

Montgomery
MODERN
BUS TOUR

Saturday, October 8, 2016



DOCOMOMO TOUR DAY



MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Presented by Montgomery County Planning Department
Historic Preservation Office



Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

In partnership with AIA Potomac Valley and Docomomo-DC



Montgomery Modern is an initiative of the Montgomery County Planning Department Historic Preservation Office



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Cedar Lane Unitarian Congregation

Grateful appreciation to all our hosts for making this event possible

Color photographs, unless noted, are by Carol M. Highsmith from *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979* by Clare Lise Kelly (M-NCPPC, 2015).

INTRODUCTION

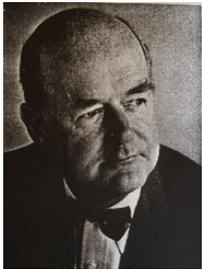
Introduction

Clare Lise Kelly, M-NCPPC

I uphold the value of genuine creativity as one of the most precious qualities any individual, or any society, can have.

-David Yerkes, FAIA¹

This tour explores the work of Deigert and Yerkes, a leading modernist architecture firm working in the Washington, DC area during the mid-20th century. The partnership of Robert Campbell Deigert and David Norton Yerkes, operating from 1947 to 1967, was known for creative designs, using variety in materials and textures, and contrast in closed and open spaces. Deigert and Yerkes are perhaps best known for the National Arboretum Administration Building in Northeast Washington. In Montgomery County, the firm designed Primary Day School (1955) and Bushey Drive Elementary School (1961), and residential developments of Tulip Hill (1949-1955) and Oak Spring (1966).



David Norton Yerkes, FAIA, (1911–2011), a Boston native, graduated from Harvard University (1933) and received a bachelor of fine arts degree from Yale University (1935). He was a draftsman for DC architect Louis Justement from 1938-39

and 1941-43, and served in the US Army Corps of Engineers during World War II. He had a solo practice during the war from 1943-46, before forming the partnership with Deigert.

Yerkes was elected an AIA Fellow in 1965 for his contributions in the fields of design and service. Known for his hard work, imagination, soundness

and breadth of reason, he served on numerous committees and organizations that were influential on the beauty and livability of Washington, DC, including the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. In 1972, Yerkes received the AIA Kemper Award for his outstanding contribution to the profession.

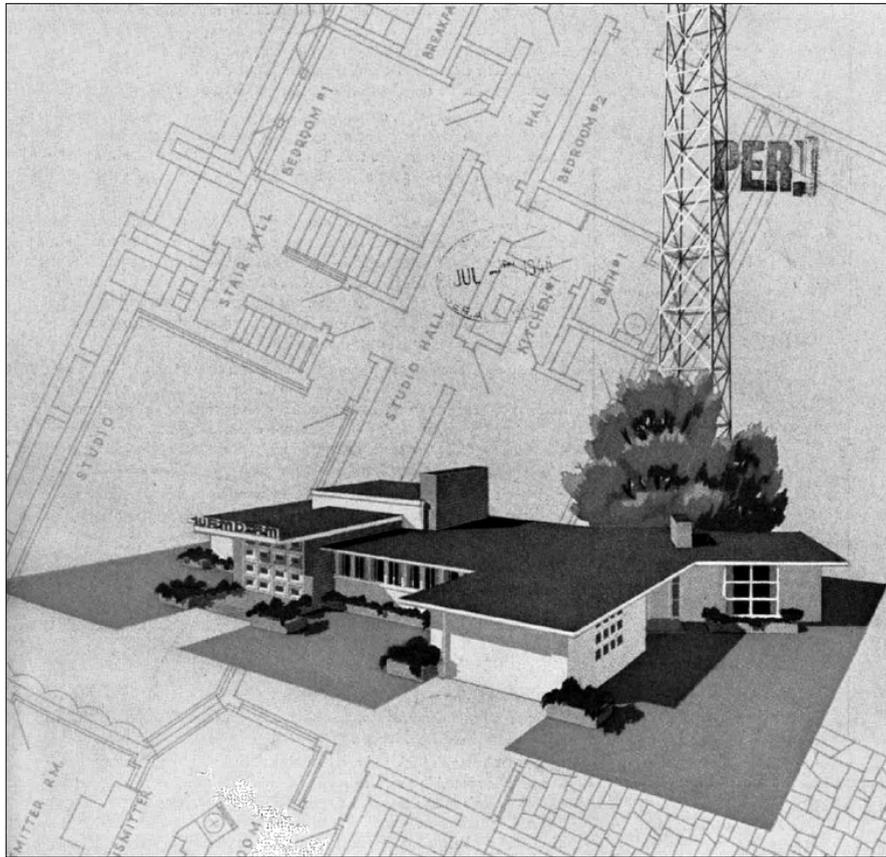


A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Robert Campbell Deigert, AIA, (1908–1974) began his career as a draftsman for influential architects Albert Kahn (1926-27), Géza Maróti (1928) and Arthur L Weeks (1929). Deigert earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from

Yale University (1933) and established a solo firm in 1934 before partnering with Yerkes. During World War II, Deigert served in the US Army Air Corps, where he was chief designer for Army Airways Communications System, setting design standards for radio station buildings and control towers, and receiving the Legion of Merit for his work.

Drawing on Deigert's wartime experience in Air Force radio communication, Deigert and Yerkes designed radio transmitter buildings after World War II, including five US stations for the International Ladies Garment Union and the Voice of America studio. After a period of time designing custom houses and schools, the firm designed a series of technical communications projects for the military.

¹ "Architecture and Regimentation," in *Modern Steel Construction*, 7:3, 1967.



WFMD Radio Transmitter, Frederick, Maryland
 Cover image from September 1947 issue of *Western Electric Oscillator*

Drawing national attention for its imaginative work, Deigert and Yerkes was featured in the October 1958 issue of *Progressive Architecture* magazine. Among the firm's best known works is the National Arboretum Administration Building (1957), described as one of the finest and most delightful buildings produced by the US General Services Administration. The design of US embassy buildings in Somalia were outstanding examples of adapting local architectural tradition without sacrificing a distinctly American character. The Kentucky Court housing project in Washington,

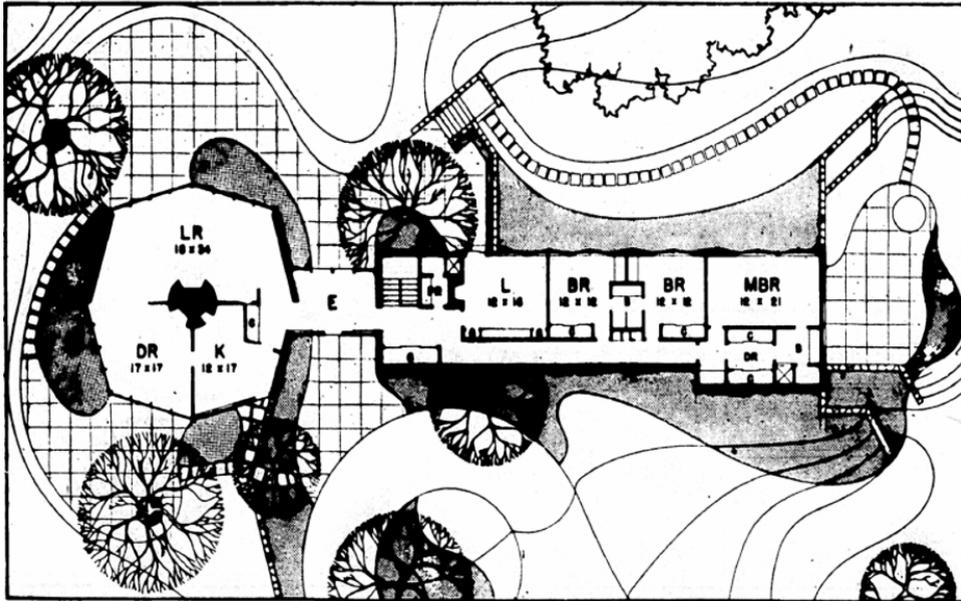
DC (c. 1964) set a new standard for public housing, fostering community life with residential buildings skillfully clustered around landscaped courts.

In Montgomery County, Deigert and Yerkes designed outstanding residential developments, custom houses and schools marked by skillful site planning, privacy and a natural setting. Their projects were often small in scale, yet have a gem-like quality of design, with ingenuity, versatility of materials, and flexibility of spaces.



Roudabush House (1957)
 Persimmon Tree Lane, Potomac, was
 a custom house built overlooking
 Congressional Country Club. In
 recent years, the residence was
 repurposed as a religious facility
 for Adat Shalom Reconstructionist
 Congregation.
Progressive Architecture, October 1958

B-6 THE EVENING STAR, Washington, D. C.
 SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 1957

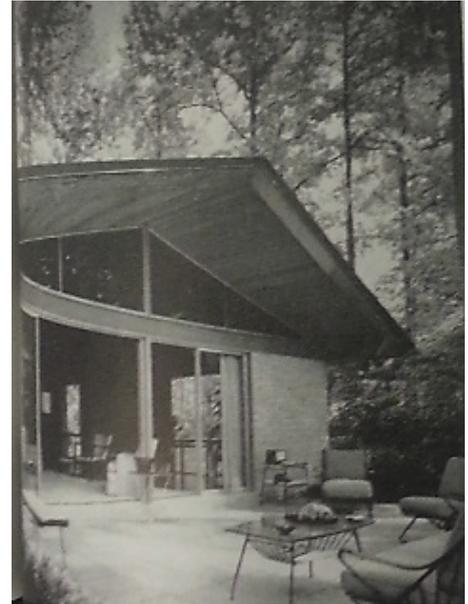


Roudabush House floor plan
Evening Star, March 30, 1957

FLOOR PLAN—This is floor plan and landscaping for the house pictured on Page B-1 to be built for Mr. and Mrs. Byron Roudabush.

In early projects, the firm worked with Demory Brothers who built Tulip Hill houses and Primary Day School. Starting in 1966, Deigert and Yerkes partnered with developers Miller and Smith in a series of residential communities, including Oak

Spring in Silver Spring and DuFief in Gaithersburg. The collaboration between the architects and developers resulted in five awards from the Home Builders of Metropolitan Washington and three from the Northern Virginia Builders Association.



1956 House of the Year, 5801 Goldsboro Road, Bethesda
Left: Robert Yerkes & Associates brochure, AIA Archives: Ezra Stoller; Right: *Progressive Architecture*, October 1958: Ezra Stoller

Designed and built by Deigert and Yerkes for *House and Garden* magazine, the House of the Year (1956) at 5801 Goldsboro Road has several levels to conform to a sloping site adjacent to Kenwood Country Club. The principal materials of the prow gable house are wood, glass and stone. The project received awards from the Washington Board of Trade, AIA-DC and Evening Star newspaper. The design was cited for its useful plan for a variety of living and its indoor-outdoor living emphasis. The first homeowners were Jack and Dorothy Patterson, who purchased the house in 1958.

The architects' partnership ended when Robert Deigert moved to Asheville, North Carolina, and practiced as Robert Deigert and Associates, Architects and Planners. Deigert died on November 19, 1974, shortly after retiring from practice. David Yerkes continued his practice until 1983, first as David N. Yerkes and Associates, with offices at 1511 K Street, NW, and later in partnerships with Nicholas Pappas and John Parker. In 1972, he married Sarah Hitchcock Satterlee. Yerkes retired from practicing architecture in 1983 and died at age 99 in 2011.



Clare Lise Kelly

The residential communities designed by Deigert and Yerkes were characterized by skillful site plans allowing for privacy and preserving natural settings. Ground-hugging residences of Tulip Hill are set in a sloping, wooded site overlooking the Potomac River.

1

Tulip Hill (1950) Bay Tree Lane and Bent Branch Road, Deigert and Yerkes



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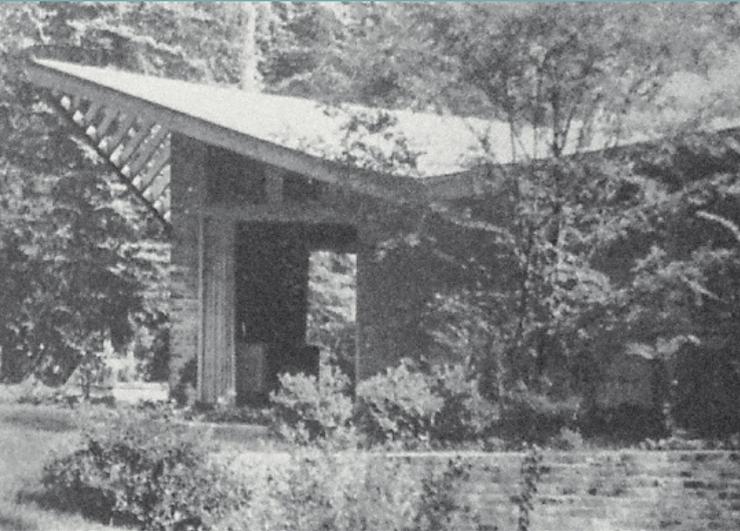
The houses are distinguished by economical floor plans, interiors featuring materials traditionally used for exterior finishes and window walls and prow gables that open to nature.

After designing Tulip Hill houses with his firm, Robert Deigert opted to reside at 6 Bay Tree Lane where he and his wife Joan lived with their three children. To design an expansion to the house, the current owner engaged architect Albert G. "Jerry" Mumma, who had worked on the Tulip Hill project as an associate for Deigert and Yerkes.



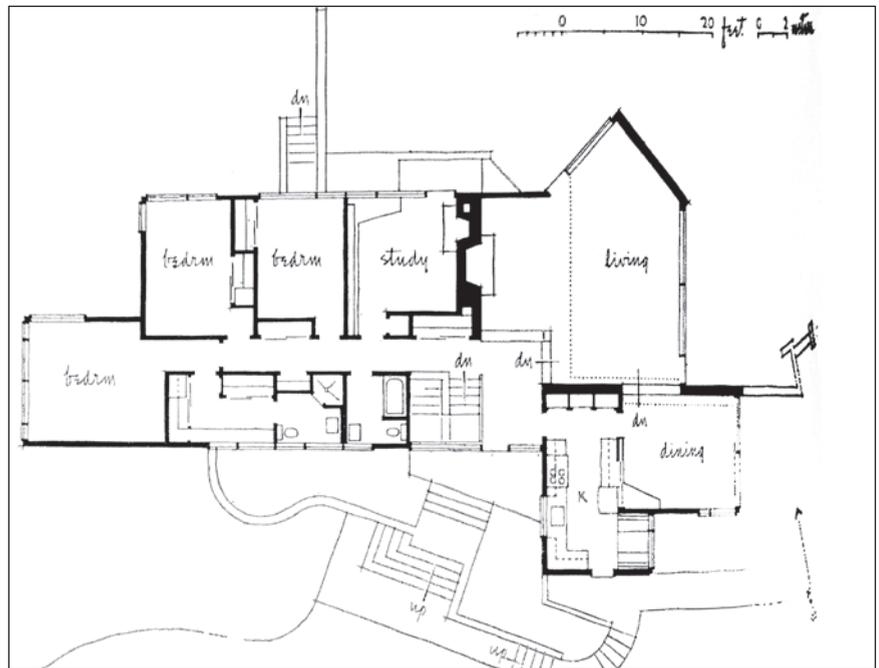
Clare Lise Kelly

Robert Deigert House, 6 Bay Tree Lane



The sprawling three-bedroom house at 5 Bay Tree Lane is clad in salvaged brick and redwood siding, with interior walls of mahogany paneling and plaster. Interior spaces have contrasting treatments to correlate with their respective spaces. The open living area has a soaring ceiling and expanses of glass, and an intimate fire alcove with wood-paneled ceiling. Glass prow gable walls extend out into the spacious rear yard. Lou Bernard Voigt was landscape architect for the project.

5 Bay Tree Lane
Progressive Architecture, October 1958: Robert Lautman





5715 Bent Branch Road, 1957 view
Washington Architecture, 1791-1957, AIA Washington Metro Chapter: Fred Maroon



Clare Lise Kelly

5715 Bent Branch Road

A spacious house at 5715 Bent Branch Road was the home of Edward Bennett Williams, the influential trial attorney and owner of the Washington Redskins and the Baltimore Orioles, who lived here from 1952 until 1972. Current owners have expanded and modified the house in several building campaigns to suit their contemporary lifestyle.

The mechanical engineer for Deigert and Yerkes projects was Robert Jones, who resided at 1 Bay Tree Lane (now demolished). The tour offers a rare opportunity to experience the original Tulip Hill houses. Sadly, Tulip Hill has been the subject of mansionization in recent years. Of nine identified Deigert and Yerkes houses, three have been demolished and, at the time of this writing, two more are slated for demolition.

The Primary Day School (1955)

7300 River Road, Deigert and Yerkes



The Primary Day School was founded in 1944 as a private demonstration school for the Phonovisual Method, a phonics-based approach to reading and writing. Deigert and Yerkes designed a customized demonstration room for visiting educators. In the October 1958 issue of *Progressive Architecture* magazine, the architects described the goal for the school to be a facility that is “small in scale, colorful, light and cheerful.”

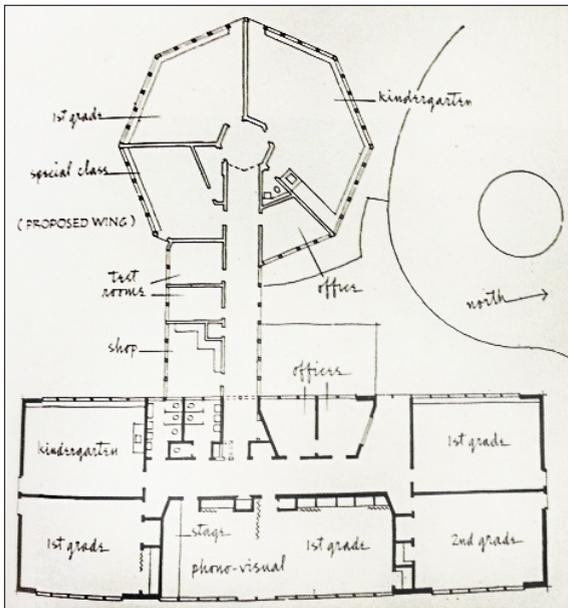
In a play on the school’s name, exterior spandrel panels were painted in primary colors of red, yellow and blue. Interiors were painted pastel green, blue and yellow. The use of color, both outside and in, was an important aspect of modern design.

The architects provided for expansion by designing an octagonal wing, built a few years after the school opened. Built without air conditioning, the school was designed to take advantage of natural ventilation.



Washington Architecture, 1791-1957, AIA Washington Metro Chapter: Robert Lautman

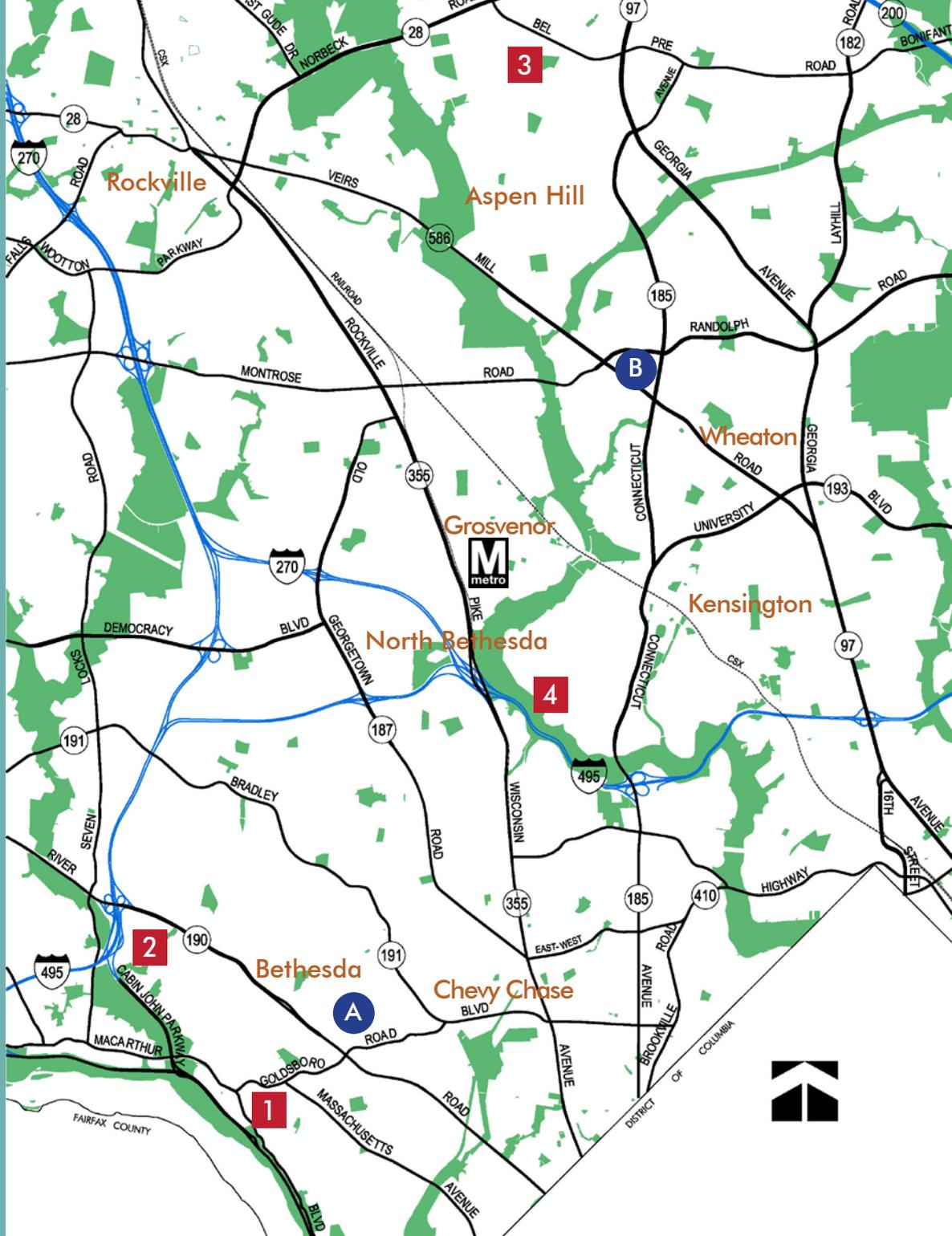
Contributing to its airiness, classroom ceilings were open to rafters, and natural lighting came from skylights. The school was designed for classes from kindergarten through second grade. All classrooms had doors opening directly to the outdoors. Small and economical warm air units heated indoor spaces. While other schools in the area began as early education centers and later expanded to become elementary schools, Primary Day is unusual in retaining its focus on young children.



In addition to their professional responsibilities, Deigert and Yerkes took personal interest in the school. Robert Deigert was instrumental in securing the funding for construction of the school and was listed as the responsible party in the 1955 building permit. For many years, Robert Deigert and David Yerkes were members of the board of directors for the school.

Progressive Architecture, October 1958: Robert Lautman

TOUR MAP



Montgomery Modern Bus Tour 2016

1 **TULIP HILL** (1950)
Bay Tree Lane Vicinity

2 **PRIMARY DAY SCHOOL** (1955)
7300 River Road

3 **OAK SPRING** (1966)
Woodcrest Drive Vicinity,

4 **CEDAR LANE UNITARIAN CHURCH**
(1953 design, 1958 completed)
9601 Cedar Lane

Nearby Projects:

A **House of the Year** (1956)
5801 Goldsboro Road

B **BUSHEY DRIVE SCHOOL** (1961)
4010 Randolph Road, Deigert and Yerkes

The bus boards at the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro and heads to Tulip Hill houses, off Goldsboro Road. Lunch is provided by Primary Day School, following a tour of the facility.

Oak Spring houses will be open to participants in the afternoon.

The tour wraps up with a tour of Cedar Lane Unitarian Church and a reception at Chalice House.

The bus brings participants back to Grosvenor-Strathmore Metro at the conclusion of the tour at 3:30pm.

Cedar Lane Unitarian Church was designed by Pietro Belluschi in association with Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon. All other projects listed here were designed by Deigert and Yerkes.



Clare Lise Kelly

14430 Woodcrest Drive

Oak Spring was the first of a series of communities designed by the architects for builders Miller and Smith. The 94-house project earned the team a design award for a residential subdivision preserving mature trees in a natural landscape. The design is welcoming to nature, yet offers privacy for home life.

Building materials are both rustic in character to fit in a natural setting and low-maintenance to suit busy, casual lifestyles. Exteriors are constructed of earth-colored brick, natural cedar and redwood panels. Inside, slate-floor entry halls are naturally illuminated through opaque glass panels. Freestanding brick chimneys form partitions between living rooms and dining rooms or hallways. Other original features include built-in bookcases, aggregate concrete patios and decorative screen fencing.



Clare Lise Kelly

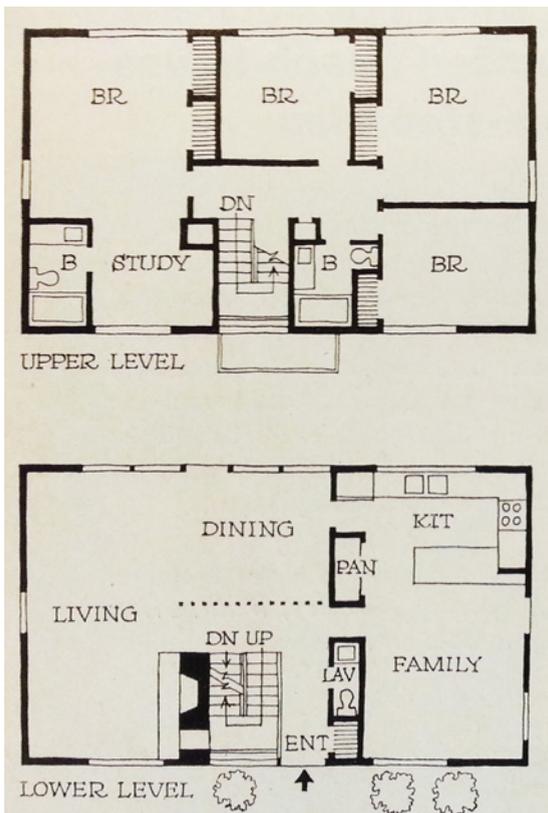
14501 Barkwood Drive, Split Oak Reverse house plan with solarium and garage.

The Oak Spring community has four house models. Featured on the tour is the Split Oak model, banked into a side sloping lot, that has a freestanding brick fireplace dividing living from dining areas. Also on the tour is the Grand Oak model, featuring an open stairwell with mahogany screen dividing hall from dining area. Other models are the Twin Oak, a two-story plan banked into a lot sloping upward from front to back; and the Rambling Oak, a one-story model with a basement on the side sloping lot.



Clare Lise Kelly

Grand Oak models



Grand Oak floorplan and interior views.
House and Home, October 1966: Robert Lautman



Built-in table separates kitchen from family room



Fireplace wall separates living room from stairhall

Throughout the community, builders Miller and Smith preserved native plant species, including bloodroot, lycopodium and solomon's seals. The natural areas were augmented by plantings designed by Edmunds and Hitchcock, a DC landscape architecture firm founded in 1960 by Rose-Marie deFoix Edmunds Chapman and Sarah Hitchcock Satterlee. Married respectively to architects Grosvenor Chapman and Nicholas Satterlee, the partners were accomplished horticulturists. Sarah had a master of architecture

degree from Harvard University and later married David Yerkes.

The project received an award from the American Institute of Architects and *House and Home* magazine in the Homes for Better Living competition. *House and Home* recognized the contemporary design of both plan and elevation, featuring the Grand Oak model in its October 1966 issue devoted to pace-setting designs for the merchant-built housing market.



Central staircase of Grand Oak model



Lower living area of Split Oak model on Woodcrest Drive opens to landscaped yard



Original lighted sign



Oak Spring

Look for original features as you tour these houses:

- a** Lecy-Yeoh House, 14430 Woodcrest Drive, Split Oak – House on wooded corner lot has original lighted address sign, stair rail, flooring and windows, and lower-level study.
- b** Lang House, 14501 Barkwood Drive, Split Oak – Reverse plan of Lecy-Yeoh House with original privacy glass foyer, bathroom tiles and vanity, solarium, pool and detached garage.
- c** Smith House, 14506 Barkwood Drive, Split Oak – Original built-in bookcases in living room, brick fireplace with slate hearth and pass-through wood box, and aggregate concrete patio. NOT INCLUDED ON TOUR
- d** Martin-Collette House, 14510 Barkwood Drive, Grand Oak – Mahogany screen dividing front hall from dining area, family room/kitchen combo, master bedroom and detached garage.

Cedar Lane Unitarian Church (1953 design, 1958 completed)

9601 Cedar Lane, Pietro Belluschi in association with Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon



Banked into the wooded sloping land, the Cedar Lane Unitarian Church has an organic design, with wood siding and window muntins, as well as a cedar shingle roof. The structure was constructed of reinforced steel with steel purlins and gypsum decking, while the assembly hall is steel-framed. The 1974 *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, DC* praised the contextual design of the facility, noting, “careful siting, natural landscaping and simple materials used to advantage in a residential scale all contribute to make this complex a welcome neighbor.”

Nationally prominent modernist architect Pietro Belluschi often worked with local architects,

particularly during his years as Dean of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s School of Architecture and Planning from 1951 to 1965. The June 1958 issue of *Progressive Architecture* magazine highlighted four of Belluschi’s collaborative church designs, including Cedar Lane Unitarian Church. The church was designed to be built in three phases as funds allowed. Two of the three stages have been constructed: the first was a 250-seat assembly hall with classrooms on the lower level. The second was a children’s chapel wing and courtyard. A final phase was to be the main sanctuary, but it has not yet been built. The project design received an AIA Potomac Valley Award of Merit in 1960.



Nearby project:

Bushey Drive School (1961) 4010 Randolph Road, Deigert and Yerkes

The Bushey Drive School, with its distinctive cylindrical form, was identified by the AIA as an important experiment in school planning and design. A grant from the Ford Foundation's Educational Facilities Laboratories made possible experimental innovations. Its circular plan, wedge-shaped classrooms and ample flexibility were cited as a prototype for other schools built throughout the nation. The 1961 school design attracted widespread attention from educators.

The school was banked into a small sloping site. The three-story circular form enabled preservation of open space for a play area and parking. Precast exterior wall panels came in sections that were two stories high and eight feet wide. During construction, as many as 14 panels were installed in a single day.

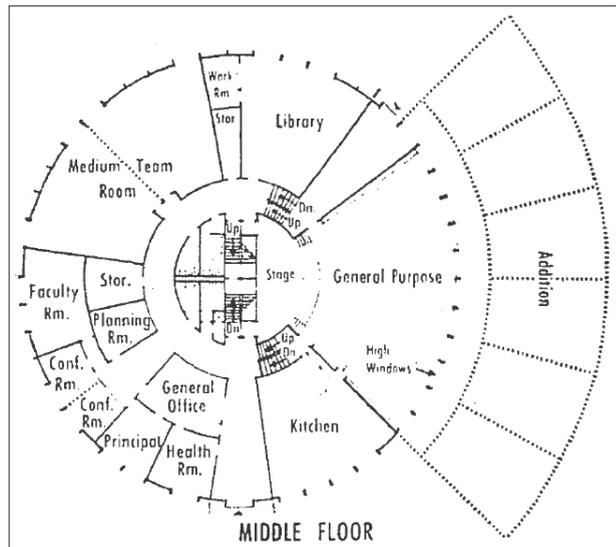
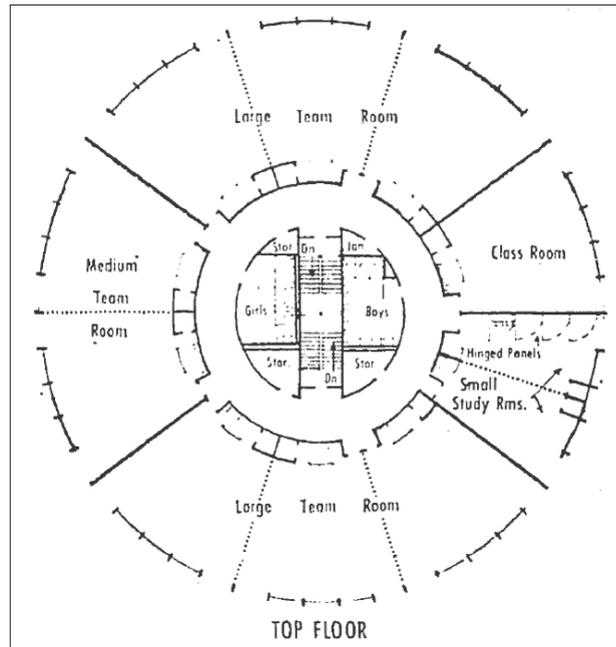
The construction of the school was noteworthy for its achievement in the science of construction. The exterior walls are loadbearing precast concrete panels. Work was completed in 1963 according to the AIA Fellow file for David Yerkes.

The Bushey Drive School was for many years home to a theater group organized by the Montgomery County Recreation Department. The building spawned the Round House Theatre group, named for its place of origin. Today, the Recreation Department has administrative offices at the Bushey Drive School, which still accommodates theatrical performances.



David Yerkes and Associates brochure, AIA Archives

The floor plan for the Bushey Drive School was designed to facilitate team teaching and ease of circulation. In plan, a central core contains the stairs, bathrooms and storage area. A circular corridor surrounding the core leads to radiating classrooms. Removable partition walls enabled flexibility in configuration of the classroom space. The middle story held common rooms (kitchen, library, general purpose room) and offices, sandwiched between the top and bottom floors of classrooms.



Washington Post, December 3, 1961: Deigert and Yerkes

Resources:

Clare Lise Kelly, *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979* (M-NCPPC, 2015) Available in hardback, paperback and e-book

Montgomery Modern website: www.montgomeryplanning.org/montgomerymodern

Additional Information:

American Institute of Architects, Historical Directory for American Architects, data for Robert C. Deigert and David Norton Yerkes including AIA Membership Files at <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/>

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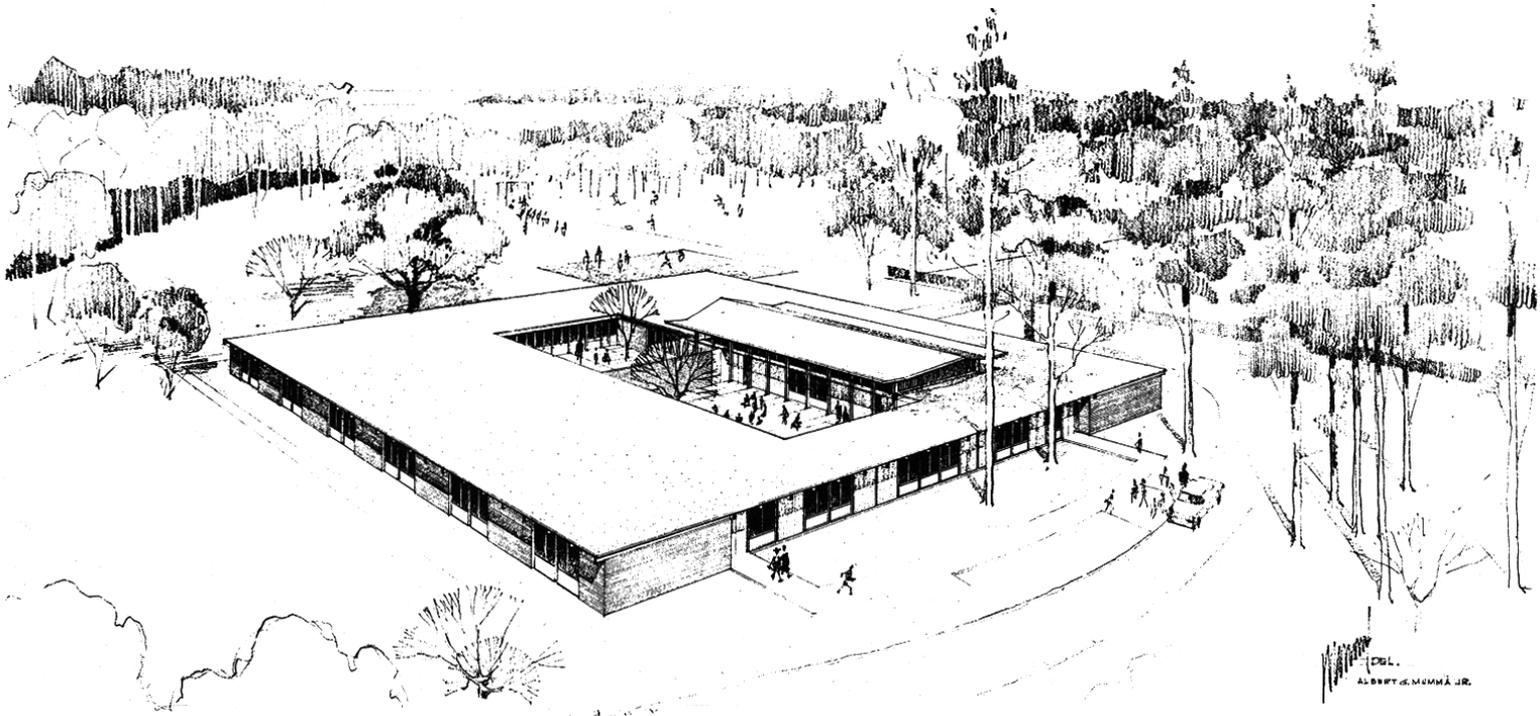
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Cresthaven Elementary School (1964; Demolished 2009), 1234 Cresthaven Drive, Silver Spring, Deigert and Yerkes
 Rendering by Albert B. "Jerry" Mumma of Deigert and Yerkes. 1965 Hillendale Master Plan, M-NCPPC

In 1964, the Washington Board of Trade honored Deigert and Yerkes with design awards for Cresthaven Elementary School and for the National Arboretum Administration Building. Laminated beams and exposed rafter tails gave the building a rustic character, while glass walls afforded views of landscaped courtyard and wooded setting.



David Yerkes and Associates brochure, AIA Archives



National Arboretum Administration Building (1957) Washington, DC, Deigert and Yerkes
David Yerkes and Associates brochure, AIA Archives

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