

Sumner Field Homes,
Building D-2
771-791 North Bryant Avenue
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-160-D

HABS
MINN
27-MINAP
34D-

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

**SUMNER FIELD HOMES,
BUILDING D-2**

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- Location:** 771-791 North Bryant Avenue
Minneapolis
Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Quad:** Minneapolis South, Minnesota
- UTM:** 15:477040.4981260
- 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:

1. **Date of erection:** 1936-1937
2. **Architects:** Edwin H. Hewitt, Robert T. Jones, Gottlieb R. Magney, and Wilbur F. Tusler
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** Housing Division of the Public Works Administration; United States Housing Authority; Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority; Minneapolis Public Housing Authority
4. **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 D-2 was a three-story, 28-unit apartment building, one of four virtually identical apartment buildings in the project. Its plan was essentially “L”-shaped, with the wings extending from their intersection to the east and north. A cross-axis created a “T” at the end of the east wing; near the end of the north wing, another cross-axis created a cruciform. Red-brick veneer faced the flat-roofed clay-tile and concrete structure (see photographic copy of 1937 elevations, HABS No. MN-160-D-10). Fenestration was asymmetrical, dictated by interior space considerations. The double-hung wood-sash windows were placed singly and in pairs. A simple stone coping trimmed the parapet edging the roof.
6. **Alterations and additions:** The interior stairway, which was located at the intersection of the two wings, was replaced at some point by a stair tower. The tower projects slightly into the courtyard between the wings. Fire escapes have been added to the south side of the building. The original stone parapet coping has been replaced by a narrow metal cap. Kitchen windows have been filled with brick on the north end of the east wing’s cross-axis. In the early 1980s, exterior windows and doors 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. While Building D-2 generally followed this standard, a few details reflected the streamlined modernist aesthetic of the 1930s (see photographic copy of 1937 elevations, HABS No. MN-160-D-10). Some of these details have been altered, but some remain. A concrete canopy covers the primary entrance in the east end of the east wing; a similar canopy protects a basement door on the north end of the north wing. The main entry is highlighted by a glass-block window (now altered) and limestone surround, and the stairs approaching the door are served by curved metal-pipe railings. A doorway near the original central stairway was also

trimmed with limestone; this entry was modified, however, when the stair was altered. These details, although minimal, mark the building as a product of its era.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair

B. Description of Exterior:

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The outer (west) wall of the north wing extends for 137'-2", while the outer (south) wall of the east wing reaches 122'-0". Both wings are 27'-0" deep. The north cross-axis projects 22'-10" from each side of the wing. The other cross-axis projects 12'-4" from each side of the east wing.
- 2. Foundations:** Poured concrete; tops of foundation walls are exposed to varying heights dependent on grade
- 3. Walls:** Common-bond, variegated red-brick veneer
- 4. Structural system, framing:** Structural clay tile and concrete
- 5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** The primary entrance is approached by a stepped concrete stoop with a curved metal-pipe railing. A door in the central exterior stair tower is announced by a shallow concrete stoop. A third door on the east side of the north wing is reached by a concrete stoop. The fourth entrance is located at the bottom of a concrete stairwell located on the west side of the building. The stairwell is defined by a concrete bulkhead and metal-pipe railing. Another bulkhead and railing surrounds large daylight basement windows on the adjacent north end.
- 6. Chimneys:** There are three interior brick chimneys: one near each end of the building, and one in the center.
- 7. Openings:**
 - a. Doorways and doors:** There are four entrances to this building. With the exception of the primary entrance, all the entries held originally wood-panel doors with large, fixed-sash glass inserts. All exterior doors were replaced in the early 1980s with hollow metal doors and frames. A 6'-0"-tall glass-block window adjoins the primary door on the east end of the east wing. Originally this door was wood with a small glass insert at the top and a metal kick plate at the bottom. The entire doorway is enframed with limestone slabs and sheltered

by a concrete canopy. A modern metal canopy surmounts the door in the exterior stair hall addition. Before the addition, this entrance also had a limestone-slab architrave, and a glazed wood-panel door. A third entrance on the east façade of the north wing has a thin, limestone-slab surround topped by a small wood canopy. On the north end of the north wing, a concrete stairwell holds a below-grade basement door. The door is sheltered by its original canopy, as well as a modern shed-roof canopy that extends to the west.

b. Windows and shutters: Windows originally were double-hung with one-over-one wood sashes. Basement windows, with the exception of the those in an above-grade basement recreation room, were hopper-style, with tripartite steel sash and concrete sills. In the early 1980s, windows for the first, second and third stories (and the basement recreation room) were replaced with double-hung, one-over-one aluminum combination windows. The original steel basement windows remain intact.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is flat with built-up sheathing materials including asphalt, asbestos felt and gravel. It is pierced by three brick chimneys, and short, capped ventilation stacks at various intervals.

b. Cornice, eaves: Original stone coping was replaced at some point by narrow metal coping.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None

C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** Building D-2 contains 28 residential units, representing three standard unit plans. The structure exhibits three flat-style "E" plans, three flat-style "G" plans, and three flat-style "H" plans. See HABS No. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part I.B. for a description of the unit plans. In addition to residential spaces, the first floor includes a social room, a club room, and toilet rooms. The basement holds a recreation room, an "occupational room," a machine room, a laundry room with adjoining drying rooms, passageways, toilet rooms, several small incinerator rooms, and several large storage rooms.
2. **Stairways:** The three main entrances to Building D-2 open into stair halls that provide access to all three floors and the basement. The stair halls are finished with glazed-brick walls. The closed-riser steel stairs have a 180-degree return

configuration, and feature steel-pan treads and landings filled with concrete and sheathed with asphalt tile. Treads are finished with textured metal nosing. Square metal balusters topped with round metal handrails surmount steel channel stringers, terminating at square metal newel posts. Three thin strips of decorative metal molding cap the tops of the newel posts. All the steel components of the staircases are painted.

3. **Flooring:** Most of the living rooms, bedrooms and dining rooms retain hardwood floors with narrow wood baseboards. Kitchen floors were originally covered with linoleum. In the early 1980s, they were sheathed in vinyl asbestos tile or sheet vinyl. Unit bathrooms and toilet rooms in common spaces all have ceramic tile floors. The common areas on the first floor and in the basement are finished with asphalt tile floors over concrete with wood baseboards. The utility rooms and hallways in the basement have concrete floors.
4. **Wall and ceiling finishes:** The residential units and the common recreation rooms have plaster walls and concrete ceilings. The machine room, laundry rooms, utility rooms and storage rooms have concrete walls and ceilings.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** Interior doors are two-panel wood with simple wood surrounds.
 - 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 D-2 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, stair halls and common areas are equipped with original cast-iron radiators which were refitted to accommodate the heating system conversion.

Equipment in the basement machine room includes a hot-water generator, a vacuum pump, a hot-water circulating pump, a flash tank, a pressure gauge board, and water, gas, and electric meters.

b. Lighting: Modern overhead electric fixtures are found on the interior; modern porch lights hang adjacent to the exterior doors. The original metal fixture plates are still attached above three of the main entrances.

D. Site:

1. **General setting and orientation:** Building D-2 is located on the southwest corner of North Eighth Avenue and North Bryant Avenue. The end of the east wing faces North Bryant Avenue, while the north wing extends to North Eighth Avenue. The wings frame a large yard to the northeast. The south side of the building overlooks the Sumner Field steam plant (HABS No. MN-160-F) across a narrow strip of grass and a chain-link fence, and the west side is bordered by North Colfax Avenue, a half-block, dead-end street that provides loading access to the steam plant. On the northwest corner of the lot, a paved parking area meets the concrete bulkheads of Building D-2's basement stairwell.
2. **Historic landscape design:** Building D-2 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. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Private photograph collections of former Sumner Field Homes residents.