PUBLIC HOUSING ON PENINSULAR CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA: A HISTORY OF SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

Jason Christopher Grismore
Clemson University

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to document, analyze and provide a social and cultural history for twelve public housing communities to better understand the evolution of housing low income residents on the Charleston peninsula below the northern boundary of Mount Pleasant Street. There are five distinct categories of assisted housing, however this thesis primarily focuses on public housing, considered ‘projects.’\(^1\) Mount Pleasant Street was chosen because it serves as a boundary between the Charleston peninsula and the industrial district of the Upper Peninsula. The survey of each property includes; date of construction, architects, contractors, structure type, building materials, time line of the property, historic and recent photos, its location by address and on Sanborn maps.

No earlier surveys exist for the public housing communities on the peninsula of Charleston, making them a silent, yet important part of the city’s fabric. While there is much written about public housing programs throughout the nation, there is little written comprehensively on the public housing in Charleston. Since the community is known for its high level of historic architecture and preservation, the architecture of the public housing in Charleston is of particular interest. Most of the projects were built for African-American residents. This survey catalogues the housing to determine what Charleston, internationally

\(^1\)The five types of assisted housing that are represented on the Charleston peninsula include public housing, or ‘projects’, low income and mixed use/income housing, private section 8 housing, Housing of Urban Development (HUD) funded housing that is not administered by the Charleston Housing Authority and non-profit sponsored housing such as Habitat for Humanity. Refer to Map 1.
known as a beautiful city, built for its subsidized housing. Ideally, it should be aesthetically pleasing since aesthetics have a profound effect on pride, confidence and frame of mind.

This thesis discusses public housing projects, throughout the history of Charleston, beginning in the early 18th century and continuing up to the early 21st century. It addresses the social and cultural history of public housing Charleston. Alternative types of public housing, such as scattered site and mix use income communities are also addressed. Analyzing twentieth-century public housing on the Charleston peninsula through survey and comparison, identifying the differences, whether architectural, social or historical of these projects and applying that knowledge to make suggestions to improve existing and future public housing community sites is ultimately the purpose of this thesis.
Chapter 1

Charleston ‘Public’ Housing from the 18th to the 20th Century

Historically most societies have had a class of people who could not afford housing. In Charleston, like other early American port cities, there has always existed a substandard transient and poor population. Public housing and welfare have not always been available for those in need since they are twentieth-century inventions. Before then, churches and humanitarian societies dealt with the poor. Relief for the poor and indigent has been around since the early eighteenth century, even in states that had only been a part of the colonies for a couple of decades. South Carolina was no different, and according to historian Tim Lockley, “although broadly based on the English poor laws South Carolina’s public relief system differed significantly in terms of its operation and its generosity from that of the mother country, and from those of other North American colonies.”

The rice planters of colonial South Carolina constituted some of the wealthiest individuals in British North America in the mid-eighteenth century and also had a strong ethos of public service, which included the colonial assembly and parish vestries. Tim Lockley explains that “while the colonial assembly was far more politically significant than the parish vestries, those elected as churchwardens and as vestrymen in South Carolina played a far greater role in

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local government than their counterparts did in other colonies.\(^3\) South Carolina and Georgia left the overseeing of nearly all local affairs exclusively to the vestries, which was unlike other southern colonies. These vestries exerted a vast influence over local affairs, including the responsibility for the poor, which was granted to them under the 1712 poor law, which was an act created for the better relief of the poor in South Carolina.\(^4\) South Carolina’s vestries were empowered to assess the property of the inhabitants of the parish in order to fund relief for the poor, however close relatives of the poor were expected to care for them if possible.\(^5\) Orphan children were apprenticed until they reached their maturity rather than becoming a public burden. To be eligible for relief, applicants had to have been settled in their parish for three months, while transients were returned to their home parish for support.\(^6\)

Like many other colonial port cities of the eighteenth century, Charleston had a diverse population of rich, poor, black, white, free, and enslaved. The poor whites consisted mainly of the sick, aged, and orphaned, and included immigrants and transients. The vestry of St. Philip’s church in Charles Town originally provided relief for those it deemed worthy of help, however the rise of the poor population in 1738 forced the vestry to open a poorhouse for the reception of ‘rogues, vagabonds and other lewd, idle and disorderly persons’ as well as parish paupers.\(^7\) Even though the cost of relief was increasing rapidly, especially during the 1760s and 1770s, and although vestrymen had certain ideas as to who was worthy of charity, relatively few applicants were turned away.\(^8\) The poor concentration in Charleston was not duplicated in rural areas.

\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Walter J. Fraser, “The City Elite, “Disorder”, and the Poor Children of Pre-Revolutionary Charleston” South Carolina Historical Magazine v. 84 n. 3 (1983), 168.
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Lockley, 957.
\(^8\) Ibid.
Charles Woodmason maintained in 1766 that “there is not a beggar in the province – every parish maintains its own poor – but there are few, or none, out of Charlestown.” 9 Alexander Hewatt believed that “as every person by diligence and application may earn a comfortable livelihood, there are few people in the province, except the idle or unfortunate.” 10

Poverty was a growing problem in Charles Town during the late Colonial period, so in 1768 the provincial legislature increased the period of residency required to receive poor relief from three months to one year. This denied help to some, but it did nothing to reduce the poor tax burden and Lockley explains, “Annual poor relief expenditure in Charles-Town continued to rise quickly, from 5,721 pounds in 1765 to more than 16,500 pounds in 1775.” 11 Despite the law, the residency requirements for poor relief were not strictly observed and the poor were likely to be given assistance regardless of their home parish. The vestry of St. Philip’s dealt with several transients from outside of Charles Town, but sent only a few back to their home parishes, one of whom was Lydia Jones who was ordered back to St Helena’s parish in 1737, but only after she was given care. 12 Lockley concludes, “The attitudes of South Carolinian vestries towards legal settlement stands in marked contrast to their counterparts in England and New England, where authorities regularly denied relief to those without a legal settlement and went to great lengths to exclude those who might become parish paupers.” 13

Although the number of those receiving relief in South Carolina had been rising steadily during the eighteenth century, it is mentioned by Governor James Glen in 1751 that 5,000 of the

11 Lockley, 960.
12 Lockley, 961.
13 Ibid.
25,000 white people living in South Carolina lived on a meager sustenance; however the demand for relief did not reflect these numbers. One wonders why this was the case, however Ebenezer Hazard said in 1778, that “the poor people of South Carolina are proud, the rich haughty and insolent, all of them remarkably indolent,” thereby making it seem as though accepting poor relief placed people in a dependent position. Alexander Hewatt thought that although “in respect of rank, all men regarded their neighbors as their equal” many would have gone to some lengths to avoid such a public loss of independence. Many of the poor were more than likely taken in and cared for by family, friends, and neighbors, thereby never having to receive relief, while some people bequeathed money to help the poor in their parish, such as Joseph Arden, who left more than 1,000 pounds in his will in 1773 to help the poor in St. George’s Parish. Aside from those who left money to the vestry or their parish to provide relief for the poor, churchmen would grant a monthly allowance to assigned wet nurses to care for orphaned children. Private benevolent societies, such as the South Carolina Society (founded 1751) and the Fellowship Society (founded 1769), also assisted the poor in Charleston. The vestries of South Carolina treated their poor with a small amount of dignity and individuality, which differed from other welfare providers in colonial America.

Tim Lockley explains that, “Unlike almost any other social environment in colonial South Carolina, the day-to-day operation of the poor relief system brought the elite face to face with paupers. Vestrymen were drawn from the highest echelons of South Carolina society and the willingness of the elite to serve on the vestry was most likely because of the important

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14 Lockley, 963.  
16 Hewatt, 294.  
17 Lockley, 963-4.  
18 Fraser, 177.
political and administrative role that vestries had in South Carolina.”  In South Carolina the responsibility for the poor was shared equally among churchwardens and the overseers of the poor who were appointed by the vestry, many of these churchwardens and overseers were men of independent means, who could lend money to the parish.

South Carolina vestries were more generous than their contemporaries, having given chronic poor persons approximately fifty pounds (seven pounds sterling) per year. Fifty pounds per year was significantly higher than what paupers were receiving in other colonies, in fact John Tobler, in 1710, thought Carolinians to be “very obliging, and kind to strangers and poor people.” Even though fifty pounds was significant to someone who was destitute, “it is clear that few would have accepted parish relief in preference to employment” because “the scarcity of skilled carpenters, bricklayers, and tailors in the province meant that they commanded wages of sixty pounds or even seventy pounds sterling per year.”

If the poor relief for adults in South Carolina during the eighteenth century was generous compared to other colonies, the poor relief for the children of South Carolina was no exception. The future of the society depended on the children and it was considered that the poor children should be afforded every opportunity. Children were ineligible for long-term support from the public since the 1712 poor law stipulated that all orphan children should be apprenticed out until

19 Lockley, 965.
20 Lockley concludes in his article that there are several reasons why South Carolinians were more generous, stating that those paying the poor rate could have afforded it. The average estate wealth of vestrymen in St. John’s Colleton was 3,162 pounds sterling, which was equal to 22,134 pounds in South Carolina. So, if one adds in the number of slaves and amount of acreage owned in 1760 by vestrymen, they would have paid a poor tax of 8-9 pounds that year. Lockley states that another possibility is that “elite vestrymen used poor relief to differentiate between whites and blacks…elite South Carolinians were perfectly aware of lowcountry parishes that were home to large rice and indigo plantations and to allow poor whites to subsist on the same meager rations as slaves…would have suggested that whites existed on the same basic human level as the enslaved, thereby weakening the racial basis of slavery.” Finally, Lockley states that “in northern colonies, where whites far outnumbered blacks, poor relief was broadly comparable to English levels, but in Charles Town, where there were roughly equal numbers of whites and blacks, poor relief was considerably more generous. Outside Charles Town, where whites were heavily outnumbered, relief was more generous still, and it marked a clear boundary between poorer whites and slaves.” Lockley, 969 and 971-2.
22 Lockley, 970.
eighteen years old for girls and twenty one years old for boys.\textsuperscript{23} There were economic advantages for masters who took in apprentices since they obtained free labor for the length of the apprenticeship in return for boarding, clothing, and food for their charges.\textsuperscript{24} The terms of indentures could be subject to abuse and usually differed among masters, such as Michael Butcher’s apprenticeship under blacksmith David Geddy. Butcher was not allowed to harm Geddy’s property or work and he was not allowed to play cards, go to ale houses, taverns, playhouses, nor get married. However by the end of his apprenticeship he was able to read and write and he knew enough of the blacksmith trade to earn a living for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{25} Josiah Smith recited a quote from the Bible to parishioners in St. John’s Berkeley that “if we train up a child, in the way he should go, he will not depart from it, when he is old.”\textsuperscript{26} South Carolinians took care of the poor in any way they could during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Individuals from the vestry, and philanthropists alike felt the need to ensure that those who could not afford to care for themselves, had some level of support and relief. The way society viewed the poor did not change considerably during the early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century; however during the middle and late part of the century attitudes toward, and support of the poor certainly changed.

During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, three options existed for the poor: they could rely on their families to take care of them; pay free market rents, (called ‘seven percent philanthropy’), or seek residency in private benevolent homes and societies and the city or county almshouse.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} Lockley, 972-3.
\textsuperscript{24} Fraser, 179.
\textsuperscript{25} Lockley, 973.
\textsuperscript{26} Smith, Josiah. \textit{The Duty of Parents to Instruct Their Children: Being the Substance of Several Sermons Preached at Cainhoy, in the Province of South Carolina, Anno Dom. 1727.} Boston: 1730. p. 8.
\textsuperscript{27} According to Keith Esgen, contributing historian to the Historic American Building Survey of the William Enston Home in 1993, “‘five percent’ or ‘seven percent’ philanthropy refers to a practice begun by the British social activists and philanthropists in the 1830s and 1840s. In essence, it involved persuading investors to finance low-income housing projects, from which they could expect to reap a modest profit – a five to seven percent net return being the minimum for which most investors were willing to become involved.” He also stated that “by the 1850s the ‘seven percent solution’ had spread to America, where its best-known proponent, working in the 1880s, was Brooklyn’s Alfred T. White and by the 1870s and 1880s American journals
Private benevolent homes were, for the most part, church run affairs, intended for the elderly members of a particular religious faith or congregation. These places usually charged a fee for their services which ensured lifelong care. The populations that were housed by these institutions were small: frequently fewer than twenty people. During the late nineteenth century, such institutions in Charleston were the Caroline Wilkinson Home, the Episcopalian House of Rest, the St. Philip’s Church Home, the Colin Grant Homes (at the time) and the William Enston Homes. Other institutions included veterans’ homes and organizations such as the St. Andrew’s Society, although these types of agencies were inadequate to the demand.28

The final and most insidious of these housing types were city or county run almshouses, which were considered the “fundamental institution in American poor-relief” whose “inmates [were] often the most sodden driftwood from the social wreckage of the time.”29 The Charleston Poor House, which was renamed the Almshouse and eventually The Charleston Home (1771), was located at the corner of Mazyck and Magazine Streets.30

After 1820 and during Andrew Jackson’s presidency, almshouses became a menacing institution in America. The population expanded with European immigrants, many of whom were unskilled and impoverished, so the local governments turned to the almshouses as a solution for dealing with the poor immigrants. Most of these almshouses administered indoor and outdoor aid. Outdoor aid was conceived as partial/temporary and involved the distribution

like the Sanitary Engineer were running articles and competitions related to model tenement design and seven percent philanthropy”. Architecturally, this most often resulted in new or remodeled multi-story tenement or dormitory buildings and were located in densely populated urban areas and directed at low-income workers and their families, which did not apply to the poorest of the poor. Eggener, Keith. Historic American Buildings Survey: William Enston Home (HABS No. SC-686, 1993).

28 Eggener, 3.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
of food and sometimes fuel rations to people who did not live within the almshouse. Those who received indoor assistance received full time food and shelter within the almshouse. The healthy individuals were expected to work and all were expected to follow strictly enforced codes of behavior. Unfortunately, as opposed to the 18th-century thinking and what may be a foreshadowing of the 20th century philosophies, the poor were thought to be responsible for their own poverty and the aim of the almshouse was to rehabilitate them through hard work and discipline, and then allow them to return to society.

According to historian David Rothman, “the reformatory aspects of institutionalizing the poor were in most cases outweighed by punitive aspects. Make the almshouse unpleasant enough, the logic went, and the poor would be frightened into independence, forced to think twice about asking for public support.” Historian Walter Fraser remarked “that conditions in Charleston’s almshouse” [where solitary confinement and near starvation diets were standard means of discipline] were such that “the needy poor refused to apply,” preferring to go without rather than face the indignities of an institution whose reputation was that of “a place for the punishment of the unworthy.” Poverty was seen as a form of social deviancy, so it is no surprise that the poor were often locked up and guarded along with convicted criminals and mental patients and in many cities the workhouse, the insane asylum and the almshouse were fitted into the same physical structure or compound. Ideally the almshouse was an orderly,

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31 The Historic American Building Survey of the William Enston Home stated that, ‘although cheaper to provide outdoor relief than indoor relief, outdoor assistance was frowned upon by many because it was thought to rob the poor of initiative and encourage laziness’ and ‘after about 1850 this type of aid became increasingly rare in the United States’. Eggener, 4.
32 In many cases these people could be sold or rented out by the almshouses to farmers or factory owners. Eggener, 5.
33 Punishments could include reduced rations, beatings, solitary confinement for those who did not complete their assigned duties or gave them out for someone else to finish, or for those who did broke the house rules and the alternative was to be expelled from the building and even the town, kicked out to face homelessness and starvation or even turned over to the penitentiary. Eggener, 5.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
regulated correctional institution; however the reality was something otherwise because it was
“ordinarily a depressing experience to visit an almshouse.” The almshouse tended to be
overcrowded, dilapidated, dirt and disease infested, which happened to be the case around the
country.

A growing concern about the poverty stricken was that many of them were elderly
people. The number of elderly Americans increased and unfortunately their social and economic
status declined and because of this, forced retirement became common and pensions were rare. By the twentieth century the feeding and housing of the poor and elderly indigents became a
concern and during the twentieth century programs emerged at state wide and national levels.

Programs such as the Massachusetts First Public Commission on Aging, and the First
Federal Old Age Pension Bill began in 1909 to deal with the problem. The William Enston
Homes, now owned by the Charleston Housing Authority, are an example of the early housing
opportunities that were available, on a small scale, to the elderly poor during the late 19th and
early 20th centuries. The elderly poor were a major concern during the 20th century, but the
rising poverty rates, along with the Depression and increase in poor living conditions around the
nation became disconcerting among politicians. The Franklin D. Roosevelt administration began
the Public Works Administration (PWA) in 1935. President Roosevelt, recognizing the enormity
of the problem, said in an address from his home in Warm Springs, GA, “The government

37 Ibid.
38 In an 1833 report cited by Rothman, ‘the Boston House of Industry packed 623 inmates into its single building, “the aged,
decrepit and insane...abandoned children and expectant, unwed mothers” all crowded together in the same rooms, averaging
seven persons to a room” and an 1857 report on the conditions uncovered during an inspection tour of almshouses in New York
found that almost all were “badly constructed, ill arranged, ill warmed and ill ventilated”.’ Eggener, 5.
39 Eggener, 2.
40 The William Enston Homes are an early example of benevolent, philanthropic housing for the elderly, which was funded by a
bequest of 1859, but was not built until 1884 and 1888, with additional structures being added in 1893, 1927, 1933 and into the
present time. Eggener, 1. They will be discussed in further detail in the chapters to come.
recognizes its obligation to those whose standards of living are so low that something must be
done for them, but whose pocketbooks are so small that they cannot obtain private credit.”

With this, the Housing Act of 1937 was passed, just two years following the creation of the
PWA. According to this Act, “It is the policy of the United States to assist States and political
subdivisions of States to remedy unsafe housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent and
safe dwellings for low-income families.” The Housing Act resulted from the rising awareness
of the need for better housing for less fortunate families in America. Public housing was one
direct result. Today, public housing ranges from scattered single family dwellings to high rise
apartments. Currently in the United States there are approximately 1.2 million households living
in public housing units, which are managed by roughly 3,300 Housing Authorities. Since its
inception in 1935, the Charleston Housing Authority has provided assistance to over 4,000 low-
income families.

After 1937, and especially beginning in the 1950s, cities across the nation saw urban
renewal as a remedy to slums. Urban renewal refers primarily to public efforts to revitalize
aging and decaying inner cities. Slums: dense, poor, unsanitized and not code compliant pockets
of poverty developed during the Depression and progressively worsened, which resulted in the
creation of the Housing Act of 1937. Cities manipulated the intent of the Housing Act to clear
these slum areas and then use the sites to build better housing. This included massive demolition

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41 Cameron, Donald J. The Housing Authority of the City of Charleston: A Report on Fifty Years of Service. Charleston: The
Housing Authority of the City of Charleston, 1985. p. 2
42 Http://www.hud.gov/offices/ogc/usha1937.pda
43 Http://www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm
44 Http://www.chacity.org/
45 Many cites used the urban renewal concept to tear down slum areas but were not required to build replacement housing for the
poor. It was the ‘negro removal’ concept. One example of this was Memphis, which would use slum clearance to rid the city of the
poor and force many of them into Mississippi, making it someone else’s problem. Slum clearance and urban renewal were
well meaning ideas, however many cities used it to their advantage. It was not until 1968 that the federal government regulated
this practice, to keep cities from doing this. This was the dark side to public housing, cities purposefully gentrifying under the
and rehabilitation. Many states passed local and state legislation that allowed for these blighted areas to be cleaned up, and some cities exercised their power of eminent domain, which allowed the seizure of property for new public purposes of slum prevention. Legislation also allowed some cities to convey property to developers at a greatly reduced price. The legislation often provided assistance in relocating residents, but mostly to areas outside of the city.

The Housing Act of 1937 marked a major transition in federal housing policy. The bill authorized the Housing and Home Financing Agency (HHFA) to grant money over five years to local governments for planned and initiated slum clearance projects and other money in federal grants to cover losses associated with such projects. Along with Federal legislation, state and local legislation also became involved. The Housing Act declares “…that the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of sub-standard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas…the realization…of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.”

Due to racial tensions of the 1960s, which sparked riots, cities began to spread from their centers outward, plunging many urban cores into disrepair. Some residents left the inner city because of violence, while others followed the ‘American Dream,’ the notion that Americans are entitled to a house and a front and back yard for their kids. Concentrated cities were further

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 City sprawl was happening before the 1960s due to several reasons, however during the 1960s it was at a rapid pace.
decentralized when industries also migrated out to the suburbs. The loss of jobs and people in the central city caused houses and stores to close and become vacant. White flight took place, meaning wealthier and often white families left for the suburbs, which deconstructed the diversity of the city and downtown neighborhoods. “For all practical purposes, the inner-city neighborhoods had lost their function.”\textsuperscript{50} Urban renewal was created for cities to help beautify their downtowns and clean up the slums. However, in the last twenty years critics have attacked urban renewal, since besides destroying downtowns (and historic properties), it often benefits private real estate developers, “wantonly uprooting tens of thousands from their homes, and destroying vibrant working class neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{51}

The public housing that was provided, based on the proponents of ‘modernism’ which pervaded the architecture of the time, failed to help the situation. High-rise modernist public housing projects were built for the low income population. However, since “white middle-class people objected…to the presence of housing projects in their neighborhoods, the new projects were usually built in the old ghettos of the inner city.”\textsuperscript{52} These housing projects attracted problem families, plagued by alcoholism, delinquency and unemployment, since the housing projects were seen as a type of welfare housing. With urban renewal, “cities bulldozed countless inner-city neighborhoods, many of them African American, with scarce attention to the social and economical needs of residents, with scant or nonexistent help for relocation and with little chance for a speedy return into project areas.”\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Hoffman, 10.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.  
Urban renewal patterns and efforts that were taking place in Charleston reflect what was taking place in American cities. In 1938 the city’s new public housing project, Robert Mills Manor, was being constructed in a slum area that was in the heart of downtown Charleston, bounded by Beaufain, Logan, Queen and Franklin Streets. A housing development plan in Wagener Terrace was designed with the notion that “with every new home built here a slum dwelling will be removed elsewhere in the city.”\(^{54}\) The Robert Mills Manor site was considered one of the worst slum areas in Charleston prior to the construction of the project.\(^{55}\) In fact, the 1938 City Annual described the site as “the worst disease-breeding spot in the lower section of the city.”\(^{56}\) There were approximately 121 derelict dwelling structures, along with the city jail, an orphanage for African Americans (marine hospital), an African American church and the medical college. Based on the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and historic photos of the area, the site of the Robert Mills Manor seemed to have been a closely knit African American community. Even though the Robert Mills Manor was constructed in the historic district and farther south on the peninsula than the previously built Cooper River Court and Meeting Street Manor projects, it was built in an area that had housed the poor for years.\(^{57}\) The Black community was demolished in order to build the Robert Mills Manor, which was constructed for poor whites, displacing the African Americans.

\(^{55}\) Cameron, 6.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) An almshouse was located on the corner of Mazyck Street (now called Logan Street) and Magazine Street and the Jenkins Colored Orphanage was located (also known as the old marine hospital) next to the city jail. During the 1980s, when the Charleston Housing Authority was considering selling the Robert Mills Manor, many residents in the surrounding neighborhood were in support of the sale because of the idea of having “poor housing,” which led to the notion of high crime rates and lowered property value. However, Charleston had housed the poor on this site for well over a hundred years prior to this argument, meaning that replacing the public housing with anything else would actually be out of character for this section of the city. “Study Says Project’s Sale Not Economically Feasible”. Charleston News and Courier. June 6\(^{th}\), 1985
Urban infill and renewal projects have been undertaken and are currently being carried out around the peninsula. Charleston has been beautifying its peninsula for over four decades, however with the high real estate demand and the rising housing costs on the peninsula it is difficult for the average working family, no matter their race, to afford a decent home. According to architect Christopher Alexander “…urban renewal takes it [the magic of a great city] away from everyone except the few who are lucky enough or rich enough, to live close to the largest centers.”58

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Since 1939 there have been opposing viewpoints as to whether public housing programs should be expanded or even if the government ought to construct housing for the poor. Leonard Freedman, an historian and public housing scholar, mentions that in 1950 “there was persistent opposition at the national level” towards public housing. Congress passed a housing act in 1949 which allowed for substantial expansion of public housing; however Congress made drastic reductions in appropriations for the program in 1951, meaning that many public housing communities that were slated for construction or for completion by the mid 1950s were still not completed by the 1970s. Due to the housing legislation of 1968, housing programs were given a much needed boost, however Freedman asserts, “…the public housing program is still generally unloved.” The pace of the growth of the public housing program has been slow since then, which led to the development of alternative programs to provide assistance to the low-income housing problem, which Freedman states “…could no longer be entrusted to public

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60 The main provisions of the act were:
Title I: slum clearance, community development and redevelopment. Local public agencies, after a public hearing, could acquire a blighted area, clear the land and make it available for public or private redevelopment. The Housing and Home finance Agency was authorized to make loans or grants, $1 billion in loans and $500 million in capital grants, to meet losses involved in slum clearance. Families displaced must be properly relocated.
Title II: amendments relating to the Federal Housing Administration
Title III: low rent public housing and amendments to the 1937 housing act
Title IV: housing research by the HHFA to promote cost reductions and increased production incentives to localities to do their own studies for redevelopment, etc.
Title V: farm housing – special loans for home or building improvements
Title IV: (a) a national housing census to be taken in 1950 and every ten years afterward, (b) banking provisions, (c) provision for public housing in Washington D.C. (Freedman, 1-2)
61 Freedman, X.
housing alone." Many of these programs had to be carefully constructed to overcome the difficulty that undermined public housing – the profound weakness, such as under representation, of the poor in the political system of the United States government. While the controversy over public housing was somewhat subdued during the 1960s, it heated up again in 1969 when Federal District Judge Richard B. Austin, ordered the Chicago Housing Authority to build seventy-five percent of all new public housing communities in predominately white communities and at least one mile from the edge of the nearest African-American slum and to limit future projects to no more than three stories. However, this was not undertaken because of the outraged reactions by white homeowners and their political representatives, which mirrored earlier attacks on public housing.

Authorization from the Housing Act of 1949 was given to complete 810,000 public housing units nationwide within six years; however this was abandoned soon thereafter. After six years some 200,000 units were completed and by 1960 the total had yet to reach 300,000 units. By the early 1980s, the original six year goal still had not quite been met. The hostility and controversy over the passing of the 1949 housing act was considered surprising to many, because according to Freedman, “…it [the 1949 housing act] was no different than the housing act of 1937, which established the United States Housing Authority and allowed for construction loans to be made for creating local housing authorities and to provide subsidies to the housing authorities to keep the rents at levels the poor could afford.” The scale was larger than before with a revolving fund of $1.5 billion, from which local housing authority construction loans

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Freedman, X-XI.
65 Freedman, 2.
66 Ibid.
67 Freedman, 2-3.
could be made and guaranteed by the Public Housing Administration along with annual contributions of up to $336,000,000. Even with the additional 810,000 public housing units this would finance, the public housing program in the United States was still quite small in comparison with similar programs elsewhere. The governments of most industrialized nations had been providing public housing for the working class for several decades. In England, approximately one out of every five workers occupied a rental unit owned by local government agencies and subsidized by the national government, while in France, Scandinavia and Holland the programs are much larger proportionately than the United States. Each of these countries had responded to the fact that the private housing industry had been unable to provide a decent and safe home for the poor.

Many low income people lived in deplorable housing conditions in the United States between the 1940s and 1970s and according to Freedman, “Census figures can provide abundant evidence of this [deplorable housing conditions] and even the most cursory inspection of the dismaying blight at the center of so many of our cities confirms the statistical data.” Substandard housing, according to the Census, includes homes that, “at best, lack the amenities Americans regard as indispensable and, at worst, are damp, decaying, crowded” and infested with unwanted vermin. Millions of people lived in such housing in 1949 and unfortunately it did not change much in twenty years.

Leonard Freedman states that “The general political and cultural climate in the country is always a critically important factor for social welfare legislation. In the case of public housing

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68 Freedman, 3.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
the prevailing climate was usually uncongenial, for the program ran counter to widely held views about the poor, about [minorities], and about the role of government.”\textsuperscript{72} The general attitude of the majority comes across as being somewhat impatient toward the minority that has been left behind economically. Obligation to the poor has been somewhat recognized throughout history, however legislation to carry out the obligation has not been wholeheartedly welcomed except where the majority has some stake in the legislation as well. Freedman mentions that, “this broad consideration has been reinforced in the housing context by two factors…first, the majority by and large is not badly housed…and secondly, the majority has preferred to live at a comfortable distance from the poor.”\textsuperscript{73} Since the majority has managed, by their own efforts, to obtain good housing for their families, they displayed little sympathy for those who sought government help for housing. As soon as the majority of the nation could, they moved to the suburbs, leaving the city centers to the low income group, (a situation already discussed earlier in Chapter 1). However, after the enactment of the Housing Act of 1949, the program’s administrators in some cities felt compelled to find sites outside the poverty areas, which were adjacent to or even within more prosperous neighborhoods. This generated deep resentments since it threatened to nullify the success of the middle or lower middle class in escaping from the poor. It would bring the more prosperous people closer to large numbers of people afflicted with poverty who are concentrated into large, unattractive blocks of apartments. This is unfortunately how many public housing communities were viewed at the time. Freedman states that “The reaction, not surprisingly, was often fearful and angry, replete with anxious forebodings about damage to the quality of school systems, to property values, and to personal status.”\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Freedman, 7.  
\textsuperscript{73} Freedman, 8.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Race has played an important role in regard to the many problems, resentments and anxieties that public housing has aroused in the minds of the majority and fellow suburbanites, much of which also stemmed from class and income differentiation. The poor include a considerably disproportionate number of blacks and ethnic minorities. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, blacks who could afford better housing were often denied it due to discrimination. Public housing tenants included a large and growing number of blacks and as the number of minorities increased, the public housing communities became less attractive to low income whites, many of whom moved out and were replaced by more blacks. It is mentioned by Freedman that “public housing projects, already segregated by class, became citadels of segregation by race. And as this happened, the attitudes of the white, affluent majority grew even less sympathetic to the program and even more resistant to allowing new projects into the neighborhoods.”75 While Christopher Alexander explained, “People in the ghetto are usually forced to live there, isolated from the rest of society, unable to evolve their way of life, and often intolerant of ways of life different from their own.”76 The slogan, “Do You Want To Pay Somebody Else’s Rent?” which was used with few variations in cities around the United States, could not have better captured the distrust and disdain for the poor at that time.77 The ongoing mentality was the notion, “Why should his [the homeowner/majority] own thrift and hard work be penalized to support people who were shiftless and irresponsible – slum dwellers who would make slums out of public housing, too?”78 Unfortunately because of this, racial tensions and prejudices played a major role in the public housing controversy and

75 Freedman, 8-9.
76 Alexander, 44.
77 Freedman, 99.
78 Ibid.
consequently the public housing program continues to illustrate all too well the dilemmas contained in the growing racial confrontation in the United States during the Civil Rights Era.

By the 1970s residents of many large American cities viewed public housing as housing of last resort and eventually matters got worse. Between 1979 and 1984, the federal government accelerated the trend toward “concentrated impoverishment by passing legislation that skewed public housing admissions to favor the least advantaged applicants.” 79 In 1979 Congress expanded federal preferences to include people living in substandard housing, which later came to include homeless people, and in 1981 legislators severely hampered the number of public housing units that could go to those earning more than half of the median income. 80 Congress then increased the percentage of income public housing residents would have to pay for rent from 25 to 30 percent, “thereby undercutting the incentives for higher-earning families to remain in public housing,” according to Lawrence J. Vale. 81 In 1984 Congress gave clear preference to a broad group of disadvantaged applicants, encompassing the homeless, the disabled, who included the mentally ill, and those paying more than fifty percent of their income in rent. The administration at the time defended these federal preferences as a necessary appreciation of the broader societal trends toward greater impoverishment and multiple problems among low-income people needing housing assistance. However in the 1990s these policies came under bipartisan criticism for having ‘ghettoized’ the most vulnerable and as the 1990s ended, only approximately one in five public housing families reported earned wages as its primary source of income.

80 Ibid.
81 Today, the Housing Authorities use income limits developed by HUD, which sets the lower income limits at 80% and very low income limits at 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which one chooses to live. Income limits vary from county to county and city to city.  http://www.hud.gov/renting/phprog.cfm
income, and more than three-quarters of households were headed by a single female.\textsuperscript{82} Since the majority of public housing residents were black or Hispanic, the program as a whole faced increased “political marginality, especially at a time when affirmative action programs were under sustained attack.”\textsuperscript{83} And according to Lawrence J. Vale, “The result of all this has been a convergence of increasing economic distress among residents, managerial capacity, design failures, and budgetary contraction, all at a time of persistent violence, struggling public education, lingering racism, and inadequate job opportunities in inner cities.”\textsuperscript{84} Public housing has been blamed for contributing to these societal problems. Vale asserts, “When public housing is viewed together with the bipartisan frontal assault on the welfare programs that had helped sustain a large proportion of its tenants, it is easy to see why this housing has so frequently been seen as a national failure.”\textsuperscript{85}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Vale, 6-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Vale, 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} Some United States Senators, such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, were in support of welfare and politics on poverty and since the mid 1960s he cautioned about the disintegration of poor American families and the need to create a national policy to rescue them. In 1987 he was chairman of the Senate subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy, and began an effort to overhaul the nation’s welfare program, which received bipartisan support. In an interview with \textit{The New York Times}, in February 1987, Moynihan stated, “…there’s about 12 million poor children right now. Seven million receive benefits and five million do not. But the basic problem is that children don’t vote and nobody expects to be a child again. Retired persons vote, and persons who haven’t retired expect to be retired and no matter how well or badly everybody else behaves, how well or badly experiments work, you’re going to have to take care of the children. It’s the law.” He mentions in the same interview that there was no political support, when he was first elected a Senator in 1977, in welfare because the only thing they saw were stereotypes, such as welfare bums, welfare queens and welfare Cadillacs. He goes on to state that something has changed, people were beginning to think that “this isn’t the country I grew up in” and says that the nation’s social morals are different because half of marriages now end in divorce and there’s a huge increase in out-of-wedlock births. What wasn’t foreseen was the large number of children living with a single parent, when the other parent had not died or was not disabled…” Currently there is research on welfare that states people who receive welfare cannot be regarded as one undifferentiated mass of people, and you can’t treat them all alike. For instance, about a quarter of mothers who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children do so for less than one year. These are self-sustaining, capable people who have had a sudden divorce or separation. They’ll get their lives put back together and we won’t see them again. At the other end of the spectrum-about a quarter of the people-are those who are unmarried and in real trouble and go on welfare very young. If you don’t get hold of those people very quickly and work very hard and put a lot of resources into them, you have a spoiled life. And their children have fairly chancy prospects…you don’t have to change the way people behave, because nobody knows how to change the way people behave but you’ve got to make more equitable arrangements in areas like child support. We have a child support system that’s medieval”. As quoted in the \textit{New York Times} article; ‘Washington Talk: Q&A: Daniel Patrick Moynihan; Welfare and the Politics of Poverty.’ Maureen Dowd, February 19, 1987. Vale, 7.
\end{itemize}
What was going on around the country was reflected in Charleston. In 1957 public housing tenants had problems with making their rent in their uncomfortably small, ‘ill kept’ housing quarters. In 1962, Mayor Palmer Gaillard believed that public housing would have a ‘double barreled’ effect, which meant that it would eliminate slums while providing and rebuilding structures that were fit for human habitation. However, citizens were concerned that housing projects that replace slums tend to crowd large numbers of low-income residents into one area. The same article also revealed that the Robert Mills Manor, which is centrally located in the nicer area of the city, housed all white families, whereas most of the public housing communities on the outer limits of the city were home to mostly black families.

Charleston in the late 1960s and early 1970s debated public housing. In 1969 a $3,700,000 loan from the United States Housing Assistance Program had been halted because the Neighborhood Legal Assistance Program accused the Charleston Housing Authority of perpetuating segregation due to their method of selecting sites, assigning tenants and placing projects in certain areas. The projects that were selected included a one hundred unit high rise apartment building, for the elderly poor, situated in a predominately black area such as the Ashley Avenue, President, Spring and Cannon Street corridor or north of Mount Pleasant Street.

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86“‘Project’ Tenants Have Rent Problem” – Charleston News and Courier, February 8, 1957.
87“Mayor Explains City’s Position on Public Housing” – Charleston News and Courier, October 13, 1962
88 Ibid.
89 As was discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the poor were corralled in localized areas throughout Charleston’s history. The Robert Mills Manor was home to low income residents along Cromwell Alley, and the Almshouse, Edmunds colored orphanage, an asylum and the city jail were located near this site as well. A 1930s account from Charlestonian Mamie Garvin Fields, described the site of the Cooper River Court and Meeting Street Manor as a “rotten borough” where people were “jammed together in houses that you could see right through” and they were considered the fortunate ones because “others lived in abandoned warehouses and railroad box cars”. Cameron, 4. The site of the Gadsden Green Homes and extension was in close proximity to an almshouse for African Americans and the same goes for the site of the Wraggborough Homes and extension. The site of the Ansonborough Homes was in extreme disrepair. The Ansonborough Homes site was in tumbledown character much like the Market area was during the same time.
90 “Plans for Housing Halted” – Charleston News and Courier, December 18, 1969
and West of Rutledge Avenue near the Kiawah Homes. The high-rise apartment building for the elderly poor was eventually built north of Mount Pleasant Street.

Early in the 1970s, when other cities had abandoned plans for high rise low-income housing apartment buildings because they had failed, Charleston had just begun to construct them. Charleston Housing Authority had planned on building a ten story high rise low-income apartment building between Radcliffe, Morris and Coming Streets. However, a local Roman Catholic priest vehemently opposed the work due to the failures of high rise low-income apartment buildings in other cities such as St. Louis and Chicago. The priest contended that high concentrations of poor families tend to have higher crime rates, high drug abuse and health problems. The Charleston Police Department said that officers on duty and those in cruisers would check the building’s lobbies, elevators and stairways to ensure the tenants’ safety. One wonders how long this would have lasted. During the same year that the ten story low-income apartment building was to be built, another twelve story low-income building, which was sponsored by HUD, was to be constructed on Coming and Morris Streets. According to a 1973 News and Courier article the security would be upgraded with a closed circuit television and a watchman would lock the door nightly. Tenants would be carefully screened so the building did not become filled with ‘undesirables.’ Fortunately these buildings were never constructed.

Public housing officials, tenants, social workers and citizens believed that public housing was failing to do its job. HUD believed that there should be “decent, safe, and sanitary housing

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91 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
for every American family.’”96 The belief in Charleston was that public housing was seen as temporary housing and that families could live while working to improve their situation, whereas at the time, public housing had become little more than “corrals for the poor, the indigent and the elderly.”97 Most tenants did not find a way out, and the failure seemed to rest with the current housing system and the tenants themselves. There was not enough money to supply the demand for housing or maintenance. HUD gave $2.1 million to Charleston, but the amount was too low to properly renovate the city’s 2533 units with the rise of material and labor costs. The situation looked bleak and while most tenants would have liked to improve their quality of life, however due to the lack of education, job training and simple misfortune, they were unable. They expressed discouragement with living in public housing and mothers expressed that they did not want their children growing up in public housing.98 The elderly felt the same way due to the high crime rate, vandalism, the distance [that public housing projects are] from friends and family and churches.99 The bad atmosphere, run down conditions, the feeling of personal charity, made things even bleaker for tenants.100 With all of this, there still was a large waiting list for public housing in the city and many did not want to be displaced out of Charleston and into North Charleston. They showed a preference for where they lived even though they did not pay rent.101 There was a growing consensus that better public housing coupled with education, job opportunities and training was needed.

97 Ibid.
98 A 43 year old mother of four stated, “I don’t like having my children growing up here [public housing project] but we can’t afford anything better.” Other tenants mentioned their dissatisfaction for public housing due to high crime rates, “bad atmosphere” and “run down conditions.” Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 August J. Tamsberg, director of the Charleston Housing Authority (at the time of the article), stated “many people from the city don’t want to move out of their local areas.” Housing and welfare officials went on to state that “you can’t simply transplant people into public housing and expect them to automatically better their situations” Ibid.
Fortunately, the plans to build the high rise low-income apartment buildings failed due to the CHA’s “failure to prosecute diligently the development of the project.” The CHA disputed the charges, claiming that highly restrictive federal construction and cost requirements, red tape, changes in federal policies, a civil lawsuit against the proposed site and the rapidly increasing construction costs made it impossible for the CHA to meet federal requirements.

By the end of the 1970s, the Charleston Housing Authority had renovated three, or twenty five percent, of the total public housing projects on the Charleston peninsula, which included the Cooper River Courts, the Gadsden Green Homes, and the Meeting Street Manor. Some of the work that was completed included landscape upgrades, window screens, new paint, building repairs, installation of porch lights and repairs to the sidewalks. Despite these improvements and the CHA recognizing problems with the public housing, the attitudes around the city toward public housing seemed to be different. The CHA claimed that the situation in the public housing communities was the best it had been in over a decade. The Charleston Police Chief, John F. Conroy, agreed, stating that the crime in the projects was no worse than any other low-income area in the city and it only appeared worse because of the density of the population. However, the residents of the public housing communities did not agree with the CHA or the Police Chief. Many residents did not say anything to the police because they believed those that were “called out would get back at you.” Interviews were conducted and one tenant, who lived without air conditioning or a phone, complained that her apartment flooded

103 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
every time it rained and she locked all doors and windows due to the violent gang activity.\textsuperscript{109} Another tenant groused the public housing in Charleston was similar to the public housing one would have found in New York City.\textsuperscript{110} He mentioned that there was a murder at his project and no one decided to help the victim because residents believed they could be the next victim, therefore no one was apprehended. Residents of public housing were afraid and refused to go out at night. Residents said that police often rode by and saw gangs dealing and using drugs but they decided to do nothing.\textsuperscript{111}

By the 1980s, the city of Charleston was revitalizing and so was the public housing, even though the CHA suffered funding cuts, typical of housing authorities around the country. The short staffed CHA experimented with creative and innovative alternatives to public housing. The CHA built scattered site housing in various parts of the city, to decentralize the low-income families and begin to assimilate them into the population subtly. The bad image attached to public housing residents (including laziness, welfare recipients, handout takers and involved in crimes), was not completely forgotten.\textsuperscript{112} However, Officer Isaiah Choice of the CCPD stated that the majority of residents were hard working, law abiding, intelligent citizens who worked and paid their own rent and were not on welfare.\textsuperscript{113} During the 1990s and into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, public housing saw advances and regressions much like the 1980s. Scattered site housing was gaining momentum and the CHA was creating new transitional programs to help homeless

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} The opinions of the residents differed drastically from those of the police chief. The CHA has a policy that states that residents that break the law will be removed from the public housing program. Many public housing residents need subsidized housing and one assumes that they do not want to jeopardize it. A look at the police report for 2007 revealed that the number of reported crime rates (petty crimes and felonies) were slightly lower in public housing projects than outside of them, however this could be due to several variables.
\textsuperscript{112} “Housing Projects Have a Bad Image” –Charleston News and Courier, November 31, 1983.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
people to become drug and alcohol free and to become accustomed to paying rent.\textsuperscript{114} The premise for the program was to provide privacy and dignity to individuals that they could not have in shelters.\textsuperscript{115} Programs like this were created during this time, unfortunately the funding was not always secured so the CHA as well as other city housing authorities had to fund some of these programs on their own, a problem that was known to the public housing program all too well.\textsuperscript{116}

Though public housing in America revealed the political weaknesses and lack of representation of the poor in Congress during the first twenty years after the 1949 Housing Act, it does not seem that the cause for public housing was hopeless. The housing program has survived and even continues to expand and if the struggle held back its growth, it seems to have led to some sorely needed improvements in its quality and flexibility.\textsuperscript{117} The housing program has evolved and is only one of many programs like it being implemented or has already been introduced, which could considerably alleviate the housing plight of low income people.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114} "City Agency Goes it Alone" – Charleston Post and Courier, January 19, 1992.
\textsuperscript{115} Interview with the Executive Director of the Charleston Housing Authority, Don Cameron, June 2008.
\textsuperscript{116} Many of these housing programs were federally funded and with federal budget cuts, housing authorities around the country had to find a way to fund them on their own.
\textsuperscript{117} Freedman, 11.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
Chapter 3

The History of Public Housing on the Charleston Peninsula

The great financial crisis of 1929 had a devastating impact on Charleston typical of the whole country. It was a difficult time for the poor, the disenfranchised middle class, and even some of those previously considered to be secure in their finances. Living conditions for the poor in Charleston from the early 1900s into the 1930s were deplorable. Mamie Garvin Fields, longtime teacher, activist and co-author of Lemon Swamp and Other Places – A Carolina Memoir, recalled Charleston, “Families living in rotten borough and cool blow on the East Side were jammed together in houses that you could see right through. They were the fortunate ones; others lived in abandoned warehouses and railroad box cars.”119 A study prepared by the Department of Commerce in 1934 that surveyed the housing conditions in 64 American cities ranked Charleston dismally low, in fact it was the worst in the study.120 It revealed that 48% of all houses were without indoor toilets, 56% were without bathtubs, 21.7% of all houses were without running water, and infant mortality within the city was 29.5% higher than that of the nation as a whole.121

A Housing Commission had been established in 1933 by the city of Charleston to ameliorate the harsh living conditions for the poor. The Housing Commission identified large concentrations of poverty in various wards that grew daily due to the influx of country people that were laid off from work. Due to the worsening conditions, Charleston was selected as one

120 Cameron, 6.
121 Ibid.
of the first cities to implement public housing projects undertaken by the Public Works Administration (PWA), Department of the Interior, under Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration in 1935.122

The public housing issue was moved forward on the State level as well when, in 1934, the South Carolina State Legislature passed the Housing Authorities Law, which permitted cities, through a special declaration of need, to create a local agency for providing relief.

On May 5, 1935, the Charleston Housing Authority (CHA) had an organizational meeting and elected Dr. Josiah Smith as its first Chairman. For its first two years the CHA acted in a limited advisory capacity to the PWA during the construction of the Meeting Street Manor and the Cooper River Court.123

(Fig. 2, 1937 aerial photo of Meeting Street Manor and Cooper River Court shortly after completion of construction. Meeting Street Manor is located on the left (South) in the photo and the Cooper River Court is located in the foreground. Taft, Charleston News and Courier, 1937.)

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid. Refer to Projects 1 and 2 on Map 1.
The PWA housing program was launched for the dual purpose of providing employment for the building trades and for the improvement of the housing conditions through slum clearance and construction. Local autonomy for the Housing Authority did not come until 1937 when the Housing Act was signed by FDR, which enabled local housing authorities to finance, construct, and manage their own projects. The problem of inadequate housing continued to grow, but the Housing Authority was in a position to closely monitor the need for adequate housing and make projections for the future.

The choice and cost of building materials was an issue since they could be neither ‘too good’ nor substandard. The Meeting Street Manor and the Cooper River Court were built in...

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124 Ibid.  
125 When originally built, public housing was considered temporary housing for the poor with the belief that they would only need to live in public housing for a few months, eventually getting their finances and life back on track. Over the next few decades it was clear that this previous notion of temporary housing was not the case, due to the fact that many residents who grew up in public housing eventually reared a family of their own in the public housing project they grew up in. The cost of
1936-7 using a painted brick veneer over wood frame and red asbestos shingles, which were later replaced.

(Fig. 4, 1937 photo of Cooper River Court taken from the intersection of Hanover and Johnson Streets. Charleston Evening Post, Jacobs)

(Fig. 5, Cooper River Court taken from the intersection of Hanover and Johnson Streets, Jason Grismore, 2007)

The structures are one and two stories. Both projects were built on 16 acres that were originally the city dump and railroad corridor and the site is bounded by Meeting Street, Johnson Street, construction needed to be kept low because of HUD regulations, which required that the housing costs be kept low. The low construction costs justified spending the money on housing for the poor, therefore the construction materials tended to be average to offset the cost of construction.
Harris Street, Hanover Street and Stroble Lane. The total cost of construction was $3.5 million. The two projects were built on adjacent sites but the Cooper River Court housed African Americans and Meeting Street Manor housed low income whites, so they were deliberately considered separate projects. Loutrel W. Briggs, a notable landscape architect of the time, created the landscape design for the two housing projects.¹²⁶ The arrangement of the Meeting Street Manor is considered artistic because the six buildings that are situated between Meeting Street and Hanover Street are open-ended and inviting with a well manicured landscape and Cooper River Court emulates this arrangement, scaling and landscape as well. For these reasons the Meeting Street Manor and Cooper River Court, in comparison to later Charleston projects, are considered good housing.

Robert Mills Manor was the next project to be constructed.¹²⁷ It was built in 1939 as a slum clearance project like many of the early public housing communities.¹²⁸ The structures were partially built from brick salvaged from the Old Marine Hospital.¹²⁹ The construction cost $900,000 and was placed on 7 acres in the heart of Charleston.¹³⁰ Its funding was one of the first awards made under the 1937 Housing Act. The Robert Mills Manor was the first project that was independently planned, built and managed by the Charleston Housing Authority and was placed in an area of Charleston that the 1938 City Annual described as “the worst disease-

¹²⁶ L.W. Briggs had a large New York business. He graduated from Cornell University in 1917 with a degree in landscape architecture he was asked by some New York clients to design gardens for their Charleston properties. His first commission in Charleston was in 1929 for Mrs. Washington Roebling, widow of the engineer who supervised the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. She was living at the Gibbes House on 64 South Battery Street which includes one of the city’s largest formal gardens. Soon afterward, Briggs opened a Charleston office and spent winters living and working in Charleston until his retirement in 1959. His work was published in national magazines and because of his book, Charleston Gardens, he became a Charleston legend. http://www.preservationsociety.org/progress/PPJUNE06CS.pdf
¹²⁷ Refer to Project 3 on Map 1.
¹²⁹ Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, on March 11, 2008.
¹³⁰ Consult footnote #89 for further explanation of the previous use of the land prior to the construction of Robert Mills Manor.
breeding spot in the lower section of the city.”131 The buildings were designed by Samuel Lapham and The Housing Architects Associated of Charleston and are two stories with clay pantiled gable roofs and “wore built in the form of those in other areas, but in their materials and detailing as well as scale they seem like dependencies behind old Charleston houses, arranged in a courtyard fashion.”132 Since the time of their construction and for years afterwards, representatives of housing authorities from around the country came to Charleston to study the Robert Mills Manor, to create similar well designed projects in their own cities.133 This was largely due to the success of the integrated design which blended so well with the surrounding historic district as to almost go unnoticed. Some of the detailing that has made the Robert Mills Manor famous includes the grape leaf patterning in the wrought iron supports on the portico and the graceful copper roofs on the porticos. Also incorporated with the public housing structures are 63 and 65 Beaufain Street, which are nineteenth-century single houses of stuccoed brick with two story piazzas that are supported by Tuscan columns. These structures are used for low income housing residences in the Robert Mills Manor. Throughout the years not all who have lived at Robert Mills Manor have been low income persons. The Medical University of South Carolina had a contract with the Charleston Housing Authority to allow residents and interns to live in Robert Mills Manor, many of whom are now doctors at the university.134 The Robert Mills Manor Extension, which added twelve new dwelling structures, was built in 1940 in the same location. The materials and architectural detailing emulate the previously built structures.

131 Cameron, 8. Independently planned project refers to the first project planned and managed by the Charleston Housing Authority.
133 Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, on March 11, 2008.
134 Ibid.
The Wraggborough Homes and Ansonborough Homes were constructed at about the same time as Robert Mills Manor, in 1940. They were designed by Douglas Ellington and Middleton McMillan Architects, Inc. and are built of painted cinderblocks, glazed on the interior of the structure and not covered in sheetrock. These one-story structures are built with asphalt

135 Refer to Projects 4 and 5 on Map 1.
shingled gable roofs. Both projects were built as slum clearance projects for African Americans. At the time of construction the sites of the Wraggborough Homes and Ansonborough Homes contained many dilapidated structures.\textsuperscript{136} An almshouse had been near the site where the Wraggborough Homes were constructed and the site where the Ansonborough Homes were to be built was the railroad corridor and wharf.\textsuperscript{137} The city saw it as a chance to beautify the two sites in slum areas, however the Ansonborough Homes were built on a hazardous flood zone next to the railroad corridor and the Wraggborough Homes were built on a flood zone next to the railroad corridor as well. The Wraggborough and Ansonborough Homes are the first projects that reflect who the public housing was being originally constructed for. The barracks-style arrangement of the structures and the lack of architectural detailing reflect that they were intended for the undeserving poor. In 1989 Hurricane Hugo flooded the Wraggborough Homes severely. The only sheetrock inside the structures is on the ceilings, so cleanup crews came in after the hurricane and were able to pressure wash the interior of the houses and let them air dry so residents could move back in.\textsuperscript{138} This process took just forty five days. However, the Ansonborough Homes were not as fortunate. After Hurricane Hugo severely flooded the homes, a study was done and benzo-a-pyrene, a cancer causing compound, was discovered in the soil where the project stood. Therefore the Charleston Housing Authority closed the project down for good in 1991. The Charleston Housing Authority sold the land to the State Ports Authority and the city of Charleston and shortly thereafter in 1996, demolition began.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{136} 105 structures at the Wraggborough Homes site in 1940 were considered substandard and were demolished to make room for the new public housing project. “Rentals for Negro Units” – Charleston Evening Post, February 21, 1940.
\textsuperscript{137} Information gleaned from 1888 and 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.
\textsuperscript{138} “Rentals for Negro Units” – Charleston Evening Post, February 21, 1940.
\textsuperscript{139} “SPA Buys Homes” – The Charleston Post and Courier, March 29, 1996.
(Fig. 8, Photo taken in 1939 during the slum clearance prior to construction of the Ansonborough Homes. Charleston Evening Post, Peck, 1939)

(Fig. 9, Ansonborough Homes, 1940. A Report on Fifty Years of Service.)

(Fig. 10, Ansonborough Homes in 1996 prior to demolition. Post and Courier, Gabriel B. Tate.)
(Fig. 11, Former site of the Ansonborough Homes. Photo was taken from Concord Street looking west towards Washington Street. Jason Grismore, 2007)

(Fig. 12, Wragborough Homes on America Street looking northeast towards South Street. Jason Grismore, 2007)
In 1941-42 the Gadsden Green Homes were constructed. The structures were designed by Harold Tatum and the Charleston Re-Housing Architects of Charleston, SC and are two story brick veneer over wood frame structures with pan tiled gable roofs and two story porches, which were originally supported by steel, but the CHA surrounded the steel with white painted wood in the mid 1980s to make it more appealing. The structures are constructed with brick painted various colors such as soft pinks, soft light blues and soft cream yellows, which are reminiscent of the colors of Rainbow Row. The Gadsden Green Homes site is bounded by Line Street, Flood Street, Norman Street, Allway Street, President Street and Hagood Avenue. The Gadsden Green Homes Extension was constructed by Cummings and McCrady in 1968 around the time of the construction of the Meeting Street Manor Extension and the Wraggborough Homes Extension. The buildings in the Gadsden Green Homes Extension are two-story brick veneer over wood frame structures with asphalt shingle roofs. The housing arrangement is reminiscent of the barrack style arrangement of the Wraggborough and Ansonborough Homes. However, one striking difference is the attention to architectural detail that Tatum used. The pan tile roofing and two story porticoes reflect the piazzas and architectural detailing one finds on the Charleston single house.

140 Refer to Project 6 on Map 1.
141 Ibid.
142 The Gadsden Green Homes were painted these colors in 1978.
The Cooper River Court Extension (Project 8 on Map 1) was constructed in 1953. The one to two story structures, constructed of brick veneer over wood frame with asphalt shingle roofs, appear to emulate mill houses for the Bennett Rice Mill or the Old Cigar Factory, both of which are located down East Bay Street from the Cooper River Court Extension. The Cooper River Court Extension followed the pattern set by the Robert Mills Manor of fitting in but was less successful. In 1978, the Cooper River Court and Extension was considered a model housing project by HUD and was cited as a reason to get more money for housing due to its proximity to the Cooper River Bridge.  

143 “Housing Being Spruced Up” –*Charleston News and Courier*, January 13, 1978
In 1953, during the construction of the Cooper River Court Extension, the Kiawah Homes (Project 7 on Map 1), originally built in 1942 for defense worker housing during WWII, were converted to public housing. They had been built by Harold Tatum Architects of Charleston, SC, and are bounded by Sunnyside Avenue, Ashley Avenue and Rutledge Avenue. The Kiawah Homes contain thirty one dwelling structures and sixty one total units. The one story clapboard sided duplexes are on a raised concrete masonry unit foundation and have shared porticoes. The buildings are painted in the same soft pastel colors as the Gadsden Green Homes. The Kiawah Homes are unique since they are separate duplex homes. They give the feel of a quiet neighborhood rather than a public housing community. The surrounding neighborhood is scaled down, and with the Kiawah Homes having followed the Robert Mills Manor of fitting into the fabric of the community, it can be considered successful. However, one needs to keep in mind that the Kiawah Homes were never originally intended to be used for public housing. In
2004 the Charleston Housing Authority updated the duplexes by adding bungalow style columns with brick bases and back porches. The concrete masonry unit foundations were stuccoed over and the siding was replaced.

(Fig. 15, Kiawah Homes from Mount Pleasant Street looking towards Sunnyside Avenue. Jason Grismore 2007)

(Fig. 16, Kiawah Homes after 2004 renovations from the intersection of Ashley Avenue and Sunnyside Avenue. Jason Grismore, 2008)
The Meeting Street Manor Extension (Project 9 on Map 1), which was built in 1968 along with the Gadsden Green Homes Extension (Project 11 on Map 1) and Wraggborough Homes Extension (Project 10 on Map 1), were the last public housing projects built on the peninsula. The brick veneer structures are one and two stories. They were designed by Cummings & McCrady using architectural designs similar to the Gadsden Green Homes Extension and the Wraggborough Homes Extension.

(Fig. 17, Meeting Street Manor Extension [constructed in 1967-8] from Meeting Street. Jason Grismore, 2007)
The first public housing projects in Charleston, SC were designed and built by professional architects and engineers that were out of work during the Depression. Charleston cleared some of its worst diseased and crime-ridden slums and employed professionals to design
and build subsidized housing for low income persons. Architects had a more artistic arrangement for public housing projects until the post war era, when barrack housing, which emulated prison camps, became the norm. The housing design and layout showed a fundamental resentment towards the poor. Housing Authorities even became more relaxed in their applicant screening process. During the postwar boom, there was recognition of an increasing underclass. The growing sentiment was that the poor did not deserve anything better than what was being built. The federal government made public housing a necessity for every city to construct, therefore the architectural design for public housing in Charleston (particularly the Wraggborough Homes, Gadsden Green Homes, Meeting Street Manor and Cooper River Court Extensions) and around the country reflected this new attitude towards public housing.

Although the city of Charleston might not have succeeded in always providing aesthetically and architecturally pleasing public housing communities, it did however, build in accordance to the zoning ordinances and the local neighborhoods even though the city was never required to do so by the Board of Architectural Review and the city government. None of the structures in the public housing communities were taller than two stories, keeping the scale of the project consistent with the neighborhoods. In this case, the city of Charleston was very successful, while many other cities at the same time failed by building tall housing projects in traditionally low-scaled neighborhoods. Concerned citizens spoke out against high rise low

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144 Grass, near entrances to individual project buildings, was replaced with tar. Victory gardens, which project residents took care of, were removed and replaced with tar as well. Residents became callous and began throwing trash on the lawns, which led to fighting. People did not care anymore because Housing Authorities did not care. Fuerst, J.S. When Public Housing Was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. p. 105-6.

145 Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, on March 11, 2008.
income apartment buildings because of noted failures in other cities keeping the projects to a low scale.\textsuperscript{146}

The Charleston Housing Authority recognized that all types of residents contribute to a diverse city. Sadly during the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s, the residents’ bad behavior (drugs, crime, homicide, domestic violence, etc) in the public housing communities became identified with the project. For example, when a crime was committed, the police would report that the incidence took place at Meeting Street Manor Extension, instead of at 22-A Conroy Street. The CHA is working with police to use addresses and not public housing project names to identify a crime location, in an effort to de-emphasize the association of bad behavior to housing projects.

Chapter 4

Scattered Site Public Housing and Alternative Housing on the Charleston Peninsula

Following the construction of the last public housing projects in 1968, the city of Charleston and the Charleston Housing Authority shifted to scattered site housing and mixed income communities, and began transitional programs which were designed to educate the homeless in order to help them become self-sufficient. Scattered sites are an alternative to large projects, which concentrate poverty and problems.\textsuperscript{147} They are defined as projects of fewer than fifteen units located in nonminority concentrated neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{148} Scattered sites are integrated within the neighborhood fabric so as to go unnoticed. Mixed income communities refer to projects that contain low income residents, moderate income residents, the elderly poor as well as the handicapped poor.\textsuperscript{149} Transitional programs refer to educational programs for the poor. The program allows the homeless a room to live in and they learn how to pay rent, hold a job, stay clean of drug abuse and after twelve to eighteen months, they can move out on their own. Since the Charleston single house is the city’s unique architectural innovation, and has been used to shelter every level of Charleston society, it is easy to understand why the single house was the inspiration for a new concept in public housing in Charleston. The single house form disguises public housing, making it look like non-public housing. Since this building form is unique to the city, using the single house style for scattered site public housing only works in Charleston.

\textsuperscript{147} [http://www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/scatter.html](http://www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/scatter.html). Refer to the unnumbered, orange-colored areas on Map 1.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} “Practical Solution for Enston Home” –Charleston Post and Courier, June 13, 1994. A further explanation for mixed income communities will be explained later in the chapter. Refer to the unnumbered, green-colored areas on Map 1.
The single house, according to architectural historian, Gene Waddell “is a separate, multi story dwelling one room wide and three across including a central entrance and stair hall.”\textsuperscript{150} The single house “typically, but not necessarily, has its narrow end to the street, a piazza along one of its longer sides, and back wall chimneys.”\textsuperscript{151} Ken Severens, an architectural historian, asserts the most common rationalization for the single house as “a creative response to the increasing scarcity of space in the city and was designed to mitigate the unpleasantness of hot, humid summers. With its narrow side directly on the street, the rectangular house with two rooms in each story grew tall to raise the main entertaining room to the level of the prevailing breeze which passed through a side piazza. As a free standing house communicating more with a side garden than with the street the single house offered a masterful but still vernacular solution

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
to the residential problems of achieving comfort, privacy and property.”152 Architectural historian Bernard Herman states that “the single house emerged in the third quarter of the eighteenth century as one of Charleston’s most favored dwelling forms” and “a key design consideration within the diverse repertoire of urban dwelling options was a common need for buildings combining commerce and residence.”153 The most common solution was a street level, one room shop with a living space or dining area behind and the ‘best’ room and chambers above.154 By the end of the eighteenth century the single house was the preferred form for Charleston’s urban housing and by the late 19th century there were over 4,000 single houses in Charleston (now there are approximately 2,500 left). Although the plan arrangement of the traditional Charleston single house is different than the scattered site ‘single house’, the scattered site house still very much looks like a Charleston single house. The loss of the garden allowed for a parking lot behind the scattered site housing. The scattered site housing became successful because it was a type of stealth housing, due to the single house being a typology that can easily fit into the city fabric.

Beginning in the 1980s, Charleston built thirteen scattered site dwelling structures totaling forty six units. Some of the first units were built on Saint Philip Street, Coming Street and Marion Street. They were designed by Middleton and McMillan Architects, Inc. Some of the structures were constructed in the Charleston single house style. In 1981, the Charleston Housing Authority came to an agreement with the Radcliffeborough neighborhood to construct scattered site low income housing units.155 This agreement settled a court battle to keep low income housing out of Radcliffeborough. The criminal image the projects had among outside

152 Poston, 38.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 “Radcliffeboro, Authority Reach Agreement” –Charleston Evening Post, August 28, 1981
citizens continued to be a setback even during the 1980s because when the sites were chosen for scattered dwellings the neighborhood residents would start litigation to prevent public housing in their neighborhoods. These neighborhoods believed that public housing within their neighborhoods would result in lowered real estate values and higher crime. Despite neighborhood residents’ protests, fifty two additional scattered site units were eventually built on Saint Philip, Nassau, Cannon, Reid, and South Streets. In 1981 the Mitchell Construction Company was given a $2.2 million contract to construct sixty seven low-income scattered sites on the Charleston peninsula beginning in January, 1982.

(Fig. 21, 149 Coming Street looking Southwest across Coming Street Jason Grismore, 2008)

156 “HUD Lessening Control of State, Local Housing”-Charleston News and Courier, September 25, 1981. According to HUD, “Although scattered-site public housing has been promoted as an alternative to large projects that concentrate poverty and problems, little systematic information is available about its characteristics and performance.” However, “Scattered-site housing is widely favored by residents, as shown in a 1983 national sample survey and subsequent case studies. PHA directors surveyed in 1994 also reported that residents favored and benefited from this type of housing.” And although, “There is some disagreement about costs associated with scattered-site units -- although many PHA directors surveyed believed that scattered-site units were somewhat more costly to manage, other studies have reported that higher maintenance costs are offset by better resident care and less vandalism.” http://www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/scatter.html

157 “Groundbreaking for Housing Units”-Charleston News and Courier, January 20, 1982
149 Coming Street was the first of eight sites to be built. The Charleston Housing Authority believed that scattered site housing could be constructed in a way that the tenants would not be “an intrusion on the neighborhood but rather a part of the fabric.” Many of the buildings were built in the Charleston vernacular form, the single house. The housing is considered compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and no more than five houses would be built at the eight sites. The Charleston Housing Authority takes pride in these units since the design was well executed. The units generate enough rental income to offset the expenses of construction and are therefore considered ‘self sufficient.’ The buildings cost an average of $58,820 each to construct, which is within the guidelines of HUD. Many of these scattered site units were constructed in the Old and Historic District of the Charleston Peninsula.

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158 “Public Housing” - Charleston News and Courier June 3, 1982
159 “Scattered Site Housing Nearly Ready for Tenants” - Charleston News and Courier, December 17, 1982
160 There is a paternalistic idea of scattered site housing that the residents will begin to emulate the middle class if they are living in close proximity to better people. This concept socializes immigrants and was an original idea behind Central Park in New York City. The landscape architect that created Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, believed that immigrants would assimilate into American society by watching Americans socialize and interact on a large scale. Warehousing the poor did not work well because they were not bettering their situation, therefore Charleston decided to move public housing residents into a different context and setting. Scattered site housing, in the long run, may be better suited for public housing because it is affordable to build and it may have a higher turnover rate than large public housing projects do.
161 “Scattered Site Housing Nearly Ready for Tenants” - Charleston News and Courier, December 17, 1982
162 Ibid.
Renovations and reuse are also included in the city’s low income housing campaign.
such as the 1984 conversion of a night club into eight apartment units.\textsuperscript{163} Another building at 68 Amherst Street was rehabilitated to house six additional apartments for low income families.\textsuperscript{164}

The use of scattered site housing marked a major transition for the process Charleston uses in housing low income persons. Charleston, also in the mid 1980s, experimented with alternative housing, such as transitional programs and mixed income housing communities. In 1988 a transitional program was established by the Charleston Housing Authority and HUD to help homeless people become accustomed to renting and working on their own.\textsuperscript{165}

The buildings at 581 Meeting Street, the former Colin Grant Foundation Homes, were purchased to provide sixteen apartments for thirty two people.

\textsuperscript{163} “BAR To Be Converted Into Housing Units” – \textit{Charleston News and Courier}, April 19, 1984
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} “Transitional Housing Program Set”–\textit{Charleston News and Courier}, February 5, 1988
In 1992 architect Christopher Rose designed prefab Charleston cottages, modeled after those built starting in the 1870s by newly freed slaves, with updated amenities such as porches, vaulted ceilings and large windows. These cottages are located directly behind the Colin Grant Homes on the corner of upper Meeting Street and Huger Street. The cottages that were built for newly freed slaves are called Freedman's cottages. Freedman’s cottages are small, one-story dwellings with side piazzas, and are sometimes described by architectural historians as a subset of the Charleston single house.

The Historic Charleston Foundation mentions that Freedman’s cottages are “long associated with African-Americans, freedman's cottages have not been thoroughly studied for their architectural associations. Along with the shotgun house and praise house, the freedman's cottage may represent one of the only vernacular architectural types in America to be associated exclusively with African-American history.” The floor plan of many Freedman's cottages feature one room to either side of a central fireplace and are oriented with the gable end to the street, the cottages were originally entered through a piazza screen. They can be found in Charleston's historic district, but are concentrated in predominately African-American neighborhoods in the northern sections of Charleston's peninsula, including Elliottborough, Radcliffeborough and neighborhoods near and to the north of Highway 17.

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166 Christopher Rose: Cottages of Humble Dignity”-US News and World Report, December 28, 1992 Miriam Horn
167 On Map 1, they are the buildings highlighted in green, which are situated directly southwest of the Meeting Street Manor (#1)
168 http://www.historiccharleston.org/preservation/why_freedman.html
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
The Christopher Rose Cottages cost only $12,000 each to construct.\textsuperscript{172} Their design helped overcome local prejudice against public housing. The uniqueness of this project was heightened because they were built by homeless people who were employed by Rose.\textsuperscript{173} They are award winning cottages. The eight duplexes on nearby E Street, which are also used as transitional housing, increased the transitional housing program’s capacity to fifty two people.\textsuperscript{174} These duplexes are additional housing for those that need more than the traditional twelve to eighteen months to successfully complete the transitional program.

Charleston County, with the help of HUD, also renovated and restored several one story houses that were originally a part of a local Greek Orthodox Church that was looking to get rid

\textsuperscript{172} Christopher Rose: Cottages of Humble Dignity”-.US News and World Report, December 28, 1992 Miriam Horn
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} “City Agency Goes It Alone”-.Charleston Post and Courier, January 19, 1992

Fig. 25, Christopher Rose Cottages from Huger Street. (Jason Grismore, 2007)
of them since they had fallen into disrepair.\textsuperscript{175} These houses were moved behind the Joseph Floyd Manor, a high rise low income apartment building for low income elderly persons, to the east of Interstate 26 and currently serve as homes for low income persons.

Also in 1988, forty seven additional low income housing units were slated for construction.\textsuperscript{176} Many of these units were built next to existing scattered site housing with preference given to residents with special needs from involuntary displacement including those

\textsuperscript{175} Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, on March 11, 2008. Refer to the unnumbered, yellow-colored areas on Map 1.

\textsuperscript{176} “New Low-Income Housing Units May Be Built”—Charleston News and Courier, June 24, 1988
from actual or threatened domestic violence, those living in substandard housing or those that had current rent payments of more than 50% of family income. \(^{177}\)

Recently, low income housing includes the renovation and partial reuse of the William Enston Homes on King Street. \(^{178}\) Twelve of the dwelling structures on the William Enston Homes site were built circa 1884-88, with additional structures being built in 1893, 1927, 1933 and recently. The 1884/88 units were converted into duplexes for low income elderly people and the 1920s/30s buildings facing King Street were converted into transitional housing for disabled homeless residents. \(^{179}\)

\(^{177}\) Ibid.

\(^{178}\) The William Enston Homes originally consisted of twenty-nine structures, twenty-four of which were residential. They were built as rent free housing for the elderly poor, however the CHA purchased the property from The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home in 1994. “Practical Solution for Enston Home” – Charleston Post and Courier, June 13, 1994. The CHA kept the original structures for the elderly poor, but also incorporated housing for poor handicapped individuals, some were converted to public housing scattered site units and more recently thirteen new structures were built for moderate income residents ($45,000+ income per year). Ibid. This broke the will of William Enston, who originally wanted “only the deserving poor” to live on the William Enston Home site. Ibid. The deserving poor referred to the elderly white poor. Some other projects for low income residents include Longborough neighborhood near Wagener’s Terrace and Peecksens Court, near Rose Lane. Longborough was once a site of low income/poor housing that was converted to affordable housing for first time buyers for homeowners. “Homes Don’t Call Attention to Themselves” – Charleston Post and Courier, June 30, 2008. Peecksens Court is an affordable housing community as well, that won design awards from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and HUD for the 2003 community. Ibid. Affordable housing is eligible for first time home buyers who make between 60 and 120 percent of the median income, i.e. $35,040 to $70,080 a year for a family of four in Charleston. Ibid. Nonprofit developers, such as Humanities Foundation, along with some support from the city, help keep the cost of housing low for qualified buyers. Ibid.

\(^{179}\) Ibid.
Scattered site housing has been successful in de-emphasizing the need for public housing projects by building dwelling structures in various neighborhoods allowing the residents the chance to assimilate into the neighborhood without the perceived fear/threat that larger housing
projects elicit. In addition to the success of the scattered sites, the transitional program has been effective, so much that even though the Federal Government cut its funding for the program in the early 1990s, Donald Cameron of the CHA decided that the housing authority would find a way to continue the program. In an interview with him, Mr. Cameron stated that 75% of the homeless people that finish the program find employment and pay for housing on their own. The 25% that does not finish the program in the allotted time are given extra months to complete it.

Charleston County has constructed high density low income housing on the peninsula, which includes the Joseph Floyd Manor, which sits on Mount Pleasant Street and was built in the 1960s by local architects. The Joseph Floyd Manor is for low income elderly and disabled people and is the single low-income high rise in Charleston.

![Fig. 29, Joseph P. Floyd Manor from Mount Pleasant and North Meeting Streets. (Jason Grismore, 2007)](image)

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180 "City Agency Goes It Alone" - Charleston Post and Courier, January 19, 1992
181 Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, March 11, 2008.
The Habitat for Humanity (HFH) program, known for their well-designed and volunteer-community built homes, has had a presence of the peninsula since its founding in 1976. They both build and rehabilitate houses for families in need. Many of their houses are designed by architecture students from around the country. The houses are also constructed by those in need alongside volunteers, which exemplifies the concept of “partnership housing.” In Charleston, HFH remains an important source of available funding outside the federal and local government. The waiting list for affordable housing and public housing communities in Charleston averages 400 families and HFH typically builds houses for those that are not eligible for government assistance. 

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182 http://www.habitat.org/
183 Ibid.
While the scattered site housing and the transitional housing program in Charleston has had success, the mixed income housing, i.e. the William Enston Homes, is too new to see the success so far. Mr. Cameron stated in an interview that he believes some of the most successful housing sites are mixed income because these sites do not encapsulate low income people in a community/project. He also believes that scattered site housing is successful because the houses are well designed and constructed to blend with the neighborhoods.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Donald Cameron, chief executive director of the Charleston Housing Authority, March 11, 2008.
Conclusion

Public housing in Charleston compared to other cities around the country is relatively successful in terms of design and crime rates. There has never been a notorious project such as Cabrini Green or any area where the crime was so extensive that it made national headlines. Throughout the years Charleston has had good leadership from the city and within the housing authority. Public housing (strictly scattered infill housing) followed local zoning ordinances and sometimes used vernacular building traditions allowing the buildings to blend within the surrounding neighborhoods. Compared to national projects, public housing on the peninsula has been successful, has had a higher quality of design, materials, craftsmanship and contextualism, and lower crime rates.

The first public housing projects, Meeting Street Manor and Cooper River Court (built 1936-7), were federally sponsored housing projects. They were designed by Samuel Lapham and built on upper Meeting Street that was once the site for the city dump and railroad corridor. The overall design and site plan is average. Following the completion of the Meeting Street Manor and Cooper River Court, was the first public housing project that was

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185 North Charleston and Charleston are considered separate cities and municipalities. The Ben Tillman Homes and the George Legare Homes (no longer extant) of North Charleston were disreputable ‘projects.’
186 The Charleston Housing Authority would not allow crime rates and drug use destroy their public housing communities. The CHA is a ‘tough landlord’ and if a resident was to commit a crime, then the resident would be evicted and most residents do not want to make that mistake for the fear of possibly having to move out of the city due to high rent.
187 According to the 1888 and 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.
locally funded and driven, the Robert Mills Manor (built 1939-40). Samuel Lapham was the Chief Architect and Harold Tatum was the contractor for this project. The architectural design and site plan is excellent. The attention to architectural detail is evident, with the use of clay pan tile and copper roofing materials and wrought iron supports for the porches. This housing project was and is used as a template by other housing authorities for integrating public housing successfully into city centers. While the Robert Mills Manor was being built, the Ansonborough Homes (no longer extant) and the Wraggborough Homes were beginning construction (built 1940). The Ansonborough and Wraggborough Homes were sister projects. Douglas Ellington was the Chief Architect for both housing projects and utilized the same building plans and architectural designs for both. Both were constructed of painted cinderblocks. Compared to the Meeting Street Manor, Cooper River Court and the Robert Mills Manor, the Ansonborough and Wraggborough Homes are dreary. The Gadsden Green Homes is the final original public housing project (built 1941-2). Harold Tatum was the Chief Architect for this project. The Gadsden Green Homes are constructed of painted brick veneer over wood frame and even though clay pan tiles were used for roofing materials, the barracks-style arrangement and design make this public housing project dreary as well.

The scattered site infill and small scale housing are encouraging. Some of the awards the scattered site infill housing has won include the Recognition Award for Innovation (1983), Federal Design Achievement Award (1984) and the Presidential Design Award (1985). The scattered site infill and small scale housing designs have been inspired by vernacular architectural types such as the Charleston single house and the Freedman’s cottage, which is just one reason for their success as a type of stealth housing.