

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 10, 1943

Benefits of Public Housing Pointed Out By Chairman W. S. Hendley In Address to the Rotary Club

Following is the text of an address delivered by Chairman W. S. Hendley of the Columbia Housing Authority at the meeting of the Rotary Club here yesterday:

During this afternoon this morning, I saw Mathews village and other attractive homes in the city and the thought occurred to me if these are typical of your homes private enterprise is doing a commendable job and it is possible that you do not need public housing as a community problem.

At any rate, the benefits of public housing have been demonstrated in Columbia and I hope you will be interested in a review of its progress.

Public housing was first introduced in this country a little more than 10 years ago. You will recall the conditions in 1933, a period when most of us were asked to "Look around the corner for prosperity." Business was at a low level—there was a grave problem of unemployment—therefore public housing was proposed to Congress. Surveys were made and on that record funds were appropriated. An astounding ratio of sub-standard housing was reported; distressing living conditions were found. The city of Columbia was among the first to be studied. The late Mayor Owens immediately became interested. Legislation was sponsored, and a test suit was brought in the courts to determine the legality of public housing. In South Carolina, the court decisions were entirely favorable to the plan, and the Columbia City Council adopted ordinances creating a Housing Authority of five members. On April 10, 1934 Mayor Owens named as the authority commissioners Professor Edward C. Coker, Ordway H. Crawford, Samuel L. Latimer, L. Cooper Smith and W. S. Hendley. This group has served continuously through reappointments by the late Mayor Owens and our present mayor, Fred D. Marshall.

This authority is a part of the city administration, but technically it is a public corporation and its transactions do not involve the credit of the city. Strange to say public housing has been administered in Columbia without a single appropriation of funds by the city council.

The introduction of public housing in Columbia was a challenge to integrity, courage and initiative. Doctor Rast was living in our city at the time and he can tell you there was much opposition, organized and unorganized. Meetings were held and letters were sent to the press, condemning the plan. This can be easily understood, some had been misinformed, little was known as to the scope of housing; therefore they sincerely believed it would mean a deflation in values of privately owned properties. Others did not believe it would bring about the idealistic conditions for which it was planned, using that old story about bats to store coal, by the low income groups.

I can now assure you that all opposition to public housing in our community has faded away—our people know about its beneficial results, providing the low-income groups a type of housing at nominal rentals which they can afford, giving them in many instances their first opportunity to enjoy decent living. Our problems in the early days were made easier through the co-operation of Federal, City and County officials and the encouragement received from civic organizations.

Not Competitive

Public housing is not in competition with private construction, it is not based upon profits, but its purpose is to provide opportunities for self respect and decency to American families whose fate otherwise would have been to spend their days in slums. A sense of responsibility is developed; a community spirit and human relationships are established. It is believed that it is the responsibility of the public to provide livable homes for families in the low-income brackets—incomes so low that private enterprise cannot serve them.

Our particular field is not related to FHA, which guarantees private loans on individual homes. Selection of tenants is by a trained staff who investigate each application, usually interviewing the employer.

Thus far I have given little information as to what has been accomplished in the field of housing in Columbia. I shall briefly review the five projects, with a total of 1,084 living units representing total expenditures of \$4 1/2 million dollars.

Our first project was University Terrace completed in 1937, this was financed with PWA funds at a cost of \$700,000. It occupies four acres of land, adjacent to the University athletic field. It replaced 45 houses, only two of which could be classified as inhabitable, although all were occupied. Through certain covenants on that block were found deplorable, a mosquito both unsightly and physically insupportable. If you please an area with such living conditions, adjoining the University and land from the South by the Booker Washington High School. There are 122 living units, 40 facing the University property, 30 white families, and 74 facing the Booker Washington school, for Negro families. There is a terrace dividing the two groups.

There has never been the slightest trouble between the two races. The project eliminated unsightly conditions, and it has encouraged owners to develop adjacent properties. The present elaborate Women's building occupied by students at the University could not have been built, had former conditions been allowed to continue.

Next Projects

Our next projects were financed through a bond issue of approximately two million dollars, 90 per cent guaranteed by the government—10 per cent issued by the Housing Authority. \$400,000 of these bonds have already been retired, and we have among our reserves a total of \$600,000 invested in war bonds.

This money was used to develop Gonzales Gardens, for white tenants, and Allen Benedict Court for Negro tenants. Gonzales Gardens are situated on a site of several acres, facing the Providence Hospital. Ready for occupancy in September, 1940, a run-down, dilapidated section has been transformed into a show place. This project contains 300 living units, 100 of which were assigned to Fort Jackson for families of non-commissioned officers, an arrangement to continue until victory has been won.

Allen-Benedict Court, contains 244 living units for Negro families, more or less a duplicate in design of Gonzales Gardens. This project is named for the two Negro institutions of higher learning, situated in the same locality. The Authority assigned a Negro staff to manage Allen-Benedict Court, reporting of course to the central office. This was an innovation for public housing, but it has proven entirely satisfactory. In studying reports of actual living conditions in some of our slums, we are of the opinion that many of the employees of servants, cooks and nurses would become very much alarmed if they could know their actual living conditions.

Andrew Jackson Home

The fourth project is Andrew Jackson Home, a defense housing project, built primarily for families of non-commissioned officers at Fort Jackson. There are 330 living units, a community building, a school building and the administrative offices. Our Authority was asked to manage and direct this project under a lease arrangement.

Wilbur Wright Homes, completed early last month, is our fifth housing project. It is also a defense project with 40 living units, immediately adjacent to the Columbia Army Air Base. Its construction is somewhat of a temporary character. We direct its management through a lease at the request of the Post Commander.

Rentals at our three low-income projects are scheduled according to the income of the tenant, and the composition of each family. The ceiling is approximately 1-3 to 1-4 of his income, eliminating those in the higher income brackets. Since our country has been in war, with increase in earnings, living costs and income taxes, circumstances have arisen making it impractical to confine ourselves to the income limits originally established. Rather than ask this type of tenant to vacate, creating an additional problem for housing in Columbia, we are allowing such tenants to remain in the projects, paying a surcharge based upon their current incomes. This method will be used for the duration.

Rentals for the two defense housing projects are regulated through an agreement between the War Department and the National Housing Authority. These rents approximate the government allowances for the purpose.

Good housing alone does not necessarily mean better living conditions, therefore branch libraries, social rooms and playgrounds are maintained at the three low-income projects, all under intelligent supervision. Tenants' associations are functioning at four of the projects. These have been helpful in encouraging a wholesome community life.

We cordially invite you to visit these projects at four first opportunity. We believe you will like them.

Bid for Her Bottle



Most South Carolina housewives, like Jane Forrester (above), have empty deposit bottles they are delaying returning. To be sure of getting your living allowance this fall—all deposit bottles should be returned to where they were purchased.