

NO ERASURE: PRESERVING THE STORY OF COLLEGE HOMES IN  
KNOXVILLE, TN

A Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Built in 1939–40 and razed in 1998, College Homes was a public housing project for African-Americans located in Knoxville, Tennessee. This thesis tells the story of the planning, construction, and eventual demolition of College Homes in order to highlight the project's historic significance and to question the effectiveness of legally binding mitigations when applied to the demolition of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The thesis begins with a historical overview of public housing on both national and local scales. This is followed by an assessment of housing conditions confronting African-American Knoxvilleans during the first third of the twentieth century. Next, the meaning of surveys that quantified these housing conditions and the construction of College Homes are discussed. Chatham Village, designed by Henry Wright, is then presented as a model for the design of College Homes in order to inform the subsequent discussion of the significance of the Knoxville project.

The remainder of the thesis first addresses why, toward the end of the twentieth century, public housing was considered a failure, and how College Homes fit into this judgment. Finally, the historic significance of College Homes is framed through the lens of National Register criteria in order to discuss the efficacy, or lack thereof, of the memorandum of agreement drawn up as mitigation to permit the property's demolition.

The thesis shows that College Homes was indeed historically significant for a variety of reasons, and that memorandums of agreement—in addition to, in this case, being poorly enforced—can be an inadequate means of memorializing a historic property.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joy Samantha Naifeh was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on December 25, 1977. She graduated from John Overton Comprehensive High School with honors in 1996 and in the same year entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where in 2001 she graduated Summa Cum Laude with BAs in History and Anthropology. Matriculating immediately to Cornell University's Master of Historic Preservation Planning program, she eventually graduated in August 2009 with her MA.

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## INTRODUCTION

On November 30, 1998, the demolition of a nearly sixty-year old public housing project in Knoxville, Tennessee began. The impetus for the removal of “College Homes” was a new approach to low-income housing adopted by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), known as HOPE VI. Standing for “Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere,” this program intends to change the perception of public housing and its residents through the creation of mixed-income communities.

Buildings fifty years and older are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Although meeting the qualifications for the Register, College Homes had never been nominated. However, projects involving the federal government that affect historic or potentially historic properties must undergo what is commonly referred to as a Section 106 review.<sup>1</sup> Through this review, an “undertaking” is analyzed by the appropriate authorities, and although preservation cannot be forced, the intent is to make certain that preservation principles are included within the planning and decision-making of federal agencies.<sup>2</sup>

Because the demolition of College Homes was partially financed by the federal government, here HUD, it was subject to a Section 106 review. This review found that although College Homes had historic value, the case made for its replacement under HOPE VI took precedence. Thus College Homes was torn down, albeit not without certain “mitigative measures”<sup>3</sup>: a short written history, photographs, and measured drawings.

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<sup>1</sup> National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as amended, 16 U.S.C. 470f.

<sup>2</sup> Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *Protecting Historic Properties: A Citizen’s Guide to Section 106 Review* (2002), 4. <http://www.achp.gov/citizensguide.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 30 March 1998, between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Washington, DC, the Public Housing Division, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,

This thesis tells the story of College Homes, a pioneering example of public housing in America, in part because it is a story worth knowing, and in part to question the “mitigative measures” settled on by authorities. College Homes—and by extension other public housing projects like it throughout the country—is the physical manifestation of important social movements and was home to generations of people whose stories are rarely told or appreciated. As more of these projects are lost to redevelopment and their only recordation/memorialization is through the Section 106 process and its memorandum of agreement (MOA), fewer and fewer extant examples of these communities are left. As they become scarcer, their preservation is increasingly imperative.

To understand why public housing projects such as College Homes are important, one must first be made aware of their roles in U.S. history along with the events and policies in U.S. history that gave birth to them. Chapter 1 addresses this. For further context, Chapter 2 gives a general historical background of the city (Knoxville, Tennessee) and neighborhood (Mechanicsville) where College Homes was situated. Chapter 3 especially addresses those conditions affecting Knoxville’s African-American community that College Homes was intended to rectify. The surveys establishing the need for College Homes in the eyes of the government and the housing project’s subsequent construction are the subjects of Chapter 4. Chapter 5 deals with College Homes’s potential design legacy, while Chapter 6 tackles what, exactly, made College Homes special and worth more than the paltry “mitigative measures” assigned to it. Chapter 7 addresses why, at the dawn of the new millennium, these testaments to liberal social ideology were deemed failures and slated for redevelopment, and summarizes the goals the redevelopment is hoped to accomplish. Chapter 8 shows how College Homes fit into the issues outlined in

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the Tennessee Historical Commission, and Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, Knoxville, TN, 2.



Chapter 7, and last, Chapter 9 summarizes the significance of College Homes through the lens of National Register of Historic Places criteria and directly addresses the Section 106 process surrounding and the memorandum of agreement executed for College Homes.

## **CHAPTER 1: PUBLIC HOUSING IN AMERICA IN THE 1930s**

The history of College Homes’s establishment is multifaceted, and to grasp the project’s importance it is imperative to explore each component individually. An obvious first question could be, “Why does America even have public housing projects like College Homes?” This chapter endeavors to answer this question through a brief analysis of not only governmental policy initiatives but also their sociological underpinnings.

### **Public Housing Is Born**

Up until the early twentieth century, housing for the poor in the United States was an endeavor benevolent individuals and organizations, not the federal government. Although as early as 1909 a presidential commission suggested that a “little government aid [be] extended to these unfortunates in the form of a loan to build them habitable dwellings,”<sup>1</sup> it took the Great Depression and the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency with his New Deal Administration to spur the United States government wholeheartedly into the civilian housing business.<sup>2</sup>

However, this commitment’s main focuses were job creation and economic recovery. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), passed barely a month after FDR’s March 1933 inauguration, established the Public Works Administration (PWA), an organization charged, according to its head Harold L. Ickes, with the responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Moore Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing: Economic Aspects of the Federal Program* (New York: Harper, 1959), 74.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the public housing movement from 1900 to 1930 and beyond, see Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*; Michael S. FitzPatrick, “A Disaster in Every Generation: An Analysis of HOPE VI: HUD’s Newest Big Budget Development Plan,” *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* 7, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 421–48; and Nathaniel Schnieder Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973).

not only to provide work on worth-while and socially desirable public works projects; it was our especial duty to provide work as quickly as possible in the hope that the calling of men back to work at fair wages would have the effect of setting in motion the mired wheels of commerce and industry.<sup>3</sup>

More specifically in terms of public housing, the NIRA authorized the “construction, reconstruction, alteration, or repair under public regulation and control of low-cost housing and slum-clearance projects.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, the Housing Division of the PWA, first, administered a limited-dividend program<sup>5</sup> until 1934, which was then dropped in favor of direct financing and construction by the Housing Division itself.<sup>6</sup>

The Division could either buy or condemn the land needed for the project, and once built, it managed the facility. However, with the advent of two court cases in 1935, *United States v. Certain Lands in the City of Louisville (KY)*<sup>7</sup> and *New York City Housing Authority vs. Muller*,<sup>8</sup> the government looked to the devolution of power, meaning more local development and control over the public housing program. In *US vs. Louisville*, the court held that it was unconstitutional for the federal government to use the power of eminent domain to condemn private property for low-cost public housing because such housing did not constitute a valid “public purpose.” Thus, from then on, the government had to buy the land, which could prove an expensive

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<sup>3</sup> Harold LeClair Ickes, *Back to Work: The Story of PWA* (New York: MacMillan, 1935), 51.

<sup>4</sup> United States, *American Builds: The Record of PWA, Public Works Administration* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1939), 41.

<sup>5</sup> The goal of a limited dividend program is the production of affordable units. A law is passed authorizing the establishment of housing companies that will receive incentives to build such units if they meet certain requirements and limit the dividend company investors receive. For example, the 1926 New York State Limited Dividend Housing Companies Act bestowed the ability to condemn property on companies as well as receive municipal real estate tax abatements if dividends were restricted to six percent, rents were kept low, and low-income tenants were given priority in housing. Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 151.

<sup>6</sup> Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis since 1930*, 23, 27–28; Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, 81–85.

<sup>7</sup> *United States v. Certain Lands in the City of Louisville*, 9 F. Supp. 137 (W.D. 1935).

<sup>8</sup> *New York Housing Authority v. Muller*, 270 N.Y. 333 (Ct. of Appeals 1935).

endeavor when clearing slum sites in the middle of a city. *NYCHA vs. Muller* proved to be a saving grace for public housing. Here it was held that although the federal government could not exercise eminent domain for housing, local authorities could. Therefore, the Housing Division began to pressure states to enact enabling legislation authorizing the establishment of state and local housing agencies to which it could pass the torch of public housing construction and management.<sup>9</sup>

The George-Healey Act of 1936 relinquished the federal government's authority over public housing facilities in criminal and civil matters, set the rent schedule, approved payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs), and established eligibility requirements for residents. Rents were to be large enough to cover the operation of the project as well as to pay down fifty-five percent of the construction cost over the course of sixty years (the other forty-five percent was an outright grant by the federal government). The PILOTs were paid by the United States government to the state or locality because, as a rule, federally owned property is exempt from property taxes. Last, tenants were to be families who could not afford to live in "decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings and under other than overcrowded housing conditions,"<sup>10</sup> and the family's income could not be more than five times the rent.

Despite all the activity associated with the Housing Division of the PWA, the federal government's involvement in housing the poor was still temporary. It was not until the passage of the United States Housing Act of 1937, also called the Wagner-Steagall Act, that "subsidized public housing [became] a permanent, national policy in this country."<sup>11</sup> So too was the decentralization of public housing in America solidified, as "responsibility for its initiation, execution, ownership, and management

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<sup>9</sup> Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, 85–89; Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis since 1930*, 27–29; United States, *America Builds*, 217; Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 223–25.

<sup>10</sup> Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, 88.

<sup>11</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, *Introduction to Housing: Facts and Principles* (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1940), 123.

[was placed] on the local communities.”<sup>12</sup> The act established the United States Housing Authority (USHA), a body that not only set the regulations for the public housing program but also was its financial backbone. The terms of the George-Healey Act discussed above were changed slightly and included in the 1937 Housing Act. The USHA could lend up to ninety percent of the financing, with repayment in the same manner as previously. Accordingly, local public housing authorities (PHAs) were now responsible for only ten percent of a project’s capital. This could come either by supplying services or land, or by selling bonds that were not considered part of a municipality’s debt burden. The “five times the rent” stipulation was still intact, though it was raised to six times for a family with three or more children. And, in order to maintain rents low enough for the very poor, the “concept of annual Federal subsidies to local housing authorities to provide housing for the poor at rents geared to their ability to pay”<sup>13</sup> was established, and it exists to this day.<sup>14</sup> It was under this arrangement that College Homes and many other public housing projects like it were built before World War II.

#### Slum Clearance: A Clean Slate

Thus public housing became a national priority in the 1930s under the PWA. Depression-era efforts were focused on the “greater good” of job creation and economic recovery; projects were to “provide work on worth-while and socially desirable public works.”<sup>15</sup> In relation to the housing of the time, such projects meant the clearance of slums and the blight in communities.

Slums, as defined by the 1937 Act, were places where the health, safety, and morals of residents were adversely affected as a result of the majority of homes

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>13</sup> Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis since 1930*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Fisher, *Twenty Years of Public Housing*, 87; Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 124–25.

<sup>15</sup> Ickes, *Back to Work*, 51.

suffering from not only bad design, disrepair, and overcrowding, but also a lack of running water, proper sanitary facilities, adequate heat and air, and the like.<sup>16</sup> People lived in such squalor because it was all they could afford; they were poor. As the noted housing reformer Catherine Bauer wrote:

Every day there is new evidence to show that tuberculosis and rickets, infant mortality and infectious diseases, death-dealing fires and street accidents, juvenile delinquency and adult crime, occur at a vastly higher rate in congested or insanitary neighborhoods than they do in good residential areas . . .<sup>17</sup>

Slums were also blamed for draining city coffers. Property taxes, if even collected, were disproportionately less than the increased cost of providing these areas with the additional municipal fire and police protection, health care, and judicial overview they tended to require. Practitioners of the time recognized that this criminal behavior and general estrangement from society was not inherent to the race of slum-dwellers or simply to the decrepit slum-house; it was the product of sentiments, habits, and attitudes associated with the hopelessness of the slum lifestyle. Slum life was self-perpetuating; being in the midst of such a concentration of ills blocked one from shaking off the shackles of poverty. The best way to rid the world of this life and its related evils was to raze the slum, to wipe the slate clean by eradicating the blight. Thus slum residents would no longer be surrounded by such damaging influences; they could start anew as healthier and better citizens.<sup>18</sup> Again in Bauer's words, completing the quote above, ". . . or in the new projects housing families who come directly from slum homes"<sup>19</sup> (see Figure 1A and 1B).

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<sup>16</sup> Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Bauer, *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1940), 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16; R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 182; Ickes, *Back to Work*, 179–81; Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 55, 60, 133.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer, *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing*, 3.

**Figure 1.1. Newspaper cartoons.** These newspaper cartoons (A, B) from the era spotlight the high hopes for slum clearance found around the country. Reproduced from United States Housing Authority, *What the Housing Act Can Do for Your City* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1938), 80–81.



PITTSBURGH PRESS

To the More Abundant Life



NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN

A



Figure 1.1 (Continued)



BALTIMORE SUN



NEW ORLEANS TIMES PICAYUNE



NEW ORLEANS TIMES PICAYUNE



WASHINGTON POST

B

Up until the New Deal the federal government had little to do with housing the country's poor. Initially meant only as a provisional measure to combat the economic atrocities of the Great Depression, with the creation of USHA by the Housing Act of 1937, the government became permanently invested in not only sheltering the nation's low-income populace but also eradicating the slums from which most of these people came. One of these projects, College Homes, was built in Knoxville, Tennessee.

## CHAPTER 2: KNOXVILLE/KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE, AND THE MECHANICSVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD

Though now armed with an understanding of early public housing in the United States, in order to unravel College Homes' significance one must understand a bit about the city and neighborhood where it was built. Presented here is a short background on Knoxville, Tennessee, as well as a characterization of this city's African-American citizenry and one of their settlement patterns during the nineteenth century.

### Knoxville/Knox County

Named after General Henry Knox, George Washington's Secretary of War,<sup>1</sup> Knoxville and Knox County were established in 1792<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2.1). Nestled on the north bank of the Tennessee River between First and Second creeks, the original settlement served early on as the capital of Tennessee,<sup>3</sup> until this was moved to Nashville in 1826.<sup>4</sup> Once dethroned, Knoxville filled the role of a trade center for local agriculture and as a stop for those traveling to and from Nashville. Knoxville's growth was steady, but slow, until after the Civil War, for one simple reason: topography.

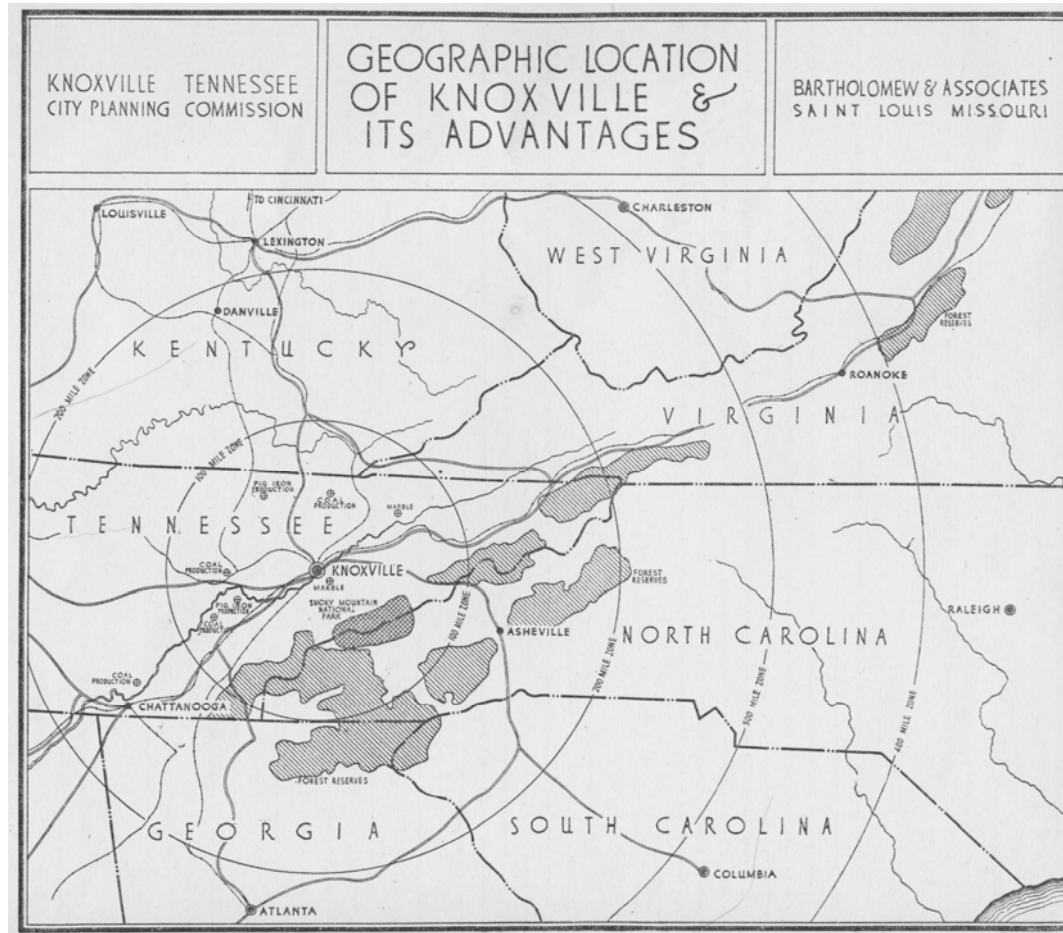
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<sup>1</sup> Victor Albert Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville, Tennessee* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1939), 2; William Rule, George F. Mellen, and J. Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee with Full Outline of the Natural Advantages, Early Settlement, Territorial Government, Indian Troubles, and General and Particular History of the City Down to the Present Time* (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1900), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Though 1792 is usually considered the year of the city's establishment, the first sixteen lots were surveyed in 1791, while the city seal has the date 1794. Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> The area that became Tennessee was organized as the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio in 1790 with Knoxville as its capital. Knoxville remained the capital when the area was granted statehood in 1796. Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 5; and William J. MacArthur, Jr., "Knoxville's History: An Interpretation," in *Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee*, ed. Lucile Deaderick (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1976), 5.

<sup>4</sup> William J. MacArthur Jr., *Knoxville, Crossroads of the New South: A Pictorial and Entertaining Commentary of the Growth and Development of Knoxville, TN* (Tulsa, OK: Continental Heritage Press, 1982), 2–3; Mary U. Rothrock, ed., *The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee* (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1946), 32, 36; Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville*, 37.



**Figure 2.1. “Geographic Location of Knoxville and Its Advantages.”** Reproduced from City Planning Commission and Harland Bartholomew & Associates, *A Report on a System of Major Streets for Knoxville, TN* (Knoxville: City Planning Commission, 1927), 8, plate 1.

Creeks, rivers, and parallel ridges of rocks have shaped the evolution of both the county and city. These have dictated land use—agricultural, industrial, and commercial—in addition to the location and types of transportation routes. These characteristics would have profound effects on the type of city Knoxville was to become and, consequently, set this area of Tennessee apart from the rest of the state and the region.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, “[u]nlike so many cities below the Mason-Dixon line, Knoxville represents a transitional type of city between the typical Northern and Southern city types.”<sup>6</sup>

Agriculturally, cotton did not become “king” here as it did in the rest of Tennessee and in the future members of the Confederate States of America.<sup>7</sup> Quite anecdotally, Mary Rothrock states that it was only between 1802 and 1807 that cotton inspectors were appointed by the county court, prompting her to wonder “if it took just five years to learn that merchantable cotton could not be grown profitably in Knox County.”<sup>8</sup> For the most part, the people of East Tennessee were merchants or small farmers, and to that end these farms tended to be smaller compared with others throughout the South. For example, the 1860 census showed only one farm in the county with over 1,000 acres. Of a total 2,397 farms, 957 fell between twenty and fifty acres. Plantations were not the norm. As a result, East Tennessee farmers did not need large amounts of slave labor. In fact, most slaves were found in Knoxville proper. In 1850, slaves composed 22 percent of the city’s population and only 10 percent of the county’s. Those in Knoxville were most likely domestic servants. Overall, slaves were a small proportion of the antebellum populace, setting the stage for blacks to compose

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<sup>5</sup> Aelred J. Gray and Mrs. Susan F. Adams, “Government,” in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 73; Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 14; MacArthur, “Knoxville’s History,” in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 23; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 13, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 308; Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville*, 195.

<sup>8</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 64. It was 1820 when the last cotton was ginned in Knoxville. *Ibid.*, 75.

a lesser share of Knoxville's and Knox County's population than in other Southern cities that carries through to this day.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of East Tennessee's many rivers, various natural obstacles prevented water routes from becoming viable options for transportation in that region.<sup>10</sup>

Turnpikes proved difficult to construct and maintain. The railroad was seen by citizens of the time as the region's only real path to economic growth:

Railroads are the *only hope* of East Tennessee. With them she would be everything a patriot would desire;—without them, she will continue to be, what she is, and what she has been, a depressed and languishing region—too unpromising to invite capital or enterprise from abroad, or retain that which may grow up in her own bosom. They are the only improvement at all suited to her condition.<sup>11</sup>

The first train entered Knoxville on June 22, 1855; by 1858 the city was connected to all the major metropolises of the South, North, and East. With the discovery of massive coal deposits in the surrounding counties between 1840 and 1850, the city had the necessary resources to finally take part in the Industrial Revolution and therefore to launch itself into fiscal prosperity. Then came the devastation of the Civil War. Although not evident at the time, the Civil War proved to be a watershed in the creation of College Homes, three-quarters of a century later. The War of the Rebellion facilitated the more integrated involvement of African-Americans in Knoxville's economic revolution.<sup>12</sup>

In 1871 it was written in reference to Knoxville that “no city of the south except Atlanta has improved more rapidly since the war.”<sup>13</sup> Knoxvillians were carrying on the economic expansion that had begun in the 1850s by again capitalizing

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<sup>9</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 40, 74, 79, 127, 308.

<sup>10</sup> Edwin P. Patton, “Transportation Development,” in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 179; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 93, 100.

<sup>11</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 24; MacArthur, “Knoxville's History,” 23; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 106–7, 220.

<sup>13</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 220–21.

commercially on the well-connected nature of the city's railroads. Job opportunities abounded; Knoxville became a focus for wholesale trade and manufacturing, and served as a distribution point for the exploitation of natural resources in nearby areas. Suburbs began to sprout up around the city proper as the population blossomed in response to the burgeoning economy, with Knox County (exclusive of the city) increasing from 20,308 to 41,665 residents between 1870 and 1900. Likewise, Knoxville became a city during this time span, by adding 23,955 citizens over the same period.<sup>14</sup> Particularly marked was the growth from the 1880s to the 1890s. Over the span of this decade the county population grew by 52 percent, while the city experienced a 132 percent<sup>15</sup> increase. Included in this surge were 4,000 free blacks, products of emancipation who "manifested a strong inclination for town life,"<sup>16</sup> arriving in Knoxville by the trainload in search of jobs. It was the railroads in addition to the iron and marble industries that provided employment to many of the African-Americans who took part in the population boom. Coincidentally, many of these establishments were located in and around a new suburb of Knoxville called Mechanicsville.<sup>17</sup>

### Mechanicsville

There is a distinct possibility that blacks lived as squatters in the area that became Mechanicsville before the Civil War. However, Mechanicsville, the future Knoxville neighborhood where College Homes would be located, did not actually exist in name until 1870. Colonel Charles McClung McGhee developed the original

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<sup>14</sup> This was the result not only of rapid in-migration but also of annexations. This is why the number given for the county is exclusive of the city.

<sup>15</sup> This includes both annexations and standard in-migration.

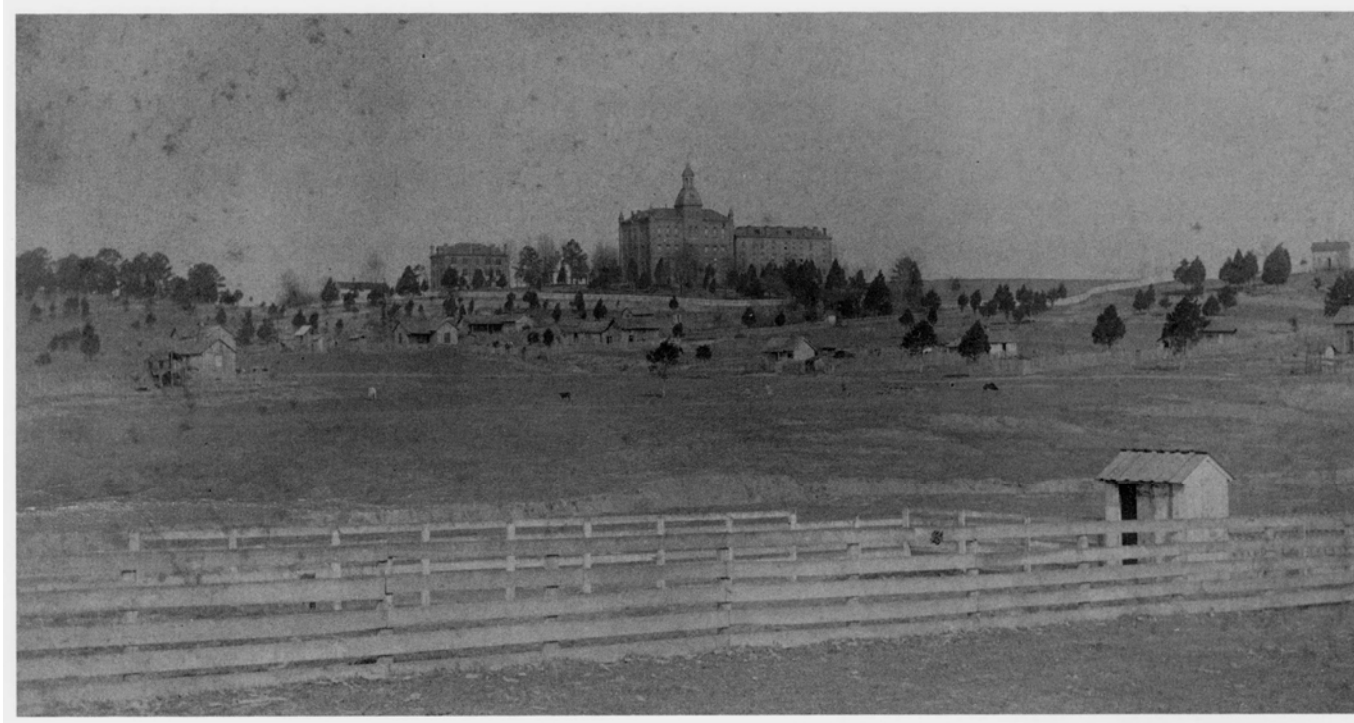
<sup>16</sup> Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 143.

<sup>17</sup> "Appendix B," in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 626; Gray and Adams, "Government," 74, 83, 99; Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville*, 35; MacArthur, "Knoxville's History," 29–30, 32, 46; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 89, 109, 143, 199, 220–21, 312–13; Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville*, 137.

**Figure 2.2. “Annexations and Undeveloped Areas.”** Reproduced from City Planning Commission and Harland Bartholomew & Associates, *A Report on a System of Major Streets for Knoxville, TN* (Knoxville: City Planning Commission, 1927), 12, plate 3.







**Figure 2.3. Knoxville College campus.** “The circa 1892 view of the campus [Knoxville College] is from the corner of College Street and University Avenue.” College Homes was to be built on the field in the foreground. Reproduced from Robert J. Booker, *And There Was Light!: The 120-Year History of Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1875-1995*, (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co., 1994), 21.

portion of the neighborhood, McGhee's Addition, on what was then the northwest fringe of the city proper as a "working and middle class"<sup>18</sup> or "residential and industrial"<sup>19</sup> suburb in 1867 as the city's population burgeoned during the post-Civil War era.<sup>20</sup> The initial thrust for settlement was most likely in response to the growth initiated by Knoxville's railroad development of the 1850s and the establishment of the Knoxville Iron Company by 1868. This was the first of many manufacturing firms to be attracted initially toward and then across Second Creek by its available water supply as well as the accessibility of the nearby railroads mentioned previously. By 1880 Mechanicsville was estimated to have 2,000 residents. In 1882 a measure was passed authorizing the annexation of Mechanicsville by Knoxville, and in 1882 or 1883<sup>21</sup> the community became the city's 9th Ward (see Figure 2.2).<sup>22</sup>

As referred to previously, Mechanicsville was home to many industries that employed African-Americans, such as the railroads, but the single most important of these was probably the Iron Company. By 1869 the Knoxville Iron Company was the city's principal manufacturer, and throughout the latter nineteenth century it was Knoxville's leading employer. As the Iron Company continued to operate in its original location until 1903, it was instrumental in the settlement of Mechanicsville.

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<sup>18</sup> MacArthur, "Knoxville's History," 32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> First sale by Charles M. McGhee listing McGhee's Addition was made November 1867. Personal communication with Eric Head of the Knox County Archives November 22, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> There seems to be a contradiction as to when Mechanicsville was actually annexed. Gray and Adams write on page 84 in their chapter "Government" that Mechanicsville became part of Knoxville January 1, 1883, yet further down the same page say it was 1882. Later on in the same chapter the date is again cited as 1883 (102). A map from Knoxville's Metropolitan Planning Commission reproduced between pages 50 and 51 in MacArthur's chapter "Knoxville's History" also has the date of 1882. Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, however, mark the date as 1883. Gray and Adams, "Government"; MacArthur, "Knoxville's History"; Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville*, 406.

<sup>22</sup> "Appendix B," in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 626; Robert J. Booker, *The History of Blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee: The First One Hundred Years, 1791-1891* (Knoxville: Beck Cultural Exchange Center, 1990), 69; W. Russell Briscoe, "Commerce and Industry," in Deaderick, *Heart of the Valley*, 413; Nissa Dahlin Brown, "Mechanicsville Historic District," *National Register Nomination*, 1980, Section 8, p. 1; Gray and Adams, "Government," 84; MacArthur, "Knoxville's History," 32, 42; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 83-84, 146, 222, 626; Rule, Mellen, and Wooldridge, *Standard History of Knoxville*, 208, 406.

More specifically, because the majority of its employees were either Welsh or black, it was the nucleus around which this community coalesced.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, there was another impetus for the settlement of blacks in the area that occurred contemporaneously with the creation of what was to become Mechanicsville: the founding of Knoxville College, a historically black institution, in 1876 (see Figure 2.3). Though not officially part of the city until 1917—then becoming Knoxville’s 21st Ward—from the beginning, the college and its surrounding neighborhood were considered part of the city because it was located just outside the northwesternmost perimeter of what was annexed in 1883 (see Figure 2.2). It was written that the school “established Mechanicsville’s reputation as an ‘aristocratic’ black neighborhood.”<sup>24</sup> And, as can well be imagined, the college has proved to be a locus for Knoxville’s African-American community since its inception.<sup>25</sup>

Because Knoxville was a transitional city between those typical of the Northern and Southern United States, its industries allowed it to prosper after the Civil War. Taking part in the flourishing economy were newly emancipated slaves. Despite composing a small segment of the city’s general population, they laid the foundations for the Mechanicsville neighborhood to become a thriving black community by the turn of the twentieth century. Yet toward the end of World War I this community was in trouble.

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, “Mechanicsville Historic District,” 2; MacArthur, “Knoxville’s History,” 47; Rothrock, *French Broad-Holston Country*, 222, 313.

<sup>24</sup> Booker, *The History of Blacks in Knoxville*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Knoxville Housing Authority, *Real Property Inventory and Low Income Housing Area Survey, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1939* (Sponsor: City of Nashville, Co-Sponsor: Knoxville Housing Authority. Work Projects Administration Project No. 665-44-3-11. A Study of Housing, Land Utilization, Family Composition, Population Growth. James S. Johnston, Director of Survey, 1939), 72; MacArthur, “Knoxville’s History,” 50.

### CHAPTER 3: BLACK LIFE IN KNOXVILLE: 1900–1939

As mentioned in *Slum Clearance: A Clean Slate*, the Housing Act of 1937 defined slums as places where the health, safety, and morals of residents were adversely affected as a result of the majority of homes suffering not only from bad design, disrepair, and overcrowding, but also from a lack of running water, proper sanitary facilities, adequate heat and air, and the like.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to put a face, so to speak, on this statement. The chapter will help bring into focus what an important public housing project College Homes was to both Knoxville and its black residents by specifically addressing those conditions affecting the black community that public housing was intended to rectify.

It is best to begin this chapter with a descriptive passage from someone who grew up within the squalor. Reverend James H. Robinson provided his recollections of daily life and housing conditions in his predominately black, low-income Knoxville neighborhood (see Figure 3.1).<sup>2</sup> While his memories may have been somewhat embellished by the passage of time, the vivid picture he paints encapsulates an average poor black's living arrangement in the city of Knoxville during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Robinson wrote that the buildings were “hardly more than rickety shacks, clustered on stilts,”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore,

The houses were drab and unpainted and hardly any could boast unbroken window panes. Here and there stood a dilapidated fence, only one having what had once passed for a gate. Parents were poor and their raggedy little children

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, *Introduction to Housing: Facts and Principles* (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1940), 22.

<sup>2</sup> James Herman Robinson, *Road Without Turning, The Story of Reverend James H. Robinson; an Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1950), 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson later explains that these stilts were actually brick pillars. *Ibid.*, 25.

ran barefooted about the streets, unpaved and with open ditch sewers along the sides.



**Figure 3.1. Reportedly a photo of the Reverend James H. Robinson, date unknown.** Retrieved from <http://wheatoncollege.edu/Library/exhibits/archive/Feb2006/images/Robinson.jpg>.

Sickness was the norm; quarantine signs warning of chicken- and smallpox, T.B., and typhoid fever were all but ignored as people came and went as they pleased. In the summer, homes were roasting, and in the winter they were drafty and cold, despite having fire in the grates and newspaper and rags plugging the cracked clapboard and broken windows.<sup>4</sup>

From his descriptions Robinson appears to have lived in a “shotgun,” a house with a strictly linear plan (see Figure 3.2). Beginning at the slim porch of this “little shack,”<sup>5</sup> one entered the front room and so on, until reaching the kitchen at the back. It had a “shuck-pen roof,”<sup>6</sup> a section added to the original structure that most likely

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18, 24, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 26. A shuck-pen roof is a shed roof, often erected as a lean-to, to cover a simply enclosed room or “pen” with boards, on the rear or side near the rear of a shotgun house. Michael Tomlan, email to author, April 22, 2009.

increased the number of rooms in the house from three to four. Off this was the rear porch, upon which was the tin tub for the Monday wash and the Saturday night bath.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 3.2. Examples of shotgun houses. “Row of ‘Shot Gun’ Houses on King Street.”** Reproduced from Victor Albert Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville, Tennessee*, (master’s thesis, University of Tennessee, 1939), 64A.

Robinson and his brother shared a cornhusk mattress on an iron bed. Their room’s surface was unfinished wood, and the two-by-fours were exposed. The roof was low enough that one could stand on the bed and grab the rafters. It looked as though it had once been painted, but during Robinson’s childhood its wall covering consisted of various religious sayings, oleographs<sup>8</sup> of Jesus and scenes from the Bible, and pictures of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglas, and Booker T. Washington, “objects and personages which held meaning in the lives of poor devout Negroes.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 22–26, 39.

<sup>8</sup> A chromolithograph printed on cloth to imitate an oil painting. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 10th ed., s.v. “oleograph.”

<sup>9</sup> Robinson, *Road Without Turning*, 23.

One moved carefully on the splinter-board floor because of its exposed nail heads and large cracks.<sup>10</sup>

The window in this room with its tattered shade had all its lights,<sup>11</sup> unlike the rest of the house. However, only his father was strong enough to open and close it. Once the window was open, it had to be supported with a broomstick. If Robinson's father was not around and it rained, water came in. Similarly, on windy days dust and sand from the unpaved roads rushed in, "making us bury our heads in our knees and cover our faces with our arms in order to capture enough air to breathe in."<sup>12</sup>

Clothes storage entailed hanging goods behind the door, as there were no closets or drawers for such things. There was no need for these anyway since one wore most of one's clothing except when asleep, and at this point one's clothes lay where one took them off.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of furnishings, there was a chair that remained useable only because its legs and rungs were wired together, and a small undecorated washstand on which was perched a large porcelain washbasin and pitcher. Only one of its drawers had a knob. At night, light was provided by kerosene lamps with round tin reflectors behind them.<sup>14</sup>

With Robinson's characterizations in mind, it is now time to look at the specific issues faced by Knoxville's slum-dwelling blacks. These included employment woes and subsequent problems encountered with the cost of living, decrepit housing, overcrowded conditions, and inadequate water and sewer connections.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22–25.

<sup>11</sup> A "light" is the correct term for what is commonly called a window "pane."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Louise Welles, *Housing Conditions in Knoxville* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1919), 2.



## Employment Woes

During the first third of the 1900s many black men were either itinerant workers, or if they did hold steady jobs, these were in unskilled positions.<sup>16</sup> In 1926 A *Social Study of the Colored Population of Knoxville, Tennessee* found that most unskilled male workers earned from \$2.50 to 2.75 a day for nine to twelve hours of work. Consequently, a head of household could hope to earn at most \$15.00 to 16.50 for a six-day work week. The majority of women were either laundresses or domestics. Those employed by a laundry establishment rather than working from the home labored nine and a half hours and could hope to earn \$7 to \$12 weekly. However, the majority of Knoxville's black women in the late 1920s remained domestic servants. Private families paid maids, on average, \$7 to \$8 per week. This was in return for working twelve-hour days, during which many maids cooked, cleaned, and nursed. Some jobs included both meals and housing, others one of the two. Other women remained domestics but were hired on an hourly or daily basis, receiving twenty to thirty cents an hour.<sup>17</sup>

## Cost of Living

Having depicted the employment opportunities for both genders of the common African-American worker, the discussion necessarily turns to a characterization of the standard of living a family could hope to achieve with the wages earned.

According to the 1926 *Study*, the cost of living for families of five (father, mother, three children) living at the poverty level amounted to \$850 to \$950 annually, or \$900 on average. In comparison, the average maximum the head of a black

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<sup>16</sup> J. H. Daves, *A Social Study of the Colored Population of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: The Free Colored Library, 1926), 4; Robinson, *Road Without Turning*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 4, 6, 7.

household in Knoxville could earn was about \$66 a month or \$792 a year ( $[\$16.50 \times 4] \times 12$ ), \$100 less than the national average and almost \$60 less than the lowest sum considered within the poverty categorization.<sup>18</sup> If the incomes possible for women discussed above were added, families could move up, but at what cost?

### Decrepit Housing

From 1900 to 1939 it seems housing conditions did not improve as the housing stock continued to age. Robinson, the *Study*, Margaret Welles, and Victor Hyde<sup>19</sup> all identify overall living conditions to be poor. Welles wrote in 1919 that most Knoxville homes should really be called shacks. Averaging three to four rooms, they were constructed close to the ground—whether raised slightly by brick “stilts” or actually resting directly on the turf—unpainted, and dingy, “thoroughly unprepossessing affairs.”<sup>20</sup> Of her sample, for example, approximately twenty percent of both white and black homes had leaking roofs and walls.<sup>21</sup> The *Study* found in 1926 that those conveniences deemed necessities by whites continued to be scarce in the black community. There were no bathrooms, lighting was supplied by kerosene lamps, and coal or wood stoves provided the heat, as furnaces were few. Homes were badly built, roofs leaked, wallpaper and plaster hung off walls and ceilings. Surroundings inside and out were filthy, and children walked around half-clothed.<sup>22</sup> By 1939 “Barrack-type flats” and shotgun houses in the area of College Homes were “of unfinished lumber loosely thrown together and stripped”<sup>23</sup> (see Figure 3.3).

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 7.

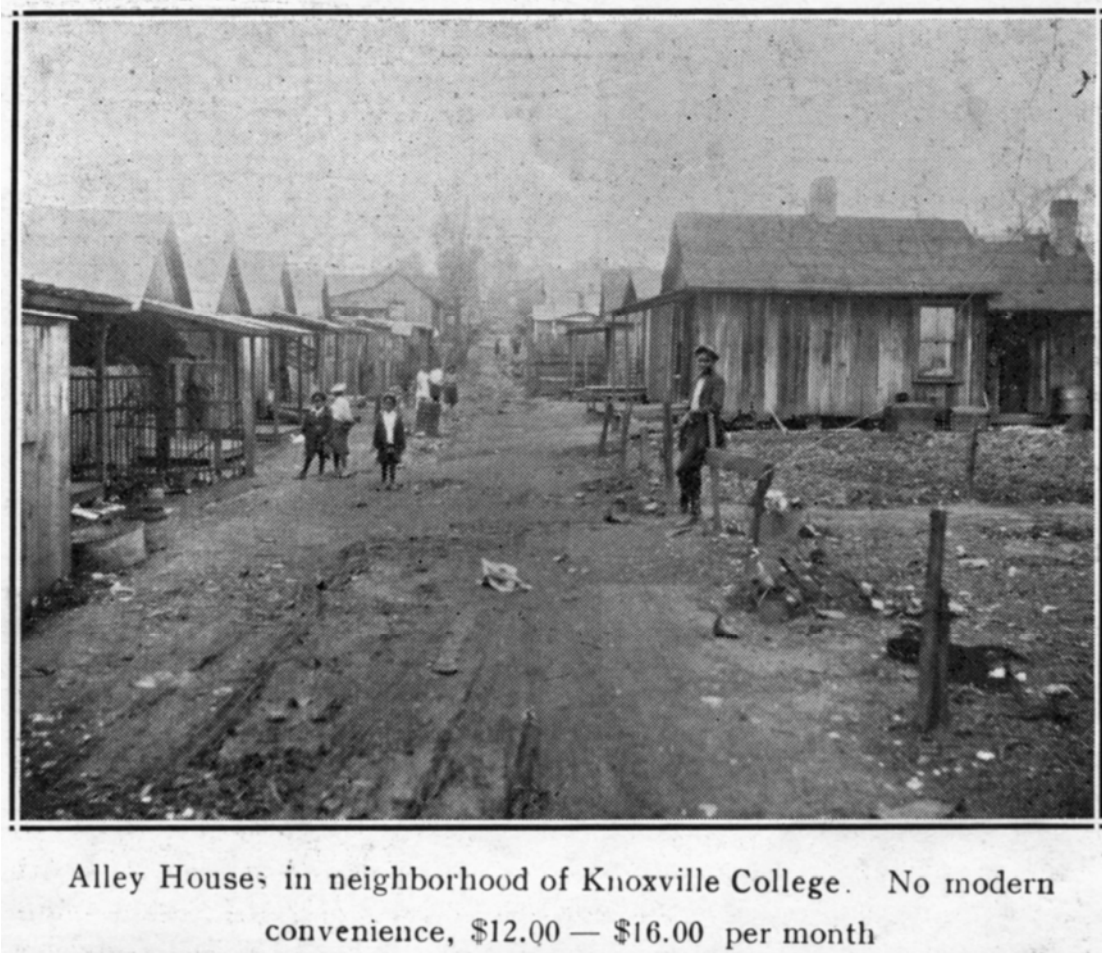
<sup>19</sup> Victor Albert Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville, Tennessee* (master’s thesis, University of Tennessee, 1939).

<sup>20</sup> Welles, *Housing Conditions*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–16, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hyde, *Geographical Study*, 64.



**Figure 3.3. Shotguns in the area of College Homes “of unfinished lumber loosely thrown together and stripped.”** Reproduced from J. H. Daves, *A Social Study of the Colored Population of Knoxville, TN* (Knoxville: The Free Colored Library, 1926), between pages 2 and 3.

#### Overcrowded Conditions

Robinson mentions sharing a bed with his brother. Welles used as her measure of overcrowding Secretary of the National Housing Association Lawrence Veiller’s 1914 *The Model Law for Housing Betterment*. Adults were to have no less than 600 cubic feet of air per room, while children twelve and under were to have 400. The estimated size of those rooms visited by Welles was ten by ten by eight, thus

containing 800 cubic feet of air space.<sup>24</sup> By Veiller’s definition, rooms in Knoxville with two or more people were overcrowded. Therefore, given that there were seven people in Robinson’s family,<sup>25</sup> it was likely that at any one time one or more of the rooms in his house were overcrowded, no matter the age of the occupants.

To make ends meet many families took in roomers/lodgers and boarders; the *Study* described overcrowded conditions exacerbated by the practice. Two particularly egregious instances were in the immediate area of that which was razed for College Homes. On Elmas (now Wilkins Street), a household of twelve lived in four rooms with no electricity, water, or sewage. In the other, on Maria (no longer extant), nine members of one family shared a four-room house with four others, two boarders and two roomers. Of the 3,151 black families assessed by the *Study*, 1,624 or 52 percent took on lodgers. To the *Study* the “lodger evil”<sup>26</sup> was worst in two of the subject neighborhoods, one of these again being the future site of College Homes. Roads specifically singled out for their offenses other than Elmas and Maria were Russell Street (no longer extant) and University Avenue.<sup>27</sup>

#### Inadequate Water and Sewer Connections

Welles made the following observation of the Green Row section of Knoxville:

Fifteen houses . . . use the same hydrant at the end of the street next to Mill Street. These fifteen houses, with five others, use sixteen toilets built together on the creek at the end of the Row. Half of these toilets are without doors. Some of the others are locked and used by only one family. Conditions are horrible.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Welles, *Housing Conditions*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Younger siblings Helen, Wanda Jo Ann, and Walter, older brother William, his mother Willie Belle, and father Henry. *Ibid.*, 24, 32, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Daves, *Social Study*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Welles, *Housing Conditions*, 5–6.

The Reverend Robinson's neighborhood was approximately a half-mile<sup>29</sup> from the aforementioned Mill Street, and a similar situation existed here. Only the four-family structure down the block had running water. Everyone else gathered water from one spigot, "a small galvanized pipe with a faucet at its end, rising out of the yellowish ooze of mud at a crazy angle."<sup>30</sup> The water came from a reservoir up on a hill,<sup>31</sup> and when food was scarce the people of Robinson's community bloated themselves on water.<sup>32</sup>

Other symptoms of Knoxville's insufficient water and sewerage manifest themselves within the home. One of these was dampness: those homes built directly on the ground with no foundations were quite dank. The ground's water content, furthermore, was augmented in some instances by "rather primitive drainage arrangements."<sup>33</sup> Welles found that some houses had no sink under the faucet and thus no piping outside the building or to the sewer. More than one had a hole cut in the kitchen floor for wastewater, which not surprisingly collected in puddles under the house. Or, wastewater was dumped into the yard and subsequently made its way to the street. In either case, such water "became stagnant and was said to be malodorous and a breeding place for insects,"<sup>34</sup> especially during the summer. Many homes also lacked gutters, which allowed rainwater to add to the standing water problems.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Figured using data found via Knoxville/Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission's KGIS online mapping software KNOX net *Where?* <http://www.kgis.org/knoxnetwhere/viewer.asp>.

<sup>30</sup> Robinson, *Road Without Turning*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> This hill has been known alternatively as Fahnstock, Reservoir, and Temperance Hill. Ronald R. Allen, *Knox-Stalgia* (Knoxville: R. R. Allen, 1999), 51, 122, 143.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, *Road Without Turning*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Welles, *Housing Conditions*, 32.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 37.

## Conclusion

Living conditions for many of Knoxville's poor African-Americans during the first third of the twentieth century were atrocious. Surroundings were dirty; homes were in disrepair and lacked running water and/or indoor plumbing. Some families took in boarders to afford their rent. Black Knoxvillians were in desperate need of change for the better, and it came in the form of the College Homes federal housing project, otherwise known as project Tenn 3-2.

## CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTION OF COLLEGE HOMES

Knoxville authors Victor Albert Hyde, the Reverend James H. Robinson, and Margaret Louise Welles documented the squalor in which many of the city's African-Americans lived, yet College Homes was not built as a consequence of their observations. Before any public housing monies were released, the federal government had to see for itself the problems facing not just Knoxville's, but the nation's, poor. As a result this chapter deals with two subjects: the establishment of the need for College Homes in the government's eyes, and the housing project's subsequent construction.

For the federal government to establish the need in any city was the *Real Property Inventory of 1934*,<sup>1</sup> one of many governmental programs created to ameliorate the effects of the worldwide economic disaster here in the United States.

[The RPI's] primary purpose was to collect information which would be useful to real-estate men, operative builders, dealers in building materials, and mortgage-lending institutions, in determining where and to what extent there was a potential market for new building or modernization.<sup>2</sup>

Each state was represented by at least one city; these were selected to symbolize various types of economic development and differed greatly as to growth rate, size, location, and age. Part of the East South Central geographic division of the United States, Tennessee was solely represented by Knoxville. The city was chosen to be one of the original 64 cities enumerated in January and February 1934.<sup>3</sup> It was

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<sup>1</sup> United States Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Real Property Inventory 1934, Knoxville, TN* (Washington, DC: Dept. of Commerce, 1934). Master negative 95-82599-25. Microfilmed as part of Columbia University's *Modern Economic and Social History Preservation Project, 1995*.

<sup>2</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States* (College Park, MD: McGrath Publishing Co., 1935), 77.

<sup>3</sup> United States Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Real Property Inventory 1934*. The USHA required another survey to be submitted with Knoxville's 1938 slum-clearance application. Knoxville Housing Authority, *Real Property Inventory and Low Income Housing Area Survey, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1939* (Sponsor: City of Nashville, Co-Sponsor: Knoxville Housing Authority. Work Projects

characterized as a center of trade, with marble, metal, and textile industries as well as railroad shops. Only 0.8 percent of the citizenry were foreign-born, while 16.2 percent were black.<sup>4</sup>

The findings of Knoxville's *RPI* quantified the problems discussed in Chapter 3 and it was instrumental in beginning the dialogue leading to the construction of College Homes. In the foreword to the *RPI*, one can see the excitement generated in the housing and construction industries in response to the government initiating such a study, in a quote from the executive secretary of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB):

The making of this real estate inventory is the most necessary and intelligent thing which the Government has ever done in the field of housing and to aid resumption of capital goods production. It is obvious that the old hit-and-miss method of building and developing must give way to something more intelligent and better planned. This can be done if we know exactly the character of our present real estate plant.<sup>5</sup>

Many such organizations cooperated in the formation of this real estate survey.<sup>6</sup> Again, the first three paragraphs of "Chapter 1: Purpose" in the same document reiterate that the main focus of the census was putting people to work and that it was also to be "a guide and stimulus for industry," whether for construction, building supplies, or home appliances.<sup>7</sup> It is not until the last sentence of this section's final paragraph that the social implications of the survey were acknowledged:

Further, the Government's housing statistics include considerable information of sociological value which, if used judiciously, should be of marked

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Administration Project No. 665-44-3-11. A Study of Housing, Land Utilization, Family Composition, Population Growth. James S. Johnston, Director of Survey, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. and Stapp, *Urban Housing*, 26; United States Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Real Property Inventory 1934*, 2 and Table B. Master negative 95-82599-24; Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 77.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Foreword to U.S. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Real Property Inventory 1934*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



assistance to movements concerned with public welfare such as low cost housing, slum clearance, and city planning.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, as *Inventory* findings were tabulated, there began to be more discourse about the social implications of inadequate housing. The government still maintained economic stimulus as its major focus, but academics and social reformers now had numbers they could cite to back up their calls for a permanent program of subsidized public housing in this country. In 1935, one year after the *Inventories*, Edith Elmer Wood wrote:

The full significance of the survey figures, from a social, economic, and health point of view, has not been generally grasped. But the figures are there for those who can visualize their meaning.<sup>9</sup>

It was only two years later that the Housing Act of 1937 passed, ending the federal government's temporary involvement in housing the poor. Thus by 1938 the opening paragraphs of a government-issued *RPI* summary refers to using the *Inventories* to formulate housing programs across the nation.<sup>10</sup> Even more telling, however, is Stapp's observation that "particular interest attaches *at the present time* [emphasis added] to the extent and characteristics of substandard housing . . . ."<sup>11</sup> It is this interest, in combination with job relief, that caused slum clearance to garner so much public support. Keating, in one of his many essays and analyses of Techwood Homes (Atlanta, GA), another Depression-era public housing project affected by HOPE VI, wrote of Atlanta's foray into slum clearance:

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. and Stapp, *Urban Housing*, iii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The city's promoters were quick to recognize an opportunity to use government money to finance their objectives and ameliorate the appalling conditions generated by the depression.<sup>12</sup>

So regardless of whether the initial interest of Knoxville's power brokers in public housing money was socially or financially driven, when they began selling slum clearance and public housing to their community they could focus on social arguments. Consequently, when the Knoxville Housing Authority (KHA),<sup>13</sup> the body responsible for supplying the city with public housing, held a public meeting to discuss its goals on April 5, 1938, slum clearance attracted citizens' attention most.<sup>14</sup>

Slum clearance remained a hot topic in Knoxville throughout the following month. On May 1, 1938, an article entitled "Slum Project 'Steals Show' for Final Forum Session" ran in *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (KNS). There had been so much interest on the subject at previous forums held by the Knox County–Knoxville Adult Education Council that the topic for its final meeting was changed to deal specifically with clearing the city's slums.<sup>15</sup>

So begins the story of College Homes.<sup>16</sup> Five days earlier, then Chairman Dr. H. E. Christenberry of the Knoxville Housing Authority had told KNS that the United States Housing Authority (USHA) had notified the local agency of the elimination of

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<sup>12</sup> Larry Keating and Carol A. Flores, "Sixty and Out: Techwood Homes Transformed by Enemies and Friends," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 3 (March 2000), 276.

<sup>13</sup> The Knoxville Housing Authority was established in 1936, pursuant to the passage of the Tennessee Housing Authorities Law in 1935. When formed it was governed by a five-person commission, the members of which were appointed by Knoxville's mayor. Lewis Leon Goss, *A Case Study: The Knoxville Housing Authority's Transition into Knoxville's Community Development Corporation* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1976), 31 and 35.

<sup>14</sup> According to the 1935 Housing Authorities Law the KHA's primary goal was to provide decent, secure, and sanitary homes for Knoxville's ill-housed citizenry. To decide on other objectives, the Authority held the public meeting. Goss, *A Case Study*, 31, 35, and 45.

<sup>15</sup> "Slum Project 'Steals Show' for Final Forum Session," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (KNS) (1 May 1938), unknown page (u.p.).

<sup>16</sup> In researching the housing project, the author was unable to locate any specific information on the genesis of public housing in Knoxville other than the RPI or specifics on site selection other than that mentioned in footnote 19.

“considerable red tape . . . to get funds working.”<sup>17</sup> On May 23, J. W. Bush, the KHA’s Executive Director, made known that although the board still had to whittle down its site choices, the “formal application” would be made within the next ten days.<sup>18</sup> Five days later, Chairman Christenberry signed this application and gave it to USHA representatives in Knoxville. On July 19, 1938, the Associated Press reported that a 60-year loan of \$2,504,000 with 3.25 percent interest had been approved for two housing projects,<sup>19</sup> College Homes for blacks and Western Heights for whites, in Knoxville totaling 560 dwelling units. Of these, 320 belonged to College Homes. With the city’s 10 percent contribution, the estimated total amount for slum clearance came to \$2,781,771.<sup>20</sup>

In April the KHA conferred with all Knoxville architects on how it should allocate architectural responsibilities. And although the firm chosen as the projects’ chief architect was the locally well-known Baumann & Baumann,<sup>21</sup> other Knoxville architects worked cooperatively on the plans. These included the city’s largest firm, Barber & McMurray, as well as Claude C. Brackney, R. F. Graf & Sons, and Frances Painter.<sup>22</sup>

The formal application simply included sketches of proposed project locations by Baumann & Baumann and Barber & McMurray. The KHA received the first check,

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<sup>17</sup> “Architects to Meet Housing Authority,” *KNS* (28 April 1938), u.p.

<sup>18</sup> “Slum Work Application to be Made Soon,” *KNS* (23 May 1938), u.p.

<sup>19</sup> The site of College Homes was chosen out of 14, possibly even 16. “Slum Work Application to be Made Soon,” *KNS* (23 May 1938), u.p.; “City’s Formal Housing Grant Bid is Mailed,” *KNS* (29 May 1938), u.p.

<sup>20</sup> “City’s Formal Housing Grant Bid Is Mailed,” *KNS* (29 May 1938), u.p.; “U.S. Approve Huge Housing Loan For City,” *The Knoxville Journal (KJ)* (20 July 1938), u.p.; “Housing Project May Start In April,” *KNS* (6 Nov. 1938), u.p.

<sup>21</sup> KHA’s head architect was A. B. Baumann, Jr. “City’s Housing Units To Have Low Rentals,” *KNS* (11 Dec. 1938), u.p.

<sup>22</sup> “Architects To Meet Housing Authority,” *KNS* (28 April 1938), u.p.; “New Slum Clearance Project Here Has Many Unique Features,” *KJ* (8 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed in Knoxville’s Slum Clearance Project in Negro Section, and Here Are Architect Sketches Showing Types of New Dwellings To Be Built by Housing Authority,” *KNS* (26 Feb. 1939), A-9. Other firms working on the project included Charles F. Lester and William C. Pauley, landscapers; L. Ralph Bush, electrical engineer; Alvin L. Lindstrom, mechanical engineer; L. W. Frierson, civil engineer and KHA executive director. “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed . . .” *KNS* (26 Feb., 1939), A-9.

for \$75,000, signaling that the program was actually underway, on September 15, 1938. However, the drawing of the College Homes plans did not commence until the first of January, 1939.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, at approximately the same time, the following ad started to appear in both *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* and *The Knoxville Journal* (see Figure 4.1):



**Figure 4.1. Housing advertisement for those displaced by demolition on future College Homes site.** *The Knoxville Journal* and *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (9–11 Jan. 1939), unknown page.

The Authority realized that relocating residents from the project site would be difficult and thus named Walter Anderson their “tenant-relations man.” A former Knox County sheriff and director of public safety, he was appointed as a result of, among other things, “his popularity, especially among members of the Negro racial group.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> “U.S. Approves Huge Housing Loan For City,” *KJ* (20 July 1938), u.p.; “Housing Board Gets \$75,000 Advance Check,” *KJ* (16 Sept. 1938), u.p.; “City Receives New Western Heights Plans,” *KJ* (11 Jan. 1939), u.p.

<sup>24</sup> “Former Sheriff To Serve As Tenant-Relations Chief,” *The East Tennessee News (ETN)* (20 Oct. 1938), u.p.

KHA began advertising for clearance bids in early March 1939, with the opening to be held at noon on the 22nd.<sup>25</sup> The contract allowed for interested parties to bid on demolition and site clearance for a fee paid by KHA, or on salvaging material from the razed homes to sell for a profit and thus pay the Authority for the opportunity to clear the site. Seven firms from throughout the country submitted bids to tear down 164 to 168 houses spread over the thirteen- to fourteen-acre site.<sup>26</sup> The bids ranged from the Jay Roehl Company of Knoxville, which wanted \$10,795 to complete the job, to H. A. Wallace of Atlanta, Georgia, who actually offered the Authority \$510 to do the work.<sup>27</sup> The job was to take 60 days, and Wallace planned to sell the materials on-site.<sup>28</sup>

The Knoxville Housing Authority tentatively approved the College Homes plans on March 30, after which they were sent to Washington for final USHA review (see Figure 4.2). A few days later, thirty men began demolishing houses at the College Homes site. Armed with pickaxes and crowbars, they brought down eight homes that

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<sup>25</sup> “Advertisement For Bids,” *KNS* (8, 9, 15 Mar. 1939), u.p.; and “Advertisement For Bids,” *KJ* (9, 15 Mar. 1939), u.p.

<sup>26</sup> The 164 figure came from “Razing Job To Be Let On March 17,” *KJ* (9 Mar. 1939), u.p, and “Slum Plans To Be Filed,” *KJ* (12 Mar. 1939), u.p. A number of 167 was reported in “Demolition Bid Okehed By Board,” *KJ* (24 Mar. 1939), u.p. The figure 168 was mentioned most. “One Asks \$10,000 To Raze; 1 Offers \$510,” *KNS* (22 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Atlanta Firm Offers To Pay To Raze House,” *KJ* (23 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Crews Raze 8 Houses In Slum Area,” *KJ* (4 Apr. 1939), u.p. Originally bounded by Russell, Shea, and Leslie Streets, the area that was to become College Homes was enlarged to finally include between 13 to 14 acres, then delineated by College, University, Shea, and Maria Streets. “Housing Projects Will Go Far Toward Wiping Out Disease And Crime In Communities,” *ETN* (1 Sept. 1938), u.p.; “Former Sheriff To Serve As Tenant Relations Chief,” *ETN* (20 Oct. 1938), u.p.; “City Options Sites for Negro Housing,” *KNS* (9 Nov. 1938), u.p.; “Owners Of Land Paid \$125,000,” *KJ* (30 Dec. 1938), u.p.; “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed...,” *KNS* (26 Feb. 1939), A-9; “One Asks \$10,000 To Raze; 1 Offers \$510,” *KNS* (22 March 1939), u.p.; “\$1,250,000 Housing Job To Start Soon,” *KNS* (16 April 1939), u.p.

<sup>27</sup> As of March 12, 1939, firms from six cities had expressed interest. “Slum Plans To Be Filed,” *KJ* (12 Mar. 1939), u.p. Those actually submitting bids were Jay Roehl and Jess Bland Cos. of Knoxville, Harris Wrecking and Star Wrecking Cos. of Chicago, H. A. Wallace of Atlanta, Cuyogua Wrecking Co. of Cleveland, and Cleveland Wrecking Co. of Cincinnati. “One Asks \$10,000 To Raze; 1 Offers \$510,” *KNS* (22 Mar. 1939), u.p.

<sup>28</sup> “Razing Job To Be Let On March 17,” *KNS* (9 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “One Asks \$10,000 To Raze; 1 Offers \$510,” *KNS* (22 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Atlanta Firm Offers To Pay To Raze House,” *KJ* (23 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Demolition Bid Okehed by Board,” *KJ* (24 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Wallace Gets Job Of Razing Houses,” *KNS* (24 Mar. 1939), u.p.; “Plan Sale Of Lumber In Slum Homes,” *KJ* (28 Mar. 1939), u.p.

day, one an hour (see Figure 4.3). In keeping with their contract, H. A. Wallace & Company sold any reuseable material on-site, and eager farmers filled their trucks with the goods. Fifty homes were gone by the 16th, and only five were left about a month later.<sup>29</sup>

The call for construction bids was placed on April 11.<sup>30</sup> The advertisement for the estimated \$1,250,000 project<sup>31</sup> read in part:

The Knoxville Housing Authority, Incorporated, will receive sealed bids for the construction of "College Homes," Project Tenn. 3-2, Knoxville, Tennessee, which work consists of 49 dwelling buildings and one administration building, and utilities and site development thereto, until 2:00 P.M. C.S.T., on the 2nd day of May, 1939 . . .<sup>32</sup>

Of four contractors<sup>33</sup> to enter bids, the lowest came from the combined forces of the Knoxville firms of A. H. Whisman Company and McGill & Daugherty in the amount of \$1,079,800, with site improvements totaling an additional \$151,527. After USHA approval, the contract with KHA was finalized on May 26, 1939.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Approve Plan For Slum Clearance," *KJ* (31 Mar. 1939), u.p.; "These 168 Houses Are Going—To Make Way for Modern Living Center," *KNS* (3 Apr. 1939), u.p.; "Crews Raze 8 Houses In Slum Area," *KJ* (4 Apr. 1939), u.p.; "\$1,250,000 Housing Job To Start Soon," *KNS* (16 Apr. 1939), u.p.; "New Housing Project May Start Soon," *KJ* (13 May 1939), u.p.

<sup>30</sup> "Housing Project Plans Completed," *KNS* (10 Apr. 1939), u.p.; "Advertisement For Bids," *KNS* (11 Apr. 1939), u.p.

<sup>31</sup> "\$1,250,000 Housing Job To Start Soon," *KNS* (16 Apr. 1939), u.p.

<sup>32</sup> "Advertisement For Bids," *KNS* (11 Apr. 1939), u.p.

<sup>33</sup> At one point six contractors were named: A. H. Whisman and Co. with McGill & Daugherty of Knoxville; Foster and Chreighton of Nashville; T. L. James & Co., Inc of Ruston, LA; the J. A. Jones Construction Co. of Charlotte; and Algot B. Larson of Chicago. "Housing Bids To Be Opened On Friday," *KNS* (2 May 1939), u.p. The Larson firm of Chicago was not mentioned in a piece written the day of the reading. "2 Knoxville Firms Bid Low On Housing," *KNS* (5 May 1939), u.p. Such few bids were attributed to the many other slum clearance and low-income housing projects going on throughout the nation, resulting in contractors submitting bids closer to home. "Housing Bids To Be Opened On Friday," *KNS* (2 May 1939), u.p.

<sup>34</sup> "2 Knoxville Firms Bid Low On Housing," *KNS* (5 May 1939), u.p.; "Slum Project Bids Studied By Official," *KJ* (7 May 1939), u.p.; "Housing Unit For Negroes Is Approved," *KJ* (26 May 1939); "War Looms On Housing Bid Award," *The Knoxville Labor News* (11 May 1939), u.p.

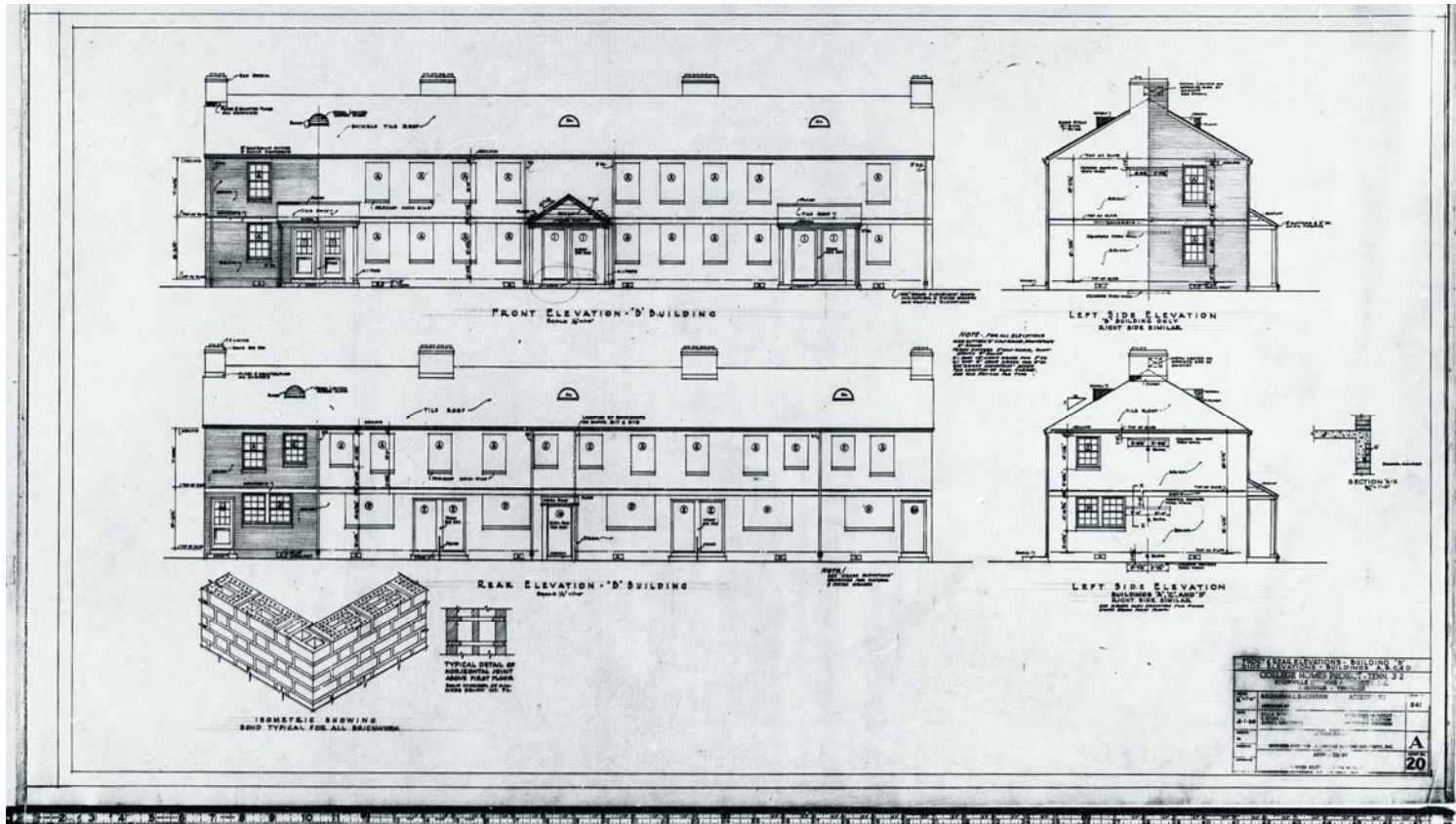


Figure 4.2. Sample of College Homes blueprints showing front and rear elevations of “Building B” and side elevations of “Buildings A, B, C, & D.” Bauman and Bauman Architects. 1 April 1939. Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, Knoxville, Tennessee, A-20.



**Figure 4.3. Panoramic of neighborhood to be razed for College Homes.** “These 168 Houses Are Going—To Make Way for Modern Living Center,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (3 April 1939), unknown page.



When the building permit was issued three days later, it was the city's largest to date, at \$1,079,800. College Homes cost more to build than two remaining Knoxville landmarks from that era: the Henley Street Bridge (\$1,000,000) and the downtown post office (\$954,000). This helped make May 1939, to that point, the month with the highest number and value of building permits on record in the city. In fact, government-backed construction set many records, reaching amounts not seen since immediately before the stock market crash of 1929.<sup>35</sup> The College Homes and Western Heights slum-clearance projects amounted to two and one-half times the number of dwelling units backed by the local private sector in all of 1938.<sup>36</sup>

Carpenters began reporting to the site on June 1, 1939 (see Figure 4.4). On June 24, it was reported that workers had completed ten foundations. By July 16, fifteen foundations had been poured and the walls of twelve buildings had been raised to the first floor.<sup>37</sup>

Though construction was nowhere near completion—a late-spring or early-summer 1940 opening was anticipated—the KHA began taking applications on November 4, 1939, so that they would have ample time to complete background investigations. These were “exhaustive investigation[s] as to the moral and financial competence of the families”<sup>38</sup> to facilitate wise tenant selection. The three most important criteria used were continuous residency in Knoxville for two years, current living conditions, and annual income. The KHA also looked into the housekeeping practices, health, family make-up, credit, and overall character of the applicants. An

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<sup>35</sup> “Building Shows Big Gain Here,” *KNS* (2 July 1939), u.p.

<sup>36</sup> “Housing Unit Permit Comes To \$1,079,000,” *KJ* (30 May 1939), u.p.; “Permits For Building Set New Record,” *KJ* (2 June 1939); “Permits For Building In City Spurt,” *KJ* (1 July 1939), u.p.; “City Building For 6 Months Sets Records,” *KJ* (2 July 1939), u.p.; “Housing Project Provides Employment For Many,” *ETN* (14 Sept. 1939), u.p.

<sup>37</sup> “Housing Project Started,” *KJ* (2 June 1939), u.p.; “Union Pickets Slum Project; Fight Staged,” *KNS* (2 June 1939), u.p.; “Begin Work On New Housing Project Here,” *KJ* (24 June 1939), u.p.;

“Foundations Poured On New Project,” *KJ* (7 July 1939), u.p.

<sup>38</sup> “Slum Plans To Be Filed,” *KJ* (12 Mar. 1939), u.p.

office, complete with interviewer and stenographer, was opened on the site at 1718 College Street to process the applications. Ten families had submitted applications by November 7, another nine by the next day.<sup>39</sup>

Led by the Negro Advisory Committee<sup>40</sup>—the body established by the KHA to “serve upon matters relating to or affecting Negroes” in association with the development of College Homes—ceremonies accompanying the laying of the cornerstone for the College Homes administration building were held at 3 P.M. on March 3, 1940. Chairman Webster Porter invited all of Knoxville’s blacks to attend. The cornerstone also served as a time capsule. Items included were pictures of the KHA and the Negro Advisory Council, a rent-schedule leaflet, information brochure, construction specifications, copies of national and state housing acts, resolutions, the USHA loan contract, the third annual KHA report and charter, and a copy of the local black paper *The East Tennessee News (ETN)* with coverage of USHA Administrator Nathan Straus’s visit.<sup>41</sup> Loudspeakers were procured to broadcast the short talks. The *ETN* later reported that “a large group of interested citizens stood throughout the

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<sup>39</sup> “Tenants Asked to Apply for Federal Homes,” *KJ* (4 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “No Rush Yet for Low-Cost Housing Unit,” *KNS* (7 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “Low-Rent Dwellings Is Aim Of Knoxville Housing Projects,” *KJ Sunday Magazine* (10 Dec. 1939), front page; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions On Tenants Are Far From Severe,” *ETN* (11 Apr. 1940), u.p.; “KHA Tenants To Be Selected,” *KNS* (3 Nov. 1939), unknown page; “28 Applications In For Housing Units,” *KNS* (8 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “28 Ask Homes In Projects Of Housing Board,” *KJ* (8 Nov. 1939), u.p.

<sup>40</sup> Members, all considered leaders of the black community, were Webster L. Porter, attorney (Chairman); Dr. N. A. Henderson (Secretary); real estate agent A. A. Felding; Dean Hardy Liston of Knoxville College; and the principal of the Mechanicsville Junior High, C. W. Cansler. “Lawyer Heads Negro Housing Organization,” *KJ* (13 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “Housing Authority Selects Race Advisory Committee,” *ETN* (19 Jan. 1939), u.p.

<sup>41</sup> The author is not quite sure exactly what was in the capsule given that the list presented here is a combination of two newspaper articles written two weeks apart. The *ETN* reported photos of the KHA and the Negro Advisory, rent schedule leaflet, info leaflet, USHA loan contract, third annual KHA report, and a copy of the *ETN* with coverage of Nathan Straus’s visit, while the *KJ* listed items including pictures, construction specifications, copies of national and state housing acts, resolutions, and KHA’s charter, among “other documents.” “Cornerstone Laying Evokes Interest,” *ETN* (14 Mar. 1940), u.p.; “Negro Housing Cornerstone Ceremony Will Be On Sunday,” *KJ* (29 Feb. 1940), u.p.

exercises enthusiastically demonstrating their approval of the worthwhile movement that will provide better homes for Knoxville Negroes, by applause.”<sup>42</sup>

In early April 1940 *The East Tennessee News* reported that “the tier of units facing College Street, from University to Shea . . . will soon be ready, with the exception of a few finishing touches, and grading of the front yards.”<sup>43</sup> It took three months, but the first tenants began moving into 32 completed units on July 9. The initial three of the total 764 families that would eventually call Knoxville’s low-income housing “home” were welcomed by general manager Otto Roehl and management aide Webster Porter (by this time Porter had resigned as Negro Advisory Committee Chairman to take the management aide position), who were on-site for the momentous occasion. The first official tenant was Willie Rowe. A gardener, he moved into a four-and-a-half-room apartment at 1710 College Street with his wife, daughter, and niece. Other examples of Knoxvillians taking advantage of College Homes included Andrew Fitzgerald, a porter for the furniture department of Miller’s, and Harold Sanders, a busboy at the S&W Cafeteria (see Figure 4.5).<sup>44</sup> Sixteen other families selected by the KHA to fill the 32 units ready for immediate occupancy arrived that afternoon and throughout the week. Forty apartments were expected to be ready in the next ten days.<sup>45</sup> At this point, “virtually all interior work ha[d] been completed and only street and sidewalk construction”<sup>46</sup> remained.

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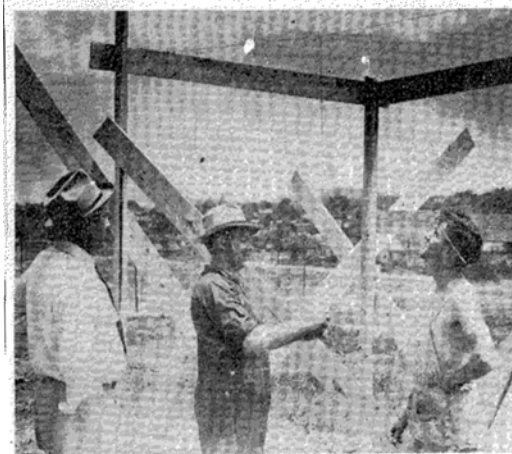
<sup>42</sup> “Cornerstone Laying Evokes Interest,” *ETN* (14 Mar. 1940), u.p.; “Negro Housing Cornerstone Ceremony Will Be On Sunday,” *KJ* (29 Feb. 1940), u.p.; “Dedicatory Program For Negro Housing Project To Be Today,” *KJ* (3 Mar. 1940), u.p.

<sup>43</sup> “False Reports Routed As Families Clamor For Beautiful College Homes,” *ETN* (4 Apr. 1940), unknown page.

<sup>44</sup> The Andrew Fitzgerald family moved into a four-and-a-half room unit, while Mr. and Mrs. Sanders took a three-room home. “3 Negro Families Move In College Homes, ‘Dedicating’ First Housing Job for Use,” *KNS* (9 July 1940), u.p.; “First Tenants Move In College Homes Apartments,” *KJ* (10 July 1940), u.p.

<sup>45</sup> “First of Housing Tenants Will Move in This Week,” *KNS* (7 July 1940), u.p.; “First Tenants Will Move In College Homes Projects Tuesday,” *KJ* (7 July 1940), u.p.; “3 Negro Families Move in College Homes, ‘Dedicating’ First Housing Job for Use,” *KNS* (9 July 1940), u.p.; “Four Families Occupy KHA Units Today,” *KJ* (9 July 1940), u.p.

<sup>46</sup> “First of Housing Tenants Will Move in This Week,” *KNS* (7 July 1940), u.p.



Three bosses on the Western Heights project of the Knoxville Housing Authority met to "plumb" a corner yesterday as work was started on the \$1,079,000 job by McGill & Daugherty-A. H. Whisman Construction Co., contractors. They were, left to right: Wade Waters, project superintendent; Lonnie Nokes, carpenter foreman, and Bob McGill, concrete foreman.



Carpenters were busy yesterday as work was started on the Western Heights project.



From this now barren scene will rise the buildings of the Western Heights project, upon which work was started yesterday.

**Figure 4.4. Carpenters at work.** The captions say these pictures are from Western Heights, but the same activities would have taken place at College Homes. "Housing Project Started," *The Knoxville Journal* (2 June 1939), unknown page.



Fred McDade, tenant assignment clerk at College Homes project, displays an electric refrigerator to a new tenant in the College Homes project. Electricity and water costs are lumped with the rent, which is \$11.60 for a 4½-room apartment.



Andrew Fitzgerald, his wife and daughter, were second tenants to occupy an apartment in the new College Homes project yesterday. Their furniture is new, having been bought last Fall for this occasion.



This mother has just received notice through the mails that her application for an apartment in the College Homes project has been approved by the Knoxville Housing Authority. She probably will move within a week.

**Figure 4.5. College Homes tenants.** These pictures show happy new tenants of College Homes. "First Tenants Move In College Homes Apartments," *The Knoxville Journal* (10 July 1940), unknown page.

Staying basically on schedule, 38 of the 40 units were ready on College and Shea Streets in late July 1940. On August 4, celebrations, ““formal openings,”” that were to “break the routine and smash the precedent,”<sup>47</sup> were held at both Western Heights and College Homes. The College Homes administration building was patriotically decorated for the 3:30 P.M. event, with addresses beginning at 4:00 P.M. Speakers at both events were USHA Region 4 director John P. Broome, Congressman John Jennings, Jr., and KHA attorney Daniel Kelley. Other attendees included members of the city council and the city manager, as well as representatives of the KHA. At each event, a pastor gave an invocation, a band played, and the first resident of both projects received a symbolic key, although at College Homes a chorus composed of three choirs (over 100 people) from Tabernacle Baptist Church performed, too.

All occupied units were opened to visitors during the event at College Homes so that attendants could “note the fine manner in which the units are serving the families living there.”<sup>48</sup> Altogether an estimated 2,000 people attended the events, and over 50 households submitted their applications that day. Activities and tenant interviews at College Homes were broadcast by local radio stations WROL and WNOX.<sup>49</sup>

By the middle of October, 208 of College Homes’s 320 units were leased. The remainder were anticipated to be filled by January 1, 1941. A total of 226 were leased at the start of November, 241 a month before Christmas. College Homes was fast

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<sup>47</sup> “Two Housing Jobs Thrown Open Sunday,” *KNS* (3 Aug. 1940), u.p.

<sup>48</sup> “Leaders Of State, Nation Speak At College Homes Occupancy Festivities Slated For Aug. 4,” *ETN* (25 July 1940), u.p.

<sup>49</sup> “Leaders Of State, Nation Speak At College Homes Occupancy Festivities Slated For Aug. 4,” *ETN* (25 July 1940), u.p.; “KHA Plans Celebrations At Projects,” *KJ* (21 July 1940), u.p.; “Activities About College Homes,” *ETN* (1 Aug. 1940), u.p.; “Low Rent Homes Here Are Opened,” *KJ* (5 Aug. 1940), u.p.; “City Opens 2 Housing Units Today,” *KJ* (4 Aug. 1940), u.p.; “2000 At Opening Of KHA Projects,” *KNS* (5 Aug. 1940), u.p.; “Housing Project Opening Will Be Broadcast,” *KNS* (4 Aug. 1940), u.p.

approaching 90 percent capacity at the first of December; only 43 units remained. A week before the Christmas holiday, the project reached 96 percent occupancy and was on track to be filled by January 1.<sup>50</sup>

The need for a slum-clearance and public housing initiative in Knoxville was more than evident to those locals who studied the problem. But it was not until the federal government became involved, as a result of the economic crisis of the Great Depression, and executed its own studies of the nation's ill-housed in its *Real Property Inventories*, that change came to Knoxville. For the city's black population, the change was the erection of the College Homes housing project. Taking approximately a year to build, 49 buildings contained 320 units (there was also one administration building, for a total of 50 buildings on-site). Undoubtedly the individual units were important to the new inhabitants since they replaced the squalor in which they once lived with the modern conveniences of the day. What many may not have realized, however, was that the complex itself—from each unit's floor plan to the arrangement of the buildings on the site—was possibly the product of the latest thinking in community planning. It is this philosophy that is the subject of Chapter 5.

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<sup>50</sup> "KHA Dwelling Units Are Filling Fast," *KNS* (19 Oct. 1940), u.p.; "Recreation Equipment Is Installed," *KJ* (3 Nov. 1940), u.p.; "Housing Projects Near 'Full' Mark," *KNS* (24 Nov. 1940), u.p.; "KHA Sells Its Share Of Bonds," *KNS* (3 Dec. 1940), u.p.; "Housing Projects To Get Yule Trees," *KJ* (6 Dec. 1940), u.p.; "Austin Homes Rent Rate Set," *KNS* (19 Dec. 1940), u.p.

## CHAPTER 5: THE DESIGN LEGACY OF COLLEGE HOMES

The architects who designed College Homes did not come up with the plan in a vacuum. They had the experience of those projects built before them to use as guides. But from where did these other developments derive their inspiration? A possible answer is Henry Wright and Chatham Village. This chapter strives to recount the potential design legacy of College Homes by highlighting the progression of Wright's thought processes—with those of his partner Clarence Stein—through the developments of Sunnyside (Queens, New York) and Radburn (New Jersey) and how these culminated in Chatham Village (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and its group housing model.

Henry Wright is credited with many of the design characteristics of America's first public housing,<sup>1</sup> which featured

large scale, low coverage (35 per cent) and low density groups of apartments or row houses from two to four stories high, sited on superblocks<sup>2</sup> as slum clearance projects in central urban locations—the characteristic urban housing pattern of the 30s in America.<sup>3</sup>

As an initial consultant to the PWA Housing Division (the predecessor of the USHA, the federal entity under whose auspices College Homes was built), Wright did much to synthesize the modern housing of Europe with American traditions. What Wright

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (1978): 236.

<sup>2</sup> Here units were placed side-by-side and oriented inward toward one another to form a quadrangle, hence creating a central open space. This could manifest itself as a large zone surrounded by major streets with the units situated along the fringe or as groups of smaller superblock quadrangles interspersed throughout the site, which when taken as a whole, fashioned one grand superblock. Richard Dagenhart, "Public Housing and Context: A Preliminary Report," in *Future Visions of Urban Public Housing; An International Forum, November 17–20, 1994, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA: Proceedings*, ed Wolfgang F. E. Presier, David P. Varady, and Francis P. Russell (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati College of Design, 1994), 386; and Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 267.

<sup>3</sup> Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing," 236.



borrowed from the Continent, specifically from Dutch and German planners and architects of the 1920s, was his fundamental belief in the importance of “large-scale, functional community design.”<sup>4</sup> However, this Continental system was rigid, untied from the urban grid structure, and featured a stiff, severe, “reductionist”<sup>5</sup> design.<sup>6</sup> The American customs Wright synthesized into the large-scale European template instead offered varied site and apartment configurations as well as adherence to city blocks, little courts and returns, and the more conventional materials favored by traditionalist architects of this country. Exemplars of this cited by Richard Pommer in his essay “The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s” are the Mackley Houses (Philadelphia), Lakeview Terrace (Cleveland), and Harlem River Houses (New York) (see Figure 5.1).<sup>7</sup> The reader will notice, however, that these look nothing like College Homes or most of the public housing of the era found in smaller cities across the nation. Therefore, if it is true that Wright was influential to early public housing and that he established the “characteristic urban housing pattern of the 30s,” but the developments held up and analyzed by academe look nothing like the subject of this thesis, what role did Wright play in these? The answer is almost certainly found in Chatham Village (see Figure 5.2). Large projects such as Mackley were not appropriate for many of America’s smaller cities, but designs such as Chatham were.

Chatham Village embodied three concepts that were refined by two sequential developments. The concepts were Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden City,” Clarence A. Perry’s “Neighborhood Unit Plan,” and what Wright called “group housing”; the developments were Sunnyside and Radburn.

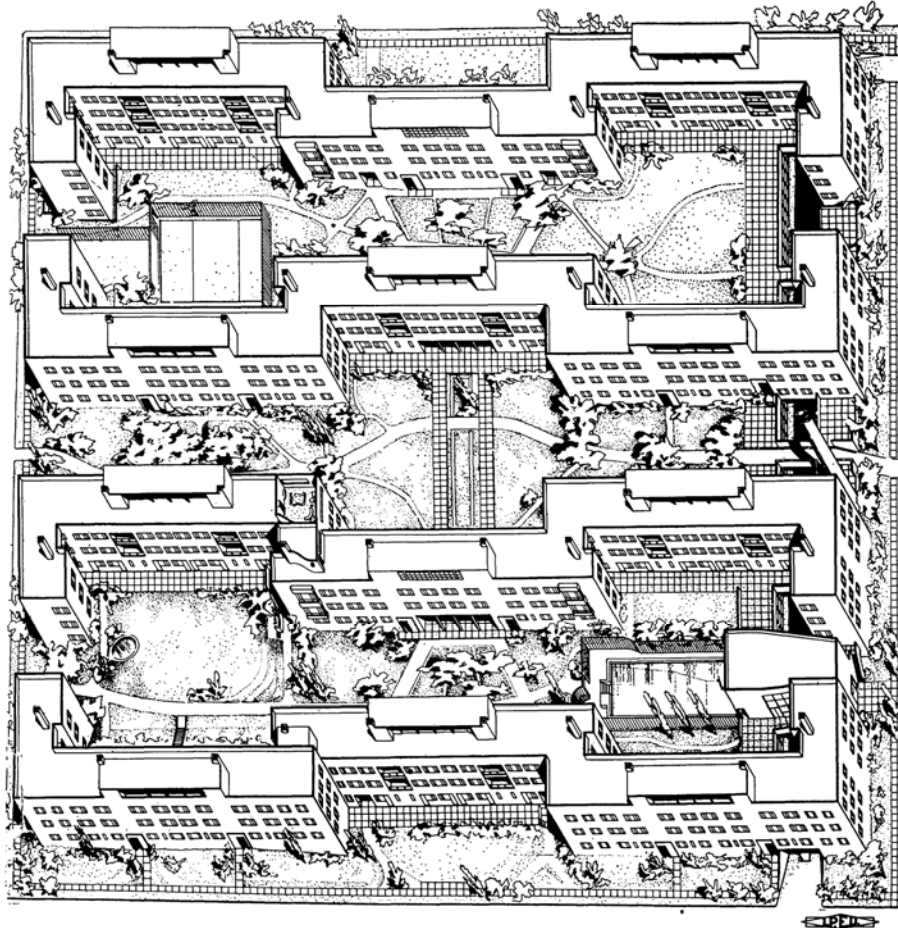
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<sup>4</sup> Roy Lubove, “New Cities for Old: The Urban Reconstruction Program of the 1930’s,” *The Social Studies* 53, no. 6 (1962): 206.

<sup>5</sup> Pommer, “The Architecture of Urban Housing,” 237.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 237, 242, 259.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 262–63.



A

**Figure 5.1. Mackley Houses, Lakeview Terrace, and Harlem River Houses.** (A) Mackley Houses. (B) Lakeview Terrace. (C) Harlem River Houses. Reproduced from Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (1978): 241, 248, 255.

**Figure 5.1 (Continued)**



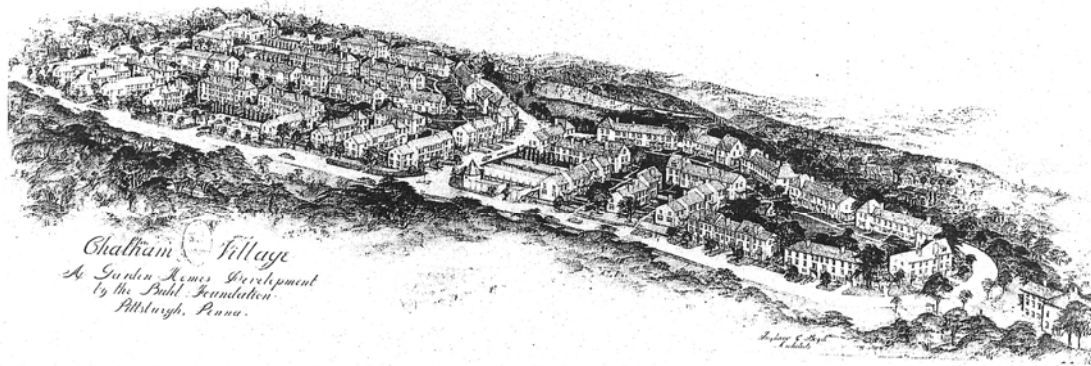
**B**



**C**



A



Original architects pencil rendering, c. 1936  
(located in Chatham Village Association office)

CHATHAM VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT  
ALLEGHENY COUNTY, PA

B

**Figure 5.2. Chatham Village.** (A) Elevation reproduced from Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 49. (B) Rendering of Chatham Village reproduced from Edith B. Wallace, Paula S. Reed and Linda McClelland, “Chatham Village,” *National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 2003, no page.

Because the Garden City idea is a well-known one, it will be mentioned only briefly here. It was conceived at the turn of the twentieth century by Ebenezer Howard, an Englishman, as a way to improve the plight of London's poor. In sum, the Garden City had two main goals: to provide its residents with improved living conditions compared with the filth and squalor found in modern cities of the time, and to do so while controlling the value of land. It was while creating the world's first Garden City, Letchworth, in 1903 that Sir Raymond Unwin found that cost control was better achieved through managing development costs such as the improved planning of roads, utilities, houses, and site layout, and through projects erected at economies of scale.<sup>8</sup>

Less familiar is Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit Plan (NUP). Initially introduced in December 1923, it is a combination of early-twentieth-century sociologist Charles H. Cooley's studies of the *primary group* and Perry's own experiences living in Forest Hills Gardens (Long Island), a product of the social settlement movement of the same era.<sup>9</sup> This plan establishes a neighborhood with consonant architecture, thoughtful plantings, and community buildings at its heart. These "meet the needs of family life in a unit related to the larger whole but possessing a distinct entity characterized by the four strictly local factors"<sup>10</sup>:

1. The neighborhood was centered, literally and figuratively, around an elementary school. No home would be more than a half mile away and neighborhood size was based off a minimum and maximum population allowed the school.<sup>11</sup>

2. Around ten percent of the neighborhood's land was set aside for recreation purposes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9; and Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing," 262.

<sup>9</sup> Lubove, "New Cities for Old," 204–5.

<sup>10</sup> James Dahir, *The Neighborhood Unit Plan, Its Spread and Acceptance; A Selected Bibliography with Interpretative Comments* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1947), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 16; and Lubove, "New Cities for Old," 208.

3. Stores catering to, at the least, basic needs located along the periphery of the community.<sup>13</sup>

4. Interior roads were sized according to function with the purpose of deflecting through traffic to wide surrounding thoroughfares. Serving a dual purpose, these roads not only defined the community but Perry also wanted the imposed limits to cultivate pride and loyalty to a distinctive, intelligible community.<sup>14</sup>

It was during the next thirteen years as Henry Wright and Clarence Stein strove to establish an American Garden City that both Sunnyside Gardens (1924–28) and Radburn (1928–33) were created. Again, these two developments are also well-known and will be dealt with only in short, concerning only that which pertains to Chatham Village.

Sunnyside gave Chatham several things, including central garden areas lined with row homes of different floor plans (otherwise known as group housing) and homes fronting interior garden courts (see Figure 5.3). These vegetation-covered cul-de-sacs were grouped together at the edge of the Sunnyside grounds and separated at their backs by private service drives.<sup>15</sup> Radburn furnished Chatham with superblocks containing central garden areas, cul-de-sacs, and service streets. However, in contrast to Sunnyside, Radburn's cul-de-sacs were roadway, not grass. Consequently, these paved areas became the service drives, unlike at Sunnyside, where service drives ran between the cul-de-sacs like alleyways. In addition, freeing Radburn from the grid with superblocks allowed for the cul-de-sacs to face collector streets (see Figure 5.4). This facilitated the efficient use of each superblock's periphery and consequently left inner-core areas untouched by streets and useable as parks.<sup>16</sup> All of this was just as

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<sup>12</sup> Dahir, *The Neighborhood Unit Plan*, 16; and Lubove, "New Cities for Old," 208.

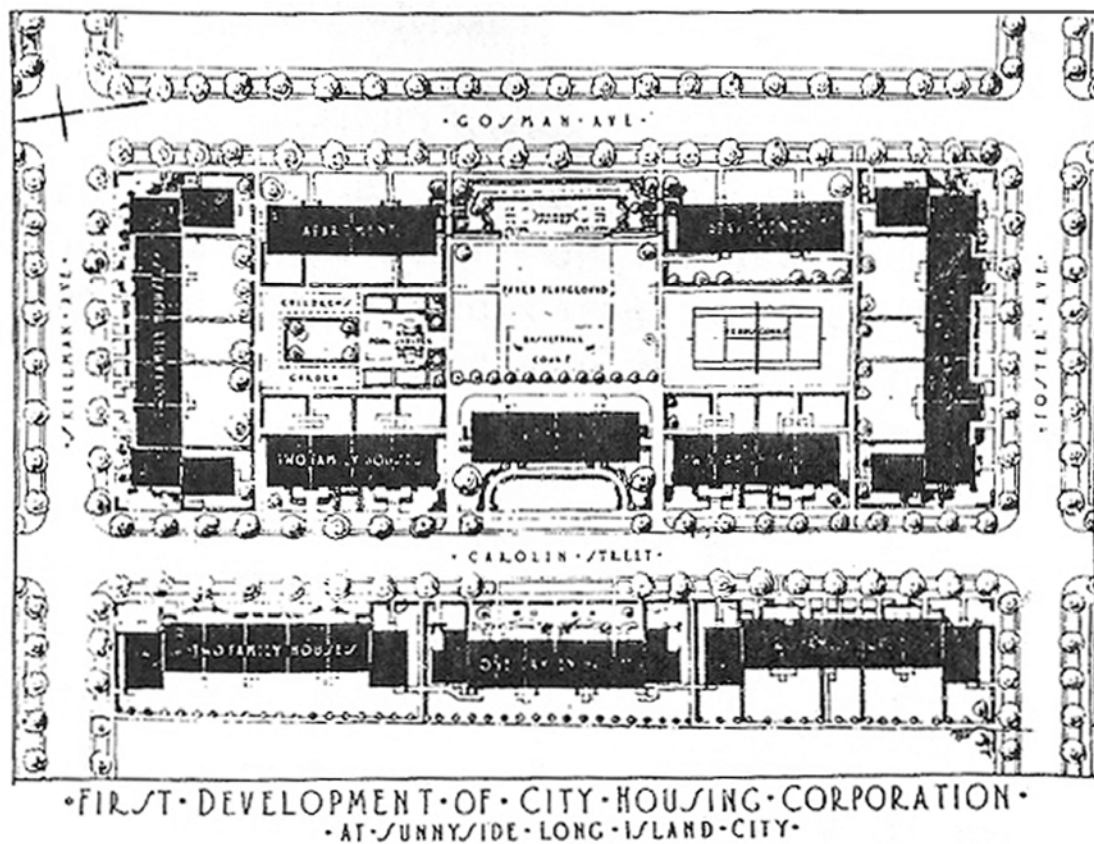
<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Dahir, *The Neighborhood Unit Plan*, 16; and Lubove, "New Cities for Old," 207.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 40, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Perry's NUP intended.<sup>17</sup> Another important change at Radburn was the reversal of the house front. Stein and Wright had begun this at Sunnyside by shifting the porch to the back of each home, so that it looked out on the central green. The road should, according to Stein and Wright, exist only for service reasons; therefore, at Radburn kitchens faced the street. This allowed for the entire living room, not just the porch, to turn and face the garden side.<sup>18</sup>



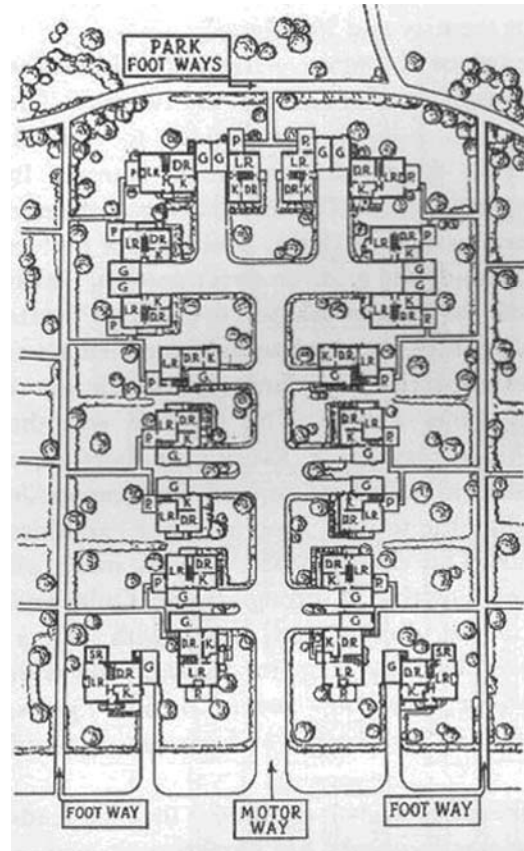
**Figure 5.3. Plan showing Sunnyside's central garden spaces and houses designed in complete blocks.** Reproduced from Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Mumford to James Dahir. Dahir, *The Neighborhood Unit Plan*, 29n1.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 40, 45.



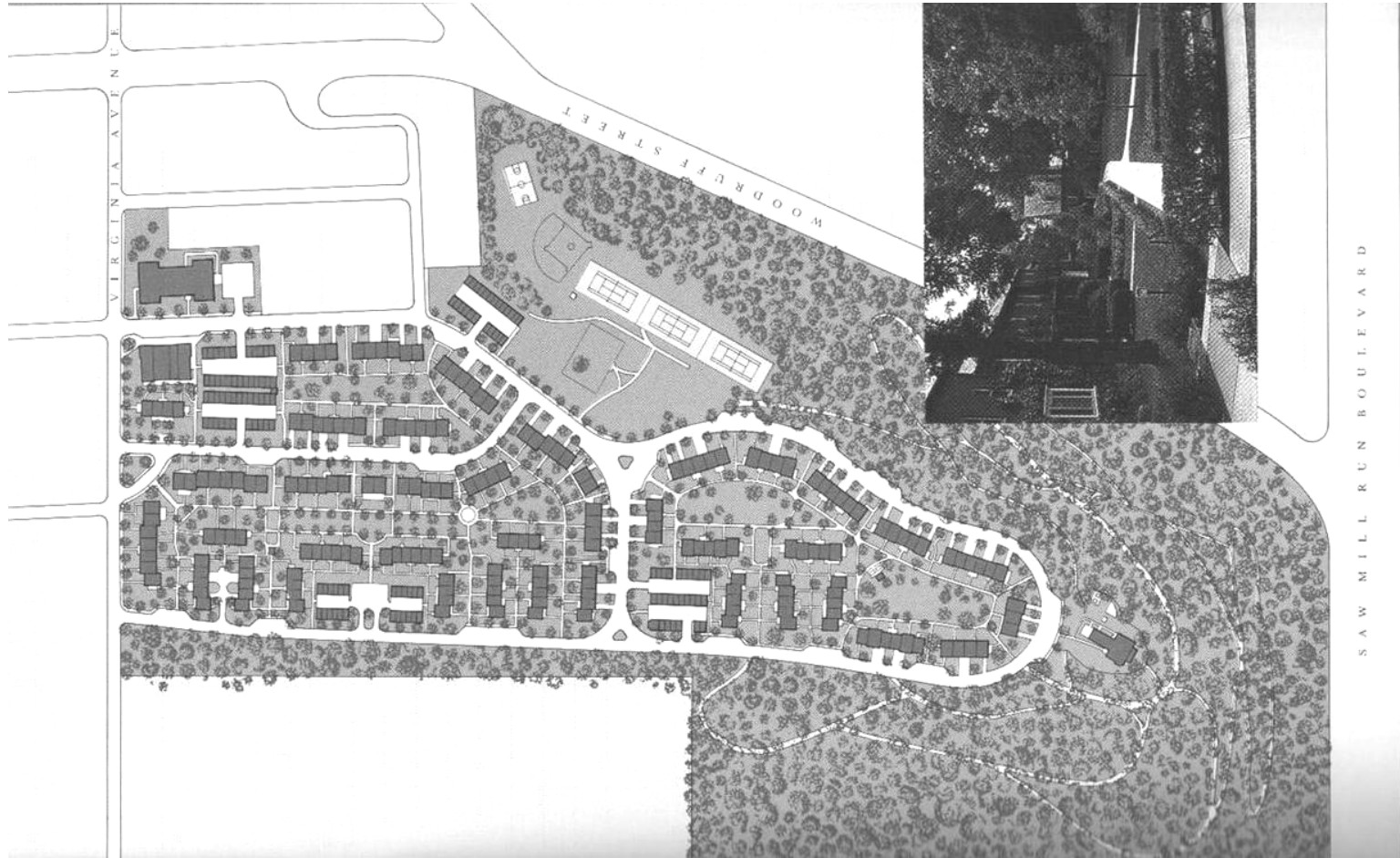
A



B

**Figure 5.4. Radburn, New Jersey.** (A) Layout reproduced from Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 42. (B) Block reproduced from Susan Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village, 1932–2003: A Planned Community by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 2003), 43.





**Figure 5.5. Plan of Chatham Village.** Reproduced from Susan Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village, 1932–2003: A Planned Community by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 2003), 49.

With the experiences of both Sunnyside and Radburn to guide them, Stein and Wright turned to Chatham Village. The Buhl Foundation had hired them as consultants to this Pittsburgh project. Asked to verify the cost-effectiveness of developing the site with single-family homes aimed at those with moderate incomes (then clerical workers making \$5,000 or less a year), the architects determined group housing to be the most economical solution. Clustering four to eight homes in groups allowed for 40 to 44 more units on the site (128 versus 78–84 single-family homes), with living space remaining nearly equal and sale prices lowered by about twenty-five percent<sup>19</sup> (see Figure 5.5).

Because it was thought that Pittsburgh’s potential home buyers would not purchase an attached home, the Buhl Foundation chose to retain ownership of the units and to rent them instead. Wright relates how this decision removed technical limitations from the design-build process. Now the concerns were “how to design the best possible, most efficient, and most economically maintainable dwellings.”<sup>20</sup>

In attaining these goals, “the consultants followed through the experience at Sunnyside and Radburn”<sup>21</sup> by building group housing. The two-story group dwellings featured varied floor plans. Some were arranged around cul-de-sac roadways that connected to service drives. All homes faced the central garden from their position at the periphery of superblocks. It was also discovered that a hilly site such as Chatham, when graded into levels of roughly uniform terraces, allowed for greater site coverage without spoiling the planned vistas and the desired feeling of openness. In fact, the increased expense of the intense grading by machine was offset by eliminating the need for manpower to make individual adjustments when required. Group housing, too, was found to be well suited to a terraced site. This housing type was also less

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<sup>19</sup> Gordon, *The Success of Chatham Village*, 36; and Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 46–48.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

expensive than detached housing, for two reasons: first, the foundation wall of row homes could double as a retaining wall for the terraces, and second—related to the manpower savings mentioned above—there would be fewer adjustments to make without the space between individual buildings.<sup>22</sup>

Last, the popularity of Chatham when it opened exhibited something that would be very important to the initial success of public housing: it need “not conform to the usual standards of the locality if it has assured merits and superior features which are suitable to the groups to be housed.”<sup>23</sup>

### Group Housing

The above passages have mentioned aspects of group housing, but what exactly is it? In his book *Rehousing Urban America*, Henry Wright defines group dwellings as

More than two dwellings . . . erected in one continuous structure; that is, they are not semi- but fully attached. Their height runs from one to three stories. They have a broad-front, shallow plan, not over two rooms deep. They are provided with independent access to every suite at ground level. There is no necessity for internal stairs or hall space used in common by more than one family.<sup>24</sup>

Group housing as Wright envisioned it was a hybrid descendent of the row house and flat.<sup>25</sup> During World War I there was much study of housing both here and in Europe by architects, such as Wright, who worked for the United States Shipping Board’s Emergency Fleet Corporation and the United States Housing Corporation. Most of the projects built by these entities were in the region of Philadelphia and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>25</sup> A flat “is a dwelling all on one floor, in a building containing at least two flats, one above the other. The rooms of each dwelling are in tandem, running from front to back” (Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 5).

Baltimore, so “their basic dwelling form was derived from the row house commonly used in that district.”<sup>26</sup> These developments included Yorkship Village (New Jersey), Union Park Gardens (Delaware), Crane Tracts and Black Rock (Bridgeport, Connecticut) and others in New York, Philadelphia, and Bath, Maine.<sup>27</sup>

Group housing was a cornerstone of Sunnyside, Radburn, and Chatham. To Wright, ventilation and light were a must for all households, and the best way to provide this was via a home that was shallow in its plan, not over two rooms deep, as mentioned in the above quote. This requisite light and air, along with recreation areas, could be ensured by amassing open land. In urban areas where land is expensive, as Sunnyside taught Wright, the best way to provide the above was to reconfigure city blocks by removing lot lines and the alleys and small side yards these formed. He learned that doing such naturally leads to erecting homes in closed rows or groups.<sup>28</sup> In fact, “[g]roup planning assembles buildings and land for effective openness without extravagance.”<sup>29</sup>

According to housing scholar Roy Lubove, Wright was sure that group housing suited well the socioeconomic requirements of low-income households. Group housing was flexible; thus planners and architects could experiment with new building techniques, organizations, and forms. Group housing was more cost-effective to build than a typical detached unit because of its solid construction. As mentioned with Chatham Village, for example, instead of separate foundations erected for each building, group housing allowed for uninterrupted foundations that were erected continuously during construction. Party walls also conserve heat and cooling. And

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>27</sup> John F. Bauman, “Community Building versus Housing Reform: Roy Lubove and the History of Housing Reform in the United States,” *Pennsylvania History*, 68 (2001): 303; and Lubove, “New Cities for Old,” 205.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 30.

these advantages are best met when group housing is built on a large scale. The shallow, two-room-deep plan makes housekeeping more time-efficient and facilitates cross-ventilation. With the side yards gone, windows can open onto wide, green areas, and all rooms can be arranged to receive adequate sunlight.<sup>30</sup>

Last, in keeping with the NUP and Garden City ideals of providing inhabitants with a complete community, compounds of group dwellings are perfect for the establishment of shared amenities. These could include play and recreation, nurseries, and workshops, among other offerings, thus “enriching the life of the community and providing fruitful employment for a growing leisure.”<sup>31</sup>

In sum, from Sunnyside, Radburn inherited central garden spaces, row houses with varying floor plans (group housing), cul-de-sacs, and service streets.<sup>32</sup> In turn, Radburn passed these on to Chatham, with the addition of the superblock. And Chatham gave us all of the above as a refined whole. To see how these ideas manifested themselves in federally financed public housing, the discussion turns again to College Homes.

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<sup>30</sup> Lubove, “New Cities for Old,” 206; and Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 30–31, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–42.

## CHAPTER 6: COLLEGE HOMES, A MANIFESTATION OF CHATHAM VILLAGE?

In 1939, 175 families, or approximately 700 people—the majority of them black—lived on the future site of College Homes, many in shotgun houses. Within the neighborhood, College Street was the only paved thoroughfare; the other streets were at best crushed stone, and more typically mud. There were no paved sidewalks, either, only paths of trodden earth.<sup>1</sup> And yet, despite the “unwholesome homes and situations,”<sup>2</sup> there were within five minutes’ walking distance a branch of the Knoxville Public Library, two community centers, a playground, two public schools and a nursery school, Knoxville College, and five churches.<sup>3</sup> Because of the combination of poor-quality housing and multiple amenities, the Knoxville Housing Authority deemed the neighborhood ripe for redevelopment. According to KHA officials, the new structures “would be plain, well-built, and livable.”<sup>4</sup> More specifically:

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<sup>1</sup> “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed in Knoxville’s Slum Clearance Project in Negro Section, and Here Are Architects Sketches Showing Types of New Dwellings To Be Built by Housing Authority,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel (KNS)* (26 Feb. 1939), A-9.

<sup>2</sup> “What Do You Think?,” *The Flashlight Herald* (11 Mar. 1939), unknown page (u.p.).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> “City’s Formal Housing Grant Bid Is Mailed,” *KNS* (29 May 1938), u.p. Despite downplaying College Homes’s aesthetic, the development actually received outside praise for just that when first built. Wendell T. Hedgcock, director of the PHA for the City and County of Denver, Colorado, said the site of College Homes was “more attractive” than those in Denver (“Has Praise For Knox Housing Sites,” *KNS* [29 Nov. 1939], u.p.). Langdon Post, author, former chair of New York City’s housing initiatives, and at the time an USHA consultant, said College Homes fared well when judged against the other 25 to 30 developments he had visited throughout the nation, adding that “These projects are really beautiful” and “very sensibly planned” (quoted in “Expert Believes Housing Marks 20th Century,” *KNS* [22 Dec. 1939], u.p.). Michael Rosenauer, a European authority in neighborhood housing and city planning, visited Knoxville in early September 1940. He praised Knoxville’s housing projects, College Homes in particular, saying, “You have met local conditions very skillfully. The atmosphere of a peaceful garden home has been preserved, particularly at the College Homes project. I like the way the service roads are handled, so that none crosses a front lawn, and yet each building is so easily accessible” (quoted in “European Town Planner Likes KHA Projects,” *KNS* [1 Sept. 1940], A4).

The Housing Authority buildings will not be palaces, nothing grand about them. But they will be sanitary, comfortable, convenient, fireproof, and decent . . . Every room will be vermin-proof.<sup>5</sup>

Following the directives codified by Henry Wright while he was a consultant to the PWA, the KHA's architects had other projects on which to base the new development that would become College Homes. The genesis of these projects was possibly a model in Pittsburgh called Chatham Village. This model was both a formal design strategy and an idea about social progress based on design. The best way to see how similar College Homes and Chatham Village were is to analyze them through an architectural and site description of each based on Chatham's National Register of Historic Places nomination and a master's thesis written in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

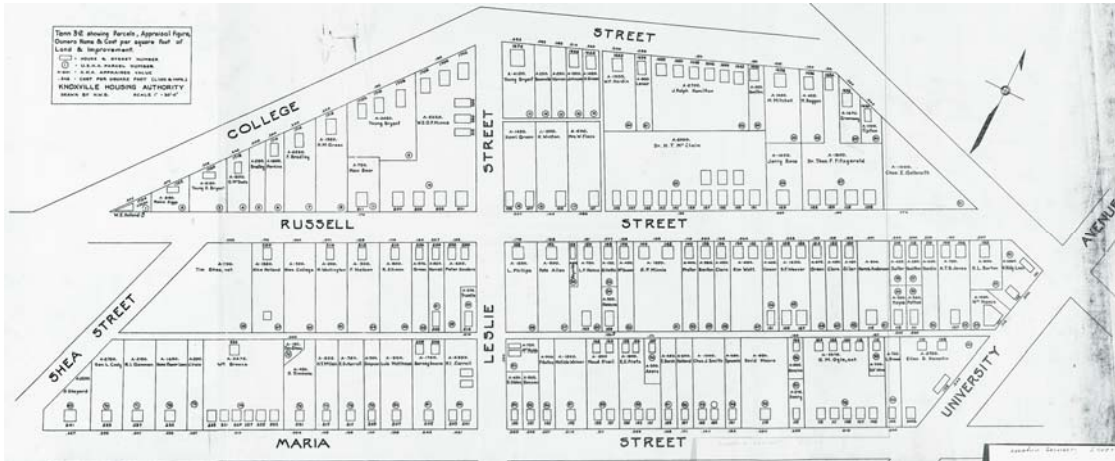
Reading the physical description of Chatham Village in its National Register Nomination is almost like reading about College Homes. Both developments presented substantially different faces to the surrounding neighborhood via their architectural design and superblock site configurations. Five small superblock units cover sixteen of Chatham's 46 total acres, whereas College Homes' thirteen to fourteen acres were divided into four, each with the original lot lines and alleys removed<sup>7</sup> (see Figure 6.1). Group housing in the form of two-story row homes was pushed to the edge of these four superblocks, leaving large central garden areas as in Sunnyside, Radburn, and Chatham. College Homes was in turn surrounded by four major streets: Shea Street, College Street, University Avenue, and Maria Avenue. Taken as a whole, this fashioned one grand superblock.

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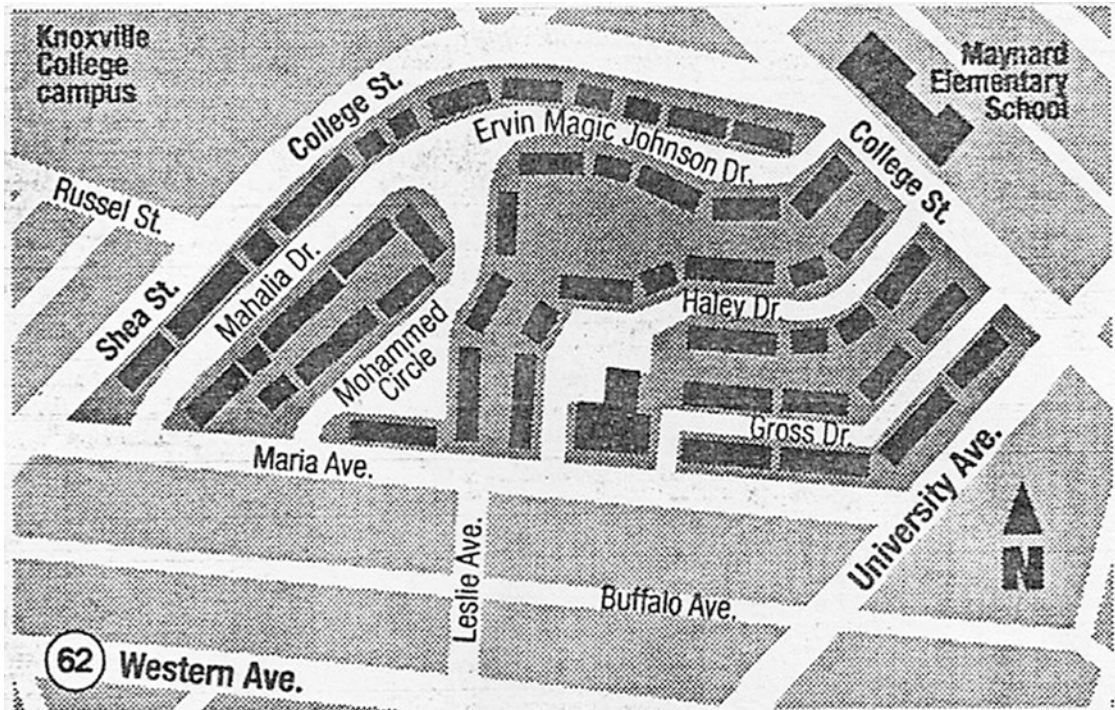
<sup>5</sup> "564 Families To Get Modern Homes In Plan," *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Gordon, "The Success of Chatham Village, 1932–2003: A Planned Community by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania" (master's thesis, Cornell University, 2003); and David J. Vater, "Chatham Village Historic District," *National Register Nomination*, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon, "The Success of Chatham Village," 47; and Vater, "Chatham Village Historic District," Section 7, p. 1.



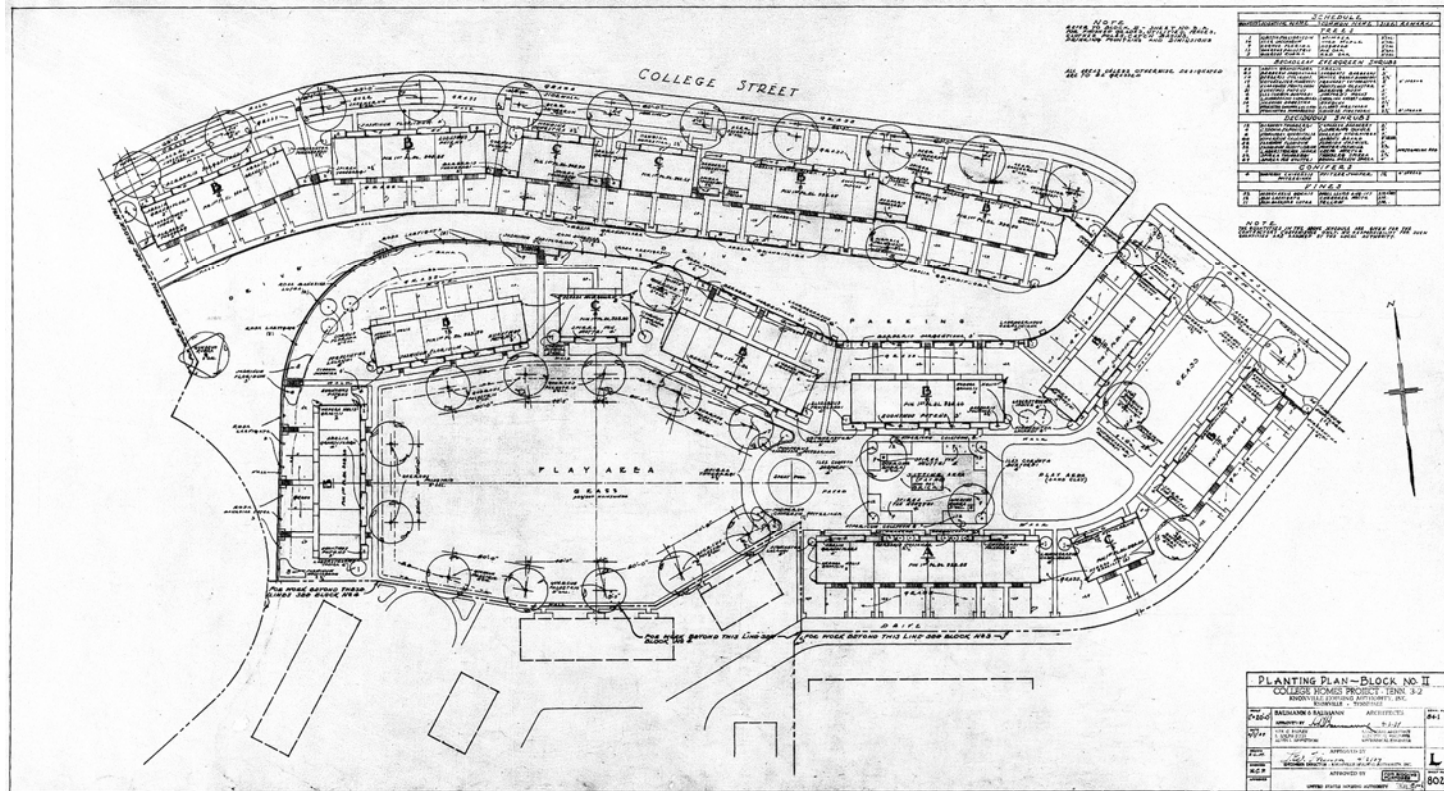
A



B

**Figure 6.1. College Home site plans.** (A) Before demolition, in 1939. (B) Building configuration before demolition, in 1998. 1939 plan reproduced from Bauman and Bauman Architects. Date unknown. Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, Knoxville, Tennessee. 1998 plan reproduced from Jacques Billeaud, David Keim and Add Seymour, Jr., “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (12 April 1998), 2.





**Figure 6.2. Planting schedule for College Homes Block II.** Plan reproduced from Bauman and Bauman Architects. 1 April 1939. Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, Knoxville, Tennessee, L-802.

The group housing positioned on the artificially terraced site of College Homes was uniformly set back from perimeter streets, as with Chatham Village. These horizontal ridges of earth allowed for such Garden City tenets as better air circulation and light to penetrate College Homes and helped to control development costs.<sup>8</sup> As with Chatham, the building foundations formed retaining walls that held these terraces in place, once more adding to the management of building costs. Like Radburn, both developments separated sidewalks from roads. At College Homes, these 16-foot-wide curvilinear interior service roads, which discouraged through traffic and provided access for deliveries, were lowered to basement level<sup>9</sup> at the back of all buildings.<sup>10</sup> The Knoxville complex was “attractively landscaped,”<sup>11</sup> as was Chatham. Plantings served to unify the projects and at College Homes included a variety of vines, shrubs, and trees (see Figure 6.2).<sup>12</sup> Both Chatham and College Homes were built of similar materials in a simplified Georgian Revival style. Massing and roof lines were repeated. College Homes, like Chatham, had regularized elements that gave it a “distinctly unified campus feel.”<sup>13</sup> These included hipped terra cotta roofs, six-over-six double-hung sash, and alternating shed and pedimented porch roofs supported by squared-up Tuscan columns of cast iron (see Figure 4.2 and Figure 6.3). Just as with Chatham Village, the faces of the College Homes units were reversed; the front doors and living areas looked out onto garden courts, while the kitchens opened onto the service streets (see Figure 6.4).

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<sup>8</sup> Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 60.

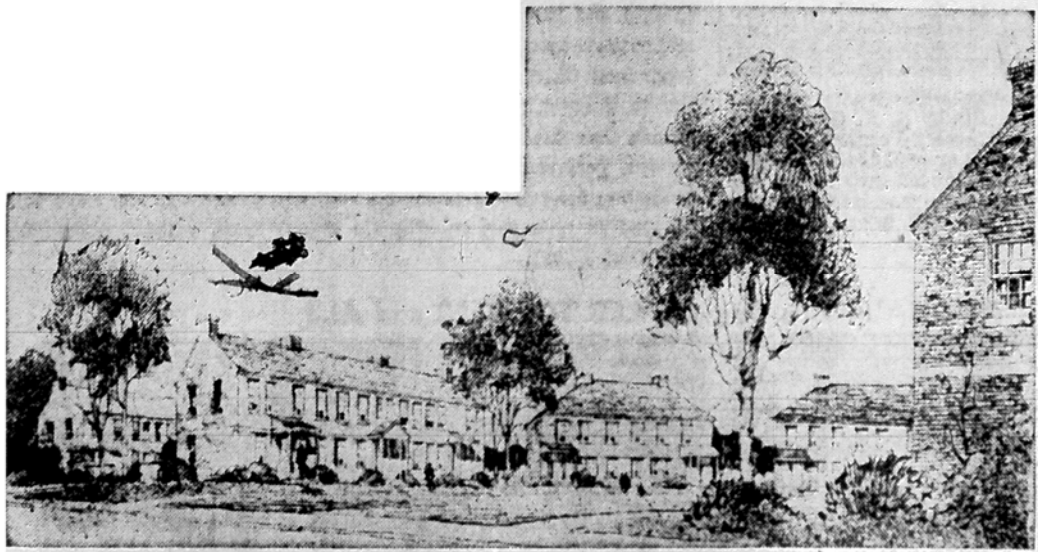
<sup>9</sup> The terraced earth gave each building a basement for service use only, thus making the two-story homes appear to be three stories from the rear.

<sup>10</sup> “Slum Project Rezoning Is Given Okeh,” *The Knoxville Journal (KJ)* (2 Feb. 1939), u.p.; “Artist Shows How College Homes Will Look,” *KNS* (12 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “\$1,250,000 Housing Job To Start Soon,” *KNS* (16 Apr. 1939), u.p.

<sup>11</sup> “Artist Shows How College Homes Will Look,” *KNS* (12 Nov. 1939), u.p.

<sup>12</sup> “Landscapers” were Charles F. Lester and William C. Pauley. “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed . . .,” *KNS* (26 Feb. 1939), A-9.

<sup>13</sup> Vater, “Chatham Village Historic District,” Section 7, p. 1.



**Figure 6.3. Rendering of College Homes.** “164 Houses Like This To Be Razed in Knoxville’s Slum Clearance Project in Negro Section, and Here Are Architect Sketches Showing Types of New Dwellings To Be Built by Housing Authority,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (26 Feb. 1939), A-9.

In order to achieve both well-organized and economically maintainable units at College Homes, the architects chose group housing with its homes that were shallow in plan, not over two rooms deep. College Homes’s 320 two-story row homes included one to three bedrooms divided into four apartments of 3, 3½, 4½, and 5½ total rooms. Similarly, Chatham has 197 two-story row houses with standardized plans of one to four bedrooms that are arranged into seven types of dwellings. Buildings at both sites had reinforced concrete floors and ceilings, plaster walls painted white, and exterior walls of red brick. At College Homes hardwood was laid over the concrete in the living room and bedrooms, while the kitchen and bath had linoleum floors. Both combined the varied dwelling units into a continuous form with a unified exterior<sup>14</sup> (again, see Figure 6.4).

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 58; “564 Families to Get Modern Homes in Plan,” *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “\$1,250,000 Housing Job To Start Soon,” *KNS* (16 Apr. 1939), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions on Tenants Are Not Severe and Asks Them to Use Consideration So Noises Will Not Disturb Their Neighbors,” *KNS* (7 Apr. 1940), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions On Tenants Are Far From Severe,” *The East Tennessee News (ETN)* (11 Apr. 1940), u.p.; Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 55.

The College Homes complex consisted of one administration facility and forty-nine other structures divided into four types. Unit plans were repeated, since, according to Wright, doing so allowed for group housing to be organized efficiently. Consequently, the thirteen *A* buildings housed two each of the 3-, 3½-, 4½-, and 5½- room units for a sum of ten dwellings per building. The twenty-two *B* style structures contained six units: four 4½- and two 5½-room apartments. Two apiece of the 3- and 3½-room units made up thirteen *C* buildings. There was only one *D* building, which had five units divided between two 3- and 3½-room dwellings and one 4½-room unit. Each residence was designed to house one family. The administration building was home to the project's offices, repair shop, supply room, tenant assembly hall, and a branch of the public library. When the development first opened, the repair shop doubled as a workshop for adult vocational classes, complete with new power tools.<sup>15</sup>

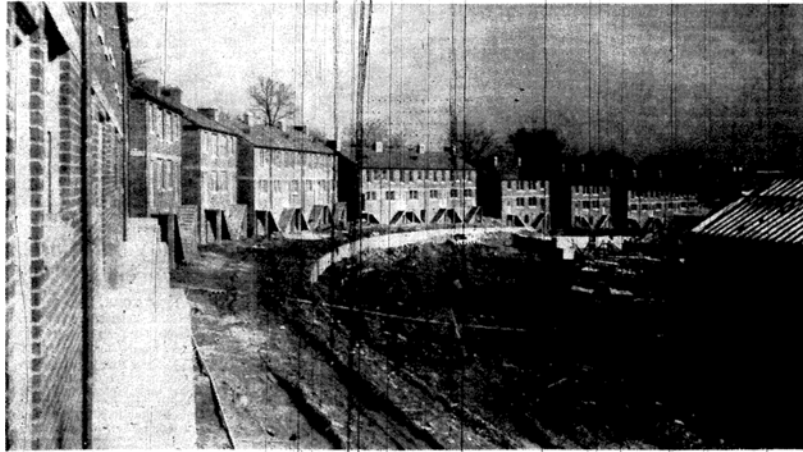
The 3- and 3½-room apartments were contained on one level, whereas the larger units took up a full two stories. Each apartment was “scientifically ventilated and electrically lighted [sic].”<sup>16</sup> Amenities included door and window shades; private bathrooms with running water, medicine cabinets and porcelain toilets, sinks, and tubs; kitchens with a bin for the coal used to operate the range and circulating-heating stove in the living room, an electric refrigerator, combination laundry tub/sink, a working table, and cabinets. In fact, these amenities were not much different from what was present at Chatham<sup>17</sup> (see Figure 6.5). Clotheslines were provided in back at

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 71; “N-S Give You First Panoramic Look at City’s First Housing Project,” *KNS* (19 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “564 Families To Get Modern Homes In Plan,” *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “College Homes’s Housing Project Progresses,” *KJ* (12 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “Recreation Equipment Is Installed,” *KJ* (3 Nov. 1940), u.p.

<sup>16</sup> The units were “scientifically ventilated” because they were designed as two rooms deep. “564 Families To Get Modern Homes In Plan,” *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.

<sup>17</sup> As built, all rooms at Chatham but the bath had hardwood floors; bathrooms had a built-in shower and tub; kitchens had a porcelain sink, metal backsplash, metal cabinets, wooden drain board, and an electric refrigerator. Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 60.



This close-up of College Homes shows the type of houses which have displaced several hundred unsanitary shanties, formerly occupying the site. Long life is insured in the solid brick construction.

A



B

**Figure 6.4. Photographs from the rear of both College Homes and Chatham Village.** (A) College Homes. (B) Chatham Village. One of the College Homes service drives was to be built adjacent to the retaining wall in the middle of the picture. College Homes picture from “These Pictures Show ‘Before and After’ On Knoxville...,” *The Knoxville Journal* (21 Jan. 1940), unknown page. Chatham Village photograph from Edith B. Wallace, Paula S. Reed, and Linda McClelland, “Chatham Village,” *National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 2003, number 27.



*Mrs. Arnold's new happiness is reflected in this kitchen scene where Evelyn, the half-grown daughter, washes the dishes in a large white porcelain sink. And she can turn on a faucet and get hot water—a luxury they had rarely known.*

**Figure 6.5. Kitchen typical of College Homes.** Though this photograph is of a kitchen at Knoxville's white project, Western Heights, it is representative of the kitchens found at College Homes. *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (4 Aug. 1940), unknown page.

both developments, and water and electricity were included in the cost of rent at College Homes.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the interior courts of College Homes provided ample play space for children. The design called for the majority of this recreation space to be at the center of the complex, with smaller areas elsewhere on-site.<sup>21</sup> There were even spray/wading pools, sand pits, playgrounds with equipment, and tennis and badminton courts (see Figure 6.6). College Homes had arranged with the Leslie Street Park to use their diamonds for baseball and softball. The City Recreation Department directed all sporting activities. As a comparison, Chatham had playgrounds, sandboxes, tennis courts, baseball fields, and basketball courts.<sup>22</sup>

As the many amenities discussed above attest, housing reformers called for the new housing projects such as College Homes to shield their residents from any detrimental outside pressures by creating “the complete community.”<sup>23</sup> A “built-in” neighborhood was insurance “against future blight and spotty decay.”<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, with houses and gardens in compact groups, laid out not on a rigorous checkerboard of uniform subdivided lots but with loving care for topography, sun, prevailing breezes, outlook and neighborhood amenity, there

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<sup>20</sup> “564 Families To Get Modern Homes In Plan,” *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “Low-Rent Dwellings Is Aim Of Knoxville Housing Projects,” *KJ Sunday Magazine* (10 Dec. 1939), front page; “Low Rental Rates Given By Projects,” *KJ* (17 Dec. 1939), u.p.; “\$13.60 Is Top In KHA Rental,” *KNS* (20 Dec. 1939), u.p.; “Open Ten Bids On KHA Needs; Delay Contract,” *KJ* (17 Jan. 1940), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions on Tenants Are Not Severe and Asks Them To Use Consideration So Noises Will Not Disturb Their Neighbors,” *KNS* (7 Apr. 1940), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions On Tenants Are Far From Severe,” *ETN* (11 Apr. 1940), u.p.; Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 57.

<sup>21</sup> A twenty-five-foot landscaped border facing College Street was the only dimension explicitly referenced other than total acreage (2/28/39).

<sup>22</sup> “564 Families To Get Modern Homes In Plan,” *KNS* (15 Jan. 1939), u.p.; “Recreation Equipment Is Installed,” *KJ* (3 Nov. 1940); *KNS* (4 Aug. 1940), u.p.; “Artist Shows How College Homes Will Look,” *KNS* (12 Nov. 1939), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions on Tenants Are Not Severe and Asks Them To Use Consideration So Noises Will Not Disturb Their Neighbors,” *KNS* (7 Apr. 1940), u.p.; “Housing Manager Says Restrictions On Tenants Are Far From Severe,” *ETN* (11 Apr. 1940), u.p.; Susan Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 47, 55.

<sup>23</sup> United States, *America Builds: The Record of PWA. Public Works Administration* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1939), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Bauer, *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1940), 30.

can be playgrounds for different age-groups and parks and perhaps even a community center, instead of dead chasms between houses and acres of unnecessary pavement in streets, sidewalks and alleys. The whole neighborhood may be just one super-block, which means complete play safety for the children and clean, quiet green surroundings and outlook for all the houses.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 6.6. Spray pool typical of College Homes.** Though this picture is of the spray pool at Western Heights, it is representative of that found at College Homes. “Water Spray At Western Heights Popular With Children,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (6 July 1941), unknown page.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.



Redevelopments were to be distinct from their surroundings, in both design and size. They were filled with housing spread over a large area where there existed many shared amenities.<sup>26</sup> These characteristics, housing reformers postulated, would inhibit the project's degenerating into the ways of the slum it had replaced. More specifically, the superblock's interior orientation was touted as a means by which the housing project could protect itself from infiltration by the problems inherent in any portion of the previous slum that may have escaped redevelopment. And the central open space, devoid of automobile traffic, would let in the therapeutic properties associated with air and sunlight, so conspicuously absent from the slum. It was, therefore, a way to bring a piece of those calming qualities associated with country living to the city.<sup>27</sup>

It is easy to see from the above architectural and site description how College Homes was so similar to Chatham Village and its Neighborhood Unit Plan. There was consonant architecture, thoughtful plantings, and a community building at its heart. Within five minutes' walking distance—less than a half-mile away, as Perry directed—were not just one but three schools. Although the exact acreage of the project eludes the author, much of its land was set aside for recreation. Victor Albert Hyde writes in his 1939 thesis that a commercial district led right up to the site of College Homes, too.<sup>28</sup> But what of the Garden City? The green of the Garden City is there, but were there other ways, aside from simply terracing the College Homes site and the resultant continuous row home foundations serving as retaining walls, by which the cost of development was controlled?

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 40; and Karen A. Franck, "Changing Values in U.S. Public Housing Policy and Design," in *Future Visions of Urban Public Housing: An International Forum, November 17–20, 1994, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA: Proceedings*, ed. Wolfgang F. E. Preiser, David P. Varady, and Francis P. Russell (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati College of Design, 1994), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, *Introduction to Housing: Facts and Principles* (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1940), 34, 129–30.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Albert Hyde, *A Geographical Survey of Knoxville, TN* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1939), 82–83.

Recall that the two main goals of the Garden City were to provide its residents with improved living conditions and to do so while controlling the value of land. Sir Raymond Unwin, in his quest to establish a Garden City, found that price control was better achieved through controlling development costs. Stein and Wright followed these principles at all three of their projects, refining them along the way into a system that was ready-made for housing low-income slum populations of the Depression. For example, the standardized plans of both Chatham Village and College Homes were key in realizing the advantages and savings of large-scale construction. More to the point, however, Wright considered himself more of a cost accountant than an architect, and as such adopted what this author refers to as “principles of efficiency” to make low-cost (read here “low production cost”) housing possible. To Wright, efficiency took into account not only the quality of a space but also its usability. Thus he suggests that when space is at a premium it is best to mingle larger and smaller rooms. This principle should manifest itself, for instance, in living rooms being large and in bedroom and service areas remaining as compact as possible. Every College Homes unit was arranged in this manner. In fact, the plans for College Homes’s 4½- and 5½-room apartments are almost exactly like those used at Chatham Village. The only difference is that at Chatham the kitchen and dining room are separated by a wall, whereas at College Homes they are a combined kitchen-dinette (see Figure 6.7A and 6.7B). These were a direct descendent of a Sunnyside unit, with further refinements by Wright’s cost analyses at both Radburn and Chatham. Wright’s treatise *Rehousing Urban America* includes many such refined and reworked plans from sources other than Sunnyside, Radburn, and Chatham, and it is not a far stretch to see how the 3- and 3½-room units at College Homes were derived from a Clarence Stein study on which Wright made slight variations<sup>29</sup> (see Figure 6.8A and 6.8B).

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<sup>29</sup> Gordon, “The Success of Chatham Village,” 58; Richard Pommer, “The Architecture of Urban

As mentioned Wright's accounting efficiency dealt with the usability of space, so his concern was not just with the juxtaposition of rooms, but also with their internal layout. While today many features of the College Homes (and Chatham Village) layouts are considered standard design for multiple-unit housing, both affordable and market-rate, it is still worth seeing how much they followed the guidelines developed by Henry Wright in his unpublished 1931 *Manual of Good Housing Practice*.<sup>30</sup>

This handbook offers an insight into the thought processes that guided his work on developments such as Chatham, and College Homes was a physical manifestation of these. For example, the "ideal circulation arrangement," according to Wright, "provides for free access to bath from all rooms without crossing any other room, and access to the bedrooms without crossing the living room."<sup>31</sup> Such an arrangement ensures that each room has privacy and allows for the living room to be used as an auxiliary bedroom.<sup>32</sup> Again, College Homes' 4½- and 5½-room units accomplish this, although the 3- and 3½-room units do not (see Figure 6.7B and Figure 6.8B). However, in the latter units the bedrooms are "accessible from the bath hall"<sup>33</sup> (see Figure 6.8B). Except for the end units, bathrooms and kitchens of neighboring units were placed back-to-back for plumbing economy. Bathrooms were even oriented with the tub under a window across the narrow end of the room. This was the most compact layout and grouped "all supply lines and drains under one wall, avoiding the necessity of passing them under the floor, thereby reducing expense of maintenance and repair."<sup>34</sup> In the same vein, in two-story apartments, bathrooms were

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Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (Dec. 1978), 262; Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 37, 43–44, 48–49, 58, 112, 152, 159.

<sup>30</sup> Excerpt found in Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, as an addendum.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

placed over kitchens in order to utilize the same stacks. Furthermore, kitchens were made narrow to save a housewife steps.<sup>35</sup>

Wright wrote that the minimum width of a bedroom should not be less than nine feet, except “[i]n the case of a minor bedroom furnished with a single bed parallel to the wall,”<sup>36</sup> which could be narrower. Again, College Homes followed Wright’s lead; the smallest width was 8’3”, and the smallest room measured a total of 8’6” by 9’8½”. All the other chambers ranged from 10’ to 12½’. And although tenants could arrange bedrooms how they chose, in planning the idea was for one closet per person per bedroom. Furthermore, as Wright suggested, each unit had a linen closet in the hall, a coat closet near—if not in—the living room, and a broom/utility closet in the kitchen. The standard, which College Homes adhered to, was “one shelf above the clothes pole.” Also, some closets had curtains instead of doors, one of the “compromises” suggested by Wright for low-cost housing.<sup>37</sup>

Before College Homes was built, the site and its homes lacked many of the basic amenities. Many characterized it as a slum. The Knoxville Housing Authority, receiving aid from the federal government, razed the slum, erected a new low-income housing project in its place, and named it College Homes. The design of the Homes was most likely based on the model of Chatham Village, a development aimed at those with moderate incomes in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Chatham Village represented the refinement of thoughts and principles in community planning, namely the Garden City and Neighborhood Unit Plan as well as group housing, executed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright via their other projects, Sunnyside and Radburn.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 112, 160–61.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 161.

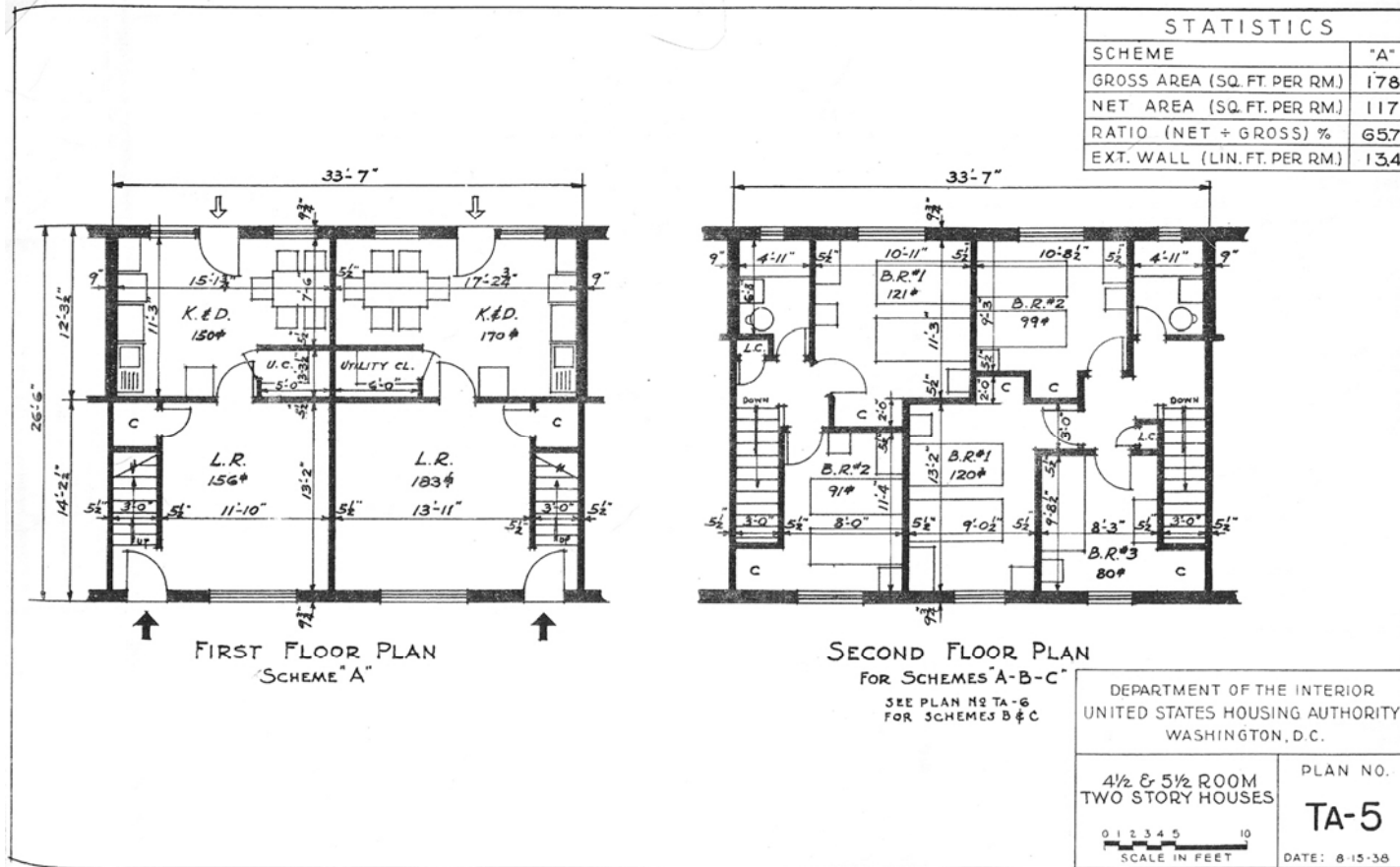


A

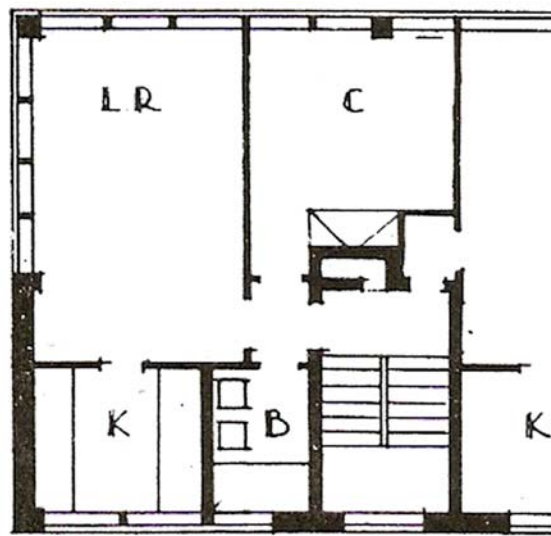
**Figure 6.7. Multi-unit plans for Chatham Village and College Homes.** (A) 4½- and 6-room units from Chatham Village. (B) 4½- and 5½-room dwellings from College Homes. Chatham Village reproduced from Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 49. College Homes reproduced from United States Housing Authority, *Unit plans: Suggestions for the interior arrangement of low-rent dwellings* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, August 1938), TA-5.

Figure 6.7 (Continued)

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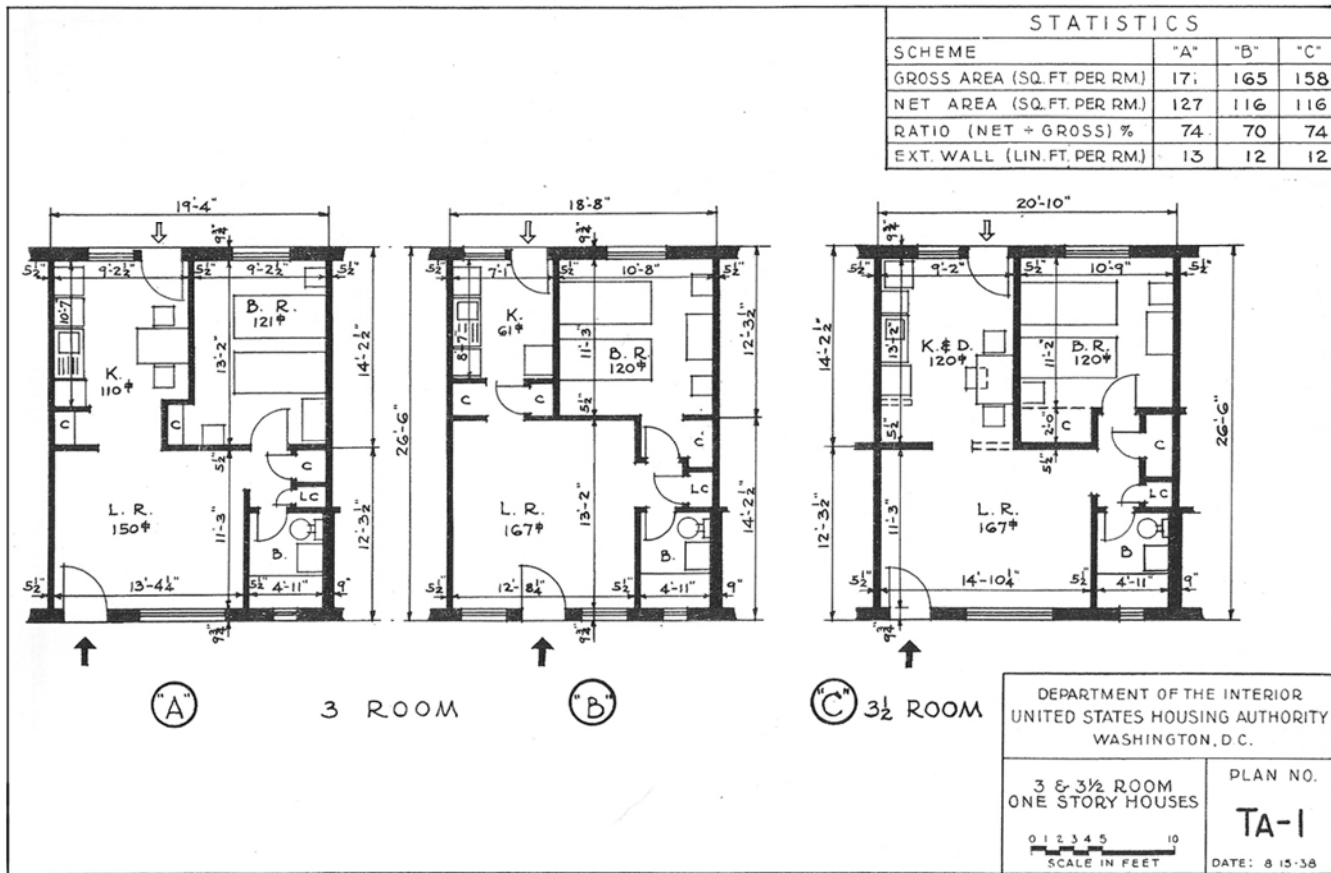
B



A

**Figure 6.8. College Homes plans.** (A) Clarence Stein–derived plan. (B) 3- and 3½-room plans used at College Homes. Stein from Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 112. College Homes reproduced from United States Housing Authority, *Unit plans: Suggestions for the interior arrangement of low-rent dwellings*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, August 1938), TA-1.

Figure 6.8 (Continued)





A roaring success when it first opened, College Homes was, in the 1990s, demolished. The following chapter addresses why, at the dawn of the new millennium, College Homes and projects like it—these testaments to liberal social ideology—were deemed failures and slated for redevelopment, in addition to summarizing what goals the redevelopment hopes to accomplish.

## CHAPTER 7: EVOLUTIONS OF PUBLIC HOUSING

A victim of bureaucracy, College Homes started down a path of steady decline that finally resulted in its demolition, which began on Monday, November 30, 1998. As this chapter will explain, as America's public housing stock—places such as College Homes—aged, the evolution of public housing policy from 1940 to 1990 served only to pull resources away from these communities and their residents, causing a fixable situation to become one beyond repair.

To begin with, the composition of those living in public housing has changed over time. The Great Depression was in full swing when the federal government began its public housing programs, and poverty was rampant: 15 million people were unemployed in the early part of 1933; 4 million received relief payments. But these were the “deserving poor,”<sup>1</sup> hard-working families deeply affected by the economic downturn. Applicants for public housing were screened carefully, and tenure in PWA/USHA projects was only ever intended to be temporary, just until residents were on their feet once again. However, the installation of income limits by the 1937 Act, in combination with the subsequent forty years of housing legislation, changed the focus of public housing by the 1990s from nuclear families “down-on-their-luck” to the “more permanently distressed underclass,”<sup>2</sup> who were some of the poorest people in the country.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, an increase in one's income level meant eviction, which consequently discouraged residents from improving their economic status. And,

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<sup>1</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 226.

<sup>2</sup> R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Michael S. FitzPatrick, “A Disaster in Every Generation: An Analysis of HOPE VI: HUD'S Newest Big Budget Development Plan,” *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* 7, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 428; Hays, *The Federal Government*, 94; Wright, *Building the Dream*, 220, 226–27.

despite the removal of federally mandated limits in 1959, which thus allowed localities the flexibility to decide income restrictions for occupancy themselves, local public housing authorities (PHAs) still set their limits far below their communities' median<sup>4</sup> income level through the 1960s. The effects of this restriction were compounded by the 1968 Housing Act, which set ceiling rents at twenty-five percent of tenant income. The next year the Brooke Amendment removed requirements for minimum rent and permitted families lacking income into public housing. Consequently, public housing authorities were left with revenue shortfalls (recall that tenant rents were to be high enough to cover the operation of a project), which resulted in the deferred maintenance of buildings. Furthermore, activities such as Urban Renewal, whilst eliminating blight, flushed out even more poor—some of whom were plagued with violence, alcoholism, and instability—who turned to public housing for shelter.<sup>5</sup>

In 1980, the government changed statutory requirements once again, this time allotting displaced persons, those with below-standard housing, the homeless, and households spending over fifty percent of their earnings for shelter priority to publicly funded housing. Furthermore, increased utilization of the Section 8<sup>6</sup> program allowed the best tenants remaining in public housing to move out.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> When household incomes in a geographic area are arranged from high to low, the median is the middle value.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Billeaud, David Keim, and Add Seymour, Jr., "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel (KNS)* (12 April 1998), 5; Hays, *The Federal Government*, 94, 175; Mindy Turbov and Valeria Piper, *HOPE VI and Mixed-Finance Redevelopments: A Catalyst for Neighborhood Renewal* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005), 6; Wright, *Building the Dream*, 228–29; Alexander von Hoffman, "The Future of Public Housing in the United States in Historical Perspective," in *Future Visions of Urban Public Housing: An International Forum, November 17-20, 1994, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA: Proceedings*, ed. Wolfgang F. E. Preiser, David P. Varady, and Francis P. Russell (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati College of Design, 1994), 101–2.

<sup>6</sup> A "housing allowance." Hays, *The Federal Government*, 107. The idea of a housing allowance first appeared in the mid-1940s. Then called "rent certificates," they were advocated by the real estate industry as an alternative to the federal government's involvement in public housing. Nathaniel Schnieder Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), 56. At the time, however, the government scoffed at the idea, viewing it as a way "to maintain the profitability of slum areas and blighted areas." Quoted in Hays, *The Federal Government*, 56. Yet, the government reconsidered its position twenty years later. Housing allowances were sanctioned in the Section 23 Leased Housing Program, a little-used initiative originally passed as part of the Housing Act of 1961. Through it, the local public housing authority identified an empty unit, chose a tenant from its applicant

Congress created the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing (NCSDPH) in 1989 “to identify strategies for remediation, and to develop a national action plan to eliminate distressed conditions nationwide.”<sup>8</sup> By the time of the commission’s *Final Report*<sup>9</sup> in 1992, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)<sup>10</sup> estimated that of its nonelderly population, eighty percent lived below the poverty line. Over the 1980s, the number of households with less than ten percent of the local median income, a key sign of economic destitution, made a noticeable jump: between 1981 and 1991, the percentage grew from 2.5 to nearly 20 percent.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, HUD reported that around two-thirds of its nonelderly families were headed by single women. As related by Vale:

In public housing in general, the national average [of female-headed households] is 85 percent . . . As of 1991, more than 86 percent of such female-headed families with children had incomes below the poverty line. Nearly three-quarters of nonelderly [sic] public housing families report receiving no income from employment, and a growing majority of these families receive welfare.<sup>12</sup>

As job opportunities fizzle or that which is earned does not make ends meet, people will look to other means of support. For some it is welfare, as mentioned in the Vale quote, for others drugs and/or crime. Across the nation during the latter half of

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list, and settled on a rental fee that the resident could afford. After this, the authority would enter into a leasing agreement with a landlord, paying the difference (the *housing allowance*) between the rent it and the resident settled on and what the unit would garner on the private market. With the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, this plan was strengthened and renamed Section 8. Hays, *The Federal Government*, 106–7, 147, 149.

<sup>7</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 5; and Gayle Epp, “Emerging Strategies for Revitalizing Public Housing Communities,” *Housing Policy Debate* 7, no. 3 (1996): 567.

<sup>8</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 566.

<sup>9</sup> National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, *The Final Report of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> In 1965 the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), a descendent of the USHA, was added to the president’s cabinet and renamed the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis*, 75, 165.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence J. Vale, “Beyond the Problem Projects Paradigm: Defining and Revitalizing ‘Severely Distressed’ Public Housing,” *Housing Policy Debate* 4, no. 2 (1993): 155.

<sup>12</sup> Vale, “Beyond the Problem Projects Paradigm,” 155–56.

the 1980s, low-income neighborhoods, and especially public housing developments, suffered an explosion in crime and drug-related activity. And whether residents of public housing chose to participate in this illegal behavior or not, it still seemed to surround them: a 1990 study by the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) found that in their developments, the criminals, gang members, and drug dealers responsible for the rise in the drug trade were illegal tenants finding their way in through romantic relationships, bullying, threats, and bribes.<sup>13</sup>

As alluded to above, many public housing residents have physical and mental health problems. According to a multicity study by the Urban Institute, of its adult respondents, over one-third had diabetes, arthritis, or high blood pressure. Twenty-nine percent of those surveyed reported “poor mental health,”<sup>14</sup> a rate nearly fifty percent higher than that of the nation. Similarly, the health of the children of public housing was worse off than that of their peers. Of children 6 to 14, one in five had asthma. The figure for those under 6 was one in four, three times the national average. These children also faced problems at school. One in ten children under 6 were in special education classes. Of those aged 6 to 14, one in ten were in special education for behavioral issues, while another one in four were in classes for learning difficulties.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 573; Larry Keating, “Redeveloping Public Housing: Relearning Urban Renewal’s Immutable Lessons,” *APA Journal* 66, no. 4 (2000): 393–94; Larry Keating and Carol A. Flores, “Sixty and Out: Techwood Homes Transformed by Enemies and Friends,” *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 3 (March 2000): 286.

<sup>14</sup> Susan J. Popkin, “H.R. 1614 HOPE VI Reauthorization and Small Community Mainstreet Revitalization Housing Act: Testimony before U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Financial Services,” *The Urban Institute* (April 29, 2003), <http://www.urban.org/publications/900614.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Susan J. Popkin, Diane Levy, Laura E. Harris, Jennifer Comey, Mary K. Cunningham, Larry Buron, “HOPE VI Panel Study: Baseline Report,” *The Urban Institute* (Sept. 1, 2002), <http://www.urban.org/publications/410590.html>; Susan J. Popkin, “H.R. 1614 HOPE VI Reauthorization and Small Community Mainstreet Revitalization Housing Act: Testimony before U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Financial Services,” *The Urban Institute* (April 29, 2003), <http://www.urban.org/publications/900614.html>; The Urban Institute, “HOPE VI Helps Many in America’s Worst Public Housing, but Vulnerable Families Face Significant Barriers,” *The Urban Institute* (Dec. 10, 2002), <http://www.urban.org/publications/900574.html>.

In sum, historically the general public has viewed the poor in a negative light. Thus, as the century progressed and public housing continually focused on those with the highest degree of hardship, it too acquired this damaging aura.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that public housing's problems were not limited to just its residents despite the best efforts of its early champions. Harold Ickes wrote in 1935:

We would be doing a disservice to the principles of slum clearance if . . . we should permit ourselves to produce results so badly conceived, so wretchedly planned and so flimsily built that the effect would be to discredit for a generation to come what seems to me to be the most desirable social objective toward which the government is moving at this time.<sup>17</sup>

Public housing projects of the late 1930s and early 1940s were meant to last sixty years—the extent of their mortgages—with minimal costs for repairs. And although public housing units were small, they were efficient, having those features that were considered essential to a healthy life at the time.<sup>18</sup>

Recall that Henry Wright was not simply an architect but also a cost accountant (see Chapter 6). He would work and rework plans in order to find “the most economically efficient arrangement of desirable rental space to meet the requirements of the group to be served.”<sup>19</sup> It is no surprise that through his combination of rational planning and standardization, basic designs, referred to as “modules”<sup>20</sup> or “unit plans,”<sup>21</sup> were created to allow for variety and flexibility in the interior layout of group housing. Housing reformers, however, took this scheme one step further, advocating that the module/unit plan create the “minimum house,”<sup>22</sup> the

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<sup>16</sup> Hays, *The Federal Government*, 26–27, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Harold LeClair Ickes, *Back to Work: The Story of the PWA* (Norfolk, VA: Donning Co., 1978), 185.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Bauer, *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 1940), 40.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Wright, *Rehousing Urban America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 259.

<sup>21</sup> Ickes, *Back to Work*, 188.

<sup>22</sup> Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 237.

smallest space possible within which one could live decently. These practitioners were capitalizing on the interior ideals of ventilation, sanitation, order, and privacy espoused at the turn of the twentieth century as a revolt against Victorian extravagance. Reformers saw this as a way to create a setting that would promote appropriate social as well as familial life and development. For example, as Wright suggested, closets were built without doors in order to contain costs, but the meaning of this was expanded to the fostering of neatness. In order to discourage the custom of babies sharing a bedroom with their parents, these rooms were intentionally made too small for the practice. It should be noted, however, that by extension it was feared that providing more than this “minimum” would undermine any motivation tenants had to improve their plight in life.<sup>23</sup>

Also remember that Henry Wright was an early advisor to the PWA Housing Division. It is easy to understand how the Housing Division, and its successor, the USHA, could seize upon his unit plan ideas and assemble these and their own into guides to “give architects and engineers the benefit of this information in designing low-rent housing units.”<sup>24</sup> As one such guide warns:

It must be kept in mind that the typical units incorporated are for guide purposes only. No attempt has been made to solve individual problems or local site conditions. Instead, the effort has been to present typical layouts covering different units and combinations of units, in the belief that the architects will use them as aids to develop their own ideas, both for the individual unit and group plan.<sup>25</sup>

Harold Ickes, administrator of the PWA’s Housing Division, stated defiantly, “[t]here is little danger of over-standardization because of these unit plans,”<sup>26</sup> and

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<sup>23</sup> Hays, *The Federal Government*, 98; Roth, *A Concise History*, 250; Upton, *Architecture*, 237; Lawrence Wodehouse and Marian Moffett, *A History of Western Architecture* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1989), 462; Wright, *Building the Dream*, 232.

<sup>24</sup> Foreword to United States Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Housing Division, *Unit Plans* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ickes, *Back to Work*, 189.

there may not have been, under different circumstances. Although PHAs and their architects were allowed artistic license in designing each individual housing project, there were still governmental regulations and standards to meet, including those of cost. Consequently, it was not long before, in the never-ending quest to save money and time, early designs possibly based on Wright's Chatham Village became the form on which all subsequent developments were modeled, until the second phase of public housing design began in the mid-1950s.<sup>27</sup> For a case in point, see Figure 6.7B and 6.8B. College Homes's 3- and 3½-room apartments are "Plan No. TA-1," and the 4½- and 5½-room dwellings are "Plan No. TA-5" in *Unit Plans: Suggestions for the Interior Arrangement of Low-Rent Dwellings*, a guidebook published by the USHA in August 1938.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, design restraints imposed by the government to once again contain costs ultimately robbed both the Garden City and the Neighborhood Unit Plan of their effectiveness as urban design strategies.

In addition, although the poor were moved into better living arrangements, the existing segregation and social order of a municipality stayed the same. At the time no one fathomed the lasting detrimental effects of this seemingly minor decision in the implementation of the public housing program. However, in combination with the standard of "rents geared to [residents'] ability to pay,"<sup>29</sup> this and other factors, discussed above and later on, led to an entrenchment of inner-city ghettos.<sup>30</sup> So, despite the fact that Ickes and the PWA Housing Division strove to produce a product

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<sup>27</sup> Von Hoffman writes that pre-World War II public housing design did mix American traditions with European Modernism, whereas Dagenhart maintains that the Avant-garde did not appear until after World War II and that this was mainly expressed in the high-rise developments built in the late 1950s and afterwards. Richard Dagenhart, "Public Housing and Context: A Preliminary Report," in *Future Visions of Urban Public Housing: An International Forum, November 17–20, 1994, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA: Proceedings*, ed. Wolfgang F. E. Presier, David P. Varady, and Francis P. Russell (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati College of Design, 1994), 386; Ickes, *Back to Work*, 186; von Hoffman, "The Future of Public Housing," 96, 100; Wright, *Building the Dream*, 237

<sup>28</sup> United States Housing Authority, *Unit Plans: Suggestions for the Interior Arrangement of Low-Rent Dwellings* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, 1938).

<sup>29</sup> Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Building the Dream*, 227.



that would not fail and weigh down the United States' attempt at low-income housing for years, he—and it—did.<sup>31</sup> By 1946 the FPHA, in its volume *Public Housing Design: A Review of Experience in Low-Rent Housing*, had this to say about the aesthetic of its projects:

So far, it is safe to say that no distinctive movement in architectural expression has evolved from the program. True enough, many of the projects are stamped “public housing,” but this seems due to the general use of standardized plans plus the enforced simplicity of structural design and exterior materials rather than to any inherent necessity.<sup>32</sup>

As a matter of fact the range of methods, details and finished used in low-rent public housing has been confined to a relatively narrow field; the broad uniformity of the housing program and the enforced necessity for economy in first and continuing cost, has molded most of the projects into a fairly consistent pattern, extremely simple in structural design and use of materials.<sup>33</sup>

As time marched on, aesthetic reviews deteriorated. In 1971, the *President's Third Annual Report*<sup>34</sup> stated that the housing policies of the federal government, in combination with choices made at the local level, “sometimes wrought unfortunate environmental consequences,” such as

poorly planned . . . developments [that were] drab, monolithic, . . . largely segregated, [and] which still stand in our major cities as prisons of the poor—enduring symbols of good intentions run aground on poorly conceived policy, or sometimes simply lack of policy.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, by 1990, units in these developments were considered twenty to thirty percent smaller than the changing standards of adequacy recommended. This meant, for instance, that bedrooms were too small for double occupancy, storage space was

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<sup>31</sup> Ickes, *Back to Work*, 184.

<sup>32</sup> United States, *Public Housing Design, A Review of Experience in Low-Rent Housing* (Washington, DC: National Housing Agency, Federal Public Housing Authority, 1946), 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>34</sup> *President's Third Annual Report on National Housing Goals* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1971).

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Charles J. Orlebeke, “The Evolution of Low-Income Housing Policy, 1949 to 1999,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000): 498.

insufficient, and kitchens were too small for a table to seat all members of a family during a meal.<sup>36</sup>

Compounding these issues in planning and design was that as the years passed the population of public housing projects became more destitute, resulting in rents geared to the ability to pay falling lower and lower. Thus, as this chapter endeavored to show, it became much harder for national and local organizations to procure the money needed to cover operational costs. Further, in addition to the obsolescence mentioned above and the construction of new housing projects being slim to none by the 1980s, projects began to degenerate as a result of their falling revenues. Aging developments became more and more expensive to maintain.<sup>37</sup> Sixty years of public housing policy finally resulted in what Gayle Epp labeled “triage,”<sup>38</sup> the focusing of money for improvements and modernization on projects with minor needs. This approach led to an even swifter physical decline in the more troubled, usually older, developments. Consequently, by 1992 it was estimated that with the available funding, modernization requirements for America’s public housing would take over ten years to finance, and this was without tackling any other maintenance needs that had accrued during that time.<sup>39</sup>

This “project identity”<sup>40</sup> or “project concept,” which “began as a utopian social and architectural ideal and became a legacy of housing policy and urban design failures,”<sup>41</sup> directly contributed to the identification of public housing developments as dreary and repetitive, blighting those areas they were to have helped.<sup>42</sup> And, in

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<sup>36</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 568n6.

<sup>37</sup> FitzPatrick, “A Disaster in Every Generation,” 436.

<sup>38</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 568.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 565.

<sup>40</sup> Von Hoffman, “The Future of Public Housing,” 95.

<sup>41</sup> Dagenhart, “Public Housing and Context,” 383.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

combination with a change in resident characteristics by the 1990s, this image of public housing became one of

deteriorated buildings and asphalt-paved sites devoid of function and use, occupied by single-female-headed households on welfare and riddled with gangs, drugs, and criminal activity.<sup>43</sup>

Resident characteristics as well as aesthetic reviews and adequacy standards were not the only aspects of public housing evolving as the twentieth century progressed, so, too, was public-housing ideology. The political and cultural outlook on poverty heavily influences the design, scope, and implementation of “social welfare” programs at the time. From even before the national program of public housing was established, the concentration of poverty, and thus the poor, to an area was seen as the crux of the “Culture of Poverty.” This concentration was a slippery slope that served to further strengthen and encourage the separation of those with low incomes from the rest of society. If only the concentration could be dispersed, then pathologies associated with the poor would be alleviated. Yet, as data from Urban Renewal initiatives throughout the country emerged, they contradicted completely the arguments advanced by Bauer, Woods, Ickes, and other reformers earlier in the century who advocated for public housing and slum clearance. For instance, a 1961 study revealed that sixty percent of those residents subject to relocation simply moved to other slums. Even new slums emerged as these people fanned out into cities looking for shelter.<sup>44</sup> Why?

The inner workings of poverty are vastly complex and thus hard to explain succinctly. Suffice it to say that Urban Renewal initiatives exposed the many sides to poverty other than its housing, such as mental health, crime, transportation,

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<sup>43</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 564.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert J. Gans, “The Failure of Urban Renewal: A Critique and Some Proposals,” *Commentary* 39, no. 4 (1965): 30; and Hays, *The Federal Government*, 182.

employment, physical health, and education, just to name a few. This tangled web prevents attacking the problems separately on a one-by-one basis. Urban Renewal highlighted the fact that better housing does not by itself make people more capable parents, harder working, or more emotionally stable. Subsequently, the most effective means to prevailing over these matters is not only to raze the slum, to erase the blight; but to make services available to the poor to improve all aspects of their lives. Displacing the poor without providing such services will only force them into a similar environment or foster the creation of a new slum as the population continues to adapt to its situation the way it always has, as evidenced by the 1961 study noted above.<sup>45</sup> As sociologist Herber J. Gans put it, “the occupants of even the best-designed public housing project remain just as poor, as subject to the pathologies associated with poverty, and as stigmatized as slum dwellers.”<sup>46</sup>

In light of the transformed perception of the Culture of Poverty, there were calls for change. James Rouse proposed integrated development, which would eliminate the distinction between public housing developments and their surrounding neighborhoods, as early as 1957.<sup>47</sup> In 1965, building on this idea, Herbert J. Gans wrote that “Obviously, the ideal approach is one that coordinates the elimination of slums with the reduction of poverty.”<sup>48</sup> This, he reasoned, was best achieved by placing low- and middle-income (possibly even upper-middle-income) people in the same “quasi-communities,”<sup>49</sup> which would foster a “semi-suburban style of living.”<sup>50</sup> Facilities and programs, such as job training, education, and social welfare, must exist not only to help public housing tenants achieve self-sufficiency, to escape poverty, but

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *People, Plans, and Policies: Essays on Poverty, Racism, and Other National Urban Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 196–97, 222; Gans, “The Failure,” 36; Hays, *The Federal Government*, 182, 185.

<sup>46</sup> Gans, *People, Plans, and Policies*, 223.

<sup>47</sup> Dagenhart, “Public Housing and Context,” 383.

<sup>48</sup> Gans, “The Failure,” 36.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

also to make “erstwhile slum-dweller[s] feel comfortable with [their] new community, yet without labeling them as poor.”<sup>51</sup> These developments, facilities, and programs together would help erase the stigmas of inferiority and poverty that being associated with public housing had placed on the poor. Furthermore, higher-income residents would help subsidize the cost of their housing.<sup>52</sup> HOPE VI is intended to meet all these goals.

As the name implies, there were other HOPE, or Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere, initiatives before HOPE VI. The previous incarnations of HOPE, first authorized by the National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, centered on the idea “that homeownership [is] a central element in self-sufficiency and pride for low-income persons, particularly those residing in public housing.”<sup>53</sup> For instance, HOPE I envisioned selling public housing projects to resident management organizations, with eventual sale to individual tenants. HOPE II followed the example of HOPE I, but applied to federally aided projects under private ownership. With HOPE III, units were rehabilitated or built by nonprofits for purchase by the poor.<sup>54</sup>

Then came the NCSDPH’s *Final Report*. It explored the social, physical, and regulatory atmosphere of the “severely distressed” public housing project. Such developments were found to have squalid living conditions; to exhibit varying degrees of physical decline; to provide social services that were not only insufficient and disjointed but that also did not reach the majority of tenants; to have been abandoned by civic institutions in the provision of basic services such as fire and police protection, education, and health care; and to be surrounded by communities in as dire straits as the projects themselves.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>53</sup> Hays, *The Federal Government*, 257.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>55</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 566, 568.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development believes that in learning from its past it has allowed for the future of successful public housing with HOPE VI. HOPE VI was built on the foundation laid by the 1990 Act in combination with suggestions of the *Final Report*. The thrust of the program is that reviving both the severely distressed public housing project and the surrounding neighborhood requires a comprehensive approach to the two key, interrelated problems discussed previously: project design and resident characteristics, albeit in combination with some aspects<sup>56</sup> from the change in the ideological basis for the Culture of Poverty that began in the mid-1960s. In other words, HOPE VI aims to “comprehensively address an entire development, both physically and socially”<sup>57</sup> via the establishment of mixed-income communities.

Government-sponsored low-income housing in America has become home to an increasing number of economically distressed individuals. As Gans suggested, HUD hopes that by diversifying the range of earned incomes through the establishment of mixed-income communities, gainfully employed “role models” will be attracted into these distressed neighborhoods, thereby incorporating public housing into the larger community.<sup>58</sup> This is in spite of Gans’s fears that the prejudices and negative opinions held of low-income people would prevent the more well-to-do from embracing such a living arrangement. He advocated regulating the proportion of low-income to middle-class residents to ameliorate status fears and social isolation.<sup>59</sup> HOPE VI has basically done this by keeping a proportion of the units public housing

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<sup>56</sup> For example, though Gans postulated that the real way to fight slums was to improve the social and economic status of their inhabitants, instead of solely focusing on large-scale demolition and relocation, PHAs do have the choice to use governmental funds for renovation of existing housing projects, leveraging partial demolition with new construction, or demolition of an entire project in favor of building completely anew on- and off-site.

<sup>57</sup> Turbov and Piper, *HOPE VI and Mixed-Finance Redevelopments*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Epp, “Emerging Strategies,” 572–73; and Turbov and Piper, *HOPE VI and Mixed-Finance Redevelopments*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Gans, *People, Plans, and Policies*, 223–24; and Gans, “The Failure,” 34.

while selling and renting others at market rates. However, avoidance by the middle class is also rectified by another aspect inherent to HOPE VI: those moving into VI neighborhoods know exactly what they are buying into. The fact that the community is a mixed-income one is flaunted, not hidden. HOPE VI has embraced Gans's recommendation of fostering a "semi-suburban style of living"<sup>60</sup> that would attract the middle and upper classes through its use of "New Urbanist" design principles.<sup>61</sup> Demolition and new construction through VI is seen as the answer, since renovation is often prohibitively expensive and cannot easily remedy these issues. Furthermore, integrating a variety of incomes will reduce not only operating subsidies as a result of the continued presence of higher earning and rent-paying households but also the isolation of tenants from their city's mainstream economy. It must be noted that not all distressed public housing developments are ripe for this type of venture; the housing's location and the viability of its surrounding housing market are key considerations.<sup>62</sup>

From 1992 to 2004 HUD awarded 446 HOPE VI grants to 166 cities.<sup>63</sup>

Knoxville's Community Development Corporation (KCDC)<sup>64</sup> saw HOPE VI as a means to redevelop an ailing College Homes and thus applied for monies on July 17, 1997.<sup>65</sup> In 1998 Knoxville was awarded a grant. But how exactly did College Homes manifest the symptoms of a severely distressed project?

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<sup>60</sup> Gans, "The Failure," 35.

<sup>61</sup> For an explanation of New Urbanism, see Charles C. Bohl, "New Urbanism and the City: Potential Applications and Implications for Distressed Inner-City Neighborhoods," *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 4 (2000): 761–801.

<sup>62</sup> Epp, "Emerging Strategies," 574–75; and FitzPatrick, "A Disaster in Every Generation," 438.

<sup>63</sup> Susan J. Popkin, Bruce Katz, Mary K. Cunningham, Karen D. Brown, Jeremy Gustafson, and Margery A. Turner, "A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Changes," *The Urban Institute* (May 18, 2004), <http://www.urban.org/publications/411002.html>

<sup>64</sup> The Knoxville Housing Authority's (KHA) name was changed to Knoxville's Community Development Corporation (KCDC) in 1973 as a result of "extensive changes in administration, philosophy, policies and programs." Lewis Leon Goss, *A Case Study: The Knoxville Housing Authority's Transition into Knoxville's Community Development Corporation* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1976), 66.

<sup>65</sup> Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, "Application for Fiscal Year 1997 HOPE VI Program Funding" (Knoxville: KCDC, 1997).

## CHAPTER 8: A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE

In 1939 the area of Western Avenue leading to Knoxville College was the largest black commercial region in the city.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-nine years later, former resident Robert Booker<sup>2</sup> recalled this in a newspaper interview. “[College Homes] used to be one of the finest areas for blacks to live in town.”<sup>3</sup> There was a black movie theatre, the “Booker T.” People hung out at Bradley-Moore’s Service Station or the College Café. Parties were held at the local VFW. The neighborhood even had its own newspaper, *The Flashlight Herald*.<sup>4</sup>

As a young girl when the project was being built, Margaret Gaiter collected scrap wood from workers on the site. She recalled, “I was always hoping that we could live in the project because I thought you had moved up.”<sup>5</sup> But by the 1960s, College Homes began to decline.<sup>6</sup> Gaiter later worked for KCDC through the 1950s and ’60s and attributed the development’s downfall to changing policies. Rules such as admitting only married couples began to be seen as dated intrusions on civil liberties. Booker blamed social programs such as integration and Urban Renewal. With the end of segregation, there was no longer a need for a separate black movie house. Urban Renewal<sup>7</sup> forced people to move.<sup>8</sup> Both Booker and Gaiter were right:

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Albert Hyde, “A Geographical Survey of Knoxville, Tennessee” (master’s thesis, University of Tennessee, 1939), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Booker is the executive director of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, Knoxville’s black history museum, and has authored many books on the life of African-Americans in this city.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Jacques Billeaud, David Keim and Add Seymour, Jr., “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel (KNS)* (12 April 1998), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, “Application for Fiscal Year 1997 HOPE VI Program Funding” (Knoxville: KCDC, 1997), H-50.

<sup>7</sup> Booker may have been referring in part to the construction of Interstate 40 that destroyed part of Mechanicsville in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was actually a result not of Urban Renewal but of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, commonly referred to as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act.

<sup>8</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2.



things at College Homes had changed, and not for the better. In fact, by the late 1990s College Homes was a textbook example of the problems discussed in Chapter 7.

### The Statistics: Crime, Drugs, and Poverty

At the time KCDC applied for HOPE VI funding, College Homes was the most infamous center of the illegal drug trade in Knoxville, as public housing provided customers and dealers anonymity. And although, just as in Atlanta (see Chapter 7), outsiders were to blame for most of the drug problems and violence, some residents did have problems. According to KCDC's HOPE VI application,<sup>9</sup> in 1996 fifteen tenants were evicted for crimes linked to drugs. The next year eleven were evicted. Furthermore, the incidence of violent crimes in College Homes far outpaced that for Mechanicsville and Knoxville (see Table 7.1). Residents were eight times as likely to be victims of assault, and the rate of drive-by shootings was almost twenty times that of the city. Numerous attempts at establishing a neighborhood crime watch failed.<sup>10</sup> Police commented on how hard it was to mobilize people who were "so intimidated by thugs that they refuse[d] to cooperate with [us]."<sup>11</sup>

Despite integration, in the late 1990s College Homes continued to be a mostly black project (85%), while the racial composition of Mechanicsville was more evenly divided between black and white (57 and 43 percents, respectively). Residents of College Homes fell into three main categories: senior citizens, those with handicaps, and female-led, single-parent families. The latter especially had "little or no employment skills, limited parenting skills, meager resources, and very little civic

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<sup>9</sup> The same background information, such as crime statistics, was used in KCDC's Demolition Request, HOPE VI Application, and HOPE VI Revitalization Plan. The Gray Group, L.L.C., "Demolition Request: College Homes (TN000302)" (Columbia, MD: Gray Group, 1997); KCDC, "Application"; KCDC, "College Homes: HOPE VI Revitalization Plan" (Knoxville: KCDC, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Billeaud, "Criminals use frightened tenants and the project's bunker design as cover," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2; Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 6; KCDC, "Application," B-12, C-15-16.

<sup>11</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 3.

attachment.”<sup>12</sup> To say residents were of low income seems an understatement. From 1994 to 1997, the percentage of tenants earning no income grew from 13 to 31 percent, while only 23 percent collected income through employment.<sup>13</sup> As such, according to 1996 census numbers, College Homes households averaged annual earnings of only \$2,219; Knoxville’s median at this time was \$25,784. Though one person paid \$500 a month in rent, the average was \$3.23. Not only did one-half of tenants live rent-free and have KCDC pay their utilities, but another half also paid less than \$50 for rent and utilities combined. Rents this low could not sustain the development; therefore, over time KCDC relied more heavily on governmental subsidies to do just that.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 8.1. 1996 crime statistics comparing College Homes to Mechanicsville and Knoxville (per 1000 population).**

	College Homes	Mechanicsville	Knoxville
Population	605	1,507	170,830
Murder	3	0	0.1
Rape	5	0.6	0.4
Robbery/burglary	24	32	17
Assault	38	9	5
Drive-by Shooting	92	1	5

Note. Table adapted from Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, “1996 Crime Statistics per 1000 Population,” in “Application for Fiscal Year 1997 HOPE VI Program Funding” (Knoxville: KCDC, 1997), B-12.

<sup>12</sup> KCDC, “Application,” A-1.

<sup>13</sup> The exact number of tenants on which these statistics are based is unclear. College Homes was composed of 320 units, and the 1997 HOPE VI application listed its 1996 population as 605, while a May 1997 newspaper article counted 607 residents contained within 310 households. KCDC, “Application,” B-12; and “Who lives in Knoxville’s public housing?,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Balloch, “City gets grant to replace College Homes,” *KNS* (9 Oct. 1997), A4; Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 3; KCDC, “Application,” A-1, B-9–11, C-15, G-42.

Last, as originally envisioned, public housing was to be a way station, assisting families who wanted to leave poverty behind. For some it became not a transitional place, but a dead end. Beatrice Orr (84) had lived in College Homes since it opened. Thomas Barkley (84), Barbara Hardin (69), and Vera Mae Greene (64) had called the project home for over thirty years. Mildred Johnson (84) had raised her two daughters, Juliette Johnson (46) and Julia Chesson (age unknown), there, and now Juliette's daughter Jovette (28) was doing the same.<sup>15</sup> The matriarch of the Johnson clan was quoted as saying, "Franklin Roosevelt built these when we were living in a shotgun house with no bath tub. This is the only decent place I've lived in."<sup>16</sup>

#### Problems with the College Homes Design

"Residing in College Homes is like living in a separate city."<sup>17</sup> In this way, the design succeeded. "Residents are a few feet from the mainstream but light-years away from the advantages it offers."<sup>18</sup> In this way, it failed.

As discussed in Chapter 6, College Homes was a superblock of two-story brick apartment buildings arranged around three slender and meandering private drives. The original design was intended to protect residents from the harmful influences of the slum lying beyond the project's edge. Now, police routinely complained about the short sight lines and many hiding places the complex offered. Drug dealers working the interior of the development exploited this configuration by planting lookouts between buildings at the periphery to warn them of oncoming trouble. From the

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<sup>15</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 1; Jacques Billeaud and Add Seymour, Jr., "Resident: 'Why should we leave?,'" *KNS* (5 Oct., 1998), A3; David Keim, "Forced to move from home of 3 decades, 69-year-old finds delight with new apartment," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 3; David Keim, "Plans Being Finalized to Replace College Homes," *KNS* (27 July 1998), A3; Add Seymour, Jr., "'You've got people that were born here in these projects, raised up in these projects . . . This is their home,'" *KNS* (12 April 1998), 3; Add Seymour, Jr., "College Homes eviction begins; issue isn't clear-cut for Some," *KNS* (7 Oct. 1998), unknown page.

<sup>16</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2.

<sup>17</sup> KCDC, "Application," A-1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

outside the courtyards, intended as space for outdoor activities for all family members, seemed empty even when people were in them. They were said to “invoke a feeling of entrapment, danger and fear.”<sup>19</sup> On average, vandalism cost KCDC \$1,750 monthly. Offenses included burned dumpsters, graffiti, and shot-out lights. These were attributed “to the lack of defensible space and the lack of security surveillance caused by the obsolete configuration of the site and topography.”<sup>20</sup> Steep grades and slim streets made it impossible to adapt entrances, curbs, and sidewalks to meet the needs of the handicapped as required by law. In combination with the small size of interior rooms, such obstacles allowed only five percent of the dwelling units to be remodeled for handicapped access. Furthermore, the streets made access to the site by emergency vehicles prohibitively difficult. KCDC, and by extension HUD, were liable to be sued.<sup>21</sup>

Handicapped accessibility was not the only problem plaguing College Homes on its interior. Kitchens and bathrooms needed significant renovations to bring them not only up to code but also up to acceptable market standards. Even during the summer, some buildings received less than three hours of sunlight. Originally, none of the structures had insulation, the windows leaked air, and coal fueled the heaters. Consequently, there was a major weatherization campaign in the 1970s that, among other things, changed the heating system to electric baseboard units. By the time of the HOPE VI application, the College Homes per-room utility costs averaged 26 percent more than KCDC’s comparable developments. Roof leaks were an issue, as well. Fasteners for the original terra cotta tiles were deteriorating, resulting in water damage to ceilings, walls, and tenants’ personal property. Together with the weatherization

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., B-13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., B-7.

<sup>21</sup> Billeaud, “Criminals use frightened tenants and the project’s bunker design as cover,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2; Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2; KCDC, “Application,” B-5–6, 9, 12.

initiative, which had caused units to sweat liberally during “extreme weather,”<sup>22</sup> College Homes had significant issues with mold, mildew, dampness, and crumbling plaster. These problems, along with the vandalism and the high price of repairing and maintaining the baseboard heaters, resulted in the development producing 50 percent more work requests than KCDC’s average for its other family developments. As a result, College Homes maintenance costs surpassed KCDC’s average by 27 percent. In 1997, an assessment of the project’s physical needs determined that it required a total capital investment of \$52,094,230. To “minimally modernize”<sup>23</sup> College Homes would cost \$24,224,253. Based on fiscal year 1997 funding levels, to execute such a minimal plan would exhaust the monies available to KCDC for modernizing *all* of its properties over the following five years. Thus, KCDC concluded that without HOPE VI it would take twenty years to bring the project up to code.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Solution: HOPE VI

The above issues are why KCDC saw HOPE VI as the only way to solve the problems at College Homes. Recall that not all distressed public housing developments are ripe for this type of venture. Location and the viability of the surrounding housing market are key considerations.<sup>25</sup>

College Homes was chosen as a HOPE VI site in part because of attributes of the wider Mechanicsville community. The neighborhood is convenient to downtown, Knoxville College, and the University of Tennessee. In addition to Mechanicsville’s near-even racial composition, its median household income was a moderate \$17,168 (in 1996), 67 percent of that for Knoxville. This was a community with a solid

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<sup>22</sup> KCDC, “Application,” B-8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, B-5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, B-4–6, 8, 13; C-15; N-69

<sup>25</sup> Gayle Epp, “Emerging Strategies for Revitalizing Public Housing Communities,” *Housing Policy Debate* 7, no. 3 (1996): 575.

foundation of “modest, owner-occupied homes,”<sup>26</sup> where the city had focused many of its revitalization initiatives for over ten years. In fact, the outmoded Victorian homes vilified by Catherine Bauer were now an asset, as was the neighborhood’s street grid. Mechanicsville’s historic structures were praised in KCDC’s HOPE VI application for their “rich architectural diversity”<sup>27</sup>; mimicking the grid in a new development would “enable the footprint to be rebuilt as an integral, culturally meaningful, and economically contributing part of Mechanicsville.”<sup>28</sup> The list of positive attributes went on.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of the market, a market feasibility analysis completed in 1997<sup>30</sup> documented “the viability of replacement housing as a catalyst for lessening the concentration of very low-income families.”<sup>31</sup> Building on this, the next year a market study<sup>32</sup> identified the most successful mix of designs, sizes, amenities, and pricing for the new units.<sup>33</sup> All of this further underscores how perfectly College Homes fit the HOPE VI criteria.

But before the redevelopment could begin, KCDC needed permission from HUD to tear down College Homes. As noted, the HOPE VI application was submitted in July of 1997, while the demolition request required as part of the application was submitted on August 29, 1997. Razing was approved, “pending environmental review,”<sup>34</sup> on April 15, 1998. Although final approval was given on July 1, 1998, part of the environmental review is the subject of Chapter 9.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> KCDC, “Application,” B-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., B-10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., B 9–11, C-16.

<sup>30</sup> Metroventures/USA, Inc., *Market Feasibility Analysis: College Homes Knoxville, Tennessee* (Columbia, MD: Metroventures, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> KCDC, “Revitalization,” D-17.

<sup>32</sup> Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Inc., *College Homes Revitalization Market Study* (Clinton, NJ: Zimmerman/Volk, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> KCDC, “Revitalization,” F-38.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., C-11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., C-9, 11.

## **CHAPTER 9: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGE HOMES**

As noted at the end of the last chapter, full approval of the College Homes demolition hinged on an “environmental review.” But what, exactly, is this? Projects involving the federal government that affect historic or potentially historic properties must undergo what is commonly referred to as a Section 106 review.<sup>1</sup> Through this, an “undertaking” is analyzed by the appropriate authorities, and although preservation cannot be forced, the intent is to make certain that preservation principles are included within the planning and decision making of federal agencies.<sup>2</sup> The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) sits atop the pinnacle of preservation authority in the United States and can, when necessary, become directly involved in a particular Section 106 review. Such was the case with College Homes.

In order to “successfully complete”<sup>3</sup> the review, a federal agency such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development must arrive at an agreement “on measures to deal with any adverse effects . . .”<sup>4</sup> with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO),<sup>5</sup> other involved parties, and, when necessary, the ACHP.<sup>6</sup> It may be necessary for the ACHP to comment when there is “significant public controversy, or if the project will have substantial effects on important historic properties.”<sup>7</sup> Whatever the reason, the ACHP was involved in mitigating the adverse effects, here the

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<sup>1</sup> National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as amended, 16 U.S.C. 470f.

<sup>2</sup> Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *Protecting Historic Properties: A Citizen’s Guide to Section 106 Review* (2002), 4. <http://www.achp.gov/citizensguide.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> SHPOs were created pursuant to the NHPA of 1966, and these offices are charged with undertaking many responsibilities in historic preservation, such as “[s]urveying, evaluating and nominating significant historic buildings, sites, structures, districts and objects to the National Register” of Historic Places (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/shpolist.htm>). The National Register “is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation” (<http://www.nps.gov/nr/>).

<sup>6</sup> Advisory Council, *Protecting Historic Properties*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

demolition, of College Homes. A memorandum of agreement (MOA)<sup>8</sup> was executed between HUD, KCDC, and the Tennessee Historical Commission (Tennessee's SHPO) in March 1998. This MOA stipulated that "mitigative measures" were to be "incorporated into the project plans."<sup>9</sup> Those pertinent to this thesis are as follows:

1. Prior to demolition of any building within the College Homes project, all project buildings will be documented by KCDC to a standard mutually agreed upon by HUD, KCDC, and the Tennessee SHPO. A full set of original floor plans and current floor plans shall be submitted to the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office for the benefit of persons wishing to do research in the design of public housing projects.

2. A full set of black and white 35 mm photographs in 3" X 5" format appropriately labeled documenting the exterior and all public and representative private spaces shall be submitted to the Tennessee SHPO.

3. A full set of these plans and photographs shall be retained in the administrative office of KCDC and provided to any future researcher as documentation of the original appearance of the buildings.

4. A short narrative history of College Homes shall be produced by KCDC or a qualified contractor . . .<sup>10</sup>

Based the above-quoted material, I propose two arguments. First, I argue that the recordation requirements of the MOA, particularly the "short narrative history," did not adequately commemorate the place College Homes held in the history of

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<sup>8</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 30 March 1998, between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Washington, DC, the Public Housing Division, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Tennessee Historical Commission, and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, Knoxville, TN. "A memorandum of agreement (MOA) or cooperative agreement is a document written between parties to cooperatively work together on an agreed upon project or meet an agreed upon objective. The purpose of an [sic] MOA is to have a written understanding of the agreement between parties" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorandum\\_of\\_agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorandum_of_agreement)). More specifically in terms of historic preservation, as part of a Section 106 review, if an undertaking is found to have "adverse effects" on a historic property(ies), the agencies involved begin a dialogue to find ways to avoid, reduce, or moderate them (<http://www.achp.gov/106summary.html>). MOAs are the legally binding documents through which an "undertaking shall be implemented . . . in order to take into account the effect of the undertaking upon historic properties." Memorandum of Agreement, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Knoxville. Second, I argue that KCDC and the THC did not adhere to the MOA requirement that the recordation be kept in their offices for the benefit of future researchers.

Before addressing the two arguments mentioned above I shall first justify the eligibility of College Homes for the National Register of Historic Places, for without doing so, the two arguments are moot. The chapters of this thesis have endeavored to portray the many reasons College Homes was significant to Knoxville and to give that importance context, both of which are key when considering the significance of a property for listing on the National Register. To be placed on the National Register, however, properties must have *integrity* and meet certain criteria for evaluation. As explained in *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and

A) That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

B) That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

C) That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type . . . and represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

D) That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in terms of these criteria, the College Homes historic district (College Homes is considered a district since it “represents a significant and distinguishable

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<sup>11</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 2.

entity whose components may lack individual distinction”—Criteria C) falls under Criterion A for community planning and development, social history, politics/government, and black history. Furthermore, College Homes embodied Criterion C for architecture, here pre–World War II public housing potentially based on the Chatham Village model with the associated comprehensive cost-analyses pioneered by Henry Wright. Also, when listing property(ies) on the National Register, a “period of significance,” that is, the time within which a property(ies) “made important contributions”<sup>12</sup> to history, must be determined. The period of significance for College Homes begins with the awarding of funds to the Knoxville Housing Authority by the USHA on July 19, 1938, and ends with the passage of the Brooke Amendment in 1969.<sup>13</sup>

In approaching the considerations in the order in which they appear in the material above, the first to be analyzed is the question of the *integrity* of College Homes. “Historic integrity is the authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s prehistoric or historic period.”<sup>14</sup> Integrity comprises seven facets: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Property(ies) do not necessarily have to possess all of the aspects, but usually most are apparent.<sup>15</sup> Those applying to College Homes are discussed below.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

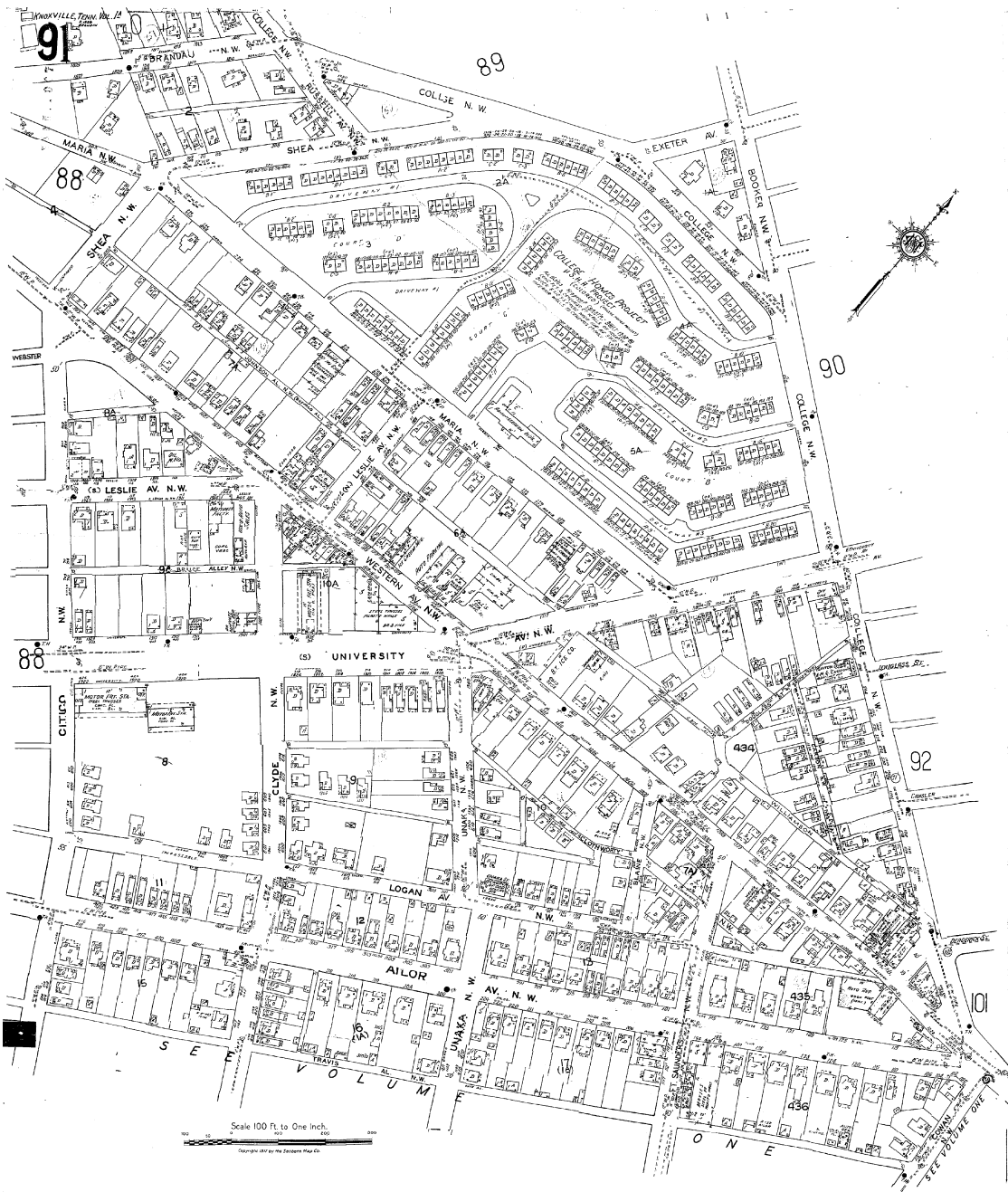
<sup>13</sup> “U.S. Approves Huge Housing Loan For City,” *The Knoxville Journal (KJ)* (20 July 1938), unknown page (u.p.); “Knox Housing Projects Get U.S. Approval” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel (KNS)* (20 July 1938), u.p. The Brooke Amendment changed public housing rules to allow the poorest people in as tenants. Thus its passage was a watershed moment in the decline of public housing. Jacques Billeaud, David Keim, and Add Seymour, Jr., “College Homes: Life in Limbo,” *KNS* (12 April 1998), 5.

<sup>14</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 4.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Dept. of the Interior, *How to Apply*, 44.



**Figure 9.1. A portion of the homes on the site of College Homes before demolition.** “This 1937 aerial view shows the campus [Knoxville College] before the construction of College Homes.” Reproduced from Robert J. Booker, *And There Was Light!: The 120-Year History of Knoxville College, Knoxville Tennessee, 1875–1995* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co., 1994), 110–11.



**Figure 9.2. Sanborn map showing how College Homes differed from its surrounding neighborhood.** Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Plans of Cities and Towns (Knoxville, TN)* (Pelham, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1950), sheet 91.

## Location

College Homes was in its original location. The land adjoining College Homes on all sides was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As seen in Figure 9.1 and Figure 9.2, the surrounding housing, just like Chatham, illustrated “the difference between traditional profit-motivated urban planning tied to frontage along the gridiron street plan and the innovative social-minded plan of”<sup>16</sup> College Homes.

## Design

Through its similarity with Chatham Village, it is likely College Homes was a descendent of the English Garden City movement and the Neighborhood Unit Plan combined with what the architect and cost accountant Henry Wright referred to as group housing (for a more in-depth explanation of the probable original design strategies influencing College Homes, see Chapter 5). Like Chatham Village, College Homes’ group row housing was built on an artificially terraced site with a unified, campus, American-village-type feel. The buildings were of a simplified Georgian Revival style. Curvilinear, narrow drives were separated from pedestrians and oriented at the back of buildings. Homes were only two rooms deep.

Between 1970 and 1976 the units received upgrades: the original coal heating units were replaced with electric baseboard heat, kitchens cabinets were replaced, new vinyl floors were installed, and the project’s electrical wiring was upgraded.<sup>17</sup> At some point the original doors and windows were changed, and in 1989 six one-bedroom

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<sup>16</sup> Edith B. Wallace, Paula S. Reed, and Linda McClelland, “Chatham Village,” National Historic Landmark Nomination, 2003: 9.

<sup>17</sup> Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, “A Brief History of College Homes,” 1998.

apartments were modified for wheelchair use.<sup>18</sup> Despite these changes, College Homes maintained most of its design integrity.

### Setting

College Homes remained separated from the surrounding community not only through its architecture but also via its street boundaries and inward orientation (see Figure 9.2 and Figure 9.3). In contrast to the hill of neighbor Knoxville College and the flat of its other surroundings, College Homes was terraced. Additionally, the two-story brick housing units enclosed courtyard greens, whose geometric patterns allowed each unit to have its own identity. Breaks were provided amid housing blocks, allowing for pedestrians to choose their way between courtyards. This contributed to the openness of these large landscaped parks.<sup>19</sup>

### Materials

Built to last the extent of its mortgage, sixty years, College Homes was constructed of materials with lasting qualities. Roofs were of terra-cotta tiles, various elements were concrete such as window sills and porches, gutters were metal, porch columns were cast iron, and walls were load-bearing brick. In fact, special bricks, called Speedbriks, were developed for public housing. Their dimensions (12 by 8 by ? inches) allowed masons to complete their jobs more quickly<sup>20</sup> (see Figure 9.4).

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<sup>18</sup> Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, "Application for Fiscal Year 1997 HOPE VI Program Funding" (Knoxville: KCDC, 1997), B-8-9; and "A Brief History of College Homes."

<sup>19</sup> David J. Vater, "Chatham Village Historic District," *National Register Nomination*, 1990, Section 8, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> "Homes in Western Heights White Housing Project to be Ready by Next Spring; 'Speed Brick' Helps," *KNS* (20 Aug. 1939), u.p.



Figure 9.3. Inward orientation of College Homes buildings. Photograph taken in the late 1970s, photographer unknown. Becky Wade, mailed to author, June 14, 2005.

# SPEEDBRIK

*Was used on  
Knoxville's Beautiful  
New Housing Projects  
Why?*

*Because*

- 1—OF ITS LOW INITIAL COST
- 2—MINIMUM UPKEEP
- 3—PERMANENCE
- 4—BEAUTY
- 5—INSULATION VALUE
- 6—DRYER WALLS

Whether you are considering the erection of a Home,  
Apartment, Business House, it will pay you to  
investigate "SPEEDBRIK"

## GENERAL SHALE PRODUCTS CORP.

GENERAL SALES OFFICE



View of brick masons at work laying "SPEEDBRIK" on College Homes Project, showing perpendicular hollow wall construction which is known to be of superior insulating value over other types of construction.

"SPEEDBRIK" is a revolutionary new building unit. It gives you sound, permanent construction. People are realizing more than ever before that outside walls built of burned clay material are, after all, the cheapest in the long run. And the good part about it is these permanent walls need cost but little more than frame or brick veneer. In the building of the Knoxville Housing Project, the owners and architects wanted to build permanently and soundly, and, after considering the cost from every standpoint, "SPEEDBRIK" was decided on because it not only saved money but produced beautiful and permanent walls for the outside of the buildings — plus superior insulating values.

You, too, can profit by the use of this "SPEEDBRIK." Ask us for full details. SEND IN TODAY FOR YOUR COPY OF FULLY ILLUSTRATED CATALOG SHOWING CONSTRUCTION DETAILS, ETC.

Or Call on Our Knoxville Office

**OLLIE COLEMAN BRICK SALES CO.**

for This Information.

## GENERAL SHALE PRODUCTS CORP.

JOHNSON CITY, TENN.

Figure 9.4. Speedbrik advertisement. *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (21 Jan. 1940), unknown page.

## Workmanship

Workmanship, as defined in *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, is “the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.”<sup>21</sup> Although College Homes did not feature carving, tooling, graining, or other features usually cited as evidence of workmanship, the housing project did exhibit workmanship by “revealing . . . national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles.”<sup>22</sup> More specifically, the workmanship of College Homes was a conglomeration of some of the previously discussed facets of *integrity*, specifically design and materials. College Homes was an archetype for the latest thinking in affordable “technological practices” in the late 1930s. And, similarly, College Homes was an archetype of the most modern ideas in “aesthetic principles” for community planning and development during the same period, as its resemblance to Chatham Village has endeavored to show.

## Feeling

“Feeling is a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.”<sup>23</sup> Feeling is related by the retention of, for example, “original design, materials, workmanship, and setting.”<sup>24</sup> As the discussion of integrity has attempted to illustrate, in terms of the period of significance for College Homes, the project retained its sense of feeling.

## Association

Again according to *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, a “property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Dept. of the Interior, *How to Apply*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer.”<sup>25</sup> And once more, in terms of College Homes’s period of significance, it was “where the event or activity occurred and [was] sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer.”

In turning to an analysis of the criteria, some elements of integrity will be touched upon again.

## Criteria A

### *Community Planning and Development*

College Homes drastically changed the look of the Mechanicsville neighborhood. Where the project was sited was once an area of gridiron streets and shotgun houses. With the coming of College Homes, however, an approximately thirteen- to fourteen-acre superblock was leveled, and 49 two-story brick structures (housing 320 units) and one administration building were erected, possibly based on designs and planning ideas pioneered by Chatham Village. Designed with its buildings facing inward in order to keep out any of the remaining slum influences, College Homes was literally and figuratively cut off from the rest of the neighborhood (Figure 9.2). It was the first of its type in Knoxville.

### *Social History*

The causes of the slum-clearance/low-income housing initiative both in America and in Knoxville have been touched on in this thesis. Chapter 1 gave a general overview as to why the United States established public housing in the 1930s: to foster economic recovery from the Great Depression. The beginning of Chapter 4 explained how the information from the *Real Property Inventories* was seized upon by

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

governments and housing reformers who used the information to increase public support for slum-clearance/low-income housing programs. Thus, whether Knoxville power brokers' initial interest in public housing money was socially or financially driven, when they began selling slum clearance and public housing to the community they could focus on social arguments. Consequently, when the Knoxville Housing Authority, the body responsible for supplying the city with public housing, held a public meeting to discuss its goals on April 5, 1938, slum clearance attracted citizens' attention most.

### *Politics/Government*

The Knoxville Housing Authority was established in 1936, pursuant to the passage of the Tennessee Housing Authorities Law in 1935. When formed it was governed by a five-person commission, the members of which were appointed by Knoxville's mayor. This was the body responsible for procuring and administering the funds with which College Homes was built.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to the Tennessee Housing Authorities Law, a "friendly suit"<sup>27</sup> was brought by the KHA against Knoxville, Knox County, and the State of Tennessee to resolve all questions of the KHA's legality. The final ruling, validating the constitutionality of state laws that authorized the Knoxville Housing Authority and others like it to undertake slum clearance, was handed down on December 6, 1938.<sup>28</sup> The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the ruling on appeal in January 1939.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lewis Leon Goss, *A Case Study: The Knoxville Housing Authority's Transition into Knoxville's Community Development Corporation* (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 1976), 31 and 35.

<sup>27</sup> "Rules Housing Agency Here Within Law," *KJ* (7 Dec. 1938), u.p.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*; and "Housing Authority Ruled Legal Here," *KNS* (7 Dec. 1938), u.p.

<sup>29</sup> "Knox Housing Board Upheld," *KNS* (21 Jan. 1939), u.p.; *Knoxville Housing Authority, Inc. v. City of Knoxville, et al.*, 123 W.2d 1085 (Supreme Court of Tennessee 1938).

## *Black History*

Knoxville's poor African-American community faced dispiriting and pervasive slum conditions during the first third of the twentieth century (summarized in Chapter 3). The coming of College Homes was a watershed moment in the community's history. Mildred Johnson, a resident then 84 years old, said in 1998 of the Homes: "Franklin Roosevelt built these when we were living in a shotgun house with no bath tub. This is the only decent place I've lived in."<sup>30</sup> She had moved in when College Homes opened and had never left. Robert Booker and Margaret Gaiter had fond memories of a bustling College Homes and Mechanicsville. And despite the problems the project faced toward the end of its life, College Homes remained important to some members of Knoxville's black community: Julia Chesson, Mrs. Johnson's daughter, along with some others, fought tooth and nail to save College Homes from destruction.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Billeaud, Keim, and Seymour, "College Homes: Life in Limbo," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Add Seymour, Jr., "College Homes: Life in Limbo: Other Voices," *KNS* (12 April 1998), 5; David Keim, "Focus of discussion shifts at College Homes meeting," *KNS* (16 April 1998), A5; David Keim, "New life emerging for College Homes area as plans take shape," *KNS* (20 April 1998), A5; Add Seymour, Jr., "Not leaving, residents say," *KNS* (29 May 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud, "KCDC faces lawsuit over project plan," *KNS* (10 June 1998), A1, 3; Jacques Billeaud, "College Homes tenants invited to file suit," *KNS* (26 June 1998), A1, 6; Jacques Billeaud and Add Seymour, Jr., "College Homes tenants rebuffed again," *KNS* (3 July 1998), A4; Add Seymour, Jr., "Vision of the future," *KNS* (12 July 1998), A1, 15; David Keim, "Plans being finalized to replace College Homes," *KNS* (27 July 1998), A1, 3; Add Seymour, Jr., "College Homes eviction begins; issue isn't clear-cut for some," *KNS* (7 Oct. 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud, "Judge rules last College Homes residents must leave by Nov. 6," *KNS* (28 Oct. 1998), A1, 7; Add Seymour, Jr., "Report another blow to College Homes holdouts," *KNS* (30 Oct. 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud, "2 of 5 holdouts leave complex," *KNS* (4 Nov. 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud, "All but one family agree to leave complex," *KNS* (7 Nov. 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud and Add Seymour, Jr., "Rain delays College Homes eviction," *KNS* (10 Nov. 1998), u.p.; Jacques Billeaud, "Full speed ahead," *KNS* (11 Nov. 1998), u.p.; Add Seymour, Jr., "Judge rejects request to block demolition of College Homes," *KNS* (17 Nov. 1998), u.p.; David Keim, "Arson delays demolition work at College Homes site," *KNS* (17 Nov. 1998), A1, 5.

## Criteria C

### *Architecture*

As mentioned above, College Homes embodied Criterion C for architecture, here pre–World War II public housing potentially based on the Chatham Village model with the associated comprehensive cost-analyses pioneered by Henry Wright. Chapters 5 and 6 documented in great detail College Homes’s latent connection to Chatham Village. Furthermore, College Homes was not only the first of its type of community planning and development Knoxville had ever seen, but it was also the first of its type of architecture, too.

The above portion of this chapter has brought the claims of College Homes’s importance made throughout this thesis full circle and presented them through the lens of actual National Register Criteria. It is now time to turn to return to the two arguments with which the chapter began.

### Argument 1

The recordation requirements of the MOA, particularly the short narrative history, did not adequately commemorate the place College Homes held in the history of Knoxville.

The short narrative history is reproduced in Appendix A. Although the MOA required a “short” history, the document’s length—barely a page (31 lines, actually, in the original document)—seems a bit lacking, especially when a whole thesis has now been written on College Homes. Of these 31 lines, 9 are devoted to chronicling College Homes’s struggle with crime later in its life. No mention is made of why the project was built, of the slum College Homes replaced, of the positive economic impact the project had on Knoxville during the Great Depression, or of anything positive, in fact.

## Argument 2

KCDC and the THC did not adhere to the MOA requirement that the recordation be kept in their offices for the benefit of future researchers. Despite the fact that both the Tennessee SHPO and KCDC were to have copies of these recordation requirements on hand for future researchers, neither did when I first requested them in June of 2004. In fact, the state had lost its copies of everything. Although I received the short narrative history from KCDC in August 2004, it was not until a year later that copies of the original floor plans were sent to me, after much wrangling. I also received photographs, although they were not the 35mm, black-and-white 3" by 5" photographs taken right before College Homes was torn down but snapshots from the late 1970s, before a modernization campaign. KCDC said they could not locate the 3" by 5" images, and the then "current" floor plans were never discussed. I mention my problems in locating the recordation requirements and the shortness of the narrative history to highlight a pitfall of MOAs: enforcement of MOA conditions. In the MOA between HUD, THC, and KCDC, it is HUD that is charged with ensuring that the measures, the recordation requirements, "are carried out in accord with the recommended approaches . . ." <sup>32</sup> The question remains, why in the case of College Homes did HUD not follow up to verify that this portion of the MOA was adhered to? Could it be that HUD is woefully underfunded and overwhelmed? That the memorialization of a small, black housing project in a small Southern city was not high on the priority list? What's more disturbing, however, is that the THC, the organization charged with overseeing preservation in the State of Tennessee, lost its copies of the College Homes recordation and did not even realize it until I brought it to their attention in 2004. A natural outgrowth of this is the concern about what

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 1.

other histories—not just that of public housing—is, at the least, being misinterpreted and, at the most, lost?

A Section 106 review is supposed to ensure that preservation principles are included within the planning and decision making of federal agencies. And in so doing, MOAs stipulate mitigative measures that are to be met so that the review is successfully completed. The thrust of this chapter has been to summarize the importance of College Homes and to point out how that importance was basically ignored by not only the MOA's call for a short narrative history but also the inadequate stewardship of documentation by HUD, KCDC, and the THC. This prompts us to ask, if MOAs are apparently not fully enforced, what is the best way to memorialize significant historic structures for posterity? Furthermore, the author wishes this chapter, and this thesis, to serve as a type of wake-up call to the preservation community: pre-World War II public housing in this country, such as College Homes, has a storied past that should be honored, not discarded.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary

The U.S. government's involvement in public housing remained temporary until the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Act in 1937. The body formed by this Act, the United States Housing Authority, was charged with not only housing the poor but also eradicating slums and blight during the process. Slums, as defined by the 1937 Act, were places where the health, safety, and morals of residents were adversely affected as a result of the majority of homes suffering not only from bad design, disrepair, and overcrowding, but also a lack of running water, proper sanitary facilities, adequate heat and air, and the like.<sup>1</sup>

Knoxville, Tennessee was a recipient of this governmental aid in 1938. Over the next two years a slum in the Mechanicsville neighborhood of the city was transformed from an area of unpaved streets where homes lacked running water into "College Homes," a shining example of group housing modernity possibly based on Henry Wright's Chatham Village.

By the 1990s, however, fifty years of federal policy miscues had led College Homes down a path of misery. Tenants were no longer nuclear families "down-on-their-luck" but the "more permanently distressed underclass"<sup>2</sup> who were some of the poorest people in the country.<sup>3</sup> Plagued with monetary issues, modernization woes, crime, and drugs, Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, the Public Housing Authority responsible for College Homes, looked to the HOPE VI program as an answer to these ills. The thrust of this program was quite similar to that which

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Elmer Wood, *Introduction to Housing: Facts and Principles* (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1940), 22.

<sup>2</sup> R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 94; and Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 227.

led to the establishment of College Homes: the problem area should be razed in favor of new construction. But before the redevelopment could be realized, KCDC needed permission to tear down College Homes.

KCDC was ultimately authorized to demolish the National Register–eligible housing project by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as long as three forms of recordation were executed to memorialize the development for posterity: a short history, a set of original and current floor plans, and a set of 35mm 3" × 5" black-and-white photographs. Although the Tennessee Historical Commission and KCDC were to have these documents on hand for future researchers, the THC lost its copies, and retrieving those from KCDC proved difficult; even then not all were provided, since like those of the THC, KCDC's replicas had vanished. And, as this thesis has shown, the short narrative history required by the MOA was woefully inadequate. These issues highlight the problems with MOAs and question their effectiveness.

#### Limitations and Omissions

This thesis, unfortunately, is by no means an exhaustive study of College Homes. I lacked the funds needed to hire a researcher to probe the National Archives for Knoxville's original slum-clearance application as well as the time to do it myself. And even then, the application may be lost. There are many issues surrounding the establishment of College Homes from 1938 to 1940 that I did not address, such as an in-depth analysis of the project's financing or labor issues. All the period newspaper articles came from scrapbooks found in KCDC's administrative offices. I did not have the time to adequately scour every issue of *The Knoxville Journal*, *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, *The East Tennessee News*, or *The Flashlight Herald* from the era in search of articles that may have been missing from the KCDC scrapbooks. I also did



not have the time to go through those dated after World War II to find any interesting tidbits. Last, I did not try to access any of the original architects' files for pertinent information.

## Questions

My thesis was based mostly on the white view of public housing and slum clearance in Knoxville. It would be interesting to find and analyze more fully the African-American take on the situation via period accounts from the community's newspapers such as *The Flashlight Herald* and *The East Tennessee News*. Similarly, interviews with residents from various stages in the housing project's life would prove insightful. For example, in the eyes of those who lived it, how did having College Homes actually transform black life in Knoxville? Did the development work as a noble experiment? What, exactly, was everyday life like at the project? Over the course of its life, did the development house any important people or did any important events occur there?

Turning to other issues, was the lack of oversight of the terms of the MOA simply due to underfunding? Could it have to do with the fact that College Homes was a black housing project and not an instance of "George Washington slept here?" Furthermore, exactly how many pre-World War II public housing projects have been lost to HOPE VI? Of those public housing authorities that took part in the program, how many completed the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and executed a memorandum of agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation? What were the mitigative measures included in the MOA? Were they similar to those executed for College Homes, or did other acts of preservation occur? If so, why? For instance, were any of the original buildings saved and adaptively reused? Were any features unique to the first project conserved and

incorporated into the new facility? Were these other acts of preservation simply pursuant to the MOA? Or, alternatively, did the community push for the preservation of an aspect of that which was to be redeveloped/destroyed? And maybe the most important question of all: how have the former residents of College Homes who now live in the HOPE VI redevelopment fared?

**APPENDIX A:**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLLEGE HOMES**

Note: This short narrative history was produced either by KCDC or a qualified contractor, pursuant to the memorandum of agreement between HUD, KCDC, and the THC. The author received it via email from Becky Wade, then KCDC's HOPE VI Director, on August 30, 2004.

On May 9, 1936, the Knoxville Housing Authority was incorporated. Dr. H. E. Christenberry was elected Chairman of the Board of Commissioners at the first meeting. Other commissioners appointed by Knoxville Mayor James W. Elmore included Walter P. Taylor, Max Friedman, James P. Trent, and Robert G. Cerny. In 1938, KHA applied for funding for slum clearance and low-rent housing. This application was rejected because the unit cost exceeded allowable limits. A second application was made and approved for \$2.5 million for 60 years at 3.25% interest. With these funds, 320 apartments were built at College Homes and 244 apartments were built at Western Heights. In 1940, College Homes was complete and the first families began moving in to the new housing. The average rent paid by College Homes residents in 1940 was \$11.56 per month.

Beginning in 1969, with the passage of the Brooke Amendment by Congress, tenant rent was required to be based on household income. Modernization of the College Homes apartments began in 1970 with the receipt of funds through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Upgrades such as electric baseboard heating, new kitchen cabinets, new wiring, and new vinyl flooring were installed between 1970 and 1976 in all the units. In 1973 the Knoxville Housing Authority changed its name to Knoxville's Community Development Corporation to better

reflect the overall activities of the agency and its role as a housing authority and the city's redevelopment agency. In 1989 College Homes was remodeled again, and some of the one-bedroom units were made accessible for handicapped residents as required by federal regulation. In 1990 KCDC established an agreement with the City of Knoxville for security services in all family housing developments including College Homes. In an effort to control drug dealing and violent crime, KCDC sought and received city approval to close Muhammed Dr. In 1992 all streets and sidewalks within College Homes were leased from the City of Knoxville, making it private property. "No Trespassing" signs were posted on the property, and nonresidents were not allowed to loiter on College Homes property. In 1993 uniformed police officers were assigned to each family housing development, including College Homes, during normal business hours in addition to regular evening patrols. This additional security was funded by HUD drug-elimination program monies.

In 1997 KCDC applied for and received a HOPE VI grant to demolish College Homes and replace it with single-family and duplex homes in a mixed-income community. Activities to promote family self-sufficiency were also funded through the HOPE VI grant.

**APPENDIX B:**  
**AUSTIN HIGH SCHOOL PLAY**

An indication of the significance College Homes had to black Knoxvilleians of the time is evidenced by a pageant performed in lieu of the commencement address at the May 30, 1940, graduation exercises of the City's black high school, Austin High. The play, with its original musical score, elaborate stage effects, and costumes, was written by music director R. J. Tate with speech department head Henry Lenoir. Called either "Better Housing—Better Living"<sup>1</sup> or "Public Housing in America,"<sup>2</sup> it involved not only the entire senior class but also other students and faculty members, over 200 characters in all.<sup>3</sup>

Austin High's principal, T. R. Davis, gained the Knoxville Housing Authority's attention through the KHA's Educational Director R.H. Claggett. Mr. Davis wished to "stimulate interest in the housing program that is doing so much to help humanity in general."<sup>4</sup> Providing a study sample, the KHA asked the USHA for its approval; in turn the U.S. Housing Authority requested 200 more copies to send to other cities throughout the nation for use in their schools. The script was even shown to a meeting of the American Association of Adult Education in New York and recommended for use by other schools. The KHA also assisted with production by providing all the settings, including a pipe organ.<sup>5</sup>

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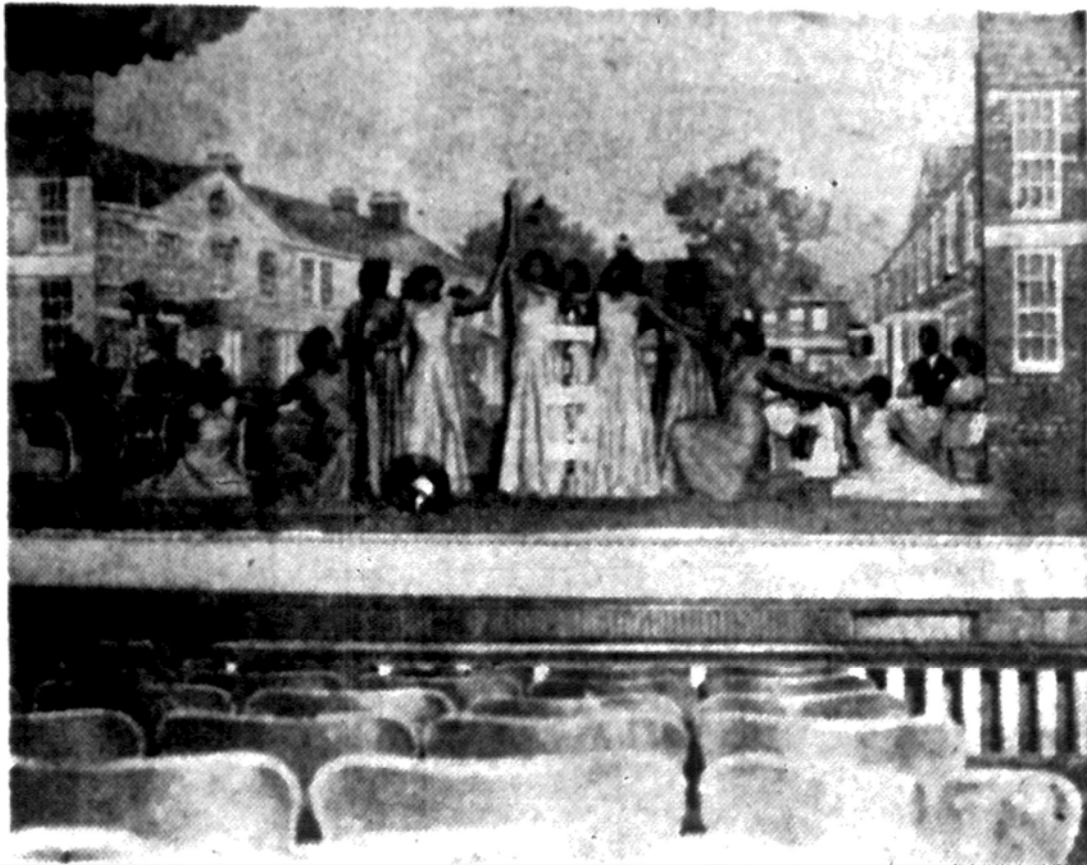
<sup>1</sup> "Austin School Plans Pageant On Housing," *The Knoxville Journal (KJ)* (14 May 1940), unknown page (u.p.); "Austin Grads Plan Big Housing Pageant," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel (KNS)* (14 May 1940), u.p.; "USHA Asks Copies of Austin Pageant," *KNS* (14 May 1940), u.p., "Austin High Will See Pageant," *KNS* (19 May 1940), u.p., "Austin Hi Commencement Pageant To Depict Housing Program," *The East Tennessee News (ETN)* (23 May 1940), u.p.

<sup>2</sup> "Fruits of Cooperation," *ETN* (6 June 1940), u.p.

<sup>3</sup> "USHA Asks Copies of Austin Pageant," *KNS* (14 May 1940), u.p., "Austin School Plans Pageant On Housing," *KJ* (14 May 1940), u.p.

<sup>4</sup> "Austin Hi Commencement Pageant To Depict Housing Program," *ETN* (23 May 1940), u.p.

<sup>5</sup> "Austin School Plans Pageant On Housing," *KJ* (14 May 1940), u.p.; "Austin Grads Plan Big Housing Pageant," *KNS* (14 May 1940), u.p.; "USHA Asks Copies of Austin Pageant," *KNS* (14 May 1940),



In this scene from the Austin High School Pageant, "Better Housing—Better Living." College Home tenants, seated to right and left, watch an exhibition of supervised play presented by the group of performers in the center.

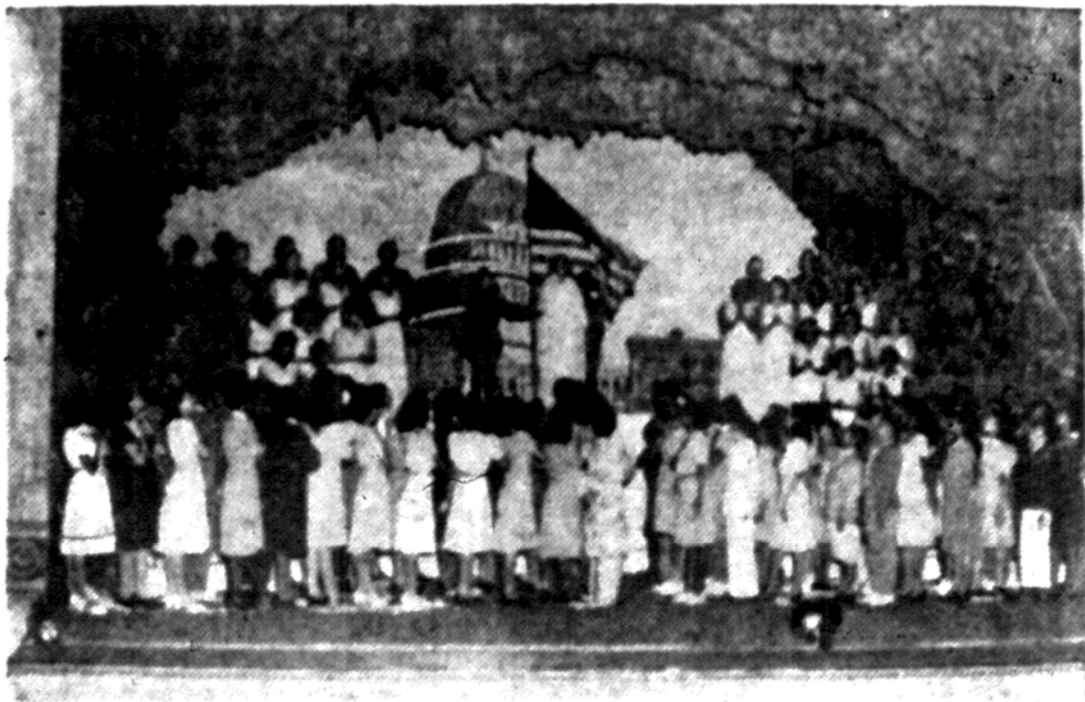
A

**Appendix Figure B.1. Austin High School play.** (A) A scene from the play. "Austin High Students Acclaimed for Pageant on 'Better Housing,'" *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (4 August 1940), unknown page. (B) A scene from the play's prologue. "Austin High Students Acclaimed for Pageant on 'Better Housing,'" *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (4 August 1940), unknown page. (C) A capacity crowd witnessed the play. "Austin High Students Acclaimed for Pageant on 'Better Housing,'" *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (4 August 1940), unknown page.

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u.p., "Austin High Will See Pageant," *KNS* (19 May 1940), u.p., "Austin Hi Commencement Pageant To Depict Housing Program," *ETN* (23 May 1940), u.p.

Appendix Figure B.1 (continued)



*In the prologue of the pageant, the Spirit of Democracy, appears as the people chant medley—"God Bless America" and "Star Spangled Banner." Boy Scouts wave the "Stars and Stripes" on high.*

**B**

Appendix Figure B.1 (continued)



*A section of the capacity audience which packed Lyric Theater to witness the commencement pageant. The theater overflowed and many were unable to get in.*

C



**APPENDIX C:**  
**BUTTER 'N EGGS**

At the time, College Homes proved to be a winning number not just for those moving in. Prominently featured in an article chronicling people moving into the project was an accompanying photograph of two tenants standing astride their new front door. On this door was the house number, 678. Once this picture hit the streets, many used the numbers to play the Butter 'N Egg<sup>6</sup> game, one winning \$500; another, \$300.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Not knowing what this term meant, I contacted Nick Wyman of the University of Tennessee's Special Collections Library (1/30/2005). I assumed it referred to gambling, but not what kind. I wondered whether the name came from the fact that people should be spending their money on butter and eggs, not betting it away. He replied that he did not know, so he asked local historian Ronnie Allen. Mr. Allen said that it was called the "butter 'n egg game," although he was not sure why, and the name referred to the numbers racket (2/1/2005). I also queried Eric Head of the East Tennessee Library and Archives (1/30/2005). From what he knew, this money "was traditionally the loose change that wives or families kept squirreled away that served as a kind of emergency fund" (1/31/2005). Mr. Head said that he figured that in the case I was referring to, it was simply small change being wagered at small betting houses (1/31/2005).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



**Appendix Figure C.1. Newspaper photograph from which people placed their bets.** “Butter ’N Egg Boys Hit as Housing Number Turns Up, Winners Collect,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (11 July 1940), unknown page.

**APPENDIX D:**  
**NATHAN STRAUS'S VISIT**

It was announced January 6, 1940, that Nathan Straus, Jr.,<sup>8</sup> USHA Administrator, had accepted a KHA invitation to visit Knoxville January 21-22. While there he visited the Western Heights, College Homes, and Austin Homes sites and demonstration units. Straus's visit to the sites was a way to celebrate the opening of the projects to the public for review.

Straus, who was accompanied by Director of Region Number 4 Southeastern States for the USHA John P. Broome and his assistant Tyrrell Krum, emerged from a train at approximately 1:30 P.M. and was met by members of the Knoxville Housing Authority. After settling in at the Farragut Hotel, Mr. Straus was taken by some of Knoxville's worst slum areas en route to his review of the projects.<sup>9</sup> The tour was characterized as follows:

One of America's men of wealth and power, kindly, gentle-voiced Nathan L. Straus, today had walked and talked with the lowly people of Knoxville's slums, patted the tousled heads of their children, given them understanding and told them their miserable hovels were doomed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nathan Straus was a financier, capitalist, one-time publisher of *Puck* magazine and assistant editor for the New York *Globe*. He became interested in slum clearance and public housing during his tenure in the New York State Senate and in 1935 was sent to Europe to study their housing projects as a representative of New York City. He became head of the United States Housing Authority at its establishment in 1937. "Strauss [sic], Noted Financier, To See Housing Projects," *KNS* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "Straus Will Be Housing Guest Here," *KJ* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "Welcome, Mr. Straus," *KJ* (21 Jan. 1940), u.p.

<sup>9</sup> "Strauss [sic], Noted Financier, To See Housing Projects," *KNS* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "Straus Will Be Housing Guest Here," *KJ* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "USHA Head To Make Three Talks Here," *KNS* (18 Jan., 1940), u.p.; "Straus Due Here Sunday," *KJ* (20 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "New Housing Units To Be Opened Today," *KJ* (21 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "Knoxville May Receive Further Housing Funds," *KJ* (22 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "City May Get \$6,000,000 More for Housing Projects," *KNS* (21 Jan. 1940), u.p.

<sup>10</sup> Bob Cunningham, "Slum Districts Here 'Among Worst Anywhere,' Straus Says After Tour," *KNS* (22 Jan. 1940), 2.

Apparently while on this tour Mr. Straus “hopped right out”<sup>11</sup> of the car and braved harsh winds and the slush and mud of streets that lacked paving to talk to slum residents.

Afterward, Mr. Straus gave a talk to which the public was invited. The auditorium at Maynard Elementary School (a black school located across the street from College Homes) was filled to capacity with “one of the most representative groups of Negro and white citizens that has been seen here in many years.”<sup>12</sup> What follows is an excerpt from his address to the crowd:

These houses are of brick and mortar. They will not be home until a community of happy families live in them. Unless this brings from you a response to citizenship’s high call, this brick and mortar will degenerate. You should turn over a new leaf. There shouldn’t be a scrap of paper allowed to remain on these premises—not even a chewing gum wrapper. For filth once started multiplies itself rapidly. Colored people are essentially a cleanly people. There is not instance among all the projects for Negroes where they haven’t been kept well and neat, with flowers and shrubbery planted. Help your local authority and me to keep on until your last slum is wiped out.<sup>13</sup>

And, he was so taken with the Austin High School Chorus’s rendition of “God Bless America” that he requested to shake hands with its 40 members.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “Housing Authority Head Addresses Throng At Maynard,” *ETN* (25 Jan. 1940), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, “Slum Districts Here ‘Among Worst Anywhere,’” 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



*"You have some of the worst slums I've seen," exclaimed Nathan L. Straus (right), director of the U. S. Housing Authority, after he had inspected the dwelling shown here. The window, with panes broken out, is covered with tin; on the porch beside Mr. Straus is the tub in which this Lane Street family carries its wash water from a nearby faucet. With Mr. Straus is Olin Berry, chairman of the Knoxville Housing Authority.*

**Appendix Figure D.1. "Straus Finds Our Slums 'Some of Worst.'" "Plans For 15 New Projects Here Presented U.S. Housing Chief," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (22 January 1940), unknown page.**

**APPENDIX E:**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE HOME ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT**  
**ASSISTS COLLEGE HOMES**

Students and faculty of the University of Tennessee (UT) Home Economics Department furnished demonstration units for public viewing in late January 1940.<sup>15</sup> The program was led by Miss Jessie Harris, head of UT's Home Economics department and after whom the current Home Economics building on campus is named. Four units total were furnished, two each at College Homes and Western Heights. Those at College Homes were of the one-bedroom variety, meaning they were composed of a kitchen, living room, and bedroom.<sup>16</sup> At first it was reported that this endeavor would utilize only used furnishings, so as "to show what can be done by the occupants of the units who, of course, will use their own used furniture."<sup>17</sup> Later, the focus was widened to include items conceived through "adaptability and ingenuity" in order to "demonstrate how attractively and conveniently they [the units] can be furnished at small cost" not to mention a "small income, combined with originality and thrift."<sup>18</sup> These included a piece of furniture made up of rough lumber with two egg cases covered by good-looking material and half a barrel upholstered to make a library seat. Fifty participating students used such methods and materials to outfit the units. Reports of average cost per room differed, but suffice it to say they were affordable at the time.<sup>19</sup> One article made sure to point out the economy of the

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<sup>15</sup> "Straus Will Be Housing Guest Here," *KJ* (6 Jan. 1940), unknown page; "'Rural Housing' To Be Topic of USHA Head Here on Jan. 22," *KNS* (14 Jan. 1940), u.p.

<sup>16</sup> "Knoxville Authority and Tennessee U. Cooperate in Home Demonstrations," *Public Housing Weekly News* 1, no. 34 (2 April 1940): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in "Straus Will Be Housing Guest Here," *KJ* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.

<sup>18</sup> "'Rural Housing' To Be Topic of USHA Head Here on Jan. 22," *KNS* (14 Jan. 1940), u.p.

<sup>19</sup> The *Knoxville News-Sentinel* reported an average cost of \$26.94 per room, while the *Public Housing Weekly News* quoted a few different amounts. The two College Homes' units were said to have been completely furnished for \$91.77 and \$75.31, whereas the Western Heights' three bedroom apartments cost \$134.71 and \$146.62 to furnish. The total for the \$75.31 unit was broken down by rooms. The

endeavor: "In every case the figures represent the cost of acquiring and remodeling or making the furniture, draperies, pictures, pillows, etc."<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, these units were to remain open as models for interested parties from 3 to 5 P.M. Monday through Saturday and from 1 to 5 P.M. Sunday until the project's completion.<sup>21</sup>

The cooperation between UT and KHA was featured in the *Public Housing Weekly News*,<sup>22</sup> a periodical published by the USHA. This article gave more information on the students participating in the project. UT trained its Home Economics majors for fieldwork in Appalachia; thus they were "already familiar with the needs and means of low-income families."<sup>23</sup> Miss Harris wanted to turn this type of experience into a summer course, while UT planned to offer homemaking classes to project tenants.

Finally, the university's work also earned praise via letters from USHA Administrator Nathan Straus after a visit in January. Furthermore, pictures of the demonstration units were used by other housing entities throughout the country in planning their own.<sup>24</sup>

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living room cost \$33.67, the bedroom \$27.50, and the kitchen \$14.34. Together the average cost for all four units per living room was \$37.98, per bedroom, \$29.89, and per kitchen, \$15.05. Bob Cunningham, "Slum Districts Here 'Among Worst Anywhere,' Straus Says After Tour," *KNS* (22 Jan. 1940), 2; "Knoxville Authority and Tennessee U. Cooperate in Home Demonstrations," *Public Housing Weekly News* 1, no. 34 (2 April 1940): 3.

<sup>20</sup> "Knoxville Authority and Tennessee U. Cooperate in Home Demonstrations," *Public Housing Weekly News* 1, no. 34 (2 April 1940): 3.

<sup>21</sup> "'Rural Housing' To Be Topic of USHA Head Here on Jan. 22," *KNS* (14 Jan. 1940), u.p.; Cunningham, "Slum Districts Here 'Among Worst Anywhere,' Straus Says After Tour," 2; "Straus Will Be Housing Guest Here," *KJ* (6 Jan. 1940), u.p.; "False Reports Routed As Families Clamor For Beautiful College Homes," *ETN* (4 April 1940), u.p.

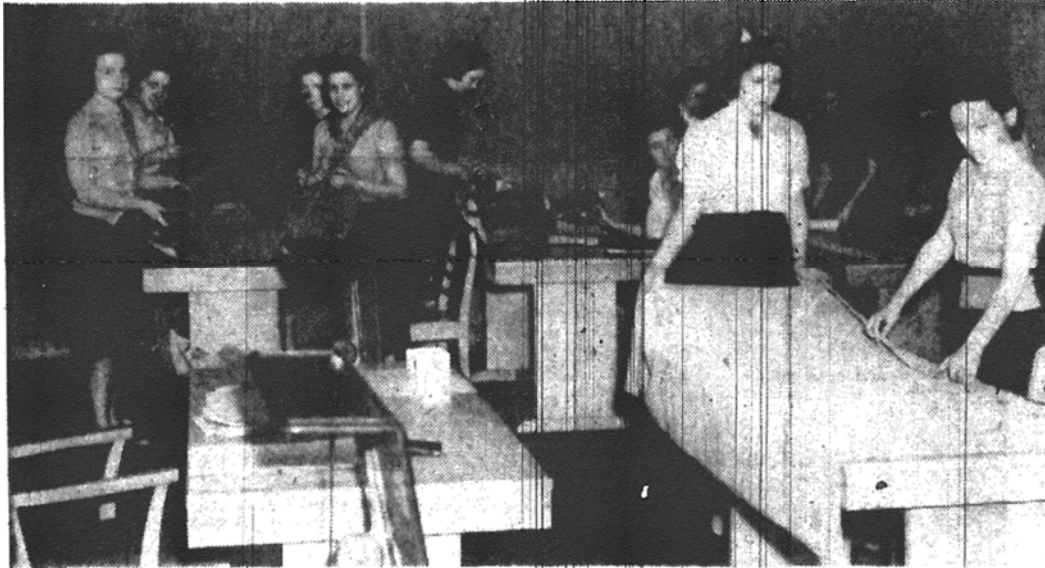
<sup>22</sup> "Knoxville Authority and Tennessee U. Cooperate in Home Demonstrations," *Public Housing Weekly News* 1, no. 34 (2 April 1940): 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> "Slum Areas Also To Be Paid Visit," *KJ* (18 Feb., 1940), u.p.



Orange sacks, which are thrown away in the average household, are being converted into draperies for furnishing the demonstration apartments in the Western Heights and College Homes housing projects. The furnishings are being made and installed by girl students of the department of home economics, of the University of Tennessee. Left to right are: Margaret Jane Stephens, Eustice Rhister, Rebecca Clendenin and Catherine Slatten.



This is another group of U-T students in the department of home economics, making curtains and other furnishings for the demonstration apartments of Knoxville's new low-rental housing projects.

**Appendix Figure E.1. University of Tennessee Home Economics students at work on furnishings for College Homes units. "Orange Sacks Are Turned Into Draperies,"** *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* (21 January 1940), unknown page.





**Appendix Figure E.2. Sample rooms at College Homes furnished by the University of Tennessee's Home Economics Department.** "U-T, Knoxville Authority Co-Operate In Furnishing Units," *The Knoxville Journal* (27 October 1940), p. 10.

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