

Guidelines for Surveying Post-World War II Neighborhoods and Residences

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Background

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a housing boom throughout the United States. Many returning soldiers became first time home owners with the help of government acts, including the National Housing Acts and the 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment, known as the GI Bill. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, home ownership growth in South Carolina remained stagnant from 1900 up until 1940. But between 1940 and 1950, ownership climbed 15 percent (30.6 to 45.1%). By 1960 the number of home owners in the state reached 57.3 percent. Automobile ownership also drastically increased in the post-war period. The construction of improved freeways and the interstate highway system led to citizens having easy, quick commutes to work, allowing housing developments to flourish outside cities and downtowns.

The proliferation of residential construction led to the expansion of planned communities and the suburbanization of many American cities. Some of these communities were planned *subdivisions*, with a land developer, one or two builders, and planned streets and public facilities. Other communities grew more slowly as *neighborhoods* developed. Neighborhoods are more likely to feature a mix of architectural styles and lot divisions. Post-war architectural trends also carried over to the country where rural residents constructed the new styles.

Styles & Characteristics

New residential architectural styles emerged after the war, including the split-level, while others that appeared earlier gained popularity, such as the Minimal Traditional and Ranch. These two styles are further discussed below because of their commonality throughout South Carolina. Residential architectural styles after World War II also include various Ranch styles, including the Transitional Ranch, A-frame, Cape Cod, bi-level, contemporary, neo-Mansard, and other revival forms. In addition, prefabricated houses became more popular. For descriptions and characteristics of these styles, please see the NCHRP Transportation Research Board's publication [A Model for Identifying and Evaluating the Historic Significance of Post-World War II Housing](#) (PDF).

The high demand for housing also created the need for a new, more affordable type of construction. Small housing styles, such as the Minimal Traditional, began popping up all over because their small, minimal design was quick and cheap to construct. Simplifying construction by mass producing materials and having construction teams consist of semi-skilled workers was also part of the answer. Materials such as plywood wall panels, sheet rock, asphalt shingles, and concrete-slab became common because of their low cost and quick installation. Although concrete gained popularity as a construction material, brick veneer construction and brick chimneys are characteristics of post-war houses as well. Siding materials varied with wood or asbestos shingles, brick veneers, clapboard, aluminum, and simulated products (Permastone, fiberboards, etc.).

Aluminum windows became more typical, but wood windows are also still common. The design of windows also changed from earlier housing. Before or during the war, houses typically had smaller window panes; while post-war houses feature larger window panes with decorative designs (see below).

Significant Style Characteristics (may vary in appearance and use)

Single-Family Ranch

- One-story
- Low horizontal form
- Rectilinear or “L” plan
- Concrete slab foundation or crawl spaces
- Low-pitch gable, hip, or modified hip roof, broadside to the street
- Roof materials predominantly asphalt shingle
- Carport or garage
- Exterior walls primarily a combination of siding materials or brick
- Rectangular or square window or door openings
- Steel casement and aluminum horizontal slider windows
- Decorative windows: large single-pane picture windows, window walls, clerestories, bay windows, corner windows, diamond panes
- Wide or prominent chimney

Minimal Traditional

- One or one-and-a-half stories
- Simple, lacks decorative detailing
- Rectilinear or “L” plan
- Typically no attached garage or carport
- Low or intermediate roof pitch
- Eaves and rakes close building
- Gable roof, often with a cross gable
- Chimney
- Relatively small windows with divided lights, wood or steel frame
- Exterior walls typically wood siding, although aluminum is common on later examples

Subdivision Development Characteristics

- Landscaping features, including uniform building setbacks, lakes, streams, trees, and other park-like features
- Street plans and names, especially cul-de-sacs and themed street names in the neighborhood
- Signage
- Schools, churches, and other community buildings highlighted or featured in the development

Evaluation

To determine the historic context for a post-war subdivision or neighborhood, it is critical to conduct documentary research to determine the age of the neighborhood/subdivision and the buildings within the community. Some post-war neighborhoods may be for the African American community, as residential segregation was the norm in the 1940s and 1950s. Other neighborhoods may reflect “white flight” from the inner cities. The growth of local industries or military bases may contribute to the development of new subdivisions as well. The local tax assessor’s office or county’s tax GIS website may have information on building ages. Also examining local histories, historic topographic maps, street maps, and aerials may show the presence of the new neighborhood or subdivision. It is often difficult to tell the age of a post-war residence and neighborhood/subdivision boundaries in the field, so this documentary research is essential to determining the development of the neighborhood and its significance to the community.

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

There are four eligibility criteria for the listing in the NRHP, three of which are relevant to post-war residences and neighborhoods. Most significant post-war residences and neighborhoods will be evaluated under the NRHP Criterion A or C. It is also possible for a residence to fall under Criterion B for association with the lives of significant persons of our past. For detailed information on post-war resource criterion and examples, see [A Model for Identifying and Evaluating the Historic Significance of Post-World War II Housing](#) (PDF).

Criterion A

According to the National Register Bulletin *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, Criterion A relates to resources “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” This criterion is usually applicable for neighborhoods and subdivisions. Areas of significance for post-war neighborhoods and subdivisions may include community planning and development, social history of the area, transportation, or government. For example, the resources might relate to racial integration or segregation of suburban neighborhoods, wartime industries, is the first of its type for the area, or the neighborhood or subdivision influenced other property developments in the region.

Criterion C

This criterion is defined by the National Register Bulletin *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* for resources “that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” Areas of significance under Criterion C include architecture, community planning and development, along with landscape architecture. Criterion C community planning and development area of significance differs from Criterion A’s in that C’s focuses on the physical features of the resource instead of trends.

Assessing Historic Integrity

According to the National Register Criteria, there are seven aspects that define integrity. Since South Carolina currently has an abundance of post-war residences and neighborhoods, several or most of these aspects must be met in order for a post-war residence or neighborhood/subdivision (district) to have integrity. The seven aspects are:

- Design – resource maintains the original design elements such as form, style, and size. No major additions or alterations to the building have been made.
- Materials – resource has original construction materials such as windows, doors, siding, and porch posts.
- Workmanship – resource exhibits original labor and craftsmanship skills. Although workmanship is not commonly seen in post-war houses, some may show workmanship through use of materials to create a setting.
- Location – resource is in original construction location and subdivision or neighborhood boundaries are intact.
- Setting – the physical environment around the resource has not been altered.
- Feeling – resource conveys an aesthetic or historic sense of the post-war period.
- Association – resource is directly associated to a significant historic person or event.

Individual Residences

Because of the abundance of post-war residences, these resources must retain a high degree of integrity (see seven aspects of integrity above). For Minimal Traditional houses it is especially important that they maintain their original materials and design since this style is very plain with little architectural characteristics. Post-war residences considered individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, especially under Criterion C, should retain:

- Garage or carports originally attached to the building and not enclosed
- Original windows and front door
- Original siding/wall materials
- Original metal porch posts or carport posts
- Original chimney
- No large scale additions, especially to the residence's front or side

Not all building alterations compromise integrity for individual residences. Small scale additions (especially in the rear of the building), replacement garage doors, reversible limited alterations (i.e. shutters), and changes to the landscape, such as trees, should not affect the resource's integrity. If multiple changes have been made to the residence, then integrity can be affected. Major alterations to a residence also compromise integrity. These include changes to the roof line, front entrance, introduction of new design elements, and large scale additions that alter the original form.

In addition, an intact interior could add to the significance of the building's design. Since most surveyors do not have interior access, it is not always necessary to know if the inside has been altered or not. Some exterior alterations may allude to

interior changes. For example, a closed-off (i.e. covered by construction material) window may indicate a new purpose for the room. While an addition may alter the floor plan, it also can change the flow of the house. When a house retains its original floor plan and interior design elements, sometimes a stronger case can be made for inclusion on the NRHP.

Neighborhoods/Subdivisions

Neighborhoods/subdivisions comprising post-war houses should retain integrity as a group or district. Many houses constructed after World War II were built with the expectation that future owners would make changes to their houses as families expanded and needs changed. Neighborhoods/subdivisions considered eligible for the listing in National Register of Historic Places as districts should retain:

- Repetition of house type or style (many builders re-used similar plans throughout the neighborhood)
- Community buildings (churches, schools, recreation centers, shopping areas) if part of the original plan/design
- Majority of residences retain historic materials and design
- Setting (lot size, building setback, streetscapes, parks, and landscape design)

Like individual properties, certain changes do not affect a historic district's National Register of Historic Places eligibility. For example, alterations to a small number of resources, loss of original landscape design elements in the neighborhood/subdivision or a small amount of resources with a lack of integrity do not affect a historic district's overall integrity. Some alterations that decrease the integrity of a district consist of a change in housing lot sizes, alteration in transportation patterns, loss of considerable areas of the neighborhood, or a large number of noncontributing resources with major changes/alterations.

Conducting Section 106 Identification Surveys

Because of the ubiquitous nature of post-war housing at this time, the SHPO does not require completed survey cards for all post-war neighborhoods and residences for review and compliance survey purposes. An abbreviated survey process should be done when assessing post-war neighborhoods/subdivisions.

Individual Residences

Isolated post-war residences and those in groups of 5 or less (in a linear grouping along a road) generally do not need to be surveyed or photographed. These resources may represent rural houses, infill in older areas, or possibly the only survivors of ever increasing modern development. Properties that have been heavily modified, possess little integrity, or do not have character defining features may be excluded from the survey. If the residence appears to be a pristine, excellent example of its type, the surveyor should use his/her discretion when determining if the house should be photographed or recorded on a reconnaissance survey card.

Neighborhoods/Subdivisions

For post-war neighborhoods/subdivisions within the project's Area of Potential Effect (APE) or a portion of which is within the APE:

- a. Discuss survey requirements with your SHPO reviewer prior to beginning survey.
- b. Conduct background and map research to determine the date of the neighborhood/subdivision and the date of the residences and buildings within the neighborhood; any builders, developers, or significant individuals or firms working in the neighborhood; when streets were laid out and developed. Research should also include what were the driving forces behind the development of the neighborhood/subdivision and is the development or design significant or precedent setting in community planning and development.
- c. Determine the typology of houses in the neighborhood (i.e. single-family ranch; split-level; A-frame, etc.). Record the number of each type of house in the neighborhood.
- d. Photograph and record on Reconnaissance Survey Form one or two examples of each type of residence in the neighborhood to include in the survey report.
- e. Photograph and record on Reconnaissance Survey Form all historic community buildings in the neighborhood, such as churches and schools. Photograph significant landscape features, such as lakes, ponds, streams, parks, and significant trees. Include photographs of these buildings and landscape design in the survey report.
- f. Provide a map of the neighborhood's boundaries as part of the survey report.

The SHPO may request additional survey forms for significant residences or properties within the neighborhood after the review of the survey report. The SHPO is always available for consultation when planning a survey of an APE that may include post-war residences.

Mixed Neighborhoods

Older historic neighborhoods with infill of post-war housing should be selectively surveyed. For example, in neighborhoods with a mixture of 1930s, 1940s, and post-war housing, Ranch houses may contribute to the significance of the neighborhood, and should not be overlooked. The survey requirements for these neighborhoods are:

- a. All buildings should be reconnaissance surveyed in the neighborhood
- b. Houses constructed prior to 1945 should be photographed and recorded on a survey form
- c. Post-World War II houses should follow steps c. through f. of the Neighborhoods/Subdivision guidelines outlined previously
- d. Create a map/site plan illustrating the post-war infill in the neighborhood for the survey report

Resources

[A Model for Identifying and Evaluating the Historic Significance of Post-World War II Housing](#) (PDF) (NCHRP, Transportation Research Board)

[Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places](#) (National Park Service)

[North Carolina Post World War II Survey](#)

[Post-war Subdivisions and the Ranch House](#) (PDF) (Louisiana SHPO)

[Post-World War II Residential Architecture in Maine, A Guide for Surveyors](#) (PDF) (Maine SHPO)

[Post World War II Subdivisions](#) (Scottsdale, Arizona)

[Preservation Hotline #13, Researching a Mid-Century/Modern Property](#) (PDF) (South Carolina SHPO)

[The Ranch House in Georgia](#) (Georgia SHPO)

[Researchers Guide for Developing a Context for Evaluating Post World War II Suburbs for National Register Eligibility](#) (PDF) (Pennsylvania SHPO)

[Selected Post-World War II Residential Architectural Styles and Building Types](#) (PDF) (Colorado SHPO)

This document is a work in progress and applies only to post-WWII housing. Post-WWII commercial, institutional, and governmental buildings that are surveyed should follow the guidelines in the [Survey Manual](#).