

Levittown

Willingboro, NJ (US)

Levitt & Sons

Levittown: Willingboro, NJ, Verenigde Staten/United States
Ontwerp/Design: Levitt & Sons
Opdrachtgever/Client: Levitt & Sons
Ontwerp-oplevering/Design completion: 1954-1972
Aantal woningen/Number of dwellings: ca. 11.000/approximately 11,000

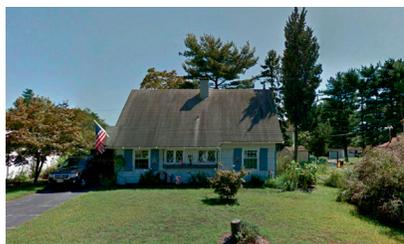
Plangebied/Area: 2.020 ha/2,020 ha
Voorzieningen/Amenities: scholen, kerken, winkelcentra, bibliotheek, sportcentra, speelvelden, zwembad/schools, churches, shopping centres, library, sports centres, playgrounds, swimming pool

Bronnen/Sources: Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners; Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Random House, 1967)
 'Bill Levitt's Third Big Town: More Value for Less Money!', *House & Home* (augustus/August 1958), 72-73

'New Two-Story: 1700 sq ft at \$14,490', *House & Home* (augustus/August 1958), 80
 'New 1½ -Story: Four Bedrooms at \$11,990', *House & Home* (augustus/August 1958), 82
 'New One-Story: Open Plan at \$12,490', *House & Home* (augustus/August 1958), 84

Van links naar rechts: varianten van het type 'Cape Cod', 'Colonial' en 'Rancher' in Levittown (nu Willingboro), NJ, 2015

From left to right: variations of the Cape Cod, Colonial and Ranchers housing types in Levittown (now Willingboro), NJ, 2015



De Verenigde Staten kwamen uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog tevoorschijn met een enorm huizentekort. In de oorlogsperiode en de daaraan voorafgaande Grote Depressie van de jaren 1930, was de woningproductie teruggelopen tot minder dan 100.000 nieuwe woningen per jaar. De plotselinge toestroom van uit de oorlog teruggekeerde soldaten maakte de woningnood aan het eind van de oorlog acuut. In 1945 hadden 3,6 miljoen Amerikaanse gezinnen geen huis of appartement.

Een combinatie van wetgeving (de Housing Act van 1949, die 810.000 nieuwe woningen per jaar stipuleerde voor een periode van zes jaar), beleid (goedkope leningen voor oorlogsveteranen) en een snel groeiende economie, leidde echter in de jaren na de oorlog tot een woningbouwhuusse die het gezicht van Amerika grondig zou bepalen. Aan de randen van de steden verscheen de een na de andere buitenwijk, gekenmerkt door vrijstaande woningen aan gebogen straten, vaak met een garage en een voor- en achtertuin. Suburbia, zoals dit laagstedelijke model werd genoemd, groeide uit tot hét symbool van de 'American way of life', bezongen en beschreven in populaire media, naarstig bestudeerd door sociaal-wetenschappers en argwanend bekeken door architecten en stedenbouwers. En zoals suburbia symbool staat voor het naoorlogse Amerikaanse wonen, zo staat Levittown symbool voor suburbia zelf.

Levittown is het model voor grootschalige buitenwijken, dat werd ontwikkeld door projectontwikkelingsbureau en bouwbedrijf Levitt & Sons. In de oorlog bekend geraakt met prefabricatie en industrialisatie, ziet het bedrijf de kans schoon om volgens dezelfde principes een betaalbare woning – en buurt – op de markt te zetten. Het succes is eclatant: in een periode van circa 25 jaar worden meer dan 200 Levittowns gebouwd, voornamelijk in de Verenigde Staten, maar ook in Canada, Puerto Rico, Spanje en Frankrijk. En het bezorgt William Levitt de bijnaam 'King of Suburbia'.

Een typische Levittown bestaat uit tien tot 20 autoluwe buurten met elk circa 1.000 vrijstaande woningen en enkele gemeenschappelijke functies zoals een schoolgebouw. De woningontwerpen én het stedenbouwkundig plan komen van de tekentafels van Levitt & Sons. Meanderende straten worden omzoomd door brede stoepen en stroken groen, en zijn door middel van opritten verbonden met de huizen. De kavels voorzien bovendien in een flinke achtertuin.

Toekomstige bewoners kiezen uit een catalogus zelf de woning die ze willen hebben. Meestal zijn er drie verschillende typen beschikbaar, variërend van twee- tot vierslaapkamerwoningen. De meest succesvolle varianten – de 'Cape Cod', de 'Rancher' en de 'Colonial' – verwijzen naar woningtypen die aan de Amerikaanse oostkust populair zijn. Ze blijken gewilder dan de meer modern uitzienende woningen waarmee Levitt óók experimenteerde. De plattegronden zijn zeer compact: er is een minimum aan verkeersruimte en de meer symbolische ruimten, zoals een *hall*, ontbreken helemaal. Alles is kant-en-klaar: de woningen zijn voorzien van keukens, een wasmachine en inbouwkasten.

Cruciaal voor het succes van Levittown is de efficiëntie en industrialisatie van het bouwproces. Foto's van een Levittown in aanbouw laten betonnen vloervelden zien met daaromheen uitgestald de materialen en de componenten waaruit een van bouwplaats tot bouwplaats trekkende stoet bouwvakkers de ene na de andere woning optrekt. De beheersing van het proces gaat nog verder. Levitt tracht, grotendeels met succes, elke

Following the Second World War, the United States faced a huge housing shortage. During the war and the preceding Great Depression of the 1930s, housing production had been reduced to fewer than 100,000 new dwellings per year. The sudden influx of soldiers returning from the war led to an acute housing shortage at the end of the war. By 1945, 3.6 million American families had no house or apartment.

However, in the years after the war, the combination of legislation (the 1949 Housing Act, which stipulated 810,000 new dwellings be built annually for a period of six years), policy (cheap loans for war veterans) and a rapidly growing economy led to a boom in house building that would greatly determine the face of America. On the outskirts of cities, suburbs featuring detached dwellings – many with garages and front and back gardens – on meandering streets emerged one after the other. This urban low-rise model was called 'suburbia' and it became the symbol of the American way of life, praised and portrayed in the popular media, diligently studied by social scientists and looked at askance by architects and urban planners. And as suburbia symbolizes the post-war American way of living, so Levittown symbolizes suburbia itself.

Levittown is the model for large-scale suburbs that was developed by project development and construction company Levitt & Sons. Having gained knowledge of prefabrication and industrialization during the war, the company saw its way clear to market affordable housing – and neighbourhoods – according to the same principles. It was a resounding success: more than 200 Levittowns were built in a period of approximately 25 years, mainly in the United States but also in Canada, Puerto Rico, Spain and France. And William Levitt was given the nickname 'King of Suburbia'.

A typical Levittown consists of ten to 20 low-traffic neighbourhoods, each with approximately 1,000 detached dwellings and a couple of communal facilities such as school buildings. Both the dwelling designs and the urban plan originate from the drawing boards of Levitt & Sons. Drives connect the houses to the meandering streets lined with wide sidewalks and strips of green. The plots also have substantial back gardens.

Future residents choose the dwelling they want from a catalogue. Usually, there are three different types available, ranging from two- to four-bedroom houses. The most successful options – the Cape Cod, the Rancher and the Colonial – echo dwelling types popular on the American East Coast. As it turns out, these are more popular than the more modern-looking dwellings Levitt also experimented with.

The floor plans are very compact: they have a minimum of traffic space and the more symbolic spaces, like the hall, are not included at all. Everything is ready for use: the dwellings are equipped with kitchens, a washing machine and fitted closets.

Crucial to the success of Levittown are the efficiency and industrialization of the construction process. Photographs of a Levittown under construction show concrete floor slabs surrounded by displays of materials and components from which a procession of workers travelling from one building site to the next build one dwelling after another. The control over the process is even more far-reaching. Levitt attempts, and largely succeeds, to gain control over each link in the production chain, from sawmill to white goods wholesaler.

The public opinion on Levittown is of vital importance to Levitt & Sons. The company goes to great lengths to meet the fierce criticism vented on suburbia in general – and Levittown in particular – with design improvements. Within the limits of industrialization there are various choices possible with regard to roof shape and finishing standards.

schakel van het productieproces in handen te krijgen, van houtzagerij tot witgoedgroothandel.

Ook de publieke opinie ten aanzien van Levittown is van groot belang voor Levitt & Sons. Het bedrijf getroost zich veel moeite om de forse kritiek die suburbia in het algemeen – en Levittown in het bijzonder – ten deel valt, te pareren met verbeteringen in het ontwerp. Binnen de grenzen van de industrialisatie zijn keuzes mogelijk ten aanzien van de dakvorm en de afwerking. Per woningtype zijn er twee voorgevelvarianten om uit te kiezen, en deze kunnen weer in verschillende kleuren geschilderd worden. Zo wordt iets van de gelijkvormigheid tenietgedaan, die veruit de meeste afkeuring oproept.

Ook het woningontwerp zelf verandert. Waren de woonkamers eerst nog op de straat gericht, later verschuift de nadruk steeds meer naar de achterkant, waar de woonkamer en de tuin (en daarachter het gemeenschappelijke groen) de ideale plek vormen voor een gezin, ver verwijderd van de jachtige stad. Aan die kenmerken herkennen we suburbia nog steeds. Op basis van het commerciële instinct van William Levitt, heeft Levittown niet alleen bijgedragen aan de leniging van de naoorlogse woningnood, maar ook aan de transformatie van de Amerikaanse wooncultuur. (pvdp)

Per dwelling type, there are two front façade variations to choose from and these can be painted in different colours. This counteracts some of the uniformity that incurs the most disapproval by far.

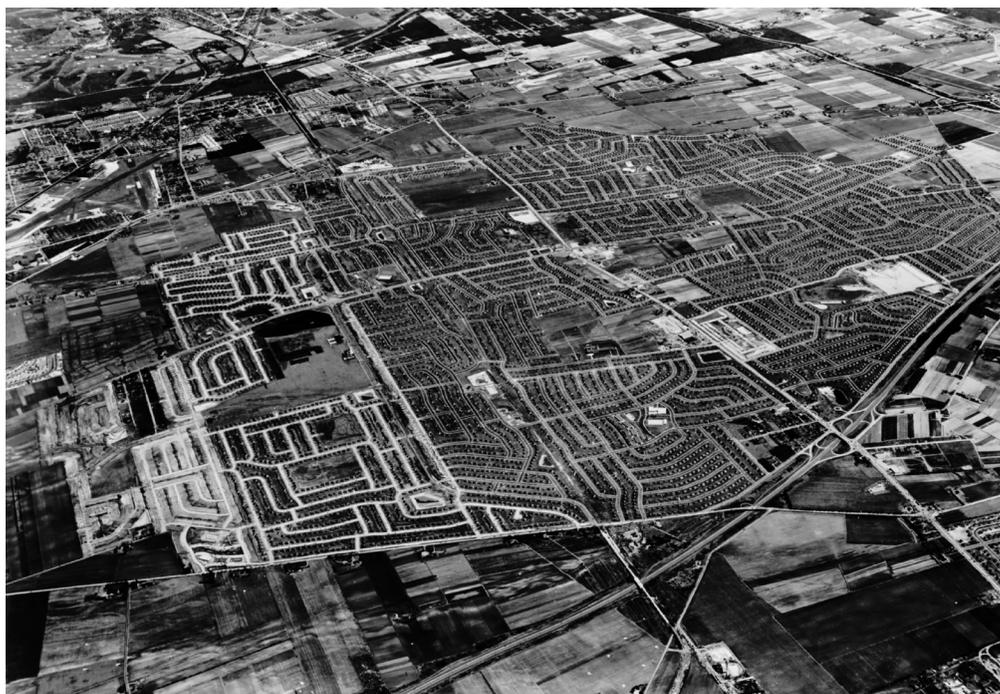
The dwelling design itself also changes. The first living rooms faced the road; later the emphasis shifts to the back, where the living room and garden (and the communal green beyond) create the ideal family space, far from the hectic pace of the city. These characteristics are still typical of suburbia today. Based on William Levitt's commercial instincts, Levittown not only contributed to the relief of the post-war housing shortage, but also to the transformation of the American housing culture. (pvdp)

Locatie van Levittown (Willingboro, NJ) in het stedelijk weefsel van Philadelphia
Location of Levittown (Willingboro, NJ) in the urban fabric surrounding Philadelphia



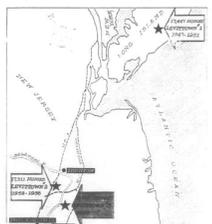
Luchtfoto van de eerste Levittown tijdens de bouw, Long Island, NY, 1947-1951

Aerial view of the first Levittown under construction, Long Island, NY, 1947-1951





Bill Levitt's third big town: more value for less money



The best known name in homebuilding is on a new sign at a new location. At Levittown, N.J., Bill Levitt—who built his reputation by building big towns—is now producing what he calls “the best value we’ve ever offered.” His line of new models: a four-bedroom story-and-a-half for \$11,990, a one-story for \$12,490, a two-story for \$14,490. All three cost less per sq ft than his earlier houses at Levittown, Long Island, and Levittown, Pa. Biggest cost cut: \$1.25 a sq ft on the two-story. For the first time, Levitt went outside his organization for architectural help, but his elevations designed by L.-G. Island Architect Herman H. York.

Levitt is also pushing more value than ever into his community. He believes he has solved the look-alike problem. His streetscapes have more variety because he is putting houses of different sizes, types, and prices side by side instead of simply changing his song, setbacks, and elevations.

He believes he has solved the school problem. For the first time, he is including schools in his house prices. He plans to build Levittown’s schools—the first is already under construction—then hand them over to the school board. Result: homeowners will be free of the tax load imposed by new school construction.

He believes he has solved the neighborhood problem. For the first time, he expects to divide his entire town into self-contained neighborhoods of 1,200 to 1,500 homes. He tried to do it in Pennsylvania but was stopped because his community spread over four townships. His new neighborhoods will be better planned than those in Pennsylvania. A school at the heart of each will double as a community building. All 10 neighborhoods will be served by a shopping center with a new kind of layout—zig-zag, instead of straight-line malls.

Levitt’s New Jersey operation is also free of some of the red tape and reputation that handicapped him in the past.

For the first time, he has stopped selling under VA and is selling only under FHA. His reason: “It is sheer stupidity for one builder to have to process paper through two government agencies.”

“Will this lose him houses?” He doesn’t think so. “At our prices,” he says, “FHA down payments are comparable to VA, no down payment, via purchaser-pay settlement charges in cash. These charges come to about \$275. On our lowest priced house, the FHA down payment, including closing fees, comes to \$400. We don’t

believe \$125—the difference between what VA and FHA buyers pay in cash—will keep anybody but poor credit risks from buying a house.”

For the first time, Levitt is unhampered by local building codes.

All of Levittown No. 3 is in one township (Willingboro), where Levitt is the only homebuilder. He asked Willingboro to accept FHA’s minimum property standards (including the National Plumbing Code) as the local code. Willingboro did.

Says Levitt: “FHA’s standards are as good as a code as there is. More now” has been spent in developing them than on any other code. From an economic viewpoint, all communities would be highly sensible to accept them.”

For the full story of Levitt’s better values, see the next 12 pages.

For a contrast of new and earlier models, see p. 74. For more about schools and neighborhoods, see p. 76. For more about the new shopping centers, see p. 77. For a contrast of new and earlier streetscapes, see p. 78. For a look at extra value values, see p. 79. For photos and drawings of the new models, see pp. 80-5.



New 1½-story: four bedrooms at \$11,990

There’s a story behind this house, and it has a happy ending for Levitt and his buyers.

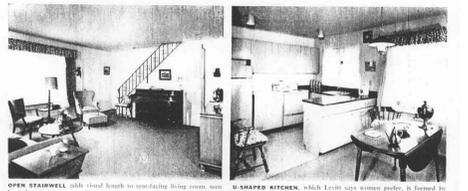
Chapter 1: when Levitt opened his third town in June, he offered two versions of the house—a stripped-down version with an unfinished attic for \$11,990, and a four-bedroom version with two bedrooms and a bath upstairs and 1,419 sq ft of living space for \$12,490.

Chapter 2: two weeks later he discontinued the stripped-down house. Why? “Most people just couldn’t resist getting two extra bedrooms and a bath for \$1,000.”

Chapter 3: At the same time he dropped the price of the four-bedroom house by \$500. Why? “We reduced our costs.” His figured costs—\$8.44 a sq ft—are the lowest of all three new models.

Levitt makes two points about the heating system in this and other new models:

1. “We’re sticking with radiant heat because we still think that’s the best way to heat a house.” First-floor heat is from copper coils in the slab, second-floor heat from baseboard convectors.
2. “We’re switching to natural gas. The used oil at all other two Levittowns became a headache, more trouble-free, and, in this area, costs less.” He uses gas for heating only. His kitchens are still all-electric (p. 8).



OPEN STAIRWELL adds visual height to one-bedroom living room, view here from front door. Door at foot of stairs opens to backyard.

U-SHAPED KITCHEN, which Levitt says women prefer, is framed by counters, appliances. Window seat in refrigerator adds counter space.



New two-story: 1,700 sq ft at \$14,490

“This model is our runaway best-seller,” says Levitt. “It’s frankly traditional, and right now that is the way the market is swinging.” But buyers like more than just the looks of this house.

They like the ample living space.

They like the two living rooms—one for adults and one for children.

They like the separate dining room.

They like the handy utility room—big enough to double as a bedroom in a pinch.

They like the big 12x21 1/2 driveway garage.

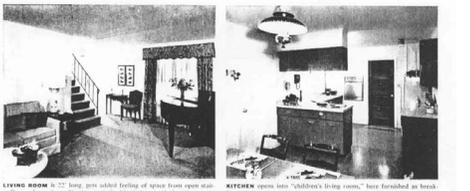
They like the 2 1/2 baths—both upstairs bedrooms are larger than the 5’8” baths in many merchant-built houses.

They like the big master bedroom (11’3” x 15’9”).

They like the master bedroom’s two walk-in closets—one with a window. (Why the window? To preserve the front elevation’s formal balance, the window aligns with the front door.)

They like the full complement of appliances—this model, unlike Levitt’s others, has a dryer as well as a washer, a wall oven and range instead of a free-standing stove.

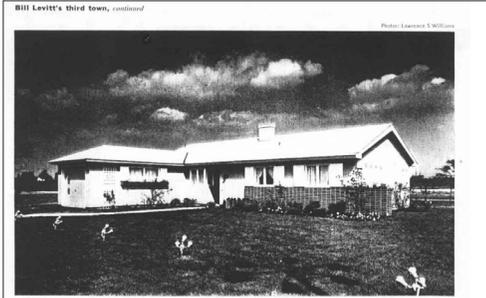
And they like such extras as the dining room cabinet (p. 77), handy storage shelves (p. 77), and out-of-season storage space under the stairs.



LIVING ROOM 22’ long area adds feeling of space from open wall that runs from door. Size is emphasized by baby grand piano in corner.

KITCHEN 8’ across area “delights” living room, here furnished as breakfast room. Exit door on far side of kitchen leads to laundry.

‘Meer waar voor je geld!’, *House & Home*, 1958
‘More Value for Less Money!’, *House & Home*, 1958



New one-story: open plan at \$12,490

To get the open plan between the living and dining rooms, Levitt uses a ring-bolt truss rafter system.

Trusses are partly assembled in his central yard, then trucked to the site, and bolted to the top plate of the house where they are finally nailed together. To assure an even ceiling line, his carpenters line up the rafter chord with temporary sheathing.

Is the truss system more economical?

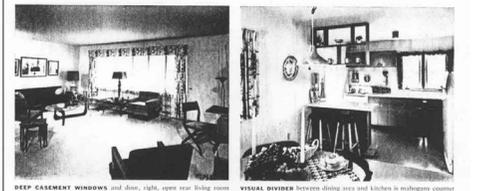
“We wouldn’t use it if it weren’t,” says Levitt.

He also cuts costs in this and other models by: 1) putting molding between side walls and ceiling instead of taping the joints; 2) putting a wood buster around exterior tile in bath; 3) using accordion-folded door; 4) specifying the entire interior in a single color. Economies like these help him provide colored appliances, wood windows (Bob-Well, Curtis), screens, and plenty of shutters.

Levitt’s L-shaped, one-story model is his smallest house—1,200 sq ft. It also costs more per sq ft—\$10.40—than his two-story and story-and-a-half houses. Why does he bother with a one-story when he can build other types for less?

“We’re trying to sell everyone,” he says, “and the plain fact is that some people prefer one-floor living.”

The proof? This house sells just as well as his 1 1/2-story, four-bedroom bargain (p. 25).

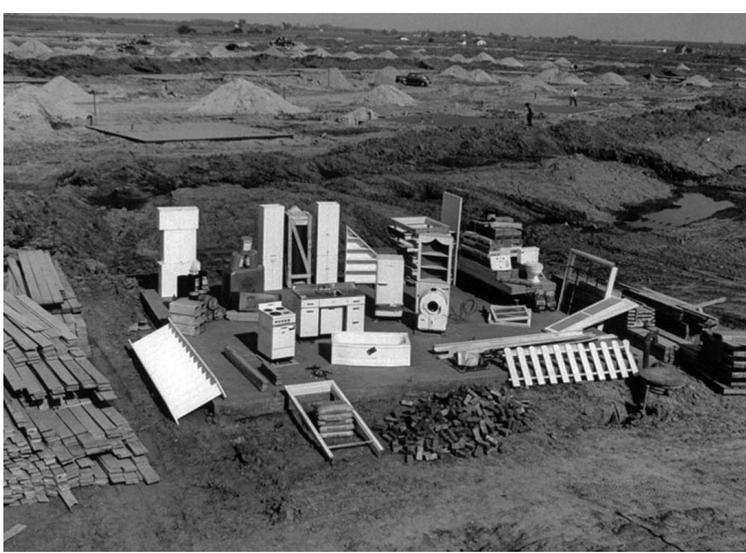


DEEP CASEMENT WINDOWS and door, right, open rear living room to back yard. All in all Levitt models, featuring it, are underpriced.

VISUAL DIVIDER between dining area and kitchen is mahogany counter and mullioned open shelves. From door a view of photo at left.

Beschrijvingen van de types ‘Cape Cod’, ‘Colonial’ en ‘Rancher’, *House & Home*, 1958
Descriptions of the Cape Cod, Colonial and Rancher housing types, *House & Home*, 1958

De complete set materialen om een ‘Cape Cod’ te bouwen, Levittown, NY, 1947
The complete set of materials needed to build a Levittown Cape Cod house, Levittown, NY, 1947





Deel van Levittown, Willingboro, NJ
 Part of Levittown, Willingboro, NJ

- 1 school
- 2 kerk/church
- 3 winkelcentrum/shopping mall
- 4 bibliotheek/library
- 5 bank





Deel van Somerset Park, Willingboro, NJ. Hier werd in 1958 gestart met de bouw van de eerste woningen.

Part of Somerset Park, Willingboro, NJ. Here, in 1958, the first dwellings were built.



Shetland Lane, Willingboro, NJ, 2015

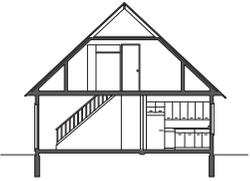
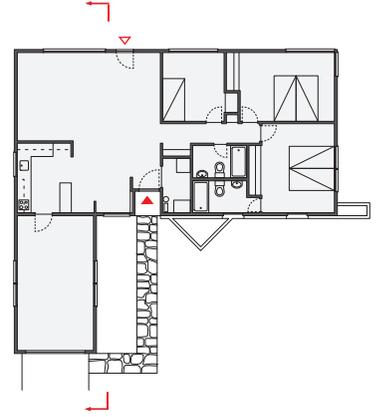
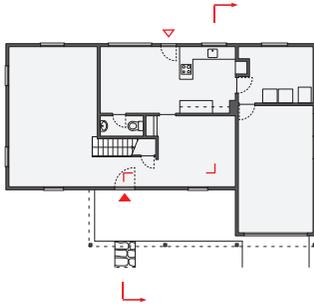
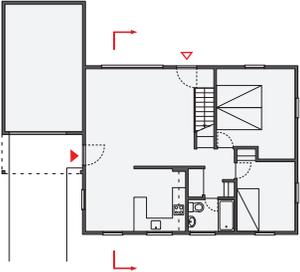
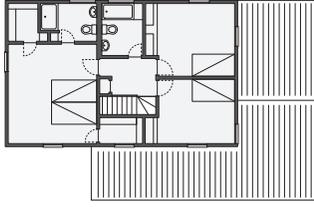
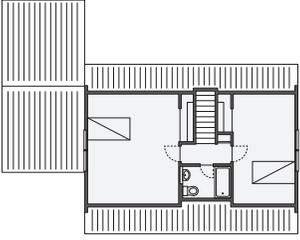


Sherwood Lane, Willingboro, NJ, 2015



Sheffield Drive, Willingboro, NJ, 2015

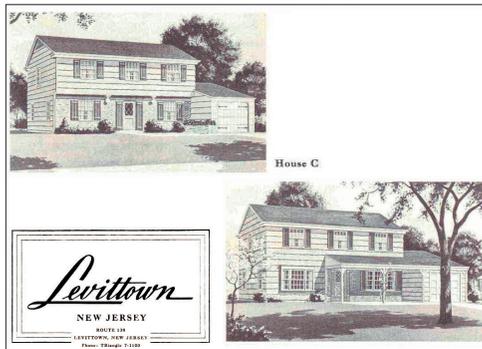
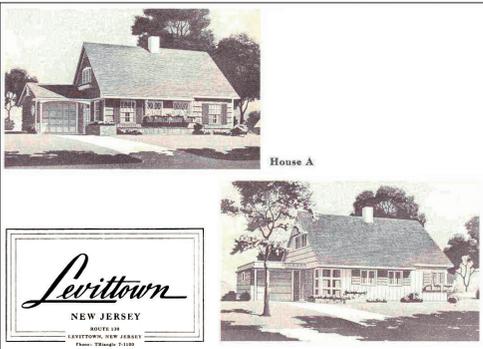




Type 'Cape Cod'

Type 'Colonial'

Type 'Rancher'





Type 'Cape Cod' (model 1958),
Willingboro, NJ



Type 'Colonial' (model 1958),
Willingboro, NJ



Type 'Rancher' (model 1958),
Willingboro, NJ

