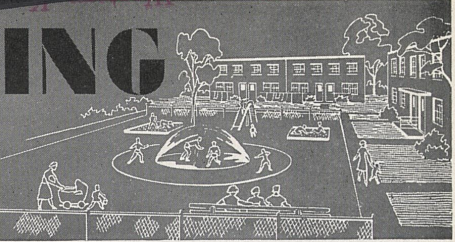


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PUBLIC HOUSING

Weekly News

FROM AMERICAN COMMUNITIES ABOLISHING SLUMS AND BUILDING LOW-RENT HOUSING



Federal Works Agency - John M. Carmody, Administrator

Vol. 1, No. 41 - May 21, 1940

U. S. Housing Authority - Nathan Straus, Administrator

Surgeon General Says Slums Menace Health

Speaking before the thirty-eighth annual conference of State and Territorial health officers in Washington, D. C. recently, Surgeon General Thomas Parran reminded the members of the "tremendous stake" they have in slum clearance projects throughout the country. Dr. Parran told the assembly that substandard housing, where disease breeds rapidly, is as much the problem of the public health officer as it is of the social worker.

Dr. Parran referred to the "new concept of health," which includes (along with considerations of heating, lighting, and ventilation) comfort and well-being. He emphasized the control of respiratory infections through careful attention to living conditions. Dr. Parran's address was given the first day of the conference, May 9.

The second day was featured by the report of the Conference's housing committee, presented by Dr. George C. Ruhland, District of Columbia Health Officer. The committee's report recommended that State, municipal and county health officers turn to the U. S. Public Health Service, and also to the Housing Committee of the American Public Health Association "for assistance and guidance."

Since November 1939 Dr. Joseph M. DallaValle and Mr. John C. Leukhardt of U. S. Public Health Service have been cooperating with USHA in the task of coordinating the activities of the two agencies.

Poindexter Village Opens Doors To First 28 Low-Income Families

Twenty-eight families (average annual incomes—\$863.82) moved into Poindexter Village, USHA-aided project in Columbus, Ohio, early this month, obtaining new homes for old and a rental reduction in the bargain.

Formerly the 28 families were living in substandard houses where they were paying an average of \$273.84 a year for rent and utilities. This was nearly one-third of total annual income. In their new homes, designed for safety, comfort, efficiency, and

Beister, instructor. Furniture and decorations in the model apartments were designed to demonstrate the possibility of satisfactory home-making at a minimum of cost. Prospective tenants were urged to economize in every practical way in furnishing their new homes.

Designed for predominantly Negro occupancy, the project is composed of two-story flats and row houses, with dwellings ranging in size from 3½ to 5½ rooms. Each dwelling is equipped with a gas range, electric lighting, modern plumbing and heating. Each family has its own front and back yard. The design of the project facilitates a high degree of tenant maintenance. Tenants will care for their own yards and lawns and do all but the technical work in the care of buildings.

Although the buildings are constructed to last for 60 years as good rental property, the net construction cost of the project is only \$2,712 per dwelling. The over-all cost, including land and the local housing authority's administrative, carrying, and contingent expenses, is \$4,241.

Mr. O. A. Corzilius is Executive Director of the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority; James Madison, local Negro, is project supervisor. Authority members are: Charles St. John Chubb, Chairman; Frank A. Hunter, Vice Chairman; E. L. Weinland, Treasurer; C. L. Dolle, Jr.; and Fred Lazarus.

This week
9733 families
were living in
USHA Homes

pleasant community life, they pay an average of \$224.28 per year for rent and utilities, only one-quarter of total annual income.

Before leasing their new homes, tenants were invited to inspect three model apartments completely and inexpensively furnished by students in the Economics Department of Ohio State University, working under the supervision of Miss Charlotte



This was Thorn Alley in a Columbus (Ohio) slum, a welter of dismal shacks, littered garbage, and outdoor plumbing.



This is Thorn Alley, now part of Poindexter Village, a well-planned community of safe, comfortable homes.

Virgin Islands Get Housing Authority

The USHA-aided program was extended to another outlying possession recently when Robert Morss Lovett, Acting Governor of the Virgin Islands, announced the formation of a housing authority by the Municipal Council of St. Thomas and St. John. This is comparable to the enactment of State enabling legislation, since "St. Thomas and St. John" is one of two municipalities (the other being St. Croix) whose Councils, meeting together, constitute the Legislative Assembly of the Virgin Islands. The Council of the former municipality has also authorized the appropriation of \$5,000 for the local housing authority's initial expenses.

Acquired by purchase from Denmark in 1916, the Virgin Islands support a population (1930) of 22,012 on 133 square miles of territory.

The PWA Housing Division built three housing projects in the Islands—the Berg Homes project on St. Thomas and the Bassin Triangle and Marley Homes projects on St. Croix. Now operated by USHA, the three projects contain 124 dwelling units and are occupied by families with an average annual income of \$323. Shelter rents average \$4.55 per month.



The H. H. Berg Homes Project, built on St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, by the PWA Housing Division, and now operated by USHA. Rents average only \$4.55 a month.

Rhode Island, smallest State in the country, leads the Nation's public housing program in one important respect, local housing authorities having been set up in 85 percent of its cities. Five out of Rhode Island's seven cities now have local authorities. They are: Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Newport.

Florida Rotary Club Wins Service Prize

The \$500,000 slum clearance and low-rent housing project of the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., housing authority was an important contributing factor in the Fort Lauderdale Rotary Club's winning first prize in Rotary's 1939 Community Service contest.

The Fort Lauderdale Club sponsored a great many community services, including a contribution to the Children's Home Society, promotion of a summer playground and recreational program, support of a local Boy Scout troop, and provision of an educational fund; but the most important single achievement of the club was the effective support given to the local housing program.

As the Rotarian for April 1940 reports: "A \$500,000 slum clearance and low-rent housing project was pressed to completion because of Club activity. When the city came to entering contracts as sponsor of the project, several owners of tenement property undertook to block the action by injunction, thus protecting their investments in an area where better housing was needed to improve health and prevent crime.

"The Club called a public meeting at which the citizenry heard supporting facts and displayed such enthusiasm that the objectors withdrew."

Austin Notes Trend to Suburban Areas

American cities are "flattening out" Director William L. Austin of the Census Bureau said recently after studying field office reports which indicate that a tremendous migration of city residents to suburban areas has taken place since the 1930 census.

Many factors are involved in this significant and important population movement. These include: Improved roads and transportation facilities which enable people to live farther away from their work; cheaper housing in rural areas near cities; opportunities to supplement wage and salary income by raising poultry and garden produce; expansion of electric and water service to rural areas in recent years. Probably the greatest factor, however, was the good old American desire to own a home and a plot of ground out in the country.

There is little doubt but that this flattening out process will be reflected in 1940 population figures of many cities, Mr. Austin said. The rate of growth in hundreds of cities has slowed down. Some cities will show an actual decline in population. This development was forecast by the test census last summer in two Indiana counties. A slight decrease in the population of South Bend and Mishawaka, the leading cities in the two counties, was more than balanced by a sharp increase in the number of residents living in adjacent areas.

These population losses did not affect the economic strength of the cities, Mr. Austin explained, since the suburban residents still worked and spent their money in the urban areas. In fact, a whole new market was created for such commodities as gardening tools, sports equipment, and lawn and porch furniture which are classed as "necessities" of suburban living.

Additional indications of this movement to the outskirts of cities were found in the returns of the 1935 farm census which revealed a sharp increase in the number of small farms located in the neighborhood of industrial areas.

Two Texas Authorities Have Women Chairmen—4 in U. S.

There are now four women serving as chairmen of local housing authorities in the United States. Texas lays claim to two.

Housing as it affects Latin-American populations has a common interest for Mrs. Otto Nordwald, chairman of the housing authority of El Paso, and for Mrs. Volney W. Taylor, chairman of the Brownsville authority. They are chairmen in cities which, although 800 miles apart along the border, have similar serious slum conditions which they are seeking to remedy through participation in the United States Housing Authority program.

Mrs. Ruby Black is chairman of a county housing authority—that of Lamar County, Miss.—and Mrs. Blanche Cronin is president of the Hamtramck Housing Commission, Hamtramck, Mich., teeming Detroit suburb.

Although women housing authority chairmen total only four out of more than 415 possibilities, still, to mothers, teachers, nurses, clubwomen, and others throughout the Nation, belongs much of the credit for the success of the public housing movement.

New York Univ. Produces More Educational Films

The Educational Film Institute of New York University, 71 Washington Square South, has just produced two excellent sound films: *And So They Live*, two and one-half reels (25 minutes); and *The Children Must Learn*, one reel (13 minutes). Both films deal with the normal daily life of American families in the Southeast. They show conditions in rural areas, emphasizing education, health, and housing. Especially valuable are the pictures of farm families' dwellings, both interior and exterior. The films may be rented from the Institute at \$1.50 per reel.

The Negro as Tenant and Neighbor

By Robert C. Weaver, Special Assistant to the Administrator, USHA

An address delivered at a panel discussion on social security at the Third National Negro Congress, Department of Labor Auditorium, Washington, D. C., Sunday, April 28, 1940.

For many years now we have been told that Negro occupancy results in the deterioration of property, the depreciation of property values, and a general decline in neighborhood standards. This charge has been repeated so widely and so insistently that it has found general acceptance among the American people. Negro tenants, we have been told, will not keep up their property. They will take over a good dwelling and let it run down. They are destructive and careless. They let rubbish accumulate in their yards. They do nothing to check the spread of vermin. They are loud. They do not value privacy. They're pretty poor tenants and impossible neighbors.

It is important to examine these allegations to determine to what extent they are true or false, because they are significant factors in the development of patterns of residential segregation. Professedly upon the basis of these charges, real estate men generally refuse to rent or sell homes to Negroes in any save established Negro neighborhoods; banks turn down applications for loans for the purchase or construction of homes for Negroes; and certain agencies decline to guarantee mortgages for Negro applicants outside of a "black belt."

Segregation and Congestion

The results of these policies are socially and economically disastrous. First, there is the increasing concentration of Negroes in restricted areas, creating land and room congestion. Expansion of these areas is a slow process of penetrating the surrounding community, an effort not infrequently accompanied by violence. Within these areas rents and purchase prices are skyrocketed out of all proportion to the value of the property. Since few new homes are built for Negro occupancy, colored families are compelled to take over old structures

which have outlived their original purposes. The age of these buildings, together with the congestion and the neglect of the property by landlords contributes to their deterioration and the development of blighted areas and slums. Having confined the Negro to these areas and having imposed this plight upon him, the landlords, the real estate agents, and the banks point to these conditions as evidence of the Negro's irresponsibility as a tenant and as justification of their discriminatory practices.

It is a vicious circle. The Negro is corraled in the slums and blighted areas, charged excessive rents, blamed for the conditions prevailing in those areas, and denied opportunity to move out or to obtain adequate financial assistance for improvements to dwellings within his districts.

Public Housing Launched

Not until the Government's public housing program was launched in 1934 was there any large-scale attempt made to break this vicious circle by clearing the slums and developing low-rent housing projects for small wage earners living in substandard homes. This program is significant, not only because it is providing decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for low-income families, but also because it is demonstrating that these tenants, including about 7,500 Negro families, do not of themselves run down property as alleged by some landlords.

Visit any one of the 18 low-rent housing projects occupied predominantly by Negroes and developed in colored neighborhoods by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration or the six such projects recently developed by local housing authorities with the financial assistance of the United States Housing Authority. See for yourself how well kept the grounds and buildings are. Look into the dwellings and see how neatly the housewives are keeping their new homes. Walk through the project grounds and notice what quiet prevails. Talk with the tenants and learn what pride they take in the upkeep and appearance of the project.



"Well-planned and well-kept"

After visiting Smithfield Courts, a low-rent housing project in Birmingham, in November 1938, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in her daily column: "One of the first things I was taken to see this morning in Birmingham was another housing project which I had seen just beginning when I was here before. In many southern cities the worst housing is usually occupied by the Negro population, and so I was glad to find that this project was for colored people and already practically filled. We asked a woman who came out into her yard if we might see her house. She let us in, and it seemed to me well planned and well kept."

Reporting on a recent tour of the South, George S. Schuyler observed in The Pittsburgh (Pa.) Courier:

"The greatest obvious changes are noticeable in the numerous housing projects and farm resettlement communities for Negroes . . . The fine housing projects must be contributing greatly toward changing the local attitudes on what is good enough for Negroes and the responsibility of society for the well-being of all the people. Some cities have two, three, four, and in some instances five different projects built and building. These residential projects are attractive, stable, and neat and certainly must be imposing new standards of thinking on their occupants. Swarms of ugly shanties still house a large section of the Negro population in almost every town, but there must no longer be the feeling that Negroes are doomed to continue in such dwellings."

Memphis Report

According to the annual report of the Memphis (Tenn.) Housing Authority, "anyone visiting the apartments in Lauderdale Courts [white project] or Dixie Homes [Negro project], as members of the Commission and staff of MHA do on various occasions, would be amazed by the everyday spic and span conditions maintained by the people who live there."

That these conditions are increasing property values in neighborhoods of projects occupied by Negroes as well as by whites is substantiated by a recent survey which the USHA has made of 78 low-rent

(Continued on next page)



" . . . what pride they take in the appearance of the project"

The Negro As Tenant And Neighbor

(Continued from preceding page)

housing projects throughout the Nation. This survey revealed that in the vicinities of these projects \$15,000,000 has been spent during the past 2 years on both private and public construction and improvements.

Does any of this indicate that Negro occupancy must result in a deterioration in neighborhoods and a decline in property values? On the contrary, it is clear demonstration that, given an opportunity to live in a decent home, Negro families strive to maintain a high standard and take pride in their homes and neighborhoods.

Under the present USHA program 160,000 families will find shelter in low-rent housing projects. Of this number, approximately one-third will be Negro families. There is no reason to doubt that the tenants in these new projects will maintain the high standard in the care of their homes already set by tenants of the PWA and early USHA-aided projects.

Having demonstrated their desire for better homes and their eagerness to keep these homes up to standard, and having refuted the charge that their occupancy necessarily precipitates a decline in property values, will Negro tenants and prospective home owners continue to face a restricted market? Will the landlords, realtors, and bankers cling to their preconceived ideas in the face of these facts? Or will they recognize how baseless their allegations have been and open the market to Negroes on the same terms as for whites? Certainly this demonstration disproves the charges against the Negro tenant and should, in the long run, be an important factor in breaking down the ghetto walls.

Although five of the USHA-aided projects in which Negroes are now living are for mixed occupancy, fear has been expressed in some quarters lest public housing be used to perpetuate and extend the existing patterns of residential segregation. This may be effected by displacing Negroes from desirable neighborhoods or through excluding them from public housing projects in cities where existing public facilities do not provide separate racial accommodations.

If, in these latter communities, we plan for "Negro" and "white" projects today, we may be erecting projects which will, because of population shifts or changes in management policy, become areas of mixed racial occupancy during the next 60 years. It will

Columbia To Grant First Housing Master's Degree

Students in the School of Architecture at Columbia University, beginning in the school year 1940-41, may work toward the degree of "Master of Science in Planning and Housing." This is believed to be the first graduate degree in housing offered by any American university.

According to Mr. Carl Feiss, Assistant Professor of Architecture at Columbia, students eligible to register for this degree must be "graduates of accredited schools of architecture or landscape architecture, or of schools of civil, architectural, and general engineering."

"The work of the Planning and Housing Division is primarily concerned with the physical improvement of environment and in the development of technical ability to foster such improvement."

Students in the Planning and Housing Division will deal with problems "urban, suburban, rural, and national in character." In addition to the regular lectures and classroom work, they will make field trips and will carry on independent research.

"The typical course is of 2 years' duration, but applicants with previous experience or training acceptable to the Faculty of Architecture and who perform satisfactory work in Planning and Housing may receive their degrees in 1 year's time."

not be easy to change the type of racial occupancy if a definite pattern of separate facilities has been established, for such a pattern creates vested interests which resist change.

In addition to the six USHA-aided projects in which both Negro and white tenants are now living, there are 14 projects for mixed occupancy developed by the Housing Division of PWA. This mixed occupancy has in no instance occasioned any serious and lasting difficulties.

What effect the Government's public housing program will have on the problem of residential segregation only time will tell. However, the program has already made an initial demonstration of two important factors involved in this problem: first, that Negro occupancy need not result in depreciation of property, that the Negro is a responsible tenant in a decent home; and, second, that the two races can live harmoniously together in the same project, that the Negro can be a good neighbor as well as a good tenant.

Newark Tenants Now Pay Less, Get More

A recent report by Harry B. Weiss, Tenant Relations Director at Pennington Court, shows clearly the efficient manner in which the Newark housing authority has carried on its tenant selection activities and the remarkable improvement in the living conditions of the families that became tenants.

Pennington Court is 100 percent occupied; in its 236 comfortable homes are 236 low-income families. Their average income is only \$945 per year, with actual incomes ranging from \$501.36 to \$1,246.56. From these incomes the Pennington Court tenants pay an average of \$21.05 per month for shelter, water, light, fuel, and refrigeration. Before they came to Pennington Court these families were paying an average of \$24.03 per month for questionable facilities in substandard homes. On the basis of shelter rent alone, the contrast is even more striking. The report shows that, whereas tenant families were paying more than one-fifth of their income for shelter in the slums, they now pay only about one-sixth of their income for shelter in the project. The income is the same, but the standard of living has been raised and the cost of living has been lowered.

Pennington Court tenant families formerly paid more for less in the following ways: Nearly three-fourths (72.5 percent) of the families had no inside private baths; about one-half (47.9 percent) had no private flush toilets; one out of five had no private cooking facilities; more than one-half (54.2 percent) had inadequate and unsafe heating; one family out of ten had inadequate and unsafe lighting; and more than one out of three (37.3 percent) had inadequate light and ventilation.

Not only has the quality of living facilities been improved but the actual living space per family has been increased. "In their previous homes," the report states, "our tenants had 3.5 rooms per family. At Pennington Court the average dwelling unit has 4.19 rooms. Previously the average number of persons per dwelling unit was 4.27; at Pennington Court the average is 3.74 persons per dwelling unit."

The report is not available for general distribution.

Weekly Construction Report

Item	Week ended May 10, 1940	Week ended May 3, 1940	Percentage change
Number of projects under construction.....	205	204	+0.49
Number of dwellings under construction.....	79,784	78,614	+1.49
Total estimated over-all cost ¹ of new housing.....	\$354,067,000	\$348,778,000	+1.52
Average over-all cost ¹ of new housing per unit.....	\$4,438	\$4,437	+0.02
Average net construction cost ² per unit.....	\$2,775	\$2,778	-0.11

¹ Includes: (a) Building the house, including structural costs and plumbing, heating, and electrical installation; (b) dwelling equipment, architects' fees, local administrative expenses, financial charges during construction, and contingency expenses; (c) land for present development; (d) nondwelling facilities.

² The cost of building the house, including structural, plumbing, heating, and electrical costs.

Schedule of Bid Opening Dates¹

Local authority and project number	Number of units	Date of bid opening
Biloxi (Miss.-5-3).....	100	6-13-40
Brunswick (Ga.-9-1)....	128	6-4-40
Brunswick (Ga.-9-2)....	144	6-4-40
Dayton (Ohio-5-1-R)....	604	5-28-40
Elizabeth (N. J.-3-2)....	405	5-22-40
Fall River (Mass.-6-2)...	222	6-5-40
Phoenix (Ariz.-1-3).....	135	6-3-40
Puerto Rico H. A. (P. R.-3-1).....	210	5-28-40
San Antonio (Tex.-6-4).....	236	6-20-40

¹ There is usually a 30-day period between bid advertising and bid opening.

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