

# Virginian Colonial

©2025 Ted H. Schaar

We moved into our 1959 ranch in the late summer of 1990. Located in the pleasant Milwaukee suburb of Brookfield, it had great fundamentals and was well cared for by previous occupants.



The first owner, Ray Hall, headed the company—Traditional Homes—that built the house, finishing it in early 1960 as indicated by crumpled pages from a *Milwaukee Sentinel* dated March 8, 1960 that were used to wedge the half bathroom's yellow tile toilet paper holder in place while the mortar set.



Oddly, the toilet paper holder was *behind* the toilet tank. The wayback tile installer had been given poor direction, misread the plan, or simply was in a

hurry to complete the job and move on to the next home... It would have been costly to reposition the toilet and toilet paper holder so a cheaper holder was affixed to the wall near the toilet. The one installed incorrectly was left behind the tank.

Years later we removed the toilet and holder when we remodeled the bathroom and discovered the newspaper.

I like to keep things original, but my wife is the primary user of the half bath with its mirror bracketed by dressing room lights, so the period yellow- and mocha-tile had to go. We did save the original vanity below the sink which had the same mid-century style as the the one in the full bathroom.

The vanities are strange in a home that also had early American flourishes when we moved in; these included an incandescent fixture above the dining room table modeled after a 19th-century oil lamp and a purely decorative cupola atop the garage. We ditched the fixture early on; when we had the roof redone we discarded the cupola.



Half Bathroom Vanity.



Full Bathroom Vanity.

Not long after we moved in we hosted a party to meet the neighbors. The husband in the house down the hill and slightly to the west informed me that their house had the same plan as ours, only those arriving through the front door turned to the left to enter the living room while those entering our house turned to the right.

Combined with the wrongly installed toilet paper holder, this made me think our ranch was an upscale tract home put up quickly to accommodate 1950s buyers choosing suburbia over the city. In subsequent years, I discovered six more homes with the same basic plan and probably there are more in

Brookfield and across the country. These could be outfitted to suit buyers. Richard M. Ballinger in *The Illustrated Guide to the Houses of America* wrote:

"Almost 40 percent of all new single-family housing is custom contract or owner-built housing. In this category the consumer is entitled to make all decisions regarding design, kinds of materials, and even the specifications of individual brands if he so desires. Even most of today's single family homes, where in order to make the sale more quickly, many builders will permit the buyer a wide range of 'optional choices.' Different kinds of products, sometimes different brands, variations in the plan of the house, and even the alteration of styling is often granted a buyer who asks. The second-time buyers' market is more a buyers' market than a 'sellers' market, a fact that has permitted many new homeowners to purchase builder or speculative housing which has been 'customized' to meet individual tastes."<sup>1</sup>

Mainly, houses with similar plans vary in options such as cladding—ours has light yellow brick; others have red brick, and so on. Our fairly deep and wide fireplace is Tennessee stone; others have brick. Some have decorative shutters, ours doesn't.

Porch overhang depth varies, too. Ours is deeper than most with a second shingled roof over the extension. At least one of the homes has the original wood porch screens and windows that could be changed to take advantage of the seasons. An excellent feature. It turns porches into sunrooms in the winter warm enough to be comfortable with a space heater on clear winter days and screened porches in the summer that keep bugs out.

The owners before us replaced the wood-framed porch windows and screens with an aluminum Sears conversion kit that allows the windows to be left in place but lowered at bottoms and tops to expose screens. A giant improvement! When we purchased the place in 1990, Marion, the wife in the previous couple, said the porch was her favorite room and now it's mine.

A commonality in these ranches is an unusual transom window high on the wall between the full- and half-baths. Ours—made of horizontal fluted glass—is the only source of natural light the room received originally.

I'm not certain but believe it likely this floor plan was designed by Herman H. York who lived in Upper Brookville, Long Island, located about 30 miles east of Manhattan. York provided plans for other homes the contractor, a builder named Ray Hall, developed. Hall's father worked in the building business

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<sup>1</sup> *The Illustrated Guide to the Houses of America* Edited by Richard M. Ballinger and Herman York. Galahad Books New York 1971 page viii.



before him after a career in vaudeville, his mother was a pianist of some renown, and his wife, a former student of his mother's, also taught piano.



Transom window between full- and half-bathroom.



Transom window in another house with the same floor plan as ours.

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL  
28 Sunday, June 10, 1962 Part 7

Because of his belief in the high resale value of traditionally styled homes, a Milwaukee home builder has erected this colonial model.

The home contains 2,260 square feet and is priced at \$22,990, plus lot. The price includes built-in kitchen appliances and a fieldstone fireplace in the family room, according to Ray Hall, president of Traditional Homes by Ray Hall Builders, Inc. The home was designed by Herman H. York, a Jamaica (N. Y.) architect.

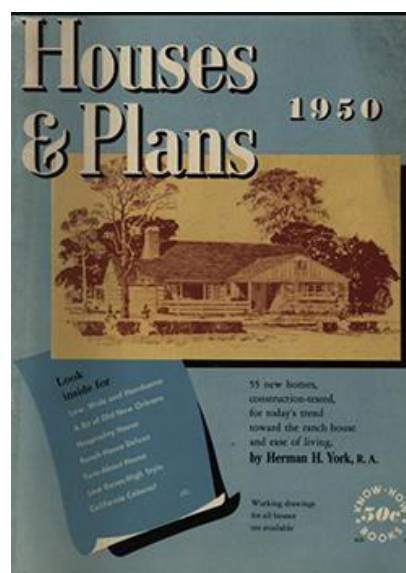
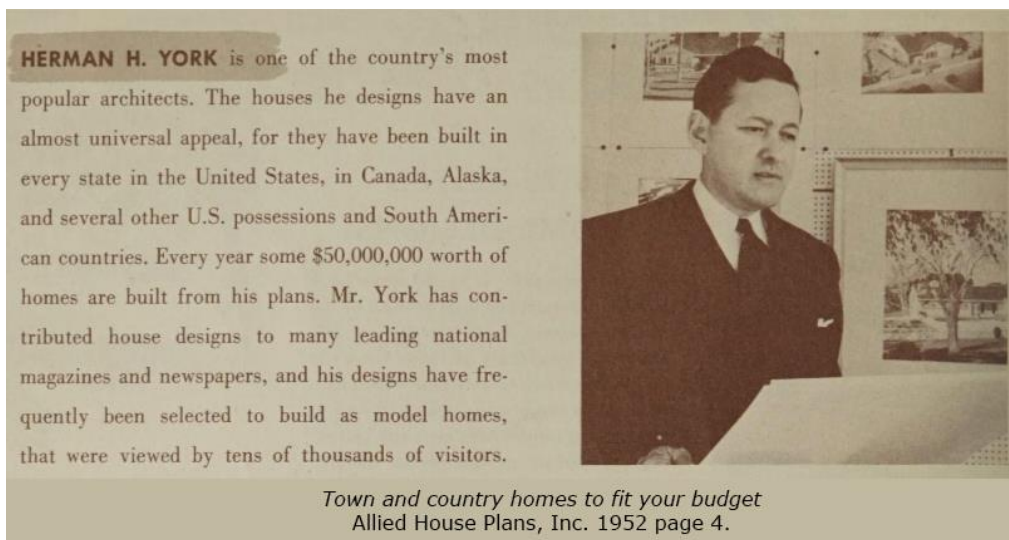
Below is an excerpt-enlargement from story at left that features contractor Hall.

**The home was designed by Herman H. York, a Jamaica (N. Y.) architect.**

York sold plans through the mail which didn't endear him to purists. When he applied for membership in The American Institute of Architects, he was nearly rejected due to his marketing practices. But he was just trying to make a buck. It's acceptable today for architects and lawyers to advertise, though some, attorneys particularly, go overboard. Even doctors and hospitals tout their advantages and offerings in various media.

Richard M. Ballinger co-authored *The Illustrated Guide to the Houses of America* with York and wrote: "Most of Mr. York's clients are builders—over fifty-five at last count. He contributes regularly to the Associated Press feature 'Houses of the Week' and holds over forty national awards for house design."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, I haven't found much information about Ballinger or York or their publisher Galahad Books.



<sup>2</sup> *The Illustrated Guide to the Houses of America* Edited by Richard M. Ballinger and Herman York. Galahad Books New York 1971 page xi.



## Houses and Plans, 1950

by Herman H. York, R.A.

So many of the houses shown in this book have been built and are being lived in, that you can be sure that there is a "construction-tested" plan included, just made for you. The lovely home pictured above, for instance, is one of many built from the plan described on page 46. This ranch house is no longer a picture of a dream, but a practical house, like so many others, built from the plans of a practical architect for the most in living, today and always.

HOUSES AND PLANS, 1950, by Herman H. York. A Know-How Book published by Archway Press, Inc., 41 W. 47 St., New York 19, New York. Photos by Richard Averill Smith. Copyright 1950 by Herman H. York. Printed in the United States of America.

## About the Architect

Herman H. York, R. A., brings to the field of small home design the experience and practical knowledge of over 20 years of architecture in the New York and Chicago areas.

Mr. York's houses have been acclaimed by enthusiastic builders and owners in every state from Maine to California. Economy and practicality are the keynotes of his work, but there is no dearth of the little touches of charm which "makes a house a home."

Tens of thousands of people have visited and approved the model homes which he has designed, and annually, over \$50,000,000 worth of houses are being built from his plans.

A member of the Long Island Home Builders Institute and the National Association of Home Builders, Mr. York has contributed house designs to many leading national magazines and newspapers.



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#### FOUNDATION PLAN:

Sizes and accurately dimensioned locations of wall and footings, engineered girders, columns, floor beams with spacing, windows, furnace, flues, tubs, etc.

#### 1st FLOOR PLAN:

Carefully dimensioned layout of partitions, windows, doors, girders, 2nd floor ceiling beams, stairs and general information covering window and door sizes, stair headroom, rooms, etc.

#### 2nd FLOOR PLAN:

(Picture 2nd floor layout on 1½ story houses) (omitted on 1 story houses). Same dimensioning and overall information as on 1st floor plans.

#### FRONT, LEFT, REAR and RIGHT ELEVATIONS:

Material information, floor to ceiling and window heights, flashing, louvers and other necessary notations.

#### MISCELLANEOUS DRAWINGS:

Sections through house showing rafters, sills, box frame, stairs and general construction details of house. Plumbing section showing drainage and vent system, sizes of pipe.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

##### (Description of Materials):

Standard F.H.A. form describing items such as concrete mix, types and grades of lumber, finishes and special items.

For any of these designs you choose for your new home—we supply detailed, individual sets of working drawing-blueprints and a description of materials. Here is everything that you need in blueprint form to show your builder (or architect) as a guide to give you the home you have always wanted. These working drawing-blueprints will enable any experienced contractor to build your dream house directly from the detailed scale plans.

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# WHAT PEOPLE WANT IN A HOME

## A Symposium by Experts Sums Up Family Preferences Today And Forecasts the Trends in Tomorrow's Housing

*To find out what people are looking for today in new homes and apartments, five experts in the New York metropolitan area were asked to set forth their views. Here are the reports.*

By **HERMAN H. YORK**  
*Architect*

**C**ASUAL living, reflected to a degree in the informal clothing worn in suburban areas, is influencing our concepts of space use in new homes today, with the trend toward space planning rather than room division.

During the past several years the family room all but replaced the formal living room, which was no longer being "lived" in and had become merely a showplace for furniture, lamps and carpeting. With the trend today toward more informality in the living area, the family room is still a requirement but is now becoming a part of the kitchen. This change is giving better balance to the habitable areas of the house, the living kitchen being a control center for daytime activity with the living room designed for adult family use.

In home materials, there is an increasing demand for those which require little or no maintenance. This is particularly true of home interiors, where the use of wood and brick on inside walls cuts down upkeep costs and also provides a finish which shows less wear.

The home buyer, even in less

expensive houses, is demanding the latest in built-in kitchen equipment. He recognizes the convenience of eye-level appliances and also realizes how much less work is required to keep such built-ins clean.

<sup>3</sup> New York Times "What People Want In A Home."  
May 5, 1957, Section H, Page 401

Over the years I was in touch with just about every owner of a house with the same floor plan but none had blueprints even though some were original owners. One lady said she thought the design had "Virginia" in the name.

Sure enough.

Researching a *Milwaukee Journal* online archive, I found a 1958 ad for a place with a look and floor plan like our house—see below.

**THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL**  
 Sunday, Nov 30, 1958 Page:109

**DRIVE OUT TODAY and see this beautifully furnished model. Open Sun., 2 to 5:30.**

**TRADITIONAL HOMES presents**  
**the VIRGINIAN COLONIAL**  
 3-Bedroom—All Red Norman Brick  
 (White Pillars)



**'You Won't Be Disappointed!**  
**2,550 SQ. FT. UNDER ROOF** with all the extras.  
 17½x25-ft. living room, raised hearth fireplace, full dining room, all-ceramic 1½ baths, all Hotpoint built-ins in a modern kitchen; 2 large porches; attached 2½-car garage; oak trim throughout. This all-electric home features: Built-in electric range, full housepower, unlimited service electric water heater, 100 amp. service, and provision for electric dryer circuit ..... **\$20,900**  
on your lot



No one ever regretted buying quality!

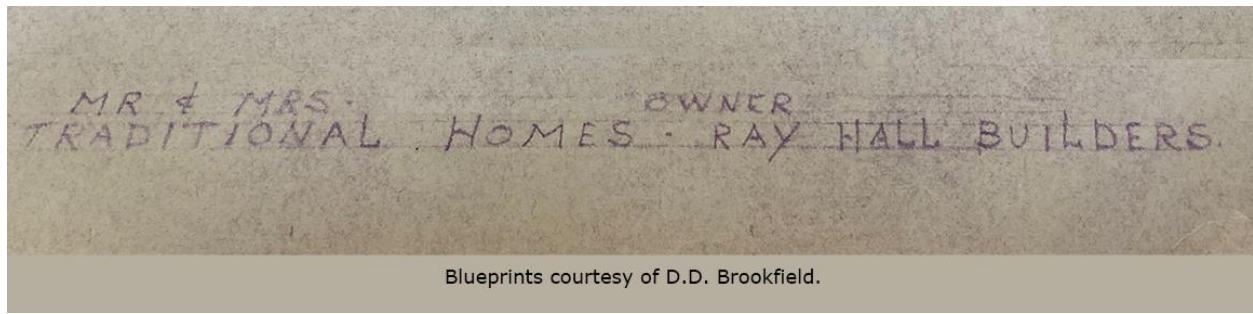
**Ray Hall Builders**  
 SUNset 6-7186

Now I had a name for this style of house—*Virginian Colonial*—as the lady recalled correctly.

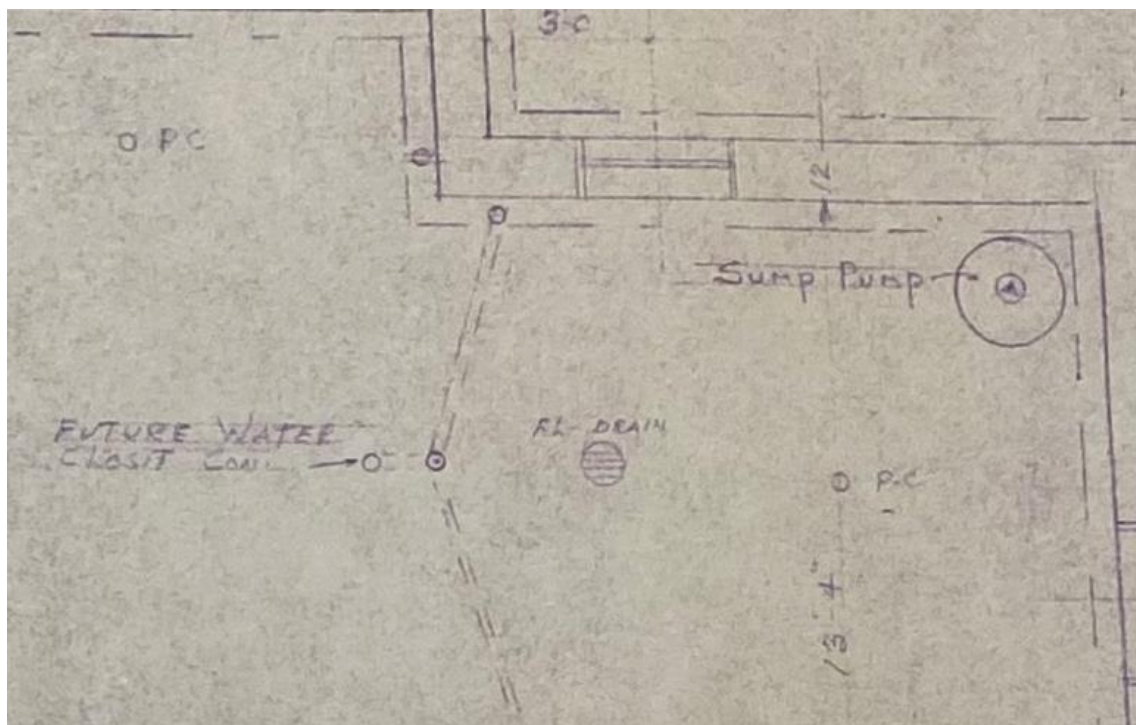


An inflation calculator website shows the \$20,900 price in 1958 now equals \$229,274.00<sup>4</sup> which is less than half of its actual current value of around \$500,000.

D.D., a resident who lives in the the Eldorado Subdivision responded to a post I did to the "I Remember When In Brookfield" Facebook group seeking blueprints Ray Hall used. We met at the library, and she allowed me to photograph the ones drawn for her Ray Hall-built house—detail below.



The plan indicates a "Future Water Closet Connection" on the basement floor. Our place has this, too, though it was never used by previous owners or us. However, it was good to install it during the home's construction, and it still might be used someday.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>

Hall added a sound-deadening wall between his wife's studio (originally the family room) and the dining room in our house. The space is now my office-in-the-home, and I appreciate the extra wall insulation.

A July 12, 1964, *Milwaukee Journal* article stated Hall had been in the "building business for 22 years. He succeeded his father and grandfather who had Traditional Homes before him. The firm builds about eight to ten custom homes a year..."<sup>5</sup>

This makes me speculate that Ray Hall's father tried but failed to succeed in vaudeville, so returned to the family business.

*"Traditional Homes"* by Ray Hall, Jr. . . . presents

**this "FINEST" rustic colonial ranch**

The Milwaukee Journal  
October 27, 1957 page 108



**OPEN TODAY,**  
**1 to 6**

Highest quality construction • Split field stone and cedar stained siding • 3 bedrooms and built-in vanity • Dining room with French doors • Ceramic bath, vanity and one-half with vent fan • Large living room with oak paneling • Split field stone fireplace with raised hearth • Beautiful knotty cedar kitchen and Formica tops • Hotpoint built-in oven and range, hood and vent fan • G-E garbage disposal • Oak trim throughout • 2½-car garage • Milwaukee thermo-flo gas (or oil) heat • Baseboard registers • Disappearing stairs to large attic • R.O.W. self-storing combination storms and screens • Large front porch • 100-ampere service • G-E constant heat electric water heater • Fine grading • Stone drive • 11-course basement • Fully decorated.

**\$20,900 PLUS LOT**  
**NO HIDDEN EXTRAS**  
**Trades Invited!**  
**SID DWYER**  
**and Associates**  
**REALTOR • BUILDER**

Contractor Hall also offered "fallout-blast shelters" which were frequently mentioned in the Cold War '50s though rarely actually built and ready to help owners survive nuclear war.

<sup>5</sup> *The Milwaukee Journal* July 12, 1964 page 217.

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL  
 Sunday, Oct 08, 1961 | Milwaukee, WI | Page:149

**ADDITIONS**  
**New Homes—All Remodeling**  
**Sensible Prices**  
**You Know Our Reputation**  
**FALLOUT-BLAST**  
**SHELTERS**  
**Built to Approved CD Plans and**  
**Specifications**  
**NO DOWN PAYMENT REQUIRED**  
**TRADITIONAL HOMES CO.**  
**BY RAY HALL BLDRS.**  
**SU 3-6770 SU 3-6751**

In that nervous era, schools and other public spaces often had Civil Defense provisions—food, water, medical supplies, etc.—stored in stacks of olive green barrels with yellow lettering. Barrels like the one pictured below are well known to those who were around in the '60s.



Along with fire drills, pupils learned what to do in case of a nuclear attack or tornado. Instructions at the grade school I attended were to leave the classroom with its windows and squat facing the lockers, hands over head. We practiced this now and then. Today I sometimes see it called "duck and cover," but I don't remember that phrase.



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**TRADITIONAL HOMES**  
Ray Hall, Builders



10

Sunday, September 2, 1962

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL

**\$23,990**  
Plus Lot

Architecturally Designed by Herman H. York, A.I.A.

The **"TRADITIONAL HOUSE"**

**OPEN**  
Sunday, 1-6,  
and Weekdays



**Model for Sale!**

- 2½ BATHS
- 4 MASSIVE BEDROOMS
- SUNKEN FAMILY ROOM

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- Ask About Our Custom Building-Designing

**Traditional Homes, Inc.**  
by Ray Hall Builders  
**SU 3-6770** **SU 3-6751**

**ELECTRICITY DOES IT BEST**

This is a Medallion Home

It includes an electric oven, range, and installed electric service water heater, 120v. dryer outlet. It has 100-ampere service entrance wiring, plenty of circuits and outlets, modern wiring.



Sunday, September 2, 1962

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL

Architecturally Designed by Herman H. York, A.I.A.

# The "TRADITIONAL HOUSE"

*Milwaukee Sentinel*  
February 4, 1964 page 20.



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HOMES**


**RAY HALL • BUILDER**



**Ray Hall**  
*President*  
**Traditional Homes By**  
**Ray Hall Builders, Inc.**  
*The Milwaukee Journal*  
 August 2, 1964 page 95

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THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL | Sunday, Mar 31, 1968 | Milwaukee, WI | Page:116




**Traditional Homes, INC.**

*Ray Hall Builders & Remodelers*

*3rd Generation of Service*

**CALL FOR FREE ESTIMATES**

**SU 3-6751 and SU 3-6770**

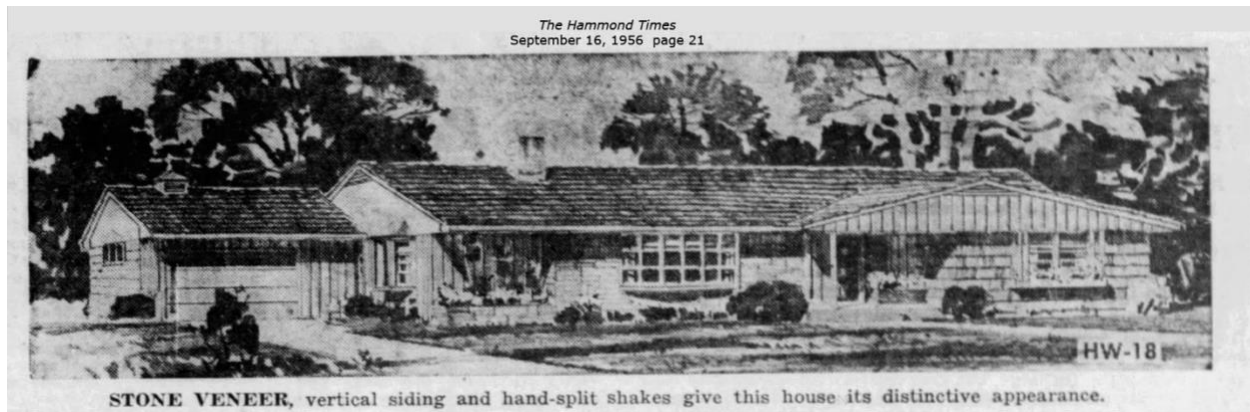


<sup>6 6</sup> *New York Times* "What People Want In A Home."  
 May 5, 1957, Section H, Page 401



Single story ranch homes were popular in the 1950s as Architect York explained in an article printed in *The Hammond Times*:

"Luxuries made possible by the single floor layout are packed into this design. Herman H. York, architect specializing in private dwellings, says he planned HW-18 [below] 'as an explanation for the continued hold of the ranch house on first place in all surveys.'"<sup>7</sup>



HW-18, like our house and other Virginian Colonials, has a purely decorative cupola on the garage and a gable-roof over the front entrance.

The same article mentions the HW-18 ranch:

"...covers an area of 2,050 square feet without its two car-garage—an adjunct that is figured separately at lower rates in building estimates."

It required a large lot but York observes:

"Modern highways and modern motor cars, combined with rising taxes in crowded communities, are prompting families to move farther into the country, where they can enjoy the freedom of elbow room."

Seeking more information about architect York I was able to locate his son, who lives in New Jersey. He was cordial and related background facts about his dad:

"He was born in Japan in 1909. My grandfather and grandmother moved to the US in 1914 to the Inwood section of upper Manhattan. My father took the A Train subway to Stuyvesant High School and eventually got a job as a draftsman. He attended

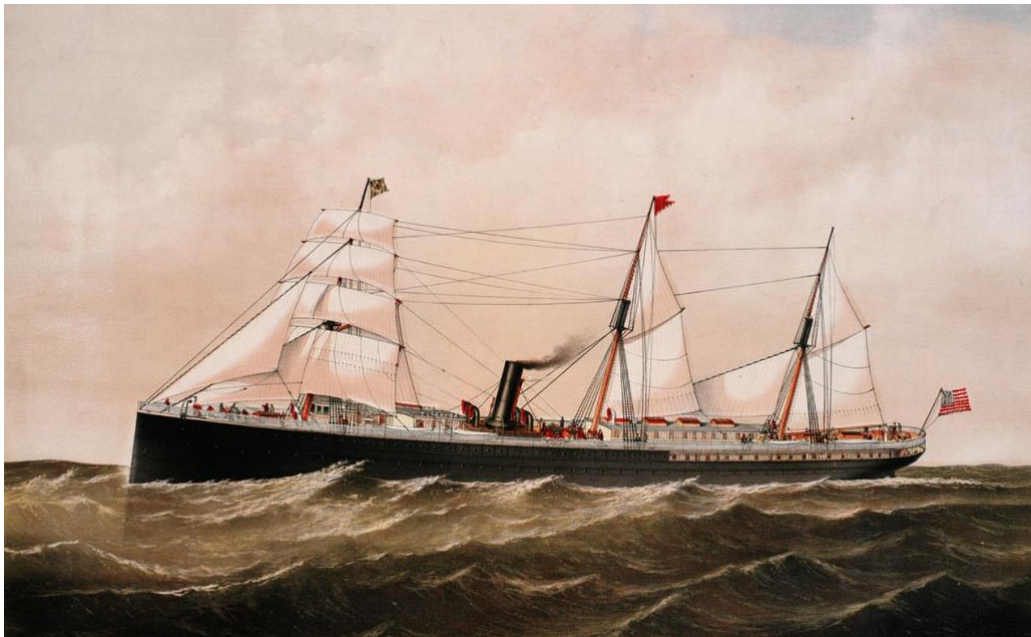
<sup>7</sup> *The Hammond Times* September 16, 1956 page 21.

"Columbia University taking courses in math and architecture. He was a partner in an architectural firm before establishing his own business. The primary focus of his firm was single family houses.

"Our family moved from Inwood to Forest Hills, Queens, to Garden City, Long Island and Upper Brookville, Long Island. The ranch house in Upper Brookville was on two acres, which was a welcome relief from his early days in noisy Inwood!

"My father was an active layman in the Lutheran Church and became the first Chairman of the Board of Directors of Long Island Lutheran High School (my alma mater). He was on the greater board of the Salvation Army and volunteered to ring bells into his early 80s!

"My father's father—Zenji Yamada—made several trips from Japan to San Francisco in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In February of 1901 he was on the ship *SS City of Rio de Janeiro*. Just outside of the harbor in San Francisco; the ship ran aground and most of the passengers died.



*SS City of Rio de Janeiro*  
Courtesy of National Marine Sanctuaries

"The *San Francisco Chronicle* had an article that listed 'passengers unaccounted for and presumed dead.' One of the names was Z. Yamada. Fortunately my grandfather was an excellent swimmer and somehow made it to shore. If he wasn't a good swimmer we wouldn't be having this e-mail exchange. Also, hundreds of thousands of people would be living in houses designed by somebody other than the famous architect, Herman York."

"Grandfather Yamada eventually settled in New York City. He was a struggling artist and made ends meet by working as a domestic for a wealthy family on 5th Avenue. He met a German woman there who also worked as a domestic. They became close when she cared for him during a somewhat serious illness. Her family disapproved of his ethnicity, so they moved to Japan to get married. They stayed there during the early 1900s. My father was born in 1909 and his brother, Carl, a year later. They moved back to NYC in 1914 and settled in the Inwood section of Manhattan."



Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

"I believe Pearl Harbor occurred on a Sunday morning. When my father went to work on Monday he was fired immediately. He became an enemy alien, had to report in once a week, and could not travel outside of the city without permission. After the war ended he and his brother changed their name to York. It was short and sweet, so I suppose it made sense. They were fortunate not to be in California where things were a lot worse. It was a very difficult time. I always think it was ironic that he lived in the US from 1914 into the 1940s before the war started. He graduated from Stuyvesant High School and attended night classes at Columbia. He obeyed all the laws and paid a huge amount of taxes during his lifetime. I believe the experience drove him to succeed."

In his spare time, architect York enjoyed building wren houses. His son sent a photocopy of a Letter to the Editor his dad wrote that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. I found the letter (below) in the magazine's archives. It mentions "four photos of wren houses" but images of only three were published. It might be significant that the one for "agnostics" was omitted.





### Birds Not of a Feather

As a follow-up on the amusing cartoons in the December '89 and March '90 issues in which bird feeders were featured, I am sending the enclosed four photos of wren houses which I have hanging in our backyard.

With apologies to Sir Christopher Wren (the famous British architect who designed St. Paul's in London), I call these "Wren Churches," which are used by wrens of four persuasions: Christian, Jewish, Shinto, and the one with no symbol at the door for wrens which are agnostics.

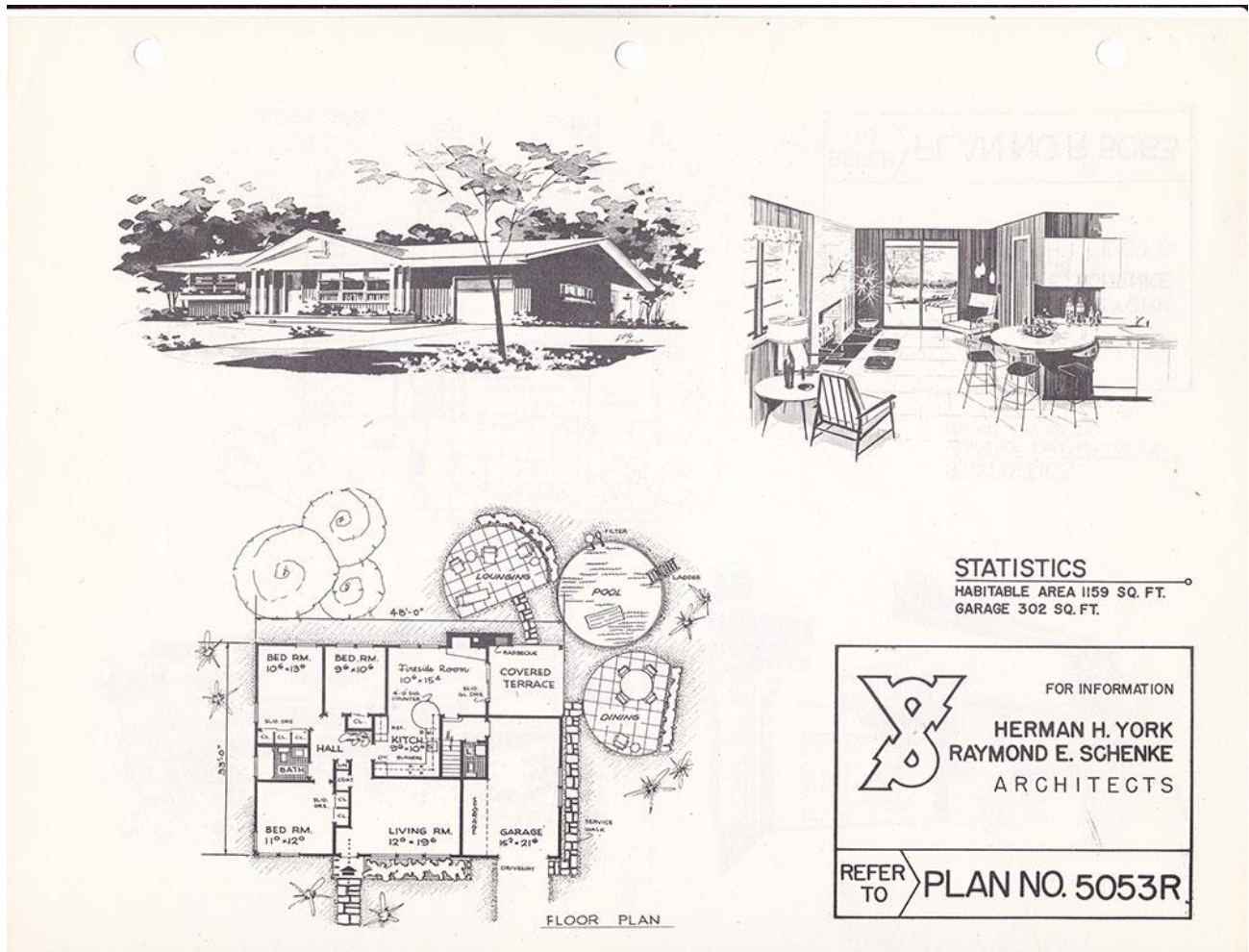


We attract an ecumenical group of wrens each summer!

I would, of course, be pleased should you wish to use the photographs in a forthcoming edition of your great publication.

*Herman H. York*  
Oyster Bay, New York

Later in his career, York became associated with an architect 24 years his junior named Raymond E. Schenke, born in 1933.



Today new ranches in Brookfield are rare. And some brick or lannon stone beauties from the '50s and '60s have been torn down and replaced by two-story "McMansions." The ranch's decline sometimes is attributed to vanishing space and increasing acreage cost. Typically multi-story homes offer living space equivalent to or greater than ranches on a smaller lot.

We love ours with its nearly one-acre lot, but it was built at a time when Brookfield had only been incorporated as a city for five years and was mainly a community of farms.

Brookfield Junction where two railroad tracks met. And diverged with one taking freight and passengers to the northwest and the other to the northeast was the heart of the community. But the importance of rails declined with the emergence and eventual dominance of motor cars and trucks. The city grew as a suburb of Milwaukee—mainly a retail and residential community with some manufacturing.

Now I know the style of house we're in was called The Virginian Colonial by the contractor if not the architect. Though I believe it was designed by Herman York, I do not have proof positive.



\* \* \*