

COLONIAL VILLAGE SHOPPING CENTER
1711-1731 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington
Virginia

HABS VA-1444
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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COLONIAL VILLAGE SHOPPING CENTER

HABS No. VA-1444

Location: 1711-31 Wilson Boulevard, in the Fort Myer Heights/Rosslyn area, near the Colonial Village apartment complex, in Arlington County, Virginia.

The coordinates for the Colonial Village Shopping Center are 38.894292N, 77.078947W; these were obtained using Google Earth in August 2010 and, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Description: The Colonial Village Shopping Center is a low-scale commercial building with a parking forecourt that faces Wilson Boulevard. It is one-story in height and rectilinear in appearance. The shopping center was built of bricks laid in 6:1 American bond and has a cross-gable roof, plus a flat roof covering each end unit and the service areas. Colonial Revival details ornament the roofline, including a balustrade and an entablature with a boxed ogee cornice. Originally built for eight stores, each with a central entrance flanked by plate glass windows, the interiors have been altered over the years and partition walls inserted.

Date: 1937. The shopping center was part the innovative garden apartment complex known as Colonial Village that was developed by Gustave Ring. The complex was constructed in phases, and the shopping center was one of the modern amenities included in the initial plans. The architect of the first three phases of the development of Colonial Village, work that took place between 1935 and 1937, was Harvey Warwick. His oversight lent a continuity of design and architectural character to the endeavor, a cohesion that has remained intact. The shopping center remains integral to the Colonial Village community, and its accessibility to passers-by on Wilson Boulevard ensures its vitality.

History: During the 1930s a steady influx of people moved to Washington, D.C., and environs as part of the burgeoning federal government, working in New Deal programs and later in defense related industries in preparation for war. Arlington County was no exception. In this decade some 40 percent of Arlingtonians would be employed in public service; many were commuters. As a result, residential and commercial construction projects abounded, especially in the suburbs and included a myriad of apartment complexes and what would become the neighborhood shopping center. The shopping center could be an independent venture, located near a residential community, or be part of the planned development. Such duality of purpose was encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration, the agency insuring many of the apartment buildings and complexes. Unlike a downtown Main Street, the neighborhood shopping centers

clustered between seven to twenty tenants in one structure and offered off-street parking.¹

Automobile culture defined the design for the shopping centers, assuring the presence of a parking forecourt that occupied a significant portion of the lot with one or more rows of diagonal spaces. The low-scale shopping centers were generally one story in height. The individual retail stores were contiguous to one another, each fronting on the parking lot. All of the stores had an entrance accessed directly from the lot.²

Following Arthur B. Heaton's (1930) *Park and Shop* on Connecticut Avenue were another twenty-five or so neighborhood shopping centers erected throughout the D.C. suburbs up until the United States' entry into the Second World War in 1941. The innovative *Park and Shop* served as the model for these shopping centers, both in D.C. and throughout the country as a whole, as the type emerged during the 1930s. At least eleven neighborhood shopping centers of this genre were constructed in Arlington County before the war. In fact, by 1941, neighborhood shopping centers appeared on almost every major thoroughfare in the county. There were four on North Glebe Road, including the Glebe Center (HABS No. VA-1436), plus three on Columbia Pike and two on Wilson Boulevard, one of which was Colonial Village.³

Sources: This summary is drawn from survey work completed by Laura Trieschmann, EHT Traceries, and the Arlington County Historic Preservation Office, as well as a site visit in December 2010 with the HABS Photographer, James Rosenthal.

Historian: Virginia B. Price, 2011.

¹ See Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-41," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 51 (March 1992): 5-34; Laura Trieschmann and Carrie Albee, "Glebe Center," Nomination July 2003, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, who cite Carl B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Baltimore: Port City Press, Inc., 1976), 247-48. See also, www.arlingtonva.us/deaprtments/CPHD, accessed April 2011.

² Longstreth, 11.

³ Sara Amy Leach, "Mihran Mesrobian's Suburban Virginia Garden Apartments and Shopping Centers," Paper presented at Beyond the Mall, Washington, D.C., December 1994; Trieschmann and Albee, sec. 8, 6-8; Longstreth, 17, 33 (appendix).