C.2 Architecture in the Suburbs

This section explores architecture in the suburbs through the three applicable chronological periods defined by MHT. Within each period are discussions of both residential and non-residential building types and styles. The first period, Agricultural-Industrial Transition (1815-1930), also includes descriptions of building types that existed in the study area before suburbanization occurred. Examples of these types frequently remain in the contemporary landscape. Further explanation of dwelling forms and architectural styles are included in Chapter D.

C.2.1 Agricultural-Industrial Transition Period (1815-1870)

C.2.1.1 Residential Properties

Prior to the suburbanization of the late-nineteenth century, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties were agricultural areas punctuated by a few rural villages. The wealthiest members of the rural society were usually the plantation owners, who inhabited substantial houses on large tracts of land. While the ornamentation of these houses changed with the passing fashions, the center-passage Georgian plan remained the preferred form. Farm managers, independent farmers, well-off tenant farmers, and various merchants and professionals generally occupied vernacular houses in a range of recognizable forms, including the front-gable, gable-front-and-wing, I-house, and massed plan. These houses also frequently featured the stylistic ornamentation of the time. Another large portion of the population, including many slaves, poor tenant farmers and seasonal workers, inhabited simple wood-frame or log dwellings with one or two rooms. Little is known about these dwellings because few have survived. However, many of the more substantial houses from the agricultural era remain within the project area.

During the mid-nineteenth century, when suburbanization in Maryland began, the nuclear family was repeatedly upheld as the ideal social unit. Architects, philosophers, and other writers discussed ways in which the home environment might reinforce the family, and their opinions influenced the design of new houses (Wright 1981, 77). In keeping with the Romantic Movement in art and literature of the time, prominent landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing described the ideal family home as an individual, rural cottage amidst well-tended gardens. The house itself, Downing believed, should elicit pleasant associations and reinforce the prevailing values of the time (Wright 1981, 82-83). Intricate details and natural materials emphasized nature and craft, individual houses and rooms offered privacy to the family and the individual, while porches provided pleasant places from which to view outdoor scenery (Wright 1981, 85-109). The dwellings of this time period, commonly called "Victorian," had increasingly specialized spaces: libraries for men, boudoirs for women, parlors for public visits, and sitting rooms for family activities (Wright 1981, 112). The many rooms resulted in floor plans punctuated by nooks, bay windows, and porches (Wright 1981, 82). Highlighting these elements were the architectural revivals and other fanciful styles of the time, such as the medieval-inspired Gothic Revival and the Italianate. In wealthy suburbs, these houses were set on large lots in a naturalistic landscape.

Architectural pattern-books began to gain popularity at this time, promoted by an emerging professional class of architects that included Andrew Jackson Davis and Calvert Vaux. These designers published books of house designs appropriate to rural and suburban areas, and promoted them using their professional reputation for "good taste." For further information, see Appendix B: The Influence of Pattern-Books and Mail Order Catalogs.

C.2.1.2 Non-Residential Properties

Related to the development of a residential area is the development of nearby commercial enterprises. Prior to the suburbanization of Montgomery and Prince George's counties, commercial properties developed primarily around transportation routes. Larger towns quickly developed business centers while small crossroads villages usually had a few stores clustered around a post office.

Crossroads general stores were commonly wood-frame structures sheathed in clapboard. They served as a place where farmers could purchase groceries, feed supplies and hardware. These establishments were in many ways the focal point of rural communities, serving as the post office, the community social center and a place to exchange news (Gottfried and Jennings 1988, 247).

Small-scale commercial buildings in towns were similar in form to simple dwellings and outbuildings. Often of wood-frame construction and one- or two-stories tall, these buildings were built to serve specific functions such as shops or offices. In two-story structures, the top story often provided living space for the proprietor. These buildings usually had front-gable or parapeted flat roofs and typically featured a large display window and a prominent sign over the entrance. Decorative features were few, usually limited to a transom over the door and decorative signs (Liebs 1985, 5-8).

The formerly rural, now suburbanized landscape also includes public and institutional buildings. Prior to the suburbanization of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, educational facilities in the project area consisted almost solely of small, rural school buildings. The most recognizable form of rural school building is a front-gable structure with a three-bay facade and three windows symmetrically arranged along each side. Such schools commonly had a bell tower located close to the front of the building and a chimney placed at the back of the roof. Most schools also had either a partial shed roof porch supported by wooden posts, or an enclosed entry porch. In most school buildings, the depth exceeded the width. In poorer areas schools were simple structures, often with a side-gable roof, constructed of timber with board and batten siding. These schools usually had only one window in the front and one on each side. They also included an exterior gable-end chimney usually made of stone. Schools in very remote areas were frequently constructed of log (Gulliford 1991, 35-45).

Another remnant of the rural landscape is the rural church. The early vernacular church almost invariably featured a front-gable roof and often a bell tower that called attention to the building's religious function. Generally, these buildings had two or three

small windows on each side, no windows in the front or rear, and little or no ornamentation. By the 1820s and 1830s, larger churches, often constructed of brick, were built as simplified versions of urban churches. Typically, they were front gable structures with a three bay facade and three symmetrical windows along each of the sides. Sometimes they featured a modest steeple. Ornamentation was still simple and limited to hooded windows, a round window in the front gable, and double doors with a transom above.

The three decades before the Civil War were an era of great religious fervor often known as the "Second Great Awakening". It had a strong effect on the country politically as can be seen particularly in the temperance and abolitionist movements. The renewed religious intensity sparked a period of great church building activity. The dominant styles of the period were Greek Revival and Gothic Revival. These styles began in the larger cities of the northeast but their influence gradually spread into virtually every rural county in the country. Unlike urban churches, however, rural churches were rarely designed by an architect. Designs for such churches were derived from books or duplicated from churches that parish members had seen elsewhere. Architectural styles in such churches were reduced to their most basic elements and ornamentation was limited or non-existent (Rifkind 1980, 132-138).

Although few remain intact, small post offices once peppered the rural landscape in the project area. Even sparsely populated counties often had dozens of post offices during the mid-nineteenth century. Many rural post offices were little more than gable-roofed sheds with a window and a door in the front. They also had a single window on each side and a small, central chimney. More common were structures with a three-bay facade and an awning or simple shed roof porch over the entrance. Generally, such structures rested on wooden piers. Rural post offices of this period were typically constructed of vertical wood siding and sometimes covered with tar paper. Over the entrance hung a simple sign proclaiming that the structure was a post office. It was quite common for post offices to be located at the front of a general store. Few of these small, rural post offices survived the suburbanization of the twentieth century (Rennick 1993, 6).

Another building type that existed in great numbers in the project area during the nineteenth century was the gristmill. Gristmills were constructed to meet the needs of farmers who brought their grain for processing. The typical gristmill was a rectangular structure three- to three-and-one-half-stories tall. A vertical arrangement was necessary because grain was poured into the hopper from the top floor. Most gristmills were constructed of wood and rested on a coursed rubble-stone or masonry foundation. Most were supported by a post-and-beam structure, had a central brick chimney, and were covered by a tin, gable roof. Mills appear in the Agricultural-Industrial Transition Period and occasionally in the Industrial/Urban Dominance Period (Zimiles 1973, 25-32).

C.2.2 Industrial/Urban Dominance Period (1870-1930)

C.2.2.1 Residential Properties

During the late nineteenth century, the wealthy continued to build elaborate houses in the styles of the Victorian period in spacious, pastoral suburbs. With the opening of streetcar lines and the subsequent development along their routes, more compact building forms began appearing in new, middle-class suburbs. Some of these were adapted from rural types, while others were brought from urban areas. Frequently found in streetcar suburbs were the front-gable, gable-front-and-wing, and massed-plan types. Row house and I-house types also appeared. These types were suited to the narrow, deep lots of streetcar suburbs in that they were generally three bays wide or less, and were deeper than they were wide.

The "cult of domesticity" reached its peak in the 1880s and 1890s, and even relatively modest middle-class dwellings displayed porches, bay windows, and Stick and Queen Anne-style details. Enthusiastic homeowners sought to express their individuality through such ornament, although much of it had been produced in great quantities by factories. Machinery developed following the Civil War made possible the mass production of door frames, mouldings, sash and window units and porch ornamentation. Even modest, vernacular dwellings were frequently ornamented with "gingerbread" (Wright 1981, 100-102).

After the turn of the twentieth century, attitudes toward family and home changed to emphasize simplicity. The Colonial Revival movement, which had begun in the late-nineteenth century, kindled an interest in the simple, Puritanical lives of the colonists. At the same time, family size was shrinking and the formality that characterized the Victorian era was being abandoned for a more casual home life (Wright 1981, 171-172). Several new forms and styles of houses emerged at this time.

The traditional, double-pile, center-passage Georgian-plan house had never truly gone out of fashion; it had merely been elaborated with nooks, projections and towers. A Georgian-plan ornamented with a combination of Queen Anne and Colonial Revival detail regained popularity in the late-nineteenth century. The related Four-Square form, two rooms wide, two rooms deep and two stories tall, appeared around 1900. Four-Squares were simple and inexpensive, and were built in large numbers during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This was in part due to the influence of pattern- books. Companies such as Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck and Company advertised the Four-Square as one of the first designs for which they offered complete, pre-cut materials, shipped ready for assembly (Wells 1987, 53).

Colonial Revival was one of the most popular styles of the early twentieth century. Victorian-plan, Georgian-plan, Four-Square and massed-plan houses of this period frequently showed the influences of the Colonial Revival Style. While early Colonial Revival houses freely experimented with architectural elements, later buildings of this style more accurately reflected their eighteenth-century models. The Eclectic Revival

Movement of the same time period reflected the influence of Dutch Colonial, Tudor, Spanish Colonial and other styles.

The Bungalow was a popular house in the period between 1900 and 1935, and dominated the 1920s. The form was inspired by Charles and Henry Greene, brothers who worked together in Pasadena, California between 1893 and 1914. The Greene brothers built intricate and detailed examples of Bungalows, sometimes called "Ultimate Bungalows" (McAlester and McAlester 1984, 454). The Bungalow style spread eastward from California, primarily through popular magazines and pattern-books. Pattern-books offered plans for Bungalows for as little as five dollars. Some offered pre-cut packages of lumber and architectural detail that could be assembled by local builders. Bungalows were advertised in popular magazines such as *House Beautiful*. A monthly periodical called *Bungalow Magazine* was published from 1909 to 1918 (Klein and Fogle 1986, 44). Vernacular versions of Bungalows, in the form of simple, massed-plan houses, proliferated in rural and suburbanizing areas in the 1920s and 1930s. Bungalows were generally built in the Craftsman style, which, in keeping with the emphasis on a simple and casual lifestyle, favored rustic materials and details (Wright 1981, 162-163).

By the 1920s, more middle-class people could afford to own automobiles and travel around a city without relying on the streetcar. At the same time, suburbs were located further from city centers and were constructed at lower densities.

Zoning restrictions also became popular during this period. The use of zoning to regulate the suburban environment and the resulting designs reflect the desire for security, often associated with homogeneity. The 1920s were the era of "thematic" suburbs, in which the dwellings were designed in a single style. Colonial Revival was the most popular style in the Mid-Atlantic region. Thematic suburbs were generally constructed within a short period of time by a small number of builders contracted directly by the developer. Often, houses in these suburbs were either all the same or very similar. Other suburbs of the same time, in which lots were sold individually, may feature a variety of architectural styles that were popular at the time (Wright 1981, 200-210).

C.2.2.2 Non-Residential Properties

During the early years of suburbanization, from the 1880s through the 1910s, affluent suburbanites continued to rely on city merchants for their daily and special needs. Many businesses would take orders by telephone and deliver merchandise to the customer's home via deliverymen or streetcars. Not until the middle-class suburban population grew during the 1920s did commercial enterprises begin to open in the suburbs in large numbers. Whereas older suburbs had deed restrictions forbidding commercial development, newer suburbs included provisions for businesses frequented by their residents, such as grocery stores, drugstores, theaters and garages (Rebeck 1987, 11). These early shopping centers were usually designed to resemble a cluster of dwellings and were ornamented in the same style as surrounding dwellings (Walston 1986, 331). Even on major thoroughfares, businesses ranging from service stations to motels were housed in buildings with residential features (Ford 1994, 235).

Plate 1: Tudor-style gas station (7060 Carroll Ave., Takoma Park)

Automobile-related structures also began appearing in the early twentieth century. They include repair garages, gas stations, and showrooms. Early in the twentieth century, gasoline was sold at local grocery stores. Filling stations consisting of gas pumps and one-room shelters began to appear around 1910. They gradually became more complex, adding display areas, waiting areas, garage bays, and restrooms. Like commercial buildings, early automobile-related structures resembled dwellings, sometimes with a porte-cochere extending forward to shelter the filling area. The Bungalow style was particularly popular, although occasional examples of the Tudor style also appear (Plate 1) (Rebeck 1987, 1-5).

Among institutional buildings, rural schools were commonly built with either Bungalow-style or Four-Square style hipped roofs after 1900, reflecting the influence of contemporary urban and suburban building styles. By this time, however, the heyday of the one-room schoolhouse was ending in areas booming with development. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw large-scale school district consolidations in both rural and suburbanizing areas, often resulting in monumental public school buildings, frequently designed in simplified interpretations of the Beaux-Arts style (Gulliford 1991, 35-34).

Also by the early-twentieth century, churches frequently included a complex of related buildings that serviced the religious and social needs of the community. The buildings included the house of worship, parish house, lecture room, day care center, social hall and gymnasium. Classical Revival became a fashionable style for new churches in the twentieth century (Rifkind 1980, 146).

The government at this time began constructing increasingly ornate post offices in cities, suburbs and small towns. Some of these remain in the contemporary suburban landscape. Improved roads allowed rural suburban residents greater access to these larger post offices, which offered a wider variety of shipping services than did small, rural post offices. The beginning of Rural Free Delivery also meant rural residents could receive mail at their homes. Many of the small, rural post offices closed at this time (Rennick 1993, 6).

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, industrial sites included mills, lumberyards, mines, and furnaces. The most prevalent form of industrial structure was a utilitarian single or multi-story building, with no formal architectural style. The size, shape and form of the building was dependant upon the building technology in use at the time of construction and the intended function of the building. The vernacular factory was usually a small or medium-sized building, often of masonry, bearing wall construction with small windows. The development of steel and reinforced concrete structural frames in the late-nineteenth century eliminated the need for bulky bearing-wall construction and allowed larger exterior windows. Factory roofs were moderately pitched until the 1870s, at which time new truss systems allowed them to become flat or low-pitched (Maddex 1985, 103).

Railroad-related structures of this period range from small, frame buildings to more elaborate structures. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were thousands of passenger or combination freight and passenger stations in the United States, the majority of which served smaller communities. Although great pains might be taken to design an imposing central depot in a large city, the railroad station serving a small community was modest in scale and erected at a minimal expense by a cost-conscious railroad company. Although often architecturally ornate, the primary objective in smaller station design was the efficient housing of the various activities that took place in the building. The need for ticket offices, waiting rooms, restrooms, baggage rooms, and freight handling facilities, all easily visible from the ticket window, imposed specific requirements on the design of a station.

Although there were a variety of popular styles in the late nineteenth century for small railroad stations, the architectural style of the building was largely secondary to its efficient operation. Railroad companies frequently used standard designs for the modest structures that were erected in such great numbers in smaller communities. Many of the stations that existed in the small towns bisected or created by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad were small, one-story, unadorned frame buildings (Baker, 1899; Bye, 1973; Droege, 1912, 1916; Grow, 1977; Meeks, 1956; Stilgoe, 1983).

C.2.3 Modern Period (1930-1960)

C.2.3.1 Residential Properties

The Modern Period is characterized by the increasing capabilities of machinery. Residential design since 1930 reflects both a desire for the convenience of technology and a preference for traditional forms. Prominent Modern designers experimented with new ways of designing in the 1920s and 1930s, producing rambling, asymmetrical buildings with modern materials and unconventional ornamentation. The geometric Art Deco style, the sleek Art Moderne style, and the spare International style grew out of modern designers' efforts. However, very few residential properties, particularly single family homes were built in these styles (McAlester and McAlester 1984, 465-470). The community of Greenbelt in Prince George's County and a collection of polychromatic houses in Montgomery County are rare examples. In general, while the buyers of new homes were enthusiastic about new appliances such as washing machines and low-maintenance materials such as linoleum, they preferred houses with a traditional appearance, usually drawing from the Colonial Revival style. The influence of the Modern styles appears primarily in features such as plate-glass windows with steel frames and concrete-slab foundations (Wright 1981, 253).

The Federal government was also more comfortable with the familiar, and FHA loans were more easily obtained for traditional houses (Wright 1981, 241). This did not rule out innovation; in the late 1940s, Abraham Levitt and his company in Long Island, New York, successfully combined a contemporary plan and materials with a traditional Cape Cod form, and produced 17,450 copies of it in Levittown over the next several years (Wright 1981, 251-253). Their Cape Cod became one of the standard forms of suburban housing in the Modern Period. The Levitts also developed the subdivision Bowie (originally called Belair) in Prince George's County. Founded in 1960, Bowie grew to occupy more than 11 acres and eventually contained more than 9000 detached houses based on five Levitt models (Calcott 1985, 75-77).

Other forms that evolved during the Modern Period were the ranch and the split-level. The ranch house has a long, linear plan arranged on a single level, while the split-level has a two-level wing intersected at the mid-point by a one-level wing. Both forms have plans in which living spaces flow together while sleeping spaces are kept separate. This reflected the informal, family-oriented lifestyle that came to characterize suburban living, particularly after World War II (McAlester 1995, II-126-127; Ames 1995, II- 100; Wright 1981, 251).

The forms that developed during the Modern Period, the Cape Cod, the ranch, and the split-level, differ from those that preceded them in that the later forms are positioned on a lot with the longest side facing the street. These wide lots are a defining characteristic of the freeway suburbs.

Plate 2: “Streamlined” building (WTOP Radio, 2021 University Blvd., Wheaton)

C.2.3.2 Non-Residential Forms

In the 1930s, the predominance of the automobile led to the development of the first automobile "strips." Because most shopping trips were now made with the car, new shopping centers began providing large parking areas, usually located to the rear of the buildings (Walston 1986, 333). The buildings often had two entrances, one facing the street for pedestrian customers and one facing the parking lot for driving customers (Walston 1986, 333). In response to the new "machine age" of automobiles, airplanes and appliances, commercial architecture was designed in a new "streamlined" style, characterized by clean, sleek buildings with rounded corners (Ford 1994, 238). Neon lighting first became popular during this time period (Ford 1994, 238). The WTOP Radio building in Wheaton is an example of this type of building (Plate 2) (Walston 1986, 333).

New construction of all types slowed during World War II. At that time, suburbanites "bought food, cars, and gasoline close to home, but relied on the city for clothing, furniture, jewelry and department store purchases" (Walston 1986, 334). With the exponential growth of the suburban population following World War II came the expansion of commercial activities outside the city. During the late 1940s, small

Plate 3: Standard shopping center (Village Thrift Shopping Center, 5600 Annapolis Blvd., Bladensburg)

developers constructed shopping centers in the suburbs for independent businesses (Walston 1986, 334). After comparing their own falling profits to the success of small business in the suburbs, large city stores began opening suburban branches (Walston 1986, 334; Kelley 1994, 9-10). The Hecht's department store, traditionally a downtown business, opened a branch in the Silver Spring Shopping Center in 1947 (Walston 1986, 334). Modern commercial strips developed where independent and branch stores congregated (Walston 1986, 334). While they contained modern conveniences such as elevators and air-conditioning, the new commercial buildings had traded the streamlined design of the 1930s for the simple, boxy form that has come to characterize suburban commercial architecture (Walston 1986, 335-336) (Plate 3). Suburban commercial buildings of the 1940s and 1950s generally had steel and concrete superstructures with windowless, masonry exterior walls (Walston 1986, 335-36). Limestone veneer, a portico or some other ornamentation might distinguish the facades, but the buildings were essentially blank slates which could be adapted for any enterprise merely by applying new signage to the exterior (Walston 1986, 336).

In contrast to the plain, uniform suburban commercial buildings were the occasional "signature" buildings or "exaggerated modern" buildings (Ford 1994, 237, 242). The most famous of these are shaped like a product such as a milk bottle or ice-

Plate 4: “Signature” building (Little Tavern Hamburgers, Second St., Laurel)

cream cone. In the 1950s, they frequently had a features such as multiple slanted planes on the roof, slanted, plate-glass windows, or bright, recognizable colors (Ford 1994, 242) (Plate 4).

During the 1930s, new automobile-related structures were often built in the "streamlined" and Art Deco styles common among commercial buildings of the time. Competition among petroleum companies also led to the development of "signature" designs and signage. The 1950s brought new designs with exaggerated, angular roofs, large plate-glass windows, and bright, oversize signage (Rice 1995, II-25; Rebeck 1987, 1-3).

The defining feature of all commercial strip buildings of the 1940s and 1950s was the expansive parking lot between the street and the building, a feature that has been carried into contemporary strip center design. These modern automobile strips only appear during the Modern Period. (Walston 1986, 337; Kelley 1994, 10)

Since 1960, commercial strips have been joined by the enclosed shopping mall, usually located at a major intersection (Walston 1986, 338; Kelley 1994, 9-10). Also during the 1960s,

> lured by the glamorous new image of the suburban shopping mall and increased intraurban accessibility, industrial and office parks began to be attracted to major suburban freeway corridors and interchanges (Kelley 1994, 10).

A major suburban population increase in the 1950s necessitated an increase in school construction. The new buildings were typically characterized by low, utilitarian, flat-roofed forms with sleek bands of windows, often built with modern 1950s styling (Gulliford 1991, 35-45).

Industrial buildings constructed between 1920 and 1945 reflect the demand for considerable interior open space. With the coming of truck freight hauling, many industrial buildings were designed to facilitate freight loading and transfer, and featured loading docks, cargo platforms, and special elevators. New buildings, built for specialized processing or warehousing, were also erected between 1920 and 1945. While new machine shops or auto repair garages were often built, older factories were also often converted into such facilities.

Additional information on the relationship of the suburban strip and the Central Business District can be found in Carolyn Kelley's, "The Spatial Evolution of a Commercial Strip in the Post-World War II Suburbs: Rockville Pike, Maryland, 1959-1990," University of Maryland Masters Thesis. The effect of transportation developments on the design of the strip, particularly on signature buildings, is the subject of Larry Ford's, "Drive-in Dreams: Decades of Design on the American Commercial Strip," in *Cities and Buildings*. The evolution of the automobile strip is described by Mark Walston in "The Commercial Rise and Fall of Silver Spring: A Study of the 20th Century Development of the Suburban Shopping Center in Montgomery County," in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Volume 81, Number 4, Winter 1986. Andrea Rebeck describes traditional commercial architecture in Montgomery County in the chapter "Early Twentieth Century Neighborhood Shopping Facilities in Montgomery County," in *Montgomery County in the Early Twentieth Century*.