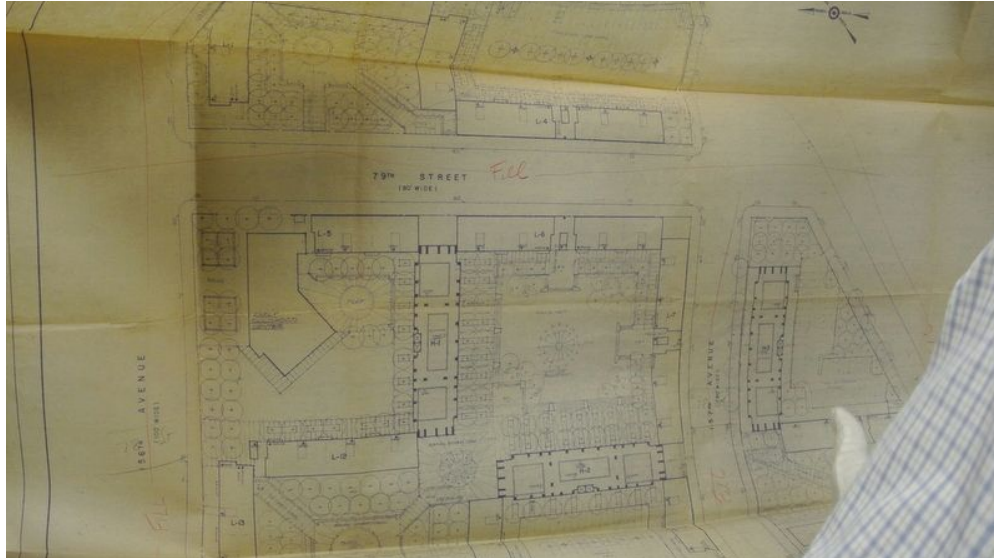


Learning Places Spring 2016

LIBRARY / ARCHIVE REPORT

Laguardia's Wagner Archives - NYCHA Collection



Jessica Samide

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INTRODUCTION

The class met at Laguardia Community College outside of the Wagner Archives. The purpose of this visit was for the archivists to educate the class on NYCHA projects relating to Urban Renewal in Vinegar Hill. We broke off into two separate groups and each group sat down with an archivist who provided us with photographs. The photographs were not of Vinegar Hill, but they were of similar housing projects from Manhattan that were built around the same time. After the archivists discussed the photographs with us, we were taken into the space where they store their content. Lastly, we met with a Wikipedia Campus Ambassador who gave a presentation on editing wikipedia and how to post citations.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

The trip to the Wager Archives will be focused on gathering information on the New York City Housing Authority, which is an organization the was founded in the 1930s. Because the focus of my project is from the l880s until about 1915, the information that will be gathered is not very applicable to my

research. However, I am still looking forward to learning about the various NYCHA projects. I may even be able to make connections on how the events of the time period that I am focusing my research on has led to the creation of this organization.

SOURCES found

1. Created by NYCHA Carpenter - Name Not Provided, “Diorama of Housing Development Apartment”, Laguardia Community College Wagner Archives, 2004.
2. Photographer’s Name Not Provided, Photograph of Tenement House on the Corner of Madison Avenue, Manhattan, Laguardia Community College Wagner Archives, January 27, 1956.
3. Photographer’s Name Not Provided, Photograph of the Harlem River Houses, Laguardia Community College Wagner Archives, April 12, 1938.
4. Photographer’s Name Not Provided, Harlem River Houses: White Woman Speaking with a Group of Black Children, Laguardia Community College Wagner Archives, approximately mid-1940s.

DOCUMENTATION of site & resources (maps/archival documents/photos)



This photograph is of a “Diorama of Housing Development Apartment” from the New York City Housing Authority’s 70th Anniversary Exhibit in 2004. This diorama was created by a NYCHA

carpenter. The purpose of this diorama is to show an accurate depiction of what a NYCHA apartment looks like down to the smallest detail in 2004. The carpenter added window guards and the same tiling used in existing apartments around New York City. While the apartments this diorama is modeled after were built over fifty years later than the Farragut Houses, there are probably many similarities. The Farragut Houses was also built and owned by NYCHA, which leads me to believe that the materials used and the formatting of the apartment is similar to the model apartment. I have never seen the inside of the Farragut Houses. Based off of my assumption, I can use this diorama to have an idea of what the interior of the Farragut Houses may look like.



The infographic

in this photograph discusses briefly why the NYCHA apartments were in such large demand in the 20th Century as well as why they chose to design the buildings around open spaces. None of the pictures shown are of Farragut Houses. However, the layout of apartment complexes shown are very

similar to Farragut Houses. The Farragut houses were completed in the post World War II 1950s. During this time the ideal living situation was the suburbs, which is why NYCHA built the buildings were surrounded by open lawns and paths with benches.



This is a photograph of a tenement building on the corner of Madison Avenue in Manhattan. The buildings in Vinegar Hill that were constructed in the mid- 19th Century had a very similar design to the buildings in this photograph. These tenements were built to provide large amounts of affordable

housing for the large influx of population due to migration as well as immigration. In the 20th Century the living conditions of these tenements were less than adequate. The rooms were cramped and many of the buildings were in need of serious repairs due to their age. In the 20th Century, building developers wanted to develop buildings that were not fully and semi-attached to each other. This was true for all of the City including Vinegar Hill.



This picture is of the Harlem River Houses, a housing development of NYCHA. In contrast to the photograph above, this development has freestanding apartment buildings and large open spaces separating the buildings. In the center appears to be a courtyard where the inhabitants of the apartments can congregate and socialize. In the 20th Century, many of New York City's inhabitants found houses with a yard and plenty of space to be the ideal living situation. For this reason, there was a large wave of city dwellers moving out of the city into the surrounding suburbs of Long Island. By the time the Farragut Houses were built the suburbs were just as idealized, which is why the developer used similar open space plans as seen in this photo.



This photograph shows a white woman speaking to a group of black children during the Christmas holiday season. All of the children in this picture are of the same race except a child who appears to be white in the far right corner, which was cut off. This picture suggests to the viewer that the racial demographics of the Harlem River Houses was not diversified. Because NYCHA housing complexes provided its inhabitants with an outside community within the realm of the housing development, there was little need to for the people to mix with

neighbors outside the development. This led to further segregation beyond the usual racial segregation. Since the developments were self contained, many of the inhabitants were also cut off from their local communities outside those of the developments.

DISCOVERIES

1. Neighborhood History

- a. Throughout the 19th Century, Vinegar Hill was the home of a large immigrant population of many different European nationalities. Most prominent was the Irish population, thus branding the neighborhood with the nickname “Irishtown.” Towards the turn of the century and well into the 20th Century, the demographics of Vinegar Hill began to change and continued to diversify. The people of Vinegar Hill were consistently made up of working class families, which meant that affordable housing was necessary.
- b. In the 1940s-1950s, urban renewal began to change the way inhabitants of Vinegar Hill had been living for the past century. NYCHA developers began to plan and then construct the Farragut Houses. The old 19th Century houses, stores, and streets were demolished in order to create the large blocks that the Farragut Houses occupy. The completion of the Farragut Houses provided additional affordable housing with the goal of removing the slums as well as bringing in new inhabitants as families left the city for suburbia in droves.

2. Key Events / Historical Dates

- a. 1929-1939: The span of the Great Depression.
- b. 1934: The year the New York City Housing Authority was formed.
- c. 1939-1945: The year span of World War 2 and the start of the “Baby Boomers.”
- d. 1951-1952: The years in which the construction of the Farragut Houses were completed.

3. Key Players

- a. New York City Housing Authority: An organization dedicated to developing and building apartment complexes throughout the five boroughs of New York City. These apartments were intended to house low income and lower-middle income families.
- b. Robert Moses: A city planner who greatly influenced urban planning and development in 20th Century New York City and the surrounding areas of New York.
- c. New York City and State governments.

4. Relationship Key Players

- a. NYCHA depended on the New York City government and the state government to fund the building of its housing developments as well as the upkeep of the buildings.

- b. NYCHA and Robert Moses teamed up together to plan and build many of NYCHA's housing developments after World War II.
5. Public Perception of Key Events
- a. Due to the ten year span of the Great Depression many people living in New York City were part of the low-income working class, the need for affordable housing to was in high demand.
 - b. The widespread dislike for the poor, cramped, and dirty living conditions that tenements afforded its inhabitants led to the desire of living in an area of more space in newly built buildings.
 - c. The slums that were occupied by these tenements were prevalent throughout New York City. Due to the people's as well as the urban planner's dislike for tenements, NYCHA was able to demolish slums and replace them with public housing.
6. Important Changes to Neighborhood
- a. I believe that after the demolition of houses, businesses, and streets for the construction of the Manhattan Bridge, continued demolition of parts of Vinegar Hill was not seen as being detrimental to the neighborhood.
 - b. During World War II the Brooklyn Navy Yard was being used extensively by members of the military. At this time, the area surrounding the Brooklyn Navy Yard was considered to be part of the slums. Urban planners found this area to be ideal for putting the Farragut Houses.
7. Other Observations
- a. From examining modern maps of the Farragut Houses, it seems that the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway was placed strategically adjacent to the the Farragut Houses.
 - b. Due to the shift in neighborhood boundaries, most of the Farragut Housing development is not within the bounds of Vinegar Hill. From examining a map and applying modern Vinegar Hill's boundaries, it seems like the buildings on York Street are just on the edge of Vinegar Hill.
 - c. The upkeep of Farragut Houses development today does not seem to be at the same level as it was throughout the 1930s-50s.

TOPICS & KEYWORDS

"NYCHA", "New York City Housing Authority", "Architecture", "Farragut Houses", "Urban Renewal", "20th Century", "Segregation", "Demographics", "Census", "1950s", "Housing Development", "Redevelopment", "Downtown Brooklyn", "Vinegar Hill", "Robert Moses".

QUANTITATIVE DATA for Area of Study

Subject	Data
Land Ownership	New York City Housing Authority
Number of Blocks	3 very large blocks.
# of Buildings on a Typical Block	3-4 buildings.
Materials	Brick.
# of Stories of Buildings	13-14 stories high.
Residential Bldgs	10 buildings.
Gardens/ Open Spaces.	There are large amounts of open space between the apartment buildings. There are lawns and benches in the open spaces.
Commercial Uses	The Farragut Houses are not used for commercial use. All of the commercial buildings are located on the surrounding blocks.
Industrial Uses	The Farragut Houses are not used for commercial use. The industrial buildings are further into Vinegar Hill.
Farragut Houses Population	~3,440 occupants.
Relationship to Other Buildings	Each individual apartment building is freestanding and not attached to other buildings.
# of Individual Apartment Units	1,390 apartment units

QUESTIONS to Research Further

QUESTIONS:

1. Are the interior layouts of the apartment units in Farragut Houses truly similar to the apartment layout shown in the “Diorama of Housing Development Apartment”?
2. Why did NYCHA choose to build the Farragut Houses in the location that it is in now?
3. Did the Farragut Houses bring in a more diversified demographic? If so, did this lead to increased levels of segregation in Vinegar Hill?

RESEARCH METHOD/ ADDITIONAL SOURCES NEEDED TO ANSWER EACH QUESTION ABOVE:

1. Question 1
 - a. Research the web or search the NYCHA collection at the Wagner Archives for blueprints or developmental plans of the Farragut Houses.
 - b. Contact the NYCHA employees who work directly with the Farragut Houses by calling the number provided on the NYC.gov website.
 - c. Utilize the Development Data Book specific to the 1940s-1950s provided on NYC.gov’s NYCHA page.
2. Question 2
 - a. Examine maps that predate the construction of the Farragut Houses, probably the early 20th Century maps, and look for features that make the location ideal for the housing development.
 - b. Utilize MyNYCHA Developments, a link on the NYC.gov NYCHA page that provides factual information on each of the NYCHA developments as well as additional information.
 - c. Compare a map or aerial photographs from after the completion of the Farragut Houses to maps from before to determine what landmarks remained the same and how the development relates to the surrounding buildings.
3. Question 3
 - a. Utilize the census records from pre-construction of the Farragut Houses with records from after its completion.
 - b. Examine maps to see if there are any noticeable cutoffs between the Farragut Houses and Vinegar Hill. For example, are there two separate shopping centers or does the Navy Yard act as a separator?
 - c. Apply the information learned from the trip to the Wagner Archives when the archivist explained the photo of the black children with the white woman and the

second photo of the white children with two black women and how these housing developments impacted segregation.

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

During the trip to the Wagner Archives, I enjoyed sitting down in groups with the archivists the most. I learned a lot about NYCHA in general as well as the reasons why its plans to replace tenements were so welcomed. The photographs that were discussed played an integral part in helping me understand and picture how the NYCHA housing developments aided in racial and community segregation. While this topic and era of history is not one that I am focusing my research on, I appreciate being able to have an opportunity to be taught about this important time in New York City history. I am sure that the events that occurred during the time period that I am researching had a great impact on the development of the Farragut Houses. On a final note, for the photographs that I tried citing, I was unable to find the name of the photographer or the names of the photos, so I tried to describe them in the citation to the best of my ability.