

ALLEQUIPPA TERRACE

Burrows Street, Wadsworth Street, Waring Court, and Robinson Court  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6222

HABS  
PA  
2-PITBU  
79-

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

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Location: Burrows Street, Wadsworth Street, Waring Court, and Robinson Court  
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

USGS Pittsburgh East Quadrangle  
UTM Coordinates: 17.058772.4476942, 17.058736.4477610,  
17.058700.4477537, 17.058729.4477100

Present Owner: Housing Authority City of Pittsburgh  
200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Present Occupant: Public housing residents

Present Use: Public housing

Significance: Allequippa Terrace is among Pittsburgh's earliest low-income public housing projects. Following a long period of agitation by housing reformers, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh was formed in 1937. Shortly thereafter, large-scale demolition began in the Hill District, site of Pittsburgh's worst slum housing. Allequippa Terrace was developed through a collaborative effort by a distinguished team of architects and planners: Raymond Marlier, William Boyd, Edward B. Lee, and Bernard H. Prack. Constructed in 1939-41, Allequippa Terrace provided 1,851 units of low-income housing in Bauhaus-inspired three-story apartments on curving streets.

### Historical Information

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, heavy industry cast a polluted pall over Pittsburgh, but also drew thousands of immigrants to the region in search of jobs. As the city's population grew, single family houses were quickly divided into overcrowded flats. Landlords often deferred or ignored needed building maintenance. Crowded conditions and lack of basic amenities, such as indoor plumbing and regular trash collection, contributed to high rates of illness and death. With the rise of these urban ills, Pittsburgh, the archetypal industrial city, became the subject of scrutiny by social workers and reformers. The *Pittsburgh Survey*, begun in 1907, and other social welfare studies, documented the deplorable condition of much of the city's housing and publicized the need for safe, sanitary housing for the urban poor. Conditions in the inner city only grew worse when the Great Migration of blacks from the South put additional pressure on limited housing in the late 1910s.

Local civic leaders and reformers made a number of attempts to improve the quality and availability of low-cost housing. During the 1920s the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce created a Community Housing Corporation to build low cost, limited dividend developments. The corporation managed to build 304 units before failing. Chatham Village, a garden city development in the Mount Washington neighborhood, was also constructed in the 1920s. However, while considered a great success, Chatham Village was intended for the working class and did not have an impact on low income, inner-city families.

Beginning in the late 1920s the Pittsburgh Housing Association, a coalition of civic groups, pressed for demolition of substandard housing. The City responded by demolishing hundreds of dilapidated homes, focusing mainly on the Strip District and Hill District, neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. Reformers hoped that the private sector would rally and replace the cleared slums with low-cost housing at a modest dividend. Those efforts, however, failed to materialize.

In the early 1930s a delegation of Pittsburghers participated in two conferences which fueled the idea that the federal government might become a major participant in the solution to the housing problem. The Conference on Housing and Home Ownership, held in Washington, DC in 1931, addressed the possibility of federally assisted slum clearance. Two years later Cleveland convened a national Conference on Slum Clearance and Housing during which participants resolved that, "Housing developments furnish the opportunity for the employment of labor and purchase of materials to a greater degree than most other types of public works," and that "[we] urge upon city councils and administrations... that they aid, participate and cooperate in large scale low cost housing and slum clearance developments to the full extent of their legal and financial powers." Planners, "housers," and reformers began to petition state legislatures for the creation of housing authorities. Pennsylvania delayed action until 1937. Those interested in reform, however, began planning right away.

In 1935, Harold Ickes, head of the Public Works Administration, appointed an eighteen member Pittsburgh Housing Advisory Committee to study and approve projects, and a team of architects was commissioned to identify sites for the city's first projects. Studies completed by the Advisory Committee indicated that the Hill District was in the greatest need of housing. The Hill District had long served as the "point of entry" to the city. Waves of immigrant groups began here and established themselves before moving on to other neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. By the 1930s, the Hill District had a high percentage of substandard housing. Three hill top slum sites, Ruch, Goat, and Gazzam Hills, were chosen to demonstrate the practicality of developing hilly sites for low income housing purposes. In April 1937 Pittsburgh City Council approved an ordinance creating the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh. The following year, the Pittsburgh Housing Authority applied to the United States Housing Authority for a \$10 million loan for three projects. A short time later, they requested an additional \$3.5 million. The first public housing communities in Pittsburgh were to be Bedford Dwellings, Addison Terrace, Wadsworth Terrace and Allequippa Terrace. Initially Addison was known as Terrace Village I and Wadsworth and Allequippa were jointly known as Terrace Village II. Currently Wadsworth and Allequippa are together known as Allequippa Terrace.

The architectural team chosen to develop Allequippa Terrace included Raymond Mailer, William Boyd, Edward B. Lee, and Bernard Prack. Marlier had served as Chair of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce's Architectural Committee. Boyd, of the firm Ingham and Boyd, designed the homes at Chatham Village. E. B. Lee was a prolific local architect whose work included the Chamber of Commerce building, Peabody High School, and the Edgewood Club. Little is known of the work of Bernard Prack, except that he was a member of the American Institute of Architects.

Allequippa Terrace was planned for Goat and Gazzam Hills, a 150 acre parcel with over 500 homes and businesses. After completing the required relocation of residents and building demolition, contractors began the task of leveling the hill, pushing much of it into the adjacent valley. The project was huge, calling for 1,851 units. Planning began in 1938 and by Spring 1941 the first families were moving into Allequippa Terrace. Although Allequippa Terrace cost \$10.8 million to built, construction costs were kept to a minimum--\$5,337 per dwelling unit. Planners soon discovered, however, that cheaper materials often resulted in higher maintenance costs, as well as inconvenience for the tenants.

During the next fifty years, Allequippa Terrace experienced few renovations or improvements. In 1988 five apartment buildings with 102 units along Allequippa Street were razed. Three years later, in 1991, the Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$12 million from the Major Reconstruction of Obsolete Projects Program to fund the remodeling of fourteen apartment buildings. Eight buildings were renovated. However, further work was suspended while discussions were initiated on the future of the complex. In keeping with the new philosophy to decentralize public housing, current plans call for all of Allequippa Terrace, except for the eight

renovated apartment buildings, to be demolished. The site will then be redeveloped with a mix of housing--single family, townhouses, and apartments-- both subsidized and market rate. In late 1997, many of the residents have moved and apartment buildings are being boarded up.

### Architectural Information

Situated on a leveled hill, Allequippa Terrace is an isolated community which does not blend in with its neighbors either architecturally or geographically. The main entrance is up Bentley Drive, a long sweeping street, wooded on either side. Adjacent housing projects are separated by valleys and major streets, and the few contiguous structures include small single family dwellings and a gymnasium owned by the University of Pittsburgh.

The Allequippa Terrace housing project consists of seventy-seven three-story walkup apartment buildings and several community buildings. There are 636 one-bedroom units at Allequippa Terrace, 825 two-bedroom units, and 288 three bedroom units. The two community buildings original to the complex are Allequippa Hall which serves as the management office, and Wadsworth Hall, the recreational center. The Mathilda H. Theiss Center, a one story brick building constructed in 1977, is a medical facility operated by the University of Pittsburgh. The Housing Authority also maintains a police department in a one-story brick building constructed in 1984.

The apartment buildings are arranged along four streets. Burrows is a wide curving street that runs through the center of the complex joining Wadsworth Street at a Y intersection. Waring Court is a tight circle off of Burrows. Robinson Court, also a circle, runs off of Darrah Place at the western end of the project. Most of the buildings are situated perpendicular to the streets with small common courts between.

Little remains of the original landscape plan and common-use areas. There was originally an amphitheater at the intersection of Bentley and Burrows. That area is now overgrown with trees and no vestiges of the theater remain. Although there are mature pine and maple trees throughout the complex, there is no pattern of shrubs, vines, or flowers left from the original design. In some areas there are still lines of rusting metal poles, once used for drying laundry. Scattered throughout the complex are cement benches which appear to be of recent vintage. A small outdoor play area to the west of Wadsworth Hall has a tiny amphitheater with seating for perhaps two dozen children. Adjacent is a single basketball court.

Sources of Information

Architectural drawings and historic views

Four 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 Allequippa Terrace 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.

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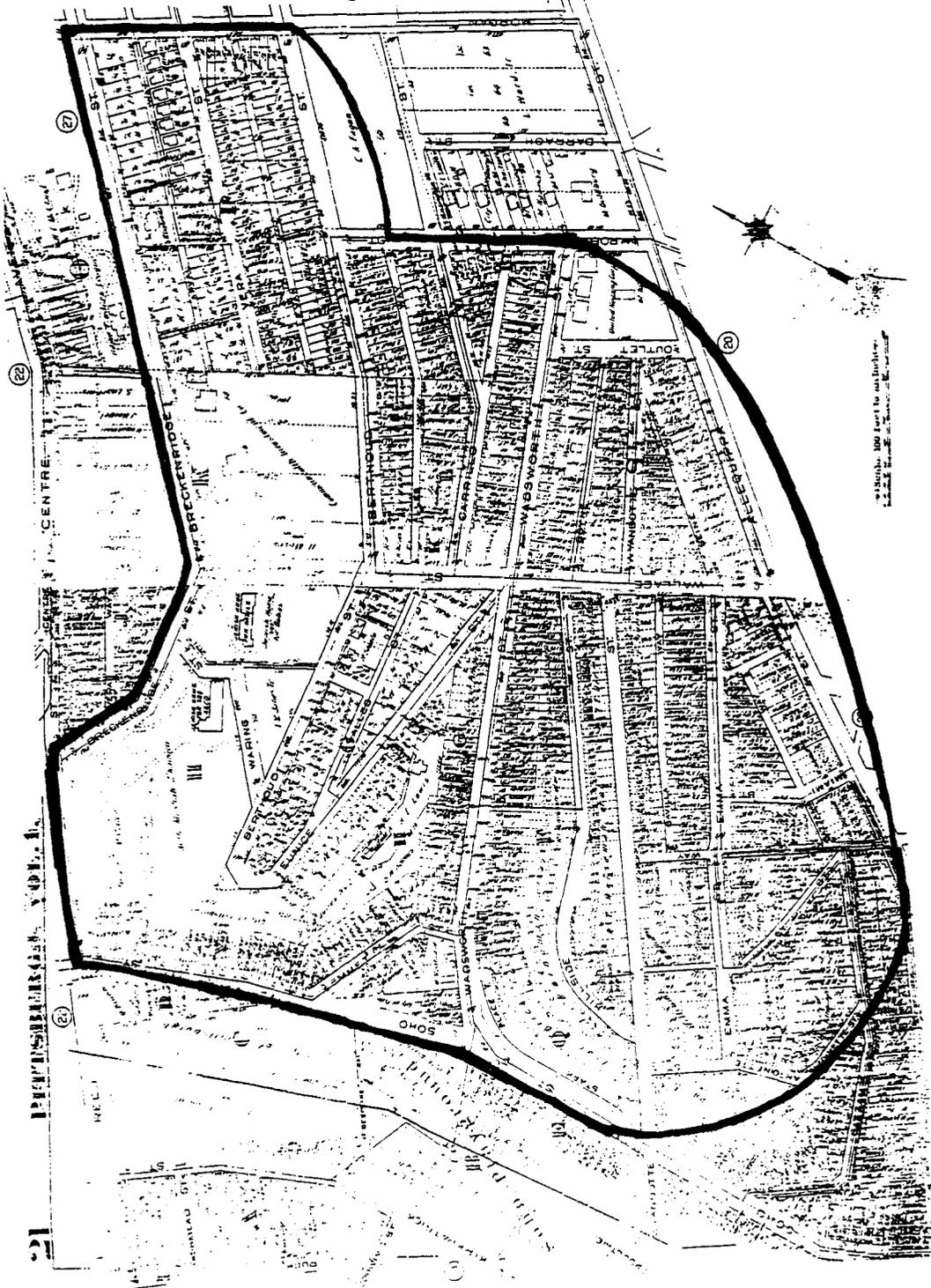
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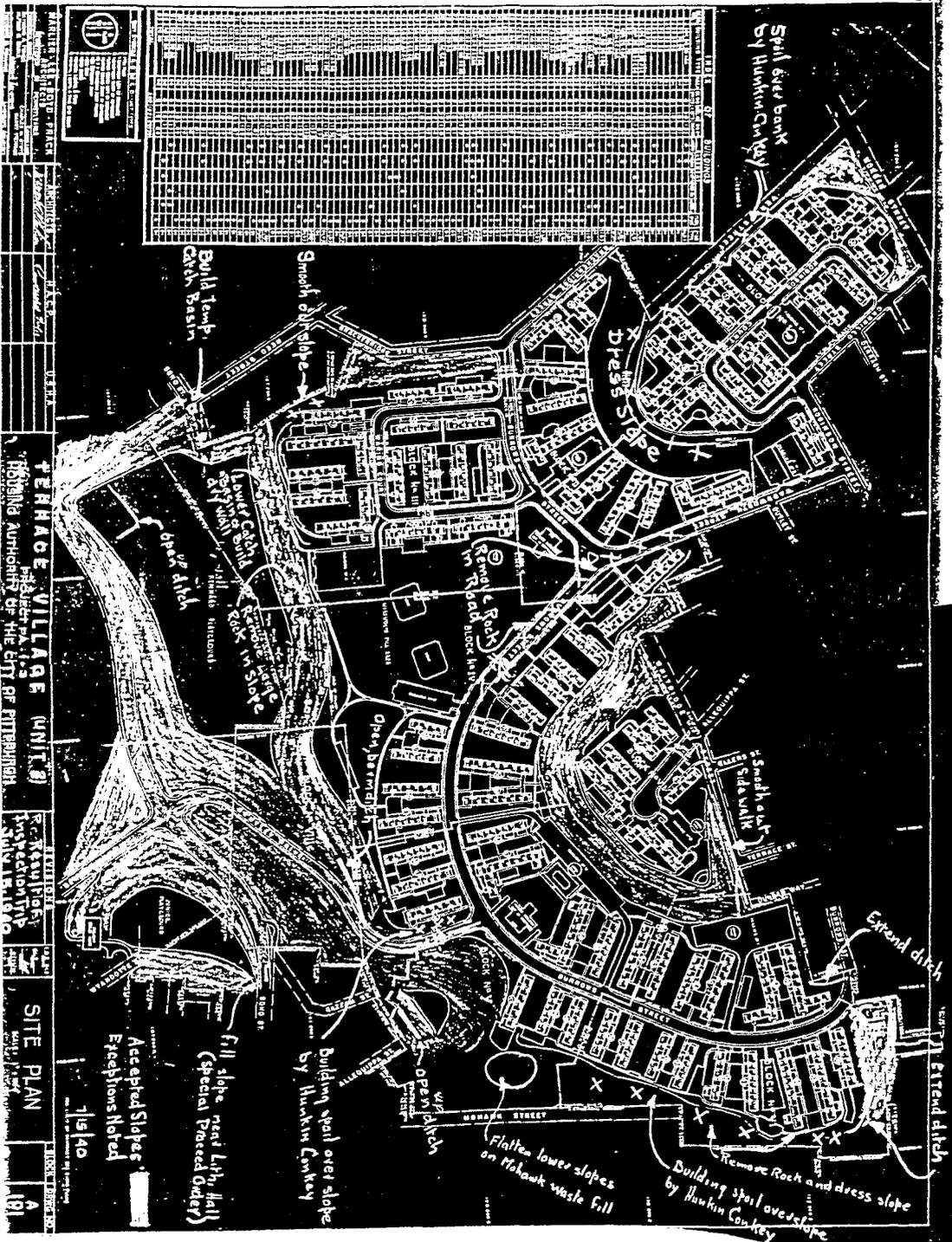
### Project Information

The Allequippa Terrace complex is slated for demolition using funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Current plans call for eight apartment buildings, recently remodeled, to be retained as part of a new development.

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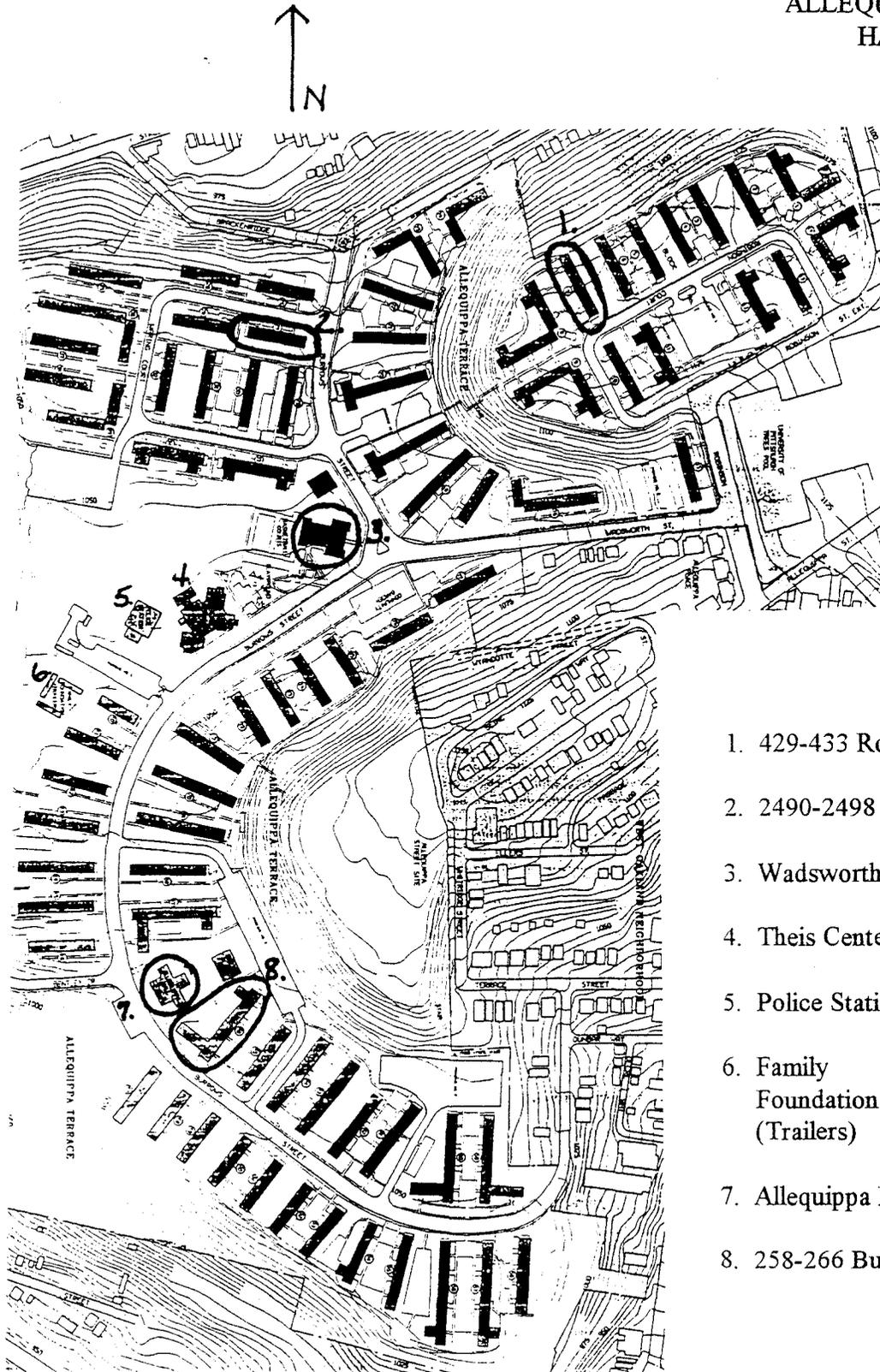


G. M. Hopkins Atlas, 1923, plate 21 - showing approximate boundaries of Allequippa Terrace



Allequippa Terrace Site Plan  
Result of Inspection Trip July 15, 1940





1. 429-433 Robinson Court
2. 2490-2498 Waring Court
3. Wadsworth Hall
4. This Center
5. Police Station
6. Family Foundation (Trailers)
7. Allequippa Hall
8. 258-266 Burrows Street

Site Plan 1997