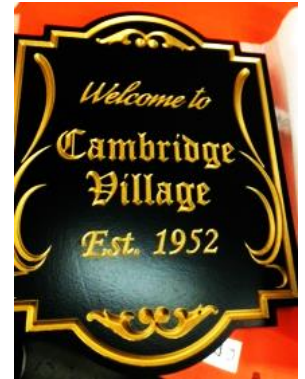


AN EARLY HISTORY OF CAMBRIDGE VILLAGE

Compiled by Gary R. Cocozzoli (2025)

The charter for Cambridge Village was signed in November 1952, but the first model homes were built to be seen by the public in 1953. These homes had a distinctive “look”. Though some were true “Mid-Century Modern” in style, others had a quaint country look, but all had a certain mid-century something that made them distinctive and very clearly more stylish than similar homes being built in the suburbs.



Brick predominated in later homes, but the early homes had cedar shingle siding available in eight colors. A few of these homes still have this siding today. Most homes offer large overhangs which protected windows from the sun and allowed them to remain open in the rain. Remember, air conditioning in homes was not a common thing until the 1970s. Only the wealthiest people had central air before then. This passive-solar concept was ahead of its time. And it was not common then for lower-cost homes to have fireplaces, which many Cambridge homes feature.

The builder, Rodney Lockwood Community Builders, was getting a reputation for quality homes that were affordable, but also distinctly more elegant than the standard post-war ranches being built across the metro area. His early activity in Royal Oak and Beverly Hills was a test; our sub would be the first built-from-scratch development he would achieve. It was obviously successful, as in just a few years, he would plan a subdivision more than double in size, Cranbrook Village just north of 12 Mile. It would stretch to 13 Mile, but those homes (with the 30000 and up addresses) were in the Birmingham School District and had a variety of builders. The southern half was purely Lockwood-built and many of those home's models were built in Cambridge Village first. He did add tri-levels and two-story homes there to accommodate larger families.

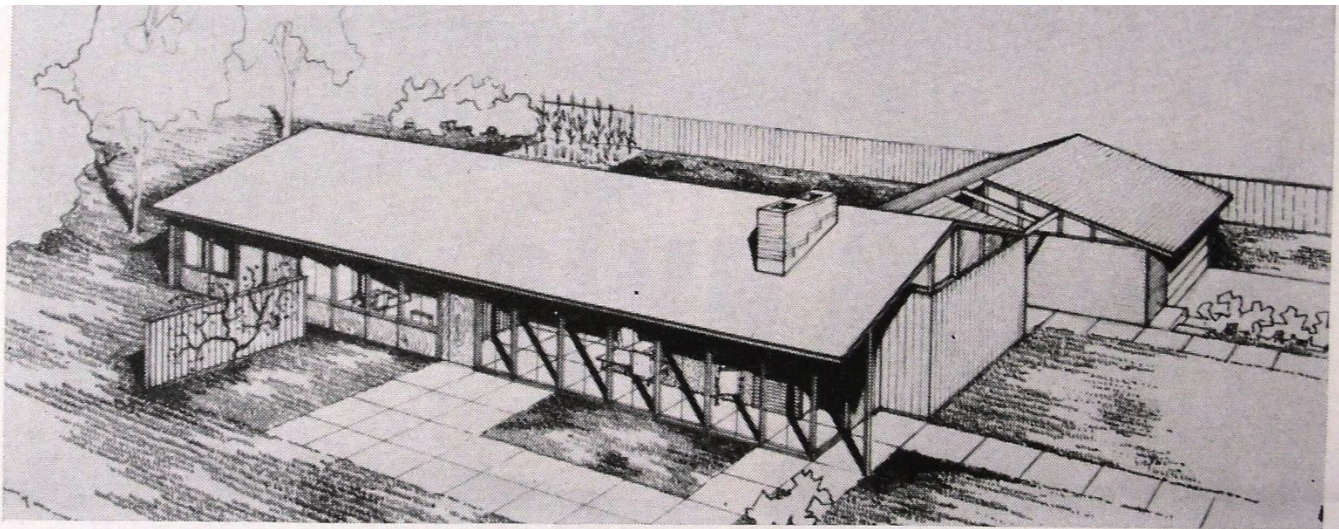
With the desire to show off the new sub, a lot on the east corner of 11 Mile/Lexington was set aside to host a Builders' Association "Ideal Home" for 1953 (later called "Idea Home"). It was a sharp example of the Mid-Century Modern movement that was developing in the 1950s and 1960s. People would tour this dream home and would indeed dream, but then would elect to buy our more modestly-priced models which shared some of this modernity. The Cambridge models represented the type of more upscale houses that people could actually afford to buy and maintain. These annual "ideal" homes were designed by student architects usually from Lawrence Tech, University of Detroit, or University of Michigan. Local architects and professors judged the designs and the home was built as a demo of modern design. If you looked at the newspapers of the time, it was page after page of advertisements for new subdivisions in this post-war decade. So, Cambridge Village had to have something different to stand out.

The majority of homes here were built from 1953 to 1956, and in truth, a few of the last few homes built in the 1960s were possibly done by different builders. The streets were concrete, then asphalt-topped, then concrete again, and now are asphalt with concrete curbs. The goal was to have a park-like setting, with decorative fences and with curved

streets that included circles on Johnny Cake and Spring Arbor. (Note that most of the other streets in our square mile are not winding, just grid-like.) Many subdivisions were moving away from having sidewalks, but with many families with children who could walk to school, having sidewalks was a plus and that is still true to this day. People may not have had as many dogs back then but today it is very common and sidewalks are essential for those who must walk a dog daily.

The original deed restrictions said no livestock and, technically speaking, aluminum or vinyl siding was not permitted! Siding like that was not widely available and may have thought to be garish at the time before it became predominant in practically every home built after Cambridge Village. The sub also has bylaws along with deed restrictions. The bylaws are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the way the subdivision operates. The original dues have gone up over the decades. It was \$7.00 a year in the mid-1980s, and the Board voted to raise it to \$10.00 per year by the late 1980s. It is still the same today as of 2025. The dues are not optional. Every household in Cambridge Village has to support the ongoing maintenance of the sub via the homeowners' association.

(the sketch below was featured in House and Home, (~1952) a monthly magazine for home builders that featured new trends in homes and subdivisions. The home as built is actually swapped as a mirror image of this sketch.)

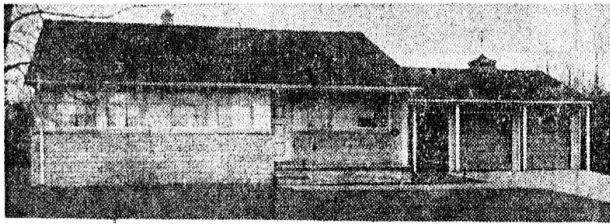
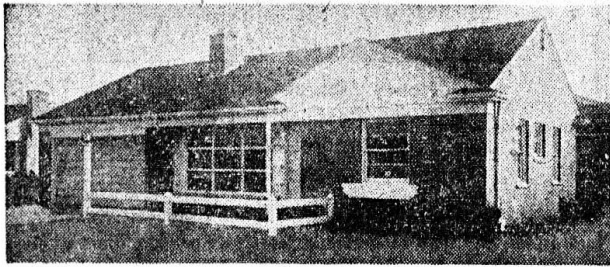


Detroit homebuilders pick “Ideal 1953 Home”

This contemporary two-bedroom and study-guest room house with 1,576 sq. ft. of living area won an \$800 first prize last month in a contest sponsored by the Builders Association of Metropolitan Detroit for a model to be featured in conjunction with its Home Show next year. Henry

F. Fett, NAHB regional vice president and former head of the Detroit organization, will build the model on a 110' x 120' corner lot in Southfield Township. The contest was limited to Michigan architectural and engineering students. Winner was Richard C. Donkervoet.

(side note: the designer Richard Donkervoet was probably about 22 at the time he designed this. He got his Masters in Architecture at UM in 1953, and later became a prominent architect in Baltimore, Maryland. He died in 1975.)



YOU'LL FIND THESE HOUSES IN CAMBRIDGE VILLAGE
Subdivision is opened off W. 11 Mile, Southfield Twp.

ON SHAGBARK LANE . . .

Cambridge Village Opened by Lockwood

Cambridge Village, a quaint but modern community in the Greater North Woodward area, is being presented to the public Sunday by Rodney Lockwood.

On an 80-acre wooded tract off of Eleven Mile Road between Greenfield and Southfield, the village is ringed by a white picket fence, and is dotted with Colonial lamp posts and rustic street signs.

There is a wide variety of home styles in the village. Some are brick, others a combination of brick and cedar shakes. Some have two bedrooms, others three. Some have basements, others not.

THERE IS A furnished model, "Cambridge House," at 27030 Lexington Parkway, which will be open to the public daily and Sunday to show how attractively the homes can be furnished. The R. L. Pope Co. has decorated the house in contemporary modern, with striking ebony and silver grey furniture in the living room.

The floor plan features a two-way entrance from the front door. One archway leads into the living room, the other to the bedrooms and bath.

The hall is papered with a Swedish import in geometric design.

A glass brick window in the bathroom is fitted with a venti-

lating fan. An over-size mirror is above the washstand.

THE SUBSTANTIAL size of the house is apparent in the basement, where the 1,200 square feet of uncluttered floor space will make a fine recreation room.

Lockwood plans to accommodate about 1,000 families in Cambridge Village. The area will be easily accessible to Detroit when the John C. Lodge Expressway is completed. It is also handy to Birmingham and Pontiac. The Northland Shopping Center will be a short distance away.

Lending a quaint flavor to the village are the names of its streets, like Shagbark Lane and Johnnycake Lane.

Watch for Sag

In applying glossy points and wall enamels, make sure the final brush strokes are up and down. If sags appear, stroke them upward with the brush tip.

These two "models" on the left were two of the twenty floorplans from \$14,000 to \$20,000. The article infers there will be "1,000 families" which is curious, since we have only 288 homes, but if using the original platting, there might have been 350 homes. Many homes on Spring Arbor and Red Leaf straddle more than one originally-sized lot, reducing the numbers. Canterbury Gardens north of Catalpa was not developed yet, so perhaps developer Lockwood had his eyes on that property, or even the vacant Tanglewood property to the east. Three years later, the larger Cranbrook Village would encompass many more homesites while using many of the models developed for Cambridge.

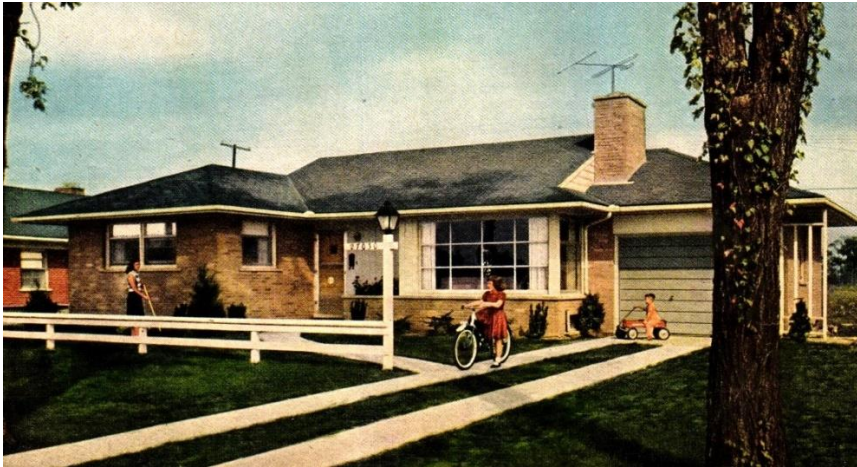
Remember, Southfield was not a city yet (1958), and Northland (1954) and its subsequent area development was underway but not opened yet. This area was considered "way out" but it was convenient to Royal Oak, Birmingham, Berkley, and to Detroit via Northwestern Highway and James Cousins boulevard (no freeway yet beyond Wyoming Rd.). Southfield Rd. had no freeway either. Oak Park was growing concurrently.

Lathrup Village was started in the 1920s, yet was still being developed through the early 1970s. No doubt the elegant Lathrup development added cachet to the area. Cambridge homes' unique styling and subdivision layout was more in tune with quaint Lathrup than with other subs being built at the time in the Detroit area in this price range.

The relative value of Cambridge homes in 1953 in 2025 dollars is \$169,000 to \$241,600, so those original sale prices are not as inexpensive as they sound.

By the way, at the time, the street signs were made out of wood for a rustic look. These were replaced some years later with

traditional city signs, as the wood could not stand the test of time. Lockwood had previously built more modest homes in Royal Oak ("Olivia St.") and bigger ones just like ours in Beverly Hills. In fact, it is likely that the homes pictured above and in Cambridge Village's earliest brochure hand-out (see it on our website) were actually pictures of homes built at 14 Mile/Greenfield in the Beverly Hills subdivision.



This picture was featured in the Summer 1954 *Popular Homes* magazine, as a blueprint you could buy. It is mentioned as a home built at Cambridge Village.

Note the fence and light in front: these fences were once found throughout the subdivision and were the only type the builder provided. Not very dog friendly! Along with the ribbon driveway, it attempts to create a parklike setting

One other claim to fame: if you look at the map of Southfield subdivisions, it is clear that Cambridge Village was the first fully-planned "builders" sub, based on models, not based on custom homes built by different builders. This created a harmonious look and feel. To some extent, Lathrup Village had some model homes, and strict planning and deed restrictions, including some ethnic restrictions (now invalidated) but the majority of homes are custom. And our subdivision was the very first one in the township to be designed with one central entrance, a style that would be the hallmark for subdivisions to come.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE HERE IN 1953?

The early residents were pioneers of sorts. While it is true Lathrup Village was under development from the 1920s, and had enough residents to become a city in 1953, it still continued to fill in until the early 1970s. The section closest to Cambridge Village was likely the most developed by Cambridge's early years. The only other well-known sub was the Magnolia Subdivision area in the Southfield/8 Mile area; and Washington Village at 10 Mile/Northwestern/Mt. Vernon. These and most other developments were custom homes. The area north of Catalpa and east of Pierce (we call it Bonnie Acres but it is a different development) was settled from the 1920s, but with older-style modest homes. All of the brick ranches in those subs followed along after Cambridge. The area east of Cambridge Village ("Tanglewood") was not started until the late 1960s so it was vacant land with the official name of Meadowvale subdivision.

Our subdivision grew east to west, with Shagbark first, and Spring Arbor westward last. The homes grew in size as families grew in size too. There are about seven homes of the 288 that are unique, as in just one of each style built in our sub. Four of these were later built in greater numbers at our sister sub, Cranbrook Village. Interestingly, eight of the ten houses facing Red Leaf Lane (the even number addresses) just south of San Quentin are all models commonly found in great numbers in Cranbrook Village (except for one

style that didn't make the jump: it is shown in the lower picture above, representing two of the ten).

Probably the most famous design at the time is the Mid-Century Modern "sloped roof" model with cathedral ceilings. This is touted in the Southfield History bus tour as a Cranbrook Village home but it was actually built first in Cambridge Village in 1954. It used a new building method, "Rock-Crete" which meant the concrete walls were cast in place vs. the traditional building method. Though not an inexpensive home, it still had a dramatic interior and boasted an open concept that everyday people could afford.

Grade schools nearby included Annie Lathrup School and Simms School (now demolished, but was located at Simms Park on Pierce) and Southfield High School was founded in 1951. Southfield-Lathrup High would not open until the 1960s. Police Dept. was established in 1953. There was no major local shopping. Northland was under construction and would open in spring 1954 bragging that it had the largest parking lot in North America (7,500 cars). However, when Disneyland opened in 1955, its lot was 12,000 cars. Royal Oak was the closest big city, and the Cambridge Village deed restrictions filed in November 1952 showed a Royal Oak address. We would later have a Lathrup address and still do as of today as the sub's official mailing address. Berkley and Birmingham were nearby, including groceries at Hiller's Shopping Center Market on 12 Mile (now closed). Soon there would be a Kroger at Northland with an innovative package pickup conveyor belt that led to the parking lot. (Back then, everyone used brown paper bags for groceries.)

Most homes here still have a "milk chute." With likely just one car per household, families depended on a milk delivery service for milk, bread, ice cream, and other daily sustenance. Back then, milk came in glass bottles: empty bottles were placed in the chute, the milkman swapped the empty glass empties for fresh milk and the pattern would repeat.

Nearby movie houses included the Berkley (now a vacant Rite-Aid), the Washington (aka the Baldwin), Main, and Royal Oak theaters. The Birmingham and Bloomfield, just 4 miles north, were not considered part of "Detroit" and could show movies just after they opened downtown and before the local neighborhood shows including in Royal Oak. The Oak and West Side drive-in theaters were also close by. Otherwise, off to Detroit or Pontiac for amusement.

Lawrence Tech was planning to move to Southfield by 1955. The college was located in Highland Park with plans to move to a property they bought at 8 Mile, Greenfield, Northwestern Highway in the 1940s. Little did they know that this was to be the hottest piece of property in the Detroit area, as J. L. Hudson needed that land to build the world's first modern shopping center, Northland. (At one point, that parcel was considered the geographic center of the metropolitan region.) The college sold the land and with the profits, bought a farm at 10 Mile and had enough money from the sale to erect their first building. Amusingly, a few faculty members built homes in the Magnolia Sub area, figuring they could just walk to work. That would end up being a long walk to 10 Mile Rd.

Early residents likely did not perceive the controversy that would envelop the area as the proposed east/west I-696 freeway was looking for a place to go, with planning starting in the 1950s. One long-time resident said one of the ideas was to put the freeway DOWN CATALPA (!). Fortunately, that idea went nowhere, and it would take some 36 years for our central section of the freeway to open in 1989 after some years of messy construction. 11 Mile used to be a non-descript 2-lane road before the freeway, but look at it now. As bad as traffic can be, it was truly terrible before the freeway opened. It could take 45 minutes to get to Northwestern Highway during rush hour times before the freeway. And getting out of the sub via 12 Mile was no picnic either.

Once the freeway opened, fears were put to rest about enhanced crime...it never happened and in fact, most thieves might well be confused as to how to make a getaway. Don't try to cut through Lathrup Village! Since you can't. A few would-be thieves found out the hard way.

The sub endured two summers when the streets were torn up over the years. It was quite a mess, but the streets have been good ever since. Because we have combined storm and sanitary sewers, the sewer grates sit above enlarged caverns that can collect rainwater so it does not back up into the house. (That is why there are puddles after a heavy rain...it is so the water trickles down slowly.) The first major street replacement was a disaster: the concrete used was unknowingly defective and began cracking/spalling within a few years. There was no choice but to rip it all up and redo it. The second time they did work on the water lines as well, so that made it worth the pain. But it was painful, so the fact that the streets are greatly improved helped make it worth it.

In the early days, the sub was full of children so there were activities such as the annual Halloween costume contest. This lost its luster as there were fewer children to participate and many chose after-school parties instead, so it was discontinued in the 1990s. The Home Awards has always been popular. It was originally five signs and chosen by the CVA Board of Directors. It became impossible to choose because of so many potential awardees. The Board agreed to make new signs and increase the possible awardees. Guest judges were invited from outside of the subdivision to give fresh perspective. Now instead of just six people arguing in a car as to which home was best, judges assess each home with points and those with the cumulated highest points get the award.

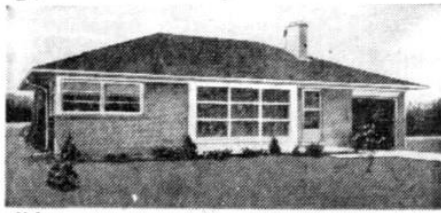
The year-end holidays are capped by the annual luminaria display. The Kulish family came here from Albuquerque where paper bag farolitos (or luminaria) line streets, sidewalks, and roofs with sand and a votive candle. CV adopted this tradition in 1963 and may well be the first sub in Oakland County to do this as a community project each year. It is a lot of effort and takes careful and strategic planning; it is made possible by an army of our wonderful volunteers. As for the street sign greenery swags, that came about in an unusual way. One of our residents did some major trimming of some evergreen trees and with some other neighbors hung these clippings as swags on our street signs. The Board (and residents) really liked the idea and we took it over as an official duty each December. It too is a lot of work that is made slightly easier when the weather cooperates.

Some less successful activities have been sub-wide garage sales, block parties, social events. These just don't work as well now with the frantic pace most of our residents live their lives. CVA does host an annual meeting which is a good opportunity to meet others in the sub and discuss issues.

Most people who come to live in Cambridge Village are proud of the subdivision and its place in the history of Southfield. Southfield itself is on an upswing after some years of concern, and Cambridge has continued to attract new residents who enjoy the super-convenient location, the excellent city services like police, fire service, beautiful library, and wide-ranging parks and recreation. A strong homeowners' association that helps keep properties desirable also gets attention from the City when help is needed.

This ad appeared later in the development of Cambridge Village. The prices had risen \$3,000 to \$4,000 more than when introduced. Note that the "sales office" was the original sloped-roof contemporary model mentioned earlier. Lockwood saved trees whenever it was possible, and provided "complete" landscaping, meaning lawns, which was usually optional in other subdivisions.

ONLY
\$18,250



17330 SUNNY BROOK

Our Featured home is a Beautiful 3-Bedroom Ranch Home with a natural fireplace and attached garage. It is located on a 70-foot lot in Cambridge Village, Detroit's most outstanding suburban community. Street paving, sewer, water and COMPLETE landscaping are included in Cambridge Village.

Other models from \$17,750 to \$24,950

Sales office—27275 Red Leaf Lane
(W. 11 Mile Rd. bet. Greenfield and Southfield)

Open 11 A.M.—9 P.M. DAILY



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