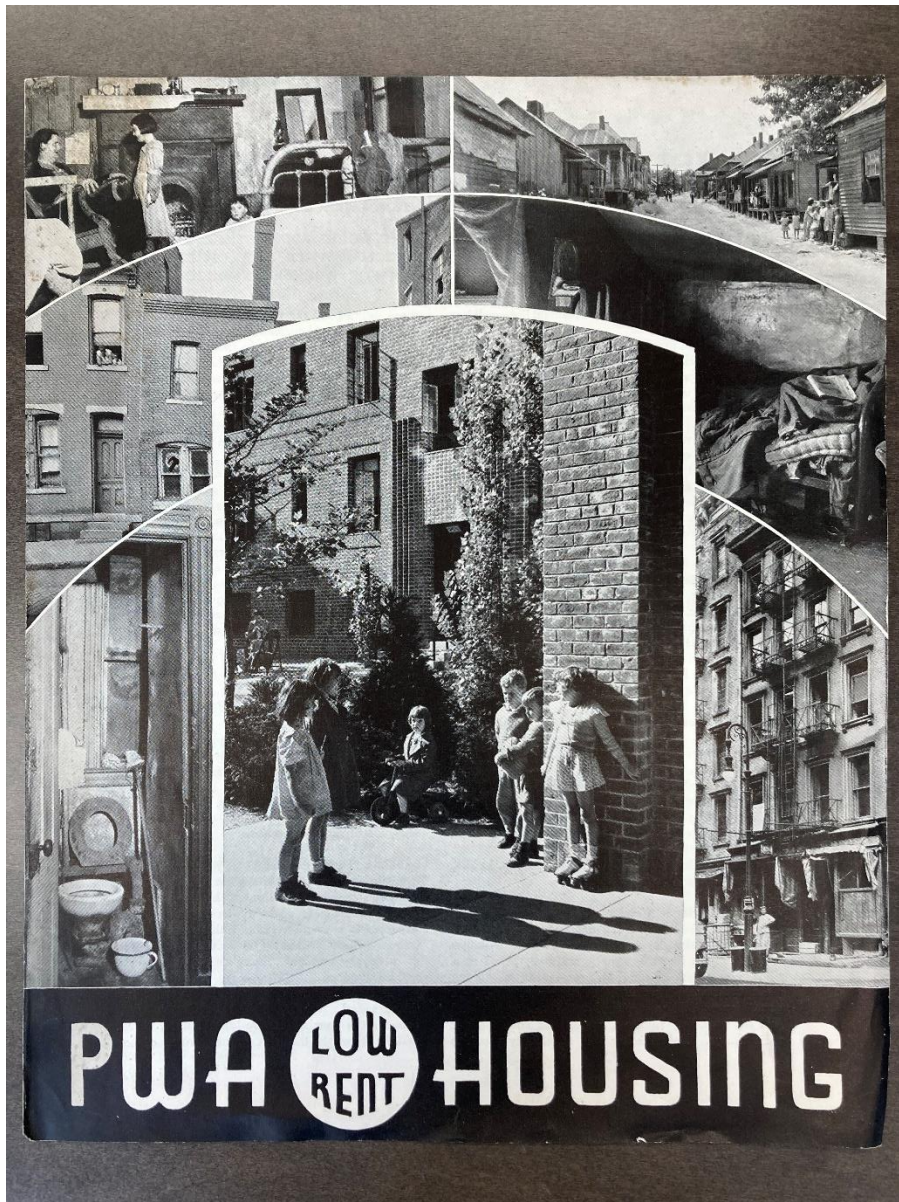


Allen Benedict Court  
Mitigation of Adverse Effects  
Columbia, South Carolina



Prepared for:

Housing Authority of  
the City of Columbia

1917 Harden Street

Columbia, SC 29204

Prepared by:

Sean C Stucker, MHP

4441 Reamer Avenue

Columbia, SC 29206

February 24, 2021





February 24, 2021

Housing Authority of the City of Columbia  
1917 Harden Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29204

Attention: Ivory Matthews

Reference: Allen Benedict Court  
Mitigation of Adverse Effects  
Columbia, South Carolina  
Project Number 4.4

Dear Ms. Matthews:

I am pleased to present a written narrative report, which fulfills Stipulation IV.D in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Housing Authority of the City of Columbia (CHA), and the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), executed in October 2020. In addition to the written report, electronic files containing CHA's archival information on Allen Benedict Court, a site plan and building inventory, and digital photographs of the interior and exterior of representative buildings and apartments of each type are included on a portable external hard drive. This documentation fulfills Stipulations IV.A, IV.B, and IV.C, respectively, of the above-referenced MOA. I appreciate the opportunity to work on this phase of work associated with the mitigation of adverse effects on Allen Benedict Court.

Sincerely,

Sean C Stucker, MHP



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## 1.0 Introduction

On behalf of the Housing Authority of the City of Columbia (CHA), Sean Stucker, MHP, has completed this report as part of the mitigation of adverse effects to Allen Benedict Court, located in Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina (Figure 1). Allen Benedict Court will be adversely affected by the proposed demolition of the structures and redevelopment of the site. Work for this project was carried out in general accordance with the Historic Columbia Proposal, dated January 13, 2021.

Allen Benedict Court is officially located at 1810 Allen Benedict Court, Columbia, SC, 29203, the address referencing the administration building for the complex; the development itself is approximately 16 acres in size and is bounded by Harden Street, Laurel Street, Oak Street, and Read Street (originally Calhoun Street). Allen Benedict Court is a public housing complex that was designed by architect James B. Urquhart and constructed by developer M.B. Kahn Construction in 1940 to house low-income African American residents of Columbia, South Carolina. One of two housing complexes built at the time, its counterpart, Gonzales Gardens was originally designated as a complex for low-income white residents.

Both complexes were constructed using funds from the United States Housing Authority (USHA) and administered by the local Columbia Housing Authority. The Allen Benedict Court development consists of 26 apartment structures and one administrative building; these buildings consist of four different apartment arrangements, ranging from three-room to five and one-half room layouts. Allen Benedict Court is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A, for its association with the New Deal and public housing development in the 1940s; it is also eligible under Criterion C, as an example of early public housing architecture and as the work of James B. Urquhart, a notable South Carolina architect.

In order to mitigate the adverse effects to the NRHP-eligible Allen Benedict Court, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the CHA, and the South Carolina State Historic Preservation office (SHPO), was executed in October 2020.

Fieldwork and research for this project was completed by Sean Stucker, MHP, from January through February 2021. The present-day photographs of the Allen Benedict Court structures were taken by Rick Smoak in August 2020 and were submitted prior to the writing of this report. Completion of this report and additional documentation was made possible through assistance from Lee McRoberts, Executive Assistant to the CHA Executive Director, as well by CHA Executive Director and CEO Ivory Matthews herself.

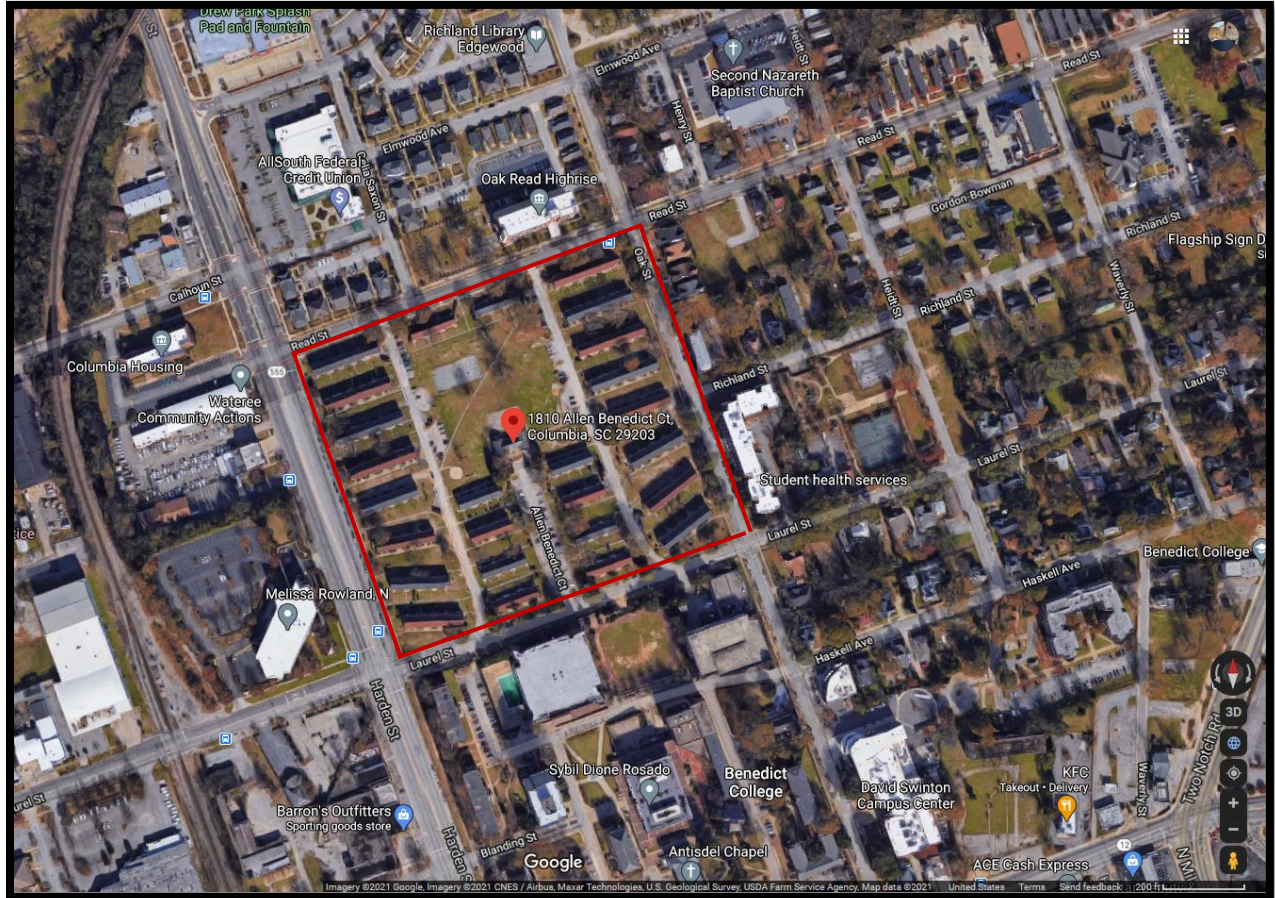



Figure 1

Allen Benedict Court 



Richland County, SC



## 2.0 Architectural Description

Early versions of public housing in the 1930s and pre-war 1940s were based upon a prescription to provide modern living, and the resulting architectural styles sought to achieve this goal. Not all housing developments were built in the same style, nor were any considered “high-style” designs, but their functional design and durable construction fulfilled the planners’ desires to provide quality affordable housing to low-income residents while also fostering “environments where the poor could learn to live as virtuous citizens” (Hess, 22). Public housing proponents sought to eliminate social and economic ills by moving low-income families out of areas “full of gullies and overgrown...a cesspool, morally and physically,” and by providing them with modern amenities and conveniences (*The State*, 10/25/1941).

Columbia’s earliest public housing project, University Terrace (built in 1937), mimicked Modern design principles, featuring flat roofs and a block-building layout that created a “superblock” where previously the area had comprised several blocks of a more organic layout of streets and alleyways. These large-block communal settings were intended to create spaces and buildings that implemented modern materials and techniques and that would improve society by focusing on mass housing and mass production. These projects were also designed with a level of quality not often seen in public projects today, because the government loan structure dictated that the buildings be amortized over a sixty-year lifespan, requiring planners and designers to build in a manner that guaranteed long-term operation.<sup>1</sup>

While the block-building layout and brick construction were retained for both Allen Benedict Court and Gonzalez Gardens, the buildings themselves in the second phase of Columbia’s public housing featured pitched gabled roofs that hearkened back to a Classical form more traditional for the locale.

Nevertheless, the goal of improving society through public housing remained a primary tenet of the planners. The original advertising brochure for Allen Benedict Court states that: “The program of the Housing Authority of Columbia is to furnish low-rent homes to persons with low income, now living in undesirable homes...Here fire, disease and crime will find hostile reception but the ‘welcome’ sign will be out at all times for wholesome living, good neighbors and ample recreation”(CHA Brochure 1940). Modernism may not have caught on in Columbia, but the goal of better living through community planning endured.

### 2.1 Architect

Architect James B. Urquhart (1876-1961) hailed from South Hampton County, Virginia, but his adopted city of Columbia was where he spent more than six decades and where he was laid to rest in Elmwood Memorial Cemetery. A graduate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Urquhart initially employed his civil engineering training designing railroads but moved to Columbia in 1901 to work as a draftsman for Charles Coker Wilson’s architectural firm, where he would later achieve partner status. Following a short period in solo practice, Urquhart and well-known Columbia architect J. Carroll Johnson established Urquhart & Johnson in 1912, and, over the next two decades, the firm designed many private residences but was involved in a wide range of public and institutional projects, including buildings at the South

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.fdrlibrary.org/housing>, accessed on 2/16/2021.





Carolina State Penitentiary and the auditorium at Winthrop College. Among the schools designed by Urquhart were Columbia High, Booker T. Washington High, and Kilbourne Road Elementary.<sup>2</sup>

Urquhart served as the architect of the CHA from its founding in 1934 until his death in 1961 but, prior to his tenure, was already known as a proponent of low-income public housing from his work with the precursor to the CHA. The success of Urquhart & Johnson had made him one of Columbia's most prominent architects, which almost certainly contributed to the notoriety of his and CHA's early public housing projects of University Terrace, Allen-Benedict Court, and Gonzales Gardens, all of which opened to great fanfare through public commemorations and in local publications. Moreover, Urquhart's experience designing public buildings like schools and prisons spoke to the CHA's goal of creating buildings that were built to last, while the scale of and budgets associated with these kinds of government projects allowed him access to the modern materials and methods required to make the projects successful (Hess 2002).

## 2.2 Plan

Allen Benedict Court inhabits approximately 16 acres and consists of 26 residential buildings and a centrally located administration building (Figure 2). The 26 residential buildings contain 244 housing units, split into six flats with three room and three and one-half room units and townhouse-style apartments with three room, three and one-half room, four and one-half room, and five and one-half room units. In total, there are 116 three room or three and one-half room units, 88 four and one-half room units, and 40 five and one-half room units. The two-story townhouse-style apartments comprise Buildings A through H, Buildings K through R, and Buildings W through Z, while the one-story flats comprise Buildings I and J and Buildings S through V. While the one-story buildings are nearly identical and contain 6 apartment units each, there are four types of two-story townhouse-style apartment buildings, and each building houses around 10 units. The three room and three and one-half room end units in the townhomes occupy a single floor, while the four and one-half room and five and one-half room units span both floors.

The H-shaped administration building, symmetrical in form and sited at the center of the plan, is accessed by the entry drive to the south, Allen Benedict Court, located in the center of the Laurel Street block. The one-story Minimal Traditional brick building is a double-ended and double-sided gable and wing roof structure that features centrally located doorways, topped by a triangular pediment and flanked by quoins, in both the south- and north-facing west-side wings (Figure 3). These doorways have paired, horizontally-oriented two-over-two double-hung windows on either side, and the words "ALLEN-BENEDICT COURT" are inscribed in the lintels above the doors. A single doorway in the south-facing center block features a more minimal surround and is topped with the inscription "OFFICE", while a double doorway in the south-facing east-side wing features the same minimal-type surround but with

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/113760295/james-burwell-urquhart>, accessed on 2/17/2021.



Allen Benedict Court Report on Mitigation of Adverse Effects – Columbia, South Carolina

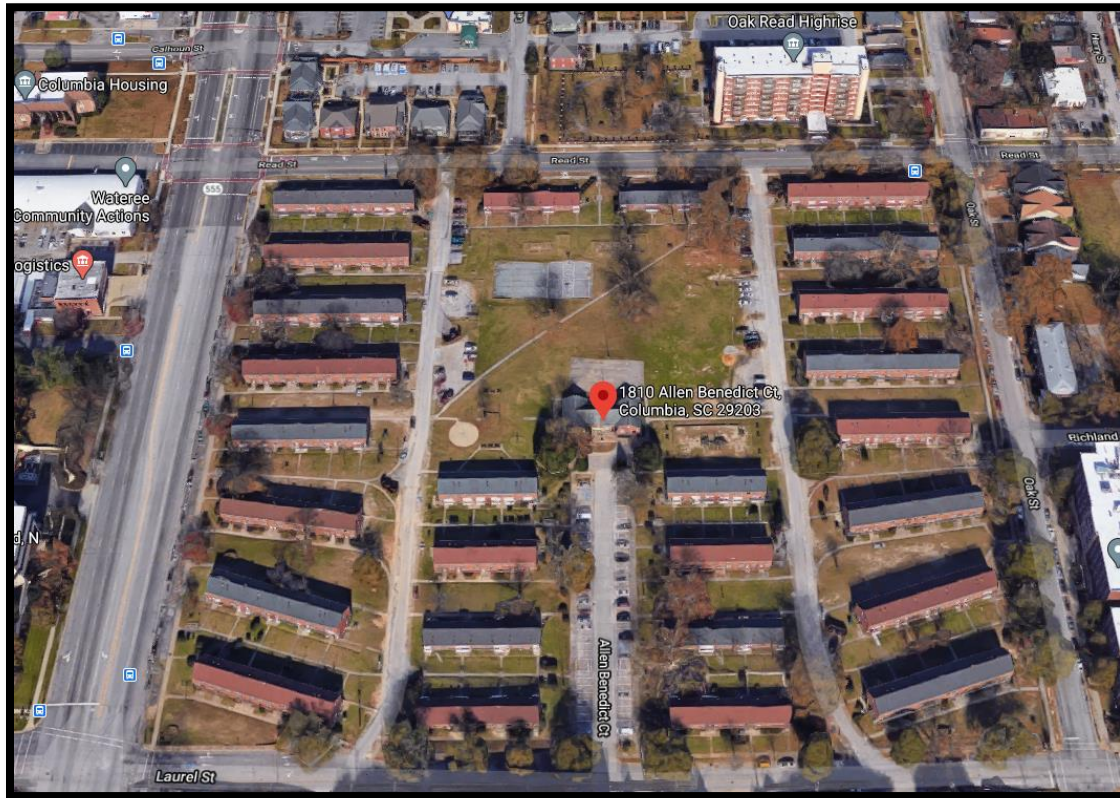


Figure 2



Figure 3



no inscription. The north-facing center block and east-side wing contain secondary entryways with minimal-type door surrounds.

Fostering a better living environment through better community planning was central to the mission of public housing and of Allen Benedict Court. To that end, the plan did not stop with just housing itself but



Figure 4

was also enhanced through public indoor and outdoor spaces and through community activities and amenities. In addition to the management offices, the Administration building also had “an assembly room for use by tenants and for pre-school activities for small children...a shop and storage rooms,” and adjacent to the rear of the building was a designated recreation area with a “paved spray pool” that also functioned as a roller skating rink, as well as several other brick paved sitting areas placed throughout the project (CHA Brochure 1940).

Recreation areas with integrated benches flank the building to the west and the east; the area on the east side has a playground, and the integrated wooden benches are of the same type that were found at Gonzales Gardens, featuring circular “wheel-like” metal armrests embedded in concrete and brick pads (Figure 4). The field behind the Administration building historically had a baseball field that hosted youth games between teams of residents and other local teams (Figure 5), but the field was lost to history and was replaced by several areas of playground equipment and a joint basketball and tennis court near the northwest corner of the field. In addition, each apartment has a small outdoor sitting area adjacent to each doorway, which is covered by

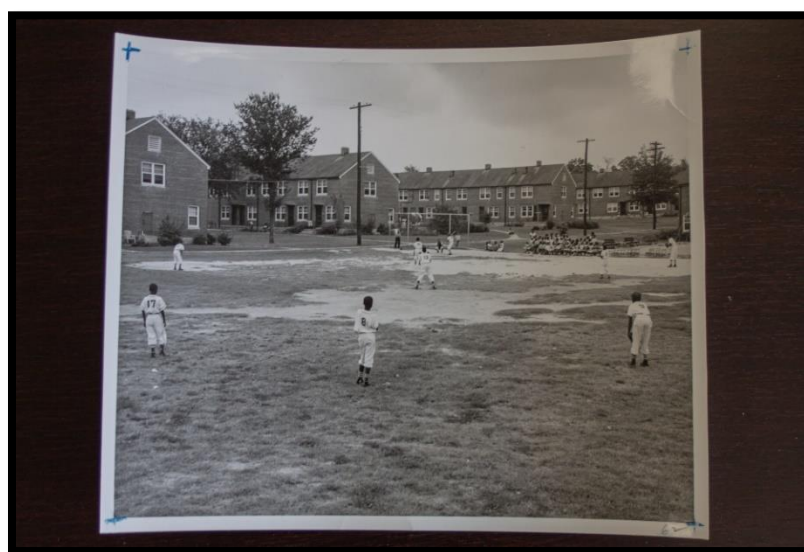


Figure 5

each doorway, which is covered by



Figure 6

either a flat or a pitched canopy that extends to shelter the adjacent window; these concrete platform areas were specified in the original design plans. The addition of swales and concrete drainage paths in the 1960s, overgrown but still visible in the overhead drone images, were an attempt to reduce standing water in the unnaturally flatly graded spaces around the buildings.

The Allen Benedict Court development, like many public housing complexes of its day, was designed as a “superblock” with the Administration building and the single access street of Allen Benedict Court at its center. This access street also served as the complex’s only on-site parking area, but, of course, far fewer people would have required this amenity in 1940 – particularly among low-income residents. The “superblock” plan did not orient the buildings towards the street; rather they were connected by sidewalks that traversed the complex interior, and the community-focused design resulted in only the entryways along Laurel and Read opening onto an exterior street, such that both the front and rear doors of most apartments opened to face either neighboring apartment buildings or open spaces within the community (Figures 6 and 7). The landscaped grounds, park-like spaces, brick patios, and manicured walkways distinguished the complex from the surrounding streets, while the retention of many mature trees, especially in the central open space, provided shade from Columbia’s searing summer sun as well as a sense of continuity with the historic community that had been supplanted by progress.

### 2.3 Exterior

Influenced by ideas from European Modernism, early public housing projects in the United States were designed using scientifically-based planning principles and were



Figure 7



constructed using high-quality building materials, and Allen Benedict Court was no exception. The 26 housing unit buildings, as well as the Administration building, sit on raised concrete foundations and are constructed of infilled concrete masonry block clad in a five-course common bond brick veneer (Hess 2002). While the stripped down design and townhouse-style layout of the complex adhered to Modern design principles, Urquhart's use of the gabled roof lines and stone-capped chimneys,



Figure 8



Figure 9

as well as a more vernacular form for the Administration building, established a departure from the Modernist architecture that embodied University Terrace.

Aside from the door surrounds and entablatures found on the Administration building, the apartment buildings themselves feature almost no adornment, save for the rectangular cast stone gable vents at the ends of the buildings and the aforementioned chimney caps and canopies (Figure 8). Under each first story window, cut into the concrete foundation, are vents with cast iron grates (Figure 9).

In all four types of townhouse buildings, the three and three and one-half room flats sandwich the ends of the building, with the three room units found upstairs and accessed by a stairwell inside an exterior door and the three and one-half room units located downstairs. The original plans for these flats are near duplicates, with the primary difference being a front and rear entry door for the downstairs, as opposed to the single stairwell entry for the upstairs. The one-half room of the downstairs



Figure 10

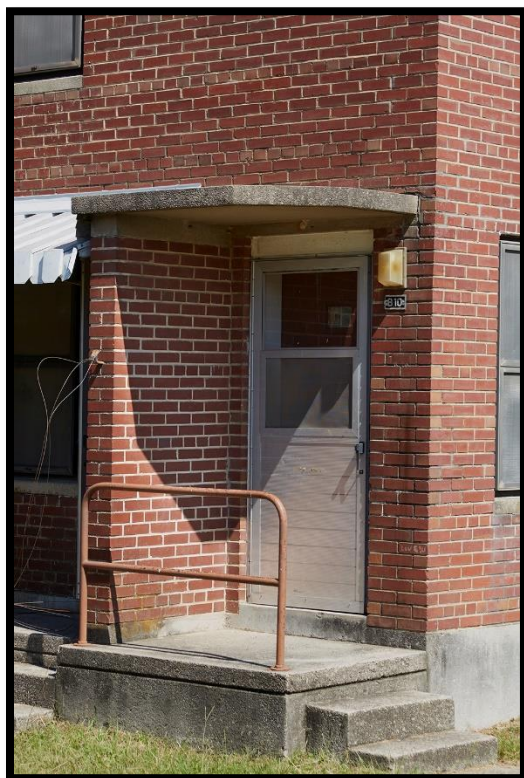


Figure 11

apartments presumably refers to the sitting area outside of the rear door, which was not included with the upstairs flats (Figure 10).

Every apartment other than the second-floor flats has two entrances, the front into the living room and the rear into the kitchen. Front doors feature octagonal canopies above the concrete stoops, while rear doors are topped by the sloped metal canopies. The townhouse-style apartment front doorways are paired, with no windows in between them, and share a larger, semi-circular canopy. The rear of the buildings feature two doors near each corner (Figure 11); the one at the corner itself, beneath a concrete canopy, accesses the stairway to the upstairs three-room flat apartment, while the door just to the inside of the corner is the kitchen door for the downstairs three and one-half room flat. The long elevations feature sets of paired double-hung two-over two windows across the entire length of the front but vary between single double-hung windows and sets of paired double-hung windows

across the rear, while the ends have a second-floor central paired window and two single windows closer to the corners. A utility room is also housed at one end of each building and is accessible by a door.

The one-story buildings are nearly identical and contain 6 apartment units each, with single entryways at either end and two sets of side-by-side entryways in between. The entryways have small stoops in front with either one or two steps up, and all are covered by flat roofs supported by circular metal columns (Figure 12). Rear doorways for these units feature pitched metal canopies above and open onto a small concrete patio.



Figure 12



As with the townhouse apartments, the long elevations feature sets of paired double-hung windows across the entire length of the front but vary between single double-hung windows and sets of paired double-hung windows across the rear, and the ends have two single double-hung windows closer to the corners. Also like the townhouse apartments, a utility room is located at one end of each building and is accessible by a door.



Figure 13

Window and door arrangements on all of the different building types identifies the two groups of symmetrical units within the central part of each building, with each pair having a single-double-double-single set of windows on its upper story. Since none of the doors of symmetrical apartment pairs are paired on the rear elevation, each apartment has a separate canopy, with the exception of the two central apartments, where the canopy is extended between them to cover a utility door. Each residential building also has a door to the electrical distribution center (Figure 13), which is centered in the rear



Figure 14

(kitchen entrance) elevation, and two utility closets, one on each gable end, under the stairs that lead to the upstairs three room flat, all of which are slab steel doors.

The apartment buildings originally had four-panel front and rear exterior doors, each with a three-panel exterior screen door, and the double-hung windows, both paired and single, were a horizontal two-over-two pattern. 600 aluminum window screens were added to the paired double hung windows in 1957, and, notably, a “change in design gave us a sturdier hook and...[resulted in] a saving of over \$1.50 per screen in labor and material” (AMD Report 1957). Over time, the doors were replaced with steel slab doors and aluminum exterior storm doors, and the windows with one-over-one, double-hung aluminum windows with tilting exterior storm windows (Figure 14).

Other exterior features that were either part of the original design or were added over time include gas meters on the central rear elevation and electric meter panels at the ends of the buildings, metal pipe



railings for doorways that are elevated above 2 steps and aluminum vents, and steel clothesline hooks affixed to the brick walls (Figures 15 and 16). The clothesline hooks, designed for running drying lines to the T-shaped clothesline poles centered between the buildings, are another example of the kinds of modern amenities that were standard offer in this and other low-income developments of the day. Terra cotta inlets to underground drainpipes are also present, though the associated downspouts and gutters, present in an image from 1989 (Figure 17), have long since been removed.



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17





## 2.4 Interior

The interiors of the Allen Benedict Court apartments were designed to be modern, stark in terms of ornamentation or decoration. Throughout all 26 apartment buildings, the layouts are nearly identical, save for the number of bedrooms and the fact that the three and three and one-half room flats



Figure 18

inherently have the bedroom on the same level as the other rooms. Rooms in Allen Benedict Court units are all relatively small, simple rectangles, with at least one window included in each room in an effort to maximize the presence of natural light. The original layout connects the front living room with the open kitchen/dining room to the rear, and then a centrally-located doorway accesses a hallway between the bedroom at the front of the unit and the bathroom at the rear (Figure 18). The access stairs for the

upstairs three-room units runs along the exterior wall, with the upper landing located between the living room and kitchen.

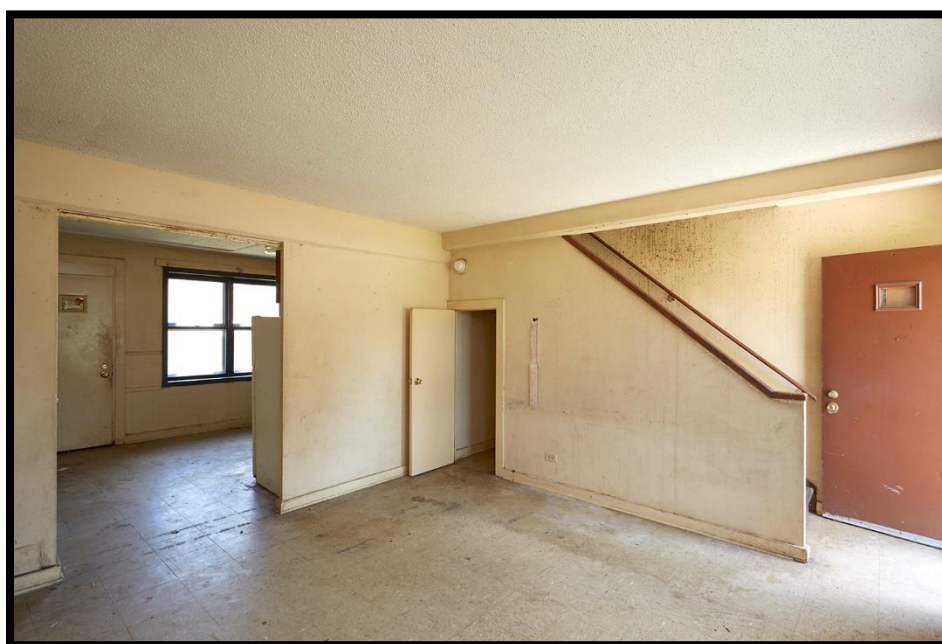


Figure 19

In all of the townhouse-style units, the stairs are located just inside the front entry, the living room and kitchen/dining room are located downstairs, and two small utility closets



can be found, one below the stairs and one in the kitchen; the upstairs houses two or three bedrooms and the bathroom, plus a small linen closet at the top of the stairs (Figures 19 through 21). Each bedroom has a closet that was originally designed to be open, and the bathrooms are small by modern standards and contain a sink, a toilet, and a bathtub (not including a shower head), as well as a mirrored medicine cabinet above the sink (Figures 22 and 23).

According to the 1940 brochure for Allen Benedict Court, each unit came equipped with “an oil burning space heater, a woodtop work table and kitchen cabinet, shades, oil burning hot water unit, a gas range and an electric refrigerator” (CHA Brochure 1940). Over the decades, some appliances were replaced and upgraded according to the times, including the addition of modern space and water heaters as well as washing machines in some kitchens, though gas ranges were maintained throughout (Figure 24). Additional renovations included recovering of floors with linoleum, interior door replacement, and addition of window air conditioning units in some rooms. Aside from the additional bedroom in the five

and one-half room unit, the upstairs layout of the townhome apartments is nearly identical, and, similar to the hallway in the single-floor flats, the upper stair landing opens onto hallway that provides access to the bedrooms and the bathroom (Figure 25) (Additional Images Figures 26 through 34).

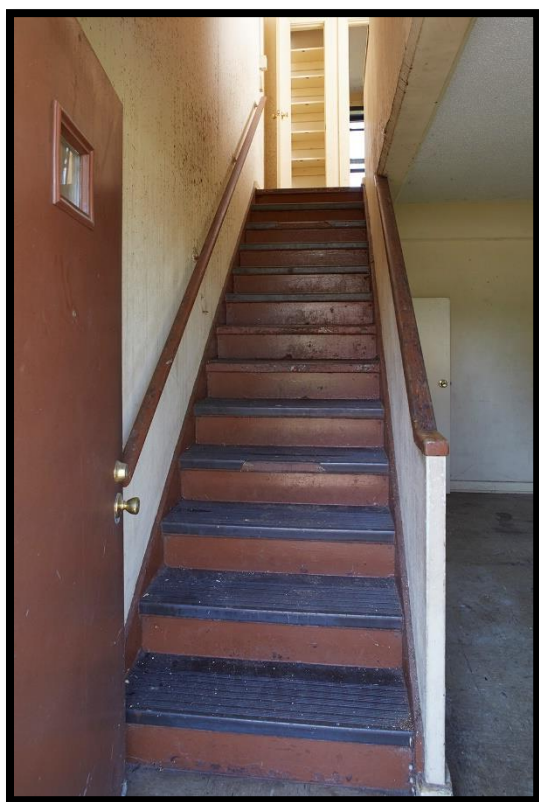


Figure 20



Figure 21

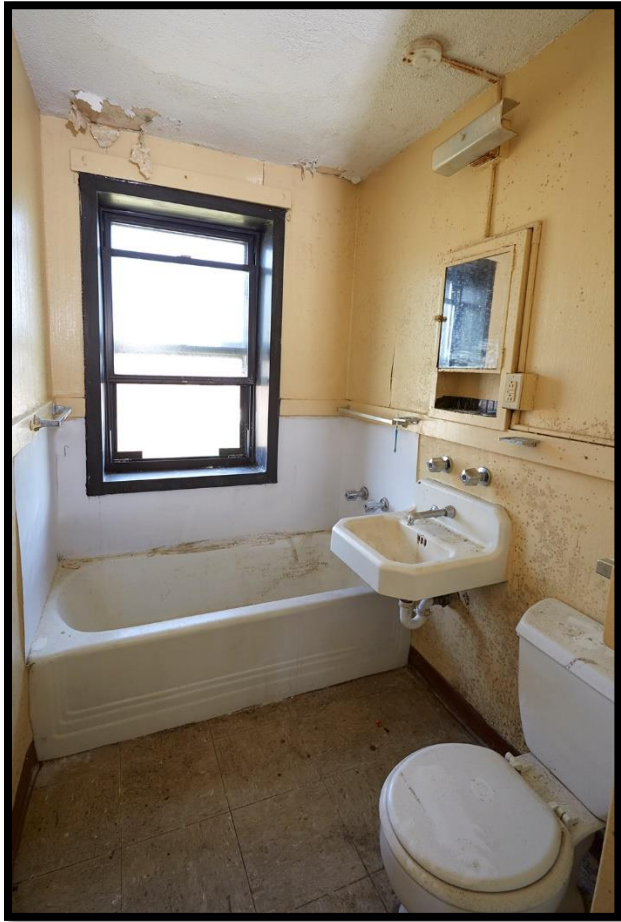


Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



### 3.0 History

An outgrowth of the New Deal-era attempts to stimulate the building industry, passage of the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act on September 1, 1937, established the Low-Income Public Housing program (LIPH) within the Public Works Administration (PWA). As the first federally supported rental housing assistance program of its kind, it was one of the primary factors that enabled the boom in construction of multifamily rental housing properties for low-income families that started in the late 1930s and continued apace through the following decades. The new law established the United States Housing Authority (USHA), precursor to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and provided \$500 million in loans for low-income housing projects nationwide and allowed for financing up to 90% of project costs, at low-interest and on 60-year terms. By the end of 1940, over 500 USHA projects were either underway or had been completed, among them Allen Benedict Court (FDRLibrary.org).

The CHA began accepting bids for the construction of Allen-Benedict Court on November 18, 1939, but debate over the project – and about public housing more generally – had already been ongoing for years by then. Beginning in the early 1930s, one faction of Columbia’s business community saw the need for a higher standard of low-income housing within the city, and the organization they established eventually led to the creation of the CHA by decree of City Council on April 10, 1934 (Columbia City Council Regular Meeting minutes from 10 April 1934).

Funding for Columbia’s first public housing project, University Terrace, was awarded in 1935, and the project was opened to the public in August of 1937; as part of the public opening ceremonies, the CHA’s “Negro advisory committee” participated in apartment tours that allowed them to provide input

towards efforts to secure additional public housing funds for “a project for both races for Columbia” (*The State* 27 August 1937). The success of University Terrace led directly to the CHA’s ability to secure an additional \$800,000 in USHA funding in December of 1937 for the construction of Allen Benedict Court and Gonzales Gardens (*The State* 24 December 1937).

Despite the success of University Terrace and the praises bestowed upon the CHA and its programs by USHA director Nathan Straus, Columbia’s alternative business faction, led by John L. Rice, sought to block construction of additional public housing (Figure 35). Barely a week following the USHA award, Rice convened a “committee of businessmen” that declared it was “apprehensive over the real estate situation in Columbia which some believe is already overbuilt and if the proposed housing project and housing financing go through, it is the opinion of experienced real estate men that such action will not only seriously affect the value of real estate in Columbia but will also greatly impair mortgage



Figure 35



investments held by widows, loan associations, and the like” (*The Columbia Record* 3 January 1938). Appeals spotlighting the vulnerable may have changed somewhat since 1938, but it’s clear that even then they recognized the value of tugging at the heartstrings – don’t let little old ladies be left out in the cold! Alas, these protests were quieted by a May 1938 Circuit Court ruling that was subsequently upheld by the SC Supreme Court in October in favor of the state’s “full participation in the \$800,000,000 slum-clearance and low-rent rehousing program” (*The State* 30 October 1938).



Figure 36

Commensurate with the November 1939 bid invite, CHA director Arthur Wellwood announced that the boundaries for Allen Benedict Court would encompass the area inside Harden, Oak, Calhoun (Read), and Laurel Streets. Following a month-long search that considered 7 bids total, a December 20 headline in *The State* newspaper announced “Kahn, Boyle Low Bidders New Housing”, confirming that M.B Kahn Construction of Columbia, in conjunction with Boyle Road and Bridge Company of Sumter, had submitted the low bid of \$668,700 and were awarded the project contract (*The State* 20 December 1939) (Figure 36). The design included 244 apartment units, 182 of which were leased before the official move-in date of November 15, 1940, and, while the combined rent and utilities were actually slightly less than those advertised for Gonzales Gardens, Allen Benedict Court provided more options on apartment size than its sister project. Prior to the November opening, M.A. Entzminger, longtime CHA employee and later chairman of the Richland County Negro War Bond Committee, was appointed the Resident Manager of Allen Benedict Court by the CHA's board of directors<sup>3</sup> (*The State* 19 September 1943).

Of note regarding the financial structure put in place by the Wagner Act is that it reorganized the relationship between the federal housing authority and its local partners. Funding for University Terrace had been provided and overseen directly by the federal government, but the Wagner Act instead gave much greater control of design, construction, and operation of the new housing developments directly to the local housing authorities (Hess 2002). While this may have been seen as reducing red tape and empowering localities to make decisions based on regional rather than on national interests, it also sanctioned the segregation policies of the time. While University Terrace had indeed segregated races within the project boundaries, it had still been a step forward in terms of housing integration.

Yet, just a few years later, the local control associated with the phase two projects allowed for fully segregated plans for Gonzales Gardens and Allen Benedict Court from the start, a plan that was lauded by *The News and Courier* of Charleston which argued that, through the Wagner Act policies, “the federal government, the Roosevelt government [had] set up jimcrowism as a federal policy” (*The State* 25

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.columbiahousingcsc.org/history>, accessed 2/15/2021





October 1941). Moreover, alterations to fit new time and budgetary constraints resulted in buildings of slightly lesser quality than the earlier project. However, the end goal remained the same: better living through better planning. For public housing officials, planned site location, inclusion of modern amenities, creation of community spaces, and access to social programs were all central to the plan for making life better for low-income citizens.

### 3.1 Location

CHA's site selection process for Allen Benedict Court used similar criteria for that of University Terrace. A survey conducted in 1934 had found that of the roughly 12,000 residences inside the Columbia city limits, almost 60% did not have electricity, nearly 50% lacked a tub or a shower, almost 40% had no indoor toilet, and a quarter were without running water (NAHO 1934). The area that was cleared for University Terrace arguably fit the bill for these averages, and, even as this first public housing project had resulted in the demolition of what the CHA considered a blighted area, the Wagner Act codified slum clearance as a project requirement.

While the area selected for Allen Benedict Court was not considered nearly the slum that University Terrace had replaced, it was still deemed a depressed area where "many of the buildings were eyesores", and, although it was located further from the central city core than its predecessor, its



Figure 37



Figure 38

proximity to both Allen University and Benedict College afforded an obvious association with the institutions (*The State* 3 August 1939) (Figures 37 through 39). Public reaction to the plan was generally well received, among both black and white community leaders, and, although several lawsuits were filed by property owners against the CHA for lack of compensation, site control was secured in a relatively short amount of time (*The State* 3 and 17 August 1939).



Figure 39

Despite its placement at what was then considered the edge of town, this site selection was considered by many not as an effort to exclude but, rather, to improve and to expand. Not only was slum removal seen as clearing away undesirable conditions, but the planned developments that replaced them were also considered a bulwark against potential future slums. Indeed, a project approval issued by Columbia City Council on October 10, 1938 hoped that “a housing project will promote the opening and paving of Harden Street to Colonial Hts...and connect up the negro sections and promote the paving of Calhoun Street from Two Notch up to Marion Street...and give North Main Street a good territory to draw trade from” (“Housing project for Colored people” memo 10 October 1938).

Still, the aforementioned “jimcrowism” built into the phase two developments cannot be avoided; the signed document accompanying this project approval is labeled “Colored”, in contrast to a separate approval document from that same day labeled “Whites”, and the final sentence reads: “Segregate negroes and prevent clashes in going to and from Parks, etc., and add to their content and happiness.” Again in contrast, the site selection for the “Whites” development made no reference to containing or partitioning its residents from any other portion of the population and, instead, referenced proximity to Providence Hospital and the inclusion of a Park and a widened Taylor Street as requirements, as opposed to hoped-for improvements (“Housing project for white people” memo 10 October 1938).

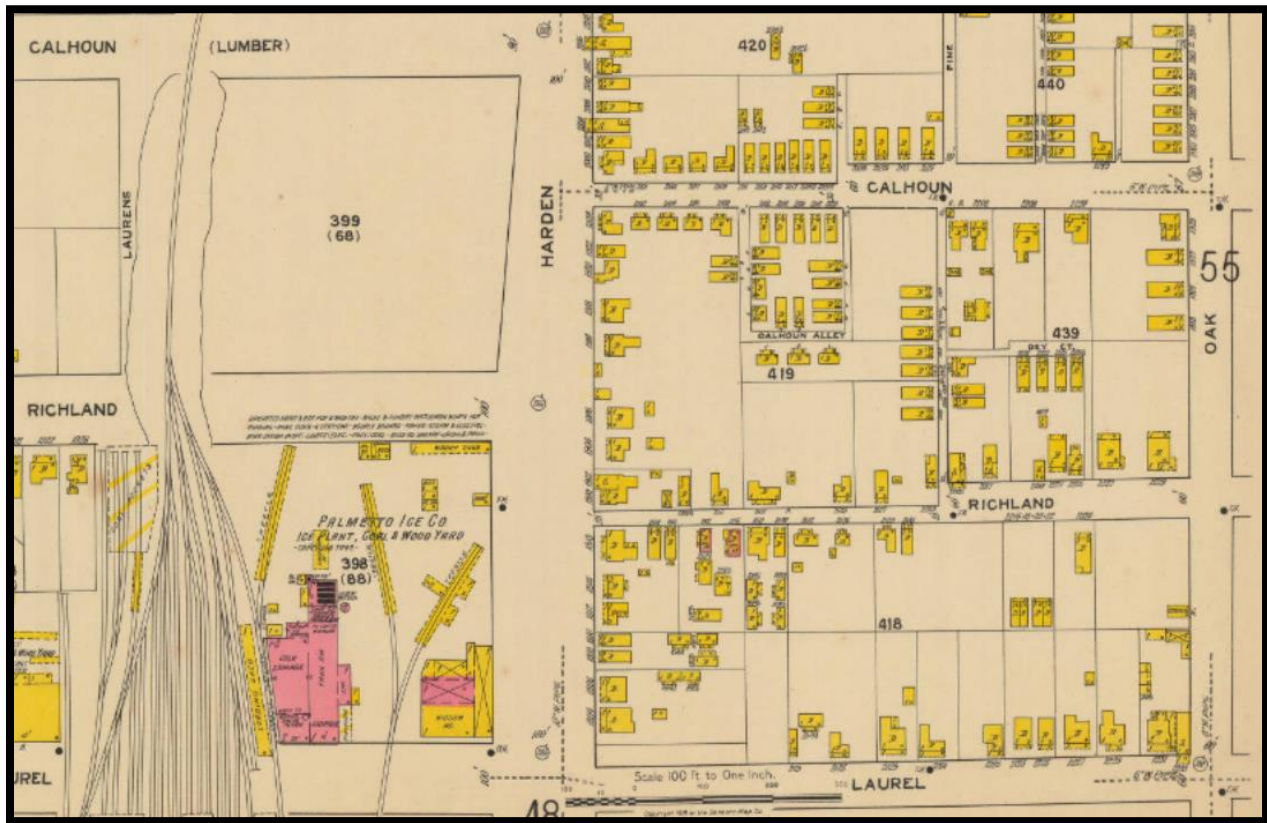


Figure 40

While housing reformers believed in locating projects inside or near the city core, granting access to transportation and employment opportunities, the project layouts created “modern village” communities, with few interior streets and a focus on “large-scale, low-coverage and low-density groups of apartments or rowhouses ranging from two to four stories sited on superblocks in razed slum areas in central urban locations” (Hess 2002).

The area where Allen Benedict Court was located had loosely comprised three blocks, with Richland Street bisecting east to west from Oak to Harden Streets and Pine Street Alley running north to south between Calhoun and Richland streets. A small U-shaped alleyway, Calhoun Alley, was located between Harden Street and Pine Street Alley on Calhoun Street, while another smaller side street, Dey Court, ran north from Richland Street turning 90 degrees west to terminate into Pine Street Alley. Many of the houses that lined these streets and alleyways were shotgun houses and all were of modest construction; as represented on the 1919 Sanborn Map, all but two were of frame construction and built entirely of wood, and the other two – 2112 and 2116 Richland Street – were frame with brick veneer (Figure 40).

The property acquisition records for the development area indicates 39 tax parcels, and the 1919 map shows 112 existing buildings with street numbers, 17 of which were either duplexes or “1/2” addresses – as in 2118 ½ Richland Street – that were usually located at the rear of the lot and separate from the



primary structure. There were 22 additional structures that included garages (auto), barns, outhouses, sheds, and at least one unnumbered larger structure that may have been a former or unpermitted residence. The records indicate a handful of owners that were holding or trust companies, as well as one multiple property owner, Effie B. Germany, but the majority appear to have been owner occupied (CHA Property-Acquisition Archives 1939-40).

The “Architect’s Drawing” published in newspaper articles and marketing brochures shows the rectilinear rowhouse building layout, with ample open space between buildings and in the open space park in the center of the block and around the Administration Building. The single access street is shown connecting Laurel Street to the Administration Building, and mature trees that existed before the development are integrated into the park areas and even between buildings in a few instances. Adjacent to the south is Benedict College Campus, while the other surrounding blocks show renderings of the existing housing stock, similar to the buildings that would be demolished (Figure 41).

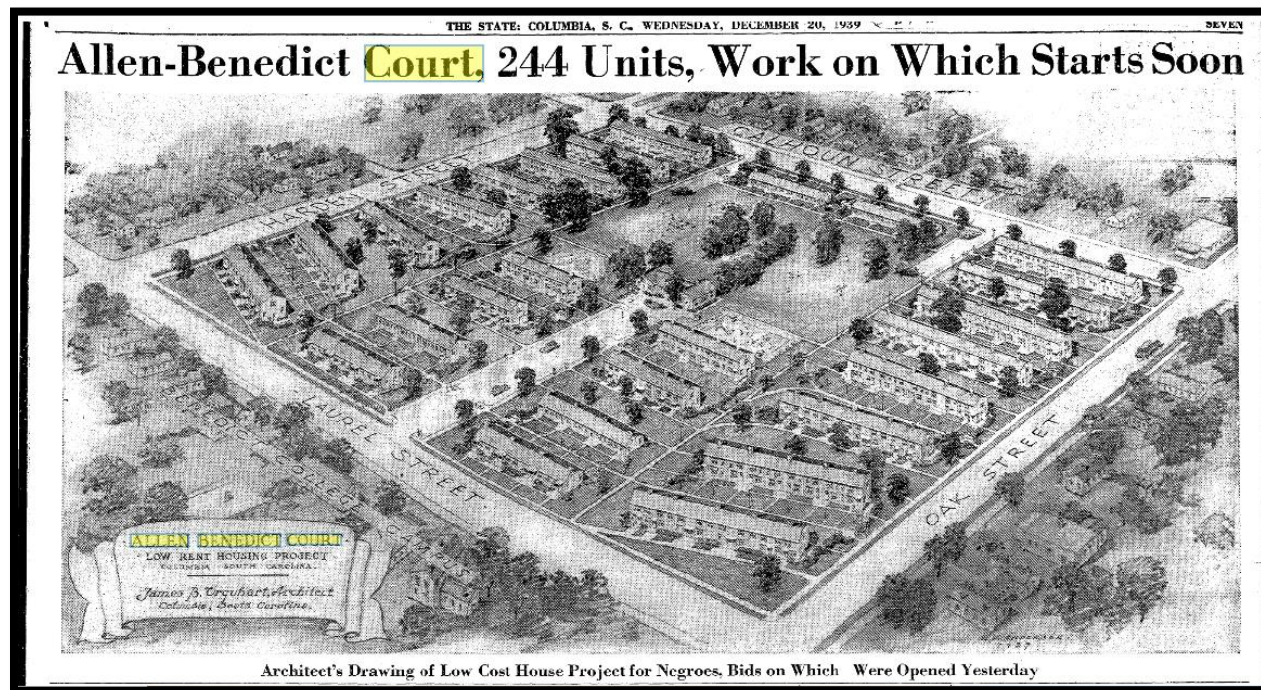


Figure 41

### 3.2 Construction

The timeline for Allen Benedict Court and Gonzales Gardens – from granting of funds, to site selection and planning, and finally to construction and occupation – was rapid, taking place all in under 4 years. As discussed in the History section (3.0), funds were allocated in December 1937, and protests to South Carolina’s participation in the LIPH program were settled in court less than a year later, paving the way for the City Council project approvals in October 1938, and, in March 1939, a contract was signed sending nearly \$2.1 million to Columbia for the projects (*The State* 17 March 1939).



Property acquisitions were settled throughout the summer and fall of 1939, and the aforementioned bid invite was issued in November with the contract awarded the following month, and construction began on February 11, 1940 (*The State* 20 December 1939). Not only did these projects create much-needed housing for low-income residents, but they also created jobs. USHA statistics from February 1940 “estimated amount to be spent for direct wages at the site of...Allen-Benedict Court \$241,000. The estimated amount to be spent on construction materials...for Allen-Benedict Court \$380,000...At Allen-Benedict Court a total of 670 men will be employed with 250 to receive employment off the site in making materials” (*The State* 16 February 1940).

As with other aspects of the project, the construction moved at a fast pace, driven by regulations in the Wagner Act that incentivized speed. This sometimes amounted to unfavorable and unsanitary working conditions, resulting in at least one carpenter strike at the Gonzales Gardens project in March 1940. Although no workers were reported to have gone on strike at Allen Benedict Court, the strike resolution included agreements by the contractors to use local union workers, but the fast pace did not let up, as the November move-in date had to be met (*The State* 15 March 1940).

Despite the negative perception of “project housing” in the present day, as well as some opposition from the business community at the time, Allen Benedict Court and Gonzales Gardens were widely considered to benefit to the city, not least because of the public and transportation improvements associated with them. Moreover, throughout the construction process, the projects were publicized through a multitude of newspaper articles and through a monthly Housing Authority newsletter, as well as through public tours and speeches given by CHA chairman W. S. Hendley and supervising manager of the three projects William R. Geddings at association and club meetings (Multiple speech transcripts from CHA Archives). And, in an article that ran the day before the dedication ceremony, the author noted that the event “has been planned by the Negroes...[and] should be an event of note in the Negro’s continued upward progress, and in continued goodwill co-operation between the races in Columbia” (*The State* 25 October 1940).

As to the construction methods and materials, those were summarily described in the Exterior section (2.3), but the primary materials were concrete and brick. Poured foundations, filled concrete block framing, and brick veneer, and the standard material layouts and improvements described in the Interiors section (2.4). The project was completed in approximately nine months, with the dedication ceremonies held on October 26, 1940 and the first residents welcomed on November 15 (CHA website) (Figure 42).

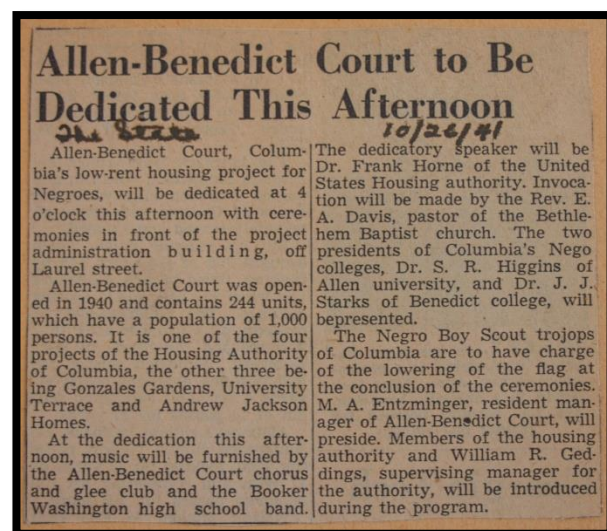


Figure 42



### 3.3 Community

As has been made perfectly clear by now, enhancing and promoting good moral values was a key tenet of housing reform in this era, and, as such, keen attention was paid to tenant selection. While the smaller-sized flats were less suitable for large families, the preference was, indeed, to have families as tenants, as borne out by the 1940 brochure. Reference to preschool amenities and parks for children are coupled with a call for “Families with incomes between \$4 and \$20 weekly will be eligible, with rentals varying according to persons in the family and the size of home rented.” Alongside Gonzales Gardens, Allen Benedict Court was one of the first public housing developments to scale rents according to income bracket. Each apartment type had three different rent rates based on these brackets that were as follows: three room units would rent for \$7.65, \$11.10, or \$14.00 per month; three and one-half room units would rent for \$8.65, \$11.60, or \$14.50 per month; four and one-half room units would rent for \$9.90, \$12.85, or \$15.75 per month; and five and one-half room units would rent for \$10.90, \$13.85, or \$16.75 per month (*The Palmetto Leader* 17 August 1940). Rents included utilities (water, gas, and electricity), and occupancy rates were also listed, ranging from “2 to 3 Persons” in the smallest units up to “4 to 7 Persons” in the largest (CHA Brochure 1940) (Figure 43).

Room Configuration	\$ 7.65	\$11.10	\$14.00	Occupancy Limits
3 Room				2 to 3 Persons
3½ Room	8.65	11.60	14.50	2 to 3 Persons
4½ Room	9.90	12.85	15.75	3 to 5 Persons
5½ Room	10.90	13.85	16.75	4 to 7 Persons

Children under two years of age not counted in limits.

**YOU SHOULD APPLY FOR THESE HOMES**

**If Your Family Income Is Low**  
Families with incomes between \$4 and \$20 weekly will be eligible, rentals varying according to persons in the family and the size home rented.

**If Your Dwelling Is Substandard**  
If your present home is in need of major repairs, lacking in adequate heating, cooking, lighting and toilet facilities, or if you are overcrowded, full information should be given when application is made for quarters. Under the rules governing selection of tenants this information is important.

Figure 43

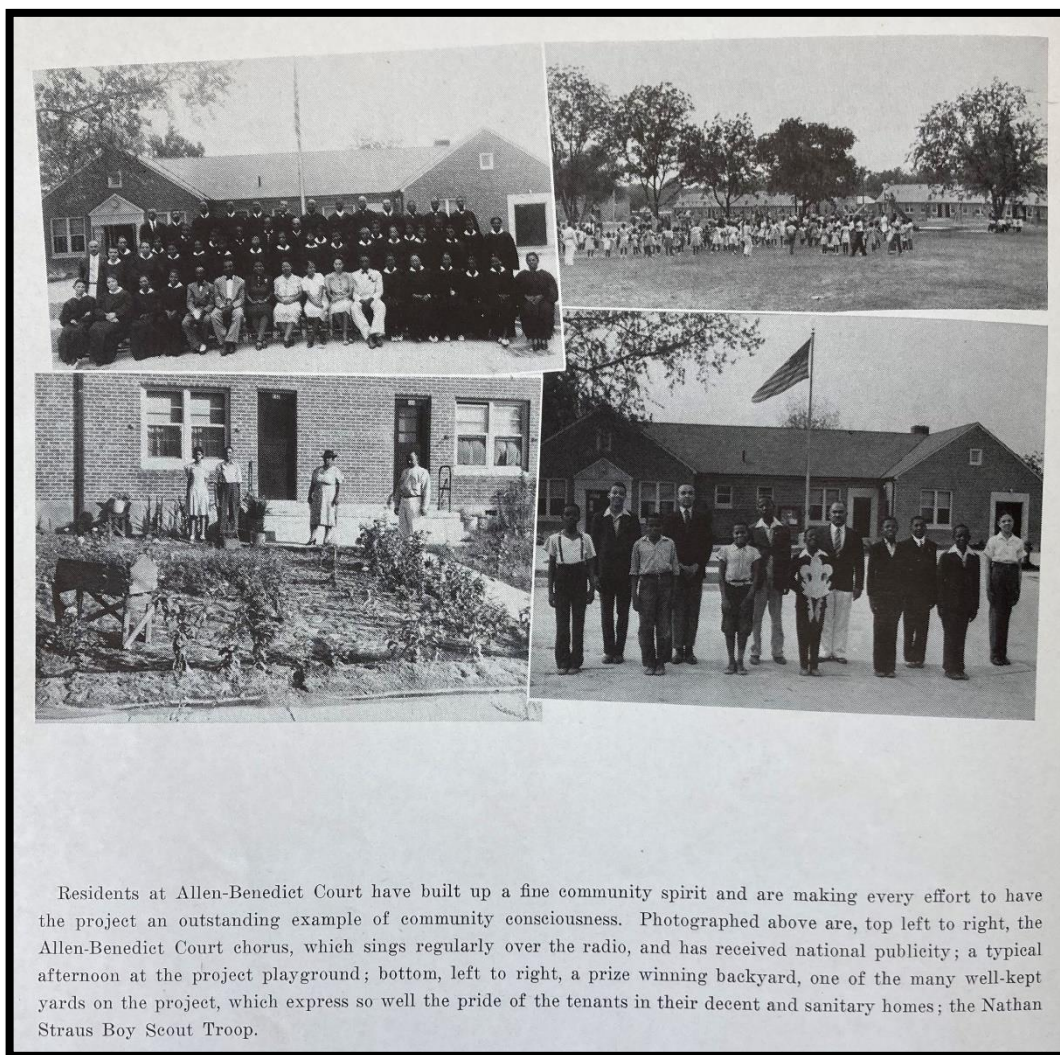
In addition to recruiting families, the CHA used the application process to screen potential tenants, in an effort to amass a resident population of “unobjectionable character.” Not only was public housing meant to improve conditions of the built environment, but its advocates also intended it to lift up society itself. Therefore, applicants considered to be struggling but still trying to succeed, as opposed to simply lacking in morals and ambition, were given preference. Rent, after all, was tiered according to income, which suggests preferred tenants would be of the working class, albeit at the lower income end of it.

Key to promoting good moral values through public housing was building community life. As discussed, the rowhouse-plus-open space design of the development itself encouraged cohesive community, but the CHA also sought to further this goal by sponsoring recreational activities, club and associations, and public events. Of course, the open spaces, paved spray pool, and playground equipment allowed for DIY



recreation, but there was also a baseball field originally located to the east of the Administration Building, where teams of boys from Allen Benedict Court would compete against other teams from nearby neighborhoods. And, of course, the preschool located onsite provided both a community and an educational opportunity for the resident children.

In terms of club associations, the two most prominent in the historical record are the Allen Benedict Court chorus and the Nathan Straus Boy Scout Troop. Pictures of both are featured in the program that was distributed at the dedication of Gonzales Gardens (Figure 44), and the chorus performed regularly on the radio, at Allen Benedict Court itself, and at various locations and functions around town throughout the year. One newspaper snippet from February 1942 previews a concert to be held at the Sidney Park A.M.E. church, while an image of the chorus from August of that year announces an upcoming series of concerts taking place at the Carver Theater on Harden Street, across from Allen University (*The Columbia Record* 12 February 1942) (*The State* 30 August 1942) (Figure 45).



Residents at Allen-Benedict Court have built up a fine community spirit and are making every effort to have the project an outstanding example of community consciousness. Photographed above are, top left to right, the Allen-Benedict Court chorus, which sings regularly over the radio, and has received national publicity; a typical afternoon at the project playground; bottom, left to right, a prize winning backyard, one of the many well-kept yards on the project, which express so well the pride of the tenants in their decent and sanitary homes; the Nathan Straus Boy Scout Troop.

Figure 44



Figure 45

Another association, of course, includes the church. Little mention is made in relation to churches in the historic periodical record, save for as the locations of some of the chorus performances, but, based on the church histories found on several church websites, it's safe to assume that many of the nearby churches served the residents of Allen Benedict Court for generations. Some of these include Trinity Baptist Church, 2521 Richland Street, which helped organize one of the first basketball leagues in the neighborhood (chartered September 21, 1921 and established in its current location in 1937); Second Nazareth Baptist Church, 2300 Elmwood Avenue, which hosted “meetings of the local branch of the NAACP...as well as several statewide strategy meetings” (founded in 1903 and established at its present location in October 1906); The Progressive Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc., 2222 Barhamville Road (founded in 1944 by the late Bishop Joseph D. Williams, Sr. and established at its current location in 1952); and the Emmanuel AME Church at 2130 Barhamville Road, among others.<sup>4</sup>

And then public events, while not as numerous as those held at Gonzales Gardens, were also an important part of Allen Benedict Court's community history. Examples of internal events include the “closing exercises” (or graduation ceremony) for preschool students and the “prize winning backyard” competition between residents. But the complex also hosted events that were open to the public, such as a circus show in August 1944 that drew over 500 attendees and in which, “over 100 children from Old Howard, St. Anna's and Allen-Benedict Court took part in the ten-act show” (*The State* 27 August 1944). In addition, Allen Benedict Court and other public housing complexes sometimes played host to health clinics, such as the mobile “Chest X-ray Unit”, which aimed to “Target TB, Heart Disease, and Lung Tumor” (Figure 46). Indeed, public housing advocates regularly argued for its role in promoting public health, not only to the resident community, but to the community at large; according to USHA

<sup>4</sup> History references from [Google Maps](#) website links to church websites' History pages; web addresses listed in Section 4.0, accessed on 2/19/2021.





Administrator Nathan Straus, "An excessive tuberculosis death rate is only one of the prices we have to pay for our slums" (*The State* 22 June 1941).

**TARGET**  
**TB**  
**HEART DISEASE**  
**LUNG TUMORS**

## GET A FREE CHEST X-RAY

Takes Only One Minute - No Undressing  
 AGE: WHITE—20 Years and Over  
 NEGRO—15 Years and Over

Place—Location—Date	Time	
	A.M.	P.M.
CEDAR TERRACE SHOPPING CENTER (Across from the Veterans Hospital) Tuesday—June 23		3:00-7:00
EASTOVER (Rutland's Grocery) Wednesday—June 24		3:00-7:00
FARMER'S MARKET (Bluff Road) Thursday—June 25	10:00-1:00	2:00-4:00
Friday—June 26	10:00-1:00	2:00-4:00
Monday—June 29	10:00-1:00	2:00-4:00
HARDEN STREET FIRE STATION (1915 Harden St.) Tuesday—June 30		2:00-7:00
Wednesday—July 1		2:00-7:00
FOREST HILLS NURSING HOME (Near Providence Hospital) Thursday—July 2		4:00-7:00
LIBERTY HILL (Lyon St. School) Monday—July 6		3:00-7:00
CAMP FORNANCE (Warren's Grocery—Lucius Road) Tuesday—July 7		3:00-7:00
HARTFORD NURSING HOME (Carver Heights) Thursday—July 9		3:00-7:00
BLYTHEWOOD (J. R. Wilson's Store) Friday—July 10		3:00-7:00
LOWMAN HOME (White Rock) Monday—July 13	10:30-12:30	2:00-4:00

*Protect Yourself and Those Close to You - Have a Chest X-Ray*

Sponsored By  
 THE SOUTH CAROLINA  
 STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
 RICHLAND COUNTY HEALTH  
 DEPARTMENT  
 CENTRAL TUBERCULOSIS AND  
 HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
 "Christmas Seals  
 Fight TB"

*Above June 26, 1964 - Allen Benedict Court Jagers Terrace, S.C.  
 " June 30, 1964 - Hendley Homes*

Figure 46

In the post-war years, and frankly for most of the rest of the twentieth century, there exists very little of this kind of documentation of Allen Benedict Court in the CHA archives or in searchable print sources, other than mentions in classifieds, a pair of articles about a resident child that was struck and killed by a motorist, and a few mentions of revenue collected from the USHA on CHA properties in city budget reports (*The State* 18 January 1947) (*The Columbia Record* 17 January 1947) (*The State* 23 May 1955) (Figures 47 and 48).

Rather, attention through the 1950s, 60s, and 70s focused on whatever the next project

in the pipeline was, and there were many. The need for more military housing quickly established the Andrew Jackson Homes community in July 1941 at Fort Jackson; consisting of 350 units for soldiers and civilian workers, management of this facility was returned to the US Army in 1947. Beginning in 1952, a series of developments followed over the next decades: Hendley Homes (1952), Saxon Homes (1953), Jagers Terrace (1958), Oak Read Apartments (1967), Latimer Manor (1970), and Marion Street High-Rise (1975). In addition, the CHA ratified an agreement in March 1976 adopting the new Section 8 housing program that would, ultimately, result in reinforcing the concept of scattered site housing and



Figure 47

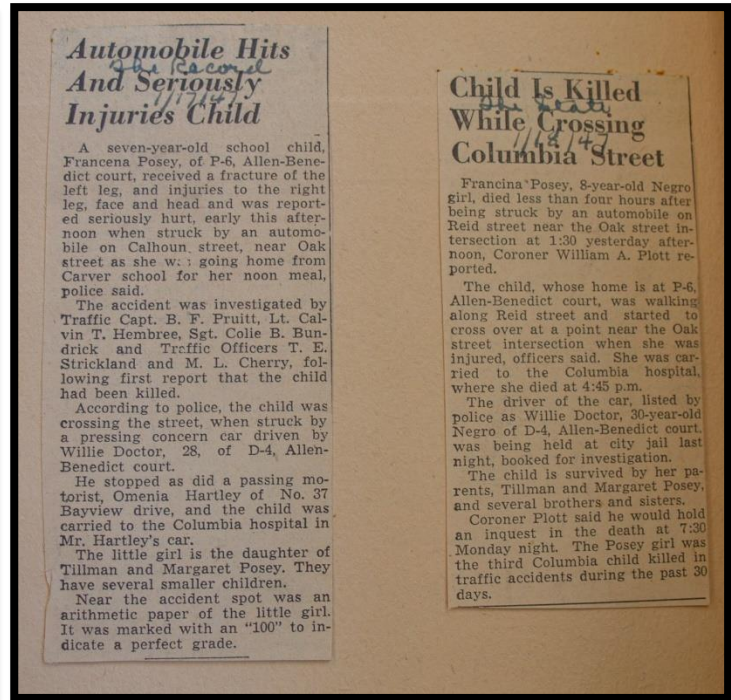


Figure 48

ending the concept of block building housing project design that had dominated theretofore (CHA website).

However, the prosperity that followed World War II eventually led to a change in public perceptions of public housing, resulting in stigmatization of all public housing complexes, which came to be known colloquially as “the projects” (Hess 2002). Moreover, the loss of urban population and the growth of suburbia resulted in less connected community within public housing, and, in turn, the images that began to define community life and the associated media coverage took a very negative turn.

### 3.4 Allen Benedict Court into the Twenty-First Century

By the time the CHA had adopted Section 8 housing in 1976, public sentiment towards large-scale public housing complexes had already soured. Opponents argued that the original vision of providing a stepping-stone to low-income residents so that they might move up the social ladder had given way to a cycle of poverty in which generations of the same family had been born and then died as residents of public housing (*The Columbia Record* 8 November 1976). Articles throughout the 1960s and 70s that detail break-ins and thefts gave way to articles in the 1980s and 90s describing drug deals and murders, buoyed by the occasional captioned image of children on the spray pad or on a playground (*The State* 22 September 1995). To be fair, articles about the resident teens, the CHA Security Cadets, that banded together to combat crime also ran during this time period, but the positive aspect of that coverage was



precedented on the overall negative perceptions and outcomes surrounding public housing (*The State* 5 July 1989) (Figures 49 and 50).

Nevertheless, positive coverage did exist. For example, there are several articles about former residents of Allen Benedict Court being added to the CHA Wall of Fame, which “honors former public housing residents who have made significant contributions to the community and who can be role models for youths now living in these facilities” (*The State* 26 May 1988 and 7 April 1993) (*SC Black Media Group* 1995). And a review of the 2001 CHA Family Fun Festival, hosted at Allen Benedict Court and featuring fun, food, a free giveaways of school supplies and other items (*Black News* 16-22 August 2001). And advocates for public housing still occasionally found voice, such as in a letter to the editor from the Housing Authority of Charleston’s Executive Director, Donald J. Cameron, arguing against conservative

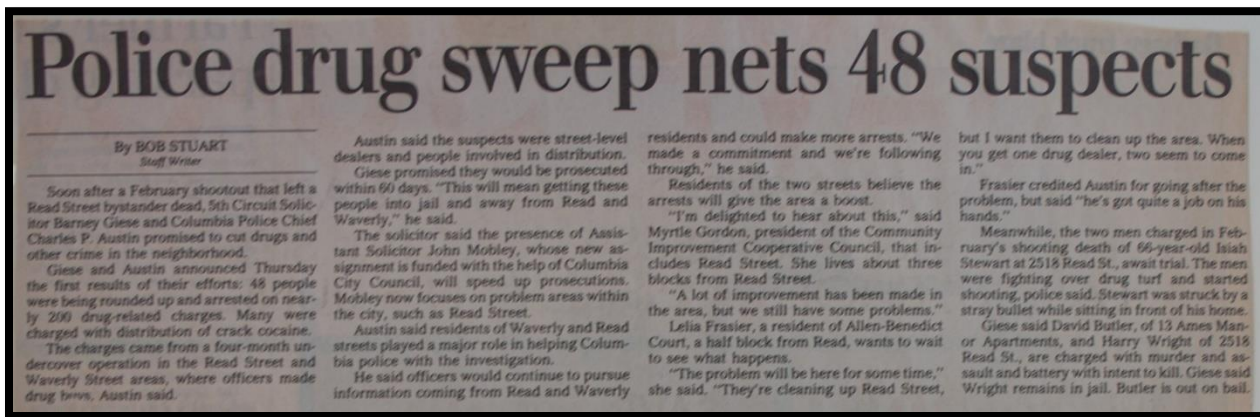


Figure 49

calls to abandon public housing and in favor of finding ways to fix it (*Wall Street Journal* “Spring” 1996)

However, by 2000, the focus of news coverage on Allen Benedict Court had shifted towards demolition and redevelopment of the site, along the lines of what was currently taking place at Hendley Homes and at Saxon Homes (*The State* 19



Figure 50



February 2000). Still, fifteen years later, due to scarce federal funding for HUD planning grants, plans for both Allen Benedict Court and Gonzales Gardens remained stalled, though discussions with local developer The Mungo Co., long-time Columbia area developer who had also been involved with development of Rosewood Hills on the former Hendley Homes site, hinted at the possibility that something might yet happen at one or both sites (*The State* 3 August 2014).

In October 2017, the wrecking ball finally came down on Gonzales Gardens, and, nearly three years later, plans were unveiled for a “development called The Oaks at St. Anna’s Park...The \$58.3 million dollar project will create 285 units...A third of [which] will be designated as senior housing. The rest will be two- and three-bedroom townhouse style apartments meant for families” (*Freetimes* 4 October 2017) (*The State* 23 June 2020). Securing funding for this project, however, was far more complicated than just being given a pot of money by the USHA. No longer does HUD provide funding for affordable housing, nor does CHA have the funds for new development, so the fact that “funding will come from a variety of sources including multi-family housing revenue bonds issued by the housing authority, federal and state low-income housing tax credits and a grant from the S.C. Department of Mental Health” speaks to the byzantine nature of successfully building new low-income housing in the twenty-first century (*The State* 23 June 2020).

Meanwhile, as Allen Benedict Court awaited its fate, an unexpected turn of events early in 2019 resulted in the complete abandonment and foreclosure of the complex as a residence. On January 17, 2019, “Benedict College police arrived at Building J, apartment J-1, in Allen Benedict Court to do a welfare check on Derrick Caldwell Roper, who had not shown up to work for several days.” The 30-year old Roper was soon found unresponsive and declared dead at the scene by EMS, and another resident, 61-year-old Calvin Witherspoon Jr., was also later found deceased due to carbon monoxide poisoning (*The State* 30 January 2019).

A Columbia Police Department report found that cyanide, carbon monoxide, and other toxic gases had been leaking into the apartments for some period of time before being discovered, but, while the report identified numerous code violations throughout the complex, it was determined that there was no probable cause to bring criminal charges (*Freetimes* 27 November 2019). Rather, this calamity was a result of negligence and deferred maintenance, made even more tragic by the fact that the natural gas pipes were replaced in 1978 at Gonzales Garden, Hendley Homes, Saxon Homes and Jagers Terrace. Allen Benedict Court – built the same year as the one and nearly 15-20 years before the others – was not included on that list, though the plans did consider options for “creative ways to change the facades of the buildings” there and at the other developments (*The Columbia Record* 24 July 1978 and 18 August 1978) (*The State* 19 August 1978). Clearly, an opportunity was missed in that instance, resulting in a much different ending to the story than had been intended.

In a matter of days, Allen Benedict Court had evacuated its more than 400 residents and fenced off the area, and, as of the writing of this report, the property remains closed to the public, awaiting the



demolition of its current buildings and a plan for what might come next (Additional Images Figures 51 through 65).

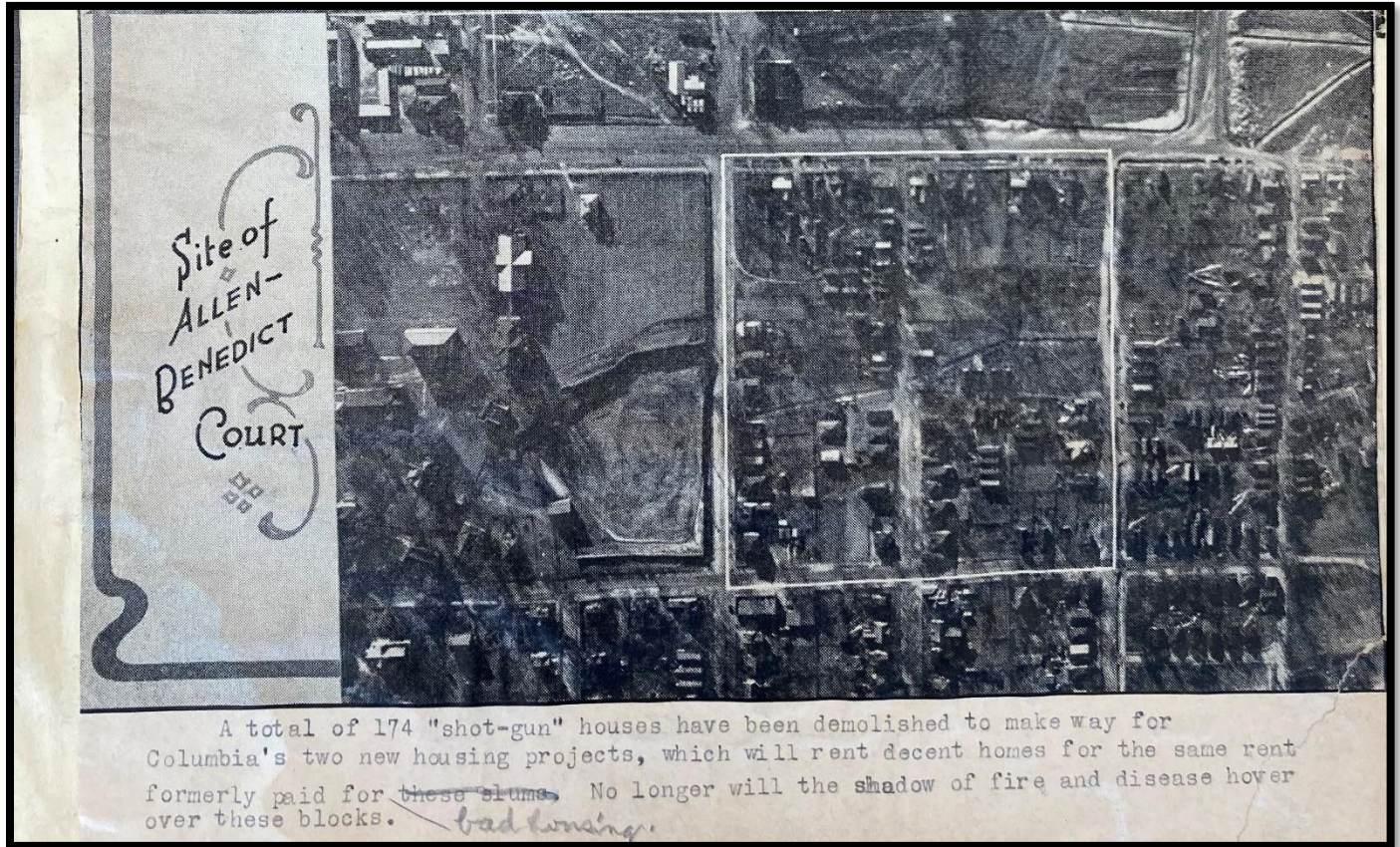


Figure 51

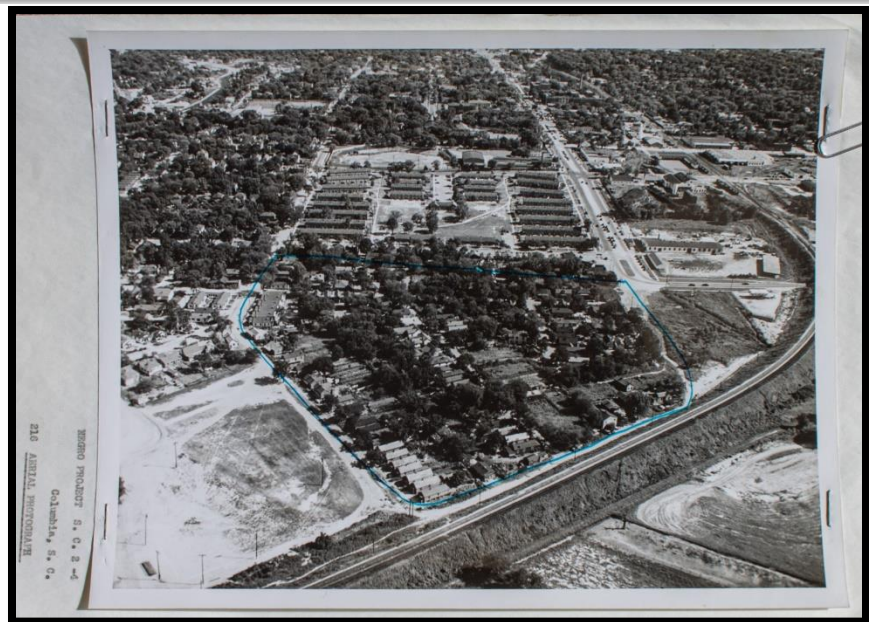


Figure 52



<p>FOUND—ONE LARGE PUCK THE owner call 2-7830.</p> <p>LOST—"B" GASOLINE COUPON BOOK. Return to A. O. Martin, Phone 288.</p> <p>LOST—FOUR KEYS ON STEEL RING ON which is stenciled the name of some bank in Durham. X. C. Howard. Write to Box "P.H." care The State.</p> <p>LOST—BROWN BILLFOLD CONTAIN- ing money, "A" and "C" gas sheets and other valuables. Liberal reward. W. F. Ingram, 300 Walker Street.</p> <p>LOST—BATION BOOKS, MINNIE FEL- der Hays and James Felder, Nos. 3 and 4, C-6 Allen Benedict Court.</p> <p>LOST — ON NEWBERRY - COLUMBIA highway, about 20 miles from Columbia, near Mr. Mackley's store or between there and Newberry, a bunch of auto keys in auto lock. Was lost Tuesday eve., March 7. Re- ward if returned to owner. Rev. Samuel Nance, Box 98, Helena, S. C.</p> <p><b>Travel Notices</b> 3</p> <p>DESIRE TRANSPORTATION TO JACK- sonville, or vicinity, around March 14. Share expenses. References exchanged. Ph. 2-2880.</p>	<p>Transportation paid by employer. Statement of Availability required.</p> <p>Apply at <b>United States Employment Service Of The War Manpower Commission</b> 1625 Sumter Street Columbia, S. C.</p>	<p>WANTED—NEAT CO for part time work for work. 2224 Heyward St.</p> <p>WANTED—COLORED girl house work. No pay. 2928 Monroe St.</p> <p>WANTED—RELIABLE an for general house hours. Phone 6446.</p> <p>COLORED GIRL WITH hours 9 to 3, \$7 week 1217 Princeton St.</p> <p>COLORED GIRL TO child. Good hours. 1834 1/2 Main Street.</p> <p>WANTED—TWO BUST washers. Apply Lan- ter Street.</p> <p>WANTED—COLORED girl house work and 1215 Main Street.</p> <p>NEAT, DEPENDABLE with cooking, house- ment and nursing of on 210 South Harden.</p> <p><b>Employment Wa</b></p>
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Figure 53

**Allen-Benedict Chorus  
To Sing Monday Night**  
*Oh, R. ... 2/12/42*

The Allen-Benedict Court chorus will give a special program of Negro spirituals at the Sidney Park M. E. church in the 1100 block of Blanding street Monday night. The program will begin at 8:15 o'clock. A section of seats will be reserved for white persons.

Figure 54

*The Record*  
**FURLOUGH IN LONDON** *8/4/45*  
Private First Class Willie L. Hicks, of Apartment K 10, Allen-Benedict Court, Columbia, has arrived in London from the continent to spend a seven day furlough in the United Kingdom. Private First Class Hicks, who fought with the 3194 Quartermaster Company, expects to spend his allotted time visiting London. His wife, Lucille Hicks, resides in Columbia.

Figure 55

**Benedict Court  
Scene of Circus** *The State 8/27/44*

At the first city-wide circus held at Allen-Benedict court playground last week there was an attendance of around 500.

Over 100 children from Old Howard, St. Anna's and Allen-Benedict playgrounds took part in the ten-act show.

Figure 56



Figure 57



Figure 58

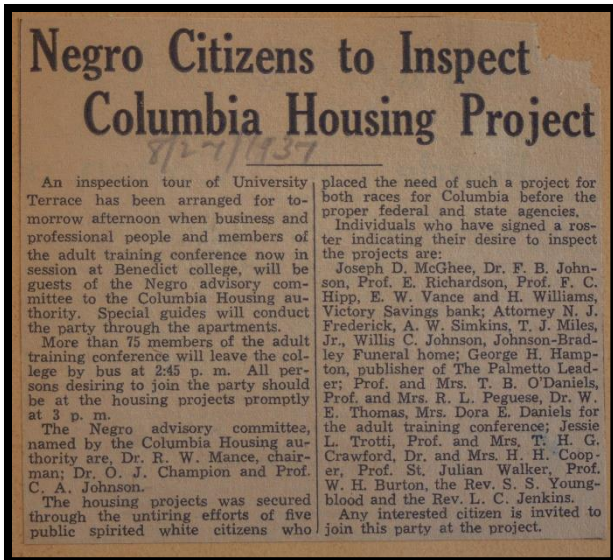


Figure 59

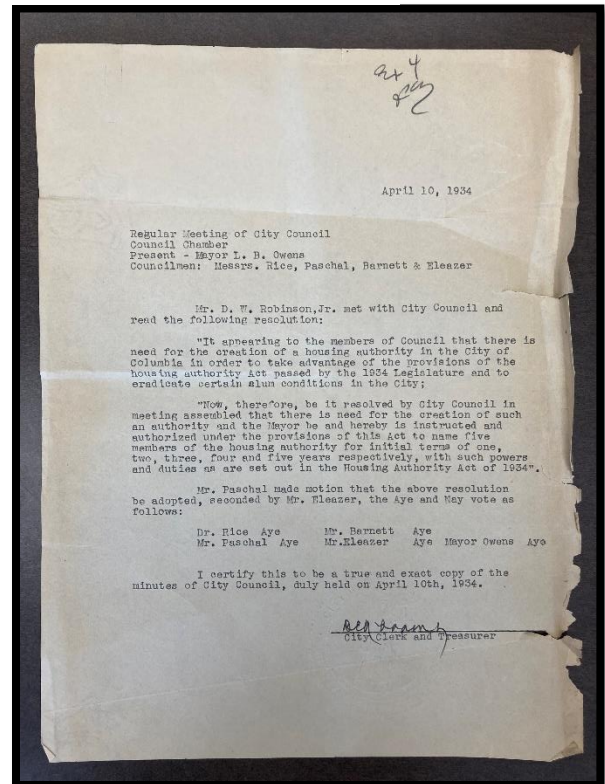


Figure 60



Allen Benedict Court Report on Mitigation of Adverse Effects - Columbia, South Carolina

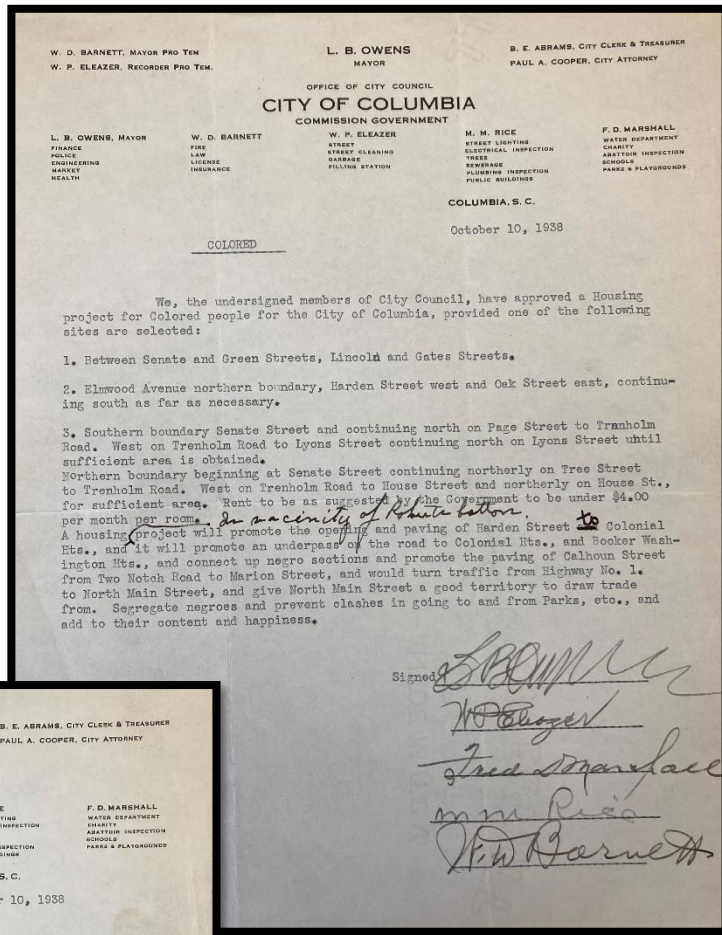


Figure 61

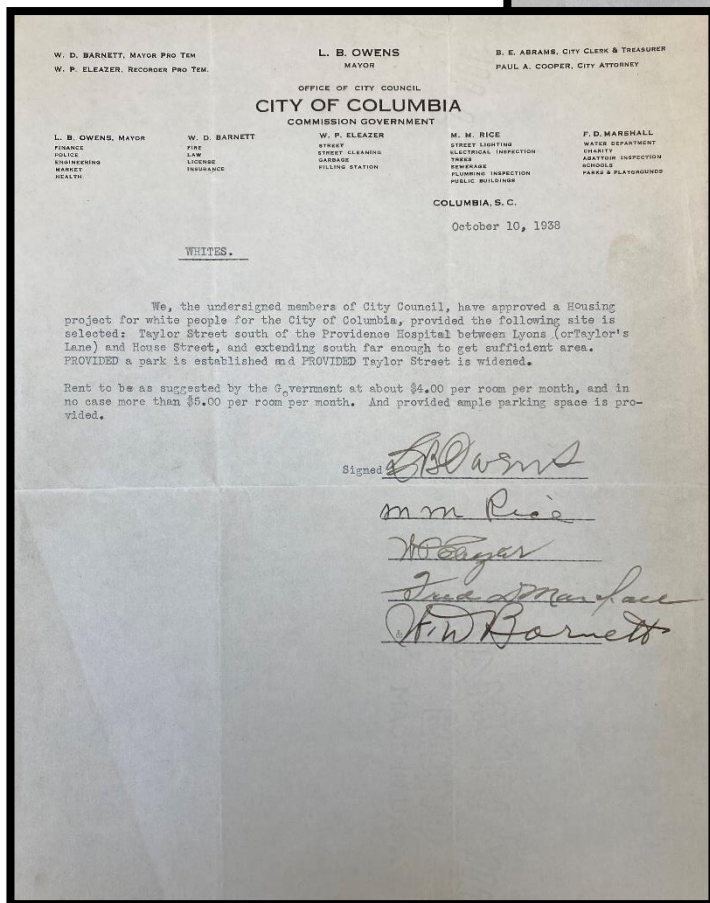


Figure 62



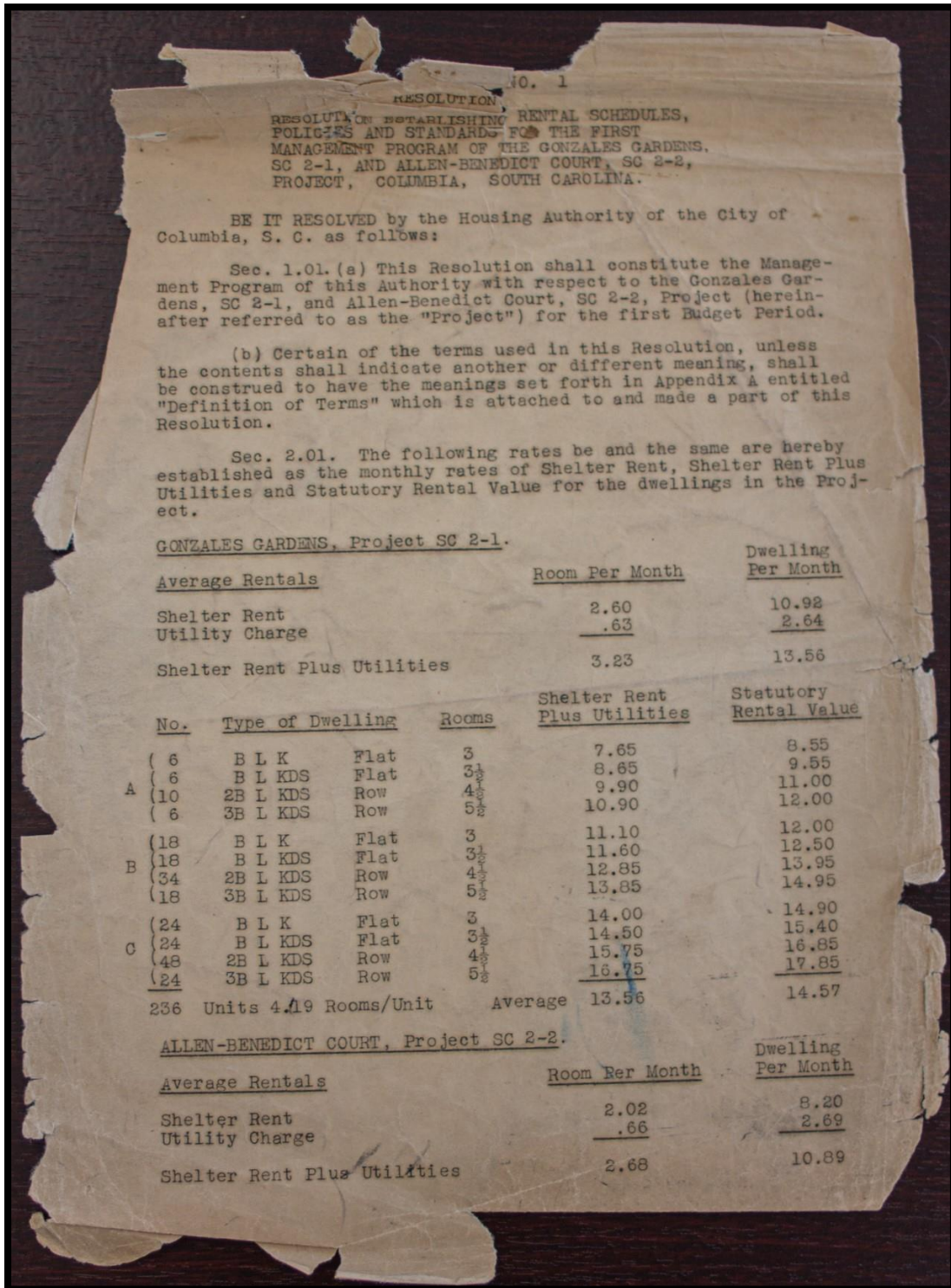


Figure 63

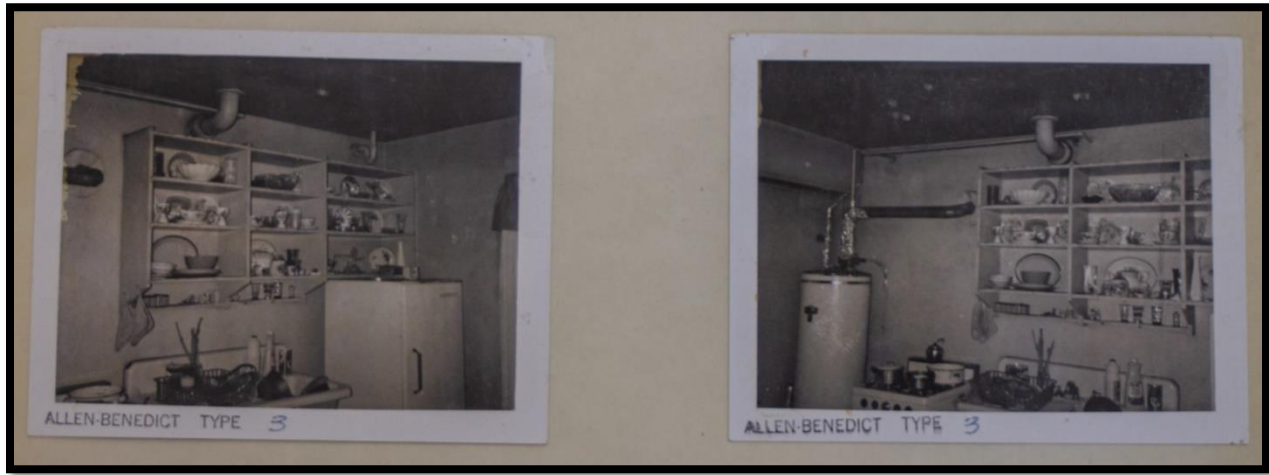


Figure 64



Figure 65

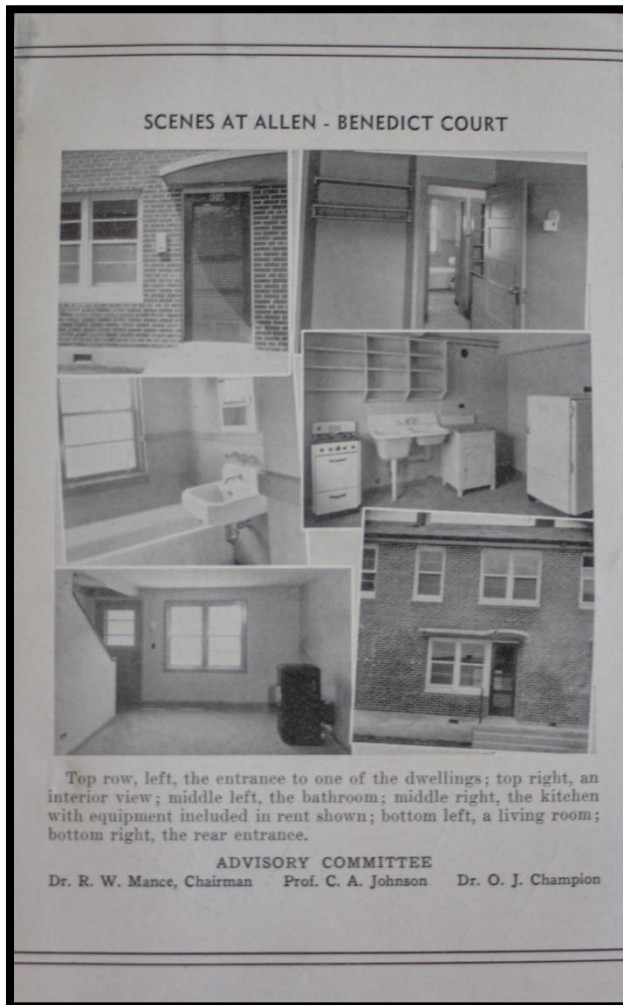


Figure 66

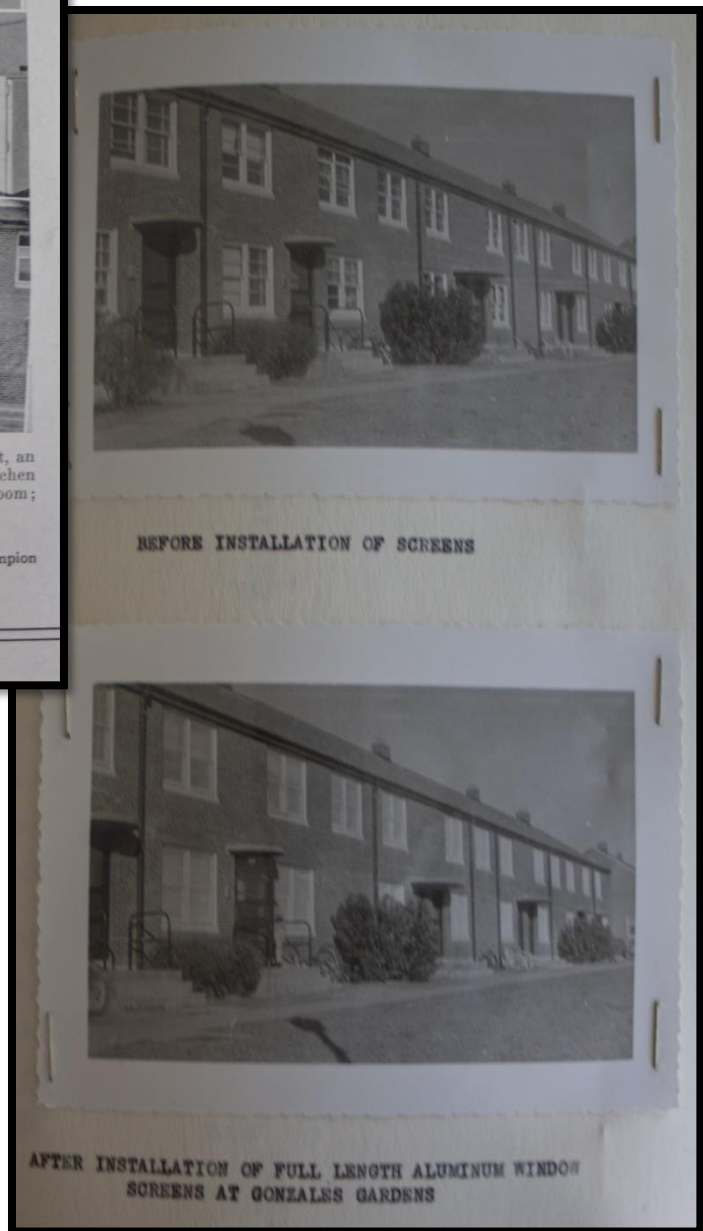


Figure 67



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