

# Architecture in government housing

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Carl Mackley Houses, Philadelphia. Designed by Kastner & Stonorov, executed under the direction of W. Pope Barney.

## Architecture in Government Housing

**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**







## Acknowledgements

The members of the Committee on Architecture and Industrial Art wish to acknowledge their appreciation of the generous cooperation they have received from the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration and the Resettlement Administration in making possible this exhibition.

Especially thanks are due the department heads and the individual architects who have given their time and energy in the preparation and assembling of the material. In addition the Committee wishes to thank Miss Catherine Bauer for contributing the foreword to this brief catalog.

## Committee on Architecture and Industrial Art

Philip Goodwin, Chairman  
Alfred H. Barr, Jr.  
Catherine Bauer  
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Any architectural exhibition worth looking at provides material for broader judgments than the mere rating of individual buildings. Important aspects of the social economic framework of the times are sure to be reflected there, and to invite analysis.

The tag of "style" or "period" often means that the particular combination of means and purposes which produced the buildings was dominant and official at the time. Or it may represent a rebel movement, perhaps a prophetic one, turning counter to the established order of things. In any case, there can be no real understanding or critical appreciation of an exhibited group of buildings without an answer to the question: "Who ordered and paid for these structures? And why?"

The housing projects shown here in drawings, photographs and models were ordered and financed by two different agencies of the Federal Government, the F.W.A. Housing Division and the Resettlement Administration. They are intended to house low-income families who have always hitherto been forced to live in outworn and unhealthy homes. This means that every one of these projects (except the Carl Mackley House) must receive a subsidy, and will thus be partially paid for by the tax-payers of the United States.

Most of these developments will remain in public ownership, and all will be permanently removed from the private speculative market. Some are also clearance and reconstruction projects, while others are on cheap land in outlying suburban areas, but they are all planned and constructed as complete neighborhood units. Parks and community service facilities are built in. Streets and buildings also become an integral and functional pattern instead of a stand-alone "subdivided" gridiron. The particular projects exhibited here are all of simple, modern architectural design, with no color, no tags or advertising excursions.

In short, this housing is as different from our usual mode of residential construction as Christ's Cathedral is from a Roman temple.

But what does it really mean? When he comes to his notes on these buildings, will the future historian of American architecture and environment start a new chapter? Or will he merely say in a footnote that in the year 1936 certain strange experiments were temporarily engaged in by the Federal Government?

No one can answer this question yet. Of the projects here shown, one has been occupied for more than a year and almost all the others are in process of construction (with the exception of Greenbrook in New Jersey, which was recently stopped by court order due to unsafe local conditions). These two temporary Federal agencies have now about fifty similar projects under construction. But the



work cannot continue much longer on a temporary opportunist basis. And the U. S. Housing Bill, which would remove many legal uncertainties and set up housing on a permanent basis, will probably fail of enactment at this session of Congress. It is not on the President's "must" list.

Likewise, although a serious attempt to develop modern planning techniques and standards of neighborhood design has been made by the P.W.A. and Resettlement, certain other Federal agencies are among the bitterest enemies of these experiments. One of the so-called "housing" agencies provides Federal assistance to promote the same old type of speculative subdivision which is responsible in large measure for present slums and blighted areas.

All we have to go on, in short, is a few more or less accidental housing projects. As yet there is no national housing policy or program.

We have achieved one thing in the past four years. We have begun to realize that "housing" is a very complex problem, which cuts across almost as many fields as there are special interests and viewpoints in our society. The economic fact that most families do not have enough income to pay a profitable rental for a decent new dwelling; the industrial fact that unemployment is still rife in the building trades, while the housing shortage mounts; the social fact that slum living conditions are prevalent in cities and open country; the technical fact that we know how to build a better human environment; the cultural fact that a housing movement would provide the one great opportunity for a real modern architecture, as it already has done in many European countries; the political fact that an effective housing program can be put through only by organized pressure and vigilance . . . not one of these facets of the housing problem can be neglected.

But this exhibition is not a presumptuous one. It does not aim to present the problem in toto, or analyse administrative solutions. The emphasis here is entirely on concrete examples of new construction which may be of vast significance in the future not only of our architecture, but of our entire environment. And it may well be worth while to interrupt the abstract arguments and political jockeying with this simple reminder that a housing movement must eventually be judged by its houses and not by its theories.

Catherine Bauer



work cannot continue much longer on a temporary emergency basis. And the U. S. Housing Bill, which would remove many legal barriers and set up housing on a permanent basis, will probably fail of enactment at this session of Congress. It is the opinion of President's "staff" that.

Likewise, although a serious attempt to develop modern planning techniques and standards of neighborhood design has been made by the F.W.A. and Reconstruction, certain other Federal agencies among the highest number of these experiments. One of the agencies called "housing" agencies provides Federal assistance to private the same old type of speculative subdivision which is responsible in large measure for present slums and blighted areas.

All we have to do on, in short, is a few more or less scattered housing projects. As yet there is no national housing policy or program.

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# Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division

The Housing Division of the Public Works Administration was created in July 1930 and \$125,000,000 was set aside for slum clearance and low-cost housing. Limited dividend corporation applications were the first projects to be considered. Only a few of the hundreds submitted were found to satisfy the requirements of low rent, good planning and slum clearance, the objectives of the program. The Division then turned to the alternative of public projects.

By the end of 1934 the Division was proceeding with actual plans and commitments totaling \$143,728,000 officially allotted to projects when in December \$110,000,000 of this amount was impounded to finance direct relief. There remained only \$33,728,000 with which to carry out projects already planned to utilize the full amount. Uncertainty about appropriations continued until April 1935 when Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, allocating \$450,000,000 to urban housing. As this action did not constitute authority for immediate action, it was not until June that the Division was able to proceed. Again in 1935 its program was cut because of relief policies from 144 projects totaling \$380,000,000 to 37 projects totaling \$100,200,000 in addition to 7 projects financed by the original PWA funds already under weigh.

After many readjustments and difficulties, the program now is being vigorously pushed ahead. At present a total of 49 projects in 35 cities in the United States and in two of its insular possessions are now in active construction. Approximately 25,000 families of the low income group will be housed and direct employment provided for about 50,000 building workers. Seven housing developments erected by limited dividend corporations and operating on PWA loans and under Division supervision are now occupied.

The information above was drawn from the December 1935 Bulletin of the National Association of Housing Officials and the report of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division, 1936



Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division

The Housing Division of the Public Works Administration was created in July 1933 and \$125,000,000 was set aside for its operation and low-cost housing. Limited dividend corporation applications were the first projects to be considered. Only a few of the hundreds submitted were found to satisfy the requirements of low cost, good planning and also clearance. The objectives of the program the Division then turned to the alternative of public projects.

By the end of 1934 the Division was proceeding with actual plans and commitments totaling \$125,000,000 officially allotted to projects when in December \$17,000,000 of this amount was impounded to finance direct relief. There remained only \$108,000,000 which to carry out projects already planned to utilize the full amount. Uncertainty about appropriations continued until April 1935 when Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, allocating \$450,000,000 to urban housing. As this action did not constitute authority for immediate action, it was not until June that the Division was able to proceed. Again in 1935 the program was was cut because of relief policies from 144 projects totaling \$280,000,000 to 37 projects totaling \$100,000,000 in addition to 7 projects financed by the original FWA funds already under way.

After many readjustments and difficulties, the program now is being vigorously pushed ahead. At present a total of 42 projects in 25 cities in the United States and in two of its insular possessions are now in active construction. Approximately 25,000 families of the low income group will be housed and direct employment provided for about 50,000 building workers. Seven housing developments erected by limited dividend corporations and operating on FWA loans and under Division supervision are now occupied.

The information above was drawn from the December 1935 Bulletin of the National Association of Housing Officials and the report of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Housing Division, 1935



1. Langston Terrace, Washington, D.C. Robinson, Porter and Williams, architects.

A project to house 317 Negro families of low income. The site was chosen for its proximity to market, school, recreation facilities and hospital. The buildings will be two story flats, group houses and three story apartments.

Exhibits

Model of development

Perspective view

Typical living units and social rooms

Map showing location of site

2. Cedar Central, Cleveland, Ohio. W. R. McCornack, architect.

A development of three story houses to house 654 low income families. The previous density of population was 67 persons per acre. The new buildings will house 120 persons per acre but by orderly planning will provide increased light, air and recreation grounds.

Exhibits

Site before demolition vs. site as planned

Night view of facade

3. Williamsburg Housing Development, New York. R. H. Shreve, Chief architect; James F. Bly, N. W. del Gaudio, Arthur L. Holden, William Lescaze, Samuel Gardstein, John W. Ingle, Jr., G. Harmon Gurney, Paul Trapani and Harry Leslie Walker, associated architects.

Foundations are being laid for this low cost housing development which will cover an area of approximately 10 city blocks. The development will consist of 4 super-blocks, each of which will be surrounded by a park area. Each super-block will include a social room, nursery school and two play grounds. Neighborhood stores are also included in the plan. 1614 families will be housed in two, three, four and five room apartments.

Exhibits

Perspective rendering

Facade

Details

Plan of typical building: basement, first floor and typical floor

Site plan

Photographs of site before and after

Map showing Williamsburg in relation to New York



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Exhibits  
Model of development  
Perspective view  
Typical living units and social rooms  
Map showing location of site

S. Cedar Central, Cleveland, Ohio. W. H. McGovern, architect.

A development of three story houses to house 654 low income families. The previous density of population was 67 persons per acre. The new buildings will house 120 persons per acre but by orderly planning will provide increased light, air and recreation grounds.

Exhibits  
Site before demolition vs. site as planned  
Night view of facade

3. Williamsburg Housing Development, New York. N. H. Shreve, Chief architect; James F. Rye, N. W. del Gaudio, Arthur L. Holden, William Lescage, Samuel Gerstman, John W. Ingis, Dr. G. Harmon Gurney, Paul Trepani and Harry Leslie Walker, associated architects.

Foundations are being laid for this low cost housing development which will cover an area of approximately 10 city blocks. The development will consist of 4 super-blocks, each of which will be surrounded by a park area. Each super-block will include a social room, nursery school and two play grounds. Neighborhood stores are also included in the plan. 1614 families will be housed in two, three, four and five room apartments.

Exhibits  
Perspective rendering  
Facade  
Details  
Plan of typical building: basement, first floor and typical floor  
Site plan  
Photographs of site before and after  
Map showing Williamsburg in relation to New York



4. Carl Mackley Houses, Juniata Park, Philadelphia. Designed by Kastner & Stonorov, executed under the direction of W. Pope Barney.

The first project started by the Housing Division, it houses 284 families in two and one half, four and five room apartments. It is a limited dividend corporation organized by the American Federation of Hosiery Workers. Rentals are not, however, limited to hosiery workers only and the aim of the management is that the majority of tenants form a cross section of the industrial population of Northeast Philadelphia. Rental includes electric light and refrigeration, heat and use of laundry. For the kindergarten and swimming pool nominal fees of 5¢ are charged. The average rental is \$9.35 per room per month. It was ready for occupancy January 1, 1935.

Exhibits

View from swimming pool  
Detail of houses  
View toward pool  
General view  
Bath house  
Site plan  
Plans

5. Westfield Acres, Camden, New Jersey. Associated architects of Camden, New Jersey. Joseph N. Hettel, Chief architect. Designed by Oscar G. Stonorov.

Westfield Acres is a Federal Housing Development financed entirely by the Federal Government. It is sponsored by the Camden Labor Housing Committee, a committee in which all organized labor, i.e. the American Federation of Labor and Industrial Unions are represented. It will house 598 families in three, four and five room apartments.

Exhibits

Facade renderings  
Plans  
Model of development

Four complete towns, each with its protective greenbelt of small farms, parks and gardens, are being built with relief labor by the Resettlement Administration. They are near Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C. and Board Brook, New Jersey.



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View from swimming pool  
Detail of houses  
View toward pool  
General view  
Bath house  
Site plan  
Plans

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Exhibits  
Rental schedule  
Plans  
Model of development



## SUBURBAN RESETTLEMENT

Suburban Resettlement is a division of the Resettlement Administration. This Administration, like the Public Works Administration, was created under the Emergency Relief Act. Unlike the Housing Division, however, Resettlement is set up to do its own building and has a construction division. Its objectives as stated by J. S. Lansill, Director, are:

- (a) to secure a large tract of land and thus avoid the complications ordinarily due to diverse ownerships;
- (b) in this tract to create a community, protected by an encircling green belt upon which there will be no building;
- (c) to design a community for people of predominately low income, and so arranged and administered as to encourage that kind of community and family life which will be better than they now enjoy;
- (d) the dwellings and the land upon which they are located to be held in one ownership, preferably a corporation to which the Federal Government will transfer title, which corporation will rent the dwellings and not sell them;
- (e) to set up a municipal government in character with such governments now existing or possible in that region;
- (f) to provide those public services of educational and other character which the community will require;
- (g) to accomplish these purposes in such a way that the community may be a tax paying participant in the region, that extravagant outlays from the individual family income will not be a necessity, and that the rents will be suitable to families of modest income; and,
- (h) concurrently with these efforts to develop a land use plan for the entire tract, and under the direction of the Administrator, to devise a system of rural economy coordinated with the land use plan for the rural portions of the tract surrounding the Suburban community, - and to integrate both the physical plans and the economies of the rural area and the Suburban community.

Four complete towns, each with its protective greenbelt of small farms, parks and gardens, are being built with relief labor by the Resettlement Administration. They are near Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Bound Brook, New Jersey.

Model of double house by Albert Mayer  
Plans



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1. Hightstown, New Jersey. Alfred Kastner, principal architect, Louis I. Kahn, assistant architect and co-designer.

A town for garment workers to be completed September 1, 1936. A cooperative holding corporation will purchase the project from the Government and through supervised management will operate the community until the full amount is amortized. Several subsidiary cooperatives are already being organized.

Exhibits

Map showing location of project in relation to marketing centers and transportation facilities

Map of town site, farm area and woodland

Town plan

Rendering: one story house, foreground study

Rendering: one story house, background study

Rendering: two story house, in perspective

Rendering: Swimming pool

Rendering: Community Center

Plans

Model of development

2. Greenbrook, New Jersey. Henry Churchill and Albert Mayer, architects.

The total area contemplated for this project was 3,900 acres for the town site and agricultural belt. Of this 125 acres was the approximate area of the first unit to be built for 750 families, but planned for an ultimate population of 5,000. The dwelling units are one, two, three and four bedroom houses in groups of two to six, a few single family one story houses, a small percentage of flats and one three story apartment house. Orientation was given great consideration so that in general all major bedrooms and living rooms face park areas rather than streets and receive as much sunlight as possible. The population was to be drawn from the surrounding industrial towns, the income range being probably between \$900 and \$1500 a year. A town center for the first unit was planned to take care of eventual growth. The final use of the agricultural belt would probably have included a cooperative farming system.

Exhibits

Map showing relation to adjacent centers

Map showing relation to New York

Panorama

Business center

Renderings and plans of one story house

Model of double house by Henry Churchill

Plans

Model of double house by Albert Mayer

Plans



1. Nighttown, New Jersey, Alfred Easton, architect and co-designer.  
 Louis I. Kahn, assistant architect and co-designer.

A town for garment workers to be completed September 1, 1958. A cooperative holding corporation will purchase the project from the Government and through supervised management will operate the community until the full amount is amortized. Several subsidiary cooperatives are already being organized.

- Exhibits
- Map showing location of project in relation to market-  
ing centers and transportation facilities
- Map of town site, farm area and woodland
- Town plan
- Hand-drawn one story house, foreground study
- Hand-drawn one story house, background study
- Hand-drawn two story house, in perspective
- Hand-drawn swimming pool
- Hand-drawn Community Center
- Plans
- Model of development

2. Greenbrook, New Jersey. Henry Churchill and Albert Meyer, archi-  
 tects.

The total area contemplated for this project was 2,800 acres for the town site and agricultural belt. Of this 188 acres was the approximate area of the first unit to be built for 750 families, but planned for an ultimate population of 2,000. The dwelling units are one, two, three and four bedroom houses in groups of two to six, a few single family one story houses, a small percentage of flats and one three story apartment house. Orientation was given great consideration so that in general all major bedrooms and living rooms face park areas rather than streets and receive as much sunlight as possible. The population was to be drawn from the surrounding industrial towns, the income range being probably between \$200 and \$1500 a year. A town center for the first unit was planned to take care of eventual growth. The final use of the agricultural belt would probably have included a cooperative farming system.

- Exhibits
- Map showing relation to adjacent centers
- Map showing relation to New York
- Panorama
- Business center
- Hand-drawn and plans of one story house
- Model of double house by Henry Churchill
- Plans
- Model of double house by Albert Meyer
- Plans



Gaylord  
PAMPHLET BINDER  
Syracuse, N. Y.

The Museum of Modern Art





