

Washington Manor Housing Project, Kanawha County, Charleston, West Virginia

The Housing Authority of the City of Charleston, West Virginia (CHA) purchased land for the Washington Manor project ca. 1938, and the housing project was constructed ca. 1940. Funds for the project were provided through the United States Housing Authority's program for building low-cost public housing. The architects were H. Rus Warne, Charles Arthur Haviland and Julius Meredith Gardner of Associate Architects, Charleston, WV, and the contractor was Skilken Brothers of Columbus, Ohio. Associate Architects also designed Littlepage Terrace, which was the other public housing project built in Charleston during the New Deal. The original architectural plans show that 62 parcels totaling just under 11 acres were obtained for the Washington Manor housing project. According to a ca. 1935 report on slum conditions conducted by the Work Division of the West Virginia Relief Administration, the area was primarily a decaying residential section with a large percentage of dwellings either unfit for habitation or requiring major repairs. Living conditions were generally very unsanitary and vastly overcrowded. The City's incinerator was located in this area also.

Washington Manor was originally set up with separate sections for white and black residents, while its sister housing project Littlepage Terrace was for white occupants only. Occupants of the new project were families who had to meet a minimum income level of about \$900 to \$1,000 per year to qualify for residency. There were maximum income limits also, based on family size. Statements in the local newspapers about black and white residents living together at Washington Manor emphasized that in buildings with apartments for both races, there would be completely separate entrances, playgrounds and facilities. The monthly rents at Washington Manor ranged from \$15 for 3 rooms to \$16.25 for 5 1/2 rooms. Rents included steam heat, hot and cold water, electricity, and gas for cooking and refrigeration; the stove and refrigerator were also supplied. In the late 1930s in the slum vicinity of Washington Manor, the average monthly rental was \$15.25 to \$16.45. The new housing project was similarly priced, but in contrast to most of the existing housing in that area, was modern, clean, included utilities, had hot and cold water, and laundry rooms and play areas.

Of the 16 buildings at Washington Manor, four were red brick in the International style and 12 were originally concrete block but renovated ca. 1970 with faux red brick, yellow stucco with half timbering to simulate the Tudor Revival style. The complex had 304 apartments, and originally, 177 were designated for white residents and 127 for black residents. Buildings had a mix of one, two, and three bedroom units with either private entrances or a shared hallway entrance. Regardless of size, each unit had a living room, one bathroom, and a combined kitchen/dining room or kitchen with separate dining room. Buildings had interior bicycle racks and perambulator storage, and those with basements contained central laundry facilities, social rooms, playrooms, and incinerators. The boiler and maintenance shops were housed together in the basement of one building. There were outside playgrounds which had water basins for summer use.

Washington Manor was the first WPA public housing project for low income residents authorized in West Virginia and was designated Project No. WVA 1-1 by the USHA. Roadways and courts within the project were named after local politicians, prominent citizens, members of the CHA, and the three architects. Although Washington Manor was designated as the first project, Littlepage Terrace was actually started first. The construction delay may have been caused because the land for Washington Manor had to be created from 62 lots obtained from individual property owners. Littlepage Terrace, however, was purchased from a bank as a large single tract plus small pieces from three individuals. Photos and artifacts from both Washington Manor and Littlepage Terrace are exhibited at the museum located in the historic Littlepage Stone Mansion on Washington Street West.