

12408 STONEHAVEN LANE (HOUSE)  
(The Rancher)  
(The Buckingham)  
Belair at Bowie, Maryland  
Bowie  
Prince George's County  
Maryland

HABS MD-1257  
*MD-1257*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### 12408 STONEHAVEN LANE (HOUSE) (The Rancher) (The Buckingham)

HABS No. MD-1257

**NOTE:** Please see the following historical reports for additional information about the history of Belair at Bowie, Maryland:

Belair at Bowie, Maryland (overview)	HABS No. MD-1253
12418 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1254
12420 Stonehaven Lane (The Cape Cod)	HABS No. MD-1255
12500 Swirl Lane (The Colonial, 4 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1260
12100 Tulip Grove Drive (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1263
12400 Shadow Lane (The Colonial, 3 bedroom)	HABS No. MD-1264
Belair Bath & Tennis Club	HABS No. MD-1265
12401 Sussex Lane (The Manor House)	HABS No. MD-1267
12405 Sussex Lane (The Rancher)	HABS No. MD-1269
12413 Salem Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1270
12406 Skylark Lane (The Country Clubber)	HABS No. MD-1271

**Location:** 12408 Stonehaven Lane, "Belair at Bowie, Maryland," Bowie, Prince Georges County, Maryland.

**Significance:** The house at 12408 Stonehaven Lane is a representative example of The Rancher model at Belair. It is located in Somerset, the first completed and occupied section of the development. The house retains a particularly high degree of integrity; except for the painted brick, it appears much as it did when Levitt and Sons built the house in 1960-61. The Rancher was the only Levitt and Sons model from Levittown, New Jersey, replicated "as is" for the 1961 product line used to launch Belair. It appealed to the company because The Rancher added greater variety to the suburban streetscape and met consumer demand for one-story houses, which was, without a question, the most popular postwar form. The original purchasers of this model would have made their decision based on the identical one constructed at the sales and exhibit center, now located at 12405 Sussex Lane (HABS No. MD-1269).

**Historian:** James A. Jacobs, HABS

**Description:** The Rancher at number 12408 is located in the middle of the block between Shield Lane and Stonybrook Drive, on the northwestern side of Stonehaven Lane. Except for the roof type over the front-wing (gable or hip) of The Rancher and the type and location of decorative embellishments, both variations share identical plans, massing, and overall exterior organization. The L-shaped perimeter of the house can be

roughly divided into similarly-sized thirds, with two arms extending outward at right angles from a central core. The external form of the two original façade variations, however, suggests a more dynamic three-dimensional composition—a rectangular main block turned with its short side to the street with a wing extending to one side at a point midway back along one of the main block's long walls. This skillful effect was accomplished using standard design conventions.

The roof pitch over the main block is steeper than that over the wing, which not only gives that portion of the roof greater mass, but also a more prominent ridgeline. This already dominant portion of the roof extends clear to the rear, ultimately covering two-thirds of the house. In addition to the roof, the overall presence of the side-facing wing is further reduced by a covered front porch scooped out of its mass.

The main block is also aggrandized by choices in cladding materials and applied decoration. Because of its L-shaped form, The Rancher is the only house at Belair having two perpendicular exterior walls that were treated as “public” in character. Generally, in order to keep costs down, Levitt and Sons limited to the façade the more expensive sheathing materials and architectural decoration, which give the houses their neo-colonial or neo-traditional “look.” Except for the use of shutters on the side-wall windows in some model variations, the rear and side walls of the Belair houses were essentially unadorned and utilitarian—clad in simple, colored asbestos shingles and exhibiting little of the symmetry or formal balance employed in organizing the street elevation.

Because the front door of The Rancher is set back from the street in the crux of the L, the front wall and the one on the main block paralleling the entrance drive are both treated as the façade. For the house at 12408 Stonehaven Lane, these two walls are sheathed in brick and the front corners of the wing are articulated with simple wooden pilaster in the Doric Order. These give the illusion of support for the hip roof. The windows on both of these walls have shutters, as does the small window under the entrance porch near the front door and a flower box extends across the front of the wing under the windows. In contrast to the masonry of the main block façade(s), the front wall of the side-facing wing is sheathed in asbestos panels. The secondary character of the side-facing wing to the main block provides an interesting, if inadvertent, link to historical precedent. Although the front door is located within the porch carved out of the wing, the remainder of the wing mostly contains the “work” areas of the house—the kitchen, laundry, mechanical equipment, and garage—in a manner not unlike the service wings common to older American houses (but, historically most often placed to the rear of the house).

Of particular note with this house and not visible in the photograph of an identical model documented by HABS (MD-1269) is the survival of the wood window grille to the right of the front door. This contemporary decorative flourish on an otherwise neo-traditional house screened an aluminum sliding window opening onto one of the bathrooms. In The Rancher's original design, both of the bathrooms were positioned to include exterior windows (the one for the en suite bathroom in the master bedroom is just to the right of the one with the window grille). Although Levitt and Sons was primarily concerned with

the exterior when redesigning The Rancher in 1962, the firm did make some relatively minor improvements to the plan. Staff architects turned the back-to-back bathrooms 90° so that only the master bathroom had an exterior window; the interior bathroom would rely on an exhaust fan for ventilation. While mechanical ventilation made the change viable, the reason behind the decision was probably aesthetic. The window grille was a slightly odd feature considering the rest of the house and likely only added to mitigate the fact that the bathroom was more-or-less in full view of anyone coming to the front door. Furthermore, from a design standpoint, there were too many openings squeezed into the crux of the L-shaped footprint: the kitchen window, front door, and grilled bathroom window under the covered porch with the shuttered master bathroom window just beyond. The redesign provided more visual breathing space around the front door and greater bathroom privacy for the house's occupants.

**History:** The Rancher was the only direct carryover of an earlier model in Levitt and Sons 1961 product line used to open Belair.<sup>1</sup> The firm previously approached one-story models with caution because their comparative cost per square foot was greater than similarly-sized multistory houses; however the company could not entirely ignore the American obsession with one-story “ranch” houses and the easy, casual, family-oriented lifestyle popularly associated with them. The company half-heartedly acknowledged the market potential in 1949 with the Rancher version of its New York Cape Cod, which was followed by a three-year experiment with thousands of single-story Levittowners in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Levitt and Sons devised a one-story model known initially as House B for its New Jersey subdivision, which opened in 1958. The model's contribution to a more varied streetscape was probably its most compelling attribute. House B sold poorly and within a year was replaced by an entirely new one-story model that Levitt and Sons developed for both New Jersey and for the new development being planned for the Maryland exurbs, or outermost suburbs, of Washington.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to its immediate predecessor, the new Rancher model quickly became a favorite among buyers. For the exterior of the L-shaped house, the company created two traditional facade variations, one with a gable roof facing front and one with a hip roof. Eighteen months after opening sales at Belair, Levitt eliminated the hip-roofed version

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<sup>1</sup> The 1961 product line was also used in new sections of Levittown, New Jersey, where the number of marketed models increased from the original three (a one-story, a one-and-one-half story, and a two-story) to six (The Rancher, The Cape Cod, three- and four-bedroom versions of The Colonial—each with a distinct front elevation, and two luxury models: The Country Clubber and The Manor House).

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of Levittown, New York, models, see Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); for an overview of Levittown, Pennsylvania, see “Technology: The Most House for the Money,” *Fortune* 46 (Oct. 1952): 150-56+.

<sup>3</sup> “Look How Bill Levitt Is Meeting the Changing Market: More House, More Money, More Value,” *House & Home* 16 (Sep. 1959): 138-143, for one-story model redesign. Levitt and Sons had been planning Belair since late in 1957 and the firm would have had both markets in mind with the design of what became known as The Rancher.

and refined the other by lowering the roof pitch and lining-up the ridges of the two wings, and cladding some of the exterior in sandstone and “hand-split shingles.”<sup>4</sup>

The Rancher’s low-slung profile and conventional neo-colonial detailing on its street elevation presented a blandly appealing face to prospective buyers, masking an undeniably modern interior that incorporated many of the latest planning trends for domestic space and was fully equipped with a full range of appliances and mechanical systems (fig. 1). As found in all of Belair’s houses, The Rancher provided an integral garage, a separate laundry area with standard washing machine and matching clothes dryer, and, most notably, whole house central air conditioning—a luxury at the time expected only in the most expensive new houses.<sup>5</sup> With central air conditioning and laundry equipment offered in all models, most prospective buyers were likely satisfied with kitchens that came equipped with only a stove and refrigerator; only the two highest priced models featured dishwashers and in-sink garbage disposers. Still, the kitchens in all of the models were efficiently arranged with U-shaped layouts and nearly all included provisions for casual dining within or adjacent to the kitchen’s work area, a feature fast becoming indispensable to middle-class buyers.

In addition to a large, equipped kitchen, a front door that did not open directly into the living room, a clearly-defined “formal” dining area, and a second full bathroom topped the list of consumer desires at the time that Levitt and Sons was devising the Belair models. All of these elements were found in the Rancher and contributed to its popularity among buyers. The Rancher’s L-shaped plan was also well-organized with the three bedrooms occupying one wing that was buffered from the most active areas of the house (kitchen, laundry, garage) by the entry hall and formal living and dining rooms, which are situated at the house’s center.

In 1963, the *Washington Post* reported that The Cape Cod and The Rancher were the “two most popular houses” at Belair.<sup>6</sup> Strong sales of The Rancher likely spurred the creation of an expanded variation called The Devon, which Levitt and Sons began offering in 1964. The Devon was, at its core, a Rancher that had been enlarged with the insertion of a standalone family room between the garage and the kitchen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For revamped model, see: “Unveiled by Levitt,” *The Washington Post* 3 Mar. 1962, sec. D: 7, and “New Rancher Popular at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 31 Mar. 1962, sec. D: 7.

<sup>5</sup> Levitt and Sons, Inc., “Belair at Bowie, Maryland,” 1962, for information about included features and amenities. In author’s collection.

<sup>6</sup> “Cape Cod, Rancher Popular at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 14 Sep. 1963, sec. D: 16.

<sup>7</sup> “Ranch Model Is Enlarged,” *The Washington Post* 21 Mar. 1964, sec. E: 11; “New Rambler Shown at Belair,” *The Washington Post* 6 Jun. 1964, sec. E: 21. In 1967, Levitt and Sons began offering another, more modest, new one-story model “intended to attract newly married couples and people of retirement age.” It was smaller than The Rancher and contained within a compact, rectangular footprint. Despite its size, it competed well with the other models because of its generous front-facing portico. A furnished display house was constructed at the exhibit and sales center on Sussex Drive. “New Levitt Model,” *The Washington Post* 13 May 1967, sec. C: 34.

**Selected Bibliography:**

“Bill Levitt’s Third Big Town: More Value for Less Money.” House & Home 80 (Aug. 1958): 72-85.

“Cape Cod, Rancher Popular at Belair.” The Washington Post 14 Sep. 1963. Sec. D: 16.

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“New Levitt Model.” The Washington Post 13 May 1967. Sec. C: 34.

“New Rambler Shown at Belair.” The Washington Post 6 Jun. 1964. Sec. E: 21.

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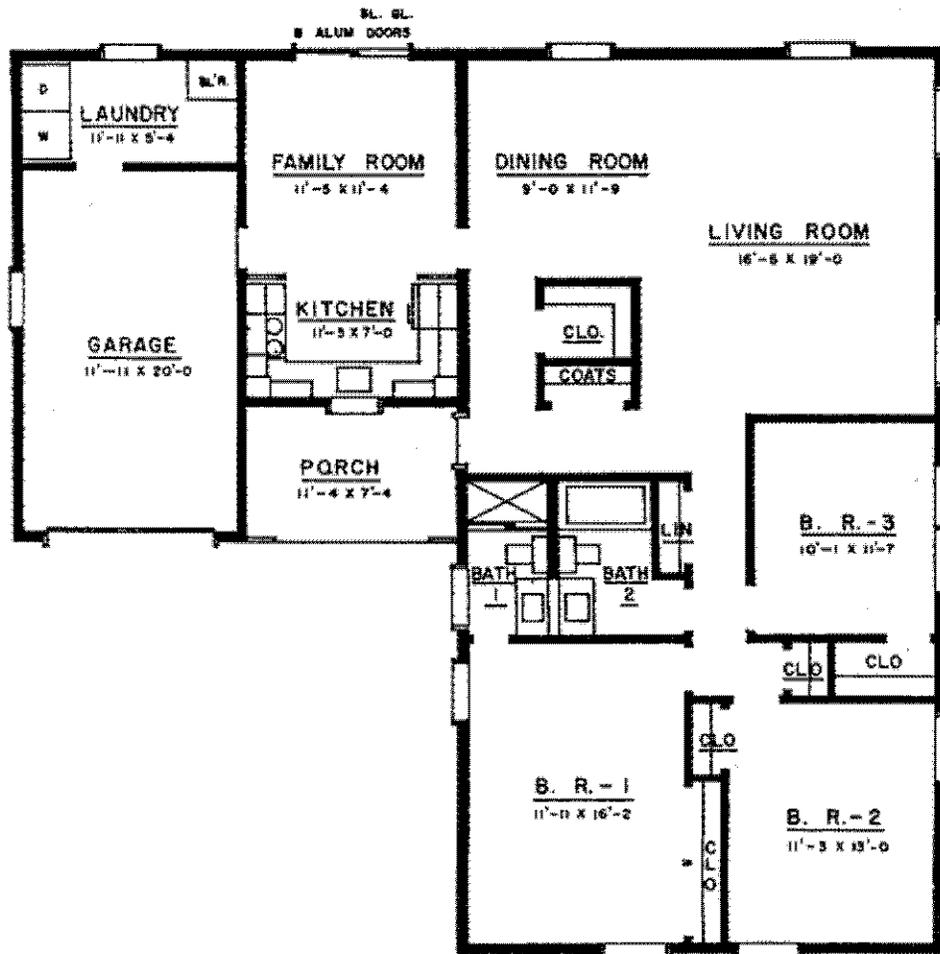
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**Project Information:**

The project was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. Support was provided by Stephen E. Patrick, Director of Museums, City of Bowie. The documentation of Belair at Bowie, Maryland, was undertaken by HABS, Richard O’Connor, Acting Chief, Heritage Documentation Programs; under the direction of Catherine C. Lavoie, Acting Chief, HABS. The project leader was HABS historian James A. Jacobs. The documentation was produced in 2006-08, written history by HABS historian James A. Jacobs and large-format photography by HABS photographer James Rosenthal.

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**APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS**



FLOOR PLAN

**Fig. 1.** The Rancher model, floor plan, 1964. The plan for the house at 12408 Stonehaven Lane was slightly different from the one depicted above, which exhibits some of the changes made to The Rancher between 1960 and 1964. As originally designed, the laundry was located in the large walk-in closet between the main entry and the dining room. The rear of the garage was later partitioned-off and the laundry relocated there along with the heating equipment, which was formerly positioned in a closet in the bedroom wing. In its early form, The Rancher's bathrooms were oriented so that both had exterior windows; repositioning the bathrooms and eliminating the hall closet with the furnace allowed for a larger master bedroom and provided greater privacy for the bathrooms. Author's collection.