

The New Deal and Washington Manor/Littlepage Terrace Public Housing Projects

The Washington Manor and Littlepage Terrace Housing Projects in Charleston, West Virginia were built ca. 1940 under the Works Progress Administration of the New Deal Program, which was implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as an economic boost for the United States during the Great Depression. He hoped to provide work for many of the unemployed as well as to develop state economies for the long term through recreation and infrastructure projects. The first wave of programs was developed during a period known as the "Hundred Days" under the Emergency Conservation Work Act (ECWA), beginning March 9, 1933. This first wave included the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The second wave of programs under the ECWA began January 4, 1935, and included the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

By President Roosevelt's order, the WPA was created in April 1935, and it became the largest New Deal agency. Harry L. Hopkins was the head of the WPA at the Federal level. In 1939 the agency was restructured and renamed from the Works Progress Administration to the Work Projects Administration. Under the WPA, city and county infrastructures such as roads, sewer systems, bridges and municipal buildings were built and improved. The WPA was also responsible for many arts, drama, media and literacy projects. Photography highlighting the effects of the Great Depression in Appalachia was part of the Writer's Program, and post office murals and other arts programs are evident in West Virginia.

The Federal government's initial involvement with housing was through the Emergency Relief and Construction Act in 1932 and the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). The Federal Home Loan Bank Board was also established at this time, followed by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) in 1934 under the National Housing Act. These programs were intended to address issues during the Great Depression of unemployment, expanding slums and insufficient or inadequate housing. The goal of the programs was to stimulate housing construction as part of the economic recovery through encouraging the release of credit through banks and lending institutions for construction and home repair and thereby creating jobs.

The Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, commonly referred to as the PWA, made loans to limited dividend corporations, provided grants to state or local agencies, or built its own housing projects. The intent of the PWA was to support construction of public building projects, which included housing. This housing was supposed to create new apartment complexes while clearing slum areas. Although slum areas were replaced with modern, high quality housing projects under the PWA, rents were usually too expensive for most of the intended low income families.

During this time public housing was considered a viable solution to the problems associated with the growing urban slums and unemployment. The current stigma associated with public housing or low income housing was not prevalent in the 1930s. Instead, the goal of these housing programs was not only to provide employment but to help people too poor to buy homes but who were deemed worthy and deserving of help. The premise was that improving the physical environment of poorer citizens would improve their quality of life and chances for success, thus leading to better social behavior. That attitude was reflected in Washington Manor and Littlepage Terrace, which were thoughtfully laid out complexes that provided amenities for its residents such as laundry rooms with ironing stations, perambulator closets, outside drying yards and play areas, extensive landscaping plantings and a fountain basin for summertime use.

Amid concerns about nationalized housing, competition between private and public sectors, and the new housing construction that was unaffordable by the intended beneficiaries, the PWA ended its housing responsibilities in 1937. However, the Federal government continued its commitment to alleviate substandard housing in metropolitan areas through passage of the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Housing Act.

Similar efforts were directed at helping the rural poor at this time through other government authorized agencies.

The 1937 Housing Act shifted the role of the government as an active builder of projects and as a money lender to limited dividend corporations to one of a more passive yet controlling influence. Now, money would be lent directly to cities, which were required to form permanent housing authorities to address their low-income public housing needs. These local housing authorities oversaw the construction of and administered a public housing project, and rental rates were limited to those that could be afforded by the low income residents of the slums that would be razed to make way for the new housing projects. These permanent housing authorities could borrow money from the United States Housing Authority at low interest rates with long terms. Loans were for up to 90 percent of the value of new low cost housing, with repayment extending over 60 years at an interest rate of 0.5 percent.

In Charleston, West Virginia, the administration of Mayor Daniel Boone Dawson took advantage of this new housing act and established the Housing Authority of the City of Charleston, West Virginia (CHA) to plan and seek funds from the USHA for two large housing projects. These apartment complexes were Littlepage Terrace on Washington Street for white residents only and Washington Manor on Clendenin Street for white and black residents in separate sections. Noted architect Harry Rus Warne was commissioned to develop the plans for both projects. He also designed the WPA low cost housing project built at this same time in Mount Hope.

Besides Charleston, Mount Hope and Huntington were the only other two communities in West Virginia that established housing authorities to build low income housing through the WPA program. Three low income housing projects were built in Huntington, and one in Mount Hope at this same time. Similar projects were being built in other cities as well, including New York City and Chicago.

All the housing projects did not use the same set of plans. For instance, while the Charleston and Huntington projects were similar in that they were multi-storied masonry buildings, Mount Hope's project consisted of two-unit, two-story, wood-framed dwellings. Buildings at Littlepage Terrace were multi-colored blonde brick, three-stories tall, with and without basements in the International style. Buildings at Washington Manor were three stories tall of either red brick in the International style, or originally painted concrete block but changed ca. 1970 to faux red brick, yellow stucco and half timbering to simulate the Tudor Revival style.

Washington Manor was the first WPA public housing project for low income residents authorized in West Virginia and was designated Project No. WVA 1-1 by the USHA. Littlepage Terrace was Project No. WVA 1-2, and Mount Hope's Stadium Terrace was Project No. WVA 2-1. Although Washington Manor was designated as the first project, Littlepage Terrace was started first. The construction delay may have been caused because the land for Washington Manor had to be created from 62 lots obtained from individual property owners, whereas Littlepage Terrace was purchased from a bank as a large single tract plus small pieces from three individuals.

Mount Hope's Stadium Terrace was constructed in 1939. H. Rus Warne was the architect for Stadium Terrace as well as for Charleston's Washington Manor and Littlepage Terrace. However, the Stadium Terrace design was very different from the others. Stadium Terrace consists of identical, two-unit wood frame dwellings along North Pax Avenue. They are sparse in their detailing, and each has a laterally-oriented gable roof and flat-topped fenestration. Littlepage Terrace and Huntington's three projects maintained their original exterior appearances while Washington Manor was a mix of original and ca. 1970 exterior renovations. Mount Hope's Stadium Terrace underwent some renovations, including the removal of the original asbestos shingle siding and replacement with vinyl siding and the addition of new asphalt shingle roofing. Overall though, the complex retained the basic massing, interrelationships and

integrity of setting of the original. Mount Hope has the distinction of being "the nation's smallest community to receive grants from an agency that President Roosevelt created primarily to eradicate slum conditions in metropolitan areas." (quoted from page 113 of NR form for Mount Hope, taken from S. Allen Chambers reference). The Stadium Terrace buildings are contributing resources in the Mt. Hope Historic District (Listed NR 8/3/2007).

Huntington's Washington Square, Northcott Court and Marcum Terrace apartment complexes are red brick buildings in the International style with one to three bedroom units. Washington Square embraces Eighth and Artisan Avenues between Hal Greer Boulevard and Seventeenth Street and was Project WVA 4-1. It was constructed and ready for occupancy by August 30, 1940. Northcott Court, fronting Hal Greer Boulevard between Doulton and Charleston Avenues, was Project WVA 4-2, and it too was constructed and ready for occupancy by August 30, 1940. Marcum Terrace on Olive Street was Project WVA 4-3, constructed and ready for occupancy by September 28, 1940.

All of these projects represented an urban solution to the issue of slum residential areas. West Virginia's Arthurdale, Eleanor and Tygart Valley, on the other hand, are examples of homestead communities, a program whereby the government purchased land, and then planned and built an entire community. These Depression era inspired new communities were intended to provide jobs, housing and an improved quality of life. Residents were carefully selected, houses built, and the cycle repeated until a complete community was established. Homesteaders paid rent, worked their farm acreage or had jobs in the community, and helped build the community. Homestead communities were established in locations throughout the United States during the 1930s.

Littlepage Terrace and Washington Manor were the first low income public housing built and administered by the Charleston-Kanawha Housing Authority. Philip Hill was its Executive Director at the time. Later Charleston projects included Hillcrest Village, Oakhurst Village, Orchard Manor (across Kanawha Two-Mile Creek from Littlepage Terrace) and South Park Village. As attitudes towards housing project layouts evolved, smaller resident groupings were deemed more appropriate than those used in the late 1930s. This change in approach eventually resulted in Littlepage Terrace and Washington Manor being razed and rebuilt in smaller cluster style projects. Emphasis was also given to integrating housing throughout the city's communities.

An interesting connection was found between the New Deal programs, the Washington Manor and Littlepage Terrace projects, and Julius Gardner who was one of the projects' architects. While information is readily available on the other two architects, H. Rus Warne and Charles Arthur Haviland, there was little on Gardner. After much research and some realistic assumptions, the following biographic sketch of Gardner was developed.

Julius Meredith Gardner was born in Charleston on May 18, 1900, and received his bachelor of arts degree from Howard University in Washington, DC in 1923. He was one of the two first graduates from Howard's Department of Architecture and was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, the first intercollegiate Greek letter organization established by blacks. The fraternity was service oriented, fostered leadership, and promoted education and academic achievement within the black community in some of its earliest national initiatives. In 1945, the fraternity's constitution was changed by unanimous vote to allow membership to any male student, removing the previous restriction of any Negro male student.

Gardner's World War I draft registration card signed September 17, 1918 indicates that he was living in Charleston, WV and was a student. In the 1920 U.S. Census he is listed as a resident of Ward 14 in Charleston, WV, living with his father, mother, and younger sister. By the 1930 census he is living in Washington, DC with his wife Louise. His occupation is architect; hers is teacher. From 1928 to 1932

Gardner was a member of the faculty at Howard and was associated with Dean Albert J. Cassell, Howard University Architect. Sometime in the 1930s Gardner moved back to Charleston, and between 1937 and 1938, he joined Charleston's Bachelor Benedict Club. The club was founded in 1935 to promote good fellowship among its members and create and stimulate worthwhile social entertainment. Its members were business and professional black men. Gardner is listed in Polk's 1940 Charleston City Directory as a resident on Washington Street and an architect with Associate Architects in the Virginian Land Bank Building.

Gardner served as an assistant to Robert C. Weaver under the direction of Nathan Straus of the National Housing Commission. This employment was presumably during Gardner's residency in Washington in the 1930s. Weaver started work for the government in 1933 and was active in fighting discrimination in New Deal programs and later ones associated with World War II. During his long career both in and out of government, Weaver worked to change the traditions of racial subordination. Straus was the Administrator of the National Housing Authority when Littlepage Terrace and Washington Manor were conceived and built. These connections may have been relevant to Gardner's involvement with Charleston's two low cost housing projects. He was one of the three architects who designed and supervised the Littlepage Terrace and Washington Manor housing projects. His name and signature are on the original architectural plans for both projects, along with Warne's and Haviland's under Associate Architects.

At the time of his death at age 44, Gardner was as an investigator and inspector for Negroes for the War Manpower Commission. The Commission was responsible for assuring the most effective mobilization and use of manpower for the civilian labor markets as well as the military during World War II, and as a result, included the integration of Negro workers into defense industries. He is buried in Washington, DC, where he died on October 13, 1944.