

Sumner Field Homes,  
Building E-1  
861-869 North Eleventh Avenue, 1068-1072 NORTH BRYANT AVE.  
Minneapolis  
Hennepin County  
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-160-G

HABS  
MINN  
27-MINAP,  
34G-

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 E-1

HABS No. MN-160-G

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27-MINAP,  
34G-

- Location:** 861-869 North Eleventh Avenue  
1068-1072 North Bryant Avenue  
Minneapolis  
Hennepin County, Minnesota
- Quad:** Minneapolis South, Minnesota
- UTM:** 15:477090.4981530
- 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 E-1, located on the north end of Block “E,” was a two-story, seven-unit row house. The long axis of the strip plan was aligned east-west, with a prominent ell extending south from the west end of the south 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 E-1 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 106’ x 28’. A prominent ell projects about 15’ southward off the west end of the south 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. Building E-1 stands on a slightly sloping lot, so the stoops are preceded by several concrete steps at the south side and west end entries. Entrances on the north side and west end of the main block, and the south end of the ell, 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 E-1 contains seven units, representing three standard unit

floor plans. The structure exhibits one "flat"-style "C" plan, two bi-level "A" plans, and one bi-level "B" plan. See HABS No. MN-160: Sumner Field Homes, Part I.B for a description of the unit plans.

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 retain 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 and 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 E-1 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 E-1 stands on the southeast corner of North Eleventh Avenue and North Bryant Avenue. The primary long façade faces North Eleventh Avenue, while the west end, which includes the long wall of the ell, faces North Bryant Avenue. The lot is slightly sloping, so the west end is reached from the sidewalk by a short flight of concrete stairs flanked by a low concrete retaining wall that runs the width of the façade. The south side faces another strip-plan row house, and a particularly expansive stretch of lawn. The east end of the building faces a sound barrier wall for Interstate 94, the modern eastern boundary of the housing project.
2. **Historic landscape design:** Building E-1 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.