

MONTGOMERY MODERN BUS TOUR

DOCOMOMO TOUR DAY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2013



Presented by Montgomery County Planning Department
Historic Preservation office



Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

in partnership with AIA Potomac Valley



Special thanks to our sponsors:

Konst <http://www.konstsiematic.com/> for providing lunch



Carderock Springs Citizens Association for refreshments

River Road Unitarian Congregation

Grateful appreciation to all our hosts for making this event possible

Montgomery Modern is an initiative of the Montgomery County Planning Department Historic Preservation office



Docomomo is a non-profit organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of modern movement resources.

Modern Movement Architecture in Montgomery County, 1945-1970

Introduction

Modern movement architecture intentionally avoided the traditional design of revival styles that had been popular in this country since the colonial era. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City presented “Modern Architecture,” a 1932 exhibit organized by architect Philip Johnson that was a landmark event establishing modern movement architecture in the public consciousness. Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote an exhibit guide, coining the term International Style, to describe a modern style of architecture. International style architects approached design as an expression of volume rather than mass, balance rather than preconceived symmetry, as they avoided applied ornament. The International Style has its origins in the Bauhaus school of Germany. Key proponents were Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, both Germans, and Le Corbusier, a Swiss architect.

Gropius and Mies were influential in the spread of International Style esthetic as heads of programs at, respectively, the Harvard Graduate School of Design and Illinois Institute of Technology. Another key factor in the dissemination of the modern approach to design was publication of Siegfried Giedion’s *Space Time and Architecture* (1941), which quickly became required reading for architects in training. New York City was a stronghold of International Style architecture in the early 1950s. Landmark projects included Lever House (1952) and Manufacturers Hanover Trust (1954) both by Gordon



Bunshaft of Skidmore Owing and Merrill, and Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram Building (1954-58).

By the post-war era, another aspect of modern movement architecture was organic modernism. A key force in this movement was Frank Lloyd Wright, who drew inspiration from nature. While International Style architects were inspired by machines and geometry, using the box as the starting point for a design, Frank Lloyd Wright broke up the box, and drew on forms in nature for his designs. Organic modernists experimented with the properties of wood, inspired by traditional architecture of Japan and, with influence of Alvar Aalto and Eliel and Eero Saarinen, of Finland.

Modern Movement in D.C.

For the most part, modern architecture was not widely accepted in the Washington metropolitan area, particularly in the immediate post-war era. Early practitioners were Berla and Abel, best known for apartment buildings, and Charles Goodman, known for his custom houses and residential subdivisions.

Through much of the history of the Washington Metropolitan area, residents have preferred traditional architecture over modern design. In the post-war era, Colonial Revival houses in the form of Cape Cods and two-story brick houses were the predominant residential types. The overwhelming majority of homeowners—and lenders—preferred traditional style dwellings. A 1936 Architectural Forum survey found only about a tenth of those surveyed preferred Modern style houses. By this time, the revival of colonial era architecture had been popular for over a century. Traditional designed houses made good marketing sense for developers and were considered safe for lenders and a sound investment for property owners.

Proponents of modern design catered to conservative tastes by packaging modern design for a middle class market in suburban subdivisions. Starting in the early 1950s, Charles Goodman designed modest modern houses set into a natural landscape. The rectilinear design of the houses was softened by natural settings, made accessible by patios and balconies. Buildings were skewed on their sites to maximize views of nature and minimize views of neighboring houses, and they were banked into hillsides to preserve the natural landscape. This

approach of fitting modern design into a natural setting has been dubbed “situated modernism.” It was supported by legislation when Montgomery County Council passed the “Anti-Bulldozer Bill” to discourage developers from leveling the land and removing trees, as had been common practice in the immediate post-war years.

A number of the sites on this tour are the product of a collaboration between architects Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon and developer Edmund Bennett. Both entities received numerous awards for their collaborative work.

In 1965, *House and Home* magazine named Bennett and Lethbridge among the 12 Top Performers for housing in the nation.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon worked mainly in the District of Columbia, where the firm had its office, and in Montgomery County, and to a lesser extent Northern Virginia. All three partners had received training in the immediate post-war years from early practitioners of the modern movement—Arthur Keyes and Donald Lethbridge trained with Berla and Abel, and David Condon with Charles Goodman. During their partnership, each of the partners was also noted for remarkable individual achievements. They were all elected Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in the 1960s. Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon became an important training ground for young architects interested in residential design.

Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon set high standards for modern architecture in the Capital Region. In the

District of Columbia, their projects include the Forest Industries Building (1962), at 1619 Massachusetts Avenue, and the Sunderland Building (1969), at 1320 19th Street NW. In the urban renewal area of Southwest D.C., Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon won the competition for Tiber Island (1961-1963), a residential community that received an AIA national award.

The Washington metropolitan area has been described as a formative arena in the promotion of builder-architect collaboration in tract housing. In the fast-paced development climate of the post-war era, a Montgomery County architect was most likely to succeed in the tract house market by partnering with a seasoned home builder. Such collaboration was encouraged by the professional bodies of the National Association of Home Builders and the American Institute of Architects. In addition, award-winning architects added popular appeal to tract housing. Buyers who might not be able to afford custom designed houses could still enjoy a sense of prestige in owning a house designed by a prestigious architect. Targeting an educated and worldly clientele, Bennett advertised, in 1956, that a Kenwood Park house design by Keyes and Lethbridge was “like Dior on the label of a gown.”

A common feature of many sites on the tour is a challenging terrain, which in many cases had been, a generation earlier, considered undesirable for development. Bennett and Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon took advantage of the sloping terrain to offer cost-saving and space-efficient two-story plans, while preserving the feeling of “lying low on the land,” which was a characteristic of most post-World War II modern houses.

In addition to preserving natural terrain, many of the best designs from this era took care to preserve trees and vegetation. A forest floor was often conserved as an alternative to manicured lawn. Not only did they protect privacy, but trees also diminished the noise of increasingly congested roads and saved the buyer considerable expense in landscaping his property. At Potomac Overlook, branches were trimmed and a few trees cleared in order to provide a view of the Potomac River from every house.



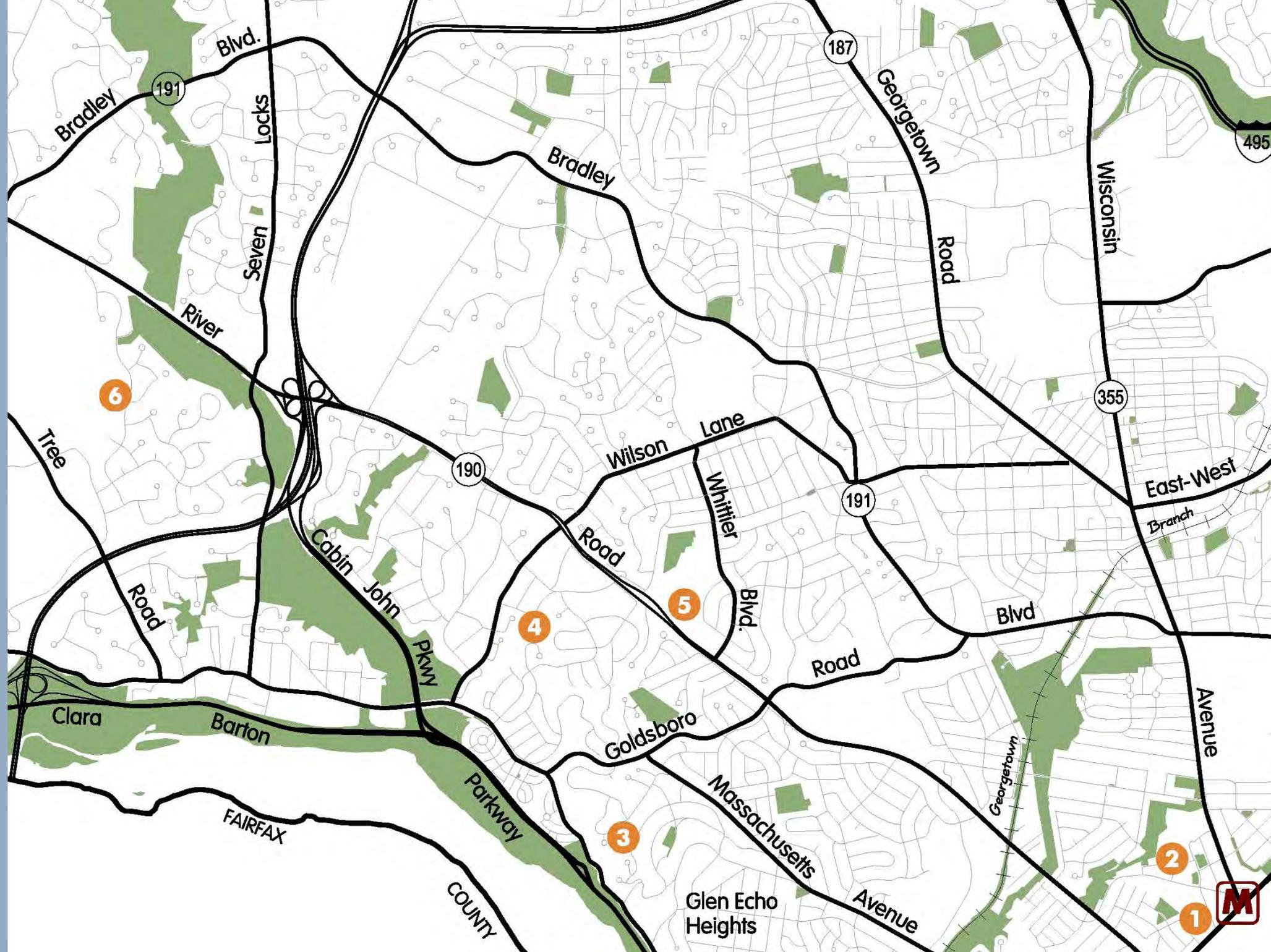
Underappreciated and threatened with redevelopment, mid-century buildings are fragile resources as they are being demolished or renovated beyond recognition throughout the county. Too often buildings from this era have been considered outdated and obsolete, rather than being appreciated for their historic significance and architectural distinction. As awareness increases about mid-century modernism, it is our hope that more owners and residents will understand the value of these resources to understanding our past.

TOUR MAP

The bus boards at the first stop, the Geico Headquarters in Friendship Heights, at the corner of Willard Avenue and Friendship Boulevard, opposite the Willoughby Apartment Building.

Lunch, catered by Konst, will be served at the River Road Unitarian Church. The tour finishes at the Carderock Clubhouse, after which participants can visit three open houses.

The bus will leave the Carderock Clubhouse for Friendship Heights at 2:15 p.m.



- 1** Geico Corporate Headquarters
5260 Western Avenue
Friendship Heights
- 2** The Irene
4701 Willard Avenue
Friendship Heights
- 3** Potomac Overlook
(Mohican Hills)
- 4** Kreiger House
6739 Brigadoon Drive
- 5** River Road Unitarian Church
6301 River Road
- 6** Carderock Springs
- M** Friendship Heights
Metro Station



1 GEICO Headquarters (1959)

5260 Western Avenue, Friendship Heights
Vincent Kling, architect



landscaped campus includes mature trees, terraced parking, flying saucer light fixtures, and a broad fountain perched at the entrance like a hovercraft. A taller office tower was added in 1964.

Architect Vincent Kling of Philadelphia worked for Skidmore Owings & Merrill before establishing his own firm in 1946. His expertise was in research labs and commercial space. At the same time he designed the GEICO building, Kling was creating Philadelphia's Penn Center—a multi-use downtown complex—with the goal of bringing the middle class back to the city.

The Government Employees Insurance Company was founded in 1936. Presiding over the opening of new GEICO headquarters building in Chevy Chase was investment banker Lorimer Davidson, who became Chairman and CEO in 1958. The suburban corporate headquarters complex was a new building type for this era.

The corporate headquarters for GEICO (1959) is an outstanding example of an International Style complex composed of carefully articulated buildings set in a natural, landscaped campus. Long low wings are contrasted by taller opaque blocks sheathed in textured porcelain enamel panels and colored, crystal-textured glass panels. The 26-acre



AIA Guide to Washington D.C., 1965 and 1974



Gatz & Achterberg, Color and Architecture, Germany, 1967

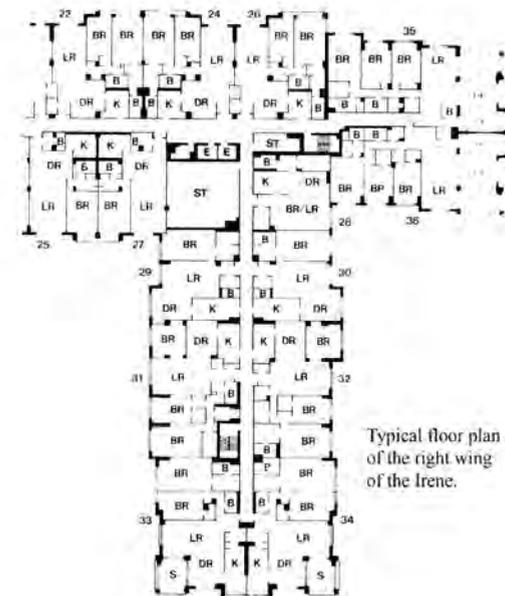
2 The Irene (1964)

4701 Willard Avenue, Bethesda
Berla and Abel, architects



Apartment historian James Goode described the Irene as the grande dame of modern rental apartment houses in the Washington area. The complex's irregular E-shape plan fits snugly into its rectangular parcel, yet provides well-lit and spacious living space, including unusual solarium with glass walls. The entire first floor is dedicated to public space, while the three-level roof holds extensive recreation facilities. The International Style apartment house is designed by architects Berla and Abel, who were among the first practitioners of modern architecture in the Washington region. The firm became a training ground for rising stars of mid-century modern architecture, including Arthur Keyes and Donald Lethbridge.

The Irene was the first highrise in Friendship Heights. The building was named for the wife of builder and owner, Abe Pollin.



Typical floor plan of the right wing of the Irene.

Best Addresses, James Goode



Best Addresses, James Goode

3 Potomac Overlook (1956-1959)

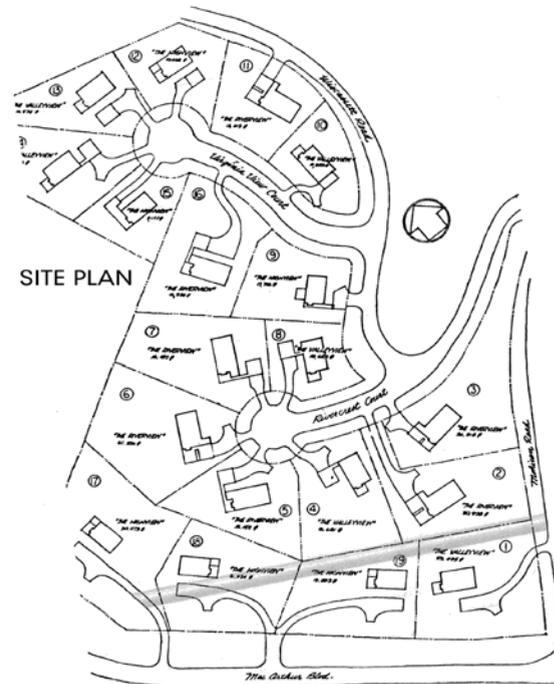
Mohican Road and MacArthur Boulevard, Glen Echo
Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon, architects; Edmund Bennett, developer



In 1958, the project received awards from the AIA Potomac Valley chapter for site planning and house design, and from the National Association of Home Builders for Neighborhood Development. Architectural historians Mary Corbin Sies and Isabelle Gournay have described Potomac Overlook as an “enchanted almost magical community,” with houses “arranged informally along the steep hillside like family members at a picnic gathering photo shoot.”

This subdivision was created on steep land that had been passed up as undesirable by other developers. Potomac Overlook consists of 19 houses on a nine-acre tract with irregular boundaries.

This modernist subdivision is one of three in Montgomery County designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon and developed by Edmund Bennett—the others being Carderock Springs and New Mark Common. Built in the late 1950s, at the height of the most radical phase of “situated modernism” in Maryland suburbs, Potomac Overlook is an early example of a neighborhood that was planned to integrate housing into the existing landscape and topography, with secluded cul-de-sac streets serving wooded, sloping lots. Houses are distinguished for their crisp, geometric detailing and clear expression of building components.



Journal of Homebuilding, National Association of Home Builders, 1958

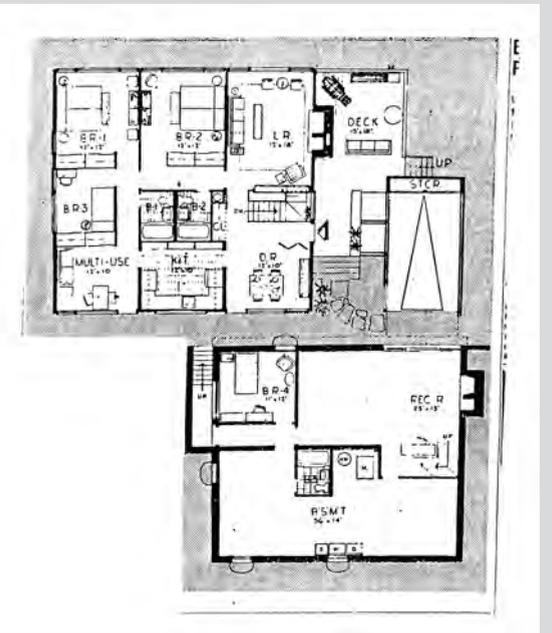
6525 Wiscasset Road is open for the Tour Day. Known as the Riverview model, this residence had the largest plan offered in Potomac Overlook, with five bedrooms and three bathrooms. This model received an award from the Potomac Valley chapter of the AIA in 1958. The house has a one-story front (on Wiscasset Road) and two-story back facing Virginia View Court. Like its immediate neighbors, the house was built by Edmund Bennett.



Potomac Overlook included houses on MacArthur at Mohican Road, Virginia View Court and Rivercrest Court. In recent years, the neighborhood has seen great change as many original houses have been enlarged or replaced by large houses in revivalist styles.

Glen Echo Heights

The nearby Glen Echo Heights area has many mid-century modern houses, including more than 30 designed by Donald Lethbridge and his associates between 1957 and 1961. Edmund Bennett started building houses in this neighborhood in 1954, and he built his own house at 6216 Wiscasset Road. The house at 6210 Wiscasset (Franklin Newhall House) won a 1956 award in residential architecture co-sponsored by the Washington Chapter of the AIA and the Washington Evening Star.



6210 Wiscasset Rd (1956)
Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies, University of Maryland



AIA Guide to Washington D.C., 1965

Seymour Krieger House (1959)

6739 Brigadoon Drive, Bethesda

Marcel Breuer, architect; National Register 2008; Master Plan for Historic Preservation



The Seymour Krieger House is an excellent example of the evolution of the International Style to utilize indigenous materials and the integration of geometric forms. Architect Marcel L. Breuer (1902-1981) played a key role in the advancement of the International Style from Europe into the United States. A native of Hungary, Marcel Breuer worked with Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus. In the late



AIA Guide to Washington D.C., 1965

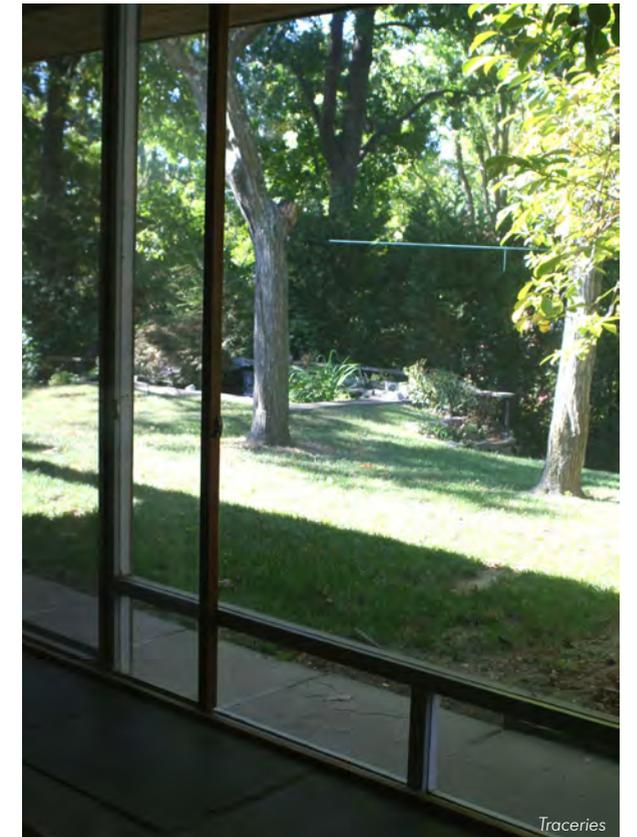
1930s, Breuer followed Gropius in moving to the US, joining his mentor's architectural firm and the teaching staff of Harvard University. It was during his

tenure at Harvard that Breuer tutored other future architectural greats such as Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph, and John Johansen. Gradually, Breuer became more interested in the incorporation of regional materials to the International Style, an industrial-looking Modern Movement design that originated with the Bauhaus School. To fit the New England landscape, Breuer and Gropius used local fieldstone and natural timber, but combined these materials into pure geometric forms.

Typical of the International Style, the interior of the one-story dwelling has an open plan defined by asymmetrically-placed openings that express the spaces within. Despite physical dividers such as

a full-height screen of natural-finished birch with caning, the interior is open, allowing complete interaction between the living room, dining area, kitchen, entrance hall, and playroom. Private areas include the three bedrooms, two baths, and study. Like the exterior, the interior detailing is minimal, reduced to indigenous construction materials such as the bluestone flooring and the American black walnut ceilings.

Across the street is a house designed by Hal Esten (a one-time Goodman associate).



Traceries



Traceries

The Seymour Krieger House (1958) is an International Style house designed by Marcel Breuer. Every aspect of the architectural and landscape designs of the Seymour Krieger House has a specific function, an ideal promulgated by the International Style. The project was the first of several collaborations between Breuer and landscape architect Dan Kiley, who designed the setting for the Krieger House on its triangular shaped lot. The steel-framed structure is constructed of all-stretcher coursed brick (painted white) and marlite panels with bands of large plate-glass windows and sliding-glass doors set within steel frames. The concrete foundation is clad in native fieldstone, the same material used in the construction of the walls that project from the structure.

5

River Road Unitarian Church (1964)

6301 River Road, Bethesda

Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon; Donald Lethbridge, principal architect



Depression, followed by shortage of materials during World War II. In addition, new suburban communities arose from farmland as developers provided housing for returning veterans, made affordable with low-interest government loans. Situated outside the nation's capital, with a booming population, Montgomery County was particularly well-primed for a wave of church construction. Churches were often the first community buildings constructed among the new subdivisions.



Architects of churches in Montgomery County recall that in this era they had little family life, as they were attending a church committee meeting nearly every day of the week.

Situated on a wooded knoll, the complex originally contained classrooms, offices, a social hall, and sanctuary to accommodate 400 people. A Fellowship Room addition (2008), along River Road, continues the design.



AIA Guide to Washington D.C., 1965

The Unitarian denomination has been identified as a driver of innovation and design in churches from nationally recognized to locally important examples. River Road Unitarian Church received several design awards, including American Institute of Architects award of merit 1966. Lethbridge was the partner in charge for River Road Unitarian Church (with the first phase completed in 1966). The River Road Church sanctuary is outfitted in warm wood paneling and designed with wooden elements including paneling, balcony railing and even light fixtures of wood. A tremendous wall of glass looks out onto a natural setting. Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon also designed Cedar Lane Unitarian Church, in association with Pietro Belluschi.

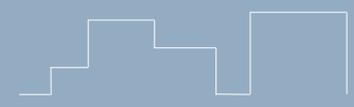
In the mid-century era, the nation was engaged in the greatest boom in church building in the country's history. Contributing factors were a backlog of projects caused by economic hardship of the Great

6

Carderock Springs (1962-66)

Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon, architects. Edmund Bennett, developer

National Register of Historic Places, Historic District



Like Potomac Overlook, Carderock Springs was developed by Edmund J. Bennett, with houses designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon. The community uses the same principles of natural setting, modern architecture and banked architecture, here incorporated into a large-scale community. In Carderock Springs, a range of house models was designed for a variety of site conditions, unified by a design aesthetic consistent with Bennett's vision of a visual community. Curvilinear, secluded streets serve wooded, sloping lots.

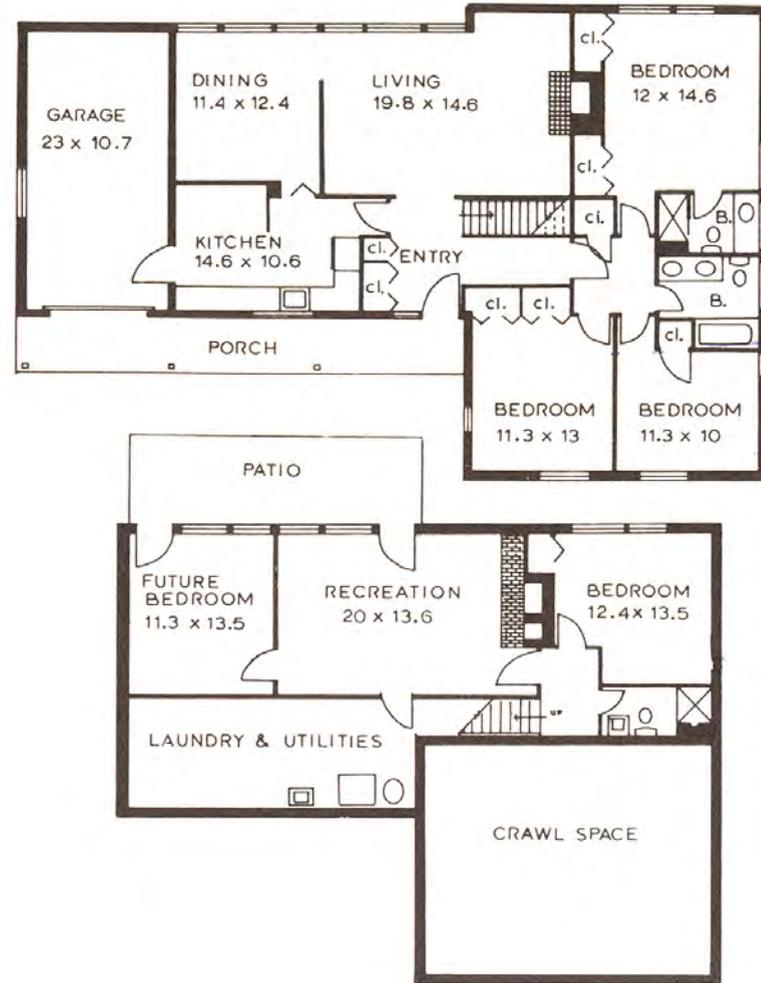
With the exception of Carderock Springs' seven atrium houses, all Bennett/Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon houses had a two-slope roof, the low pitch of which precluded attics but made possible space-enhancing cathedral ceilings, as well as glazed transoms. The "traditional" roof also reassured both lenders and buyers as to resale values. Room configuration and fenestration were flexible enough to adapt to the topography of each site. By digging into

the hillside, Bennett and Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon added usable space at relatively low cost per square foot. With very few exceptions, houses adopted a two-story layout. In Washington's close suburbs, where lots were relatively small, this cost-saving, stacked configuration was more prevalent than that of "ramblers." In a recent interview, Mr. Bennett stressed his concern for proper solar orientation, favoring south or southeast exposures for the major living spaces and minimizing western exposures.

Bennett preserved trees whenever possible. The sales brochure for the third section of Carderock Springs claimed: "We agree with Frank Lloyd Wright that the house should be 'of the site and not on it'." While most mass builders tried to erase accidents in the natural terrain if they were in the way of fast and cheap construction, Bennett did not hesitate to purchase heavily wooded and rugged sites abundant in Western Montgomery County. He used sections that were impossible or difficult to build upon for open or recreational space.

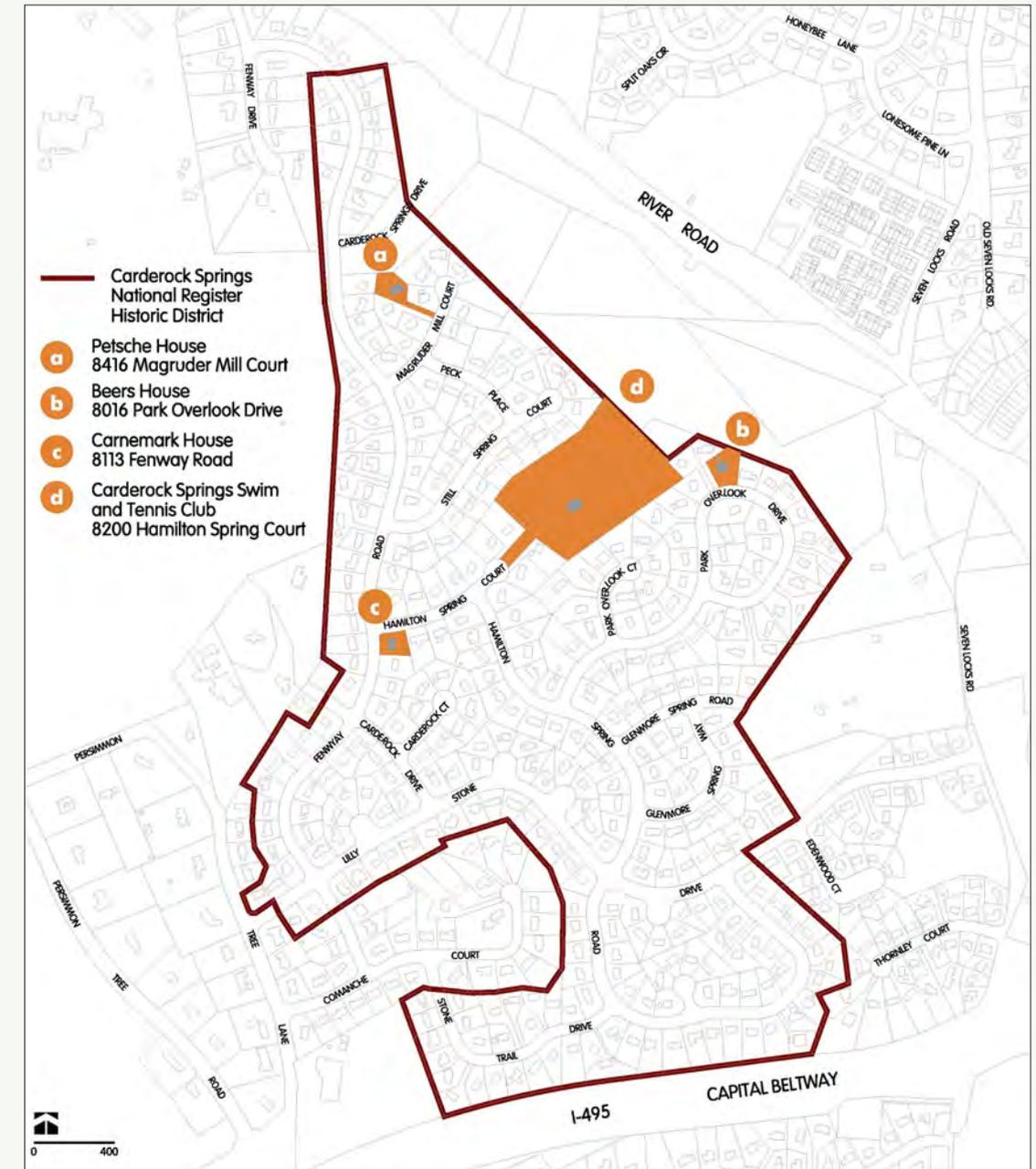
Careful attention was paid to streetscape design. Cars were not allowed to be parked permanently in driveways and visitors could not park at street curbs. Carderock Springs was the first subdivision in the county where electrical lines were buried underground. The Carderock Springs subdivision takes its name from a land tract that comprised much of the community, which formerly belonged to Lilly Moore Stone (1862-1960), who operated a stone quarry and was a local historian and civic leader. Bennett named a street in the subdivision in her honor.

Model homes had clean lines inside and out, and avoided showiness. Their modified open plans, large expanses of glass in Mondrian-like rectangular patterns, and indoor-outdoor living features made them clearly modern but in an effortless, unassuming way. Balconies and terraces bring living space into the outdoors, while window walls bring the outdoors in.



Woodside model, floor plan
Carderock Springs brochure, c1962

Carderock Springs National Register Historic District



Buildings open for the tour:

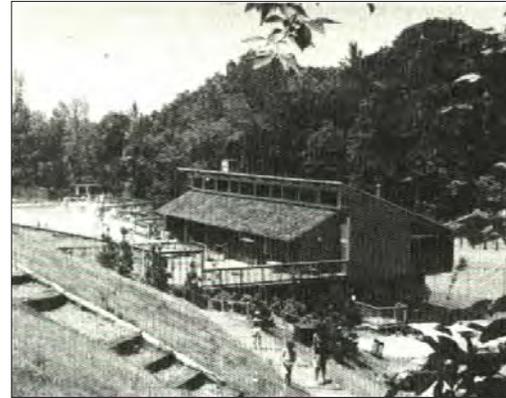
a Petsche Residence

8416 Magruder Mill Court, 1962 Woodside model

b Beers Residence

8016 Park Overlook Drive, 1965 Atrium model

A precedent for Carderock Spring's Atrium houses was the Gerald Luria House (1954) that Keyes, Smith, Satterlee and Lethbridge designed at 2533 North Ridgeview Road in Arlington, which was a large flat-roofed house featuring glass transoms and a patio-solarium.



c Carnemark Residence

8113 Fenway Road, 1963 Glenmore model

The Bennett buyer was highly educated, and affluent. According to a Washington Post advertisement, stating that "41% of all Carderock Springs' homeowners were professional-level government executives; 47% are private professionals in legal, medical, education or other fields," it was the very professionalism of Bennett and his collaborators that attracted these residents to the community.

Like New Mark Commons, also a Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon-Bennett collaboration, Carderock Springs has architectural covenants. They are enforced by an Architectural Review Committee, which reviews fencing, sheds, paint color, and tree removal. The community maintains an architectural vision that values the preservation of contemporary design, scale and massing, and the relationship between built and natural environment.



d Carderock Springs Clubhouse (1962)

8200 Hamilton Springs Court

The tour concludes at the clubhouse, a community feature of Carderock Springs, built in 1962. A regional park borders on the southeast.

For additional information

http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/historic/montgomery_modern/

Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies, "Subdivisions Built by Edmund Bennett and designed by Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1956-1973", National Register Historic Context, 2004.

EHT Traceries, "Seymour Krieger House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.

James Goode, *Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinguished Apartment Houses*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1998.

Richard Longstreth (Editor), *Housing Washington: Two Centuries of Residential Development and Planning in the National Capital Area*, Chicago, IL: Center for American Places, 2010.

Robinson & Associates, "DC MODERN: A Context for Modernism in the District of Columbia, 1945-1976," District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office, 2009.

Teresa B. Lachin, *Rockville's Recent Past*, Rockville, MD, Peerless Rockville, 2012.

Chris Martin, "Tract House Modern", PhD dissertation, George Washington University, 2000.

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