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Parkfairfax, Building 966, 3400 block of Martha Curtis **Drive (photo by author, October 1996)**

A STUDY IN DECENTRALIZED LIVING: PARKFAIRFAX, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

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The Washington, D.C. metropolitan area has a sizeable and interesting collection of garden apartment complexes dating from the 1940s. A response to the need for conveniently located, affordable rental housing for employees of the expanding federal government, these complexes are the physical manifestation of a trend towards decentralized living, as proposed by architects and planners like Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, and developers like Gustave Ring. Seeing the opportunity to create viable communities which could be financially successful, large businesses like Metropolitan Life Insurance Company entered the rental housing market. Parkfairfax, built in Alexandria, Virginia between 1941 to 1943, is an excellent example of rental garden apartment complexes constructed by large corporations using the theories of Stein, Wright, and Ring.

First collaborating in the mid- 1920s, the team of Clarence Stein and Henry Wright proved to be a powerful force in the planning and design of decentralized housing projects in the United States. Both of these men belonged to the vanguard of a movement that dealt with aspects of city planning and housing.

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Other members of this movement included Lewis Mumford, Catherine Batter, and John Bright. Stein and Wright worked together actively for over a decade, beginning in 1924. They worked so closely during this period of time that it is difficult to determine exactly what role each man assumed in their projects. Generally, Stein was the architect, while Wright was the planner.’

Stein, trained as an architect, was first employed as chief designer for Bertram Goodhue’s firm in New York. In this capacity, Stein was placed in charge of the planning of the mining town of Tyrone, New Mexico, which may have been his initial exposure to community planning issues. He was instrumental in founding the Regional Planning Association of America in 1923, and helped to keep the organization running in its infancy.* During the same year, Stein was appointed by New York Governor Al Smith to chair the State’s Commission of Housing and Regional Planning. In this position, Stein undertook the redevelopment of many blighted New York City neighborhoods into large federal housing projects. In search of possible models, Stein traveled to Europe. In England, he visited Welwyn, the country’s second garden city, and was thus exposed to a new way to plan communities.[3]

Wright was formally trained as a landscape architect. He and his wife raised a family of four children, and it may be that providing for his large family helped him to become acutely aware of the basic requirements of low- and moderate-income housing. Wright and his family lived for a time at Sunnyside Gardens, which was the site of Stein and Wright’s first foray into decentralized federal housing in the borough of Queens, New York. Lewis Murnford asserted that this experience helped Wright to recognize “the necessity of both lowering the cost of housing and doing a better job of it; and his analysis led him to emphasize the way in which control over the over-all pattern could contribute to both ends."[4] Stein and Wright felt that America was ready for a revolution in the way that her communities were planned, and that the best way to accomplish this was by creating an entirely new model. Stein reminisced in the 1950 foreword to *Toward New Towns for America* that,

> I had in mind that both in America and in Europe the time is ripe for complete change in the form of urban environment. I believe that the best and easiest way to start that change is to build New Towns on new sites, as Sir Ebenezer Howard suggested. The opportunity to do this may come sooner than we had reason to expect. The creation of towns for industry and for living, of moderate size, widely separated from each other, may be imminent as a defense measure. This could be the beginning of a new era of nation-wide decentralization. For fortunately here the best policy for peace and for defense are the same: orderly, related dispersal of workers and working places in limited-size communities, surrounded by open country.’

Stein based his model for decentralized living partly on Englishman Ebenezer Howard’s plan for the Garden City. Howard had defined the Garden City as “a town planned for industry and healthy living, of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but no larger, surrounded by a permanent rural belt, the whole of the land being in public ownership, or held in trust for the community."[6] The Garden City model itself was strongly based on a highly idealized version of the preindustrial past. Stein was also influenced by the work of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

The model for Stein and Wright's work was based on the qualities of safety, spaciousness, nature, beauty, economy, and order.[7] Low-scale buildings, usually two to four stories, were arranged on cul-de-sacs and placed around open greens. This arrangement was then set into a lush landscape. On one level, the common green was meant to be aesthetically pleasing; on another, it was to be utilized for recreational purposes. The density for the projects Stein and Wright designed was to be limited to a maximum of one hundred persons per acre. Although these characteristics added significantly to the initial investment, Stein and Wright

> insisted on including open spaces and generous plantings as part of the essential first costs of housing. In the effort to achieve utmost economy, at a time when building costs were still prohibitively high, they doubtless sometimes allowed the inner quarters of the house to become a little cramped.'

Stein believed that decentralized living was as appropriate for the redevelopment of declining neighborhoods within existing cities as it was for the creation of entirely new developments. He strongly felt that these redevelopment projects would not be successful within the framework of the city unless they were "conceived, planned, and carried out as large-scale units of new cities - new cities even though they are on old sites."' Stein and Wright did not, however, plan as they did simply out of a personal preference for low-density living. They proved through detailed analysis that the great expense of long-term maintenance for high-density developments tended to make them cost prohibitive. Of their findings, Mumford said,

> The invisible costs of such projects - the increased burden on non-existent parks, playgrounds, schools, the excessive costs of traffic congestion and avenue widening in cities developed now for five or six tunes their original density - heavily outweighs all the visible economies Stein and Wright had demonstrated on the basis of careful cost analysis, which included long term as well as immediate costs, that the prejudice in favor of high buildings simply could not stand up under rigorous appraisal. In short,...Nothing {is} gained by over-crowding. In community development it is not the first costs but the final costs that count."

There was a strong moral and social tinge present in Stein and Wright's planning. Stein felt that the primary objective of his "New Towns" was "fundamentally social rather than commercial. Bluntly, the distinction is that between building for people or building for profit...New Towns will be created for communities, vital and contemporary, to encourage and foster present-day good living."" Most of their housing projects included community features such as schools, shopping centers, meeting rooms, and swimming pools, highlighting Stein and Wright's opinion that well-planned and well-executed housing could uplift the daily experiences of the masses. This progressive view was shared by many housing reformers of the day.[12]

Under the auspices of the City Housing Corporation, which funded experimental housing ventures, Stein and Wright began a concerted effort in the 1920s to develop new housing models for the United States. Stein and Wright designed many low-density housing projects during their collaboration, including Sunnyside Gardens, in the borough of Queens, New York City (1923); Radburn, in the borough of Fairlawn, New Jersey (1928); and Chatham Village, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1930). Wright and Stein parted ways a few years before Wright's death in 1936. Stein continued to design and consult on similar types of developments, including Hillside Homes, in the borough of Queens, New York City (1932); and Baldwin Hills Village, in Los Angeles, California (194 1). He was also involved in the Resettlement Administration's planning of four "Greenbelt" towns.

These projects had a number of characteristics in common. Stein and Wright saw many changes occurring in American society during this period, and as such, incorporated these changes into their designs. A shorter work day had resulted in increased leisure time, so opportunities for active and passive recreation were built into their developments. The standards of living to which people were accustomed to, or aspired to, had greatly improved from the preceding era. Material goods were more readily available to more of the population. Indoor plumbing, mechanical systems, appliances like refrigerators and televisions, and the automobile had been greatly improved and, as a result, became highly desirable to a majority of Americans. The opportunity to obtain the "Good Life" had extended to a larger segment of the population. Stein and Wright included these improvements in the quality of life in their designs; they also viewed their "New Towns" to be an appropriate setting for a better way of life. The fact that few families had maids or cooks by this point led to a simplification of the floor plan of the basic housing unit, and to the formation of a community patterned to ease the burden of the family unit on the mother. [13]

The physical form of these "New Towns" differed greatly from older communities that had been imposed onto a grid plan. Individual buildings were set around open greens, also called inner block parks, facing inwardly towards nature and outwardly towards roads and services. Buildings were oriented away from the street and outdoor living spaces were located to the rear. New construction was set within the existing topography. In several cases, the entire development was surrounded by a green belt. Large developments were divided into "neighborhoods" to give residents a sense of belonging to a specific community.

There were two distinct frameworks within Stein and Wright's developments - streets for automobiles and pathways for pedestrians.[14] Most "New Towns" were composed of blocks divided by these streets and pedestrian footpaths. Parking spaces were integrated into the communities; off-street parking was preferred to preserve a sense of order and nature. [15]

The philanthropically-funded housing experiments of the 1920s came to an abrupt halt with the beginning of the Great Depression. In response to the building industry's decline, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a New Deal program dating from 1934, was designed to revive private housing ventures during the Depression. The FHA proposed to revitalize construction through building actual dwellings, and through insuring mortgages for approved projects.

Builders of FHA-insured projects were required to maintain certain design and construction standards. These standards had been developed by the Technical Division of the FHA, so that they had a way to protect their investments. The standards addressed two separate areas of the building arena, new construction and the renovation of existing structures. Detailed requirements were set as to the workmanship, construction, materials, mechanical equipment, and building performance. Guidelines on resistance to wear from use and weather, convenience, and livability were also dictated. Architectural design itself was not mandated, as it was based on issues of taste and on regional differences.[16]

At first, the FHA concentrated on the building and insuring of single-family detached homes. As few people had enough money to purchase single-family homes, this approach met with limited success. Soon after, the FHA discovered rental garden apartments as a building type more appropriate for their involvement.

The decentralized living model proposed by Stein and Wright for federal housing projects was appropriated and modified by private-sector developers for use in constructing garden apartments for rental purposes. Gustave Ring was one of the most successful developers of rental garden apartment complexes in the Washington metropolitan area. In 1939, out of the $100 million worth of mortgage insurance made available by the FHA for new rental housing nationwide, Ring held $37 million.[17]

Through the Ring Construction Company, Ring developed a number of garden apartment complexes in the metropolitan area, but he is best known for Colonial Village and Arlington Village in Arlington County, Virginia. Colonial Village, built in three phases from 1935 to 1937 in a colonial revival mode, is comprised of 974 units arranged in groups for four families. Arlington Village, built in 1939 also in a colonial revival mode, is comprised of 661 units divided into five superblocks. Both developments feature open green spaces, parks, parking areas, and service yards."

Ring became nationally known as an expert on the design and construction of garden apartments. In issues of ***Urban Land Magazine*** dating from 1948, Ring shared his theories on the planning of garden apartments. He aimed for fifteen to twenty-five percent of land coverage by buildings in his projects. An advocate of low-density living as well as of low land coverage, he preferred a ratio of ten to fifteen families per acre. Ring thought open space should be placed where it would count the most, and that dwellings should be arranged so as to reap the fullest benefits of privacy and solitude. He incorporated on-street parking and community facilities, like shopping centers, into all of his complexes.”

Ring and other local developers appropriated the model of low-density, decentralized living because it was popular with prospective tenants and also because it was highly profitable for the builders. Ring spent approximately $600,000 on Arlington Village in 1939; and in 1940 he sold the complex for $4 million, making a 666 percent profit. Ring was able to build cheaply and efficiently by assembling a team of professionals, including architects, landscape architects, and contractors, who worked solely on his projects. He preferred to work only with contractors who were familiar with local conditions, and he carefully adhered to FHA building standards.*’

By building garden apartment complexes, Ring and other developers were simply responding to an acute need for affordable rental housing in the Washington metropolitan area, which was apparent by the spring of 1940. Federal employment greatly expanded as a result of the nation’s defense program, as the United States geared up production and administration for its entry into World War II, and as a result of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal administration. Housing was needed not only for employees of the expanding federal government who were new to Washington, but also for natives of the area. Long-time residents of the metropolitan area with moderate incomes had difficulty finding decent housing even before the flood of new federal workers, as rents in the area were relatively high and there were not many low-rent housing units available.[21]

In 194 1, hoping to learn more about the housing patterns of federal employees, the Bureau of Labor Statistics surveyed employees in the executive departments of the government as to their living arrangements and rents. The survey results revealed that rather than recent rent increases, it was the high cost of rents in general in the metropolitan area which caused hardship for federal employees. Seven percent of the workers surveyed rented houses or apartments at a cost of less than $30.00 per month, and forty-four percent were spending $50.00 or more per month. Families with monthly incomes of less than $150.00 were spending approximately one-third of their wages to rent living quarters.**

The housing problem was even more acute for new federal employees, as they were paid considerably less than employees of longer standing. Most of the new employees surveyed were renting spare rooms from families or living in boarding houses. Although this choice could be partially explained by the fact that most of these employees were young, single, and earned relatively low wages, the scant availability of living spaces they could afford also factored into the equation.[23]

Finding housing in the Washington area was quite difficult for new federal employees who were married and had children. Generally, rents in the metropolitan area were much more expensive than they were in the communities from which the new employees came. This prevented new married employees from moving their families with them. Many workers reported that high rental costs absorbed the increased earnings which resulted from their new federal government jobs.[24]

In the early 1940s, the need for affordable housing in the metropolitan area, both for natives and newcomers to Washington, became more serious. It is rumored that, prior to World War II, President Roosevelt contacted his close friend Frederick Ecker, Chairman of the Board of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and asked if he could do something to ease the severe housing problem in the nation's capital. By this point, Metropolitan Life had considerable experience in the planning, construction and management of rental garden apartment complexes.[25] Metropolitan Life's housing projects were primarily new complexes located in suburban settings not far from city centers, like Los Angeles or San Francisco, California, or were urban renewal projects within existing city centers, mainly in New York.

Metropolitan Life's decision to become involved in the housing market was based on a desire for permanent investment projects which would possess public value. The company espoused a "policy of making investment not only sound and enduring but valuable from the standpoint of public service."[26] The construction of garden apartment complexes provided work for hundreds of men who worked in the building trades and in manufacturing, and gave thousands of families the opportunity to live in a suburban environment close to city centers. These complexes functioned well during World War II by providing housing for defense workers and members of the armed forces. Metropolitan Life saw all of these characteristics as evidence of success in their housing ventures.[27]

The Metropolitan Life rental housing projects most often compared with Parkfairfax are Parkchester, Parklabrea, and Parkmerced. Parkchester, in the borough of the Bronx, New York City, was completed in 194 1, and consisted of 12,272 apartments located in fifty-one apartment buildings ranging from seven to thirteen stories high. Parklabrea, in Los Angeles, California, had both two-story buildings and thirteen-story buildings present in its design. The complex consisted of 4,253 apartments when it was completed in 1950. Parkmerced, in San Francisco, California, also consisted of two-story and thirteen-story buildings. When completed in 1950, it contained 3,483 apartments. Both Parklabrea and Parkmerced were started several years earlier, and their construction was halted by the war effort. Parkfairfax was the only Metropolitan Life project of this type to be built by Metropolitan Life entirely on a low scale. Nearby, Fairlington, a garden apartment complex of 3,400 apartments, built by the Defense Homes Corporation from 1942 to 1943, was also composed entirely of low-scale buildings.**

Parkfairfax was originally built on 201.7 acres of land; presently 132 acres of the original site remain. The development is bounded on the west by Quaker Lane and the Shirley Memorial Highway, on the south by Beverley Drive, on the east by Wellington Road, Gunston Road, and Valley Drive, and on the north by Glebe Road and Four-Mile Run.[29] The land on which Parkfairfax is located, in the North Ridge section of northwest Alexandria, remained rural in character until its purchase by Metropolitan Life in 194 1. Groundbreaking took place in 194 1, and construction was completed in 1943. The leasing office, located at 3360 Gunston Road, opened May 1, 1943 (Figure 2).

Parkfairfax, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Leasing Office Staff, in front of office at 3360 Gunston Road, May 1, 1943 (Parkfairfax Management Office, Alexandria, Virginia)

The first families of Parkfairfax moved in on October 1, 1943, and three months later, the complex was fully leased.[30]

Parkfairfax was constructed at a cost of $8.5 million (Figures 3-4). The architect for the project, Leonard Schultze and Associates, was nationally known as designers of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. The general contractor was Starrett Brothers & Eken, Inc., which had constructed the Empire State Building and Metropolitan Life's Parkchester complex. Both of these firms were based in New York City. The basic premise behind Parkfairfax's design was the creation of a park community. This was to be accomplished by dividing the property into a series of different sized parks, and by having the various buildings open directly into these individual areas.[31]

Parkfairfax under construction, circa 1942 (Parkfairfax Management Office, Alexandria, Virginia)

The informal and simple plan of Parkfairfax features asymmetrical winding streets designed to limit traffic to 25 miles per hour (Figure 5). Two hundred and eighty-five detached

Plan of Parkfairfax, circa 1943 (Parkfairfax Management Office, Alexandria, Virginia).

buildings, all either two or three stories in height, are grouped in small clusters or in cul-de-sacs, either facing or backing onto park-like settings. Buildings, placed into the existing topography, cover only one-tenth of the original acreage, for a ratio of thirteen families per acre. The buildings were constructed of two different types of brick: white-painted sand brick and finished red brick. For variety and interest, the use of these types of brick alternate from building to building. The buildings differ in height, shape, and in the way the facades are treated (Figure 6).[32]

Parkfairfax, Building 607, 1100 block of Valley Drive (photo by author, October 1996)

The buildings contain a total of 1,684 apartments: 720 one-bedroom units, 862 two-bedroom units, 10 1 three bedroom units, and 1 four-bedroom unit on Mt. Eagle Place created by Metropolitan Life for the express use of the community's resident manager. The three bedroom units are all two levels, and were placed two to a building, across from each other, and separated by a breezeway which runs through the center of the building. The apartments vary in size and layout; fifteen different floor plans exist.[33]

Privacy and solitude are two features which received high priority when Parkfairfax was planned. All units were designed with separate outside entrances. The buildings are small and low-scale; most are two stories and contain four to ten units. The desire for privacy manifests itself in the floor plan of the apartments as well. Kitchens and bathrooms were placed to the front of the buildings, and bedrooms, dining rooms and living rooms were located to the rear of the building, looking out to the common greens.[34]

Another feature that made Parkfairfax so desirable was its location convenient to Washington and the Pentagon. Contemporaneous with the development of both Parkfairfax and Fairlington was the construction of the Shirley Highway, which was designed to connect the newly built Pentagon with Fort Belvoir. Once completed in 1944, the Shirley Memorial Highway significantly improved access to Washington, D.C., allowing a sparsely settled area to be more intensively developed.[35]

Both in marketing pieces and in the design of the development itself, Metropolitan Life stressed the fact that the land on which Parkfairfax was built was located in “historic Alexandria,” Virginia. An account of the history of Parkfairfax written by an unnamed Metropolitan Life employee attempts to draw parallels between the history of the port city of Alexandria and Parkfairfax's large parcel of land. This same spirit of appropriation of history for one’s own uses seems to have affected Parkfairfax’s design. The choice to use the colonial revival mode for the buildings’ construction was viewed by the company as an appropriate means for conveying the colonial history of the area.[36]

In addition, the fourteen streets in the complex are named after people or places associated with eighteenth-century Virginia. For example, Martha Custis Drive was named after George Washington’s wife; and Gunston Road was named for Gunston Hall, the plantation that belonged to George Mason.[37] Techniques like these were used to give the new community a sense of tradition and history, as it was developed during a period of national strain. It is also plausible that these features gave the community an identity and an appearance that made it attractive to prospective renters, and that employing these techniques was a way to make the community more marketable, and inevitably more financially successful.[38]

Metropolitan Life was committed to creating a community which would prosper, as well as one that would be financially successful, and took strides to provide the amenities necessary to provide their tenants with a high quality of living. At the request of the City of Alexandria, the company donated a parcel of land on Martha Custis Drive within the complex, along with a cash gift of $50,000, to be used for the construction of a public elementary school. In October 1943, the first Charles Barrett School opened, with forty children and four teachers in attendance. This white frame, temporary prefabricated structure, containing six classrooms and a kitchen, had been built by the U.S. Works Progress Administration. The school was named for a Marine Corps general, killed in World War II, who had graduated from Episcopal High School in Alexandria. The original portion of the present brick structure was built in 1949, and is still visible amid numerous later additions.[39] Both buildings existed on the site until 1955, when the first school was razed.

The monthly rent scale was announced in April 1943 by Thomas Campbell, the first resident manager. All rents included gas, electricity, and refrigeration. Monthly rent for one-bedroom apartments averaged $6 1.25; two-bedroom apartments averaged $78.75; and three-bedroom apartments averaged $90.00. Prospective tenants were asked to notify the leasing office in writing, so that appointments for interviews could be arranged.[40] Metropolitan Life wanted their community to be inhabited primarily by families, and pictures of the families of prospective renters were requested at these interviews. As in many communities at this time, blacks and Jews were not welcomed.

So as to achieve a sense of stability and quality within the community, a number of rules were drafted to govern the behavior of the residents. No dogs or cats were permitted. Tenants could only grow flowers, and not vegetables. Single people, except for widows, were not allowed. There were even strict rules about what types of families could occupy which units. For example, a married couple with one child was not permitted to occupy a one-bedroom apartment; if a married couple occupying a one-bedroom apartment decided to have a child, they were required to move to a two-bedroom apartment. Adherence to these restrictions did contribute to the stability, as well as the homogeneity of the development.[41]

The first lease in Parkfairfax was signed by an Army major who worked at the Pentagon. He had been living with his family in Baltimore, and spending four hours a day commuting by train and bus. Occupations of early tenants included "...lawyers, economists, engineers, analysts, secretaries, examiners, statisticians, and accountants employed in government agencies, as well as many families of officers of the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps, the Marine Corps, the WACS, and the WAVES."[42]

As a rental property, Parkfairfax was fully occupied, due to its varied floorplans, natural setting, low rents, and convenience to Washington. Parkfairfax is known locally as the "cradle of Presidents," referring to the tenancy of Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Many other prominent politicians, including members of Congress, rented apartments at Parkfairfax while beginning their careers.[43] Parkfairfax remained a rental property owned and operated by Metropolitan Life from 1943 to 1966. From 1966 to 1968, Weaver Brothers Realtors was engaged to manage Parkfairfax for Metropolitan Life.[44]

In 1968, the buildings of Parkfairfax were sold to the Arlen Realty Corporation for $9.8 million, while Metropolitan Life granted Arlen a 99-year lease on the land. Arlen Realty, a New York development company, improved the property in numerous ways from 1970 to 1978, including installing new "harvest gold" stoves and refrigerators, boilers, air conditioners, and the Martha Custis Drive swimming pool. Controversy arose when Arlen Realty announced their plans to demolish a section of the complex, so that high-rise apartments could be constructed. In actuality, Arlen intended to replace the entire neighborhood with high-rise buildings surrounding a lake and park with bridle paths. Tenants of Parkfairfax organized themselves into a citizens association, and fought the project through Alexandria's political system. The project was eventually defeated by the City of Alexandria, which would not grant permits for the high-rise buildings due to an insufficient sewer system. The City also imposed a four-story height limit on the project, which made development of this type unattractive to Arlen. Only one fifteen-story building, the Parc East on Martha Custis Drive, was ever built, in 1970-1971 .[45]

As a result of their failed building program, Arlen Realty lost interest in Parkfairfax, and allowed the property to fall into disrepair. In 1977, Arlen Realty and Metropolitan Life sold a 14 1 -acre property containing Parkfairfax and Parc East to the PIA/IDI Corporation for $30 million. PIA/IDI then sold Parc East as a separate property, thus reducing the acreage of Parkfairfax to its current 132 acres.[46] PIA/IDI was lead by Giuseppe Cecchi, a Washington developer who had first met with success by building the Watergate complex in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of the District of Columbia. He later built the Watergate at Landmark and the Rotunda in McLean, two large apartment complexes in Virginia.[47]

In early 1977, Cecchi announced his intention to convert Parkfairfax into a condominium community. Many tenants were outraged, and Cecchi attempted to win them over to his position by sharing with the Parkfairfax Citizens Association his conversion plans. Cecchi planned for an ordered conversion constructed in phases, in which each of four sections of the complex would undergo minimum renovations before being offered for sale in several stages. Units which were purchased by their current tenants underwent a limited renovation, in which the kitchen and bathroom were painted, a new tile floor was laid in the kitchen, and electric baseboard heaters were installed. Tenants were permitted to live in their apartments during a majority of the renovations. Each apartment was renovated in ten days, and cleaning crews were sent in as soon as the work was completed.[48]

Renovation costs totaled $18 million, and included new plumbing, electrical wiring, storm windows, and interior painting. Adjacent units were combined into single, larger units, only when both were empty or were not to be purchased by their tenants. The fifteen different floor plans were renamed for American presidents; for example, a three-bedroom unit with a certain arrangement was named a "Van Buren."[49]

Over eighty percent of the tenants renting at the time their village was converted chose to purchase condominium units in Parkfairfax - a testimony to the both the comfort of the neighborhood and the implementation of the conversion. Another factor may have been the discounts Cecchi offered to current tenants to induce them to remain. All current tenants were given a 90-day grace period to decide whether or not they would purchase a unit. Tenants were given first option to buy their units (or other units in the neighborhood) before they were released to the public, and were offered discounts from $3,000 to $6,000 to help them do so. Tenants who wanted to purchase a unit other than the one they were currently renting were offered lesser discounts or no discount at all. Long-standing and elderly residents were offered an additional $2,000 discount.[50] As another concession to moderate-income and elderly residents, tenants could continue to rent in the community for five years, as long as they paid rent to an actual unit owner.

Life in Parkfairfax was also seen as desirable by people outside the community. Without advertisements, hundreds of potential purchasers came to Parkfairfax. One rainy night in November 1977, over fifty people waited throughout the night to purchase 130 units the next morning. At this point, prices ranged from $29,500 for a one-bedroom unit to $45,000 for a three-bedroom unit. Later, a lottery system was used to sell the few remaining units, which were quickly sold. Purchasers during the conversion were mainly single professional men and women, and included a few young married couples and retired couples with grown children. A number of units were bought by investors for long-term rental properties or for short-term investments. Often these units were then resold at a higher price within the next year by owners who had never lived in Parkfairfax. This mix of residents, with the influx of families with young children within the past five years, has continued to the present."

Wayne Williams, landscape architect for the developer, wanted to divide Parkfairfax into four "theme" villages, each focusing on a specific interest, such as arts and crafts or cooking. Plans were also made for the construction of an amphitheatre, gourmet kitchen, fitness center, craft workshop, and golf course. Williams, a native of Los Angeles, had devised similar plans for communities in his home town which were well-received, but these plans were quickly dismissed by Parkfairfax residents, who had no desire to be told what their interests should be. These grandiose plans were eventually abandoned for a more simple approach. The Coryell Lane and Lyons Lane swimming pools were built, and two volleyball courts and eight tennis courts were constructed. Building 309 at 3554 Martha Custis Drive was renovated into a woodworking shop and fitness center with a sauna. The former rental office was remodeled into a community center with a new kitchen, administrative offices, and rooms for social gatherings and meetings.[52]

The conversion project proved to be a complete success when the final condominium unit was sold in 1979. Only a year later, the value of most units has doubled their purchase price. The condominium complex became totally self-governed in July 1979, when the first Board of Directors was elected. The complex remains self-governing to this day, but there have been periodic changes in management companies.[53]

Parkfairfax's conversion to condominium units was not an isolated incident; rather, it is representative of a larger trend towards new means of home ownership. As the cost of living and of housing increased dramatically in the Washington metropolitan area, many people still possessed a strong desire for home ownership. To meet this need in a new way, many rental garden apartment complexes turned to this form of ownership in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some of these include Fairlington and Colonial Village in south Arlington, and McLean Gardens in northwest Washington. In these cases, conversion to condominiums has been an excellent way to keep the complexes intact and in good condition.[54]

Parkfairfax is an excellent extant example of rental garden apartment complexes built according to the theories of housing experts Wright and Stein, as they were reinterpreted by local developers like Gustave Ring, and carried out on a large-scale basis by companies like Metropolitan Life. Though the development has undergone changes in management and ownership, it still retains many original characteristics, and much of its original setting has been preserved. Parkfairfax has been able to withstand different waves of development pressures, and to evolve with the times into the distinct and vibrant community that it is today.

Endnotes

1. Stein, Toward New Towns for America, (New York, New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1957), p. 13.

2. Stein, Ibid., p. 13

3. Stem, Ibid., p. 19.

4. Stein, Ibid., p. 12.

5. Stein, Ibid., p. 7.

6. Stem, Ibid., p. 130.

7. Stein, Ibid., p. 219.

8. Stem, Ibid., p. 16.

9. Stein, Ibid., p. 7.

10. Stein, Ibid., p. 16.

11. Stein, Ibid., pp. 219-220.

12. Stein, Ibid., p. 17.

13. Stein, Ibid., p. 218. Since the projects Stein and Wright designed were public housing, I am not sure how relevant the fact that families did not have servants truly was. It was, however, something Stein thought about.

14. Clarence Stein, "Communities for the Good Life," p. 39, in Apartments and Dormitories: An Architectural Record Book, (F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1958).

15. Stein, Toward New Towns for America, p. 219.

16. "Development of Dwelling Standards," Insured Mortgage Portfolio, p. 5, 3, (1st Quarter 1941), p. 21. Laura Spina, "A New House in Six Hours: An Analysis of the Construction and Design Standards Established by the Federal Housing Administration," 30 April 1993, p. 7.

17. Dennis Domer, "Escaping the City: New Deal Housing and Gustave Ring's Garden Apartment Villages," p. 66, in Malcolm Quantrill and Bruce Webb, eds., Urban Forms, Suburban Dreams, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).

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19. Gustave Ring, "Modern Trends in Garden Apartments," Urban Land, pp. 7, 5, (May 1948), pp. 3-4.

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2 1. Jerome Cornfield and Marjorie Weber, "Housing of Federal Employees in the Washington (D.C.) Area in May 1941 ," Labor Review, November 1941, p. 1224.

22. Cornfield, "Housing of Federal Employees," p. 1225.

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