

Architectural Survey Report

Peltoma Acres Pittsfield, Maine

Erin Ware
Kleinfelder
16 Commerce Drive, Suite 2, Augusta,
Maine 04330
eware@kleinfelder.com
(207)626-4919

Prepared for:

Sponsoring agency or entity

Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine

Dates:

Provide the dates from when the project was started up through when the report was written and/or revised and submitted.

May 7, 2020 – June 2, 2020

Level:

Reconnaissance or Intensive

Reconnaissance

Name of surveyors:

(If different from author, provide contact information for each surveyor.)

Erin Ware

Continuing project?

If so, please summarize previous efforts.

No.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Peltoma Acres is a planned development located primarily south of Peltoma Avenue, with an additional section along Main Street/Route 11, in the town of Pittsfield. Forty-nine of the original houses, along with 16 garages, were surveyed. Eight garages were determined to be less than 50 years old and were not surveyed. Six houses and one garage along Main Street/Route 11, also part of Peltoma Acres, were previously surveyed. Twenty-eight of the properties are eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places as part of a historic district.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

A. Basis:

Describe the purpose of this survey. Identify the Federal or State regulations mandating this survey, or any Programmatic Agreements associated with this project.

The purpose of this survey is to identify and document the original structures that were constructed as part of the Peltoma Acres development in 1947. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) initiated this survey.

B. Survey and Research Goals:

Describe the underlying project, specifically citing the type of project and duration of project. Summarize planned or anticipated alterations to landscapes, buildings, structures, districts, objects or sites.

The goal of the project is to provide a baseline for identifying properties or historic districts that are potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. A reconnaissance-level architectural survey was conducted by a Secretary of the Interior qualified professional. The survey consisted of 58 architectural survey forms that were electronically entered into the Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA). The forms have also been printed with color photos attached. A survey report, including a context statement, map, matrix and image index, and CD with digital images have also been completed. Six houses and one garage that are part of the Peltoma Acres development were surveyed by K. Willis in 2017. The previous determinations of eligibility have been reevaluated as part of this effort.

C. Survey Boundaries:

- 1. Draw the boundaries of the survey on the topographic map in blue or black and label this line "Survey Boundaries." The boundaries of a survey map include portions of a property that lie outside the APE.*
- 2. Describe the limits of the surveyed area. The survey boundary may be larger than the APE. Make reference to geographic landmarks, addresses or political boundaries. Utilize reasonable demarcations – tree lines, back lots.*

The survey boundaries are discontinuous. The first survey area extends along Cianchette Street, beginning approximately 200' south of its intersection with Peltoma Avenue to approximately 100' north of its intersection with Wright Street, along Franklin Street between Cianchette Street and Chester Street, along Chester Street south of Franklin Street approximately 650'. The survey boundaries also include 128 Chester Street, 176 Summer Court, 211 and 203 Peltoma Avenue, and 341, 351, 362, 377, 383, 391, 399, 485, and 490 Main Street/Route 100.

D. Survey Methodology:

- 1. Describe background research method.*

The National Register Information System and MHPC files were consulted to determine if there are any properties in the APE that are listed in, or officially eligible for listing in, the National Register. Additionally, the surveyor looked at MHPC files to determine if they contained any previously recorded resources within the APE. The surveyor researched local histories at the Maine State Library for information about properties in the survey area.

- 2. Describe field research method.*

The surveyor conducted an initial drive through the project area and determined there were resources present greater than forty-five years of age. Next, the surveyor walked the project area and recorded on MHPC survey forms all of the buildings, structures, sites, objects, and landscape features within the boundaries that appeared to be forty-five years old or older, and photographs were taken of each resource.

- 3. Did you undertake a file search at MHPC for NR or previously recorded properties?*

Yes.

E. Goals:

- 1. Provide the number of acres in the planned survey area.*

The planned survey area is approximately 16 acres.

- 2. Prove the number of surveys this project is expected to generate.*

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III. SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Acres:

Provide the total number of acres within the survey boundaries.

The survey acres is approximately 16 acres.

B. Setting:

Provide a general overview of the setting, including topography, development, and landscape.

The setting of the project area is a residential development in the southeast area of Pittsfield as well as a separate section located to the west and south along a busy state route. Historically the route connected Waterville to points north before the construction of I-95. In both areas, the houses are adjacent to older development, dating from c.1900-c.1930. The established streets off of Peltoma Avenue are laid out in a grid pattern while the newer Cianchette Street is curvilinear. The houses sit on approximately .25 acre lots with consistent set-backs from the street. The yards are made up of lawns dotted with large deciduous trees. Shrubs frequently line the houses' foundations. Paved driveways are located to one side of the houses, some of which lead to garages. There are no sidewalks. The second section of homes border a busy road that also contains commercial and industrial properties. This section does not have the cohesiveness of a neighborhood, with the houses are scattered between older development and more recent industrial properties. The topography is generally flat in both areas.

C. Number of Resources Recorded:

Count each individually recorded building, structure, object, or site.

65 resources were surveyed.

D. Previously Inventoried Properties:

Address whether any of the resources had been previously surveyed. If so, how many, and how were these properties represented and evaluated within the current project?

SM #52-55, 57-59 were previously surveyed by K. Willis in 2017. Due to lack of changes to the resources, no new survey forms were completed. The determinations of eligibility have been re-evaluated for this effort.

E. Types of Properties:

1. Summarize general trends within the project area: commercial, residential, urban, rural, etc.

The survey area contains residential properties in a small town.

2. Summarize the age, style, and condition of the resources within the project area.

The majority of the resources are Neo-Colonial in style. SM #10, 38, 39, 40, 48 and the garages are vernacular. The houses date from 1947 while the garages date from c.1950-1965.

3. Describe in detail any potentially eligible individual properties or historic districts.

Peltoma Acres (SM #1-24, 27, 28, 32-48, and 51) is eligible for listing in the National Register. It is a subdivision made up of 39 structures. Twenty-eight are contributing resources (6 of which are garages). The houses sit on 1/2 acre lots with consistent set-backs. There are 5 distinct styles/forms:

- Cape consisting of either three or five bays with 2 dormers, with entry door topped by simply molded sunburst
- One-story Dutch Colonial consisting of 3 bays, with entry in first or third bay and sheltered by a bracketed hood, gambrel roof with either a 3 bay shed dormer or 3 individual front gabled dormers
- 1½ Story Side Gable, similar to Dutch Colonial but with a side gabled roof
- 2 Story Side Gabled, a simple rectangular structure consisting of 3

- bays, with entry located in the first or third bay.
- Two houses are the only examples of their type; SM #10 is a L-shaped ranch form house and SM #47 is a hip-roofed single-story box.

The one-story Dutch Colonial form is the most common form. All houses are simple with a lack of ornamentation. Most houses are clad in vinyl siding with a few featuring asbestos shingles or aluminum siding. Many houses have garages, either freestanding or attached via an enclosed breezeway.

F. NR Eligibility:

1. Address resource integrity, NR criteria, area of significance and period of significance.

Peltoma Acres (SM #1-24, 27, 28, 32-48, and 51) is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, Community Planning and Development on the local level as an example of a classic post-World War II planned subdivision. The neighborhood follows many of the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) guidelines for subdivisions, including standard lot size and house setbacks, curvilinear streets, and sited adjacent to established neighborhoods. It was built in 1947 by local contractor J. R. Cianchette (cousin of the founders of Cianbro). According to Sanger Mills Cook's history of Pittsfield, the impetus of the development was a lack of housing for workers of the local Medwed Shoe Factory (in particular for the executives). Peltoma Acres is unique as a post war development due to the fact that the timber used to construct the houses was sourced locally and milled by the contractor. Building materials were depleted by the war effort, and Pittsfield's location in central Maine with its plentiful timber was an advantage. In May 1960 a plan for an additional 40 lots along Estelle and Wright Streets was filed though far fewer houses were actually constructed.

Based on historic photos, it does not appear that any garages were included in the initial construction phase. Historic aerial photos from 1953 show several were added very soon after the houses became occupied. Sixteen garages are 50 years old or greater and 8 are less than 50 years old. Of those greater than 50 years old, several have undergone significant changes and are therefore do not contribute to the district. While not part of the original construction, these early garages contribute to the district as illustrations of the prevalence of car ownership by the middleclass in the post-war period.

While the integrity of materials and workmanship has been diminished by the prevalence of replacement windows and siding, there is a high degree of integrity of design as many houses retain they original forms. They present a cohesive collection of buildings that are recognizable as a planned neighborhood. The development has a high degree of integrity of setting and feeling, retaining its original boundaries, circulation patterns of the streets, and division of housing lots. The houses remain single family residences and therefore retain their integrity of association. Several houses have had significant alterations such as changes in fenestration and large additions and do not contribute to the district. The houses in the addition along Main Street/Route 100 lack the cohesiveness of a planned development and are therefore not included in the district. While the development may have some significance under Criterion C for Architecture, much of the integrity of

design, materials, and workmanship has been lost on a majority of the resources. Its period of significance is 1947-c.1950, when the first garages were added.

2. For a historic district provide a topographic map showing the limits of the proposed district illustrating street or landscape views and all non-historic or non-contributing resources.

G. Threats

The Peltoma Acres subdivision is not currently threatened by outside development. The most pressing threat is alterations to individual properties by the homeowners, including replacement of original fabric with inappropriate materials and additions that out of scale with the original structure. Almost all the houses have undergone some change, most commonly the replacement of windows and siding.

H. Recommendations for Further Work

Maine does not currently have a historic context for post-World War II suburbs. While MHPC recently published a guide to post-World War II housing, it is focused on architectural styles and did not fully explore post-war subdivisions. A more extensive survey of these subdivisions in Maine would provide insight into whether Peltoma Acres is significant on more than the local level, how its degrees of integrity compare, and whether it was unusual for developers in Maine to mill their own lumber. Further research could also be conducted to determine who initially purchased the homes in Peltoma Acres. This information would provide insight into whether or not veterans in Pittsfield took advantage of the Veterans' Affairs (VA) loan program.

I. Data Repository

Hard copies and digital copies of the survey materials, including photographs, will be kept in MHPC's files.

IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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V. Historic Context Statement

Peltoma Acres was part of the post-World War II boom in single-family home construction. In 1947, six million families were living with other families and another half a million were living in temporary structures. The need to provide housing became a national priority. More than 13 million homes were built in the U.S. between 1945 and 1954 and residential construction became a major industry in many communities as a result. The majority of postwar residential development took place on the edge of previously established communities. Across the country, thousands of developments were constructed with similar housing styles, setbacks on curvilinear streets, often on land that had been previously used for agriculture. Builders and developers created the majority of suburban developments. Before the war, developers usually subdivided the lots and built only the infrastructure of streets and sewers, leaving the house construction to a builder. With the introduction of government financing programs it became more profitable for developers to construct the houses as well. In order to make construction more efficient, developers usually constructed a limited number of different models with simplified designs using standardized materials and components that were often prefabricated. Small scale subdivisions were usually built by local developers, while there were a few companies, known as merchant builders, that were capable of building larger developments.

Pittsfield, like many towns across the U. S., experienced an industrial expansion during World War II. The Civil Works Administration, as part of the New Deal, provided the town with \$25,000 to construct an airport on the site of the old race track that was used by the Navy for training from 1943 through the end of the war. In addition to the increase of construction jobs, a shoe factory was established by Pinches Medwed in the old woolen mill in 1941, which by 1948 employed 300 people. The war effort limited the materials and man power that could be used for housing construction. After the war ended the existing housing shortage was exacerbated by the return of around 400 soldiers. Between 1940 and 1950, the population of Pittsfield grew 17.4%.

Joseph R. Cianchette partnered with the Federal Housing Administration and the Civilian Production Administration to develop a housing subdivision called Peltoma Acres. Cianchette, a first cousin of the brothers who founded Cianbro, was a successful local contractor. His construction company completed work on the air base at Dow Field in Bangor. Cianchette was also involved in many other ventures in Pittsfield. He owned several buildings downtown, including The Lancey House hotel and *The Pittsfield Advertiser* building, in addition to owning the paper itself. He also ran a truck and farm business. Cianchette was instrumental in revitalizing the old woolen mill into

a shoe factory that was purchased by Pinches Medwed. The Cianchette Hall of Science at the Maine Central Institute was built using funds he donated. He also served on the Board of Governors of the Maine Good Roads Association in the 1940s.

The plan for the first 44 lots of Peltoma Acres was filed on September 13, 1946 and an additional plan for 8 lots along Maine Street/Route 100 was filed three months later on December 27, 1946. The Peltoma development was laid out with assistance from the Land Planning Division of the FHA. The FHA had started providing mortgage insurance to private financial institutions under the National Housing Act of 1934. In order to ensure their investments would hold their value and to encourage improvements in overall housing standards the FHA had developed standards which addressed street orientation, lot size, room layout, and overall form and style. They also provided technical assistance and land-planning consultation. They also insured bank loans to developers to purchase land, subdivide it, and construct homes.

Paul Atwood of Prentiss and Carlisle Engineering in Bangor produced the nine different home designs. The styles and forms drew from traditional New England architecture, and included Cape and Dutch Colonial styles, with facades that were usually symmetrical. Ground-breaking took place in June of 1946 and the first 49 houses were put on the market in May 1947. The houses were held for 30 days for purchase by a veteran, after which they became available to the public. Prices ranged from \$6,800 to \$7,600. The houses featured hardwood floors and modern bathrooms on lots big enough for a garden.

Veterans interested in purchasing one of the homes in Peltoma Acres were likely to take advantage of the VA loan program. Part of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the World War II GI Bill), the program offered home loans to veterans without a down payment or mortgage insurance. Most veterans had not had the opportunity to establish credit due to their time spent serving in the military. The program would allow them to receive a loan to buy a home or establish a business that they otherwise would not have been able to qualify for. The amount of the loan could not exceed \$4000 and was limited to a maximum of 25 years with a maximum interest rate of 4%. Veterans could apply for a loan up to 10 years after the end of the war. The VA, though separate from the FHA, closely followed FHA practices. The GI Bill allowed for loans to be split into two, one insured by the VA and one insured by the FHA. During the first five years after the war, nearly one-fifth of VA loans were second mortgages that supplemented an FHA mortgage. The Housing Act of 1950 expanded the original loan program. Between the end of WW II and 1966, one-fifth of all single-family residences in the U. S. were financed by the home loan program for veterans.

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