

Gales Ferry Development 1950s and early 1960s

Kim H Millar, 20 April 2026

In the 1950s, Ledyard, CT, transformed from a rural farming community of under 2,000 inhabitants into a growing suburb, with a 208% population increase between 1950 and 1960 (from 1,749 to 5,395) and a 175% increase between 1960 and 1970 (from 5,395 to 14,834). The population has remained steady since then; it was 15,412 in the 2020 US Census.

In the post WW II years, Federal Housing Administration (FHA)... increased access to homeownership by insuring mortgages and protecting lenders from financial loss in the event of a default. Though only slightly more than a third of homes had an FHA backed mortgage by 1964, FHA backed loans had a ripple effect with private lenders granting more and more home loans even to non-FHA backed mortgages. The effects of government programs and subsidies like FHA were fully felt in the postwar economy and fueled the growth of homeownership and the rise of the suburbs.

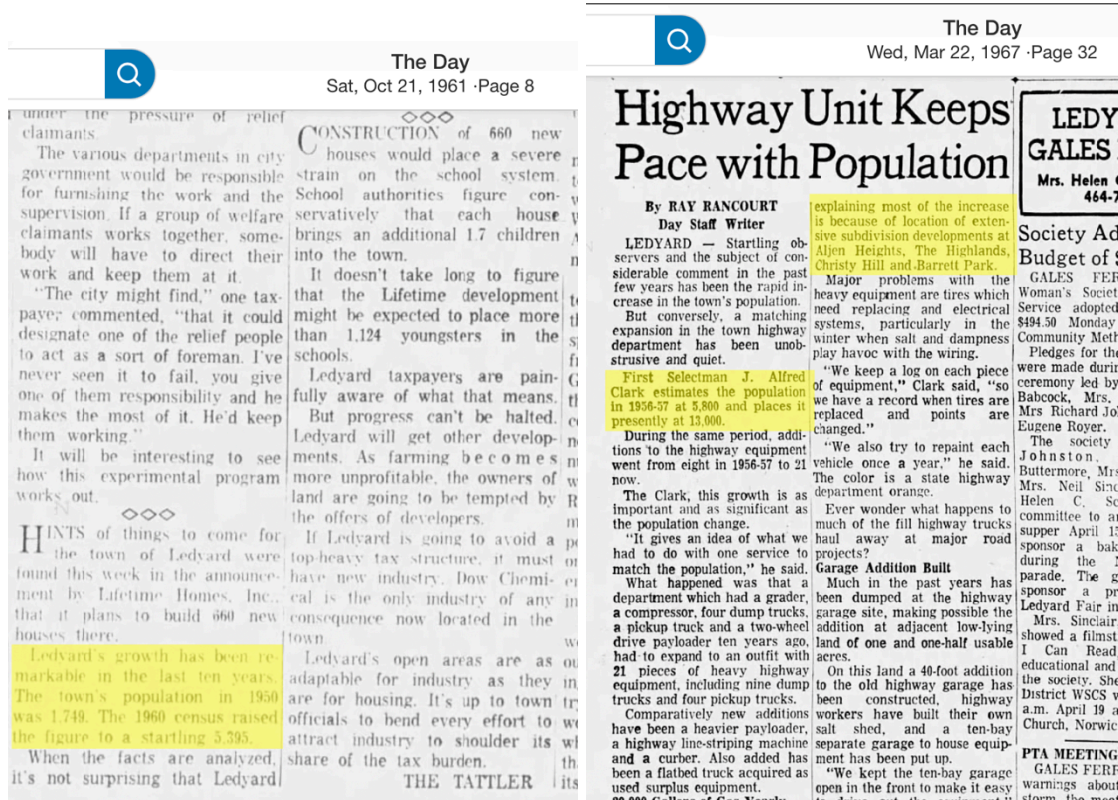
Government expenditures provided loans to veterans, subsidized corporate research and development, and built the Interstate Highway System. In the decades after World War II, business boomed, unionization peaked, wages rose, and sustained growth buoyed a new consumer economy. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (The G.I. Bill), passed in 1944, offered low-interest home loans, a stipend to attend college, loans to start a business, and unemployment benefits.

The rapid growth of homeownership and the rise of suburban communities helped drive the postwar economic boom. Suburban neighborhoods of single-family homes tore their way through the outskirts of cities. William Levitt built the first Levittown, the archetype suburban community, in 1946 in Long Island, New York. Purchasing mass acreage, "subdividing" lots, and contracting crews to build countless homes at economies of scale, Levitt offered affordable suburban housing to veterans and their families. Homeownership rates rose from 44% in 1940 to almost 62% in 1960. Between 1940 and 1950, suburban communities of greater than 10,000 people grew 22.1%, and planned communities grew at an astonishing rate of 126.1%. Between 1950 and 1970, America's suburban population nearly doubled to 74 million, with 83 percent of all population growth occurring in suburban places.

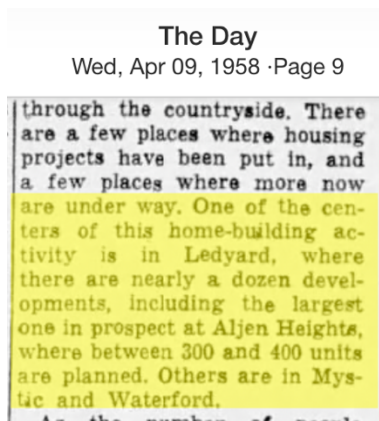
The postwar construction boom fed into countless industries. As manufacturers converted back to consumer goods after the war, and as the suburbs developed, appliance and automobile sales rose dramatically. Flush with rising wages and wartime savings, homeowners also used newly created installment plans to buy new consumer goods at once instead of saving for years to make major purchases. The mass-distribution of credit cards, first issued in 1950, further increased homeowners' access to credit. Fueled by credit ... consumers bought countless washers, dryers, refrigerators, freezers, and, suddenly, televisions. This new suburban economy also led to increased demand for automobiles. The percentage of American families owning cars increased from 54% in 1948 to 74% in 1959. ¹

¹ https://kids.kiddle.co/Ledyard,_Connecticut

These national trends were evident in the rapid expansion of Ledyard's population and housing stock in the 1950s.



Across New London County, family farms and woodland acres were sold to local builders, who built developments of single-family homes at a brisk rate. In this article from 1958, Ledyard was noted to have nearly a dozen developments in the planning stage or under way.



Irving Norman of Gales Ferry built two subdivisions in Gales Ferry north of Long Cove Road, starting in the mid 1950s. One was called Ferry View Heights, built on a rise behind *Vality* department store, which opened in 1962. The other subdivision was further south off Rt. 12 and King's Hwy. Mr. Norman named the roads here after his children: Barry, Richard, and Patricia. Over the years, he built houses in numerous developments in Ledyard, including Sherwood Forest and Presidential Estates. Mr. Norman built commercial buildings and apartments along Rt. 12, and the apartments off Ash Drive.

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3 Subdivisions Get Planning Board Approval

LEDYARD — Three subdivision plans were given final approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission Wednesday night, newly-elected Chairman Walter M. Nowak said.

The commission approved five more lots in Torrey Park, which is under development by Matthew Garvey on Inchliffe Rd., Gales Ferry.

Nowak noted approval has been delayed due to drainage, lot size and other problems. However, the problems have now been resolved and the lots conform to regulations, he added.

Twelve lots off Christy Hill Rd. owned by Irving Norman were given final approval. Nowak said Norman submitted his plans prior to the adoption of zoning regulation in October, 1963, but approval was withheld because of zoning technicalities.

Eight lots overlook Vality Shopping Center and four are at Norman Dr.

Woodbine Estates off Groton-Norwich Rd. in the vicinity of Tanager Dr. was also given final approval.

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Ledyard Gales Ferry

Jeff Muise
443-2882

14-Lot Subdivision Approved

LEDYARD — The Planning Commission approved developer Irving H. Norman's application Thursday night to build a 14-lot extension to his Sherwood Forest subdivision.

The subdivision will extend north of the present development and will include a new street joining Whalehead Road and Robin Drive. The 14 lots will range from 40,000 to 65,000 square feet.

At a public hearing in Town Hall on the application, Norman was the only speaker.

Commission Chairman James H. Dougherty Jr. said approval is subject to the receipt of an additional construction bond and maps of the subdivision. The commission decided that a \$19,000 bond already posted by Norman did not include funds for street signs and survey markers.

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Wed, May 27, 1970 -Page 6

Apartment Complex OK'd

LEDYARD — The Zoning Commission tackled the apartment problem again Tuesday night at Town Hall and granted approval to Irving Norman for a 36-unit complex off Ash Drive.

Members David Shippee, Mrs. Janet Sitty and Chairman Thomas Vivirito were in favor. John Lawrence voted against the application on the basis of a 677-signature petition presented in connection with proposed apartment development.

Sources reported the Board of Selectmen would receive written complaints this afternoon from residents questioning building permits. In March, Zoning Enforcement Officer Herbert A. Dalton was criticized for issuing a permit to Derry Hill Builders of Montville because of drainage from the construction site on Pumpkin Hill Road onto property owned by the Nature Conservancy. Complaints now are being made by property owners on Pumpkin Hill Road.

Mrs. Reynard New President

Development South of Gales Ferry Village

Gales Ferry homes built in the 1950s and 1960s offer a “time capsule” of design, layout, construction, and landscape, illustrating the trends of these decades. Homes were considered family-centered, functional, and low-maintenance.²

Focusing on Irving Norman’s development off Route 12, comprising Barry Drive, Richard Rd and Patricia Court, and the houses built by George Foote on Harvard Terrace, typical housing styles of the 1950s can be seen.

In general, the following characteristics are typical of 1950s houses:

1. Open floor plans: Designed for family interaction, with spacious living areas and easy access to the outdoors.
2. Large Windows: Picture windows to bring in light and connect outdoor and indoor spaces.
3. Functional Layouts: Emphasis on practicality, with built-in storage and compact kitchens
4. Open floor plans: Designed for family interaction, with spacious living areas and easy access to the outdoors.
5. Low-Pitched Roofs: With wide eaves, they create a streamlined appearance.³

Local builders offered a limited number of house styles to prospective buyers. Essentially, there were three types of homes built in this era: Ranch, Raised Ranch, and Split Level. Today, many of these houses remain in their original configuration; some have been updated or expanded over the years.

² architecturecourses.org

³ Center for Community Design and Preservation (CCDP) at the University of Georgia’s College of Environment and Design

Ranch Style

The Ranch House peaked in popularity in the 1950s, when it accounted for nine out of ten new houses built. They had one story, simple layouts, and easy access to the outdoors. The rise in automobile ownership led to attached garages, often with a covered breezeway. They were relatively cheap to build, as a second story did not need supporting and there were less materials involved.

Defining characteristics of a ranch house:

- 1) Single story
- 2) Long, low-pitch roofline
- 3) Asymmetrical rectangular, L-shaped, or U-shaped design
- 4) Simple, open floor plans
- 5) Attached garage
- 6) Windows with a large glass area
- 7) Mixed material exteriors of stucco and brick, wood or stone
- 8) Deep overhanging eaves⁴

The ranch house style was adapted for commercial use during the time of the style's popularity. As the concept of a "drive-in" shopping center was being created and popularized, the ranch style was a perfect style to fit into the large tracts of ranch homes being built. Commercial ranch buildings, such as supermarkets and strip malls, typically follow the residential style with simple rustic trim, stucco or board and batten siding, exposed brick and shake roofs, and large windows.

⁴ Center for Community Design and Preservation (CCDP) at the University of Georgia's College of Environment and Design



Vality in Gales Ferry was built in ranch style. It opened in 1962



Ranch style house plan



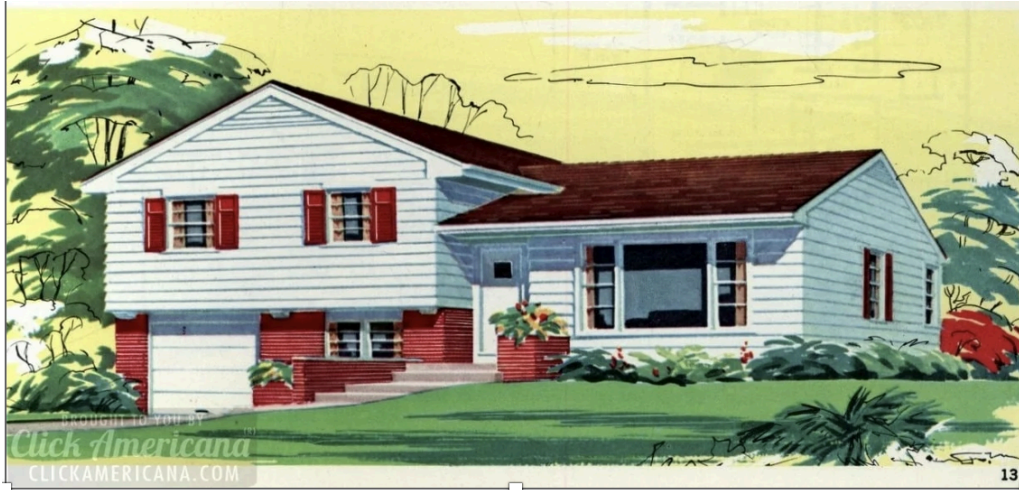
Ranch style homes on Harvard Terrace, above, and in the Irving Norman development off Rt. 12, below



Photographed 2026

Split-Level

The split-level home offered a practical way to separate living and sleeping areas without increasing the house's footprint. With the advent of phonographs and television sets, it became vital for bedrooms to be separated from the living areas of homes. Split-level floorplans usually had a recreation room or den on the ground level. The home could also be entered comfortably from the garage in all weathers.



Side split-level. One side of the house includes the living area, dining zone, and kitchen. The other side of the house is split into two stories, with bedrooms and bathrooms upstairs and the finished basement downstairs.

Characteristics of a split-level house:

- 1) Asymmetrical silhouette
- 2) Low-pitched roof
- 3) Mixed-material façade
- 4) Natural materials like brick, stone, and wood
- 5) Steps leading to the front door
- 6) Attached or integral garage
- 7) Double-hung windows
- 8) Large picture windows or bay windows on the main level
- 9) Minimal ornamentation

The open floorplan, along with sightlines to other floors, can make these homes feel more spacious than they are. They are well suited to larger families.⁵

⁵ <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/split-level-house-everything-you-need-to-know>



Split-level houses in Irving Norman development
Photographed 2026

Raised ranch

The **raised ranch** (also called a bi-level) is a two-story house in which a finished basement serves as an additional floor. It may be built into a slope to utilize the terrain or minimize its profile. This type of home features multiple stories of living space, though with a distinctly different layout. The front door of the raised ranch opens directly to a staircase leading both upstairs and downstairs, with the kitchen and bedrooms usually on the upper level. (6). This type of home became popular as families outgrew their ranch style homes. The footprint was the same as a ranch, allowing these two-story homes to be built on relatively small lots.



Raised ranch house plan

Characteristics of raised ranch homes:

- 1) Simple design
- 2) Rectangular shape
- 3) Low-pitched gable roof
- 4) Wide eaves
- 5) Front door opens to a small landing with immediate stairs to upper or lower levels
- 6) Finished lower level only partially submerged below ground level, allowing windows
- 7) Two main levels (unlike split levels, which have three or more)
- 8) The garage is often integrated into houses at lower levels.⁶

⁶ Wikipedia.com



Raised ranch on Harvard Terrace, above,
And in Irving Norman development, below
Photographed 2026



Argument for Historic Consideration

Subdivisions built in the 1950s and 1960s are now more than 50 years old and fit the definition of “historic districts” as defined by the National Historic Register, a division of the National Park Service. Below are listed the criteria for a district.⁷

DISTRICT

A district possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.

Concentration, Linkage, & Continuity of Features

A district derives its importance from being a unified entity, even though it is often composed of a wide variety of resources. The identity of a district results from the interrelationship of its resources, which can convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically or functionally related properties. For example, a district can reflect one principal activity, such as a mill or a ranch, or it can encompass several interrelated activities, such as an area that includes industrial, residential, or commercial buildings, sites, structures, or objects. A district can also be a grouping of archeological sites related primarily by their common components; these types of districts often will not visually represent a specific historic environment.

Significance

A district must be significant, as well as being an identifiable entity. It must be important for historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, or cultural values. Therefore, districts that are significant will usually meet the last portion of Criterion C plus Criterion A, Criterion B, other portions of Criterion C, or Criterion D.

Types of Features

A district can comprise both features that lack individual distinction and individually distinctive features that serve as focal points. It may even be considered eligible if all of the components lack individual distinction, provided that the grouping achieves significance as a whole within its historic context. In either case, the majority of the components that add to the district's historic character, even if they are individually undistinguished, must possess integrity, as must the district as a whole.

A district can contain buildings, structures, sites, objects, or open spaces that do not contribute to the significance of the district. The number of noncontributing properties a district can contain yet still convey its sense of time and place and historical development depends on how these properties affect the district's integrity. In archeological districts, the primary factor to be considered is the effect of any disturbances on the information potential of the district as a whole.

In addition to the above criteria, it is critical that a district represent a significant part of the history of an area and be representative of that history. (See below)

⁷ nps.gov

The brisk building pace of residential neighborhoods in Ledyard in the 1950s and 1960s reflected multiple historic trends:

- 1) Post WW II programs to encourage home ownership
 - 2) Focus on the nuclear family: working Dad, housewife Mom and kids
 - 3) Advent of the automobile
 - 4) Single family homes in neighborhoods where community involvement was encouraged
 - 5) More time spent in outdoor recreation, with individual yards and shared community space
 - 6) Employment during Cold War at EB, Pfizer, Subbase, Dow Chemical specific to area
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UNDERSTANDING HISTORIC CONTEXTS

To qualify for the National Register, a property must be significant; that is, it must represent a significant part of the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture of an area, and it must have the characteristics that make it a good representative of properties associated with that aspect of the past. This section explains how to evaluate a property within its historic context. *(For a complete discussion of historic contexts, see National Register Bulletin: [Guidelines for Completing National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms](#)).*

The significance of a historic property can be judged and explained only when it is evaluated within its historic context. Historic contexts are those patterns or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning (and ultimately its significance) within history or prehistory is made clear. Historians, architectural historians, folklorists, archeologists, and anthropologists use different words to describe this phenomena such as trend, pattern, theme, or cultural affiliation, but ultimately the concept is the same.

The concept of historic context is not a new one; it has been fundamental to the study of history since the 18th century and, arguably, earlier than that. Its core premise is that resources, properties, or happenings in history do not occur in a vacuum but rather are part of larger trends or patterns.

In order to decide whether a property is significant within its historic context, the following five things must be determined:

- The facet of prehistory or history of the local area, State, or the nation that the property represents;
- Whether that facet of prehistory or history is significant;
- Whether it is a type of property that has relevance and importance in illustrating the historic context;
- How the property illustrates that history; and finally
- Whether the property possesses the physical features necessary to convey the aspect of prehistory or history with which it is associated.

These five steps are discussed in detail below. If the property being evaluated does represent an important aspect of the area's history or prehistory *and* possesses the requisite quality of integrity, then it qualifies for the National Register.
