Hartford: A Cradle of American Suburbanization

Adjunct Lecturer:
Donald J. Poland, MS, AICP
E-mail: dpoland@mcc.commnet.edu
Web: www.donaldpoland.com

The Suburban Ideal and Suburbanization

Understanding Suburbanization
What is Rural?

Understanding Suburbanization
What is Urban?
Understanding Suburbanization

What is Suburban?

Characteristics of Urban and Suburban Space?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>Gridiron</td>
<td>Curvilinear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes</td>
<td>Row-house</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yards</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard Design</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Ornamental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Core</td>
<td>Fringe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So how did this change? How did we go from urban to suburban?

The Industrial City

"Suburbia can never be understood solely in its own terms. It must always be defined in relation to its rejected opposites: the metropolis. If the eighteenth century creators of suburbia bequeathed to their successors their positive ideal of a family life in union with nature, they also passed on their deepest fears of living in an inhumane and immoral metropolis. Buried deep within every subsequent suburban dream is a nightmare image of eighteenth century London." (Fishman, 27, 1987)

The Evangelical Ideals of Family and Home

American suburbanization traces back to Clapham, England (1760s -1790s).

A direct link between the Evangelicals (William Wilberforce) in Clapham and their Christian ideals of family, children, and home that become critical components in the ideological movement away from cities and toward a society dominated by a suburban lifestyle.

"One might call the Evangelicals the ideologies of the closed, domesticated nuclear family."

"A location like Clapham gave them the ability to take the family out of London without taking leave of the family business."

Robert Fishman – Bourgeois Utopia’s: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (1987)
Understanding Suburbanization
The Evangelical Ideals of Family and Home

- Andrea Palladio (1508-80), who...became synonymous in England with the purist classicism...the most famous, the Villa Rotonda, was a true villa suburban designed for elegant leisure. The house is the ultimate expression of civilization conceived... (Fishman, 46, 1987)
- The path from the Villa Rotonda to the suburban tract house is a long and twisted one, but we cannot understand the latter without realizing that some small vestige of the former's ideal of the 'civilized house in nature' survives in even the most modest suburban development. (Fishman, 46, 1987)

Understanding Suburbanization
American Ideals of Suburbanization

- "The...ideas...(of) house and the yard did not enter the nation's consciousness through the efforts of any person or group of individuals."
- "Dozens of people, including the park planner Fredrick Law Olmsted, the social reformer Charles Loring Brace, and the Transcendental thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson, helped create a new suburban vision of community between 1840 and 1870."
- "Three authors whose productive lives spanned the years between 1840 and 1875—Catharine Beecher, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Calvert Vaux—were the most important voices in shaping new American attitudes toward housing and residential space."
  - Kenneth Jackson - Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (1985)

Understanding Suburbanization
Important Individuals – Creating the Suburban Ideal

Three Most Important:
- Andrew Downing Jackson
  - Single Family Home Design
- Calvert Vaux
  - Single Family Home Design and Parks
- Catharine Beecher
  - The Domestic Role of Women and Single Family Home as a Vehicle for Moral Living

Also:
- Fredrick Law Olmsted
  - Suburban Design and Parks
- Jacob Weidenmann
  - The Yard and Landscape Design

Understanding Suburbanization
The American Evangelicals

- Timothy Dwight, Yale and the New American Evangelical Divinity
- Lyman Beecher
  - Catharine Beecher, whose Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841)
  - Harriet Beecher Stowe, House and Home Papers for the Atlantic (1863)
  - Catharine and Harriet The American Woman's Home or the Principles of Domestic Science (1869)
  - Henry Ward Beecher – Brooklyn Heights
- Horace Bushnell's Christian Nurture (1847): described how the home and family life could foster 'virtuous habits' and thereby help assure the blessed eternal peace of 'home comforts' in heaven
Understanding Suburbanization
The American Evangelicals and Others in Hartford

Lived in Hartford
- Catharine Beecher
- Harriet Beecher Stowe
- Horace Bushnell
- Fredrick Law Olmsted
- Charles Loring Brace
- Jacob Weidenmann

Visited Hartford
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Henry Ward Beecher

Others:
- Charles Dudley Warner
- Mark Twain

Understanding Suburbanization
Housing, the Single Family House, and the Suburbs

- Fredrick Law Olmsted and Riverside, IL (1860s)
- The suburban ideal and suburban form
- Respecting the natural contours of the land
- Notice the curved street (replaces the grid of the city)
- Parks and open space part of the design
- Blending the natural environment with urban life and lifestyle

Understanding Suburbanization
Hartford and Suburban Design

- Fredrick Law Olmsted (1822-1903)
- Born and raised in Hartford in an Evangelical family
- Close friend of Horace Bushnell, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charles Loring Brace
- Brings Jacob Weidenmann to Hartford to design Bushnell Park
- Weidenmann, Superintendent of the City Park and Cedar Hill Cemetery (1863-1874)
Although the elaborate lawn would be attainable only by the wealthy in England, in the United States carefully tended grass became the mark of suburban respectability.

In 1870 Frank J. Scott published *The Art of Beautifying the Home Grounds* and Jacob Weidenmann issued * Beautifying Country Homes: A Handbook of Landscape Gardening*, one of the first American books devoted entirely to ‘methods by which every landowner may improve and beautify his suburban home effectively and with economy.’ (Jackson, 1985)

“Explicit in such books was the notion that the only reason for living in the city was to make enough money to retire to the country.

The well-manicured yard became an object of great pride and enabled its owner to convey to passers-by an impression of wealth and social standing…what…would later label ‘conspicuous consumption.

Such a large parcel of land was not a practical resource in the service of a livelihood, but a luxury in the service of gracious living.

Weidenmann noted, ‘The location of the house [on lots of from half an acre to two acres in extent] should be sufficiently back from the public road to afford ample room for an unbroken ornamental lawn.’ (Jackson, 60, 1985)
In 1852, John Hooker, husband of Isabella Beecher Hooker, “with his brother-in-law Francis Gillette, John purchased Nook Farm, a tract of 100 acres…the farm lay just outside the western city limits and was still, in portions heavily wooded. Its trees and knolls and its winding stream…made it an ideal residential site.

Francis Gillette moved into the comfortable farmhouse on the property.” (Andrews, 3, 1950)

It is important to note at this point that Frances Gillette, was part of the Evangelical movement in America, a member of the State Legislature and later the U.S. Senate, and a leader in the abolitionist movement in Connecticut and America.
Understanding Suburbanization
Hartford and Nook Farm

- 1852, when Nook Farm is purchased coincides with the development of Llewellyn Park, a suburb of New York City in New Jersey.
- "...the world’s first picturesque suburb;...Llewellyn Park comes directly out of the half-century-old English tradition..." (Fishman, 125, 1987)
- "Perhaps the culmination of this phase of English suburbia’s assimilation by American came in Llewellyn Park, New Jersey (1857), an elaborate landscaped villa development...was conceived as a picturesque assemblage of villa development on curving roads..." (Fishman, 125, 1987)
- Jackson explains, "In 1852 Llewellyn S Haskell began purchasing property in West Orange. He added land every year until 1856 he and eight partners owned four hundred acres....
- While both Llewellyn Park and Nook Farm develop during the same decade, Nook Farm is purchased, developed, and inhabited by Evangelicals—the same Evangelicals who are recognized as influential in developing and spreading the suburban ideology.

From the first, the Hookers looked upon Nook Farm as a small society of their very own." (Andrews, 4, 1950)
- Hooker opened Forest Street among the trees and built a very substantial home upon it. Nook Farm was...on its way to becoming Hartford’s choicest residential district..." (Andrews, 3, 1950)
- As the city pushed westward from the river, the owners were able to subdivide desirable land among congenial persons whom they wished to have as neighbors.
Understanding Suburbanization
Hartford and Nook Farm

- The Hartford Daily Courant (Hartford Courant):
  - June 2, 1851 - reprint from Home Journal, “The Suburban Villa”
  - July 21, 1853 - first advertisements for sale of lots on Nook Farm.
  - August 30, 1853 - A visitor to Hartford writes “Hartford in June” - “Every observer would notice it is fashionable to cultivate flowers in this city, especially about the suburban dwellings where there is ample room for them.”

- The Hartford Daily Courant (Hartford Courant):
  - August 18, 1855 - letter to the editor titled, “Nook Farm—Beautiful Scenery in the Environs of Hartford—Love in a Cottage” - “We took a drive through…and found it delightful; a broad, graveled roadway leads from Forest Street, and winds its way through the grove…there are many small ponds in the grove round which the winds…We were not aware, prior to our drive, that, Nook Farm had so many desirable locations for buildings…. Hooker…has a beautiful cottage…Perkins…ground are laid out in a neat and tasteful manner…Nook Farm can’t be beat for desirable locations; and all those that like love in a cottage, and all that sort of thing, had better take a drive through and see for themselves.”

Understanding Suburbanization
Mark Twain on his first visit to Hartford - 1868

- “composed almost entirely of dwelling houses—no shingled-shaped affairs, stood on end and packed together like a ‘deck’ of cards, but massive private hotels, scattered along the broad straight streets, from fifty all the way up to two hundred yards apart. Each house sits in the midst of about an acre of green grass, or flower beds, or ornamental shrubbery, guarded on all sides by the trimmest hedges of arbor-vitae, and by files of huge forest trees that cast a shadow like a thunder-cloud…Everywhere the eye turns it is blessed with a vision or refreshing green. You do not know what beauty is if you have not been here.” (Andrews, 20, 1950)
1907 Hartford appoints first permanent planning commission in America.
1912 Hartford adopted one of the first city plans in America (Burnham’s Chicago, Cincinnati, and San Francisco plans pre-date Hartford).
City Beautiful movement (led by Burnham) greatly influenced the Hartford Plan and its recommendations.
The Plan focused on government buildings and public spaces. Plan recommends redesign of the State Capitol property and Bushnell Park to include a grand mall with many monuments and called for 400 foot wide boulevards to radiate out from the city center.

Text: “Suggested type of layout for factory sites and workmen’s housing.”
Text: “A scheme of development for outlying district to give a system of streets on a uniform plan, taking advantage of the lay of land, with plots of ground suitable for small houses and susceptible of picturesque and individual treatment.”
Possible grouping of houses on fifty foot lots with resultant gardens & open spaces in contrast to the usual treatments of houses built in rows.

The path from the Villa Rotonda to the suburban tract house is a long and twisted one, but we cannot understand the latter without realizing that some small vestige of the former’s ideal of the ‘civilized house in nature’ survives in even the most modest suburban development.” (Fishman, 46, 1987)

“Improbably, the museum and the theater were not in a great cosmopolitan city, but in Hartford, Connecticut. For a moment, the insurance capitol of the world had become the greatest risk taker in the country.” (Gaddis, 4, 2000)
Hartford and the Modernist Movement
Hartford and Suburban Design

- By 1934 he had already produced America’s first great Italian baroque paintings exhibition…first surrealist show, in which Salvador Dali’s *Persistence of Memory* was seen for the first time in the United States.
- He fought and badgered his architects into designing the interiors of the Athenaeum’s new building, the Avery Memorial, to his modernist specifications.
- He would prove himself such a trailblazer in the arts that in 1935 the French architect Le Corbusier, after visiting what became known as "Chick’s museum," would call Hartford “a spiritual center of America.” (Gaddis, 4-5, 2000)

Hartford and the Modernist Movement
Hartford and Suburban Design

- "My first talk in America about the ideas of *Radiant City* took place in the Museum of Modern Art, and the second the following day in New England, at Hartford, Connecticut. Hartford is a small city with has acquired a reputation through the quality of the undertakings sponsored by its very living museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum." (Le Corbusier 128, 1947)
- "In Hartford…Le Corbusier came onstage…drew elegant plans and diagrams and explained his theories of housing…described houses he had built, and set forth his vision of the city of the future—a fast, efficient, airy urban center of tall buildings on stilts with glass walls, flat roofs for aerial gardens, elevated expressways, pedestrian walkways, and underground parking garages…" (Gaddis, 288, 2000)

Hartford and the Modernist Movement
Hartford and Suburban Design

- Hitchcock, "in this essay of 1928 he had coined a new term: the advanced style was he wrote, ‘very definitely not a French, nor a Dutch, nor a German, nor a Russian, but an international style.’"
- “The International Style represented, at that time, perhaps the most abrupt change in living and working environments in the history of architecture. Its airy and immaculate spaces, defined and dramatized with primary colors on flat surfaces and bold lines that met at right angles, amounted to three-dimensional abstractions—a total rejection of the overstuffed and stylistically jumbled surroundings of nearly every European and American. The house, in Le Corbusier’s words, would become ‘a machine for living.’” (Gaddis, 171, 2000)

Hartford and the Modernist Movement
Hartford and Suburban Design

- To introduce contemporary architecture more fully to Hartford, Chick asked Hitchcock to give a public lecture at the end of the year.
- With new lantern slides from his summer in Europe flashing across a screen, Hitchcock illustrated the work of Le Corbusier, Oud, Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe, among other…
- His audience saw every kind of building in Europe that embodied the new aesthetic, from gas stations and churches to factories, houses, and museums.
- Richard Neutra, on his way back…from the International Congress of Modern Architecture in Zurich, made an unscheduled appearance…and described the radical buildings he had recently designed in Los Angeles. The Hartford audience was thus among the first in the country to hear about the International Style directly—from the scholar who named it and the architect who first realized it in America.” (Gaddis, 173-4, 2000)
Chick and Helen has been uncertain about the design of the house until they spotted the Villa Ferretti... It was a classically simple country house, built in 1596 by Vincenzo Scamozzi, a student and rival of Andrea Palladio... they decided that this little-known villa would be the perfect model for their new home. The understated lines of its long white stucco façade could be translated into the painted wood of a New England house. They took snapshots to give their architect. (Gaddis, 117, 2000)

When guests arrived at the opening of the Austin house “What they saw was a pristinely white miniature villa, eighty-six feet wide and only eighteen feet deep, set far back from the street on two and a half acres of recently graded land. The two-story house was dominated by a central bay, topped by a triangular pediment, and fronted with four shallow pilasters, each one capped by a modernized ionic scroll. The bays flanking the center each contained eight tall windows. At first glance, it seemed a perfectly symmetrical house, but two windows in each wing were false—window frames enclosed blank boards—these false windows were not symmetrically placed. Chick seemed to be playing some kind of architectural joke on Palladio, and the effect was vaguely disturbing to some Hartford observers.” (Gaddis, 119, 2000)
Hartford and the Modernist Movement

Hartford and Suburban Design

- The path from the Villa Rotonda to the suburban tract house is a long and twisted one, but we cannot understand the latter without realizing that some small vestige of the former’s ideal of the ‘civilized house in nature’ survives in even the most modest suburban development. (Fishman, 46, 1987)

Hartford and the Modernist Movement

Hartford and Suburban Design

- From the perspective of half a century, friends…saw the house as a precursor.
- Kirstein…it as ‘a jewel-box’ that combined ‘splendor and intimacy,’ suggested that its simplified Palladianism was ‘the first example of Post-Modernism…in fact before ‘modernism’ has even triumphed.’
- Johnson agreed…‘Of course none of us [modernist] could stand his house. We wouldn’t do a copy of a Palladian house, heavens no. The least we could do was copy Gropius. Today, every architect that I know under 45 wouldn’t think of building a house without going through his books of Palladio first. And there it sits on Scarborough—a post-modern house, if you please, fifty years ago.’ (Gaddis, 124, 2000)

Hartford and Suburban Design

Have we come full circle?

Understanding Suburbanization

Population Change 1800 to 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Hartford</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>2,497</td>
<td>6,406</td>
<td>18,615</td>
<td>29,933</td>
<td>57,583</td>
<td>49,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>5,437</td>
<td>13,555</td>
<td>79,850</td>
<td>166,267</td>
<td>177,397</td>
<td>158,017</td>
<td>121,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2,546</td>
<td>10,610</td>
<td>23,799</td>
<td>34,106</td>
<td>47,994</td>
<td>57,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Britain</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3,029</td>
<td>28,202</td>
<td>68,685</td>
<td>73,726</td>
<td>83,441</td>
<td>71,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Hartford</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>3,186</td>
<td>33,776</td>
<td>44,402</td>
<td>68,031</td>
<td>63,589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Department of Economic and Community Development
Hartford and Urban Design
Only the downtown is urban

Hartford and Urban Design
The rest of the city is suburban