



# **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

1616 McCormick Drive, Largo, Maryland 20774 • 301-952-3680 • <http://www.pgplanning.org/469/Historic-Preservation-Commission>

January 2, 2024

## **FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION ON THE ELWOOD AND WILMER GROSS HOUSE (DOCUMENTED PROPERTY 66-000-02) AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING FOR CLASSIFICATION AS A HISTORIC SITE**

### **Procedural Background**

August 31, 2023	The owner submitted an application for Historic Site Evaluation in compliance with Section 29-120.01. The property is not listed in the Inventory of Historic Resources.
October 20, 2023	The property owner and the adjacent property owners were mailed 60-day written notice of the time, date, and location of the public hearing.
December 5, 2023	The property was posted "at least 14 days in advance," according to the provisions of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Ordinance (Subtitle 29-118) and the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance (Subtitle 27-125.03). Evidence of sign posting, and 14-day written notice are attached.
December 5, 2023	The survey and documentation of the property were completed by Kacy Rohn.
December 19, 2023	Date of Historic Preservation Commission public hearing.

### **Findings**

#### *Summary Architectural Description*

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House at 5110 Pierce Avenue is a contemporary-style tri-level Split-Level dwelling built in 1962. The home is an intact "Capri" model kit house, sold by Swift Homes, Inc. The dwelling is built of frame construction on a block foundation. It is clad in brick veneer on its lowest level, horizontal aluminum-clad cedar siding on the middle level, and a mix of horizontal and vertical board-and-batten aluminum-clad cedar siding on its upper level. The home retains its original wood-frame picture windows and horizontal two-over-two sash windows, and is capped with a characteristic low-pitched hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves, sheathed in three-tab asphalt shingles.

#### *Setting*

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House sits on a corner lot at 5110 Pierce Avenue in the Lakeland neighborhood of College Park, Maryland. The house retains its historic function as a single-family residence. The 0.241-acre square-shaped parcel includes the house, a gently sloped grassy front lawn, and a rear garden designed and cultivated by Wilmer Gross for over forty years. The property is bounded by Pierce Avenue to the south, 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east, and single-family dwellings to the north and west.

### *Historical Overview*

In 1890, Edwin A. Newman subdivided approximately 200 acres of land just north of the Maryland Agricultural College (now the University of Maryland, College Park) and platted the new subdivision of Lakeland. Newman envisioned a resort community anchored by the nearby manmade lake, which he named Lake Artemesia. Despite initial enthusiasm, it quickly became apparent that the low-lying land was highly flood-prone and poorly suited for development.

Beginning in 1900, the demographics of Lakeland began to shift as Black families, previously segregated on the east side of the B&O Railroad tracks, began to move to the west side of Lakeland. As African Americans increasingly settled in western Lakeland, white families departed. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, Lakeland was well established as a thriving Black community with schools, churches, and social and commercial facilities.

Among the early Black residents to settle in the central part of Lakeland were George H. Gross and Rosa Gross, the paternal grandparents of Elwood Gross, who lived in the community by 1900. The Grosses built a family home at 5100 Pierce Avenue, which still stands today. They raised five children in Lakeland while George Sr. was employed by the railroad and Rosa managed the household and worked as a laundress, both in her home and at the university. George Henry Gross, Jr., Elwood Gross's father, was born to George Henry and Rosa Gross on July 3, 1904.

George Henry Gross, Jr. married Agnes Harrison, of Muirkirk, in 1925. The couple purchased a house on Cloud Avenue, in Lakeland, in 1929. Elwood Gross was born in the home on December 4, 1933. He enjoyed a rich childhood and young adulthood despite the pervasive racism which surrounded the Lakeland community. The neighborhood's bus and streetcar service gave young people access to recreational opportunities that were not available in segregated College Park, including restaurants and dance halls in Fairmount Heights and baseball and football games at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C.

After graduating from high school, Elwood Gross enrolled in St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, VA, a historically Black private college founded in 1883. There, he met his future wife, Wilmer Venetia Sydnor. Wilmer Sydnor was born January 5, 1937, in Richmond, Virginia. Her mother, Ella Sydnor, prioritized her children's education and began teaching Wilmer reading, writing, and math before she began school. At a time when many other children frequently missed days or weeks in the classroom to help their families earn a living, she was encouraged to focus on her education.

After college, c. 1957, Elwood Gross was drafted into the U.S. Army and spent two years in military service. After his service, he moved to Chicago, where he and Wilmer were married. They spent several years living on Chicago's west side before the birth of their twin daughters, Maxine and Delphine. While on a return visit with family in Lakeland, Elwood Gross enquired about employment opportunities for mechanics at the University of Maryland and found a position with the Physical Plant unit. The family moved back from Chicago into his parents' home on Cloud Avenue.

Shortly thereafter, in 1962, George Henry and Agnes Gross, Elwood Gross's parents, gifted the couple the undeveloped property at 5110 Pierce Avenue. Using the land as collateral, Elwood and Wilmer Gross purchased a tri-level Split-Level kit house sold by Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc., a local subsidiary of a national pre-cut housing manufacturer. Swift Homes laborers laid the foundation and built the shell of the building, and the remaining work was done by Elwood Gross, working late nights after his workday, with the help of Lakeland community members knowledgeable in the building trades.

In Lakeland, Wilmer Gross found employment with the post office and then the Patent Office of the U.S. Department of Commerce. She commuted to Washington, D.C. by streetcar and worked for the federal government until her retirement. In her new home, she pursued her passion for gardening by carefully planning and cultivating the home's landscape for over forty years. Later in life, Wilmer Gross also volunteered for her community with long term service on the City of College Park's Committee for a Better Environment.

Elwood Gross served a long career at the University of Maryland and represented the third generation of his family to be employed on campus. He advanced over time from his start as a mechanic's helper to Assistant Director of the Physical Plant unit. He served for a time as president of the Lakeland Civic Association and was deeply engaged in the Lakeland Urban Renewal project as a member of the Project Area Committee (PAC).

The PAC was a local body established to liaise with the municipality and federal Housing and Urban Development officials through the redevelopment process. Through his work on the PAC, Elwood Gross saw firsthand the ways in which the project's final scope shifted away from Lakelanders' original vision for community revitalization. Over 80 households were displaced from the project area, and many never returned. The widescale demolitions and displacement that affected Lakeland in the mid-to-late twentieth century had a significant personal impact on Elwood's family through the loss of his parents' longtime home on Cloud Avenue. Lakeland residents who lived through urban renewal, and their descendants, experienced this transformation as a deep loss. Elwood Gross keenly observed the sacrifices that were made by Lakelanders to achieve the benefits that other communities took for granted.

The home at 5110 Pierce Avenue remains in Gross family ownership today.

A detailed architectural description and historic context, including photos and figures, are provided in the attached draft Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties form.

### *Significance*

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House is significant as embodying the development of the historically African American community of Lakeland and the influence of the Gross family within the neighborhood, particularly during the contested urban renewal campaign of the latter twentieth century. The property is also significant as a representative example of a contemporary tri-level Split-Level, a popular house form of the mid-twentieth century, and an intact representation of the "Capri" model kit house sold by Swift Homes, Inc.

### *Integrity/Degree of Alteration*

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House retains sufficient physical integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance. The home remains in its original location, and while the adjacent landscape has changed, the demolition of historic buildings and construction of new homes and the Paint Branch Elementary School are reflections of this site's historic context and do not undermine its integrity of setting.

The property holds a high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, and materials: the home has had minimal alterations to the standard Swift Homes, Inc. "Capri" model kit house and is easily legible as a contemporary style tri-level Split-Level. The house retains a spatial connection to the former Gross family property in Block 2 and to the adjoining Gross family home at 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue and therefore retains its integrity of feeling and association.

Historic Preservation Commission Policy #1-87, "Evaluating Integrity, Degree of Alteration, and Scarcity and Frequency," states that a property's integrity should be considered in the context of the scarcity of the resource type it represents, with a less restrictive standard of integrity applied when few or no other similar properties exist in the Inventory of Historic Resources. The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House conveys historical themes related to family and community history of Lakeland and the African American experience of urban renewal, which are underrepresented in Prince George's County's Inventory of Historic Resources. It would also represent the first mid-century split-level kit house to be designated. Within Lakeland, only the Lakeland High School, an institutional resource, has been designated as a Historic Site.

In light of the minor changes that have occurred to the exterior materials and appearance, the subject property retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as reflection of the heritage of the African American community of Lakeland, the influence of Elwood Gross during the Lakeland Urban Renewal project, and a unique architectural form.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

1. Staff concluded that the Elwood and Wilmer Gross House meets four of the nine historic site designation criteria of Subtitle 29-104(a):

#### *Historic and Cultural Significance*

- (1)(A)(i) has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the County, State or Nation
- (1)(A)(ii) is the site of a significant historic event
- (1)(A)(iii) **X** is identified with a person or a group of persons who influenced society



- (1)(A)(iv) **X** exemplifies the cultural, economic, industrial, social, political or historical heritage of the County and its urban and rural communities

*Architectural and Design Significance*

- (2)(A)(i) **X** embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction
- (2)(A)(ii) represents the work of a master craftsman, architect or builder
- (2)(A)(iii) possesses high artistic values
- (2)(A)(iv) represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- (2)(A)(v) **X** represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or County due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape

2. Staff further concluded that, in weighing both the alterations that have been made to the house and the current representation of the resource type within the Inventory of Historic Resources, the Elwood and Wilmer Gross House can be found to possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent, or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant.

**Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the Planning Board and District Council that the Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, Documented Property 66-000-02, and its 0.241-acre Environmental Setting (Lot 1 of Block 3, "Lakeland"), be designated a Prince George's County Historic Site as meeting the following criteria in Subtitle 29-104(a): (1)(A)(iii), (1)(A)(iv), (2)(A)(i), and 2(A)(v).

**Historic Preservation Commission Recommendation**

Commissioner **Norwood** moved that the Historic Preservation Commission recommend to the Planning Board and the District Council that the **Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, Documented Property 66-000-02, and its 0.241-acre Environmental Setting (Lot 1 of Block 3, "Lakeland")**, be designated a Prince George's County Historic Site as meeting the following criteria in Subtitle 29-104(a): (1)(A)(iii); (1)(A)(iv); (2)(A)(i), and (2)(A)(v). The motion was seconded by Commissioner **Jenkins**. The motion was approved 7-0-0.



John Peter Thompson, Chairman

**Attachments:**

**MIHP Form for 66-000-02 (including maps and photographs)**

c:

*Owner:*

Estate of Wilmer S. Gross  
5110 Pierce Avenue  
College Park MD 20740

Elizabeth Hughes, Director  
Maryland Historical Trust  
100 Community Place, 3rd Floor  
Crownsville MD 21032-2023

*Municipality:*

The Honorable S.M. Fazlul Kabir, Mayor  
City of College Park  
7401 Baltimore Avenue  
College Park MD 20740

Meagan Baco, Executive Director  
Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc.  
4318 Gallatin Street  
Hyattsville MD 20781

*Prince George's County Council:*

The Honorable Eric Olson, District 3  
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building, 2nd Fl.  
1301 McCormick Drive  
Largo MD 20774

The Honorable Mel Franklin, At-Large  
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building, 2nd Fl.  
1301 McCormick Drive  
Largo MD 20774

The Honorable Calvin Hawkins II, At-Large  
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building, 2nd Fl.  
1301 McCormick Drive  
Largo MD 20774

Donna J. Brown, Clerk  
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building, 2nd Fl.  
1301 McCormick Drive  
Largo MD 20774

*Interested Parties:*

Douglas McElrath, Chairman  
Prince George's Heritage  
4703 Annapolis Road  
Bladensburg MD 20710

Alfonso Narvaez, Chairman  
Prince George's Historical & Cultural Trust  
PO Box 85  
Upper Marlboro MD 20773

Donna Schneider, President  
Prince George's County Historical Society  
PO Box 1513  
Upper Marlboro MD 20773



Figure 1: Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, south (front) elevation, October 2023.



Figure 2: Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, south elevation looking northeast, October 2023.





Figure 3: Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, north (rear) elevation, October 2023.



Figure 4: Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, northeast corner, October 2023.



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Figure 5: Elwood and Wilmer Gross House, oblique aerial from south, January 2021.  
Source: Pictometry via PGAtlas.com

**Capsule Summary**  
**PG 66-000-2**  
**Elwood and Wilmer Gross House**  
**5110 Pierce Avenue, College Park, MD 20740**  
**c. 1962**  
**Private**

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House is a contemporary-style, tri-level Split-Level dwelling built in 1962. The home is an intact “Capri” model kit house, sold by Swift Homes, Inc. The dwelling is built of frame construction on a block foundation. It is clad in brick veneer on its lowest level, horizontal aluminum-clad cedar siding on the middle level, and a mix of horizontal and vertical board-and-batten aluminum-clad cedar siding on its upper level. The home retains its original wood-frame picture windows and horizontal two-over-two sash windows, and is capped with a characteristic low-pitched hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves, sheathed in three-tab asphalt shingles. The house sits on a corner lot in the Lakeland neighborhood of College Park and retains its historic function as a single-family residence. The 0.241-acre square-shaped parcel includes the house, a gently sloped grassy front lawn, and a rear garden designed and cultivated by Wilmer Gross for over forty years. The property is bounded by Pierce Avenue to the south, 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east, and single-family dwellings to the north and west.

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House is significant as embodying the development of the historically African American community of Lakeland and the influence of the Gross family within the neighborhood, particularly during the contested urban renewal campaign of the latter twentieth century, in which Elwood Gross was significantly involved as a member of the local Project Area Committee. The property is also significant as a representative example of a contemporary tri-level Split-Level, a popular house form of the mid-twentieth century, and an intact representation of the “Capri” model kit house sold by Swift Homes, Inc.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. PG:66-000-2

### 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Elwood and Wilmer Gross House

other

### 2. Location

street and number 5110 Pierce Avenue not for publication

city, town College Park vicinity

county Prince George's County

### 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Estate of Wilmer S. Gross

street and number 5110 Pierce Avenue telephone

city, town College Park state MD zip code 20740

### 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Prince George's County liber 9197 folio 405

city, town Upper Marlboro tax map 33 tax parcel 0000 tax ID number 21- 2340313

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

☐ Contributing Resource in National Register District

☐ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District

☐ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

☐ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register

☐ Recorded by HABS/HAER

☐ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT

☒ Other: Historic Preservation Section, Prince George's County Planning Department, M-NCPPC

### 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	Contributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	1
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> defense	
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic	
		<input type="checkbox"/> education	
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	1
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	
		<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	
		<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
		<input type="checkbox"/> social	
		<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
		<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	
		<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	
		<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	
		<input type="checkbox"/> other:	
			Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory

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## 7. Description

Inventory No. PG:66-000-2

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### Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

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Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

### Site Description

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House sits on a corner lot at 5110 Pierce Avenue in Lakeland, College Park, Maryland. The house retains its historic function as a single-family residence. The 0.241-acre square-shaped parcel includes the house, a gently sloped grassy front lawn, and a rear garden designed and cultivated by Wilmer Gross for over forty years. The property is bounded by Pierce Avenue to the south, 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the east, and single-family dwellings to the north and west.

### Summary Description

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House at 5110 Pierce Avenue is a contemporary-style tri-level Split-Level dwelling built in 1962 (Figure 1). The home is an intact “Capri” model kit house, sold by Swift Homes, Inc. The dwelling is built of frame construction on a block foundation. It is clad in brick veneer on its lowest level, horizontal aluminum-clad cedar siding on the middle level, and a mix of horizontal and vertical board-and-batten aluminum-clad cedar siding on its upper level. The home retains its original wood-frame picture windows and horizontal two-over-two sash windows, and is capped with a characteristic low-pitched hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves, sheathed in three-tab asphalt shingles.

### South Elevation (Façade)

The three floors composing the tri-level split form are prominent on the home’s façade (south elevation). The two-story section sits to the right (east) and the one-and-a-half story section to the left (west). The home sits on a concrete block foundation and takes advantage of the slightly sloping lot. A concrete driveway and walk provide access from Pierce Avenue (Figure 1).

The home’s lowest level is clad in a running-bond brick veneer, with a small entryway composition at the center of the elevation sheathed in an aluminum-clad lapped cedar siding (Figure 2). A three-lite wood door with stacked side-lites provides the main entrance into the home. To the east of the entryway, a three-part picture window with a concrete sill is composed of a central fixed window flanked by narrow two-over-two wood frame double-hung sash windows, shielded by a storm window. At the home’s southeast corner, a non-historic paneled single-car garage door sits within the original opening.

The middle level of the home is clad in running bond brick veneer to the level of the main floor, where the cladding transitions to a horizontally lapped aluminum-clad cedar siding, stained white. A centrally placed three-part picture window matches that provided on the ground level, without the concrete sill (Figure 3).

The home’s upper level is clad in horizontal lapped siding up to the sill level of two evenly spaced horizontal two-over-two wood frame double hung sash windows, shielded by aluminum storm windows. From the bottoms of the windows to the wide overhanging eave, the cladding is vertical board and batten wood siding. This uppermost floor is capped with a low-pitched hipped roof clad in three-tab asphalt shingles, with low-pitched gable roofs at the lower levels.



# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

Number 7 Page 1

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### West Elevation

The home's west elevation is clad in brick veneer to the height of the main floor, horizontally lapped siding to the level of the eave, and vertical board-and-batten siding under the gable (Figure 4). Behind a brick stair wall, five concrete steps lead up to a side entrance consisting of a paneled wooden door behind a non-historic glass storm door. A scrolling iron handrail surrounds the small entry stoop. Closely spaced to the left (north) of the door, there is a wood frame window with double-hung horizontal two-over-two wood sash, behind an aluminum storm window. A louvered gable vent provides circulation to the attic.

### North Elevation

The tri-level form is notable again on the rear (north elevation) of the home (Figure 5). The home's western half appears as one story above a raised basement. The basement level is clad in brick veneer and the upper level in horizontal lapped siding. A two-part fixed steel frame window provides light to the basement. An exterior brick chimney, centrally placed within the western section, pierces the gabled roof's overhanging eave and rises above the home's second floor. To the right (west) of this window, there is a three-part picture window matching those on the front of the home. A non-historic garden window is to the left (east) of the chimney.

The home's two-story eastern half is clad in brick veneer to the top of the first floor, where the material transitions to horizontally lapped siding. A modern two-part glass door fills the original doorway opening. A typical horizontally-paned window is to the left (east) of the door. There are two such typical windows on the second floor and a compact version of the same form, likely indicating the placement of a bathroom.

### East Elevation

The home's east elevation is minimally fenestrated with two typical windows evenly spaced on the upper floor (Figure 7). The lower level is clad in brick veneer, which transitions to a horizontally lapped siding. At the sill level of the windows, the cladding transitions to vertically-oriented board and batten siding.

### **Integrity**

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House retains sufficient physical integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance. The home remains in its original location, and while the adjacent landscape has changed, the demolition of historic buildings and construction of new homes and the Paint Branch Elementary School are reflections of this site's historic context and do not undermine its integrity of setting.

The property holds a high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, and materials: the home has had minimal alterations to the standard Swift Homes, Inc. "Capri" model kit house and is easily legible as a contemporary style tri-level Split-Level. The house retains a spatial connection to the former Gross family property in Block 2 and to the adjoining Gross family home at 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue and therefore retains its integrity of feeling and association.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 1: The south elevation (façade) of the home at 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 2: The entryway composition on the south elevation of the home at 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 3: Southwest corner, 5110 Pierce Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 4: West elevation, 5110 Pierce Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 5: North elevation (rear), 5110 Pierce Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
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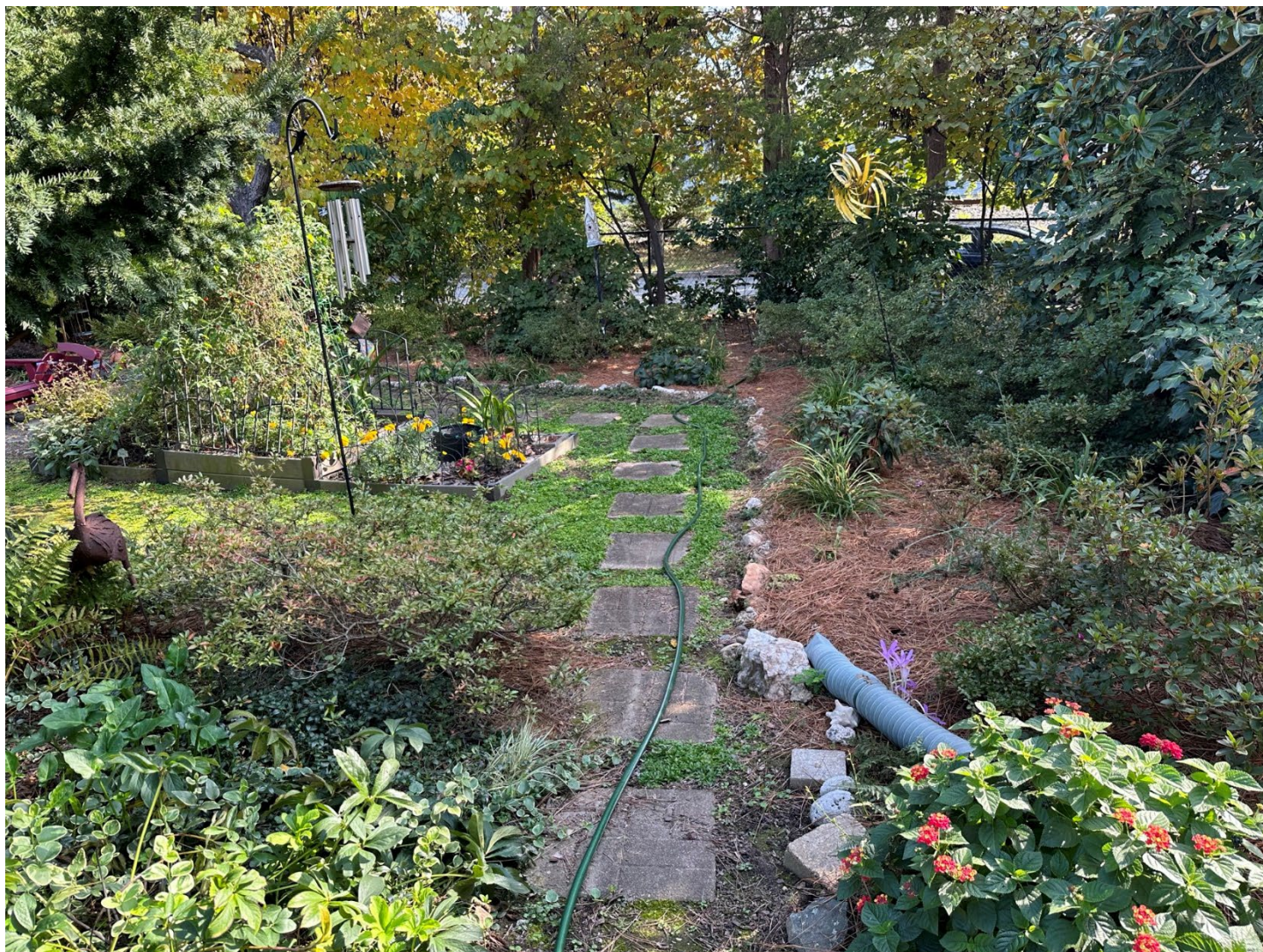


Figure 6: Part of rear garden developed by Wilmer Gross, 5110 Pierce Avenue.



# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Figure 7: Northeast corner, 5110 Pierce Avenue.



## 8. Significance

Inventory No. PG:66-000-2

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social history	
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____	

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<b>Specific dates</b>	1962 - 2021	<b>Architect/Builder</b>	Swift Homes, Inc./Elwood Gross
<b>Construction dates</b>	1962		

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Evaluation for:

☐ National Register      ☐ Maryland Register      ☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

### Summary

The Elwood and Wilmer Gross House at 5110 Pierce Avenue was built in 1962. It is a representative example of a contemporary tri-level Split-Level, a popular house form of the mid-twentieth century, and an intact representation of the “Capri” model kit house sold by Swift Homes, Inc. The property conveys the development of the historically African American community of Lakeland and the influence of the Gross family within the community, particularly during the contested urban renewal campaign of the latter twentieth century.

### Narrative<sup>1</sup>

#### Early Settlement of Lakeland

The land that became the Lakeland community remained rural through the mid-1870s (Figure 8). Northeast of the growing Maryland Agricultural College, established in 1856, most land was in large, family holdings.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the 1870s, suburbanization of Prince George’s County began along the Washington Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and accelerated with the completion of the electric streetcar line through the area in 1902.<sup>3</sup> This era saw intense real estate speculation and construction along the railroad right-of-way, as speculators planned and marketed suburban havens and recreational destinations easily accessible by rail from Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup>

In 1890, Edwin A. Newman subdivided approximately 200 acres of land along the rail line, just north of the Maryland Agricultural College, and platted the new subdivision of Lakeland (Figure 9).<sup>5</sup> Newman envisioned a resort community anchored by the nearby manmade lake, which he named Lake Artemesia, and promised to install sidewalks and electric lights, and to implement newspaper and grocery delivery. By 1891, over 70 individuals had bought property or settled in

<sup>1</sup> This summary is intended to provide a brief historic context for the subject property and not a comprehensive history of the Lakeland community.

<sup>2</sup> G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington, Including the County of Prince George, Maryland,” Vansville District, 1878.

<sup>3</sup> EHT Traceries, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Calvert Hills Historic District. Section 8, page 67.

<https://apps.mht.maryland.gov/medusa/PDF/PrinceGeorges/PG:66-37.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> KCI Technologies, Inc., “Suburbanization Historic Context and Survey Methodology: I-495/I-95 Capital Beltway Corridor Transportation Study – Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, Maryland, Volume 1,” 1999, D-7.

<sup>5</sup> Prince George’s County Circuit Court, “Map of Lakeland,” Subdivided and Surveyed by Edwin A. Newman, 1890, Plat Book BB 5, P. 51, Maryland State Archives, <https://plats.msa.maryland.gov/>.

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Lakeland.<sup>6</sup> Despite the initial enthusiasm, it quickly became apparent that the low-lying land was highly flood-prone and poorly suited for development.<sup>7</sup> Property owners arrived in Lakeland to find that lots they had purchased were “partly occupied by a creek and lying in a hollow,” rather than the high ground that had been advertised.<sup>8</sup>

In the subdivision’s earliest years, the community was racially segregated with white families living to the west of the railroad tracks and Black families to the east. By 1900, Lakeland’s demographic makeup began to shift as African American families moved from the east to the west side of the B&O Railroad tracks, expanding the footprint of the existing Black community and challenging entrenched residential racial segregation. Early Black residents who settled on Lakeland’s west side included the Brooks, Johnson, and Dory families, who were locally employed as railroad laborers or at the Maryland Agricultural College.<sup>9</sup>

Census records from the early twentieth century show a gradual shift in the racial balance of the community between 1900 and 1930.<sup>10</sup> As more Black families settled in Lakeland, friends and relations from other parts of Maryland and Prince George’s County were drawn to the area, while white residents left.<sup>11</sup> As in many historically Black communities established amid racial segregation, residents built and improved community institutions such as churches, schools, and social halls to serve broad community needs that otherwise would have been unmet. In Lakeland, these included two churches, Embury African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church (PG:66-12)(est. 1903) and the First Baptist Church of Lakeland (est. 1891) and two schools, Lakeland Elementary (PG:66-13)(1926) and Lakeland High School (PG:66-14)(1928).<sup>12</sup> Community stores, social halls, and the neighborhood ballfield provided additional social anchors.

Among the early Black residents to settle in the central part of Lakeland were George H. Gross and Rosa Gross, the paternal grandparents of Elwood Gross, who lived in the community by 1900.<sup>13</sup> The Grosses built a family home at 5100 Pierce Avenue, which still stands today. They raised five children in Lakeland while George Sr. was employed by the railroad and Rosa managed the household and worked as a laundress, both in her home and at the university.<sup>14</sup>

### Childhood and Young Adulthood of Elwood and Wilmer Gross (1933-1962)<sup>15</sup>

George Henry Gross, Jr., Elwood Gross’s father, was born to George Henry and Rosa Gross on July 3, 1904.<sup>16</sup> He grew up in Lakeland and in 1923, at age 19, began a nearly fifty-year career with the Maryland Agricultural College, a major

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<sup>6</sup> “Outside of the City Limits: Millions Have Been Invested,” *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1891.

<sup>7</sup> “Suburbanization Historic Context,” 204.

<sup>8</sup> “Think They Have Been Cheated,” *The Washington Post*, December 22, 1892.

<sup>9</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census, Prince George’s County, Vansville District, via Ancestry.

<sup>10</sup> EHT Traceries, Lakeland (66-000), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> These schools were built with money from the Rosenwald Fund, which assisted in the construction of schools for Black students in Southern states in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> 1900 U.S. Federal Census. There have historically been several branches of the Gross family living in Lakeland and the surrounding area. References to the family refer to the direct ancestors of the current property owners unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census; 1930 United States Federal Census.

<sup>15</sup> For more detailed information on George Henry Gross, Jr. and Agnes Harrison Gross, see MIHP Form PG: 66-000-3 for 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

<sup>16</sup> World War II, United States Draft Registration Card for George Henry Gross, 1942, via Ancestry.

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employer for the Lakeland community.<sup>17</sup> In 1925, he married Agnes Harrison, whose family came from the nearby African American community of Muirkirk (Figure 10).<sup>18</sup>

They lived for a time with George Henry's parents on Pierce Avenue, before purchasing their own home on Cloud Avenue in Lakeland in 1929.<sup>19</sup> Elwood Gross, the couple's only child, was born on December 4, 1933 (Figure 11). He grew up in the Cloud Avenue home, one of only a few houses in Block 2 of the Lakeland subdivision. The Grosses were close to their near neighbors within the block, the Gray and the Green families.

In Elwood Gross's youth, Lakeland was a closeknit community where residents had familial ties and participated a shared social life centered on Embury A.M.E. Church and the First Baptist Church of Lakeland, and the neighborhood baseball games which followed Sunday services.<sup>20</sup> Many Lakelanders worked for the University of Maryland, the federal government, or the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC).<sup>21</sup> His mother, Agnes, was an active member of community social clubs, and led his youth Cub Scout pack as a den mother. As a child, Elwood Gross attended elementary and middle school at the all-Black Lakeland Elementary School, across the railroad tracks. He was among the first generation of Lakelanders to attend high school at the Fairmount Heights High School, which opened as a segregated Black secondary school in 1950.<sup>22</sup>

Elwood Gross enjoyed a rich childhood and young adulthood despite the pervasive racism which surrounded the Lakeland community. The neighborhood's bus and streetcar service gave young people access to recreational opportunities that weren't available in segregated College Park, including restaurants and dance halls in Fairmount Heights and baseball and football games at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C.<sup>23</sup>

After graduating from high school, Elwood Gross enrolled in St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, VA, a historically Black private college founded in 1883.<sup>24</sup> There, he met his future wife, Wilmer Venetia Sydnor (Figure 13). Wilmer Sydnor was born January 5, 1937, in Richmond, and grew up in Clarksville, VA.<sup>25</sup> Her mother, Ella Sydnor, prioritized her children's education and began teaching Wilmer reading, writing, and math before she began school. At a time when many other children frequently missed days or weeks in the classroom to help their families earn a living, she was encouraged to focus on her education.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lakeland Community Heritage Project, Inc., *Lakeland: African Americans in College Park*, 2009, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Agnes Gross' maiden name is given in different sources as Harris and Harrison. District of Columbia Marriage Records, 1810-1953, via Ancestry.

<sup>19</sup> Oral history of Elwood Gross, 2007.; Prince George's County Land Records, Liber 334, Folio 49.; This home is no longer extant and was on the site of the present-day Paint Branch Elementary School.

<sup>20</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> "St. Paul's Normal and Industrial School," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Wilmer Venetia Sydnor Gross, Obituary, 2021, Tribute Archive; 1950 U.S. Federal Census.

<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Wilmer Gross and Ms. Delphine Gross Interview, by Rachel Brown and Nateara Gaston, 2011, Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP partnership, <https://lakeland.umd.edu/items/show/615>.

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After college, c. 1957, Elwood Gross was drafted into the U.S. Army and spent two years in military service (Figure 12). After his service, he moved to Chicago, where he and Wilmer were married.<sup>27</sup> They spent several years living on Chicago's west side before the birth of their twin daughters, Maxine and Delphine. (Figure 14).

While on a return visit with family in Lakeland, Elwood Gross enquired about employment opportunities for mechanics at the University of Maryland and found a position with the Physical Plant unit.<sup>28</sup> The family moved back from Chicago into his parents' home on Cloud Avenue in Lakeland.

### 5110 Pierce Avenue

In October of 1962, George Henry and Agnes Gross gifted Elwood and Wilmer Gross with the property at 5110 Pierce Avenue.<sup>29</sup> The lot was one of three additional properties acquired by George Henry and Agnes Gross during the years they lived in the adjacent block, on Cloud Avenue. They acquired Lot 1, Block 3 (the subject property) in 1935, and Lots 2 and 3 (present day 8002 and 8004 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue) in 1958. The corner lot was purchased shortly after their son's birth in 1933 and may have been bought with his future settlement nearby in mind.<sup>30</sup>

The gift of property allowed the young family to settle in Lakeland and build their own home. Shortly after the land transfer, Elwood and Wilmer Gross mortgaged the property to Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. to finance the construction of their new home.<sup>31</sup>

### *Swift Homes, Inc.*

Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. was a Glen Burnie, Maryland based subsidiary of Swift Homes, Inc. a nationwide pre-cut kit house manufacturer headquartered in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania.<sup>32</sup> Local Swift Homes dealers marketed the company's pre-cut and packaged homes as affordable, customizable options in a range of one, two, and split-level designs.<sup>33</sup> Around 1955, Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. opened for business on Ritchie Highway in Glen Burnie.<sup>34</sup> The company's materials targeted the "do-it-yourself" market and promised that homes could be erected in a matter of days, with instructions that made the work simple, "even for the novice."<sup>35</sup>

Construction of Swift Homes followed a basic outline, in which a Swift Homes crew would deliver the materials, lay the foundation, and erect a shell in about five days. From that point, the degree of finishing was up to the homebuyer, with the option for a bare-bones plan in which they did most of the remaining work themselves, or a more expensive plan in which Swift laborers finished the job.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Land Records of Prince George's County, October 3, 1962, Liber 2737, Folio 189.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Maxine Gross and Delphine Gross, by Kacy Rohn and Janet Adesina, November 14, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Land Records of Prince George's County, October 27, 1962, Liber 2755, Folio 604.

<sup>32</sup> "The Key to Your Future," Murphy Swift Homes, Inc., Harrisburg, PA, 1957. The Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/TheKeyToYourFutureMurphySwiftHomes/page/n27/mode/2up>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> "Do-It-Yourselfers Build More Homes," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 18, 1958.

<sup>35</sup> "The Key to Your Future," 22.

<sup>36</sup> "Do-It-Yourselfers,"; "The Key to Your Future," 24.

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In 1959, Ritchie Swift Homes advertised the addition of five new split-level plans to their inventory. The new models offered “unusual flexibility in room arrangement” and a choice of finishes.<sup>37</sup> Among the plans advertised to the local market was the tri-level split “Capri” model (Figure 17).<sup>38</sup>

### *The Split-Level*

The split-level was a novel house form that surged in popularity post-World War II.<sup>39</sup> The homes looked large, which buyers liked, and allowed many functions on smaller lots, with garage space for the personal automobile tucked under distinct living spaces.<sup>40</sup> The tri-level split separated interior spaces into “quiet” living, sleeping, and “noisy” living levels.<sup>41</sup>

Swift Homes’ “Capri” model, available beginning in the late 1950s, embodied this form (Figures 15-16). The home at 5110 Pierce Avenue has maintained its original layout, with the garage, family room, and utility space on the ground floor; kitchen, living room, and dining room on the middle floor; and bedrooms and bathrooms on the upper floor. Marketing materials promised that the Capri would “make day-to-day living almost effortless,” and that the split-level design offered “more convenience and usable space.”<sup>42</sup>

### *Financing and Construction*

One of the advantages of the Swift Homes program was the built-in financing plan. Property owners could use their land as collateral and put no money down.<sup>43</sup> This was especially beneficial to the Gross family in the discriminatory lending market of the early 1960s. Before the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, which made racial discrimination in mortgage lending illegal, Black families in Lakeland struggled to obtain home financing even with solid incomes.<sup>44</sup> After being gifted the lot at 5110 Pierce Avenue in the fall of 1962, the Grosses mortgaged the land to Ritchie Swift Homes for \$22,788.<sup>45</sup> Most of this money went to Ritchie Swift Homes for the materials and initial construction: Swift laborers delivered the materials, laid the foundation and framed the walls. The remaining work was done by Elwood Gross in the evenings and nights after he finished his workday at the University of Maryland. Neighbors from Lakeland pitched in skilled labor as needed, a typical practice through which many of the community’s home were built.<sup>46</sup> The result was a modern home for the young family (Figure 18).

### *Family Life in the Home*

In Lakeland, Wilmer Gross found employment with the post office and then the Patent Office of the U.S. Department of Commerce.<sup>47</sup> She commuted into Washington, D.C. by streetcar and worked for the federal government until her

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<sup>37</sup> “5 New Split-Level Houses Offered,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 21, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> “Swift Homes: No Money Down,” [Advertisement], *The Baltimore Sun*, June 24, 1959.

<sup>39</sup> *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Virginia Savage McAlester. Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 2015, 614.

<sup>40</sup> *Field Guide*, 613.

<sup>41</sup> *Field Guide*, 614.

<sup>42</sup> “A Look Into Your Future with Swift Homes,” Swift Homes, Inc., 1960. The Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/ALookIntoYourFutureWithSwiftHomes/page/n45/mode/2up>, 14.

<sup>43</sup> A Look Into Your Future, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Land Records of Prince George’s County, Liber 2755, Folio 604. October 27, 1962.

<sup>46</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Maxine Gross and Delphine Gross, by Kacy Rohn and Janet Adesina, November 14, 2023; Employee Bulletin, Number 117, April 1965, United States Department of Commerce, Patent Office. Via Lakeland Digital Archive: <https://archive.lakelandchp.com/collection/item/4430>.

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retirement. In her new home, she pursued her passion for gardening by carefully planning and cultivating the home's landscape for over forty years.<sup>48</sup> Later in life, Wilmer Gross also volunteered for her community with long term service on the City of College Park's Committee for a Better Environment.<sup>49</sup>

Elwood Gross served a long career at the University of Maryland and represented the third generation of his family to be employed on campus. He advanced over time from his start as a mechanic's helper to Assistant Director of the Physical Plant unit.<sup>50</sup> He served for a time as president of the Lakeland Civic Association and was deeply engaged in the Lakeland Urban Renewal project as a member of the Project Area Committee (PAC).

### Effects of School Desegregation (1968-1970)

Beginning in the late 1960s, a series of social upheavals began to disrupt the community that Elwood Gross had known since childhood. Significant social and political changes resulting from the Civil Rights movement began to be felt in Prince George's County. One of the most locally impactful shifts was the gradual process of school desegregation, and the eventual closure of the Lakeland High School, which had served generations of residents at various grade levels since its construction in 1928.<sup>51</sup> By the 1968-1969 school year, the Board had determined that the substandard Lakeland school should be closed.<sup>52</sup> As the decision was made to build a larger elementary school to serve a mix of communities, parents and advocates in Lakeland fought to have the new, integrated elementary school built in the neighborhood, where it could continue to serve as a community hub.<sup>53</sup>

On March 25, 1969, the Board of Education authorized their representative, Elliott Robertson, to begin negotiations for the purchase of 8.5 acres in Blocks 1 and 2 of "the Newman property" in Lakeland, at a price of \$7000 per acre.<sup>54</sup> Although a significant amount of undeveloped land remained in Lakeland, the selection of this site resulted in the displacement of George Henry and Agnes Gross, Elwood Gross' parents, and two neighboring families from their homes in Block 2.

On January 23, 1970, George Henry and Agnes Gross sold their Cloud Avenue property, their home for four decades, to the Board of Education. The low price offered by the Board left the Grosses without much money to start over. George Henry and Agnes Gross relied on their son to do the bulk of the work to construct their modest new home at 8002 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue, adjacent to his house on Pierce Avenue (see PG:66-000-3). Much as Elwood had for his home next door, the family relied on the donated labor of community members skilled in the building trades.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Delphine Gross, by Kacy Rohn and Janet Adesina, October 20, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes, Regular Meeting of the College Park City Council, Tuesday, March 14, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Maxine Gross and Delphine Gross, by Kacy Rohn and Janet Adesina, November 14, 2023; "Officials See Need to Recycle," *The Diamondback*, October 2, 1989.

<sup>51</sup> Bullock, James A. "Lakeland High School," PG:66-14, MIHP Addendum, The Ottery Group, Inc., 2009.

<https://apps.mht.maryland.gov/medusa/PDF/PrinceGeorges/PG:66-14.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> "A Long Day's Journey into Light," 207.

<sup>53</sup> "Mrs. Wilmer Gross and Ms. Delphine Gross Interview," Rachel Brown and Nateara Gaston, Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, <https://lakeland.umd.edu/items/show/615>.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the Prince George's County Board of Education, March 25, 1969, Box 7, Folder 1, Ruth S. Wolf Papers, University of Maryland Archival Collections.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

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Although the Grosses had been displaced from their home, the new house on 54<sup>th</sup> Avenue allowed them to remain in Lakeland through a period when many residents lost their homes and were unable to return to the community. The adjacent family homes allowed George Henry and Agnes Gross to stay engaged in the lives of their son's family and to grow close to their young granddaughters. Many Lakeland families were not able to retain these close physical connections.

### Urban Renewal to Present-Day (1970-2023)

Significant change beyond school desegregation was underway by 1970. By the second quarter of the twentieth century, Lakeland was firmly established as an African American enclave within the City of College Park, which incorporated in 1945. Residential segregation persisted in the city, county, and Washington metropolitan area well into the 1960s, a result of public policy and private practice that had severely curtailed housing options for Black residents.<sup>56</sup> As a result, neighborhoods such as Lakeland were home to Black families who represented a wide range of income levels.<sup>57</sup> The housing stock in Lakeland reflected this diversity, with a mix of modern and substandard homes (Figure 18).<sup>58</sup>

Some houses had suffered the effects of persistent flooding, which had plagued the Lakeland community since the time of Edwin Newman's original platting of the subdivision (Figure 19). By the 1960s, the Army Corps of Engineers was studying ways to mitigate the recurrent flooding from the Paint Branch and Indian Creek. Hurricane Agnes, in 1972, was an especially dramatic example of the problem, but nuisance flooding was a regular occurrence. The low-lying area between Rhode Island Avenue and U.S. Route 1/Baltimore Avenue was particularly susceptible.

The conditions in Lakeland drew the attention of City and State elected officials. In 1962, the Maryland General Assembly granted urban renewal authority to Prince George's County and the City of College Park.<sup>59</sup> This authorization allowed the City to access federal urban renewal funding intended to reorganize and redevelop American cities for the post-war era. Once a local urban renewal plan was approved by the federal government, municipalities could purchase and redevelop "blighted" areas at greatly subsidized costs.<sup>60</sup>

The urban renewal process in Lakeland stretched over two decades in a complex interplay of federal and local actions and intervening environmental and economic forces. The approved plan was intended to address issues of flooding, housing quality, access, and land use.<sup>61</sup>

The City's urban renewal plan divided Lakeland into three areas: two clearance areas, where existing homes and businesses would be demolished, and one conservation area, where water and housing quality issues were comparatively

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<sup>56</sup> A Long Day's Journey Into Light, 57.

<sup>57</sup> The United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Civil Rights USA: Housing in Washington, D.C.*, 1962, 6.  
<https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12h81.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> "On Wedges and Corridors: A General Plan for the Maryland-Washington Regional District," The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1964, 104.

<sup>60</sup> Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, New Village Press: 2016, 57-59.

<sup>61</sup> "R-213 Urban Renewal Plan: Lakeland Urban Renewal Area, College Park, MD," Approved by City of College Park Mayor & Council, October 10, 1978, via Lakeland Digital Archive. <https://archive.lakelandchp.com/collection/item/4130>

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minor (Figure 20). The Gross families lived within the central part of Lakeland designated for conservation. Although their recently built homes were not slated for demolition, many families lived in the areas to be cleared.

Between 1973 and 1981, at least 82 families in Lakeland were relocated out of the project area (Figure 21).<sup>62</sup> Many of them lived in the flood-prone area between Rhode Island Avenue and Baltimore Avenue. These families left their single-family homes with the belief that the urban renewal program would build modern, single-family homes in their place, to which displaced families would have priority access.<sup>63</sup> The reality of the final redevelopment plan was starkly different from initial expectations, with primarily mid-rise apartment buildings, a small number of townhouses, and only six single-family homes. Officials alleged that costs from the flood mitigation had raised the price of the overall project so much that single-family homes were not considered cost-effective.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Lakeland Project Area Committee*

Throughout the Lakeland Urban Renewal project, Elwood Gross served on the Project Area Committee (PAC). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which administered federal urban renewal funds, required that projects involving residential rehabilitation establish a PAC comprised of residents of the project area and coordinate with the committee to ensure residents' participation in the development of renewal plans.<sup>65</sup> His reflections on this experience are captured in a series of oral histories conducted c. 2007-2013 by the Lakeland Community Heritage Project and the University of Maryland. His memories reflect the complexity of the process that unfolded in Lakeland. Elwood Gross recognized at the project's outset that there were issues that needed to be addressed, namely the persistent flooding and deteriorated homes within the community, which the lack of available financing made difficult to upgrade.<sup>66</sup> Not all community members supported urban renewal, but many who initially did were deeply disappointed with the process and the outcomes.

The PAC was established as a mechanism for residents to have input into urban renewal. Elwood Gross recalled the PAC working with the two urban renewal project administrators, who operated from a mobile trailer in Lakeland, as well as Lakeland's representative on the College Park City Council (and later Mayor), Dervy Lomax.<sup>67</sup> Although the PAC was purportedly set up as residents' voice in the process, Gross recalled limited access to information and an abrupt shift in the plan that did not align with Lakelanders' wishes.<sup>68</sup> By the point that the decision was made to not rebuild the demolished single-family homes, the PAC and Lakeland residents had lost any meaningful input into the process.<sup>69</sup> Gross later reflected on the fact that this decision was made in the dark: "If I knew that was happening, I would have been on the other side saying, no urban renewal."<sup>70</sup> Although urban renewal ameliorated Lakeland's flooding problems, it came at a

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<sup>62</sup> "Relocated Households from Lakeland Urban Renewal Project Area since 1973," March 20, 1981, Lakeland Digital Archive, <https://archive.lakelandchp.com/collection/item/1879>

<sup>63</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Phillip Rhodes, "Michigan's Citizen Participation Statute," *Urban Law Annual*, Volume 1970: 235. [https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law\\_urbanlaw/vol1970/iss1/13](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_urbanlaw/vol1970/iss1/13)

<sup>66</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



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high cost. Just as with the loss of his parents' home to make way for school integration, Elwood Gross saw that Lakeland had made many sacrifices to gain benefits that other communities took for granted.<sup>71</sup>

### *Aftermath of Urban Renewal*

Lakeland's history mirrors the national experience of urban renewal, in which disproportionately high numbers of minority residents of "blighted" areas were displaced with promises of returning to their communities, which never materialized.<sup>72</sup> In implementing the federal urban renewal program, American municipalities collectively displaced, at minimum, 300,000 families nationwide between 1949 and 1974, with devastating consequences for intergenerational wealth and social cohesion.<sup>73</sup> Lakeland, the only community within College Park to undergo urban renewal, is a significant local example of this pattern.

Lakeland residents who lived through urban renewal, and their descendants, experienced this transformation as a deep loss of both community history and future opportunity, with negative impacts on the "physical, emotional, and sociological health of generations of Lakelanders."<sup>74</sup>

The Gross family remained in Lakeland throughout this transformation. Elwood Gross remained active in the Lakeland community through his retirement in the 1990s, and Wilmer Gross lived at 5110 Pierce Avenue until her death in 2021. Elwood Gross currently resides out of state. The home remains in the Gross family's ownership.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> *Renewing Inequality: Family Displacements through Urban Renewal, 1950-1966*, Digital Scholarship Lab, University of Richmond, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> "Urban Renewal in Lakeland," Digital Exhibit, Introduction, Lakeland Digital Archive, <https://archive.lakelandchp.com/exhibits/urban-renewal>

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### CHAIN OF TITLE

Liber 9197: 405 November 22, 1993	Deed: Elwood H. Gross to Wilmer S. Gross Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 2890: 516 October 2, 1963	Release of Mortgage: United Dealers Corporation to Elwood H. Gross and Wilmer S. Gross  Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 2760: 539 October 29, 1962	Assignment of Mortgage: Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. to United Dealers Corporation of Pittsburgh  Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 2755: 604 October 29, 1962	Mortgage: Elwood H. Gross and Wilmer S. Gross to Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. Mortgagors indebted in the sum of \$22,788.00 Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 2737: 189 September 2, 1962	Deed: George Henry Gross and Agnes Gross to Elwood H. Gross and Wilmer S. Gross Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 487: 175 October 3, 1935	Deed: John J. Kleiner to George Henry Gross and Agnes Gross Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), "Lakeland"
Liber 342: 101 September 30, 1929	Deed: Charles Shepard and Florence I. Shepard to John J. Kleiner An undivided one-half interest in and to Lot numbered one (1) in Block numbered three (3), and Lot numbered 9 in Block numbered thirty-four (34), "Lakeland"
Liber 191: 50 October 30, 1922	Deed: Edwin A. Newman, President, Aquarium Fisheries Company of Prince George's County, Maryland to John J. Kleiner and Charles Shepard Lots numbered one (1), two (2), three (3), seventeen (17) and eighteen (18) in Block numbered three (3), and Lots numbered eight (8), nine (9), and ten (10) in Block numbered thirty-four (34), "Lakeland," a subdivision of certain tracts of land known as "Timber Bottom Enlarged" and "Riversdale"
Plat Book A: 51 July 15, 1890	Plat: "Lakeland"
Liber JWB 15: 33 April 1, 1890	Deed: David M. Nesbitt to Edwin A. Newman Approximately 109 acres, parts of tracts of land called "Timber Bottom Enlarged" and "Riversdale"
Liber JWB 13: 118 May 4, 1889	Deed: David M. Nesbitt to Edwin A. Newman Approximately 148 acres, parts of a tract of land called "Timber Bottom Enlarged"

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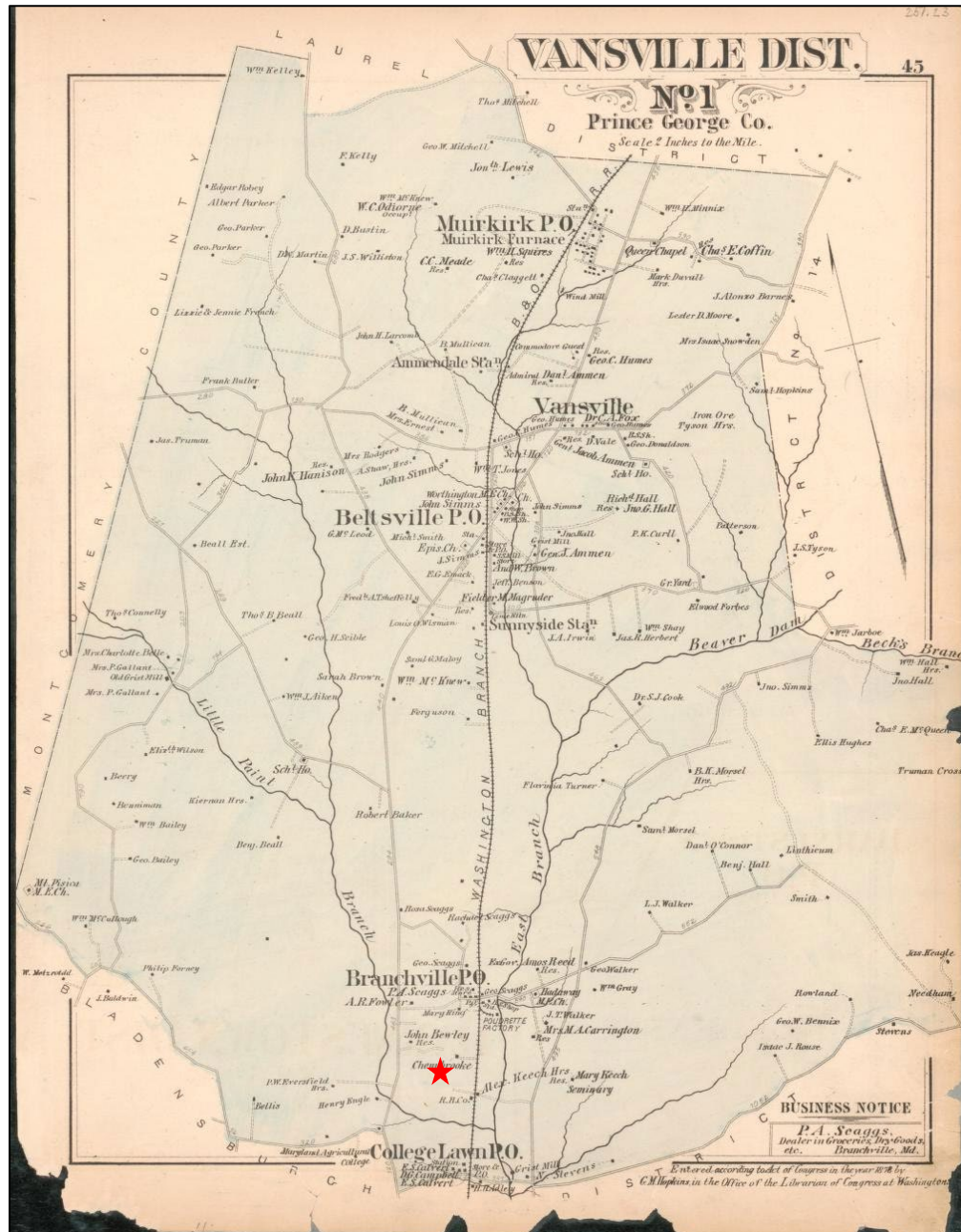


Figure 8: The red star indicates the largely undeveloped land that became the Lakeland subdivision. G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Fifteen Miles around Washington, Including the County of Prince George, Maryland (1878).

<https://www.loc.gov/item/76354156/>

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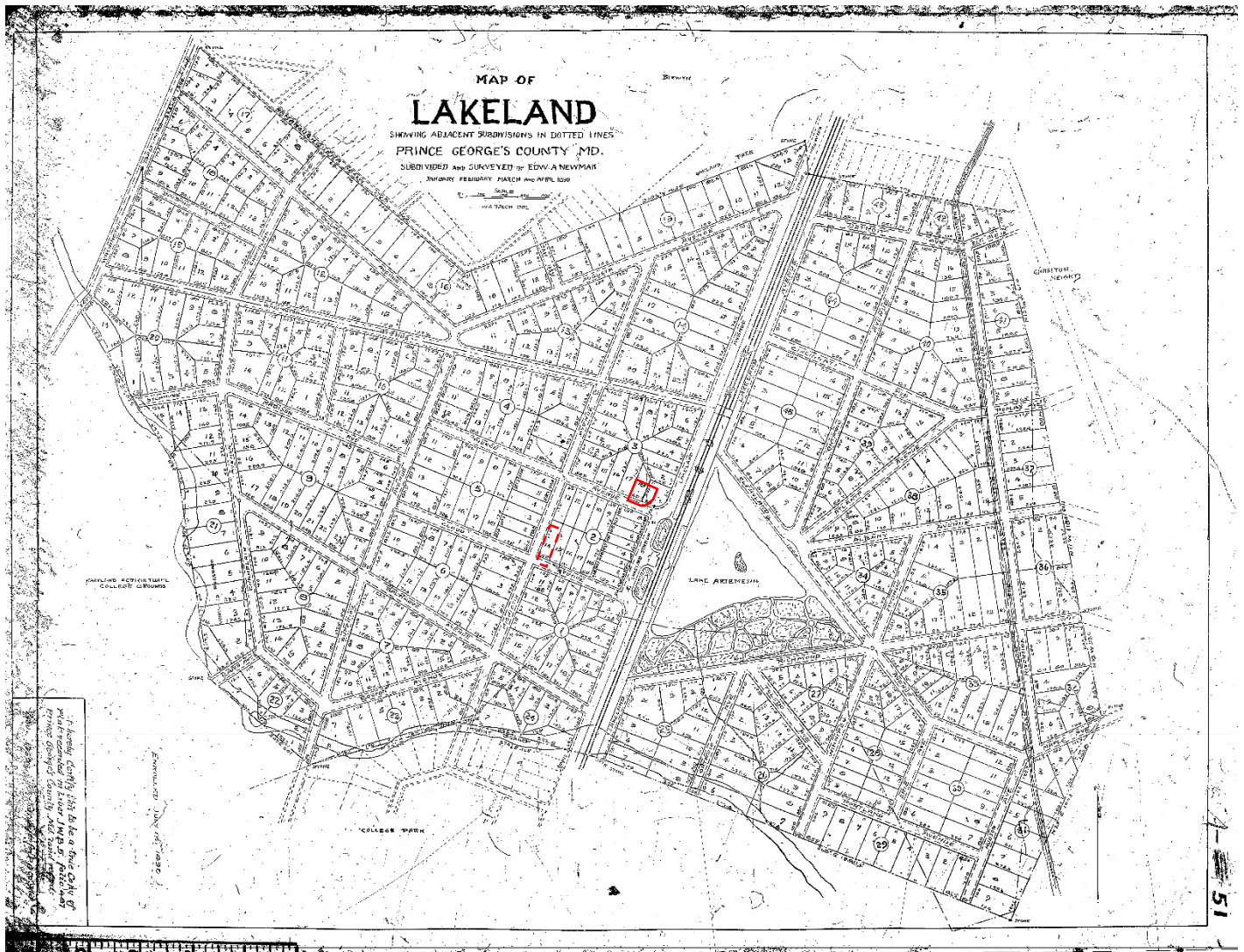


Figure 9: Plat of Lakeland, 1890. The subject property (5110 Pierce Avenue) is indicated by the solid red border. Elwood Gross' childhood home on Cloud Avenue (now demolished) is indicated by the dashed red border. Maryland State Archives.



# Maryland Historical Trust

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Figure 10: George Henry Gross, Jr. and Agnes Gross celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in 1950 at their home on Cloud Avenue in Lakeland. Lakeland Digital Archive.

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Figure 11: Elwood Harrison Gross as a young child, 1935. Lakeland Digital Archive.

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Figure 12: Elwood Gross was drafted into the U.S. Army c.1957. Lakeland Digital Archive.

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Figure 13: Wilmer Sydnor Gross as a young woman at her in-laws' Cloud Avenue property in Lakeland. Lakeland Digital Archive.



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Figure 14: Wilmer Gross with her twin daughters, Maxine and Delphine Gross, c. 1965 at their new house at 5110 Pierce Avenue. Lakeland Digital Archive.

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
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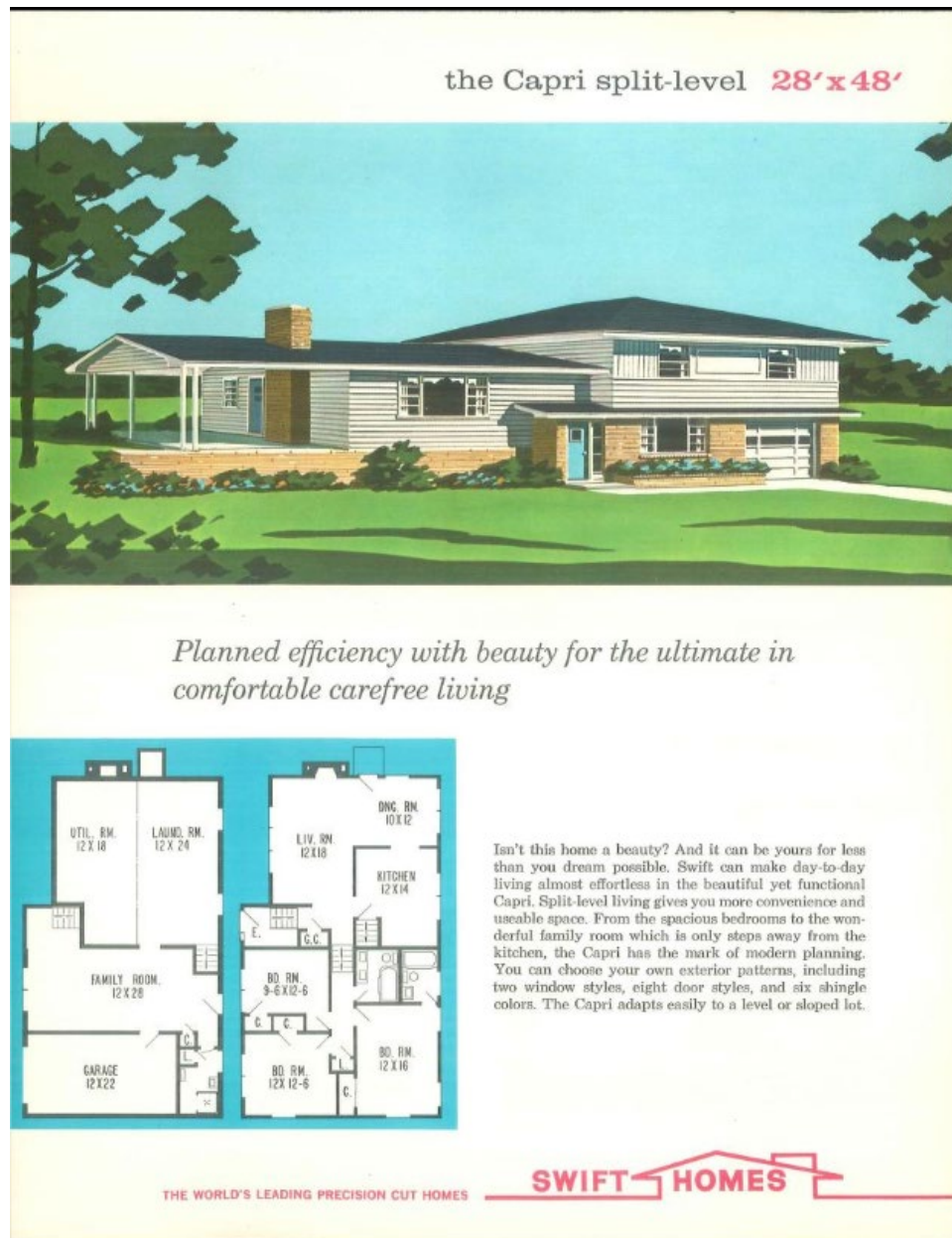


Figure 15: The Gross family purchased the pre-cut Split-Level “Capri” model kit house sold by Swift Homes, Inc. *A Look Into Your Future with Swift Homes*, 1960.

<https://archive.org/details/ALookIntoYourFutureWithSwiftHomes/mode/2up>



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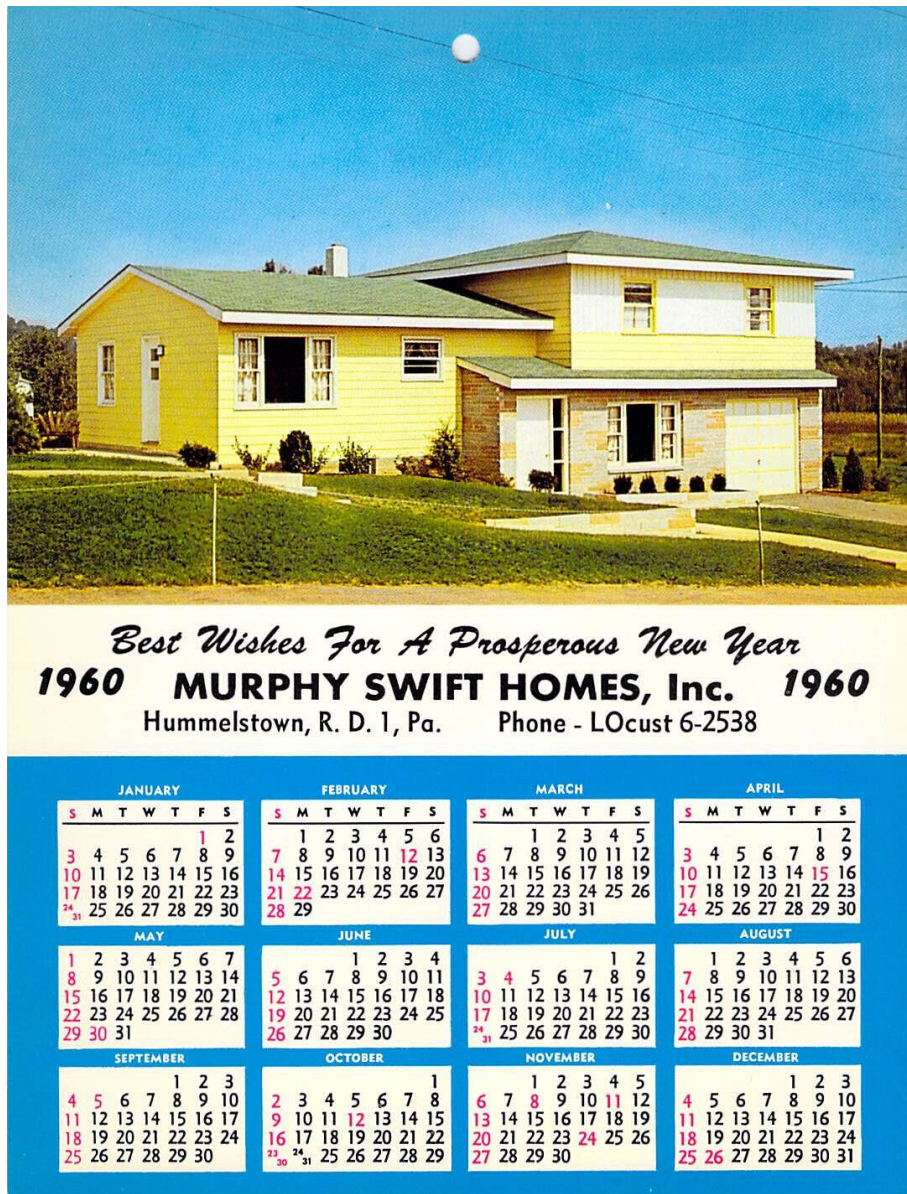


Figure 16: The Capri could be configured for flat or sloped lots with optional exterior finishes. 1960 Murphy Swift Homes, Inc. Promotional Calendar, via eBay seller queenofchrome.

# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
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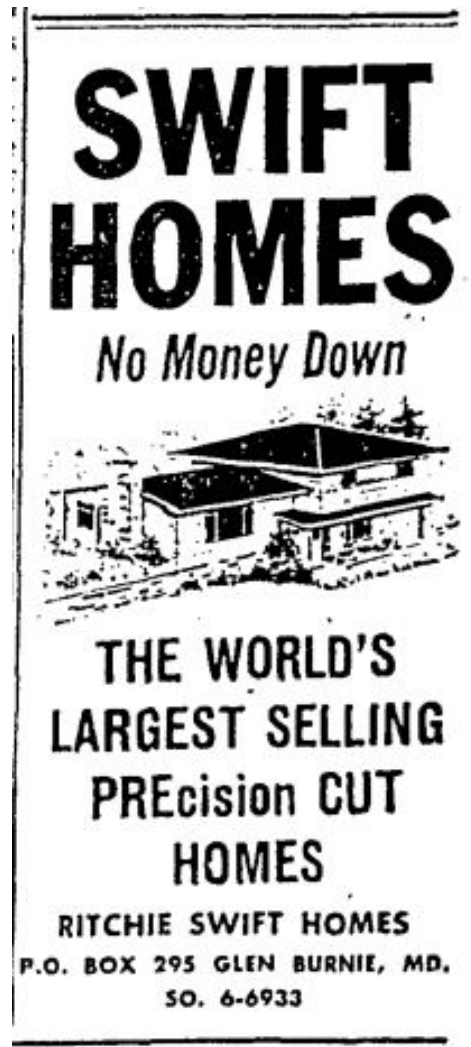


Figure 17: Ritchie Swift Homes, Inc. advertised several split-level models to the Maryland market beginning in 1959, including the Capri, shown here. "Swift Homes: No Money Down," [Advertisement], *The Baltimore Sun*, June 24, 1959.

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Figure 18: Elwood and Wilmer Gross's house at 5110 Pierce Avenue, c. 1965. Modern homes like theirs were intermingled with some older homes in poor condition (at left) in the years leading up to urban renewal. Lakeland Digital Archive.

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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 21

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Figure 19: Flooding in Lakeland, 1950. Lakeland Digital Archive.

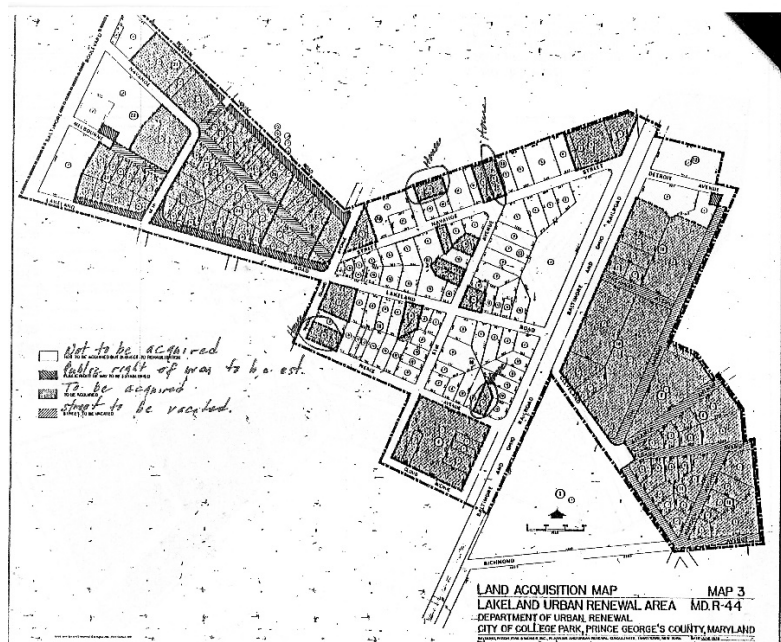


Figure 20: Land Acquisition Map, Lakeland Urban Renewal Plan (1978), p. 213-32. Lakeland Digital Archive.



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Elwood and Wilmer Gross House  
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Figure 21: The Lakeland Urban Renewal project began demolitions in 1974. Excerpt, Edwards Scrapbook (1969-1979), Lakeland Digital Archive.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. 66-000-2

Ancestry.com, Various

Lakeland Digital Archive, Various.

Land Records of Prince George's County

Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2007, Eli Pousson, Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership.

Oral History of Elwood Gross, 2013, Angela Forest, Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership.

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 0.241

Acreage of historical setting 0.241

Quadrangle name Washington East

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot numbered (1) in Block numbered Three (3) in the subdivision known as "Lakeland" as per plat thereof recorded in Plat Book A at Plat 51, among the Land Records of Prince George's County, Maryland.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Kacy Rohn, Planner III, Historic Preservation Section		
organization	Prince George's County Planning Department	date	December 1, 2023
street & number	1616 McCormick Drive	telephone	301-952-3680
city or town	Largo	state	MD

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Maryland Department of Planning  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-697-9591