

BROADHEAD MANOR  
Northern Corner of Broadhead Fording and Mazette Roads  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6221

HABS  
PA-6221

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
Philadelphia Support Office  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## BROADHEAD MANOR

HABS NO. PA-6221

- Location: Northern corner of Broadhead Fording and Mazette roads, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
- USGS Pittsburgh West Quadrangle  
UTM Coordinates: 17.059224.4481009, 17.057761.4477752,  
17.057738.4478090, 17.057753.4478241
- Present Owner: Housing Authority City of Pittsburgh  
200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
- Present Occupant: Public housing residents
- Present Use: Public housing
- Significance: Broadhead Manor, first occupied in February 1944, is among Pittsburgh's earliest public housing projects. At the beginning of World War II, the tremendous demand for shipbuilding resulted in a 6,000 person increase in the workforce at Dravo Corporation's Neville Island site. This expansion created an influx of workers in need of housing. The U. S. Public Housing Authority responded by developing a war-worker's housing project near Pittsburgh's West End in an area known as Fairywood. The architectural firm of James A. Mitchell and Dahlen Ritchey was chosen to design 500 (later reduced to 448) dwellings. The site plan was provided by Simonds and Simonds. Constructed in 1943-44, the simple Bauhaus-inspired row houses were spartan both inside and out, but were artfully arranged on curvilinear streets. The houses were designed to be converted to low-income housing after the war.

### Historical Information

Pittsburgh's economy, long based on steel and heavy industry, made the city an ideal candidate for expansion during WWII. Carnegie-Illinois's Homestead Works doubled in size and Dravo's shipbuilding facility on Neville Island added between 5,000 and 6,000 workers in the early 1940s. Adequate housing for this influx of workers quickly became a critical issue. Broadhead Manor, one of Pittsburgh's first war housing developments was a response to this need.

Congress passed the Lanham Act in 1940 to address the critical defense housing shortage. The Lanham Act provided for permanent, federally-built and owned defense housing, managed by local housing authorities. Broadhead Manor was originally slated to be a Lanham Act project. The National Housing Administration, however, offered the City the opportunity to have the project completed as Act 671 housing, built to higher City Planning Commission "approved" planning and housing code standards. Act 671 allowed unexpended federal public housing monies to be diverted for defense housing purposes.

After consultation with the city's Housing Authority and Planning Commission, (which had been conducting studies on suitable sites for public housing) the U. S. Public Housing Administration chose this open, rolling, and lightly wooded area at the western border of the city. A Sanborn map from 1881 shows most of the area as owned by the heirs of William Petrie. Their thirty seven acre lot contained only three homes and several outbuildings at the time. The surrounding land was also divided into large parcels and only sparsely developed. An undated map, probably from the early twentieth century, shows nearly the same configuration with the parcel still owned by Petrie's heirs and little neighboring development. In addition to being large enough to support a housing development, the site was accessible to Dravo's Neville Island plant by rail. Initially Broadhead Manor was designed to include seventy buildings with 500 housing units. However, in order to create a slightly less cramped and more open plan, the project was scaled back and the final design created sixty one buildings with 448 units. Even today the area is relatively open with few streets and homes, unlike the rest of densely-built Pittsburgh.

The firm of James A. Mitchell and Dahlen Ritchey was chosen to design the dwellings. They retained Michael Rosenauer, who had extensive housing experience in Europe, as a consultant. The site plan was developed by Simonds and Simonds. Preliminary plans were developed by the end of 1942 and the first families began to occupy Broadhead Manor in February 1944. Those interested in public housing had already learned several lessons from the first low-income projects completed in Pittsburgh's Hill District. There, too large a percentage of units contained only one bedroom, making them unacceptable for families. At Broadhead Manor, only twenty units, less than 5%, contained a single bedroom. Initially another twenty single bedroom units were planned, but they were among those dropped from the final design. The distribution included 296 two-bedroom units, 112 three-bedroom units, and twenty four-bedroom units. The Pittsburgh

Housing Association also noted that, while cheaper materials and lower quality equipment were used in order to reduce costs in the Hill District projects, these generally resulted in greater maintenance costs. Minor adjustments were made in later developments such as the use of composition tile flooring instead of painted concrete. Another complaint of public housing tenants was the lack of convenient shopping. At Broadhead Manor a commercial building with space for grocery, drug, and variety stores was included in the original development. A maintenance and community building housed a repair shop, the rental office, kitchen, health center and nursery, in addition to a large room for war services. A site plan from 1953 notes five small play areas scattered throughout the complex.

Broadhead Manor was designed as permanent housing to be converted to low-income housing after the war. Deeds indicate that ownership was transferred from the U. S. Public Housing Administration to the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh on June 30, 1954 for \$2,862,684.22. In the early-to-mid 1980s the five buildings containing single-bedroom units were demolished and the area landscaped. In 1991 the commercial building was updated and in 1996 remodeling was completed on seven of the rows in the southwest corner of the complex. Further work was halted, however, while discussions began on whether to continue remodeling or demolish the complex. By the summer of 1997 the majority of tenants had moved and the vacant units were boarded up.

### Architectural Information

The Broadhead Manor housing project consists of fifty six rows with six or eight units each, a community center, and a commercial building. The site is relatively flat with a slight rise to the northeast and southwest. Although the rows of houses clearly mark this as a housing project, the boundaries of the project are not distinct. The surrounding land is also flat and sparsely developed, with a school building and swimming pool to the southeast and large, one-story tractor trailer shipping facilities to the north and west.

The streets and walkways within the project are curvilinear. The ribbon-like rows are sited both parallel and perpendicular to the streets. The architects took advantage of the gentle slopes to design two sets of rows which step up the banks. Fairwood Street curves through the southern half of the site while Old Orchard Circle occupies the northern half. North, South, East, and West Court are the walkways. The original commercial building is on Broadhead Fording, and the community building is located at the northwest end of Old Orchard Circle. The streets within the project are wide enough to accommodate parallel parking. Only a few areas have been widened to accommodate head-in parking. The rows of houses are spaced far enough apart to provide a small expanse of common lawn between them. The space left by demolition of the one-bedroom units within North Court has been planted with grass and trees, providing a common open space for the buildings around Old Orchard Circle. At the southwest corner, between Fairwood and

Mazette, there is a large expanse of lawn ringed by a basketball court, a small ball field, and a tot lot. The rows are all masonry construction, red brick on the "service" or front wall and buff brick on the "garden" or rear wall. A few of the rows have end walls of rough coursed stonework relieving slightly the monotony of the design.

### Sources of Information

#### Architectural drawings and historic views

Two flat file drawers of original drawings and plans have been kept by the Housing Authority City of Pittsburgh. Upon demolition of the complex, all plans, drawings, and historic photographs will be transferred to the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1212 Smallman Street Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

#### Bibliography

The historical information on Broadhead Manor was adapted from the report "History and Significance of Housing Authority of Pittsburgh Projects: PA-1-2 and PA-1-8 (Bedford Dwellings and Bedford Dwellings Addition; PA-1-3 (Allequippa Terrace); and PA-1-6 (Broadhead Manor)" prepared by John F. Bauman for the Housing Authority City of Pittsburgh in 1997. The following includes bibliographic information from that report.

Alberts, Robert. "Hill, Houses and Emergency," *The Bulletin Index* (July 18, 1940), 6,7.

Bauman, John F. *Public Housing Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Public Housing: The Dreadful Saga of a Durable Policy," *Journal of Planning Literature*, Vol. 8, No.4 (May 1994), 349-361.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Visions of a Post-War City: A Perspective on Urban Planning in Philadelphia and the Nation, 1942-1945," *Urbanism Past and Present*, 6 (Winter/Spring 1980-1981), 1-12.

Bodnar, John, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber. *Lives of their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Bratt, Rachel G. "Public Housing: The Controversy and Contribution," in Bratt, et.al., *Critical Perspectives on Housing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

- Civil Unity Council. "Report on Population Movements and Housing Trends, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1950, Prepared by Bryn Hovde," mimeographed. Pittsburgh Civic Unity Council, 1950.
- Davis, Allen F. *Spearheads For Reform: The Social Settlements and Progressive Reform*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Evans, George E. "Pittsburgh, Federal Housing," *Greater Pittsburgh* (December 1937), 18.
- Federation of Social Agencies, "Federation of Social Agencies of Pittsburgh, 17th Annual Report, Year Ending, May 31, 1939," *The Federator*, XIV (June 1939), 151-152.
- Federation of Social Agencies, Bureau of Social Research. "Juvenile Delinquency in Public Housing, Pittsburgh Public Housing Report, Number 2," mimeographed. September 1944.
- Federation of Social Agencies, Bureau of Social Research, "The Population of Public Housing, Pittsburgh, PA," mimeographed, 1944.
- Friedman, Lawrence. *Government and Slum Housing*. New York: Rand McNally, 1968.
- Harper, Frank C. *Pittsburgh of Today: Its Resources and People*. Vol. V. New York: American Historical Society, 1931.
- Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh. *The First Seven Years: A Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh for the years 1937-1944*. Pittsburgh: Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, 1944).
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Report to the People: Public Housing in Pittsburgh, 1938-1953*. Pittsburgh: The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, 1953.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Minutes of the Board of Directors and the Housing Commissioners of the City of Pittsburgh, 1937-1947*. Found in the Offices of the HACP.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Map Files and Other Assorted Historical Records on File at the Authority's Offices, 200 Ross Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*.
- Hovde, Bryn J. "How Public Housing Works," *Survey Graphic*, Vol. XXXIII (April 1944).
- Ihlder, John. "Housing and the Depression," *Greater Pittsburgh* (March 1933), 11.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Housing Bills at Harrisburg Pocketed," Greater Pittsburgh (April 1933), 12.

Lubove, Roy. Twentieth Century Pittsburgh Vol. I: Government, Business, and Environmental Change. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962.

McGeary, Nelson. The Pittsburgh Housing Authority. The Pennsylvania State College Studies, No. 14. State College: The Council on Research, The Pennsylvania State College, 1943.

Pittsburgh Housing Association. Housing in Pittsburgh: Three Year Report, 1931-1933. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Housing Association, 1933.

\_\_\_\_\_. Housing in Pittsburgh, 1934-1937. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Housing Association, 1937.

\_\_\_\_\_. Housing in Pittsburgh: Summary of Activities, 1940-1941. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Housing Association, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_. Housing in Wartime Pittsburgh: Summary of Activities, 1943-45. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Housing Association, 1945.

\_\_\_\_\_. Citizens Look at Public Housing: A Symposium on a Housing Authority and its Operations by Board Members of the Pittsburgh Housing Association. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Housing Association, 1945.

"Pittsburgh's Own Housing Project." Greater Pittsburgh (February 1936), 25.

Thompson, Ellis H. "Public Housing Comes to Pittsburgh," Survey Magazine (1940), found in Clipping File, Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh.

Tufts, Joseph. "Why No Federal Housing Here." Greater Pittsburgh (October 1935).

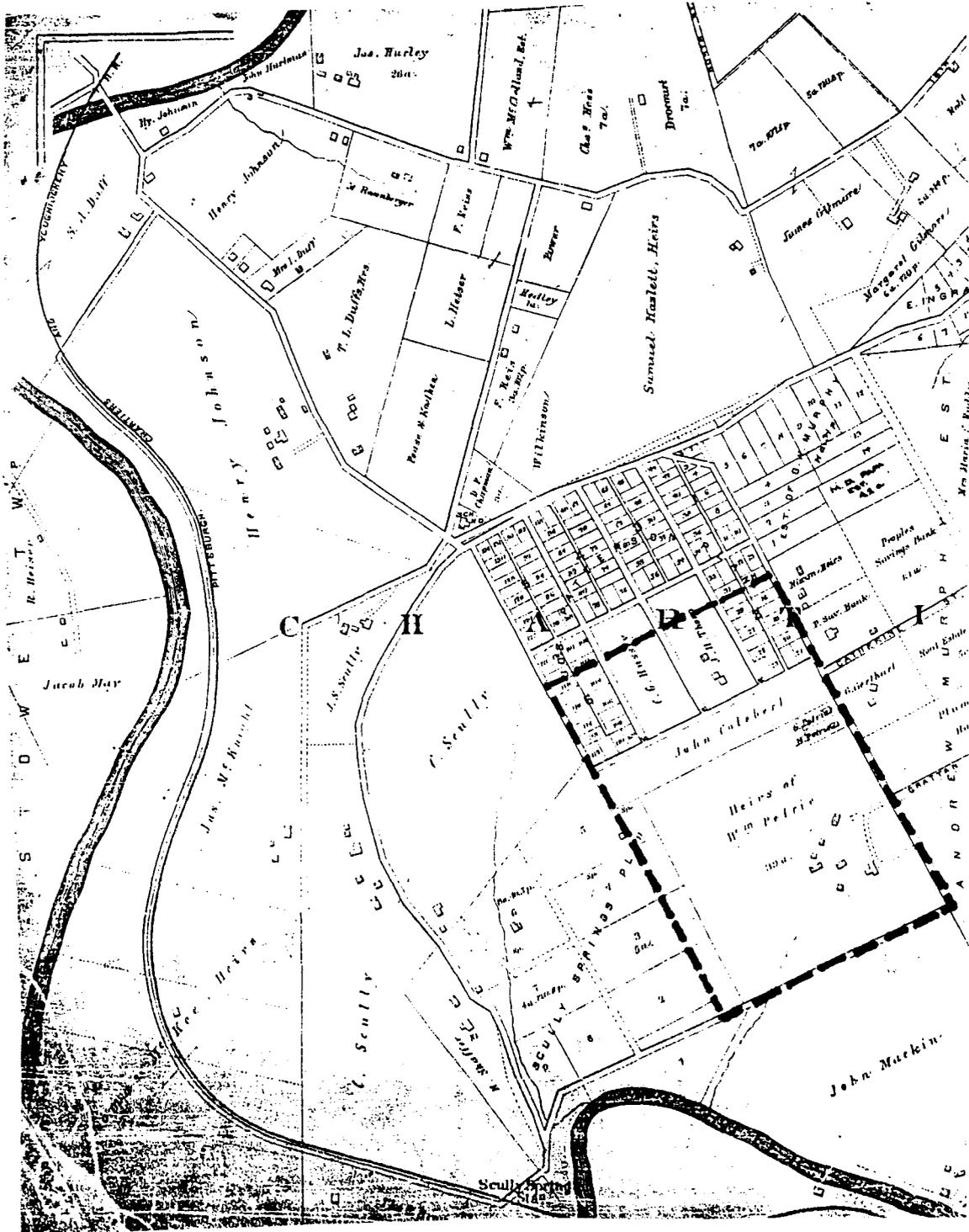
\_\_\_\_\_. "The President's Housing Conference." Greater Pittsburgh (January 1932), 37.

Topalov, Christian. "Scientific Urban Planning and the Ordering of Daily Life: The First War Housing Experiment in the United States, 1917-1919." Journal of Urban History, 17, 1 (November 1990), 14-46.

Project Information

The Broadhead Manor complex is slated for demolition using funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

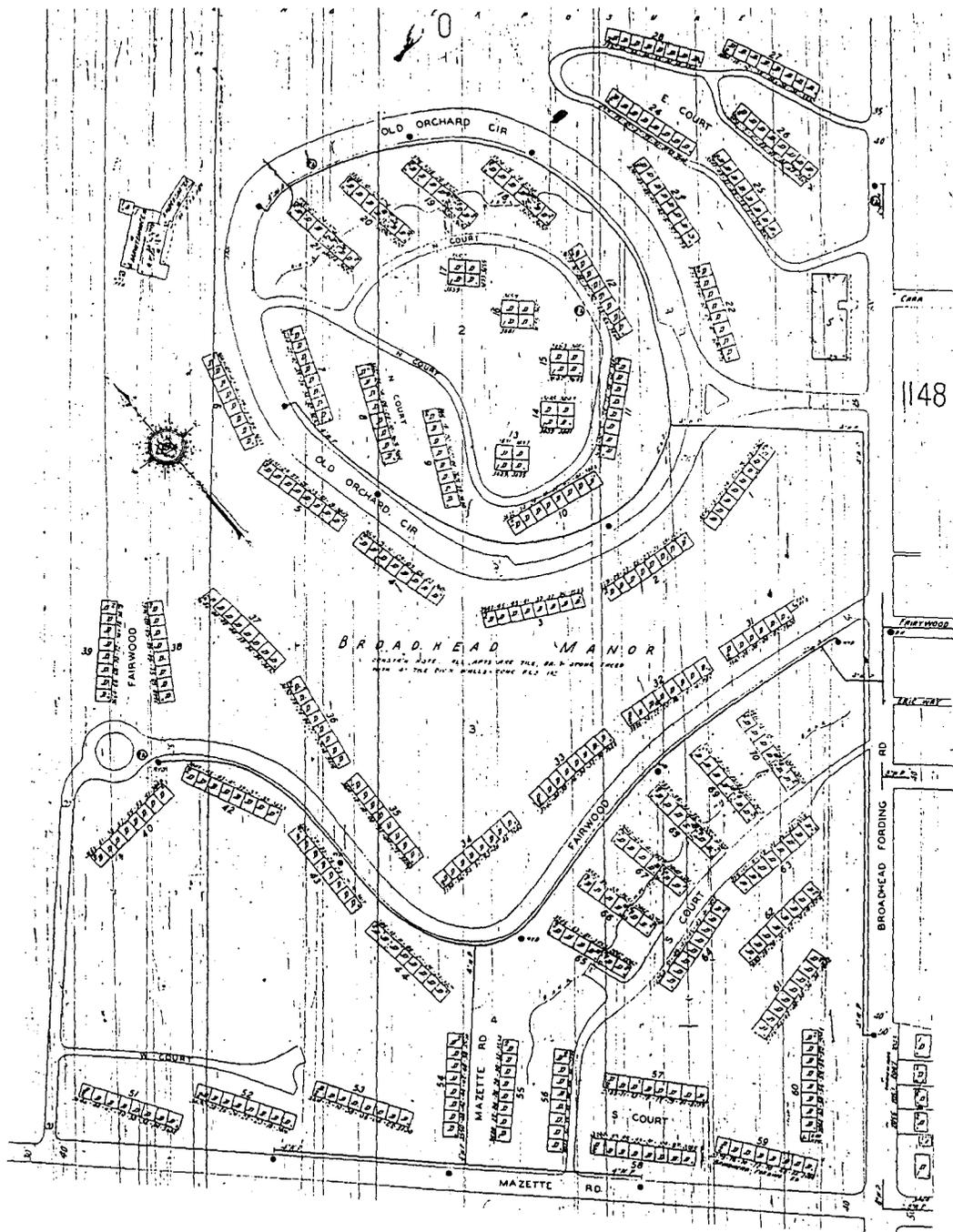
Prepared by: Lauren Uhl  
Title: Special Project Associate  
Affiliation: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania  
1212 Smallman Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
Date: July 1997

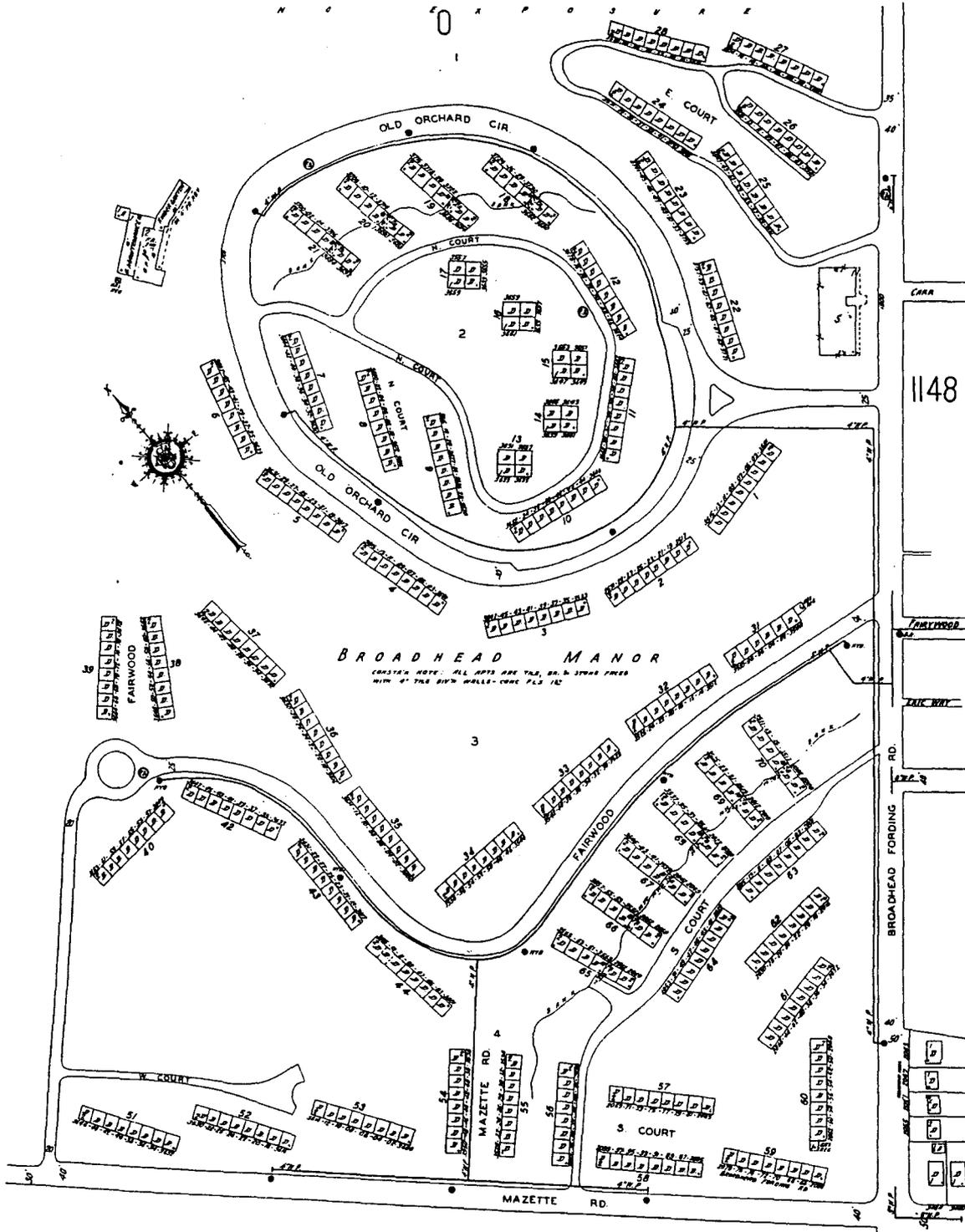


Allegheny County Atlas, 1881, plate 27

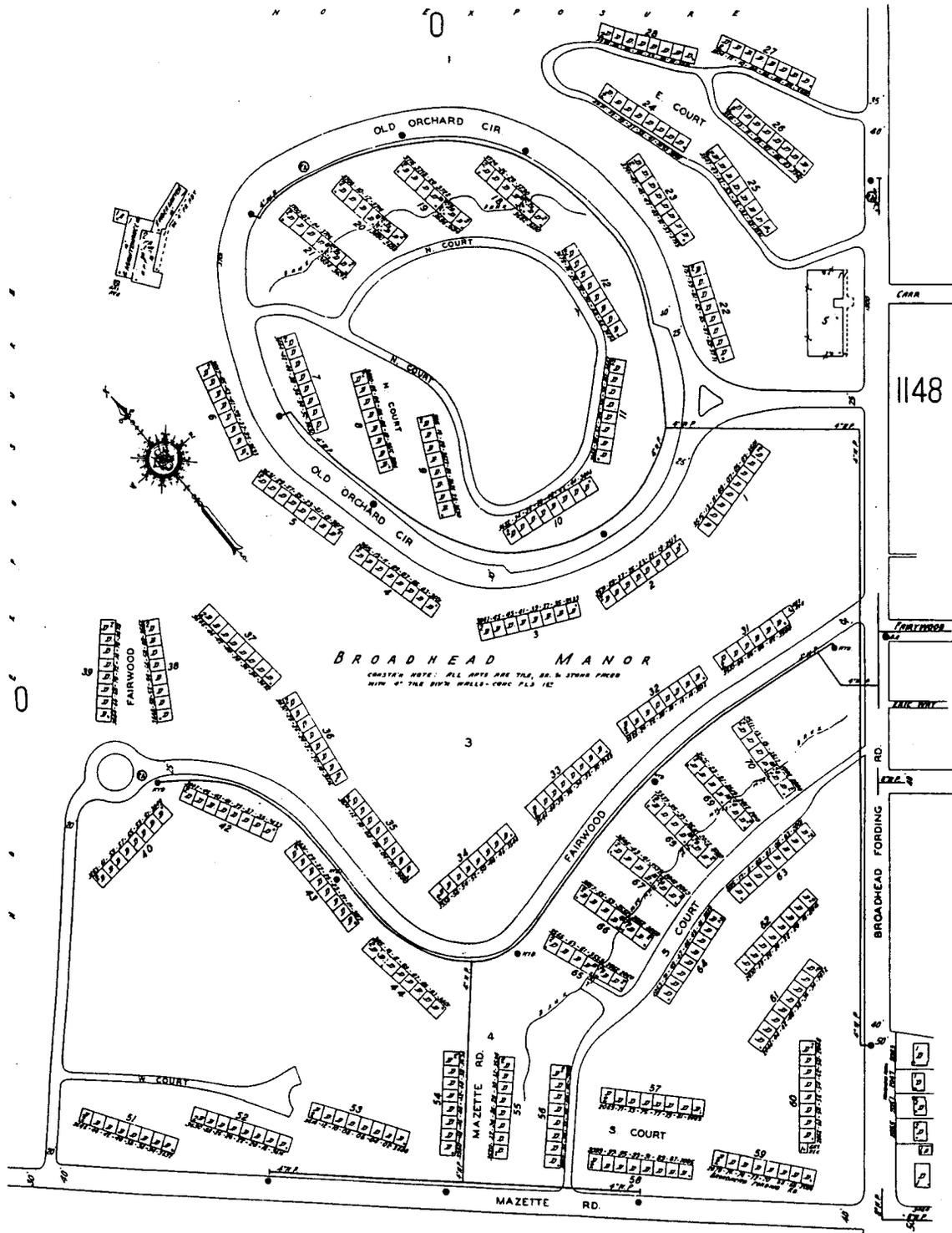


Undated Sanborn Atlas





1924 Sanborn Atlas, updated in 1979



Site Plan, 1997