

**The Little House**  
**825 Hanshaw Road**  
**Cayuga Heights, Ithaca, NY**

The two-bedroom, gable-front house with an inset front porch sits on a roughly half-acre lot at 825 Hanshaw Road, the prominent corner where Hanshaw Road intersects with the busy Triphammer, North Triphammer, and East Upland Roads. The one-story home with a low-pitched roof measures 856 square feet.<sup>1</sup> The partial red brick façade contrasts with the white clapboard siding.



**“Square” Plan Gives House  
 Very Economical Arrangement**



Here is a sensible solution to the problem of a small house, one that embodies economy and yet sacrifices nothing in arrangement. Economy springs first from the fact that the plan is almost perfectly square.

Secondly, that there is no waste or unusable space. The kitchen and the bathroom are so arranged that plumbing is back to back. Containing two bedrooms, living room, dining room, bathroom and kitchen, this unpretentious plan makes for spaciousness and airiness desirable in a home of this size.

The cellar stairs to the basement are accessible to the main portion of the house. This house



is attractive in its exterior simplicity and its avoidance of all artificial ornamentation. Built in Nashville, Tenn., it is valued at \$3000 by the Federal Housing Administration. Any builder or architect could duplicate it.

The Olean (New York) Times-Herald published a regular Saturday section entitled “Building Tips for Builders and Home Owners.” In 1941, the newspaper featured a Minimal Traditional small house whose square plan and “avoidance of all artificial ornamentation” cut construction costs.

Stylistically, the home resembles a streamlined, single-story offshoot of the front-gabled folk houses popular in New England and the Northeast beginning in the 1830s. (The popular Craftsman bungalows of the 1930s also have a prominent front gable and a recessed front porch.) It fits into the “Minimal Traditional” style of homes built in the period roughly between 1935 and 1950.<sup>2</sup> Minimal Traditional homes are “compromise” styles that feature low- or medium-pitch roofs; they lack overhanging eaves and exterior ornamentation. Painted ornamental shutters provided the only design detail for the front elevation.

Minimal Traditional homes such as the one at 825 Hanshaw Road exemplify the inexpensive small houses prevalent across the United States during the Depression, the war years, and the postwar period.<sup>3</sup> Built as part of the “Small House Movement,” these compact single-family homes had a simple layout—usually consisting of just two or three bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room on a single level. Newspapers and magazines published plans for small homes that could be built quickly and affordably with standardized materials.

The Federal Housing Administration, established in 1934 as part of the New Deal efforts to reform the banking industry and revitalize the housing industry, actively supported the building of small homes and set construction standards for builders. The FHA’s revised 1940 edition of the *Principles of*

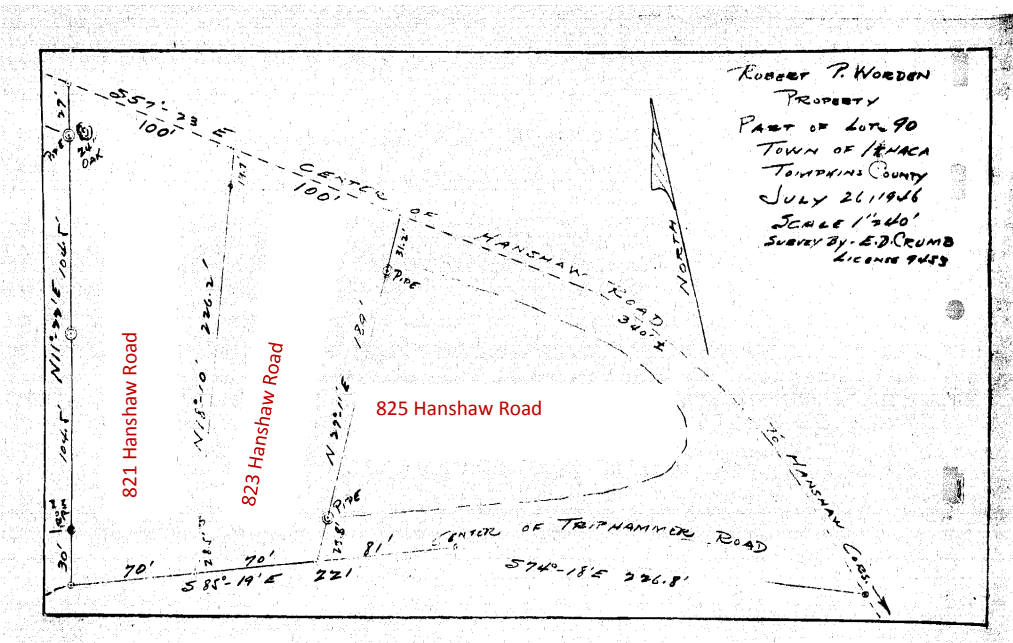
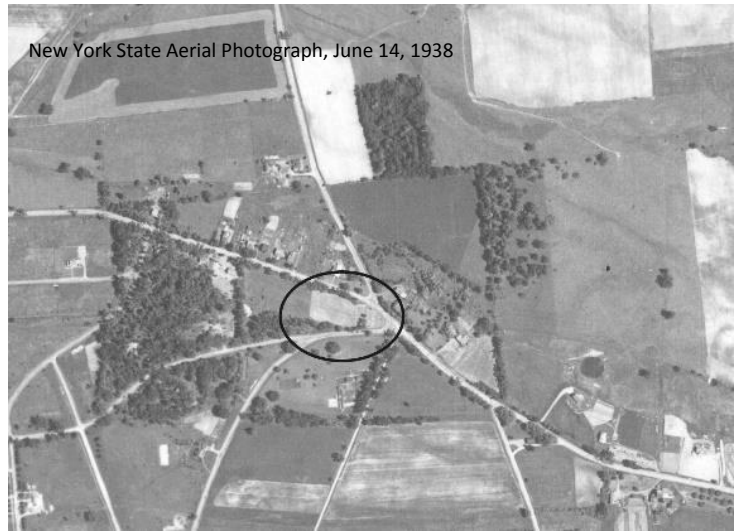
*Planning Small Houses* proposed that affordable small homes could be achieved through a “well-balanced design”:

*The necessity of well-balanced design is especially evident in the small house of low cost. Here a maximum amount of usable space, with as much comfort, convenience,*

and privacy as possible, must be obtained for a minimum amount of money. To achieve this objective, construction, equipment, and room arrangement must be related and considered together to avoid excesses in one or more directions at the expense of inadequacy in others. The starting point of balanced design is the plan, for it is here that all essential elements of a house are brought together and are coordinated.<sup>4</sup>

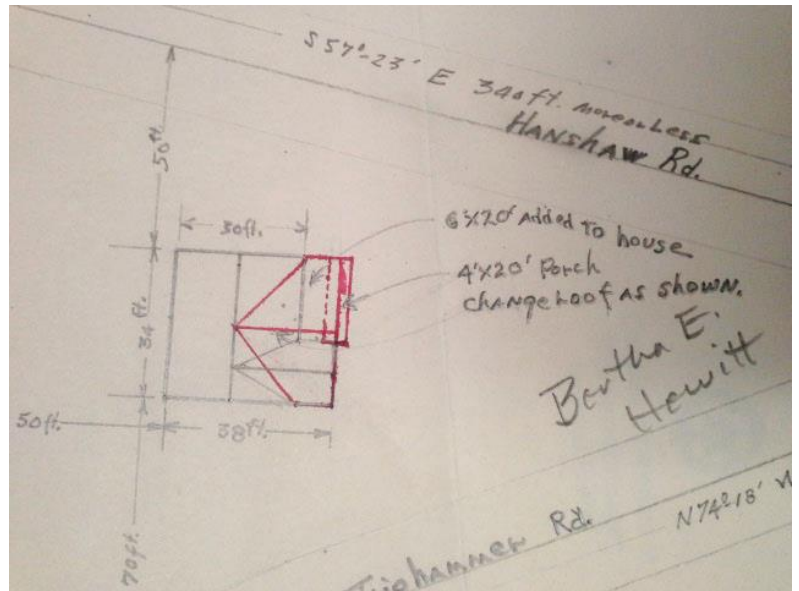
Along with a ready supply of architect-designed small house plans, prospective home owners had easier access to home loans through FHA programs. After World War II, the G.I. Bill also helped put homes within reach of veterans by insuring low-interest, low down-payment loans through the Veterans Administration. These small homes made single-family home ownership possible for working-class and middle class Americans.

Harry B. Dahmen—a World War II Navy captain<sup>5</sup> and an employee of the Grange League Federation—and Elizabeth Dahmen bought the lot at 825 Hanshaw Road in 1946 and had the house built.<sup>6</sup> Before the Dahmen purchase, the lot had been part of a larger parcel transferred to a series of owners, including Eunice Cornell Taylor, who owned the red brick Kline farmhouse across the street at 830 Hanshaw Road.<sup>7</sup> A June 1938 aerial survey of the Village shows the lot cleared, likely for agricultural use. Robert P. Worden acquired the parcel in 1946 and split it into three lots. The small houses at 821, 823, and 825 Hanshaw Road were built at about the same time and likely according to the same house plan.<sup>8</sup>



Soon after the Dahmens built their home, developers constructed retail stores at the Corners Community Center to the southeast on Hanshaw Road. In 1949, the commercial center housed the Corners Beauty Shop (owned by Sophia G. Brand), Atwater's Grocers, Hill Drug Store, and the Corners Service Station.<sup>9</sup>

The Dahmens sold the home at 825 Hanshaw Road to Fay and Gladys Hewitt in 1953. The Hewitts then transferred the home to Fay's mother, Bertha Hewitt, in 1955. Mrs. Hewitt transformed the house to its current configuration. Hewitt Brothers, Inc. of Locke, New York, added 120 square feet to the front of the house and changed the roofline to a full front gable. The contractors also added the front porch. (See pencil sketch at right from the 1955 permit.) The widowed Mrs. Hewitt lived in the home until her death in 1974. Her son Fay Hewitt gave the Village first option to purchase the property, which an appraiser valued at \$33,900.<sup>10</sup> The Village board of trustees voted to buy the home and study whether the lot could be used as a traffic circle to solve congestion at the busy intersection.<sup>11</sup> Village Engineer Jack Rogers proposed that the Village wait to see whether the Route 13 overpass to be built would help ease the traffic issues at the intersection, and a traffic circle was never constructed.<sup>12</sup> The Village currently rents the house to Village volunteer firefighters.



The Dahmen home's design with its distinctive front gable and recessed porch resembles the Lustron Corporation's "Esquire" kit home (left), which was the brainchild of industrial engineer Carl Strandlund and was designed by Chicago architectural firm Beckman and Blass. The company delivered the first Lustron kit homes, which were constructed of steel frames with enameled steel exterior panels, to buyers in 1949 (<http://www.lustronpreservation.org/>). Cornell's College of Home Economics built two Lustron homes on campus in 1949 to conduct a research study on space usage in farm kitchens. (*Cornell Daily Sun*, Monday, October 24, 1949.) Two postwar front-gabled homes in the Normandy Village subdivision of Fredericksburg, Virginia, also have a similar front elevation as the home at 825 Hanshaw Road. The historic district homes at 605 Woodford Street (middle) and 3008 Fall Hill Avenue (right) were built in 1955. Source: Historic Buildings of Fredericksburg, <https://sites.google.com/a/fredbuildings.org/buildings/historic-districts/normandy-village>.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Tompkins County Tax Assessment information, Image Mate Online.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984, p. 478.

<sup>3</sup> A 1991 publication by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources calls this historic house type the iconic "American Small House." <http://georgiashpo.org/historic/housing>. See also "House and Yard; The Design of the Suburban Home," in David L. Ames and Linda Flint McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs, Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation For the National Register of Historic Places*, National Register Bulletin, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/part3.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *Principles of Planning Small Houses*, Federal Housing Administration, Washington, DC, July 1, 1940, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006

Name:	Elizabeth Anne W O Harry Bellis Dahmen
Service Info.:	CPT USN
Birth Date:	3 Mar 1910
Death Date:	5 Sep 1970
Relation:	Unknown Relationship To Veteran
Interment Date:	16 Sep 1970
Cemetery:	Arlington National Cemetery
Cemetery Address:	C/O Director Arlington, VA 22211
Buried At:	Section 51 Site 3390

### Source Information:

National Cemetery Administration. *U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006.

Original Data: National Cemetery Administration. *Nationwide Gravesite Locator*.

<sup>6</sup> The Manning's Ithaca directory of 1947 is the first to list the home's address. The 1953 deed of sale from the Dahmens to the subsequent owners mentions a dwelling on the premises.

<sup>7</sup> OWNERS OF 825 HANSHAW ROAD	YEAR IN	YEAR OUT	PROFESSION
Village of Cayuga Heights	1974		
Hewitt, Bertha E. (1883-1974)	1955	1974	Widow, O.D. Hewitt (produce dealer, Locke, New York)
Hewitt, Fay D. and Gladys W.	1953	1955	Employee, Wilcox Press
Dahmen, Harry B. and Elizabeth A.	1946	1953	Employee, Grange League Federation
Worden, Robert P.	1946	1946	Student
Russell, Alma T. (1901-1990)	1945	1946	Real estate investor, 415 Klinewoods Road; Spouse: George Russell, lawyer
Gilson, Walter S.	1940	1945	Charles Taylor's cousin, according to 1925 NY St census
Cornell, Franklin C. III	1935	1940	Dairy farm owner
Taylor, Eunice Cornell	1926	1935	Dairy farm owner
Mandeville, Arthur J. and Hattie V.	1910	1926	Milk dealer (1920 census, house number 350, next to Frank and Rachel Hanshaw; Hanshaw Road, 1925 NY St census)

Sources: Tompkins County, New York Deeds: Book 234 Page 409, 1926 (recorded 1934); Book 237 Page 367, 1935; Book 257 Page 225, 1940; Book 278 Page 332, 1945; Book 283 Page 271, 1946; Book 292 Page 146, 1946; Book 363, Page 216, 1953; Book 383 Page 208, 1955; Book 534 Page 138, 1974

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<sup>8</sup> 821 Hanshaw Road (Tax ID 5.-4-8; 1046 square feet; E. Russell and Eleanor R. Lambert, 1946, Book 292 Page 35);  
823 Hanshaw Road (5.-4-9; 968 square feet; William R. and Ruth H. Bromstedt, 1946, Book 294 Page 402)

<sup>9</sup> Manning's Ithaca Directory, Volume XLVIII, H.A. Manning Co, Bellows Falls, VT, 1949, p. 375.

<sup>10</sup> Village of Cayuga Heights Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, April 15, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> Village of Cayuga Heights Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, July 15, 1974 and August 19, 1974.

<sup>12</sup> Village of Cayuga Heights Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, September 16, 1974.