

Sumner Field Homes,
Building A-13
900-914 North Emerson Avenue
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-160-B

HABS
MINN
27-MINAP,
34B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Great Lakes Systems Office
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102-2571

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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SUMNER FIELD HOMES,
BUILDING A-13

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- Location:** 900-914 North Emerson Avenue
Minneapolis
Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Quad:** Minneapolis South, Minnesota
- UTM:** 15:476860.4981370
- Present Owner:** Minneapolis Public Housing Authority
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Significance:** Sumner Field Homes was Minnesota's first low-income public housing project, and the only one in the state that was built during the Great Depression. The project was an integral part of the Public Works Administration's demonstration public housing program which influenced American public housing practices for at least the next 30 years. Sumner Field Homes embodied the major characteristics of PWA Housing Division design, such as garden apartment massing, low site coverage, and the use of PWA-approved standardized unit plans.
- Historians:** Christine A. Curran, Jeffrey A. Hess, and Charlene K. Roise, Hess, Roise and Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota; September 1997

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- Date of erection:** 1936-1937
- Architects:** Edwin H. Hewitt, Robert T. Jones, Gottlieb R. Magney, and Wilbur F. Tusler
- Original and subsequent owners:** Housing Division of the Public Works Administration; United States Housing Authority; Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority; Minneapolis Public Housing Authority
- Builders, contractors, suppliers:** Foundation contractor - Johnson, Drake and Piper, Minneapolis; superstructure contractor - Butler Construction Company, St. Paul; structural engineer - Ralph Hamlin; mechanical engineer - William

Kyle Robertson; landscape architect – Hugh Vincent Feehan.

5. **Original plans and construction:** Building A-13 was a two-story, eight-unit row house with a modified strip plan (see photographic reproduction of 1937 plans, HABS No. MN-160-B-5). The structure, which was essentially rectangular, was aligned on a north-south axis on the south half of Block “A.” A long center section projected 5’-0” from the north and south bays on the front (west) side; the same section was recessed 5’-0” from the north and south bays on the back (east) side. Red-brick veneer faced the flat-roofed wood-frame structure. Fenestration was asymmetrical, dictated by interior space considerations. The double-hung wood-sash windows were placed singly and in pairs. The building’s only distinguishing architectural feature was the cantilevered rectangular canopy sheltering the glazed wood-panel front door of each unit. A simple metal fascia trimmed the parapet edging the roof.
6. **Alterations and additions:** In the early 1980s, exterior windows, doors, and the parapet fascia were replaced with modern metal units. During the same period, apartment kitchens were renovated. Light fixtures have been replaced on the interior and exterior.

B. Historical Context:

For context of site, see HABS No. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part I.B.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The overall design of the Sumner Field Project was utilitarian and lacked architectural pretension; Building A-13 conformed to this standard. The cantilevered rectangular canopy over each residential entrance, however, offers a hint of contemporary design, since this element was popular among modernist architects in the 1930s.
2. **Condition of fabric:** Fair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The building measures approximately 145’ x 28’. On the front (west) side, a 71’-8” central section projects 5’-0” from 36’-8” bays to the north and south. The same section is recessed by 5’-0” on the rear (east) side.

2. **Foundations:** Poured concrete; tops of foundation walls are exposed to varying heights dependent on grade.
3. **Walls:** Running-bond, variegated red-brick veneer
4. **Structural system, framing:** Light wood balloon frame
5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** Doorways are approached by concrete stoops; entrances on the west side are sheltered by wood canopies with metal flashing. Canopies indicate front entrances to units.
6. **Chimneys:** None
7. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** Doors originally were glazed wood panels with wood frames. They were replaced in the early 1980s with hollow metal doors and metal frames.
 - b. **Windows and shutters:** Windows originally were double-hung with one-over-one wood sashes. In the early 1980s, windows were replaced with double-hung, one-over-one aluminum combination windows. Frames are flat and simple in style.
8. **Roof:**
 - a. **Shape, covering:** The roof is flat with built-up sheathing materials including asphalt, asbestos felt and gravel. Penthouse vents run lengthwise down the middle of the roof, which is pierced by short metal ventilation stacks at various intervals.
 - b. **Cornice, eaves:** A wide metal fascia follows the perimeter of the building at the roof-wall junction. Added in the early 1980s, it covers the original metal fascia, which was narrower in width.
 - c. **Dormers, cupolas, towers:** None

C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** Building A-13 contains eight units, representing one standard unit

floor plan. The structure exhibits four bi-level "A" plans. See HABS No. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part I.B for a description of the unit plans. Plan "A" is illustrated in photograph MN-160-23.

2. **Stairways:** Most stairways consist of thirteen steps and are typically contained between two interior walls with a wood railing attached to one of the walls. Stairs have closed risers with rubber-sheathed treads. Wall stringers are capped with wood molding. Two steps in each staircase have pressed metal grilles in the risers. The grilles cover the ducts of a stair convector, a component of the heating system located underneath each staircase.
3. **Flooring:** Most of the living rooms, hallways, and bedrooms have original hardwood floors with narrow wood baseboards. Original linoleum kitchen floors were sheathed at some point with asbestos tile. The tile and original wood baseboards were replaced in the early 1980s with sheet vinyl with vinyl baseboards. Bathrooms have original ceramic tile floors.
4. **Wall and ceiling finishes:** Partition walls between units are hollow clay tile. Partition walls within units are wood frame. All walls and ceilings are finished in plaster.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** Interior doors are two-panel wood with simple wood surrounds. Closets and pantries have shuttered metal bi-fold track doors installed in the early 1980s.
 - b. **Windows:** Double-hung, one-over-one aluminum-sash windows replaced the original wood-sash windows in the early 1980s. However, the original simple wood surrounds are still intact.
6. **Decorative features and trim:** None
7. **Hardware:** There are metal doorknobs and hinges on the wood doors. Some appear to be original; some have been replaced.
8. **Mechanical Equipment:**
 - a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** Like all the buildings at Sumner Field, Building A-13 was heated by steam generated at the boiler plant on site. In the early 1980s, the steam-heating system was converted to hot-

water heat. All units are equipped with original cast-iron radiators, which were refitted to accommodate the heating system conversion.

b. Lighting: Modern overhead electric fixtures are found on the interior; modern porch lights hang over or adjacent to every exterior door.

D. Site:

1. **General setting and orientation:** Building A-13 is just south of the center of the block between North Eleventh Avenue and North Eighth Avenue. Basically rectangular in shape, the building is oriented on a north-south axis. The building's front (west) side is flanked by two smaller strip-plan row houses on a perpendicular alignment, together forming a "U" shape. A grass lawn fills the space encircled by these buildings and North Emerson Avenue to the west. To the east, across a wide public yard that runs the length of the block, is a mirror-image U-shaped row-house configuration.
2. **Historic landscape design:** Building A-13 is surrounded by the walkways and public yards that were part of the original landscape design of Sumner Field Homes. For site information, see HABS No. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part II.D.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings:

For drawing citations, see HABS NO. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part III.A.

B. Bibliography:

For bibliography, see HABS NO. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part III.D.

C. Sources not yet investigated

The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Private photograph collections of former Sumner Field Homes residents.