SAINT BERNARD HOUSING PROJECT, BUILDING NO. 74
1441-49 Saint Denis Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SAINT BERNARD HOUSING PROJECT, BUILDING No. 74, PHASE I

HABS No. LA-1380-~~B~~ I

Location: 1441-49 Saint Denis Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana

Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates:
29.99510924579351°, -90.07707193493843°

USGS New Orleans East Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates:
15.781985.3321841

Date of Erection: 1940
demolished in 2008

Architects: Herbert A. Benson, George H. Christy, and William E. Spink

Owners: Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), City of New Orleans

Significance: The Great Depression of the 1930s spurred the first peacetime federal government attempts to systematically address the lack of adequate affordable housing for low-income residents. The federal government financed local building efforts through a series of new laws. Among the third wave of these projects planned and built in the ~~late 1930~~1940s, the construction of Saint Bernard Housing Project addressed two major issues of the era: the housing reform movement (i.e. – urban "slum clearance") and the reemployment of large sections of the labor force.

History: Please see ~~historic report~~ field notes for HABS No. LA-1380 for the general history of St. Bernard Housing Project.

Description: The architects of Building No. 74 of the ~~LaFitte~~ Saint Bernard Housing Project designed the building to echo the brick townhouses of the Vieux Carré. Yet it was a modern multi-unit apartment designed to allow the lowest income residents in New Orleans a safe and sanitary place to live.

Even after many storms and two major hurricanes (Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Katrina in ~~2008~~ 2005), the brick, concrete and terra cotta "tile" walls had no structural failure. The asbestos tile roof was almost completely intact. Only surfaces, plumbing, and electrical systems needed cleaning, repair or replacement. The original site plan labeled Building No. 74 as type "B", not be confused with HABS No. 1380-B.

The building stood almost 77 feet long, a little over 27 feet deep, and 29 feet tall at the ridgeline. It had two stories with five units. The walls set on concrete footings with an approximately three foot high knee-wall forming a vented crawlspace. Terra cotta "tile" masonry supported the twelve-inch thick walls with a brick exterior veneer. The floors were six-inch thick concrete slabs. The only wood could be found in the roof: trussed rafters spaced 23 ½ inches on center.

Situated on the side elevations, canopies covered the front stoops of the first and fifth units. The front porch, extending six feet from the façade, stretched in front of the three entrances. A low slope roof, supported by steel double columns, covered the entire porch. Back stoops were about five feet deep and uncovered. Four chimneys were evenly spaced down the length of the building.

Exterior doors were simple affairs with eight-light over panel front doors with no brick detailing. An important point of comfort: all doors had a secondary wood screen door for summer ventilation (while protecting the people from insects). Two first floor units had windows adjacent to their rear doors.

Designers specified most windows as eight over eight pane wood double-hung windows. Interestingly, eight over eight-pane window are more common to the northern half the United States. (Traditionally, most historic New Orleans houses use six over six double-hung windows.) In contrast with Lafitte, C.J. Peete, and B.W. Cooper Housing Projects, architects used double windows (two windows in one opening) extensively. Historically, second floor windows were situated over first floor window of the same width. The use of double windows gave the elevations a sense of rhythm not found in other housing projects. Unfortunately, all the wood windows had been removed. Contractors created new aluminum casings to fit over the wood casing; aluminum sashes replaced all the wood sashes.

The contractor installed asbestos tiles on the gable-ended roof.. A wood fascia obscured the eave vents (for air intake). Architects included ridge vents for air outtake. This passive ventilation moved accumulated attic heat outside. Box gutters with downspouts carried rainwater off the roof.

The first floor contained five two-story two-bedroom units. The architects arranged the rooms flanking the staircase that ran straight back from the front door. The first floor contained the kitchen and living room; the second floor enclosed the bedrooms and bathroom. The stair railings were not of a residential type: instead of a newel post, railing, and banisters, a sold half wall flanked the stairs.

The architects used traditional residential finishes: floors with wood (later tile), plaster surfacing over the terra cotta walls and concrete ceilings. All walls had a simple, but well crafted wood baseboard. All doors were two-panel doors with a plain surround that matched the baseboards. The chimneys existed to provide ventilation for the heating units.

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