ft x 2 ½ ft x 6 ft Long. Same to have stop Cock for shutting off water. Will put in Cellar ready to Connect to water Pipe when Brought in from Street. ¼ Galvanized Iron Pipe with Stop Cock All Pipes in Cellar water Supply Pipes to be Galvanized Iron. Will do everything in the Best workmanlike manner and furnish Only First Class material all Complete for the Sum of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>213.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Pipes</td>
<td>22.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

89 Records, Kelley Plumbing Company, VFM 2053, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
This type of system was common to late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban houses.\textsuperscript{90} Plumbers installed many early plumbing systems in houses through the open plumbing method (Fig. 3.19). Drainage piping was exposed outside of the walls so

\textsuperscript{90} See “A House in Wichita, Kansas: A Frame Dwelling with Stucco Exterior and Brick Trimmings – Some Details of Construction,” \textit{Building Age} 34 (1912): 507-510, “the water supply to baths, laundry tray, basins and sink comes from a 200 barrel cistern, the water being lifted by an electric pump made by the Dayton Mfg. Company, Dayton, Ohio. All basins, baths, laundry trays and sinks have soft hot and cold water and the basins have city water supplied by a separate Fuller Swing Shampoo cock over the fixture.” Also, “A Shingled Dwelling in a Boston Suburb,” \textit{Building Age} 32 (1910): 369-371. This article discusses a 2’x2’x3’ copper lined tank in the attic and gives a very good description of finishes in a kitchen and bath. Walls were four coats of lead and oil sized prior to painting.
that the homeowner could be certain that “sewer gasses” were not leaking out into the house. These gases were viewed as harmful and a cause of disease.91

In July of 1920, Probst Brothers installed a new bathroom in the Warren G. Harding home in preparation for the summer’s “Front Porch Campaign.” The bathroom included the latest plumbing fixtures available. The company installed an 18” x 24” cast iron, enameled sink with a back and apron costing $27.25. The sink contained three water faucets, one for hot water and one for cold water, both served by an external cistern presumably pressurized by an electric pump in the basement. The third faucet was a tap for city water. The bath also contained a toilet with a vitreous bowl with a Mahogany seat and a cast iron tank. The toilet cost $43.50. The company also installed a 60” bathtub with a base and a “standing waste with china knob,” at a cost of $76.50. The plumbing company installed the bathroom with all manner of nickel-plated accouterments, such as a “combination soap and tumbler holder,” a toilet paper holder, a soap holder with opal tray, and “opal towel bars” with nickel plated posts.92

During the 1920s, modern bathroom fixtures became widely available. Companies such as Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward & Co. offered complete sets. Companies such as American Standard and Kohler standardized fixtures, 

91 Many people thought that the foul smelling gasses that came from the sewers brought disease into the home. Arthur, The New Building Estimator, 374; Wright, Moralism and the Model Home, 96; See also Clark, The American Family Home, 102.

92 Probst Brothers receipt, July 10, 1920, 2, MSS 345, Warren G. Harding Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. This four-page receipt included plumbing supplies for two bathrooms, electrical supplies, and at least one gas fixture. Each piece of the piping and wiring are itemized, down to the “1/2” pipe straps” and “28 long brass screws.” The Hardings were renovating the house after having spent four years living in Washington, D.C. The house contained a mixture of electric fixtures, combination fixtures, and gas fixtures. The receipt itemizes charges for “10 50 watt Mazda lamps,” “2 100 watt Nitrogen lamps,” 8 Welsbach upright mantels,” and 14 Welsbach inverted mantles.” Not only did they maintain these various light fixtures, but on the 1920 receipt they purchased two electrical fixtures for the front porch ceiling as well as a single inverted gas fixture for the new second-floor bathroom.
and porcelain soon replaced both iron and marble fixtures. Contractors placed these standard fixture packages directly into new homes constructed with plumbing systems, the idea of the modern bathroom becoming more important than the fixtures themselves. Some experts even suggested that the “modern kitchen” was the most important room in the house.⁹³

Figure 3.20: Modern bathroom, Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1923 (Sears Modern Homes, 1923, 133).

THE HOUSE PLAN AS A SERIES OF ROOMS

We have discussed the various rooms associated with the 1920s near urban house. The house worked, however, only when these various rooms were put together under one roof. In the design of housing, the floor plan provides the tool to see the house as a whole.

William Arthur’s ideal plan for the modern house is the best example of explaining this uniform typological plan. A superbly qualified eyewitness who articulated what he experienced, Arthur, in 1914, provided a typical example of where he thought the house building industry should be going. His ideal plan was not necessarily the first of such plans to be published, but his is an excellent early example.

WILLIAM ARTHUR’S IDEAL PLAN

By 1910, as noted above, Arthur was promoting a basic floor plan for the modern family. The plan consisted of a vestibule, a hall, a large living room moving into a dining room, and a kitchen with a pantry. These rooms were configured into what he referred to as the “square house.” Arthur suggested that this style of house was “the latest favorite,” and was “probably the most sensible of any for the average family.” In comparison to the “former Queen Anne kind,” Arthur asserted that the square house would last longer and cost less to maintain.  

94 William Arthur, The Home Builders’ Guide (New York: David Williams Company, 1914), 19-23 and 33. Schweitzer and Davis, America’s Favorite Homes, 165-166, speculate that the “box house” descended from the first hipped roof Federal townhouses of 1790 though 1810. Frederick Thomas Hodgson, a builder and
In 1914, Arthur published an analysis of what he called the ideal plan. Designed for the “average family,” the plan contained ten rooms in a two-story structure of 670 square feet per floor. Transitional in nature, the house contained elements of both the Victorian era and the modern era. Arthur’s plan leaves us with an example of how housing experts disseminated their ideas to building trades. As such, it also offers a good base from which to investigate what the house had become by the first decade of the twentieth century.95

The basement of the ideal house consisted of a potato cellar, an area set aside for vegetables, a coal bin, an area to do laundry, and a vault, with a fireproof door to act as a “fine hidden safe.” The potato cellar extended under the front porch. The coal bin sat in the front corner of the house, separated from the cellar by wood plank walls. A clothes chute emptied to the left of the coal bin. The laundry area consisted of a two-sink tub, lavatory, and a water closet tucked into a separate room. An exterior door exited from the basement into the rear yard and allowed clothes to be easily taken to a clothesline.96

---

95 Arthur, *The Home Builders’ Guide*, 146. Arthur’s ideas about the ideal were not unusual. As early as 1911, real estate interests in Cleveland had held an “ideal home exhibition” where they, among other things, constructed a 24’x 36’ ideal home in the “colonial style and containing 8 rooms and a bath.” “Cleveland’s Ideal Home Exhibition,” *Building Age* 33 (1911): 385.

Arthur suggested that the workable area of a first floor needed to be 24 feet by 28 feet, with an additional eight feet of exterior space on the porch. Arthur considered the porch to be “part of our dwelling place,” extending the living area outside. It should be noted here that, in his ideal plan, Arthur considered the porch an exterior room.97

---

97 Ibid., 149.
The first floor of Arthur’s ideal plan contained many of the rooms he had discussed in 1910. The ideal plan, however, let the reader see what rooms he considered important for the average family and provided a visual of the hierarchy of these rooms within the plan. A small vestibule permitted “a double door arrangement to keep the wind and cold out of the house when the front door is opened.” The plan also included a hall off the entry. Operating as the main circulation space, the hall provided access to a parlor and a kitchen. The hall also contained a large stair with a decorative railing and a
built-in seat. Arthur suggested that the stair rail should be “facing the door,” where it added “to the beauty of the hall much more than if run up straight against the wall as used to be the custom.” The stair landing, positioned partially outside of the main block of the plan, also connected to a back stair running into the kitchen.98

Off of the kitchen, Arthur located a small mud room, the laundry chute, and the pantry. The plan had a “pass pantry” between the kitchen and dining room similar to those other housing experts advocated. This arrangement did not allow direct access from the kitchen to the dining room. Arthur stipulated, however, that “a swinging door was originally put in the partition between the kitchen and dining room,” and that either preference, a swinging door or a pass pantry, was a “personal choice.” Additionally, inside the pantry Arthur devoted a space to an icebox, designed to be fed through a door from the exterior of the house. This matched what he advocated in other sections of his work concerning the use of new technological devices in the house.99

A five-foot wide opening from the hall provided access to the parlor. Arthur maintained that this opening was “large enough to practically make the two rooms into one.”100 The nomenclature of “parlor” is interesting, given Arthur’s previous discussion of the living room. This use of the term parlor shows that Arthur’s ideal plan was transitional in nature. Though the plan had modern elements in terms of room placement,

---

98 Ibid., 150. The configuration of the floor plan containing at least a kitchen, a dining room and a parlor had become the accepted norm by the turn of the twentieth century. In 1912, Perry, “A Measure of the Manner of Living,” 399, in a study by the American Statistical Association, asserted that “The kitchen, dining-room, and parlor mark the more important stages of the modern household.”

99 Robinson, Domestic Architecture, 74. See Arthur, The Home Builders’ Guide, 23-24, where he discusses how the refrigerator should be placed in the house. See also next chapter.

size, and style, the names given to some of the rooms identified more with Victorian culture, even to the point that Arthur suggested adjustments to the plan so circulation worked “without attracting notice from callers in the parlor.”

There are several added features on the first floor of Arthur’s house in the form of built-in amenities. Contemporary sources indicated that built-in units made the small house livable. In Arthur’s ideal plan, almost every feasible built-in is used. A built-in seat in the hall eliminated the use of a Victorian hallstand. Another built-in seat in the in the dining room filled the bay window. At this seat, Arthur raised the window in the center “to allow for pictures or flowers on the shelf.” The 18-inch shelf, with drawers and doors underneath, made an excellent addition to the room. In the far corner of the dining room, a glass “conservatory” held a “few shelves for plants.” To the right of this, a built-in china cupboard held plates and silver. Arthur agreed with other housing professionals in believing that built-ins, like the china closet, were “worth all it costs in a small home.”

The second floor of Arthur’s ideal plan contained three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a “sun parlor.” The bedrooms were labeled with the eighteenth-century nomenclature of “chambers” in the plan but discussed as bedrooms in the text. Arthur noted that “in such a house there is usually a small bedroom.” In Arthur’s case, the

---

101 Ibid., 152
102 Ibid., 151
fourth bedroom was small because the staircase intruded into one of the front rooms, shortening the room by a foot and a half.\textsuperscript{103}

The rear bedroom was the largest, with the bay window extending up from the dining room. This room also contained a large closet. The sun parlor on the second floor was located directly off of the rear bedroom. Arthur suggested that the room could be

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 154
“surrounded by a small railing,” to provide “an opportunity for airing clothes.” For an extra $120, the room could be turned into “an enclosed Sun Parlor.”\textsuperscript{104} Although Arthur did not ever refer to the room as a sleeping porch, in plan the room has all the characteristics of one.

Arthur also utilized the third-floor attic space in his ideal plan. This floor contained a large storage room, a clothes closet, and a library. Arthur suggested that the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 154-155
clothes closet should be lined with cedar. No explanation existed for placing the library on the third floor. \(^{105}\)

The front elevation of Arthur’s ideal plan showed a two-story, two-bay house with a front porch extending the full width of the structure. The elevation is very typical of the near urban house that would predominate in the mid-twentieth century. The porch is elevated six steps, allowing for basement windows. One large window on the first floor and two symmetrical windows on the second floor provided fenestration. The front gable had a tripartite window, and the house had two additional dormers lighting the attic.

Arthur was not alone in producing published plans expressing modern ideas of housing at the turn of the century. Countless housing boosters advocated similar progressive measures within the housing literature. As housing became big business during the first half of the twentieth century, modern housing plans and ideas proliferated throughout the country, as I suggested above. And although Arthur’s ideas were among those widely circulated throughout the building industry, many others received far greater exposure in popular magazines and business catalogs at that time and in succeeding years. Moreover, housing companies and corporations, by and large, had more opportunity and marketing dollars than Arthur to both sell and advertise new housing plans. Modern ideas about housing thus became codified.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 156
EVIDENCE OF A TYPOLOGY

The typological house plan for the 1920s that has been presented above appeared repeatedly in contemporary materials promoting small houses. For this study, a sample of 600 house plans was analyzed, using plan books and house catalogs available between 1908 and 1927. The results of this analysis show that the plans had commonalities that reflected the cultural change of the 1920s.106

The most common room among all the plans is the living room. Every house plan published by the companies in this investigation contained a living room. Not one of the house plans contained a parlor.

The next most common attribute of the early twentieth century house was the connection of the living room and dining room. In 78 percent of the house plans, the dining room was located directly off of the living room. In 444 of the plans, a door or set of doors separated the two rooms. In the rest of the plans, the connection was an open doorway creating an open plan within the first floor of the house.

The average house plan in these catalogs, therefore, had a 12-foot by 18-foot living room with an open doorway to a dining room and a kitchen on the first floor, an apt description of the houses on Chase Avenue.

Many homes contained a hall, as in Arthur’s ideal plan, to provide a transition from the outside to the interior living space. Of the house plans analyzed, 28 percent contained a hall. In most instances the hall acted as a receiving area and often contained a coat closet. Fifteen percent of the homes included a vestibule as the transition between entry and living room. A few houses had a vestibule that entered into a hall.

Some of the plans contained what could be called a feature or bonus room. These rooms served specialty functions and were vestiges of the Victorian dwelling. Many of these rooms have been previously discussed. The bonus room, in fact, seems to be one of the key factors in one’s decision concerning what house, or house plan, to purchase. Out of the 600 house plans, 21 contained a den, nine a sewing room, seven a library, and two a music room. Eighteen of the plans contained a sleeping porch on the second floor.

Just over 8 percent, or 51, of the plans, contained a sun porch or a sun room. Though not significant in total numbers, sun rooms were often a featured bonus room in magazines. These rooms, presumably placed on the south elevation, were used as casual living areas, often furnished with wicker suites similar to those popular for living rooms.

Kitchens possibly showed the most difference between plans. Fourteen percent of the plans contained a pantry in the kitchen. Seven percent of the kitchens contained a breakfast nook, the area set aside with a built-in table for eating quick meals.
### Distribution of First Floor Rooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living Room</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Room - 11’ 12’ or 13’</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Room off of Living Room</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall with entry</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestibule</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Distribution of Bonus Rooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pantry off of Kitchen</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Room</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast Room</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Den</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Porch</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washroom Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcove off of Living Room</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Distribution of Rooms from 600 Plans Published 1917-1927.
Figure 3.25: Front elevation, The Suburban, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924 (Wardway Homes, 1924, 21).

Figure 3.26: Floor plan, The Suburban, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924. Note bonus rooms (Wardway Homes, 1924, 21).
CATALOGS AND MAGAZINES: THE EVIDENCE

What the catalogs and magazines show, when one looks at the evidence, is a standard housing plan marketed to middle-class couples, often in outlets available primarily to women.

The average housing consumer was inundated with images of new modern housing plans by the marketing campaigns that the manufacturers of prefabricating housing launched. The housing campaigns reached people far and wide. The impact of the larger companies that were able to use already established marketing outlets, such as Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, was even greater.

Nevertheless, the importance of the pre-cut housing industry to the actual production of housing, as has been previously suggested, has been grossly overestimated. Historic preservation professionals have focussed on Sears, Roebuck and Company as a provider of prefabricated housing, but many companies supplied prefabricated houses and many companies supplied pre-made house plans.107

---

107 Schweitzer and Davis, America’s Favorite Homes, 14, also draw this conclusion.
Figure 3.27: Front elevation, The Hudson, Aladdin, 1918 (Aladdin Homes, 1918, 62).

Figure 3.28: Floor plans, The Hudson, Aladdin, 1918 (Aladdin Homes, 1918, 63).
Figure 3.29: Front elevation, The Huron, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924 (*Wardway Homes*, 1924, 78).

Figure 3.30: Floor plan, The Huron, Montgomery Ward Co., 1924 (*Wardway Homes*, 1924, 78).
SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY

Sears, Roebuck and Co. entered the housing market in 1908 with a catalog of housing plans called “Modern Homes.” Sears offered to supply all the lumber and materials needed for the house as well. Starting in 1916, Sears, Roebuck offered pre-cut houses for which all the lumber came cut to size. Their advertisements told the homebuilder to “hang his saw upon a nail.”

Sears “Modern Homes” began between 1895 and 1900 with the creation of a department to handle building materials, though technically the term “Modern Homes” would not be used until 1911. High expenses had kept the original building materials department from being profitable. As late as 1906, the department sold almost $1.2 million in material but posted a net loss of $35,000. The department was to be liquidated by F.W. Kushel, but he instead proposed to reorganize, and starting in 1908 with the first issue of the homes catalog, the department began to turn a profit.108

From 1908 to 1925, the Modern Homes Department was consistently profitable. After the issue of the first homes catalog, the department began to grow quickly. In 1909, Sears, Roebuck purchased a lumber mill in Mansfield, Ohio, in order to improve service. In 1911, a lumber yard was constructed in Cairo, Illinois, to simplify distribution. In 1912, a millwork plant was purchased in Norwood, Ohio. In this way, Sears, Roebuck and Company began to control all the aspects of material production for the entire house. The department wrote the first bill of sale for a complete home in 1909 and made the first house mortgage loan two years later. By the end of 1912, over 2.5
million dollars in sales had been reached, and $649,000 in mortgage loans had been written.\textsuperscript{109}

Most sales still consisted of assorted mail-order building materials. Owning the production capability to produce entire homes, however, allowed the company to begin producing pre-cut houses sold through the “Modern Homes” catalog. Pre-cut housing saved money in three ways. First, the company bought lumber in the most economical lengths instead of longer lengths. Second, second-grade lumber could be purchased and converted to first-grade lumber by cutting out knots where smaller lengths needed to be pre-cut. Third, with all the waste lumber removed, freight charges were considerably reduced. By 1920, the combined annual sales of the building department had reached 6 million dollars.\textsuperscript{110}

Between 1921 and 1926, the sales of building materials became second to the sale of pre-cut “Modern Homes.” The operation changed from being a standard mail-order department to an administrative unit with manufacturing operations and a sales force. The company established regional sales offices in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton, in 1921. The following year, offices opened in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington. In 1924, a sales office opened in Columbus, Ohio, and in 1925 an office opened in Detroit, Michigan. With continued expansion, however, expenses increased to 20 percent of sales, and profits decreased from 15 to 10 percent of sales.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, \textit{Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), discuss the beginning of the Modern Homes Department on 108; the development of pre-cut housing is discussed on 226-228.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 226-227

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 227.
The company produced and sold prefabricated houses from 1913 to 1940. Throughout the 1920s, Sears was the largest manufacturer of pre-cut houses, offering over 370 different styles and shipping houses from coast to coast. In a few cases, Sears, Roebuck supplied houses for entire company towns.\textsuperscript{112}

GORDON VAN TINE

The Gordon Van-Tine Company started business in 1906 in Davenport, Iowa. Originally a local supplier of specialty lumber, the company expanded into the direct sales of millwork after the business passed to the sons of the original owner. Their first retail catalog listed more than 7,500 pieces of millwork, and within a year they were the largest specialized mail-order company in the country.

In 1910, the firm entered into the pre-cut housing market with a national advertising campaign. Gordon Van Tine experienced growth in sales and operations during the 1910s and 1920s and became very profitable. By 1915, the company had purchased a fourth lumber mill, operating mills to cut lumber in St. Louis, Washington, and Mississippi. Sales slowed drastically during the 1930s. Unable to recover from the

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 228. The actual “Modern Homes” department was organized in 1921 in Philadelphia. The authors, 300, suggest that the decline of the “Modern Homes” department owed, in part, to a very liberal installment plan that “came to be predicated on an even more unsound basis of overly generous nature.”

\textsuperscript{112} Rosemary Thornton, \textit{The Houses That Sears Built: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sears Catalog Homes} (Alton, Illinois: Gentle Beam Publications, 2002). Thornton discusses the 192 houses that Sears supplied Standard Oil of Indiana and shipped to Carlinville, Wood River, and Schoper, Illinois. Of the 192 houses, 156 were built in a twelve-block area of Carlinville, an area in which the author became enamoured by the idea of the Sears home, 35-66; Sears, Roebuck is also discussed in Schweitzer and Davis, \textit{America’s Favorite Homes}, 65-69. Of course, the seminal book on Sears Catalog Homes is said to be Stevenson and Jandl, \textit{Houses by Mail}. 186
Depression and a new wartime economy, the firm ceased business during the Second World War.113

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO.

Montgomery Ward and Co. entered the housing market in 1910 with a catalog of house plans. By 1912, their “Building Plans for Modern Homes” catalog contained 80 pages and offered 66 different house designs. By 1918, they had changed the name of the catalogs to Wardway Homes and offered both “Ready-Cut” and “Not-Ready Cut.” The Ready-Cut System was explained as the “scientific cutting” of all the lumber “exactly according to the architect’s drawing.” This eliminated “all chance for mistakes.” Copy in the Wardway Homes catalog stated that the carpenter “simply takes the piece the plan calls for, slips it into place and nails it up.”

If ordered Not-Ready Cut, the lumber came in standard mill-run lengths and had to be “cut to fit by the carpenter.” In 1924, the savings between the two systems ranged between $74 and $110 on houses costing $1,298 to $1,995. According to the company, the Not-Ready Cut system, though costing more owing to the labor costs associated with cutting the lumber at the site, provided the advantages of easily altering Wardway house designs.114

113 The “Publisher’s Note” to 117 House Designs of the Twenties, suggests that Gordon-Van Tine might be the first company to offer prefabricated houses, but Aladdin had been advertising and selling homes for at least three years before Gordon-Van Tine.

114 Schweitzer and Davis, America’s Favorite Homes, 69, present a brief history of Wardway Homes. They use “Ready-Cut” and “Un-Cut” to describe the two systems offered by Montgomery Ward. Wardway Homes (Chicago: Montgomery Ward and Co., 1924), 8, lists the two systems as Ready-Cut and Not Ready-Cut.
The Wardway Homes catalogs offered many different styles of houses. These included the “Square Home,” the “Southern Colonial,” the “Colonial Bungalow,” and the “English Style.” Most of these distinctions had to do with the exterior trim details and were not totally indicative of a high style. In the 1924 catalog, house designs were closely split between square house and bungalow concepts; twenty-six designs showed two-story houses with square plans, and thirty designs showed a one-story or one-and-a-half story bungalow design. Ten other house designs showed small one-story homes often labeled cottages or small homes.\footnote{Wardway Homes (Chicago: Montgomery Ward and Co., 1924).}

Within the Wardway Homes catalog, the company suggested that success owed to the thought and effort that went into their designs. A “staff of experts,” chosen because they were “specialist in some phase of home building,” designed each home. According to the catalog, each house was studied after being built in several different climates and revised until every detail was just right. A comparison of Wardway Homes and Gordon Van Tine homes offered during the 1920s showed several identical models. Perhaps both companies bought designs from the same source. Wardway Homes continued in business until 1931 when the last mention of the Montgomery Ward pre-cut housing venture appeared in a regular catalog.\footnote{Schweitzer and Davis point this overlap out in America’s Favorite Homes, 69. They suggest that perhaps Gordon Van Tine supplied some homes for Montgomery Ward and Co. Good examples of this can be seen in the Wardway Homes 1924 catalog and Gordon Van Tine, 1923 catalog, re-published by Dover Publications. The Gordon Van Tine home No. 545 on 17 is identical to “The Warrenton” on 13 in Wardway Homes. The picture of the house is exactly the same in the two catalogs. The two plans have the exact same layout, though they are two different drawings. Note that on one plan a room is labeled a “chamber” and on the other the same room is labeled a “bedroom.”}
Figure 3.31: Elevation, “Square House,” Montgomery Ward & Co., 1924 (Wardway Homes, 1924, 31).

Figure 3.32: Floor plan, “Square House,” Montgomery Ward & Co., 1924 (Wardway Homes, 1924, 31).
Three pre-cut housing companies had offices in Bay City, Michigan, founded principally as offshoots of the most successful and longest operating pre-cut housing business. Aladdin served as the pioneer of the pre-cut housing market and provided pre-cut homes from 1906 to 1982. Two brothers, Otto E. and William J. Sovereign, founded the company in 1906 after seeing first hand the success of a local mail-order boat business in Bay City. Otto Sovereign had a background in advertising and newspaper reporting. During the first year they offered “knocked-down Boat Houses and Summer Cottages,” a market readily available from the mail-order boat companies already operating in Bay City. During the second year, the brothers scraped enough money together to place a one-time advertisement in the Saturday Evening Post. By 1910, the company had begun to prosper with sales over $87,000. By 1913, sales had reached $565,000, with a total of 2,400 houses shipped and sold. During the 1920s, sales averaged 2,000 houses shipped each year, with a peak of 3,650 in 1926. During the 77 years of business, the company sold more than 50,000 homes.\footnote{Schweitzer and Davis, America’s Favorite Homes, 15. Though Schweitzer and Davis talk about several companies in their book, Aladdin Homes is used as the primary company to explain how the prefabricated housing business worked. They specifically talk about the early history of the company on 81-84. Sales figures for early years are given on 84, but there is a very nice graph of sales figures on 86. A copy of the first advertisement for the company is located on 85; see also Reiff, Houses from Books, 196-202. Reiff provides several examples and stories of Aladdin houses actually constructed and documented.}
LEWIS/LIBERTY HOMES AND STERLING HOMES

Two other pre-cut housing companies followed in the success of the Aladdin Company. It is unknown how close the ties were between the companies. Perhaps the early success of Aladdin Homes sparked the interest of others in Bay City, or perhaps the Sovereign brothers had a falling out with working partners who started their own companies based on what they had seen at Aladdin Homes. Both the owners of the Lewis Manufacturing Co. and Sterling Homes had ties to the organizational network utilized by Aladdin to produce pre-cut lumber for their business, and both started very similar businesses within the first six years of Aladdin’s success.

Lewis/Liberty Homes began in Bay City, Michigan, as a planing mill owned by Miss Adna G. Lewis. Her family had founded a local lumber business in 1896. By 1907, the Lewis Manufacturing Co. supplied cut lumber for the Sovereign brothers of Aladdin Homes. Adna Lewis had business ventures with Aladdin, at one point being listed as a vice-president within the company. In 1914, the Lewis Manufacturing Company began to produce its own line of “Easy-Built” homes, introducing a Lewis-Built Homes catalog with 105 different designs. Lewis provided houses very similar to houses in other catalogs, houses typical of those being built in near urban neighborhoods. One of their designs was even labeled the “Semi-Bungalow.” During the late 1920s, the company changed its marketing strategy and began publishing a catalog of less expensive houses under the name Liberty Homes.118

118 Schwietzer and Davis, America’s Favorite Homes, 70-72.
Sterling Homes began to produce catalogs of prefabricated houses around 1915. The owner of the company, W. D. Young, also owned three lumber mills and was known as the world’s largest producer of maple flooring. Though the company went bankrupt in the late 1920s, another family lumber concern bought Sterling Homes and issued catalogs of prefabricated houses until 1971.\footnote{Ibid.}

MARKETING AND SELLING HOUSES AND HOUSE PLANS

Sears, Roebuck and Company changed the marketing of prefabricated houses in a way that no other company could hope to. As noted above, starting in 1911, Sears, Roebuck offered financing for homes they sold through their catalog. Credit would be advanced for both material and construction labor. Typically, monthly installments lasted for five years at 6 percent interest. Sears financing increased even after the stock market crash in 1929. Sales of their pre-cut houses peaked that year, with half of the $12,050,000 representing sales on credit.\footnote{Jandl and Stevenson, “Special Delivery.”}

Montgomery Ward maintained a strictly cash business. In catalogs, the company stated, “We buy and sell Wardway Homes Only for Cash!” They also stated, however, that if a customer did not have “the ready cash in hand,” they could “arrange with a local bank to furnish all or any part of the amount.”\footnote{\textit{Wardway Homes}, 1924, 1.}
Both the local savings and loan and the local lumberyard, therefore, had to compete with self-financed mail-order sales. Lumber yards worked especially hard to keep business in the local community. In Collingsville, Illinois, the Savings and Loan League and local lumber suppliers worked together to combat Sears, Roebuck and Company home sales. They took a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper that featured Sears, Roebuck house names and numbers. The ad read, "We will build the houses that Sears, Roebuck talks about for 10 per cent less than their prices. We will give you grade marked yellow pine and turnkey jobs on fifteen years or on any other time that Sears Roebuck offers." The advertisement was very successful and allowed the building delivery process to stay within the community of Collingsville. The cooperation of the savings and loan and the lumber industry "stopped the Sears plan in Illinois."122

Lumberyards, suppliers, and builders often offered their own plan books to compete with the national companies. Of course, national companies in fact produced the plans used by local businesses. The West Side Lumber Company, on the Hilltop in Columbus, had several plan books available for people interested in building a “modest home” (Fig. 3.32). By 1930, the Building Age, a journal marketed to contractors, featured an article on “how to conduct your advertising campaign to attract a greater number of prospects,” declaring that “big profits result from newspaper advertising.” The article provided as examples ads showing plans and house elevations of small modern houses.123


Figure 3.33: Advertisement, West Side Lumber Company
(Hilltop Record, November 3, 1921).
All of the catalogs served to codify what the house should be and how it should be used. Pictures of interiors and cutaway views of the house showing how rooms could be furnished also exposed homeowners to ideas about what consumer items should be purchased for inside the house. For instance, Thornton suggests that Sears began selling houses in order to create expanded markets for the furniture in their catalogs (Fig. 3.33).^{124}


---

^{124} Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built.*
typical pre-cut houses from Gordon Van Tine, Lewis Manufacturing, E. F. Hodgson Company, and Sterling System Built Homes.  

The distribution of home plans also became a marketing scheme used by wholesale publishers as a way to expand their product through established methods of distribution. The Curtis Publishing Company, the publisher of the Ladies’ Home Journal, initiated a specific home plan service, creating its own demand through ads in the magazine. The company would hire architects to design homes and then would mass-produce these designs for publication and sale. Well-known architects, who did “not always do small work,” designed special house plans that could be purchased for just one dollar. Plans were published with interior views of individual furnished rooms, and from the pictures, prospective buyers could visualize how the house would look and should be used after completion. These advertisements were specifically marketed to women and, in this way, they promoted the consumption of plans that could be purchased by the average home seeker.  

For the dollar, a would-be buyer received an envelope with the home plans, specifications, and four white sheets of paper on which a model of the house was printed. The model could be punched out of the paper and glued together, allowing the purchaser to see what the house would look like when built. This distribution medium was extremely effective. The Curtis Publishing Company printed over 16,000,000 magazines every month.  

127 Ibid.
The distribution of home plans in different media was therefore remarkably extensive. The evidence suggests that this flood of images allowed new homebuyers to accept the small house as a legitimate purchase. Moreover, including the small house within the possibilities of ownership led to the conceptual change that allowed a person to view the house as a consumable commodity. Stanford White, a member of the prominent architectural firm McKim, Meade, and White, gave the editor of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* credit for this change when he stated, “I firmly believe that Edward Bok has more completely influenced American domestic architecture for the better than any man in his generation.”

**CONCLUSION: THE NEAR URBAN HOUSE PLAN**

The marketing techniques that became standard in the 1920s were unproven and cutting edge during the first decade of the twentieth century. Part of a general movement of experimentation in marketing and business, individual actors saw the potential of new housing markets, and they moved within a sphere of business opportunities and entrepreneurial possibilities.

---

Many of the early actors pushing for a transformation of the housing delivery system did so through small business enterprises. As such, the success of the transition was determined by the success of a few individuals. Not until these first few businesses began to change the perception of the housing market did larger businesses and corporations become involved and thus create institutional changes within the delivery system. Even so, the marketing of the new house plans and styles proceeded through myriad small and medium sized business publishing books, flyers, catalogs, and advertisements, all aimed at getting a piece of the new housing market. To the market, this advertising had the effect of a concerted campaign for change in housing and was a precursor to even more dramatic institutional change that would occur in the 1930s.129

The system that evolved was built around a house type. As evidenced by the Chase Avenue homes, the 1920s did provide the framework for a ubiquitous house archetype, the near urban home. Even though plan books and advertisements pushed the idea of the revival styles, as early as 1910, William Arthur, the participant-observer, noted that “the latest favorite, the ‘square house,’ is probably the most sensible of any [style] for the average family.”130 Contemporaries viewed the idea of the ubiquitous near urban house as a style. Some housing experts understood that the sensible family wanted this style of house, a dwelling that provided the most modern and up-to-date functional plan without the exterior accouterments of a typical style. While the housing experts continued to push houses for their stylistic merits, local builders provided a market-

129 Mansel G. Blackford, *A History of Small Business in America* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991), points out that many small businesses survive within niche markets, but all of these small businesses aggregated into a system as if someone were directing it.

driven alternative in the near urban neighborhoods that provided the perfect commodity for the sensible family.

The near urban house dominated most new neighborhoods within the annexation rings of cities during the 1920s. Contemporaries simply referred to the new houses as “modern homes.” The term “modern” had direct implications for what the plan of the house would be and what physical services would be provided. Where form and social rituals dictated late Victorian housing, the modern “conveniences” of electricity and plumbing dictated the typical dwelling in the 1920s. Much was changing culturally in the lives of the typical family, but the incorporation of modern kitchens, bathrooms, electrical wiring, telephones, and radio truly ushered in the modern age for the typical middle-class family.

The campaign to transform housing took the form of several independent movements and marketing techniques that all operated independently but served a market that allowed for little variation. The near urban plan developed out of a campaign to provide housing plans in a new and expanding market. The implied social meanings of the near urban plan, as discussed above, and the restructuring of social life during the first decades of the twentieth century, only partially explained the evolution of housing. During 1900-1920, some experimentation occurred before the market reached a critical mass, at which point realtors and financial institutions began to control the type of house style and plan that could be built. By this time, the standard interior configuration of the twentieth-century house had been established.
CHAPTER 4

FROM TYPOLOGY TO TECHNOLOGY: THE MODERN HOME AS A BOX FOR TECHNOLOGY

Henry Clyde Shetrone and his family moved into a brand new house at 75 North Chase Avenue in 1926. Shetrone had been married in 1905 to Lillie Mae Klinger, and he moved into the home with his wife, and both of his wife’s parents. Shetrone was the foremost archaeologist in the state of Ohio and was soon to be the director of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society. Early in his life, Shetrone was a romantic adventurer, but when he moved onto Chase Avenue, he was making the transition to a middle-class managerial position in the museum profession.

Shetrone had been born in Millersport, Ohio. He joined the military during the Spanish-American War in 1898, where he learned how to maintain and operate telegraph systems as a member of the U.S. Volunteer Signal Corps. He became very skilled with the technological system. After being discharged, he remained in Cuba, where he had been stationed, as a provincial superintendent of telegraphy for the Cuban government. In 1902 he returned to the States where he worked in New York as a telegraph operator. Then, in 1903, he returned to Ohio to work as a telegrapher for various newspapers.
around the state. His skill at using communication technology provided opportunity for advancement. He moved from an operator to telegraph editor to financial editor to feature writer for the American Press Association.

At the same time, Shetrone developed a passion for the archaeology of prehistoric native American cultures. He enjoyed researching and writing stories about the excavations being completed at mound sites by the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society. He wrote articles concerning the excavations at Adena, Harness, Gartner, and Seip mounds, all being completed by William C. Mills, curator of archaeology. Shetrone also became an avid collector and, by 1910, had one of the largest collections of pre-
historic mound artifacts in the state. In fact, when out-of-state institutions contacted the
Society about obtaining artifacts for research or display, they were directed to Shetrone.

In 1913, Mills hired Shetrone as his assistant. Shetrone traveled around Ohio
systematically surveying and identifying archaeological sites for the Archaeological Atlas
of Ohio and aggressively seeking private artifact collections for the state museum.

Shetron traveled, often for periods of several days, on a motorcycle over roads
that were less than adequate and sometimes impassible. After one day of traveling like
this, he spent a miserable and stormy night in Thornville, Ohio, in a hotel that did not
have any modern amenities. The next day the roads had become quagmires of mud and
water and Shetrone resorted to pushing his motorcycle down the Baltimore and Ohio
railroad track as it was the only navigable path. He arrived at his destination late that night ragged and dirty and surprised that his contact, an elderly women with a large private collection, would let him into her home to document the artifacts.

In 1921, Mills became the director of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society and Shetrone replaced him as head curator. Over the next two years, he and Mills conducted archaeological excavations at Mound City in Chillicothe. This work was published in a final report in 1922. After this, Shetrone continued excavation on his own at Campbell Island Village, Hine Mound, Wright Mound, and Seip Mound.

In 1928, William C. Mills died, and Henry Shetrone replaced him as director of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society. During the 1930s, Shetrone led the Society through the entrenchment of budget reductions as well as massive public relief work undertakings, including Civil Works Administration projects and three Civilian Conservation Corps camps.

In 1942, at 65, Shetrone moved to a new, smaller house on Cresent Drive in the Broadview Addition. By this date his wife had passed away, and he moved into the home with a cousin, Mrs. Bertha R. Kerr, and his brother-in-law, John Klinger. He retired in 1947 and continued to live in the home on Cresent Avenue until his death in 1954.

Shetrone’s interest in technology, science, and archaeology went hand in hand. Under his direction, archaeology incorporated scientific research principles. He had no formal

---

1 Though his days in the field had come to an end, Shetrone continued to analyze and categorize the archaeological work in Ohio. In 1929, he published his largest work to date, *The Mound-Builders: A Reconstruction of the Life of a Prehistoric American Race, through Exploration and Interpretation of Their Earth Mounds, Their Burials, and Their Cultural Remains*. This work established Shetrone as the foremost authority on archaeology in Ohio, and a national expert on prehistoric mounds. Though busy with the everyday operations of the Society, Shetrone spent the next year lecturing all over the state about the mound builders.
training in history or archaeology, but he took the concepts of science as he had leaned them through the technical training he had received and applied them to a field he was passionate about. Because of his ability to negotiate the space between his technological skills and his hobby, he helped formulate the practices that would come to symbolize the professionalization of archaeology as it moved from a gentleman’s hobby to institutionalized scientific research program. The same negotiation that occurred in this major field of research also occurred in his home on Chase Avenue.

Figure 4.3: Henry Shetrone’s house on Crescent Avenue, Broadview Addition, ca1950 (photo courtesy of Ohio Historical Society).

* * *

Much like the archetype of the modern home, technology was intangible. All of the evidence suggests that the homeowner wanted the things that technology had made possible, the radio, the telephone, electrical “labor saving devices” and so on. When purchasing a new home on Chase Avenue, a homeowner mentally, if not physically, purchased all of these things. The use of all of this technology was implied by the home and imagined by the homeowner.

“Modern” technological systems allowed the devices to work and integrated them into both the house and the community. The homeowner could not see the framework of these technological systems. In many respects, the homeowner understood the technology only in terms of consumerization. Following the work of Ruth Schwartz Cowan especially, the historians of technology now incorporates the perspective of the consumer. The validity of this approach is confirmed by the artifacts themselves. Starting with the artifacts, therefore, offers one way into the consumer perspective.

MODERNISM AS TECHNOLOGY, NOT STYLE

The concept of modernism is generally characterized as a period of related historical, intellectual, technological, and aesthetic developments. Modernism as an artistic and social movement has been defined as an international movement, often

[3] See Leo Marx, “Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept,” in Arien Mack, ed., Technology and the Rest of Culture (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1997). Marx, 4, states that we use the word technology “as if it were a discrete entity, and thus causative factor—if not the chief causal factor—in every conceivable development of modernity. Although we cannot say exactly what “it” really is, it nonetheless serves as a surrogate agent, as well as a mask, for the human actors actually responsible for the developments in question.” I am suggesting that the homeowner did not conceive of new appliance or devices in larger terms than the daily usefulness of those artifacts.
centered in Europe. Some historians argue that the concept of the “American way of life,” the concept of a unified American culture which emerged in the 1930s, is in fact American modernism. The concept of culture itself has advanced into divisions of high culture and popular culture or high brow, middle brow, low brow. These concepts have been argued as a bipartite history of culture separated into the spheres of anthropological culture and aesthetic culture. My research suggests a distinction between modernism as an anthropological concept and modernism as an aesthetic concept. Historians of housing have often discussed housing during the 1920s as a result of aesthetic modernism, but the primary evidence left by homebuilders and homeowners suggests a different interpretation.4

The near urban house shows that modernism, as it was understood in the home, was directly linked to the developments in technology that changed the way people worked and lived. Under this paradigm, the house became a cultural mediator for new technological systems and devices. During the first two decades of the twentieth century,

4 Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4. The idea of an anthropological and aesthetic concept is drawn from Hegeman, 7. See also her discussion of the culture of modernism and “American modernism,” 19-23. Both the concepts of culture and modernism have a long literature that cannot be addressed in this study. The idea deserves further investigation in its own right and could be the topic of an entire study of the revival style homes made popular during the 1920s and 1930s. Michael Thomas Carrol, *Popular Modernity in America: Experience, Technology, Mythohistory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000) asserts, xiii, that “if the politics and popular culture of the Age of Manifest Destiny mark the very dawning of popular modernity, then the new cultural and economic doctrine of the 1920s marks its transformation into a doctrine for the management of mass culture.” As an example of the current view of modernism as an aesthetic within housing, see Kristina Wilson, *Livable Modernism: Interior Decorating and Design During the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). This book, and the art exhibition that accompanied it, showcased Modern furniture and household artifacts along with magazine advertisements depicting them. The focus clearly differentiated high culture from a vernacular understanding of the modern home, but because of the attention given to pieces of high design, there was no opportunity for an alternate model. This same argument can be made about Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Have: Yale University Press, 2004), who looks at the Modernist Bloomsbury movement in England during the first decades of the twentieth century. For visual examples of Modernism as an architectural aesthetic, see Dennis Sharp, *Twentieth Century Architecture: A Visual History* (New York: Facts on File, 1991).
plumbing systems, electrical systems, the telephone, radio, and automobile all became standardized and integrated into daily life. Advertisements underscored this reality: “You want a good many other things – an automobile, a piano, and so forth. But get your home first.”

The idea of a “modern” home was ubiquitous throughout the country during the 1920s. A sales ad for a new home in Helena, Montana, for instance read: “New Modern Five Room Bungalow, completely furnished. Including piano, grafanola, large garage, large lot, fine lawn.” In Syracuse, New York, a builder named Eagan offered a house with a “long living room, open brick fireplace, built-in bookcases, coat room with mirror door, two immense bedrooms with large lighted clothe presses in each, oak floors and finish throughout, special lighting fixtures, beautifully decorated. Of equal importance, the home came “equipped with ranger, screens, and Munroe Tubular furnace.” The Grandview Heights subdivision in Monessen, Pennsylvania, was advertised with “choice homesites where the air is light and pure, yet within walking distance of the city and big industries…Streets paved, water, sewer, gas and light. Every convenience.” Another article in a Helena, Montana, paper instructed a homebuyer to inspect the kitchen “even more closely than any of the other rooms.” The author continued: “Are there any convenient lights, such as one at the sink, besides a center ceiling light? Are there any base plugs for electric attachments? How are the so-called “modern” conveniences arranged?”

5 “A Home First,” West Side Lumber advertisement, Hilltop Record, May 23, 1924. See also note 8, Chapter 2.

6 “New Modern Five Room Bungalow,” Helena Daily Independent, October 12, 1924. For sale ads for homes equating “modern” with both technological systems and a new plan can be found in newspapers all over the country. Many of these advertisements equated the term “modern” with descriptive aspects of new
Technology altered the way people worked and lived in the house. New technologies such as the radio, telephone, and automobile altered both spatial configurations and social configurations of public rooms. Additionally, new technologies, such as the iron and washing machine, changed the nature and the division of labor of household work.

This chapter, then, is about the technological transformation that changed the home from the Victorian domicile to the modern house type, though, unlike the proportional image of the modern house in plans, the technological archetype was imaginary. It is possible to visualize this transition by looking at five simultaneous developments in technology that came into the home during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Each of the five technologies developed concurrently, and by 1921 these technologies, while they were not the only important technologies, formed the essence of the modern house.

The five technologies were: the telephone, the radio, the electrical system, the refrigerator, and the heating system. These technologies embodied the technological...
artifacts, or new devices, that contemporaries understood to constitute the difference between the Victorian and the modern age.\(^7\)

The telephone was the epitome of the technological system that connected independent artifacts to one another, largely bypassing the front-porch neighborhood. The telephone connects to a system, meaning that a telephone by itself in the home did not work. A phone that sits on a desk is an artifact with no meaning unless it is attached to a technological system to which other phones are attached.

The radio will be discussed next. The radio was the model of technological change. During the 1920s, technology allowed external communication to enter the home. A corresponding internal focus resulted, whereby the family members began to understand their relationship to the community from inside the house instead of from the outside, via the porch and sidewalk. The radio and the telephone, to a large extent, were the root of this change.

Third, electricity as a system of consumption will be discussed. Electrical distribution systems, once in the home, allowed the homeowner to visualize future consumption of both electricity and appliances. The homemaker could look at the electrical outlet and visualize new appliances being plugged in and used.

\(^7\) Often, technology and modern design went hand in hand. The *Inland Architect and News Record* was a monthly journal published in Chicago by the Inland Publishing Company. There is a noticeable difference in the style of advertising between the January 1899 issue and the August 1900 issue. The 1899 issue contains ads with Victorian scrolled borders and ads showing Victorian interiors. By 1900, most of the Victorian fluff had been removed. The changes seem insignificant, but taken as a whole, the magazine is cleaner, and the ads appear to focus on new construction materials. For example, advertisements for Westinghouse changed from a scroll-bordered picture of a “Gas engine for power” to a plain, large-type, bold-faced ad for “Electric Lighting and Power Stations.” See also Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity*, 1920-1940 (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), 9-10. Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), examines the introduction of five technologies to rural America: the telephone, the automobile, household appliances and plumbing, radio, and electrification.
Fourth, the technology of refrigeration will be discussed. This fourth technology demonstrates the complexity of the change while still reinforcing the direction of the change. Why is refrigeration important? Ice refrigeration operated outside of the household electrical system. The ice-service connected the house to a city-wide service network. At the same time, home refrigeration reduced neighborhood ties, such as daily visits to the butcher. It is striking that after 1934, even the city-wide distribution network was disrupted by the electrification of refrigeration units so easily accommodated to an already existing arrangement. Refrigeration illustrates to the greatest extent the ability of changing technology to remove the house from local community/connection.

Lastly, heating systems, much like refrigeration, connected the home to local networks of fuel distribution. Coal deliveries kept the homeowner in contact with the community businesses. Heating systems also opened the home, removing the barriers associated with the localized heating of individual rooms by fireplaces and stoves. As furnaces, however, converted to gas, the connections that attached the technology to the community were severed, exactly as happened to the refrigerator.

Taken together, then, the telephone, radio, electricity, refrigeration, and heating all served to move the homeowner to independence from the community. Moreover, technologies such as the radio, telephone, and the automobile, had the potential to connect people over vast distances. In doing so, they connected the family to networks far removed from the local neighborhood. At the same time, new technologies caused the home to retract and become internally focussed. The independence of electrical appliances, the telephone, and the refrigerator decreased the homemaker’s interaction with social and business networks in the community.
The near urban house plan, as explored in the previous chapter, facilitated the shift in cultural focus from the outside to the inside of the house. After 1921, family activity centered around these new technologies, and the near urban plan embodied the installation and use of technological systems in the home. Technology was modernism. Modernism was physically and culturally embedded in the home. The technologies that will be discussed below worked perfectly within this plan, or, more to the point, within the imaginary box of the “modern” home.

The exception was the automobile, which has been discussed already as having a major impact on the living room. The technological and social implications of the automobile have been discussed in detail by other authors, who have argued many facets of the cultural importance of the car to which I have already alluded.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE HOME

The “modern” home embodied the technological revolution that was occurring throughout society during the twentieth century. For most people, interaction with

---

8 Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*.

changing technology happened through daily activities in the home. In the process of
washing clothes, using an iron, calling a friend, or making toast, people interacted with
new technologies.

When people bought a modern home, then, they bought a complete box for
technology. New homes constructed between 1914 and 1927 often contained all of the
fittings for the most modern technology available. Even William F. Ogburn, in
developing his ideas about culture lag during the first decade of the twentieth century,
noted the “vast cultural changes” in “material culture,” occurring in “new types of
dwellings” with a “variety of new types of consumption goods.”

As builders and mechanical engineers integrated technological systems into the
home, the house plan changed to meet new requirements. In previous chapters, we have
seen how this new dwelling became standardized in form with three rooms on the first
floor and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. The relatively square
nature of this plan was matched by the two-story structure. The new dwelling not only
was a box, but a box that could be filled with technology in ways appropriate to the
culture.

Within this box, as numerous writers have pointed out, technology mechanized
traditional activities and domestic work. These new technologies did not change the

---

Heubsch, Inc., 1922), 269.

11 Susan Strasser, *Never Done: The History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt and
Company, 1982), was one of the first historians to address the changes in household labor during the
twentieth century; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology
from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), discusses the sociological
process of technological changes in housework and the reality of the status and work of women. Merritt
York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1999), provides informative graphics and tables.
fundamental nature of the activities or the work as much as they reorganized them.

Technology was not the determining factor of this reorganization as much as the home created an environment that mediated life and technology. The home became a place where individuals negotiated the day-to-day cultural changes that came with the fast pace of new technology throughout society. By investigating technology in the home, therefore, one can get a sense of how fundamentally important the house mediated cultural transformations during the 1920s.12

Though much of the technology that found its way into the home had been invented in the late nineteenth century, the technological systems that allowed the modernization of daily life were perfected during the 1920s – exactly the time when both large and minute changes in the house plan came to symbolize the restructuring of middle-class life.

TECHNOLOGY AS SYSTEM

Technological systems snaked throughout the house, behind walls, and in floors. To the house investigator, the systems within the house are a collection of old wires, tubes, knobs, and pipes. These systems, for the most part, were hidden inside walls and

behind plaster. Engineers and contractors saw them as a series of contracts and specialty trades. The homeowner did not see them at all.

In the last several years, historians have studied technological systems and have provided in-depth analysis of how these systems negotiated the terrain between municipal development and private enterprise. Thomas P. Hughes became a pioneer in looking at technological systems outside of time and place, to investigate the pattern and sociological process of networks.\(^\text{13}\)

The technological systems, such as electricity, gas, water, and sewerage, integrated the house with streets, neighborhoods, and municipalities. In fact, utilities integrated the house into the system of the city. These systems were controlled by forces far away from the home, and like the systems in the house, they were, for the most part, hidden from view, or in the case of wires on poles, taken for granted. The systems, however, tied the near urban house itself directly into a larger network of communication and services that were, before 1934, unmistakably urban in nature.\(^\text{14}\)


214
Inside the house, however, utilities became material artifacts. These artifacts, like the sink, the toilet, the telephone, the electric light, and even the gas-fired heater, appeared as individual furnishings. The objects in themselves, like the disconnected telephone, could do nothing. Integrated into the larger technological system, however, they connected the occupant of the home to a larger network or community infrastructure.

This technological systemization of the modern home could happen only in areas in which utility systems had been installed. Increasingly, during the early twentieth century, such installations occurred in newly developing areas. New housing, therefore, often came ready-made with technology installed and hidden. When moving into a new neighborhood, one did not see the systems themselves, only the results of the systems. In many cases, the homeowner saw the results of the systems through appliances and attachments such as an iron or a telephone. Such evidence of the technology was used every day.

Small, everyday things made the house retract from the neighborhood and moved the family into a larger community of consumers. As an example, initially housing experts understood electricity in the home only as a better replacement for gas lighting. At the turn of the century, new homes with electrical systems often had wiring only for lights, and not outlets for appliances. Partly this wiring arrangement came of the fact that few electrical appliances were available or understood to be desirable.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} Cowan, \textit{More Work for Mother}, 93; Cross and Szostack, \textit{Technology and American Society}, 198, state that as late as 1920, 80\% of home electricity was used for lighting and 15\% for ironing.
Electrical companies aggressively marketed electrical devices, often sending representatives door to door. Often companies would allow trade-ins of older non-electric appliances for new devices.\(^\text{16}\) This implied that many people who purchased new homes prior to 1921, even with electricity, brought older customs and traditions of work into the new home.

Technology also served to solve what was considered the “servant problem.” During the early twentieth century, housing advocates understood the servant problem to be the difficulty of finding good domestic help that could be trusted. Social and economic changes made domestic service undesirable. Those who had options resisted such work because, in part, the work was drudgery. Domestic work entailed jobs that the housewife did not want to do. Moreover, a servant’s hours were long. A live-in domestic servant was required to start work before the family woke and ended her day after the family had gone to bed. Yet, Ruth Schwartz Cowan reports that in all of her research on domestic life in the United States, she had never come across a household, between 1660 and 1860, that did not at some point have hired or boarded help.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{16}\) James C. Williams, “Getting Housewives the Electric Message,” in Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun, eds, *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 95-114, discusses Southern California. Williams states that by 1915, energy company salesmen accounted for 80% of the company’s total appliance sales, 99; Rose, *Cities of Light and Heat*, see especially 115, provides a detailed history of Roy Munroe, a salesman for the Denver Gas and Electric Company. Munroe sold the first electric iron in Denver in 1905 and won a contest for the most irons sold in 1915. A long-time employee before entering sales, Munroe “merged his knowledge of gas and electric appliances and consumer tastes” to become a leading salesman and eventually manager of the sales department.

\(^{17}\) The “servant problem” is discussed by Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 28-29 and 122-124. Cowan quotes employers as espousing the benefits of female domestic labor, but this does not seem to have been accepted as truth by those employed, 123. A good representation of the importance of domestic servants within the house at the turn of the century is Ethel Spencer, *The Spencers of Amberson Avenue: A Turn of the Century Memoir* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983). In her memoir, Spencer related that during the late nineteenth century, her mother hired servants to help with running their household at a cost of $1.50 a week. Her mother “engaged newly arrived immigrants, trained them, taught them to speak English and make bread, and then sadly lost them to husbands eager to take over such jewels,” 30.
After the turn of the century, households turned to domestic design and technology to fill the lack of hired help. As technology changed and redefined business and manufacturing, many people who had previously found work in domestic service found work in manufacturing. New jobs provided opportunity and the possibility of escape from a defined servant class. Many young women, in fact, would have rather worked in a factory than as a domestic servant. In 1870, women working as servants accounted for 60.7 percent of all women employed. In 1920, only 18.2 percent of employed women worked as servants. Cheap labor became scarce in this new marketplace. Additionally, members of the new managerial class who were purchasing new homes did not have the excess wealth to hire multiple servants to do the traditional tasks associated with homeownership. Technology therefore became the servant within the new modern house.  

TECHNOLOGY AS MATERIAL CULTURE

Technology, as a concept of cultural change, manifested itself in actual material objects, as I have observed. These objects affected the way people performed work and

---

entertained within the home. Builders, housing experts, and homeowners all saw electricity as a great modernization, but it was the devices themselves that changed life. According to one advocate of electricity in the home, “Anything that simplifies house work is a boon in homes without servants.” In 1920, in an exhibit called the “Electrical Home,” a model two-story home in San Francisco, showcased 31 electrical appliances said to be “every device invented to date in which electricity plays a part.” According to published reports, people seeing the exhibit understood the use of electricity as the future of the house. To the “woman whose electrical possessions included only the familiar toaster, coffee percolator and indispensable flat-iron, the Electric Home was a revelation.”

As suggested above, the house became the environment in which the middle class interacted with technology and negotiated the cultural change that technology brought into the home. One can go on and say also that because the house functioned as part of a larger consumer culture, the home served as a microcosm of the whole society. As people embraced new cultural and social activities, technology enabled the house to evolve in form. By the 1920s, cultural activities were taking place outside of the home. Once the social rituals that had made the house a center of social display had been removed, the house could be -- and was -- redesigned to serve the functional needs of technology.

19 Elaine Hollis, “Electrifying the Home,” Sunset October 1920, 70, 72.

20 Goods associated with the home were increasingly marketed to institutional customers such as hotels, railroads, hospitals, restaurants, and schools. In this way companies placed their products in public settings where customers would take notice and become familiar with certain devices or even brands, Marina Moskowitz, “Public Exposure: Middle-Class Material Culture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, eds., The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class (New York: Routledge, 2001), 170-188.
As technology expanded at the expense of social and consumer contacts, the new house type, as discussed in the previous chapter, pulled the home inward. For instance, a study of Columbus neighborhoods in 1918 showed that lower-income residences were dependent on neighborhood institutions, but “the telephone, the automobile, and the business contacts” of “home-owners of the more stable and economically superior residential districts” allowed them an “independence of neighborhood organizations.”21

THE TELEPHONE

The telephone, as I have suggested, is the epitome of an in-home artifact that connected people to a larger system. The artifact, however, was but one small part of the technology that made the system work. Only by connecting the phone to other similar phones in similar houses could the system function and perform.

Telephone systems started locally in small nodes. Robert Wiebe has described how the country consisted of largely of isolated communities in the nineteenth century.22 In part, this was the original telephone model. Small isolated telephone systems began in urban areas and towns, each in turn linked to one another through the extension of long distance lines. Little by little the systems expanded until one large, unified system existed.


THE TELEPHONE IN OHIO

In September 1878, one of the most talked about exhibits at the Ohio State Fair was the telephone tent. Here, visitors could pay ten cents to talk over the wire with someone in a downtown office on one of four telephones: an Edison, a Phelps, a Gray or a Bell model.23

The telephone worked only when connected directly to another phone, a direct line between fixed points. These could be installed as private lines from one location to another. In fact, the first telephone line in Ohio had been installed between the wholesale office and the retail yard of Rhodes and Company, a Cleveland-based coal dealer. This occurred only a year after Bell received his first patent.

In Columbus, Ohio, the first exchange opened on January 1, 1879. This switchboard, installed downtown at Long and High Streets, utilized two lines connecting seventeen phones. The telephone system, as a tool for business, took off rapidly, and by the end of the year, the switchboard served 215 telephones. In June 1883, the Central Union Telephone Company organized and developed the Bell service in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio.24

After the original Bell patents expired in 1893, independent telephone companies began to install systems in order to compete with the larger Bell companies. The first independent companies established exchanges in rural areas where Bell did not provide

23 The Telephone in Ohio (Cleveland, Ohio: Public Relations Department The Ohio Bell Telephone Company, ca1958), 2.

24 Ibid., 3, 11.
service. 25 Nobelsville, Indiana, was the first such town, though small towns in Texas, Kansas, Ohio, and Illinois soon followed.26

In Ohio, independent companies grew rapidly in towns such as Massillon, Lima, and Bucyrus. These independent companies flourished for several reasons. The Bell companies focussed on larger more profitable markets, leaving small towns without service. Businessmen, knowing how successful the Bell companies had become in larger markets, saw the opportunity to set up smaller profitable businesses themselves. Moreover, not all urban areas were happy with the Bell service they were receiving. This allowed independent companies to move into newly developing areas of the city, as happened in Columbus. Because of these circumstances, many businessmen saw an opportunity to develop an independent system, which could then be sold to Bell at a substantial profit.27

25 By 1900, Bell serviced 800,000 telephones with $120 million in assets, while independent companies serviced 600,000 telephones with $55 million in assets. The use of the telephone to connect over long distances became an issue for independents. Bell refused to interconnect with independent companies, so if a user wanted to talk to someone outside of his or her local exchange, he or she had to be a Bell subscriber. Brooks, Telephone, 108, 114.

26 Brooks, Telephone, 104

27 The Telephone in Ohio, 11; As telephone technology changed rapidly, new independent companies incorporated these changes. Therefore new developments often included the very latest in technology. The first automatic dial telephones in Ohio were installed by independent companies, starting with the Dayton Home Telephone Company in 1903. The Citizens Telephone Company initiated dial service in Columbus in July 1905 and became the largest dial exchange, with over 7,000 subscribers. By 1913, seventeen magneto exchanges in Columbus connected almost 14,000 subscribers directly through dial service. By the same year, Columbus had become the center of an extensive inter-city dial network in which Columbus operators could dial subscribers in Dayton, Zanesville, Akron, Youngstown, and Canton. They could dial to other operators in at least 50 other cities and out of state to Indianapolis, Indiana, and Huntington, West Virginia. The Telephone in Ohio, 12-13. In 1905, businessmen installed an 8000-line telephone exchange in Columbus. By 1920 there were several exchanges that serviced various communities or areas of the city. Typically, in Columbus, an individual telephone connected to this network through a local exchange, each phone having its own four-digit number. Downtown businesses belonged to the Bell Main exchange. Individual customers on the Hilltop belonged to the Bell Hilltop exchange.
In September 1921, the Ohio State Telephone Company and the Ohio Bell merged to form a statewide, integrated system. Upon organization, the company serviced 475,215 telephones and 243 central offices, handling 2,198,085 local and 23,609 toll calls a day. Though the telephone as a working technological system developed early in the late nineteenth century, and many of the smaller independent companies offered successful local services, it was this merger in 1921 that perfected the conception of a statewide network of communication.

THE TELEPHONE IN THE HOME

The phone, as an artifact, was typically not purchased, but was leased from the phone company. As such, local companies offered few choices. The early telephone did come in two basic types or forms. The wall-mounted phone could be placed conveniently on the wall at the height of the caller’s mouth. The candlestick telephone could be placed on a desk or table. With this model, just the mouthpiece and handset were visible, and the magneto bell and generator had to be placed out of the way under the table, on an adjacent wall or attached to the table itself.

As depicted in photographs and advertisements, in the home, the telephone was either installed in a den or office or in the kitchen or back hall. Putting the telephone in the den or office placed the artifact in the male sphere of the household. The phone, in

---

28 The Telephone in Ohio, 17

29 W. H. Radcliff and H. C. Cushing, Telephone Construction, Installation, Wiring, Operation, and Maintenance (New York: Norman W. Henry Publishing Co., 1908), 62-63, including a diagram of the desk set system. Like the wall mounted units, the generator on this desk set had to be hand cranked.
this case, became an extension of the male-dominated business world. This connected the home to the virtual networks of the work environment.

Acknowledging the standard placement of a phone in the hallway, one interior designer suggested that a telephone placed in a hall was an “abomination.” Placed here, conversations could be overheard. Guests could overhear “the price of their roast,” or the family could overhear the homemaker “tell a white lie for society’s sake.” The phone should have been kept in a closet or upstairs where “the family alone” were the “listeners in.”

Telephone companies originally conceived of the telephone as a technological system to be used as a tool for business, placing the telephone in the den or office. It is clear that users of the technology did not adhere to the proponents of the new communication system, but they adapted the technology to their own needs, most particularly social conversation. In this case, consumers and not engineers ultimately determined the outcome of the cultural impact of the technology.

30 Foster, Interior Decoration for Modern Needs, 140. “Listeners in” was also used at the time to denote early radio listeners.

The phone in the home was seen by telephone companies as the equivalent of the business phone. Telephone salesmen often promoted units to be used for the efficient ordering of goods and services by the housewife who was seen as a household administrator. This vision worked well with ideas emerging from both advertising and home economics.\(^{32}\) By the first decade of the new century, however, quite unintended uses became possible as well, such as making a prank phone call or an appointment to get one’s hair done.\(^{33}\)

\(^{32}\) Fischer, *America Calling*, 232.

In the home, telephone users mediated the technology within the needs of the home and their own uses. Women, increasingly comfortable with phone use, began to use the technology for their own purposes. Selected studies in 1930 found that 25 to 40 percent of calls made or received by housewives were commercial and 30 to 50 percent were social. In the home, women, and not men, pursued what they wanted from the new technology, that is, conversation.34

In looking at parlor culture, one historian has pointed out the connection between “calling” as both the designation for the Victorian social custom and telephone etiquette. The technology network of the telephone replaced the need for the middle-class housewife to “stay home” or keep parlor hours in order to be connected to local social networks. Users chose to telephone rather than “go the five miles just for a short visit.”35

The telephone, therefore, contributed to the decline of parlor culture and the formal domestication of the public rooms of the house by replacing the traditional social contact with convenience.

34 Fischer, America Calling, 232-235, argues that the telephone was an icon of modernity at the turn of the century. Advertisers used the phone as a symbol of modernity and power. Fischer, 234, goes on to argue, however, that by 1910, at least in Northern California, the telephone had become commonplace and hardly was given notice; Carroll, Popular Modernity in America, 13-14, emphasizes that “telephony demonstrates a continuing pattern of new technologies being mythopoeticized and ideologically co-opted through hypermediation.” Just as the telegraph had been given a set of “mythic signifiers related to imperialism, national superiority, and Manifest Destiny, through advertisement and print, the telephone became a symbol to unite the nation and make the “continent a community.” By the late 1920s, however, use-patterns outside of the control of AT&T caused the telephone to become “increasingly conceptualized and marketed as a social facilitator.”

35 Katherine C. Grier, Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-class Identity, 1850-1930 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 77; Fischer, America Calling, 237. The quote is from a personal interview of a woman from Northern California, where most of his research was completed. He also quotes and cites Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 273-275, who documented the use of the telephone as a substitute for “visiting.” Fischer argues in a footnote that multiple reasons could be argued for the reduction of in-person visiting, and the phone usage might be a reaction to, instead of the cause of, less visiting.
When the houses on Chase Avenue were constructed in 1924, they had fully integrated telephone systems. The wires hidden inside the walls connected the home to every other telephone in the state. The telephone negotiated the tensions across both technology networks and social networks. So far had the telephone gone to create a constant connection to social networks, that the device potentially disconnected the housewife from face-to-face contact.36

Installing the phone in the kitchen did not just remove the housewife from formal social customs, it created a new area from which to manage the household. Advertisements reinforced the idea of the housewife as an efficient home manager. Part of this efficiency became balancing informal conversation and household communication with work. One such advertisement showed a woman taking time from preparing a meal to talk to “Jerry,” which could be either her husband or a female friend (Fig.4.5). A common design feature in the 1930s became the telephone niche placed in the wall between the kitchen and dining room. The phone niche established a central place for the phone book, notepads, and pens, the social communication node that attached the

36 Fischer, Calling America, takes up this idea of the loss of face-to-face contact on 236-239. He discusses two forms of the argument. The weaker form postulates that the phone made people lazy and they called friends rather than visiting face-to-face. The stronger form suggests that the telephone allowed people to live further apart, thus altering the nature of visitation while preserving social contact. Fisher argues that there is very little evidence for the stronger form. The telephone, however, had the tendency to make social contacts emotionally thin. Carrol, Popular Modernity in America, 16, asserts that the phone became “an extension of self – in using it repeatedly, the human subject becomes increasingly unaware of its presence, thus making it not so much an intermediary between self and the world, but a part of self in what is experienced.”
modern family to the community.\textsuperscript{37} The telephone, placed in the kitchen or hall, then, removed social connection in the home from the parlor, and hence the front of the house, to the rear of the house, the new female sphere. In part, this created a void at the front of the house where other communication technologies could enter the home and begin their cultural transformations as well.

THE RADIO

Both the piano and the phonograph were technologies by means of which music entered the house during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Both items were

\textsuperscript{37} Marchand, \textit{Advertising the American Dream}, 186-188. Rose, \textit{Cities of Light and Heat}, 136, shows a picture of such a phone niche in a home built in Kansas City in 1939.
frequently shown in published house plans. In 1914, more than 500,000 phonographs were being manufactured every year, while at the same time 323,000 pianos were manufactured. Both permeated late nineteenth-century culture. There was an old vaudeville joke; “Do you play the piano? No, but I play the phonograph.”

Though seemingly ubiquitous at the turn of the century, by 1923 both the piano and the phonograph were being eclipsed by the radio.

In Victorian culture, music was seen as a female activity. The piano dominated musical entertainment in the older parlor. During the Victorian period prior to 1900, music was a large part of family activity. Many families had a piano in the living room, and “spontaneous singing” was a “part of the fun of any and all gatherings.”

The piano had been a prominent part of parlor furnishing in Victorian culture. Though the height of the popularity of the piano occurred between 1870 and 1890, peak sales came in 1909. The piano, in fact, was one of the last vestiges of Victorian culture still in the modern home, and the decline of the instrument was directly proportional to increased sales of the radio.

Playing the piano, and musical education in general, was understood as a female activity steeped in the middle-class cult of domesticity. This began to change somewhat during the 1920s. The invention of the phonograph and radio brought families in contact with all kinds of different music. This in itself may have altered parlor culture and music as a

---


41 Ibid., 13, 21, 32.
female pastime. The radio mediated traditional gender spheres in the home, and expanded the family’s connection to different communities. It was the model technology.

TECHNOLOGY AS MALE DOMESTICATION

By the late 1920s, the radio was not a novelty but a “household utility.” The radio was turning the house from a domestic environment centered on the neighborhood to an outlet of consumption focussed on internal utilities. In fact, the radio acted as the catalyst that intimately connected men and boys with technology and music. In this way, the radio served to break the hold of female domesticity in the home. Some promotional material even connected the radio with the construction of the home. One small booklet, given away by a local lumber yard in Missouri, contained pages for estimating the materials for a new home as well as the cities and letters of “Broadcasting stations of 1000 watt power and over” with a places to annotate the “dial” and “adjustment” necessary to receive the stations on a hand-built radio unit.42

As a new technology, the radio was a male-dominated activity, especially among boys. In a questionnaire given to high school boys in Muncie, Indiana, in 1923, “radio” was the most common answer to the question, “In what thing that you are doing at home this fall are you most interested?”43

The radio allowed people to expand their understanding of what was available in a larger world outside of their own local surroundings. By listening, they conceived of a

---

42 *Home Suggestions and Radio Log* ([St. Louis]: C.J. Harris Lumber Co., n.d.).
larger experience for themselves. This was certainly the case of the early listening activity known as “DXing.” Radio operators listened every night, keeping records to see from how far away they could receive transmissions.44

In this larger world, music and speech occasionally alerted people to what was lacking in their own isolated community. In a very telling example, one resident of Muncie indicated that she came home from Sunday School every Sunday and tuned to different radio services all day to listen to the dynamic speakers in other cities, observing that “We’ve no preachers here that can compare with any of them.” On one occasion she listened to a “ripping sermon” from California.45

FRANK CONRAD AND THE FIRST BROADCAST

The first regularly scheduled broadcast of voice and music over the radio is credited to Frank Conrad. The details suggest how the radio came into the home. A Westinghouse employee in the radio division, Conrad held multiple patents for radio advances he made during the war effort. When his work slowed at Westinghouse after the war, he began experimenting with the broadcast of sound in a makeshift station he set up in his garage at his home on the corner of Penn Avenue and Peebles Street, in a suburb east of Pittsburgh. What could be considered the first prototype of commercial radio

44 Douglas, Listening In, 73-75.

45 Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 270. Though the radio provided an understanding of a larger, better world, the fact that one had a radio, and stations to listen to, brought one into a community where a differentiation was made between those who had access to a radio and the “other” who did not. See Randall Patnode, “What These People Need is a Radio: New Technology, the Press, and Otherness in 1920s America,” Technology and Culture 45 (2004): 396-405.
broadcasting occurred in a garage, in a male dominated sphere of an early suburban home.46

During early 1920, Conrad’s garage became a regional center of radio experimentation. Often working in the evening and late into the night, Conrad began using phonograph records in order to keep a constant sound through his transmitter. Occasionally, his two sons worked as announcers. Soon, regular listeners began writing in and requesting songs. Owing to this, Conrad began having a regular Saturday night broadcast, which he called a “concert.” When he had played all his own phonograph records, he made arrangements to borrow records from a local retailer in exchange for mentioning the store on the air. Records he played on the air began to sell better than other records, and in the process Conrad became a local celebrity.47

In September, the Joseph Horne Department Store put an ad in the Pittsburgh Sun announcing that the store had radio sets for sale that could pick up the Conrad radio program. Harry P. Davis, Conrad’s supervisor, saw the ad and had a vision of the future. The next day, Davis held a conference with Conrad and other officials to see if the company could build a more powerful transmitter at the Westinghouse plant in Pittsburgh that could offer regularly scheduled programming. If this could be done, Westinghouse could enter the market manufacturing radios so that people could listen to their broadcasts.48


The new station received a license and the call letters KDKA from the Department of Commerce on October 27. The first radio station with the intent to appeal to a mass audience, KDKA began broadcasting at 8:00 P. M. November 2, 1920. With much publicity, the new station began broadcasting by announcing up to the minute returns during the presidential election between Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox.49

The station continued to broadcast regularly. The first broadcasts emanated from Pittsburgh nightly between 8:00P.M. and 9:30P.M. This was soon expanded to included daytime hours. Though typically the transmissions had an effective range of less than 200 miles, on a clear night the station could be heard in Illinois. The success of KDKA was not readily apparent. For one reason, Westinghouse did not begin producing radio units in large numbers until more than a year later.50 The station had, however, set the stage for things to come.

In 1921, just a year later, radio mania swept the country. Large companies, newspapers, churches, stores, and private individuals paid for a license and entered into the experimental radio market. New licenses included WIP in Gimbel Brothers Department Store in Philadelphia, WEAF in New York owned by American Telephone & Telegraph Company, and the Yahrling-Rayner Piano Company’s station, WAAY, in Youngstown, Ohio. By the end of 1922, 690 different radio stations operated throughout the country.51


50 Ibid., 21-23.

51 Ibid., 32-34.
LISTENING

Many of the early listeners had been known as amateur operators. This would eventually be shortened to “hams.” Most of these ham radio operators were men and boys who had become interested in the technological aspects of the radio. Even as early as 1907, amateurs had been experimenting with wireless telegraphy units in their own homes. Prior to 1912, amateur operators had been able to send and receive telegraph signals. During the Titanic disaster, however, so many false telegraph messages had been sent around the country that the Navy petitioned the government to eliminate amateur transmissions. The result was the Federal Communications Act of 1912. After this, wireless operators in the home could only listen in.52

Harry Mills was typical of one of the early listeners to Conrad’s program. At 12 years of age, Mills would lie in bed and listen to radio operators signal back and forth in the dots and dashes of Morse code almost every night. One night at 10 or 11 at night, Mills heard a voice. He remembered “letting out a yelp or a shout of some sort and my dad, who had just gotten out of the bath, came in wrapped in a towel to make sure... that something hadn't happened to me.” He continued to tune in every night and soon heard Conrad playing phonograph records. To Mills, the music coming over his wireless “opened up a whole new world.”53

Bringing the radio “into everyday life” affected areas of the house such as “the garage, the attic, and the living room.” Just as listening to the radio began to connect

52 Douglas, Listening In, 55, 58; Douglas, The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting, 43.

people to the transmissions of a larger nation, the act of “listening in” caused family members to be focussed on themselves, away from any idea of local community, in specific rooms of the house. Listening to earphones up in the attic or in the basement allowed only the perception of being connected to a larger community. In reality the average tinkerer was becoming more isolated.\footnote{Douglas, \textit{Listening In}, 52.}

As an invention, the radio has been important for redefining masculinity in the home. In part, the radio served to make the pleasure of music acceptable for men. Being active in exploring nature was the traditional Victorian pastime of manly activity. When men began to “tinker” with, first, the automobile and, then, the radio, a male-dominated sphere returned to the house. But just in certain areas. The next phase would be to bring male domestication back into the domesticated area of the home, the living room. An advertisement in the \textit{Hilltop Record} for D. O. Sites shows a drawing of a boy listening to a radio in the living room, with headphones on, while his father sits beside him with a note pad evidently to record how far away he could pick up signals.\footnote{Douglas, \textit{Listening In}, 12-13. \textit{Hilltop Record}, December 4, 1924.}

Many boys were proud to say that they had made their own radio sets from scratch.\footnote{In the beginning, one did not just buy a radio, bring it into the house and plug it in. The early crystal sets and even the early tube sets were purchased as kits and put together. The crystal set consisted of an aerial, an induction coil, a crystal detector, and a pair of headphones. Also necessary, was a piece of galena crystal with a “cat’s whisker.” The aerial had to be positioned high enough to collect waves from the air and had to be attached to a ground, often a water pipe. In some cases, the aerial could be as much as 85 feet of wire attached 30 feet in the air from the house. In one case, an amateur operator placed the aerial in his attic under the roof running the length of the house. Douglas, \textit{Listening In}, 52; Douglas, \textit{The Early Days of Broadcasting}, 40, 41.} The act of building the sets demystified science and engineering and gave many young men a solid grasp of electricity and electronics. Crystal sets were fairly
simple, requiring no power source. A coil could be made by winding a wire around an oatmeal box with the ends connected to wooden posts. A brass track and slider placed on top of the coil acted as a tuner. One end of the wire would be attached to the aerial and the other end attached to the headphones. Though reception was very poor, “thousands of tinkerers” fashioned their own sets during the first decades of the century.\(^{57}\)

One of these young amateurs, Edwin H. Armstrong, had begun experimenting with wireless gadgets in his attic workroom in 1905 at the age of 15. In the Signal Corps during the First World War, Armstrong began to work on the development of transmitters using vacuum tubes. While with the army in 1918, he designed an eight-tube receiver of unusually high quality. This receiver, the Radiola Superheterodyne, revolutionized the radio industry because it offered reliable, clear reception that, with the attached loudspeaker, itself an invention of the early 1920s, could be heard by multiple listeners.\(^{58}\)

In 1922, Armstrong sold a perfected receiver to the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). RCA had been established in 1918 as a dummy corporation to acquire American Marconi, a British-owned company operating radio stations needed by the U.S. Navy.

---

\(^{57}\) Douglas, *Listening In*, 52, 57; Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, 40; Douglas quotes a letter from one enthusiast who states his “aerial [was] mostly under the roof of an ordinary two-family house.”43; Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 198, discusses a *New York Times* estimate of “Several hundred thousand” active amateur operators by 1912. She also quotes a 1911 source recalling that in “large cities meddlesome antennae can be counted by the score.” J. Fred Macdonald, in *Don’t Touch that Dial: Radio Programming in American Life, 1920-1960* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 12, states that aerials “began to clutter the skyline, and people shopping for new homes began looking for locales with good reception.” Pegg, *Broadcasting and Society*, 36-37, has a very good description and diagram of a ca1922 crystal set. Costing $10 to $35 apiece, crystal sets were extremely popular. In fact, Westinghouse was producing 25,000 sets a month by 1922 and could not keep up with demand, Douglas, *Listening In*, 52.

Through acquiring the patents of American Marconi, RCA became a major player in the development of the radio in the early 1920s. 59

Armstrong had invented the first commercially marketable radio. His device ran on batteries, did not require an antenna, and could be easily tuned. By 1924, RCA engineers had reduced the unit to a reasonably-priced six-tube receiver and began marketing and selling what could be thought of as the first modern family radio. 60

The culmination of the technology occurred in the mid-1920s when the A-C tube was invented, allowing the radio to run on electricity. A cheap and practical A-C tube began to be produced by RCA in 1927, and the radio became a home appliance attached

---

59 Ibid., 13, 48.
to the wall. After electrification, companies began to design large console sets made out of fine wood and resembling furniture. Companies such as RCA, Magnavox, Zenith, and Philco designed and marketed radios specifically to be placed in the living room.61

The early consoles competed with the piano and the phonograph for the musical dominance of the living room. Before the production of Armstrong’s Radiola Superheterodyne, the sound quality of the phonograph was much higher than the “tinny” sounds coming from the radio. After the introduction of the new set, however, sound came out of the radio loud and clear and better than sound from the phonograph. The phonograph industry immediately began to decline.62

The radio quickly became a fixture in American living rooms. Every one of the 5,873 families inventoried in Cleveland in 1939 had a radio. Thirty percent of the radios had been purchased before 1931. Slightly more, 32 percent, had been purchased within the last three years, between 1936 and 1939.63

By 1928, the radio had revolutionized home entertainment and American culture. In the 25 years previous to 1928, 19,000,000 automobiles had been produced. In the 30

---

60 Ibid., 46. On pages 71-73 Douglas discuses the growth of RCA’s tube production and the companies collaboration with other manufacturers who used its tubes.


63 Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Press, 1939). During the month of June, 1939, the Cleveland Council of Parent-Teachers Associations distributed and collected 5,870 household report forms, labeled the “Seventh Cleveland Home Inventory.” The reports were intended to “show family buying habits,” and they were distributed across the entire economic population of Cleveland. The company publishing the report intended to sell the statistical analysis to “merchants and manufacturers.” The report establishes a good baseline for products and consumer goods purchased and used in the household. The most popular brand among the families was a Philco; 23 percent had this brand. Philco sets made up about 30 percent of the purchases through 1937 but had steadily declined after that. In the late 1930s RCA and Zenith began to dominate the market. About one-fifth of the people surveyed had car radios as well, though very few had come with the car. Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh, E-1 - E-6.
years previous, 13,000,000 phonographs had been sold. In the previous half a century 18,000,000 phones had been installed. But in six years, between 1922 and 1928, 7,500,000 homes were equipped with radio sets, with a listening audience of one-third of the population. This increase in radio came during the same time that the housing boom produced more single-family homes than ever before in history.\(^{64}\)

The radio achieved what it did by 1927. Just as the automobile changed the perception and reality of distance within the community, so the radio changed the perception of reliance on community institutions. This was especially true with national advertising, but the anecdote, quoted above, about listening to better preachers, is very telling. Radio listeners began to conceive that more options and opportunities existed in the national community than existed in their local community. By 1927, people could move out of their local neighborhoods via the radio because the perception of what community they lived in had changed.

ELECTRICITY AND THE MODERN HOME

Of all the technology systems available, electricity brought the most significant change to the near urban, that is, the modernizing household. Indeed, of the material culture artifacts that impacted housework, most functioned only when attached to an electrical system. Most of the electrical devices available to the homeowner were thought of as labor-saving devices. In order to operate these devices, the home obviously

had to be equipped, or wired, with electrical service and had to be connected to a larger network of electrical production.

Before the early 1920s, housing experts considered electricity not as a necessity, but as a luxury to be “incorporated in the very construction of the dwelling.” In older homes, as noted above, electrical systems had been installed for lighting and not for the general use of household electrical appliances. Housing advocates began to argue that contractors and homeowners should prepare for the expansion of electricity in the home by providing “generously for present and future electrical light and equipment needs." In an article in *House Beautiful*, in 1916, an author asked, “Why use electricity only to light your home? Why not transform housework with some of the many electrical household appliances now on the market?” The article then showed many of the new devices available.  

By the early 1920s, electricity had grown to become the primary utility in the home. New homes in urban areas came specifically equipped with installed electrical systems. In 1923, in an article in *House and Garden*, one author contended that the buyer of a new home “will say little about the style of his house or the period of his furniture, but he will want to know everything you can tell him about electricity [and] the new methods of heating.” Electricity and the devices it ran had become the “most modern” way of “making the home safe and sane.”

---

65 Richard Derby, “Electricity Domesticated,” *House Beautiful* 39 (1916):146-147, 146; Cowan, in *More Work for Mother*, 93-94, briefly discusses how houses were first electrified for lighting only, and how between 1910 and 1920 several household devices that reorganized household work came on the market.

Electrification in the home had to be planned in order to be utilized conveniently. The planning and installation of electrical systems had to foreshadow the future purchase of electrical devices and had to take into consideration how one planned on living and working in the home. Houses in which systems had not been planned with future uses in mind resulted in a “percolator and toaster connected to the chandelier above the dining-room table.” Additionally, in order to use a vacuum, some homeowners were “obliged to unscrew a lamp from the lighting fixture and replace it when through using the cleaner.” Owing to the general lack of electrical outlets in homes, many early electrical appliances were, in fact, designed with electrical plugs that fit into light sockets because many houses did not have wall receptacles.67

Within the house, therefore, homeowners explicitly conceived of the electrical system as it directly related to the use of household electrical devices. They understood the technology only as it related to the specific use, or the future use, of electrical devices. In this way, the principles of consumption were built directly into the home. By having an electrical system and outlets, people in the house visualized having and using electrical devices. The placement of outlets in every room explicitly implied buying other devices and appliances.

In a 1918 article, entitled “Electricity in the Home: Which One Shall We Buy First?” one expert related a story of a friend who wanted to “start in and get some of these electrical appliances.” She informed the author that she wanted “to pick them up

---

gradually, from time to time, until we are equipped as we should be.” She thus explicitly
established a pattern of consumption based on a prioritized list of electrical devices to be
used in the home. At the top of the list was the suggestion to get an “electric flatiron
first.” If summer was coming, the author suggested a fan second, stating that it would
“freshen up the sleeping rooms and the nursery before bedtime and bring more rest.”
Next, came an electric heating pad, “just the thing for warming the bed on the sleeping
porch before you climb in on cold nights.” After this came a succession of appliances, a
tableside grill, a toaster, a waffle iron, coffee pots, and secondary items such as a “tea
kettle, hot cup, immersion heater, curling iron, vibrator.”

During the first decade of the twentieth century, advertisements for electrical
devices had to convince consumers of the need to purchase. The first electrical devices
typically replaced existing non-electrified devices in the home. Admen sought to
promote the modern use and convenience of the appliances by identifying electrical
devices with social status and respectability. These campaigns worked very well, and by
1937, the author of a government publication could state:

Household electrical appliances are not considered as luxuries but rather as
necessities in efficient housekeeping. With the present low cost of the appliances
themselves and the low cost of the electricity to operate them, it is really more
economical to use many of them than to try and get along with old-fashioned
methods and equipment on hand.69

---

68Earl E. Whitehorne, “Electricity in the Home: Which One Shall We Buy First?” House Beautiful 43
(1918): 372. The vibrator was understood at the time to be used for massaging muscles for health purposes.

69 Rose, Cities of Light and Heat, shows how educational campaigns occurred with electric and gas
salesmen in Kansas City and Denver; James C. Williams, “Getting Housewives the Electric Message:
Gender and Energy Marketing in the Early Twentieth Century,” in Horowitz and Mohun, eds., His and
Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology, 95-114, discusses Southern California. Williams states that
by 1915, energy company salesmen accounted for 80% of the company’s total appliance sales, 99; quote
from Technological Trends and National Policy: Including the Social Implications of New Inventions
(Washington: National Resources Committee, 1937), 325. See also Carolyn Goldstein, “From Service to
Housing experts in the first decades of the century suggested that electrical outlets needed to be placed where the appliance was to be used. Often this involved placing outlets in the floor for lamps that would sit on desks, or placing outlets halfway up the wall where it would be convenient to plug in an iron. Installing wiring therefore necessitated an understanding of what appliances would be used and where furniture would be placed. One expert suggested that “any woman who wishes to plan her wiring for economy as well as convenience would do well to locate, in theory, the chief articles of furniture in her room before she begins to assign locations for receptacles.”

In 1927, the New York Edison Company commissioned a book that included a chapter on suggestions for “wiring the new home.” The author acknowledged the modern trend in living rooms to “provide the owner one large room which in turn serves as a parlour, music room, and library.” Since this was the “type of living room found in the great majority of modern houses,” the author discussed the “electrical equipment to cover general living-room needs.”

Lighting trends in the living room moved toward the eliminating of one large central chandelier in favor of “brackets at suitable points along the walls, supplemented by floor and table lamps.” A minimum of three “convenience outlets” provided “connection for one floor lamp or table lamp, and a point at which to connect the vacuum cleaner, the electric heater, or a cord from the tea wagon.” Care had to be given in

---

placing outlets, as “an outlet under the piano or behind a bookcase” could not be “spoken of as a convenience.”

Likewise, planning electrical outlets in the dining room posed additional considerations. The author suggested that there was “hardly a room in the house where electrical facilities will be more frequently employed.” One outlet needed to be centrally placed to be used for a “vacuum cleaner, an electric radiator, or an electric fan.” A moderate demand existed for “one outlet to go under the dining room table, to serve as a source of supply for electrical table cooking devices.”

A 1921 study in Philadelphia found the electric iron as the number one device in 87 percent of “Modern homes” and in 90 percent of “Better class” homes. The vacuum cleaner was listed as second in 83 percent of modern and 84 percent of better homes. Third was the washing machine in 28 percent and 32 percent respectively. Next came the fan, in 10 percent and 30 percent of the homes. And with less than 10 percent came the coffee percolator and the electric range. For all classes of homes, the refrigerator and radio were not listed as even 1 percent, at this time.

Just a few years earlier, labor-saving devices had been very different. In a survey of 60 families published in The Household Budget by John B. Leeds in 1917, the number one “labor-saving” device in all 60 households surveyed was the sewing machine. Coming in second, in 56 of the homes, was the carpet sweeper. Half of the homes also

---

71 Ibid., 28.
72 Ibid., 30.
73 Ibid., 34.
74 See table 6.1 Appliance ownership in 1,300 electrified homes, Philadelphia, 1921, Nye, Electrifying America, 268.
had a vacuum cleaner. It should be noted that these household devices were often not electrified.75

New homebuyers, did not conceive of technology as independent from the house. The unity of the house and technology can be seen in the way in which electrical appliances were marketed and sold. During the introduction of new appliances and systems, electrical companies found that educating consumers was an important first step in developing customers. Often these companies hired salesmen and who went door to door demonstrating appliances in order to mediate the transition from Victorian culture to modern culture. These individuals and institutions served as “agents of cultural mediation” and transformed the dynamic between producers and consumers of electricity.76

Considering the sales force promoting modern technology, one author has suggested that gender made a difference in the marketing of electrical appliances. Misconceptions about what women actually did in the house made it hard to sell appliances such as ranges and cooking devices that entailed dramatic changes in household practice. Smaller electrical appliances such as the iron could be readily sold because they “followed, and clearly made easier, existing patterns of women’s work.” General Electric developed a direct sales marketing plan in which the company could get a foothold in the home by first selling small appliances such as the iron. The electric company offered to take in older flat irons on trade and amassed thousands of the older-style irons. In part, this showed how easily homemakers accepted the new technology,

Figure 4.7: 1924 Electrical service plan installed at 225 North Powell Avenue, showing original light and receptacle locations (drawn by author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>5873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>4249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>4142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacuum</td>
<td>3935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>3245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toaster</td>
<td>2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixer</td>
<td>1634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing Machine</td>
<td>1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Range</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Cleveland Seventh Home Inventory - Percentage of Electrical Appliances in 5870 Surveyed Homes in 1939.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>1466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing Machine</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacuum</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toaster</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixer</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Range</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Cleveland Seventh Home Inventory - Percentage of Electrical Appliances in 5870 Surveyed Homes Prior to 1931.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curlers</td>
<td>1173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacuum</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toaster</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaters</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating Pad</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Range</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Ironer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Number of Electrical Appliances purchased in Muncie, Indiana, May-October, 1923.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toaster</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacuum Cleaners</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clocks</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerator</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Percolator</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waffle Iron</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaters</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating Pad</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Plates</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Range</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookers and Casseroles</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Ironer</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Percentage of Electrical Appliances in Homes Wired for Electricity, 1936.77

77 Technological Trends and National Policy, 325.
and in part it showed how uncomplicated the transition was when the new technology did not disrupt existing patterns of housework.\textsuperscript{78}

The other side of marketing took the form of massive national advertising campaigns that promoted the consumption of electric appliances. In July 1922, General Electric hired Bruce Barton, an advertising agent, to develop a new campaign for the company. Barton organized a campaign, which unified all General Electric appliances into a single sales line and focussed on large themes that showed how electricity could liberate the housewife. Campaigns had titles such as “Make Your House a Home” and “The Home of a Hundred Comforts” and emphasized complete home wiring and the ease and comfort that electrical appliances could bring. Under Barton’s direction, General Electric’s advertising budget grew from $2 million in 1922 to $12 million in 1930.\textsuperscript{79} This type of national advertising made electrical appliances a conspicuous element in consumer desire.

TECHNOLOGY AND LAUNDRY WORK

As shown above, the first labor-saving electrical devices to be accepted and used in the home helped housewives with laundry. Laundry was the most tedious and dangerous work activity in the home, and the first to be alleviated by electrification.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} Williams, “Getting Housewives the Electric Message,” 97, 99, and especially 110n. Nye, Electrifying America, 264.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 268.

\textsuperscript{80} Jacob A. Swisher, “The Evolution of Wash Day,” Iowa Journal of History and Politics 38 (1940): 3-49. There have been several excellent works looking at the history of domestic laundry work. For example, Strasser, Never Done, 104-124, and Joy Parr, “Economics and Homes: Agency,” in Nina E. Lerman et al.,
New technology solved problems within existing established patterns of work. The electric flatiron relieved the person doing laundry from having to use a cast-iron clothes iron. For several decades, the cast iron clothes irons had been heated over the stove and used to press fabrics. Most homes utilized several irons of different shapes and sizes for different fabrics. Ironing with these items was hard and dangerous.81

Though it seems like a simple device, the hand-held electric iron revolutionized the most difficult aspect of the homemaker’s week. Most households could afford the appliance, and large numbers of consumers soon viewed an iron as indispensable. In giving advice on the selection of “electrical equipment” for the home, one domestic housing expert suggested that the homemaker “buy an electric flatiron first.” This, he stated, was not just his advice but was “the verdict of the entire country.” In Muncie, Indiana, for instance, nearly 90 percent of the homes had electric irons by 1923.82

Likewise, the electric washing machine became a standard “labor saving device” in the small house. In an article aimed at a “bride” checking off her “laundry bill,” the author argued that the new bride should “persuade her husband to invest in an electrical washing machine.” Because of the savings associated with the wearing of fabrics, the

eds., Gender and Technology: A Reader (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 329-358. Elizabeth Shove, Comfort, Cleanliness, and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality (New York: Berg, 2003), chap.7, 118, uses a variety of secondary sources to argue that the “enterprise of laundering” was a “co-production involving those who do the washing, their values and ambitions, the conventions and standards of the day and the tools and technologies” they used.”

81 Strasser, Never Done, 108, presents a very detailed description of ironing with a flat iron. An advertisement for the “New Perfection Sad-iron Heater” in a 1912 newspaper showed a woman ironing on a board in the kitchen with two irons heating on a New Perfection oil cook-stove. Advertisement, Marion Star, June 15, 1912.

82 Whitehorne, “Electricity in the Home,” 372. Jessie Martin Breese, “Decorating the Small House: V – The Use of Electricity,” Country Life May 1923, 54-56. This article starts with the sentence, “Electricity, as a labor saver, entered the small house through the laundry.” Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 172.
young couple “sensibly regarded the electrical laundry equipment in their new home as a necessity, rather than a luxury.”83 Although the article was depicting a fictitious couple, the message was one understood by many couples buying new houses – the new house brought new technology to the laundry area.

In the middle-class home, the washing machine became one of the most common appliances to be brought into the house. In Cleveland, as shown by Table 4.1, an electric washing machine was the second most purchased electrical device, after the radio, and the electric iron was third. Wide acceptance of technological systems made the privatization of laundry in the home an irresistible option. Water and sewer systems, electrification of the home, and cheap washing machines allowed the processes of commercial laundries to be packaged in sizes for the home where women were “better able to oversee the consumption of cleanliness.” Acceptance of electrical washing machines over commercial laundry was not necessarily in the best interest of the housewife, but as one historian points out, “emotional selling” successfully promoted the concept that middle-class housewives wanted to own washing machines. Advertisers sold the washing machine as a crucial status symbol, and much like the house itself, the appliance was linked with the health of children and happiness in the home.84

83 Elaine Hollis, “Electrifying the Home,” Sunset October 1920, 70.

84 Arwen Mohun, Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1940 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), quote on 33, 249-67; see also Jeffery M. Hornstein, review of Steam Laundries, by Arwen Mohun, Economic History Services, Nov 10, 2004, [http://www.eh.net/bookreviews/library/0314.shtml]. Hornstein discusses the 1959 “kitchen debate” between Khrushchev and Nixon to argue that “the washing machine was an icon of postwar American prosperity. It became axiomatic that middle class Americans did their own laundry in the privacy of their own(ed) homes,” 2; W. F. Ogburn and M. F. Nimkoff, Technology and the Changing Family (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), point out that commercial laundries decreased in the US between 1929 and 1939, but the amount of money spent for laundry service per household increased 17 %. They state that in 1941, 40% of families in cities still sent their laundry out, 128. Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh, 1939, E-8-E-28. For
The appliances themselves did save labor and money. A government publication showed that with a new electric iron, “an hour’s ironing can be done for the cost of approximately 3 cents.” The author was doubtful that anyone could buy “fuels to heat an old-fashioned [sic] iron at this price.” Likewise, when washing machine prices decreased in the 1930s, households accepted laundry work in the home as an investment and a way to save money.85

New washing machines may have appeared to bring economic savings, but they did not necessarily save on the labor necessary to do laundry. In fact, the first electric machines still required hand labor to operate. Some electrical advocates suggested that new appliances reduced the typical Monday work to “an hour-a-week wash day.” Historians suggest, however, that electrical appliances did not lessen the amount of work, but actually lengthened the workday in the home. In part, the increased amount of time devoted to housework resulted from the rising expectations of middle-class women. During the same time that labor-saving devices entered the home, women began to prepare more meals, sweep more carpets, maintain a larger wardrobe, do more laundry, and spend more time with children. The electric washing machine, however, replaced the grueling regiment of the traditional Monday washday and the physically demanding use of the washboard.86

---

85 Technological Trends and National Policy, 325; Mohun, Steam Laundries, 266.
86 Whitton, The New Servant, 135; Nye, Electrifying America, 272; Cowan, More Work for Mother, 199; see also Parr, “Economics and Homes,” 333; see also Strasser, Never Done, 121-122. Strasser argues that because of the washing machine, middle-class women did laundry in the “isolated privacy of their own homes” and lost the community interaction of the hydrant and clothesline.
Figure 4.8: Ironing the old fashioned way. Note the iron heating on the stove (Abbot, *Tenements of Chicago*, 222).

Figure 4.9: Ironing with an electric iron, from. Note the electric cord run from the overhead light socket (Abbot, *Tenements of Chicago*, 236).
The electric washing machine consisted of a steel tub with a motor attached to the bottom and a wringer, with a pair of wooden or rubber rollers, attached to the top. The machine did not fill or run automatically. The operator filled the tub with heated water from a hose or bucket. Soap flakes were then added and mixed. Clothes and linens placed in the tub were then washed by the agitation of the motor. The operator then manually lifted each article and ran it through the ringer and into rinse water in the tub where the clothes were moved around the water with a stick. Clothes, once rinsed, were

87 This photograph is also used in Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 255. Note the exposed galvanized water lines and the water heater.
fed back through the wringer and collected into a basket to be taken outdoors to the clothesline.\(^{88}\)

Contractors built homes with space for the new machines planned for in the basement. Plumbers placed water lines and a soapstone double sink along an exterior wall. The washing machine was placed next to this sink where it could be easily filled with water and where clothes could be rinsed. Plumbing for the machine also required coordination with the electrical system. In the near urban house, the laundry area was often in close proximity to the stairs, at the top of which an exterior door allowed easy ground level access to the rear yard and laundry lines.\(^{89}\)


\(^{89}\) Whitton, *The New Servant*, 51-52, discusses wiring for the “lighter end and the cellar” with “one double outlet placed either between the washing machine and ironer or ironing board.” Additionally, the book provides a room layout diagram on 53. See also the “Marvels of the Electrical Home” advertisement in Ierley, *The Comforts of Home*, 178, which shows a cutaway view of an electrified house with people using various devices and appliances. Note the laundry room in the basement with an electric washer next to the soapstone tub and the ironer, a machine that was heavily advertised but not extensively purchased. See also “Home of a Hundred Comforts” illustration from a 1925 General Electric Company booklet shown in Nye, *Electrifying America*, 189. This illustration clearly shows electrical conduit running from a first floor outlet to a basement light, to a duplex wall outlet in the laundry area. Note the electric washer and ironer both plugged into the outlet. The consuming public did not equally accept all labor saving devices. During the same time the washing machine and electrical iron became central to technology in the home, the ironing machine, or ironer, was advertised as an essential part of the modern home. In Whitton, *The New Servant*, the electric ironer is discussed in a whole chapter. See the chapter, “Electric Ironers – Hand and Machine,” 151-165. In Cleveland in 1938, the modern home was still being sold with a “washing machine and an ironer in the laundry room.” By 1939, however, of over 5800 houses inventoried, only 829 households had ironing machines and only 229 of these had been purchased before 1931, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 26, 1938; *Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh*, E-19; Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 254, discusses how “ironers never became big sellers.”
Refrigeration in the house became one of the hallmarks of modernization of the home. By 1910, the traditional icebox had taken its place as a modern convenience in the modern kitchen. Many house plans even adopted configurations to make the management of the icebox more convenient. Refrigeration technology, however, dynamically changed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Housing experts at the time placed the change within an understanding of modernism.

According to housing experts, the “modern scheme of living” made artificial refrigeration in the kitchen a necessity. The traditional icebox, seen as the answer to these modern needs in 1910, had, by 1925, become labeled “the old-fashioned ice box.” Homemakers, however, continued to purchase millions of iceboxes until 1930.90

The technology of refrigeration changed the way in which foods could be cooled in the home. In the early nineteenth century, the icehouse was a common outbuilding in most large residences. Traditionally, ice would be harvested and stored in a protected, often underground, vault packed with sawdust as an insulator. In this way, many wealthy people had ice throughout a large part of the year. Additionally, outbuildings built on streams or springs could keep foods, such as milk and cream, cool throughout the year. In the same way, ice harvested from frozen rivers and lakes could be sold in urban areas and used to cool foods in specially created insulated iceboxes.

When commercial electrification allowed large industrial refrigeration, icehouses began to freeze ice commercially throughout the year in urban areas.

The word refrigerator came into use sometime around 1803 with the invention, by a Maryland farmer, of a device for the transportation of butter to market. As late as 1926, however, only 34.6 percent of the population was using refrigeration to protect foods. In many homes, people used cellars and even living rooms to store food. When temperatures rose above 60 degrees, however, these spaces became entirely inadequate.91

In 1915, Good Housekeeping magazine published an article on how to build the “Rochester Cold-Box.” Built on “the same principal as the ice-house,” the directions included the construction of a zinc tank with a drain in the bottom, around which a 2x2x3 packing case would be placed with legs keeping the box off the floor. A space of three inches between the zinc liner and the box was to be filled with sawdust or fine shavings. Once completed, the ice-box would keep 50 pounds of ice for five days.92

The principal of artificial refrigeration is to provide an environment in which perishable food can be stored in temperatures between 32 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Below this, foods will freeze, and above this, bacteria begin to multiply rapidly, and food spoils.93 Like the Rochester cold-box, the key to keeping foods cold was a well-insulated box.

---

91 Ierley, The Comforts of Home, 80. E. Clark King, Jr., “The Advantages of Electrical Refrigeration,” Better Homes and Gardens July 1926: 13; King mentions keeping food in these rooms of the home but does not give statistics or evidence. It was a common practice throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century to have a vegetable cellar in the basement. This was typically the furthest room away from the heater. In the near urban house the vegetable cellar usually had a plank door and was filled with wooden shelves. Because of the small size of the basements, often the room was located next to the coal cellar.

92 “The Rochester Cold-Box,” Good Housekeeping January 1915, 93-94.

The commercially manufactured icebox contained two compartments, one for a large block of ice and one for the storage of food. Air circulated around the block of ice and then passed through the other compartments to keep food cool. Models that placed the ice on the top of the compartment worked well because the heavier cold air dropped to the bottom of the box.

During most of the 1920s, when new homeowners purchased a “refrigerator,” they were purchasing an icebox. From 1923 through 1927, families purchased more than a million iceboxes a year. Electric refrigeration, however, began to grow as advances in technology made the systems more reliable. Advertisers were quick to promote electrical refrigeration. The limited number of units sold during the 1920s, however, is a clear indicator that this technology was slow to affect the average modern kitchen. Even a 1922 author describing the merits of the electrical refrigerator noted that “for good, legitimate reasons, the majority of us must continue to use a refrigerator which requires icing.”

Since the icebox required a routine of constant maintenance and attention (see below), sales of electric refrigerators increased every year. It was late in the decade, however, before the electric refrigerator displaced the icebox in the new home. In 1920,

---

94 *Technological Trends and National Policy*, 317, 316; Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 128-143, discusses the early development of the electric compression machine and the competition between gas and electricity as a power source. The first electrical units were produced in 1918 by Kelvinator. General Electric entered the market in the mid-1920s. Though studies found natural gas systems to be more efficient, General Electric decided to pursue an air-cooled electrical unit. The fundamental key to GE’s development of the electrical refrigerator unit was the fact that an electrical refrigerator ran 24 hours a day and thus served to increase demand and profitability of home electrical service. GE’s “Monitor Top” refrigerator went into production in 1927. Virtually unlimited advertising funds pushed the Monitor Top to the top of the market and guaranteed the success of the electrical units.

95 “Electricity or Ice,” *Good Housekeeping* May 1922, 77.
manufacturers sold 737,000 iceboxes compared to just 10,000 electric refrigerators. Between 1926 and 1935, however, manufacturers had sold 8,255,000 of electric units.  

The advance in household electrical refrigeration can be illustrated by one manufacturer. In 1931, Sears, Roebuck and Company developed an inexpensive electric refrigerator in order to expand what they saw as an untapped market. The company bought the patents of an existing unit and hired refrigeration engineers to design an appliance that could be easily repaired.

The innovations included a removable freezing unit and a removable electrical unit that the customer could remove and return for repair. Other innovations included the use of aluminum shelving that was guaranteed not to rust and was much cheaper to produce than the stainless steel that other companies had been using. The result was a serviceable appliance that could be manufactured for an affordable price.

The Sears, Roebuck merchandising department had noted that 60 percent of all refrigerators sold in the United States had been four cubic feet in size, but most families wanted to buy a six-cubic-foot unit. Sears produced a new line of refrigerators named the “Coldspot” and sold a six-foot unit for $149.50, the price of the standard four-foot unit. Within ten years, the Coldspot became one of the best selling consumer appliances. The promotion of this refrigerator and the relaxation of credit terms resulted in high sales. In Cleveland, one housing survey showed that the Sears Coldspot accounted for only 7.3

---

96 Technological Trends and National Policy, 316, 317. Owing to these numbers, even as late as 1936, only 34.2% of homes that had been wired for electricity had an electric refrigerator.
percent of electrical refrigerators purchased by consumers in 1934 but accounted for 32.4 percent of all refrigerators purchased in 1939.97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Electric Refrigerators Sold</th>
<th>Iceboxes Sold</th>
<th>Residential Units Constructed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>737,000</td>
<td>247,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>571,000</td>
<td>449,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>760,000</td>
<td>716,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>1,139,000</td>
<td>871,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>1,282,000</td>
<td>893,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>1,231,000</td>
<td>937,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>1,290,000</td>
<td>849,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>390,000</td>
<td>1,116,000</td>
<td>810,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>560,000</td>
<td>980,000</td>
<td>753,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>840,000</td>
<td>1,053,000</td>
<td>509,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>850,000</td>
<td>419,000</td>
<td>330,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>965,000</td>
<td>282,000</td>
<td>254,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>840,000</td>
<td>213,000</td>
<td>134,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1,080,000</td>
<td>244,000</td>
<td>93,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1,390,000</td>
<td>276,000</td>
<td>126,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Sales by Year of Refrigerators and Houses.98

Through the search for better technologies, the kitchen went through the same transitional phase as the rest of the house. It was a microcosm of the entire home. Again,

97 Boris Emmet and John E. Jeuck, Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 390-92; Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh, E-9. Shelley Nickels, “‘Preserving Women:’ Refrigerator Design as a Social Process in the 1930s,” Technology and Culture 42 (2002): 693-727, argues that the refrigerator was designed for the high-end market during the 1920s, but after 1930, the “streamlined curve, vegetable drawer, and door handle” were designed for the mass market as part of the servantless house. For instance, refrigerator doors needed to be designed so that they could be opened by a homemaker with both hands full.

this is a clear example showing that advertising did not reflect actual living conditions. The model kitchen was not the real kitchen. Yet the sales also show how consumers knew what a “modern” kitchen was supposed to be.

MANAGING REFRIGERATION

Management of the icebox required a good deal of work. Prices for ice jumped from 30 cents per hundred pounds in 1910 to 70 cents in 1920. To get the greatest efficiency from the unit, homemakers needed to follow a series of management procedures. First, the homemaker needed to “keep the ice chamber filled to its capacity,” but no food should be placed there. The cooling capacity of the icebox was dependent on the surface area of the ice block. A six-inch ice cube had one-fourth the area of a twelve-inch ice cube. As the ice melted, water and moisture needed constant attention. Second, the doors of the unit were not to be opened unnecessarily, or left open. The icebox had to be wiped down whenever moisture appeared on the outside, and the unit needed to be repainted or varnished at regular intervals. Additionally, placement in the house was important as units “should not be subjected to climate conditions.” Homemakers were warned against “placing the refrigerator on the rear porch,” but the very best place was “in the entryway, or in the kitchen near the rear entrance.”

The key component to the management of the icebox was procuring ice. When ice melted and became low, the homemaker would hang out the ice sign, wait for the
iceman, then clean out the ice compartment, take the ice, and pay the iceman. After this, the homemaker had to “clean up the traces of ice drippings and muddy tracks.” This was constantly repeated as “by tomorrow or the next day, the ice will be melted away and the programme must be repeated.” Some advocates of the electric refrigerator referred to this as an “annoyance and a bother.”

Many house designs of the 1920s had a specific place designed for the icebox. Arthur suggested in 1914 that house builders construct an entry hall for the specific placement of the refrigerator. A small pantry placed in combination with a service hall became a common design. Arthur argued that the refrigerator should be specially configured to receive ice from outside of the house proper. He urged that: “In all cases the ice should be fed to the box from the outside. This simple expedient is often neglected, and the iceman with muddy feet spoils the look of the kitchen floor and makes unnecessary work.” In 1914, he reiterated this argument, stating additionally that an ordinary refrigerator could be ordered “with an opening in the end instead of the top, at an extra cost of probably five dollars.” A door in the wall of the house could be “opened from the outside, the ice dropped in, and everything is then handled from the inside of the pantry or hall.”

---


The McCray Refrigerator Company, of Kendallville, Indiana, advertised that they “originated” the “outside icing arrangement” (Fig. 4.11). The outside icing door could be placed on any residential model. The feature, they stated, found instant appreciation as it eliminated “the trail of muddy boots and dripping cake of ice.”

The storage and delivery of ice also presented potential concerns for the homemaker. In some cities, among the “poorer classes,” deliverymen brought ice by push cart, often with “a filthy piece of carpet or a worse quilt thrown over it” to keep the
ice from melting. In other sections of the city, dividing cakes of ice on the sidewalk was “almost too common a practice to attract notice.” Additionally, naturally produced ice could be cut from water supplies “near and below a sewer line” or a pond “draining into which was a slaughterhouse.”

Advances in the technology of mechanical refrigeration did affect the home. Large industrial electrical and gas units served to supply block ice commercially, and advances in refrigerated transportation brought a variety of fresh produce and meats into the local market place. In large part, refrigeration had an impact on the home canning of produce. Additionally, cheaper, constant sources of ice in major cities and even smaller towns allowed the wide acceptance of the icebox, itself a technological breakthrough.

103 “McCray Refrigerators”, advertisement, House and Garden 43 April 1923, 8.

104 “Is the Ice Bill Exorbitant?” 663, 664.

105 By around 1893, the quantity of food placed in cold storage became large enough to affect foodways. The popularity of green vegetables began to be reflected in the canning industry by the first decade of the twentieth century. During this period “asparagus, beets, okra, pumpkin, sweet potato, rhubarb, sauerkraut, spinach, and squash” were added to the commercial list of food already containing “tomatoes, corn, peas, and beans.” Lafayette B. Mendel, Changes in the Food Supply and Their Relation to Nutrition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916),14, 39. Lynd and Lynd, Middletown, 156-157, referred to the changing diet of people in Muncie, Indiana. During the 1890s, food sources were separated into a “summer diet” and a “winter diet.” By 1923, the Lynds saw a change, for housewives were “buying more fruit and vegetables throughout the winter.” They attributed new buying habits to both “new mechanical inventions” and the “development of the modern women’s magazine.”
Figure 4.12: Wall framing for exterior ice door (*House Beautiful*, 43 1918, 289).

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, refrigeration was a passive receptor of community. The production and delivery of ice tied every home with an ice-box into a complex, community-oriented delivery system. As technology changed, the introduction of electricity to the refrigerator removed the dependence on the community-business interaction of ice delivery. Neighborhood institutions such as the local butcher or iceman had to serve larger areas, or in the case of some near urban communities, became obsolete all together. Better refrigeration allowed the longer storage of food. Gradually, the homeowner became the less dependent on a daily trip to the meat market. By 1929, electrical refrigeration was eliminating the connection to daily ice delivery for the modern home.
HEATING SYSTEM

Much like refrigeration, heating systems within the house were passive receivers of community as well. The actual heating unit had an organized delivery system for fuel. The near urban house had both the transitional delivery system and the technology. The house type could adapt to either one.

Though not often thought about, contemporaries held that improvements in heating technology had had a lot to do with the modern, smaller house movement. One such housing expert suggested that “not only must a modern house look well and be of good construction, but the mechanical equipment: heating, plumbing, and electric wiring, must be practical and so worked out as to contribute to the comfort of the family.” Heating was an elemental part of this comfort. During the first decades of the century, experts argued that “heating is by many considered to be of first importance; to be cold is even worse than being hungry.”

Heating technology had been around for several decades. Victorian homes had heating, but the units were not always reliable and certainly did not have comfort perfected. The Spencer family, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, lived in a Queen Ann Victorian house built in 1885. They had a coal-fired furnace intended to heat only the first floor “and the coldest room on the second floor.” All of the second floor rooms had

---

106 In some cases not just passive receivers of community. On the Hilltop, the coal supplier, the West Side Lumber Company, advertised that its managers were “100 Per Cent Hilltop,” all lived and worked in the community. H. G. Deems, the manager of the coal department was the long-time Sunday school superintendent at Hogue Memorial Presbyterian Church and was an extremely well respected community leader, Advertisement, Hilltop Record, February 23, 1923.

fireplaces. The family bought coke by the train-car load, splitting the load with a family member who also lived on the street. A hired laborer moved the coke in a wheelbarrow from the pile on the street to an iron coal chute emptying into the basement.109

Inefficiency could also result in costly expenses. In 1904, one family found that the “cellar heater” in their new house “consumed such an amount of fuel, without warming the house, that they could not afford to use it.” Consequently, the family had to “resort to stoves with all the increase of labor and extra trouble to keep clean that stoves cause.” The heater, in their case, was “always empty, cold, and absolutely useless.”110 New technology during the first two decades of the twentieth century did not seek to change the idea of the heater as much as the efficiency of the units.

As early as 1910, Arthur discussed changes to the house plan because of new heating technology. He observed that most “moderate priced houses” were heated by a furnace or hot water by the first decade of the twentieth century. The new technology created a reliable environment and houses could be designed and built with large openings “made between the hall and front room, and that and the dining room.”111

108 Ibid.
109 Spencer, The Spencers of Amberson Avenue, 25.
Figure 4.13: Circulation diagram of a coal-fired furnace (Sears, Roebuck, *Modern Heating Systems*, 1915, 33).

As heating technology changed, heating units became more efficient. The technological aspects of new systems sometime became more important to some than the aesthetics. As one contemporary noted, the husband “doesn’t care what kind of house she builds as long as he can pick the furnace.”

In newly-constructed houses, the placement of the furnace became an important aspect of the design. Specialists had to install the heating units meeting technical specifications to insure that the apparatuses would work correctly. Building laws also

---

required “heat-pipes passing up through the walls to be covered with asbestos paper.” Whether or not local codes actually required it, one author suggested that “this should always be done, as it not only lessens the danger of fire, but keeps the pipes from radiating heat and promotes the flow of warm air.”

In 1919, another expert argued that “the modern furnace is a very different article compared with that of twenty years ago.” The planning of the house determined the success of the new furnace. “It is obvious that a compactly planned house can be more easily heated by a furnace than a house which is spread over a considerable area.” “If a furnace is to be used, it should be considered in the construction of the house, and ample opportunity given to run the pipes without cramping.”

The new heating installations in the near urban home still required the storage of coal and the daily or hourly feeding of the furnace. The storage of coal was a significant part of the requirements of the cellar during the 1920s. The West Side Lumber Company delivered coal to many of the houses on Chase Avenue, dropping the coal into the coal room in the basement through a metal door located at the side of the porch. Coal dust permeated so much of the house that dust is still in evidence on the sill plates in the basement at 151 North Chase and in a house at 220 North Binns Boulevard as well.

Yearly maintenance for the furnace was also required. The above author implored readers to “take good care of the heating apparatus during the summer. After the fire is let out, clean all the old coal and ashes out of the furnace or boiler, clean the

113 Randall, “Heating Your House,” 140.

114 Ibid.
boiler flues with a brush, and brush off the inside doors and the firepot. Take down the smoke pipe, clean and put it back.”

Constant attention had to be maintained in order to keep the heating system running smoothly to provide comfort in the home. Most heating plants, if installed properly, would heat a home effectively with “a little coal thrown on in the morning, and night, with one light shaking each day and a thorough shaking down once a week.” But as one author noted, “Every heating system must be run with care and intelligence. Many perfectly good systems are unsatisfactory because of ignorance, neglect or both. Take a lesson or two from the man who installs your work. Learn how to keep a clear and bright fire, how to bank the fire at night, and bring it up quickly in the morning. You ought to know these things, even if you do not run your own heater.”

During the 1920s, improvements to heating technology kept pace with other technologies in the home. The Spencer family, as mentioned above, replaced their original coal furnace in January of 1928. The new furnace used more coal than the old furnace, and so soon they converted the unit to gas. Though the new furnace still did not heat the second floor of the house, the family “ceased to be slaves of the furnace.”

Another family installed a new system, stating that “in the place of the stoves which were our reliance for warmth in the cold weather, but which left the hall and several rooms cold, we have a furnace in the basement which provides a genial temperature all over the house.” Indeed, as heating systems improved, they became an

115 Ibid., 198.
117 Spencer, The Spencers of Amberson Avenue, 25.
Figure 4.14: Furnace parts placed in basement before installation (*House Beautiful* 44 [1918], 367).

Figure 4.15: Furnace installed in basement (*House Beautiful* 44 [1918], 367).
CONCLUSION

The near urban house type was the first form to try and come to grips with the new evolving culture of technology. The house came to embody new forms of household management and convenience. As technology continued to change and advance, the conceptualization of the house form also changed and advanced to conform to new understandings of technology.

By the late 1930s, the average house plan had undergone a significant transition. An advertisement read, “Which is modern? A look in the basement will tell you.” The ad, showing pictures of two identical houses proclaimed, “Two houses look exactly alike to all appearances, yet only one is truly modern…” The difference was the inclusion of the newest technology, an incinerator, “the crowning convenience for modern housekeepers.”\footnote{Advertisement, Kernerator Incineration, Building Age April 1930, 44.} Newer and better technologies equaled a better and more modern house. The near urban house type had become antiquated and old-fashioned. People who had the means moved from the near urban neighborhoods, many less than ten years old, into more fashionable developments with updated technological systems, only a few blocks away.

In these many respects, then, by 1914, the American home was becoming a box for technology. The general view of housing at the turn of the century is that Victorian decoration gave way to the less decorative Colonial Revival. Stylistic changes certainly played a part in the change, but to what extent a change in style drove the transformation of housing is unclear. By 1930, Leonard Reaume, the President of the National
Association of Real Estate Boards, noted, “Eighty-four percent of American families have an annual income of $2,000.00 a year or less,” and “they can afford to spend about $500.00 to $600.00 a year” for a home. He called for the building industry to meet this demand and provide housing for this segment of the population.119

The new housing of the 1920s had begun to meet this demand, but it took large housing initiatives and federal government involvement during the 1930s to solidify a new housing stock for the middle-class. The Own Your Own Home campaign, as will appear in the next chapter, had been very effective at promoting home ownership, if for only one segment of society. This segment however, was the very segment that was pushing technology into the home.

Technology itself can produce politicized artifacts. The traditional role of women and the use of technology in the home is a clear example of this. During the 1920s there was a clear elimination of domestic servant spaces in the near urban house and a restructuring of the daily housework routine. Some authors have discussed this change as a transition in which women had to learn new skills. When looking at the people on Chase Avenue, however, another option becomes clear. There was not the rejection of old technology, with a learning curve for woman’s work. During the 1920s there was a transition from one technology to another. By buying a box for technology the home owner, in one step, acquired all of the new roles that the new housing brought.

Women did not learn new skills and reject old methods of housework as much as they accepted and learned one new way, the new way inspired by a domestic technological revolution.

In 1926, Edward Eagan moved his family into a brand new home at 169 North Chase Avenue. The family had owned a home on South Harris Avenue, one block east of the newly developing Hilltop neighborhoods. Eagan was employed as a wood worker at the West Side Lumber Company, working in the lumber mill. He developed skills as a carpenter and also worked in the community as a building contractor. At 38, Eagan had purchased a home appropriate for his middle-class managerial aspirations.

Eagan lived with his wife Mary, a son, Edward, and two young daughters, Olive and Edith. His widowed father-in-law, Burns Kimbrough, had also been living with the family for several years.

Both Edward and his wife were born in Ohio, and both grew up in Columbus. Edward came from a working-class neighborhood where his mother, who had been widowed after immigrating from Ireland, worked as a chambermaid. Mary’s father worked as a pole setter for the local electrical company.

Edward and Mary married in 1913. He was 25, and she was 19. Their first son was born that year. Three years later they had their second child. Two years after that, they had their third child.
Figure 5.1: Floor plans, 169 North Chase Avenue (drawn by author).
The house on Chase Avenue does not seem to have been big enough for the Eagan family. A 12’-3” by 22’-4” living room filled the front of the house. This front room connected to a 14’-2” by 13’-9” dining room and a kitchen with breakfast room beyond. The second floor contained three bedrooms and a bath.

When the family moved into the home, they had a 14-year-old son, daughters of 10 and 8 years of age, and Mary’s father who was 66. For the next four years, the six family members shared the living spaces of the home.

By 1930, Eagan had moved up to become a foreman at the mill, and the family moved to Fremont Street in the Broadview Addition. The previous year the stock market crash began what would become known as the Great Depression, but the Eagan family was doing very well with three kids in school and Edward’s income providing for
everything that they needed. Though they did not yet have a radio, the family ate
together every night between 5:00 and 6:00 o’clock, and times were good.

Some time after moving into the home on Fremont Street, Edward lost his job at
the lumber mill. He continued to work as a contractor, but times only got harder for the
family.

In 1935, Eagan bought a new home on Guernsey Avenue in the Broadview
Addition, just around the corner from where they were living. His son, Edward, had
begun to work and quickly moved up into a management position at a downtown Kroger
grocery store. The younger Edward, at 21, had married a young lady, Beulah, he had met
at West High School. The couple resided in the house on Guernsey with the rest of the
family. Beulah had graduated from high school and had attended a school in which she received office training. She worked as a stenographer at a downtown law firm.

The young couple, both of whom had steady employment, supported the family. Tensions ran high, however, as the senior Edward brooded over his inability to find work. He did work three days a week on the Columbus relief rolls. In January, the elder Edward became asphyxiated while working on the family car in the garage. He was found and rescued by Mr. Kimbough. Doctors worked on him for an hour before he was revived.

Wednesday, January 8, 1935, began like any other day. Buelah walked the three blocks to the streetcar and took it downtown to work. Edward worked a late shift at Kroger’s and was not home when Buelah returned from work, nor when the family sat down for dinner. Though he normally ate in his shirt sleeves, after dinner the elder Eagan
put on his suit jacket and went down to the basement to do some painting. Buelah followed a little later to complete some laundry.

As Buelah moved the electric washing machine over to the soapstone sink, she saw Edward pull a .38 caliber revolver from the suit coat he was wearing. She immediately ran for the stairs, but before she could climb the third stair the elder Edward fired the revolver striking her in the head. As she fell back, he shot her again, sending a second bullet through her arm and into her body. Buelah fell onto her back at the foot of the stair. Edward proceeded to place the revolver to his own head and pulled the trigger, his housing troubles seemingly over.
In 1930, the Eagans had moved from Chase Avenue into a home with a higher value and in a more prestigious neighborhood, though just several blocks away. Striving to attain the middle-class lifestyle that prevailed as the dominant cultural theme in America during the 1920s was fraught with tension, stress, and, in the case of the Eagan family, tragedy. The home became the central image in the context of middle-class progress, but it also showcased the trials associated with slow upward mobility.¹

The desire for middle-class consumption fueled the eventual problems. The need to maintain an automobile, which was becoming increasingly required to live in the Broadview Addition, resulted in the father’s illness. The desire for a young couple to own their own home caused tension between generations. At 21, with steady employment, even in the midst of the Depression, Buelah and Edward saw their future as homeowners. This decision was not based on what was good for the family, necessarily, but was a part of a general cultural trend toward the consumption of housing.

* * *

Working from the material artifact, and specific information, the familiar narrative of housing and suburbanization in the United States can be expanded to include what came between the city and the suburb during the 1920s. For most Midwestern and many other growing cities in this transformational period, near urban neighborhoods developed as an extension of the fabric of older neighborhoods.

¹ The above narrative was drawn from “Hilltop Resident Slays Son’s Wife, Then Shoots Self,” Columbus Evening Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, May 9, 1935; “Unemployed Man Shoots Self After Killing Son’s Wife,” Hilltop Record, May 10, 1935; Obituaries, Columbus Evening Dispatch, May 10, 1935; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Enumeration District 25:263.
In Columbus, after the successful development of the Hilltop Addition, and Chase Avenue, near urban neighborhoods continued to be developed on the west side of Columbus, Ohio. When compared to the Hilltop Addition, the new developments show even greater evidence of the transition between city and suburb. A second stage of near urban development began in 1924, with the housing additions developed on the south side of West Broad Street. Two of these developments, the Broadview Addition and the Westgate Addition, provide clear examples of the stage beyond the near urban.

BROADVIEW AND WESTGATE ADDITIONS

The development of the Broadview Addition began in 1923. Although just a few blocks apart, there are differences between the Broadview Addition and the Hilltop Addition. Much of the difference stems from the ever-increasing importance of the automobile. This was not the only reason for changes in the two neighborhoods, however. The house had become a consumer item similar to other large, desirable, class-distinctive purchases. And now, the street became an artery to hold individual, consumable boxes for technology and ceased being a connector of community.

The Broadview Addition was platted by Heed and Holton, a company that had previously developed two near urban neighborhoods on the Hilltop. It was platted from a 70-acre plot, still a working farm in 1921.² Heed and Holton advertised and marketed Broadview conceptually as a suburban subdivision. That is, the addition was marketed,

² Graves and Westervelt, Abstract of Title, Lot 21, Plat Book No. 15, Page 10, Recorder’s Office, Franklin County, Ohio. In possession of homeowner, 220 S. Binns Avenue.
not as a diversified community like other neighborhoods on the Hilltop, but as a community of privilege within the city limits.

Advertisements started in February 1923, corresponding to the announcement of the great building boom occurring on the Hilltop that year. By this time electric lines had already been constructed. In March the final ordinance for sewers had passed City Council, and the contracts for the infrastructure were awarded in April. The city engineer was also making plans to asphalt the major streets of the addition. Heed and Holton were, as a local journalist noted, “making remarkable progress in their Broadview Addition.”

Heed and Holton marketed Broadview as “the new subdivision of exclusive high class homes.” The “district of winding boulevards and green parks and new homes among growing elm trees” had been designed by William Pitkin Jr., “a landscape architect of national reputation,” a claim reminiscent of the early large subdivisions outside East Coast cities. In fact, the developers sold Broadview as the equivalent of those newly developing suburbs. This is particularly significant because Broadview was contiguous to late streetcar developments that extended the walking city beyond the boundaries of Columbus proper. Advertisements advised readers that “well removed from the smoke and grime of the downtown sections, you will yet be living within the city with direct transportation in West Broad Street by auto, city, and interurban lines.”


4 Broadview Addition advertisement, Hilltop Record, April 6, 1923; Broadview Addition advertisement, Hilltop Record, April 12, 1923. See also full-page advertisement for Broadview, Hilltop Record, April 24, 1924. Governor Donahey attended a groundbreaking in the Broadview Addition in April 1925. He dug into one of the housing lots with a golden spade and afterward discussed the Hilltop development with Mr. Heed of the development company, “Gov. Donahey at Broadview,” Hilltop Record, April 16, 1925.
The lots in Broadview sold very quickly. Before the city had finished with improvements, Heed and Holton had released nearly $100,000 worth of home sites. These sites were no longer available to a mixed residential market, however. The developer sold the lots, as the advertising suggests, to the “most successful business and professional men of the Hilltop.” These professionals had built 40 homes in the addition by September 1924, even though Heed and Holton did not offer lots for purchase until October 1923. It was no wonder that within two years of establishment, real-estate companies considered Broadview the most successful development on the Hilltop.5

This addition was not like the older areas of the Hilltop, in which community involvement had been fundamental to the growing area. Mixed-use neighborhoods had been the key element in the walking city and in the early street development of near urban communities. In Broadview, however, Heed and Holton’s advertising sold consumers on the idea of separation. The local newspaper ran advertisements that proclaimed the “entire addition, even Broad Street, is restricted against business of every kind,” a defining feature of Broadview’s progressiveness. Broadview, therefore, drastically altered the near urban ideal of separation from city but cohesion of community.6

Yet the transition was not complete. The advertisements for Broadview claimed that the addition still participated in the walking environment. The developers ran advertising selling the fact that “community life would be complete...for there are churches of every denomination within easy walking distance” and “splendid stores

5 Broadview Addition advertisement, Hilltop Record, September 25, 1924. This advertisement is a full-page ad with several photographs of the development.
conveniently on hand.” Heed and Holton, nevertheless and, ironically, advertised the pedestrian amenities of the Broadview addition with transportation directions that necessitated an automobile. In one advertisement, prospective buyers were asked to come out and visit over the weekend. If a customer could not make it, however, the developer would “send an auto any weekday.”

Broadview established the conceptual identity of the suburb that was placed in the path of the near urban community. One subdivision of “exclusive high-class homesites” where “nothing but single houses can be built” may not have had a detrimental effect on the near urban community. The problem came when other development companies repeated the success of the “exclusive” subdivision, a subdivision of strictly residential structures and no commercial development. With the acceptance of the idea of residential neighborhoods that restricted mixed use, the walking distance became greater and greater as successive residential additions developed. Thus, with the creation and acceptance of Broadview, the development chain in the commercial corridor had been broken.

While Heed and Holton still advertised Broadview as within walking distance of urban amenities, subsequent developments did not even allude to this idea. In the fall of 1924, the Pavey-Johnson Company began a new addition just north of the Broadview

---


7 Advertisement, “Neighborhood of Broadview,” Hilltop Record, April 12, 1923. At the bottom of this advertisement, the H.G. Butler Company was listed as “Special Agents.” Heed and Holton also announced: “We have a list of those who have already bought in Broadview. We are proud of this list and will be glad to show it to you.” This was another example of the exclusive nature of this addition, turning the near urban neighborhood into a conceptualized suburb.

8 Broadview Addition advertisement, Hilltop Record, April 12 and April 19, 1923.
Addition. The developer did not base the Westgate Addition on the idea of community at all. The original advertisements called the new development the Ideal Westgate Addition. That this subdivision would be called “ideal” is fitting, because the addition became the anti-near urban neighborhood and hastened the death of the pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. The concept of an ideal neighborhood allowed leaders within the Hilltop community to imagine their buying homes in the new neighborhood -- and imagining products and purchasing was one of the core concepts of consumer culture.9

The Pavey-Johnson Company developed the Westgate Addition purely because of the success of other residential additions and the motivation of making higher profits on the Hilltop than in other areas. The company had completed a survey of the city and reported that “27 representatives of the Real Estate Board found that the Hilltop section had been enjoying more development than any other section of the city.” The Pavey-Johnson Company, which had not previously worked on the Hilltop, advertised in large, bold letters: “The demand exists, the supply is limited, buy in Westgate now -- it will mean a profit to you later.” Pavey-Johnson’s advertising clearly shows the profit motive in buying a commodity – the house -- and premeditated placement of the subdivision which was “lying directly in the path of development.”10

Westgate developed with the attributes familiar to later suburban development.

The Columbus school board bought a ten-acre site for a new school. City Council bought

9 In Ella Briggs, “The House with a Future,” Country Life May 1923, 62, the author states that “in the back of most of our heads is the thought of one day building and owning our very own house, in which we can incorporate our own ideas and wishes. And although the time we may afford to build may be slow in coming, yet we are always thinking of something new for our house.” Advertisement, “Ideal Westgate Addition,” Hilltop Record, September 25, 1924.

10 Hilltop Record, September 25, 1924
a site for a new park. Since Westgate was a “restricted residence subdivision,” no commercial buildings would be built along Broad Street. The addition had the restrictions and amenities of the automobile suburbs but was touted as being “within the city limits.” Like Broadview, prospective buyers were invited out to see the new development. This time, however, the consumer’s options of getting there were even more limited. A person could “drive out” or could call the office, which would “gladly provide a car.” This, coupled with the lack of sidewalks, eliminated any vestige of the walking city.

By the time of the development of the Westgate Addition, the commodification of the house had changed the size and style of the residential structure. The house did not incorporate the idea of community as it had before. Gone were the porches and the repetitive nature of the dense grouping of street lots. In Westgate, the lots had been increased to 40 feet, and no sidewalks were provided. Two months after the opening of the Westgate Addition, the West Side Lumber Company advertised that “The day of small home building is here.” This advertisement was accompanied by a picture of small, detached homes on large lots, with no porches and no sidewalks (Fig. 5.6). The picture looks like a suburban subdivision, but it also looks like what had been built in the Westgate Addition.12

---

11 Ibid. The directions at the bottom of this advertisement read, “Drive directly west on Broad, just beyond Hague Avenue.” This was an obvious attempt to market the addition to those with automobiles. One article, “New Westgate Addition,” *Hilltop Record*, May 1924, suggested that there were 828 building lots in the addition.; the addition became so popular that another 190 acres was purchased and platted by Pavey-Johnson, with 33 acres devoted to a new city park. “Westgate Park Addition Opens,” *Hilltop Record*, April 2, 1925.

12 Advertisement, West Side Lumber, *Hilltop Record*, December 11, 1924.
The day of small home building is here!

How long have you been paying rent? Let's take as an example a man who pays $30 a month rent, for say, eighteen years. In that time he will have paid out $10,800 in rent. The interest on this amount comes to $5,852. At the end of eighteen years he has paid interest $16,632 and doesn't own a blade of grass or a nail. The same man could have bought a home for $5,000, financed it, paid it out in eighteen years, for over $3,000 less than what he paid on the rental basis—and would have the home to show for his efforts.

After you have a home of your own, you find as the years go by that you have a lot more in it than just the building materials. You have comfort and convenience; you have memories and happiness. Your children have something real to look back to, and to inspire them, after they grow up.

Your dealer can help you. He knows the building material business; he knows conditions, and he can advise you all along the line—and help you save money. Get his advice.

Heat With Our Coal
Build With Our Lumber

Figure 5.6: West Side Lumber Company advertisement (Hilltop Record, December 11, 1924).
OTHER NEAR URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE MIDWEST.

Near urban neighborhoods, and successor neighborhoods, did not develop just in Columbus, Ohio. Similar neighborhoods and similar houses became the standard form of development for providing middle-class housing in growing cities during the 1920s. Examples can be found in both large cities and small towns, showing that the near urban home served as a model for development anywhere that modern technological systems had been implemented.

Vernon Heights, a “new home section in southeast Marion,” Ohio, for instance, was developed much as the Broadview Addition was. Designed by William Pitkin, the landscape architect who designed the Broadview Addition, the neighborhood consisted of winding streets, two parkways, and a central public park. Each of the 661 lots was to contain a single family home. The neighborhood had been developed by R. T. Lewis and George Knapp, a local development company with offices in downtown Marion.13

The West Haven development, also known as the “Kessler Boulevard and Speedway Avenue Subdivision,” was a near urban development in Indianapolis, Indiana. Construction began in 1924. Advertisements reiterated the fact that the development was only “4 squares from the city schools and 4 squares from the West Tenth Street car line.” Technological systems were also important to the buyers in West Haven as the development company underscored the fact that there were “electric lights to each lot” and “artificial gas to each lot.” The neighborhood was a mix of one-and-a half-story and

---

13 Advertisement, “Marion’s Beautiful New Home Section in Southeast Marion. Development Will Start Next Spring,” Marion Daily Star, December 13, 1920. Pitkin is listed as working for Seward Hamilton Mott in Cleveland, Ohio,
two-story single-family and double residential structures, all with porches. Both automobile and pedestrian friendly, the developer had included “graveled streets” and “cement sidewalks in front of each lot.” The development began selling lots in June and expected every lot to be sold by the end of the first week.14

The Home Owners Investment Co. offered lots in two developments outside of Wheeling, West Virginia. Pleasant Valley and the Dimmeydale Subdivision were “highly restricted and exclusive residential” sections of the city. Much like Westgate, the Pleasant Valley development was advertised as “Ideally Situated.” An advertisement for the development showed a young couple looking at a small house and a house plan consisting of a first floor porch, living room, dining room, and kitchen. New home buyers could easily “open an account” at a local furniture store and outfit a home such as

---

14 Advertisement, “Some of the Homes in West Haven,” *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, June 8, 1924 and “Come Out Today to See West Haven,” *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, September 14, 1924. The area just north of downtown Indianapolis developed with multiple near urban additions very similar to the north and west sides of downtown Columbus. In Indianapolis this area is known today as Broad Ripple. Maple Lawn, the “Addition with Boulevards on Three Sides” and a “fully restricted residence property” is an example of this. To get to this new development one could “take Broad Ripple car to 59th Street and walk four blocks east.” See advertisement for Maple Lawn, *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, June 8, 1924.
this with “every article needed” for $999.40. The store even displayed what the first floor would look like and advertised that couples could realize their “dream of that Better Home,” an idea that will resonate below.\textsuperscript{15}

   Neighborhoods like those in Broadview, Westgate, Vernon Heights, West Haven, and Pleasant Valley both reinforced and were reinforced by a national network of housing information that sought to promote new suburban development and small, middle-class homes. Participants in this information syndicate understood housing to be “both a base and an indicator for the American economy.” Promotion of modernization of housing and what some have called the “suburban home ideal” moved from local initiatives to institutionalized national programs.\textsuperscript{16}

   At the local level, the question becomes why would someone build a home on Chase Avenue, live there for less than ten years, and then move to a new home six blocks away, and live there for the rest of his or her life? This was the exact case with Henry Shetrone, the Director of the Ohio Historical Society, and the contractor Edward Eagan.

   The answer to this and to the success of the housing information syndicate was the commodification of the home. By moving across Broad Street from the Hilltop Addition to Westgate, the people who moved left the emergent middle class and by neighborhood defined themselves as arrived middle class. This was exactly the transformation. The nature of housing changed from this point on. The individual, the

\textsuperscript{15} Advertisement, “Buy Your Home in Pleasant Valley,” \textit{The Wheeling Register} March 15, 1924; Advertisement, “It is Coming,” \textit{The Wheeling Register} March 30, 1924; Advertisement, “Palace Furniture Company,” \textit{The Wheeling Register} March 9, 1924; Advertisement, Cooey-Bentz Co., \textit{The Wheeling Register} March 9, 1924.

consumer, the personal identity, had become defined by the commodity of the house he or she purchased and the neighborhood in which the house was located.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE HOUSE

By the late 1920s, then, the near urban neighborhood had morphed into something different. Cultural change and economic pressures had served to eliminate most vestiges of the walking city in favor of the automobile. Selling the neighborhoods became less about community and more about consumption. The house became equated with the car and the radio as consumer items. In doing so, the street became increasingly less important for community ties and more connected with the automobile and individual identity. The street became an artery to serve individual consumable boxes of technology and ceased being an artery that connected people into the community. The full transformation of the near urban street was that the neighborhood itself had become the commodity as well.17

To large extent, the real estate and banking industries drove the comodification by tying the home into a credit system that other commodities had already established. In 1932, a leader in the building industry told the members of the United States Building and Loan League that when he was a boy “it was a disgrace for a man to have a mortgage on his home,” and “if you lived in a rented house you really weren’t in good society.” He went on to suggest that during this same time, people were not concerned about a

17 The technologies of convenience used inside the 1920s home are just beginning to be brought into the historiography of housing and are discussed at length in the introduction.
“mortgage on [their] piano or furniture.” But he also suggested times had changed: “We have popularized the idea that you should buy certain things and that you must have them, even if you can’t pay but ten per cent down. We have popularized the idea of a mortgaged home.”

In the next stage (in Columbus it dated to about 1927), the idea of community and of the near urban house itself outgrew the near urban neighborhood, and the homebuyers embraced what eventually became the ideology of post-war suburban sprawl. Owing to this conceptual change, the suburban sprawl associated with the large housing developments of the late twentieth century is a direct result of the movement from the production of residential housing to the consumption of residential housing during the 1920s. This movement paralleled the change from a producer mentality to a consumer mentality in the larger American society.

Social and community forces, therefore, altered the conceptual ideal of the single-family residence. First, the concept of “home” replaced the physical attributes of the house. Americans were inundated with advertising proclaiming the moral obligation for home ownership and the value of rearing children in a home. As a consumable item, the idea of “home” became the marketing tool used to sell a small, commodified house to aspiring members of the vast middle sectors of American society. The president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, Leonard Reaume, proclaimed at the annual meeting of the Building and Loan League in 1930, “The greatest opportunity that we have today, collectively, is to reinspire the American people to own their own homes,

---

thus giving to their families the advantages and privileges and the ideals that flow from
the fireside of American homes.”

This assertion was not isolated. In 1923, an article entitled “The House for the
Future” began with the statement, “If there is one thing that man wants more than another
in this mortal sphere of ours, it is a home. Now ‘home’ means more than just the
structural part of a house that we own. It is the very existence: the place we love for its
association, and the place where in all the world we will always find a welcome awaiting
us.”

The list of major consumer items for the aspiring middle-class professional
included a radio, an automobile, and a house. These items topped the list for the new
professional-managerial class. The house and automobile became the two items most
frequently bought on credit. It was not unusual for a homeowner to use a second
mortgage to pay for a new car. The desire to own an automobile helped to create the
acceptance of a smaller house during the 1920s. The Lynds suggested that landscaping,
which had once dominated lawns, by the 1920s had given way to driveways extending
back to garages. By the end of the decade, the author of an architectural textbook
recognized that the “lessened desire for a large house” came because the new “sign of
distinction [was] a high-priced car.”

19 See Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth
Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of
Finally, by 1927, for the majority of the new professional-managerial class, simply owning a house became more important than the quality of the house. Once ownership became, conceptually, a driving force in housing, the developer and builder could construct a smaller and cheaper dwelling. The ideal of the house as a product of traditional craftsmen was replaced by the concept of the house as a mass-manufactured, consumable item. As a result, the house became standardized, and all non-essential elements were eliminated for the sake of economy. The process of commodification, therefore, caused the house to lose the attributes, such as the porch and sidewalk, that helped create community.

During the 1920s, the home became a local and national iconic symbol of hopes and aspirations on which everyone could agree. The visual image of the home itself expressed American values and aspirations much like the image of Uncle Sam.23 The conceptualization and marketing that embodied and sold these ideas were, in most cases, first worked out at the local level through mainly private initiative. Then the nationalizing forces of the First World War and then the New Deal propelled successful local programs to become national in scope. Government-sponsored programs focused on domestic reform and aimed at stimulating local activity. To do this, officials often drew on the expertise of individuals who had a record of success in local ventures. These people would be co-opted into the government to run large programs, national in scale, that replicated what they had achieved locally.24

23 Dunn-Haley, The House that Uncle Sam Built, 95-96; see especially footnote 3.

24 Marriner S. Eccles, Beckoning Frontiers: Public and Personal Recollections (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951); Eccles, for instance, worked in the family businesses of lumber and banking in Utah. During 1931 and 1932, his planning and management kept the First Security Corporation solvent through several runs on his banks, 56-71. During the same time, the Utah Construction Company, of which Eccels was a
As has been suggested above, at the same time that the near urban neighborhood developed to fill the need of middle-class housing, the public conception of housing changed. The cultural changes brought on by technology influenced the public to accept a smaller near urban home. But, simultaneously, specific private programs and government-sponsored programs also served to influence the direction of change in housing. During the 1920s, programs, organizations, and housing advocates coalesced to create the social syndicate that disseminated information on new housing. One historian has called this the “home-ownership network.” 25

We have already seen that the housing syndicate worked at the local level to produce a standardized housing type. These efforts to disseminate housing information also took place on a national scale through federally-sponsored programs as well. Herbert Hoover’s Department of Commerce aimed at opening information channels between various interest groups. Only by getting lenders to talk to builders, and builders to talk to suppliers, officials believed, could progress in housing be achieved. Officials in the Department of Commerce developed programs specifically to disseminate information. 26

__Notes__


These programs influenced and often worked directly to shape the efforts of local lenders, building supply firms, and contractors. Some local aspects of how this synergy worked have been shown in Chapter 3. During the 1920s, the federal involvement took the form of government-sponsored voluntary programs. After 1934, a national housing policy and federal programs became institutionalized, focusing mainly on the financial structure of housing.27

The savings and loan and banking industries had a large stake in the housing industry, even before 1934. The examples on Chase Avenue illustrate how most people who financed a new house did so through a local savings and loan. In securing these loans, the local savings and loan promoted modern housing. In 1928, the Farm and Home Savings and Loan in St. Louis published a booklet called *The Modern Home*. In it, the company suggested that “When you have selected a location and have the plan of a home that you propose to build, call our office and let us explain our Loan Plan that will assist you to build your home.”28

After 1934, banks played an ever-increasing role in financing federal government programs. In some cases, the banks actually presented examples of how someone could use his or her funds to modernize a home. In one case, a bank janitor in Elizabeth, New Jersey, built a model of a house for a program the bank was advertising. One side of the house showed a dilapidated structure and the other showed what the house would look like.

---


like once repaired and painted. The house was a “before and after” model with one-half of the house made of “rough unpainted material, while the other half he neatly finished with the necessary modernization repairs and white paint.” “Officials at the bank,” added the writer who reported the incident, “had to set up a consultation booth near the exhibit to answer questions of the hundreds stirred to action by the model. Prior to the demonstration, many of Elizabeth’s home owners didn’t know how easy it was to convert a shabby dwelling into a livable house or change a house into a home.” This case is an example of how many local institutions made great efforts voluntarily to support and promote large national programs.29

GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED VOLUNTARY PROGRAMS

At the top of the information syndicate was Herbert Hoover. In February 1921, Hoover accepted Warren G. Harding’s offer to head the Commerce Department. Hoover was forty-seven years old. He wanted to “centralize ideas and decentralize execution.” Basing his ideas on the concepts of active cooperation and voluntarism of the public, Hoover created a national housing policy by advocating, at length, a particular residential model, the single-family suburban home.30

29 “Janitor Constructs Tiny Housing Show.” Better Housing February 6, 1935, 6. The bank was participating in a Home Modernization Program, which was part of the Better Housing Program funded by Title I of the 1934 Federal Housing Act. See below.

Hoover’s policies centered on the voluntary action of individuals and organizations. He believed that government should intervene to “induce active cooperation in the community itself.” The former Secretary of the Interior, Ray Lyman Wilbur, wrote in 1937 that Hoover proposed to solve problems within a “framework of strong local as well as Federal Government and the development of understanding and voluntary co-operative action among free men.” Wilbur noted the several goals involved: one, to create a better public understanding of what constituted good housing; two, to create an interest in home ownership; three, to make available plans and specification of practical and attractive homes.31

The federal government was actively participating in the housing syndicate to encourage home ownership as a secure foundation of American citizenship. Specific government agencies endorsed the suburban ideal as both attainable and desirable for the middle class. The housing syndicate participated by establishing networks through which government, or non-government, organizations disseminated information on housing through the cooperation of local individuals and businesses.32

31 “Induce active cooperation” quoted in Blaszczyk, “No Place Like Home,” 95, who cites David Green, Shaping Political Consciousness: The Language of Politics in America from McKinley to Reagan (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1987), 100; Ray Lyman Wilbur and Arthur Mastic Hyde, The Hoover Policies (New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons, 1937), ix. The authors place Hoover’s policy of volunteerism in direct opposition to Roosevelt’s “vast turn toward centralization of government.” Wilbur and Hyde list six of Hoover’s goals: the fourth was to create national interest in home owning, the fifth was to reduce the cost of housing, and the sixth was to organize reasonable credit facilities, 80.

32 Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” 185. Hutchison’s article is a brief but very thorough article on four programs that Hoover’s Commerce Department used to spread information about the modern home and home ownership. She correctly argues that Hoover’s efforts at promoting the ownership and improvement of housing has been largely unexplored by suburban scholars, 185. Many of these programs are also discussed in her dissertation, “American Housing, Gender, and the Better Homes Movement, 1922-1935,” Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1989.
THE OWN YOUR OWN HOME CAMPAIGN

The Own Your Own Home Campaign began in 1918 as a program of the Labor Department in response to housing problems caused by mobilization for the First World War. Overseen by a successful residential housing developer, Paul Murphy, the program drew from very successful local programs in Rochester, New York, Chicago, and Portland, Oregon. The National Association of Real Estate Boards organized the Own Your Own Home Campaign in Chicago in 1917. Murphy had successfully organized real estate professionals in a local campaign in Portland, which featured a model bungalow. The house was constructed and equipped with donated materials from organized labor, lumber associations, and furniture dealers. The event ended with a marriage ceremony in the living room. Drawing on a sentimental public, the groom was a private in the army. The pastor preached on the merits of home ownership, and then the couple received $1000 in furniture and other goods.\(^3^3\)

As a dollar-a-year-man, Murphy moved to Washington as part of the war effort. He immediately established a national advisory panel with members drawn from the United States League of Building and Loan Associations, the National Association of Real Estate Boards, and different sectors of the construction industries.\(^3^4\)


\(^3^4\) Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” 189.
leaders disseminating the ideas of Murphy’s local program, the Own Your Own Home Campaign capitalized on the for-profit motives of local community and business leaders.35

Throughout the program, the Department of Labor served as a clearinghouse for information on selling and buying houses. Between 1900 and 1920, the percentage of home ownership dropped from 64.4 percent of all housing to 58 percent. Just over half of the households in the country now owned houses, and Department of Labor officials wanted to increase this percentage.36 Congress funded the program with a $250,000 appropriation and understood the program as a way to combat the spread of bolshevism. Proponents believed that people who owned a home would have no interest in communism.37 Demonstration houses, newspaper and magazine promotions, radio broadcasting, and film all worked as marketing outlets for the campaign. Murphy provided promotional materials locally to committees who mobilized programs and nationally to newspaper officials who provided advertising.38

The national committee depended on local representatives to promote their own campaigns. Murphy divided the country into ten districts, each headed by a real estate or

---

35 Dunn-Haley, *The House that Uncle Sam Built*, alludes to the spreading of successful local programs across the country, 108.


38 Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” 189.
construction professional. Based on his experience in Portland, Murphy published a pamphlet, “Suggestions on How to Run an Own-Your-Own-Home Campaign,” in order to provide local leaders a model. The Department of Labor distributed over 8,000 of these pamphlets in 1919. Local committees were instructed to run a year-long campaign, which included paying for advertisements in local newspapers, partnering with businesses, providing information to children through the school systems, and building a model house based on the Portland model. Officials, for the most part, developed the program to promote the idea that home ownership provided the best environment in which to rear children.39

After 1921, the Own Your Own Home Campaign continued as part of the Division of Building and Housing within the Department of Commerce run by Hoover. The program blurred the boundaries between business and government, spreading the propaganda of home ownership though local committees, housing conferences, and advertising. In 1923, two department employees, John Gries and James Spear Taylor, wrote a government pamphlet, “How to Own Your Own Home.” The 28-page pamphlet advised prospective owners on financing, house plans, maintenance, and location. Among other things, the booklet promoted the idea of credit, suggesting that borrowing

39 Dunn-Haley, The House that Uncle Sam Built, 112-116; Lawrence J. Vale, From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), writes about the “Own Your Own Home” campaign as it affected housing in Boston, 119-128. The committees produced tangible results, see Bleecker Marquette and Ethel F. Ideason, A Housing Manual for Cincinnati Schools (Cincinnati, Ohio: Better Housing League, 1941), which, 11, was “offered for teachers with the knowledge that sufficient material is now available to make it possible to give the study of housing a place in the curriculum of the upper elementary grades and the high schools.” The manual discussed the physical requirements of housing, the psychological requirements of housing, planning, financial costs, new building materials, and “simple rules for Home Buying and Homemaking.” This last point included the selection of a house and the selection of furniture.
to buy a home was “no disgrace.” Sold through the Government Printing Office, 200,000 pamphlets were distributed the first year, and the booklet sold throughout the decade.\footnote{Dunn-Haley, \textit{The House that Uncle Sam Built}, 121-124; John Gries and James S Taylor, \textit{How to Own Your Own Home: A Handbook for Prospective Owners} (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), 5; Dunn-Haley quotes from the pamphlet about credit on 124.}

**THE BETTER HOMES IN AMERICA MOVEMENT**

The Better Homes in America Movement, established in 1922, was the brainchild of Marie Meloney, a successful magazine editor. The program operated as a national housing competition in which local chapters, often sponsored by women’s organizations, exhibited model homes during a nationally-designated Better Homes week. Meloney sought the endorsement of the federal government, and the Department of Commerce officials sought her women’s magazine, the \textit{Delineator}, as an outlet for their own propaganda.\footnote{Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,”193-194. See “From the Editor’s Point of View,” \textit{The Delineator} September 1922, 1, for an example of how the \textit{Delineator} contacted Governors to participate. Propaganda, here, is not meant to be negative and corresponds to the findings of other historians. See Blaszczyk, “No Place Like Home,” 133, and Dunn-Haley, \textit{The House that Uncle Sam Built}, 96; Wilbur and Hyde, \textit{The Hoover Policies}, 81, date the Better Homes Movement to 1923. They state that over the next ten years Hoover raised over $200,000 a year to support the program, which consisted of over 9000 chapters with 30,000 members.}

In 1923, the construction of a National Better Home on the Washington Mall drew national attention to the Better Homes movement. The “Home Sweet Home House” illustrated the combined efforts of the government, manufacturers, and voluntary associations to promote a prototype of the suburban American home, the Colonial Revival. Meloney oversaw the construction and furnishing, but events such as the
groundbreaking by Hoover and the dedication by President Warren G. Harding provided the real national attention.  

Local communities in Ohio also participated in the Better Homes Week exhibits. In October of 1924, The Columbus Dispatch newspaper and the Columbus Retail Furniture Dealers Association hosted, in Columbus, a Home Beautiful Exposition for the Better Homes in America week. The exposition included thirteen homes and one apartment located throughout the city. The homes were open to the public “for everyone to see the latest modes in home furnishings” and “the newest labor-saving appliances for home comfort.” One home had been constructed on the Hilltop on Sullivant Avenue. Built by William Mann for the Barnett Realty Co. specifically for the exhibition, the house had been constructed in six weeks. During the first four days of the exhibition, 106,000 people had walked through the homes, greeted by hostesses from the City Federation of Women’s Clubs.

In 1924, Hoover oversaw the reorganization of the Better Homes movement into a non-profit corporation, housed within the Department of Commerce. Funding for the

---


43 Hutchison, “Building for Babbit,” 192, and Hutchison, “American Housing, Gender, and the Better Homes Movement,” 51, both state that Meloney credited an Ohio “Own Your Own Home” exhibit as her inspiration for the Better Homes program, citing “From the Editor’s Point of View,” The Delineator September 1922, 2. The article, which is actually on page 1, does not say this.

44 The exposition in Columbus occurred the week of October 19-26. “Home Beautiful Exposition” advertisement, The Columbus Dispatch, Columbus, Ohio, October 9, 1924. Two of the houses, including the home at 2767 Sullivant Avenue, were pictured in The Dispatch: “These Built in Six Weeks for Home Beautiful Exhibit,” The Columbus Dispatch, October 9, 1924; “Paradise for Home Lovers Attracts Increasing Crowds,” The Columbus Dispatch, October 23, 1924. The Sullivant Avenue house was a near urban semi-bungalow described as “a six-room structure with a breakfast-room and a combined sun and lounging room and bath.” The first floor living room was “furnished with a three-piece taupe and rose velour suite, piano, wall desk, lamps, smoking set, and mantel clock. The dining room had “a nine-piece walnut suite with all the little accessories that go to make an attractive room.”
non-profit was secured from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, and officers were
drawn from top officials at the Division of Building and Housing.\footnote{Blaszczyk, “No Place Like Home,”130.} Bringing the Better
Homes program under the control of the Department of Commerce illustrates, again,
how successful private, local initiatives became institutionalized under federal guidance.

The Better Homes program continued to operate until the beginning of the Second
World War, although the most active years of the program occurred during Hoover’s
involvement while at the Department of Commerce and then as President. One of the
most significant achievements of the organization was President Hoover’s Conference on
Home Ownership and Home Building in 1931. In 1938, more than 16,000 committees
still existed, exhibiting more than 5,000 model homes.\footnote{Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,”196. Karen Dunn-Haley, \textit{The House that Uncle Sam Built},131.} The Better Homes movement
illustrates how private local programs could become institutionalized and spread
nationally, the movement also provides an excellent example of how individuals within
the housing syndicate viewed modernization of housing as a significant government
function.

THE ARCHITECTS’ SMALL HOUSE SERVICE BUREAU

The Architects’ Small House Service Bureau was a residential mail-order plan
service established by a group of Minneapolis architects in 1919 in order to offer
professionally designed house plans as an alternative to the free plans offered by lumber
yards, builders, and pre-cut catalog companies. Believing that architect-designed small
homes would be better for the public, the bureau sold the blueprints and specifications of a three-to-six-room house for six dollars per room.\(^47\)

The bureau worked as a non-profit corporation funded by practicing architects. Member architects prepared plans for the co-operative as part of their private practices. They were paid hourly rates for their work but did not receive royalties. Designers prepared plans to be built economically, to “eliminate waste,” and “to supply every home comfort and convenience within reason.”\(^48\)

Endorsed by both the American Institute of Architects and the Department of Commerce, by 1921 the organization had grown into a national service with thirteen regional offices. The program served as an educational tool for style and design more than as a successful business. Bureau-designed plans were advertised in newspapers every week, and nearly every women’s magazine published an article about the service. The Bureau also distributed a yearly catalog. The Better Homes in America literature often suggested the use of Bureau plans, and several communities built demonstration houses using Bureau plans. The architect of the Better Housing “Home Sweet Home House,” Don Barber, was an active participant in the Architects’ Small House Service

\(^{47}\) Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,”196-197; Rieff, *Houses from Books*, 208; One advertisement claimed that “A group of Minneapolis architects recently drifted into a discussion of the small house problem. All agreed the waste of material and lack of good taste was deplorable,” “News Readers to Benefit,” *The Lima News* March 3, 1922.

Bureau. The Commerce Department as well as other public and private organizations often requested plans to publish and promote through combined programs.\textsuperscript{49}

Between 1922 and 1942, the Bureau offered approximately 400 different plans. Some were successful. Others were not. One estimate suggested that over the life of the organization, about 5,000 houses were built from Bureau plans.\textsuperscript{50}

THE HOME MODERNIZATION BUREAU

In 1928, several business and industrial representatives, all of whom had previous organizational experience working with the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau or sponsoring “Own Your Own Home” campaigns, formed the Home Modernization Bureau in order to emphasize remodeling and to push commercial sales of building materials. By 1928, new housing starts began to decline as the market became saturated. In contrast, more than 12 million homes, three out of every five, needed some form of modernization. The Home Modernization Bureau provided information to this market. Where most of the housing syndicate programs pursued new construction, the Home Modernization Bureau advocated the remodeling of existing homes.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Rieff, \textit{Houses from Books}, 208; Dunn-Haley, \textit{The House that Uncle Sam Built}, 133; Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” 198; as an example, \textit{The Lima News}, ran a Bureau plan every Sunday for ten weeks beginning in March 1922, under the heading “You Can Have an Architect Design Your Home.” One of these houses was a two-story, gray-stucco, six-room home with a bath, sun porch, and sleeping porch built for $7500, \textit{The Lima News}, March 3, 1922. As another example, the \textit{Decatur Daily Review} published house plans stating that plans could be purchased at a moderate cost from the Community Service Department of the \textit{Review} in co-operation with the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau. “A Favorite Plan of Established Values,” \textit{The Decatur Review} February 10, 1928.

\textsuperscript{50} Reiff, \textit{Houses from Books}, 209.

\textsuperscript{51} Hutchison, “Building for Babbitt,” 199.
The Home Modernization Bureau opened offices in cities across the country. Using architects to design additions and improvements, the offices would produce drawings for contractors and homeowners who wanted to add to or remodel existing houses. The goal of the program was to modernize older nineteenth-century housing stock according to the standards of beauty, comfort, and convenience of the 1920s. To accomplish this, the organization promoted model homes, much like the programs on which this one was in part modeled.52

The president of the Home Modernization Bureau, Walter Kohler, epitomized the government/business alliance that fueled the for-profit motives of the organization. Kohler was president of the Kohler Company, a leading manufacturer of modern bathroom fixtures. He was also the governor of Wisconsin. His leadership showcases how the housing syndicate worked together to provide and promote the suburban ideal of housing. As the developer of Kohler Village, a garden city for company employees, Kohler annually exhibited a model home fully equipped with Kohler appliances and fixtures. This model home consistently won an annual Better Homes award between 1925 and 1942.53 Kohler was thus able to use the Better Homes movement to market and promote Kohler Village and used the Kohler Village and the Home Modernization Bureau to market Kohler bathroom fixtures.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.
THE NEW DEAL AND MODERN HOUSING

The greatest institutionalization of local and independent housing programs came after the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. Under the New Deal, housing became a major focus of the federal government. Although several of Hoover’s housing programs continued throughout the Roosevelt administration, financing became the fundamental element in the New Deal programs.

The institutionalization of housing policy came with the passage of the 1934 Housing Act. In general, the act sought, through loan guarantees backed by the federal government, to relax the requirements of private financial institutions. The act had three parts, Titles I, II, and III. Each addressed different areas of construction in an attempt to stimulate the building industry and created the Federal Housing Administration. Policies and institutions resulting from this legislation had a tremendous impact on housing in America. According to urban historian Kenneth Jackson, “No agency of the United States government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the Federal Housing Administration.”


Title I of the act addressed itself to the modernization of homes. The act established a lending program by which a homeowner could receive a loan of up to $2000.00 without any special collateral.

Title II of the act pertained to the lending of funds for the purchase of a house. Banks had traditionally avoided risky housing loans by lending only 50 percent of the value of a home and often only over a period of five years. Many people had to take second and even third mortgages to purchase a new home. The 1936 Housing Act required banks and savings and loans to lend 80 percent of the value of a home and established a payback period of twenty years at five percent interest. The federal government would back these loans so that the banks did not have anything to lose by making what was perceived as a risky loan.56

MODERNIZATION OF HOUSING

In 1934, the Better Housing Program, established through Title I of the Housing Act, continued the goals of the Home Modernization Bureau. The program encouraged modernization by providing federally backed loans for home improvements. The Better Housing Program worked through local chapters to complete and promote model houses that had been renovated.

Model homes were completed all across the country. In one case, an Eastlake-style house in San Antonio built in 1898 received a “modernization job,” being

“completely modernized, inside and out at a cost of less than $2,000.” The exterior transformation of this house was remarkable, with a round turret turned into a bay window and two gabled extensions added, changing the front porch into a recessed entry. In another case, a local committee turned a small shotgun type house into a colonial revival.57

Many local businesses supported Better Housing Program model homes and other forms of publicity. In one example, the “cooperation of architects, contractors, banks, material dealers, and merchants in building a model house” was cited by the Chairman of the Better Housing Committee for Oakland, California. In this case, a display home had been built in the center of a shopping district to “stimulate the people’s interest in home construction.” The Oakland Committee had all of the materials and the design work donated and printed nearly a million circulars advertising the project.58

The local committees sought their own support, but the Better Housing Program organization offered direction. Federal involvement ranged from offering pre-designed newspaper advertisements to lists of the steps necessary for a successful project. Advertising materials were designed and distributed by the Public Relations Department of the Federal Housing Administration during the “Modernization Program.” The ads were designed for either the “imprint of a single firm or by a group of cooperating


advertisers.” An article in the *Better Housing* publication in 1935 showed fourteen two-column ads that newspapers ads could order from the FHA.\(^{59}\)

In March 1935, Better Housing Program administrators issued a list of marketing ideas for local Committee chairs. This list included:

1. Enlist the aid of your Water Department to stamp all of its water bills with a Better Housing insignia
2. Milk bottle caps stamped with the emblem will get into every home.
3. Billboards in an artistic setting should carry the message.
4. Department stores might allot a display with a model house and erect a booth where literature can be distributed.
5. Lumber dealer, and other building-material dealer, trucks should carry a red, white, and blue “Better Housing insignia.
6. Every store window should display a “We Are Cooperating” sign.
7. Full page and special sections can be run in the newspapers.
8. If you have a radio broadcasting station, enlist its aid.
9. Moving-picture houses will be supplied with films, devoid of advertising, which they can run.
10. House-to-house canvasses should be pushed to uncover any new jobs.
11. Ask your clergymen to point out the value of a Better Housing Program to develop improved social quarters and put men to work.
12. Aid of Boy Scouts might be enlisted to distribute a “Home Owner’s Booklet” and a “14 Questions and Answers” pamphlet in every home.
13. A parade and building exposition will arouse the populace.
14. Let a model home be the focussing point around which these other features revolve.\(^{60}\)

---

\(^{59}\) “Pictorial Story of the Modernization Plan,” *Better Housing* March 5, 1935.

\(^{60}\) “Ideas for Committee Chairman,” *Better Housing* March 5, 1935.
STANDARDIZATION OF HOUSING

With the new focus on financing, however, programs shifted away from direct support of advertising and advocacy. The largest impact of the 1934 Housing Act, as I have noted, came with the creation of the FHA and the efforts that went into developing a strategy to guarantee mortgage loans. The intention of the housing program was to stimulate the building industry without direct federal expenditures.

Because the lending program was national in scope, FHA officials sought to limit agency liability by imposing design standards in order to guarantee consistent construction practices and product. These standards included both the house and the types of neighborhoods and developments deemed to be desirable features with resale value. To get a loan guarantee, the house and neighborhood had to meet the standards.61

Within neighborhoods, the FHA set up standard requirements for lot size, street setbacks, and separation between houses. For the house itself, the FHA established guidelines that promoted a detached single-family suburban residence, which often became the various colonial revivals in style.62 By making these standards a requirement

61 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, discusses these aspects of the FHA in detail, 203-218. He points out that part of the consequence of these standards was the restriction of racially mixed neighborhoods, which were excluded from FHA financing by the practice of “redlining.” This became a very important consequence causing, in part, the decline of many urban neighborhoods; see Jackson, 206-207. See also Wright, Building the Dream, 247, who uses different primary sources to argue the same point; for an example of how this worked in a specific location, see Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); see especially 62-63 for this exact argument.

of financing, the FHA institutionalized the type of house and floor plan advocated by the Better Homes Movement and the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau.

The FHA also developed minimum standards for construction. These standards, were intended to insure that houses would be free of gross structural or mechanical deficiencies. Both the developers and lenders promoted the standards as a positive within the industry. In 1938, a writer in the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported that “construction standards of the FHA [were] showing their effectiveness – requirements for decent architecture, livable floor plan and soundness of work and materials.” Often this was presented as a contrast to building practices before FHA. As written in the article, the new standards insured “against terrific losses due to poor design and plan and bad construction over the years.”

The minimum standards delineated by the FHA were based on generally accepted construction techniques that most qualified contractors, such as both H. G. Butler and William Orebaugh, already practiced. Though the standards had to be enforced only for houses seeking an FHA guaranteed loan, most builders began following them.

---


63 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 205; James G. Monnett, “FHA Standards Bringing Results,” Cleveland Plain Dealer June 26, 1938.

64 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 205. Government publications and conferences served to educate realtors about how to encourage the universal use of the standards; see Proceedings of the Realtors’ Housing Conference Discussing the National Housing Act.
By putting the standards into a codified, written form, the minimum requirements became universally accepted as standard residential building practice. There was little incentive for contractors to build above the minimum, and in fact, in the tough construction market of the 1930s, building to the minimum requirement placed builders on a level playing field.

Builders submitted plans to the agency and received a “conditional commitment” of FHA approval. Though any building plan could be submitted, by designing homes using the minimum requirements as design guidelines, contractors were virtually guaranteed approval. In this way, the FHA publications resulted in the mass replication of similarly designed houses all over the country.65

The FHA publications, “General Acceptable Requirements” and “Minimum Requirements,” established a house as a living unit for one family with sleeping, cooking, and dining accommodations with at least a separate bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom. The house had to include technological systems including plumbing, heating, and electrical power.66

In 1934, a booklet describing the efficiency of electrical cooking in St. Louis showed evidence of how technology had been integrated into the houses such as described by the FHA documents. The owner of one two-story, eight-room house had

---


twelve electrical appliances in her “well electrified home.” These appliances included a refrigerator, a radio, a washer, an iron, an ironer, a mixer, a toaster, a percolator, a clock, a fan, a waffle iron, and a cleaner. A five-room brick story-and-a-half, very similar to the Eagan house on Fremont Street, had ten of the same appliances in use. The homeowner especially liked the electric stove because there were “no fumes, no pots and pans to clean or no redecorating expense.” In this case, electricity had fundamentally altered the domestic obligation of cleaning and re-wallpapering with a technology that homeowners would find “convenient and inexpensive.”

Houses like these were to be placed on suburban lots and in developments with winding, tree-lined streets. In general, the FHA institutionalized the houses, the technology, the neighborhoods, and the culture associated with the modern home.

CONCLUSION: FROM NEAR URBAN TO SUBURBAN

The conceptual change of the neighborhood, moving from a pedestrian-friendly to an automobile-friendly environment echoed the expansion of consumerism in society at large. Housing specialists sold the American Dream as the desire to own a box for technology. By the late 1920s, the style and quality of the home one owned did not matter as much as the fact that one owned it. The American Dream became to own no matter what the cost.

67 Electric Cookery is Cheap in St. Louis, (St. Louis: Union Electric Light and Power Company, 1935), 10, 11, 23. There are multiple homes in this booklet showing a picture with a description of the electrical appliances in use. They include a home at 3906 Federer Place, a two-story stone house; 5704 Neosha, a story-and-a-half modern; 4836 Margaretta; and 5737 Lisette Avenue a bungalow.
Once ownership became the core value of middle-class housing, the neighborhood in which one owned grew in importance. Within the Hilltop, prior to 1924, one’s value was associated with the community. After the construction of the Westgate subdivision, one’s value became associated with the neighborhood one lived in. The very identity of the individual became associated with owning a home and the location in which one owned the home.

The concept of community changed from an internal condition to an external condition. Technology, such as the automobile, the telephone, and the radio fostered a wider social experience outside of the home, but at the expense of the local community. Indeed, the concept of community itself became about isolation from the local neighborhood. The telephone put one in touch with a wider social network and the automobile allowed immediate access to the that network.

The widening sphere of these external social relationships allowed the concept of home to be disassociated from the local community in which one worked and played. Increasingly, the home became a place of retreat from the world. Porches and sidewalks attached the home to the street and other surroundings and had no place in a retreat. The automobile as well became as escape. Increasingly, the garage connected the homeowner and family to community. As such, community could be distant and not tied to a local jurisdiction. People saw themselves in a community of police officers, or in a community of professionals, or in a community of bowlers.68

CONCLUSION

Several years ago, the question that began this study was, why do the houses we live in today look the way they do? It does not seem that the outcome of housing in the late twentieth century -- a living room, dining room, and kitchen with three bedrooms under a gabled roof clad with asphalt shingles and wood-like siding -- should be determined by how we live in the house. My finding, however, based on actual houses as material artifacts, as well as other kinds of evidence, is that as technological systems entered the house during the first three decades of the twentieth century, developers, builders, realtors, architects, and housing experts modified the floor plan to conform to how consumers used these systems to change work and leisure. By the 1920s, the new house plan permeated nearly all aspects of house construction.

Middle-class and working-class housing during the late nineteenth century looked very different from what we have come to recognize as the “typical house.” Clearly, the Victorian manse of 1880s is very different from row after row of similar colonial revival houses in any one of the many Levittowns. This change, to a degree, has been fundamental to our conception of the cultural geography of urban and suburban landscapes today.

I have been dealing with change. The discussion within this work is how housing in America has gone from point A to point B during the twentieth century. The
conclusion drawn here is that the change occurred in an area between the city and the suburb, an area to which I refer as the near urban neighborhood.

First, I walked the reader down a near urban street sufficiently typical to provide the evidence for conclusions about the development of single-family housing between 1914 and 1927. The geography of the street, a grid lined with boxy two-story houses of similar proportion and massing, tied the neighborhood to the existing fabric of the city. Sidewalks and porches provided a tangible connection and also symbolized the way in which people interacted as a community.

The description also included the people who lived there, what they did, who they were, and what constituted a family. The houses along the street offered residences to middle-class families of various configurations. The families clearly had aspirations, indicated concretely by their homeownership.

Second, the discussion focussed on how each individual house was constructed to become a part of the larger whole. The delivery system brought houses onto the market in many forms. Though the houses all looked very similar, the housing delivery system was not uniform. Houses investigated in this study included a house built by a realtor, a house built by a small family business, and a self-built house constructed by a homeowner. Yet each of these houses had a very similar plan.

Third, the uniform nature of the house plan was explored. Builders created the houses of the 1920s out of a standard kit of parts. Additionally, the commonalities of the plans resulted in a typical placement of furniture.

The analysis of 600 plans showed that the consistent plan, as described, is what was built. During the housing boom of the 1920s, few alternatives were available. As a
curious cultural phenomenon, the plan itself became part of the cultural experience of the middle class, as repeated exposure in media and other outlets revealed the plan as an everyday experience.

Clearly in these houses there was a shift in attention. The forth point discussed was how new technological systems entered, and transformed, the house. The inclusion of specific technologies, including the telephone, the radio, electricity, refrigeration, and heating, defined the house as modern. The house became basically a box for technology. The technological transition occurred in the near urban home even before suburbanization in its modern meaning.

Fifth, once technological systems entered the house, the house quickly became internally focussed. Technology, once perfected, removed physical ties to the surrounding community. Without the ties to coal and ice delivery, public transportation, and community services, the house and family could be placed anywhere. This led to the commodification of the house, where location became more important than quality of structure or quality of community.

EVIDENCE

Actual houses constructed in a near urban neighborhood provided the initial evidence used in this work. Through the actual structures, we learned of a surprising uniformity -- particularly in a multi-purpose living room that replaced much of the Victorian home.
The near urban street offered the geography of community. Developers organized individual houses in a geographical pattern that recalled the walking city. Linear streets on a grid offered the shortest distance to commercial properties and to public transportation. In later near urban neighborhoods, the new prominence of the automobile resulted in curvilinear streets and no sidewalks.

The house served as the fundamental environment in which people interacted with technology. There is evidence that people within the home had agency to mediate the forces exerted by cultural change.\(^1\) Indeed, by the 1920s, people were buying houses already adapted to the new technological systems. If the cult of domesticity served to teach family members the social skills necessary to negotiate Victorian middle-class culture, then the new technology in the home during the first decades of the twentieth century served to teach the skills necessary to negotiate the cultural changes of the twentieth century.

The environment of this new house became the conduit through which most aspiring middle-class individuals viewed and achieved “progress.” Under new models of “modernity,” the artifacts of technology were fluid and predictable, giving up symbolic meaning to be replaced by a rational effort to improve household life. The near urban house, therefore, became the ideal type to spread this new cultural norm.\(^2\)

---


Though most of the people living in the United States were not able to participate in this ideal, it did become the model. Indeed, even as the new house type became a commodity for the upwardly mobile, within just a few years, government programs, the outgrowth of a consumer-driven economy, lending and mortgage patterns, and the process of cultural filtration brought most Americans under the roof of a “modern” house.3

CONSUMERISM AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology connected people to consumer communities. As these changes occurred, Americans moved from a production-oriented culture to a consumption-oriented culture. Other authors have shown how technological changes in steel and plate glass allowed the urban merchandise stores to become centers of consumption, not just through the purchase, but through the display, of merchandise. Urban shoppers could envision their attaining the goods they desired.4

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the house became the center of consumption for most families. As technological systems were added to the home, the systems themselves allowed the consumer to envision buying and possessing appliances,

---


fixtures, and furniture that plugged into new outlets, hooked up to new pipes, or fit into new architectural spaces. Probably no other space inspired more desire for new “stuff” than the home.

The near urban communities where developers and builders constructed new homes became consumable neighborhoods of consumer communities. The house became equated with other consumer items such as the automobile and the radio. The desire to own a home became more important than the house itself or the community in which the house belonged.

The idea, or conceptualization, of community changed during the mid-1920s. Before this time, community was about where one lived, played, and worked. It was not unusual for a homeowner to live and work in the same neighborhood, even near the same street, as was the case for many on Chase Avenue. People bought groceries within walking distance of their homes. It was possible for business owners to live on the same street as employees. And it was possible for managers to live near the managed.

These neighborhoods were communities of production. People lived in the neighborhood because it was near to their work. The focus of life, centered on the interaction of the people on the street.

Caroline Loeb describes new communities manufactured by the Ford Motor Company around company plants. In many ways, these communities were transitional. They were constructed as production communities. People who purchased the homes


6 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961). Though written much later, Jacobson describes the dynamics of the late nineteenth-century street, which was designed for social interaction.
worked together in proximity to the plant, but the homes themselves were models of the new technology-driven modern home.\(^7\)

During the late 1920s, community became about who a person was.\(^8\) In the new consumer communities, where they lived and what they bought defined homeowners. Many of these purchases were small in themselves, one item purchased at a time. But when combined, the appliances, fixtures, electrical devices, furniture, and automobile defined the homeowner.

The house plan mediated and transformed to incorporate these new technologies during the 1920s. The result was the new house type demonstrated in Chapter 3. Each technology had small but somewhat fundamental corresponding changes. Although economics, the servant problem, and demand for housing all contributed to the rise of the small house, new technology made it work. On Chase Avenue, the result was a nearly square house with a modern kitchen and bath, modern sleeping and eating arrangements, often with built-in, space-saving features for ironing, the telephone, and the refrigerator.

The living room and the kitchen incorporated most of these changes. These two rooms also became the most actively used, multi-functional rooms in the house. The family interacted and participated in household life in these rooms.

In the Chase Avenue houses, the living room became elongated, replacing the typically square Victorian parlor, in order to accommodate social interaction, entertainment, and circulation.

\(^7\) Loeb, *Entrepreneurial Vernacular*.

\(^8\) In this case, as I have suggested, community embodied the change from an outward focus to an inward focus.
The front door opening directly into the room necessitated an open area for coming and going, as well as a coat closet. Where the stair had been placed to one side of the living room, the room acted as a circulation path between the first floor and the second floor. In this context, unlike the Victorian household, circulation promoted social contact.

After 1925, electrified radio consoles began to be manufactured as pieces of furniture to be placed in the living room. The radio quickly replaced the hearth as the center of family entertainment. Musicals and parlor games became a thing of the past, sitting around the radio in the corner of the living room listening to “Amos and Andy” became modern.

Domestic engineering had shrunk the kitchen to the size of a series of efficient steps, but modern conveniences expanded the room around its periphery. In many of the Chase Avenue houses, builders added a breakfast nook to the rear of the kitchen for casual dining. With the fast pace of modern life, brought on in part by the expanded opportunities offered by the automobile, formal family dinners began to be replaced by quick meals in the kitchen. By the mid-1920s, it was not unheard of for the father in the house to make his own meal on occasion.⁹

The necessity of accepting ice delivery for refrigeration gave rise to the refrigerator alcove and rear mud room. Evidence shows that ice could be placed into the refrigerator directly from the porch through a specially constructed exterior door. None of the houses on Chase Avenue had this feature, however. On Chase Avenue some

---

refrigerators could be easily accessed from a ground level delivery entrance located on the side of the house.

This side door was in fact an extremely common feature in the Hilltop Addition. The door provided easy access to both the kitchen and the basement. This made taking laundry from the basement wash area to the rear yard to dry very convenient. At 217 North Chase, the laundry could be easily brought back into the home through a rear door and ironed in the kitchen on a built-in ironing table.

THE TRANSITION

The near urban neighborhood and the near urban house continued to evolve and influence the house building industry throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Once the house became inwardly focused with the integration of technological systems dependent on unseen forces and not on community networks, members of the family in the house became mobile and visualized themselves as part of a greater community. Under this conceptual framework, the near urban house could be placed anywhere and still function as the mediator between modern culture, technology, and the family. As a result, houses for broadly middle-class Americans did not have to be integrated into the fabric of the existing city. Technological systems could be extended into new suburban developments, and the automobile could serve as transportation into separately zoned districts for business and industry.

It is after this transition that suburban developments became capable of being not just mass-produced, but conceptionally mass-sold. Early suburbs, such as Llewellyn
Park, in New Jersey, Forest Hills Gardens, in Queens, New York, or Shaker Heights, outside of Cleveland, Ohio, served a very elite clientele, one that could afford to leave the city but still work and function in, or live off, the city.\textsuperscript{10}

Although these early efforts set the stage for modern developers, local speculative builders had worked out the mechanics of mass production by the mid-1920s. Conceptually, local developers and builders were constructing exclusive middle-class suburban neighborhoods with winding roads and large front lawns by 1924. This was the model of the Westgate development. A fully developed suburban model, as we understand it today, would have followed in the 1930s. The technology existed. This has been shown with housing developments in Los Angeles in 1932.\textsuperscript{11} The saturation of the middle-class housing market by 1927, the depression starting in 1929, and the Second World War starting in 1941 served to interrupt the inevitable. What followed, was the combination of economic recovery, housing need, and the corportization of the local

\textsuperscript{10} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 76-78. Llewellyn Park, designed by Alexander Jackson Davis, is considered the first suburb developed in the United States in the 1850s. John R. Stilgoe, \textit{Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), Forest Hills Gardens, 225-238, Shaker Heights, 239-251. Though Forest Hills Gardens served an emergent middle class, Stilgoe shows that typical residents were “involved in ‘creative’ work,” and many were professionals, 235.

\textsuperscript{11} Greg Hise, \textit{Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), uses the development of Lakewood Village and Westchester, California, to argue the importance of FHA to wartime housing. Between 1941 and 1942, Los Angeles builders constructed 95,000 housing units, accounting for one-fifth of the FHA applications, 159.
building process; what has become known as the suburban post-war housing boom. But, these later developments grew out of, and owe their development to, the boxes for technology that lined the near urban streets of the 1920s.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Department of Trade and Development, Columbus, Ohio, Building Permit Records.

Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Franklin County, Ohio, Enumeration District 25.


Plat Record of the Hilltop Addition, Plat Book No. 10, page 132, Recorder’s Office, Franklin County, Ohio.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Reports, Pittsburgh Division, 1520-03 Mahoning Dam-Specs-Damtenders Dwelling- Gamble & Gibson - W-1500
NEWSPAPERS

*The Columbus Dispatch*, 1918-1938.
*The Decatur Review*, 1926
*The Hilltop Record*, 1921-1935.
*Helena Daily Independent*, 1924.
*The Lima News*, 1922.
*The Marion Daily Star*, 1912-1926.
*The Wheeling Register*, 1924.

PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES: BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS


*Cleveland Home Inventory: Seventh*, Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Press, 1939.


PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES: ARTICLES


Barton, Margaret U. “The Big Problem of Little House,” *Good Housekeeping* November 1921: 34.


Clark, Martha McCammon. “We Settle the Building Question,” *Better Homes and Gardens* September 1925, 14-15.

“Cleveland’s Ideal Home Exhibition,” *Building Age* 33 (1911): 385.


“Electricity or Ice,” *Good Housekeeping* 74 (1922): 76-77.


“From the Editor’s Point of View,” *The Delineator* September 1922: 1.


“Ideas for Committee Chairman,” *Better Housing* 5 March 1935.


“Janitor Constructs Tiny Housing Show,” *Better Housing* February 6, 1935.


“McCray Refrigerators,” advertisement, House and Garden April 1923: 8.


Northend, Mary H. “Assuring Better Breakfasts,” House and Garden 41 (1922): 50


“Pictorial Story of the Modernization Plan,” Better Housing March 5, 1935.


Shumway, Harry Irving. “We Build Ourselves a Home,” *House Beautiful* 43 (1917): 18-19; 82-84; 130-132; 205-207; 288-290; 366-367; 44 (1918): 21-23; 82-84; 140-142.


“The Breakfast Room in its Variety,” *Sunset* February 1920: 64.


“The Rochester Cold-Box,” *Good Housekeeping* 60 (1915): 93-94.


PLAN BOOKS AND REPUBLISHED PLAN BOOKS


PUBLISHED GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS


SECONDARY SOURCES: BOOKS


SECONDARY SOURCES: ARTICLES


**UNPUBLISHED STUDIES**


______“Between City and Suburb: The Rise and Fall of the Suburban Alternative and the Commodification of the American Dream,” presented at the Northeast Popular


