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ABSTRACT

TO MAKE AMERICA OVER:
THE GREENBELT TOWNS OF THE NEW DEAL

by Julie D. Turner

In 1935 Rexford Tugwell convinced President Franklin Roosevelt to begin a work-relief program that would build communities for the working class. Tugwell hoped that these communities, eventually named the Greenbelt towns, would usher in a model for remaking American culture and society, discarding outdated ideas about individualism and introducing a cooperative spirit better suited for the new realities of the modern age. To make this dream a reality, Tugwell needed the help of skilled design professionals to plan the towns, and these men and women came to the project with their own hopes for the nation. Their vision for the communities tended to be more conservative, reflecting both the ambivalence that the American public felt in this era about the fading of the nation's rural past and resultant fears that the national character was being undermined by the new mass-production, urban modernity.

This study begins by examining the issues and debates that attended fears about the shifting American identity, modernity, urbanization and suburbs, concepts of "home" and "community," and personal rights versus the public good. This is followed by an examination of the factors that had led to a housing crisis by the 1930s, various attempts prior to the Greenbelt program to provide improved housing, and an exploration of Tugwell and his rather unconventional ideas. The study then turns to the design professionals and the assumptions, attitudes, and goals that they brought to the project. The final portion consists of an examination and analysis of the towns themselves, and what the designs reveal about the ambivalence and anxiety about modernity during this era. This dissertation has utilized a

variety of sources including the written works of Tugwell and the design professionals who worked on the towns as well as outside experts and observers.

The Greenbelt communities reflect Rexford Tugwell's desires for a rethinking of traditional institutions, as well as the designers' hopes to rekindle something of the "lost" national character while at the same time preparing the American people for a modern future and illustrate a crucial moment in the nation's movement toward a new suburban identity.

TO MAKE AMERICA OVER:
THE GREENBELT TOWNS OF THE NEW DEAL

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Introduction

The machine comes so quickly we are unprepared. We are always behind time in adjusting ourselves to it. For any one man, the machine is a convenience…. But all this is not true of our organizations, such as the government, the family and the church. They are behind the times. The machine seems to be their master. It cracks the whip; they are its slaves.

- William F. Ogburn, 1934[1]

Year by year our cities grow more complex and less fit for living. The age of rebuilding is here. We must remould our old cities and build new communities better suited to our needs.

- *The City*, 1939[2]

On May 26, 1939, the "World of Tomorrow," the World's Fair in New York City, began showing what the fair's guidebook called "the most important" of the films to be presented in the Science and Education building.[3] The film was *The City*, a documentary that juxtaposed the chaos and disorder of modern metropolises, first with the bucolic tranquility of a New England village of "a century or two ago," and then with a clean, orderly, planned contemporary community. The quick-cut shots of city hurry, dirt, and danger in the early scenes, along with Aaron Copland's urgent music, set the tone for the film's urban segments. The rapid-fire narration explicitly lays out the threats: "Machines, inventions, power! Black out the past, forget the quiet cities! Bring in the steam and steel, the iron men, the giants! Open the throttle! All aboard! The promised land! Pillars of smoke by day, pillars of fire by night! Pillars of progress! Machines to make machines! Production to expand production! … Faster and faster, better and better!" The message is clear – somewhere along the line, the United States had lost its way. People's identities were being subsumed by a machine-driven modernity.

[1] William F. Ogburn, *You and Machines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 51.
[2] *The City*, The American Institute of Planners (1939).
[3] "Wonder City Seen in Film at Fair," *New York Times*, May 28, 1939; *Official Guide Book: New York World's Fair 1939* (New York: Exposition Publications, Inc., 1939), 204.

What had been a nation of cooperative and friendly communities had become engulfed by urban seas of nameless, harried drones, completely unlike the spirited individuals who had built the nation. But the film's narrator informs us that there is a possible remedy for this dire situation. As the pace of the narration and music slow, we are shown a shining suburb, the sort of place that could once again imbue Americans with a long-lost sense of peace, harmony, and shared purpose.

The idyllic little enclave featured in this serene film vision of the future was the very real community of Greenbelt, Maryland, one of three Greenbelt towns built from 1935 to 1938 by the New Deal's Resettlement Administration.[4] The concept behind this program called for the purchase of large plots of land near selected major cities, to be the sites of entire communities constructed from the ground up by the United States government. The nearby urban centers would provide employment for the towns' residents, although administrators also hoped that industries might eventually be induced to locate on the edge of these new communities, thus providing even more convenient proximity between home and work. The population would be primarily low-income, working-class.[5] Each town would include not just housing, but also a local commercial center for retail businesses, ample recreational and community facilities, and a band of green land, largely undeveloped but including some agricultural use, to encircle the community and shield it from outside encroachment and undesirable sprawl.

Among the roughly one hundred housing projects undertaken as part of the New Deal, the Greenbelt program is unique in the nature of its perceived and stated goals, going beyond mere work relief, slum clearance, or rural resettlement.[6] These were not just to be towns to

[4] The program overall was known as the Greenbelt towns (or, less commonly, "Greentowns") program. One of the three towns was named Greenbelt, as well. In order to avoid confusion, I will try to make clear whether I am referring to the program or the town throughout this study.

[5] For the purposes of this study, "working class" will mean predominantly those with blue-collar, non-salaried employment and lower-level white-collar (such as clerical) work; "middle class" will indicate predominantly white-collar, though there will be considerable blurring of the line at the point where working-class and lower-middle-class meet. Further, the designations will correspond roughly to the Roosevelt administration's breakdown designating those with incomes between $1,000-$2,000 per year as working class and those with incomes of $2,000-$2,500 per year as middle class; the administration classified those with incomes below $1,000 per year as the "relief group," though in this study many such families will fall within the working class. Carol Aronovici and Elizabeth McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing* (Newark, NJ: Beneficial Management Corp., 1936), 22.

[6] Several excellent books examine the wide array of New Deal agencies involved in housing, and the projects that resulted. One book, in spite of being decades old at this point, continues to be among the most useful and comprehensive: Paul K. Conkin's *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell

help get people out of urban slums – although they were touted as a means to do that – nor were they only to provide better opportunities for down-and-out farmers – although that, too, was a stated goal. They were not even simply suburban-industrial housing. These were to be new kinds of communities, designed and built with the specific purpose of creating an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation, old-time neighborhoods constructed for the new mass-production, automobile-driven industrial age, places where democracy could flourish, where the individual American dream would meld with a collective dream for a better America. The administrators and planners of the Greenbelt communities firmly believed that their model towns would be emulated, altering the landscape and changing the way that most Americans would live in the future. These were envisioned as templates for a new national character; this was a program that touched the very heart of American identity – concepts of home, family, community – but, for that very reason it was also a program that touched a nerve and caught the attention, and in some cases the ire, of onlookers.

These factors make the Greenbelts well worth studying. The towns represent a microcosm of the issues and debates that arose concerning the modern age, what to preserve of the past, how to prepare for the future. Entangled within these issues were others: what the government owed its populace, how government might attempt to mold the people to fit a preconceived idea of "good" democratic citizens (and whether it had a right to do so), and what citizens themselves needed and wanted from their homes and neighborhoods. Most important for this study, the Greenbelt towns, the careful planning of the communities with social ends in mind, represent the physical embodiment of the anxiety and ambivalence that Depression-era Americans felt about their rapidly-changing world. They illustrate a redesigned, modern national landscape that both spoke to the future and harkened back to a vanishing past. This

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University Press, 1959). Conkin gives a clear and insightful overview of New Deal housing developments, and devotes an entire chapter each to five specific projects, including one chapter on the Greenbelt towns. More recently, Robert D. Leighninger, Jr.'s *Long-Range Public Investment: The Forgotten Legacy of the New Deal* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007) examines construction ventures agency by agency. Although Leighninger's scope is broader, including such endeavors as dams and public buildings, his discussion of housing programs is extremely helpful in sorting out the myriad agencies and the projects they produced as part of the New Deal. Gail Radford, in *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), looks at several specific housing projects resulting from the ideas of architect and housing reformer Catherine Bauer. Finally, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* by Diane Ghirardo (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) offers a transnational comparison of selected Depression-era government building programs in Italy and the US.

study is an exploration of the inception and design of the Greenbelt towns, but it is more than that. It seeks to illustrate how one project would test deeply-held convictions about home and community in addition to fears about how the American identity might adapt to fit the modern world.

Fairgoers who saw the Greenbelt vision in *The City* were shown what the nation could be, what, in fact, many believed it needed to be.[7] Once the film transitions to describing and showing scenes of life in Greenbelt, the film's narration, now tranquil, paints a picture of the vast difference between life in this town and the other, urban, existence: Greenbelt "is organized to make cooperation possible between machines and men and nature. Each has its place. The sun and air and open green are part of the design. Safe streets and quiet neighborhoods are not just matters of good luck; they're built into the patterns and built to stay there. The motor parkways weave together city and countryside…. Who shall be master – things or men? At last, men take command."[8] In this new environment, which allows for the peaceful coexistence of work and home life, "science serves the worker and the work together, making machines more automatic and the men who govern them more human." "These new communities," the narrator somberly notes, "rest foursquare on men and women, their need for friendly faces, their need to have a public world that is just as human as their private homes…. In smaller cities planned for living, we live within a bigger world. Here life comes first; the means of life is second. Machines at last serve men and set them free for other tasks and other pleasures besides their work. Here men have used forethought and public funds to satisfy their common needs."

The images and script of *The City* point to a moment of crisis in the United States. Industrialization had been evolving for decades by the 1930s, but the pace of social transformation seemed to be ever quickening as urbanization and mass production, and the changes they brought about, threatened to unsettle society. The American people had a fascination with – and often an apprehension about – the new and increasingly complex world

[7] It has been proposed that more Americans saw this than had seen any documentary up to that time. The film was shown several times per day; the fair ran from April 30, 1939 through October 31, 1939, and again from May 11, 1940 through October 27, 1940. George Stoney interview by Joseph Horowitz (2007), "Special Features," *The City*, DVD, (Naxos, 2009).

[8] The film never mentions Greenbelt by name, though filming for the "new city" portion all took place in Greenbelt.

in which they lived. As news and entertainment media told them, and as they saw for themselves, the United States had entered "the machine age." Cars, radios, and inexpensive mass-produced goods had forever altered the tempo of American life for all but the most isolated of citizens, a situation not universally heralded as positive. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, and reaching a fever pitch by the 1920s and 1930s, concerns about modernity and all it seemed to represent – secularism, social restlessness, and heightened acquisitiveness – sparked a backlash against much of what appeared too new, too foreign, too modern. During the Depression in particular many believed that the excess and self-indulgence brought about by the machine age had been the cause of the nation's economic collapse, and possibly a breakdown of character as well, and yet the American public to a large extent maintained its fascination with all things modern. Historian Alan Brinkley has noted, for instance, that although during the 1930s the United States "was a society reeling from the failures of the industrial world," this did not result in a rejection of progress.[9] Most Americans recognized that the modern machine age had the potential to bring great benefits, but must be used wisely, must not be allowed to subvert the basic essence of the national character.

This was not the first perceived threat to the American identity, nor would it be the last. In the late nineteenth century fears had largely centered on immigrants, on poverty, on crime and disease. These concerns continued to loom large by the 1930s, but they had mutated. Immigrants no longer held the terror they once had, primarily because immigration had been sharply curtailed in 1924. Poverty, crime, and disease still posed real and imagined dangers to middle-class Americans, but grafted onto these lingering concerns were new ones, born of the heightened urban-industrial age. Progressive reformers had watched in apprehension throughout the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth as cities became increasingly congested, as workers were swallowed up by factory jobs that required long hours of labor for little pay, as a new restlessness seized a population mobilized first by train and then by car, as institutions such as home and family seemed on the verge of collapse.

For most people, this was not literally a fear of machines, or even necessarily of the machine age, but of the rapidity of social change brought about by that age, a feeling that

[9] Alan Brinkley, *Culture and Politics in the Great Depression* (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, 1999), 14, 16.

American society as they knew it was spinning out of control. The modern urbanized society arising from the 1890s through the 1930s appeared to be eradicating the American spirit of the past. Sociologist William F. Ogburn noted with alarm in 1934, "the city has done things to us. More crimes are committed in the city than in the country. Not so many people get married. Families have fewer children. More women are employed outside the home. Suicides are more frequent in cities. City people are more nervous and more of them go insane…. The problem of city people is not to adjust their life to climate and food supply, but to machines…. Cities have made man a different person."[10] And if Americans were now different, what might that mean for the nation itself? Could the institutions that had made the United States what it was – family, home, community, democracy – survive this maelstrom of change? It seemed to many observers that the nation and its cherished institutions needed to be saved from the modern world.

The perception of both the promise and limitations of the new modernity were particularly noticeable in concerns over housing; for many of the more forward-thinking architects, the new age offered great opportunities to rethink old design paradigms. Architect Catherine Bauer, for example, wrote in 1934: "If we are to use the machine, if we are to have planned houses and cities, … then we must first get rid of all our preconceptions as to what a building *should* look like: for the new conditions (and, more subtly, our own turn of mind which resulted in the machines and the desire to 'plan') determine entirely new forms."[11] Social critic Lewis Mumford also embraced the new age, but interjected into the dialogue a warning, writing that "the end of a civilization that considers buildings as mere machines is that it considers human beings as mere machine-tenders."[12] Modernity and the machine age held the promise of increased comfort and leisure, and yet also served as a vivid reminder that the world was rapidly changing. Old ways were being pushed aside, and many Americans questioned whether they any longer had any control over their environments or their lives.

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[10] Ogburn, *You and Machines,* 33-34.
[11] Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 218-219.
[12] Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924; New York: Dover, 1955), 187. Citations are to the Dover edition.

The City vividly illustrates these concerns. Mumford wrote the narration. The documentary had been made by the American Institute of Planners; the board of directors for the making of the film included the Institute's president, Tracy Augur, along with Russell Black and Clarence Stein, all of whom had been planning consultants for the creation of the Greenbelt towns.[13] For these men – and many other men and women who shared their enthusiasm for the Greenbelt program – towns and neighborhoods, houses and public buildings were more than merely spaces, without meaning or consequence; they were instead shaped by and shapers of private, public, and even national identity. As such they held great significance for the future direction of the United States. The creators of these towns took advantage of the opportunity opened by the momentary economic crisis to implement an experiment in new ways of building communities, one intended to bring about harmonious, cooperative, democratic neighborhoods and, by extension, harmonious, cooperative, democratic citizens.

The Greenbelt towns were proposed and tirelessly promoted by Rexford Guy Tugwell, an agricultural economist from Columbia University, then serving as Undersecretary of Agriculture, soon to be head of the Resettlement Administration (RA), and one of Franklin Roosevelt's closest, and most controversial, advisors. Tugwell himself was not overly alarmed about the changes taking place in the nation, but he was concerned about the ways society reacted to those changes. He feared, as did others, that American institutions were failing to keep up with the transitioning world – a phenomenon termed "cultural lag" – that society was not keeping pace with the rapidly-evolving modernity.[14] For Tugwell the issue at hand was not whether the machine age was itself a positive or negative thing, but whether the machine age could be made to work for the betterment of the nation. He was not interested in preserving the American past, but in forging a new and vital American future, and if that process required a substantial reworking of the American character, that was fine with him. In the Greenbelt program he saw a tangible opportunity to bring the nation into the modern age and fit it for whatever lay ahead, to "make America over."[15]

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[13] "Wonder City Seen in Film at Fair," *New York Times*, May 28, 1939; *Official Guide Book New York World's Fair 1939* (New York: Exposition Publications, Inc., 1939), 204.

[14] The term "cultural lag" had been coined by sociologist William Fielding Ogburn in his 1922 book *Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1922).

[15] This phrase comes from a poem Tugwell wrote as a young man; see page 119.

He pitched his idea for the Greenbelt towns to President Roosevelt in the spring of 1935. On March 3, Tugwell wrote in his diary about his upcoming post as head of the RA, "FDR let me off city housing [that is, agreed to leave city housing out of the purview of the RA], though he laughed at me for not wanting to do it. I talked to him about satellite cities as an alternative and interested him greatly. My idea is to go just outside centers of population, pick up cheap land, build a whole community and entice people into it. Then go back into cities and tear down slums and make parks of them. I could do this with good heart and he now wants me to."[16] Tugwell hoped that the resulting Greenbelt towns program would create as many as twenty-five such communities, although Roosevelt initially approved the construction of only eight.[17] When the project received far less funding than Tugwell had hoped, the number of towns was scaled back to just four: Greenbelt, Maryland; Greendale, Wisconsin; Greenhills, Ohio; and Greenbrook, New Jersey (Greenbrook, however, was never constructed).[18] The immediate official goal of both the RA and the Greenbelt towns was to "make jobs, and quickly"; for FDR, at least, all other considerations were secondary.[19] Tugwell had a grander vision, seeing in this program a chance to make much-needed changes in American society and in the fundamental American character.

Largely because of Tugwell's initial influence, the trajectory of this project pushed the Greenbelt program in the direction of becoming an experiment in social planning and social engineering, but one that also reflected a variety of visions and desires. Tugwell envisioned these as models of the way that American society should be reordered, places dominated not by acquisitiveness and self-interest, but by cooperation and egalitarianism. To many onlookers, however, Tugwell's dream for the future of the country, as embodied in the Greenbelt towns,

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[16] Rexford Tugwell, personal diary, March 3, 1935, Tugwell Papers Collection, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York. Although in his diary Tugwell refers to this as "my Resettlement job," the Resettlement Administration had not actually been created yet, though clearly Tugwell knew that it would be. The RA officially came into being with an executive order signed by FDR on April 30, 1935; Tugwell's diary shows that he and Roosevelt discussed the possibilities of this new agency as early as February 24.

[17] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959), 307.

[18] Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 40.

[19] John Lansill to W.W. Alexander, attached to "Final Report of the Greenbelt Project of the Greenbelt Town Program," 1938, John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (hereafter cited as Greenbelt Final Report).

appeared to border on radicalism; "cooperation" seemed to many Americans to be a code for "communism." Officials working under Tugwell in the Resettlement Administration shared much of his vision for the communities, but none hoped for quite the metaphysical national changes that he desired. They wanted to do good – to alleviate unemployment; to provide decent, inexpensive housing; to show that government could intervene in the economy in positive ways; and, if possible, to demonstrate a model for better community-building, in both the social and physical sense of "community."

Numerous designers and planners of the towns, meanwhile, brought their own visions to the project.[20] These professionals for the most part embraced many of the same goals as the administration, although they did not desire to overhaul the American character as Tugwell did. Recognizing, as did Tugwell and other RA administrators, that the nation was becoming, and would likely continue to become, increasingly urban, they too wanted to offer an alternative, envisioning, in addition to large cities, small, semi-urban, semi-rural enclaves, close-knit, cooperative, aesthetically pleasing and culturally satisfying. They sought also to demonstrate the usefulness of their own professions and skills. Here was a project that would show that planned towns, carefully designed buildings, and a scientific approach to architecture and spatial layout would yield superior built environments and therefore promote better living, and better lives, for residents. And they, much more than Tugwell, shared the national apprehension about the swiftness of social and cultural change brought about by the machine age and the perceived need to preserve the cherished institutions of the past even as they faced the future. If they sought to "make America over," it was an effort to remake it in its own earlier, purer image, to make it again as it once had been, or at least to capture a reasonable facsimile of that mythical past. The design of the towns, and the social expectations they represented, were thus at once forward-thinking and nostalgic in conception, and illustrate the tug-of-war between past and present that raged during the early twentieth century, and during the Depression in particular.

[20] There were four separate planning teams, one for each of the proposed towns. Including a coordinator for each team, lead architects and town planners, and expert consultants, at least twenty-four men and one woman were in charge of designing the towns. For a more detailed discussion of these teams see Chapter 5.

The differing visions of Tugwell, other RA administrators, and designers for the intended impact of the Greenbelt towns rarely stood in the way of the project, but other forces intervened to create one stumbling block after another, hindering the full implementation of the program. The financial, legal, and public relations issues that served to hamstring those who struggled to bring the towns to fruition have been amply chronicled by other scholars, and so will not be a significant part of this study.[21] Instead, the focus here will be on the attempts to create these new communities, on the varying goals of those who worked toward their creation, and on the ways in which these issues reflect the hopes and fears of Depression-era Americans about the implications of modernity.

Although the building of these towns marks but one moment in the history of cities and suburbs, this moment and this project are significant for several reasons. First and foremost, they mark a turning point (admittedly, one of many) in which Americans reconsidered their nation's identity in terms of its place in the modern world. If technology was bringing about rapid shifts in the social and cultural climate, and if American society and culture were the backbone of the democratic American spirit, what might these changes portend for the future viability of the nation?

A second significant aspect of the Greenbelt program is the planning that went into them, the careful layout of the communities as well as the architectural design of the buildings. The look of the towns challenged prevailing ideas about proper types of American homes, neighborhoods, and communities. Although there existed a wide range of acceptable possibilities for the design, placement, and building of houses, some concepts were beyond the pale – respectable Americans did not live in dwellings that were too modernist in design, and while they were expected to be a part of their communities, they did not live any sort of "communal" life. The Greenbelts were not like other American towns. Their appearance and arrangement differed in many ways from traditional communities, even as they sought to hold on to the institutions of the past. Like the machine age itself, this move away from tradition – some critics called it a rejection of tradition – made many Americans uneasy. The sometimes

[21] For further discussion of these issues see Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 318-320, and Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 62-76, 117-119, 194-200.

heated discussions about these towns forced a certain amount of public reassessment of how American communities should function, and where and how Americans should live.

Finally, the Greenbelt program is significant in its connection to the concept of the American dream, an idea that was actually introduced during the Depression, and has been used – and overused – ever since by advertisers, politicians, and anyone else with something to sell to the American public. Historian and author James Truslow Adams introduced the concept and coined the term "the American dream" in 1931; as he later explained it, "the dream is a vision of a better, deeper, richer life for every individual, regardless of the position in society which he or she may occupy by the accident of birth."[22] He intended for this to be in contrast with European society and its virtually inflexible social classes. In America, he said, each person has the possibility of rising to a better position and a better life. This is a concept that embodies the self-perception of the United States as a nation made up of people always achieving, always striving for improved circumstances, for a home, for security. This is surely an expression of optimism and hope. It may seem odd that such an optimistic concept was born in the midst of a crippling economic depression, yet for Adams the depression itself held the potential of fulfilling that dream, of pushing the nation and its people to summon the inner strength that he felt certain they possessed. Yet, like many other Americans, he recognized the inherent risks of modernity, of the unsettling and potentially threatening rapid technological and social changes. He wrote, for example, "what we dread, unless civilization breaks down entirely, is not lack of food from drought or pest but the ending of what I have elsewhere called 'the American dream,' from failure of mind and character to control and organize the vast forces at our disposal."[23] He believed that the economic crisis must not become a crisis of faith in the American system or its citizens.

Yet by the 1930s the dream appeared to be ever more difficult to achieve. The nation no longer held out the hope of vast tracts of inexpensive land, and many of those who had earlier taken up the challenge of taming those lands were, by the Depression, struggling to survive. Industrial development had offered up the promise of plentiful employment and readily affordable consumer goods, but at the price of abysmal wages and, eventually,

[22] James Truslow Adams, "America Faces 1933's Realities," *New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1933.
[23] Ibid.

overproduction, layoffs, and the Depression itself. The early decades of the twentieth century, and particularly the 1930s, therefore mark a time when people began to reassess national institutions, long held as virtually sacred, because suddenly the American dream – a new phrase for something that immediately seemed an integral part of the national character – appeared beyond the reach of so many. Historian Alan Brinkley has noted that perhaps by the 1930s "the 'dream' must have seemed, to many of those who embraced it, all the more alluring because it was so unattainable" as the American people feared what lay ahead and struggled to keep home and family together.[24]

The dream could mean something different for almost everyone. For many in the Roosevelt administration it symbolized what the nation could become: if only the American people would work together there was no limit to what could be achieved. For most, however, this was not about collective will, but rather something that they could cling to for their own families and their own futures. Brinkley writes that the American dream has more commonly been interpreted as a hope for personal upward mobility, representing "an individual, not a social, dream."[25] Many politicians, too, would look to this definition of the dream, carrying a belief that it was the rugged individualism of the American people that held the key to a hoped-for brighter future. This tension between collective and personal advancement was at the heart of much of the debate that surrounded the New Deal, including the issue of housing and the Greenbelt towns program.

"Home" and "community" are not simply built environments – they are deeply cherished institutions within American culture. The importance placed on these concepts, and the ideals attached to them, illuminate integral aspects of the ways in which people identify themselves, both individually and as a nation, and the ways that they define and identify each other. During the Depression, these institutions appeared to be in jeopardy. Decades of urban overcrowding and deterioration, cycles of boom and bust for farmers, an economic disaster of previously unknown proportions, all undermined the longed-for security and permanence of

[24] Brinkley, *Culture and Politics in the Great Depression*, 5.
[25] Ibid.

home and community. Houses could be lost through foreclosure.[26] Families could be torn apart as members left in search of work or to escape increasingly burdensome obligations.[27] Communities could disintegrate as families, either willingly or unwillingly, packed up and moved on. Even the much-touted nurturing character of the traditional home strained, and sometimes broke, under the pressure of economic troubles as, according to one sociologist in 1935, "family problems that had been dormant [were] brought to the surface, enlarged, and made disastrous, which under easier circumstances might never have appeared."[28] Losing a job, losing a home, losing a sense of family and community stability could be devastating.

Amidst the misery and uncertainty, however, the Depression created new possibilities for advocates of housing reform, who had long sought the means to effect a positive change in the residential lives of America's working class.[29] This was a rare opportunity. Historian of city planning Mel Scott has commented that "in the experimental, reform atmosphere of Roosevelt's first term of office it would have been strange if the federal government had not embarked on some town-building projects designed to show how living conditions in metropolitan areas could be improved."[30] For those who had long advocated rationally-planned housing programs for the masses, the New Deal and experiments such as the Greenbelt towns offered the promise – finally – of forceful, positive action in the provision of housing for the nation's working class. The combination of citizens' desperation, urgent calls for action, the eagerness of experts to give their advice, and a temporary willingness to experiment and work together among federal and local officials all aligned just right, if only for

[26] "Normal" (it is unclear whether they mean "average") foreclosure rates stood at about 78,000 per year. In 1932 the number of foreclosures was 273,000, and in 1933 it was 271,000. Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 61.

[27] Although statistics on family breakups are hard to come by, a 1935 article in *The American Journal of Sociology*, for example, stated that "family desertions have increased and must now include the leaving home of youth, particularly sons, as well as husbands, who, by going elsewhere, get rid of a responsibility that seemed intolerable." Ernest R. Groves, "Adaptations of Family Life," *The American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 6 (May 1935): 773.

[28] Ibid.

[29] In 1921 Carol Aronovici, then Director of Housing for the California State Commission of Immigration and Housing and a prolific writer on the topic from the 1910s to the 1950s, provided the following definition of "housing reform": "The furnishing of healthful accommodations adequately provided with facilities for privacy and comfort, easily accessible to centers of employment, culture, and amusement, accessible from the centers of distribution of the food supply, rentable at reasonable rates, and yielding a fair return on the investment." Carol Aronovici, *Housing and the Housing Problem* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1920), 7.

[30] Mel Scott, *American City Planning since 1890* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 335-336.

a brief moment. But this moment was also defined by anxiety about the machine age and the long-term implications of modernity for the national character. This anxiety would in turn help determine the shape of the Greenbelt towns.

The communities built under this program differ from one another somewhat, but share several common elements. They were designed to be small, relatively self-contained towns, a combination of rural and suburban in character. They were planned to best facilitate the formation of strong community cohesion, friendliness, and cooperation. As a result, the designers of the towns placed great importance on the overall look of the communities, but also on the placement of homes and public buildings, roads and sidewalks, playgrounds and parks. All aspects of the towns' plans were carefully considered in terms of helping to create a community feeling among residents. As the design teams worked toward this goal, they injected their own attitudes about what community meant, about how to integrate the best aspects of past village life into the modern world. The towns were thus planned to adapt to new technologies such as cars and to make use of new forms of amusement including movies and swimming pools, but they were also self-consciously nostalgic in the way they looked back to small settlements of the past, both real and imagined.

Previous studies of the Greenbelt program

The Greenbelt towns have been studied in the years since their construction, though there has been only a limited amount of scholarship on the program overall, and virtually none on how the vision for the towns – their conception and planning – relate to national identity and overall concepts of home and community. Only one book has been devoted entirely to the Greenbelt towns program. Joseph Arnold's 1971 work *The New Deal in the Suburbs, A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* gives a detailed account of the organization of the Resettlement Administration, the physical planning of the towns, the construction, and the negative publicity from the press. This is a thorough chronology of the project, and should be the source of choice for information on how the towns came into being. There is, however,

almost no consideration of the larger context of the times, the social goals of the planners, or the cultural impact of the communities. Although Arnold gives a highly informative account of the negative reaction of the press and some of the more active opposition, he says little about the response of the general public to the concept and designs, which were to influence popular attitudes about suburban living.

Another book that contains extensive discussion of the program is Paul K. Conkin's *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program*, published in 1959. This book covers the entire spectrum of New Deal community-building projects, with much of its focus on the Subsistence Homesteads and other programs aimed primarily at the rural poor. Although Conkin devotes just one chapter to the Greenbelt towns, his work is still extremely informative and useful for scholars of these and the other New Deal communities he discusses. Conkin provides a good deal of information on the rationale behind these projects, and serves as a compliment to the chronology provided by Arnold. These two books have been the most comprehensive and most widely-recognized authoritative studies of the Greenbelt program to date.

Several works have focused on single Greenbelt towns, with Greenbelt, Maryland, receiving the greatest amount of scholarly attention. One of the earliest efforts was a doctoral dissertation written in 1944 by William H. Form, "The Sociology of a White Collar Suburb: Greenbelt, Maryland." As the title suggests, this a sociological, and not strictly a historical, work, providing a wealth of information on the demographic characteristics of Greenbelt in its first several years of occupancy. In 1975 Sally Scott Rogers completed her dissertation, "Community Planning and Residential Satisfaction: A Case Study of Greenbelt, Maryland." As with Form's work, this is sociological in nature rather than historical, with her main focus, as the title states, on the issue of residential satisfaction. Another study that focuses on the sociology of the town is Jennifer Karen Kerns' dissertation, "A Social Experiment in Greenbelt, Maryland: Class, Gender, and Public Housing, 1935-1954," completed in 2002. Kerns argues that the design and planning of the towns was specifically geared toward imposing and maintaining middle-class gender norms of the era. Kathy Dee Knepper's *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (2001) is a more historical, rather than sociological, work, and is based

on her 1993 dissertation, "The Gospel According to Greenbelt: Community Life in Greenbelt, Maryland 1935-1990." Knepper examines the intentional cultivation of a spirit of camaraderie and cooperation in the town through its cooperative retail establishments and community groups. Although she does provide some overview of the early planning of the town, this portion is relatively brief, with the majority of her work focusing on the postwar period. A better illustration of the life of early Greenbelt residents is given in *Greenbelt: The Cooperative Community, An Experience in Democratic Living*, written by George A. Warner and published in 1954. Warner was among the earliest occupants of the town and served on the community newspaper staff, and so offers an insider's perspective on the early years of residence.

Greendale, Wisconsin, has also been the subject of several scholarly works. The most comprehensive is *Main Street Ready-Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale, Wisconsin*, by Arnold R. Alanen and Joseph A. Eden, published in 1987. Much like Joseph Arnold's *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, this book offers up a plethora of information on the RA, the Greenbelt program, and its planning and construction, but in this case only for the town of Greendale. Just a fraction of the book deals with these early concerns, as the authors examine the community into the 1980s. A much earlier treatment may be found in Douglas Gordon Marshall's 1943 doctoral dissertation, "Greendale: A Study of a Resettlement Community." Like several of the works on Greenbelt, this is a study in sociology, not history, and as such presents valuable information on the social aspects of the town. Finally, in her 1986 book *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement*, Carol A. Christensen devotes a chapter to discussing Greendale, supplying information on such issues as the selection of the first residents, cooperative activities of the community, and the general design of the town.

Greenhills, Ohio, has received the least attention from scholars. The 1978 doctoral dissertation by Bradley Charles Leach, "Greenhills, Ohio: The Evolution of an American New Town" offers an extremely detailed discussion of the founding of the Greenbelt program and the design of Greenhills. Numerous other monographs give brief attention to the Greenbelt communities, either to the overall program or to one individual town. Few of these offer any additionally enlightening information. Many master's theses have also examined the Greenbelts, but will for the most part not be considered for this study.

The Greenbelt experiment has captured the attention and imagination of a number of scholars in the years since the Depression. The towns have intrigued sociologists because there were such clear socially-oriented goals in place for the communities, both negative (imposition of gender roles, for example) and positive (such as neighborly cooperation). The Greenbelts have fueled historical inquiry, commonly being cast as an aberration, a somewhat quirky program that in the end had little influence beyond the boundaries of the towns themselves. Historians of architecture and planning have seen a more lasting impact in the story of the Greenbelts, as they recognize that not just the social goals, but the actual design of the towns both signified and helped launch new attitudes about where and how Americans would live in the future.

It is easy to write about such projects, as has frequently been done in the past, in the passive voice, as though the ideas and outcomes were nearly inevitable: "the concept was pitched to and approved by Roosevelt," "land was acquired," "plans were drawn," "the towns were built," "the houses were occupied." Yet this is not a passive story, but an active one, and nothing about it was inevitable, except perhaps that it would meet with opposition – what government program, after all, does not? A housing crisis and an economic catastrophe combined with the ideas of a somewhat radical dreamer and those of a handful of architects and planners and resulted in three towns that are unique in America's history. Individual men and women created the communities, and along the way, as each new personality touched the project, the shape and meaning of the towns changed. All agreed, however, that the essential goal of the program – the provision of decent housing for the working class in order to meet the demands of the modern age – was imperative. When journalist Marquis Childs visited the design staff offices in Washington, DC, he observed a group of professionals who were "exceptionally keen and intelligent. Earnest, hard-working, giving off ideas like showers of meteors, they stood on the threshold of the new era, a little tremulous. Theirs was a cozy conspiracy of good will to remake America on a cleaner, truer, more secure pattern."[31] In 1919 housing expert Edith Elmer Wood, in stressing the dire necessity for comprehensive housing

[31] Marquis W. Childs, *I Write from Washington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 12.

reform, had written that the nation needed to go back "to being what we once really were – a land of promise and a land of homes."[32] In the 1930s the planners of the Greenbelts hoped that their communities would help to facilitate this goal, would inspire a new way of creating towns, and in the process, would reinvigorate the national character.

Although the Greenbelt towns themselves did not, as they were intended, serve as models for all residential construction to follow, they were harbingers that change was on the horizon. They serve as a bridge between the older conception of America as a land of independent farmers or small-town dwellers and the modern, suburbanized face of the future. As such they straddle nostalgic and forward-thinking conceptions of community form and function. Physically and socially, postwar suburbs bore little resemblance to these purposely-small, neighborly communities. During the intervening years anxieties had shifted yet again. The machine was our staunch ally in winning the Second World War, and although it would become a threat once again after the inception of the nuclear age and Cold War arms race, other dangers for a time loomed much larger: first the Nazis and the Japanese, and then communist subversives and the Soviet Union. But postwar suburbs undoubtedly carried forward the Greenbelt towns' legacy of new thinking about the form that American life was to take. The Greenbelt story demonstrates how some saw in this vision of the future a threat to the national identity, and how others saw in it the embodiment of the American dream. These three small communities show what some visionaries believed was possible, a national future predicated on cooperation, on planning and rationality, on civic-minded democracy, on a machine age no longer a threat, but instead harnessed for the good of the nation and its people.

[32] Edith Elmer Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner: America's Next Problem* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 277.

Chapter 1. Attitudes and Issues Relating to Housing, Past, Present, and Future

"What is a house?" It is the prime element of national growth. It is the soil whence springs that eagerness in the heart of every man for a home of his own. It is, after all, the physical attribute of life upon the possession or retention of which most of our energy is directed. Because of these things, it is the backbone of the nation. By the quality of its appearance, its convenience, its durability, one may infallibly determine the real degree of a nation's prosperity and civilization.

- Charles Harris Whitaker, architectural editor and critic, charter member of the Regional Planning Association of America, 1918 [1]

The home, for the most part, centers the entire drama of life. It is the foundation and cornerstone of society – the first world into which the child is born and the source of adult power. Surely, then, the home should be an orderly, attractive, healthful place around which the idealism of the individual centers. Citizenship means something more than economic independence and political integrity. It should carry with it certain personal and social relationships from which the higher values of a progressive society emerge."

- *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, 1932.[2]

In 1938, town planner Elbert Peets sat down and wrote a 151-page evaluation of his most recent project, the town of Greendale, Wisconsin, for the final report being compiled on the federal government's Greenbelt towns program. In his analysis he stressed that the United States was at a crossroads between its well-honored and remembered – but quickly vanishing – past, and the uncertain modern world that so clearly lay on the horizon, and he argued that

[1] Charles Harris Whitaker, "What is a House?" in *The Housing Problem in War and in Peace* (Washington, DC: The Journal of the American Institute of Architects Press, 1918), 6.

[2] John M. Gries and James Ford, eds., *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 8, *Housing and the Community – Home Repair and Remodeling* (Washington, DC, 1932), 86.

new kinds of American communities in general, and the Greenbelt program in particular, were vital for the nation as it faced this unknown future. Peets wrote: "If we do not soon find ways of living that keep abreast of the technical forces we are putting into play, then unscientific and anti-social ways of urban life will be built into the permanent brick, steel, concrete of concentrated cities, and much of our farm population will sink into habits of pauperism."[3] Housing, to Peets and countless other Americans, had a resonance far beyond mere habitation; it had the power to determine the fates of men, communities, and nations.

For many Depression-era Americans – architects, town planners, government officials, but ordinary citizens as well – few concepts or institutions were so closely identified with personal and national identity as "home." They longed for "home, sweet home"; they believed that "home is where the heart is." Attitudes about housing and the home reflect both individual and public beliefs and desires; in fact clashes between the personal and public in this realm are common. In the United States, for example, the belief in private property and personal rights runs to the very heart of national self-identity, yet tempers often flare over residential choices made by someone in the neighboring house or the neighboring town, and over who has the authority to limit the uses of privately owned land and buildings. A home can reflect well or poorly on the individual or on the community as a whole; thus from the beginning of the Republic the American sense of self has been intimately connected to where and how we have lived.

But by the 1930s it seemed that the nature of the home was changing. As a result of industrialization and urbanization increasing numbers of Americans no longer lived in a home that very much resembled the sort that their ancestors had inhabited. More of them lived in cities than ever before, more in multiple-family dwellings. They moved more often and put down roots more shallowly. The families within the homes seemed also to be in a state of transition, as the Depression pushed more women into the workplace even as it forced so many men out of it.[4] A 1935 article in *The American Journal of Sociology* noted hopefully that "the

[3] Elbert Peets, "Final Report of the Greendale Project of the Greenbelt Town Program" (hereafter cited as Greendale Final Report), 1938, vol. 2, "Report of the Town Planning Section of the Greendale Planning Staff," 4, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[4] Women had always worked for wages in the United States. During the 1920s, however, it became increasingly acceptable for unmarried middle-class women to have full-time employment. The Depression vastly increased the

depression has enforced the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society, and challenged the opinion of those who prophesied the passing of the family as a result of social changes brought by our modern way of living."[5] In truth, however, the family appears to have suffered as a result of the economic crisis. Marriage and birth rates fell because of strained financial circumstances (divorce rates also dropped, and probably for the same reason, but abandonment of wives and families by husbands increased).[6] In the 1930s, "home" as both an ideal and an institution seemed to be in jeopardy.

The nature of the ideal home, the best types and locations of housing and towns, were topics that provoked intense debate and disagreement. Some people clung to the past; others looked to the future, but disagreed over the shape that future should take. Politicians, the press, and the public, moreover, debated the question of how housing and communities should come about and who should be responsible for their creation. For most Americans, the only answer was private enterprise, but for others, particularly during the crisis years of the Depression, it seemed more and more that the federal government owed it citizens a chance for a decent life – a chance that seemed possible only with the provision of adequate housing and safe communities.

The Greenbelt towns, in spite of Rexford Tugwell's hopes for sweeping social change, were built primarily in answer to the challenges the modern world posed, to stabilize the home for the working class, and by extension to engender more harmonious neighborhoods and communities and to revitalize democracy through the offer of achieving the American dream. Along the way, they touched on many of the central issues that swirled around the subjects of housing, community, and government responsibility and intervention.

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ranks of working women, since jobs perceived as being "women's work" – waitresses, nurses, low-level office help – were less hard-hit than many other occupations, such as construction and engineering. In addition, many employers took the opportunity to cut costs by hiring women, who could be paid less than men. Women had accounted for just 17 percent of the workforce in 1890; they would account for 22 percent in 1930 and 25 percent by 1940. Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 23.

[5] Groves, "Adaptations of Family Life," 772.

[6] Ware, *Holding Their Own*, 6.

The ideals of the past, the realities of the present

The United States had until the twentieth century defined itself as an agrarian nation, made up predominantly of farmers working their own land, independent, beholden to no one. It is an image that dominated the American character from colonial times, when Thomas Jefferson wrote:

> Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people.... Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.... While we have land to labour, then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a workbench.... The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.[7]

The myth held that the United States was made unique, could be a perfect democratic union, precisely because of the self-sufficiency and drive of the people and their close relationship to the land. In the Jeffersonian vision independence of mind and spirit had been inextricably linked to land ownership, and republican principles could only be upheld by a population of independent land-holders. Wage laborers and tenants, on the other hand, were suspect, for they were at the mercy of employers or landlords who held power over them. Independent citizens in touch with the land, owning their own homes, making their own way, neither requesting nor accepting help from anyone – including, or perhaps especially, from the government – had made the republic the virtuous institution that it was. Long after the age of the founders, the American people, recalling the Jeffersonian ideal (even if only subconsciously), continued to accept the link between being a good citizen and having a decent home in the open countryside.

Cities were suspect as well, seeming to pose a risk, and long having been stigmatized as dens of vice and decay.[8] In the Unites States, Jeffersonian notions about the purity of a life in the countryside held sway for well over a century, along with the belief that urban life was,

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[7] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia with Related Documents*, ed. David Waldstreicher (New York: Palgrave, 2002; originally published 1787), 197. Citations are to the Palgrave edition.

[8] See, for example, Carol A. Christensen, *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986), 15-16; John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 38-48.

perhaps, a necessary evil, but an evil nonetheless. Jefferson wrote, "I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries; as long as they are chiefly agricultural…. When they get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe."[9] Debates over the relative merits of rural life versus urban – and later, suburban – have raged throughout the nation's history. Long after the agrarian lifestyle ceased to represent the average American existence, the idea that the countryside offered the healthiest, most spiritually and morally uplifting environment continued to predominate.

The nature of wage work was also cause for concern. Working for someone else, rather than as an independent farmer or artisan, seemed to make labor increasingly impersonal. Once the deep satisfaction of creating something tangible and whole was removed from working life, some wondered, what would become of the American work ethic? For decades after wage work began to be the reality for increasing numbers of Americans the suspicion lingered that these growing hoards of wage workers were compromising the strength of the democracy. Others worried about the effects of such work on the family. In a speech given to the American Catholic Sociological Society in 1940 Paul J. Mundie, the Society's president, noted that "the separately earned wage, paid for individual labor, led to a general change in the social and economic organization of the family," and that in fact the industrial revolution had begun the slow erosion of family unity, as individuals began to be more concerned about their own gains than the family unit's security as a whole.[10] The results of these shifts, Mundie argued, were that family authority was weakened, and as a result "the family today is generally much less effective than formerly as a mental hygiene agency."[11] He blamed what he saw as the general decline of American society and families on the attitude of "survival of the fittest" that had accompanied industrialization. As he saw it – and he was not alone – the culture that had grown up as a result of the new industrial realities had brought about many detrimental outcomes and offered few benefits to the national character.

[9] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Dec. 20, 1787, in Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *Jefferson vs. Hamilton: Confrontations That Shaped a Nation* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 25.
[10] Paul J. Mundie, "The Family in Transition," *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 2, no. 1 (Mar. 1941): 43.
[11] Ibid.

The geographic changes resulting from industrialization were also seen as causing erosion of social cohesion. Factories made it possible to obtain goods beyond the imagination of the subsistence farmer of days past, but also enticed people into the cities, away from the family farms and rural villages of a bygone era. Throughout the nineteenth century the scales in the contest between urban and rural living tipped decidedly in favor of cities. This is not to say, however, that the longing for some idealized agrarian past disappeared. If anything, the national image of life in the open, surrounded by greenery and fresh air, grew stronger as fewer and fewer Americans had, or could expect ever to have, firsthand experience of such a life.

As is true of many cherished images, the rural ideal was never simple or straightforward. And while Thomas Jefferson, country squire that he was, may have been absolutely genuine in his praise for agriculture both large and small, the truth was that many, if not most, small-holding farmers lived lives of intensely hard work, few material pleasures, geographic and social isolation, and the ever-present threat that the seemingly-capricious forces of nature might demolish everything for which they had struggled. Despite the popular image of the self-sufficient, hardy farmer working his own land with his wife and offspring at his side, most people embraced modern improvements and amenities as soon as they were available at acceptable prices. Self-sufficiency was fine as a romantic concept, but in the real world comfort, convenience, and abundance were immensely more alluring, even if the modern urban society that came with industrial advancement was a cause for concern to many Americans.

In fact, the idealized agrarian image had never been the reality for all, or even most, Americans. Land ownership, for example, had not been as widespread as the myth suggested, and throughout the nineteenth century, as urbanization and industrialization reshaped American society and culture, the possibility of achieving the ideal became increasingly remote for more and more of the populace. For growing numbers of Americans life in the countryside began to give way to life in congested urban areas; expectations of a single-family house began to give way to apartment living. By 1930, 56.1 percent of the population lived in cities, less than half of American families owned their home, and just 84.3 percent of urbanites lived in

single-family dwellings.[12] The issue by this time, however, was less that the idealized home was beyond the reach of so many Americans – this had after all always been the case – but that the modern industrial age appeared to be making the achievement of the goal increasingly difficult. Despite the fact that urban life seemed clearly inferior to rural living, and crowded apartment buildings seemed far less desirable than individual homes, these living arrangements became the reality for a growing number of American workers.

By the twentieth century, of course, few any longer believed the myth as literally as had been the case in Jefferson's day, but there nonetheless continued to be a lingering suspicion that those who remained tenants living on another man's property, or who remained permanent wage laborers throughout their lives (as opposed to landowners in Jefferson's time, and either independent farmers or salaried professionals by the 1930s), were somehow less reliable, less able, less worthy of respect. Such a perception seemed to be borne out by the inferior living conditions of laborers, by their inability to adequately provide for their families. The reasoning was that, in this land of opportunity, only the lazy, the shiftless, or the unintelligent could fail to supply a family homestead, and that such people could hardly be expected to be model Americans. If by the 1930s the absolute social stigma of being among the unpropertied class had for the most part vanished long ago, an economic stigma remained. Those in the working class had little opportunity for land- or home-ownership, and once enmeshed in city life, few had any hopes of escaping to more serene surroundings. Regardless of whether ordinary Americans any longer clung to the Jeffersonian agrarian myth, however, this ideal still held sway in the minds of many political leaders, intellectuals, and public commentators, and remained part of the popular American identity, even if no longer quite rational or reasonable in the modern age.

Closely tied to these issues was the question of how to adapt a society based on a rural-agricultural past to the urban-industrial power it was clearly becoming, and how this transition

[12] US Census Bureau, *Population: 1790-1990*, Urban and Rural population table, 1993, http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-4.pdf; US Census Bureau, *Census of Housing*, Historical Census of Housing tables, "Homeownership," 2004, http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/owner.html; US Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the Unites States 1940*, Table 38, "Dwellings by Size, and Families, by Home Tenure, for Urban and Rural Areas, Continental Unites States: 1920 and 1930," http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/ documents/1940-02.pdf.

might affect the basic American character. As the physical and social landscape changed, as the nation became more industrialized and urban, Americans developed a gnawing fear that the very identity that had defined them was being lost, that a strong and independent democracy could not possibly be compatible with an age characterized by machine-driven work, machine-made goods, acquisitiveness, and city life. If the American identity was tied to a mythical ideal of independent ownership of a family home in the countryside, that identity was crumbling.

There were, however, those who recognized the trend toward urbanization and suburbanization and accepted that this would be the American identity of the future. Carol Aronovici, an instructor on housing and community planning at New York University and Columbia University, boldly stated in 1939: "Civilization is inseparable from urban living. Without cities civilization is inconceivable."[13] Even as early as 1909 civic reformer Benjamin Clarke Marsh observed that "the drift to the city is inevitable."[14] Yet Marsh had misgivings about this trend, stating that "physical deterioration is sure to ensue as a result of congestion of population per room and per acre," and, as a result, houses "should be in all the outlying districts."[15] In the mid-1930s such sentiments were shared by the Greenbelt program's administrators, who drew upon current economic and political thinking to envision an altered, improved society – built for urban realities, but away from urban congestion – brought about by government action in connection with the input of educated experts. Also among those who saw a new suburban age on the horizon were architects and planners, both those who worked on the towns and others watching eagerly from the sidelines as the manipulation of physical space was utilized to bring about positive social change.

Despite the fact that the agrarian ideal maintained a privileged place in the popular national identity, American famers had for decades been leaving behind the often difficult, solitary, seemingly anachronistic rural life in favor of industrial cities.[16] Although urban living

[13] Carol Aronovici, *Housing the Masses* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1939), 175.
[14] Benjamin Clarke Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge to the American City* (New York, 1909), 6.
[15] Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning*, 7, 129.
[16] In 1920 the US Census showed for the first time that a majority of Americans lives in urban, rather than rural, settings. It is worth noting that, as this population migration took place, although there was still a tremendous nostalgic attachment to the rural ideal, the 1920s had seen a shift in attitude toward farmers themselves. As the nation became increasingly urban, lampooning farmers as rubes and "country bumpkins" became a common

posed its own problems, most people recognized that their futures would be tied to cities and suburbs, not to the countryside. Historians have generally placed the turning point, the full acceptance of the new, more widely accessible non-agrarian reality, as somehow connected to the end of the Second World War. It was, after all, the postwar era that saw the rise of the interstate highway system and of sprawling suburban development. Within a decade of the war's end the landscape began to be dotted with newly constructed subdivisions, new suburban shopping centers, and newly built roads bearing station wagons filled with suburban mothers and their baby-boom offspring. By the early 1960s singers such as Malvina Reynolds and Pete Seeger were deriding the new national culture dominated by subdivisions comprised of "little boxes made of ticky tacky" and cultural commentators worried about suburbia's dominant message of conformity and its scarring of the landscape. In reality, however, it was the pre-war decade, not the post-war, which began the nation on this path.

Cities and suburbs

Through much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, fears about the threats posed by rapid urbanization loomed large in the middle-class American mind – fears based on very real problems. Cities were noisy, dirty places. Factories polluted the air. Horses pulled carts and wagons, leaving piles of manure in their wake. Garbage and dead animals rotted in the gutters. Too much humanity seemed pressed into too small a space, and too much of that space was made up of crumbling, decaying slums. Thus, the long-accepted belief that rural life was virtuous and city life was detrimental, even depraved, seemed borne out by the increasing overcrowding and degradation of urban tenement districts. Christine Boyer has written, "as the American city expanded as a place of production and consumption, it simultaneously deteriorated as a place for human life and activity."[17]

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comic device within cosmopolitan social circles. During the twenties a real tension, even hostility, existed between urban and rural factions. Yet most Americans, even if they could laugh at jokes made at the expense of farmers, still believed that the nation's countryside represented both physical and spiritual wholesomeness.

[17] Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 33.

Civic reformers throughout the nineteenth century gave a great deal of thought to the relative merits of country, city, and suburban life. Whether or not the prevailing ideal continued to be rural, the fact remained that by the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth more and more of the population was living in cities, a state of affairs that alarmed an increasing number of observers. As urban tenement districts filled with economic refugees from the countryside and recently-arrived European immigrants, the dangers of the city – crime, vice, disease – seemed to loom as ever greater threats to the stability, morality, and health of the nation. Responses to this troubling trend varied greatly. Outside of progressive circles, primarily among the upper and middle classes, the prevalent belief was that most of the urban poor had no one but themselves to blame for their misery. Others, however, argued that residents of impoverished neighborhoods were the victims of circumstances beyond their control. Industrialization and runaway capitalism had, reformers claimed, forever altered conditions so that pulling oneself up from abject poverty was a much more daunting task than it had been in earlier eras. Rather than citing abysmal conditions in poor neighborhoods as the proof of residents' character flaws, they countered that such an environment made upward mobility and success virtually impossible.

For many reformers, the improvement of housing and neighborhoods seemed to be the activity through which the most good might be accomplished. This was seen as straightforward, relatively uncomplicated, essentially common sense (until one approached the very real problem of *how* to provide better housing). The notion that better environments bred better people – or better workers, better citizens, better parents – was a very old idea. The thread of 1930s thought on the subject is most directly connected to beliefs that had arisen during the Progressive Era, and which had largely been promulgated by social workers and others in the new, professional, "civic expert" fields such as public sanitation, sociology, and urban design. Photojournalist Jacob Riis in his 1890 exposé *How the Other Half Lives*, on life in the slums of New York City, wrote that "there is nothing in the prospect of a sharp, unceasing battle for the bare necessaries of life to encourage looking ahead, everything to discourage the

effort. Improvidence and wastefulness are natural results."[18] Riis, like others calling for measures to improve impoverished neighborhoods, saw the deteriorated environment as directly responsible for the desperate lives of residents. He observed that "pauperism grows in the tenements as naturally as weeds in the garden lot. A moral distemper, like crime, it finds there its most fertile soil. All the surroundings of tenement-house life favor its growth, and where once it has taken root it is harder to dislodge than the most virulent of physical diseases."[19]

The theme of poverty as not simply creating an environment for the spread of disease, but as itself a disease, was a common one dating from the late nineteenth century. Urbanization was seen as a syndrome that brought unwelcome symptoms: psychological dysfunction, social unrest, laziness, crime. For many observers, this malady was directly related to the environment; the social ills connected with poverty were incubated in bad neighborhoods filled with bad housing. Housing expert Edith Elmer Wood wrote in 1940, under the heading "The Cost of Bad Housing in Juvenile Delinquency and Crime," "ideological contagion seems to be more virulent than physical."[20] She was by no means alone in this belief; although it was to some degree commonly assumed that the lower classes had some character defect that kept them in their demoralized condition, it was also commonly accepted that bad environments exacerbated the problem.[21]

It is no coincidence that housing for the working class became such a consuming issue for many Americans at the end of the nineteenth century. Social workers, economists, planners, and others in the new professions were eager to prove their worth to society and to apply their expertise in solving the nation's problems, and so were extremely vocal in their calls for change. Cheaper, mass-produced print media allowed the population to see, to experience – even if from a safe distance – the horrors of poverty and poor housing conditions. Christine Boyer argues that even the much-discussed "closing of the frontier" played a part; she writes

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[18] Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890; New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 129. Citations are to the Penguin edition.
[19] Ibid., 184.
[20] Edith Elmer Wood, *Introduction to Housing: Facts and Principles* (Washington, DC: Federal Works Agency, United States Housing Authority, 1940), 54.
[21] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 116-117.

that "when Americans reached the end of westward expansion and were finally forced to turn inward upon themselves, it was with hostility and embarrassment that they observed their disfigured and inhumane cities. Was this to be the forge upon which the future of American civilization would be cast?"[22] And it was this idea – the belief that the future of the nation rested on the character of its citizens, and that this social character was being polluted by an impure environment – that unleashed fears about the dangers of urban life in educated experts and ordinary observers alike.

For some, the answer lay in escaping the cities to more healthful suburban environments.[23] Nineteenth-century cities were diverse places – both the poorest and the wealthiest citizens were likely to live there; tenements, mansions, slaughterhouses, manufacturing facilities, and office buildings might be just blocks apart. It is little wonder that throughout the second half of the century those who could afford to escape this chaos in favor of the fresh breezes of the countryside did so, especially in the summer months when heat and humidity made the city all the more unpleasant. Initially suburbs were very much seen as part of the rural, not the urban environment. They provided an opportunity for well-off city residents to experience the bucolic ideal without the inconvenience of having to actually wrest a living from the land, without the enforced isolation of the farm, without the provincialism of the small town. As author Harlan Paul Douglass put it in 1925, suburbs were "urban society trying to eat its cake and keep it, too."[24] They represented the middle ground between country and city. Douglass also drew a distinction between small towns located outside larger cities and actual suburbs, saying, "the town's primary relationships are rural. It is the country thickened up." The suburb, in contrast, "is a part of urban civilization. Even though it is a town in form, the brand of the city is stamped upon it. It straddles the arbitrary line which statistics draw

[22] Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, 4.

[23] A definition of what is meant by "suburb" is in order here. Planning expert James Dahir defined it this way in 1950: "'Suburb' literally means a population center 'which is under the town to which it is attached.' It has no independent life in the sense that a city has, and when it achieves such independence and insofar as it achieves it, it ceases to be a suburb." He noted that the ties between the two went beyond the fact that inhabitants might commute to employment within the larger city, saying that the suburb "is 'attached' by the connections of the local shopkeeper with the city wholesaler, by the city transportation, electric, gas, and telephone systems, the city newspapers and radio broadcasting, the city as the source of most of the specialized services whether medical, cultural, educational, social, charitable, or recreational." James Dahir, *Communities for Better Living: Citizen Achievement in Organization, Design and Development* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1950), 106-107.

[24] Harlan Paul Douglass, *The Suburban Trend* (New York: The Century Co., 1925), 4.

between the urban and rural spheres; but in reality it is the push of the city outward. It makes physical compromises with country ways but few compromises of spirit. It is the city trying to escape the consequences of being a city while still remaining a city."[25] Suburbanites might well wish to reside away from the urban center, but they did not desire to sever all connections to it. They wanted the benefits of industrial cities without fully immersing themselves – or, more importantly, their families – in the perceived evils of the urban environment.

New attitudes toward suburbs came with the arrival in the United States of such transportation innovations as the streetcar and the railroad. Undoubtedly improved communication in the form of the telephone also made life away from the city, yet still somehow attached to it, seem more plausible and desirable. Although cities had undeniable attractions, they still represented in the American mind (and not without justification) crime and disease, danger and chaos. Kenneth Jackson notes that, in contrast, "suburbia, pure and unfettered and bathed by sunlight and fresh air, offered the exciting prospect that disorder, prostitution, and mayhem could be kept at a distance, far away from the festering metropolis."[26]

This luxury was initially afforded only to those who had the means to commute to and from the city. In the early days of urban railways, for example, it was railroad company executives who were usually the first to remove themselves and their families into what was still countryside, now connected to the city, out to the end of the line. The relative ease (relative, of course, only to riding into town by horse and buggy), and relative affordability (still far beyond the daily means of the vast majority of Americans) combined with the unquestioned benefits of semi-rural living to spawn picturesque suburban enclaves near countless American cities by the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, "suburban" though they may have been, these elite communities were far removed in character from the suburbs that came to dominate the landscape in the post-World War II years. In the imagination of most of the late-nineteenth-century populace, the rural-suburban environments of their day must have seemed as far beyond their reach as palaces.

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[25] Ibid., 3-4.

[26] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70.

A turning point in the move toward suburbanization came in the 1910s and 1920s, when increased car ownership opened the way for commuting into and out of the cities to a much larger portion of the population. Yet cars were still expensive enough to purchase and maintain that automobile-linked suburbs remained beyond the economic resources of most working-class Americans. With balloon-frame construction and the popularity of the bungalow style, houses in the borderlands became more affordable during this period, as well, but even with these innovations the cost of a suburban home was still out of reach for those below the middle class. Prior to the twentieth century, home construction or purchase costs were paid in cash. If money had to be borrowed, loans were primarily obtained from friends and family. In the early twentieth century this began to change, as building and loan companies began offering financing. But such loans required down payments, good references, steady employment. Payments included interest and had to be made on time. For most of the working class home ownership, and suburban life, was far beyond the realm of possibility. If in the first decades of the twentieth century working-class and poor citizens thought about suburbs at all – and, indeed, most had little reason to do so – they were unlikely to have imagined themselves someday living there. Suburbs were for the middle and upper classes. Those of lower status had to make do with the dismal options available to them.

Still, for a growing number of town planners suburbs seemed to offer the best opportunity for such social improvement. Harlan Paul Douglass, for example, wrote in 1925: "Because they constitute an unscrambling of an over-complex situation, because they are largely composed of like-minded people to whom cooperation should not be difficult, and because of the environmental advantages of roominess, the suburbs, in spite of their limitations, are the most promising aspect of urban civilization." These were the places that left behind old urban problems and offered the potential for something new and improved. Douglass continued, "formed out of the dust of cities, [suburbs] wait to have breathed into them the breath of community sentiment, of neighborly fraternity and peace. They reflect the unspoiled and youthful aspect of urban civilization, the adolescent and not yet disillusioned part of the city, where, if at all, happiness and worthy living may be achieved, as well as

material well-being."[27] Fraternity, peace, "worthy living" – all were among the goals of the administrators and planners of the Greenbelt program. If modern cities were, as so many Americans believed, dangerous threats to the nation's identity, perhaps these new towns could be the answer.

Attitudes about home ownership

Although opinions varied about where it was best to live, the idea of home ownership itself had not yet gained the resonance it would come to have following the Second World War. As sociologist Niles Carpenter observed in 1932: "Individual home ownership … appears to be far from general in the United States, and, in fact, to be quite exceptional in great metropolitan centers, notwithstanding its preeminence in the expressed sentiments and ideals of the American people."[28] Although the Jeffersonian ideal of owning land continued to have a powerful hold on the popular imagination, renting had long been a fact of life for much of the population. In 1920, just 45.6 percent of American families owned their homes.[29] Home ownership rates were lowest among the urban population, as many urban dwellers did not consider home ownership to be essential and in fact preferred the mobility and flexibility afforded by renting.[30] Farm families, too, were often tenants rather than owners, and in fact the proportion of tenant farmers rose between 1920 and 1930 as the early phases of the depression hit agriculture with a ferocity that caused many to lose their land to foreclosure.[31]

Many observers saw in this a potential threat to the nation; they repeated the idea that home ownership, good citizenship, and the American character were inextricably linked so frequently that it would become accepted by much of the populace as an unassailable fact. Renting was seen as linked to the high mobility of the modern urban society, a mobility that

[27] Douglass, *The Suburban Trend*, 36.
[28] Niles Carpenter, "Attitude Patterns in the Home-Buying Family," *Social Forces* 11, no. 1 (Oct. 1932): 77.
[29] John M. Gries and James Ford, eds., *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, *Home Ownership, Income and Types of Dwellings* (Washington, DC, 1932), 2.
[30] For example, in 1920 the city of Buffalo, New York, had a home ownership rate of just 38.6 percent, and New York City just 12.7 percent. Carpenter, "Attitude Patterns in the Home-Buying Family," 76.
[31] Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, 82.

represented restlessness and wanderlust, not the sort of settled reliability necessary for a stable civilization. Whether it was true or not, the public perception was that this unsettled social character was growing; Carpenter noted, for example, that "the literature of sociology is so filled with discussions of the shallow-rooted nature of family settlement in the present day that the point needs no further development here."[32] In 1932, when Herbert Hoover presented the opening address at the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, he stated that "to possess one's own home is the hope and ambition of almost every individual in our country," and "that our people should live in their own homes is a sentiment deep in the heart of our race and of American life."[33] In the foreword to the fourth volume of the published findings of the conference Robert P. Lamont wrote: "It is doubtful whether democracy is possible where tenants overwhelmingly outnumber home owners. For democracy is not a privilege; it is a responsibility, and human nature rarely volunteers to shoulder responsibility, but has to be driven by the whip of necessity. The need to protect and guard the home is the whip that has proved, beyond all others, efficacious in driving men to discharge the duties of self-government."[34] He continued:

> In designating this Conference as one on Home Building and Home Ownership, the President was profoundly aware of the importance of the ownership of homes in safeguarding the traditions and developing the ideals of our Nation. Responsible citizenship is largely dependent upon individuals having a stake in the community, which is the major source of civic pride and judicious participation in the affairs of local government. Through the relationship of his home to its neighborhood and to the city government, the home owner acquires a keener civic interest and a greater sense of civic responsibility. In addition, home ownership means high standards and better control of the environment by the occupant. It helps also in the development of thrift and self respect, facilitates wholesome living, and promotes character development in that it gives the family a fresh incentive for sacrifice and a new and high ideal.

Civic leaders and housing reformers frequently made similar arguments, asserting that a renting population was essentially a nomadic population, and that home ownership had a stabilizing influence on citizens.

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[32] Carpenter, "Attitude Patterns in the Home-Buying Family," 78.
[33] Ibid., 76.
[34] Robert P. Lamont, foreword to *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, *Home Ownership, Income and Types of Dwellings*, by John M. Gries and James Ford, eds. (Washington, DC, 1932), vii.

There were some who challenged this view. Architect and town planner Clarence Stein wrote in 1932, for instance, that for the working-class man "the ownership of a home which according to the propaganda was to have made him a better citizen has merely robbed him of his freedom of movement…. The purchaser has been chained to a house that was ill fitted to his needs in the beginning, and was so badly built and so badly placed that it will be worthless long before the mortgages have been paid and the building really belongs to him."[35] Similarly, Carol Aronovici wrote in 1939: "Nothing is said by political orators, preachers, and crooners about the tragedy of mortgage foreclosures or overdue tax bills," and that "the tenacity of the superstitions which have been built up around the 'ideals' of home ownership passes understanding."[36] He concluded that "as long … as society … is not concerned with the incidents and tragedies of workers with uncertain incomes and without economic security, home ownership should be avoided as a social obligation."[37] Undoubtedly many renters – whom Aronovici pointed out were not "given a proper place in the roster of the solid citizenry, despite the fact that the majority of our people live in rented houses" – felt this way, too, but among the educated elite this view was in the minority. Far more common was the belief that widespread home ownership was the key to a more stable society.[38]

The Greenbelt program's relationship to this issue is complex. The idea for the towns was clearly predicated on the belief that stable communities were essential to the stability of the nation. Yet the Greenbelts were intended for the working class, and the working class simply did not have the means for home ownership. Thus the towns were not intended to promote ownership – there would in fact be no private landholding in the Greenbelts for over a decade after their completion. The plan was for the government to construct the towns and then turn ownership of the entire enterprise over to a nonprofit organization or local municipal housing authority. The occupants of the towns were to be renters, not owners. Due to a lack of any clear alternative at the time, however, the federal government retained ownership of

[35] Clarence Stein, "Housing and Common Sense," *The Nation* (May 11, 1932): 543.
[36] Aronovici, *Housing the* Masses, 120.
[37] Ibid., 121.
[38] Ibid., 120.

the towns until after 1949, when a Senate bill called for their sale.[39] So the Greenbelt towns, while advancing the notion that a stable population in "their own" homes benefited the nation, at the same time created towns populated with renters, allowing for no private home ownership. The stability, then, was expected to arise from long-term occupation, leading to a close-knit community of neighbors who knew and interacted with each other, and from a basic feeling of civic and emotional investment in the community itself, not on monetary investment in the home or land. The Final Report for the town of Greendale, Wisconsin summed up the hope that "a feeling of personal participation in the ownership of the public buildings and public land of the town is a valuable instrument for building a loyal and cooperative citizenship."[40] The idea to a large extent combined the Jeffersonian ideal – commitment to place leading to civic responsibility – with the concerns of those who cautioned that home-ownership could act more like a noose than a tether for those of the working class. The Greenbelt plan, then, was not a call for widespread home ownership so much as for widespread home stewardship. In being good stewards of their homes and communities, residents would accrue the same benefits that property-holding had long been presumed to bring, with none of the undue burden that home ownership might have inflicted on the towns' working-class inhabitants.

"Proper" types of homes

The issue of single-family versus multiple-family housing joined the debate on the relative merits of urban, suburban, and rural living, along with concerns about renting versus owning. Beyond the distinction between owning and renting, for many commentators the type of residence also mattered a great deal, with a single-family detached home seen as the most desirable.[41] The possibility of living in such a house, however, was itself increasingly remote for

[39] For a thorough discussion of federal ownership of the towns, see Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 124-133, 232-238.
[40] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 61.
[41] Discussions of these issues are complicated by the fact that, for most Americans, a single-family home was by definition a detached, free-standing house, while for Europeans, and for American architects, planners, and

many in the working class. One option available, particularly to those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, was apartment living, but the growth of the apartment trend alarmed many observers. Long confined only to inner-city slum districts, beginning in the decade or so before the turn of the century apartment buildings and other multi-family dwellings of varying sizes and configurations began to spring up in cities, some even tailored to the middle and upper classes. This was a sharp break from the American tradition of detached houses intended for single families; the fact that such conjoined homes had long been accepted in Europe served to enhance the feeling that this was an alien dwelling form. The conventional wisdom in the United States, as expressed by politicians and other social commentators, was that single-family detached homes, at least somewhat removed from the worst congestion of the cities, represented the superior environment for the raising of virtuous children and virtuous citizens. Yet for a vast portion of the population the discussion was irrelevant. Such a house, either within or beyond the city, if no longer exclusively for the wealthy, was increasingly less an option for the working class or the poor. The Greenbelt program would not choose sides on this issue: Greenbelt, Maryland, consists primarily of row houses and apartment buildings; most of Greendale, Wisconsin's dwellings are single-family detached or twin homes; and Greenhills, Ohio, is split between the two, offering a mix of these configurations.

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housing reformers, "single-family" meant only that nobody else lived above or below. *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, Vol. 4, *Home Ownership, Income and Types of Dwellings* provides the following definitions: "One-family dwelling: One family occupying a single house from ground to roof with independent use of land. [Variations within the one-family designation]: Detached: with open spaces on all four sides. Semi-detached: one wall of each house is a party wall built on the lot line. Group and row: both sidewalls of all except end houses are party walls built on the lot lines." A two-family house placed one family above the other; multiple-family dwellings were "for three or more families usually with joint use of stair halls, entrances and land." Thus, while a unit within a double- or triple-decker was not considered a single-family house, a side-by-side duplex or row house was. Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, 150. In this study, I will combine "two-family" and "multiple-family," using "multiple-family" or "multi-family" to designate any dwelling where one or more families reside above another. I have endeavored to make the distinction between the use of the terms as understood by the general American public and the more official definition clear in the text; however, when speaking of the general public, unless specified otherwise I use the term "single-family home" as the public would have interpreted it – as a fully detached house.

Personal rights, collective good, national identity

Concerns about housing also came to be connected to a central issue for the American identity, the ever-present struggle between the individual and the collective. In 1940 housing reformer Edith Elmer Wood wrote, "the future of large urbanized and industrialized democracies may well depend upon our ability to preserve a … balance between the rights of the individual and the collectivity."[42] The "right" of the working class to decent housing, the "right" of landlords to make the best profit possible, the "right" of citizens to make their cities safe all clashed in discussions about housing. Property rights and personal rights, social obligation, national and personal security all opened the possibility for public disagreement and debate. The programs and policies of the New Deal were particularly susceptible to charges of too much government intervention, of undermining personal liberties; they incited the fear that handouts in any form would weaken the self-reliant American character. The Greenbelt towns, as huge public works projects that also touched on central concepts of home and community, sparked particularly heated debates about these issues.

In the United States the patriotic desire to do what is best for the nation frequently clashes with a national identity that defines this as a country built and populated by rugged individualists, people who do not bow down to tyranny or coercion from foreign states, from law-breakers, even from their own government. And there is undoubtedly much truth to this national myth. Self-interest undeniably fueled the settling of the North American continent by Europeans and their descendents. It stimulated the rise of industry. Individualism has been revered as the force that made the United States what it is. Personal profit – capitalism – and personal advancement have been intricately tied to the history of this nation. Yet many of the strongest believers in the idea of Americans' fierce independence and self-sufficiency have also had strong opinions about how others should live. Crowded slums, for example, might spread disease, and therefore jeopardize the health of middle-class suburban families. Certain living arrangements may be associated in the popular imagination with foreignness, with radicalism,

[42] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 127.

with degradation. In such cases, it is often argued, it is surely an extension of one's own rights to ensure that potential social and cultural pollutants are contained, even eradicated.

A similar challenge arose from the question of what role the government should play in its citizens' daily lives, what obligations it had to its people. For most of the nation's history the prevailing belief – even if not always true – was that government, and particularly the federal government, should have a minimal impact on its citizens. Yet in a democracy government is seen as the servant of the people. By the turn of the century some Progressives believed that modernity had created a society that was too complex to be allowed to be guided by any sort of free market or economic "invisible hand." The Depression deepened and spread this belief. Such attitudes seemed to be supported by a growing worry that it was in fact the free market that had brought on the economic collapse. In times of crisis, moreover, it is common, and understandable, to hear calls for the government to use its substantial resources to ease the suffering of the populace. As the economy ground to a halt, a clamor for desperately-needed assistance arose. But assistance for whom? How should it be implemented? Who would decide? These were (and continue to be) extremely contentious issues.

Early in the crisis, President Herbert Hoover stood on the side of tradition, confidently aligned with the American myth of the powers of self-sufficiency and individual ability. He firmly believed that to offer aid would be to weaken the national character. As the economic downturn spiraled out of control, he implemented policies intended to help business, and therefore heal the broken business cycle. It was not enough. As historian David M. Kennedy writes of Hoover, "the Great Humanitarian who had fed the starving Belgians in 1914, the Great Engineer so hopefully elevated to the presidency in 1928, now appeared as the Great Scrooge, a corrupted ideologue who could swallow government relief for the banks but priggishly scrupled over government provisions for the unemployed."[43] New Deal scholar William Leuchtenburg put it more succinctly, saying that when it came to the Depression, Hoover "approached problems with a relentless pessimism."[44]

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[43]David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91.

[44] William Edward Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 13.

The stock market crash and ensuing financial collapse had caused some to wonder whether the individualistic nature of the American character had steered them down the wrong path. Perhaps capitalism itself was to blame. Some got angry. Rexford Tugwell reportedly said, "I do not think it too much to say that on March 4 [FDR's inauguration date] we were confronted with a choice between an orderly revolution – a peaceful and rapid departure from the past concepts – and a violent and disorderly overthrow of the whole capitalist structure."[45] Others drifted into a kind of dazed stupor, waiting and hoping for times to improve. Leuchtenburg contends that, even in the winter of 1932-33, when unemployment was at its highest point, "the mood of the country … was not revolutionary."[46] There has been much debate among historians in the intervening years over how close to widespread unrest or even revolution the nation was in the darkest days of the Depression. Richard Pells argues that it worked in two opposing ways: the crisis pushed intellectuals closer to radicalism even as it made most Americans more determined than ever to maintain stability.[47] Alan Brinkley also sees little outrage among the general populace, noting that it was far more common for people to assume the blame themselves for the enormity of the tragedy at hand. In a society where personal and national success seemed so clearly a sign of competence and determination, such a monumental failure reflected poorly on their own actions, both individually and as a society.[48] Wherever they stood on this spectrum, whether bordering on revolution or simply experiencing a deep crisis of national or personal faith, Americans were desperate for some sort of change.

They sought that change in the person of their new commander in chief. In 1932 Franklin Roosevelt took over the presidency, having built up the hopes of the nation with promises of recovery and a willingness to experiment in order to find the cure. In this he was far less successful than either he or the American public had hoped. The crux of the problem came back to that old conundrum that had long bedeviled policymakers. The need to help was all too clear, but help whom, and how? Most people agreed that direct handouts – commonly

[45] Nathaniel S. Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis Since 1930* (New York: Universe Books, 1973), 22; Keith provides no citation.
[46] Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 26.
[47] Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 86.
[48] Brinkley, *Culture and Politics in the Great Depression*, 7-8.

referred to as “the dole” – were not a workable solution. Simply giving out money would undermine that quintessential American self-reliance, and would at best be only a short-term answer, anyway. Much more popular was work relief, which put unemployed laborers to work performing tasks of benefit to society as a whole while also providing much-needed funds to individual families, who would in turn spend their paychecks and bolster struggling businesses.

Yet even work-relief plans ran into enormous problems. If a new road or bridge was to be built in Town A, Town B was almost certain to see this as favoritism. Perhaps there would simply be grumbling in the local press, but there might also be calls for investigations to see whether bribery had been involved in the selection of locations. If there was the slightest hint that the project would only benefit a small portion of the population, or if it seemed to cost too much, or if it was tainted by any other kind of controversy, it was certain to be tagged a “boondoggle.” When the government tried to open a factory in Arthurdale, West Virginia, to build furniture for post offices and thus create work for down-and-out coal miners, furniture manufacturers protested that federal authorities were bringing in unwanted and unfair competition. When slum clearance projects were proposed for the nation’s inner cities, landlords claimed that their interests were being subverted because they could not compete with low government-subsidized rents. In program after program, any gain for one segment of the population was bound to be interpreted as a slight to another.

While the public disagreed over what the government should do and for whom, many progressive housing reformers and policymakers at the turn of the century and beyond embraced the possibility that federal resources might finally supply an answer to many social problems, both those that had long challenged the nation and those recently brought on – or made worse – by the modern age. Rexford Tugwell was one such man. He had long believed that governmental and expert planning should be applied to problems of poverty and inadequate living conditions. It was time, he believed, for federal authorities to work for the benefit of all of American society, and in particular for those who most needed help – not, as he believed, to continue aiding business at the expense of the average citizen. This view called for a middle ground between the two ends of the American economic spectrum, between the Jeffersonian ideal of limited government and an independent citizenry able to rise in society as

far as their talents might take them and the Hamiltonian notion of firm governmental control which would ensure the soundness of the economy as a whole, but possibly at the expense of the absolute independence of much of the population. Tugwell wanted, as Paul Conkin puts it, "to use Hamiltonian methods to serve Jeffersonian purposes."[49]

In the realm of housing for the working class reform-minded Americans had a model for the kinds of changes that might be possible. Many European nations had embarked on public housing programs during the 1910s, and their efforts increased immensely following the First World War.[50] American planners and reformers understood that such programs would in all likelihood meet with resistance as being counter to the national spirit, but they believed that no other options held as much promise for improving the living conditions of the working class and the poor. Benjamin Clarke Marsh wrote in 1909, for example, that "foreign city planning may be bad for the written, but is very good for the human constitution."[51] Invoking the belief that modern society was just too complex to be left to its own devices, Marsh contended that the necessary city planning would involve "a radical change in the attitude of citizens toward government and the functions of government, but one to which the exigencies and the complexity of city life in nearly all great American cities is resistlessly impelling us. It compels a departure from the doctrine that government should not assume any functions aside from its primitive and restrictive activities and boldly demands the interest and effort of the government to preserve the health, morals and efficiency of the citizens equal to the effort and the zeal which is now expended in the futile task of trying to make amends for the exploitations by private citizens and the wanton disregard of the many."[52] In 1937 the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works posed the question, "What does the householder have a right to expect in his home?" The answer, they contended, was that "just as every American has a right to education he should have a right to a home that is healthful and sound, a home that contains enough space for his family to live a normal private life. This standard seems simple

[49] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 5.
[50] This was not simply a result of wartime destruction. For a further discussion of European efforts, see Chapter 3.
[51] Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning*, 27.
[52] Ibid.

enough and reasonable to expect."[53] The implication, not surprising as it had come from a New Deal agency, was that the fulfillment of this expectation should be the responsibility, at least in part, of the federal government.

These, then, were among the perceived threats to American concepts of home and community, to the American identity, to the American dream. An idealized vision of a mythical American past collided with modern realities of industrial urbanization. On one side were the realities of agrarian life, which were often darker and more foreboding, particularly during the Depression, than painted in the pastoral ideal. On the other side stood the undeniable problems associated with city dwelling. Poverty and disease, crime and depravity, all seemed too ominously close to many citizens' families, and the urban contagion threatened to spread. Suburbs offered a potential escape, but even by the 1930s this option was available only to a small portion of the population. Commentators worried that not enough citizens were home owners, and thus not as deeply invested in the American system as they should have been, yet home ownership had always been less common than popularly believed. Further concerns centered on the rising number of multi-family dwellings, environments seen as less than ideal for raising children, upon whose shoulders, after all, sat the future of the nation. The crushing depression – which brought out angry rebellion in some, but self-doubt and despair in others – heightened anxiety over these issues, many of which had been grave concerns for decades. The national mood was gloomy indeed. Even the enthusiasm that greeted Roosevelt's early efforts, particularly his work-relief programs, dimmed as people realized that they might not get their slice of the recovery pie. Bitterness and rivalry began to cloud the promise of the New Deal, bringing about renewed concerns over federal obligations and the role of government in citizens' lives.

It should not be surprising, then, that Americans fell back on comforting ideas during these anxious times. Among the most comforting was the concept of home and community as escape, as haven. Closely tied to this was a belief that only by pulling together, only by bringing forth the best and most cooperative efforts of the people, could the nation survive. During the

[53] Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Homes for Workers* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1937), 5.

Depression years an idea took hold, boldly reflected in the era's art and literature, that Americans were simple but virtuous pioneers pulling together to improve their society. This was a vision that people could cling to, could see as the possible road to national and personal salvation.

All of these issues converge in the Greenbelt towns. A large and growing portion of the population, even those fortunate enough to have jobs, faced extreme difficulties when it came to housing. Employment, when it could be found, was primarily located in the cities, but few workers in the lower-middle and working class could afford to commute. Urban residence was thus their only choice, but it was a poor choice indeed. Increasing numbers of citizens – not just those once seen as the dregs of society, but good, upstanding families – were relegated to tenements in overcrowded urban slums. Meanwhile, more and more farming families found themselves without land or livelihood as the depression dragged on. Reformers and civic experts debated endlessly over the means of solving these pressing problems, and over whether the federal government bore any of the responsibility for alleviating the suffering of its citizens. Added to this were often-urgent discussions concerning the harm that city life, renting, and apartment living posed not just to individual families but to the nation as a whole. Finally, American individuality ran up against calls for a collective, governmental solution to it all. Given this last, essential conflict, it is unlikely that any proposed plan would have met with anything but mixed reviews. Other New Deal building projects also gave rise to strong emotions, but the Greenbelt towns seem to have been particularly incendiary – for some a beacon of hope, for others a looming, menacing threat to the very core of the nation's identity and character.

Chapter 2. The Need for Better Housing

The great majority of the homes that are being built in this country today are not worthy of the American people.

- *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, 1932 [1]

By 1900 any fairly acute person might have realized that this matter of housing, in its largest sense as average human environment, was bound to be one of the pivotal questions of the twentieth century.

- Catherine Bauer, architect and housing expert, 1934[2]

During the Depression, the housing situation for countless Americans had become nearly intolerable. Families who in previous eras would have lived on farms or in small towns found themselves – as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and finally the Depression itself – forced into overcrowded cities, vying with each other for rental housing that was more often than not both inadequate and overpriced. For many families the inability to find a decent home weighed heavily. In a society where identity and residence are so closely connected, the daily reality of living in a substandard dwelling, or the knowledge that one's family might be torn apart due to a lack of adequate housing, must surely have felt like personal failure. The seeming intractability of the situation, multiplied over and over, began eventually to look like a national failure, as well.

One of the worst cities in which to seek a decent home was Washington, DC. Among those who desperately hoped to find better living conditions were the families who eventually applied to live in Greenbelt, Maryland. These included Anthony Madden's family. [3] They were fortunate at least in the fact that Anthony had a job with the Department of Agriculture,

[1] Gries and Ford, eds., *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 11, *Housing Objectives and Programs* (Washington, DC, 1932), 150.
[2] Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 106.
[3] Anthony Madden, interview by Steve Schleig, Nov. 12, 1980, *Looking Back*, Section 3 (interviews), 44-45.

fortunate because the year was 1938 and unemployment stood at about nineteen percent. Anthony had left his home in Cleveland in 1934 and relocated to Washington in search of work; he had met his future wife there, and they eventually had a child. Yet they had difficulties. His salary was not bad – $1,620 per year, well above the median national income of $1,160, and placing the family just above the federally-defined poverty level of $1,500 annually.[4] But in the capital decent affordable housing was almost impossible to find; as a result, the father, mother, and baby lived in a third-floor tenement, sharing a bath with four other families. When he recalled that apartment years later, Anthony described it as being in a noisy slum, where "drunks were out on the street all night long." But there were so few other options.

And there were others. There was Joseph Comproni, whose family was separated by the Depression; he worked in Washington while the rest of his family remained behind in New Hampshire because they could not find an affordable place in the capital to live and raise children.[5] There was the Jernberg family from south Texas; the father, Carl, was a farmer who could no longer support his wife and children through agriculture. He took the civil service exam hoping for a government position in nearby Brownsville; when notified that the job he was being offered was in Washington, he hesitated. But employment was too scarce to turn down the opportunity, and so the family moved to where the work was, even if the change from farmland to urban squalor would be wrenching.[6] There was Carl Bott – a father employed as a special policeman for the National Park Service – and his wife and teen-aged daughter, who rented a District house with no bathroom and no hot running water.[7] Each of these families may have been grateful that they had an income at all, but they must also have believed that things surely could have been better, and they longed for a proper home. They all eventually applied for a home in Greenbelt, Maryland, and each, with the exception of the Bott family, were among the community's first residents.

[4] Median figure for 1935-36. Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 93.
[5] Joseph Comproni, interview by Margo Kranz, Dec. 3, 1980, *Looking Back*, Section 3 (interviews), 1.
[6] Dale Jernberg, interview by author, Feb. 13, 2008.
[7] *Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 30, 1937, Tugwell Room, Greenbelt Library.

The men and women who were in charge of implementing the Greenbelt towns program were well aware of the housing crisis. The final report on Greenbelt, Maryland, in a section entitled "Washington: A National Example," stated:

> Washington really has two housing problems. The most glaring … is its slums…. Less conspicuous but no less urgent is the need for ordinary, inexpensive homes. A chronic house famine has pushed rents a third higher than the national average, and is forcing low-waged government workers to pay as much as half of their salaries to keep any kind of roof over their heads. The majority of federal employees in Washington fall definitely within the low income groups. Sixty-one percent of them earn less than $2,000 a year, and 25 percent earn less than $1,500…. Federal employees, however, are living on velvet in comparison with the city's lower-paid laborers.[8]

By the 1930s deep concerns about poor housing, overcrowding, and increased residential mobility plagued the nation. Modern industrialized mass-production had proved a double-edged sword, allowing families to purchase more ready-made goods more cheaply than ever before, but also demanding of employees considerable compromises in home life. The jobs were in the cities. Public transportation was rarely inexpensive enough for factory workers to use on a daily basis. Even for those of the working class who had cars, a home in the suburbs still lay beyond the economic reach of all but a fraction. To have access to employment most industrial workers had little choice but to live in the cities or on their edges, options that seldom proved to be particularly satisfactory. Had the reality of working-class housing not become such an urgent need, such a national embarrassment, such a perceived threat to the American character, programs such as the Greenbelt towns never would have been considered. As the situation for workers in search of decent places to raise their families became increasingly bleak more and more citizens began to recognize that something was terribly wrong, that the existing system for providing housing was not functioning as it must, and that somehow it would have to adapt to accommodate the new realities of the modern era. The Greenbelt towns attempted to propose a solution to these problems, but not before the situation had reached devastating proportions.

[8] Greenbelt Final Report, "Washington Housing: A National Example."

There had always been bad housing in the cities, but since such environments had historically been occupied only by the underclass, it had been easy enough for most of the American populace to ignore. Certainly there were concerns about fires, crime, and disease emanating from the tenement districts, and reformers tried various methods of "cleaning up" the slums and those who lived there, but most people gave little thought to how to actually improve living conditions for the poor.[9] As the twentieth century dawned, however, and the scarcity of decent housing spread beyond the poorest members of society, fears about the potential threat of these suspect environments deepened. It had been easy enough for earlier generations to dismiss the dismal plight of those who lived in slums as having been of their own making. It was quite another matter, in the 1920s and 1930s, to be told – perhaps to see firsthand – that is was not just the poorest of the poor who lived in decrepit tenements, that in fact the children of honest industrial workers and farmers suffered in unhealthful homes and neighborhoods. It required no expert's insight for most Americans to agree that exemplary citizens were unlikely to be produced in blighted communities. City planner Clarence Perry wrote in 1929, for example, "one of the most fundamental discoveries of modern research is that of the role played by the neighborhood, or the local community, in fixing and developing the character of the younger generation."[10] This was not seen as a trivial matter. Edith Elmer Wood in 1940 urged that improvements in housing and neighborhoods were vital "if we are to maintain a successful urban civilization without deterioration of the race."[11]

Such concerns for the nation's hosing situation were not always purely philanthropic. In this era, when imperialism and nationalism were so prevalent, it seems only natural that the issue would be raised of just what all of this meant for America's global standing. At the turn of the century, the United States had little reason to feel left behind in any sort of "housing race." All of the industrialized nations of the world faced difficulties related to poverty and poor housing. The years immediately preceding and during the First World War, however, marked

[9] Jeff Wiltse points out that the first municipal swimming facilities were provided specifically as a way for city-dwellers, who generally lacked adequate plumbing at home, to get clean. Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[10] Clarence Arthur Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit," in *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs*, Vol. 7 (New York: Committee on Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1929), 126.
[11] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 131.

the beginning of a shift in some European nations as they started to provide, first, mild legislative efforts at making housing a possibility for the working class, and then wartime housing and, later still, government-subsidized public housing for workers. Undoubtedly most Americans could not begin to conceive of the United States moving in that direction and were more than willing to leave such "undemocratic" tactics to foreign states, but for others the unfavorable comparison to the likes of France and Germany rankled. The U.S. certainly could not fall behind in this most urgent of tasks. Wood wrote at the war's end: "in the new democratic world which we hope for after the war, that nation will be the most successful whose people as a whole attain the highest standards of health, morals and intelligence…. Good citizenship is a product of normal family life. The other nations of the world are seeing to the housing of their people. Can we alone afford to neglect it?"[12] Thus, not only were good neighborhoods and decent housing essential for the strength of the American people, but they were also vital to the country's potency and international status. Saving the human race, saving the children, saving the nation – all were linked to housing, or so it seemed.

The crisis

The abysmal state of living conditions in the tenement districts of urban centers had been recognized and denounced ever since urbanization and industrialization had begun to draw people into the cities. Progressive reformers promoted the use of scientifically-conducted surveys as a favored technique for the production of informative data during the 1890s and continued into the twentieth century, leaving us a valuable record of the realities of life at the time. Promoted by social workers and sociologists, surveys provided a way to see beyond patent assumptions and conventional wisdom about the conditions and problems of modern America. These techniques eventually spread to other fields, including housing and city planning. In 1916 housing expert Carol Aronovici argued that the use of the scientific social survey represented "the growing consciousness among the leaders in social, industrial, and

[12] Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner*, 28.

governmental life of this nation of the need for a clearing of the atmosphere, and an intelligent and honest facing of the facts that have so far stood in the way of a realization of the highest ideals of a potentially ideal democracy."[13]

During the Depression the need to face, and understand, the facts seemed more urgent than ever. President Herbert Hoover, though often portrayed as either unwilling or unable to attempt to end the Depression, was by training an engineer, and he attacked the problems before him with an engineer's sensibilities. In August of 1930 he announced the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, an effort to quantify – and hopefully to discover solutions to – the economic disaster that had hit the housing industry and the general public. A committee headed by the Secretary of Commerce and Secretary of the Interior organized thirty-one subcommittees to investigate every aspect of housing and home ownership.[14] Their findings were published in 1931 in eleven volumes. From 1934 to 1936 the Department of Commerce conducted a "real property inventory," examining living conditions in sixty-four American cities. Other organizations from the Progressive Era through the Depression gathered a wealth of information on the housing crisis as well. The portrait they painted was not a pretty one.

Despite decades of attempts by social workers and others to ameliorate the situation, there had been little improvement in the housing situation by the 1930s. In fact, by that time the problems of inadequate housing had spread well beyond the inner-city poor, leaving most of the working class to make do with the few, relatively unappealing housing options available to them, and causing a widening array of experts to turn their attention to the issue of how to provide decent habitation for the nation's workers. When Roosevelt opened the doors for a broad range of programs and experiments aimed at easing Americans' burdens – shifting at least some measure of the responsibility for citizens' welfare to the government – social workers and city planners, along with a host of other civic-minded individuals, seized the opportunity that the New Deal offered. For those who had long sought a way to address the nation's housing needs, and in so doing to address many of society's deeper ills, the Depression provided an opportunity and a catalyst for change, change that highlighted and sometimes

[13] Carol Aronovici, *The Social Survey* (Philadelphia: The Harper Press, 1916), 1.
[14] Robert P. Lamont and Ray Lyman Wilbur, respectively.

challenged American cultural notions concerning home and community. The Greenbelt towns, as much as or more than any other project, epitomized these cultural struggles.

Among the most pressing issues a severe housing shortage, brought about by urbanization, had been taking place throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The 1910 U.S. Census had reported 45.6 percent of the population as urban (defined as having 2,500 or more residents) and 54.4 percent as rural. In 1920 the proportion of urban residents had reached 51.2 percent, and by 1930 it stood at 56.1 percent. [15] (Interestingly, 1930-1932 actually saw a substantial reduction in urban population, with city-dwellers rebounding to 56.6 percent only by 1940. This was certainly due to the fact that job-seeking in the cities during the early years of the Depression no longer held the promise that it once had.)

Another factor in causing the shortage was that the expense of construction had been rising. Between 1895 and 1914, for example, residential construction costs had risen by fifty percent. This was largely due to the increased expense of building materials, particularly lumber.[16] Land prices had risen, as well, and although the cost of land in the cities rose as a result of scarcity, the cost in the centers and on the edges of the cities also rose due to speculative buying and selling practices. For example, twenty-nine lots on 170th Street in New York City had sold in 1903 for $68,000. In November of 1904 they sold again, this time for $82,000. They changed hands in February 1905 for $100,000, and again later in the same month for $117,000. Similarly, a 40-by-120-foot piece of property on 4th Avenue in Pittsburgh sold for $30,000 in 1884, and after being resold several times, was valued at $400,000 by 1908.[17] The scarcity of urban land drove prices ever higher, costs that were then reflected in rents, but the realities of urban employment left workers little choice but to stay in the cities and close to work.

Traditionally, workers' housing in and near the cities had come about primarily in one of two ways: either housing that had originally been built for the more well-off portion of the population was eventually discarded by that class and subdivided for use by those at lower

[15] Warren S. Thompson, "Movements of Population," *The American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 6 (May 1935): 718; US Census Bureau, *Selected Historical Decennial Census Population and Housing Counts*, Urban and Rural Populations, 1990, http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-4.pdf.
[16] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 11.
[17] Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning*, 25.

economic levels, or cheap houses, apartment buildings and tenements were constructed specifically for the working class. When older housing was converted for use by the lower classes, it was generally subdivided in whatever way would yield the most rent-producing units. Large single rooms might be divided into several smaller ones, even if this meant that some would have no windows. Wood noted in 1923: "We don't expect working people to eat broken fragments of other people's food or wear cast-off clothing. But we do, in America, accept with perfect philosophy a condition of affairs in which the rank and file of workers are born, live, and die in shabby, depressing, hand-me-down homes."[18] Most people agreed that conditions in such housing were almost universally substandard, and far too frequently utterly deplorable.

The construction of housing specifically for the lower classes, although generally held to be more desirable than the subdividing of existing homes, had been decried by housing reformers for decades for its inefficiency and ineffectiveness. One criticism leveled at traditional low-income residential building – both within the cities and on their peripheries – was that, in order to make construction cost-effective and profitable, the expense and, as a consequence, the quality of both workmanship and materials had to be kept to a minimum, resulting in an inadequate final product. Speculation in low-rent housing proved unattractive to many builders due to the fact that, even with cost-cutting measures in place, profits might be slim, and so there was rarely enough new construction in working-class neighborhoods, even of an inadequate nature. In the early decades of the twentieth century most cities began to impose building codes and zoning laws that, while ensuring basic levels of safety, light, and ventilation, made profitable home-building even less practicable, further discouraging new construction. Added to this was the fact that credit became much more difficult to obtain for those engaged in speculative building, making such ventures even less appealing to potential builders and investors.[19] Architect and town planner Clarence Stein wrote in 1932, "there is a fairy story about housing that all Americans like to believe. It tells us that any American of sound character and industrious habits can provide himself with 'the house of his heart's desire.'… Now the hard facts are quite different from the fairy story…. Private enterprise does

[18] Edith Elmer Wood, "Must Working People Live in Frayed-Out Houses?" *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (1923), 349.
[19] Keith, *Politics and the Housing Crisis*, 18.

supply homes for [a] very limited part of the population. Housing for the well-to-do is a good business, but housing for two-thirds of our citizens is nobody's business."[20]

These issues had led to a slowdown in the building trades that began in the 1920s and increased in magnitude in the 1930s. For example, 1925 building permit values for residential construction in 257 surveyed cities totaled over $3.8 billion; by 1929 the amount totaled just $2.58 billion; and in 1931 just under $1.05 billion.[21] The decline was particularly noticeable in the area of multi-family dwellings, which had been increasing through most of the 1920s, but reversed course at the decade's end. In Chicago, admittedly an extreme example, construction of multi-family dwellings accounted for up to eighty percent of residential building during the twenties.[22] The survey mentioned above, for example, showed that in 1928 just 35.2 percent of the residential construction had been single-family units.[23] Most cities during the decade saw a marked increase in units intended for more than two families (hence, presumably, with lower rents than even a two-family dwelling). This trend toward more and larger multi-family units began to dissipate by the end of the 1920s and fell off even more sharply during the Depression. From 1931 through 1933, for instance, total residential construction dropped by seventy-one percent, but the total construction of multi-family dwellings declined by an even more dramatic eighty-six percent.[24] Since an apartment in a multi-family unit was the only type of dwelling that many workers could afford, this situation fueled a particularly acute housing shortage for the working class.

Along with the urgent need for more housing within the cities was the fact that the working class throughout the 1920s had faced rising housing costs without the benefit of a commensurate rise in wages. In spite of the general conception of this as a decade of widespread prosperity, those at the upper end of the economic scale reaped the majority of the benefits.[25] Estimates show a growth of income of between twenty-nine and thirty-four percent

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[20] Clarence Stein, "Housing and Common Sense," 541.
[21] Niles Carpenter and Clarence Quinn Berger, "Social Adjustments in Cities," *The American Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 6 (May, 1935): 735.
[22] Gries and Ford, eds., *The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 5, *House Design Construction and Equipment* (Washington, DC, 1932), 26.
[23] Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, 193.
[24] Carpenter and Berger, "Social Adjustments in Cities," 735.
[25] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 20.

for the wealthiest five percent of the population during the 1920s, while industrial workers' incomes remained steady after 1923.[26] This meant that, even as housing costs soared, wages stagnated, making it increasingly difficult for much of the population to afford decent housing. At the end of the 1920s the United States contained 27.5 million families, of whom 12 million (or 43.6 percent) lived below the poverty line as defined by the federal government: $1,500 per year.[27] Washington's Brookings Institute, which calculated the minimum income necessary to provide the "basic necessities" to be higher, at $2,000 per year, found that sixty percent of American families failed to meet this minimum standard.[28] The post-World War II situation, in which a strong economy elevated a huge number of Americans to the middle class, had not yet arrived; in the first decades of the twentieth century an enormous portion of the population was "poor," a situation that only worsened with the coming of the Depression.

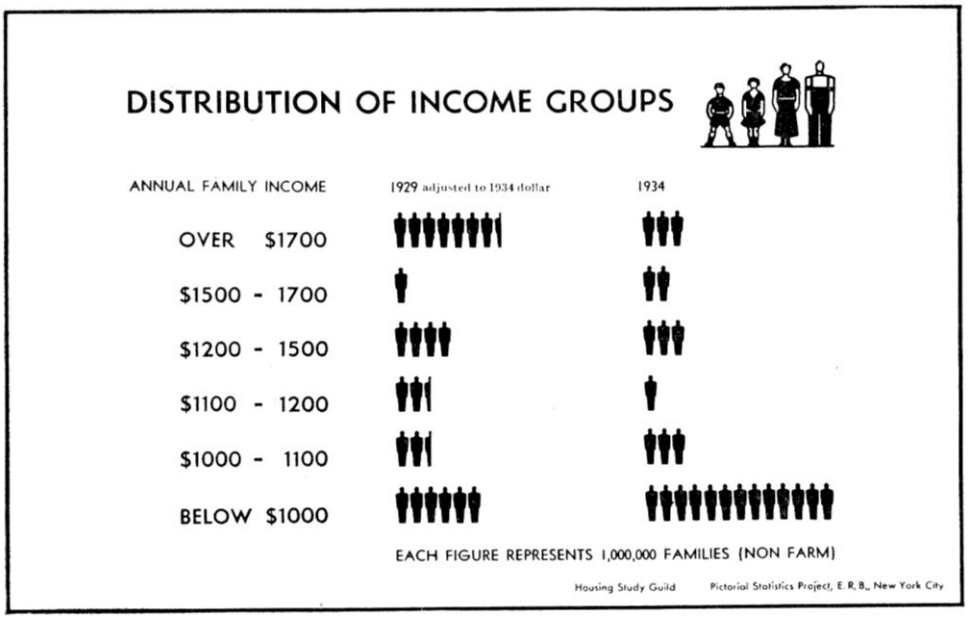

Fig. 2.1. Graph comparing 1929 and 1934 incomes. Reprinted from Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 27.[29]

[26] Ibid.

[27] David E. Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940: How Americans Lived through the 'Roaring Twenties' and the Great Depression* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 210-211. This figure leaves out the roughly 2.5 million single-person households, which were not counted as "families." The Brookings Institute estimated incomes in 1929: 7.6% of families at $500 or less per year; 13.8% at $500-1,000; 20.9% at $1,000-1,500; 17.1% at $1,500-2,000; 11% at $2,000-2,500; 7.2% at $2,500-3,000; 5.2% at 3,000-3,500; 3.6% at $3,500-$4,000; 2.6% at $4,000-4,500; 1.8% at $4,500-5,000; and 8.2% at $5,000 or more. Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 21.

[28] Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States*, 211.

[29] Full citations for images appear following the bibliography.

When working-class families could find a home in the city, it was unlikely to be the sort deemed a "proper" home by housing reformers. Single-family homes had historically been the norm for all but the poorest urban residents of the United States; multi-family units for those not in abject poverty were for the most part an introduction of the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is not uncommon for historians to point out the seeming obsession with the single-family home of the post-World War II period, but in fact the ideal of the single-family home was a return to earlier expectations, not something new. The increasing numbers of middle- and upper-class apartment dwellings in the nation's cities around the turn of the century marked a drastic change from the old order, and one that was largely seen as an unwelcome aberration brought about by the coming of modernity and urbanization. Many experts had viewed the rise in multi-family dwellings as an alarming trend, and were happy to see it slow in the late 1920s and early '30s. Particular fears centered on the detrimental effects on children not living in a single-family home with at least a bit of yard. The findings of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership declared in 1932 that "the child reared in a dwelling that typifies the individual family has advantages over one reared in a congregate dwelling," and that "beginning with the detached one-family house surrounded by ample grounds, the desirability of dwellings for children decreases as the dwellings are crowded more and more closely together."[30] They further concluded, "occupants of one-family houses, whether owned or rented, tend to have greater stability, a greater concern in the character of their neighborhood."[31] Despite such attitudes favoring individual homes, the cost of such a house was moving out of economic reach for an increasing portion of the population. Although in 1930 over three-quarters of Americans still lived in single-family rather than multi-family dwellings, in the city centers the proportion was just 63.3 percent.[32] Whether it was desirable or not, multi-family units were the only available option for increasing numbers of urban Americans. For many traditionalists, this seemed yet another example of the ways in which the coming of the modern age was interfering with long-held and much-cherished American ideals.

[30] Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 4, 163.
[31] Ibid., 171.
[32] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 4. And bear in mind that "single-family" did not necessarily mean detached.

Other aspects of urban working-class homes made them dismal places to live. By 1925 the cost of an entry-level new house in Chicago, for example, had risen to five and one-half times the 1885 price.[33] Most Chicago families could not afford to purchase a home; more than two-thirds of families were renters during the 1920s.[34] (This figure may be compared to the national figures for homeownership in 1930, when 51.2 percent of the population rented rather than owned their homes.)[35] Experts of the time calculated that twenty percent of a family's income was the maximum amount that could be spent on housing "without impairing health by undue economy on food and clothing."[36] Yet families in Chicago's lowest twenty-fifth percentile income bracket were spending on average thirty-six percent of their earnings on housing, though even giving up over one-third of their funds on rent certainly did not ensure a decent habitation.[37] A typical flat consisted of a living room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen arranged in a long row of dim, or even windowless, rooms. The only plumbing in the apartment was commonly a cold-water kitchen tap and a toilet tucked into a small space nearby.[38] These were strictly utilitarian dwellings – no comforts, no conveniences, no frills.

Yet even these Chicago flats did not represent the worst urban housing. In 1932 the editors of *Fortune* magazine enumerated some of the problems encountered in urban residential areas. They found, for example, in a survey of nearly 6,000 apartments in Cincinnati's "malodorous 'Basin' district," in which approximately one-fourth of the city's population resided, "that 70 per cent had outside toilets used by … up to nine families. There were eighty bathtubs in the whole area. Half the flats had two rooms only and were occupied by one to seventeen people. Dark and windowless rooms existed, and a third of the buildings

[33] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 22.
[34] Ibid., 24.
[35] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 4. Despite the suggestion that just 20% of income should be used for housing, the reality was that many families spent much more. A Cincinnati study of rents for white families showed that just 45% paid 20% of their income or less on rent; 28% paid between 20% and 30%; 11% paid between 30% and 40%; and 14% paid over 40% of their income on rent. Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 30.
[36] Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner*, 14.
[37] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 21, 25. Families in this lowest range earned, on average, $1,160 per year, or $97 per month. Although an expenditure of twenty percent of this income should have meant rents of just $19 per month, average rents were actually $35 per month.
[38] Ibid., 25.

(three and four stories in height or more) had only one egress."[39] They similarly found that in 1929, in Philadelphia's poor districts, ninety percent of the dwellings had outdoor toilets, and ninety-five percent were heated only by a stove.[40] They summed up their discouraging findings by noting, "and so the story runs, in one degree of filth or another, for most of the industrial cities of the continent."[41] That this was the case for *industrial* cities is important: industrialization had caused the shortages by bringing workers into urban centers, and the high demand had ensured that landlords could charge outrageous rents without making improvements, but industrialization had done little to enhance conditions within city tenements and slums. The modern age may have been a blessing for slumlords, but seemed to be a curse for workers.

Fig. 2.2. Tenement kitchen, Hamilton County, Ohio, 1935.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

[39] Editors of *Fortune*, *Housing America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), 11. One-fourth population statistic from "A Study of the Characteristics, Customs and Living Habits of Potential Tenants of the Resettlement Project in Cincinnati," Feb. 1936, Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.
[40] *Housing America*, 12.
[41] Ibid., 12.

Other experts also set about enumerating the problems of the nation's urban districts. Between 1934 and 1936 the Works Projects Administration conducted inventories of city housing based on exhaustive surveys of 203 of America's urban areas. The resultant data provided housing reformers with potent ammunition for their contention that something must be done to improve workers' residential living standards. Among the findings was the fact that fifteen percent of the dwellings surveyed lacked private, modern, indoor flush toilets. Twenty percent had neither a bathtub nor a shower. Forty percent were without central heating. Outside of New York City (about which the *Fortune* editors had said, "the tenement history of that city is one of the most shameful of human records"[42]), sixteen percent of homes were deemed to be either in need of major repairs or completely unfit for habitation.[43]

The staff of the Greenbelt program was well aware of the situation. The Final Report on Greenbelt, Maryland, offered evidence of the depth of the crisis in the form of a breakdown of the costs of renting in a modern Washington, DC, apartment building intended for white residents: one room and a bath, with no kitchen, rented for $25 to $30 per month; one room with both a bath and a kitchen cost $30 to $50 a month. Larger families, needing more space, had a particularly difficult time, as three rooms with a bath and kitchen required $60 to $90 per month. Yet one-fourth of federal employees earned under $1,500 annually. Using the guideline that just twenty percent of a family's income should be spent on housing, a family earning $1,500 per year should spend no more than $25 a month on rent – the cost of a single room and bath. Sixty-one percent of federal employees earned $2,000 or less annually, allowing for housing costs of just $33 per month, or one room, a bath, and kitchen (note that this is one *room*, not one bedroom).[44]

[42] Ibid., 9.
[43] Peyton Stapp, *Urban Housing: A Summary of Real Property Inventories Conducted as Work Projects, 1934-1936* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1938), 4-5.
[44] Greenbelt Final Report, "Washington Housing: A National Example."

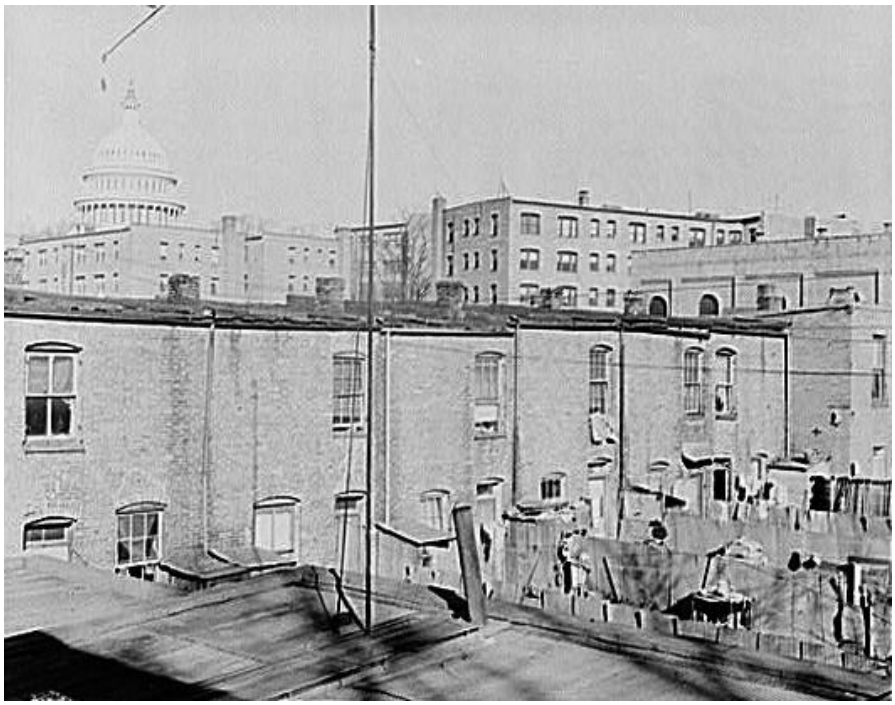

Fig. 2.3. Washington, DC, slum, with U.S. capitol in the background.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Others who lived within the nation's cities or just on the outer edges, but not in actual slums, had accommodations which at least appeared to be somewhat better; yet these, too, were deemed inadequate by housing experts. Those units constructed beyond the city limits were rarely subject to zoning laws, and thus were often poorly built, soon-to-crumble firetraps. The editors of *Fortune* stated in 1932 that although most of those in the middle class would find it difficult to believe, the "block after block of crowded and unattractive but respectable-looking and apparently serviceable brownstone houses, and three-decker wooden houses, and bow-windowed, half-shingled two-family houses, and red-brick, four-storied, front-step flats which, in one style of architecture or another, circle our larger cities and our more urban towns" in fact failed to meet "a minimum standard of decency."[45] Added comforts and amenities would have necessarily increased construction costs, and therefore rents, putting housing built to standards above the bare minimum out of the economic reach of much, if not most, of the working class.

[45] *Housing America*, 13-14.

Potentially confusing these issues for the modern reader is the fact that we must keep in mind the broad designation of "urban" then in use. Reflecting the fact that they had as yet failed to recognize the increasingly complex array of residential possibilities, the Census Bureau in the 1920s and 1930s did not distinguish between large urban areas, smaller towns, and suburbs; they simply categorized based on population – and the relatively small count of 2,500 residents was enough to classify a settlement as a "city." Although many of those in the working class and lower middle class in fact did live in the tenement districts of industrial cities, many who would also have been enumerated as urban-dwellers lived in cheaply built, relatively crowded, aesthetically uninspired housing on the cities' fringes, often within sight and smell of the factories in which they labored (see figures 2.4 and 2.5). These homes were not, as middle-class suburban residences often were, built for a specific buyer. Rather they were constructed at the least possible expense by speculative builders looking to make the highest possible profit. In terms of comfort, such houses were only a slight step above inner-city tenements, if even that. Today we might look at these fringe areas, with population densities lower than in the urban core, and call them suburbs, but the Census Bureau did not classify them as such. Whether in the packed tenements of the inner city or the poorly-built housing on a city's edge, the vast majority of the nonagricultural working class was, in the eyes of the government, "urban." This reflects the persistence of a system that classified Americans as either urban or rural; officially – and in the minds of much of the population as well – there was nothing in between.

For most of the working class, then, the situation was grim indeed. In industrial cities across the nation, and in the outlying areas around them in which workers lived, circumstances relegated much of the population to inadequate housing. Rising construction costs brought about by higher land prices, speculative buying and selling practices, and higher expense for materials combined with, and fed, a severe housing shortage. This in turn led to increases in rents, even while wages remained steady. The result was that the average family, even if not unemployed, even if not "poor," was trapped in substandard housing with little hope for anything better in the foreseeable future.

Fig. 2.4. Factory workers' homes, Camden, New Jersey, 1938.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 2.5. Workers' housing in Cincinnati, 1935. Note the outhouses and railroad tracks.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Rural conditions were certainly not guaranteed to be superior to urban, and in fact were frequently worse in many ways. A U.S. Department of Agriculture survey conducted in 1939 showed that of 595,855 farm households studied, 69.6 percent had no water supply in the house, 82.2 percent were without electricity, 88.8 percent had no bathtub, and 91.5 percent had no flush toilet. Wood declared that "by rights, we should call 80 percent of farm homes substandard."[46] *Our Economic Society and Its Problems*, a 1934 textbook co-authored by Rexford Tugwell, pointed out further troubles associated with rural life: "The poor family in the country is often shut off in a thinly settled region where roads are bad and neighbors few. Because conveyances are expensive, they stay at home. Constant contact with the same few people breeds monotony and sometimes hatred; consequently, few opportunities exist for sociability or for gatherings of friends and acquaintances. If neighbors are near, they carry the same burdens and are limited by the same disabilities."[47] Increased car and truck ownership among farmers eventually alleviated this isolation to some degree, but could not eradicate it entirely. Rural-dwellers, although they had the benefit of the fresh air and sunlight so rare for urbanites, suffered a lack of many of the modern conveniences of industrial American life.

Fig. 2.6. Missouri sharecropper's cabin, 1938. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

[46] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, 19.

[47] Howard C. Hill and Rexford Guy Tugwell, *Our Economic Society and Its Problems: A Study of American Levels of Living and How to Improve Them* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), 61. This is an interesting text. Intended for an adolescent to young adult aged audience, it espouses quite liberal views, and was later used by Tugwell's critics as evidence of his supposedly radical leanings.

The housing problem, then, was not confined to just urban slum-dwellers; it encompassed those living on the fringes of the cities, in what might today be considered industrial suburbs, and those who lived in the countryside as well. And it did not seem to be getting any better, in spite of years of reformers' calls for improvement. Housing advocate Bleecker Marquette of Cincinnati wrote in 1923, "not for decades has the housing problem been so acute as during the past two or three years. For almost the first time in recent history it has ceased to be a problem for the submerged tenth alone, and has hit squarely the people of moderate means. They are better able to understand today a thing that our underprivileged classes have long understood – what it means to lack an adequate supply of houses at reasonable costs."[48]

Many experts and casual observers saw the housing problem as directly related to the modern world. The lack of electricity and indoor plumbing had never been a problem for residents of rural areas when nobody had those conveniences; it was only relative to their better-equipped urban brethren that their deprivation was apparent. City dwellers' problems, too, could be linked to modernity – urbanization, overcrowding, industrial pollution. Industrialization had created many of the housing ills of the time, but offered no solutions, or at least none that had yet been successfully implemented. In 1932 the editors of *Fortune* summed up the situation this way: "the housing problem is an industrial problem…. Housing is the one field where private enterprise and individual initiative have notoriously failed. And it is by no means an overstatement to say that the housing situation is the disgrace of American industry."[49] Mass-production of housing would not become common until after the Second World War, lagging far behind other economic sectors in terms of coming into the modern age.

This was a true national crisis, and not simply because so many people lacked decent housing options. The residential building slowdown had a severe impact on the amount of housing available, but it also had a devastating effect on the economy overall. The high number of people normally employed in construction meant that the downturn was doubly serious: not only was residential construction falling behind the levels needed to supply sufficient housing

[48] Bleecker Marquette, "The Human Side of Housing: Are We Losing the Battle for Better Homes?" National Conference of Social Work, *Proceedings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), 344.
[49] *Housing America*, 21.

stock, but so many were thrown out of work because of the slowdown in building that eventually about thirty percent of the unemployed were those formerly working in the building trades.[50] Thus, in the sort of downward spiral that epitomized the Depression, and which was so difficult to break, the economic slowdown caused increased unemployment, which deepened the depression and resulted in an even more dramatic scaling back on new construction. This provided a powerful incentive for New Dealers to call for public works, including residential building projects, as one of the most effective ways to reverse the economic collapse.

As a result of the deep concerns that had arisen around the housing crisis, in 1934 the National Association of Housing Officials wrote that "the health of any community and its social and economic stability require the maintenance of a certain minimum standard of housing accommodation for all its families. The community cannot afford the continuing degeneration of the living standards, the discontent, and the expense thrown upon public services … which follow any failure to maintain such a standard in housing." They insisted that "experience shows that private enterprise, working on ordinary commercial lines, cannot afford to provide this minimum of house room and amenity for the lower income-groups in a community. Consequently the duty of securing the *standard* must be regarded as a public responsibility, and, as in the case of education and water supply, must be undertaken as a public service."[51] For those who felt that the costs of subsidized housing would be too high, Milton Lowenthal of the Housing Study Guild in 1935 had this response: "We find that $180 per year (relief rent per family) … is paid for slum housing, and every cent of it goes into maintaining slums, so that although we do not call it a subsidy, we have one government agency financing slums and others supposedly maintained to eliminate them."[52] Others, too, noted the financial burden of continued occupation of slums. The Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works concluded that "to those who live in the slums, the

[50] Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 59.
[51] National Association of Housing Officials, *A Housing Program for the United States* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1934), 5-6.
[52] Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 39.

effect of bad housing is too often broken lives. To those who do not live in the slums, their toll is increased taxes to pay for medical care of diseases bred by the slums; to pay for arrest and detention of criminals who have learned their tricks in the slums; to maintain fire departments to prevent the spread of fires that break out in slum shacks and tenements."[53] Thus the call for better housing for the working class and poor was not always strictly humanitarian; there were recognized consequences for the rest of society as well.

Not everyone agreed; some voiced skepticism over the claims that the housing situation amounted to a full-blown national crisis. Albert Farwell Bemis was a civil engineer whose father owned the Bemis Brothers Bag Company in Madison County, Tennessee. Albert, an advocate of modular house construction, used modular methods to construct the company town of Bemis, Tennessee, in the first decades of the twentieth century. From 1933 through 1936 he wrote a trilogy of books on the state of American housing, books that sent a rather mixed message concerning this issue. In the first volume he stated, "it is in the home, the very cradle and source of social life, that spiritual things are born, and spiritual things inspire and direct human evolution."[54] In the second volume he wrote that "housing is today perhaps the very crux of our whole economic, monetary, moral tangle."[55] And yet he also contended that perhaps more was being made of the perceived housing crisis than was warranted, writing:

> In these days, especially in the United States, false standards of respectability are in the ascendant. So many pens and tongues have asserted the inability of large portions of our population to possess a respectable home that the public is beginning to believe it. A third of our people – some say two-thirds – is said to live in squalor and indecency because of lack of income. Have our lives become so controlled by the almighty dollar that spiritual values have disappeared? Unselfishness, industry, and love will make a home decent and healthy, however humble and simple it may be. A national spirit founded on such a belief would make the nation sound and strong. Not all the bathtubs and

[53] Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Homes for Workers*, 15.
[54] Albert Farwell Bemis and John Burchard II, *The Evolving House*, vol. 1, *A History of the Home* (Cambridge, MA: The Technology Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1933), 462.
[55] Albert Farwell Bemis, *The Evolving House*, vol. 2, *The Economics of Shelter* (Cambridge, MA: The Technology Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1934), 493.

> radios in the world will make decent a home that is ruled by love of pleasure, selfishness, and animosity.[56]

Bemis rejected the idea that the housing shortage represented a true crisis, yet he did call for new thinking in the provision of housing, for rational design and modern construction methods. He rather contradictorily argued both that the housing situation was one of the most pressing problems facing the nation and, at the same time, that many people were overreacting to a situation that merely called for improved planning and methodology. He also staunchly opposed government aid in housing, stating that "where direct financial aid or concessions have been given in the past they have often foreshadowed the decline of civilizations, as was the case, for instance, with the doles provided by Athens and Imperial Rome."[57] In this view he was not alone.

Although experts may have disagreed about the means for viable solutions, and although there were those like Bemis who at times downplayed the urgency of the situation, most felt that this was indeed a crisis. Decent housing was viewed as an integral part of the character of the nation, something of much deeper importance than had previously been recognized. Home and community ties were seen as the cornerstones of American society and culture, and both seemed to be coming up short for a startling number of the nation's citizens. The machine age had undeniably increased crowding in urban centers, had certainly left rural residents behind; yet it had done almost nothing to make the housing situation better. The prevalence of substandard working-class housing, and the social ills believed to accompany it, seemingly offered incontrovertible evidence that modernity was causing the country to skid wildly in a new direction. For some, the solution seemed to be to strengthen old institutions. For others, however, the situation called for a reassessing of old ways, a rejection of traditional practices, and the firm intervention of the federal government. The Greenbelt towns are among the most tangible results of the merging of these two views, but they also built on a legacy of previous attempts to solve the problem of providing decent housing for workers.

[56] Ibid., 494.
[57] Ibid., 406.

Chapter 3. Making New Kinds of Communities

No nation can rise higher than the level of its homes.
- Edith Elmer Wood, 1919[58]

The use of man's accumulating knowledge must necessarily more and more be devoted to the development and betterment of human society as a whole. What that development may be and what such betterment may be, … that they will be directed through the medium of increasing cooperative action, nursed and cradled in the home (however complex and different from today the home of the future may become) seems fully to be established.
- Albert Farwell Bemis, 1933[59]

Many reformers and planners in the early twentieth century held out great hope that the social and political nature of the United States could be bettered by focusing attention on the creation of improved neighborhoods. The neighborhood is, after all, the place in which public and private spaces meet. It blends the lives of individual families into a community; it brings individual people together to form "*the* people." It is the meeting point of two warring impulses – the desire for personal welfare and the desire to belong to the larger society. Within their own homes, families might become too focused on their own needs and wants. At the state or national level, politics and public welfare tend to become mere abstractions. But in the neighborhood, in the local community, a population would – ideally – work together cooperatively and democratically to forge a better, more smoothly-running society. Yet the social ground was shifting under reformers' feet even as they sought answers to the question of how to create good communities, good neighborhoods, and good citizens. The decades around the turn of the twentieth century saw immense changes in American culture as urbanization, mass production, and the automobile all radically reshaped the way people lived, and although

[58] Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner*, 1.
[59] Bemis and Burchard, *The Evolving House*, vol. 1, 467-468.

modernity seemed not to offer much improvement in the residential environments of the working class, experts hoped that modern ideas, properly applied, could provide better homes and neighborhoods for workers.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the esoteric concept of neighborly communities clashed with the harsh realities of life among the working class. The strains of living in overcrowded cities were all too real, as was the isolation of the countryside. Housing experts agreed that there had to be better alternatives, that there must be a way to offer workers decent, comfortable housing at affordable prices. The Greenbelt designers were by no means the first (nor the last) to address this problem; they built upon a decades-long history of efforts to secure adequate worker housing. New academic and professional disciplines – sociology, social work, landscape architecture, city planning – had held out great promise for solving the riddle of how to bring proper housing to the workers, but each in turn proved not wholly up to the task. Private enterprise had shown little interest in the issue, and approached it primarily from the position of trying to make the provision of working-class housing profitable. Captains of industry had entered into the field by constructing company towns, which had all too often solved one problem only to create multiple new ones. Nonprofit and limited-dividend organizations had also tried by building planned low-income residential developments, but always the cold, hard realities of keeping costs down resulted in towns that fell far short of the goal of providing affordable, pleasant living environments for workers. The sole success stories came from Europe, where government subsidies had enabled the establishment of impressive working-class neighborhoods; yet Americans were hardly likely, at least in normal economic circumstances, to embrace such "socialized" housing. These previous attempts guided the Greenbelt planners, who looked to the failures and near-successes of the past to show them the way as they debated how best to accomplish what had until then seemed impossible, the building of aesthetically pleasing but low-cost towns for the physical and emotional betterment of working-class Americans.

The possibility that suburbs might provide the answer to these problems seems not to have occurred to many observers at the time. In addition to the fact that suburbs were overwhelmingly out of the financial reach of any but the upper middle class and the wealthy,

there were other concerns, with many fearing that, although cities were clearly not superior living environments, suburbs presented problems of their own. This ambivalence about suburbs is apparent in many of the era's writings on the topic. James Dahir, even as late as 1950, wrote, "that we shall have suburbs with us for some time if not indefinitely is our assumption here. But this is not to say that the suburb is the ideal to be aimed at. It is not and cannot be a complete community. And a complete community is what ought to be the goal."[60] It was this fear, that suburbs would be somehow incomplete and therefore unfulfilling for their residents, that in part kept many reformers and planners from wholeheartedly embracing the suburb as the best hope for the nation's residential future. The Greenbelt planners would address this concern in the Greenbelt program, making a conscious effort to create complete towns, and make in these towns something not quite like any other housing project of the New Deal.

The idea of "planned communities" was certainly not new in the 1930s. In the United States, examples of towns that had been carefully laid out date back to colonial Williamsburg and the District of Columbia. Yet such planned towns were too often laid out in rigidly-applied, unimaginative grids that did little to enrich the lives of the population within them. Through the nineteenth century, when cities were planned – and many were – the purpose was to allow for better land allocation, speculation, and expansion as the population surged westward through the Ohio and Mississippi valleys and beyond, and it was common practice to impose equally uninspired and uninspiring grids upon the landscape of each up-and-coming town. These cities were mixed-use conglomerations of residential space, early manufactories, warehouses, and anything else that seemed necessary for fledgling settlements. Those who could afford to live in the best sections of town did; everyone else made do as best they could with the accommodations available to them. Although there were occasional efforts at building better communities, often in connection with religious or other "utopian" groups, in most cities across the country there was little or no concerted effort to create decent, wholesome environments for the majority of residents.

[60] Dahir, *Communities for Better Living*, 107.

This relative inattention to the housing needs of the working class began to change in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth.[61] The shift was brought about by deep anxieties about the new industrial society taking shape. During the Progressive Era concerns about disease, crime, insanity, nervous disorders, and racial and national strength had grown to new heights. As the population surged into the cities seeking industrial employment, thoughtful observers began to assert that bad neighborhoods and inadequate housing were breeding a mentally and morally defective population, that criminality and contagion from demoralized and deteriorating slums posed a risk to the nation. In their earliest incarnations such concerns resulted in sanitary reform efforts, later bolstered by zoning laws that sought to eliminate overcrowding, hazardous construction practices, and fire dangers. These were all attempts to make urban environments less horrible; they did little or nothing to actually make them good.

There were some efforts during the nineteenth century at improving life within cities, if not necessarily improving cities overall. These included an increased interest in parks and green spaces. Beginning in the first half of the century with the work of the Transcendentalists, most notably Thoreau and Emerson, an increasing number of Americans began to look around them and see – in contrast to earlier Puritan notions of the natural world as a dark and dangerous place – the tranquility and moral uplift afforded by nature.[62] This paralleled the movement in art known as the Hudson River School, which embraced the beauty of America's abundant untamed spaces, and the wilderness-celebrating novels of James Fenimore Cooper.[63]

One outcome of these early efforts was a growing interest in providing public parks as refuges from the disorder and chaos of the city. The most celebrated of these was New York's Central Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Calvert Vaux beginning in 1858. These urban oases were intended to give city dwellers a place to escape the noise and confusion of their daily lives, to relax and refresh their minds in the presence of calming nature.

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[61] See for example Aronovici, *Housing and the Housing Problem*, 1-30; *Housing Problems in America,* "Proceedings of the First National Conference on Housing" (New York: National Housing Association, 1911); Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning*, 6-26; Wood, *The Housing of the Unskilled Wage Earner*, 29-90.

[62] Katherine Kia Tehranian, *Modernity, Space, and Power: The American City in Discourse and Practice* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995), 69.

[63] The Hudson River School was prominent from 1820 to the 1880s.

Some municipal officials preferred that these be places for their city's upper classes to find peace and refinement among carefully manicured greenery, but others recognized that the benefits of such respite might help alleviate some of the detrimental effects of urban squalor as well.

Thus we see in the nineteenth century the emergence of the "landscape architect," men such as Olmsted and Andrew Jackson Downing who sought to shape the land to human use and enjoyment. From the design of picturesque parks these men soon turned their attention to the creation of residential environments for the wealthy and upper middle class wishing to escape the increasing chaos of the cities. Olmsted, for example, eventually utilized many of the same elements that had won him so much praise for his park designs in the creation of such suburban communities as Riverside, Illinois. He placed gently curving streets and pathways among carefully oriented plantings to create pleasant vistas, to keep what lay around the next bend hidden until another exquisite view suddenly opened up before the person strolling through. He took great pains to ensure that the elements he placed in his designs fit the topography and enhanced its natural beauty. The planners of the Greenbelt towns would later employ these same techniques.

The modern city planning movement (as distinct from the earlier designing of picturesque parks and suburbs) is generally dated to 1893 and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which brought together some of the nation's most talented designers and architects to create the "white city," intended to be an aesthetic marvel. Here many of Olmsted's practices were combined with classical architecture in order to create the most cohesive and visually pleasing environment possible.[64] This helped to boost the notion that beautifully designed spaces could help bring about a more enlightened society (this despite the fact that, by all accounts, the wild and titillating midway was far more popular with fair-goers). As planner George B. Ford wrote in 1912, "the great World's Fair of 1893 aroused the people of this country to the wonderful possibilities of city beautification."[65] For many observers, the

[64] As we will see in Chapter 5, the use of classical forms was considered the height of architectural artistry throughout the nineteenth century.

[65] George B. Ford, "Digging Deeper into City Planning," *The American City* 6 (1912): 557.

shimmering white city demonstrated the aesthetic and moral uplift that rational planning could achieve.

Fig. 3.1. The "white city," 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago.
Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University.

Although the exposition's white city and the closely-linked "City Beautiful" movement are generally viewed as the start of modern American city planning, their overall impact was, like that of the suburbs designed by Olmsted and Downing, primarily on residential spaces for the wealthy and upper middle class. Although some of the elements introduced at this time eventually found their way into plans for low-income developments such as the Greenbelt communities, particularly the inclusion of ample green space and the use of curvilinear street layouts, these romantic town designs had little or no immediate influence on the planning of working-class communities.

There were, however, other movements around the turn of the twentieth century that did influence housing for the less well-off. The construction of company towns, for example, was briefly popular; these communities were seen as a way to keep workers close to their places of employment, and also hopefully to keep them out of trouble by having family and coworkers near by as a stabilizing influence. Pullman, Illinois, and Gary, Indiana, were two of

the best known such endeavors. Pullman, built by the Pullman's Palace (railway) Car Company for its workers, began construction in 1880. Although most company towns showed little effort at creating a pleasing environment for their inhabitants, the Pullman designers did at least give attention to the aesthetics of general layout of roads and buildings.[66] The plan called for the normal grid pattern of streets laid out at right angles to each other, but the planners carefully made their designs to best break up the potential block upon block of monotonously similar buildings by the use of open spaces and larger structures mixed with smaller. Despite these attempts to create a potentially pleasing environment for residents, workers eventually bristled at the intrusion by employers – who retained ownership of all of the dwellings – on their residential space and private lives. In 1893, the same year that Chicago fair-goers were treated to the dazzling spectacle of the white city, Pullman proved an utter failure when the management cut workers' wages but kept rents steady, inciting a devastating and incredibly divisive labor strike. Pullman's residents, who in theory should have been kept contented by their company-provided community, in the end resented the all-too-obvious paternalism and the transparent attempts at social control. For most of Pullman's residents, giving up autonomy in their homes and private lives was too high a price to pay for a decent place to live.

Fig. 3.2. Pullman, Illinois, workers' housing, circa 1890-1901.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.

[66] John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 421.

Planned in 1906, Gary, Indiana, was U.S. Steel's endeavor at company-town building, and was intended to avoid the most obvious mistakes of Pullman. Individual dwellings were to be privately owned; designs for most of the housing was carried out by independent builders and the company did not play landlord to its residents, making this less a true company town. Little effort was made by the planers at providing an artistically-conceived environment. Gary was, like so many other "planned" towns for workers, unattractive and uninviting.

The idea of the company town was eventually discredited, primarily because it was so closely associated with paternalism and corporate oppression, but many of the designers of these towns truly did hope not merely to create a docile workforce but to provide improved living environments for workers. Among those planners who wanted to make a positive contribution to workers' lives by building modern company towns in the early twentieth century was Earle Draper, later a consultant for the Greenbelt program. All of the Greenbelt designers, however, not just Draper, were well aware of the past mistakes made by company town creators. The Greenbelt towns directly inherited the legacy of the most widely-accepted and lasting notion from the company-town concept – the idea that "good homes make contented workers," along with the corollary to this theorem, that good homes would also make contented citizens.[67]

The Garden City idea

The company town was not the only way to address the need for workers' housing in the industrial age. At the end of the nineteenth century people concerned with the living conditions of the working class had begun to seek alternatives to overcrowded cities. One such reformer was Ebenezer Howard, widely known as the creator of the garden city idea, which caught the imagination of social reformers and city planners including, eventually, Rexford Tugwell and the designers of the Greenbelt towns. Howard was not an architect or city planner; he was a stenographer with a keen interest in organizing society in innovative ways in

[67] From the title of a 1919 work: *Good Homes Make Contented Workers* (Philadelphia: Industrial Housing Associates, 1919).

order to improve the lives of industrial workers. He was certainly not the only one to propose such new ideas. A number of others worked out similar designs around the time that Howard was formulating his plans, including Spanish engineer Arturo Soria y Mata, French architect Tony Garnier, and German town designer Theodor Fritsch, each of whom came up with plans that in various ways mirrored those of Howard, and each of whom was his contemporary.[68] There is, however, no indication that Howard specifically modeled his plans on any of these. His contribution to the field of housing is widely recognized as significant, and the garden city concept has been hailed as one of the most original of the age. Although Lewis Pink noted in 1928, "it would be unfair to call Ebenezer Howard the father of the garden city movement. The idea was too widespread to be fathered by any one man," the fact remains that, although Howard's ideas were not unique, his promotion of them brought attention to the garden city concept and this, perhaps more so than the specifics of his ideas, has entitled him to be so closely identified with this model.[69]

Howard was deeply interested in the problems of modern society and the ways in which new town concepts might help to alleviate them. In 1898 he published his one and only book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, later reissued under the more commonly known title *Garden Cities of To-Morrow.* It is the original title that demonstrates where Howard placed his emphasis – not on the cities themselves, but on the beneficial outcome he hoped they would initiate. Although today Howard is most remembered as the founder of the garden city design, it was in fact the social, political, and economic concepts – the ways in which the cities might transform life for workers and how the projects could be financed and carried out – that were his primary interests. Such matters as necessary expenditures, revenue-raising, and administration comprise the vast majority of his book, along with a description of the hoped-for social benefits to residents. For example, he envisioned the municipality itself as being "sole landlord," and therefore able to regulate the kinds of trade that could be carried out in the towns. In particular, he suggested the regulation (though not complete elimination) of the

[68] Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth* Century (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 88, 90-91.
[69] Lewis H. Pink, *The New Day in Housing* (New York: The John Day Company, 1928), 67.

liquor trade as a way to improve community life.[70] Although he is cited as the founder of the garden city idea, however, Howard is often misinterpreted. As Carol Christensen points out, "the garden city concept over the years has come to be identified with a theory of small towns, with suburban development, with intensive family and neighborhood life, leisure activity, felicitous site design and fixed densities." This, she notes, "is highly ironic, for nowhere in *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* did Howard discuss these presumed 'characteristics,' much less identify them with the garden city."[71]

What Howard meant by "garden cities" involved, most importantly, municipal ownership and administration and, less importantly, specific physical elements. He offered a potential layout for the towns, although he acknowledged that this was simply one possible model. His design consisted of a series of concentric circles. The innermost was to be a park, encompassed by residential spaces including houses and private gardens, surrounded by a "grand avenue," and then another encircling band of residential space. A key aspect of his design was the inclusion of industry at the outer edge, allowing residents to work close to home, avoiding the need to commute to and from the city to work each day. The entire community would be connected to a larger nearby urban center by a rail line, which would also traverse the circumference of the garden city, intersecting several main boulevards that would run through the center of the town. The outermost area would be designated for farmland so that local produce would be available to residents and local farmers would have a ready market for their goods. The outer ring would also supply a rural setting for such institutions as agricultural colleges and convalescent homes. The inclusion of this "green belt" around the perimeter of the towns was one aspect that he deemed vitally important. In addition to providing fresh and wholesome food for the towns' inhabitants – something sorely lacking in inner city neighborhoods – this swath of less developed land would also prevent urban sprawl, keeping the cities within manageable space and population limits (see figure 3.3). As these cities filled up, others would be constructed further out, encircling the larger central city as so

[70] Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (originally published as *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform,* London, 1898; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 102. Citations are to the MIT edition.
[71] Carol A. Christensen, *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986), 45-46.

many interconnected spokes on a wheel, each perhaps eventually spawning its own satellites in turn (though in fact the designation of "satellite town" was not adopted for this scheme until 1919).

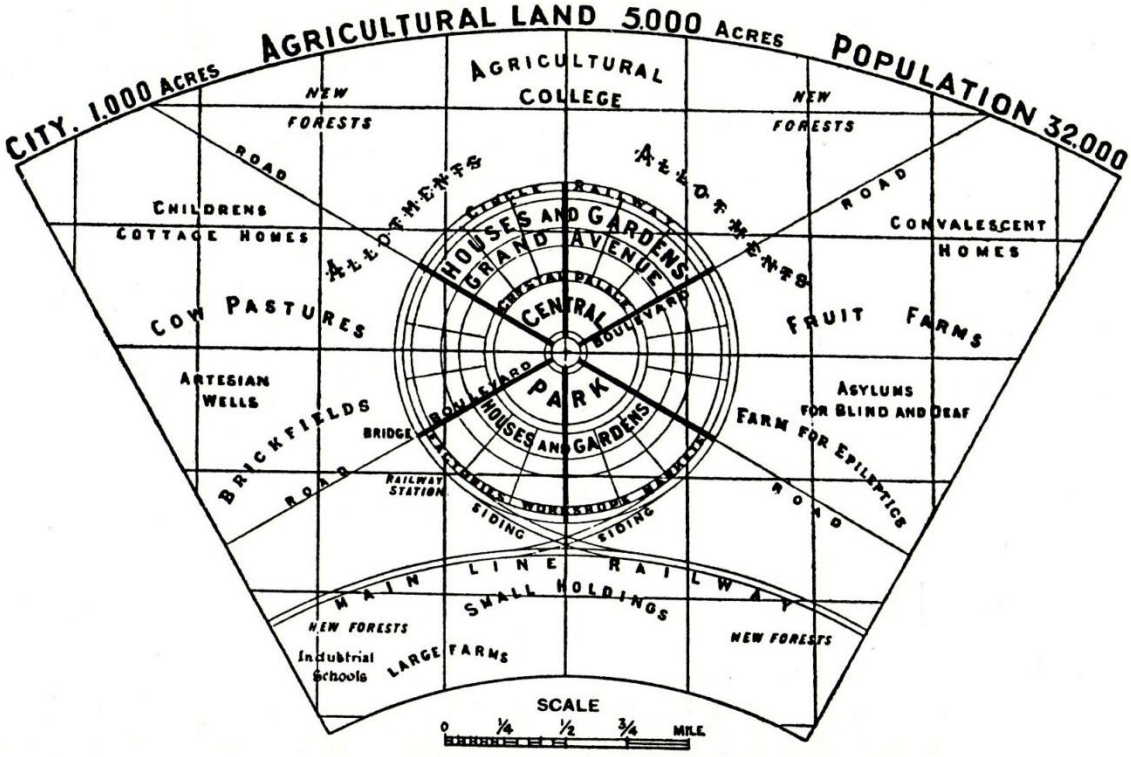

Fig. 3.3. Howard's suggested design for a Garden City in *Garden Cities of To-morrow*. Many such sections would be connected to form a large outer band surrounding a major urban center.

The name "garden city" has been applied and misapplied to countless communities in the years since Howard first introduced the concept. Frederic (F.J.) Osborn, whom Hall describes as Howard's "faithful lieutenant," and a respected town planner in his own right, noted in the preface to the 1945 reissue of *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* that the term had frequently been misused. A garden city, he said, was not the same as a "garden suburb" or "garden village," each of which implied "simply a well-planned open lay-out."[72] Howard's idea

[72] FJ Osborn, preface to *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, by Ebenezer Howard (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 26.

of a garden city was, Osborn insisted, not a suburb at all, since "the word Suburb is conveniently reserved for an outer part of a continuously built-up city, town, or urban area, implying that it is not separated therefrom by intervening country land."[73] Although Howard acknowledged that the actual design of the towns might differ from his concentric-circle plan, the original conception of the garden city was defined by several specific elements: the combination of parks, residential space, industry, transportation, and the surrounding greenbelt, all close to – but deliberately separated from – a larger urban center. Few of the "garden cities" that followed met all of these criteria; in England those that came closest were the towns of Letchworth, begun in 1903 by Howard devotees Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, and Welwyn, begun in 1919. His vision for many such towns encircling a larger urban center has never been fulfilled.

Howard saw garden cities as places that would combine the best of urban and rural living. This was an integral part of his concept; it was in giving urban industrial workers a better place to live that he believed his ideas held the promise of improving modern society. As Lewis Mumford wrote in 1945, "the Garden City, as Howard defined it, is not a suburb but the antithesis of a suburb: not a more rural retreat, but a more integrated foundation for an effective urban life."[74] Howard himself wrote of the garden city concept: "its object is, in short, to raise the standard of health and comfort of all true workers of whatever grade – the means by which these objects are to be achieved being a healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and country life," though the fact that this was not simply a physical plan for suburban resettlement is made clear by the remainder of this statement: "and this on land owned by the municipality," and, presumably, therefore under rational administrative control.[75] In this way, he hoped, "the old, crowded, chaotic slum towns of the past" would "be effectually checked, and the current of populations set in precisely the opposite direction – to the new towns, bright and fair, wholesome and beautiful."[76] As Christensen points out, "as a practical man, Howard

[73] Ibid., 26. This is not a definition with which all town and regional planners, or historians of planning, would agree.
[74] Lewis Mumford, preface to *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, by Ebenezer Howard Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 35.
[75] Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, 51.
[76] Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, 111.

was more enthralled with efficiency and economy than with beauty."[77] The garden city was intended as much more than simply a way to give a handful of industrial workers pretty environments. Howard wanted to launch a revolution in residential town building. Near the end of his book, after laying out how such a venture might be accomplished, he made clear the scope he had in mind: "We have already seen how *one* such town may be built; let us now see how the true path of reform, once discovered, will, if resolutely followed, lead society on to a far higher destiny than it has ever yet ventured to hope for, though such a future has often been foretold by daring spirits."[78] Yet it is the physical design of the cities – or, more accurately, a rather imprecise rendition of this design – for which Howard is best remembered.

Although never widely adopted, nor even having had a single fully authentic copy in the United States, the garden city idea was, in the 1920s and 1930s, still seen by many planners as the best hope for American housing for the future, a way of recapturing past social forms in spaces tailored for the industrial era. Lewis Mumford wrote in 1924: "The normative idea of the garden-city and the garden-village is the corrective for the flatulent and inorganic conception of city-development that we labor with, and under, today. So, far from being a strange importation from Europe, the garden-city is nothing more or less than a sophisticated recovery of a form that we once enjoyed on our Atlantic seaboard."[79] This basic garden city concept, adapted to fit the new machine age, in the early twentieth century laid the groundwork for what was known as the "new town" movement in the United States.

Like other towns inspired by the concept, the Greenbelts have a much more direct link to the garden city idea as it was later interpreted than as Howard initially envisioned it. The British Garden Cities and Town-planning Association offered this definition: "A garden city is a town designed for healthy living and industry; of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but not larger; surrounded by a rural belt; the whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community."[80] The Greenbelt town planners incorporated these aspects of the garden city idea, but also had to address new issues that Howard could not

[77] Christensen, *The American Garden City*, 46.
[78] Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, 128.
[79] Mumford, *Sticks and Stones,* 232.
[80] Pink, *New Day in Housing*, 67.

have imagined – how to accommodate this urban-rural concept to the rapidly changing realities of an age defined by mass-production, machine technology, and the automobile.

European housing in the inter-war years

The problems associated with providing decent housing for workers, then, had been recognized among experts and reformers – though less so among the general public – in both the United States and Europe by the late nineteenth century. If ordinary citizens were less aware of the problem, that situation changed in the first decades of the twentieth century; the First World War in particular made the housing crises in most industrial cities of the West all too plain. It also introduced a new idea, which gained widespread acceptance in Europe – that the state bore a responsibility for the welfare of its citizens even to the point of ensuring that adequate housing was available to them. This concept did not have the same level of support in the United States at this time, but by the Great Depression some Americans, including those involved in the new Deal, and particularly the Greenbelt program, began to wonder whether the Europeans perhaps had the right idea.

Throughout Europe and the United States during the war, civic leaders decried the abysmal conditions in urban areas, which became increasingly overcrowded as people flowed into the cities in search of military-production work. Most industrial cities saw housing shortages during the war years; for many governments, including that of the United Sates, this sparked the first attempts on the federal level to directly address housing issues. Although wartime efforts were for the most part small in scale, and not particularly effective at solving the problems of urban housing, the programs launched during this period demonstrated for some that the government could and should make the provision of housing part of its work. Following the war, the United States went back to a policy that saw home-building as the realm of private enterprise alone, but several European nations continued to pursue federal housing programs as a way to solve the ongoing problems of modern urban life. This activity was not

limited to those countries that had experienced physical devastation during the war and thus needed to rebuild, but also those for whom the housing shortages of the war had forced a recognition of the severity of the ongoing housing crisis. Some of these incorporated ideas that echoed portions of the garden city concept, including moving workers' housing out of crowded urban centers and into what Rexford Tugwell later called "rural-industrial" surroundings.

Government-sponsored public housing developments were constructed in the 1920s in Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria; in many cases government support took the form of loans and reduced taxes for builders of low-cost housing, but almost thirty percent of this housing was constructed by the governments themselves (though not always at the federal level) on municipally-owned land.[81] As a result, low-rent workers' housing had grown enormously from the end of the war to the start of the Depression. In Cologne, Germany, for example, between 1919 and 1932 only 1,000 homes had been built privately; the remainder of the 22,000 homes constructed in that period relied on government aid.[82] Overall, by the mid-1930s, postwar government-sponsored housing accounted for a substantial proportion of low-income residences in Europe: in Switzerland, twenty-two percent of the population lived in such housing by 1934; in Denmark, twenty percent; in Germany, eighteen percent; and in Holland and Austria, fifteen percent. For all of Europe taken together, by the early 1930s 15.7 percent of the population lived in housing that had depended at least in part on government support or subsidy.[83] The most important lesson learned from the European model by American housing reformers was the idea that housing could be seen, at least to some extent, as a governmental responsibility.

Among the most ambitious of the German building projects was that in the town of Frankfurt am Main, primarily designed by architect Ernst May, who was given extraordinary supervisory powers over planning and construction through the latter half of the 1920s. Aspects of the Garden City concept are evident in the resultant development because May had previously worked in England with Raymond Unwin, one of the leading proponents of garden cities, and perhaps the one English designer who came closest to realizing Howard's vision.

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[81] See Colin G. Pooley, ed., *Housing Strategies in Europe 1880-1930* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).
[82] *Housing America*, 135.
[83] Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 126-127.

May's work in Frankfurt is best known for his inclusion of innovative public housing. Incorporating a somewhat softened version of the new modernist style into his long rows of connected houses, he kept the exterior lines of the buildings clean and free of decoration, with flat roofs and low, horizontal profiles, and the careful inclusion of green spaces. Because he wished to ensure that his public housing could be cost-effective and affordable for the working classes – a goal which seems always to have been the elusive holy grail of public housing design – he utilized standardized plans that would allow for the use of as much modern building technology as possible. Evidence of his success lies in the fact that over ninety percent of Frankfurt's new residential construction between 1925 and 1933 was built due to May's efforts, some 15,000 dwellings.[84] At least in part because he had been given overwhelming support by the local administration and had therefore been able to realize his vision with little impedance, his project was deemed an outstanding success and he received nearly universal praise for his designs.

The cities of Stuttgart and Berlin also embarked on major public housing projects in this period, with Berlin seeing the construction of more than 14,000 dwellings from 1924 through 1933, largely using modernist design.[85] These projects excited and inspired American architects and planners. Catherine Bauer, who later served as a consultant for the Greenbelt program, toured Europe in 1930 and wrote extensively and enthusiastically about the housing projects she saw there. Other Greenbelt designers were also deeply impressed by the strides made in Europe toward the provision of workers' housing, and some also greatly admired the modern designs used in many of the European public housing projects.

Town and regional planning in the United States

While all of this activity was taking place in Western Europe, things were moving much more slowly in the United States in the realm of community design. The relatively new

[84] Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 102.
[85] Ibid., 103.

specialization of city planning, which had arisen in the 1890s with the merging of three previously separate fields – architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering – tried through the first decades of the twentieth century to make headway against entrenched city patterns.[86] During this period, as one historian has noted, "city planning existed less as a profession than as a mélange of experiments and untested ideas," and by the 1920s planners and would-be reformers had little to show for their efforts.[87] Throughout the nation's history cities for the most part had grown in an almost organic way, spreading and changing as population, business, and industry changed within them. There were exceptions, of course; some cities, such as Philadelphia and Washington, DC, had been carefully laid out, at least in part, from their beginning. Beyond the central city core, however, they tended to take on a life of their own. As city planner Henry Wright noted in 1931, "nineteenth century America had been too busy pioneering and exploiting its wealth of resources and the new industrialism to pay much attention to the beauty or even the convenience of its cities."[88] As a result, urban areas were commonly a confusion of streets, with no logic or order, where private property-holders could do almost whatever they wanted to with their own land. Subdividing, overcrowding, shoddy construction, and wild speculation in land prices had created chaos in most of the nation's largest urban areas, a situation that was little changed by the early decades of the twentieth century. City planner Frederick Ackerman wrote in 1920, "the point of view referred to as that of the public is a very complex affair. It … accepts without question the idea that our entire bundle of social, economic and political institutions must be retained and preserved simply because they have been created by us. That they should be preserved is more important than to discover whether or not they have been operating to defeat our purposes. This is the point of view which records itself in our complex, ugly, mechanistic environment."[89] The belief was growing among professionals in the early twentieth century

[86] Although city planning grew out of all three disciplines, most early planners had been trained initially in landscape architecture, and so the connection to that field was strongest.
[87] Harvey A. Kantor, "Benjamin C. Marsh and the Fight over Population Congestion," in *The American Planner: Biographies and Recollections*, Donald A. Krueckeberg, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J. : Center for Urban Policy Research., 1994), 113.
[88] Henry Wright, "The Architect, the Plan, and the City," *The Architectural Forum* 54 (Feb. 1931): 217.
[89] Frederick L. Ackerman, "Where Goes the City Planning Movement? IV: The Confusion of View-points," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 8 (Aug. 1920): 286.

that the previous chaos must be brought under control, that, as reformer Benjamin Clarke Marsh had noted in 1909, "a city without a plan is like a ship without a rudder."[90]

During the 1920s two groups expanded the field of city planning into yet another specialization – regional planning – and vied for the right to prescribe cures for the nation's urban ills. Regional planning took as its core belief the idea that simply addressing the problems of cities would never yield the changes that were necessary to the modern American landscape. Rather, cities must be studied, and remedies applied, within the context of their larger surrounding regions. Thus, it was not enough to consider what to do with the urban core, but also how to develop rational plans for the surrounding environment and its infrastructure, including transportation networks, water supply, and suburban and rural housing beyond the city limits.

One of these new regional planning groups operated with the funding and support of the Russell Sage Foundation, which had been founded in 1907 by Mrs. Russell Sage for "the improvement of social and living conditions in the United States."[91] This foundation had sponsored the establishment, in 1910, of the National Housing Association, and in 1911 had been the force behind the construction of Forest Hills Gardens, a planned community in Queens, New York. In the early 1920s an idea had coalesced among several planners that New York City was a prime subject for a large-scale regional planning study, and they secured support from the Sage Foundation to pursue this effort. The result, completed in 1929, was *The Regional Plan for New York and Its Environs* (hereafter simply "Regional Plan"), recognized as the most ambitious and influential such study of its time.

Another group that focused on regional planning in this era and conducted its work simultaneously with the Sage Foundation planners was the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), begun in 1923. This group would be intimately tied to the Greenbelt program; several of its members in fact later served on the Greenbelt planning teams, and RPAA ideas on town and regional planning were integral to the eventual designs of the Greenbelts. Despite its impressive-sounding name, the RPAA was a small and informal collection of planners, never more than twenty members strong. But the membership itself, though small, made this an

[90] Marsh, *An Introduction to City Planning*, 5.
[91] "Russell Sage Foundation History," http://www.russellsage.org/about/history/ (accessed April 1, 2009).

important organization. Key members of the group included urban-social critic Lewis Mumford, Appalachian Trail founder Benton MacKaye, and city planners Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and Catherine Bauer.[92] It was Stein, however, who, according to RPAA historian Carl Sussman, "sat indisputably at its center."[93]

Like the Sage Foundation's regional planning group, this one was deeply interested in regional planning, particularly for the New York area, but the RPAA formed a number of its ideas specifically as alternatives to the goals of the Regional Plan. Roy Lubove writes that "composed of a small number of architects, planners, and social critics in full rebellion against metropolitan centralization and suburban diffusion alike," this group "signified a sharp break with traditional housing and planning objectives in the United States."[94] The RPAA created its own regional plan for the New York area at the request of Governor Al Smith. When Smith asked Stein to head a commission on housing, Stein insisted that it focus on regional, and not just metropolitan, concerns. The result was *The Report of the New York State Commission of Housing and Regional Planning*, presented to Governor Smith in May of 1926, well ahead of the Sage Foundation's Regional Plan, though receiving much less publicity and attention than the later plan, and largely overlooked since. In part, the report stated that "the ever-increasing concentration of population in cities and towns and the continuous depopulation of the countryside have given rise to problems in both city and country in which the State as a whole has a vital interest."[95]

The RPAA view differed from the recommendations of the Regional Plan in significant ways, the most important being in contrast to the Plan's tacit assumption that New York City would continue to grow in much the way that it had in the past. Like regional plans created for other large cities, the Sage Foundation's proposal sought primarily to ensure that the urban center could continue to grow with the support of surrounding areas; they were not concerned

[92] Bauer and Stein would later serve as consultants for the Greenbelt towns program, and Wright would be a principal planner for the never-built Greenbelt town of Greenbrook, New Jersey. Other RPAA members would also work on the Greenbelts. See Chapter 5 for a further discussion of this linkage.
[93] Carl Sussman, ed. *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1976), 18.
[94] Roy Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920s: The Contribution of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), 1.
[95] Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 145.

with benefiting those outlying areas. This was, RPAA members insisted, metropolitan planning, not regional planning (or, as they often called their own views, "regionalism"), since in such plans the needs of the region as a whole were almost completely discounted. As Harvey A. Kantor writes, "by accepting the prospect of continued growth for the New York area, the [Sage Foundation's] Regional Plan identified itself as the helpmate of further urban congestion. The project in effect planned *for* growth rather than attempting to *direct* it in any way."[96] The RPAA, on the other hand, took a cue from European planners, who Sussman notes "responded with movements to reclaim local culture and to build provincial institutions [with] attempts to counteract the homogenizing effects of metropolitanism."[97] As a result the RPAA advocated ideas strongly tied to Howard's garden city concept, including the desire to build rationally planned, ostensibly autonomous communities within city boundaries or just on the periphery, as alternatives to the misguided – or unguided – provision of housing that had predominated in the past.

Lewis Mumford in particular advocated the need for more rational approaches to deal with what he termed "the fourth migration." According to Mumford, the first three major American migrations had been the movement westward, the movement to early industrial and company towns aided by the railroads, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the migration into major urban centers. The fourth migration, beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, was a movement back out of those centers. "Its basis," he wrote, "is the technological revolution that has taken place during the last thirty years – a revolution which has made the existing layout of cities and the existing distribution of population out of square with our new opportunities."[98] Stein, too, recognized that American cities had not kept pace with the technological changes taking place, writing about what he called "dinosaur cities." The problem with these urban centers, he argued, was that "in the great city there are not enough decent quarters to go around; and even the decent quarters are not good enough. That is the sum and substance of the housing breakdown."[99] There had to be better alternatives.

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[96] Harvey A. Kantor, "Charles Dyer Norton and the Origins of the Regional Plan of New York," in *The American Planner*, 178.
[97] Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 28.
[98] Lewis Mumford, "The Fourth Migration," in *Planning the Fourth Migration,* 61.
[99] Clarence Stein, "Dinosaur Cities," in *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 67.

The RPAA, then, was several things at once. It was a forum for forward-thinking planners and social critics to gather and discuss the problems of modern American cities, and to imagine possible solutions for those problems. It was an organization devoted to regional planning, but as defined by themselves, as opposed to the metropolitan planning of groups such as the Sage Foundation. As Mumford stated, "regional planning does not mean the planning of big cities beyond their present areas; it means the reinvigoration and rehabilitation of whole regions so that the products of culture and civilization, instead of being confined to a prosperous minority in the congested centers, shall be available to everyone at every point in a region where the physical basis for a cultivated life can be laid down."[100] The RPAA was also a group of innovators who recognized earlier than most the dangers of unchecked urban growth. Sussman contends that "the members of the RPAA entered the planning field as open-eyed social critics," intent on stopping urban sprawl years before most of the nation or even most planning professionals had even recognized the problem.[101] Yet in spite of having several of the most respected members of the planning community as members, they received little recognition, and even less respect, from the planning profession, and their ideas remained for the most part ignored and unimplemented.[102] Still, although the RPAA has been largely forgotten as a force in regional and town planning of the 1920s and '30s, its influence on the Greenbelt program cannot be overstated. These men and women, and their progressive ideas, defined the eventual shape and character of the Greenbelt towns.

Interest in regional planning was not confined solely to professionals in design fields. Among those who came to believe that planning held the key to solving the troubling problems faced in urban cores was Franklin Roosevelt. Planner Frederic A. Delano, well known in urban and regional planning circles, president of the American Civic Association and chairman of the Regional Plan of New York, was Roosevelt's uncle (Franklin's mother's brother), and had long sparked FDR's interest in the field. In July of 1931 RPAA members, along with others involved in regional planning, participated in a Round Table on Regionalism in Virginia. Franklin Roosevelt,

[100] Lewis Mumford, "Regions – To live In," in *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 92.
[101] Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 5.
[102] Ibid., 40.

then governor of New York, attended and spoke at the meeting at Clarence Stein's invitation.[103] The following year Roosevelt was given a copy of the completed Sage Foundation Regional Plan, prompting him to state, "now we are really getting somewhere…. I hope, of course, that all new projects will be studied in light of regional planning."[104] That same year he wrote an article entitled "Growing Up by Plan," in which he said, "I have been interested in not the mere planning of a single city but in the larger aspects of planning. It is the way of the future."[105] Both his interest in planning and his willingness to experiment were apparent when he continued:

> I am convinced that one of the greatest values of this total regional planning is the fact that it dares us to make experiments, for this country will remain progressive just so long as we are willing to make experiments, just so long as we are able to say: "Here is a suggestion that sounds good. We can't guarantee it, but let's try it out somewhere and see if it works."[106]

He also predicted that "perhaps the day is not far distant when planning will become a part of the national policy of this country."[107] In 1933 RPAA members wrote to the president and encouraged him to create a program that would "design new communities in connection with industrial decentralization with the object of building a usable environment."[108] Whether this had any influence over his eventual decision to pursue the Greenbelt towns program is impossible to say. Still, town and regional planning did in fact become public policy under his presidency, although the idea of federally-directed planning would never receive the widespread public – or governmental – acceptance that he had hoped for and as a result did not embody a cohesive movement.

There were, of course, alternatives to government-supported planning. During the 1920s numerous private developers and organizations attempted to provide better housing, some for the middle class, but some, too, for the working class. These were largely suburban in nature. Not everyone, after all, agreed with the notion that suburbs were to be avoided; in

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[103] Ibid., 38-39.
[104] Kantor, "Charles Dyer Norton and the Origins of the Regional Plan of New York," in *The American Planner*, 178.
[105] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Growing Up by Plan," *The Survey* 67 (Feb. 1932): 483.
[106] Ibid., 506.
[107] Ibid., 483.
[108] Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 38-39; no citation provided.

1925 sociologist Harlan Paul Douglass, for example, wrote that "a crowded world must be either suburban or savage."[109] He, along with many others, believed that while the days of the United States as a nation of farmers had passed, cities were most likely irredeemable. He stated: "By the very experience of revulsion by which they have taken themselves out of the central congestion of city life [suburbanites] are committed to finding or creating a solution of the city's problems as well as of their own."[110] This feeling was echoed by many of those who sought new residential forms in this period.

Some planners advocated for rebuilding cities rather than creating new suburbs; one of these was Clarence Perry. Perry's main interest was on the community as both a physical and social phenomenon, and his primary legacy is the promotion of the "neighborhood unit." Although F.J. Osborn, in the introduction to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, stated that this idea originated with Ebenezer Howard, and architectural historian Donald Leslie Johnson has claimed that architect William E. Drummond proposed the neighborhood unit around 1912 or 1913, the concept is most closely associated with Perry, especially in the United States.[111] Whether he was the originator of the idea or not, Perry was the man who most tirelessly promoted it.[112] In the Sage Foundation's multi-volume Regional Plan Perry explained the neighborhood unit idea. It would be a community limited in size to the area serviced by a single elementary school; major streets would serve as the neighborhood's boundaries so that children would not have to cross busy roads to get to school; there would be an internal street system which would facilitate circulation without adding the traffic, noise, and danger of main thoroughfares within; and it would include a local shopping district to serve the needs of residents.[113]

Perry saw this as a way to make urban neighborhoods more friendly, more cohesive, and safer. He stated that, in spite of the crowding that could presently be found in urban

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[109] Douglass, *The Suburban Trend*, 327.
[110] Ibid., 36.
[111] Osborn, introduction to *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, 18. Donald Leslie Johnson, "Origins of the Neighborhood Unit," *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (July 2002): 227-245.
[112] The situation is in fact reminiscent of that with Howard and the garden city idea. Although the idea may not in actuality have originated with him, Perry's promotion of the neighborhood unit, just as Howard's promotion of the garden city idea, has resulted in his being credited with the inception of a concept that in fact had many origins.
[113] Perry, "The Neighborhood Unit," 34-35.

centers, one could hardly call their environment a "neighborhood" in the sense of it being "neighborly." Like Mumford, Stein, and Wright, Perry recognized that the modern world had changed the ways that people interacted, and that these changes had been socially detrimental. In 1929 he wrote that city dwellers "reside in sections where widely different classes and races live side by side and yet never touch each other in informal neighborly relations. Their daytime is spent in remote offices and their marginal hours are passed either outside of the home district or in the isolation of their own family circles. Even if there are cliques or groupings within the section, these are separated from each other and the mass of the people by unbridged chasms."[114] The neighborhood unit idea was adopted by Stein and Wright for several of their collaborations in the 1920s, by the Greenbelt planners in the 1930s, and, in a somewhat weakened form, by developers of the new sprawling suburbs that proliferated after the Second World War.

Despite any differences they may have harbored about whether the best approach was to build in the suburbs or to fix existing cities, most of those who were aware of the housing problem agreed that past methods entailing speculative buying and strictly for-profit, small-scale building could not be relied on to solve the nation's housing problems. A number of housing experts believed that the application of modern industrial production techniques, expert planning, and support through private organizations and foundations – but not necessarily the involvement of the federal government – might bring about the needed improvements. The editors of *Fortune* magazine wrote in 1932: "Briefly and succinctly, the vice of the [building] industry is lack of organization. The lesson learned in the manufacturing industries and in that part of the building industry which specializes in skyscraper construction has not been learned in the industry as a whole."[115] They noted, for example, that a 1923 Commission on Waste overseen by Herbert Hoover had estimated the amount of waste in the building industry to be fifty-three percent.[116] Based on their findings, the authors were forced to conclude that "the only significance of the machine age to the building industry is more production and faster production – not cheaper production and more orderly production," and

[114] Ibid., 123.
[115] *Housing America*, 56-57.
[116] Ibid., 57.

that, in fact, "the building industry, second industry in size in the greatest industrial country of the industrial age, is itself not industrialized."[117] Numerous architects and planners – too numerous to discuss here – took on the challenge of solving the problems of waste, inefficiency, and high costs during the decade before the Depression.

These efforts at defining the role and discovering the possibilities of city planning touch on a number of key issues of the time. One resulted from the new urban modernity. How, in this rapidly changing society, could decent housing be provided for the poor and the working class? Was private enterprise – so poorly able to meet the need thus far – to be entrusted with the task? If not, then who? Would non-profit or limited-dividend corporations be the answer? Would it be municipal governments, or even the federal government? Who, exactly, bore this responsibility? And beyond the quandary of how to provide housing lay perhaps an even more pressing set of questions. How could housing, neighborhoods, and towns be made to be more congenial? The modern, urban, industrial society had seemingly ripped apart the social fabric, had made community sentiment and neighborliness a thing of the past. How could the forces of expert planning be harnessed to recreate a more unified, more stable populace? These issues drove many of the building efforts of the 1920s and '30s, and were particularly integral to the eventual shape of the Greenbelt towns program.

Radburn

The one American housing experiment of the 1920s most directly related to the Greenbelt towns was Radburn, New Jersey. An RPAA-sponsored project, Radburn, more than any other previous town-building effort, had a significant influence on the physical layout and character of the Greenbelts. Influenced by both the English garden city movement and Perry's neighborhood unit concept, Radburn took design elements from a variety of past sources and combined them into a new kind of community adapted for the modern age. It is widely

[117] Ibid., 60.

recognized as among the most important of the projects designed by Henry Wright and Clarence Stein.

Henry Wright had graduated with a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1901. His early career involved designing parks, and he was one of the planners of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. His work took him from St. Louis, where he also designed the County Club subdivision, to the east coast, where he served during World War I as Town-Planning Assistant for the creation of wartime housing for the U.S. Shipping Board.[118] In 1923 he moved to New York City and, with Stein, was a founder and key member of the RPAA. Wright was one of the town planners for the Greenbelt town of Greenbrook, New Jersey; since he was such a well-known and well-respected planner of his day, many who have studied the Greenbelts – particularly those in the design community – feel that the legal action that prevented the construction of Greenbrook and the fulfillment of Wright's vision was a particular misfortune. After his death in 1936 at the age of fifty-eight, Wright was called "the nation's No. 1 town- and site-planner."[119] Albert Mayer, fellow Greenbrook planning team member, wrote that Wright "had made a many-sided and profound contribution to the creative forces in architecture, community housing, and town planning," that "he was probably our most deeply American architect-town planner," and that "on the technical side he was in the front rank, and to some aspects of his mind it is probably not an overstatement to apply the word genius."[120] Lewis Mumford, too, paid tribute, stating, "Wright was perhaps the most fertile mind in that small group of architects, geographers and sociologists who have been preparing the way for a renascence in our urban culture."[121]

Although Wright was recognized as a talented architect and planner in his day, it is Clarence Stein who has earned the longer-lasting reputation as a visionary in the field of planning and design. Stein had grown up in the Progressive Era, absorbing the ideas of reformers, watching his nation become a modern industrial power, and finding disappointment in the fact that the combination of industrial innovation and reform spirit had failed to solve the

[118] Obituary of Henry Wright, *The Architectural Record* 80 (Aug. 1936): 83.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Albert Mayer, "Henry Wright: Creative Planner," *Survey Graphic* 25 (Sept. 1936): 530.
[121] Lewis Mumford, "Henry Wright," *The New Republic* 87 (July 29, 1936): 348.

problems of American society. He studied architecture briefly at Columbia University, and then spent a number of years at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, from which he graduated in 1911. While there, he traveled to see the latest European innovations in design and planning. After a 1908 visit to Bourneville, a British model town just outside the industrial city of Birmingham, he wrote to his brother, "I felt it to be the most inspiring thing I had seen in England. Utopian dreams can be made realities, if we only go about it in a practical, sane way."[122] The desire to design and execute such "utopian" communities became the driving force of his career. Stein also visited Letchworth, and met Ebenezer Howard. He was clearly impressed with the garden city idea, and went on to incorporate significant aspects of the concept into his own work in the coming years, causing him later to be called "the father of new towns in America."[123] During the war Stein served as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a post that eventually brought him into contact with Henry Wright, who would become his design partner.

Like many of their contemporaries following the war, both Stein and Wright were concerned about the inadequacies of residential construction at the time, with Stein lamenting that most of the houses built were "little more than decorated wooden boxes crowded and shouldered by an army of other wooden boxes," and that "construction has been slovenly – poor materials badly put together."[124] The problems inherent in the creation of working-class housing, as these two saw it, were many. Among the most pressing was the fact that residential construction was carried out as a speculative venture, with the result, as Stein saw it, that the builder "is not interested in supplying a need; he wants to make a profit. He would rather employ a clever salesman than a competent plumber, an honest carpenter, or an efficient architect."[125] Because of this Wright concluded that "it is highly improbable that we will make much real progress in housing improvement until the profit motive can be largely subordinated."[126] Further, Stein echoed the common refrain of the day that "housing is our

[122] Clarence Stein to Herbert Stein, August 13, 1908, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of the Planned Community*, ed. Kermit C. Parsons (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 53.
[123] Martin Filler, "Planning for a Better World: The Lasting Legacy of Clarence Stein," *Architectural Record* 170, no. 10 (Aug.1982): 122.
[124] Stein, "Housing and Common Sense," 541.
[125] Ibid., 542.
[126] Henry Wright, "Community Planning, 'Lo!' the Poor One-Family House," *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 14, no. 3 (Mar. 1925): 120.

one large industry that has been practically unaffected by the great decade of industrial standardization and mechanization."[127] Wright, in particular, made a name for himself studying the most efficient house sizes and the use of apartment buildings as measures to reduce costs and hopefully to make decent housing affordable for the working class.

For both men, virtually everything about the way housing had been provided in the past needed to be changed. They saw that the urban and industrial era had caused seismic changes in American society and culture, but the ways in which housing was provided had altered little. Their answer to this problem was the founding of the City Housing Corporation (CHC), with the close cooperation and support of fellow RPAA member Alexander M. Bing, partner in the Bing and Bing real estate development and management company. The CHC was a limited-dividend corporation (in other words, one specifically intended to make only a slight profit), and was to be the vehicle for funding the construction of model communities inspired by the English garden city concept.

Like Howard before him, Stein did not delude himself that industrialized nations could return to their rural past even if they had wanted to; rather he recognized that urbanization was bound to continue, and that something must be done to rectify the problems of industrial living conditions before the situation became any worse than it already was. He contended that "even if we patch the hole in the dam, the real damage will still exist, the flood will still beat against the wall. The flood is the rising tide of human beings seeking residences within their incomes. Each year … masses have been engulfed by it; they have been dragged down into the congested slums."[128] Believing, along with many of his fellow architects and planners, that "the city is the mold in which we are formed," he contended that better urban and suburban environments needed to be created. "The Garden City," he wrote, "is the solution."[129] This would be a community in which a man would live in fresh air, where the factory would not "throw its shadow constantly over his home."[130] It would be a place where employment would be close at hand, meaning that long, wasteful commutes would be

[127] Stein, "Housing and Common Sense," 542.
[128] Stein, address to members of the Advisory Council of the Commission of Housing and Regional Planning, December 27, 1923, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 120.
[129] Stein, essay written for class, May 13, 1917, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 86, 89.
[130] Ibid., 87.

unnecessary. It would be a place of peace and relaxation, a place for raising healthy children and building a vibrant society.

Sixteen miles from New York City Radburn, New Jersey, is the town plan for which Stein, Wright, the RPAA and the City Housing Corporation became most well known, and in which they adapted and modified both the garden city and neighborhood unit models. Although this was intended as a demonstration of the basic garden city idea, by 1928, when construction began, the world was very different from what it had been in 1898 when Howard had introduced his concept for towns that combined city and country living. By the time Stein and Wright drew up the plans for Radburn, the automobile had become a significant part of American life.[131] Howard's idea of satellite towns connected to urban centers by railroad was not completely outmoded, but the idea that workers had either to walk or rely on public transportation to get to work certainly was. Stein recognized this and wrote that Radburn would be "the first city that has been planned to meet the problems of the automobile age."[132] The Radburn idea, he wrote, would "answer the enigma 'How to live with the auto,' or, if you will, 'How to live in spite of it.'"[133] This consideration caused Stein to reconceptualize the garden city in terms of the motor age.

The most important and innovative aspects of what became known as the Radburn Idea or Radburn Plan were the separation of pedestrian and automobile, "houses turned around," and the superblock. Stein admitted that, just as had been true for Howard's garden city concept, "none of the elements of the plan was completely new"; his innovation was in bringing these ideas together.[134] The introduction of cars into American life had complicated town planning, adding an element of danger and unsightliness to the urban and suburban

[131] In 1900 there had been just 5,000 registered passenger cars in the United States; by 1927 there were 3,086,018. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1928* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), 373.
[132] Stein, "Notes on the New Town Planned for the City Housing Corporation," January 13, 1928, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 150.
[133] Clarence Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1951), 41.
[134] Ibid., 44.

landscape.[135] As a safety measure, Stein introduced the idea of pedestrian underpasses, which took foot traffic under major roadways and safely to the other side.

Fig. 3.4. Pedestrian underpass in Radburn, New Jersey, 1935.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

The concept of turning the houses around had come from Wright, who on a visit to Ireland had noted that many of the residences were turned so that the kitchens and utility areas of the homes faced the road and the living spaces faced the quiet of the backyard, unlike the traditional American pattern, which reversed this. Wright and Stein felt that, especially with the introduction of the added noise of the automobile, not to mention the required widening of unattractive streets for car traffic, the "turned-around" house made much more sense.

[135] In 1925, there had been 17,571 recorded traffic fatalities in the United States. United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1939*, Table 450, "Motor-vehicle Fatalities in Continental United States 1914-1937."

Fig. 3.5. Radburn homes, 1935. Living spaces faced this interior green space, while service areas of the homes faced the street behind the homes.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

They also adopted the use of the "superblock." There is disagreement over who first introduced this concept; although Raymond Unwin has been credited with being the first to design the "modern" superblock, the basic concept has its origins an ancient times.[136] Ernst May had used it in Frankfurt. It has clear connections, as well, to Perry's neighborhood unit concept. A superblock design takes a large area for residential space – in the case of Radburn as much as fifty acres – and puts the major traffic arteries around the outer perimeter.[137] Within the superblock, there will ideally be no through roads, and so less traffic and slower speeds. Dwellings are arranged primarily on truncated cul-de-sac streets (see figure 3.6). As in the garden city model, the Radburn plan also included ample green spaces, these being seen as absolutely necessary to create safe and pleasing neighborhoods. Wright had made numerous studies of the land use of traditional town plans and concluded that superblocks, which allowed for the elimination of rear alleys, were far more efficient. By utilizing this design, space requirements for roads were reduced, making for more economical land use, thus allowing the inclusion of parks and other green spaces without prohibitive expense. Although neither Stein

[136] Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 176.
[137] Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, 44.

nor Wright expected that the physical design of the town would alone determine the social character of the community, they did recognize that spatial design could have an enormous influence on the lives of residents.[138] Believing that they had hit upon a truly inspired innovation that promised to change the way towns would be built in the future, Stein later wrote that "if the superblock had not existed logic would have forced us to invent it."[139]

Fig. 3.6. Two Radburn superblocks. From "Problems of Planning Unbuilt Areas," *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs*, vol. 2, *Regional Survey*.

[138] Daniel Schaffer, "Lessons in Land Use: Radburn and the Regional Planning Association of America," in *Planned and Utopian Experiments: Four New Jersey Towns*, ed. Paul A. Stellhorn (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), 60-61.
[139] Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, 44.

In combining pedestrian underpasses, the turned-around house orientation, and the superblock, Radburn was a community where people could walk and children could play in safety, where car traffic close to the houses was kept to a minimum, and where views along the pathways and out one's living room windows appeared to be more rural than urban. The continuing influence of Frederick Law Olmsted and other nineteenth-century park designers is clear. Just like Howard's garden cities, Radburn was supposed to include industry on its periphery so that workers would not have to commute long distances to get to work. And, like Perry's ideas, this design would ideally foster a sense of true community.

Radburn was, however, the victim of poor timing. Before the town could be completed, the Depression hit. The City Housing Corporation, which had financed the project, struggled to stay afloat, but eventually failed. As a result, the town fell far short of its intended size, and never did include industry. Most workers there, as in any other suburb or small town, had to commute to the city for employment. Due to space limitations, it never had a greenbelt, and because of the importance Americans placed on private home ownership, Howard's idea of municipal ownership was never considered for Radburn. Still, despite these fairly significant deviations from Howard's vision, this community is considered by many to be, along with the later Greenbelt towns, the closest that the United States ever came to building true garden cities. Sussman concludes that "Radburn's final achievement was in the realm of social planning."[140]

Carol Christensen writes: "In American new towns, 'contemporary' would be expressed in an idealized conception of a preindustrial village where close-knit families were presumed to exist and democratic cooperation was considered spontaneous and natural. Such premises took Radburn's planners directly into the realm of social planning where 'The Radburn Idea' also figured prominently. Like many progressive reformers, they believed the primary group to be threatened by urban life and so emphasized the 'family neighborhood' in their plan."[141] The planners of the Greenbelt towns learned from all of these – garden cities, the neighborhood unit, the Radburn Idea, and the new towns movement – and in turn also attempted to create

[140] Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration*, 25.
[141] Christensen, *The American Garden City,* 61.

something both old and new, communities that would be suitable for the modern age but would also recreate the cohesive, cooperative villages of America's past.

The field of city planning was still relatively new by the onset of the Depression. In the mid-nineteenth century hopes had run high that by providing oases within cities – natural refuges from noise and dirt and congestion – the stresses associated with urban life would be alleviated. This dream had been followed at century's end by the creation of professionalized specialties in the areas of architecture, landscape architecture, and planning. By the early years of the 1930s there had been many attempts in the United States to utilize rational town planning in order to solve the worst problems posed by industrialization and urbanization. Initially, however, these planned suburban enclaves were strictly for the upper and middle classes. The working class, if they lived in planned communities, were almost certain to be relegated to company towns whose designs lacked aesthetic creativity and did little to bring enjoyment to their residents.

Some planners found inspiration in European public housing efforts following the First World War. In the United States, however, this idea ran counter to deeply ingrained notions about American individuality and independence, and so prior to the New Deal it was left to a handful of forward-thinking planners to attempt to bring about a reformation in the way housing was provided for the lower-middle and working classes. Organizations such as the RPAA and their limited-dividend City Housing Corporation sought to utilize rational planning and cost-effective construction techniques in order to create affordable, decent communities. Such attempts invariably failed to meet the lofty goals set by their originators.

Once the Depression began, housing experts and reformers who believed that environment was a key component in the formation of society and culture, and that improved housing would help ensure a better population and a stronger nation, leapt at the chance opened by the economic crisis to try federally-produced experimental housing as a cure for the nation's ills. There were disagreements over method, and some felt strongly that a return to a simpler, agrarian past, even if combined with modern industry, would provide the best hope. Others differed, looking to a new future of home building inspired by the industrial suburbs of

Europe. Chief among these visionaries was Rexford Tugwell, an expert in economics and agriculture, a man enthusiastic about the possibilities afforded by a rational housing program implemented by the federal government. And, at precisely this opportune moment in time, Tugwell just happened to be Franklin Roosevelt's "idea man."[142]

[142] This was a term used to refer to Tugwell at the time, as in the derisive article by Alva Johnston, "Tugwell, The President's Idea Man," *The Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 1, 1936.

Chapter 4. Rexford Guy Tugwell and the Resettlement Administration

> These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power, … that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.
>
> - Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932[1]

> The jig is up. The cat is out of the bag. There is no invisible hand. There never was. If the depression has not taught us that, we are incapable of education. Time was when the anarchy of the competitive struggle was not too costly. Today it is tragically wasteful. It leads to disaster. We must now supply a real and visible guiding hand to do the task which that mythical, nonexistent invisible agency was supposed to perform, but never did.
>
> - Rexford Tugwell, 1933[2]

It is difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the Greenbelt towns in any depth without considering the influence of Rexford Tugwell. His name became literally synonymous with the program, as the press – rarely favorable toward him or any of his pet projects – derisively referred to the communities as "Tugwelltowns," some continuing to do so even after the towns' actual names had been announced.[3] For Tugwell, there was no question of whether or not to embrace the modern age; it was here and it had to be accepted. In fact, as an unsentimental man not prone to a nostalgic fondness for previous eras, he firmly embraced most aspects of modernity. But he also was well aware of the cultural lag between the new

[1] Franklin Delano Roosevelt (radio address, Albany, New York, April 7, 1932).
[2] Rexford Tugwell, "Design for Government," *Political Science Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Sept. 1933): 330. The same excerpt also appears in Tugwell, "Government in a Changing World," *Review of Reviews and World's Work* (May 16, 1933): 56 and Tugwell, *The Battle for Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 14.
[3] For example: "Traffic Safety in Tugwelltown Is Assured by Highways System, *Washington Post*, October 21, 1935; "Tugwelltown for New Jersey Meets with Local Resistance," *Baltimore Sun*, November 19, 1935; "Bound Brook's 'Tugwelltown' Will Be Taxable, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 4, 1936; "Million Allotted to Tugwelltown," *Washington Star*, October 11, 1936. One headline went even further, calling Greenbelt, Maryland, "Tugwell's Folly": *Washington Post*, October 13, 1935. The name "Greenbelt" was announced on January 28, 1936.

realities of the machine age and the institutions that were failing to keep pace with the rapid changes it brought about. As he saw it, the past was best left behind; the future required new visions and new ideas. Because of his desire to prepare the nation for the modern world, because of his commitment to innovative concepts, and because of his influence over Franklin Roosevelt in the early 1930s, he had a tremendous opportunity to bring about the implementation of fresh attempts to provide decent and affordable housing for the working class, and so to bring about radical changes in the nation's culture and society. It was primarily because of Tugwell's input that the Greenbelt program went well beyond the scope of any of the other New Deal housing projects, incorporating a strong element of social engineering in the hopes of creating new kinds of towns that would "remake America."[4]

Although he was deeply involved in agricultural policy, was a close advisor to President Roosevelt, and would eventually serve as governor of Puerto Rico, Tugwell was most closely identified during his career and beyond with the Resettlement Administration, having been the primary force in its creation and serving as its first director. It was through this agency that his dreams of demonstrating the potential for a remade America found expression. The RA allowed him to pursue his interest in the plight of the nation's farmers, but also gave him what was likely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tackle head-on the problem of the nation's substandard housing through the establishment of suburban "greenbelt" communities. The housing issue was one about which he had spoken and written little up to that point, yet he had obviously been interested in it and had formulated ideas of how best to tackle it, largely influenced by European efforts. In 1918 he had traveled overseas, becoming the business manager of the American University of Paris. He remained in Europe only briefly, but he was there long enough to have seen poverty, disruption, and devastation caused by the war, and certainly would have followed news of European rebuilding efforts following the war's

[4] Essentially every other of the roughly one hundred New Deal housing and community-building programs aimed at solving specific problems. Aside from the obvious need to create employment, they were intended, for instance, to provide homes for those displaced by the clearing of inner-city slums (the Public Works Administration built many such urban public housing projects), or to provide homes for a specific locale and population (such as Norris, Tennessee, constructed as part of the Tennessee Valley Authority program to house TVA workers), or to resettle those displaced from unproductive farmland (such as the Subsistence Homesteads).

end.[5] Once he began addressing the need for improved housing in his own country he showed himself to be well versed in the problems related to housing and previous efforts to solve them.

Franklin Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration as part of the New Deal on April 30, 1935, and the agency came into being bearing both great burdens and great possibilities.[6] Building on previous programs, the RA was intended, above all, to address the enormous, and growing, problem of farmers trying to support their families on submarginal land – a virtual guarantee of continued poverty – as well as the challenge of ending unwise land-use methods.[7] The agency had multiple objectives: land reform (the proposed purchase and altered use of ten million acres of unproductive land); resettlement of farm populations displaced from marginal or unproductive land to new individual farms or to newly-constructed model communities; rural rehabilitation (providing loans and grants to farmers and helping to set up cooperative farming enterprises in which the cost of equipment was spread among many operators); and suburban resettlement for families of "modest income."[8] Although it had largely grown out of Tugwell's desire to see rational agricultural policies put into place, the agency included many divergent, often unwieldy programs, and its purpose was frequently revised.[9] From the start the RA was met with skepticism and opposition from members of the press and the public. Chief among the charges leveled against it were that it had been created by executive order, rather than by going through congressional channels,

[5] Whether due to the strains of being so close to the war and seeing its effects or to other causes, Tugwell returned to the family farm the following year, suffering from chronic asthma. Bernard Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 6.

[6] The agency was formed when the president, citing the authority given to him under the Emergency Relief Act of 1935, signed Executive Order 7027, which established the RA and named Tugwell as its head (Tugwell also stayed on at his post as Undersecretary of Agriculture).

[7] Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 104-105. In 1930 there were over 100 million acres of "unsuitable" land in cultivation. Over 650,000 farm families lived on these lands "in a condition of permanent poverty." The coming of the Depression had pushed another one million farm families into poverty.

[8] Ibid., 105. It was expected that some 20,000 farm families would be displaced as a result of resettlement.

[9] Ibid., 103-104.

and that many of its stated goals seemed to go against traditional notions of the independent, autonomous farmer as the backbone of the American character.[10]

Having inherited a patchwork of programs begun under other agencies and for which its director had little enthusiasm, the RA was a potentially unpopular agency and a possible bureaucratic and public relations nightmare. As Sidney Baldwin notes, "in retrospect, the creation of the Resettlement administration demonstrated that there is virtue in not knowing that certain things are impossible."[11] Tugwell, however, felt that he was up to the challenge. The heads of other agencies recognized that the RA's activities were likely to strike many Americans as being counter to the national spirit of individualism and independence, and so kept their distance. As historian Robert Leighninger, Jr., notes, "the one person who was fully committed and who was willing to play with political dynamite was Rexford G. Tugwell."[12] Tugwell now had an agency of his own, a place where he could at last put federal policy behind some of his most deeply-held beliefs, and the Greenbelt towns program would be his proudest effort, intended as a shining example of the way to hasten social evolution.

As they were to be neither quite in the city nor quite in the countryside, Tugwell believed that such towns would serve to alleviate the undesirable effects of both inner-city overcrowding and rural isolation. He hoped to create what he called "rural-industrial" communities (Tugwell himself rarely referred to the Greenbelt towns as "suburbs"), and in a speech that he gave to an audience in Cincinnati in February of 1936 he specifically mentioned Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement as inspirations for the Greenbelt idea.[13] In his own interpretation, such communities would offer the best of both urban and rural environments: modern conveniences, ready access to transportation networks, nearby opportunities for shopping and entertainment, but also healthful fresh air and ample green space. They would combine

[10] The issue of the constitutionality of the agency, and whether it had been lawfully created, would eventually be the foundation for the court decision that halted the construction of Greenbrook, New Jersey, and threatened the continuing projects at the three other Greenbelt towns.
[11] Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 93.
[12] Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 150.
[13] Rexford Tugwell, address to the Regional Planning Association of Hamilton County, Ohio, February 5, 1936. Tugwell Papers, FDR Presidential Library.

what was most beneficial of the rural lifestyle of the past with the improvements brought about by the machine age.

Tugwell understood that, while the difficulties facing both city and country populations may have differed greatly, they shared a common bond. For him, each location – urban and rural – had its entrenched pockets of poverty, each had its own unique problems, and each posed almost insurmountable obstacles to self-improvement for those at the lowest economic levels. In his writings, he was able to speak just as passionately on behalf of those who suffered from the crowded destitution of the slums as for those who faced the isolated destitution of the countryside. At times it appears that his message lacked a clear focus, or possibly that he lacked a clear conviction. In reading the literature created for the Greenbelt towns under Tugwell's guidance, for example, there seem to be mixed messages in the stated aims of the program. Some of the writings speak of the need to resettle urban slum-dwellers; others address the plight of farmers trying to wrest a living from marginal land. Yet this is not simply a matter of tailoring the message to the intended audience in order to most forcefully sell the idea (though that, of course, may have been a motive as well). It was, rather, a reflection of Tugwell's own ambivalence about country and city existence, his belief that neither held the key to contentment so long as the inhabitants remained impoverished and locked in old social and economic patterns. He could just as readily acknowledge that "one of the best ways to understand rural poverty is to imagine what it means to do without most of the things that make life worth living" as that "the most serious evil in urban poverty is not the misery suffered at any one time, but the difficulty of rising above it."[14] He noted that "lack of proper food, clothing, and shelter during childhood results in a weakened constitution and renders the individual unable to compete on equal footing with those who are more fortunate."[15] Tugwell believed that both the urban and rural poor were in desperate need of help, and that such help should properly come from their own federal government. The issue for Tugwell was not the living environment of the city worker or the agricultural worker, but of *all* workers. Thus, the Greenbelt towns were neither entirely urban nor rural in their mission, for the problems of the nation's poor were neither entirely urban nor rural in character.

[14] Hill and Tugwell, *Our Economic Society and Its Problems*, 61, 91.
[15] Ibid., 91.

Many of the problems of modern society, as Tugwell saw it, lay with the inability or unwillingness of social and economic institutions to adapt to modern realities. Unrestrained capitalism, for example, had perhaps been a logical and even necessary system for the nation as it was rapidly expanding, when advancement was measured by how many resources could be extracted and exploited at the fastest pace. In the twentieth century, however, the economy was no longer an extractive free-for-all. Industrialization had opened up new possibilities for equality, but it had also created a system far too complex to allow for such an every-man-for-himself approach. The seemingly never-ending cycle of economic boom and bust offered proof that some sort of rational regulation was needed.[16]

When it came to economic and social reform, Rexford Tugwell was an impatient man. Perhaps he sensed in the early years of the New Deal that the American mood, suddenly receptive to the idea that relatively drastic action might be needed to stop the depression, would not last long. Although he had been used to the rather relaxed pace of life of an economics professor at Columbia University, once he was brought into Roosevelt's administration he was eager to make changes, to implement reforms as quickly as possible. Having received approval to pursue his vision of building new kinds of communities for the American people, he felt driven to set a frenetic pace for the program's implementation. Unfortunately for his goal of rapid completion of the towns, however, this was at its core a work relief project. The primary objective, as far as the president and the Congress were concerned, was to provide employment for as many men as possible for as long as possible. This frustrated Tugwell's desire to see construction progress quickly and efficiently. At one point in March of 1935, the first month of the project, he became rather testy with the president, writing in his diary:

> He [FDR] objected strenuously to my implied aspersion on his attempts to put men to work. He said he thought we ought to do a lot of this public work by hand methods…. I told him that that reminded me of a story I had heard of two unemployed men who were watching a steam shovel. One said to the other, "If they did not have those damn machines, we would have a job." The other said, "Yes, and if they did it with spoons a lot more people would have jobs." The

[16] Michael V. Namorato, *Rexford Tugwell: A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 47-49.

> President said I was just trying to be clever and reduce the thing to an absurdity, but I had evidently made my point, because he was very much disturbed by it.[17]

The machine age was once again both savior and demon, allowing for the benefits of technological innovation while also putting men out of work. Tugwell wanted to create jobs, too, but for him there was much more at stake in this program than temporary employment and the disbursement of paychecks. An educated man, disappointed with what he saw as the United States' wasted potential, he was well aware of the rhetoric and experimentation that had been taking place in the field of housing, and now saw a chance to demonstrate just how large an impact planning and expertise could have on the quality of daily life for ordinary citizens.

The Great Depression afforded men like Tugwell an opportunity. Ideas that surely would have seemed much too radical under ordinary circumstances stood a chance of being accepted in this time of crisis. To Rexford Tugwell, the Resettlement Administration and its Greenbelt towns represented perhaps the best hope for bringing about needed changes in the nation's society and culture, in its very identity, by creating model environments to demonstrate the possibilities of a cooperative future brought about by rational planning. His impatience was aimed at the need to strike while the experimental mood of the public lasted, while there was still a chance to reorder some of the basic principles of American life. He seemed to understand – and quite correctly, as it turned out – that the politicians and the public would be receptive to radical change only as long as the situation seemed dire. Even the tiniest sign of economic recovery threatened the continued support of programs such as this. A door had been opened, and Tugwell knew that he must move quickly.

The making of a social reformer

Roosevelt had first become aware of Tugwell as a possible choice as adviser on issues concerning the economy and agriculture during the 1932 presidential campaign.

[17] Tugwell diary, March 14, 1935, Tugwell Papers, FDR Presidential Library.

Samuel Rosenman, one of FDR's speech writers, recommended that FDR look to the universities for fresh perspectives since the financial experts used in the past had proven so ill-equipped to predict or solve the Depression.[18] Roosevelt agreed that in order to successfully implement the New Deal he would require the input of such experts. He showed himself to be extremely open to new ideas and liked to surround himself with intellectuals likely to produce original proposals.[19] William Leuchtenburg contends that Roosevelt "was not well versed in economic theory, but had he accepted the greater part of what went for economic wisdom in 1932, he would have been badly misguided."[20] FDR actually had more understanding of the subject than he was often given credit for. Still, Roosevelt knew that he was no expert in economics, and that he would need help and guidance from specialists to weather the challenges posed by the Depression.

He might just as easily have ended up with a different economics professor from any of the nation's top universities. But when he turned to one of his most trusted advisors, Columbia political science professor Raymond Moley, for thoughts as to who might be the best choice, Moley suggested fellow Columbia professor Rex Tugwell, known for his forward-thinking – many would say unorthodox – ideas on agriculture, economics, and social issues. Tugwell was a prolific writer, having already completed two books – *The Economic Basis of Public Interest* in 1922 and *Industry's Coming of Age* in 1927 – and nearly fifty articles, which included titles such as "Human Nature in Economic Theory" and "Economics and Ethics."[21] He was an expert on agricultural economics, and his emphasis on the practical benefits of economic planning made him a logical choice to advise Roosevelt on such issues during the presidential campaign. When the two first met, the future president was impressed with Tugwell's intellect and his eagerness to bring about needed change, and so brought him on board as a member

[18] Joseph P. Lash, *Dealers and Dreamers: A New Look at the New Deal* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 1.
[19] Ibid.
[20] William E. Leuchtenburg, *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 27-28.
[21] He eventually authored fifteen books, as well as serving as co-author or editor of six more, and wrote over 150 articles. A complete list of Tugwell's writings can be found in Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*, 413-424.

of his so-called "Brain Trust," the group that was integral in helping Roosevelt win the presidency. The two men became friends, remaining so until FDR's death, in spite of the fact that the president was well known for his reluctance to allow any but a select few into his personal inner circle. Clearly he saw something in Tugwell that he admired; Tugwell was, after all, relatively young (forty-four years old), handsome, dapper, intelligent, well-spoken, and honest (critics said brutally so, and even his admirers acknowledged a frequent lack of diplomacy).[22] He was also enormously and vocally enthusiastic about the potential that America held.

After the election the Brain Trust disintegrated, but Tugwell stayed on, for a short time serving as perhaps FDR's closest advisor, and the president eagerly sought his input on issues beyond just economics and agriculture. Tugwell, however, rapidly became a liability. As the public learned more about him – much of it true, but much of it fabricated by the media to create sensational news stories – his presence at the president's side began to alarm many people. His rise to public prominence, even notoriety, was meteoric, but brief. Among his most lasting legacies are the Greenbelt towns, but in the end they did not bring about the radical restructuring of American life that he had hoped they would.

Rexford Guy Tugwell had been born July 10, 1891, in Sinclairville, New York.[23] His father was at that time in the cattle and meat business, but when Rexford was thirteen years old, the family moved to Wilson, New York, north of Buffalo, where his father bought a fruit orchard and went into the business of fruit growing and canning. The younger Tugwell, an only child, was an avid reader, though not always the most focused of scholars. One of his later detractors claimed that Rexford's "agrarian father never understood, it seems, the son who was detached, living, as it were, on a finer plane of civilization, even while plowing a hayfield"; however, Tugwell biographer Bernard Sternsher offers evidence to the contrary, saying that "a neighbor refuted this allegation, recalling that the business-minded Charles Tugwell was not disturbed by

[22] Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 109.
[23] Some sources mistakenly spell it with a second "s" – Sinclairsville" – but this is incorrect.

his son's intellectual inclinations."[24] Rexford was, in any case, a bright young man, and whether he lived "on a finer plane of civilization" or not, his mind was clearly fixed on the wider world beyond his family's orchards.

In 1911 Tugwell entered the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania, a move that profoundly altered the course of his future. Founded in 1881, the school claims the status of being "the world's first collegiate business school."[25] Prior to this, business was not an area of specialized study. The focus of education for businessmen up to this point had been on how to work in extractive or manufacturing industries. As historian William Leach puts it, students in these fields learned "how to 'make things,' not how to market and sell goods or how 'to make money.'"[26] Along with many other disciplines, economics was becoming recognized in this period as a specialty; it was becoming professionalized, spawning university curricula and professional associations, and developing standards by which its adherents were expected to abide. But for many of these new economists the issues at hand went far deeper than studying the means of attaining wealth. Although most students in the field were keenly interested in understanding the rapidly changing, complex world of industrial economics, there were those engaged in the discipline who recognized that the changes brought about had a profound effect on much more than just the world of finance, and that economists held the potential for positively influencing the larger society.[27] Rexford Tugwell was one Wharton graduate who epitomized this socially-inclined attitude.

The evolution of Tugwell's views toward a greater interest in the intersection of economics and social reform after entering Wharton can be largely attributed to the influence of Professor Simon Nelson Patten. Tugwell later wrote that he admired Patten and had

[24] Blair Bolles, "The Sweetheart of the Regimenters," *The American Mercury* (Sept. 1936): 79; Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*, 4.
[25] Wharton School website, University of Pennsylvania, http://www.wharton.upenn.edu/whartonfacts/ (accessed March 5, 2009).
[26] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 155.
[27] Ibid., 231.

"become immersed in his teaching."[28] Patten was a man whose ideas about the economy seemed radical for his time, as he turned away from the old notion that acquisitiveness was detrimental to society, perhaps even sinful. Instead, he saw in the new mass production of less-expensive goods the promise of a brighter future. More production and cheaper consumer products would mean more comfort and prosperity for all, and would bring about more equality in lifestyle than had ever before been possible. Thus demand would keep production going, which would allow for more acquisition, raising the standard of living for those at every economic level. The end result would be of benefit to society as a whole. As people became more satisfied (Patten, using the example of food consumption to illustrate his point, actually used the word "satiated"), they would turn their attention to other, more socially-minded outlets. Examples could be seen already, he said, in the fact that the late nineteenth century had witnessed an increase in the sponsorship of public improvements such as the construction of libraries and concert halls.[29]

For Tugwell, it was this aspect of Patten's work – the improvement of society as a whole, rather than the promotion of increased consumption – that was exciting in its possibilities. Patten's ideas were a continuation of the legacy of the Enlightenment, centered around a scientific rationalism and a strong belief in progress and the perfectibility of society.[30] Both Patten and Tugwell believed that civilization had risen through an evolutionary process, the result of which would be a more highly evolved, more equal and cooperative society. The past had been marked by scarcity and competition, what Patten called a "pain economy." Modern production methods were doing away with that model, ushering in a "pleasure economy." Once people were able to move beyond the scramble for subsistence – as they could with modern innovation – they would turn their attention to improving society. As Patten saw it, the nation had not yet achieved this end, but it was on the way, and could reach new heights of social evolution once the last traces of the pain economy were eliminated.[31] All that was required to improve the human condition, then, was to ride the wave of prosperity

[28] Rexford G. Tugwell, "Notes on the Life and Work of Simon Nelson Patten, *The Journal of Political Economy* 31, no. 2 (Apr. 1923): 153.
[29] Simon N. Patten, *The Theory of Prosperity* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 168-169.
[30] David W. Noble, "Simon Patten: Relativist or Utopian," *The Antioch Review* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1954): 337.
[31] E.K. Hunt, "Simon N. Patten's Contributions to Economics," *Journal of Economic Issues* 4, no. 4 (Dec. 1970): 38.

that would come with better production methods, allowing for social "equilibrium." The challenge, he believed, was to eliminate the aspects of the economy that hindered the social evolutionary process, and to allow the remaining positive aspects to shape a brighter future. Tugwell wrote of the possibilities of Patten's vision, "it is modern experimental economics that furnishes the means of progress in our complex world."[32] This was a belief that Tugwell took to heart, and around which his future attitudes were centered. Although Simon Patten died in 1922, many of his ideas lived on for decades through his devoted student.

In reading Tugwell's later work it becomes clear just how impressed he was with Patten and his philosophy about what use the study of economics might be to the world. In this era, when so many fields were becoming or had only recently become professional specialties, a great deal of cross-pollination existed from one discipline to the next. Patten himself, in addition to being a founding father in the area of economics, for example, was also connected to the emerging field of social work.[33] A direct outgrowth of the Progressive Era, much of the activity of such new specialties revolved around the notion that society could be improved if only problems could be studied, understood, and addressed by highly-trained experts, who often saw various areas such as economics, sociology, and town planning as intricately linked. Tugwell noted that "Patten was a man who was professionally an economist – a professor of political economy – but who was never just that. He was not afraid to break down the barriers between his science and others and to write about ethics, psychology, education, sociology, religion, and biology in the manner philosophers used before the great specializing trend of the nineteenth century began and the evidence of social causation became so vast and so intricate that single minds could not comprehend its scope."[34] The same might just as easily have been said in later years about Tugwell himself.

Another Columbia faculty member who inspired Tugwell was John Dewey, whom historian Richard Pells calls "the father confessor of American liberals." Dewey believed that complete freedom and independence was an illusion, and that the chief question was who

[32] Tugwell, "Notes on the Life and Work of Simon Nelson Patten," 176.
[33] Ibid., 187.
[34] Ibid., 154.

would hold power and how it would be distributed.[35] His views, labeled "pragmatism," emphasized the need to apply empirical evidence to problem solving. When applied to the issues of economics and government policy, such a view rejected the cherished belief that American individualism and a hands-off government were necessary for building and maintaining the nation. In close connection with Progressive ideas, many pragmatists insisted that the government had a responsibility to intervene on behalf of its least-powerful citizens. Although these notions struck traditionalists as radical, even as undemocratic and anti-American, Dewey and his followers saw it as exactly the opposite; democracy for them was a superior system, as long as it was rationally used to benefit every citizen.[36] Dewey's influence on Tugwell was not as strong as Patten's, but his ideas also continued to resonate in Tugwell's views for decades.

Taken together, Patten and Dewey had created a passion in their pupil for rational and responsible economic planning in the name of the greater good, for the continued evolution of society. Tugwell in turn melded their views to come up with his own social-political-economic philosophy. This outlook, simplified here, saw the industrial economy as bringing both good and bad to the nation. On the positive side, just as Patten had believed, Tugwell saw that a rising tide would lift all boats; thus mass production and modern technologies brought the potential for a much more widespread prosperity. On the negative side, however, he saw rampant capitalism and corporate greed as a major cause of many of the nation's problems, including, eventually, the economic meltdown of the Depression. The insatiable quest to get Americans to consume more and more had undermined the benefits that had been gained from industrialism, and drove an ever widening wedge between rich and poor. Tugwell wrote in 1924, "there can be no doubt that we live in a time when there is misery and suffering, but it is unnecessary to assume because of this that misery and suffering are the significant features of the future…. A nation that, in a single year, can add upwards of [ten billion dollars] to its capital surplus and that chooses to ignore this fact in favor of gaunt hunger … is in a pathological state, no less."[37]

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[35] Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, 113.
[36] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 4.
[37] Rexford Guy Tugwell, "Our Philosophy of Despair," *The University Journal of Business* 2, no. 4 (Sept. 1924): 431.

For Tugwell, poverty – a crushing economic imbalance that favored the wealthy and destined the poor to eternal misery – was the problem, and it was a problem that was self-perpetuating. The poor had less access to a decent education, fewer opportunities for the psychological benefits of creative self-expression or of leisure; they ate inferior diets and suffered more health problems. *Our Economic Society and Its Problems*, the textbook that Tugwell co-authored in 1934, states, "not only does poverty leave one unprotected when troubles come, but it also makes troubles far more frequent and severe. Constant fear for tomorrow lowers vitality and thus contributes to the breaking down of resistance to disease. Poverty … makes existing evils worse."[38] At issue was the near impossibility of those living in the deepest sort of destitution to overcome it. Tugwell wrote in 1924 that there still existed too great a gap in this country between those who lived their lives secure in their financial situation and the poor; he stated that "these poor, as Christ saw so long ago, we have with us still. They live in constant fear that, in spite of their best efforts, somehow calamity will descend upon them. A period of mysterious business depression that closes mills and factories, the introduction of some new machine or process, a change in the wants of people, old age, accident – all have a frightful power over their lives and the lives of those for whom they feel a responsibility."[39] Within just a few years of writing this the Great Depression descended on the nation. With its massive unemployment, bank failures, and home foreclosures, this economic catastrophe made it clear to Tugwell that the threats he had described with such prescience were faced not just by the poor, but by all who remained tied to the current capitalist system.

Having spent time in the countryside as well as in urban centers, having witnessed in Paris how the war had ravaged the populace, he had seen poverty firsthand and felt the need to someday intervene on behalf of those unable to help themselves. For Tugwell, the application of the economist's expertise was not simply an academic exercise. He wrote in 1930 that "masses of men do not exist to make some one's enterprise profitable or to create comforts for an intellectual class; we must not study them with this preconception. They simply exist on the best terms they can arrange in a society and with a set of institutions which they did not create and in the understanding or remaking of which they have had very little

[38] Hill and Tugwell, *Our Economic Society and Its Problems*, 85.
[39] Tugwell, "Our Philosophy of Despair," 428.

assistance from the experts."[40] Much of his career was devoted to the cause of facilitating equalization in living standards between the classes through the implementation of governmental policies.

For Tugwell, the key to aiding those in need lay in economic planning, and he wrote a great deal about the necessity of governmental oversight and involvement in the basic functioning of the nation's economy. In 1932 he wrote, "planning is by definition the opposite of conflict; its meaning is aligned to co-ordination, to rationality, to publicly defined and expertly approached aims; but not to private money-making ventures; and not to the guidance of a hidden hand."[41] This idea of the "invisible hand" of the marketplace, dating back to Adam Smith, seemed to Tugwell a particularly outmoded concept, one ill-suited to the modern industrial world. It required instead the intervention of the federal government, aided by the input of educated experts such as himself, to set things right. He believed that the federal government had both the right and responsibility to control the economy by such means as imposing production limits.[42] Applying these measures to agriculture and resettlement, he favored a reduction in the amount of acreage planted, particularly on land that was of marginal productivity, through the use of government funds to purchase the lands and relocate the inhabitants to places better suited for their success, whether continuing in agriculture or shifting to industrial labor.

Tugwell's ideas struck many Americans as radical, and his New Deal career was marked by an ongoing and often adversarial relationship with the press and public. From the inception of the RA he had to counter criticism and misrepresentation concerning the program; he insisted, for example, that contrary to previous reports, no one would be forcibly removed from their land or made to relocate against their will.[43] Tugwell sought always to overcome the public impression that he and others like him desired to eradicate the nation's core beliefs, or to regiment the lives of individuals. He wrote in his 1935 book *The Battle for Democracy*:

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[40] Rexford G. Tugwell, "Human Nature and Social Economy II," *The Journal of Philosophy* 27, no. 18 (Aug. 28, 1930): 490.
[41] R.G. Tugwell, "The Principle of Planning and the Institution of Laissez Faire." *The American Economic Review* 22 (Mar. 1932): 89.
[42] Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*, 91-92.
[43] Rexford Guy Tugwell, "Changing Acres," *Current History* (Sept. 1936): 61.

> the New Deal is attempting to do nothing to *people*, and does not seek at all to alter their way of life, their wants and desires. It finds them hungry, in need of clothing, shelter, being denied the good things everywhere existing around them in abundance. The obvious situation is that these people call for a redirecting of the management of the institutions and organizations through which they feel they should be able to obtain a portion of these good things that they see lying around everywhere. Therefore, what is demanded of us in America today is the making over of the institutions controlled by and operated for the benefit of the few, so that regardless of their control they shall be operated for the benefit of the many. In all this there is no thought or need to change the individual so that he may conform to some pattern or be fitted to some industrial scheme about to be created. The reverse is true: that the industrial scheme shall be made over to fit the individual and supply his wants. What the Old Order describes as 'rugged individualism' meant the regimentation of the many for the benefit of the few. The social mission of the New Deal has a somewhat higher standard of individualism – it believes in freeing the many from the regimentation of the few.[44]

Although most Americans equated the prospect of such governmental interference in the economy with socialism, the issue for Tugwell was not that the government had never interfered in the business cycle or in the nation's economy, but that it had interfered only on behalf of the privileged elite. For him, then, insistence on state and federal intervention for the poor or in the provision of housing was not a call for a new role for government but only for a shift in goals, actions, and beneficiaries. When he said that there was in fact no invisible hand controlling the marketplace he meant that the controlling hand had always been only thinly disguised federal activity in the service of the wealthy and powerful. The crisis brought on by the Depression opened the possibility that the population would come to recognize this, and to reassess the government's proper and necessary role. He wrote in 1935: "Last year was long, long ago. Each day's news brings a rush of developments which only a few months back would have seemed incredible. Forces of change long pent, deflected or ignored, are now released to be governed as best we may. We are reaping the whirlwind we inherited and trying to make it turn the mills of a capitalistic society, hastily reordered."[45] Federal power, he asserted, should be used in the aid of those least able to pull themselves out of poverty on their own, a portion

[44] Rexford G. Tugwell, *The Battle for Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 319.
[45] Ibid., 52.

of the populace that he believed had grown into a semi-permanent underclass with the coming of the modern industrial age.

Unfortunately for the success of many of his efforts, Tugwell had long demonstrated a rebellious streak, he frequently and vocally criticized the American tendency toward complacency, and he often failed to couch his arguments in suitably diplomatic language. While still an undergraduate in Pennsylvania he had written a poem which his critics would delight in quoting in the years to come. The final lines proclaimed:

> I am sick of the nation's stenches,
> I am sick of the propertied czars….
> I have dreamed my great dream of their passing,
> I have gathered my tools and my charts;
> My plans are fashioned and practical;
> I shall roll up my sleeves – make America over![46]

Although the basic idea that Tugwell was attempting to convey was that the nation had serious weaknesses, and that as a loyal citizen he felt compelled to address and fix those weaknesses, for most Americans such sentiments seemed too critical, too incendiary. These and similar attitudes of Tugwell's incited much of the criticism he received from the press, and caused both the press and the public to doubt his patriotism and loyalty throughout the course of his career, yet he always insisted that it was his love for his country and his firm conviction that it could truly be a land of opportunity and equality that inspired his work. As he saw it, Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal offered the perfect platform from which he might attempt to bring much-needed rationality and planning, coordination and cooperation to the United States. One answer that Tugwell saw to the problem of entrenched poverty was to improve living conditions. Those living in a better environment would be better equipped to face the challenges of modern life; they would be more productive citizens, but also more engaged citizens, more invested in their communities, more committed to the (newly defined) democratic ideal. The Greenbelt towns became the embodiment of that belief.

[46] Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*, 5.

The Resettlement Administration

Undoubtedly Roosevelt was well aware of Tugwell's somewhat unconventional ideas, but the Depression seemed to demand a degree of unconventionality. Roosevelt, always watching the mood of the people, also knew that they would now be more receptive to new ideas than under ordinary circumstances. For many anxious observers, conventional wisdom was now suspect; few, if any, of the old assumptions about the economy could any longer be taken at face value.[47] Desperate for change, for relief, the American public was willing, for the moment, to hear from those with fresh ideas, as was their president.

After the 1932 election Tugwell's beliefs about the need to rethink past practices, the necessity of governmental control and planning, and the elimination of cutthroat competition to regulate the economy combined with his abiding interest and expertise in the area of agriculture and farmers to make him the logical choice to become FDR's Assistant Secretary of Agriculture under Henry Wallace. The Depression was widely recognized as being intricately tied to agriculture. High profits for growers during and immediately following the First World War had led to attempts by farmers to expand cultivation onto marginal and submarginal land in hopes of greater returns. Many farmers had purchased expensive new mechanized equipment believing that this would increase their incomes. But as Europe recovered from the devastation of the war, and as a result international demand for American farm products fell off, a high burden of debt and unwise attempts to coax ever more production from ever less adequate lands combined to put enormous economic pressure on farmers faced with a glut on the market and plummeting prices.[48] The Depression thus began earlier in agriculture than in most of the rest of the economy, and by the late 1920s this sector was providing an early warning sign – largely unheeded – that more widespread

[47] Gary D. Best, *The Nickel and Dime Decade: American Popular Culture During the 1930* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 5.

[48] For example, in 1920 US farmland prices averaged $69 per acre; they hit a low of just $30 per acre in 1933. Jerome M. Stam and Bruce L. Dixon, *Farmer Bankruptcies and Farm Exits in the United States, 1899-2002*, Agriculture Information Bulletin 788 (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, 2004), 11.

economic troubles might lie ahead. Added to this were the further problems of the bank crisis, which caused countless farm foreclosures, and of soil erosion and drought, culminating in the Dust Bowl.[49] The nation's farmers were in deep trouble, and their numbers were growing, temporarily, as city-dwellers headed back to the countryside during the Depression's early years in the hope of surviving the crisis by producing food for their families. Tugwell wrote about this in his 1935 book *The Battle for Democracy*, saying, "the movement back to the farm may be merely transforming an urban relief problem into an acute rural relief problem."[50]

Men such as Tugwell believed that something more than simple handouts (which in any case farmers were initially extremely reluctant to accept) would be necessary to right this dire situation. There needed to be controls on farm production, but more than that, poor land had to be taken out of production entirely and farming families who could no longer support themselves through agriculture had to be given new options to provide for their futures. The New Deal offered precisely the sorts of institutional changes that Tugwell had long seen as desperately needed for the nation, and diving into federal policy issues, he seemed to be everywhere at once in the early years of FDR's presidency. In addition to his post in the Department of Agriculture, he was active in the creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in 1933.[51] Yet he had still more ideas for alleviating the problems of a depression-ravaged United States.

Although Sidney Baldwin writes that Tugwell, by the end of 1934, "had become disillusioned with the New Deal," the prospect of heading his own agency and the possibility of putting into effect some of the experimental programs he had longed to try clearly reignited his enthusiasm.[52] On April 8, 1935, Congress passed the Emergency Relief Act, which authorized the use of federal funds for work relief, and by the end of

[49] Farm foreclosures during the years from 1926 to 1930 were at a rate of 17 per 1,000 farms; in 1933 they reached 39 per 1,000 farms. Wayne D. Rasmussen, "The New Deal Farm Programs: What They Were and Why They Survived," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 65, no. 5 (Dec. 1983): 1159.
[50] Tugwell, *The Battle for Democracy*, 111.
[51] Namorato, *Rexford Tugwell*, 75.
[52] Baldwin states that Tugwell believed the New Deal "was running off in too many irrelevant directions, … and was falling prey to a false faith in the twin panaceas of business recovery and emergency relief." Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 88.

the month Roosevelt had created the RA. Before the agency had actually been created Tugwell had already obtained unofficial sanction from the president for the construction of model "garden cities" to demonstrate not only a better way of providing housing, but a better way of American life as well. He had also selected the site for the first of these towns, near Berwyn, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC.[53] Within weeks RA employees were drawing up the first plans for the town.

The basic idea for such towns was not original to Tugwell. Members of the RPAA had written to the president in 1933 urging him to implement a program of constructing new towns. Slum clearance had long been proposed as one way to clean up the nation's cities, and the belief that parks had a beneficial impact on urban life had been widespread for decades. Tugwell was also obviously inspired by European public housing efforts. As with so many innovations, the Greenbelt town idea was an amalgamation of many concepts that had already existed. The importance of Tugwell in this case lay in the fact that he was so passionate about trying such a program, that his goals far surpassed simple slum clearance, farm resettlement, or the building of narrowly-defined housing projects, and into the realm of reordering American society and culture, and that at that time he had a tremendous amount of influence with Franklin Roosevelt.

Tugwell left no evidence that in 1935 he had yet formulated any firm ideas about what sort of new communities might best bring about the social reform for which he hoped when he spoke to FDR about the possibility of creating "satellite cities."[54] He nonetheless leapt at the opportunity to try his hand at town-building, not giving the president a chance to forget his interest in the project (as, apparently, Roosevelt was known to do on occasion). The same diary entry that recounts his initial conversation with FDR about the possibility of constructing new towns notes that Tugwell and Roosevelt had then driven to Beltsville, Maryland, about ten miles from the capital, to

[53] Tugwell had actually expressed his desire to build the first of what eventually became the Greenbelt towns to John S. Lansill, the director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's Land Program, on February 24, 1935. At that time he took Lansill to the Berwyn site to show him where he believed the town should be built. Wallace Richards, Greenbelt Final Report, section 8, "Summary Chronology of Greenbelt Project," 1.

[54] For full diary entry, see page 8.

look at a promising site for the venture, Tugwell saying that FDR "was much surprised at its scale and took great interest in everything. One of his saving qualities is an enormous interest in physical construction and growth."[55]

At precisely the same moment that he was advocating the idea of satellite cities, Tugwell was also proposing the formation of the Resettlement Administration.[56] The primary mission of the RA was "to administer approved projects involving resettlement of destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas, including the establishment, maintenance, and operation, in such connection, of communities in rural and suburban areas."[57] The executive order specifically mentions the need to address the problems of "soil erosion, stream pollution, seacoast erosion, reforestation, forestation, and flood control," goals that much of the American public largely supported. Other portions proved less popular, including the desire "to make loans … to finance, in whole or in part, the purchase of farm lands and necessary equipment by farmers, farm tenants, croppers or farm laborers." And many Americans saw even less reason to include suburban resettlement schemes in such an agency; yet this was a project that Tugwell fervently wanted to pursue, and his position as the head of the new RA provided him the perfect opportunity.

The RA had been created in an effort to eliminate the redundancy of programs aimed at resettlement, a recognition that too many agencies were working on the same problems involving housing and land use. The day after the RA was formed the Land Program of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was transferred to the new agency; the earlier program had been buying unproductive land from farmers, but had done nothing to resettle them. Also subsumed into the RA were the FERA's Division of Rural Rehabilitation and Stranded Populations, which provided direct relief for those who would continue farming in new "resettlement" communities. This program consisted of twenty-eight projects incorporating cooperative farms, allowing for the

[55] Tugwell diary, March 3, 1935, Tugwell Papers, FDR Presidential Library. Sidney Baldwin calls Tugwell "the prime mover in the actual establishment of the agency." Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 95.
[56] Rexford Tugwell, "The Resettlement Idea," *Agricultural History* 33, no. 4 (Oct. 1959): 159.
[57] Executive Order (E.O.) 7027, April 30, 1935, Samuel I. Rosenman Papers, FDR Presidential Library.

shared use of equipment and freeing individual families from the burden of debt incurred in purchasing machinery on their own. There were new projects begun under the RA, as well. These included farming communities that Tugwell hoped would also incorporate the cooperative idea, and the Greenbelt towns. Finally, just weeks after the formation of the RA, it also absorbed the Subsistence Homesteads program from the Department of the Interior. A program for which Tugwell had scant enthusiasm – but which both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt applauded – the Subsistence Homesteads show in sharp relief some of the most basic assumptions, and disagreements, about the future of rural-industrial housing.

The Subsistence Homesteads

The Homesteads, like the Greenbelt towns, demonstrate in a very real way the tensions between the rural past and the modern age, but in the case of the Homesteads, the balance is tipped decidedly in favor of the past. The program had been begun under the auspices of the Department of the Interior in June of 1933 as part of the National Industrial Recovery Act, Title II (the Public Works and Construction Projects program, also the parent program of the PWA), Section 208, with its stated goal "to provide for aiding in the redistribution of the overbalance of population in industrial centers."[58] Although it is true that during the Depression cities no longer offered the opportunities they once had, the reference to "the overbalance of population in industrial centers" reveals more than just a desire to aid cities struggling with burgeoning ranks of unemployed men – it shows a distinct anti-urban sentiment.

The goal of the Subsistence Homesteads was to create communities that would combine industrial and agricultural life. The government definition states:

> A subsistence homestead denotes a house and out buildings located upon a plot of land on which can be grown a large portion of the foodstuffs required by the homestead family. It signifies production for home consumption and not for commercial sale. In that it provides for subsistence alone, it carries with it the

[58] Paul W. Wager, *One Foot On the Soil: A Study of Subsistence Homesteads in Alabama* (University of Alabama, 1945), 4.

> corollary that cash income must be drawn from some outside source. The central motive of the subsistence homestead program, therefore, is to demonstrate the economic value of a livelihood which combines part-time wage work and part-time gardening or farming.[59]

Three types of communities were to be created. The main focus was on communities intended for part-time industrial, part-time agricultural living. In addition, there would be experimental farm communities and "stranded community" projects, meaning new environments for "stranded" populations, such as coal miners, among whom the effects of the economic depression were well over a decade old by the inception of the New Deal.

The subsistence homestead idea appealed to many New Dealers, who recognized that simply removing farmers from poorly-producing lands or mining regions and shifting them to cities that were already burdened by unemployment offered no real solution.[60] Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were among the supporters of this idea. Although FDR expressed a keen interest in regional planning, he was not a strong proponent of urban life or urban housing. When discussing with visitors in New York what to do about the problem of slums he had once said, "you don't need money or laws; just burn it down."[61] Tugwell later wrote about the president, "it cannot be said that … he had a vision of the city as a high expression of human aspiration [or] saw the cities … as places of freedom and happiness in co-operative endeavor. He always did, and always would, think people better off in the country and would regard cities as rather hopeless."[62] For the president, the Subsistence Homesteads offered an alternative to

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[59] U.S Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, *Bulletin 1* (Washington, DC, 1934), 4.
[60] As was the case for every New Deal program, the Subsistence Homesteads project also had its share of critics. Aside from the usual charges that the administration was overstepping its authority, or that money was being spent unwisely, this particular program also earned the opposition of some on the political left, including labor leader Harold M. Ware, head of the United Farmers' Education League. Ware charged that businessmen were backing the Homesteads because they were "planning for permanent poverty. They plan to decentralize both discontent and industry and so diffuse the social risks of revolt during the period when wage standards are being reduced to coolie levels." Harold M. Ware and Webster Powell, "Planning for Permanent Poverty," *Harper's Magazine* 170 (April 1935): 515. As Leighninger points out, many observers were all too aware of the fact that farming and industry were already joined in the South, and that the results there had been disastrous for residents, producing some of the worst poverty in the nation. Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 140.
[61] Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 121. Note the distinction between housing and planning. FDR was keenly interested in urban and regional planning, as discussed in Chapter 3, because they presented both the possibility of addressing the problems inherent in cities and applying rational, sustainable growth of suburban and rural regions. Strictly urban housing, on the other hand, was not a topic in which he expressed much interest.
[62] Rexford Tugwell, "The Sources of New Deal Reformism," *Ethics* 64, no. 4 (July 1954): 266.

unchecked urban growth. Eleanor Roosevelt shared her husband's enthusiasm for rural resettlement, and not only highly praised the Homestead concept, but was directly involved in the Subsistence Homestead community of Arthurdale, West Virginia, one of the stranded mining communities. The first lady had been deeply moved by the incredible poverty she had seen on a visit to the site, and to a large extent adopted the town as one of her pet projects[63]

Another well known proponent of the homestead concept was Ralph Borsodi, author of a book on the advantages of returning to old methods of production, including raising grain and baking one's own bread. Borsodi's planned subsistence community outside of Dayton, Ohio, had been the first such proposal to gain approval for Subsistence Homesteads aid. Tugwell later wrote about the following that had gathered around Borsodi; having reviewed Borsodi's book ("rather caustically," as Tugwell himself admitted), he had suggested that "before joining the nature cult I would like to hear from Mrs. Borsodi, who must be the one who did all that grain-grinding and bread-making, and perhaps the hoeing too." He concluded that "if time – or women's labor – was worth anything, the food so highly praised by her husband was far more expensive than any that could be bought."[64] He was highly amused to later receive a letter from Mrs. Borsodi herself heartily agreeing with him.

Tugwell felt frustrated by the popularity of the Subsistence Homesteads program, which he saw as anachronistic and not accepting of the new urban reality. History has since proven that Tugwell was more prophetic than the Roosevelts and other homestead proponents. Thirty-four communities were constructed under the program. Twenty-seven were of the mixed industrial-agricultural type; most of these were located in the southeastern portion of the country. Three communities were built for resettled farmers and four for stranded

[63] Unfortunately, Mrs. Roosevelt's enthusiasm, along with that of FDR advisor Louis Howe, created immense trouble for the project as the two impulsively ordered design and construction changes that circumvented the official bureaucratic chain of command and resulted in embarrassing mistakes. Howe, for example, ordered fifty prefabricated homes to be delivered to the project site without consulting program administrators. The homes turned out to be summer vacation cottages, certainly not constructed for the requirements of year-round residence by entire families, or for the cold West Virginia winters. In addition, they did not fit the foundations that had already been poured. In the end the prefabs, which had been intended to eliminate unnecessary labor expenditures, resulted in costly modifications that provided rich fodder for critics of the New Deal and resettlement in general. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 237.

[64] Rexford Tugwell, *The Brains Trust* (New York: Viking, 1968), 177-178.

populations.[65] These settlements suffered from a startlingly high rate of resident turnover. In one study of four Alabama homestead communities (all of the "hybrid" industrial-agricultural type), for example, by May of 1944, of 358 homes total, 339 families had come and gone since the communities' opening. The main reason for families leaving were financial trouble (seventeen percent) – demonstrating that the mix of agriculture and other employment did not yield the needed funds – followed by high transportation costs (fifteen percent) and residential location inconvenient to employment (thirteen percent); so high transportation and inconvenience to employment accounted for twenty-eight percent combined.[66] This is a strong illustration of what was wrong with the Subsistence Homestead idea; part-time farming was, many families admitted, a nice hedge against tough economic times, but industrial and other full-time employment was far more important in ensuring a family's continued success. Many of these communities failed to entice industry to relocate so far from cities – this was an ongoing problem for Arthurdale, for example – and as a result the economies of the settlements continued to languish.

One of the major problems with the program's concept lay in the assumption that part-time farming was a viable way to augment a family's diet, ensuring that part-time employment would be enough to sustain them. Paul Wager, in a 1945 study of the program in Alabama, acknowledged the challenges inherent in this paradigm, writing, "the success of farming depends largely on things being done in season, yet subsistence homestead farmers must always give their industrial job their first attention. They cannot even risk being a few minutes late. This situation does not rule out part-time farming as a way of life, but it presents a handicap which cannot be ignored."[67] Yet he was quick to lay the blame for the program's spotty success record at the feet of the residents, saying that "after making ample allowance for the long hours worked in war industries [in the early 1940s] by many of the homesteaders, the conviction grows that the limited use of the land in many instances is due less to lack of time than to lack of inclination."[68] Clearly ignoring the increasing importance of leisure time

[65] Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 140-141.
[66] Wager, *One Foot On the Soil*, 42, 61.
[67] Ibid., 92.
[68] Ibid., 206.

and recreational activities in American culture he stated, "if the homesteader cannot convert his idle days and spare hours into foodstuff, and thereby reduce the drain on his cash income, he will not improve materially the family's level of living."[69]

In 1945 Wager still believed that the concept behind the program was sound. He concluded that "in the total program of rehousing American workers there must certainly be a place for suburban houses surrounded by a bit of ground on which to produce part of the family living."[70] The high turnover rate did not cause him to reconsider his position; instead he wrote that even the families who had left the settlements "got inspiration and renewed confidence in themselves by virtue of the experience."[71] Finally, he believed that "the subsistence homesteads program provided an experience in planned community development and in small acreage homesteads as a guide for future thinking. When all the elements are considered, what appears at first like a staggering loss to the Federal government assumes more the character of a bold investment in a promising experiment."[72] This reflected a continuing refusal to acknowledge that the nation had, for all intents and purposes, abandoned its agricultural identity in favor of something more modern and urban. Although Wager was able to say confidently in 1945 that "there is a place in the American economy for subsistence homesteads," the fact was that this was a program built on a nostalgic notion of a romanticized American past wedded to very real fears about putting food on the family table. It looked backward in apprehension.

Tugwell and countless others involved in the Greenbelt Towns program, on the other hand, looked to the future, not the past, and did so with a hopeful eagerness. Although as director of the RA he continued to support the Subsistence Homesteads, Tugwell never had any real confidence that they could be an answer for the nation's economic and housing problems. While it is true that many of the basic goals of the program matched Tugwell's own ideas, he felt that there was too much sentimentalism attached to the concept, too much "back-to-the-land" nostalgia, too little recognition that small subsistence farms and isolated rural

[69] Ibid., 90.
[70] Ibid., 203.
[71] Ibid., 188.
[72] Ibid., 189.

communities were unlikely to be workable plans for the modern world. He saw the program as trying to force the nation to go in reverse rather than accepting the changes that had come about as a result of industrialization and urbanization and moving forward in response to those changes. Although biographer Sternsher states that Tugwell suffered from having the reputation of being a "city slicker," he in fact never forgot his own rural roots. He was a man who had an abiding interest and fondness for agriculture and for farmers, but as he saw it, regardless of whether the bucolic past had been better or worse than the industrial present, there simply was no turning back.[73]

The Greenbelt towns

Tugwell had no illusions that the Greenbelt towns could single-handedly solve the problem of poor housing. He said, in fact, that he recognized that "millions of Americans need new homes if a minimum standard of decency is to be attained."[74] He also recognized that, as work relief projects, these communities would not be cost-effective enough to truly cater to the neediest citizens. But he felt that the program could point the way to a better system, one that could then be emulated by others, whether through state or local governments or private enterprise. Through the Greenbelt experiment, he said, "we hope to weave a new pattern of rural-industrial life, a method of land-use in which the old, wasteful practices never have a chance to get started. If these communities are successful, there will, we hope, be more of them, built by ourselves as well as by others. It is not wholly improbable that their effect upon the future will be profound."[75] Tugwell sought not only to provide decent housing, nor even simply to suggest how housing might be provided in the future. By throwing the resources of

[73] Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*, 3. In fact, despite his deep interest in farmers and agriculture, Tugwell seems to have personally had few regrets about the fact that the nation was leaving its rural past behind; he frequently painted rural life as isolated, backward, and depressing. Although Tugwell recognized the enormous problems of urban environments, he left little doubt that he saw city life as having clear advantages over life on the farm. Sidney Baldwin writes that Tugwell believed that "rural life was bleak and irrational." Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 87.

[74] Rexford Tugwell, "Housing Activities and Plans of the Resettlement Administration," *Housing Officials' Yearbook 1936* (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1936): 28.

[75] Ibid., 29.

the federal government behind the latest methods of planning – both economic and physical – he could demonstrate how the modern industrial world, with the "equilibrium" that Patten had envisioned resulting from it, could usher in a new age of democratic cooperation.

Among Tugwell's first tasks was to gather a loyal team of administrators into whose hands he could entrust his favorite project. Having come to the Roosevelt administration as a political outsider, he chose fellow political outsiders to serve as his lieutenants, and, being rather eclectic in terms of his own wide-ranging intellectual interests, he was perfectly willing to recruit people from seemingly unrelated fields, as long as they could embrace and share his essential vision for the program. The RA inherited roughly 4,200 employees from other agencies, yet most of those whom Tugwell placed in the agency's top posts, and particularly those who were to work on the Greenbelt project, were, like him, from outside the ranks of the Washington bureaucracy.[76]

He selected as his deputy administrator Will W. Alexander, a southerner who had studied divinity, a liberal and an expert on race relations who since 1931 had served as president of New Orleans' African-American Dillard University.[77] Following Tugwell's resignation, Alexander took over as head of the Resettlement Administration and later served as director of the RA's successor agency, the Farm Security Administration, a post he filled until 1940.

As head of the RA's Suburban Division Tugwell chose John S. Lansill, another southerner. Lansill was from Lexington, Kentucky. Tugwell and Lansill had known each other when both were students at the Wharton School, but rather than going into academia following his education, Lansill had gone into finance, finding success on Wall Street.[78] After Tugwell had

[76] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 155.

[77] Ibid., 154; Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 29. The inclusion of someone so closely connected to racial issues is interesting, as there seems never to have been any serious consideration of having the Greenbelt towns racially integrated. Few New Deal housing programs were in fact integrated. The feeling was that it was not within the purview of the government to introduce racial policies that went against the prevailing local sentiment, and that since separate housing projects for African Americans were being built in many locations, integration – which almost certainly would have brought in a new element of unwelcome opposition – was not needed or desired for the Greenbelts. See Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 126-127, 129-130, 145-146; Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 142-144; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 199-202.

[78] Clarence Stein, initially at least, seemed none too impressed with the reliance upon non-experts, writing to his wife that "Tugwell seems to have surrounded himself with a group of the sons of wealthy dads [apparently a reference to Lansill, though not accurate, as Lansill had amassed his wealth himself], who know about as little

become part of the Roosevelt administration, Lansill visited him in Washington, at which time Tugwell offered him a post in the FERA as director of its Land Utilization Program. Although Lansill had no administrative experience in dealing with land issues, and was an unabashed Republican, Tugwell once again chose his subordinates based upon his high personal regard rather than on their official credentials or affiliations.[79] On the very day that the RA was formed, Tugwell asked Lansill to move from the FERA and head the RA's Suburban Division. Lansill brought with him from the FERA Wallace Richards, who would later be appointed Regional Coordinator for the Beltsville project. Although initially not enthusiastic about either Roosevelt or the New Deal, Lansill eventually became a supporter of both, as well as of the Greenbelt towns.

The administrators tried their best to ensure the success of the program. Employing the most up-to-date techniques of social surveying and data collection, they not only gathered statistics on the state of existing housing for the working class, but also sought to determine what potential residents desired regarding their homes and neighborhoods. Continually running both a preemptive and a defensive public relations campaign, they fought hard to positively shape the people's perception of this project. If the towns were, as intended, to be models upon which future communities would be patterned, every possible impediment to their success had to be foreseen and counteracted.

Within a month after the RA was created Tugwell had hired two architects and a chief of land acquisition for the towns.[80] Roosevelt officially approved the funds to go ahead with the Greenbelt plan on September 13, with the stipulation that the RA would have to secure approval from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which oversaw most work relief projects; WPA approval was granted on September 30. Meanwhile, acquisition agents were purchasing land near Berwyn, Maryland. On October 14, just five and one-half months after the RA had been formed, the first workers were transported to the site of the future Greenbelt,

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about the subject with which they are dealing as he does." Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, June 19, 1935, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 308-309.

[79] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 29-30.

[80] Douglas D. Ellington was appointed Principal Architect for Beltsville and Tilford E. Dudley was named Chief of Land Acquisition on June 1; Reginald J. Wadsworth appointed Associate Principal Architect for Beltsville on June 17. Richards, Greenbelt Final Report, section 8, 1-2.

Maryland, from transient lodges in the capital. Unfortunately, the perceived need to get men on the payrolls exceeded the ability to plan such a large undertaking in so short a time. When the first laborers arrived at Greenbelt, the Construction Division had not yet been formed, and no plans would be ready until December 21. As they awaited more specific instructions, laborers were put to work clearing the site, staking road locations, and demolishing a farmhouse that stood on the property. Two days after the first plans arrived, on December 23, 1935, actual construction was begun.[81]

In the meantime, Tugwell's chief researcher began to study possible locations for more towns. Over one hundred cities were initially up for consideration. Criteria included the strength and diversity of local industries, a reasonably open attitude toward organized labor (this because the administrators did not want to create a captive workforce that would be at the mercy of greedy business owners), a strong and growing population, and, of course, the availability of suitable land close by with good transportation routes into the city.[82] Some of the original contenders were discarded due to an over-reliance on a single local industry, meaning that any interruption in that industry would doom the entire town to failure. Other sites, such as Dayton, Ohio, were considered and then eliminated because they were already slated to get housing developments through other New Deal programs. The list of potential sites for the other Greenbelt towns was quickly pared down to Cincinnati, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and New Brunswick, New Jersey. Land in St. Louis could not be purchased by the December 15, 1935 deadline, and so it, too, was dropped from consideration. This left, in addition to Greenbelt, Maryland, Cincinnati, the eventual site of Greenhills, Ohio; Milwaukee, the location of Greendale, Wisconsin; and New Brunswick (near Bound Brook), which was intended to be the setting for Greenbrook, New Jersey, although this town, in the end, was not built, having been blocked by a court order that declared the project unconstitutional.

The first Greenbelt town, which Tugwell had proposed to Roosevelt in early March of 1935, received its initial residents at the end of September 1937, not quite thirty-one months later. By then, Tugwell himself was long gone as the man in charge of it all. As "the whipping

[81] Ibid., 4.
[82] Henry Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," *The New Republic* (June 3, 1936): 96.

boy of the New Deal," his presence threatened the success of his dearest experiments.[83] His vision had brought him scorching criticism, forcing him first to defend the project as well as his own motives and character, and then to walk away in order to distance his beloved towns from his reputation as a revolutionary. As he later wrote, "we were wrong about the probability of success…. This caused countless difficulties in operation and encouraged those who viewed all the New Deal 'experiments' with chilly disapproval to regard this one with especial venom."[84] By then the damage was done. Henry Churchill, part of the Greenbrook design team, wrote later that the Greenbelts were "a part of Rexford Guy Tugwell's vision of a future that is still distant, a vision doubly damned because it was Tugwell's and Roosevelt's."[85]

It is little wonder that critics later challenged the legitimacy of the RA, citing its overly broad mission and the extreme latitude given to the president to oversee it. In the bureaucratic organization of the New Deal Tugwell, in his RA role, answered only to the president, who in turn answered – at least in theory – to no one. Public and, more importantly, congressional opposition to the agency began to build almost immediately, and grew over time. The fact that it had been created by executive order, that there was little congressional oversight, that in fact it seemed to be nothing more than a whim of Roosevelt's and, worse, Tugwell's, made this program a particular target for those who opposed the New Deal. But to Tugwell and others like him, the RA and the New Deal represented the best hope for the nation to drag itself into the modern world.

In 1959 Rexford Tugwell looked back on some of the accomplishments and disappointments of his long public career. Demonstrating that he retained his well-known rebellious streak, he wrote: "My final advice to those who are thus moved by injustices and human needs, and who think they perceive better possibilities through social organization, is to go ahead. Fail as gloriously as some of your predecessors have. If you do not succeed in bringing about any permanent change, you may at least have stirred some slow consciences so that in time they will give support to action. And you will have the satisfaction, which is not to

[83] Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 88. Tugwell's resignation was also likely due at least in part to his impending divorce from his wife of over twenty years in order to marry his administrative assistant, Grace Falke, a move which further harmed his public reputation. Ibid., 119-120.
[84] Tugwell, "The Resettlement Idea," 159.
[85] Henry S. Churchill, *The City Is the People* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1945), 80.

be discounted, of having annoyed a good many miscreants who had it coming to them."[86] The statement hints that he harbored some lasting bitterness but, true to his character as a die-hard social reformer, Tugwell, even late in his life, was not about to let his own frustrations get in the way of his larger purpose. He continued to focus on issues surrounding what he saw as the inseparable themes of economic reordering, housing, and social justice, and he still regretted that his Greenbelt experiment had not gone as he had hoped. He also still believed that a better America was possible, if only those who had vision and drive – and a good measure of relentless rebelliousness – would continue the good fight.

Fig. 4.1. Rexford Tugwell watches progress on Greenbelt construction, July 1936.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Tugwell himself had been a powerful catalyst, a force that set events in motion in a new direction, and he visited the construction site at Greenbelt often in the early months of work there. But by the end of 1936 he was no longer involved in the New Deal in any official capacity, having tendered his resignation as head of the Resettlement Administration in November of that year, after a mere twenty-one months at its helm. Yet events continued in

[86] Tugwell, "The Resettlement Idea," 164.

the trajectory he had set; his spirit remained long after he ceased to be officially connected to the program. Aside from his direct impact, he also serves as a prime example of the reform drive behind those who impatiently sought to redesign American systems and American landscapes in the Depression era, frequently in the face of severe opposition by those unwilling to let go of the traditions of the past.

While Tugwell's association had tarnished the Greenbelt program in many people's eyes, not everyone opposed the project. The design community in the United States and abroad eagerly watched this experiment in town-building and commented on its progress and promise. Some members of the press were also intrigued by what they saw and heard, and withheld judgment as they watched the towns rise up out of what had been farmland. And then there were the ordinary people who followed the news of the Greenbelt towns in hopeful anticipation of a better life. Each player in this drama saw different possibilities, and possible threats, in connection with the towns. Each brought a slightly different idea of what was meant by "home" and "community" and of who should have the right to define these concepts, and each vied to make their own vision of "the American dream" – whether a very public or a very private vision – to prevail.

The modern age did not pose the same sorts of threats to Tugwell as it did to much of the American public. For him, modernity itself was not the enemy; he believed instead that the problem lay in the stubborn refusal of society to adapt to new realities. Relatively few of his fellow citizens, however, shared this view. Among those less inclined to seek radical changes to the nation's traditional institutions were many of the designers of the Greenbelt towns, who brought to the program differing views on the direction in which American society should move.

Chapter 5. Planning the Greenbelt Towns

The great human city planning is inevitably coming, for the social instinct, the human instinct, philanthropy in its broadest sense of love of one's fellow-men, this sense of cooperation for the common good is growing apace. Evidence of it we see on every hand; and so the city planning of the future will be one of the greatest agencies in the bettering of human life.

- George B. Ford, 1912[1]

The test of the city of the future will be its adequacy in providing for the life, labor, and leisure of its people, and the housing reformer will have to join hands with the city planner to achieve this great end.

- Carol Aronovici, 1921[2]

In the summer of 1935 Tugwell and the Suburban Division of his Resettlement Administration were faced with a seemingly herculean task: creating entire towns from open farmland. Work on the projects was to proceed with as much rapidity as possible in order to fulfill the primary mandate of providing employment; little thought was initially given to design or aesthetics. As far as most government officials and workers or the general public were concerned, the New Deal building projects were nothing more than an attempt to create jobs and to provide some improved housing. In the early stages there was little reason to expect that the towns would be any more architecturally significant than any other government-initiated housing project. As Tugwell would learn throughout this process, it was one thing to propose new kinds of towns; it was another to actually create them – and although he had thought long and hard about the possible social and economic ramifications of such a program, he could not bring forth the Greenbelt towns single-handedly. Tugwell was no town planner. The need to enlist the expertise of a skilled coterie of city planners, architects, and landscape architects to design the towns eventually altered both the intended goals and the outcome of

[1] Ford, "Digging Deeper into City Planning," 562.
[2] Aronovici, *Housing and the Housing Problem*, 160.

the program. Tugwell's deputies attempted to ensure the implementation of his vision – which had all but ignored the physical design and aesthetic quality of the towns – but they also had to work and compromise with architects and planners who had their own ideas for the kinds of new communities that could best improve American life.[3] Thus the Greenbelts inherited traits from both "parents": a strong interest in and inclination toward civic involvement and cooperation from Tugwell and his administrators, and a unique appearance and neighborhood character from the designers. In toning down Tugwell's "radical" intentions – bringing the towns more in line with traditional, more conservative American values – and applying their own interpretations of what was meant by "home" and "community," those who planned the physical spaces of the towns created something new, something that the design and planning professions have since recognized as significant. The design choices made for the towns also demonstrate in a visual and concrete way the tension between past and future that was so dominant in the Depression era. Planners made a conscious effort to promote feelings of a longed-for old-fashioned unity, but also to create towns that would prepare residents for modern life.

As work on the Greenbelt program got under way the engineer in charge of the Planning Section turned the job of laying out the design for what was then known as the Beltsville project over to his engineering staff, many of whom had previously been employed in planning the Subsistence Homesteads.[4] But Warren Vinton, an economist working as head of research for the Suburban Division, became concerned about the quality of the plans being produced, and he took his doubts to Suburban Division head John Lansill; Lansill in turn consulted Tracy Augur, chief of town planning for the Tennessee Valley Authority (and a member of the RPAA).

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[3] As Joseph Arnold notes, "Tugwell was too busy to give serious attention to the physical planning of the towns, although he kept informed on their progress." Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 87.

[4] The engineer was Thomas Hibben, whose employment on the Greenbelt project was extremely short-lived. Arnold A. Alanen and Joseph A. Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale, Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987), 7; Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 46-48. According to Joseph Arnold, based on an interview he conducted with Calvin B. Baldwin (who would later head the Farm Security Administration – the successor to the Resettlement Administration – from 1940 to 1943), "engineers were employed to plan the towns because Lansill, C.B. Baldwin, and even Tugwell did not have sufficient confidence in professional town planners, whom they regarded as impractical and utopian." Arnold, 47. However, I have found no other sources, aside from Arnold's interview with Baldwin, that claim any such skepticism on the part of RA administrators about the possible utilization of professional planners. Professional architects were employed to design the buildings (rather than lay out the town) from the start.

Although the engineers declined to share their drawings, as Joseph Arnold writes, Augur and Vinton "were able to spirit a copy" of the drawings out of the engineers' office and show them to Tugwell and Calvin B. Baldwin, a former administrative assistant to Department of Agriculture head Henry Wallace and then a senior administrator for the RA.[5] These first designs for what would become Greenbelt, Maryland, were utilitarian and uninspired, with a street arrangement requiring some sixty miles of roadway laid out in a grid pattern.[6] At the urging of Vinton and Augur, the initial plans were rejected, the engineers' role as the designers of Greenbelt was ended, and Lansill turned the job of designing the towns over to professional planners.

Had this behind-the-scenes drama not taken place, the Greenbelts would have become just three of the less interesting New Deal building projects, with little or no originality or innovation in their designs and little to recommend them as worthy of much future historical interest. As the events unfolded, however, some of the nation's most prominent planners eventually played vital roles in the conception and creation of the towns, their goals at times dovetailing with those of administrators and at times clashing with them, in the process leaving a lasting record of the varying beliefs and visions the key players brought to the task of making the Greenbelt towns a reality.

For many of these professionals, the goal of bettering society through the creation of improved communities had long occupied their thoughts. Yet most did not share Tugwell's extreme vision of a reordered society; they were far more interested in creating communities that would best serve the interests of individual families and the nation.[7] Overall, theirs was a much more conservative, traditional social vision. Henry Wright wrote in 1915, for example, that "the finer virtues, loyalty and self-sacrifice, which are fundamental qualities of good citizenship, are products of the home…. For self-preservation the city and the state must

[5] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 47.
[6] Ibid. In contrast, the final design, which relied heavily on the use of the superblock and cul-de-sac, resulted in just six miles of interior streets, curving to fit the site's topography. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 311.
[7] As we will see later in this chapter, some of the planners came closer to sharing Tugwell's vision than others, but for the most part, reordering the fundamental social and economic system of the nation was not among their goals.

develop and preserve the home."[8] Henry Churchill, later a chief architect for Greenbrook, New Jersey, wrote in 1936: "These towns are not a panacea, they will not solve the problem of housing for the masses, but they will be a demonstration of what new civic patterns can do towards making a better and more pleasant way of living. We have inherited smoke and stones and dirt, chaos and confusion: these experiments may help lead us back to air and grass and sunlight, order and harmony."[9] In summing up what the Greenbelt program might accomplish, Elbert Peets concluded in 1938 that the "flow from city to country has in fact already begun, and its continuance is inevitable. The greenbelt towns illustrate the right way – or one of the right ways – to accomplish this movement, which, if not skillfully guided, will be a debit, and not an asset, to the planning of the city's environment."[10] The Greenbelt designers, then, recognized that America was changing, becoming increasingly tied to the mass-production urban-industrial economy, and they hoped to bring about new sorts of living environments suited to this modern age, but which also retained the best attributes of the rapidly-fading small-town America of the past.

This ambivalence, the tension between tradition and innovation, can be seen in the design elements of the Greenbelt towns, the homes and the public buildings and open spaces that would make up the communities. The planners of these towns sought to effect change in society, not to "remake America," but simply to recapture a community spirit that they perceived as having been lost with the coming of urban modernity. The challenge they faced was to create built environments that were in keeping with the modern age, but not so radically different from past forms that they risked rejection by a wary public. They would by necessity walk a fine line.

[8] Henry C. Wright, *The American City: An Outline of Its Development and Functions* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1916), 161.
[9] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 98.
[10] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 4.

Organization: Four teams for four towns

Due to the speed with which the program was expected to get underway, many of the activities of planning and building the towns overlapped. Yet, given the enormity of the program, progress was reasonably well-ordered. There were setbacks – adverse weather conditions, harsh media criticism, budget cuts, legal battles – but through it all the planners, engineers, architects, and the laborers who actually built the towns plunged ahead. After Tugwell and Lansill decided to reject the engineers' designs for the Beltsville project, Lansill consulted with Tracy Augur about how to choose and organize the experts needed to design this massive undertaking; Augur in turn contacted fellow RPAA member Frederick Bigger, an architect and town planner who had been serving on the Pittsburgh City Planning Commission since 1922, and who "dominated Pittsburgh planning in the 1920s and 1930s."[11] Lansill eventually came to rely heavily on Bigger in matters of Greenbelt planning and design.

Bigger consulted with the three most well-known and respected American town planners at the time: John Nolen, Clarence Stein, and Henry Wright.[12] Nolen had graduated from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1893, and, like Tugwell, studied under Simon Patten. He went on to study Landscape Architecture at Harvard, graduating in 1905, and eventually became "one of the founding fathers of the American planning profession."[13] Nolen's main contribution to the Greenbelt program was in choosing the design teams.[14] One reason that he was not more involved in the Greenbelt program may have been that he was at the time acting as a technical advisor to the Subsistence Homesteads program.[15]

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[11] John F. Bauman and Edward K. Muller, "The Planning Technician as Urban Visionary: Frederick Bigger and American Planning, 1881-1963," *Journal of Planning History* 1, no. 2 (May 2002): 126. Bigger (1880-1963) had been educated at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1903. Bauman and Muller, 128. He practiced architecture in Seattle from 1908 to 1911, then worked in city planning and housing in Philadelphia from 1911 to 1913, and worked on numerous public housing projects in Pittsburgh and Cleveland between 1918 and 1935. Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 662.

[12] Stein and Wright were no longer partners in 1935, having split in August of 1933, but each was still highly respected in his own right.

[13] John L. Hancock, *John Nolen, Landscape Architect, Town, City, and Regional Planner: A Bibliographical Record of Achievement* (Ithaca, NY: Program in Urban and Regional Studies, Cornell University, 1976), 15.

[14] He is not listed in any official documents as a consultant, but he did correspond with Tugwell and Lansill about new towns, and met with planner Justin Hartzog to discuss the plan for Greenhills (possibly because Nolen had previously designed the town of Mariemont, Ohio). Charles Bradley Leach, *Greenhills, Ohio: The Evolution of an*

Bigger, who had worked alongside Stein and Wright in 1929 in the planning of Chatham Village, a housing project for those of "limited income" in Pittsburgh, contacted the two men, soliciting their advice on organizing a design staff for the Greenbelt towns. [16] Although there is no direct evidence that Tugwell initially knew either Stein or Wright personally, given his interest in the building of new towns he would have known them at least by reputation. Stein *had* met Franklin Roosevelt in 1931 when Roosevelt was still governor of New York, and had discussed town planning with him; afterward, on March 24, 1931, Stein wrote to his wife Aline, "I am on the way back from Albany. I had lunch and a long talk with the governor, and I think he is a great guy, or a good actor, or both."[17] Stein had at least some additional correspondence with Roosevelt after that. Once Bigger had brought Stein and Wright into the Greenbelt process they contended that this project was far too large and complex to be placed in the hands of a single planner or architect, arguing that more diversity of professional input would result in better-designed towns. They further suggested that there be a separate team of designers, made up of architects, town planners, and engineers, for each community. [18]

Tugwell met with Stein over a period of several weeks, and included Stein in a conference he held at the start of July in Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, to bring together officials from the various agencies that would be involved in the Greenbelt program. Stein, never particularly patient with outsiders meddling in his profession, wrote to his wife: "There are about fifty or sixty experts in education, health, recreation, housing, community organization, home economics, and everything…. They are shooting at this idea of how to build, manage, and create a new community, from every possible angle. It's hard to make any sense of it all: an orchestra of diversified prima donnas, all of them accustomed to having the whole show."[19] At

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American New Town (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1978), 53; Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 8; Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 48.

[15] Alanen and Eden state that in this role in 1934, Nolen "had urged the hiring of landscape architects and architects, in addition to civil engineers." Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 8. Nolen died in February 1937.

[16] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 47.

[17] Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, March 24, 1931, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 198.

[18] Henry S. Churchill, "Greenbelt Towns: A Study of the Background and Planning of Four Communities for the Division of Suburban Resettlement of the Resettlement Administration, John S. Lansill, Director," n.d., typed manuscript (hereafter cited as Churchill manuscript), Chapter 3, "Organization," 2, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[19] Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, July 2, 1935, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 312-313.

the end of the conference Tugwell announced that Stein was "to design one of our towns."[20] Eventually, however, the administrative decision to centralize the design staff in Washington, DC, Stein's desire to remain in New York, and a number of other factors resulted in Stein's official role within the project being that of a consultant rather than one of the chief designers for any of the individual towns.[21] He alternated throughout the remainder of the project between (seemingly feigned) indifference, hurt feelings, and indignation at having not been selected for one of the lead roles.[22] Although he was not among the project leaders, Stein in fact did play an important role in the design of the towns, as the teams looked to this eminent planner for advice and suggestions throughout the planning process.[23] Stein's influence was particularly pronounced in how much of the Radburn concept made its way into the final design of each of the towns, and of Greenbelt in particular.

On October 4, 1935, Frederick Bigger was named Chief of Planning for the entire Greenbelt program, meaning that each team reported to him and he in turn reported to Lansill.[24] The final organization of the planning staff closely followed Stein and Wright's

[20] Tugwell announced his intention to have Stein design one of the towns to the entire group, without having told Stein ahead of time – a demonstration of his frequent lack of diplomacy. Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, July 4, 1935, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 313.

[21] By September, Stein had heard nothing further about his supposed involvement in the Greenbelt project, and so telephoned Tugwell to say that "we should do one of their towns." But he eventually lamented that he "didn't succeed in showing the Tugwell crowd that they would do much better to give me one of their towns to take back with me to New York." Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, Sept. 24 and 28, 1935, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 317, 319. Further, Parsons contends that Henry Wright and Catherine Bauer played a key part in reducing Stein's role in the program, and that in particular Bauer, who was romantically involved with Warren Vinton, head of research for the Suburban Division, advised Vinton that Stein "was pretty good at site planning, but [would be] best used as a consultant." Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 318.

[22] He wrote to his wife on September 28 about his assignment to study community facility requirements rather than design one of the towns: "Perhaps they are just trying to sidetrack me, but why should I care[?]," but on September 29 he wrote: "why I should be doing this instead of designing one of their towns – it's absurd!" Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 319, 320.

[23] Ibid., 178.

[24] There is an unfortunate ambiguity to the term "planner" in relation to this program. Bigger, for example, was a trained "town planner," but his role encompassed more than the name implies. This in part stems from the fact that at this time so much fluidity still existed between the fields of architecture and town planning (which was itself still an offshoot of landscape architecture). The teams, as they were set up, each had one or two town planners, in addition to architects and engineers; like Bigger, these men actually played an integral role in all design elements of the project, and generally took the lead role in design decisions. The broadness of the term "planner" in relationship to the towns is further complicated by the fact that, in one capacity or another, everyone involved helped to "plan" the towns. I endeavor throughout to make clear the distinction between "town planning" and general planning. When possible without being overly repetitive I use the more generic term "designers" to designate both town planners and architects taken as a group, and to use "town planners" when I

suggestions, with four teams, each consisting of one or two principal architects, town planners, and engineers, as well as a "regional coordinator," who served a purely administrative function, dealing with Lansill, the design team, and local authorities.[25] The town planners generally had the greater design responsibility, being the ones who made decisions concerning the overall look of the towns, although there was close collaboration between all members of each individual team. The teams were essentially autonomous, having remarkable leeway in their design choices, and so, as Paul Conkin writes, "each greenbelt city became a distinct experiment in itself."[26] Henry Churchill, principal architect for Greenbrook, New Jersey, noted that although it might initially appear to be redundant and economically inefficient to employ four separate teams when one might have sufficed, Lansill felt that he "could not afford, was in fact not justified, in relying on any one theory of procedure or design. There were too few men with wide experience in such enterprises, opinion was too divided and too theoretical."[27] Furthermore, Churchill noted, the locations, topography, and local customs and preferences for each project site were diverse enough that it would be inadvisable to try to make one team address so many variables.

Thus, the Suburban Division quickly transitioned from having no professional planners working on the Greenbelt program to having four entirely separate teams consisting of planners, architects, engineers, and administrators, each with distinct opinions on how to proceed.[28] Clarence Stein noted that Bigger's job was to try to "get some order out of the [Suburban Division's] chaotic architectural office."[29] While it is difficult to determine with any certainty just how important any single individual was in the implementation of the Greenbelt

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mean specifically those who carried that exact title. "Planners," however, can denote any members of teams, including the regional coordinators, engineers, etc. It is my intention that context will make my precise meaning clear.

[25] The regional coordinator is also sometimes referred to in the records as the "executive officer in charge." This study will include no further consideration of the roles of the engineers or regional coordinators, who had little or no impact on the final appearance of the towns. The engineers' tasks concerned mainly such issues as water, sewage, and electric utilities, and the coordinators were strictly administrators, not designers.

[26] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 308. Joseph Arnold states that "the freedom given the greenbelt town planners is almost unique in the history of public housing in America." Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 85.

[27] Churchill manuscript, Chapter 4, "Planning the Town," 1, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[28] Throughout this work, "teams" will be used in reference not just to those who were assigned to specific town design teams, but also to the consultants who offered advice as needed.

[29] Clarence Stein to Aline Stein, Oct. 29, 1935, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 327.

project, Bigger played a necessary – if largely unacknowledged – role in the program.[30] Bigger, along with John Nolen, chose the professionals who would comprise the design teams. Essentially all design choices, from building plans to plumbing fixtures, went before Bigger for approval.[31] At the same time, although Bigger approved every detail, he did not compel the teams to include any particular elements or designs, nor did he impose any restrictions. The individual architects and planners stamped the Greenbelt towns with their own unique style.[32]

The teams

Nolen and Bigger quickly began assembling the teams from what was still at this point a relatively small community of professional architects and planners.[33] The first professional school of architecture in the United States had been developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1868, followed by the University of Illinois in 1870, Cornell University in 1871, Syracuse University in 1873, and Columbia University in 1881. By 1894 there were still

[30] Joseph Arnold states that "while Tugwell deserves the credit for originating the program, that remains his most significant contribution. Any discussion of the towns should mention all three names [Tugwell, Lansill, and Bigger] equally. Frederick Bigger was the one responsible for all the key policy statements and basic decisions concerning the planning of the towns." Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 48. This is apparently Arnold's (admittedly very well informed) personal opinion; he gives no specific evidence or citation for this assertion. Other sources – both primary and secondary – say little or nothing about Bigger's role.

[31] Bauman and Muller, "The Planning Technician as Urban Visionary," 143.

[32] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 87. One fact deserves emphasis: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt did not personally design or oversee the design of any of the Greenbelt towns. The need for this clarification stems from the fact that the Roosevelts' personal involvement in the towns' design was and continues to be a prevalent myth within the communities. The president visited Greenbelt when it was nearly complete; Mrs. Roosevelt did eventually take an interest in the towns, and she visited both Greendale, Wisconsin, and Greenbelt, Maryland, but neither she nor her husband had any direct influence on the designs of any of these communities. Some current residents, however, still proudly announce that their homes were designed by Eleanor Roosevelt herself (this was relayed to the author by a long-time resident of Greendale, Wisconsin, but all three towns seem to have some version of the stubbornly resilient and frequently repeated myth of the supposed Roosevelt design input). It is likely that Mrs. Roosevelt's interest in the Greenbelt towns, along with her much more active role in the Subsistence Homestead community of Arthurdale, West Virginia, have combined to create the false belief that she personally oversaw the design of the Greenbelt towns.

[33] Douglas D. Ellington and Reginald J. Wadsworth were appointed as principal architects for Beltsville (Greenbelt) on June 1 and June 17, 1935 respectively. Given this early timeframe, it appears that neither Nolen nor Bigger had any input in these choices; it is not clear how or why they were selected, or by whom.

just eight professional schools of architecture in the country.[34] The burgeoning interest in architecture as a profession is apparent in the growing number of institutions offering programs in the field, but by the close of the 1912 school year there were still just twenty institutions offering architecture programs, with a total enrollment of 1,450 students.[35]

City planning programs were developed later, and even by 1935 there were far fewer planning students than architecture students in the United States. Although landscape architecture, out of which city planning largely grew – had been more or less a specific discipline for some time, the first American course in city planning was not offered until 1907 (at Harvard), and the first school of city planning (also at Harvard) was not opened until 1929.[36] Harvard in fact had many connections to the Greenbelt program and was integral to town planning in general in the 1930s. John Nolen had graduated from Harvard in landscape architecture in 1905 and later served on the Harvard faculty.[37] In addition to Nolen, Walter Thomas (1907), Tracy Augur (1921), Elbert Peets (1915), and Jacob Crane (1921) – all Greenbelt design team members – also graduated from the institution.[38] In 1920 there were just thirty-seven students enrolled in Harvard's School of Architecture, and just eleven in the School of Landscape Architecture, so students would have known each other.

Other school ties connected Greenbelt personnel. Cornell, another of the most important universities producing architects and landscape architects in the first decades of the twentieth century, had educated several Greenbelt designers. Catherine Bauer, later a member and executive secretary of the RPAA and a consultant for the Greenbelt program, attended

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[34] Anthony Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning at Harvard* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 17.

[35] Arthur Clason Weatherhead, "The History of Collegiate Education in Architecture in the United States" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1941), 136-137.

[36] Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 14. Harvard was also the first American school to offer a master's degree in landscape architecture, announcing the program in 1923. Alofsin, 65.

[37] Nolen taught City Planning for the Department of Landscape Architecture 1929-1930 and for the Department of City Planning 1930-1935. Information provided by the Special Collections archivist at Harvard University.

[38] Peets (1886-1968) graduated from Western Reserve University (later Case Western Reserve University) in 1912 and received his master's degree in landscape architecture from Harvard in 1915, where he went on to be an assistant instructor in that field. He later partnered with Werner Hegemann to plan towns and write books on civic art. Arnold R. Alanen, "History as Precedent in Midwestern Landscape Design," in *Midwestern Landscape Architecture*, ed. William H. Tishler (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 194-203. Jacob Crane (1892-1988) received a degree in civil engineering from the University of Michigan, followed by a degree in planning from Harvard, where he studied under John Nolen, in 1921. He later opened an office as a town planner in Chicago. Guide to the Jacob Leslie Crane Papers, Cornell University; *The Michigan Alumnus* 28 (Ann Arbor, MI: 1922): 668.

Cornell briefly, but did not graduate from there. Henry Churchill, Tracy Augur, Justin Hartzog, and Russell Black – all Greenbelt designers – graduated from Cornell in either architecture or landscape architecture between 1916 and 1922.[39] Frederick Bigger and Henry Wright were friends from their days at the University of Pennsylvania.[40] (This is the same institution where Nolen had previously and Tugwell and Lansill later attended the Wharton School.)

Professional organizations connected many of those who were chosen as principle designers, the most important being the RPAA. Wright and Stein had been two of the major figures in that group from its start; in addition Bigger, Augur, and Bauer were RPAA members. The Housing Study Guild provided another source of ties between team members. Formed in 1933, the Guild, consisting primarily of architects and planners, collected data on current housing conditions in order to study the economic and social challenges of modern community planning and housing.[41] Henry Churchill, Catherine Bauer, Henry Wright, and Albert Mayer were all among the Guild's founding members.[42] In 1935 the Guild placed its library at the disposal of the RA's Suburban Division.[43]

Past professional collaborations also served as an important tie among Greenbelt's designers. Albert Mayer had worked for Clarence Stein.[44] Jacob Crane had both studied under

[39] Bauer (1906-1964) received her bachelor's degree in architecture from Vassar in 1926. She later traveled throughout Europe and studied and wrote about European housing programs, and would go on to become active in numerous housing reform efforts in the United States. Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 680; Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 65-66. Churchill (1893-1962) received a bachelor's degree in architecture from Cornell in 1916 and had an architectural practice in New York City from 1918 to 1953. Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 664. Augur (1896-1974) received a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Cornell in 1917 and in 1921 he earned a master's degree in landscape architecture from Harvard. He served as a planning consultant for New York City in 1922-23, had a landscape architecture practice in Detroit from 1928 to 1933, and became principle planner for the TVA in 1933. Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 662. Hartzog (1892-1963) graduated from Cornell University in 1917. He went on to earn a master's degree from Cornell in landscape architecture in 1922, and later worked in the office of John Nolen. Guide to the Justin R. Hartzog Papers, Cornell University. Black (1893-1969) graduated from Cornell with a degree in landscape architecture in 1916 and went on to become the director of the Bay Counties (San Francisco) Regional Plan in 1923 and director of plans and surveys for the Philadelphia Regional Plan from 1925 to 1929. He served as vice president and president of the American Institute of Planners from 1933 to 1937. Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 663.

[40] Wright graduated in 1901, Bigger in 1903.

[41] Aronovici and McCalmont, *Catching Up with Housing*, 104.

[42] Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 664; Albert Mayer, "New Homes for a New Deal," *The New Republic* 78 (Feb. 14, 1934): 7. Mayer (1897-1981) graduated from MIT in 1919. *American Architects Directory* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1961), 473. Another key founding member of the Guild was Carol Aronovici, a housing expert frequently cited in this dissertation. Boyer, "In Search of an Order to the American City," 127.

[43] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 9.

[44] Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 671.

and later worked for John Nolen. Russell Black, Earle Draper, Tracy Augur, Hale Walker, and Justin Hartzog had also all worked for Nolen.[45] Russell Black served as vice president and president of the American Institute of Planners during the years 1933-1937, and so would have been relatively well known in the field.[46] Crane had been elected president of the American City Planning Institute in 1934, and so was also likely known to planners.[47]

Some of the designers had already been involved in other New Deal agencies prior to their being chosen for the Greenbelt program; the TVA in particular supplied three key men. At the suggestion of Nolen and Bigger the RA "borrowed" personnel from the TVA, among them Earle Draper.[48] Draper had begun his career in 1915, working in Nolen's practice and becoming his representative in the South, but he eventually struck out on his own, opening an office in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1917. He became well known in the region for planning more than one hundred company towns and "developing, extending, or improving mill villages in every southern textile state."[49] One of his most prominent accomplishments in the mid-1920s had been the design of Chicopee, Georgia, for the Johnson and Johnson gauze works, including in his design parks, playgrounds, picnic areas, and sports fields.[50] He also convinced Johnson and Johnson to purchase additional land so that a greenbelt could be incorporated on the outer edge of the settlement.[51] When in 1933 TVA chairman Arthur Morgan sought a planner for his agency – a position many in the profession "considered to be the most desirable job in the New Deal" – he chose Draper because of his reputation throughout the South as a builder of quality company towns.[52] Although the TVA had originally intended only to build temporary housing for its workers, Draper convinced the administrators to create a permanent town, which eventually resulted in the construction of Norris, Tennessee. Morgan advised Draper to avoid hiring "people who might embarrass us by being tied to the New York group" – meaning the

[45] Hancock, *John Nolen: Landscape Architect*, 14, 33.
[46] Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 663.
[47] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 9.
[48] Draper (1893-1993) had received a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Massachusetts State College (later the University of Massachusetts) in 1915. Parson, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 665.
[49] Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns* (London: Verso, 1995), 184.
[50] Ibid., 189, 191. Although clearly in line with Draper's sympathies, these inclusions were also indicative of Johnson and Johnson's commitment to the welfare of its employees.
[51] Ibid., 191.
[52] Ibid., 196.

RPAA – but Draper ignored him and brought Tracy Augur onto his TVA team.[53] The RA later also borrowed Augur for the Greenbelt project.[54] To fill the job as the TVA's chief architect Draper had hired Roland Wank, who also followed him to the RA.[55] Wank was a Hungarian who had established his reputation by designing monumental Art Deco buildings, including Cincinnati's Union Terminal train station.[56] He went on to design several TVA dams, along with the dams, powerhouses and a visitors' and reception center at Norris.[57]

Thus, when Nolen and Bigger began to contemplate who should be invited onto the Greenbelt teams, they drew at least in part on their own knowledge of the work of their colleagues and acquaintances.[58] Undoubtedly other, less obvious and now forgotten connections and recommendations helped round out the Suburban Division design staff. The teams were divided up, at least in part, based on individual designers' familiarity with the region for which they were to be designing. Crane, for example, may have been chosen for the Wisconsin team specifically because he had recently been made state planning consultant for the states of Illinois and Wisconsin by the National Resources Committee.[59] Elbert Peets also had previously worked in the area, having designed, along with Werner Hegemann, projects in the Wisconsin cities of Sheboygan, Madison, and Milwaukee.[60] Possibly Wank was assigned to the team designing Greenhills, Ohio, because of his recent work in Cincinnati.

[53] Ibid.
[54] Parsons, *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, 662.
[55] Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, 196. Wank (1898-1970) studied at the Academy of Beaux Arts in Budapest, the Royal Technical University in Budapest, and the Technical University in Brno, Czechoslovakia. *American Architects Directory* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co.), 737.
[56] Leighninger, *Long-Range Public Investment*, 107.
[57] Ibid., 107-109.
[58] To clarify this somewhat confusing tangle of designers, see Appendix B for a (by no means exhaustive) table.
[59] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 7.
[60] Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, 127, 203.

This, then, was the staff structure:

Director's staff	
John S. Lansill	Director
Frederick Bigger	Chief of Planning
Warren Jay Vinton	Chief of Research
Greenbelt, Maryland	
Hale Walker	Town Planner
Reginald J. Wadsworth	Principal Architect
Douglas D. Ellington	Principal Architect
Greenhills, Ohio	
Justin A. Hartzog	Town Planner
William A. Strong	Town Planner
Roland A. Wank	Principal Architect
G. Frank Cordner	Principal Architect
Greendale, Wisconsin	
Jacob Crane	Town Planner
Elbert Peets	Town Planner
Harry H. Bentley	Principal Architect
Walter G. Thomas	Principal Architect
Greenbrook, New Jersey (never built)	
Henry Wright	Town Planner
Allan F. Kamstra	Town Planner
Albert Mayer	Principal Architect
Henry S. Churchill	Principal Architect[61]

In addition, the final report on Greenbelt lists Tracy Augur, Catherine Bauer, Russell Black, Earle Draper, Robert Davison, J. Andre Fouilhoux, Louis Grandgent, and Clarence Stein as consultants for the program.

Warren Vinton, the Suburban Division's Chief of Research, also played a key role in the planning of the towns. During the First World War Vinton had served as Assistant Scientific Attaché at the American Embassy in Paris. Later he was Director of Research for the American Association for Social Security and Research Supervisor for the Federal Housing

[61] The entire staff structure (including regional coordinators and engineers, excluded here) appears in a letter from Lansill to Will Alexander attached to the Greenbelt Final Report.

Administration.[62] Although the title of Chief of Research may not seem to be integral to design, he was in fact very involved in the planning process, particularly early on. Stein, Wright, Bauer, Augur, Crane, and Churchill met with Vinton frequently to discuss design options.[63]

The teams were assembled during October and November of 1935, and their offices set up in an unused mansion in Washington. Those who had been recruited to create the Greenbelts met their task with enthusiasm. Although few of the designers wished to see the kind of substantial economic and social reordering Tugwell had envisioned, their goal of providing, in journalist Marquis Childs' words, "a cleaner, truer, more secure pattern," certainly did not clash with Tugwell's desires. He had, after all, primarily wanted government action to improve the lives of working-class Americans, and while these men and women for the most part would have been just as happy to have been planning such towns for private enterprise as for the government, the fact remains that the idea of the towns themselves – and the planners' desire to create better living environments – did in fact largely fit with Tugwell's goals. Childs was impressed by what he witnessed in that mansion filled with drafting tables and scale models. He observed that the members of the planning staff were "as bright and fresh as paint," that this collection of economists, writers, artists, and sociologists were "something brand new in government."[64] Yet the task before them was not a simple one.

The task at hand

Since the teams were composed of individuals, it is perhaps inadvisable to speak of "the goals of the designers" as though they were a homogeneous group; though they shared many of the same intentions for the towns, there were also differences among them. Overall, they saw in the Greenbelt communities a chance to provide better housing, to alleviate urban

[62] Warren Jay Vinton, "A Survey of the Approaches to the Housing Problem," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 190, Current Developments in Housing (March 1937): 16.
[63] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 7.
[64] Childs, *I Write from Washington* , 12. In addition to the architects, town planners, and engineers, a host of professionals from a wide variety of fields took part in the Greenbelt program, conducting surveys, helping to establish good housing guidelines, determining optimal dwelling size, setting up tenant eligibility criteria, and public relations.

overcrowding, and to demonstrate the advantages of improved planning and the rational design of physical space. This was a universal goal among those who worked on the program – not just the architects and town planners, but the administrators, researchers, and publicists as well – and goes back to the prevalent belief that home, neighborhood, and community were the key components of a thriving society, that the provision of improved housing would ensure the creation of better citizens, and so a better nation. Lewis Mumford expressed this attitude in 1934 when he wrote: "Our society cannot be run by brutes, dullards, and neurotics; it can be carried on only by healthy and well-balanced and alert people, … people who are in a state of active and sympathetic intercourse with their immediate neighbors, their fellow workers, and with the larger world around them. Our contemporary urban and rural environments are for the greater part so disorganized and out of balance that they do not tend to produce such people or give them sustenance."[65] Carol Aronovici echoed this sentiment in 1939, writing about the lamentable fact that "local communities are merely stopping places in the shuttling between the bedroom and the office or factory, and are not, in the strictest sense of the word, communities or neighborhoods. This disintegration of communal life, and the consequences of divided communal interest, are leading to serious social and political difficulties, and are absorbing much of the leisure which modern methods of production and reduction in working hours have made possible."[66] These views meshed with those long voiced by housing reformers and social workers who claimed that impoverished living conditions were toxic to society. Catherine Bauer joined in voicing such concerns when she wrote in 1939, "out of dank and dismal dwellings only a race of spiritual pygmies can emerge, and conversely, a free, happy, and industrious nation is more likely to spring out of sunlit and wholesome surroundings. All history testifies to the truth of this observation."[67]

Those who planned the Greenbelt towns tended to agree, and to recognize that the skills of their own professions might offer a solution to these problems. Arguing in 1936 that the importance of the Greenbelt experiment "cannot be overemphasized," Henry Churchill

[65] Lewis Mumford, "The Social Imperatives in Housing," in *America Can't Have Housing*, ed. Carol Aronovici (New York: Committee on the Housing Exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art, 1934), 17.
[66] Aronovici, *Housing the Masses*, 185.
[67] Catherine Bauer, "Low-Rent Housing and Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 31 (Jan. 1939): 14.

wrote: "Resettlement is trying to show what can be done, on new land, to provide workers of moderate income with a way of living unheard of since Colonial days. It is a social experiment of the first magnitude."[68] Like Tugwell, the planners often focused on the construction of new towns as a solution to the problems of urban blight, overcrowding, and slums.[69] Cities of the past had grown without control, and had resulted in an urban mess that could be untangled only by enormous effort, yet professional planners believed that a solution was possible. As Wright had noted as early as 1925, "if one-half the technical skill that will be devoted to the 1927 model motor car were put upon the home building problem the housing bugaboo would be well on its way to a rational solution."[70] Albert Mayer had warned in 1934 that efforts such as slum clearance and the creation of low-income housing projects, "if they are superficially framed, if they are socially misdirected, … are capable of creating as much mischief as if nothing whatever were done."[71]

The planners generally believed that suburbs held great potential to remedy these ills, but only if approached and executed in the correct way, using the latest available scientific and professional tools. Jacob Crane wrote in February of 1935 (predating the RA), "any big program should take advantage of the chance to build at least a few semi-decentralized, industrial garden cities, incorporating all that we have learned by bitter experience of the way to get (and the ways not to get) the kind of living and working conditions we want in the United States. Here lies a challenge to our courage and intelligence. Here lies an opportunity of a lifetime."[72] Crane also optimistically assessed the potential that the town he helped design represented: "Greendale is based on the concept (we might say it is based on the American Dream) that for American families, not bleak, congested city housing, but an open green environment is

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[68] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 98.
[69] Among the articles written by Greenbelt planners on these issues prior to October 1935 were Henry Wright, "Sinking Slums," *Survey Graphic* 22 (Aug. 1933): 417-419; Catherine Bauer, "'Slum Clearance' or 'Housing,'" *The Nation* 137 (Dec. 27, 1933): 730-731; Albert Mayer, "Housing: A Call to Action," *The Nation* 138 (Apr. 18, 1934): 435-436; and Henry Churchill, "No Mere Facial Uplift Can Cure the Wrinkles of Our Cities," *The American City* 50 (June 1935): 55-56.
[70] Henry Wright, "Six-Cylinder House with Streamline Body," *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 14, no. 4 (Apr. 1925): 175.
[71] Albert Mayer, "New Homes for a New Deal 1: Slum Clearance – But How?" *The New Republic* 78 (Feb. 14, 1934): 7.
[72] Jacob Crane, "Let Us Build some Garden Cities," letter to the editor, *The American City* (February 1935): 65.

demanded. This enterprise is one manifestation of the powerful American drive to achieve the ideals which tend to guide American life."[73]

Beyond simply a wish for better housing was the desire on the part of most of the planners to create better towns and a better society. The idea was not just that improved environments would make people generally happier and healthier, but that the right sort of design could bring about a particular kind of enhanced social attitude. Paul Conkin exaggerated in writing that "the many architects of the New Deal communities, despite varying philosophies, were all striving to create, within the conducive environment of their planned villages, a new society, with altered values and new institutions." [74] Few of the designers in fact had any intention of altering values, for instance, unless to bring back those believed to have been lost over the decades. Yet they did want to bring about real social change, to help create a more cohesive nation. Elbert Peets perhaps summed this philosophy up best in his Final Report:

> Greendale … will be more than a housing project. It will not be merely another small town. It will not be just a pretty suburb. If the distinctive things, the purposes and experiments, end with physical construction, the town will not be worth its cost. Greendale, to be a success, must be a productive social experiment. It must better its people as members of society, as citizens. It must be a model little piece of America, a democracy based on the dignity and good sense of the individual. It must do a thing that is probably more important than any other thing in this modern world – it must give its people the experience of working together in loyal, tolerant, and effective groups. The town should be as democratic as a pioneer community – which in fact it is.[75]

This was a small step closer to Tugwell's vision; it assumed that some measure of increased democratic cooperation could be designed into the physical space of the towns.

One factor that the planners believed would induce this cooperative spirit was the greenbelt itself, specifically its function in containing the boundaries of the town and eliminating the possibility of future sprawl (the original use of the term "sprawl" in this sense

[73] Jacob Crane, "Greendale. The General Plan," *Planners Journal* 3 (July-Aug. 1937): 89.
[74] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 186.
[75] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 124. Original residents in all three towns did in fact refer to themselves as "pioneers."

has in fact been credited to Earle Draper).[76] Recalling Ebenezer Howard's garden city concept, they felt that limiting the size of the towns would have substantive benefits, but they differed from Howard in that the benefits they sought by this size restriction were not for the sake of economic considerations, but to foster community spirit.[77] They quite literally wanted to create, or to recreate, small-town America. As Peets explained, "people, to be good citizens of a nation, good members of society, must be good and active neighbors in their own communities. To bring this about the first step is to form a community, a group of people to which individuals will have the sense of belonging."[78] One of the objectives of the Greenbelt program was "to show how better citizens and a full community life could be developed in a suburban town," because "too often, families living in big cities lose nearly all contact with community affairs"; thus "the Government hoped to demonstrate that the Greenbelt Towns offered a better opportunity for families to lead a wholesome social, educational and civic life."[79] Peets argued that this was vital to a democracy because "strong citizens cannot be made by merely letting people look at a good government – they must take part in it."[80] This certainly fit with Tugwell's vision; although most of the planners said little or nothing about social and economic reordering in their justifications for the Greenbelts, they concurred that cooperation and an intensified democratic spirit could be fostered by creating well-designed small towns.

What is less clear is how much the designers agreed with the means of creating such towns, specifically on the issue of using public funds and subsidies to make the towns possible. Architects were more likely than New Deal administrators to be fairly conservative in their political views; most architects who worked on the Greenbelts were in fact Republicans.[81] Yet they were apparently not substantially going against their own political convictions by working for the RA. According to Joseph Arnold, several of the designers told Lansill that although

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[76] Paul Stiles, *Is the American Dream Killing You? How 'the Market' Rules Our Lives* (New York: Collins Business, 2005), 152.
[77] Christensen, *The American Garden* City, 91-92.
[78] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 63.
[79] Farm Security Administration, US Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, January 25, 1940 (apparently unpublished paper, no author listed). Greenbelt Historical Society Museum. Greenbelt, Maryland.
[80] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 124.
[81] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 50.

private practice would be more lucrative when the Depression ended, "they would remain in the Suburban Division forever if they could continue planning more greenbelt towns. They were inspired by a program which became the most significant American experiment with garden city building the nation had ever seen."[82] Still, this expresses their enthusiasm for the garden city idea, even for the Greenbelt idea, but does not signify a firm conviction in either the concept that the federal government should continue to be responsible for the provision of housing or that such a program necessarily demanded a rethinking of the American character of individualism.

Some planners, however, did take their arguments to that level. Frederick Ackerman, one of the founders of the Technical Alliance, the precursor to the RPAA, and a close friend of Clarence Stein, expressed the more activist end of the political spectrum in 1918: "Now is the time, as never before, when we must scrutinize our ultra-individualistic tendencies, our relative lack of accomplishment along broad social lines of cooperative undertakings, our trembling fear of governmental control, and, above all, of materialistic aims."[83] Stein, too, expressed a more activist view; in 1932 he wrote, "housing for the lower income groups must become a direct governmental service – in my opinion a service far more important than the building of roads, utilities, transportation, even more important than schools…. Inadequate incomes never will pay for adequate homes. We shall have decent communities for the vast mass of the population only when our cities – houses and all – are financed and built as public services."[84] Catherine Bauer was among the most vocal in exhorting the provision of public housing, writing in 1934, for example: "the old methods of providing shelter for people of average income or less are today so thoroughly unworkable and obsolete that any positive attempt to solve the housing problem can only be achieved by drastic measures. No back-door or half-way measures will do the job any more."[85] Henry Churchill in 1936 argued on behalf of the Greenbelt program, "this country is large enough and wealthy enough to afford such an

[82] Ibid.
[83] Frederick L. Ackerman, "What Is a House?" 4, in *The Housing Problem in War and in Peace* (Washington, DC: The Journal of the American Institute of Architects Press, 1918), 21. Ackerman was not involved in the Greenbelt program, but was a member of the RPAA, and was known to many of the Greenbelt planners.
[84] Stein, "Housing and Common Sense," 544.
[85] Catherine Bauer, "Housing: Paper Plans, or a Workers' Movement," in *America Can't Have Housing*, ed. Carol Aronovici (New York: Committee on the Housing Exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art, 1934), 21.

experiment. The prevailing philosophy of self-liquidation, of constipated conservatism, must not be allowed to interfere with what is, by any philosophy, next to the T.V.A., the most significant of the New Deal's attempts to be a new deal."[86] So while some of the designers held relatively conservative political views, others went much further in their interpretation of the mandate of the program and of its potential significance in shaping American attitudes about government involvement in the provision of subsidized housing.

One final motive was at work among the Greenbelt planners: the desire to prove the need for their specialized skills. A 1913 article by John Nolen and civil engineer F. Van Z. Lane had argued that "if it can be conclusively demonstrated … that the net result of correctly applying this new science [of planning] will beneficially affect the cost of living as well as make living more pleasant, no doubt people will not only take to city planning more kindly, but they will want to require its application."[87] Up to this point town planners and architects had been seen as largely unnecessary to the building of average American residential environments. Architects were concerned mainly with the design of monumental buildings and homes for the wealthy; as Carol Aronovici observed, architecture had until recently been "a luxury profession."[88] Although architecture, landscape architecture, and planning had by the 1930s been established as legitimate professions, this view of them as not terribly necessary lingered. Now the design teams saw an opportunity to advance their professions in the eyes of the public. Perhaps their skills had rarely been applied to the designing of new towns or low-cost housing in the past, but now they were convinced that they could provide improved environments, could truly make a difference in the nation's housing situation. The goals were perhaps self-serving – they stood to guarantee their future livelihoods – but they seem also to have genuinely believed that their skills were necessary to the improvement of society. Churchill later wrote of city planning, "the esthetic of it, the relation of spaces to each other and to the buildings that form the spaces, is admitted to be as important to the health and

[86] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 98.
[87] F. van Z. Lane and John Nolen, "City Planning and Distribution Costs," in "Reducing the Cost of Food Distribution," special issue, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 50, (Nov. 1913): 241.
[88] Aronovici, *Housing the Masses*, 197.

welfare as sewers and playgrounds."[89] Here was a chance to show what expert planning could accomplish, a chance to demonstrate that not just the elite but also average Americans – indeed, the entire nation – needed their professional skills.

Limitations and challenges

The teams had to tread carefully. This was after all a public project, in both senses of the term – the public funded the towns and also watched intently, scrutinizing the progress, alert to any hints that this program was somehow contrary to the nation's best interests. Although, as Albert Mayer had suggested in 1934, planners of improved environments for urban workers must be careful to "resist doing the kind of housing which is only mildly better than that we would replace just for the sake of putting it through with less opposition," the fact was that even the best plans would amount to nothing if public resistance became too vociferous.[90]

In this government venture, money was always an overriding concern for the Greenbelt staff, and tight finances continually hampered their efforts. Churchill wrote later that "low-cost housing was not the objective; the aim was well built, low-maintenance and, consequently, lower-rental housing. This meant that, within limits, maintenance became a more important factor than first cost – not a new idea in theory, but a very new one in application to this type of work."[91] His interpretation of the situation, however, was not fully accurate. In fact, initial cost was an enormously important issue throughout the planning and construction phases, along with the additional goal of constructing long-lived and easily maintained homes. Congress watched the proposed and actual budget of all New Deal projects with a sharp eye. Projected costs and budget overruns made for sensational news copy, and so members of the media pounced on any hint of overspending, top-heavy bureaucracy, or the much-despised "boondoggle." The program had put to work a staff consisting of four hundred men and

[89] Churchill, *The City Is the People*, 114.
[90] Albert Mayer, "Why the Housing Program Failed," *The Nation* 138 (Apr. 11, 1934): 409.
[91] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 97.

women, overseeing the labor of between twenty thousand and thirty thousand workers who constructed three entire towns which included 2,133 dwelling units.[92] But the price tag was high – over thirty-six million dollars.[93] The administration and planners had always to defend themselves against charges that they were frittering away public funds and engaging in wasteful self-indulgence. This was hardly conducive to the spirit of innovative experimentation that Lansill and his staff had hoped to promote.

Efforts to calculate how much value resulted from the massive expenditure run into difficulties. For example, the designs for the town of Greenbrook had been largely completed when construction was halted by court order.[94] The planning costs for the town were wasted, but not through mismanagement or error on the part of the staff. Budget cuts throughout the course of the program caused several reductions in the proposed number of dwelling units in each town.[95] This meant that the towns had been designed to support much higher populations than they ended up housing; thus all infrastructure costs and expenses for public buildings were much higher on a per-house basis than if the original plans had remained in place. And, of course, the very nature of this as a work relief project caused costs to soar. A mandated preference for unskilled labor and hand methods meant that the construction of the towns would be intentionally inefficient, and therefore costly, but the point was, after all, to create jobs, not just to build towns. One report on the towns estimated that for Greenbelt alone some five million dollars "could have been saved if machines and highly skilled men had been used instead of unskilled relief labor."[96] A 1947 article on Greenbelt, Maryland, acknowledged that "conceived in a period of great unemployment, its use – perhaps abuse – as a work relief project has prevented any reasonably accurate calculation of its actual cost," and that some experts assert that as much as one-third of the expense should be assumed to be a

[92] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 49, 117-118.
[93] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 117.
[94] For a thorough discussion of the Greenbrook court case, see Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 62-77.
[95] Initially the program called for a total of 3,500 dwelling units – 1,000 each in Greenbelt and Greenhills, and 750 each in Greendale and Greenbrook. The projected numbers were reduced on several separate occasions. The final count was 885 units in Greenbelt, 676 in Greenhills, and 572 in Greendale – a total of 2,133 units. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 89, 117-118. The number of planned units at Greenhills was cut five separate times. Justin Hartzog (apparently unpublished paper), Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.
[96] Farm Security Administration, "Greenbelt Communities" (typed report), January 25, 1940, 10, Greenbelt Museum.

direct result of this work-relief mission, and therefore should not be considered part of the town's actually cost.[97] Those attempting to assign a cash value for the program, therefore, can arrive at vastly differing figures depending on what criteria they apply.

Time was another enemy of the Greenbelt planners. The public's support of such programs generally extended to their conception of how this would help alleviate the crisis of individual unemployment and, more importantly, how it would help end the Depression. Congress applied pressure to move such projects along as quickly as possible (while also employing techniques that slowed down progress). In addition to the temporal limitations placed on them, planners also watched with alarm as their budgets were cut again and again; they understood all too well that time was working against the financial resources needed to complete the towns. The longer they took, the more the money required slipped out of their hands. Public opposition, especially the Greenbrook court case, also impelled them to work quickly; a finished town could not be stopped. Elbert Peets wrote in 1938 that "in all thinking about the greenbelt town our consideration must look far into the future. It is evident that in so slow a process as the modification of population groupings through the change of deeply-rooted habits concerning housing and land economics, the time factor enters in three ways; first, it takes time to plan and carry out the physical operation of the experiment; second, it takes time to estimate the lessons of the experiments; third, these lessons may have consequences running through an almost endless vista of time."[98] Time, however, was one luxury the Greenbelt planners did not have.

The designers faced other challenges as well. One major stumbling block was a lack of concrete goals.[99] The creation of greenbelt towns was an idea Tugwell may have been mulling over for some time, but about which he had no firm plans. The program would provide better housing, offer a better way of life for the working-class, demonstrate the power of community spirit and cooperation – but how? Roosevelt for the most part had even more limited goals: to produce jobs and utilize "planning" to get people out of congested cities. Administrators, architects, town planners – all brought their own individual notions of what was to be

[97] Frederick Gutheim, "Greenbelt Revisited," *Magazine of Art* 40 (Jan.1947): 17.
[98] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 8.
[99] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 6.

accomplished. And although there does seem to have been a general consensus on what the towns were intended to do, there was a great deal of uncertainty, at least initially, as to how to go about doing it. The mammoth task of building not just housing but entire towns complicated matters immensely. Yet it was this challenge that to a large extent inspired the planning teams to give the project their best efforts.[100] Here was a project where they could truly experiment, could show what they were capable of, could shine. Their directive was vague – "to create a community protected by an encircling green belt … designed for families of predominantly modest income, and arranged and managed so as to encourage that kind of family and community life which will be better than those they now enjoy."[101] Yet this vagueness left them a good deal of room for individual interpretation, and the lack of clear guidelines in the end made for the possibility of more diversity in their approaches to the task at hand.

Another quite serious challenge to the planning of the towns was the fact that few on the teams had any experience in designing low-income housing (in fact, very few architects or town planners in the nation had such experience; even those who had attempted low-income projects in the past had almost invariably failed to meet their goals). Architects had traditionally not delved into designing any but high-end homes, and town planners usually focused their attention on either metropolitan regional planning or the creation of middle-class suburbs. The lack of experience in this area resulted in design setbacks and a certain amount of waste, though certainly not to the extent that critics claimed.[102] And there were some involved in the Greenbelts who knew a good deal about low-cost housing. Stein and Wright had hoped to make Radburn available to low-income residents, and although in the end their town – like so many other such attempts – faced cost overruns that priced it out of reach of their initial target residents, they had learned valuable lessons in what to do and what not to do to meet this goal. Stein ended up preparing cost analyses for the Greenbelts that, according to Churchill, "proved invaluable in giving direction to economic investigation of the problems."[103]

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[100] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 83.
[101] John S. Lansill, Foreword to the Final Reports for Greenbelt, Greendale, and Greenhills, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.
[102] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 88.
[103] Churchill manuscript, Chapter 4, "Planning the Town," 10, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

Henry Wright had become something of an expert on housing costs, particularly on the relative economic merits of small homes and multi-family units.[104] Draper and Augur had previously worked on company-town housing, which also required a certain amount of skill in keeping costs low. Others on the teams, however, had less experience in this area, and even Stein and Wright had more theoretical knowledge than actual past success. The fact that many of the planners were working outside their normal parameters did have certain benefits, however. It gave them more freedom to try new ideas than they would normally have had. As Albert Mayer wrote in 1937, "for once the architect was not merely a purveyor of design, but, in cooperation with his client-employer, the Resettlement Administration, a creator of both the conditions of his design and of the design itself. For once it was assumed that the technician understood his job and the implications better than did the promoter."[105] The planners could, within limits, try out their favorite theories and designs for low-cost housing in the Greenbelt towns.

Another challenge that the planners faced paralleled a basic problem of the New Deal: experts and their ideas were largely seen by the public – and not always incorrectly – as being out of touch with the experiences of ordinary Americans. When Marquis Childs observed the planning teams at work, he was initially enthusiastic. Yet the more time he spent with the Greenbelt staff, the more uneasy Childs became. He wrote afterward, "I remember being exhilarated and at the same time disturbed after a dinner or a lunch with these pioneers of a brave new world. I felt that somehow they didn't know the Middle West that I knew and the people in the Middle West. The whole process seemed far removed from the deeper currents of American life and no one was working to relate these exciting experiments to main currents."[106] This disconnect, the gap between the ideas and assumptions of elite professionals and ordinary Americans, plagued the Greenbelt program from start to finish. This did not,

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[104] Among his publications prior to 1935: "The Apartment House: A Review and a Forecast," *The Architectural Record* 69, no. 3 (Mar. 1931): 187-195; "What Does the Architect Know about Small House Costs?" *The Architectural Record* 70 (Dec. 1931): 431-434; "Comparative Cost Studies of New Group Dwellings," *The Architectural Record* 71 (Mar. 1932): 213-216, 44; "The Costs of Housing," *The Architectural Forum* 56 (Mar. 1932): 299-305; "How Can Apartment Facilities be Improved for the Lower-income Groups?" *The Architectural Record* 71, no. 3 (Mar. 1932): 147-156; and "The Architect and Small House Costs," *The Architectural Record* 72 (Dec. 1932): 389-394.

[105] Albert Mayer, "A Technique for Planning Complete Communities," *Architectural Forum* 66 (Jan.-Feb. 1937): 19.

[106] Childs, *I Write from Washington*, 13.

however, stem from a lack of trying to understand the realities of American life or the public mood.

Research

The planners of the Greenbelt towns utilized the latest surveying methods in an attempt to ensure that their communities were as nearly as possible what residents needed and wanted. The use of housing surveys had been common for several decades at this point, but the researchers attached to the Greenbelt program took the basic housing survey to a higher level. In October 1935 upper Suburban Division administrators met with Stein, Wright, Bauer, and the planning staffs of Greenbelt, Greenbrook, and Greenhills (the staff for Greendale had not yet been finalized). One issue that they agreed upon was that a careful study of existing and desired housing would be of great use to the planning teams.[107] They wanted research that would not only determine what sorts of housing people already had, but what sorts they wanted, what kind of home and community life they felt would make their lives complete. As Lansill noted, "after a town is built, it must be lived in. If it does not meet the needs of the people … it will be a failure."[108] They also sought to understand who made up the populations of Washington, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati.[109] As Henry Churchill reflected, "the architectural problem became only incidental to the much more profound one of planned living…. It was no longer a study in sticks and stones, but one of people."[110] At the same time, there was a danger that too much fact-finding could interfere with the need to work creatively but quickly. Churchill warned that one reason that "city planning has largely failed … is that the planners themselves have been too preoccupied with statistics and the dry bones of their work. They

[107] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 98.
[108] Lansill to W.W. Alexander, attached to Greenbelt Final Report.
[109] From this point on, this study will focus primarily on the three towns that were actually constructed, thus will give little additional consideration to Greenbrook, New Jersey, except as needed to illuminate aspects of the overall program.
[110] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 97.

have failed from lack of imagination. Their plans are soggy and lacking in fire, they have neither guts nor gusto."[111]

RA researchers circulated questionnaires in the areas near the proposed sites, with the distribution aimed at the potential residents of the towns, the working class. In Cincinnati, for instance, forms were given out mainly through trade unions, industrial plants, social agencies, and churches, with a few distributed to homes in working-class neighborhoods.[112] The intent was to tabulate responses only from those who would theoretically qualify – and possibly be interested in obtaining – a home in Greenhills. As a result, questionnaires from those who responded that they were not interested in the project were not tabulated, nor were those who were interested, but already owned their own homes or those who depended on boarders for part of the their income.[113] The Cincinnati researchers distributed some 24,000 questionnaires; they received 1,840 back, but once those eliminated for the above reasons were removed, only 852 remained. Of these, any received from families whose income would disqualify them for a home in Greenhills – under $1,000 per year or over $2,000 – were also discarded. When the final tally of allowable forms was made, they amounted to just 427 questionnaires, yet the researchers were able to gather a large amount of information from this relatively small sampling.[114] Respondents were asked, among other things, how many people lived in their household; family income; number and types of rooms in the family's current dwelling; whether they owned a car, refrigerator, or washing machine; religious affiliation; and what sorts of home and recreational facilities they would like to have.[115]

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[111] Churchill, *The City Is the People*, 85.

[112] Samuel Ratensky to Warren Vinton, Report of the Second Week's Activity in Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, Feb. 6, 1936, Hartzog Papers, Cornell University. Similar distribution methods were also used in the other locales.

[113] The taking in of boarders was prohibited in the Greenbelt towns. This practice had often been cited by housing experts as one of the chief causes of urban overcrowding, lack of family privacy, and other ills, and was thus seen as something to be avoided.

[114] There seems to have been some discrepancy in the final number of eligible Greenhills questionnaires, with 522 actually eligible, but only 427 counted. This appears to have been an error, as the report says that "it was felt that the additional 95, which made a total of 522 … did not justify a second complete tabulation." Final Report on Greenhills (hereafter cited as Greenhills Final Report), Analysis of Questionnaire Results, 1, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky. Greenbelt and Greendale had the same culling process, resulting in similarly small final totals: 438 for Greenbelt and 1,000 for Greendale (Greendale had the highest number of forms returned, 2,231). Final Reports on Greenbelt and Greendale, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[115] See Appendix C for the Cincinnati questionnaire form.

In addition to the questionnaires, researchers conducted another type of study in Cincinnati, a survey of local experts in various fields. Ministers, a postmaster, school district superintendants, and architects and planners, among others, were asked to give information on the general character of the local population.[116] This was what the administrators termed a "quick survey," as opposed to the more detailed statistical analysis made from the questionnaire results. The summation of this quick survey was written by Milton Lowenthal of the Research Section of the Suburban Division. The report concludes that the Cincinnati population was most identified with a German heritage. This cultural background meant, according to the experts, that Cincinnatians were generally "good home-makers"; they were "clean and neat and take good care of their homes – whether owned or rented." Residents, moreover, were likely to be "industrious and thrifty, … lovers of music, art and drama, and cultivate gardens in leisure time." Because they were "thrifty and conserve not only their monies, but also their energies," they needed homes that would "not require fussing over." Although somewhat conservative by nature, they also were "not afraid of progress."[117] In other words, they had the potential for being ideal Greenbelt town residents. A memo from Lowenthal to Warren Vinton and architect Frank Cordner provided a further assessment of the population makeup in the communities near the Greenhills site. In it Lowenthal noted that in addition to those of German descent, there were "a good proportion of negroes" (however, he said, "from all indications, it will be impossible to consider negroes for the project") and "many 'hill-billy' Kentuckians, who [had] been brought in to work in the factories."[118] The Kentuckians, he noted, were "shiftless and live on a very low standard," and therefore seemingly were not prime candidates for Greenhills.[119]

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[116] This was possibly done in the other cities, as well, though I have only found the report for Cincinnati.
[117] Milton Lowenthal, "A Study of the Characteristics, Customs and Living Habits of Potential Tenants of the Resettlement Project in Cincinnati, and the Effect of Such Characteristics, Customs, and Habits on the Planning, Design, Construction and Equipment of the Dwelling Units," Feb. 1936, Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.
[118] See note 318 for Greenbelt racial policies.
[119] This memorandum is in large part (including this specific passage)reproduced verbatim in the "quick survey" report on characteristics of the Cincinnati population. However, the memo states that the findings outlined represent "information gleaned from inhabitants of the vicinity of the project – mostly from the town of Mt. Healthy." Lowenthal gives no explanation of how this information was obtained, so it is not clear whether the same group of experts was consulted for this. Milton Lowenthal to Warren Vinton and Frank Cordner, Jan. 30, 1936, Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.

This quick survey also yielded recommendations on the types of housing residents were likely to desire. Many could be expected to prefer single-family homes, even if they currently lived in apartments.[120] This was confirmed by the responses to the questionnaires. When asked whether they would prefer to live "in an apartment building, an attractive group building of not more than six houses, or a single home costing more per month than an apartment or group house," 67.8 percent of respondents desired single-family homes.[121] Given the supposedly overwhelming American tendency to equate the ideal home with independence, virtuous citizenship, and all of the other traditional values connected with home ownership, this number actually seems rather low. As struggling members of the working class, some of the respondents likely felt that caring for a single-family home would be an added and unwelcome burden. In addition, the people responding to the surveys were of working-class background, and only those in the narrowly prescribed low-income groups were tabulated, so this figure may simply reflect the realistic expectations of citizens for whom a single-family home seemed too much to expect. It is of course also possible that the belief that every American family desired a detached home of their own has simply been overstated.

The report from the quick survey also made recommendations for specific home and community elements most likely to be desired by residents. It suggested the inclusion in each home of a "large living room with partly partitioned space for dining." The results of the questionnaire showed that while some families desired a separate dining room (the form did not ask about a combined living-dining room), others preferred to give up a dining room in favor of an additional bedroom and an eat-in kitchen. A 1935 study of working-class families conducted by the Women's City Club of New York found that 81.6 percent of wives served meals in the kitchen and just 3.2 percent in a dining room (although they did not provide data on how many of these families had dining rooms available).[122] Among Cincinnati questionnaire

[120] However, the report concluded that "many who at present object to the idea of group housing will change their minds after seeing them 'in action.'" The memo from Lowenthal to Vinton and Cordner states that "there is unanimity in the desire for a separate house," but he gives no source for this information.

[121] Just 5.3% preferred apartments and 26.7% preferred group houses. The wording on the form left the possible configuration of the "group building" up to the interpretation and imagination of the respondent. The questionnaire did not ask about what sorts of dwelling the families currently occupied. Greenhills Final Report, Analysis of Questionnaire Results, 27.

[122] Lowenthal, "A Study of the Characteristics … in Cincinnati," Appendix J, Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.

respondents 50.6 percent currently had a separate dining room. The quick survey report also recommended providing gardening space, a suggestion supported by the questionnaire results (93.5 percent of respondents wanted space for a flower garden, and 90.4 percent wanted a vegetable garden, either close to the home or in a slightly removed location).

Clearly those who returned the questionnaires – and whose results were not dismissed due to home ownership, lack of interest in the project, or other factors – were not in the same desperate situation as those who lived in the most dismal conditions enumerated in the various housing studies discussed in Chapter Two (including the poorest districts of Cincinnati). The questionnaire results for the Greenhills project showed that 86.4 percent of families currently had a living room, 99 percent had a kitchen (and the other one percent desired one), and 42.6 percent had a garage. A private bath was present in 74.5 percent of the homes; not surprisingly, those with higher income levels were more likely to have a bath. The current average number of bedrooms was 1.6 per family, while the average desired was 2.1. Family sizes ranged from one to ten, with the highest concentration – a total of 86.5 percent – falling in the two-to-five-person range, so clearly the request for additional bedroom space was not unreasonable, nor did the families hope for a very substantial increase in such space. When asked what kinds of community facilities they desired, 82.2 percent of the responses tabulated for Greenhills said that they wanted a library in the town, 77.5 percent expressed a desire for a community swimming pool, and 63 percent hoped for baseball diamonds.[123] The Washington questionnaire results showed that many respondents currently owned cars (38.8 percent), mechanical refrigerators (25 percent), and washing machines (16.9 percent).[124]

Although some of the data received were similar among the three locales, there were some noticeable differences as well. While nearly sixty-eight percent of respondents in Cincinnati, and an even larger proportion of Milwaukee residents (seventy-four percent), expressed a desire for a single-family detached home, just under thirty-two percent of

[123] Greenhills Final Report, Analysis of Questionnaire Results, 54. See Appendix D for the full breakdown of responses on community facilities for all three towns.

[124] Greenbelt Final Report, Analysis of Questionnaire Results, 43. Although I have been using Greenhills as the example for the research results, corresponding data on these amenities does not appear in the Greenhills Final Report. The memo from Lowenthal to Vinton and Cordner states that near the Greenhills location "all own their stoves … about 50% own electric refrigerators … [and] practically all own washing machines," but this information was not obtained from the questionnaires.

Washington residents chose this option on their questionnaires.[125] Washington respondents, in fact, showed a preference for group housing (over forty-five percent chose this option, and nearly twenty-three percent chose apartments, much smaller than the 5.5 percent choosing the apartment option in Greenhills, for example). This reflects the differing standards of what was considered normal and acceptable for a decent, respectable home in each location.

In addition to the formal research conducted, some planning teams also incorporated informal observation. Elbert Peets and his colleagues, for instance, drove through some of Milwaukee's working-class neighborhoods to see for themselves what sort of housing was currently available. They saw "thousands of little cottages, too close together, often ugly, but neatly kept with liberally planted front lawns and rear yards"; Peets concluded that "people who had dreamed of having one of these crowded cottages as their life's home, would live in our houses at Greendale."[126]

The purpose of the research done for the Greenbelt program was to guide the choices made by the towns' designers; the very fact that the teams embarked on their planning with the intention of taking potential residents' desires into account indicates that these communities were not, after all, going to be physically extremist or revolutionary in conception. Albert Mayer wrote of the heavy reliance on research: "We were always essentially architects and planners who simply did not want to proceed as though nothing had ever been built before, or on the basis that nobody knew anything but us. We wanted to accumulate what there was and what analysis indicated could reasonably be created, so that our planning and architecture would be the more significant because it was part of our time and part of the locality."[127] The planners wanted to create the best and most innovative towns that they could, not to make such radically unique spaces that the American public would not or could not accept them. They wanted to build real – but superior – towns for real people.[128]

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[125] Final Reports on, Greenbelt, Greendale, and Greenhills.
[126] Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 43.
[127] Mayer, "A Technique for Planning Complete Communities," 21.
[128] It is also worth noting what the towns were *not* intended to be. Henry Churchill stressed that "there is nothing of the subsistence-homestead idea in these towns. The inhabitants will depend on nearby industry for support, not on not-quite farms." Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 96.

Design influences: architectural education

As the town planners and architects settled into their offices in the Washington mansion, they brought to their drafting tables a variety of previous experiences and influences. Although Catherine Bauer had written in 1931 that architecture should not "advertise anything, least of all the individual idiosyncrasies and inhibitions of the architect," that their plans should be "impersonal, anonymous," it was in truth hardly possible for designers to leave their pasts, their own education, experience, and expectations, behind.[129]

The timing of the education of the architects on the Greenbelt design teams is quite important to the directions that their designs eventually took. Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the first decade or so of the twentieth, the influence of the French École des Beaux-Arts ("school of fine arts") reigned supreme.[130] The École had been founded in 1803, although its predecessor, the Académie Royale d'Architecture, traced its roots back to 1671 and the court of Louis XIV. Its training methods had changed little from that time: students studied great architecture of antiquity and produced meticulous drawings of monumental projects based on these classical designs. Each year students presented their work in competition.

Seen by most American practitioners as the premier architecture program in the world, the École had trained some of the most prominent U.S. architects, including its first two American graduates, Richard Morris Hunt (who studied there from 1845 to 1855) and Henry Hobson Richardson (1860-1862), and later Louis Sullivan (1874).[131] By the turn of the twentieth century not only had the school's prestige remained high, but a growing number of American professors of architecture had studied there, thus bringing the École's attitudes and techniques to the United States. The core principles of the school's method – symmetry, order, and unity of design – became the dominant influence in U.S. schools.[132]

[129] Catherine Bauer, "Who Cares About Architecture?" *The New Republic* 66 (May 6, 1931): 326.
[130] Weatherhead, 5.
[131] Ibid., 75.
[132] Ibid., 76.

Although the École tradition was centuries old by the 1900s, and represented to most architects trained in this method the pinnacle of education for their profession, it was in many ways far removed from the more practical American professional architectural training that arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The drawings produced at the École were literally "academic" – they were highly stylized, largely impractical, and for the most part were never constructed. Students were not trained in the design of utilitarian or vernacular structures, nor were they instructed on the realities of budgetary or other real-world concerns. Their designs were monumental, grand, and largely unoriginal, always recalling classical forms. Architects with an École education hoped to put this training to use in producing impressive public buildings and grand residences for the wealthy. Houses and public structures for ordinary folk, on the other hand, were sometimes designed by civil engineers, but most often were constructed by builders with little or no design training. During the 1800s, with a rising public and scholarly interest in the field of sociology, the link between quality of life and the built environment began to take on increased importance. Still, this had little impact on the École and its students.[133] A 1921 article in *Pencil Points* explained:

> The most important thing is for the student to take the work with the right attitude. Any one problem must be considered not as an end in itself, but as a part of a well mapped-out training in design – and design is not concerned primarily with ornamentation or detail, but with making an arrangement that will satisfy the practical requirements, with the composition of the elements, with the proportion of the masses, with the arrangement and disposition of openings, etc., and with producing a building of pleasing appearance.[134]

The preponderance of revivalist forms, the lack of innovation among École students, and the focus on "pleasing appearance" over functionality were instrumental in causing something of a revolt against the École tradition in the early decades of the twentieth century, when some architects turned away from the slavish copying of past designs in favor of a vibrant and new modernist style.[135]

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[133] Donald Drew Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition in French Architecture*, ed. David Van Zanten (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-5.
[134] John F. Harbeson, "The Beaux-Arts Method," *Pencil Points* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1921): 19.
[135] Marian Moffett, Michael W. Fazio, and Lawrence Wodehouse, *A World History of Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 432.

This new interest in modernism – which was taking place just as many of the Greenbelt designers were finishing their education or were in the early stages of their careers – was in many ways related to the desire expressed by Albert Mayer to design towns and buildings that were part of their time. Beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century in western Europe, and picking up speed and spreading to the United States in the first decades of the twentieth, some architects and planners began to feel a growing dissatisfaction with the seemingly endless repetition of old forms. They wanted to create designs to reflect the rapid change, the vitality, the newness of the modern age. Early signs of a movement away from lavish, ornate styles were evident in the architecture of the Prairie and Arts and Crafts styles, most notably in the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright, and in furniture design in the work of William Morris and Gustav Stickley.

This streamlined form took on a more industrial look in the years immediately following the First World War. Whereas the Arts and Crafts and Prairie Styles had stripped designs of their ornateness, but maintained the use of natural and organic materials (wood and stone), following the war European innovators began to use unadorned concrete, steel, and large sheets of glass. This style was particularly developed and promoted in Germany, under the influence of the Bauhaus ("House of Building") school of design, which had begun in 1919 under the guidance of Walter Gropius. Inspired by the artistic Cubist movement, this school came to represent a decidedly modernist aesthetic, utilizing clean lines and minimal use – or complete elimination – of decorative elements in a repudiation of the previous fussy, decoration-laden styles of the Victorian and Edwardian periods (see figure 5.1). Among those most strongly associated with this movement were Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (the school's director when it was disbanded in 1933) and Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret).

In this modern, "functionalist" aesthetic, as one scholar explained, "the masses and the planes and lines of the design were … determined, or at least definitely qualified, by modern scientific materials and machine processes. The interior became enclosed air and sunlight rather than the ancient walled place of refuge."[136] The movement began to generate interest and imitation by some American architects during the 1920s. In 1932 the New York Museum of

[136] Weatherhead, 178.

Modern Art, in conjunction with the Harvard School of Architecture, brought the new style to the attention of the American public through an exhibition of modern designs (Lewis Mumford collaborated on one portion of the exhibit, which was devoted to the issue of housing).[137] Because this movement seemed to spring up in several European nations at nearly the same time, because it celebrated "universal" modern machine processes, and because it turned away from regional and national design preferences, it was referred to in the title of the exhibition brochure – and has continued to be known since – as "International Style."[138]

Fig. 5.1. International Style: 1938 Bauhaus design by Walter Gropius in Middlesex County, Massachusetts. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey.

In Germany especially this style came to be a favorite used in government programs aimed at providing public housing, such as the designs Ernst May had executed for the city of Frankfurt. Much like Ebenezer Howard before them, many of those engaged in such housing

[137] Margaret Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts 1919-1936* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 15.

[138] Weatherhead, 179; Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 83; James Steele, "Architecture as a Reflection of Evolving Culture: The American Experience," in *Architecture: Celebrating the Past, Designing the Future*, ed. Nancy B. Solomon (New York: Visual Reference Publications Inc., 2008), 46. The actual title of the exhibition was "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition." Several different modernist styles were being imported from Europe at this time, but Americans tended not to differentiate between them and the most prestigious Bauhaus. The label of "International Style" was a convenient way to encompass all of the trends easily under one name.

programs during the 1920s and 1930s believed that through better residential environments they could provide the means for a better-functioning society. Historian Barbara Miller Lane writes of Gropius and fellow Bauhaus designer Bruno Taut that both "sought above all to discover a new principle of structure and order in German society with which to oppose the chaos of war and revolution. They wished for a process of reintegration in all spheres of life: in thought, in society, in the education of the 'well-rounded man,' between everyday life and spiritual things, between culture and industry, between artists and society, and among the arts."[139]

These German endeavors for the most part ended in 1933; once the Nazi Party came to power, party members set about repudiating these modernist styles as being decadent and in opposition to the grand history and tradition of German culture. As city planner Catherine Bauer wrote in 1934, as far as the National Socialists were concerned, "no decent German … would live under a flat roof."[140] Further, Cubist-inspired structures, intended to reflect the machine age, were denounced as too industrial, as "anti-human."[141] Lane writes that the ideas behind the designs "were in the main nonpolitical. Yet the very inclusiveness of this view of architecture endowed the new style with a broader set of associations. Thus by the time the aseptic forms of the new architecture were introduced to the German public on a large scale, they labored under a heavy load of symbolism which in turn provided substance for those, both friendly and unfriendly, who sought to interpret them in cultural, social, or political terms."[142] Thus we are offered an early glimpse of the ways in which design was imbued with deeper social meaning, sometimes by proponents, but just as often by those who viewed the new styles as threatening. Those engaged in the Greenbelt towns program came to know this phenomenon as well, though certainly with less ferocity than in Nazi Germany, where opposition to modernism took on a particularly ugly, and theoretically dangerous, tone.[143]

American interest in the Bauhaus School and International Style had been growing during the 1920s. After 1933, when many of those who had been engaged in modern design

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[139] Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany,* 67-68.
[140] Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 222.
[141] William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1969), 197.
[142] Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany,* 68.
[143] Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, 197.

fled Nazi Germany and emigrated to the United States, the modernist influence became even more widely accepted among American designers.[144] Few American architects, however, saw in the new style any sort of political statement; it was merely something new and interesting. The First World War had devastated Europeans' sense of complacence, and had created in the returning American veterans a similar, if less fervent, feeling that nothing was quite as it had been. This restlessness was in turn reflected in design.[145] The United States' new status as a victorious world power seemed to call for a turning away from the endless repetition of antique European design styles, while at the same time the modern age presented startling new possibilities for lifestyle and the built environment.

The Greenbelt designers, then, were educated and came into their professional lives at precisely the time when a shift was taking place in American architectural education and thought.[146] Although by no means did every school, professional practice, or individual embrace the International Style, nor any modern style, the influence of this shift from the fifty-year supremacy of the École des Beaux-Arts to new and experimental contemporary forms left the profession, by the 1930s, in a state of flux. In 1934 Catherine Bauer wrote, "every age of architecture is the direct expression of a social pattern: that of the nineteenth century equally with that of the thirteenth. And the degree to which an age achieves an integral 'style' in the matter of its buildings and their arrangement is very likely to be relative to the degree of order and integration in the society itself."[147] If this is true, the unsettled nature of the field of architecture at the time mirrored the unsettled nature of American society, a tension between a comforting but outmoded past and an uncertain but unstoppable future.

[144] Walter Gropius became a professor at Harvard in 1938, for example, and Mies van der Rohe taught at the Armour Institute in Chicago. Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America*, xii.
[145] Steele, 46.
[146] Even by 1921, for instance, the yearbook of Harvard's School of Architecture still featured only classical drawings; in 1938 Gropius became an instructor for the school, demonstrating the department's new willingness to embrace modern design. Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America*, 32.
[147] Bauer, *Modern* Housing, 213.

Design influences: planning

The field of town planning, too, was in a state of flux just before and after the turn of the century. The discipline was still relatively new, yet already the "city beautiful" ideal born of the Columbian Exposition had given way to more practical approaches for creating and ordering American towns. Debates swirled from the 1910s through the 1930s over issues regarding the best type and placement of public buildings, residential dwellings, and roads. Those attempting to design towns for the working class – including the Greenbelt planners – began to address issues of quality of life versus economy of construction in an effort to make pleasant living environments available to all.

It is no coincidence that the shift from the "city beautiful" to the "city practical" parallels the shift from classical Beaux-Arts training in architecture to a new emphasis on social concerns and functionality; architecture was closely tied to planning (which was itself still closely related to its parent discipline of landscape architecture). Harvard University, for example, had long promoted the idea of collaboration between architects, town planners, and landscape architects, and there was still a great deal of overlap between these fields, with many practitioners trained in two or all three areas. For the Harvard faculty and students, this meant that all efforts should be "directed towards complete design."[148] Harvard graduates Elbert Peets and Jacob Crane especially, but all American architects and planners at this time to some degree, would have been imbued with this collaborative idea.

"Planning," then, involved not just town planners. In the creation of the Greenbelt communities trained town planners, architects, and program administrators worked together to consider the needs and desires of potential residents, but also were constrained to keep within closely monitored, always-shrinking budgets. As a result they debated the relative merits of various town layouts and housing configurations. Their questionnaire analyses, for example, had told them that most potential occupants preferred a single-family detached home, but the program's budgetary limitations pressed for the economy gained by multiple-family dwellings. The designers' desire to introduce new and innovative concepts led them to

[148] Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 12-13.

consider non-traditional arrangements, but their limited funds, along with a certain reluctance on the part of the American people to embrace any ideas that seemed too strange or radical, kept them from straying too far from conventional practices. The planning of the towns was thus always dependent upon compromise between an idealized vision and stark, unyielding reality.

Complicating these problems were deeply-held attitudes about ideal American home and family life. The questionnaire results showed that not everyone felt as strongly about the need for a single-family home as is popularly believed. Yet the fact remains that for a substantial proportion of the population any sort of "communal" living – multi-family row houses, apartment buildings, even detached homes grouped together in unconventional configurations – held connotations of foreignness or of poverty and slum living. Although Europeans had long accepted the need for close quarters with one's neighbors, and even the concept of the single-family house in Europe allowed for the sharing of walls and garden spaces, this was not the case in the United States, where land had always been abundant and relatively cheap. But the availability of land as the genesis of this ideal was seldom recognized; most Americans simply saw the ownership of a detached house as linked to both individual and public identity. Even most American housing reformers, as Catherine Bauer pointed out in 1934, "believed that the ideal home was a small house with attached garden; anything else could be nothing more than an unfortunate compromise" (Bauer herself, it should be noted, did not share this view).[149] Although individuals may have been more open than is usually supposed to the possibilities of multiple-family dwellings for their own circumstances, the popular imagination remained largely wedded to the notion that the ideal type of home for the independent American family was a detached house with space around it and privacy from the prying eyes of neighbors and other outsiders.

The Greenbelt designer most closely associated with this issue was Henry Wright, who made a name for himself within the profession for his studies of small house and apartment designs. Yet even Wright had initially shared the conventional view that a detached home was preferable, writing in 1916: "For health and to develop neighborhood sympathies and civic

[149] Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 188.

interest a dwelling which may be called a home is needed. A flat, one of twenty-four of similar character within the same walls, stimulates little home feeling and tends to estrangement from, rather than familiarity with, neighboring dwellers. Pride in the home and a sense of attachment can be developed only by dwellings which to some extent are set apart from other dwellings – a house with space about it."[150]

Over time, however, Wright was compelled to change his attitude. As he watched European housing efforts unfold, he caught a glimpse of a possible solution to America's housing crisis. By 1925 he was less enamored with the ideal of the detached home, writing, "under the very best conditions that we may hope for, it will take long years of experimentation to produce results commensurate with the present technical advances of such countries as England and Holland; but in the meantime little is to be gained by excusing ourselves because of supposed American 'preferences' for foolish and wasteful types of houses."[151] This is not an indication that he had completely abandoned his earlier views, but rather that he had come to accept the reality of the situation: it was simply not reasonable to think that every American family could have a detached single-family home. In 1930 he acknowledged this fact when he wrote, "Can we longer turn our backs and feel that, because we may not like the idea of people living in [apartments], we shall do nothing about designing them, and continue to relegate them to noisy locations of a poorer, left-over sort…?"[152] Wright eventually came to the conclusion that tiny plots with detached homes on them were wasteful and far from ideal (he was particularly unimpressed with the preponderance of "ridiculous bungalows" that had sprouted across the country throughout the 1920s).[153] By 1933 he was arguing that "the fantasy of the snug and cozy little home that the typical American will own, … on his own lot, is indeed one of the most highly paid fairy tales the advertising man ever managed to float."[154]

Wright was not the only Greenbelt designer to feel that the American attachment to the single-family home ideal was counterproductive. Henry Churchill, for example, wrote in his

[150] Henry Wright, *The American City: An Outline of Its Development and Functions*, 160-161.
[151] Henry Wright, "Community Planning, 'Lo!' the Poor One-Family House," 120-121.
[152] Henry Wright, "The Place of the Apartment in the Modern Community," *The Architectural Record* 67, no. 3 (Mar. 1930): 209.
[153] Henry Wright, "Community Planning, 'Lo!' the Poor One-Family House," 120-121; Henry Wright, "Housing – When, Where, and How?" *Architecture* 68, no. 1 (July 1933): 20.
[154] Henry Wright, "Housing – When, Where, and How?" 21.

summary of the Greenbelt program that although "there was no doubt that the majority of people would prefer 'their own little home' on their own plot of land," this was in fact "a sentimental idea, without much else to recommend it."[155] The planners had received an indication from the questionnaire results that at least some of the towns' potential residents were open to the idea of row houses and apartments (much more so in Washington than in Cincinnati or Milwaukee), but they were also clearly aware that the preference for detached homes with separate yards would make the more cost-effective group housing a tough sell. There are no records that indicate that the hope of infusing a character of neighborliness and unity entered into considerations of which type of housing would be best, but it is of course possible that planners had an expectation that close proximity and shared outdoor space would foster better, more close-knit communities (as in fact, to a certain extent, was the case once the towns were populated).

Another of the design influences that planners considered was the type of town to be built, the physical arrangement of public and private spaces and streets. It has become common for scholars to stress the close ties between the towns and the garden city ideas of Ebenezer Howard.[156] This is in large part because the planners and administrators themselves frequently made this connection. Rexford Tugwell, for example, talked about Howard's concepts in a speech about the Greenhills project given in Cincinnati in February of 1936.[157] Churchill wrote that "the prototypes of the towns are the 'garden cities' of Welwyn and

[155] Churchill manuscript, 36, Chapter 4, "Planning the Town," Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky. It should be noted, however, that Fred Naumer, Regional Coordinator for Greendale, disagreed with this statement, asserting, "we are not willing to concede the accuracy of this statement." Memorandum by Fred Naumer to John Lansill, Mar. 9, 1937, copy attached to Churchill manuscript, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[156] Conkin perhaps goes the furthest in drawing this parallel, writing that "the three completed greenbelt cities represented the culmination of the garden city movement in America. They remain the nearest American approximation of Ebenezer Howard's garden city idea." Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 305. Others merely mention the Garden City idea as one of the progenitors of the Greenbelt concept; see for example Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 5-8; "Brave New Towns That Aged Awkwardly," *Business Week* (Jan. 9, 1971): 22-24; Christensen, *The American Garden* City, 71; James Dahir, "Greendale Comes of Age" (manuscript prepared for the Milwaukee Community Development Corporation, 1958), 4-5; Flora C. Stephenson, "Greenbelt Towns in the United States," *Town and Country Planning* 10, no. 40 (Winter 1942-1943): 121.

[157] Rexford Tugwell, address to the Regional Planning Association of Hamilton County, Ohio, February 5, 1936. Tugwell Papers, FDR Presidential Library.

Letchworth, England, and the industrial suburbs of Frankfort, Germany."[158] The planners themselves recognized this. Elbert Peets wrote in his Final Report on Greendale about Howard and his garden cities, but went on to state that "the greenbelt town that was envisaged in the organization of the Division of Suburban Resettlement was not the thing Howard had in mind." Rather, "they were to be, not true satellite cities, substantially complete economically, but satellite dormitory suburbs for working people, a thing now for the first time thinkable since the universal use and cheapness of the automobile."[159]

Howard had undeniably laid the groundwork for future towns such as the Greenbelts. His concept of deliberately building "satellite" communities on the periphery of large cities, of decentralizing industry, of incorporating parks and a sprawl-stopping greenbelt are evident in all three towns. Even his idea of corporate ownership was replicated in the program, although it was the federal government that retained ownership until after 1949 despite the RA's intention that the towns would be turned over "to a nonprofit corporation or local housing authority" as soon as they were completed.[160] But the Greenbelt towns resemble English garden cities more in theory than in fact. Howard himself stated that his plans for the physical layout of garden cities were only a suggestion, and that the truly important aspects were the ideas of corporate ownership and decentralization of industry. Yet in the United States his garden cities were to remain only a concept. They were too tied to the nineteenth century, to trains and a "walking city" – in other words, to the past.

Although the connection to Howard's ideas is very real, the more immediate precursor to the Greenbelts was the "city for the motor age," Radburn, New Jersey. This was not simply a matter of Stein and Wright imposing their pet views on the design teams, but that Radburn (and to a lesser extent the other Stein and Wright projects of Sunnyside, in Queens, New York, and Chatham Village near Pittsburgh) were recognized by the planning profession as being among the most forward-thinking and successful of attempts up to that point at creating "new towns" for America. The basic elements of the Radburn design were incorporated into the

[158] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 96. In general the Greenbelt planners did not publicly acknowledge any debt to German housing projects, perhaps because the Greenbelt towns were already frequently depicted in the press as being of foreign, possibly "radical" origin.
[159] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 1.
[160] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 124.

Greenbelt towns – the attempt to separate pedestrians from cars, the turned-around house, and the superblock – though in varying degrees in each town.

Forward into the Past

Yet the planning influences for the Greenbelts do not simply go back to the Radburn design of the 1920s, nor even to the garden city idea of the 1890s, but to colonial America, and still further back to the medieval European village. The idealized image of the "unity" in "community" was a powerful undercurrent throughout the design process. Greendale's plan especially looked to the past, with Peets later stating that "the planners of Greendale consciously took Williamsburg as their model" and that "in its physical plan Greendale has greater resemblance to old European villages than it has to modern western towns."[161] Thus, he contended, "Greendale is less a novelty, in form and in economic structure, than it seems to be when compared only with cities and towns as we know them in this country today. In its origin, Greendale would be classified as a colony town. And colony towns are as old as history."[162] Greenbelt and Greenhills, though not so consciously modeled on colonial forms, also recalled the supposed cozy village feeling of the past. While their architecture was much more decidedly modern, the placement of the buildings, the interaction between public and private spaces, was specifically intended to bring the community together, to foster a more unified and more civically involved citizenry, as Jacob Crane observed when he wrote that "the deepest significance of this kind of project may lie in its wide reestablishment of confidence in democratic processes, a confidence in man's capacity to manage his affairs democratically."[163] John Lansill acknowledged this reverence for the perceived unity, democracy, and contentment in the past, writing, "the Towns of Greenbelt, Greenhills, and Greendale are as well planned as the best technical talent could make them: - pleasant, permanent, safe. They are starting life as

[161] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 149-150.
[162] Ibid., 148.
[163] Jacob Crane, "Greendale. The General Plan," 90.

self-governing communities…. *They are a return to the first American way of life*" (emphasis added).[164]

This nostalgia for a lost American past was itself a product of the uncertain times of the Depression. Technology was rapidly changing the lifestyles of most people, and the populace struggled with questions of how to ensure a continuing, functioning, thriving democracy – a democracy that depended on stable and cohesive communities – in an age marked by the abrupt transitions brought about by the onset of the modern age. As Harlan Paul Douglass noted in 1925, "it is not strange that a race moving forward with so doubtful a prospect should begin to look backward."[165] For many observers, moreover, by the 1930s the price of these changes seemed too high – financial and social instability, uncertainty, and unrest. When they tried to find some way to survive, to cope with the economic and social devastation they saw around them, many fell back on long-held beliefs about the goodness of democracy, of unity, of home and friends and neighbors. Thus the Depression era is marked by a strong tendency to romanticize the past, particularly the pioneering spirit believed to have been the most forceful influence in the creation of the American character.[166]

Added to this nostalgic reverence for the mythical American past was a pervasive social pressure to conform. As is often true during times of uncertainly – the Cold War provides an excellent example – anything that seemed at all foreign or radical in nature was suspect. As Americans looked around to find someone to blame for their current desperate situation, they sought the comfort and safety of knowing that they were "normal," that they shared the traits of their fellow citizens and neighbors, that they belonged.[167] This begs the question, was the uniformity and repetitiveness in each of the Greenbelt towns' designs merely intended to create a cohesive look, or for the sake of efficiency and economy, or was it specifically intended to reflect – or create – this conformity?

Thus Rexford Tugwell's ideas for a remade America, so frighteningly radical to much of the nation's populace, were themselves remade. Although many of the goals remained –

[164] John Lansill to W.W. Alexander, introductory letter attached to the Greendale Final Report.
[165] Douglass, *The Suburban Trend*, 310.
[166] Brinkley, *Culture and Politics in the Great Depression*, 15.
[167] Ibid., 12.

cohesive, cooperative communities for the working class, and so a reinvigorated democracy – the outcome was in many ways decidedly traditional. Yet the Greenbelts, despite this strong connection to past ideals of home and community, *were* something new. Traditional architectural practices vied for dominance with modernist design; the mistakes of past planners were studied and dissected in an effort to ensure the program's success; the more extreme views, as expressed by Tugwell, Stein, Wright, and others, blended with the intention to recreate something of the lost past. The result was three unique towns that offer a visual, concrete (often literally) record of the tension between past and future that in many ways defined the Depression era.

Chapter 6. The Greenbelts Realized

The future of our civilization depends upon our ability to select and control our heritage from the past, to alter our present attitudes and habits, and to project fresh forms into which our energies may be freely poured.

- Lewis Mumford, 1924[1]

The beauty of the town will not so much express the individual family – that is what the ordinary front lawn of a pretty suburb does – as it will express (and encourage) the existence of a character and purpose in the townspeople as a social group.

- Elbert Peets, 1938[2]

The Greenbelts represent in many ways an embracing of modern ideas – the use of professional experts, the utilization of planning, the willingness to replace old concepts with new ones. In these aspects they reflect the height of the town-planning profession in the late 1930s. The Resettlement Administration employed and consulted with some of the top experts in the field and utilized some of the most up-to-date techniques of town layout, and the American and international design community watched with great interest in the following years to see how the experiment would play out.[3] Yet for all the newness of the towns, they were also attempts to recapture a vanishing past, to recreate the small-town unity and

[1] Mumford, *Sticks and Stones*, 195.

[2] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 118.

[3] In addition to the large number of articles written about the Greenbelts in the United States were several from other nations. These include Captain R. L. Reiss, "Recent Developments in City Planning and Housing in the U.S.A.," *The Journal of the Town Planning Institute* (London, England, 1937): 223-234; R. Kantorowich, "A Report on the Greenbelt Towns in the United States of America," *South African Architectural Record* 27 (Dec. 1942): 385-392; "Los pueblos Greenbelt en Estados Unidos" ("The Greenbelt towns in the United States"), El *Arquitecto Peruano* (*The Peruvian Architect*) 8 (Aug. 1944): 4-6; and Morris Fine, "Greenbrook – The Town that Never Was," *Plan Canada* 8, no. 2 (July 1967): 58-70. The town of Greenbelt was also visited by foreign housing experts, including, in October 1937, one from Germany. "Greenbelt's Small Bathtubs Amuse Nazi Housing Expert," labeled Oct. 29, 1937, Falls scrapbook, Greenbelt Museum. Sir Raymond Unwin also visited the town. "Greenbelt Pleases Briton," labeled Mar. 23, 1938, Falls scrapbook, Greenbelt Museum. The FSA employed guides to take people on tours of the towns and give information. George Panagoulis, *Looking Back*, 56.

permanence of place that seemed to have been lost with the coming of the modern age. They reflect an uneasiness with modernity, or at least with the aspects of modernity that seemed most threatening to the traditional American character. Although in some ways the towns turned out exactly as Tugwell had hoped, in other ways they epitomized a nostalgic attitude that was in direct opposition to his desire to reorder American institutions and society. Rather than remaking America in a new mold, the planners sought to *re-make*, to make as it had been, a vanishing social landscape. At the same time they acknowledged that the world had changed, and attempted to create towns adapted to, and prepared for, new realities. If the tensions between a rural past and an urban future were indeed a tug-of-war, the Greenbelt towns represent the fact that in the 1930s there would be no clear winner.

In planning these communities the design teams embraced American traditions – or, more accurately, American traditions as the planners perceived and interpreted them – while also attempting to prepare residents for the modern world. They incorporated elements intended to promote unity, such as walking paths, children's playgrounds, community and educational buildings, and public art, but at the same time included contemporary amenities such as public swimming pools, movie theaters, shopping centers, and modern kitchens and baths. The architecture and layout of the towns reflect both older and newer forms and expected use. The choices that the design teams made thus represent their own ambivalence about modernity, but also their determination to create towns well suited for the new age. They sought, in other words, to build a bridge between the best of the old ways of the past and a modern future.

Creating a village feel

The planners for all three towns had high hopes that the creation of well-designed public spaces would help ease the daily lives of the residents, but would also help bring the community together. They recognized that older gathering places – the church, the ice cream social, the town meeting hall – no longer brought people into contact with each other as they

once had. Americans in the 1930s had turned their attention to new pastimes, and the community, if it were to play a major role in residents' lives, had to compete with these new activities and offer enticements to encourage neighborly interaction. Planners thus had to interpret the needs of the working class, not only for the moment, but for an imagined future; they sought to understand what residents would want, but also what would help forge a community identity and an enhanced dedication to democratic civic life.

Starting at the outer edge of the towns we find the most unique element of the plans: the greenbelt itself. In addition to the fact that the communities were situated well away from the city center, the swath of undeveloped land surrounding each town was intended to keep the larger world out, making it possible, to some extent, to visualize these as reincarnations of older, quainter villages of the past.[4] Children could use the woods and streams as recreational wildernesses in which to play and explore. Encroachment from neighboring developments or over-expansion of the Greenbelt towns themselves would (theoretically) be kept at bay. The encircling belt also served the purpose of isolating the towns.[5] Elbert Peets wrote of Greendale, for instance, "The reasons for placing the town out in the country, where it can be surrounded by a permanent belt of green, are not exclusively sanitary and esthetic. The open land around the town has the effect of throwing the town on its own resources."[6] They were a swath of insulation, of protection, of healthful contact with nature. And as the name of the program itself reflects, they were integral to the design concept of the communities. The

[4] Depending on what starting and ending points were used, measurements of distance from their larger neighboring cities differed somewhat from one source to the next. Generally, though, Greenbelt was situated ten miles from the center of Washington, DC; Greenhills was eleven miles from the center of Cincinnati; and Greenbrook was eight miles from the center of Milwaukee. "Summary of Information, Greenbelt, Prince George's County, Maryland," June 1936; "Summary of Information, Greenhills, Hamilton County, Ohio," June 1936; "Summary of Information, Greendale, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin," June 1936; all in the Warren Jay Vinton Papers, Kroch Library Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

[5] Although it might seem that the introduction of the automobile into American life would have eliminated the isolating effects of the greenbelt, we must remember that most families in the 1930s that owned a car had only one. If the husband drove to work, the wife was left without personal transportation. Further, many residents of the Greenbelt towns did not own cars initially, and instead relied on carpools or public transportation to commute to and from the city.

[6] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 62-64.

greenbelts to large extent gave the Greenbelt towns a unique sense of purpose and identity, and they wore this identity proudly.[7]

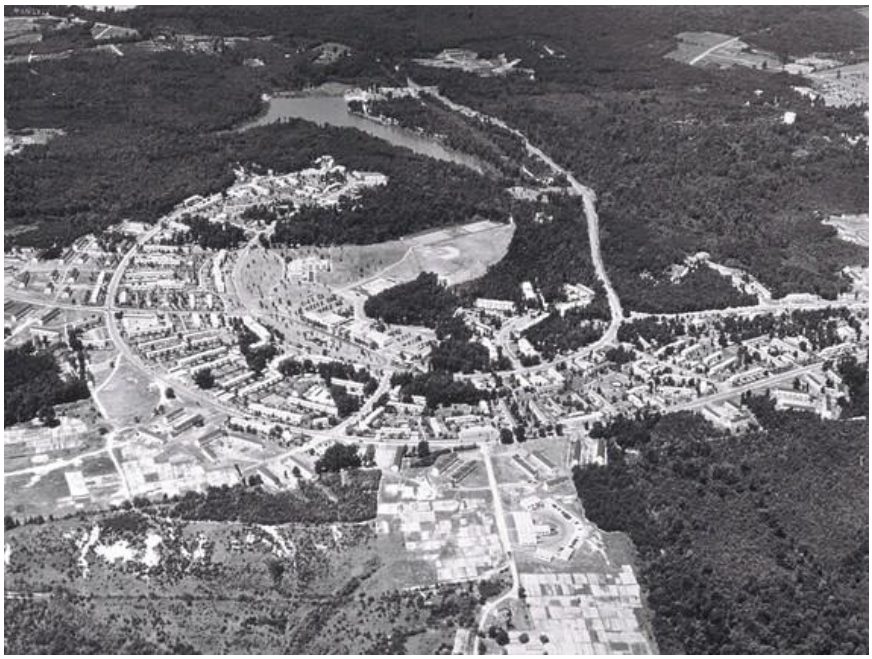


Fig. 6.1. Aerial view of Greenbelt, Maryland, showing part of the surrounding greenbelt, no date. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University.

Walking paths and sidewalks connect the greenbelts to the towns and also connect the interior spaces of the communities. Although they recognized that car ownership was likely to be a major factor in modern life, the planners also believed that by offering convenient pedestrian walkways and pleasing vistas (an echo of the influence of Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Beautiful movement) they would invite citizens to meet and mingle as they strolled leisurely through their towns. The planners of Greenbelt specifically designed "pedestrian walks [that] lead from block to block, away from the main streets, following the pleasant, quiet interior parkway with houses facing from either side, and smaller lateral walks [that] lead into the houses."[8] In addition they used "strategically planned" planting barriers to encourage pedestrians to stay where they were supposed to be, well within the safe margins of the

[7] All three towns have lost considerable portions of their greenbelts, but they continue to take pride in this aspect of the designs; in fact, there is disagreement between some residents over which of the towns has best retained the land and spirit of their original greenbelt.

[8] Hale Walker and Magnus Thompson, Greenbelt Final Report, section 3, "Town and Site Planning," 12.

carefully laid-out walkways. The focus that they placed on walking paths demonstrates the concerns that planners and the public felt regarding increased automobile usage – both the fear that cars would further isolate people in their daily errands and fears of accidents resulting from the mix of people and cars.

Fig. 6.2. Mothers walking with babies in strollers at Greenbelt, Maryland, 1937.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Although many fears about the machine age centered on the potential impact of industrialization and urbanization on democratic society or on possible implications for the economy, some concerns were in fact much less theoretical. The automobile, perhaps more than any other innovation, had reshaped American life in the early decades of the century. In addition to creating new businesses and altering the transportation patterns of the populace, the introduction of the automobile into American society had brought a new element of danger to everyday life, making simple activities such as walking to school or the local store perilous endeavors. In 1925, 17,571 Americans died as a result of auto accidents; in 1930 traffic deaths totaled 29,080; in 1935, 34,183; and in 1937, the number of traffic fatalities reached 37,205.[9] Fears about the deadly mix of pedestrians and cars, then, were not unfounded. An

[9] United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1939*, Table 450, "Motor-vehicle Fatalities in Continental United States 1914-1937." These figures include all automobile-accident deaths except those involving collisions with trains or streetcars, or motorcycle accidents.

advertisement for a New Jersey highway safety campaign graphically illustrates these concerns (see figure 6.3). Clearly, and understandably, traffic safety was an issue that resonated with the American public.

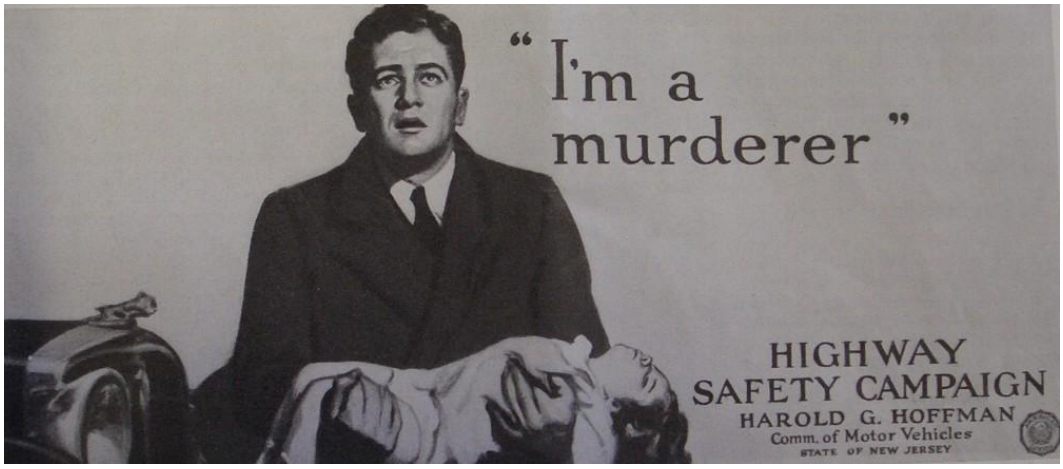


Fig. 6.3. Advertisement, "I'm a Murderer," used as an illustration for the article "Insuring Drivers' Responsibility." *Nation's Business* 21 (Jan. 1933): 35.

Following the Radburn plan to a large extent, the designers of the towns sought to separate vehicular and pedestrian traffic, hopefully mitigating some of the most physically hazardous aspects of modern life. Although all three towns used the technique of providing paths through the residential areas and connecting to the town center as a means of bringing residents together while also ensuring their safety, only Greenbelt, Maryland, incorporated the Radburn innovation of the use of pedestrian underpasses, including four such conduits in the final design for the town.[10] The planners laid out the community's walkways so that children could reach school and everyone could reach the commercial center without crossing a busy street. Town officials learned, however, that these design components brought different risks; in an attempt to ensure safe pathways for pedestrians town leaders tried to impose a rule excluding roller skaters and bicyclists from the sidewalks and underpasses – apparently with very limited success.

[10] Walker and Thompson, Greenbelt Final Report, section 3, 12.

Fig. 6.4. Pedestrian underpass in Greenbelt, Maryland, 1942.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

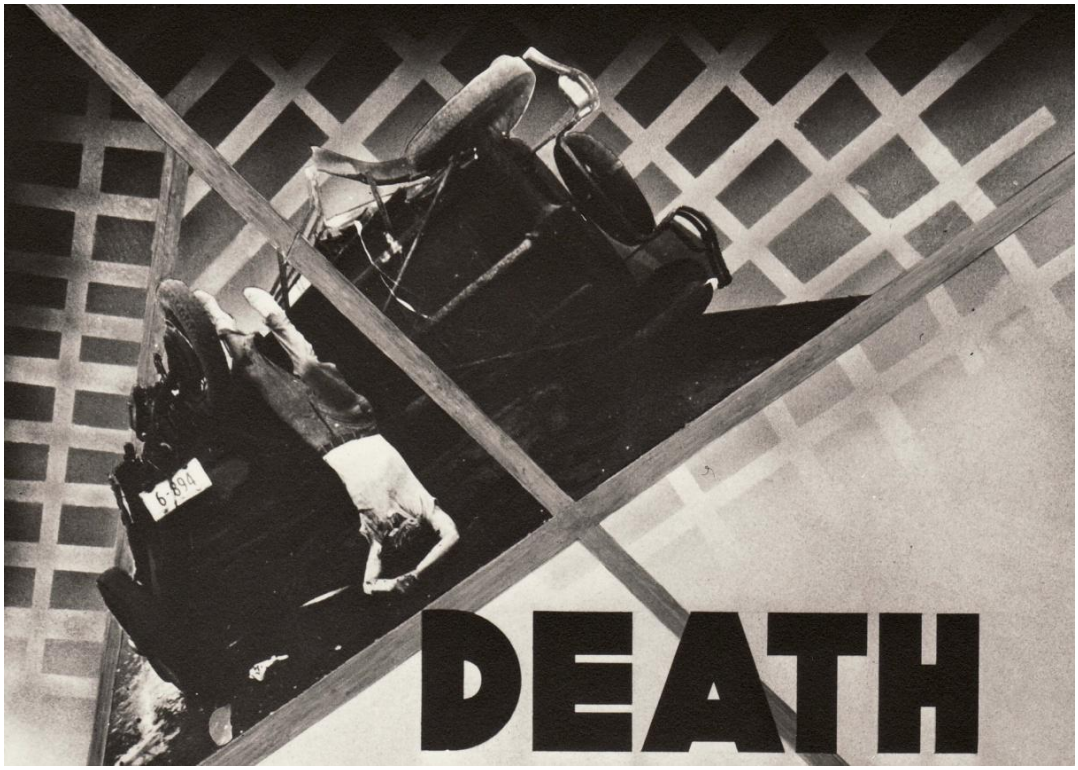
In the other towns, the plan was to allow children to reach playgrounds without crossing a street, and to try to ensure that street crossings to reach schools and the community centers would be as safe as possible. Elbert Peets later wrote that the Greendale planners had rejected directly copying the Radburn model because of the costs involved in providing a vast network of interior walkways which must then be lit, policed, and maintained. As a result Greendale used the more traditional approach of laying sidewalks parallel to streets, although paths connect interior portions of the residential areas as well. The town's layout was not, the planners felt, conducive to the use of underpasses. Instead Greendale was arranged so that main roads ran along the edge of the town and houses were located on "almost private lanes."[11] Further, Peets wrote, "we found ourselves unable to accept the premise on which [Radburn's underpasses were] based…. No matter what devices (such as limited highways and better lighting) may be employed to lessen traffic hazards, the principal protection of a pedestrian will lie in personal alertness and good judgment. These can best be learned in childhood. Many of our families will move from Greendale to other towns and cities where there is no special provision for traffic-free access to schools. We believe that early training in adjustment to the

[11] Jacob Crane, "Safety Town," *Public Safety* (Aug. 1937): 29.

automobile will save more lives than the provision of underpasses."[12] The Greendale design team chose not to rely on novelties such as underpasses, but rather, just as Clarence Stein himself had claimed Radburn would do, to show "'How to live with the auto,' or, if you will, 'How to live in spite of it.'"[13] Greenhills, too, used more traditional approaches – sidewalks parallel to the road, interior paths, pedestrian crosswalks at key spots – but for all three towns the safety of residents, and particularly children, was always a major consideration in the planning process.

This question of how residents would live with the automobile was a major concern for the planning teams and the administration. Stress on the safety of the communities was a frequently-cited aspect of the towns' designs and a common component of the public relations campaigns waged by the RA and FSA to sell the general public on the Greenbelt idea. One poster produced for the program, for example, highlighted the potential dangers of cars (see figures 6.5 and 6.6). According to the information disseminated about the positive aspects of the towns, traffic hazards – among the most tangible of the threats brought on by the machine age – would be put to rest by the careful planning that produced the towns. The reality of the danger that automobiles had introduced into American life, and the fact that no amount of planning could completely shield one from modern threats, were brought home to Greenbelt residents in 1939 when, despite planners' best efforts to avoid such a tragedy, a nine-year-old boy living in the town was killed when his bicycle was struck by a hit-and-run driver on the town's main road.[14] Planners may have hoped to keep the dangerous elements of the modern world at bay, but the truth was that this was simply not possible. Yet the careful consideration of how to deal with these dangers, and the differing approaches used in each town's design, gives us one of the clearest illustrations of the fact that planners were uneasy about the ramifications of innovations such as the automobile, but that they also saw as a major part of their task helping people learn to live with – and, as much as possible, to moderate – the new realities of the modern era.

[12] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 36-37.
[13] Stein, *Toward New Towns for America,* 41. See page 98 for this quote and initial discussion of the Radburn idea.
[14] "Cyclist Killed by Hit-Runner in Greenbelt," *Washington Post*, Aug. 25, 1939.



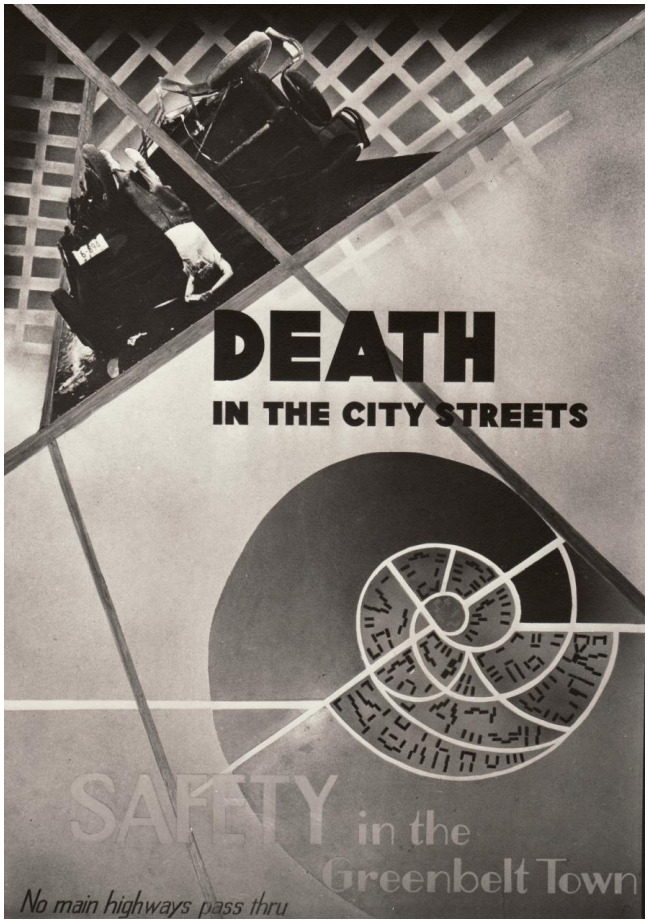


Fig. 6.5 and 6.6. Detail of crash aftermath (6.5) depicted in a poster (6.6) produced to promote the Greenbelt towns. Note that the background to the crash scene is a traditional grid street layout, while the cocoon-like safety of the Greenbelt plan forms the picture in the lower portion. It is not clear where, or if, these posters were displayed to the public. John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

The machine age had introduced a host of potential threats to American culture – physical threats such as the automobiles and congested cities, and social threats such as isolation and unfamiliarity with one's neighbors. The planners of the Greenbelts hoped to eliminate both types. An RA poster makes the point, and none too subtly: children could play in filthy city streets, having been infected by violent and dangerous influences, or they could return to the simplicity of days gone by in these pristine new towns (see figure 6.7).

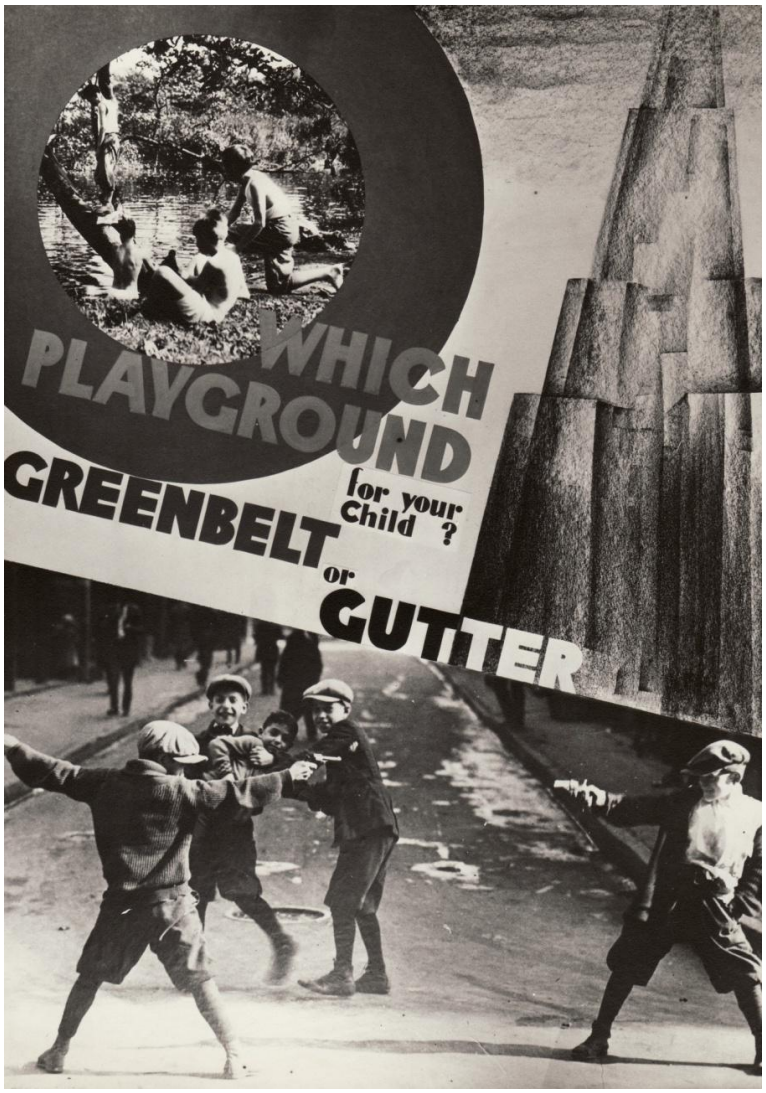


Fig. 6.7. RA poster promoting the Greenbelt towns as idyllic environments in which to raise children. Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

The welfare of children, in fact, was an integral theme in the New Deal, whether in agencies building pools and playgrounds or starting emergency day nurseries, or the passage of child labor laws.[15] In the Greenbelt program the careful inclusion of recreational and sports facilities, the peppering throughout each town of small playgrounds for younger children, the planning of safe routes to and from schools – all were designed to make these ideal communities in which to raise families. Most housing experts and reformers, and indeed many average Americans who were concerned for the future of the nation, would have agreed with Edith Elmer Wood, who wrote in 1940, "the fundamental purpose of organized society is to produce a better crop of children by teamwork and technology than was attainable through the rugged individualism of the stone-age hunter."[16] In a 1939 address to the Conference on Children in a Democracy, President Franklin Roosevelt said: "Democracy must inculcate in its children the capacities for living and assure opportunities for the fulfillment of those capacities. The success of democratic institutions is measured, not by extent of territory, financial power, machines, or armaments, but by the desires, the hopes, and the deep-lying satisfactions of the individual men, women, and children who make up its citizenship."[17] The overarching goals of the Greenbelt program had included the idea that the people of the United States could become more enlightened, more involved, more democratic citizens if they were given improved environments in which to live, and in which they could raise, as Wood said, "a better crop of children." Apparently the planners succeeded in making these very child-friendly towns. Virtually every early resident, when reflecting back, emphasizes what nearly magical places these were in which to grow up or to raise their children.[18]

All three of the Greenbelts provided ample play space for their youngest residents. Small playgrounds for very young children were located to be convenient to each residential

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[15] Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 206, 225-240.

[16] Wood, *Introduction to Housing*, x. Interestingly, she offers a footnote for this statement which mentions the proven importance of good food and ample fresh air; the reference she cites, however, is referring to the care of cattle, not people. The implicit message is that overcrowding and dirt, whether for humans or cows, were far inferior to clean open spaces.

[17] *Children in a Democracy, General Report* (Washington, DC, 1940), 1.

[18] Lee and Bonnie Shields, interview by the author, Mar. 12, 2008; Shirley Bailey, interview by the author, Mar. 15, 2008; Dale Jernberg, interview by the author, Feb. 13, 2008; William Morrison, interview by the author, Mar. 15, 2008; Rena Hull, interview by the author, Mar. 11, 2008; Larry Voigt, interview by the author, Mar. 11, 2008; James Strange, interview Feb. 21, 1998, Greendale Historical Society.

section. The importance of playgrounds had been accepted since the 1890s, when the vocal promotion of the benefits of having space set aside for play paralleled the City Beautiful and parks movements. These early playgrounds had incorporated a good deal of supervised activity intended to mold proper social interaction skills in the younger generation. Although vestiges of this mentality remained in the development of play spaces and recreational facilities for older children, the playgrounds for toddlers and other young children in the Greenbelt towns had much more to do with allowing for fresh air – an ever-present Greenbelt theme – and good, clean, old-fashioned fun. Planners likely believed, as did the authors of one of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership reports, that "modern psychology has emphasized the significance of play in child life…. If his play activity is thwarted, it may stunt his talents as a worker as well as subvert his energy into undesirable channels."[19] Play spaces in the Greenbelts generally offered a sandbox, slide, and/or teeter-totter, along with benches for adults. Social contact between mothers (and, if scenes depicted in *The City* and FSA photos are accurate, fathers as well) who supervised the playing tots was, in the Greenbelt vision, just as important as the social and physical outlet for the youngsters. There was such a facility within easy reach of every home, a natural gathering spot for adult residents and their children, a place that gave, as the planners had hoped, a sense of common ownership and investment in the community.

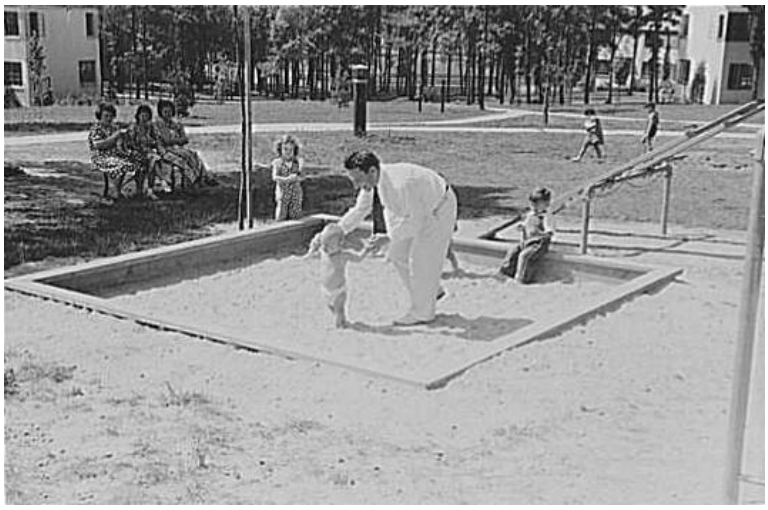

Fig. 6.8. Playground for small children in Greenbelt. Note the mothers watching and the father playing. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

[19] Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 10, *Homemaking, Home Furnishing, and Information Services* (Washington, DC, 1932), 26.

Community centers – the heart of the Greenbelt towns

The walkways that connected the recreational and residential portions of the towns also connected residents to the community center. In the Greenbelts, although the shape and use of the centers reflected modern realities – the inclusion of movie theaters, swimming pools, and shopping centers, for example – these spaces continued to serve the function that they always had in American towns: they offered a gathering place for residents, a natural focus for community identity and a space for shared activities. Three important aspects were incorporated into each of the towns' centers: a combined school/community building that provided educational and organizational opportunities for residents, a commercial shopping center, and public entertainment and recreational facilities. Two of the towns also included public art in the form of sculptures to aid in anchoring the community's identity (all three were supposed to receive such artwork, but Greenhills never did).[20] The designers of the town centers consciously used modern attractions and amenities to aid in creating a new version of the old village square. Such public spaces, the planners hoped, would counteract the modern tendency toward a loosening of social bonds.

Each of the towns included in the center a combination school and community building. In Greenbelt the school provided space for students up to high school; a consolidated high school for Greenbelt and neighboring communities was built in cooperation with Prince George's County. Greenhills used a similar arrangement; Greendale high-schoolers did not get a facility in the town and had to attend one nearby.[21] As important as the building's use as a school, however, was its availability as a community center, providing meeting space for a plethora of clubs and organizations as well as adult education classes. The idea of adult education, of enriching the intellectual life of the residents, was in fact central to all of the towns. By January 1939 Greenbelt, Maryland, adults could take courses in drafting, metal-working, woodworking, typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping. Eventually college-credit classes

[20] The sculptures for Greenhills had been begun, but not finished, when the sculptor was fired by the RA in 1942. In 1948 the Dayton stone yard where the pieces were housed billed the town for storage fees, which neither the town nor the federal government would pay. As a result, Greenhills has no public sculpture. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 101-102.

[21] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 95.

were offered at the community center in conjunction with the University of Maryland; these included courses in history, sociology, and political science. Students of all ages could take art instruction offered under the PWA art project.[22] The intention of having such opportunities was a stated part of the plans for the towns as early as 1936.[23] Either the administrators or the designers – or both – saw the advancement of education and knowledge for the towns' children and adults alike as a worthy goal for the communities.

In addition to what went on inside the school/community building, in the town of Greenbelt even the exterior of the facility was designed to educate and enlighten residents, and to remind them of their exemplary civic heritage. Sculptor Lenore Thomas was hired by the Special Skills Division of the RA to provide artwork for the front of the building; the choice of subject matter was left up to her.[24] Although not directed by the administration or planners to use any particular theme for her artwork, Thomas's choices deserve a brief examination, as they represent precisely the sort of reverence for the past exhibited by the planners, but also subtly echo some of the more liberal attitudes of Tugwell. Using a stylized, simplified realism that was extremely popular among sculptors during the Depression, she created a series of sculptural friezes that depict interpretations of the preamble to the constitution. Thomas said she chose this subject matter because she felt "it better to use this vital and natively American material than to repeat the old clichés of Science, Industry, Education, etc., seated with rolls and scrolls and having no possible connection with the lives and interests of people living in a modern Greenbelt town."[25] (The themes of science and industry actually made up a substantial portion of New Deal art, but were generally transformed from the "rolls and scrolls" of which Thomas speaks to more ordinary, "everyman" workaday depictions.) Thus she rejected one traditional artistic theme for another, equally traditional one. By highlighting the guarantees outlined in the preamble, she reinforced the notion that the government bore a responsibility to its citizens – a highly charged topic in the New Deal era.

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[22] George A. Warner, *Greenbelt: The Cooperative Community* (New York: Exposition Books, 1954), 88-89.
[23] "Greenhills, Hamilton County, Ohio" (typed report), Division of Suburban Resettlement, Resettlement Administration, May, 1936. Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky. This may in part have been a response to the desires of potential residents; some neighboring residents who had answered the research questionnaires had expressed a desire for such classes. Greenbelt Final Report, "Analysis of Questionnaire Results," 46.
[24] Later Lenore Thomas Straus.
[25] Lenore Thomas file, undated summary of Thomas's work for Greenbelt, Greenbelt Museum.

Fig. 6.9. Lenore Thomas Straus stands by one of the sculptural friezes that she created for the face of the Greenbelt school and community center. Courtesy of the Greenbelt Museum.

Thomas felt that the Constitution's preamble, though brief, embodied the spirit that was needed to face the current crisis. She noted of the phrase "to form a more perfect union," "this idea finds its most contemporary realization in the co-operative enterprise, and in the co-operation between farm and industrial workers, between clerical workers, laborers and professionals" (see figure 6.11). The scene in the "establish justice" panel shows an industrialist who, in Thomas's words, "sits fortified in his vested interests and property rights. Balanced against this is the consolidated strength of a group of unified workmen," signifying "the government … giving legal recognition to the right of labor to organize." Interestingly, although she intended this to be a depiction of organized labor, she made the scene itself ambiguous enough that it could be interpreted differently, say as citizens appealing to a judge or other government official (see figure 6.12). Although she envisioned a more liberal reading, she still avoided making the image overtly controversial. For "insure the domestic tranquility" Thomas provides an image of abundance, brought about by hardy American workers (figure 6.13). Once again she demonstrates the need for cooperation between those in the city and the countryside, a theme that she felt needed emphasizing at a time when passions ran high about

who received federal aid and how much, but that also precisely fit the Greenbelt idea. The panel depicting "provide for the common defense" (figure 6.14) shows aggressive-looking soldiers marching in lock-step – and spreading death (cemetery crosses) behind them – being confronted by an American farmer defending his land and family, a pillar of unpretentious but self-assured strength. In the "promote the general welfare" panel (figure 6.15), we see the clearest connection to the Greenbelt towns program, and indeed to the spirit of the New Deal itself. Thomas was quite aware of the direct connection between this concept and her own employment and the provision of jobs and housing for others, noting that "under this clause of the constitution have come most of the recent progressive legislative measures."[26] Here she illustrates the point with a scene of workers joining together to build and plant, to bring about a new community.

Fig. 6.10. Front of the combination school/community building at Greenbelt, Maryland. Photo by the author.

[26] All quotes from the Lenore Thomas file. Undated summary of Thomas's work for Greenbelt. Greenbelt Museum, Greenbelt, Maryland.

Fig. 6.11. "To form a more perfect union" frieze. Photo by the author.

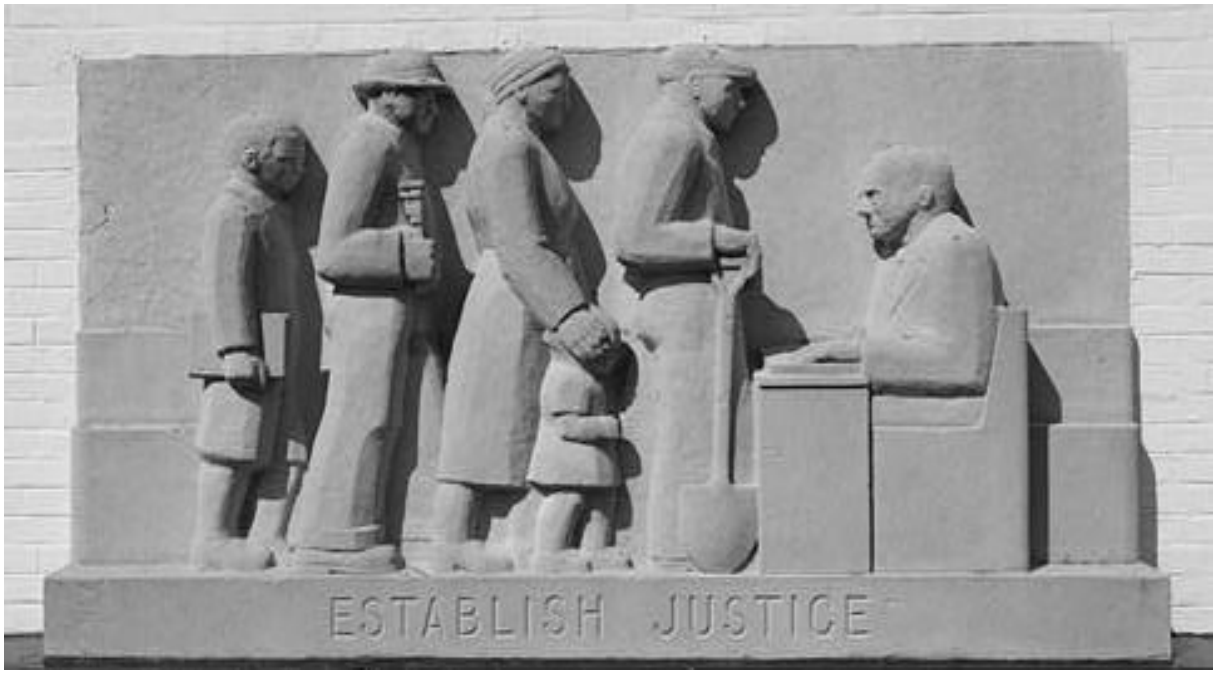

Fig. 6.12. "Establish justice" frieze.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey.

Fig. 6.13. "Insure domestic tranquility" frieze.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey.

Fig. 6.14. "Provide for the common defense" frieze. Photo by the author.

Fig. 6.15. "Promote the general welfare" frieze.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey.

The choice of such a quintessentially American motif is in keeping with the 1930s artistic movement known as "the American scene," which had begun in the late twenties and early thirties with painters such as Grant Wood. Such art, both portraying and speaking to ordinary Americans, was part of a trend toward what has been labeled "cultural democracy" or "artistic nationalism."[27] As one historian of New Deal art writes, "liberal intellectuals believed that art … could speak to all men, could enrich and give meaning to the lives of factory workers and farmhands."[28] Thomas's Greenbelt friezes were part of this trend, representing a celebration of ordinary life in an extraordinary nation. These scenes also served to reinforce the notion that the New Deal, though often denounced by critics as being decidedly un-American, was in fact legitimized by the constitution itself. The combination of the school building's Art Deco style with artwork displaying the most essential tenets of the republic embodies the desire of

[27] Bruce I. Bustard, *A New Deal for the Arts* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1997), 21, 23.
[28] Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 80.

Greenbelt administrators and planners to demonstrate that old-fashioned democracy could in fact be a vital part of the modern age.

Other artwork depicted common social themes. In addition to its school friezes, Greenbelt had another substantial piece of sculpture, also created by Lenore Thomas. This was a large statue which was placed in the commercial center, a mother and child, illustrating the centrality of family to the Greenbelt idea. Greendale received a sculpture for its flagpole, created by Alonzo Hauser. It sits between the commercial center and the school/community building and depicts a group of men, a woman, and a child and, according to a plaque placed at the site in 1991, "memorializes the mothers, youths, and working people who were to populate this uncharted urban-rural concept." The people depicted in this sculpture represent a cross-section of American society: a laborer holding a shovel, a young girl embracing a woman who holds a book (her mother, possibly, or her teacher), a businessman (or, as he holds in his hand rolled-up papers that could easily be blueprints, perhaps a planner?).

The use of ordinary people as the subjects of these sculptures fits with the cultural democracy then popular for works of public art, but is also particularly appropriate for the Greenbelt towns. Whereas a sculpture for a traditional village square frequently commemorated the founder of a community, or some brave hero of the community's past, for the Greenbelt towns the same principle is applied, but here the people are the founders and the heroes – a fairly literal interpretation since the people who populated the towns in fact devised and created its first institutions, but also because the American people had funded the construction.

Fig. 6.16, above. Mother-and-child statue at Greenbelt. The statue faces the courtyard separating the two buildings that make up the commercial center. The school/community building is behind the photographer and the community swimming pool to the rear left. Note the walking paths leading to apartment buildings in the distance. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.17, left. Greenbelt mother-and-child statue, detail view.
Photo by the author.

Fig. 6.18, 6.19. Flagpole sculpture by Alonzo Hauser, Greendale, Wisconsin. Photos by the author.

In addition to the community building and public art, the town centers were intended to bring residents together in their daily errands and leisure activities. Like town squares of the past, these spaces served as the heart of the community, offering a readily-identifiable core to the town. There was, however, a recognition among the planners that people did not spend their time in the ways that they had in the past. By the 1930s Americans had more leisure time and they adopted a more carefree attitude toward using that time for whatever pursuits they pleased; they had become consumers of leisure.[29] As sociologist Robert Lynd observed in 1933,

[29] The report of the National Recreation Association's study, "The Leisure Hours of 5,000 People," states: "Everyone knows that during the last few years there has been a rapid increase in the amount of time available to most people outside their working hours. The eight-hour day and the five-day week which so recently were looked upon as visionary working standards have … been widely attained." *The Leisure Hours of 5,000 People* (New York:

"good times, especially those involved in spending money to go places and do things, have become an expected part of the routine week of family members, rather than a matter of special occasions."[30] Thus, while the Greenbelt planners hoped that their towns would serve to revive some of the types of association of the past through an abundance of civic organizations, they also recognized that in the modern world, people would largely form their associations around leisure and consumption.

The difficulty of reconciling traditional values with a new, increasingly consumer-driven culture, which was well under way when the Depression began, points to a major source of anxiety about the modern era. Lynd noted that "increasingly urbanized living, looser family organization, secularization of values and similar social changes set up new situations of tension which necessitate difficult personality adjustments." He saw in the shifting cultural terrain the clash between many opposing forces:

> The lingering Puritan tradition of abstinence which makes play idleness and free spending sin; and the increasing secularization of spending and the growing pleasure basis of living.
>
> The tradition that rigorous saving and paying cash are the marks of sound family economy and personal self-respect; and the new gospel which encourages liberal spending to make the wheels of industry turn as a duty of the citizen.
>
> The deep rooted philosophy of hardship viewing this stern discipline as the inevitable lot of men; and the new attitude towards hardship as a thing to be avoided by living in the here and now, utilizing installment credit and other devices to telescope the future into the present.
>
> The tradition that the way to balance one's budget is to cut one's expenses to fit one's income; and the new American 'solution' by increasing one's income to fit one's expenditures.
>
> The increasingly baffling conflict between living and making money in order to buy a living; and the tendency, public and private, to simplify this issue by concentration on the making of money.[31]

National Recreation Association, 1934), 4. In addition, many people were unemployed or working only part time as a result of the Depression. Of the men who took part in the study, for example, 313 worked full time, 211 worked part time, 94 worked occasionally, and 89 were completely unemployed. *Leisure Hours*, 43.

[30] Robert S. Lynd, "The People as Consumers," in *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends*, with the assistance of Alice C. Hanson (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1933), 866.

[31] Ibid., 867.

Yet while Lynd understood that consumer culture was most likely here to stay, he badly underestimated the dominant position it would claim in American life in the coming decades. He wrote, for example: "While shopping is still a pleasure to some consumers, there is evidence that, with the multiplication of alternative activities, there is a mounting distaste on the part of both men and women for the labor of buying things, a desire to simplify and to expedite the process as much as possible."[32] In the postwar years, however, shopping and consumption for their own sake became significant avenues of leisure activity.

Whether or not the Greenbelt planners would have agreed with Lynd about the future importance of shopping, they did feel that the commercial centers in their towns would be vital aspects of the population's sense of community. Elbert Peets, in the Final Report on Greendale, summed up the basic assumptions driving the planners:

> [One] reason for developing a strong community center is social and concerns the happiness, the personality-satisfactions of the people of the town…. A neighborhood has common interests that bring people together despite other interests that are not held in common. And if the neighborhood has its own shopping center, its own educational center, its own provisions for recreation, even its own local government, it becomes a neighborhood to which it is more valuable to belong, and in which the opportunities, means, and rewards for joint efforts are greater.[33]

Greenbelt residents had little choice, on a day-to-day basis, but to patronize local businesses, and this would bring the population together, allowing them to meet and get to know each other in a way that the wide variety and availability of businesses in a city might not.

The shopping center (as opposed to the department store, all under single ownership and management) was a relatively new concept in the 1930s. Although precursors to the shopping center had appeared as early as 1870, when Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Calvert Vaux, the designers of Central Park, included a strip of stores in their plans for Riverside, Illinois, imitators were few until the 1920s. [34] One of the early innovators in providing a commercial space with parking for cars was in Radburn (Stein had dubbed it "the city for the motor age,"

[32] Lynd, "The People as Consumers," 910.
[33] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 62-64.
[34] Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, DC, 1930-1941," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51, no. 1 (Mar. 1992): 7.

after all). Even at Radburn, however, the accommodations for cars were relatively scant: two rows of spaces in front of the shops, which were set back from the street further than most stores were at the time in order to accommodate this parking area.[35] During the 1930s, early "drive-in" strips began to be built in California.[36] Mainly made up of open-fronted stalls for fresh produce and the like, these were nonetheless strips of independently-owned, connected shops with parking in front so that customers could park, shop, and leave with ease and efficiency. Washington, DC, in this period became an important center for the development of the modern shopping strip. In 1930 the Park and Shop opened in the District's Cleveland Park area. This commercial center had stores arranged in an L, lining two adjacent sides of a parking lot that was much larger than was common up to that time (see figure 6.20). This became the model for many centers to follow.

Fig. 6.20. Park and Shop, Washington, DC.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection.

Planners began to take note of these new shopping innovations. Clarence Stein and Catherine Bauer had collaborated in 1934 on a journal article on the planning of shopping centers, and they brought the ideas they had formed then to their suggestions for the

[35] Ibid., 11.
[36] Clarence Stein and Catherine Bauer, "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers," *The Architectural Record* 75 (Feb. 1934): 185.

Greenbelt towns. They wrote, for example, that such spaces "should be located so that any resident may be able to either walk safely and easily to them (at least for daily convenience goods), or ride comfortably and find a parking space." Much as Lynd had underestimated the future allure of shopping as recreation, however, Stein and Bauer misjudged the true coming influence of the automobile, stating that "if walking is made safe and attractive as it is in Radburn by completely separating pedestrian from vehicular traffic, and by paths passing through parks, there will be much less use of automobiles in local shopping. The wasteful use of the machine is likely to be more limited in the future, for even after the depression is over we will have to face reality and live on earnings rather than debt." As a result, they concluded, "no home should be more than half a mile from a neighborhood shopping center."[37] In Greenbelt, at least, walking did prove the more popular way to reach the stores in the town's early years, possibly because few housewives had a car at their disposal during the daytime.

Planners had to address the question of what sorts of stores should be included in the shopping areas, and how much space to allow for them. As demonstrated by Lynd and by Stein and Bauer, predicting the consumer habits of the future was no easy task. Furthermore, the Greenbelt towns presented their own special challenges in that the commercial spaces were not being built as speculative ventures intended to garner the highest possible profits.[38] These establishments were put in place to facilitate life in the towns, and to bring the residents together, but not necessarily to encourage consumption. There was no precedent for this model on which planners could draw. Planners made use of available data on the day-to-day requirements of a small community for commercial activity and the results of the research questionnaires to try to assess the needs for the towns. Their final decision was that there should be no competition between stores; each town would have only one grocery store, for

[37] Stein and Bauer, 183. They demonstrate an even more marked lack of prescience about the future when they predict: "In the community of the future, the purely local store will follow the example of the Radburn house. It will face toward the life of the community which will center around the park. Most people will walk to the store because it will be convenient, safe and enjoyable. There will be facilities for parking automobiles, but in most built-up communities this will be of much less importance than a safe place to park the baby where the mother can watch it while she shops." Stein and Bauer, 185.

[38] Hale J. Walker, "Some Major Technical Problems Encountered in the Planning of Greenbelt, Maryland," *Planners Journal* 4 (Mar.-Apr. 1938): 37.

example, and just one drug store. In all three communities the local businesses were initially planned to be run as cooperatives.

The designers of Greenhills and Greendale used the model of Washington's Park and Shop and other similar enterprises in a modified form. Elbert Peets, using the term generically, noted that Greendale's commercial center was based in part on careful study of "the 'park and shop' centers that are currently being built around Washington and other cities."[39] A drawing of an early conception of the Greenhills commercial center (figure 6.21) in fact shows a remarkable similarity to the Park and Shop. As finally built, the stores in both Greendale and Greenhills are located in a line, with one or more rows of parking spots in front; though neither offers the amount of parking that the Park and Shop did, they obviously expected that at least some residents would use their cars to get to and from the commercial center, and thus sought to make parking convenient and walking distances between auto and stores short.

Fig. 6.21. Early conception of Greenhills shopping center. Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

[39] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 65.

Fig. 6.22. Greendale shopping center. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

The planners of Greenbelt, however, specifically rejected this concept, choosing instead to locate shops in such a way as best to ensure that customers would have to stroll through the commercial area rather than park directly in front of the desired store (see figure 6.23). Walkways from different directions converge on the center, which is made up of two buildings with a one-hundred-foot-wide courtyard between them.[40] The idea was clearly to encourage residents to walk through the shopping center and in doing so to engage their community and their neighbors. Although Greenbelt was the only one of the three towns to arrange the commercial space this way, all three communities placed the shopping center, along with the combination school/community building (and, in the case of Greendale, a separate administration building as well) in the center of town, to serve as a focal point and gathering place for inhabitants.

[40] Walker and Thompson, Greenbelt Final Report, section 3, 17.

Fig. 6.23. Greenbelt commercial center.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.24. Interior of the Greenbelt co-op grocery store.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

After the Second World War the widespread ownership of cars combined with a strong economy and growing consumer culture to diminish the necessity and importance of small local shopping centers, yet in the Greenbelt towns these commercial areas continue to play an

important role in the social, if not the economic, life of the communities. As intended, they have served as centralized gathering places for residents; one Greenbelter recalled years later, for instance, that when they heard the news about the bombing of Pearl Harbor the "young men gathered as if by instinct at the Center."[41] Just as the design teams had intended, the commercial areas were the hub of community activity and offered a place to obtain daily necessities, to socialize, and to stay connected to the pulse of the town. A new emphasis on consumerism in American society – often cited as an indication that the nation was losing its way morally – became in the hands of the Greenbelt planners a way to inculcate a civic identity and unity among residents.

The shopping districts and immediate surrounding areas were also the center of leisure activity. The inclusion of facilities for leisure and recreation in towns ostensibly built as low-income housing might on the surface seem rather extravagant, but as J.F. Steiner pointed out in 1933, "the rank and file of the people are insisting upon the right to participate in those diversions, amusements and sports which traditionally belonged only to the favored few."[42] Sociologists had for years been promoting the idea that relaxation for the individual would benefit society as a whole. Steiner contended, for example, that "the present generation hardly needs a reminder of the fact that wholesome recreation leads to both bodily and mental health…. For thousands recreation is now a kind of cult aiming at physical, mental and moral efficiency. For additional thousands it opens the doors to a new world where during hours of pleasurable leisure the onerous drudgeries of life are forgotten…. One of society's important functions, therefore, is the cultivation of mass amusements, activities and diversions appealing to all age groups…. It is an insurance of social health."[43] If, as many people believed, the modern age had made employment and the commutes it necessitated more tedious, more taxing to one's physical and mental health, the cure might lie in both a return to old-fashioned leisure (picnics and tennis, for example) and the recreational potential of the machine age (such as movie theaters and large recirculating public swimming pools). In order for the Greenbelt

[41] Richard G. Benson, *Looking Back*, 4.
[42] J.F. Steiner, "Recreation and Leisure Time Activities," in *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1933), 912.
[43] Ibid., 913.

towns to truly foster a superior community feeling, their citizens must be able to take advantage of the recreation and leisure necessary to ensure that they could be healthy individuals. Much like Lynd's observations concerning consumerism, this illustrates that the old ideas of idleness as sinful indulgence had given way to a new embracing of entertainment and leisure activities as not only acceptable but, in the complex and harried modern world, crucial.

Movie theaters had not been among the recreational options listed on the questionnaires distributed by the Research Division, but Greenbelt and Greendale did get theaters (Greenhills did not, although at an early point in the planning stages designers had intended that it would).[44] This attests to the growing popularity of this form of entertainment up to and through the 1930s. The technology was still relatively new and rapidly evolving, with the first movie to incorporate sound recording being released in 1927 and the first commercial color feature in 1928.[45] Perhaps most importantly for the Depression years, movies were a relatively inexpensive amusement.

Although in the early stages of the motion picture industry critics worried about the negative effects of this form of entertainment on the minds and character of impressionable viewers (particularly women and children), by the end of the 1910s, and even more so in the 1920s, this began to change as entrepreneurs opened increasingly opulent "movie palaces" in the nation's cities. Touted as completely clean and respectable, these lavish buildings beckoned to adults and the middle class.[46] By the 1930s movie theaters were seen by most Americans as relatively wholesome environments. They kept children off the streets and provided families an activity in which all could share. Still, there were those who worried about the possible detrimental effects of such pervasive and powerful influences on youngsters. In addressing the American Catholic Sociological Society in 1940 Paul J. Mundie warned, for example, "the movies, books, magazines, dances and parties are widely used for recreation and are subject to little family investigation and control," and were among those social problems

[44] The Greenbelt theater is still in operation in 2009.
[45] Sound was introduced in *The Jazz Singer*. The first color feature was *The Viking*. Robert Allen Nowotny, *The Way of All Flesh Tones: A History of Color Motion Picture Processes* (New York: Garland, 1983), 242.
[46] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 221, 232-236.

that were "becoming fatally serious."[47] The amusements of the modern age, then, could be seen either as harmless entertainments or as imminent threats. For those such as Mundie, the behavior of the audience, even perhaps the content of the film, mattered less than the fact that this was another example of a new cultural paradigm replacing the family cohesion of the past. By the latter part of the decade movie studios were fending off their critics while at the same time recognizing the huge potential for child-friendly features; thus in 1937 we see Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and in 1939 *The Wizard of Oz*, in addition to the ever-present Shirley Temple movies (she appeared in some twenty-five films from 1934 through 1939).[48] Rather than eroding family unity, shared movie attendance could serve as a vehicle for bringing families together in a shared entertainment experience. By the late 1930s most people accepted that recreations such as motion pictures were here to stay, and most Americans, in spite of any possible lingering doubts, enjoyed the opportunities for relaxation that the movies offered.

The difficult economic times did not hit the motion picture industry as hard they did nearly every other sector of the economy. At the start of 1931 the nation boasted 22,731 movie theaters with a combined seating capacity of over eleven million. Weekly attendance for the period was estimated at between 100 million and 115 million. Movie ticket revenues in 1934 totaled over 1.5 billion dollars.[49] A 1934 study on people's leisure activities showed that going to the movies was topped only by listening to the radio and reading the newspaper as the most frequent pastimes.[50] As Steiner explained, "the popularity of the motion picture is shown by the fact that it has continued to attract large crowds in spite of the financial depression. It is apparently a necessary luxury, slow to feel cuts in the family budget. The important role it plays in the leisure time of the masses can hardly be exaggerated."[51]

The theater at Greenbelt was certainly intended to play a vital role in the town and its residents. Reportedly the first cooperatively-run movie theater in the United States, the fully air-conditioned facility opened on September 21, 1938, showing the Shirley Temple film *Little*

[47] Mundie, 44, 41.
[48] Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up*, 171-174.
[49] Steiner, "Recreation and Leisure Time Activities," 940.
[50] *Leisure Hours of 5,000 People*, 10. See Appendix E for more of this list.
[51] Steiner, "Recreation and Leisure Time Activities," 941.

Miss Broadway as its first feature.[52] The entire town was asked to turn out for a community-wide grand opening celebration.[53] Although nagging fears continued within the general population that movies – and, increasingly, radio as well – might exert a negative influence on youth, the children of Greenbelt enthusiastically made use of the entertainment offered. Saturday matinee showings lasted all afternoon and included cartoons, a serial, short subjects, newsreels, and the feature film.[54] Since it had gained much more respectability as a pastime for children, this economical way to while away a weekend afternoon kept Greenbelt's youth occupied, entertained, and out of trouble. As the town's planners had intended, the theater brought the community together, offering harmless – or even beneficial – entertainment that made use of modern technology, but also giving residents shared experiences and social contact.

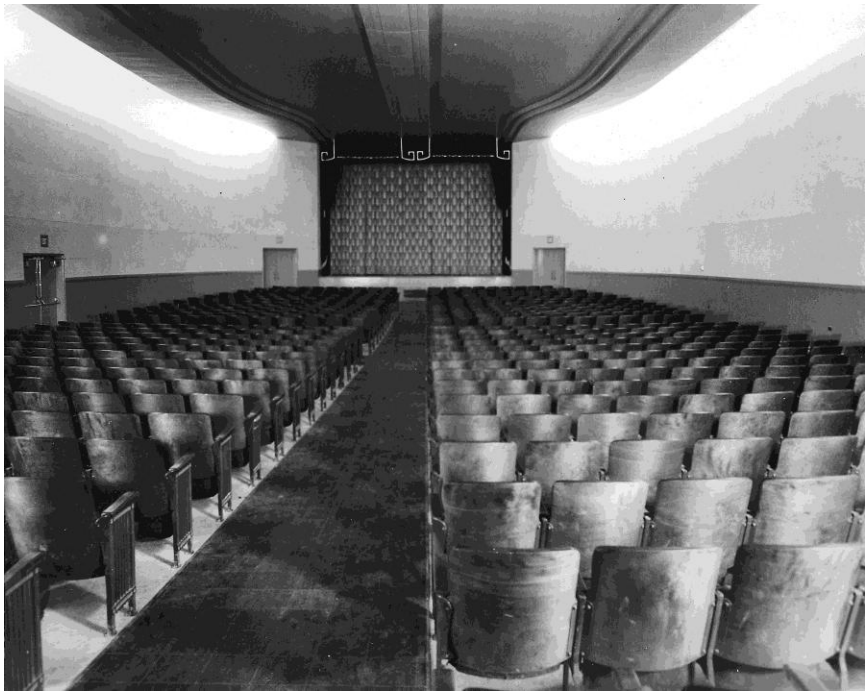

Fig. 6.25. Movie theater interior, Greendale, Wisconsin. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

[52] Note requesting that FDR send a congratulatory message, Sept. 19, 1938; Official File 1568, Farm Security Administration Papers, FDR Presidential Library; "Shirley Temple Film Opens Newest Co-op at Greenbelt," *The Washington Daily News*, Sept. 22, 1938.
[53] "Greenbelt Opens Theater Tonight," clipping in the Falls scrapbook, Greenbelt Museum.
[54] Louise (Steinle) Winker, *Looking Back*, reminiscence section, 76.

Fig. 6.26. Theater at Greendale, Wisconsin.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.27. Theater at Greenbelt, Maryland.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

For the Greenbelt towns, the inclusion of a movie theater or swimming pool was a visible demonstration that these were not ordinary low-income housing projects; they were not intended merely to house members of the working class, but to elevate them to the middle class, if not in economic reality, at least in lifestyle.[55] Because the idea behind the program was to provide better lives for residents, planners understood that they needed to offer amenities that would enrich those lives. The questionnaires distributed in Washington, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee asked about the community facilities people wanted to have available to them; 75.8 percent of Washington residents desired a public swimming pool, as did 77.5 percent of Cincinnati residents and 78.8 percent of Milwaukee residents. Although several scenes in the film *The City* show Greenbelt boys taking a dip in the community lake, the more modern option of a public swimming pool was also part of the town's design. The lake, in fact, demonstrated that "old-fashioned" was not always preferable to modern. In June of 1938 a boy from Beltsville drowned there when he fell out of a boat; lifeguards were briefly added and swimming restricted to times when the guards were on duty.[56] Then, in July of the same year, lake swimming was halted altogether when tests of the water showed it to be unfit for swimmers due to high bacteria levels.[57] The municipal pool eventually offered the only option for swimmers. When completed, both Greenbelt and Greenhills had pools; Greendale, presumably because of the more northern climate, did not.

By the early twentieth century Progressives and urban reformers had begun to see swimming pools as a way to keep city youth out of trouble by offering a respite from the city heat.[58] Civic leaders were quick to note that soaring temperatures and crowds of idle, restless urban youth frequently made a volatile combination. A refreshing swim in the local pool offered the possibility of diffusing tempers and keeping youths occupied.

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[55] At the same time, we must be careful not to make too much of this effort. The tenant selection process, after all, ensured that to a certain extent residents were already either living middle-class-style lives or wanted to. This was not, in other words, an effort to impose a lifestyle on an unwilling populace, but to offer them what they apparently desired.

[56] "2 Boys Drowned as Capital's Thermometers Hit 1938 High," *The Washington Post* (June 12, 1938); "Swimming in Lake Restricted," newspaper clipping, Falls scrapbook, Greenbelt Museum.

[57] "Bacteria Abound in Greenbelt Lake So Now It's Closed," *The Washington Post* (July 11, 1938).

[58] Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 48, 60, 75.

The New Deal was a huge builder of public pools, constructing almost 750 new pools between 1933 and 1938, and overseeing the renovation of hundreds more.[59] For many Americans such projects demonstrated that the government was trying to ease their daily lives, to help take their minds off of the troubles all around them.[60] When entertainment budgets were stretched thin or were nonexistent, a public pool offered a day's relaxation and fun at little or no expense. The National Recreation Association's study of five thousand Americans and their leisure activities showed that sixty percent of those surveyed considered themselves to be swimmers, and swimming was ranked the seventh most frequent – and second most desired – recreational pastime.[61] It also appealed to all classes, a variety of ages, and both sexes.[62] So it was with the pools at Greenbelt and Greenhills. These facilities offered a cool retreat on hot afternoons, a wholesome outlet for energetic youth and, more importantly, they brought families and the community together in a shared activity.

Fig. 6.28. Swimming pool at Greenbelt, Maryland. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

[59] Ibid., 93.
[60] Ibid., 94.
[61] *Leisure Hours*, 10, 21.
[62] Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 96.

Fig. 6.29. Swimming pool at Greenbelt, Maryland, apartment buildings in the distance. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

By providing town centers that combined educational/community buildings, public art, commercial space, and entertainment activities, the Greenbelt planning teams utilized new innovations – which had often been charged with fueling the breakdown of traditional society – to bring their communities together. Distinctive features such as an Art Deco school building or a piece of modern art with a traditional message provided a focal point for community identity. Public spaces would help foster unity; shared recreation and leisure would relieve the stresses brought on by the complex modern world. As Frank Lloyd Wright had noted in 1901,"on every side we see evidence of inglorious quarrel between things as they were and things as they must be and are."[63] Fears that the American democratic character was being eroded and undermined by modernity were acknowledged by the designers of the Greenbelt towns, but were not permitted to overwhelm the basic intention of reviving the necessary community spirit of the past while also preparing citizens for the future.

[63] Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," in *Roots of Contemporary American Architecture*, ed. Lewis Mumford (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 171.

Architectural styles

When choosing between contemporary, traditional, or a mix of styles, the designers of the Greenbelt towns were making assumptions about what sorts of homes and public buildings Americans wanted and needed, as well as what styles best suited to fit the realities of the future. As Gwendolyn Wright has observed, "for centuries Americans have seen domestic architecture as a way of encouraging certain kinds of family and social life. Diverse contingents have asserted that our private architecture has a distinctly public side, and that domestic environments can reinforce certain character traits, promote family stability, and assure a good society."[64] For the Greenbelt designers, these issues took on a particular importance.

In some ways the Greenbelt towns strongly resemble each other, but in certain key aspects they are visually quite dissimilar. The architectural style chosen for building exteriors, for example, varies from one town to the next. This variation is the result of conscious choices made by each design team, but also stems from the changing nature of architectural education at the time that the designers were in school and in the early years of their careers. The École des Beaux-Arts still influenced much of the monumental architecture being produced, even if in an altered form as skyscrapers increasingly dominated the urban landscape. Symmetry, order, and unity of design continued to be emphasized in new styles, even as modern aesthetics stripped much of the ornamentation from buildings. The overall styles of the Greenbelt towns, then, bring together several elements: the older École influence (though waning by this time); newer ideas about the advisability of sleeker, more contemporary designs (which just happened to fit nicely with constrained construction budgets); the desire to produce a built environment that recalled the old villages of medieval Europe or colonial America; and the intention to give residents towns and homes suited to the modern age.

All three communities were designed to provide superior environments for the working class; thus the architectural elements reflect the assumptions that the design teams made about what kinds of building styles were best suited to this segment of the population. Minimal use of ornamentation, for example, is reflective of the need to keep costs low, but also a belief

[64] Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*, xv.

that the use of the towns – as steered by the orientation and choice of building types – would have a much greater impact on the daily lives of the residents than would superfluous decoration. The communities were to be inhabited by no-nonsense laborers, not dilettantes. As a result, regardless of the level of modernity incorporated into the building styles of the towns, designers rejected any hint of opulence (which would have further enraged critics), but also rejected mindless adherence to older fashions and outmoded forms. Although they were intended to inculcate a long-declining social unity, the Greenbelts were also undeniably intended as towns of the future – scientifically planned, streamlined and efficient in design.

One of the chief difficulties facing the planners of all three towns lay in the conflicting missions with which they were charged: they were supposed to create low-cost housing, but also to use as many laborers – and as much unskilled labor – as possible; they were therefore to avoid overuse of machinery and other efficient methods, yet they were always aware of the need to keep expenses as low as possible. They were in an unwinnable situation. The teams researched the possibility of using new methods and materials on an experimental basis, which apparently yielded no clear advantages.[65] We must acknowledge that budget considerations always tempered the plans of the towns. Greenhills, in particular, seems to have suffered as a result of the shrinking available funds. This consideration, along with the need to ensure that much of the construction could be accomplished by unskilled labor, surely affected the final design of the homes, since they represented the major portion of the construction. Thus we must be careful not to assume that all of the buildings reflected exactly what the designers would have wished given more free rein. In addition, each town had an entire team of planners and architects. We have no record of how specific design decisions were made, but the use of teams of professionals, each bringing individual preferences to the process, must have required some degree of compromise. Henry Churchill, chief architect for Greenbrook, New Jersey, labeled the exterior design of the completed towns' houses "competent and undistinguished," seemingly indicating that he would have wished for something better had it been possible.[66]

[65] Churchill manuscript, Chapter 4, "Planning the Town," 43, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky. Churchill does not elaborate as to what these methods and materials were, but concludes that "nothing new of a satisfactory nature was discovered."
[66] Ibid., Chapter 4, "Planning the Town," 45.

We have only partial evidence for why the design teams made the choices that they did. Still, we can conclude with a fair degree of confidence that the architecture of Greenbelt, with its much more cohesive modern look, was designed specifically with the machine age in mind, and was strongly influenced by the Bauhaus and other modernist styles recently in vogue throughout much of Europe. The commercial center and combination school/community building clearly exhibit the clean lines and minimal decoration of this style, along with aspects of Art Deco. The exterior treatment of the residences offer a mix of painted concrete block or either brick veneer or shingle siding over wood frames; some roofs are pitched and some flat. Roughly half of the housing is concrete block, primarily because this method did not require the services of skilled carpenters as did wood-frame buildings, and thus could put more unskilled or semiskilled laborers to work.[67] The block buildings were painted white, with pastel trim in one of several shades at the upper corners and on the bands between the windows.[68] Each building had trim all in one color, with colors varying from building to building, or sometimes by building groups.[69] This gave the block buildings, which might otherwise have appeared stark and unimaginative in design, a softer, more pleasing look. Although some of the dwellings are not wholly modern in style, the majority of the residential units and all of the public buildings reflect a decided International Style influence, thus giving the entire town a strong contemporary feel. The architecture of Greenbelt is clearly intended to reflect the modern motor age even as the placement of the homes was meant to create a cozy community feeling.

[67] O. Kline Fulmer, "Why Some Greenbelt Houses Have Flat Roofs," *The Greenbelt Cooperator* (Jan. 5, 1938).
[68] For a breakdown of style types and exterior finishes, see Appendix J. One female resident recalls these trim colors as being pretty, but her father felt that they were "not the colors a man would want on his house." Janet M. James, *Looking Back*, reminiscences section, 41.
[69] Greenbelt Final Report, vol. 2, section 5, "Architectural Planning," 21.

Fig. 6.30. Greenbelt residential units: painted block with flat roofs in foreground, brick with pitched roofs in background. Interior court view.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.31. Greenbelt apartment buildings.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

The designers of Greendale went in a different direction architecturally; the flavor of the town is hardly contemporary at all, but much more like either a colonial American or older European village. Peets wrote extensively about the desire to replicate, or at least to pay

tribute to, traditional styles. Although the Greendale team was influenced by older styles, they resisted blindly copying these forms, instead making the look of the town something not quite old and not quite new. This more traditional architectural style is carried to the public buildings in Greendale, with both the commercial center and town hall constructed of red brick, a traditional material that calls to mind eighteenth-century style and sensibility. The town hall bears a striking resemblance to the buildings of colonial Williamsburg, which was undergoing a very public makeover and reconstruction during the 1930s, and undoubtedly heightened architects' awareness of this historical style. Elbert Peets admitted that the layout of Greendale had in fact been inspired by the look of Williamsburg; it is obvious that the architecture, too, was strongly influenced by the example.[70] But there was more at work here than superficial concerns with the architectural look of the buildings. Peets explained:

> We had … strong convictions concerning the appearance, the esthetic design, of the town. We postulated that it was essential to the social and economic success of the town that it should be liked by the people who lived in it. And yet, although we wanted to please our people, we did not care to take the easy course of making the town superficially pretty and quaint. It is easy to appeal to shallow and transitory popular fancies, but we believed that the town could and should be so designed as to give the Greendale people deep and lasting satisfactions. We were confident that rationality, lucidity, appropriateness of form, a simple clear rhythm – all these words mean no more than good workmanship – appeal to human satisfactions that lie deeper than the cultural surface of our personalities.[71]

Thus Greendale was designed to elicit a particular response in its residents, to create a pleasant and cohesive look that stirred in the people a recognition of their shared existence and common heritage.

[70] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 149-150.
[71] Ibid., 18.

Fig. 6.32. Courthouse, Williamsburg, Virginia.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.33. Greendale administration building. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

Although in Greendale, as in Greenbelt, most of the residences were painted white, the designers left the corner brick exposed on some units to give them a traditional, old-fashioned texture. The architects avoided flat roofs in favor of traditional peaked and hipped roofs.

Peets acknowledged that there had been an intentional effort to use a very uniform architectural style throughout the town, writing that "most towns and landscapes that everyone calls beautiful have a conspicuous ingredient of uniformity. The Washington cherry blossoms are dramatic, almost overpowering, because they form such a large nearly uniform mass…. Identity of material is the natural dress of rhythm in form. And even monotony may be sweet to senses wearied by the chaos of the world."[72] Here is yet another indication of the belief that the complexity of the modern world was wearing down the people; the planners hoped that a carefully designed physical environment could help overcome these detrimental effects.

Fig. 6.34. Row houses in Greendale, Wisconsin. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

[72] Ibid., 120.

Fig. 6.35. Single-family detached Greendale houses.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Greenbelt and Greendale, although using quite different architectural styles, each have their own fairly unified look. Greenhills, Ohio, on the other hand, has a more eclectic appearance. The school/community facility and the pool building show a strong Art Deco, modernist influence. Many of the homes are reflective of International Style, and in fact strongly resemble Bauhaus predecessors, but others are quite traditional in design. As a broad generalization, the single-family detached and twin units tend toward traditional styles, while the row units and apartments are more often modernist, even stark. The original exterior finishes were either brick veneer, asbestos siding, or hollow tile and stucco.[73] The majority of roofs are flat, although some homes have pitched slate roofs and a few units received red clay tiles.[74] The designers of Greenhills may have been trying to combine old and new styles in a effort to give the town a more unplanned appearance, but this mix also serves to give the community a rather schizophrenic look, as though the architects simple could not decide whether the buildings should speak to the past or the future.

[73] Some have since been re-sided using other materials.
[74] "Description of Houses, Greenhills Project," n.d., National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 96: Farmers Home Administration file. Some of the flat roofs apparently leaked early on and so were replaced by pitched roofs.

Fig. 6.36. School/community building in Greenhills, Ohio.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.37. Homes in Greenhills, Ohio. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

We can conclude that the architecture of the Greenbelt communities reflects the fact that the design and planning professions, just as the nation as a whole, were torn between a reverence for the past and a rather cautious desire to embrace the benefits and excitement of the modern age. The mix of contemporary, European-inspired forms in town layout that recalled older villages and the inclusion of both newer and traditional design elements gives each of the communities something of a split personality. Greenbelt perhaps leans more to the modern, Greendale more to the traditional, but all three bring together elements of both styles, making these tangible, visible artifacts of this moment in time, when the past seemed safe and the future both enticing and uncertain.

The shape of the towns

Perhaps no considerations concerning the towns took more of the planners' time and attention than decisions regarding how to place houses and other elements relative to roads, sidewalks, and each other. There were some facts that all three planning teams agreed on; for example they all believed that houses should provide as much light, ventilation, and privacy as could be managed within the tight (and always shrinking) budget constraints. They wanted to try new ideas, rather than simply to copy the grid street patterns and traditional house orientations that had so long been in use (see figure 6.38). And they wanted to provide homes that would offer a sanctuary while at the same time the neighborhoods would provide an opportunity for residents to be an integral part of the larger community. These issues had after all laid at the heart of many of the concerns raised by reformers for decades – the overcrowding of city tenement districts, the impersonal nature of urban social interaction, the instability of modern neighborhoods, and the feared erosion of democratic principles that might arise from these factors.

Fig. 6.38. Aerial view of a portion of Washington, DC, showing traditional grid street layout. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

The Greenbelt design teams thus took special care in determining element placement and orientation. In an effort to create homes that would truly be havens for residents, they focused on the best practices of their professions in terms of how to orient houses to utilize prevailing cool breezes or to shelter from harsh winter winds (two goals understandably often at odds with each other). Using scale models to help visualize the layout for the towns they attempted to establish how the placement of the different elements would work in the real world (Elbert Peets acknowledged afterwards that they might have benefitted from more extensive use of models, particularly in terms of which design types best fit the topography).[75] The planners used lights to simulate the sun's movement across the sky in order to visualize the best possible orientation and placement for the houses, an innovation introduced to the project by Henry Wright.[76] They sought also to position homes in such a way as best to encourage neighborly exchanges and shared use of outdoor spaces while at the same time ensuring an adequate degree of privacy for residents. In addition, the designers arranged the public spaces to bring people together and to create a unique community identity at the heart of each of the towns. The specific shape and style differs from one town to the next, but in each the focus on

[75] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 140.
[76] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 100-101.

retaining elements of old-fashioned village life while facing the coming of the modern world lies at the center of the decisions the planners made.

Fig. 6.39. Model of a portion of Greendale.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

In terms of how to situate residences relative to streets, all three towns were patterned to some degree on the Radburn model and incorporated aspects of Perry's Neighborhood Unit concept. They also all take their basic shapes from the topography of the sites: Greenbelt lies along a crescent-shaped ridge, Greendale in a valley protected from winter winds by rising slopes to the north and west, and Greenhills on undulating land cut by ridges and depressions. The idea of using the landscape to best advantage, rather than superimposing a predetermined layout without regard to topography, had been advocated since the 1920s; John Nolen had been among the most vocal proponents of this method of town planning.

The Radburn influence is most obvious in Greenbelt and somewhat less so in Greenhills and Greendale, with the designers of Greenbelt fully embracing the superblock concept. Although a somewhat busy main road does go through the center of the town, there are few homes on that road and key crossing points were given pedestrian underpasses. Most houses sit within superblocks and are accessed by smaller, quieter streets. The design does not make extensive use of the cul-de-sac, as Radburn does, however; residential units are primarily

arranged in "courts," which sit just off the street (see figure 6.40). Each court generally has a small parking area, and some also have garage space for tenants. In other areas larger garage buildings are available nearby, but not quite so close to the dwellings. The homes' service spaces are most often closer to the road and their living spaces face green interior courtyards. O. Kline Fulmer later explained the spatial arrangement: "Instead of facing only a barren street, the homes look out upon the grass and trees in the center. While each house has its own yard, much of the space is pooled for the common use. Sidewalks are not necessary along the streets because a network of paths runs through the safe and pleasant surroundings of the interior park. Kitchen doors usually open on small service courts indented from the street. These courts provide space for garages, laundry yards and delivery entries, and at the same time isolate dwellings from through traffic."[77]

By facing the homes toward the inner courtyard, by keeping these courts small, and by placing playgrounds for small children close to each court, the planners aimed to bring neighbors into contact with each other, to encourage shared space and shared experiences, and to foster a group identity within each small residential enclave as well as within the town overall. Unlike the traditional grid layout, or the postwar suburbs that were yet to come, the design of Greenbelt was specifically intended to force each neighborhood to look inward on itself, a design intended to discourage isolation and unfamiliarity. The placement of the homes ensured that neighbors would come into contact, with an arrangement of outdoor spaces that would help make these encounters friendly and cooperative.

[77] O Kline Fulmer, *Greenbelt* (Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, n.d.), 7. Fulmer was an associate architect on Greenbelt's planning team. Upon completion of the town he moved there and became Assistant Resident Manager. He lived in the town for at least four years.

Fig. 6.40. Plan of the central portion of Greenbelt showing recreation area, community building, commercial center, and residential units.
John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

Fig. 6.41. Greenbelt, Maryland, interior court, between 1938 and 1942.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.42. Greenbelt row houses, interior court view, no date (maturity of landscaping and the presence of air conditioning units indicate that this image is more recent than the 1930s).
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey.

The planners of Greendale and Greenhills incorporated what might be termed a modified superblock design. Both towns to some extent exhibit either the cul-de-sac or court idea; neither, however, use true Radburn-style superblocks. Decisions concerning the placement of housing units in Greendale reflected a continuation of the Beaux-Arts influence. Elbert Peets, in discussing the need to integrate homes of varying sizes, wrote that the design

team "determined to bring the buildings insofar as possible into interdependent groups pulled together by symmetry and axiation, each group coming to the consciousness of the observer as a single architectural composition."[78] Ideas such as symmetry, axiation, and the single architectural composition were key tenets of the Beaux-Arts tradition. The Greendale team further sought to create a cohesive look among this mix of house types "by setting the buildings in close informal association or by using the fundamental rationality of a row, straight or curved."[79]

The planners also considered how best to incorporate automobile ownership into Greendale's design. Peets concluded, "the motor car is the link between the house and the world: the court [street and driveway] brings the car into the home complex – one can go from the car to the home as directly and with almost as perfect privacy as one goes from room to room in the house."[80] They also felt strongly that parking must be as close to homes as possible due to the harsh Wisconsin winters; as a result ninety percent of Greendale houses have garages.[81] This consideration also affected their street layout. Although courts with centralized parking were utilized to some extent in both Greenbelt and Greenhills, Greendale planners feared that this would place cars too far from the entrances to homes. Thus more conventional street and driveway arrangements were deemed advisable for the Wisconsin site.

Greendale's planners, like those for Greenbelt, sought to bring neighbors into contact by grouping houses relatively close together and utilizing connected or shared outdoor spaces, although they did not group them into Greenbelt-style courts. Nonetheless, by situating homes in small, intimate clusters, they in essence replicated a courtyard feeling between neighboring houses. Peets wrote that "for the residence streets … we wanted to express repose and friendliness, order on an intimate personal scale. We wanted to make the streets clearly and emphatically town streets, the place where public ground comes into contact with private ground."[82] Neither true grids nor true superblocks, the orientation of Greendale's streets and houses melded a more traditional town layout with the intention of adapting the plan to the

[78] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 19.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 45.
[81] Ibid., 17.
[82] Ibid., 19.

topography, as urged by Nolen, and aspects of the Radburn plan, as advocated by Stein and Wright. The result is an arrangement that feels neither rigidly old-fashioned nor overtly experimental.

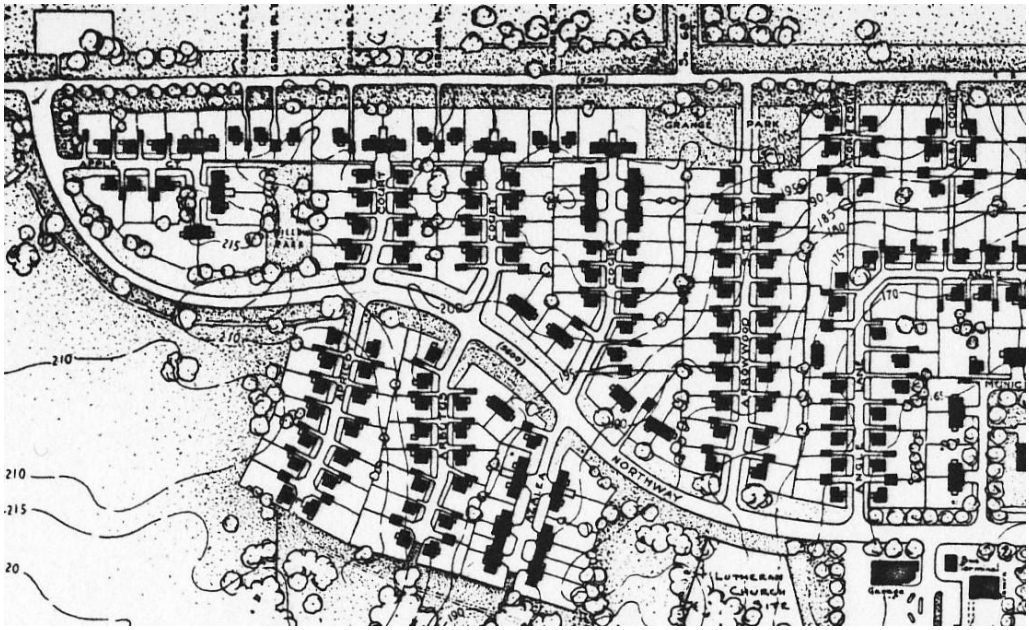

Fig. 6.43. Northwest section of Greendale, showing residential layout. Here planners used both a modified cul-de-sac and superblock concept in the area to the left, but placed houses directly along side streets in the area to the right. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

As was true of architectural style, Greenhills is also the most eclectic of the towns in terms of its layout. The roads are not laid out in true superblocks on the Radburn model, and only a few residential streets utilize the cul-de-sac design. This is largely due to the topography of the Greenhills site, which limited possible placement of elements due to the presence of numerous ridges – along which the residential spaces were laid out – and ravines.[83] The result is a town which is more spread out residentially than the other two, and which does much less to bring neighbors into daily contact. For the most part, the use of the cul-de-sac was reserved for the areas of town that contained detached or twin-style single-family homes (which were also the largest and most traditionally designed houses). Thus, residents in these larger homes had, in some ways, more private and intimate contact with neighbors than did those living in

[83] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 90.

smaller and less expensive homes. Yet what those inhabiting the smaller homes lost in intimacy, they gained in openness. If, due to topographical limitations, planners could not bring all residents of the town the benefits of shared space, they could at least spare them the oppressive overcrowding of the cities. This was low-rent housing with breathing room.

The close community atmosphere of Greenhills is also hampered by Winton Road, a major traffic artery that sweeps northward from Cincinnati and passes through the heart of the town. Without either pedestrian underpasses or the ability to keep such a thoroughfare on the outer edge of the town, designers had to plan around this busy road, which not only compromised some of the desired safety of the town, but also the hoped-for unity of identity for Greenhills residents. Planners had little choice but to work with the land and roadways present at the site. They could only hope that other design aspects of the community, such as the inclusion of ample green space and recreation areas, would compensate for the limitations placed on them by the undulating landscape and existing roadway.

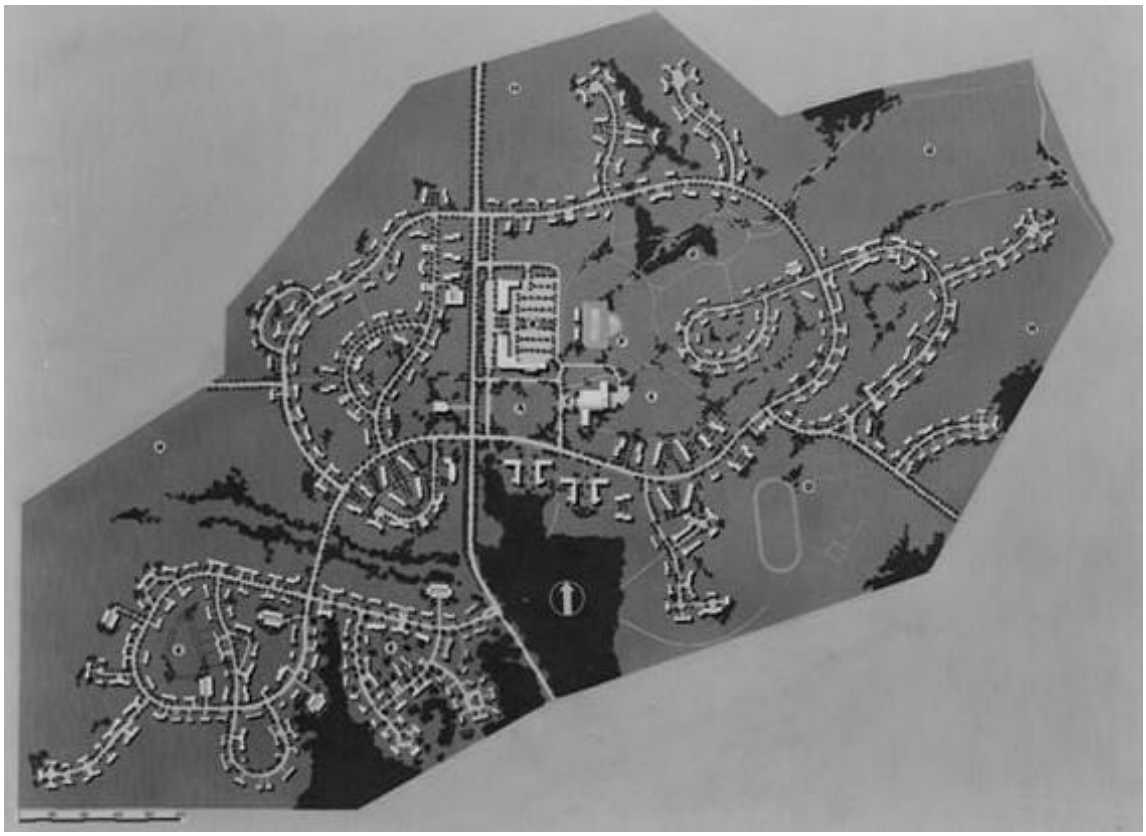

Fig. 6.44. Plan of Greenhills. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Another aspect of the overall look of the towns that the designers in all three teams agreed was crucial was the inclusion of thoughtful landscape design. More often than not housing developments include landscaping as an afterthought, if at all. This was not the case with the Greenbelt towns, whose planners gave careful consideration to the sorts of plantings that would best compliment the site and the buildings, and would provide pleasing views for residents.[84] The discipline of landscape architecture had, after all, provided the genesis for the field of town planning; thus the inclusion of plantings and the issue of how to arrange plants relative to other town elements was extremely important to the towns' designers. They were eager to create a scene that recalled the verdant countryside surrounding the communities, and to avoid the kinds of sterile, concrete-laden vistas often associated with urban housing projects. For Instance, Greenbelt's planners compiled lists of the trees to be used in the town. Greenbelt's "D" area, to give one example, was slated for the planting of seven sugar maples, seventy-two flowering dogwoods, thirty-four apple trees, twenty white oaks, seventeen willow oaks, seventeen red oaks, twenty-five locusts – and the list goes on. In addition to the trees, planners enumerated quantities of shrubs (for instance, this same section was to receive sixty-three lilac and seventeen blueberry bushes).[85] Since the Greenbelts were intended to bring together the best of country and city life, the inclusion of greenery in the town was considered absolutely essential to providing a scenic, semi-rural environment, and fit with current notions of the salubrious effects of fresh air and nature for body and spirit. This equation of flora with a sort of natural harmony may also be reflected in the decision of Greendale planners to reference plants in the names of many of the town's streets, such as Apple, Azalea, Balsam, and Carnation.

[84] Assistant Chief Town Planner WA Strong to Justin Hartzog and, Aug. 10, 1936. Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.
[85] Greenbelt Plant Field List, Oct. 22, 1936. Courtesy of Greenbelt Homes, Inc.

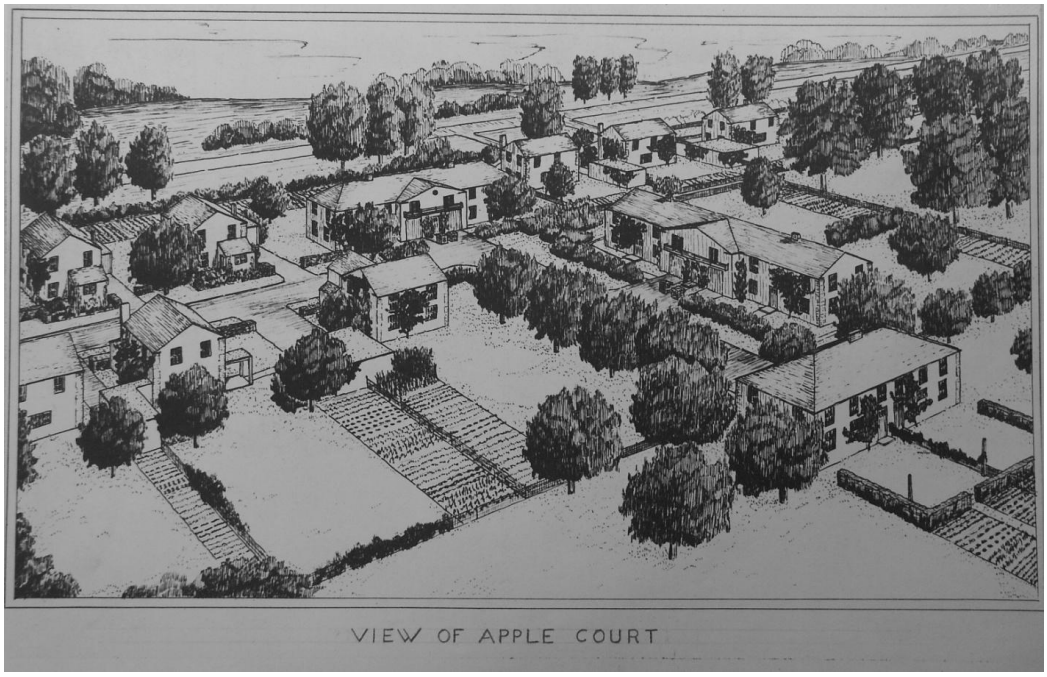

Fig. 6.45. View of Apple Court, Greendale, Wisconsin. Greendale Final Report.

As with other aspects of the designs, the choice of whether to provide single-family detached homes or some version of group housing was considered to be integral to the character of the towns, and this question of the use of single- or multiple-family homes was one that the planners weighed carefully. Yet, as with architectural choices, the designers were constrained to a large extent by the budgetary limitations of the project. In the area of housing type, especially, they were forced to make difficult compromises between what they knew many residents would prefer and what was economically feasible. We should not assume, however, that financial considerations imposed from above were the only factors considered; for many of those who planned the Greenbelt towns, this was a chance to demonstrate that the tightly-packed but socially isolated lifestyle of the city did not have to be the way of modern American life, but at the same time that the single-family detached home was not the only proper habitation for the American family. They wanted to show that low-cost housing for the working class could be economically but sturdily built, comfortable, and conducive to family and community stability.

Potential residents who had previously lived in Washington's crowded urban neighborhoods were unlikely to insist on a single-family detached home – they were satisfied

with clean, modern dwellings in whatever arrangement was available to them. This gave the Maryland team more latitude in choosing multiple-family configurations than the other towns' planners seem to have had. Yet resident preference was not the only factor considered in the housing designs; after all, although the analysis of the Research Division's questionnaires had revealed that nearly thirty-two percent of Washington respondents desired a single-family detached home, the town of Greenbelt originally included just five such houses (dubbed "experimental" houses, these were prefabricated units constructed of plywood and set somewhat apart from the center of town). The other 880 Greenbelt homes were either in multi-family apartment buildings or row houses, all but sixteen of the latter being two-story units which today might be termed townhouses.[86] Clearly the team designing Greenbelt felt that single-family detached homes were unnecessary given the experimental and low-cost nature of the program, and they believed that connected housing was perfectly well suited to modern living if Americans would only give it a chance. This likely reflected a preference among planners for the styles of Europe, where a detached home in an urban or suburban setting was the exception rather than the rule. It also shows a rejection of the notion that anything other than a detached home was somehow detrimental to the inhabitants. The placement of the row houses, in particular, illustrates the idea that connected walls had no ill effect, and that shared outdoor space would in fact bring these neighbors – forced into fairly close proximity – into genial contact, forging both friendships and tight community bonds.

Greendale's designers, on the other hand, bowed to the wishes of the majority of Milwaukee respondents, seventy-four percent of whom stated a preference for a single-family detached house. Yet, just as the Greenbelt designers did not base their decision solely on resident preference, neither did the Greendale planners consider only the desires of potential inhabitants. Peets defended the team's decision to offer primarily single-family dwellings by stating that, having driven through nearby neighborhoods and noting the small detached "cottages" he saw there, the planners felt that they had to respect traditional American forms in order to offer valid improved alternatives. He wrote in Greendale's Final Report: "If we should vary too much from this pattern the thing we built, though good of itself as one way to

[86] Farm Security Administration, "Greenbelt Communities" 12, Greenbelt Museum; O. Kline Fulmer, *Greenbelt*, 43.

plan housing, might be so far from the deeply rooted folk-way that the two would have nothing in common and no bettering of the old way would come from the example of a new way."[87] Further, he and his fellow Greendale team members believed that even though the town was to be populated by renters rather than owners, detached homes could recreate the beneficial influence of traditional home-ownership. Echoing the old Jeffersonian ideal, he wrote: "We felt that the almost universal desire in America to hold a piece of land as part of the family home is not a mere relic of an outmoded culture of individualism, a relic that ought now to be forgotten. We believed, on the contrary, that personal use of and responsibility for a house and a piece of land around it served to facilitate family cooperation and the home training of children and to establish respect for the rights of other people. We believed that it was not entirely romantic idealism to think that to be proprietor of a piece of land helped a man to be a better citizen."[88] As a result, Greendale offered 274 single-family detached homes, ninety single-family side-by-side twin units, 168 row houses, and just forty apartments.[89]

[87] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 41.
[88] Ibid., 41-42.
[89] Farm Security Administration, "Greenbelt Communities," 12, Greenbelt Museum.

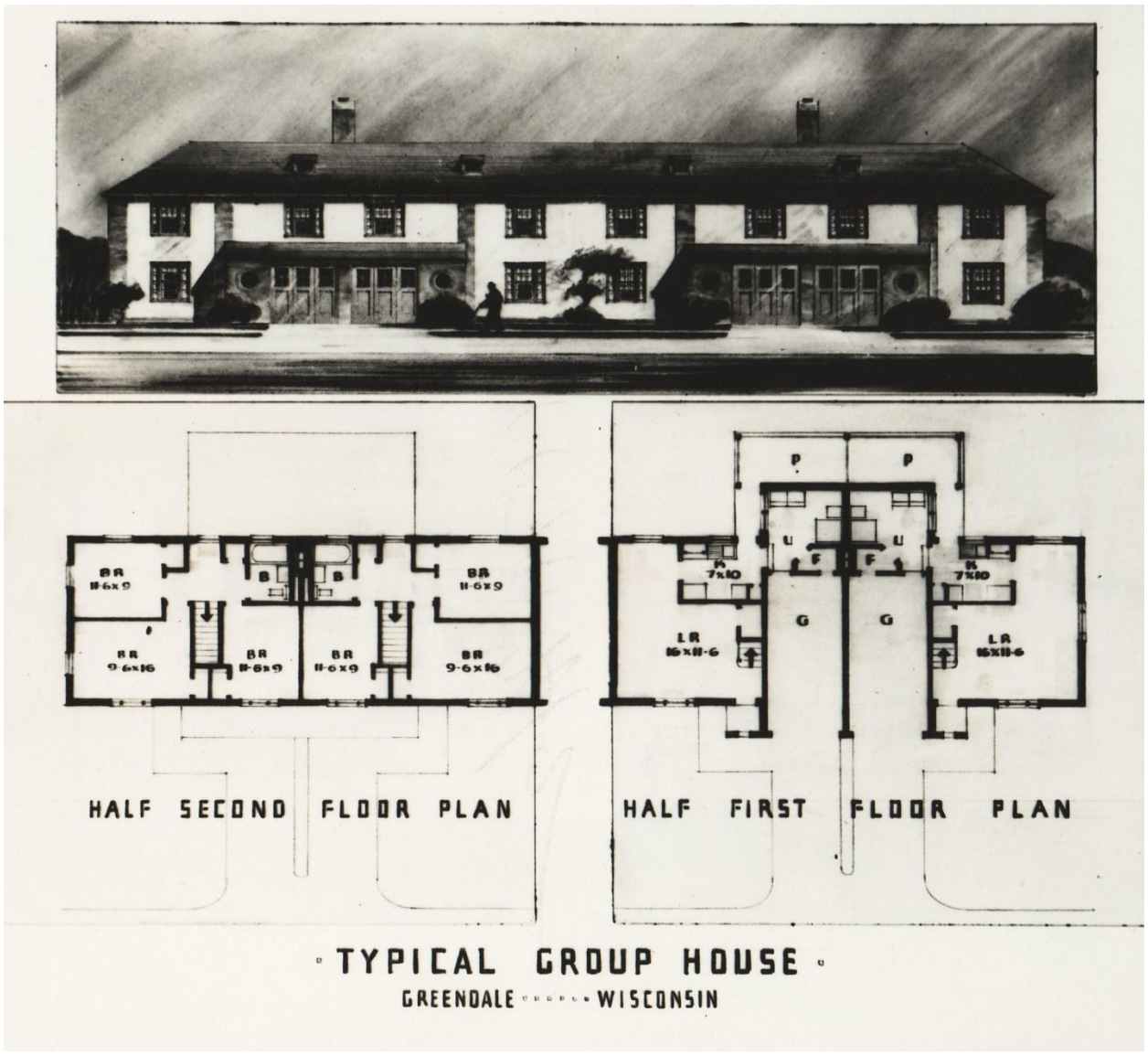

Fig. 6.46. One style of Greendale group (row) house. Room sizes were altered slightly prior to construction. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

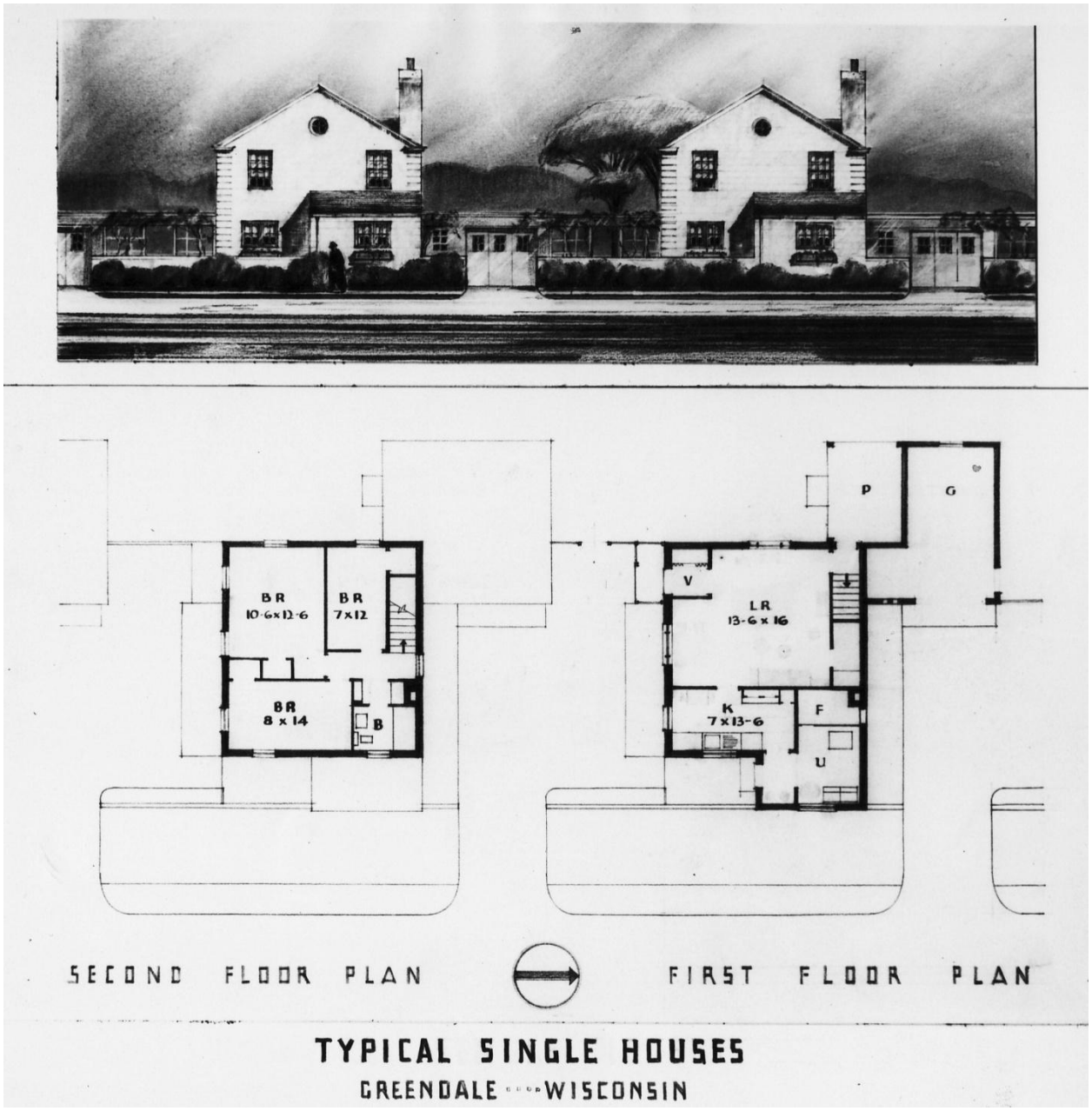

Fig. 6.47. Common style of Greendale single-family detached house (slight changes were made prior to actual construction; for example, the chimneys were placed on the front rather than the side and the arbors connecting house and garage were eliminated). This was the most-used style in Greendale, with 103 built. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

Here, just as in exterior architectural style, Greenbelt and Greendale offer the two extremes of the program's housing types, with Greenbelt favoring group housing and Greendale favoring individual housing. Once again, Greenhills straddles the two. The town has far fewer single-family detached homes than Greendale – just twenty-three – but more than

Greenbelt, and unlike Greenbelt's, these are not prefabricated experimental homes, but carefully designed, fairly traditional houses. Greenhills also has a wider variety of unit combinations. For example, in addition to detached homes, they have some that are twins but separated by garages – essentially duplexes without shared walls other than garage walls. The number of units in rows varies from one group to the next and units are staggered within rows in varying patterns (see figure 6.48). The planners of this town seem to have used a much more mix-and-match approach in their unit configuration. These were not simply random selections; the intent was to avoid the monotony offered in so many public housing projects and the repetition of design that Peets praised in Greendale. By varying styles and combinations, the Greenhills design team hoped to make this look more like an ordinary town that had simply grown over the years. As with every design decision regarding the look of each of the towns, this resulted from thoughtful deliberation and a conscious choice to combine older and newer stylistic elements.

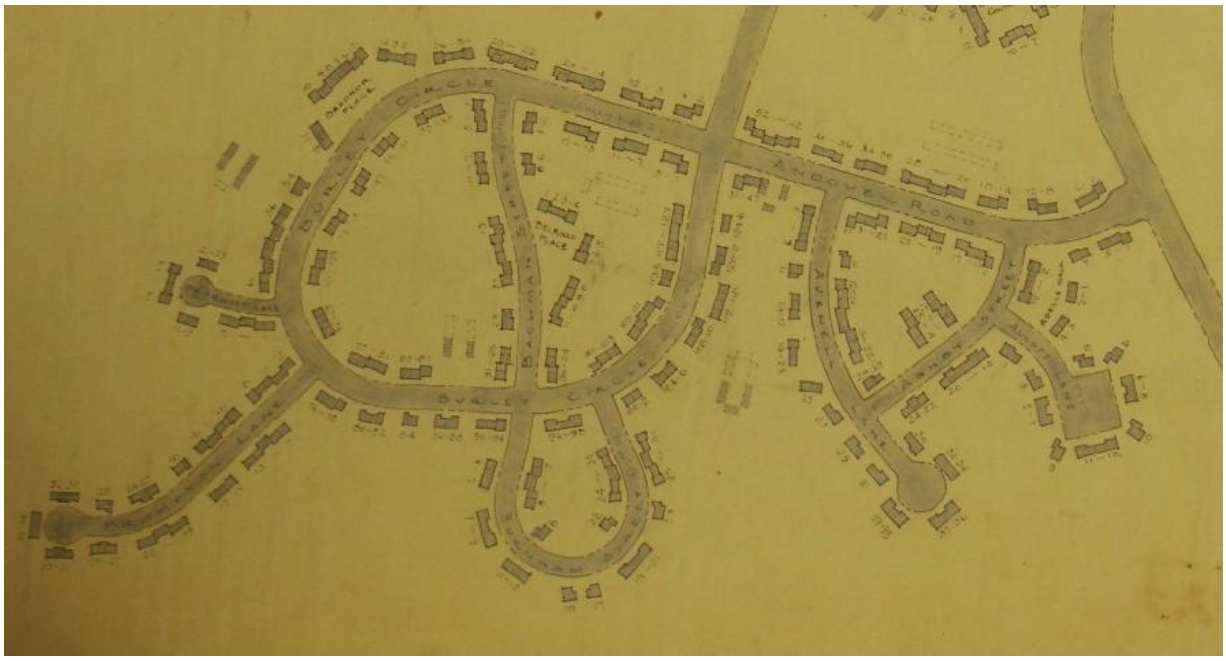

Fig. 6.48. Original hand-drawn plan of Greenhills' "A" and "B" sections, showing the various building configurations. Courtesy of the Village of Greenhills.

Fig. 6.49. Greenhills duplexes on a cul-de-sac.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Once again, however, financial constraints interfered with the intentions of the planners. Greenhills, in particular, faced budgetary problems that forced a compromise in the design of some of the homes. When in August of 1936 Greenhills' planners had to choose between either reducing the number of homes yet again or relaxing building standards somewhat, they chose the latter. The result was what in Greenhills were designated "S"-type houses. Some of the scaling-back of design in these homes, such as eliminating basements, garages, and porches, were easily justified as simply in keeping with the provision of utilitarian low-rent housing. Other aspects, however, were compromises in construction quality, going directly against the program's mission of providing extremely well-constructed housing that would last longer than most ordinary housing. These compromises included reducing roof insulation and eliminating wall insulation, providing smaller hot water tanks, and using fewer fire stops (a fuller list of differences in "S"-type houses appears in the appendix). Henry Churchill later assessed the concessions made in these houses, concluding that the homes "are inferior in layout, accommodations, construction and equipment to the standards heretofore followed. In consequence, they will be less convenient (although still livable) and may require higher maintenance and earlier obsolescence." At the same time he acknowledged that having some homes built to higher and some to lower standards, and all under the same ownership,

would provide a valuable means of comparison between the two regarding how well they would hold up and how much maintenance they would require, which would be beneficial to future planners of low-income housing.[90] The Greenhills design team eventually decided that the "apparent severity of the 'S' type building exteriors" could be softened by careful attention to the landscaping and the planting of larger trees in these sections of the town.[91]

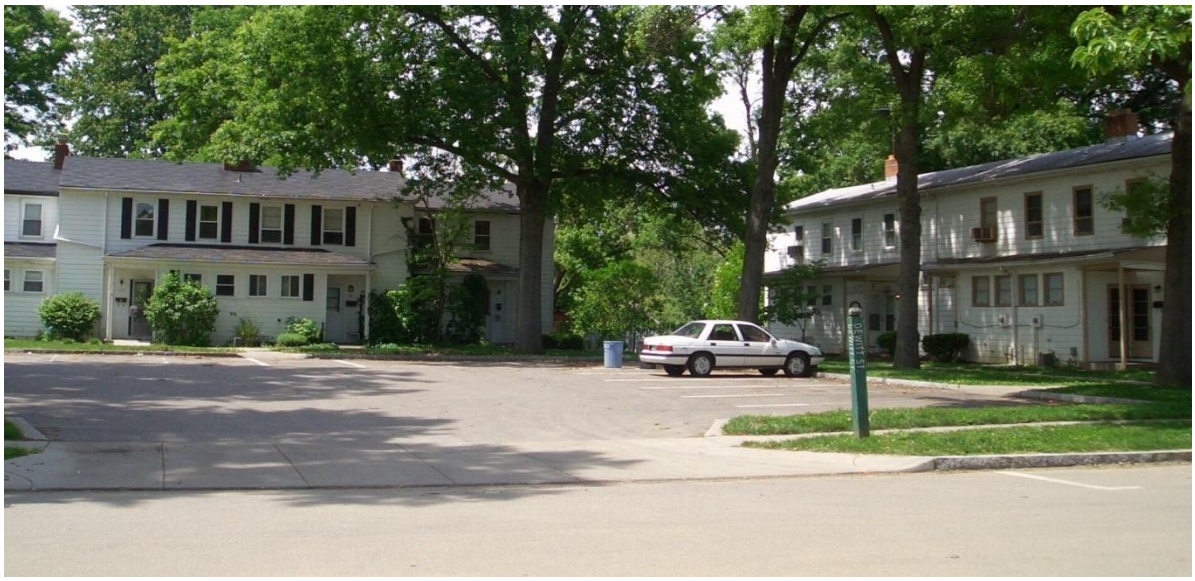

Fig. 6.50. "S"-type homes in Greenhills. Photo by the author.

Inside the homes

The designers of the Greenbelt towns did not create entirely new home concepts out of thin air. They were not intent on presenting to the American people something wholly unlike anything previously experienced, as were so many other prognosticators on the possible incarnation of "the house of the future."[92] Rather, they built upon traditional and accepted

[90] Churchill manuscript, Chapter 4, "Planning the Town, 46, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.
[91] Greenhills Final Report, "Summary Chronological History," 17.
[92] Brian Horrigan writes of these others: "these visions of the home of tomorrow had a certain consistency. They represented ideals, and they stood in stark and purposeful contrast to contemporary reality…. During this period, 'home of tomorrow' became a kind of code phrase for architects and engineers, a way of identifying their intentions and their broader motivations…. Some architects truly believed that they were, in fact, limning the

social norms and expectations. Their goal was not to dazzle with unique innovations but to demonstrate that rational planning and careful execution could provide a superior home environment, which would in turn produce a superior home life.

Although construction budgets were always a concern, planners used high-quality materials and designed the buildings specifically with the idea that future maintenance would be easy and inexpensive.[93] Yet each design team included certain elements and rejected others; each had some sense of what they wanted these spaces to offer to residents. These choices demonstrate, as does so much of this program, both a recognition that the world was changing and a reluctance to let go of the past completely.

The Greenbelt towns were certainly not designed to upset the prevailing social order. Their creators expected that nearly all of the homes would be occupied by nuclear families – father, mother, children. There were provisions for variations and alternate arrangements, but only within prescribed and socially acceptable "normal" ranges. For example, there were one-bedroom accommodations for single people and couples without children, primarily intended for young couples yet to begin their families, but also suitable for older couples whose children were grown; the town of Greenbelt offered more of these smaller homes than the other two.[94] Some expected family types were variations on the traditional: widows with children, for example. But across the board the designs were intended to enhance – not to challenge – the conventional social order.

Perhaps the first impression upon stepping into one of the Greenbelt towns' homes in the twenty-first century is that they are inarguably small by current standards. Yet they are also cozy and well-built. As a work-relief project for those with lower incomes, there was never any question of making the homes particularly luxurious. They are efficient and utilitarian, intended to accommodate a family, to provide space for eating, sleeping, studying, relaxing, and personal hygiene. Although the designers expected the family composition of residents to be fairly

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future." Brian Horrigan, "The Home of Tomorrow, 1927-1945," in *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future*, ed. Joseph J. Corn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 137.

[93] One resident who still lives in his childhood Greenbelt home points out that the original slate roof is still on the house – and holding up fine – after more than seventy years. William Morrison, interview by the author, Mar. 15, 2008.

[94] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 100.

conventional, they did plan for a certain degree of flexibility in accommodations. The plans for dwellings intended for more than one person (as opposed to the "bachelor apartments intended for a single occupant) always included a separation of "public" family spaces such as living and dining rooms from private bedroom space. The designers understood, however, that circumstances in low-income families might force alternative arrangements and compromises that disregarded conventional uses of the rooms. For example, the architects anticipated that, depending on a family's circumstances and needs, some might choose to use the dining area as an additional bedroom.[95]

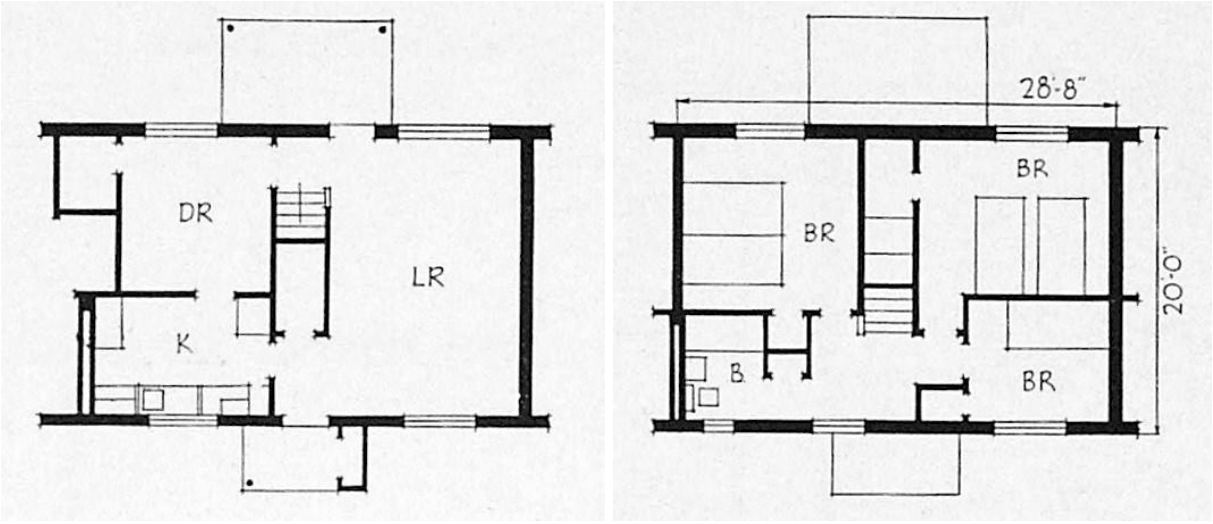

Fig. 6.51. Lower and upper floor plan of one type of three-bedroom (also called a two-and-a-half-bedroom) row house in Greenbelt, Maryland.[96] Reprinted from "Comparative Architectural Details in the Greenbelt Housing," *American Architect and Architecture* (Oct. 1936): 23.

In 1935 Clarence Stein conducted a study of minimum space requirements for different types of rooms. In his assessment a room intended to hold a single twin-size bed, small dresser, and chest of drawers could be as small as 9'10" by 7'4" or 10'2" by 6'10".[97] Although the Greenbelt designers did not make their bedrooms quite this small, they did make many of the

[95] "Comparative Architectural Details in the Greenbelt Housing," *American Architect and Architecture* (Oct. 1936): 22. The article notes that "the dining room can be used for sleeping, study, or play."
[96] This drawing essentially corresponds to design number C3-6, which was used thirty times in Greenbelt's row units. All of the three-bedroom units were close in size and configuration to this, ranging from a 25'2" frontage at the low end and 29' at the upper end.
[97] "Minimum Space Requirements of Bedroom," prepared by Clarence Stein, Nov. 18, 1935, Justin Hartzog Papers, Cornell University.

rooms in the homes as small as they felt could reasonably be done. The "first bedroom" in the two most-used home plans in Greenbelt measured 11'2" by 11'8" and 11'4" by 11'8" respectively.[98] Even the single-family detached homes in Greendale used this economy of size, although they granted a bit more room than many other New Deal housing programs. Two tables in the Final Report on Greendale offer a comparison between the town's homes and the standards applied by the Federal Housing Administration and Public Works Administration. Living rooms in a "typical" Greendale house were 212 square feet for those with no dining space and 245 for those with dining space. The most-used Greendale style offered a living room of 204.8 square feet and a separate 41.6 square foot dining area. The FHA minimum was 160, and the PWA's was 150 square feet. Similarly, a "first bedroom" in Greendale could range from 136 to 200 square feet, while the FHA required just 100 square feet and the PWA 110.[99] The Greendale architects concluded that that theirs were "fairly generous bedroom sizes."[100] Certainly the architects and administrators were aware that any hint of luxurious accommodation in this project would invite accusations that they were wasting taxpayer money. The Greenbelt planners and designers themselves, however, noted that although they were concerned with keeping construction expenses down, they also wanted to experiment with how best to use cost-effective, efficient design and to demonstrate the possibility of building decent housing that could be rented at rates affordable to the working class.

In the 1930s, the average family was satisfied with smaller interior spaces and less privacy than they would come to expect by the end of the century. The smallest of the ready-to-build kit homes sold by Sears, Roebuck, and Company during the 1920s and 1930s, for example, frequently offered bedrooms of similar size to those in the Greenbelt homes.[101] Although social critics and reformers had seen overcrowding in urban tenements as a cause for

[98] Greenbelt blueprints, Record Group 196, Public Housing Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. The C2-1 was used 131 times in Greenbelt, and the C2-7 was used 106 times.
[99] Harry H. Bentley, Greendale Final Report, vol. 3, "Report on Residential and Non-residential Construction," 5. This table is reproduced in Appendix H. The most-used style was number 3SE, which was used for 103 single-family detached homes. The bedrooms in this 3-bedroom model were 135.6 square feet, 113.1 square feet, and 85.8 square feet. List of first renters and floor plans, Greendale Historical Society.
[100] Bentley, Greendale Final Report, vol. 3, 9.
[101] As an example, the Sears model known as "The Fairy," which was offered in 1925, 1926, 1928, 1929, 1932, and 1933, had two bedrooms, sized 9'2" by 10'8" and 9'2" by 9'8". Somewhat larger models tended to offer bedrooms that measured just under 11' by 11'. Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, *Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck, and Company* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1986), 50, 68, 74, 81.

concern, they meant crowding too many buildings into one block, too many families into one building, and the lack of space differentiation within a home. They worried, for example, about people eating, sleeping, and working all in the same room, or taking in boarders when there was no separation of space between the family and non-family-members. These had long been cited as among the most egregious problems of tenement living. In contrast, as long as homes had separate spaces for different household functions, families had privacy from outsiders, and there was separation between family and bedroom space, the label of "overcrowded" was not applied. The existence of the Greenbelt towns' open spaces helped as well, specifically designating these communities as the antithesis of overcrowded. In addition, selection and rental guidelines ensured that homes would not be filled beyond capacity. Family size was usually limited to a maximum of six members. A family with parents and two same-sex children qualified for a two-bedroom home, the assumption being that the siblings would share a room. Families with more than two children, or with two or more children of the opposite sex, were entitled to a home with three bedrooms.[102] The largest homes in any of the towns had four bedrooms and were intended for families of up to seven (Greendale and Greenhills each had eighteen such homes; Greenbelt did not have any units larger than three bedrooms).

The planners did not have to simply imagine what kinds of spaces potential residents might want in their homes. They had at their disposal the results from the questionnaires that had been distributed and tabulated by the Research Division. The analysis of the Washington area questionnaire, for example, told them that the average single person currently had one bedroom (actually 1.2, indicating that some single people had more than one bedroom); the average two-person household had 1.1 bedrooms; three-person households averaged 1.4 bedrooms; four-person families averaged 1.8 bedrooms; families of five averaged 2.0; and of six 2.3.[103] Results for the other towns were similar. Most people in the required income groups shared a room. Even as they expected residents to share space, however, the planners made every effort "to provide, within the frame of economical costs, quarters sufficiently spacious to foster a complete and happy family life."[104]

[102] Dorothy and George Eshbaugh, *Looking Back*, reminiscence section, 22.
[103] Greenbelt Final Report, "Analysis of Questionnaire Results," Present Home Composition, 33.
[104] Bentley, Greendale Final Report, vol. 3, 7. For Greendale's expected occupancy, see Appendix I.

In addition to their own research, because this era had a decades-long tradition of social surveys and expert advice to build on, the design teams had no shortage of other sources for their home concepts. The Resettlement Administration employed home economists to offer counsel on how home interior spaces should be designed for optimal use. [105] Members of this profession had been offering insights and information on the best way to organize and run a household since the last decade of the nineteenth century. In the 1910s and 1920s home economists came to see themselves as the equivalent of industrial efficiency experts for the household; among the most active and vocal of these was Christine Frederick, who proudly declared that "the new and the intellectual attitude towards housework is, above all, *scientific*."[106] In her 1932 book *The Ignoramus Book of Housekeeping* she offered guidance on the best way to organize one's chore time, to keep up with dirty dishes, to do laundry, to cook.[107] Frederick's advice was aimed squarely at the housewife; she recognized the difficult and never-ending nature of the job, but she believed that despite the labor required, housework should be exclusively the domain of the wife. She admonished that "none of the responsibility for the smooth running of the house should be put on the man's shoulders, except, of course, in an emergency…. no daily routine, even that of helping with evening dishes, should be *expected* of him after his own day's work."[108]

The idea of scientific management of the home rested partially on the belief that modern innovations had relieved women of much of the drudgery of maintaining the home. But many of the "conveniences" brought about by modern innovations over the decades had incurred only marginal savings in time and effort for housewives. Frequently such improvements eliminated chores previously done by men and children – cutting and stacking firewood for the stove, for example, was in the nineteenth century replaced by coal delivery directly to the home, but either way the job of stoking the fire frequently throughout the day

[105] Rena B. Maycock, "Home Economics Work in the Resettlement Administration," *Journal of Home Economics* 28 (Oct. 1936): 560-562.
[106] Christine Frederick, *The Ignoramus Book of Housekeeping* (New York: Sears Publishing Co., Inc., 1932), 3.
[107] Ibid., 80-92, 97-109, 149-153.
[108] Ibid., 175.

remained that of the wife.[109] Sometimes innovations actually added to the wife's burden of duties, such as producing higher expectations for turning out creative and more elaborate meals with the introduction of better cooking appliances and utensils or increased pressure to keep a perfectly clean house with the introduction of the vacuum cleaner.[110] Likewise, the availability of automobiles turned many housewives into chauffeurs for their children and added new and increased "consumer duties" to their list of daily tasks.[111] There were changes wrought by industrialism that had in fact freed women from some of the most obnoxious tasks of the past; inexpensive store-bought grocery items and clothing had eliminated a good deal of unpleasant and time-consuming work. Yet, as one female author noted in 1932, if one listened to some commentators "one might think that the vacuum cleaners ran themselves and people subsisted on pills, not meals, that shops automatically delivered ready-mades in the very nick of a need."[112] Moreover, not all Americans had been able to avail themselves of the latest innovations. In 1932, for instance, just 30.4 percent of families owned a vacuum cleaner.[113]

Although some claimed that women's duties had been all but eliminated by modern conveniences, most Americans, including those who designed the Greenbelt towns and those who lived in them, knew better. Mothers still bore the responsibility for tending to very young children, for cooking and cleaning and mending. Christine Frederick suggested that, if possible, a housewife should allot two thirty-minute rest breaks in her daily routine, with the remainder of the day taken up by one household task or another (these rest breaks, however, were not necessarily entirely leisure time; she recommended, among other possible "restful" activities, gardening and marketing). She further recommended that a woman have a set "cleaning plan"

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[109] Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983).

[110] Moreover, she points out, the early twentieth century saw the decreased availability of inexpensive household help as immigrants were attracted to industrial, rather than domestic, employment. Thus, but the Depression, only the upper classes had paid help in the home, something that was much more common for the middle class earlier. Most Depression-era housewives had to rely solely on their own labor. Cowan, 21-22, 45, 53-54, 98, 12, 155-158, 174-178. See also Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1982).

[111] Joseph Interrante, "The Road to Autopia: The Automobile and the Spatial Transformation of American Culture," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 19-20 (Fall-Winter 1980-81): 511; Cowan, 81-85.

[112] Frances Drewry McMullen, "New Jobs for Women," *The North American Review* 234, no. 2 (Aug. 1932): 133.

[113] Bemis, *The Evolving House*, vol. 2, 67.

for each room, an order of cleaning operations to make the work as efficient as possible.[114] If a woman wanted to have any time to spare, she had to work long days, moving competently and quickly from task to task in a never-ending repetitive cycle.

Yet even Christine Frederick recognized that women had more leisure time than ever before, and that it was beneficial to get in some relaxation when possible. She urged the housewife to be efficient in her household duties, noting that "the idea of the desirability of reduction of energy results from the recognition of woman as an individual, and the demand on the part of the homemaker for greater leisure to devote to her outside interests."[115] She noted that if women managed to be particularly well-organized and productive, "by good planning they may have one or more whole afternoons free for club, or other preferred activity."[116] In the Greenbelts these outside interests might have included any one of the dozens of clubs and organizations available in each of the towns. It might, as depicted in *The City*, include the occasional relaxing game of bridge with the neighbors. It might even mean involvement in local politics.[117] Clearly, although the design of the houses did little to challenge prevailing gender norms, the architects and planners recognized that the care and cleaning of the home could be – indeed should be – only one part of a woman's life.

The designers of the Greenbelt towns tried to do their part to keep the towns' wives from undo drudgery. They held similar views to the committee that had studied homemaking for the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, whose report stated: "It is obvious that the floor plan of a house is important. The division of space, the arrangement of rooms, and location of halls, doors and stairways may decrease or increase the amount of time and energy spent on household tasks, and, consequently, the housewife's good humor and family concord."[118] If the towns' small room sizes were primarily a reflection of the nature of the program as low-rent housing, this at least kept space to be maintained to a minimum. Surfaces were chosen for their ease of care and cleaning, with two notable

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[114] Frederick, *The Ignoramus Book of Housekeeping*, 85-92.
[115] Ibid., 3.
[116] Ibid., 81.
[117] In November 1937 Greenbelt's first female candidate for town council was narrowly defeated at the polls, but the following year the town elected Ruth Taylor its first female council member. *Washington Star*, Nov. 24, 1937; Sharrod East, interview by Tom Saunders, Dec. 10, 1985, *Looking Back*, Section 3 (interviews), 78.
[118] Gries and Ford, *President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership*, vol. 10, 7.

exceptions. The first was the unfortunate choice of black linoleum tiles in many of Greenbelt, Maryland's homes (ignoring Christine Frederick's advice that flooring should be "neither too dark nor too light").[119] Housewives complained bitterly about the impossibility of keeping Greenbelt's black floors clean. The task was made virtually impossible while construction on the town was still ongoing, with either red-clay dust or mud continually tracked into the finished homes by anyone who had ventured outside. Eleanor Roosevelt pointed out the second mistake when she toured Greendale – the placement of always-dirty coal bins too close to laundry tubs – causing her to note that it was obvious that the plans had been made by men.[120] Interior paint colors were dictated by the design teams, and rules prohibited residents from nailing into the plaster walls, although a picture molding near the ceiling allowed for the hanging of artwork and mirrors.[121]

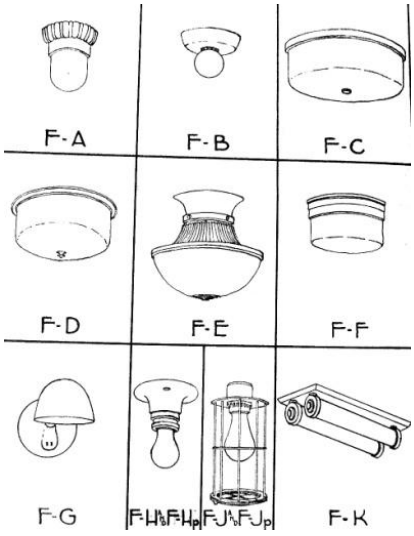

Fig. 6.52. Approved light fixtures for use in Greenbelt, Maryland homes. Courtesy of Greenbelt Homes, Inc. Homes in all three towns were fully wired for electricity, with the latest in electrical lights and fixtures provided. This was no longer a novelty, nor was it reserved only for the wealthy; by 1940 the U.S. Census Bureau found that 78.8 percent of American households had electricity.

[119] Frederick, *The Ignoramus Book of Housekeeping*, 67.
[120] Dorothy Harris, *Looking Back*, reminiscence section, 34; Alanen and Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made*, 50; Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 86-87.
[121] Greenhills manual, Greenbelt Museum; Greenbelt, Maryland Manual, Greenbelt Museum

Fig. 6.53. 2008 photo of the living room of a one-bedroom Greenbelt, Maryland, apartment. This view shows the original plaster walls, plain window trim, exposed pipe in the corner, original light fixture in ceiling, and use of picture molding. The heating / air conditioning unit is obviously not of 1930s vintage and the original window has been replaced. Photo by the author.

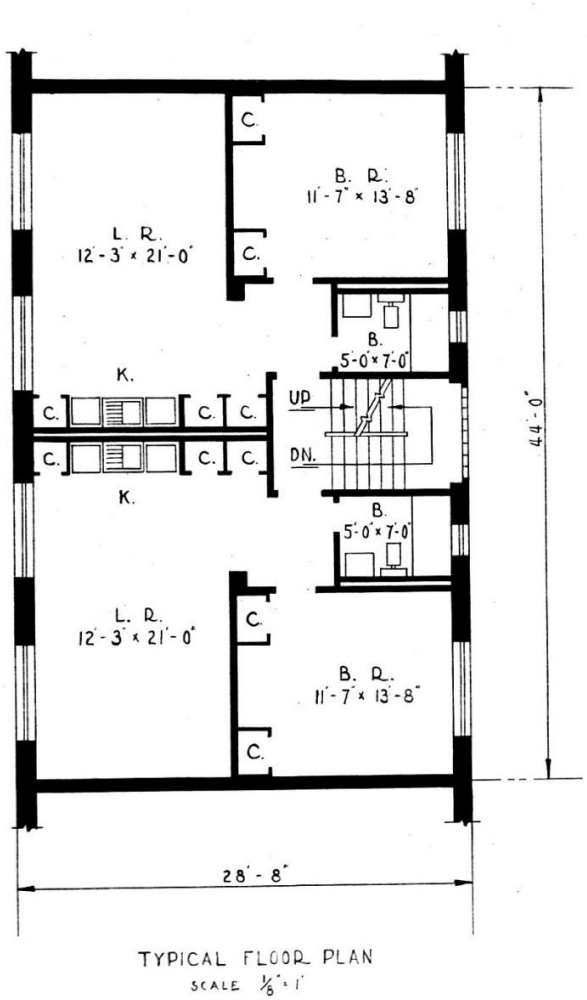

Fig. 6.54. Floor plan of two mirror-image one-bedroom apartments of the style pictured above. The kitchenette was counted as one-half of a room; thus this was considered a two-and-a-half room unit, suitable for two-person occupancy. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

The kitchens in all three towns were equipped with modern electric refrigerators and ranges. While electricity itself was commonplace by this time, electric refrigeration was still something of a luxury, with just 11.5 percent of American homes having an electric refrigerator in 1932, and just 44.1 percent even by 1940.[122] In 1932 only 3.6 percent of homes had electric ranges.[123] Due to the novelty of these appliances, in September 1938 experts from Westinghouse offered cooking demonstrations to show Greendale housewives how to use their new stoves.[124] Although the workspace was certainly small by today's standards, these kitchens were technologically state-of-the-art for the time. Planners were unwilling to compromise in the area of either quality of materials or in providing the most modern appliances. The kitchens were designed to have as much light and the most efficient use of space that could be managed in the space allotted, once again illustrating that the homes were to be constructed inexpensively, but were also intended to reflect the best possibilities for low-cost housing and to educate residents and prepare them for life in the modern age.

Fig. 6.55. Tenement kitchen, Hamilton County, Ohio, 1935.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

[122] Bemis, *The Evolving House*, vol. 2, 67; United States Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, Housing: vol. 2, part 1, United States Summary, Table 9b, "Refrigeration Equipment for Occupied Units, by Tenure and Color of Occupants, for the United States, by Region, Urban and Rural, 1940."
[123] Ibid., vol. 2, 67.
[124] *The Greendale Review* 1, no. 2 (Sept. 10, 1938), 4.

Fig. 6.56. Kitchen in Greenhills, Ohio.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.57. Kitchen in Greendale, Wisconsin.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Although architects did incorporate storage space, the small size of the dwellings dictated that Greenbelt families had to resist the urge to bring excess clutter into the home. The fact that the accumulation of too many unnecessary things was a problem even in the 1930s is illustrated by a cartoon appearing in the January 29, 1936 *Cincinnati Post*:

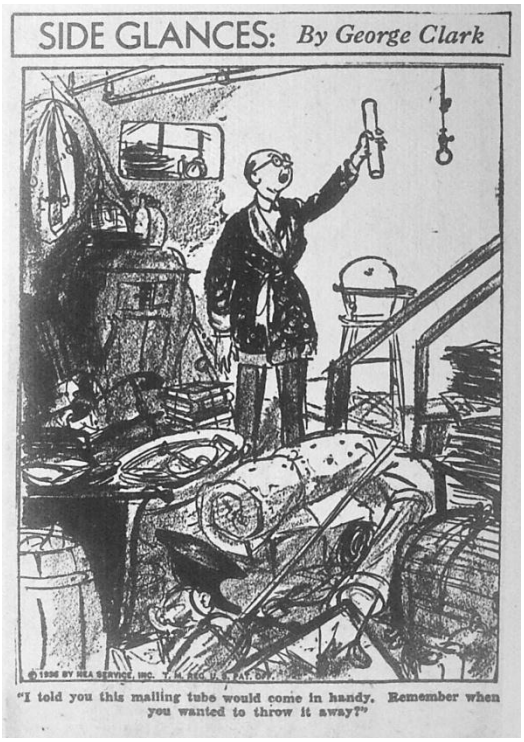

Fig. 6.58. Cartoon by George Clark.

The caption reads: "I told you this mailing tube would come in handy. Remember when you wanted to throw it away?" This cartoon was included in the Final Report on Greenhills, an indication that the town's architects were well aware of some people's tendency to allow their homes to become overrun with belongings. Such temptations had to be resisted in all of the Greenbelt towns' dwellings. Most of the homes have a reasonable amount of closet space, particularly for houses built in that era, but designers clearly did not intend for occupants to accumulate vast quantities of material possessions. Once again, the low-income resident group was a consideration; if occupants were working-class, and in need of this type of housing, they were expected to have a minimum of possessions. Yet the inclusion of a reasonable amount of storage space also indicates that the designers understood that the age of mass-production had

ushered in a more consumer-oriented lifestyle and that the accumulation of material goods was now part of the American existence.

As with kitchens, the bathroom was another space in which designers made certain to offer the most modern amenities available. Although, like most Greenbelt spaces the baths were small, they too were modern and efficient and provided precisely the sorts of superior facilities that reformers had long called for. The sanitation situation for many Americans had been improving slowly for some time; the 1940 census reported that 69.9 percent of all households had running water inside the dwelling (the percentage for the North only was even higher, at 79.1 percent).[125] In terms of bathing facilities, the census showed 56.2 percent of dwellings having exclusive use of a bathtub, 4.7 percent with a shared bath, and 39.1 percent still lacking bathing equipment completely.[126] The statistics for toilet facilities were better, with 59.7 percent of all dwellings having exclusive use of a flush toilet in the structure and five percent having a shared toilet in the building – though many of these facilities were no better than the one shown in figure 6.59. As late as 1940, 32.2 percent of Americans still relied on an outdoor toilet or privy (although here again, the figures are skewed by the disproportionate regional distribution; looking only at the North, the percentage using privies drops to 24.1).[127] The bathrooms in all three towns also provided the latest design in chrome and/or clear hardware – towel bars, toilet paper dispensers, and soap dishes. Although very few of the homes built through the Greenbelt program had more than one bathroom (some of the larger ones in Greenhills had a bath and a half), even for families of up to six or seven people, those who lived in the homes did not see themselves as deprived. Most had come from far worse living conditions. For them, the gleaming little bathrooms with the bright, clean fixtures were almost certainly an improvement over what they had known before, and indeed over what much of the population possessed. Like everything else about the Greenbelt homes, the

[125] United States Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, Housing: vol. 2, part 1, United States Summary, Table 7, "Water Supply for All Dwelling Units, by Occupancy and Tenure, for the United States, by Region, Urban and Rural, 1940." A further 4.8% had a hand pump in the dwelling unit, 4.2% had running water within fifty feet, 16.5% had some "other water supply within fifty feet," and 5.1% had no water supply within fifty feet.

[126] Ibid., Table 7b, "Bathing Equipment for All Dwelling Units, by Occupancy and Tenure, for the United States, by Regions, Urban and Rural, 1940."

[127] Ibid., Table 7a, "Toilet Facilities for All Dwelling Units, by Occupancy and Tenure, for the United States, by Regions, Urban and Rural, 1940."

restrooms were certainly not large or opulent, but they still represented state-of-the-art modernity, a vast improvement over tenement or other low-income housing.

Fig. 6.59. Toilet shared by three families in Hamilton County, Ohio, 1935. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

Fig. 6.60. Original toilet and tub in a Greenhills, Ohio, bathroom, 2009. Photo by the author.

Fig. 6.61. Original chrome and clear towel bar, Greendale. Photo by the author.

In terms of interior design, the homes were, as would be expected, fairly plain and utilitarian. Surfaces and paints were chosen for their ability to fit with a variety of furnishings, their durability, and ease of cleaning. Yet some choices went beyond simple utility. In

Greendale, for example, the living room in many of the homes had wooden beams on the ceiling, once again recalling colonial designs and bringing a level of quaintness to the space (see figure 6.62). Modern conventions dictated that such structural members be hidden from view behind clean plastered ceilings, but Greendale's designers made the conscious decision to use this design feature to highlight the natural materials and to depict solid, old-style construction. Colonial styles and the use of antiques in interior design were extremely popular among the middle class during the 1930s, and the designers of Greendale embraced this reverence for the past. Yet the same houses that featured beamed ceilings seemingly more suited to the eighteenth century also offered gleaming modern kitchens and baths fitted with modern chrome hardware (the towel bar pictured above, for example, is in the same home as the living room pictured below).

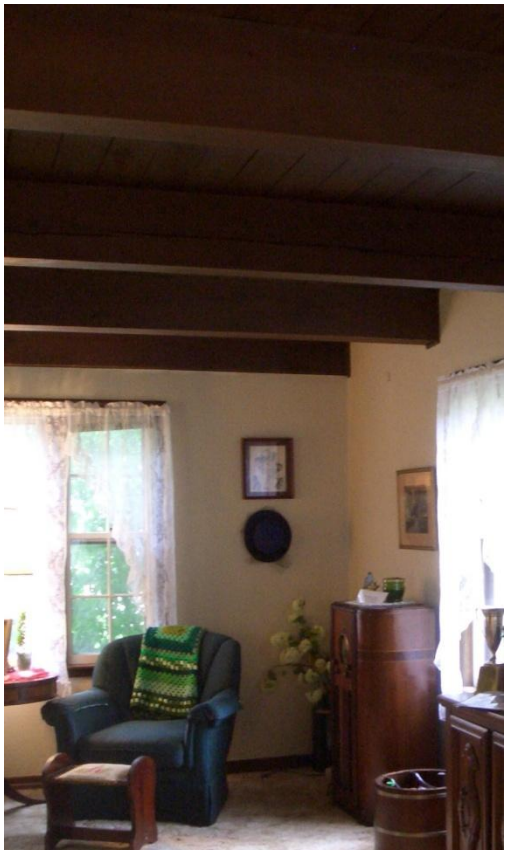

Fig. 6.62. Beamed ceiling of a Greendale home.
Photo by the author.

In considering the various choices made by the planning teams, we can draw some conclusions about the ways in which the designers envisioned residents using the homes in the Greenbelt towns. Families would have at their disposal the latest amenities in terms of bathrooms and kitchens, thus helping to ensure their health and safety. They would have enough interior space for the needs of the occupants, with separate spaces for parents and children, and for children of the opposite sex. There would be, if the families were careful and resourceful, adequate space for children to study and for parents to relax. Although during the Depression popular magazines featured articles and advertisements highlighting entertaining in the home, the architects expected that residents in the Greenbelts would entertain on a modest scale. Similarly, popular magazines offered advice throughout the decade on decorating homes to achieve the latest look; yet residents of the Greenbelt towns were forbidden to paint or in any other way alter the homes' interiors beyond hanging pictures and placing accessories. Although undoubtedly linked to the fact that this was low-income housing, such simplicity may also reflect a prevalent opinion of the time that, as Christine Frederick argued, "the too elaborate plane of living may, because of its very complexity, become an end, rather than a means to the end of happy, rational living."[128] Minimalism in form and function was seen as a potential antidote to the hurry and disorder of modern life. The expectations certainly might have been different had these been homes for the middle or upper class, but as housing for the nation's workers, the designs offered all that was necessary for modern living, and a tiny bit more. These little touches – chrome accents, durable and easy-to-clean tile bathrooms, picture molding and beamed ceilings – demonstrate that these were to be more than mere habitations; they were to be *homes*. The houses were created to shelter and nurture parents and children and the generations beyond – the citizens and future citizens of the nation.

The towns thus reflect a variety of influences and visions, as is to be expected since they were conceived and executed by a variety of individuals working together to bring to life a common – but also at times contested – goal. The placement of the towns, for example, and

[128] Frederick, *The Ignoramus Book of Housekeeping*, 7.

the intention that they should be relatively self-contained and self-sufficient, reflects contemporary thinking on the proper role of suburbs in American life, but also, and more importantly, these aspects are emblematic of the ideas of the Regional Planning Association. RPAA members Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, Catherine Bauer, Frederick Bigger, and Tracy Augur brought to the program the firm conviction that such settlements could and should be as important as the metropolitan centers to which they were attached. Not satellites in the sense of being subordinate to their larger neighbors, these towns were to be the centers of their residents' lives.

Other influences also affected the towns' designs. The inspiration provided by the Garden City movement is evident, not just in the inclusion of a greenbelt on the outer rims of the communities, but also in the idea of offering working-class housing near larger cities, but removed enough to be a sanctuary from the worst aspects of urban life. The planners applied lessons learned by the builders of company towns as they sought to ensure that the Greenbelts would foster community loyalty rather than employer domination, self-respect rather than paternalistic oppression, and pleasing towns rather than monotonous streets and houses with no character or identity. The Beaux-Arts tradition imparted a symmetry and order to the towns even as the modernist architectural styles and public housing configurations that had become so popular in Europe suffused the communities with elements of experimentation and an orientation toward the future. Still, the past exerted a powerful influence, as well, with Greendale's planners openly echoing colonial forms, and all three towns being designed with the explicit intention of creating the sorts of communities feared to have been lost to the modern age.

The modern age itself could be harnessed to bring about a renewed, revitalized society. For the planners of the Greenbelt towns, things as simple as convenient shopping facilities, swimming pools, separate bedrooms, efficient kitchens, and hygienic bathrooms could enhance daily living conditions for the working class. Modern conveniences could be utilized to help ease the burden of residents' lives; in turn, happier and healthier residents could focus their attention on other matters. These improved environments, then, would elevate the citizenry, and an elevated citizen was more likely to become a concerned and involved citizen.

The Greenbelt towns were an answer to the threats posed by modernity, both the very tangible dangers brought on by innovations such as the automobile and the more esoteric dangers of modernity itself – loosened family and community ties, diminished emotional investment in one's neighborhood or local government, and, lurking behind it all, the fear that the democratic America of the past simply could not survive the new urban, industrial, individualistic realities of the modern age. The narration for *The City* expresses it best:

> This is no suburb where the lucky people play at living in the country…. Each house is grouped with other houses, close to the school, the public meeting hall, the movies and the markets. Around these green communities, a belt of public land preserves their shape forever. The children need the earth for playing and growing. Bringing the city into the country, bringing the parks and gardens back into the city, never letting cities grow too big to manage, never pushing the meadows, fields and woods too far away – this works as well for modern living as once it did for those New England towns.[129]

The alternative, the planners and administrators insisted, was clear – the nation could continue on the dangerous path it had been on, could risk the lives and health and happiness of the next generation, could possibly destroy what was left of the American character; or citizens could choose a different direction, one that revived the best ways of the past and adapted them for the machine age.

[129] *The City*, The American Institute of Planners (1939).

Conclusion. There's No Place Like Home

The [New Deal] policies which are spoken of as a new have an entirely honorable lineage in American history; they are an expression of the American faith. 'The American faith,' it seems to me, is preferable to the usual expression, 'the American dream.' A dream implies the unreal and the unrealizable. Faith is the substance of things actually hoped for; it has served to raise men by infinitely slow but certain stages into civilization. It will carry them further.

- Rexford Tugwell, 1935[1]

Greenbelt is really a city of the future. There are the safe streets and playgrounds that we dream of. There are the good houses for low rents that we wish for. There are the good stores with reasonable prices and a share in the profits that we long for. When the 885 families get settled in their perfect town, they will feel as if they had rubbed Aladdin's lamp. And presto, they are in tomorrow's city today.

- *My Weekly Reader*, 1937[2]

By the mid-1930s many Americans had become convinced that something had to be done to address the nation's dire housing situation. Urbanization had increased overcrowding in the cities, and the need to be near industrial employment had pushed more Americans, including those of the lower middle and working class, into inadequate homes and dismal urban slums. Lewis Mumford's text for *The City* lays out the growing dilemma. At the end of the film, after showing the bustle and disorder of the city, then the peace and serenity of Greenbelt, the scenes begin to cut back and forth between the two – the slum versus the new community, children playing in an overflowing gutter versus families enjoying wholesome leisure – while the narrator warns the audience what is at stake:

> You take your choice. Each one is real; each one is possible. Shall we sink deeper, sink deeper into old grooves, paying for blight with human misery, or

[1] Rexford G. Tugwell, "The Progressive Tradition," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1935): 409-410.
[2] "Tomorrow's Town Is Built Today," *My Weekly Reader* 16, no. 5 (Oct. 11-15, 1937).

> have we vision, have we courage? Shall we build and rebuild our cities clean again, close to the earth, open to the sky? Can we afford a house, a neighborhood, a city as good as this for everyone? Maybe the question is can we afford all this disorder – the hospitals, the jails, the reformatories, the wasted years of childhood? These are future citizens, voters, lawmakers, mothers, fathers. If you're bent on having human beings grow up to human height, alive in every nerve and muscle, you have to make the city fit to grow in. You grow a garden well or build a city by taking thought day in and out. It's not just luck and accident that makes the difference – it's choice and willingness.

The narration's pace quickens once again as we see images of dams and power lines, a wave of people moving like a huge herd of sheep into a subway tunnel (highly reminiscent of the opening scene to Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film *Modern Times*) and then working at repetitive jobs like mindless robots. Again we are warned: "The spectacle of human power – immense but misplaced – disorder turned to steel and stone. A million mechanisms, almost human, superhuman in speed. Men and women losing their jobs, losing their grip unless they imitate machines, live like machines. Cities unrolling tickertape instead of life. Cities where people count the seconds and lose the days. Cities where Mr. and Mrs. Zero cannot move or act until a million other zeros do. Cities where people are always getting ready to live, some other time, some other place, getting ready – never getting there." Finally the pace slows again, and the announcer leaves the audience with one last thought: "We can reproduce the pattern and better it a thousand times. It's here – the new city, ready to serve a better age. You and your children, the choice is yours." The final images of the film are of children frolicking at Greenbelt's playground.

The message of the film, as the message of the towns, is clear. The world had become a potentially frightening place. The old American independence was being replaced by a machine-driven social order where individual identity was lost ("where Mr. and Mrs. Zero cannot move or act until a million other zeros do"). And what might this mean for the nation? How could a democracy continue if the human spirit of its citizens were eradicated? The answer lay in a return to the best aspects of the past, to close family and community bonds, to safe neighborhoods, to the innocence of childhood. Ironically, this vision for the future rested to a certain extent on mass-producing houses and towns, replicating the pattern over and over.

But the planners believed that the true spirit of the towns could not be dimmed by the tight budget constraints that mandated a certain amount of repetition of design. In fact, the need to work with the highest efficiency in some ways unleashed their creativity as it allowed them to experiment with designs and practices about which they had theorized for years. The true significance of the towns for the planners was in the feeling, the sense of community, the return to the unity and cooperation of the past. It was not wholly the vision Tugwell had first brought to the president, nor only the vision of the individual designers. The three Greenbelt towns were in the end an amalgam of differing desires – differing American dreams – as filtered through the lenses of Tugwell and the Resettlement Administration, the planners and architects, and the public who made their wishes known and thousands of whom flocked to apply for a home in the towns.

On November 13, 1936, Franklin Roosevelt toured the town of Greenbelt, Maryland, and although it was still under construction, he was impressed by what he saw. One newspaper story described the event: "President Roosevelt drove into the autumn painted hills of Prince Georges County yesterday afternoon to see one of his dreams coming true – the building of a country township where families with little money may live in health and comfort…. The President was visibly thrilled as he saw pleasant homes, schools and recreation centers springing to life, and was pleased as [a] small boy when he saw the newly made lake being stocked with prize fish."[3] As he stood "in front of one of the cheery homes where, in the near future, some family, now crowded in a squalid city street, will live," the president gave a short statement.[4] "Although I have seen the blueprints of Greenbelt," he said, "the sight of the project far exceeds anything I dreamed of. I wish everyone in the country could see it…. The project is an achievement that ought to be copied in every city in the Nation."[5]

[3] "Rural Housing Area Viewed by President," n.d., newspaper clipping in Falls scrapbook, Greenbelt Museum.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Sidney Olson, "President Likes 'Tugwelltown,' Fishes and All," *Washington Post*, Nov. 14, 1936.

Fig. C.1. Franklin Roosevelt, Rexford Tugwell, and Will Alexander tour Greenbelt, Nov. 13, 1936, driving past the unfinished school/community building.
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

No doubt Roosevelt was gratified to see one of his New Deal projects come to life in such a tangible way. Although the Greenbelt program was, as one newspaper article noted, "one of the most-criticized of all New Deal activities," proponents could at least point to all of the good that had come from it.[6] Between twenty thousand and thirty thousand men had been put to work constructing 2,133 homes and the community buildings and facilities to make life in the towns not just possible, but pleasant.[7] And if some observers were not convinced that the program had been worth its cost – over thirty-six million dollars – others enthusiastically cheered the experiment and thousands sought to obtain a house in one of the communities.[8] Even though the program created but three towns out of the hundred or so New Deal housing programs, this experiment provided nearly one-fourth of the homes, and consumed more than

[6] Olson.
[7] Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 117.
[8] Ibid., 117-118. Greenbelt filled up the fastest. Greenhills was actually not at full occupancy until two years after the town opened. Some people moved out soon after moving in, for reasons we can only guess; the selection criteria made finding suitable tenants a very slow process; and it is quite likely that there simply was not the same desperate need among Cincinnatians in the correct income groups as existed in Washington. Had families of lower or higher income been permitted to live in the town, it would have filled up more quickly. Charles Bradley Leach, "Greenhills, Ohio," 237, 246.

one-third of the funds, of all New Deal home-building projects.[9] Had they failed utterly – had they, for instance, devolved into precisely the sorts of slums they had been intended to replace – the experiment would have been one of the biggest economic blunders of the Roosevelt presidency.

From the president's perspective, however, the program had been a tremendous success and seemed to bear out his 1932 prediction that planning would be "the way of the future."[10] Roosevelt had good reason to be pleased once the towns were completed, for they met many of the goals he had set out for them. They put men to work. They demonstrated how careful planning could bring about aesthetically pleasing residential communities that fit the modern age, while at the same time holding people at a safe distance from the cities. They provided improved housing for families who otherwise would have continued living in substandard urban tenements or barely surviving on unproductive farmland. And the people who came together in the Greenbelt towns did form actual communities – collections of neighbors who felt connected to each other, to their homes, and to their towns.

The towns also seem to have encouraged the sort of civic cooperation that Tugwell and the planners had hoped they would. It took time, of course. As one scholar has noted of Greendale, the first residents "found ready-made homes but not a ready-made pattern of village life."[11] And although some eagerly embraced participation in local government and civic organizations, others simply enjoyed the pleasant towns without investing much time or energy into these community-minded pursuits. Greenbelt, Maryland, residents for example formed thirty-five different organizations in the first year.[12] Yet many families in the towns chose not to join any of the clubs or activities available, and there apparently was no pressure to do so.[13]

The program's greatest level of success is apparent in terms of residents' reactions to living in the towns. People wanted homes in these communities, possibly because the urban

[9] Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 305.
[10] Roosevelt, "Growing Up by Plan," 483.
[11] Douglas Gordon Marshall, "Greendale, A Study of a Resettlement Community" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1943), 16.
[12] Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 40.
[13] Ben Rosenzweig, interview by Kathryn Phillips, Nov. 21, 1980, *Looking Back*, Section 3 (interviews), 57; Bernard Schroedl, interview, Apr. 20, 1996, Greendale Historical Society; Lee Shields, interview by the author, Mar. 12, 2008.

alternatives were so unappealing, but possibly also because the Greenbelts themselves offered something that Americans were hungering for – a return to some semblance of the small-town community feeling that they believed had been lost as a result of modernity. Those who lived in the towns were for the most part extremely enthusiastic about the program and the towns it produced. One impressive aspect of the Greenbelts is how many people remained there for years or returned after an absence, and how many families have had multiple generations reside in the towns. Lee Shields, a Greenbelt resident from the age of three months (in 1937), lives in the community today. When he and his wife Bonnie began their family, "Greenbelt was the first and only choice" for the place to raise children.[14] William Morrison was born in 1938, not long after his family moved to Greenbelt; he still lives in his childhood home.[15] Shirley Bailey moved to Greenbelt as a young girl in 1938, left when she got married in 1949, then returned in 1956 to raise her own children, several of whom also still live in Greenbelt.[16] Charles Bradley Leach notes that at least thirty-eight families out of the original 676 stayed in Greenhills for the entire period from 1939 through 1964.[17]

The fondness of early residents for the towns is impressive, and is in fact reminiscent of the sort of loyalty one might find for traditional (even stereotypical) small towns. One Greenbelter recalled the friendly atmosphere, saying, "from the beginning we felt welcome, a part of everything. There was so much tolerance and the people were mixed – Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. My husband was a Mormon, I was the daughter of a Methodist and a Baptist, and we fit right in. Living in Greenbelt was like being part of a large family, only we got along better."[18] Another remembered first moving to the town, saying, "I shall never forget the gleaming beauty and wide open spaces of it all. I am sure my childhood sense of satisfaction about it reflected my parents' pleasure, too. There was a wonderful camaraderie among all the

[14] Lee Shields interview.
[15] William Morrison interview.
[16] Shirley Bailey interview.
[17] Charles Bradley Leach, "Greenhills, Ohio," 249. Bear in mind that rising income could, in the early years, result in a family being required to leave the town, and that families that grew too large were also required to move out. In addition, this time span includes the 1949 sale of the town, a process that caused many families to seek homes elsewhere.
[18] Edith Frank, *Looking Back*, reminiscences section, 26.

young parents at the time when economic survival itself was a difficult thing."[19] Still another simply called the day her family moved to Greenbelt the happiest day of her life.[20] One resident later declared, "if there is a heaven, and I believe there is, there must be a place like Greenbelt up there. A place where neighbors share, and love one another."[21] The towns were not utopias; there was little crime, but it did exist, and sometimes ugliness and violence crept into the sheltered little communities.[22] But overall they do seem to have been far superior to the urban environments that likely would have been the only alternative for most of these families, and many of those who have lived and raised families in the communities have nothing but praise for the program that changed their lives.

These had been intended to be places where the community spirit and virtuous citizenship of the past could be integrated into modern life. Even the new mobility of the population, often pointed to as both a symptom and cause of a lack of civic-mindedness and the crumbling of the American character, was turned to advantage in the program. As officials had expected, not everyone who moved to the Greenbelt towns remained, and there was a fair amount of resident turnover.[23] Because the homes were rented rather than owned; because the interior spaces were rather small; because the communities tended to attract very young, growing families; and because rising wages sometimes priced families out of the income limits, administrators assumed that residents would stay for a time and then move on, but not until they had been imbued with the cooperative community spirit.[24] O. Kline Fulmer noted that "it may be that Greenbelt is more important as a sort of graduate school in citizenship – offering a

[19] Martha (Likens) Spudis, *Looking Back*, reminiscences section, 46.
[20] Eva Howey, *Looking Back*, reminiscences section, 39.
[21] Charles T. Howey, *Looking Back*, reminiscences section, 38.
[22] Lee Shields' father was one of the first mail carriers in Greenbelt and often told his family about little crimes and problems that were "covered up" to keep authorities in Washington from finding out about them. Lee Shields interview. Rena Hull recalled an incident in the early years when a young man had too much to drink and got into a scuffle with a neighbor; another neighbor was injured trying to break up the fight. Rena Hull interview.
[23] The best information available is on the early turnover for Greenhills. Of the 154 families who left Greenhills between April 1, 1938 and April 1, 1940, twenty left because of inadequate transportation to their employment, just four due to dissatisfaction with neighbors, and two because of dissatisfaction with the house. More common reasons were job transfer (fifty-one families), loss of job or reduction in income (twenty-three families), the purchase of their own home (fourteen families), illness or death (eleven families), or domestic differences" (ten families). Thus most of the turnover was not directly related to any problem with the community itself. Charles Bradley Leach, "Greenhills, Ohio," 252-253.
[24] After many complaints in the early years about families being forced out if their incomes rose above the limits, the rules were changed, allowing these families to pay somewhat higher rents but remain in the towns.

few years of good training in the democratic atmosphere of a model community and then sending its graduates out into the average suburb as missionaries to spread the gospel of good community planning and organization."[25] If the pattern were repeated enough times with enough towns modeled on the Greenbelts and with enough families percolating through them, the nation could be re-educated in the ways of old-fashioned democracy now grafted onto modern life, its citizens changed and improved.

Architects and town planners too hoped that the Greenbelts would chart a new path for the nation, encouraging new town-building projects while at the same time demonstrating the usefulness of their skills and the benefits that could be gained through the proper utilization of rational, professional planning. Those who actually worked on the project were most optimistic for its continued impact. Justin Hartzog, town planner for Greenhills, wrote after the towns were completed, "no apology, no explanation, no justification is needed. The project stands for all to see as a newer and better way to live. It is its own justification, well planned, well built, and serving those whose crying needs made this undertaking imperative."[26] Similarly, Henry Churchill contended that the Greenbelts "constitute the most far-reaching and significant effort in housing today. They are the first large-scale attempt in this country to integrate all the factors that go to make a community – towns planned from the beginning by technicians according to a definite conception of purpose."[27] And Elbert Peets predicted that "as one of the elements in the texture of urban regions, we expect the greenbelt town to appear, in varying forms and numbers, around all of our large cities."[28] Yet this was not to be.

There are numerous reasons that the Greenbelts failed to become the model for future endeavors. One fault lay in the mixed and sometimes opposing goals set for the program. Rexford Tugwell had originally pitched the idea to the president that they could buy inexpensive land outside major urban areas, build complete towns, and "then go back into cities and tear down slums and make parks of them."[29] The RA did build three towns, although no slums were cleared nor inner-city parks built as part of the Greenbelt program. And we

[25] Fulmer, *Greenbelt*, 24.
[26] Justin Hartzog, n.d. (untitled, apparently unpublished paper), 15, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.
[27] Churchill, "America's Town Planning Begins," 96.
[28] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 15.
[29] See page 8 for the entire passage.

might do well to dig deeper, to question whether these were truly his goals; in examining Tugwell's background and ideology, it seems clear that he left out some integral components of his plan when he broached the subject with Roosevelt. Tugwell was a man anxious to see the nation change to meet the realities of the modern world – not simply to adapt current institutions and habits, but to reform them, to recast American culture and attitudes, to turn away from the laissez-faire economics and individualism that he believed was ruining the nation. He wanted to introduce concepts of cooperation in both a general, neighborly sense and a concrete economic sense. He wanted to create a more egalitarian society. The Greenbelt towns, for Tugwell, were to be more than just improved housing for the working class, although he was committed to this goal as well. The program, he believed, would show the American people a new direction, a better way. They would "make America over." In this they failed.

Yet Tugwell held this project dear to his heart for the remainder of his life. In 1957, having recently retired from teaching political science at the University of Chicago, he moved to Greenbelt himself, to a newly-built home outside of the original residential section.[30] He never stopped believing that the plan had been a good one, if only the politicians and news reporters and the American people themselves had fully supported the program financially and given the idea a chance to prove itself.

Others involved in the project had different aims, aims which much more closely matched those of the president than those of Tugwell. The planners and designers of the Greenbelt towns also wanted these to be places that allowed Americans to adapt themselves to the modern age, but they did not share Tugwell's desire to make the nation over. Rather, they sought to embrace the best aspects of modernity while also returning residents to an idealized harmonious past. They designed the towns specifically to bring neighbors together by providing improved housing, inviting green spaces, recreational facilities, and public buildings that served to anchor the residents and give them a sense of community. Although they acknowledged the challenges of the machine age, and planned the towns to mitigate the dangers that modernity brought, their aim was to recapture a feeling of small-town unity that

[30] Ralph Reikowsky, "Tugwell to Reside in His Greenbelt," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 4, 1957.

they felt had been all but destroyed by industrialization and urbanization. They wanted to return the nation to its mythical past. If they sought to "remake America," it was in the sense that it needed to be remade in its own, earlier, image, not made into something completely new and different. And they believed that, seeing the possibilities, others would copy the model and that similar small, close-knit communities would spring up throughout the country. In this goal, too, the Greenbelt towns failed to meet the expectations of their creators.

Another reason that the program did not have the impact its founders had hoped was that the basic concept was in many ways flawed. The goals of the program were often at odds. This was to be low-income housing, a demonstration of how to use the most up-to-date planning methods to build better low-rent homes. But as work relief the project was also intended to put as many men to work as possible – especially unskilled laborers – and as a result much of the work was done in a purposely inefficient way and using deliberately labor-intensive, non-modern techniques, driving costs up. Budgets were originally planned for much larger settlements, but as funds shriveled away the number of homes for each town was reduced and thus the per-house expense of the project skyrocketed. As prototypes, the towns were expected to cost more than subsequent communities planned on the same model, but there were no imitators to follow. Furthermore, the Greenbelt towns suffered from the same problem that so many other attempts at low-income developments had encountered: it was simply not possible to build high-quality homes and fully developed communities and also keep rents at the level needed to make the towns available to working-class families without some form of government subsidy – a highly unpopular option.[31]

Another reason for resistance to the Greenbelt concept lay in the handling of the public relations aspects of the program. Certainly Tugwell's association with the project and the fact that his manner was often perceived as arrogant and his ideas radical did not help the program's image with political critics, some of the press, and many ordinary Americans. Given the deep mistrust much of the population had for large-scale government programs, especially anything as new and untried as the Greenbelt towns, the RA certainly could have been more diplomatic in dealing with local officials and the public. Administrators had assumed much

[31] Peets, Greendale Final Report, vol. 2, 5-8.

greater popular support than they ever actually received. As Marquis Childs assessed the situation, "the [Greenbelt] conspirators had neglected to take the American people into their confidence; nor even any section of the American public that might have been expected to enter willingly into such a conspiracy."[32] The agency, quite simply, never convincingly made the case for the program, though not for lack of trying.

In attempting to create enthusiasm for the towns, officials made this a very public project, and as a result the RA opened itself to greater opposition and resistance. Greenbelt, Maryland especially stood in the glare of public scrutiny. Diane Ghirardo observes in her study of interwar housing in the United States and Italy that it was quite common for such housing programs to be made highly visible in the public eye and, much as monumental building projects, were intended to serve the purpose of bolstering popular pride in the government's achievements.[33] RA officials proudly pointed out what a grand experiment the Greenbelts were, taking politicians, members of the press, and foreign visitors on tours of the town. Although administrators hoped that this focus on the monumentality of the project might impress those who were watching, just as frequently (if not more so) it served to illuminate the high costs and limited benefits, to fuel the flames of opposition, and to invite charges of boondoggling. The program simply struck many observers as unwanted and wasteful government meddling in an area in which it had no business involving itself.

One major problem for the program was that by the time it was fully underway American enthusiasm for the New Deal was clearly waning and the population's patience for untried and experimental ideas was growing short. As William Leuchtenburg has noted, "the more successful the New Deal was, the more it undid itself. The more prosperous the country became, the more people returned to the only values they knew, [those] associated with an individualistic, success-oriented society."[34] Yet it was not simply that people perceived that prosperity was returning, but also that they saw more and more money being spent and prosperity not returning quickly enough. Thus the New Deal almost could not win – if it

[32] Childs, *I Write from Washington*, 14.
[33] Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 19.
[34] Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 273.

appeared to be succeeding it was no longer necessary, and if it appeared not to be making enough of a difference it was labeled a failure and demonized. When the population had been desperate daring projects had been relatively easy to sell as possible solutions, but by 1936 and beyond critics were increasingly able to point to the high cost and minimal benefits of such experiments, and even if many people still withheld judgment, the political opposition encouraged a growing rumble of discontent over what seemed to be a government overstepping its bounds and throwing away taxpayer money.

The issue of federal authority was of course at the heart of the debate over the New Deal, including the Greenbelt towns. On one side housing reformers such as Catherine Bauer and Clarence Stein continued to maintain that only through government intervention could decent housing be provided for the working class. At issue, they insisted, was the fact that the world had become too complex to expect that market forces, if left alone, would ensure that everything would work out as it should. As the 1940 general report on the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy explained, "the complexities of modern life require a structure of government and a social and economic order which will combine maximum individual freedom with maximum opportunity for every man to find a place among his fellows, to achieve self-support, preserve self-respect, and render community service. Events of recent years have proved that the preservation and further development of a better life in a democracy cannot be left to chance; they do not just happen."[35]

On the other side of the debate stood critics who charged that the federal government was trying to impose a set of views, values, and lifestyles on the American people. For these New Deal opponents, the question of whether a particular program was effective or not was moot. The issue was that it was not the business of the government to interfere with private lives. For these critics, programs such as the Greenbelt towns simply were not – and could not be – justified. Childs saw the problem clearly, writing, "as Doctor Tugwell found out, it is impossible to lay down a blueprint for even a small section of society in this vast, powerful, well-nigh ungovernable country. Under dictatorship, perhaps, at the cost of everything else,

[35] *Children in a Democracy, General Report* (Washington, DC, 1940), 3.

but in a democracy as diffuse as ours, hardly."[36] Any hint that a federally funded (and in this case very expensive) program was an attempt to change society, to mold people's attitudes, was quickly labeled undemocratic and subversive. Opponents pointed out that federal authority did not extend to providing housing, to building towns, to subsidizing rent or to the government acting as landlord – and that taxpayer money should certainly not be spent in the pursuit of "making over" the populace. Although many Americans recognized that the lingering economic crisis had exposed some serious flaws in certain aspects of national policy and life, they had little faith that the government was in any way equipped to improve the situation, nor that the Constitution granted federal authority to attempt a remedy. In the end Childs noted that this issue was emblematic of the troubles faced by the New Deal overall: "it was typical of the effort to superimpose from Washington a ready-made Utopia. In a democracy such as ours it is difficult or impossible to confer any benefit unless there exists or can be created an articulate, organized demand for that benefit."[37] The suburban resettlement idea, although applauded by planning professionals and residents, was never convincingly sold to the American public. Perhaps it would not have been possible to do so even with a clear, consistent mission and a diplomatic and charismatic leader, and the Greenbelt program had neither; thus the hoped-for groundswell of popular support and plethora of eventual imitators never materialized.

One final reason for the towns' failure to inspire the blossoming of a whole crop of greenbelts was the intervention of the Second World War. The heightening of hostilities in Europe and the eventual entrance of the United States into the fighting finally did what the New Deal could not – end the Depression. The return of prosperity quieted the frantic calls for government action and the population's attention turned to the war effort. More important, however, was the change in attitude concerning modernity brought about by the war. If during the first decades of the twentieth century the machine was a menace and the machine age threatened to bring about the downfall of the nation, during the war the machine became our friend and ally. It was technology, the machines of war, and mass production that saved the nation and made victory possible. It was the largest, most ambitious effort in history to harness

[36] Childs, *I Write from Washington*, 16.
[37] Ibid., 14.

the power of modern science and technology that brought the war to a sudden, shuddering end. If society and the family had been in peril because of industrial employment and working wives previously, in the early 1940s frenetic defense production and Rosie the Riveter were the very emblems of all that was right about the United States, a testament to the American character. Although people would largely return to prewar attitudes about families and about women in the workplace following the return of peace, the fear of technological innovation, change, and modernity would never again be such a driving force in American society and culture as it had been in the early part of the century. New threats would take their place, most notably the Soviets and the fear of the spread of communism. Technology, in the terrifying form of Soviet-controlled atomic weapons, ignited new apprehensions, but more mundane innovations such as assembly lines no longer seemed particularly sinister. In the decades immediately following the war, machines would be part of the solution rather than the problem. The atomic and hydrogen bombs (in American hands), telecommunications and spy satellites, even the modern conveniences available to the nation's housewives – all seemingly offered potent proof of American ingenuity and national superiority.

This is not to say that the longing for some sort of return to the past disappeared. But it was transformed. The nation no longer looked wistfully to its agrarian past, the population no longer equated wage work with dependence or saw the yeoman farmer as the most potent example of a virtuous citizen – the Jeffersonian ideal had been laid to rest. If the path toward full urban, industrial modernity had begun somewhat reluctantly in the prewar decades, by the postwar years few Americans looked back in longing to what had been lost. The modern world now held the promise of previously unimagined upward mobility and comfort. Postwar prosperity and the unleashing of a pent-up hunger for homes and other material possessions, and also for leisure and recreation, turned public attention more powerfully than ever to the concept of the American dream. Following the war this idea became more strongly connected than previously with home ownership as the means for achieving a comfortable life – usually a suburban life. This is not specifically what James Truslow Adams had had in mind back in 1931, but for postwar Americans it certainly fit into the concept of "a better, deeper, richer life for every individual." Because of the economic upswing of the postwar period, although poverty

and its attendant ills persisted, they were easily ignored by the rising tide of those who were more fortunate.

Politically, the onset of the Cold War meant that anything remotely resembling socialism or communism – such as widespread government-built housing for workers – had to be repudiated, and that everything associated with capitalism must be exalted. The postwar era saw a staunch return to notions of the power of an individualistic, capitalistic American culture. The favorable economic climate made this relatively easy. Government subsidy was out; good old-fashioned American self-reliance was in (never mind that it was all largely made possible by the GI Bill, federally-funded interstate highway construction, and the growth of a government-fueled military-industrial complex). A plan such as that for the Greenbelts would have had no chance of being heard in this climate. Entrepreneurs such as William Levitt, builder of Levittown, New York, and not the federal government, brought about the radical shift toward suburbanization for the masses in this postwar era.

The suburbs that sprouted across the country following the war owed a debt to the Greenbelt towns. Until the Resettlement Administration attempted this bold experiment in town building, few in the working class would have imagined that a home in the suburbs would be possible for their families. By the late 1940s, for those below the middle class the choice was no longer only between poor urban housing and equally poor rural housing – there was now the potential for a third option. Levittown and its many imitators put into practice the mass-production building techniques that the work-relief nature of the Greenbelt project had prohibited, they employed the Greenbelt model of buying up inexpensive land just beyond the cities but close enough for workers to commute to their jobs, and their developers reaped the profits.

But the postwar suburbs were in many ways the antithesis of the Greenbelt idea. Rather than pulling residents into tight little communities, these new developments sprawled across the landscape. Rather than aiming for aesthetically pleasing little enclaves, they produced cookie-cutter repetition and monotony. Rather than seeking to unify the people, they offered each family its own little domain where, thanks to highways and a growing car culture, in conjunction with increased television ownership, one almost need never interact

with neighbors again. And, of course, by the 1950s, ideas such as "cooperation" and "planning" had taken on subversive, ominous connotations. Tugwell and his sort, along with their seemingly radical experiments, were in disrepute. The Greenbelt towns became anomalies, examples of a rather naïve – or, for critics, manipulative – government attempt to mold the national character.

Catherine Bauer wrote in 1934 that "an age of building cannot be judged by its biggest and most expensive monuments alone…. The monuments may symbolize or intensify the whole, but reality lies in the vernacular."[38] If this is true, the Greenbelts are well worth our attention. They were not typical of the vernacular architecture of the day, but rather show what some visionaries believed was possible, was in fact necessary, as the nation attempted to meet the demands of the modern age. The differing intentions brought to the program by Tugwell and the planning teams reveal that even among the educated elite concerns about the direction the nation was headed elicited quite variable responses. Meanwhile many Americans looked to the future with anxiety and hoped that the drastic societal changes they feared might be held at bay by returning to a simpler, more neighborly past.

By the start of the 1950s an explosion in postwar suburb-building was demonstrating that the tide had turned, that the American people were ready to put the past behind them and fully welcome the nation's urban-suburban identity. The remaking had begun, but not as Tugwell had hoped. The new American dream was not wedded to a renewed sense of community cooperation, but was instead firmly anchored to a burgeoning consumer culture, inextricably tied to a vigorous economy, a baby boom, and rapidly multiplying suburbs. The eagerness with which Americans embraced this new suburban paradigm makes it easy to forget that just a dozen or so years earlier the Greenbelt towns had offered in stark concrete and rolling green spaces an illustration of a nation wedded to an idealized past and poised uncertainly on the brink of the future. They allow us a glimpse into the Depression era, into a time of enormous economic crisis and social upheaval, and show us a complicated and variegated view of what America was and what Americans wanted to be.

[38] Bauer, *Modern* Housing, 214-215.

Appendix A: Brief chronology

Where information is available in more than one source, only one source has been cited. Some sources differ in the dates they give for particular events; in such cases the date given in the seemingly more "official" source has been used, with discrepancies noted in parentheses. I have retained the original wording from source documents except for cases where rewording improved clarity. Sources are indicated in parentheses, abbreviated as follows:

GbPD = "Greenbelt Planning and Development," labeled "Extracted from the notes of J.S. Lansill ???" Greenbelt Museum and Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky

GbC = "The Greenbelt Chronicles," filed with "Greenbelt Planning and Development," Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky

SCHGbP = "Summary Chronological History of Greenbelt Project," Final Report on Greenbelt, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky

SCGh = "Summary Chronology of Greenhills," Final Report on Greenhills, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky

SHGdP = "Summarized History of the Greendale Project," Final Report on Greendale, Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky

02/24/35	Rexford G. Tugwell, Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture, suggests to J.S Lansill, Director of the Land Program, FERA, purchase of land adjacent to Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. Tugwell also suggests building a town for employees at the Research Center on the highest point. (GbPD)
03/12/35	Decision made to secure Beltsville land options. (GbPD)
04/08/35	Congress passes "Emergency Relief Act of 1935," authorizing work relief projects. (GbPD)
04/30/35	Resettlement Administration established. J.S. Lansill appointed Director of the Suburban Resettlement Division. Maryland Special Project No. 1 (Beltsville) assigned to this division. (GbPD)
05/01/35	Albert L. Miller appointed Regional Coordinator of what will eventually be Greenhills project. (SCGh)
05/05/35	Plan of cooperation discussed by Forestry Service, Soil Erosion Service, Biological Survey and other offices of Department of Agriculture for Beltsville project. (GbPD)
06/01/35	Wallace Richards appointed Regional Coordinator for Beltsville. Douglas D. Ellington appointed Principal Architect for Beltsville. (GbPD)
06/17/35	Reginald J. Wadsworth appointed Associate Principal Architect for Beltsville. (GbPD)
07/15/35	Cincinnati is tentatively selected by Director Lansill as one of the sites for a Greenbelt Town. (SCGh)
07/20/35	Members of Research Section in Cincinnati for on-site investigation. (SCGh)

07/22/35	Data on proposal to build submitted for approval as a work relief project to the WPA. (GbPD)
07/23/35	Investigation begun by Research Section to determine feasibility of developing a suburban project in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. (SHGdP)
July or August 1935	First plan for Beltsville project by engineers shown to Baldwin and Tugwell, followed by reorganization of planning personnel. (Arnold 46-47)
08/06/35	Cincinnati given definite approval as project site. (SCGh)
08/12/35	Warren J. Vinton, Chief of Research Section visits Milwaukee site, confers with city and county officials and tentatively selects a project site. (SHGdP)
09/13/35	Funds allocated by FDR with proviso that project be approved by WPA as a work relief project. (GbPD)
09/30/35	Project approved by WPA. (GbPD)
10/04/35	Frederick Bigger appointed Chief of Planning. (GbPD)
10/05/35	Roland Wank borrowed from the Tennessee Valley Authority to act as advisor on architectural planning for Greenhills. (SCGh)
10/09/35	Comptroller General reviews proposal and gives approval (required for expenditure of funds). (GbPD)
10/11/35	Justin R. Hartzog borrowed from a National Resources Committee of the Department of the Interior to act as Chief Town Planner of Greenhills. (SCGh)
10/12/35	Official "opening" of Beltsville as a work relief project. (GbPD)
10/13/35	*Washington Post* editorial calls Beltsville project "Tugwell's Folly." (GbPD)
10/14/35	Work at Beltsville is started by transients from Transient Lodges in Washington, DC, the only approved labor available. (GbPD)
10/15/35	Citizens in nearby areas aroused by rumors about Beltsville project. (GbPD)
10/16/35	Officials explain Beltsville plans to Berwyn Heights Town Commissioners who vote cooperation. (GbPD)
10/17/35	Prince George's County (Maryland) Commissioners request Beltsville project policing to insure safety of county citizens. Police force organized. (GbPD)
10/18/35	Opposition from citizens disappears when Prince George's County weekly newspaper carries a future article "Project will benefit Prince George's County." (SCHGbP)
10/20/35	20 acres of swampland cleared to provide site for Beltsville project lake. (GbPD)
10/24/35	Agreement made with Commissioner Allen outlining responsibility for transient labor and availability of future labor at Beltsville project.
	Hale Walker appointed town planner for Beltsville project. (GbPD)
10/28/35	Beltsville street plans approved; work begins on work roads. (GbPD)
11/01/35	William A. Strong appointed Assistant Chief Architect for Greenhills.
	Frank Cordner appointed Assistant Principal Architect for Greenhills. (SCGh)
11/11/35	Work begins on Beltsville road, on staking, and on demolition of existing home. (GbPD)

11/18/35 Circulars designed to crystallize sentiments against Greenhills project are circulated in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. (SCGh)

11/20/35 Mt. Healthy (closest community to Greenhills site) Council passes resolution sanctioning project. (SCGh)

11/21/35 Hours and wages of transients working at Beltsville established as follows: Transients living in the lodges and working 88 hours receive $45, subject to a deduction of $15 per room, board, laundry and transportation. Transients living in lodges and working 136 hours receive $45 and room, board, laundry and transportation. Transients living outside the lodges working 88 hours receive $45. (SCHGbP)

11/25/35 Tentative sketches of Greenhills town plan for preliminary area of development completed and presented with report to Dr. Tugwell. (SCGh)

11/26/35 Dr. Tugwell invited talk at Hamilton County, Ohio, Regional Planning Commission annual dinner of February 3, 1936.

Plans for Greenhills released in statement to press by Albert L. Miller.

Greenhills project defended in statement to press by George D. Crabbs, General Chairman of the National Housing Administration. (SCGh)

Dec. 1925 Administrative instructions issued to have active construction started on Greenhills project site by middle of December in order definitely to secure project funds from Emergency Relief Act Appropriation. (SCGh)

12/04/35 First public announcement of the Milwaukee project appears in the *Milwaukee Journal*. (SHGdP)

12/09/35 Engineering party arrives on Milwaukee site and begins topographic survey work. (SHGdP)

12/12/35 Mr. Lansill approves tentative plans for Beltsville's nucleus, of Block D, and of observation road and tourist road on the Hurley tract. (GbPD)

12/16/35 Town Planner Peets visits Milwaukee site for preliminary inspection and study and selects the location for initial building development. (SHGdP)

Greenhills project officially started as Regional Coordinator, Albert L. Miller, with Construction Division representatives, digs first shovel of dirt. (SCGh)

12/21/35 Approval of first Beltsville house plans (foundation and building units in Block D), dam and lake plans, and sewage disposal plans. (GbPD)

12/23/35 Work starting on above (Beltsville). (GbPD)

01/01/36 Letters of endorsement of Greenhills project received from numerous Hamilton County labor organizations. (SCGh)

01/02/36 Director Lansill, Warren J. Vinton, Jacob Crane and Fred L. Naumer inspect the Milwaukee project site and confirm with County and Park commission officials. (SHGdP)

01/13/36 Construction at Beltsville begins, first concrete poured, Group 7, Block D, Building 36. (GbPD)

01/14/36 Decision made that tenant maximum income be $2000 per year, with the exception of a small percentage having a larger income. (GbPD)

01/15/36 "Preliminary Study for the First Town Site" for Greenhills completed, showing in tentative manner circulatory street system and allocation of land for various uses. (SCGh)

01/19/36 Questionnaires for Beltsville project endorsed for distribution by E. Claude Babcock, President of the American Federation of Government Employees, and Miss Alice Hill, Director of the Public Assistance Division of the Board of Public Welfare of the District of Columbia. (SCHGbP)

01/28/36 Official name of "Greenbelt" given to Beltsville project. (GbPD)

02/03/36 Dr. Tugwell, Mr. Lansill and Mr. Hartzog address Annual Meeting of Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission at dinner in Hotel Gibson, Cincinnati. (SCGh)

02/15/36 First analysis of questionnaires circulated in Milwaukee received from Research Section; tabulations of 254 questionnaire forms. (SHGdP)

Preliminary house location and grading studies for Greenhills started and decision made to change from fire-proof to fire-resistant types of construction to reduce costs and attempt to keep within budget allowance . (SCGh)

02/25/36 Preliminary sketches of Milwaukee project town plan and house types presented to Director Lansill. (SHGdP)

Mar. 1936 Endorsement of Greenhills project given by numerous outstanding realty firms of Cincinnati region. (SCGh)

03/05/36 Project site at Milwaukee under two feet of snow. (SHGdP)

03/06/36 Cincinnati project given the name of "Greenhills." (SCGh)

03/07/36 Contracts let for brick and cinder building material, gypsum partition tile, lime, and plaster sufficient to complete construction of Greenbelt; foundation work begins on Block E. (GbPD)

03/10/36 Plans of Greenhills project presented to Administrator Tugwell and Director Lansill at special Washington Conference.

Preparation of scale working drawings for Greenhills houses started on basis of block plans developed for southwest area. 206 men now employed on Greenhills project in field construction activities. (SCGh)

03/13/36 Town plan for Milwaukee project approved by Director Lansill with authority granted Town Planner Peets to modify same to meet conditions disclosed by further on-site study. (SHGdP)

03/17/36 House plans for Milwaukee project group and detached types approved by Director Lansill. (SHGdP)

03/21/36 Preliminary tabulation of Cincinnati housing questionnaire returns received from Research Section. (SCGh)

03/24/36 "Greendale" chosen as name for Milwaukee project. (SHGdP)

Apr. 1936 Further labor union endorsements for Greenhills addressed to President Roosevelt by labor organizations and opposition to threatened injunction proceedings. (SCGh)

04/01/36 Sketches of Greendale town plan and house types presented to Administrator

Tugwell, Senator LaFollette et al with report by planners. (SHGdP)

04/25/36 Decision to make Greenbelt all-electric. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 09/03/36.)

04/27/36 Greenhills project plans submitted to Hamilton County Commissioners; first preliminary subdivision plans presented for approval of Regional Planning Commission. (SCGh)

04/29/36 Seventh and final report of questionnaire data tabulating 2,100 Greendale questionnaire forms, received from Research Section. (SHGdP)

04/30/36 Greenbelt plans reviewed at White House by President and Mrs. Roosevelt. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 09/03/36.)

General character of exterior design of Greendale residential construction approved by Director Lansill. (SHGdP)

05/01/36 Roy Braden, former County Manager of Arlington County, appointed community manager of Greenbelt. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 09/03/36.)

05/06/36 Excavation started on first basement in Greenhills; 500 men on payrolls. (SCGh)

05/08/36 Approval on Greenbelt unit family distribution – 712 row house group dwellings, 288 three-story multi-family dwelling units. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 9/09/36.)

05/18/36 Party of Ohio Housing Experts conducted over Greenhills site; highly favorable to project purposes and plans. (SCGh)

05/22/36 Working drawings for Greendale residential structures in Area B approved and forwarded to the Construction Division. (SHGdP)

Pouring of concrete foundations for Greenhills houses in Block G started. (SCGh)

05/24/36 Construction started on Greenbelt school and athletic field. (SCHGbP)

05/25/36 First residential construction begins at Greendale. Employees on-site number 578, exclusive of administrative force. (SHGdP)

05/26/36 Prince George's County Commission enthusiastically endorse Greenbelt by resolution. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 9/15/36.)

05/28/36 1,000 men employed at Greendale. (SHGdP)

1,000 men employed at Greenhills. (SCGh)

06/01/36 Greenbelt endorsed by resolution unanimously adopted by 106,000 members of Washington Central Labor Union. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 9/15/36.)

06/06/36 Employment on Greenhills site reaches peak of approximately 1,200 men. (SCGh)

06/23/36 National Youth Administration inaugurates project to provide guide services at Greendale due to numerous weekend visitors. (SHGdP)

07/07/36 Greendale payroll numbers 1,609; temperature on project reaches 110 degrees with 12 heat prostrations. (SHGdP)

07/08/36 Painting of cinder block houses begins at Greenbelt. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 9/19-9/23/36.)

07/20/36 Location, capacity, and type of construction of Greendale community building approved. (SHGdP)

07/30/36 Construction begins on Greenbelt apartments. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 09/23-09/26/36.)

08/11/36 Dwelling units at Greendale in various stages of construction number 343. (SHGdP)

08/20/36 Prince George's Chamber of Commerce endorses Greenbelt by resolution. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 09/26-10/01/36.)

08/21/36 Recommendation of Greenhills Planning Principals with reference to substitution of "S" type for previously approved types of residential units approved by Director, purpose of substitution being to effect economies in construction costs through omission of basements and utilization of less expensive materials and methods of construction. (SCGh)

08/29/36 Architectural staff of Greenhills starts preparation of working drawings for "S" type houses, the designs of which will incorporate all possible economies (elimination of basements, use of asbestos siding for exterior veneer, etc.). (SCGh)

08/31/36 Milwaukee Building and Loan Associations et al file bill to enjoin completion of Greendale project; Milwaukee papers announce effort to stop Greendale and numerous labor, social and other groups telegraph Washington urging that there be no delay in completing project and condemning action of real estate interests. (SHGdP)

09/05/36 Budget conferences in process following receipt of further reports of field costs. Show need of greater economies but in building construction and utility installation. Numerous utility items withdrawn from present construction program. (Not clear whether just for Greenhills or for entire program.) (SCGh)

09/09/36 Construction begins on Greenbelt school and athletic field. (GbPD)

09/15/36 Roof on first house raised at Greendale. (SHGdP)

09/19/36 Construction program of Greenhills modified to provide a primary program of 784 units only until further cost figures are available, with further reductions possible. Further suspensions of utility installations ordered. (This number will fluctuate over the coming weeks.) (SCGh)

10/01/36 Dwelling unit concept for Greenbelt set as of this date: (GbPD)

Type	From	To	Later to
Row	712	574	574
Multi-family	277	420	306
Rural	50	49	11
Experimental	0	7	5

10/03/36 Greenhills project opened to public with guide service. (SCGh)

10/15/36 2,000 men employed at Greendale, exclusive of administrative appointees; all residential units (except deferred) are under construction. (SHGdP)

10/30/36 Footings begin to be poured on all residential buildings at Greendale. (SHGdP)

10/31/36 Employment at Greendale reaches peak with 2,448 on rolls. (SHGdP)

11/02/36 Tile roofing begun in Greendale's Area B. (SHGdP)

11/7/36 Designs completed on "W" type house construction (part-basement structures) in Greenhills and preparation of working drawing in process. This type necessary to meet topographical conditions, all other features the same as "S" type houses. (SCGh)

11/08/36 A.L. Novikov, Vice-Chairman of the Moscow Reconstruction Commission visits Greendale project. (SHGdP)

11/11/36 Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt visits Greendale project. (SHGdP)

11/13/36 President Roosevelt personally inspects Greenbelt. (SCHGbP) ("Greenbelt Planning and Development" gives this date as 11/14/36.)

Greenhills project visited by Sir Raymond Unwin, noted British housing authority, who remarked on high standards of design and construction as compared with similar British projects. (SCGh)

11/14/36 Dr. Tugwell resigns as Administrator of Resettlement Administration. (SCHGbP)

11/17/36 Foundations completed on all residential structures in Greendale. (SHGdP)

12/02/36 Exterior painting at Greendale delayed by low temperatures. (SHGdP)

12/13/36 Below-zero weather impedes field progress at Greendale. (SHGdP)

12/17/36 Greenbelt Lake filled. (GbPD)

01/01/37 Resettlement Administration ordered to operate as a separate unit of the Department of Agriculture under direction of the Secretary (Memorandum No. 706). (GbPD)

01/21/37 Greenhills Community Building plans revised to effect the economies in construction costs and comprehending classroom facilities for a maximum of 920 pupils, approved by Director. (SCGh)

01/23/37 Severe rains in Cincinnati region hampering construction activities. (SCGh)

01/30/37 Work in Greenhills disrupted by reason of Ohio River flood. All resources of Resettlement Administration placed at disposal of City Manager Dykstra. Project without electrical power, water or adequate transportation. (SCGh)

02/06/37 Common labor returns to work at Greenhills project; construction water supply still lacking. (SCGh)

02/09/37 All construction work on House No. 213 in Greendale, a model for demonstration, is completed. Representatives of Special Skills Division arrive to superintend placing of furniture. (SHGdP)

02/14/37 Dr. Alexander and Mr. Perkins inspect Greendale project and the "demonstration" house; placing of furniture completed. (SHGdP)

02/16/37 Because of cost overruns developing in the field and revealed through cost-

	to-complete estimates, Construction Division instructed by Coordinator Fleming to confine primary Greenhills program to total of 676 units. (SCGh)
2/21/37	Approximately 25,000 people visits the Greendale project and constant stream of visitors pass through model home. (SHGdP)
03/06/37	Working drawings for Greendale Community Building are completed. (SHGdP)
04/07/37	First Greenhills unit (G-13, single family house) finished and ready for exhibition purposes. (SCGh)
04/15/37	Dwight J. Baum, New York City architect, visits Greendale project that suggestion of "friends in Chicago who described Greendale as the best thing done in housing." He commends general town plan, clay tile roofing, use of Curtis windows. (SHGdP)
04/19/37	First shipment of nursery stock arrives at Greendale, including 300 fruit trees. (SHGdP)
04/25/37	Sunday crowd of 22,040 brings total number of visitors to Greendale project since August 31, 1936 above 400,000. (SHGdP)
05/01/37	Public bus service to Greenhills started. (SCGh)
05/15-30/37	Drastic reduction in personnel made. Decision reached to transfer a skeleton staff of planners to site for completion of plans. Planning office in Washington discontinued; staff transferred to field. (SHGdP)
07/29/37	Ground broken for Greenbelt high school. (GbPD)
08/30/37	Frederick Bigger, Chief of Planning, ceases active duty. (GbPD)
09/02/37	Greenbelt rents and policies announced. Applications for Greenbelt residence accepted. (GbPD)
09/27/37	Arrangements made with Mr. Kalm, Post Office Inspector in Charge, to open Greenbelt Post Office by September 29. (GbPD)
09/30/37	First residents move into Greenbelt. Greenbelt Post Office opens. (SCHGbP)
10/05-06/37	Director Lansill visits Greenhills project; makes careful inspection of work completed and in process; expresses satisfaction at status of work. Director concurred in opinion of Project Principals that apparent severity of "S" type building exteriors could be relieved by planting of larger trees in house lots than were previously planned. (SCGh)
10/15/37	Seebohm Roundtree, English industrialist and housing authority, visits Greenhills project; favorably impressed by excellence of facilities offered by project. (SCGh)
10/26/37	Douglas D. Ellington, Principal Architect, ceases active duty [Greenbelt]. (GbPD)
10/31/37	First known birth to a Greenbelt family, Sonya Fullmer. (GbC)
11/03/37	Albert L. Miller, Regional Coordinator for Greenhills, ceases active duty. (SCGh)
11/22/37	Greenbelt gas station opens. (SCHGbP)
11/24/37	First issue of *Greenbelt Cooperator* published. (GbC)

12/02/37	Wallace Richards, Greenbelt Regional Coordinator, ceases active duty. (GbPD)
12/15/37	Greenbelt food store opens.
	First telephone installed at Greenbelt. (GbC)
01/01/38	Justin Hartzog, Principal Planner for Greenhills on loan from National Resources Committee of the Department of the Interior, ceases active duty with FSA.
	Roland A. Wank, on loan from the Tennessee Valley Authority, ceases active duty with FSA. (SCGh)
02/01/38	First Greenbelt town directory issued. (GbC)
02/06/38	Bus service between Washington and Greenbelt opens. (GbC)
01/12/38	Frank Cordner, Principal Architect for Greenhills, ceases active duty. (SCGh)
03/02/38	Hale Walker, Town Planner, ceases active duty[Greenbelt]. (GbPD)
03/06/38	Reginald J. Wadsworth, Principal Architect, ceases active duty[Greenbelt]. (GbPD)
03/17/38	Street and park lights first operate[Greenbelt]. (GbC)
04/01/38	First tenants move into Greenhills. (SCGh)
06/30/38	Director Lansill ceases active duty. (GbPD)
09/01/38	Last units of original housing completed [Greenbelt]. (GbPD)
09/21/38	Greenbelt movie theater opens, *Little Miss Broadway*, starring Shirley Temple. (GbC)
May 1939	Greenbelt swimming pool opens. (GbC)
05/26/39	The 1939 World's Fair begins showings of *The City*

Appendix B: Greenbelt Design Staff Connections

Had worked for John Nolen

Tracy Augur

Jacob Crane

Earle Draper

Justin Hartzog

Had worked for TVA

Tracy Augur

Earle Draper

Roland Wank

Housing Study Guild members

Catherine Bauer

Henry Churchill

Albert Mayer

Henry Wright

RPAA members

Tracy Augur

Catherine Bauer

Frederick Bigger

Clarence Stein

Henry Wright

Attended Harvard University

Tracy Augur

Jacob Crane

John Nolen (chose designers but did not serve on staff himself)

Elbert Peets

Walter Thomas

Attended Cornell University

Tracy Augur

Russell Black

Henry Churchill

Justin Hartzog

Attended University of Pennsylvania

Frederick Bigger

Henry Wright

Appendix C: Housing questionnaire

HOUSING
QUESTIONNAIRE

The Resettlement Administration is building a new suburban community northeast of Whitnall Park to provide houses for employed workers of limited income in the Milwaukee region. It will plan and develop the town and surrounding acres for the preservation and best use of natural resources. Located in gently rolling country eight miles from the center of Milwaukee, and four and a half miles from West Allis, the community will have access to working and shopping centers in Milwaukee by way of Loomis Road, in a twenty minute drive. Access to West Allis will be along Center Road.

The development will embody the following features of a modern, planned community:

- it will be surrounded by a green belt -- a wide encircling strip of land containing wood and farmland and recreational area -- in order to insure a permanently natural rural surrounding.
- houses will be close to green spaces and play areas, safe from traffic and noise, and will be convenient to schools, shops, and other facilities located within the community itself. Major traffic thoroughfares will not pass through the town.
- each dwelling will have adequate sunlight and ventilation, sanitary equipment, and privacy.
- dwellings will include houses of various types and sizes, and rentals will be within reach of families of modest incomes.
- management of the town and the houses will include representation of the tenants.

The Administration is eager to get information from people interested in the project as to the type of housing they need and the rents they are able to pay. Your cooperation in answering this questionnaire quickly and accurately will be of great value. Please use the attached franked envelope for returning it to us.

The answers to this questionnaire will be kept entirely confidential and will not in any way be considered as an application for a nome in the project. You do not need to sign your name to the questionnaire unless you wish.

DIVISION OF SUBURBAN RESETTLEMENT
RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION - WASHINGTON, D. C.

PRESENT HOME

(1) Are you interested in the possibility of living in the Resettlement community near Mount Healthy? Yes ☐ No ☐

(2) Your home address _____
(street) (town) (state)

(3) How many persons live in your home? _____ (Please fill in the following blanks)

A. MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY (Not including roomers or lodgers)

RELATION OF PERSON TO YOU	SEX	AGE	COUNTRY OF BIRTH
1. Yourself			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

B. ROOMERS AND LODGERS (not members of your family): number _____

(4) Do you own your Home? ☐ or Rent it? ☐

If you rent, how much is the rent per month? _____

Does this rent include heat? Yes ☐ No ☐

Does this rent include garage? Yes ☐ No ☐

Does this rent include furnishings? Yes ☐ No ☐

I have actually paid _____ Dollars in rent in the past twelve (12) months.
(Do not count any amounts owing but not paid)

(5) Which of the following rooms do you have in your present house?

Living Room. . Yes ☐ No ☐ Number of Bedrooms _____

Dining Room. . Yes ☐ No ☐ Porch. . Yes ☐ No ☐

Kitchen. . . . Yes ☐ No ☐ Garage . Yes ☐ No ☐

Private Bath . Yes ☐ No ☐

(6) Do you now own an automobile? Yes ☐ No ☐ , Washing machine? Yes ☐ No ☐

Piano? Yes ☐ No ☐ , Mechanical Refrigerator? Electric ☐ , Gas ☐ , None ☐

2

WORK, CHURCH AND SCHOOL

(7) Please fill in the following blanks for the principal wage-earner and all other wage-earners in your family: (Do not include roomers or lodgers. Fill out A and B for each wage-earner.)

A.

RELATION OF WORKER TO YOU	ADDRESS WHERE WORKING (IF OUT OF A JOB WRITE "UNEMPLOYED")		TYPE OF EMPLOYER'S BUSINESS	KIND OF JOB
	STREET (GIVE ONLY STREET AND NEAREST CROSS STREET)	TOWN		
1. Yourself				
2.				
3.				
4.				

B.

RELATION OF WORKER TO YOU	USUAL TRANSPORTATION TO JOB. (BUS, TROLLEY, TRAIN AUTO OR WALKING.)	COST OF ROUND TRIP FROM HOME TO JOB	TIME FOR ONE WAY TRIP FROM HOME TO JOB	WEEKLY EARNINGS	NUMBER OF WEEKS WORKED IN LAST 12 MONTHS	AMOUNT EARNED IN LAST 12 MONTHS
1. Yourself.						
2.						
3.						
4.						

(8) What was the total family income for the last twelve months?
(Do NOT include rent received from roomers or lodgers) . . . . . $_____

(9) What income, if any, did you receive from renting rooms to roomers or lodgers in the last 12 months? . . . . . $_____

(10) What church, if any, do you or your family attend? _____

(11) How many children in your family attend Public Schools _____

Parochial Schools _____

THE NEW COMMUNITY

(12) What rooms do you need in a new home for your family (not including roomers or lodgers. Remember that every room adds to the rent):

Living Room . . . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

Small Kitchen and separate Dining Room . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

or

Large Kitchen with space for eating . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

or

Kitchenette and Dinette . . . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

Number of Bedrooms? . . . . . _____

Porch . . . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

Garage . . . . . Yes ☐ No ☐

(13) Would you prefer to have your home in an apartment building ☐ an attractive group building of not more than six houses ☐ or a single house costing more per month than an apartment or a group house ☐

(14) Which of the following facilities would your family use frequently?

Note: (Schools and the usual shopping facilities will be provided).

Day Nursery ☐	Football field ☐	Library ☐
Playground for small children ☐	Handball courts ☐	Restaurant ☐
Swimming pool ☐	Basketball courts ☐	Tavern ☐
Tennis Courts ☐	Bowling Alley ☐	Beauty Parlor ☐
Baseball Diamonds ☐	Community Social Hall ☐	

What other facilities? _____

(15) Would you expect to do your own washing ☐ or patronize a wet-wash laundry ☐

(16) Would you cultivate a flower garden at your home? Yes ☐ No ☐

Would you cultivate a vegetable garden at your home? Yes ☐ No ☐

Would you cultivate a vegetable garden if a few blocks from your home? Yes ☐ No ☐

(17) Please make any additional comments or recommendations on a separate sheet

Date _____

Name _____
(sign only if you wish to)

Appendix D: Community facilities desired, the three towns compared

Community facilities desired	Percentage of families requesting		
	Greenbelt	Greenhills	Greendale
Library	89.0	82.2	86.1
Swimming pool	75.8	77.5	78.8
Playgrounds for small children	46.8	58.1	68.3
Community social hall	54.3	51.1	60.8
Baseball diamonds	34.0	63.0	57.0
Beauty parlor	43.4	44.7	45.8
Bowling alley	38.6	37.5	45.5
Tennis courts	50.9	35.1	41.2
Tavern	12.1	29.0	34.9
Football field	16.4	23.7	28.2
Basketball courts	21.0	20.8	24.3
Restaurant	23.3	20.5	21.8
Handball courts	20.8	18.5	20.6
Day nursery	13.5	7.5	12.7

From questionnaire analyses, Final Reports on Greenbelt, Greenhills, and Greendale.
John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

Appendix E: Activities participated in often, in ranked order

1. Reading newspapers and magazines
2. Listening to the radio
3. Reading books – fiction
4. Conversation
5. Reading books – non-fiction
6. Auto riding for pleasure
7. Visiting or entertaining others
8. Attending the movies
9. Swimming
10. Writing letters
11. Playing bridge (home)
12. Serious study
13. Caring for home grounds
14. Caring for flower garden
15. Political, church, or civic activities
16. Informal play hours with children
17. Parties or socials
18. Attending theaters
19. Hiking
20. Playing tennis
21. Dancing parties (home)
22. Sewing and millinery
23. Picnicking
24. Card parties (home)
25. Caring for pets
26. Reading at library
27. Playing musical instruments
28. Family parties
29. Attending card parties
30. Playing baseball
31. Day outings
32. Playing basketball
33. Carpentry, painting, repair jobs
34. Attending lectures, debates, forums
35. Attending community or club dances
36. Boating

Source: *The Leisure Hours of 5,000 People* (New York: National Recreation Association, 1934), 10.

Appendix F: Activities desired, in ranked order
("Outstanding interests and unmet leisure time needs")

Activity		No. desiring	No. taking part	No. participating often
1.	Playing tennis	837	1,841	767
2.	Swimming	793	2,976	1,603
3.	Boating	773	1,480	496
4.	Playing golf	732	977	301
5.	Camping	676	814	274
6.	Caring for flower garden	666	1,817	947
7.	Playing musical instrument	660	1,367	655
8.	Auto riding for pleasure	639	3,246	1,765
9.	Attending legitimate theater	617	2,228	801
10.	Ice skating	597	1,378	460
11.	Hiking	576	2,152	768
12.	Taking part in amateur theatrics	575	904	216
13.	Fishing	564	1,167	312
14.	Listening to the radio	546	3,955	2,842
15.	Attending the movies	538	3,670	1,642
16.	Picnicking	535	2,389	740
17.	Motor camping	525	624	170
18.	Attending concerts (free)	511	1,515	457
19.	Gymnasium classes	493	904	440
20.	Reading books – fiction	486	3,408	2,155

Source: *The Leisure Hours of 5,000 People* (New York: National Recreation Association, 1934), 21-22.

Appendix G: "S"-type houses, Greenhills, Ohio

The following appears verbatim in a manuscript (apparently unpublished) by Henry S. Churchill, held in the Lansill Papers collection at the University of Kentucky:

"Greenhills found it desirable to establish a group of houses, designated as "S" houses, of a somewhat lower standard than the majority of their dwellings. A description of these houses and their justification in the project follows:

1. The proposed housetypes are inferior in layout, accommodations, construction and equipment to the standards heretofore followed. In consequence, they will be less convenient (although still livable) and may require higher maintenance and earlier obsolescence.
2. The aggregate per family cost of maintenance, operation and capital charges would not materially differ from the aggregate on houses conforming to the previously used standards.
3. On the other hand, the character of the project will be fairly well-established before the S-houses are finished. This fact may tend to minimize the psychological effect of lower standards.
4. The presence of these houses will permit, in the option [opinion?] of the Management, greater differentiation of rents. This may facilitate the admission of lower income families, whose rents may be subsidized to some extent to tenants of higher standard accommodations.
5. The presence of these houses in the Project, under a single management, will offer an unusually favorable opportunity to test, through experience, the relative merits of dwellings of high standards and first cost but low maintenance and obsolescence as against dwellings of lower standards and first costs but higher maintenance and obsolescence. Lack of unanimity and of experimental data on the subject beclouds the issue and hinders the progress of low-rental housing.
6. It was intended to restrict the S-type houses to one type each for the two- and three-bedroom houses. Yet the lack of enough level sites renders it imperative that one variation of each be added (denoted by the addition of the letter 'A') to permit entrance below first floor level on sloping sites.
7. The chief characteristics in which these houses do not conform to previously used standards are as follows:
   a) Basements are omitted.
   b) Coal storage for less than seasonal requirements and only a moderate amount of household storage is provided in substitution for basement space.
   c) All porches, terraces and garages are omitted.
   d) All sloping roofs are omitted.
   e) Orientation is subordinated to economy.

f) House frontage is reduced, thereby reducing also the width of individual lots. The average length of lots is also reduced by closer spacing.
g) Street frontage is likewise reduced through the use of court groupings, thereby extending the average distance from street to house door.
h) First floors are of frame construction over an excavated spaces, requiring underfloor or cross-ventilation. This necessitates frequent inspection and reduces the 'tightness' of the floor during the heating season.
i) Sheathing will be horizontal rather than diagonal, with greater likelihood of plaster cracks.
j) Millwork costs will be reduced by the use of wood spring-balanced windows, 1-3/8" paneled doors, kitchen cabinets of lesser quality and quantity.
k) Heating system will be of the gravity hot water type (Arcola or similar) requiring more frequent attention by the household. Location of the heater on or near the first floor will minimize the disadvantage of this circumstance. Entrance halls will depend upon direct radiation of heater.
l) Heating pipes will be exposed.
m) Rooms will be somewhat smaller in size and deeper in shape.
n) Roof insulation will be reduced, wall insulation omitted.
o) Bathtub will be of the leg type.
p) One fire wall will be used only in the large groups. (Five units). Fire stops only will be used in the short groups. (four units).
q) Cost of electrical equipment will be reduced by the use of apartment type range, smaller refrigerator and hot water storage tank.
r) If inquiries now under way indicate possible savings and satisfactory (even though not perfect) performance, three-ply electrolytic copper will be used instead of five-ply felt roofing and insulating wallboard instead of plaster.

Churchill manuscript, John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

Appendix H: Standards for room areas, Greendale, Wisconsin

TABLE I

Standards for Room Areas (in square feet)

	Greendale 4 & 5 room houses normal house occupancy 3 to 6		F.H.A.	P.W.A.
	Absolute Minimum	Preferred Minimum	Absolute Minimum	Absolute Minimum (Moderate increases recommended)
Living room (without dining space)	180	200	160	150
Living room (with dining space)	210	230		
Kitchen (without dining space	65	75	50	65
Kitchen (with dining space	95	105		
First Bedroom	130	140	100	110
Second Bedroom	100	110	70	100
Third Bedroom	80	90	--	--
Utility Room	90	110	--	--
Ceiling Height	7'-0" to 8'-0", dependent upon room area (a)		7'-0"	8'-6"

(a) Actual heights in houses as built average 7'-11" in living rooms, 7'-6" in bedrooms, and 7'-3" in kitchens and utility rooms.

Harry H. Bentley, Final Report on Greendale, Volume 3, "Report on Residential and Non-residential Construction," 5.

Appendix I: Expected use of homes, Greendale, Wisconsin

No. of Dwelling Units	Type of Dwelling Unit	Family Occupancy	Family Composition	Family Size	Total Occupancy Persons
52	3-room units Living room Kitchen 1-bedroom	40 families	2 adults	2	80
		12 families	2 adults & 1 child	3	36
230	4-room units Living room Kitchen 2-bedrooms	100 families	2 adults & 1 child	3	300
		130 families	2 adults & 2 children	4	520
272	5-room units Living room Kitchen 3-bedrooms	44 families	2 adults & 2 children	4	176
		200 families	2 adults & 3 children	5	1000
		28 families	2 adults & 4 children	6	168
18	6-room units Living room Kitchen 4-bedrooms	9 families	2 adults & 4 children	6	54
		9 families	2 adults & 5 children	7	63
572 Units		572 families	Total Occupancy - - - 2,397 persons Persons per family - - 4.19		

Recreated from the Final Report on Greendale, Vol. 3, “Report on Residential and Non-residential Construction,” 12.

Appendix J: Dwelling types and plan numbers, Greenbelt, Maryland

Plan type and construction, row units		Times used	Total times used	Rooms per unit	Bedrooms per unit	Number persons per unit	Number persons total
A1-1	CB	12		3.0	1	2.0	32
A1-1	BV	4	16				
C2-1	CB	53		5.0	2	3.33	436
C2-1	BV	78	131				
C2-2	CB	12		4.5	2	3.33	60
C2-2	BV	6	18				
C2-4	CB	20		5.5	2	4.5	198
C2-4	BV	14					
C2-4	AS	10	44				
C2 -6	CB	19		4.0	2	3.0	135
C2-6	BV	26	45				
C2-7	CB	49		5.5	2	3.75	398
C2-7	BV	57	106				
C2-8	CB	35		5.0	2	3.74	232
C2-8	BV	27	62				
C3-1	CB	8		6.0	3	4.5	45
C3-1	BV	2	10				
C3-2	CB	7		6.0	3	4.53	86
C3-2	BV	12	19				
C3-3	CB	4		6.0	3	4.5	90
C3-3	BV	16	20				
C3-4	BV	6	6	6.0	3	4.5	27
C3-6	CB	8		6.0	3	5.0	150
C3-6	BV	22	30				
C3-7	CB	10		7.0	3	6.0	132
C3-7	AS	12	22				
C3-9	CB	19		6.0	3	5.33	240
C3-9	BV	26	45				

Plan type and construction, multi-family units		Times used	Rooms per unit	Bedrooms per unit	Number persons per unit	Number persons total
E0-2-3	CB	84	1.5	0	1.48	124
E1-6-7	CB	120	2.5	1	2.1	252
E1-8-9	CB	102	3.0	1	2.61	266

CB = concrete block BV = brick veneer AS = asbestos shingle

From Final Report on Greenbelt, Section 5, “Architectural Planning,” 7a.

Appendix K: The completed town, number and types of homes

Greenbelt:

Row units	574
Apartments	306
Single family detached "experimental"	5
Total	885

Greenhills:

Single-family detached	24
Row units	500
Apartments	152
Total	676

Greendale:

Single-family detached	274
Twin units (side-by-side)	90
Row units	168
Apartments	40
Total	572

Project total	2,133

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6.1 Aerial view of Greenbelt, Maryland, showing part of the surrounding greenbelt. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/mhsalad.060057.

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6.5 Close-up of crash aftermath depicted in a poster produced to promote the Greenbelt towns. John Scott Lansill Papers (PA65m19.357), University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

6.6 Full view of the crash poster above.

6.7 RA poster promoting the Greenbelt towns as idyllic environments in which to raise children. John Scott Lansill Papers (PA65m19.360), University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

6.8 Playground for small children in Greenbelt. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8a38456.

6.9 Lenore Thomas next to architectural frieze at Greenbelt. Courtesy of the Greenbelt Museum.

6.10 Front of the Greenbelt school/community building. Photo by the author.

6.11 "To form a more perfect union" frieze by Lenore Thomas. Photo by the author.

6.12 "Establish justice" frieze by Lenore Thomas. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.md1174.

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6.14 "Provide for the common defense" frieze by Lenore Thomas. Photo by the author.

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6.16 Collins, Marjory, photographer. Greenbelt, Maryland. View from roof of shopping center showing statue of a mother and child and apartment houses in the background, 1942. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8d45089.

6.17 Greenbelt mother-and-child statue, detail view. Photo by the author.

6.18 Flagpole sculpture by Alonzo Hauser at Greendale, Wisconsin. Photo by the author.

6.19 Another view of same. Photo by the author.

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6.22 Greendale shopping center. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.23 Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. Greenbelt commercial center. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc .pnp/fsa.8a38486.

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6.25 Movie theater interior, Greendale, Wisconsin, 1939. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

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6.33 Greendale administration building. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.34 Row houses in Greendale, Wisconsin. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.35 Vachon, John, photographer. Single-family detached Greendale houses. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc .pnp/fsa.8a04387.

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6.39 Model of a portion of Greendale. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8e03309.

6.40 Plan of the central portion of Greenbelt showing recreation area, community building, commercial center, and residential units. John Scott Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs.

6.41 Greenbelt, Maryland, interior court. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c52506.

6.42 Greenbelt row houses, interior court view. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/hhh.md1701.

6.43 Northwest section of Greendale. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.44 Plan of Greenhills. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8e04530.

6.45 View of Apple Court, Greendale, Wisconsin. Final Report on Greendale, Vol. 2, "Report of the Town Planning Section." Lansill Papers, University of Kentucky.

6.46 One style of Greendale group (row) house. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.47 Common style of Greendale single-family detached house. Courtesy of the Greendale Historical Society.

6.48 Original hand-drawn plan of Greenhills' "A" and "B" sections, showing the various building configurations. Courtesy of the Village of Greenhills.

6.49 Vachon, John, photographer. Greenhills duplexes on a cul-de-sac, 1939. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc .pnp/fsa.8a05177.

6.50 "S"-type homes in Greenhills. Photo by the author.

6.51 Lower and upper floor plan of one type of three-bedroom row house in Greenbelt, Maryland. Reprinted from "Comparative Architectural Details in the Greenbelt Housing," *American Architect and Architecture* (Oct. 1936): 23.

6.52 Approved light fixtures for use in Greenbelt, Maryland homes. Courtesy of Greenbelt Homes, Inc.

6.53 2008 photo of the living room of a one-bedroom Greenbelt, Maryland, apartment. Photo by the author.

6.54 Floor plan of two mirror-image one-bedroom Greenbelt, Maryland, apartments. Greenbelt, Maryland, blueprints, Record Group 196, Public Housing Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

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6.59 Mydans, Carl, Photographer. Three-family toilet, Hamilton County, Ohio, 1935. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8a00804.

6.60 2009 view, toilet and tub in a bathroom in Greenhills, Ohio. Photo by the author.

6.61 Towel bar in Greendale home. Photo by the author.

6.62 Ceiling of Greendale living room. Photo by the author.

C.1 Franklin Roosevelt, Rexford Tugwell, and Will Alexander tour Greenbelt, Nov. 13, 1936, driving past the unfinished school/community building. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b31442.