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HOUSING, PEOPLE AND PLACE: A CASE STUDY OF WHITNEY PIER

by

Elizabeth Catherine Beaton

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfilment of requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Interdisciplinary Studies
University of Manitoba
1996

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HOUSING, PEOPLE AND PLACE: A CASE STUDY OF WHITNEY PIER

BY

ELIZABETH CATHERINE BEATON

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In any community, housing communicates a sense of place and belonging. Through an examination of a variety of sources, including local government documents, newspapers, building practices, and interviews, this thesis hopes to show the meaning of housing in a specific community, Whitney Pier.

Whitney Pier is an urban community located on the east coast of Canada, on the north east side of Sydney, Cape Breton. Whitney Pier's industrial working class orientation is confirmed by its historic proximity to the Sydney Steel plant and coke ovens, and to Cape Breton's main coal piers. In the early part of the twentieth century, the coal and steel industries brought thousands of immigrants and Nova Scotian migrants to Whitney Pier, resulting in the community's reputation as the most diverse ethnic community in the Atlantic region.

Reflecting a span of cultural variety and a history of self-reliance, the housing of Whitney Pier illustrates ethnicity and class status, as well as the roles of the state, community activism, and to a limited extent, religion. The early farming and sea-trading era, the industrial boom and immigration, the intervention of the state in response to a failing economy, and internally inspired social action are all explicated in Whitney Pier's housing landscape.

Housing is involved in actively communicating the lived experience of individuals and groups in Whitney Pier, through

the actions of community members and through their oral tradition. The recollections of shacks provided by the company and local entrepreneurs, the conscious and positive decisions to build a home and to stay in Whitney Pier, the sense of loss created by urban renewal, the frustrations and degradation of public housing, and the problems and proud achievements of co-operative and other social housing groups are included in this study. Dependence upon industry -- transferred to dependence on the state -- matched against individual and group self-reliance has been the basis of on-going tension in the housing experience of Whitney Pier.

The relationship between the people of Whitney Pier and their housing is creative and positive rather than merely responsive and passive. This "active engagement" between people and housing in a particular place has been, and will continue to be, essential to the sustainability of Whitney Pier as community.

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Abbreviations

AHOP	Assisted Home Ownership Plan
AISI	American Iron and Steel Institute
BESCO	British Empire Steel Corporation
BUF	Black United Front
CCF	Canadian Commonwealth Federation
CHIP	Canadian Home Insulation Programme
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
DEVCO	Cape Breton Development Corporation
DISCO	Dominion Iron and Steel Company
DOSCO	Dominion Steel and Coal
HOME	Ownership Made Easy
HOMES	Home Ownership Made Easy, Sydney
IGA	Independent Grocers Alliance
LIP	Local Initiatives Project
NFB	National Film Board
NHA	National Housing Act
NIP	Neighbourhood Improvement Programme
NSHC	Nova Scotia Housing Commission
PCB	***
RRAP	Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Programme
S&L	Sydney and Louisbourg (Railway)
Stelco	Steel Company of Canada
TUF	Tenants United Front
WPNPHS	Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing Society

PREFACE

I was a teenager when I first experienced Whitney Pier, more than 30 years ago. As I crossed the overpass separating Sydney and Whitney Pier, I could smell the steel plant and the coke ovens as they blasted their effluence into the atmosphere. Wandering around, I happened into a church and saw an Iconostasis for the first time; actually I peeked through a massive "fence" decorated with holy pictures in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the very ornate but elusive altar.

The second time I visited Whitney Pier, I drove a university friend to his home in the area called the Coke Ovens. He was African-Canadian, and I was viewed curiously by a whole neighbourhood of African-Canadians who lived in houses close to the street. I viewed curiously back, for I was a rural Nova Scotian who had never seen so many black people in an urban setting.

Eventually I moved to Sydney, and because my husband was of Polish background, I was going to church, shopping, skating and visiting in Whitney Pier. St. Mary's Polish church was my church. It was at Jewish groceries and clothing stores that I shopped, at the Pier rink that I skated, and soon I was "socializing", i.e. explaining who I was wherever I went. As I got to know the Pier, I was amused that many people in Sydney were afraid to go to there. Eyebrows were raised at my

enthusiasm for the place.

Then I lived in Whitney Pier as a single parent on Railroad Street, literally beside the steel plant; to be more exact, ten yards from the steel plant's railroad track and a hundred yards from the noisy rail mill. It was a "white" street, virtually surrounded by a black neighbourhood. Down the street was the West Indian Cricket Club. All the people on Railroad Street knew my business and they "took care" of me, informing me of my daughter's activities, giving advice on how to deal with my landlord, and sending their kids to play with the kittens I found in the shed. The people of Railroad Street told me that the street was known as "Fitzgerald Row" after an early developer, also the mayor of Sydney, who owned the land and built the houses. The street was also called "Scab Avenue" because Newfoundlanders who lived there would skip over the fence to go to work during strikes. They had to support very large families. Despite their "row" appearance, the houses were not "company houses". More lately, Railroad Street was called "Widows Lane", so many of the steel workers had been killed on the plant or had died of cancer.

Now, I have a home in "The Pier". I walk or jog through the area on an almost daily basis, often carrying a camera. I see the sign warning trespassers away from the empty space that used to be the coke ovens: "Sydney Steel is not responsible for injury or death of persons in the coke ovens area" -- reminding me of the early DISCO policies toward

accidents on the plant. I look at the bountiful vegetable gardens of those who wonder about PCBs in their soils, I talk with Kaz who is challenging City Hall to downsize city council, with Sandra at the IGA who is running for a seat on council because City Hall refused to respond to her questions, with Clo who wonders whether her participation in the University College of Cape Breton Board of Governors will make a difference in sexual harassment on the campus, and to her husband Dan who now fights for senior's medicare, having spent his steelworking years fighting for health and safety. I look for bargains at Archie's "Lower Price Store at the Pier". I stop to admire Antonina's garden. She came from Poland 60 years ago, and now she wonders whether her grandchild, who has two university degrees, will find a job. At the bus stop are students with the same question about their future. At the dairy lunch counter I hear the conversation of those who object to coal dust blowing from the Piers, and those who search in the news, in the local gossip, in their souls, for answers about the possibility of job action as a way to influence government and corporate decisions at the steel plant.

The people of Whitney Pier are very much of today's world, but they are also forcefully aware of how they came to be. They respond to my curiosity about the history of the Pier with generosity and seriousness, sometimes shouting over a back fence to a neighbour or phoning a more "expert" person

for a more complete answer. Through the years, Whitney Pier became a special place for me, and I came to understand that its people know it as a special place. Its churches, halls, streets, and houses all said that here is a community embracing many cultures, but with a common identity of place. It is the people of Whitney Pier who made possible my interpretation of their housing and its relationship to their sense of place. I humbly dedicate this study to the people of Whitney Pier.



Figure 1: Coke Ovens, steel plant, Sydney Harbour, Whitney Pier. Photo by George Hunter.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study of housing in Whitney Pier seeks to understand how the built environment, especially housing, reflects the experience of a particular people in a particular community. But this examination of housing will not merely present a passive image of a community's history. Instead, through the interpretation of choices, processes and contextual limitations, I will explore how housing actively communicates the goals and values of groups of people. In this way I hope to show that housing is part of an active engagement between people and place.

Housing represents an experience common to almost every human being. As "living space", housing provides for many of the biological needs of humans, such as shelter, security, and privacy. As a form of built environment, housing is concrete and tangible; it is an objective reality, a material entity, discernable to our senses. Yet it is deeply spiritual: it represents the dwelling place, the making of home, a sacred place for it is a basic representation of existence. It is often a place of the mind, in memory or in narratives.

People's views about their housing environments form a very important part of this interpretation of housing

experience. Interviews often are used to reveal the layers of reality of the value of their housing. The physical structure of the housing, the materials and the type of construction, are a very tangible part of that reality. As well, interviews tell about the various levels of involvement in their accessing and maintaining their housing: gender, kinship, ethnicity and race. Understanding the societal implications of the housing of a community is less direct, and requires synthesizing the subjective experience of the people with a consideration of the wider social, political and economic milieu. Participant observation is also part of this qualitative approach and I have tried to enter this research with the realization of my own values and prejudices, and also the realization of my strong attachment for the community under study.

Whitney Pier, the subject of this study, is a district in the Regional Municipality of Cape Breton, located on the north east side of Sydney and close by the Sydney Steel plant and coke ovens. (Figs. 1-1, 1-2, 1-3) It is a multi-ethnic working class community of about 6500 people in a 2.2 square kilometre area. This community encompasses a rich variety of housing, reflecting a span of cultural variety and a history of self-reliance, while communicating a sense of place and belonging.

The regional history providing a social and economic context for this study of Whitney Pier can be found in a collection of essays edited by E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise

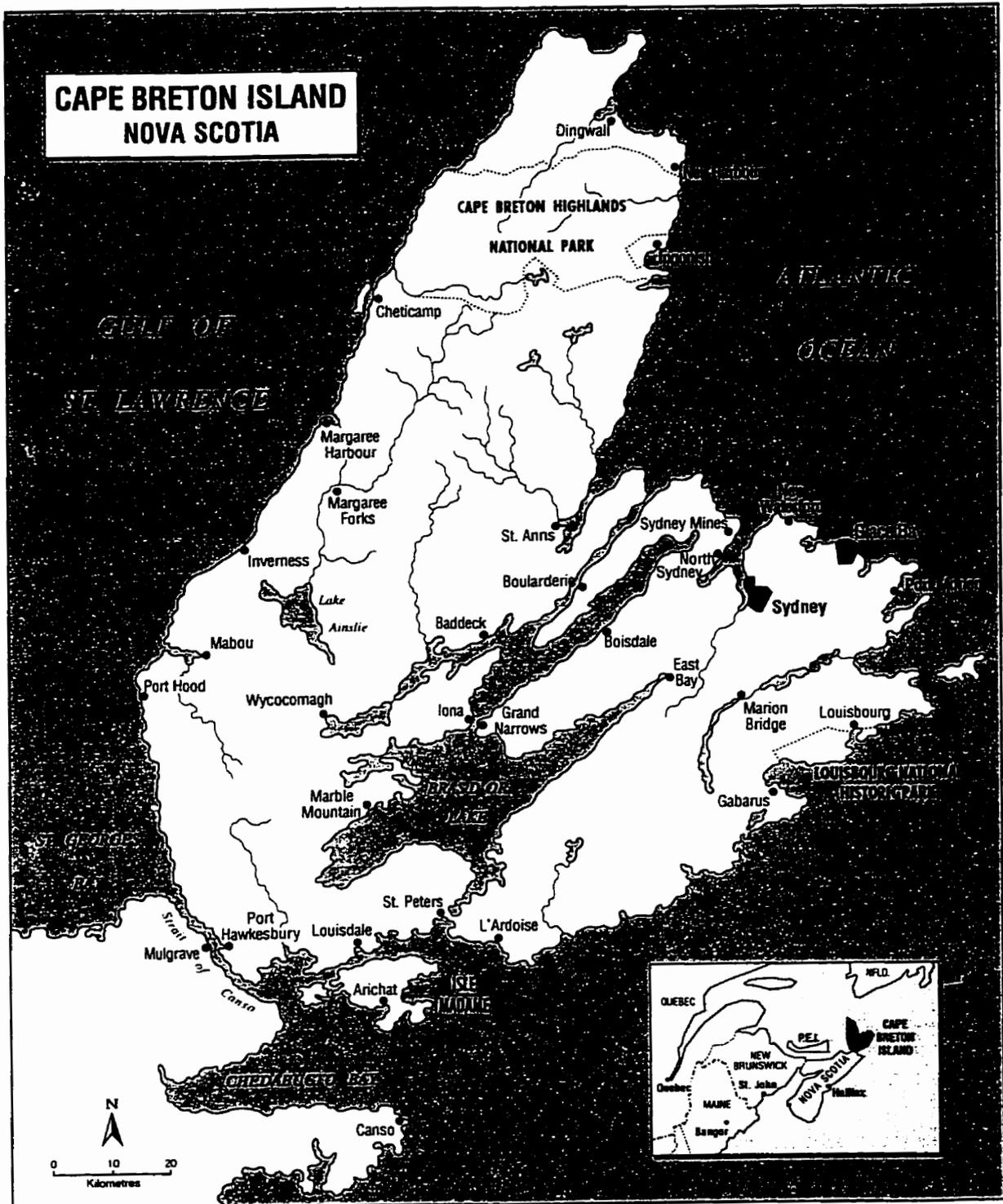


Figure 1-1: map, Cape Breton.

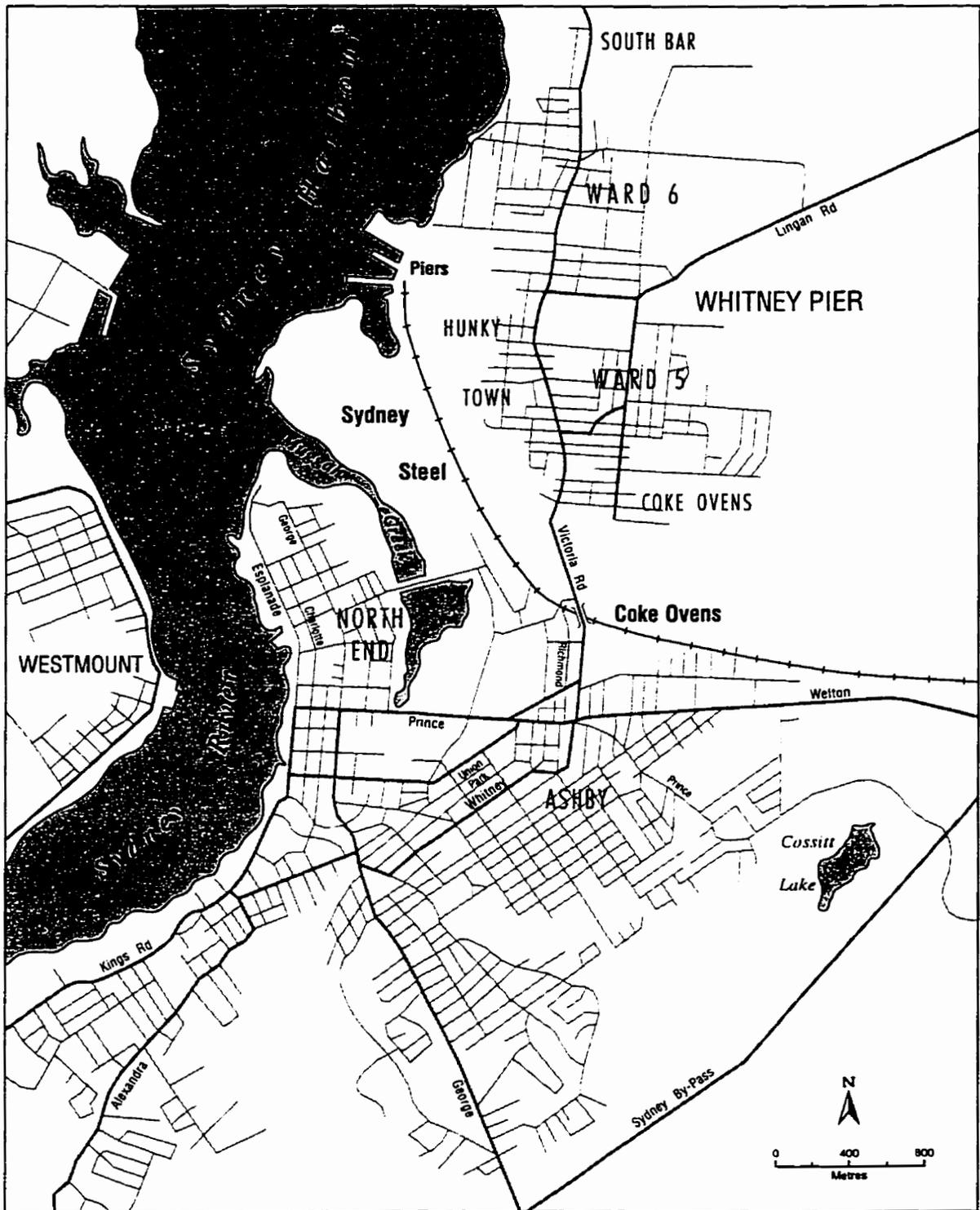


Figure 1-2: map, Sydney.

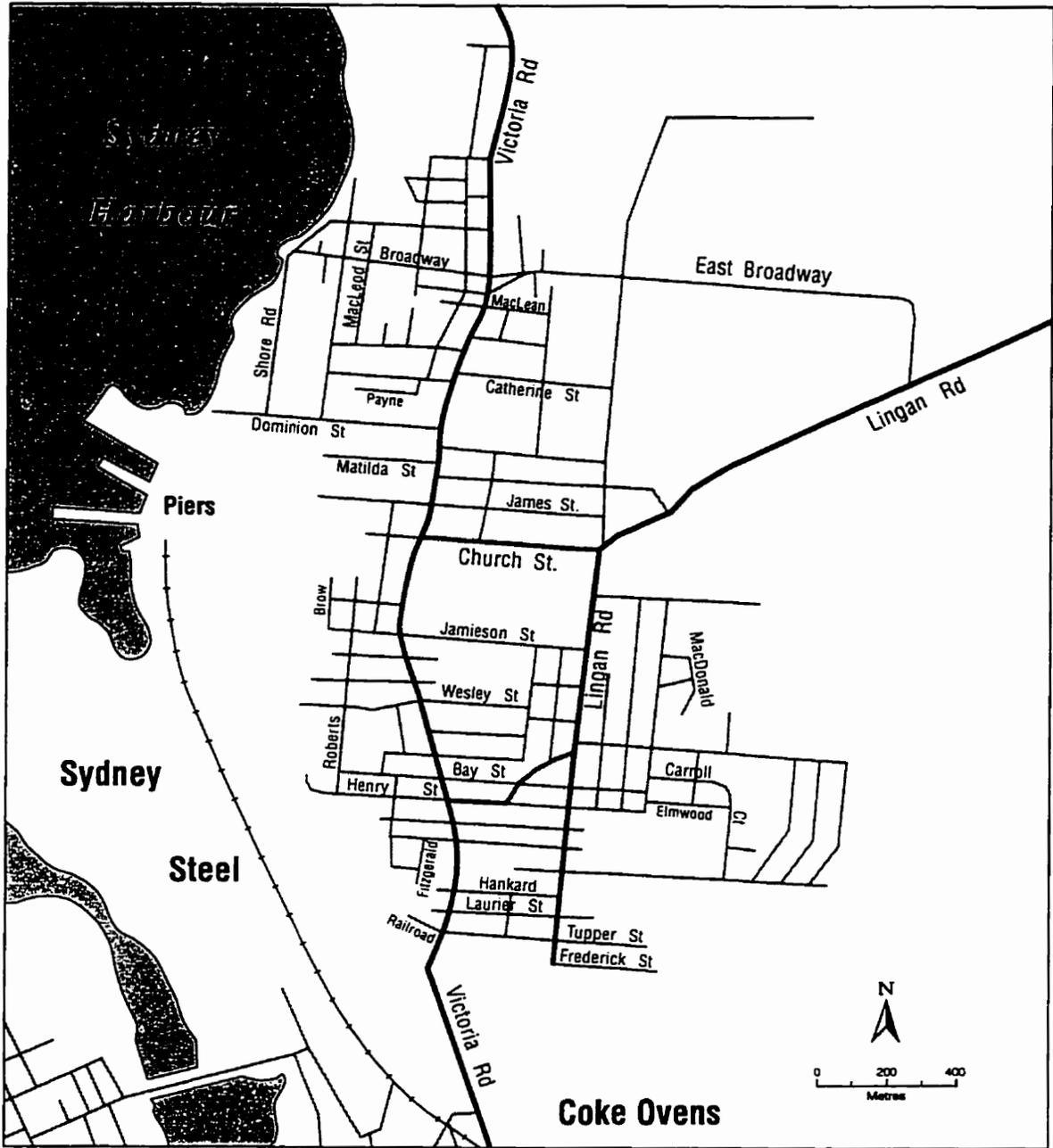


Figure 1-3: map, Whitney Pier.

which offers interpretations of ideas and events that have characterized the region.¹ In exploring the Atlantic provinces' problems and potential, this collaborative work gives a foundation to Whitney Pier as a community that had its birth in the mercantile period, but grew up in the industrializing period: it is a community that has weathered economic decline and now faces, with the rest of the region, an uncertain future. Colin Howell's chapter on industry, urbanization and reform bears witness to the tremendous industrial expansion that caused Whitney Pier to burst forth from a quiet farming area to a crowded cosmopolitan and urban district of Sydney.² David Frank's understanding of "resistance and accommodation" in the region, founded in a realization of class and region, forms a basis for understanding the working class values, the ethnic neighbourhoods, and the spirit that moved the people of Whitney Pier to build their own houses and to have their own "place" within the context of industrial capitalism.³ Ernest Forbes' epilogue spells out the situation of the 1980s and 1990s: an adjustment to a nation and region facing fiscal

¹ E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, **The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation** (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto and Acadiensis, 1993).

² Colin Howell, "The 1900s: Industry, Urbanization and Reform", in **The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation**, pp.155-191.

³ David Frank, "The 1920s: Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation", in **The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation**, pp. 233-272.

cuts. He also takes a long look at the potential of the past in trying to find a basis for a sustainable future in a fragmented region.⁴ The experience of housing in Whitney Pier, as in the rest of Atlantic Canada, has been a struggle on social and political levels with the greatest successes found in pockets of self-reliance, where culture has played a role in community awareness.

Whitney Pier housing can be seen to follow much the same patterns as that outlined in *Housing the North American City* by Weaver and Doucet.⁵ Their three phases of North American urban development -- individualism, corporate involvement, and state intervention -- can be applied to the interpretation of Whitney Pier housing. The individualism of farmers and merchants in the pre-industrial era, the involvement of the coal and steel company in providing shelter for workers, the hegemony of consumer capitalism in the decision of home building and ownership, and the role of the state in public and social housing form the broad base to this study. Co-operative ventures in house building and ownership, important in Whitney Pier since the 1930s must be set somewhat apart from the evolutionary development of housing in the rest of the country. As with cities all over North America, the

⁴ Ernest Forbes, "Epilogue: The 1980s", in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, pp. 505-516.

⁵ Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1991), esp. pp. 15-16.

phases of housing in Whitney Pier overlap, so that their temporal boundaries are flexible, and each phase might have a variable social context.

Whitney Pier's boom years of the early twentieth century saw the arrival and settlement of a vast number and variety of migrants and immigrants. They came to work in the steel and coal industries and they sought shelter, usually in the form of temporary, rented accommodation. Margaret Byington's classic 1910 study of a mill town in Pennsylvania has much to offer toward the understanding of this period in terms of adaptation to industrializing America, for the working class in general, and immigrants in particular.⁶ Her survey of households in Homestead, near Pittsburgh, shows how class and ethnicity were basic to the location, quality and objective value of housing. Whitney Pier shared that experience, with its residential segregation based on race and ethnicity, and on status within the working class structure. In both Whitney Pier and Homestead, and other industrial towns of the time, the realms of work and civic life defined their class systems through housing.

Homeownership as a significant goal was the chief housing characteristic of the "stable" period. Building and owning were part of the decision to stay and settle with a family in a community that included social and religious attachments.

⁶ Margaret Byington, **Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town** (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1974) [The Russell Sage Foundation, 1910]

Homeownership was also part of the "movement" leading to social acceptance and self-sufficiency; the movement was significantly underscored by an overwhelming selection of finished building products available to consumers for the first time. As well, home building and homeownership coincided with the change from rural to urban lifestyle which made farm land available to newcomers in small lots.

Homeownership has been explored as a symbol of solid citizenship by Gwendolyn Wright in *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*, who notes the strong relationship between housing and the ideological models adopted by the larger society.⁷ In her chronologically-oriented discussion of American housing, she considers the impact on housing of attitudes toward family and community stability, and beliefs about economic and social equality. On the correlation between the values of homeownership and the practicalities of providing it, Wright states, "Housing inevitably involves a compromise between residents and groups of experts": the layers of interaction between the ideas projected by architects, social engineers and the advertising of patterns books, and the strong opinions of Americans about

⁷ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993 [1981]). See also, Alan Gowans, who describes home as an "image of morality and virtue and as a symbol of the family", in *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1987), 2nd ed., p. 11.

family and community based on ethnic and class variations.⁸ Weaver and Doucet, as well, saw the "will to possess" as "an inspiration to independence" that occurred at different times in different places in Canada.⁹ But, despite the promise of independence in homeownership, it was the interdependence of kinship and ethnicity that accounted for much of the home building that went on in Whitney Pier. The building activity in Whitney Pier did not result in the individualism suggested by Weaver and Doucet, but instead confirmed ethnic groupings through their active choices of styles, decorations and locations.

Housing co-operatives, three examples of which are discussed in this study, represent an important and distinctive approach to providing shelter in Whitney Pier. Weaver and Doucet did not recognize this type of home building and ownership as "social" housing, even though the government of Nova Scotia, and later the federal government, had a role in financing the projects.¹⁰ The co-operatives fit, perhaps, more readily into the discussion of Canadian social democratic movements. A collection of early essays in a modern edition by R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos helps to define the spirit

⁸ Wright, *Building the Dream*, p. xvii.

⁹ Weaver and Doucet, *Housing the North American City*, p. 188.

¹⁰ Weaver and Doucet, pp. 299, 302. Gwendolyn Wright, pp. 198-199, recognized the history of co-operative housing only in terms of apartment rental projects.

of co-operation which motivated many people in Whitney Pier to work together in building their homes.¹¹ The "Fellowship for a Christian Social Order", represented in this collection was a movement which called for a "decisive statement about the Churches' responsibility in the economic realm".¹² Moses Coady, a Roman Catholic priest, is credited with providing the inspiration and leadership that resulted in co-operative housing projects in Cape Breton, including Whitney Pier. Even though Coady's religious socialism was only mildly radical, there can be little doubt that he was encouraged in his thinking by the writings and political activism of Protestant leaders who promoted social activism and even Marxism as a form of Christian love. The housing co-operatives began in Whitney Pier and in other parts of Cape Breton as a response to the economic crises of the depression. However, the co-operatives continued and took other forms because they expressed the working class values of solidarity and mutuality.

Although the federal and provincial governments were involved in housing across Canada since the 1930s, the influence of the state did not significantly affect Whitney Pier housing until the 1960s when "urban renewal" and the National Housing Act focused its attention upon slum clearance

¹¹ R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos, **Towards a Christian Revolution** (Toronto: Frye, 1989[1936]).

¹² Roger Hutchinson, "Introduction", in Scott and Vlastos, **Toward the Christian Revolution**, pp. vii.

in that community. With co-operation and cost-sharing from local and provincial governments, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) began a programme which removed substandard buildings in Whitney Pier, while offering public (low rental) housing as an alternative. The remarkable changes in the built environment of Whitney Pier effected by these policies continued through the 1970s. Albert Rose, in following an essentially bureaucratic/political chronology of Canadian housing policy, noted the political usefulness of the social commitment that motivated Canada's housing policies, while arguing that federal housing policy, particularly since the 1950s, was more than anything, intended as a stimulant for Canadian economy.¹³ In his cautious discussion of urban renewal, Rose weighed the "social" agenda of the government against the resistance of "slum" dwellers to moving and the reluctance of cities to accept public housing. In Rose's view, the Regent Park North project of the City of Toronto, completed in the 1950s, appeared to stand as a genuinely altruistic attempt at improving conditions for low income families.¹⁴ John C. Bacher was much harsher in his criticism of Canadian urban development policies implemented in the

¹³ Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies, 1935-1980* (Butterworths: Toronto, 1980).

¹⁴ Albert Rose, *Regent Park: A Study in Slum Clearance* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1958).

1950s and 1960s.¹⁵ He called urban renewal a "tragic gamble", a game that "opened a Pandora's box of local greed and boosterism [with] complex and contradictory impacts".¹⁶ In referring to the debate between subsidized housing repair and demolition, he quoted a letter which stated that the needs of individual tenants would be secondary to economic urban development considerations, that public housing must be "spartan" in order to demonstrate that government was not competing with private enterprise.¹⁷ The indignity suffered across the country in the clearing of neighbourhoods was further exacerbated in Whitney Pier by delays in providing alternative housing.

The problems of the urban renewal period led into a new era of "social housing" in which communities were invited to play a role in decisions affecting the housing in their neighbourhoods. What was probably more important about the 1970s and 1980s in Whitney Pier was that community groups carried out an open struggle to be heard as they took on governments and private interests in their fight for better housing. During this period, homeownership appeared to become Canadian society's goal, as "assisted homeownership" and

¹⁵ John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Market Place: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1993).

¹⁶ Bacher, *Keeping to the Market Place*, p. 213.

¹⁷ Letter to Stewart Bates (Chairperson of CMHC) from CMHC Board, 12 Feb., 1957, cited in Bacher, p. 214, ref. footnote 3.

neighbourhood planning came into vogue, and housing cooperatives were revived. But as reformers warned, the programmes often resulted in inflated prices for second-rate homes, and in many instances, in the inability of programme participants to meet their financial commitments.¹⁸ Albert Rose saw this period as a serious attempt on the part of the provinces, to deal each "in its own way and on the basis of its special political and social philosophy", with requirements for adequate housing.¹⁹ Bacher, however, saw hindrances to the non-profit housing movement in lack of genuine government support, especially in controlling the actions of financial institutions. Certainly, Whitney Pier benefitted from the programmes, especially the Neighbourhood Improvement ("NIP") and Residential Rehabilitation Assistance ("RRAP") programmes which resulted in repair and maintenance to existing stock, and also in the construction of relatively attractive public housing, seniors housing, and some viable self-help projects. However, it must be acknowledged that the policies supporting these programmes and the combination of demographic and economic factors contributed to a dependence on government that was highly antithetical to the earlier years of the community. The late 1980s saw the beginning of the end of most these social housing programmes.

The housing of Whitney Pier has an ambivalent future.

¹⁸ Bacher, p. 247.

¹⁹ Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies*, p.95.

Demographic shifts toward an aging female population and a preponderance of families headed by single females suggest higher rates of low income housing. The housing stock that was built to the highest standards of the 20s, 30s and 40s remain solid, but will very shortly be in need of extensive maintenance and repair. It seems that the future of housing will depend to a great extent on the national attitude toward the worth of relatively powerless groups. It remains to be seen whether the community itself will have the will and the power to provide the housing which will sustain itself. Bacher summarizes Canadian housing policy as value driven, forecasting that policy will "fluctuate between the poles of a compassionate, normative community and rapacious striving for economic mastery".²⁰

Pivotal studies of housing show that Whitney Pier housing followed a more or less parallel experience to that of other parts of Canada. **Homes in Alberta: Building, Trends and Design** by Donald Wetherell and Irene Kmet draws upon the close relationship between settlement and shelter in Alberta with its rural values of social stability, and the subsequent progression to modern housing and the increasing role of government in housing policy and practice.²¹ In the Atlantic region, Gerald Pocius' **A Place to Belong: Community Order and**

²⁰ Bacher, p. 278.

²¹ Donald C. Wetherell and Irene R.A. Kmet, **Homes in Alberta: Building, Trends and Design** (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta, 1991).

Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland, considers the tension between traditional building processes and those introduced by modernity.²² Both integrate, implicitly or explicitly, national housing policies with regional distinctions and include the potential for a cultural perspective. The ways in which Whitney Pier housing developed depended, to a great extent, on its cultural make-up, and the way that the wider society viewed that make-up.

Culture as a factor in housing is well exemplified in the ideas of Amos Rapoport. He views housing as "environmental meaning": houses are "supportive" of community, ethnic or religious values, because they represent familiar elements of the cultural core.²³ In understanding the many types of housing, Amos Rapoport suggests that housing is a "translation" of needs and values, even desires, dreams and passions, into a physical form. He acknowledges that this is more true of the "folk tradition" in housing than of "present-day design which is characterized by a greater degree of institutionalization and specialization".²⁴ He emphasizes that "choice among existing possibilities" accounts for the

²² Gerald L. Pocius, **A Place to Belong: Community Order and Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland** (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1991).

²³ Amos Rapoport, **The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Non-Verbal Communication Approach** (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982).

²⁴ Amos Rapoport, **House Form and Culture** (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 2-3.

differences between types of houses for different groups. While religion and ethnicity might be the primary basis for differing values, he also shows that economics, where a way of life becomes a "value", is also a factor. He argues that the sorts of constraints affecting choice and freedom in housing, found in the physical and economic environment can be explained by the concept of "criticality" rather than by determinism. By criticality, Rapoport means that the degree of choice is hampered or enhanced depending on the constraint, but that the choice itself still lies primarily within the value-system of the group.²⁵ In this study of Whitney Pier housing, the question of choice is always implicit. In this community ethnicity has been a negative factor in terms of social status, of housing location, of job opportunity, but also a positive factor of group cohesion. Therefore, choices in housing have led to a close balance of freedom and constraint in which neighbourhoods and the workplace have been significant factors.

James S. Duncan aptly shows how housing has social significance in terms of class identity. In *Housing and Identity*, Duncan and other scholars open the discussion of the

²⁵ Rapoport, *House Form and Culture*, pp. 58-60. See also, Amos Rapoport, "Identity and Environment", in James S. Duncan (ed.), *Housing and Identity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), pp. 6-35. Setha M. Low and Erve Chambers (eds.), *Housing, Culture, and Design: A Comparative Perspective* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1989), offer a collaborative view of the interaction between housing and culture, including, Amos Rapoport, "Foreword", pp. xvi-xxi.

ways in which housing relates to the social order in terms of gender, age, and income in both collectivistic and capitalist societies. The idea of house as a symbol of status in modern society is well introduced by Duncan's collaborators, as is the hegemonic relegation of people "to their place" based on their "value" to society or their consumer potential.²⁶ Like Amos Rapoport, Duncan looks upon housing as symbol, as a "language of objects" which "incorporates individuals into collectivist social systems".²⁷

The view of Whitney Pier as a "separate" place, based on its industrial surroundings and its ethnic make-up, contributes substantially to how the community developed its housing, and to the way in which that development was viewed from the outside. The ways in which the housing of this community has communicated the connection between people and

²⁶ James S. Duncan (ed.), *Housing and Identity*, especially, John Agnew, "Home ownership and Identity in Capitalist Societies", pp.60-97; Gerry Pratt, "The House as an Expression of Social Worlds", pp. 135-180; Bonnie Lloyd, "Women, Home and Status", pp.181-197; Edward Steinfeld, "The Place of Old Age: The Meaning of Housing for Old People", pp. 198-246; Nancy Duncan, "Home Ownership and Social theory", pp. 98-134. Other significant writings in this area include, Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing Family and Work* (New York: Norton, 1984) who pays special attention to the role of woman in her study of housing, family and work in American society; Jenny Morris and Martin Winn, *Housing and Social Inequality* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1990) who discuss the disparity in housing in Britain vis-avis gender, race and class.

²⁷ James S. Duncan, "The House as Symbol of Social Structure: Notes on the Language of Objects in Collectivistic Groups", in I. Altman and C. Werner (eds.) *Human Behaviour and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research*(New York: Plenum, 1985), pp. 133-151.

place is likewise based in its working class values, ethnic diversity and sense of place.

CHAPTER 2
INDUSTRIALIZATION, URBANIZATION AND THE PEOPLING
OF WHITNEY PIER

The Pier district extends a considerable distance back from the harbour front, and is building up in fact on the upper side of Low Point Road, which is the principal thoroughfare of the ward. It is strange to find here scenes as quiet and pastoral like as the remotest country district within a stone's throw of the site of a great industry and of five large shipping piers. For a moment you fancy yourself on the outskirts of a country village, until you look around and see near at hand the spars of many vessels and the great chimneys of the steel works. Here people are literally carving out homes for themselves in the forest.¹ *Sydney Daily Record*, 1901

The context of the formation of Whitney Pier went beyond the local situation of a small community. Regional, national and international events and situations were implicated in the development of this particular multi-ethnic district located within the industrial city of Sydney, Nova Scotia. Industrialization, urbanization and immigration, factors which propelled the entire country into the 20th century, profoundly affected the growth of Whitney Pier.

Global changes in demography also contributed to the development of Whitney Pier. Between 1880 and 1920, world-wide migrations were effected by land reform, nationalism, and

¹ "Local Topics", *Record*, June 25, 1901, p. 2. The name of the *Sydney Daily Record* took several forms over the period under study: *Sydney Record*, *Daily Record*, *The Record*, *Record*. Therefore it will be referred in footnotes to as "Record".

industrialization. The spin-offs from these situations, in communication and transportation, made up a complex of inter-related factors which resulted in significant influxes of people to Whitney Pier.

Steel making and coal transportation transformed Sydney into a nationally important industrial centre in the late 19th century.² Whitney Pier's growth was relative to Sydney's transformation. The geographical location of Whitney Pier and its history of coal shipping facilities were crucial to that relationship; the "municipal district" of Whitney Pier became part of the town of Sydney in 1899. (Fig. 2-1) In a town that became known as "the Pittsburgh of the North", Whitney Pier's population tripled and tripled again by 1921 as immigrants and migrants poured into the area. The de-industrialization of Cape Breton, which began almost immediately behind the initial "boom", with brief wartime periods of prosperity, manifested itself in the steel community of Whitney Pier through strikes and out-migration, and "hard times" that continued off and on for the remainder of the century.

² J.G. MacKinnon, *Old Sydney: Sketches of the Town and Its People in Days Gone By* (Sydney: MacKinnon, 1918). Sydney was established as a garrison town in 1785.

³ D. A. Muise, "The Great Transformation: Changing the Urban Face of Nova Scotia, 1871-1921", in *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (1991), pp. 1-42, discusses urban development in the Maritimes vis-a-vis the industrial transformation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Industry

The beginnings of Cape Breton's steel industry is lodged in the area's mineral and transportation resources. Harbours, piers and railway lines made up the infrastructure that resulted in utilization of readily available raw material necessary for making steel. But it was political will and government encouragement that brought capital, the other necessary ingredient for steel making to Cape Breton.

The proximity of rich coal fields was the primary reason for the location of the steel industry in Cape Breton. By the end of the 19th century, the potential output from these coal fields was over one million tons per year. Cape Breton's history of coal mining began in the 18th century with the French. In the early 19th century, the British-owned General Mining Association held the lease to all the coal fields in Cape Breton. In the 1850s, the GMA lost its monopoly and the mining came under the control of a variety of local and foreign ownerships, with small and large companies holding the leases of particular seams, paying royalties to the Nova Scotia government. One of the larger of these was the International Coal and Railway Company, with shareholders from Nova Scotia and the United States, which took over the lease to several "South Sydney" (the south side of Sydney Harbour) in 1865.⁴

⁴ D.A. Muise, "The General Mining Association and Nova Scotia's Coal", in *Bulletin of Canadian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 71-87. Also see, Stephen Hornsby,

Between 1870 and 1883, the International Company built coal shipping piers, two high and one low, in the deep waters of Sydney Harbour at the end of what is now Dominion Street in Whitney Pier. The International piers, the largest shipping piers on the south side of the harbour were built to allow coal loading from railway cars. It could accommodate all sizes of vessels carrying coal to central Canada, the United States and all over the world, particularly to Britain and the West Indies. From the pier was a railway line that led out of Sydney and branched off to the collieries operated by the company around Glace Bay. There was significant stimulus when the Intercolonial Railway reached Sydney in the 1880s and was heralded as the basis for increased development of the coal industry of the area under the aegis of the National Policy, instituted in 1879 by Prime Minister John A. MacDonald.

Another ingredient in making steel was limestone which was used for as a "flux" or cleaning agent.⁵ Limestone and its variants were found at several quarry locations on the north side of Sydney Harbour at Edwardsville and on the Bras d'Or

Nineteenth Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1992), pp. 169-183; C. Ochiltree MacDonald, **The Coal and Iron Industries of Nova Scotia** (Halifax: Chronicle Publishing, 1909); Richard Brown, **The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of the Island of Cape Breton** (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, 1871); **Canadian Mining Review**, vol. XIII, no. 8 (Aug. 1894).

⁵ Two forms of limestone are used in steel making. Simply put, the limestone and dolomite have different ratios of lime and magnesia. See C.O. MacDonald, **The Coal and Iron Industries...**, pp. 92-93.

Lakes, including New Campbellton, Marble Mountain. The limestone was easily shipped from these locations to the steel making operations by boat.⁶

The iron ore required to make steel was initially found at Belle Island, Newfoundland, from mines owned since 1894 by the Nova Scotia Steel Company. The early extraction of ore was done by open pit operations and later by undersea mines. Again water transportation was an obvious and relatively inexpensive mode of delivery to the steel making location at Sydney.⁷

Steel production in Canada was relatively retarded, a fact that was bemoaned by politicians and by secondary steel manufacturers who had to import their primary steel from the United States or Britain. The reasons cited for this included inadequate technology for steel production and the supply of raw materials, shortages of skilled labour and capital, and

⁶ Marble Mountain and George's River have operating quarries to the present time. Little has been written specifically about the limestone and dolomite industries in Cape Breton, except, **Reports of the Mining and Metallurgical Industries of Canada**, (e.g., 1907, pp. 537-539). Photographs also verify the quarry activities of the early 20th century: "Marble Mtn. Dolomite Quarry" (90-92-19524, 90-92-19525, 77-50-184); "Limestone Quarry Marble Mtn" (77-45-179); "Limestone Quarry Point Edward" (77-67-179), Mines and Miners Photograph File, Beaton Institute Archives.

⁷ See **Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Co. Limited** (New Glasgow: Nova Scotia Steel and Coal, 1916); Peter Neary, "'Traditional' and 'Modern' Elements in the Social and Economic History of Belle Island and Conception Bay" in **Canadian Historical Association Papers**, 1973, pp. 105-136; Wayne Clarke, "The Belle Island Mines", report, Beaton Institute, 1995.

failure to fill marketing requirements in competition with the United States and Britain. Because of these factors, there was no significant development of the Canadian steel industry between 1883 and 1900, not only in the production of primary steel, but also in high quality secondary steel.⁸

The National Policy appeared designed to turn this situation around, making the production of steel key not only to Canada's industrial development, but also to her nationalism by opening the West to immigration and to east-west trade. A result of Britain's "free trade" policy and the protectionist movement by the United States, the National Policy is generally known within the Maritimes for enabling the region to make the adjustment from a mercantile "wood, wind and sail" pre-1870s staple economy to a new technical age with manufacturing and Canadian inter-regional trade.⁹ But the National Policy also had a crucial role in encouraging Cape Breton's coal industry and later, its steel industry.

⁸ W.J.A. Donald, *The Canadian Iron and Steel Industry: A Study in the Economic History of a Protected Industry* (Boston, 1915) pp. 42-77, 242; Craig Heron, *Making Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp.14-16.

⁹ The small manufacturing economy during the 1880's included furniture, glass, footwear and clothing manufactures; sugar and textile mills; foundries, integrated steel works and car(rail) works. See, E.R. Forbes, "The Origins of the Maritime Rights Movement", *Acadiensis*, vol.5, no.1(1975), pp.54-66; T. W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1180-1910" in *Acadiensis*, vol.I, no.2(1972), pp.3-28; D. A. Muise, "The National Policy Comes to Yarmouth", Paper, Atlantic Studies Conference, Edinburgh, 1988.

Within the National Policy, steel production was one of the reasons for a significant bond between business and politics in Canada. Protective tariffs in this area were pushed through all over the country by Canadian business interests and by foreign investors.¹⁰ In Cape Breton, the Board of Trade saw the duty on American coal as a "prelude" to the local use of coal in the primary iron and steel industries.¹¹ The tariffs between 1879 and 1887 were almost totally oriented to developing the steel industry, particularly the production of secondary steel. They fluctuated mildly to "meet fiscal needs, to suit protective policy or political necessity".¹² In 1887, Nova Scotia clamoured for even more protection of its primary steel industry. As result, new tariffs were brought in with small alterations to previous arrangements. To compensate for the lack of tariffs on pig iron, a bounty system was inaugurated in 1893, and this were extended and expanded to included semi-finished steel. The protection was to be a boom to labour because the development of the industry would surely mean more employment in mining, transportation, and building industries, as well directly in the steel and iron industries.¹³

¹⁰ W.J.A. Donald, pp.138-140.

¹¹ Naylor, *The History of Canadian Business* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1975), p. 44.

¹² Donald, p.85.

¹³ Donald, p.92.

The tariffs were the subject of political debate and the object of business manoeuvring between primary and secondary producers of steel, with loud but unorganized protest from the western farmers whose equipment was the victim of the political machinations.¹⁴ But the steel industry was the "Liberal pet" and government was more than willing to accommodate businesses, especially foreign investors, who sought its support.¹⁵ The result was that Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec, benefitted from concessions to steel companies in many ways, including land for wood and for settlement of workers.¹⁶

Into this very amenable situation came an American, Henry Melville Whitney who is credited with bringing steel to Sydney. Not only was there a solid infrastructure of mines and shipping already in place by 1890, but there was effective collusion between Whitney and Premier W.S. Fielding of Nova Scotia, and the financiers in Toronto and Montreal.¹⁷ H. M. Whitney was a native of Conway, Massachusetts, born and brought

¹⁴ John Dales, "Canada's National Policies", D.B. Smith and R.D. Francis (eds.), **Readings in Canadian History** (Toronto: Holt, Rineholt and Winston, 1990), pp.43-54; also Donald, pp. 137, 151, 312.

¹⁵ Donald, pp.138, 153.

¹⁶ For a general view on the relations between business and the State, see, Tom Traves, **The State and Enterprise:Canadian Manufacturing and the Federal Government** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Fielding Papers MG 2 vol. 526, Folder 14, 1899 DISCO files 913-916, PANS.

up in the profitable realization of the connections between politics and business.¹⁸ Whitney's initial interest in Cape Breton was coal. The possibilities for Cape Breton coal on the Montreal and American markets looked so promising that, in 1893, Whitney headed up a consortium of Boston and Montreal businessmen and negotiated a 119 year lease for most of the remaining existing coal fields on Cape Breton Island. But before he started operations, there was a problem of threatened increased coal royalties suggested by the Nova Scotia government. However, on Saturday, April 23, 1892, a "chat" between Premier Fielding and Whitney resulted the following Monday in guarantees of maximum royalties on coal and a promise of additional leases in return for "engaging in extensive operations".¹⁹ At that time, it was plain that Fielding, in order to encourage a New England market for Cape Breton coal, would make the necessary concessions to bring in outside capital. Shortly thereafter, the Dominion Coal company was set up with several American shareholders, and with Whitney as chair.

By 1894, Whitney had built a coal pier beside the International piers; the new pier was known as the "Whitney" pier. At that time Whitney took over the International piers and expanded the lines of the International Railway to include

¹⁸ Don MacGillivray, "Henry Melville Whitney Comes to Cape Breton: The Saga of a Gilded Age Entrepreneur", *Acadiensis*, vol. ix, no. 1 (Autumn, 1979), pp. 44 - 70.

¹⁹ MacGillivray, p. 53.

more mines and winter shipping from Louisbourg.²⁰ Then, after five years of mining coal in Cape Breton and the acquisition of some of the Wabana iron mines from Nova Scotia Steel Company, Whitney proposed steel production. Sydney was selected for a variety of reasons:

because it was already the outlet of the coal trade; it was located in the centre of the coal and limestone area; it possessed a tract of land near the waterfront eminently suited to the purpose; the harbour was capacious and safe, and already known as a coaling port; it was a terminus of the Intercolonial Railway and a port of call for many American and Canadian coastal steamers; and a 40-mile railway connected Sydney and Louisbourg, an all-winter shipping port.²¹

But first, Whitney was able to convince Fielding, who by 1899 was Minister of Finance in the Laurier government, that the bounties on steel production must continue.²² Accordingly, continuation was promised until 1907, and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) came into being. Thus, along with being primary financier and administrator of the Cape Breton Dominion Coal Company, Whitney also became the chief share-holder in Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO)

²⁰ McAlpine Directory Sydney, 1896.

²¹ P.S. McGrath, "The Commercial and Industrial Expansion of Canada", *American Review of Reviews*, 1904, (review of *The Manufacture of Iron and Steel in Cape Breton*. E.M. vol.xxi), p.372, cited in Donald, p.203, fn 1.

²² Debates, Nova Scotia Legislature, 1899, pp.4871-73; J.S. Jeans, *Canada's Resources and Possibilities* (London, 1904), p.53; cited in Donald, fns. 1, 3, p.139. Donald notes that the Nova Scotia Steel Company also "refused to build at North Sydney unless the government would give assurances of continuances of bounties after 1902." p.139.

in 1898.²³ The province of Nova Scotia gave company a charter of "eminent domain" and the power to pay dividends on preferred stock while the plant was under construction; furthermore it was freed of provincial taxation.²⁴ The town of Sydney gave the new company 440 acres of expropriated land, valued at \$83,000, for the new plant.²⁵ It was tax free for 30 years. Royalties of the sister company, Dominion Coal, were reduced by 50 per cent, and the new steel company would pay less than the market price for coal. The relationship between DISCO and local, provincial and federal governments in terms of tariffs, royalty reductions, and freedom from taxes established a pattern of industrial dependence on the state, on foreign capital and on foreign technology that the Cape Breton steel industry experienced throughout the 20th century.

The early government assistance to DISCO, the ideal natural conditions, and established infrastructure of transportation would seem to promise great success for the DISCO operation. Instead, problems began as early as construction. The construction cost about \$24 million, as much as \$8 million more than it should have. The rail mill was partially built, discarded and then rebuilt. The Bessemer

²³ David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of British Empire Steel Corporation", *Acadiensis*, vol.IV, no.1(1977), pp. 32-66.

²⁴ Donald, p.172.

²⁵ C.O. MacDonald, *Coal and Iron Industries*, p. 84. Some sources read 480 acres; others read 480 hectares.

Process was found to be unsuitable because of the high phosphorous nature of the Newfoundland ore, and had to be replaced by the open hearth method, requiring a totally different kind of furnace. The reasons for the problems in both construction and start-up was that the management board had no experience in either steel making or in managing steel making. Top DISCO management was not only ignorant, but was made up of several factions that tried to undercut each other.²⁶

Despite the professional outcry, there was a great hailing of the new steel plant as the most modern in North America. The popular trade publications spared no superlatives in describing the state-of-the-art technology at DISCO. The literature emphasized that the plant was based on American technology and was impressive in size and scope. Even American publications admitted the superior technology of the Sydney plant, albeit grudgingly in the resentment toward the bounties and tariffs that protected the Canadian industry.²⁷ In Toronto, the General Manager of DISCO declared that

²⁶ Donald, p.205. D. MacGillivray, "Henry Melville Whitney Comes to Cape Breton...", pp. 67, 68. MacGillivray cites a number of trade and professional publications which decried the incompetence of the DISCO management, including the **Canadian Mining Review** (April, 1903; May, 1903, September, 1903; June, 1904), **Canadian Resources**, and **Minerals and Mining**.

²⁷ Waldon Fawcett, "Supplement" in **Scientific American**, vol. LIII, no. 1373, (April 26, 1902).

"Canada's position as a steel maker is invulnerable".²⁸ There can be no doubt that publicity was perceived to be more important than steel making management skills in encouraging the sale of shares.²⁹ The owners and managers of DISCO were said to be "as extravagant about building the plant as in talking of it".³⁰

Whatever the difficulties in construction and management, the process of steel making was in place at Sydney at the turn of the century. A coking plant was operating by 1900, and a few months later the integrated plant was producing pig iron from four 250 ton capacity blast furnaces. In December 1901, steel was produced from its ten 50 ton open hearth furnaces; two years later it had heavy mills to process ingots and blooms, and structural mills for producing wire, rod and bar. By the end of the first decade, there were machine shops, a foundry, a forge, gigantic wooden piers for loading coal and steel, twenty five miles of railway tracks and an imposing

²⁸ Speech by A.C. Moxham recorded by the *Toronto Globe*, February 20, 1901. Also, E.W. Hamm, "Sydney's Great Steel Plant" in *Cape Breton's Magazine*, reprinted in *Record*, Dec. 11, 1901; S.T. Wool, "Coke Making at Sydney" in *Toronto Globe*, reprinted in *Record*, Nov. 6, 1901.

²⁹ Donald, p. 200, tells of almost inconceivable blunderings by the company in terms of operational and marketing decisions in coal mining and marketing and suggests that the decision to turn to steel was based on the poor markets for Cape Breton coal in the U.S. and the limitations on winter delivery to Montreal.

³⁰ Donald, p.205.

general office building.³¹ The plant ended its first decade reporting surprising and sometimes dubious success which included questionable expansions and the "dumping" of steel on soft markets. Yet, capital investment continued to be encouraged by the bounties attached to steel, amounting to over 8 million dollars by 1908.³²

From its beginnings, DISCO was compared unfavourably with the Scotia steel plant at Sydney Mines. DISCO's financial backing was from outside interests: the original American investment gave way to control from Montreal and Toronto and the Canadian Stock Market shortly after it came into being. This was in sharp contrast to the experience of the Nova Scotia Steel Company which was financed within the Maritimes. The Scotia Company was based in New Glasgow where it was formed out of a number of companies beginning as the Nova Scotia Forge Company before 1879. It produced its first steel using the Siemens-Martin open hearth process in 1883. By the time the Scotia built its plant in Sydney Mines in 1903, it had a long tradition of technical excellence and its history of local ownership made it unique in the steel business.³³

³¹ For a chronology of the production processes, see, Beaton Institute Steel Project, **Skills Adjustment Study: Sydney Steel** (Sydney: Beaton Institute Steel Project, 1991) pp. 39-61.

³² Donald, p.203.

³³ It remained in the hands of Nova Scotia businessmen through the financial workings of Halifax Banks until 1917. See, David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry..."; **Nova Scotia Steel and Coal** (1916); C.O. MacDonald, **Coal and Iron**

Donald noted, "The growth of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company has been admirably conservative, yet regular, that of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company has been spectacular, but fluctuating."³⁴ Nevertheless Sydney's steel plant was one of Canada's "Big Four" in steel production, employing thousands of people.³⁵ With the coal mining industry, it was the basis of the Cape Breton County economy for many years.

Urbanization

The area that was to become Whitney Pier, called "Eastmount" or "South Side Sydney Harbour", was a flourishing farming and fishing district for at least 100 years before it became a coal transportation and steel making community. Well before the activities of the International Company, two roads ran through the area, connecting Sydney with coal mining villages in Cape Breton County. One was Victoria Road (also called Low Point Road) which linked Sydney with Victoria Mine some 13 km. from Sydney on the south side of Sydney

Industries, pp. 94-96, 254, 255.

³⁴ Donald, pp.180.

³⁵ The other three major Canada plants were Algoma in Sault Ste-Marie, Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) in Hamilton, and Nova Scotia Steel Company (Scotia) in Sydney Mines. See, Duncan MacDowell, *Steel at the Sault: Francis H. Clergue, Sir James Dunn and the Algoma Steel Corporation, 1901-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); William Kilbourne, *The Elements Combined: A History of the Steel Company of Canada* (Toronto, Clarke and Irwin, [1960]).

Harbour.³⁶ The other was Hankard Road which started from Victoria Road, but went east and then north, inland and gradually rising, through the county to the Lingan Mine about 20 km. from Sydney.

Neither the administrative town of Sydney nor its appendaged district of Eastmount were strongly connected with the coal industry until after the 1850s. The General Mining Association (GMA) at Sydney Mines, on the north side of Sydney Harbour, was the central focus of the industry in Cape Breton until 1853.³⁷ South Bar, just east of Eastmount, was the location of Victoria Pier, a small coal loading pier which served Victoria Mine. South Bar also provided the shipping link for the GMA mines on both sides of the harbour during the early 19th century. Thus, most of the population involved in coal production on the south side of the Harbour was settled further along the shore toward the Victoria Mine.

The face of Eastmount changed when the International Coal and Railway Company built piers and railways for coal shipment in the 1870s and 1880s. Near the piers along the Eastmount shore, there were suddenly pockets of higher population density, accompanied by businesses that catered to the shipping trade. In 1894, population became even more concentrated in this section as a result of the additional

³⁶ Church Map, {13795, National Archives Collection}, 1866 [1877].

³⁷ D.A. Muise, "The General Mining Association".

pier built by Whitney and the expansion of the coal production in South Sydney Fields.

By 1901 the presence of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company was well established just south of the coal piers. To accommodate the construction and start-up of this tremendous operation, Whitney Pier underwent sensational changes over a relatively short period. Not the least of the changes was a population explosion, with numbers of residents increasing from only a few hundred in 1891 to almost 2,400 in 1901. The name of the general area had changed from Eastmount to "International Pier" in the 1880s and then in the 1890s to "Whitney Pier" acknowledging the dominance of coal and coal mine owners as a force of development. The name "Whitney Pier" initially referred to the area immediately around the piers, but newspaper articles in 1901 indicate that the entire triangle of settlement from Muggah's Creek to MacLennan's Creek was also known as Whitney Pier. By 1901, there were at least 14 named streets and as many more un-named roads, streets and lanes in Whitney Pier. The two early roads continued to dominate Whitney Pier. Lingan Road became the new name for Hankard Road and it now ran parallel to Victoria Road starting at the coke ovens. Both Lingan Road and Victoria Road were recognized as the primary commercial routes. (Fig. 2-2, Fig. 2-3) Early Whitney Pier was distinguished by three distinct areas connected by Lingan Road and Victoria Road. The first was the northern part of the

VICTORIA ROAD, SYDNEY, CAPE BRETON

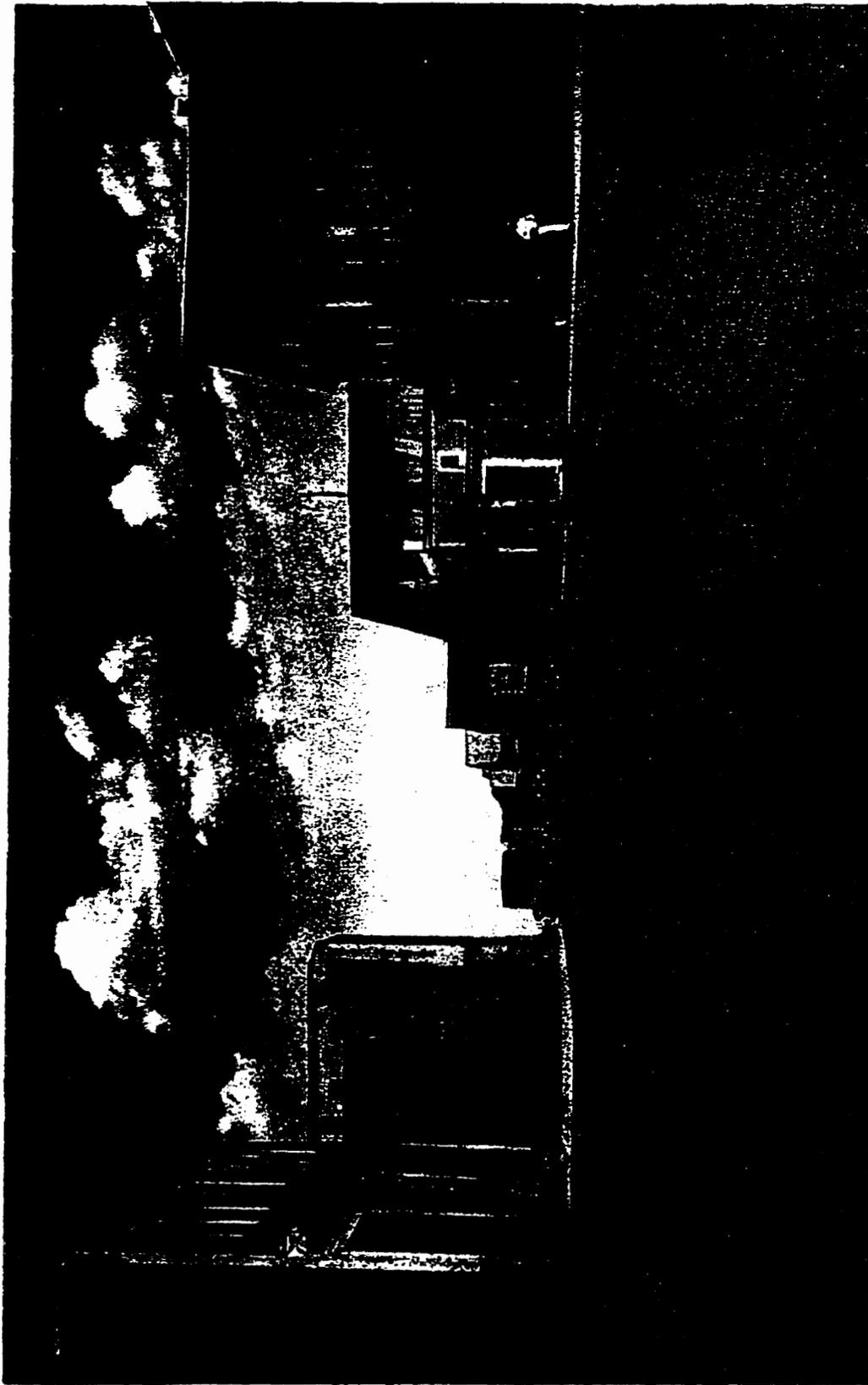


Figure 2-2: Victoria Road, 1910 (ca). No.87-875-17305, File: Towns and Villages, Sydney.
Beaton Institute Archives.



Figure 2-3: Lingan Road 1910(ca.) United Church of Canada Archives.

triangle, around the piers, well-rooted in coal shipment. Its main thoroughfare off Victoria Road was Dominion Street which led to the harbour area where the piers were located. Catherine Street branched off from Victoria Road in the other direction, and housed several of the farmer/merchants whose businesses centred on the piers. Other "streets" followed in a haphazard fashion that caused confusion and frustration as city services evolved. The second area was centrally located around Bay Street, and included Brow, Jamieson, Robert, Ferris, Henry and Summit Streets, extending from the plant across Victoria Road up the hill as far as Lingan Road. Coincidental with the development of the "Bay Street area" was the growth of the southern part of the triangle, close to the coke ovens. Laurier, Tupper, and Hankard were the named streets in the "Cokeovia" or "Cokeville" in 1901, but like the other parts of Whitney Pier, there were numerous unnamed streets in this section. (Fig. 2-4) In 1901 Sydney's Daily Record recognized the two colloquial districts in Whitney Pier, the International Pier, or the "Pier" and "Cokeville" or "Cokeovia".³⁸ Although no newspaper references to "around Bay Street" were observed, the district was recognized in McAlpine's Directory, 1903, and it is known in present-day oral tradition.

The initial commercial development of Whitney Pier

³⁸ "Local Topics", Record, June 25, 1901, p. 2. The area was also called the "Coke Ovens" at around this time.

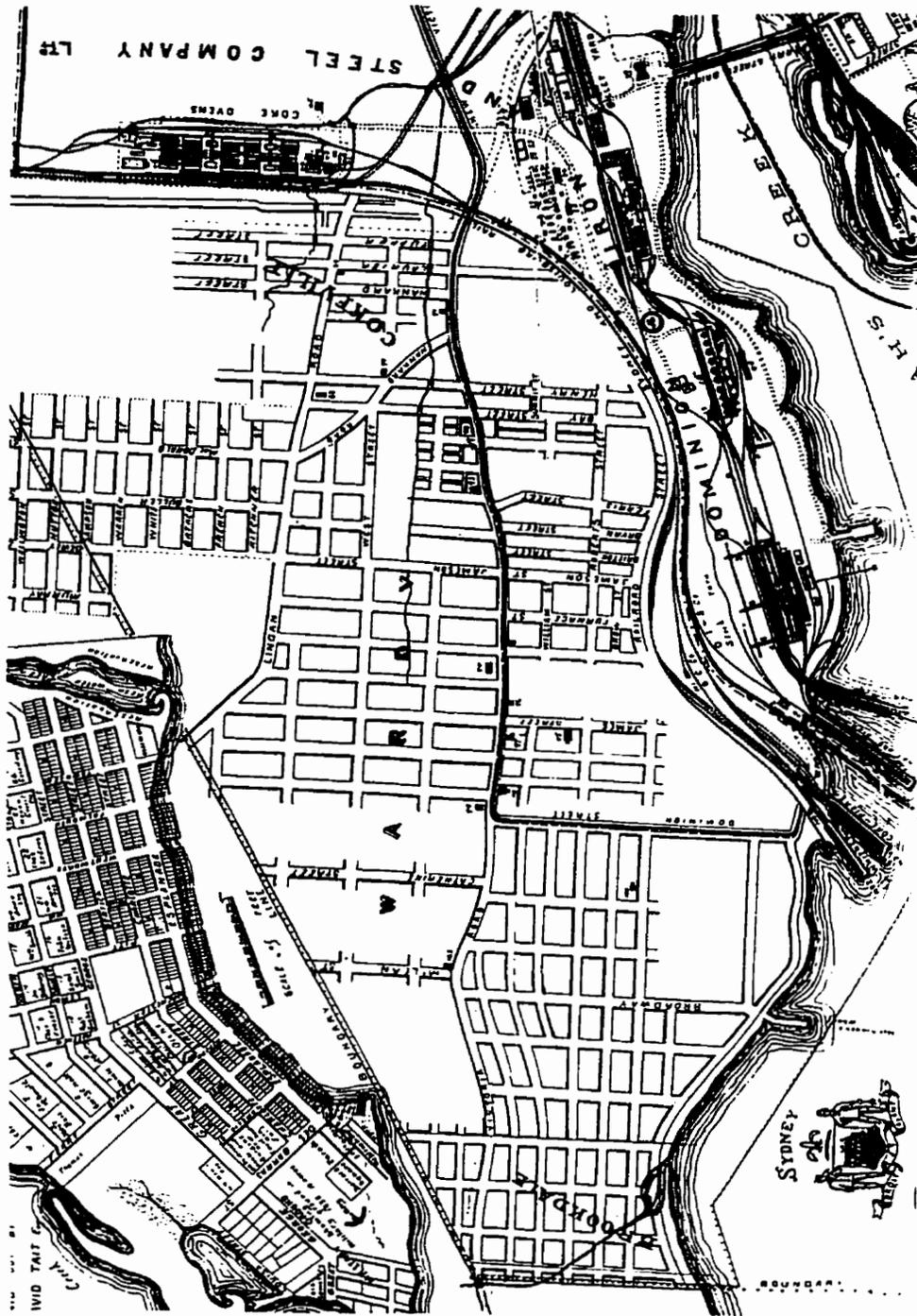


Figure 2-4: Map, "Cokeville", 1903(ca.). From Almon's Map of Sydney, 1903. Beaton Institute Archives.

followed the same general three-point pattern, but by 1905, almost the entire length of the east side of Victoria Road was filled with businesses. The "bottom" or southern end of Lingan Road was also a significant business area. Small corner stores and restaurants could be found throughout Whitney Pier as each section began to fill with people.

Whitney Pier shared fully in Sydney's "boom town" experience.³⁹ The consciousness of its growing urban importance took several different aspects. One was a very positive realization of its development in terms of its future. In 1900 the Daily Record noted, "the Whitney Pier District is rapidly building up and assuming the appearance of a large village. Land there has gone up in price and lots are selling for \$500 to \$1000."⁴⁰ A 1901 Record article featured Whitney Pier in a hopeful, if rather patronizing way, distinguishing the "pier" from the Coke Ovens:

Ward Five [Whitney Pier]... is in its way the most interesting section of the town. Within its bounds are situated our great industrial establishments and shipping piers..... Apart from these however the ward has much to interest the visitor from the older part of town. It has a character and an individuality all its own and scarcely seems part of Sydney at all. With the exception of a few farm houses and a little cluster of houses below the Dominion Coal Company's piers, ward five is the growth of the past year and a half. Somewhat cut off and sharply divided as it is from the business centre of the town, it

³⁹ "Building Boom is Not Abating", Record, Sept. 10, 1902, p.2. There are repeated references to Sydney as "the Pittsburgh of the North", e.g. "Ontario View of Sydney", Record, Aug. 30, 1901, p. 7; "Local Topics", Record, June 12, 1901, compared Sydney to Pittsburgh of twenty years previous.

⁴⁰ "Local Brevities", Record, Sept. 7, 1900, p. 5.

has grown up a self contained and self sustaining community, having its own schools, churches, shops, hotels and other accessories of an ordinary town. No one who has not passed through that district can have any conception of its extent and population. Two years ago that part of the town east of the creek and north of Prince street would not have added more than a few hundreds to the population. The population today must be two or three thousand. Its hotels and shops, small but busy and prosperous looking in their own way must be numbered by the dozen, and scores of neat and stylish looking dwellings, as strange contrast as yet to their surroundings, have going up on every side....

Perhaps there is nothing in town more unlike Sydney that(sic) the Coke Ovens, the district so called or to coin a new name, Cokeovia (Cokeovia is merely for newspaper use and must not be used by the Board of Works without permission) Cokeovia has not quite got the suburban look of the Pier; in appearance it is somewhat the -----[unclear] style of a mining town, but with better streets and more shops and hotels. The streets appear to be better here than in town and the resident of Charlotte or George street would be apt to regard with envy some of the fine macadamized roads of Cokeovia. There is a solid, permanent appearance about Cokeovia that is rather pleasing, doubtless a somewhat unexpected feature... On the whole ward five, for a brand new suburb, appears to be fairly well off for such modern accessories as schools, churches, streets (omitting the small district below the piers), shops, etc., and it has the advantage of having the iron works, coke ovens and shipping piers in its immediate vicinity.⁴¹

One 1901 newspaper declared that "the Pier" is beginning to realize that it is donning the mantle of "City" in many respects, with taxes, schools, side walks, etc., but pointed out that pigs were still running in the streets, that "urchins" must be sent to school, and that the "dirty shacks" housing workers "should be razed to the ground".⁴² Given the Pier's lack of sophistication, it was deemed reasonable

⁴¹ "Local Topics", Record, June 25, 1901, p. 2.

⁴² "Whitney Pier", Post, Apr. 22, 1901.

that the "smoke nuisance" from the steel industry should be concentrated in Whitney Pier. A newspaper editorial commented that the activities of the steel plant were "beyond the Muggah" or in Ward Five, "where their smoke and roar will be no vexation, while their great outpouring of wealth will bring abundant commercial prosperity."⁴³

When Sydney was incorporated as a city on January 1, 1904, Mayor W.A. Richardson listed the civic services available, with special reference to Whitney Pier. There were two new schools in the newly annexed area, one Protestant and one Catholic. The schools were additions to Eastmount School, built in 1901 and a school established for children of Afro-American steel workers in 1902.⁴⁴ Whitney Pier's infrastructure was also source of pride to the new city's administration. It had a fire hall at Jamieson Street and another in the Coke Ovens, and there were fire hydrants on Victoria Road.⁴⁵ In the same year the Cape Breton Electric Tram service was installed in Whitney Pier. It ran from near the ferry pier at the end of Dominion Street to "MacQuarrie's Crossing", the DOSCO/S&L railway crossing on Victoria Road between the steel plant and the coke ovens. Across the steel

⁴³ "Ontario View of Sydney", *Record*, Aug. 30, 1901, p.7. Also, "Local Topics: The Smoke Nuisance", *Record*, June 12, 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *City of Sydney Annual Report, 1902*, McConnell Library, Sydney.

⁴⁵ "Iron and Steel Beginning of New Era in its History", *Post*, Dec. 31, 1903.

company tracks, the "border" between Whitney Pier and Sydney, the tram connected with the Sydney and Glace Bay trams which ran to downtown Sydney and on to North Sydney.⁴⁶ In 1912, a "subway" or tunnel under the DOSCO railway was built to replace MacQuarrie's Crossing, to alleviate the long-standing problems created by the interruption of the tram line by the DOSCO railway. In 1913, the Daily Post announced road paving in Whitney Pier from the Subway to Dominion Street, the entire length of the Pier on its main street, Victoria Road.⁴⁷

But, for all the urban development and accompanying boosterism, it was clear that sharing the boom town experience was in many ways, a long-standing social and structural disaster. There was constant criticism about services in Whitney Pier, with particular regard to roads, housing, water and sewage. With so many of the plant workers living in Whitney Pier there was a fear expressed at town council that "Sydney would become an undesirable place for the best class of artisans".⁴⁸ Although politicians hailed the good streets in all of Sydney, it is evident from letters to the newspapers that streets in Whitney Pier were not only scarce, those that

⁴⁶ "Route of C.B. Electric Company's Tramway", Record, Apr. 21, 1902; "Whitney Pier tram service", Record, Feb. 13, 1904.

⁴⁷ "City May Pave Two More Streets", Record, Jan. 9, 1913.

⁴⁸ "Whitney Pier", Post, Apr. 22, 1901.

existed did not have plank side walks.⁴⁹ There are also problems of surveying: at the one meeting the town engineer was accused of putting "the streets on the houses and the houses had not been put on the street".⁵⁰

The Pier, or lower district, is scattered over a considerable area, but it appears to be growing up without following any definable plan. A walk through the lower district reveals the cause of the dissatisfaction over the streets, or rather want of streets, which is now bothering the Board of Works. The unsuspecting visitor is apt, just as he thinks he is on his way to somewhere, to find himself brought up short in somebody's back yard, a manure heap or hen coop barring his further progress. He will either have to climb a fence and continue his way over a field or two, or else turn back and try his luck on another street. Or he may presently find himself in a street (?) [sic] so narrow that if a wagon or cart comes along he must hastily get over the fence to escape being squeezed or run down. In order to arrive at a given place without having to cut across lots and run the gauntlet of farmyards and rickety fences, one must be thoroughly familiar with the lay of the roads, as they appear to be all more or less independent of each other.⁵¹

Connaught and Payne (called Pain in 1903) Streets were especially suggestive of this make-shift, congested housing. They remain so today. Payne Street is particularly narrow; it might more aptly be called a "lane", and the houses are crowded together with tiny yards. Other present-day lanes in the vicinity of Borden and Mercer Streets have similar problems of having no original "plan".

Housing in Sydney at the turn of the century was

⁴⁹ "Whitney Pier Notes", Record, June 22, 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁰ "The Streets of Ward V", Record, Oct. 12, 1900, p.8.

⁵¹ "Local Topics", Record, June 25, 1901, p. 2.

chronically inadequate, and over-crowding was especially troublesome in Whitney Pier. Although in 1900, "the greatest number of new houses have been erected in what is called the Whitney Pier suburb, where in all directions neat houses are for working men are meeting ready sale and demanding high rents",⁵² the problem of housing persisted into 1901: "Extensive as operations have been, there is still an unsupplied demand for dwellings...".⁵³ The mayor of Sydney pointed out that building permanent homes for such a mobile workforce was simply not worth the expense; the steel company responded by using the housing shortage as a rationale for building company houses to rent or sell.⁵⁴

Sydney's water supply was a long-standing problem. Piped water for Sydney came from Sullivan's Lake, but by 1900, it was clear that the water was both insufficient for a rapidly growing population, and unsuitable because of its colouring. The solution to the problem was to connect the town to the Steel Company water supply. However, this water was high in salt and "hard".⁵⁵ Problems of water and sewage are raised again and again in terms of communicable diseases, especially

⁵² "Past Year's Buildings", Record, Jan. 6, 1901, p.8.

⁵³ "Past Year's Buildings", Record, Jan. 6, 1901, p.8.

⁵⁴ "Question of House Accommodation", Record, Sept. 15, 1902, p. 5; "Steel Co. Has Legal Right to Build Houses", Post, Oct. 3, 1902.

⁵⁵ "Sydney's Water Supply", Record, Oct. 22, 1900; "Water Supply", Record, Oct. 10, 1901, pp. 1, 8.

in the Coke Ovens. Well water there was condemned in 1900, the water being blamed for an outbreak of "fever" disease; in 1901 well water in the Coke Ovens was polluted by the operations of the steel company; in other parts sewage was allowed to run raw on the surface of the ground: "a more scientific way of propagating disease could not be found".⁵⁶

At times, typhoid fever was apparently rampant in Whitney Pier: a letter in 1900 to the local newspaper described houses large and small with no drains, no back yards, and no wells. "...Half the people ... make use of infected water. All the dish water and swill is thrown into the nearest hole and there it collects and overflows. What in the name of common sense is to prevent the rise and spread of fever?"⁵⁷ Another letter signed in Gaelic, "Mo Hoc Rair", recognized the separateness of the Pier, being "on the other side of the Creek" (Muggah's Creek) with a list of lacking or inadequate civic services with the resulting ominous list of diseases including measles, typhoid fever, and diphtheria.⁵⁸ Still, Sydney's Medical Health Officer gave a cautiously hopeful report in January, 1901:

The congested condition in which the town was thrown owing to a large number of people coming from various parts; the want of a proper system of sewage; the many

⁵⁶ "Town Council", *Record*, Oct. 19, 1900; "Sydney's Water Supply", *Record*, Oct. 22, 1900; "Dr. MacIntyre's Report on Public Health", *Record*, Jan. 11, 1901, p.3.

⁵⁷ "Typhoid at the Pier", *Record*, Dec. 4, 1900, p. 3.

⁵⁸ "Whitney Pier Topics", *Record*, Mar. 21, 1901.

large buildings in the course of construction and the consequent increase of rubbish of all kinds, together with the absence of a dumping ground for rubbish make the question of sanitation a serious one.... I am far from saying that matters in this department are anything like being satisfactory, on the contrary I may say that is the work of years to get a rapidly growing town like Sydney in what might be called a --- good sanitary state, but I do say that a good beginning has been made... .⁵⁹

However, an outbreak of typhoid in May of 1901 focused attention on the utter inadequacies of civic services in Sydney, especially in Whitney Pier, "... the other side of the creek. The whole locality was infected and would continue as long as the people continued to drink the water from the springs and brooks".⁶⁰ Dr. Macintyre, Medical Officer for Sydney said "that the water on the other side of the creek is so bad, that if he were staving with thirst, he would not drink a glass of it, yet the people there were using the water regularly."⁶¹ The steel company offered to assist the situation by building an infectious hospital "pavilion". Adding to the town's predicament was over-crowding in shacks and rooming houses, and "the inadequate means the town

⁵⁹ "Dr. MacIntyre's Report on Public Health", *Record*, Jan. 11, 1901, p.3.

⁶⁰ "Board of Health", *Record*, May 1, 1901, p.8.

⁶¹ "Board of Health", *Record*, May 1, 1901, p.8. See also, Kathleen MacKenzie, "Social Conditions in Sydney, 1900-1914", B.A. Honours Essay, St. Francis Xavier Univ., 1983; for a broad view of public health conditions in Sydney at the time, see, Kathleen MacKenzie, "The Development of a Permanent Public Health Care System in Industrial Cape Breton, 1880-1930", M.A. Thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1991.

possessed of cleaning out back yards and privies".⁶² To deal with this latter problem the town council agreed to secure a number of horses and carts for collecting toilet refuse. The city granted a "scavenger" licence to a Mr. Hall for cleaning privies in Whitney Pier.⁶³ Thus, the institution of the "honey pot man" was established in Whitney Pier.

Another problem that faced the "boom" of Sydney was drinking. The Scott Act was invoked in 1901 in an attempt to control illegal drinking establishments, especially in Whitney Pier. Invoked by individual municipalities, the Scott Act made all sale of liquor illegal, except for licences to sell alcoholic beverages for medicinal purposes, in which case, an exact record had to be kept of all sales.⁶⁴ The Scott Act Inspector in Sydney, Mr. Cummings was given a free hand to root out all illegal drinking establishments, and was promised the backing of the police force. He was to start with the Coke Ovens, to "do something about to restrain liquor selling where it had ... got to such a pitch as to become a crying shame and nuisance". But the many editorial discussions and letters to the editor suggest that it was far from effective, and Cummings was frequently criticized by community representatives for his laxness in carrying out his duty.

⁶² "Board of Health", Record, May 1, 1901, p.8.

⁶³ "Board of Health", Record, May 1, 1901, p.8.

⁶⁴ Rev. William Scott, *The Teetotaler's Handbook in Four Parts* (Toronto: Alfred Dredge, [1860]; George E. Foster, *Scott Act; Address in Favour of Act* (Hamilton, 1880).

From the area of the Pier and the coke ovens, there were "dozens of complaints made by the employers of labour and citizens who felt that an outrageous state of affairs was going on absolutely unchecked".⁶⁵

Prostitution and "disorderly houses" were also part of the Whitney Pier boom town package. Several "houses of ill-fame" were "raided and wrecked" by un-named persons in January, 1902. The occupants, women, were literally chased out of town.⁶⁶

Drinking, the incidence of prostitution, and the common occurrence of guns and knives, presented a combination that contributed to frequent violence. Yet, as the people of Whitney Pier complained in 1901, the area had only one policeman in 1901, and no holding area for prisoners.⁶⁷ In 1902, the number of policemen increased to two. ⁶⁸

Dissatisfaction over the lack of civic services in Whitney Pier was given vent through town council meetings and through the local newspapers. As early as 1900, Mr. Morrison from Ward V suggested at a town meeting that "it was time the people of ward five were rising in their might against the

⁶⁵ Record, Feb. 22, 1901; Mar. 20, 1901.

⁶⁶ "Cokovia Crows Virtuous", Record, Jan. 24, 1902; also, "Sadie Whallen, coloured beauty of Cokovia", Record, Dec. 6, 1901.

⁶⁷ "Cokovia Police Force", Record, Dec. 27, 1901, p. 3.

⁶⁸ "Vice and Crime Decreasing in Sydney", Record, Sept. 30, 1902.

people who got them in such a mess".⁶⁹ In 1901, the Daily Record reported that "one of the gentlemen representing ward five has dangerous secession tendencies. [There are...] grievances under which his ward suffers has led him to express a desire for a separation of that ward from the town.... which is so slow in recognizing his demands with regard to streets and other public utilities." ⁷⁰ The article pointed out that secessionist movements are rarely successful, reminding the councillor of "unsuccessful attempts by Cape Breton to politically separate itself from Nova Scotia", instead suggesting that, "[t]he town should not only include the pier district, but all the section down to South Bar."⁷¹ At a "meeting of the rate paying public" at MacMillan's Hall at Whitney Pier on April 7, 1902, there was a suggestion of separation from Sydney in the discussion that centred around demands for services in return for taxes, with particular reference to streets in the "pier" section. The resolution passed gave notice that:

... whereas the said Pier section is now not only paying its proportion of the old indebtedness of the old town, but also its proportion of all moneys borrowed for streets and other improvements since being annexed to the town, without receiving any material benefits, or at least any benefits consistent with the amounts from this now important section of the town.
Be it therefore recorded that this meeting and other residents of Ward V shall oppose the borrowing of any

⁶⁹ "The Streets of Ward V", *Record*, Oct. 12, 1900, p. 8.

⁷⁰ "Local Topics", *Record*, June 12, 1901, p. 1.

⁷¹ "Local Topics", *Record*, June 12, 1901, p. 1.

further sums until such time as a sufficient guarantee is given that this part of the town shall receive out of the moneys thus borrowed, as well as from any other moneys, the proportion to which it is justly entitled."⁷²

The rationale used by Whitney Pier to promote the improvement of services was that "... the straightening out of matters would immediately encourage people to become permanent residents of the town, thus largely benefitting the condition of the town financially."⁷³ These early indications of discontent were the first of many formal and informal protests of that nature. They indicate that the early negative attitudes toward Whitney Pier, based on the influx of undesirable peoples, took the form of a denial of urban services. But they also indicate that there was an active response to these attitudes that became a tradition in Whitney Pier.

The Workforce: Migration and Immigration

The factors that brought thousands of people to Whitney Pier fit the familiar "pull and push" theory of world-wide migrations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries."⁷⁴

⁷² "Whitney Pier may ask for Separation: Dissatisfied with Treatment corded it by Town Council", *Post*, Apr. 9, 1902.

⁷³ "Whitney Pier may ask for Separation...", *Post*, Apr. 9, 1902.

⁷⁴ John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1985). Almost every title in the *Generations Series: A History of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980-86) deals with the "push and pull" factors of immigration to Canada during this period.

Economic, political and social forces in different geographic circumstances were responsible for vast changes in demography the world over. In the case of Sydney, it was the "pull" of industrialization and Canadian expansionism. In the first quarter of the 20th century, the pull affected each component of the population in accordance with overlapping situations in the development of the coal and steel industries and coincidentally, the development of Whitney Pier.

In 1788, land "east of the Creek" was granted to a John Meloney who had moved from the original base of Sydney's settlement at Point Edward. One of several grantees at the time, he is reputed to have been the first permanent settler in the locality.⁷⁵ This was followed, in the early 19th century, with the acquisition of lands by about a dozen individuals on the south side of Sydney Harbour, to the section then known as "Eastmount", referring to the elevated lands east and north of Sydney. Their names included, from north to south along the Victoria Mines Road, Capt. J. H. Beattie, J. Brookman, J. MacLennan, J. Carlin, J. Mugger [Muggah], another J. Mugger [Muggah], M. Fitzgerald, D. MacLeod. Several were related by marriage to the original John Meloney. They were favoured individuals and part of "Old

⁷⁵ J.G. MacKinnon, *Old Sydney*, ch. 2. This is verified by a land grant document issued by Governor MacCormick in 1788, Beaton Institute, MG 17, 112. For further information on the founding of Sydney, see, R.J. Morgan, "Orphan Outpost - Cape Breton Colony, 1874 - 1820", Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Ottawa, 1972.

Sydney Society". Most of the homes of these landowners ran along the road called Low Point or Victoria Mines Road. The residences of C.R. Brown, S. Peters, George Burchell, W. Muggger [Muggah] and D. Muggger [Muggah] were on the land that was to become the steel plant property.⁷⁶ Several of the original landowning families at Whitney Pier subsequently had shares in the mining and steel industries.⁷⁷ The 1868 **McAlpine Directory** lists these names in the Shiretown of Sydney or in the Municipal District. Some of them appeared as town dwellers, but they all lived in a very rural environment. They were landowners and farmers, although several had businesses which they ran on Charlotte Street in downtown Sydney. Also, from its earliest period, some of Eastmount's more prominent residents had shipping interests which coincided with their farms and the businesses they ran on Charlotte Street.

There were fishermen in Eastmount as well as the farmers, but because they tended to use the area as temporary quarters during the fishing seasons, it is difficult to document their presence. Until the 1870s, the buildings of a dozen farms and a few fishing families dotted the landscape of Eastmount along

⁷⁶ Church Map, [1877]. There are present day references in Whitney Pier: Eastmount School, Eastmount Graveyard, street names such as Maloney, Muggah, Fitzgerald Place.

⁷⁷ Burchell was the owner of the International Mining company; J.S. MacLennan was a stock-holder in the Dominion Steel and Coal Company as well as a Director of the International Company.

the shore and on the hills rising away from the water. They comprised only about a hundred people in a few major family groups before the expansion of the coal industry brought new piers to the area.⁷⁸ With the institution of the Dominion Coal Company, occupations become more varied but still related to the coal shipping business -- labourers, accountants, trimmers, harbour master, pier master.⁷⁹

The first influx of people to join the established landowners were rural Cape Bretoners who were beginning to arrive by the 1870s with the building of the International Piers. They accounted for a rapidly growing number of families, homes, boarding houses, and businesses. In 1891, the name of the area surrounding the piers was given as "International Pier" with some reference to "Victoria" [Road]. In 1891 the population of the district "east of Muggah's Creek" was about 500, made up mainly of rural Cape Bretoners who had left farming and fishing. By the 1901, the population of Whitney Pier had swelled to over twenty-five hundred.

The rural migrants who came to the Pier were part of a major demographic upheaval in Cape Breton and the entire Maritime region starting about 1840. Graeme Wynn notes that the entire Maritime region, was marked by two, seemingly paradoxical, characteristics during the last half of the 19th

⁷⁸ **McAlpine Directory Sydney, 1868.**

⁷⁹ **McAlpine Directory, Sydney. 1896.**

century -- depopulation and industrial development.⁸⁰ The out-migration from the area was pointed out by Alan Brookes who noted that, apart from the relatively few who returned to Europe or those who went to New Zealand, most Maritimers migrated to the "Boston States" -- over a half-million of them.⁸¹ Alan Brookes, in "Out-Migration from the Atlantic provinces 1860-1900", relates the mass out-migration to the economic down-turn of the region during the years following the end of reciprocity with the United States.⁸² The National Policy and the Intercolonial Railway had the effect of centralizing and consolidating the region and the outports were left economically stagnant. The areas most affected were rural farm or fishing communities for whom the new system of continental marketing presented insurmountable difficulties in terms of specialization and modernization.⁸³

⁸⁰ Graeme Wynn, "The Maritimes: The Geography of Fragmentation and Underdevelopment" in L. McCann (ed.) *Heartland and Hinterland: A Geography of Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1982) pp.157-213.

⁸¹ Alan E. Brookes, "Migration from the Maritime Provinces to Boston during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of New Brunswick, 1978.

⁸² Alan Brookes, "Out-Migration from the Atlantic provinces 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations", *Acadiensis*, vol. V, no. 2(1976), pp. 26-55.

⁸³ However, Robert MacKinnon, points out that 1891-1901 were the most productive years for farming in Nova Scotia, with significant markets found in the new industrial areas, in "A Century of Farming in Nova Scotia: The Geography of Agriculture, 1851-1951", paper presented at Atlantic Canada Workshop, Fredericton, 1986, publication forthcoming,

Although the literature deals with out-migration to the United States, and certainly the greater portion of the migration led to the Maritimers to New England, it must be remembered that a large number of migrants went to urban and mining areas within the region, particularly to Cape Breton County. In many earlier cases, older family members were born in Scotland or Ireland, adding another link to this chain of migration.⁸⁴ Later migrations show another trend: return migration of Cape Bretoners (and other Maritimers) who went to the United States and then back to Cape Breton to work in coal related industries.⁸⁵ In these instances, the ages and birth places of the male and female heads of family suggest that most originally left the Maritimes as single people. The movement of peoples to the United States and back again, suggests a determinant in the argument against the theoretical base that declines in population come with corresponding declines in the economy.⁸⁶

With the completion of construction and start-up, labouring migrants added to the skilled tradesmen who

⁸⁴ Canada Census, Sydney, 1891

⁸⁵ Canada Census, Sydney 1901.

⁸⁶ Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921" in *Acadiensis*, vol.XV, no. 1, (1985), pp. 3-34, points out that the 1870's and 1880's in the region was a time of economic growth unsurpassed in any other part of the country. The question which leaves most demographers curious is why most of the out-migration took place before the economic decline of the 1890's, and during the time of greatest industrial development, in the 1870' and 1880's.

continued to come a variety of locations. In fact, the rural to urban migration within the Atlantic region became more pronounced than before with families and single people from all parts of the region, but mostly from rural Cape Breton. In what became Whitney Pier, rural migrants made up about 75 per cent of the population in 1901.⁸⁷ Of these, some 150 heads of rural-to-urban migrant families were skilled. Labourers were commonly boarders living with these families.⁸⁸ The rural migrants brought a wide range of construction skills and less commonly, steel and iron trades to Sydney. Still others added to the established community of coal transportation workers. This group of migrants could be found anywhere in Whitney Pier - in boarding houses or their own homes near the piers, or they might settle around the Bay Street area. Single Cape Bretoners could also be found in shacks in the Coke Ovens area, but they moved from that area rather more quickly than the non-Canadians who followed them.

Carpentry was the most common trade for the rural migrants, although for many of them it was an "informal" trade.⁸⁹ They were also bricklayers, masons, painters,

⁸⁷ Canada Census, Sydney, 1901. The ratio of rural migrant settlement in Sydney is similar.

⁸⁸ Canada Census, Sydney, 1901. In many cases, the census-taker gave the county of birth if born in Nova Scotia.

⁸⁹ Ian McKay, *The Trade Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax, Holdfast Press, 1985), states that construction work during this period by "thousands of rural woodworkers, some of them carpenters, others handymen..." was protested frequently by the

electricians, blacksmiths, plumbers; others had skills more directly related to steel making such as machinists, millwrights, pipe fitters, and stationary engineers.

Although the 1901 census documents the presence of a large number of rural migrants, there were, in reality, probably many more. Many of the boarders travelled back and forth to their farms or fishing villages on a seasonal basis, creating a constantly revolving workforce. Strikes and other factors affecting availability of work accounted for this constant movement of workers between the rural and industrial areas.

A significant migrant group that came to Whitney Pier to work at the steel plant and to the coal mining areas were Nova Scotia Blacks who had been living on the "Mainland" (Guysborough, Halifax, New Glasgow, Truro, Amherst, Springhill, and the Annapolis Valley) since the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They settled in the Coke Ovens area of Whitney Pier and intermarried with West Indian Blacks and American Blacks who came around the same time. Although there continues to be a strong component of Nova Scotia Blacks in Whitney Pier, little has been written about this group's industrial experience.⁹⁰

Newfoundlanders were an ambiguous group, not Canadian, but

Carpenters' Union. pp.35-37.

⁹⁰ Interview with Marion Reid, 1993. The HERO Collection conducted by the Transition Year Program At Dalhousie has recorded some fragmentary information of this subject.

geographically close enough to be very familiar with Cape Breton. Newfoundlanders constituted a significant portion of the coal and steel labour force living in Whitney Pier; even earlier than that, they were a heavily involved in coal transportation and fishing. Newfoundlanders were the majority immigrant group to Whitney Pier.

The migration between Newfoundland and Cape Breton had been going on for as long as the two areas were populated, but it intensified greatly with the coal and steel industries, making the flow almost entirely toward Cape Breton. Curiously, the greatest number of immigrants came from the east coast areas of Newfoundland, further from Cape Breton, but closest to the communication centre of St. John's.⁹¹

The Newfoundlanders came from an island that was notoriously underdeveloped and in the economic theorists' opinion of the time, "over-populated" in terms of survival potential, but paradoxically not over-crowded. Thornton hypothesizes that the push of out-migration was in anticipation of the results of Confederation, the National Policy and centralized capitalist power, but it was the pull of the "Boston States", then to the industrial centres of the Maritime provinces, that was to exacerbate the situation and

⁹¹. David Alexander, *The Decay of Trade: An Economic History of the Newfoundland Saltfish Trade* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977; Peter Neary, "'Traditional' and 'Modern' ... Bell Island and Conception Bay"; Ron Crawley, "'Off to Sydney': Newfoundlanders Emigrate to Industrial Cape Breton 1890-1914", *Acadiensis*, XVII, 2(1988), pp. 26-51.

create disparity between regions and within regions."⁹²

The Newfoundlanders, like the rural migrants of the Maritime Provinces, were a constantly fluctuating group affected by seasonal patterns of work. Their industrial labour converged with the inshore fishery near their home villages, or they sought employment in the off-shore fishery.⁹³ Like the Nova Scotia rural migrants, their numbers in the census are probably understated: 505 are listed, constituting over 20 per cent of the total listed population. Of these, 83 list skills, including a large number who gave fishing as their skill or occupation. Their main construction skill was carpentry. Most of the Newfoundlanders were listed as "labourers". Fifty-eight families are listed and most of these have as many as 18 boarders.⁹⁴ In the early years of their settlement they tended to live in shacks or boarding houses in the Coke Ovens or Bay Street sections of Whitney Pier. Later they moved with their families toward what became Ward VI.

The importation of "alien" or foreign labour was the result of an arrangement between the Nova Scotia government and DISCO along with the Dominion Coal Company, in accordance

⁹² Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921".

⁹³ "Off to Sydney", Record, Feb. 8, 1902, p.5, tells of 30 men from Carbonear, and 15 men from other points leaving by train (and boat) for Sydney, with the expressed hope that they will soon return.

⁹⁴ Canada Census, Sydney, 1901.

with the policies designed by the Canadian Immigration Branch.

There were numerous debates in the provincial legislature over the question of the contamination of the British character of Nova Scotia by these newcomers.⁹⁵ While there was ready acceptance of white Americans, British, and Scandinavian workers, there was antipathy -- usually in the form of newspaper articles -- towards groups such as Galicians, Italians, Chinese, and people of African descent who would displace native workers.⁹⁶ Some of these concerns, such as certain groups' inability to assimilate, were actually responded to in the official and unofficial Immigration Branch policies, leading to the Acts of 1906 and 1910 of the Immigration Branch.⁹⁷ But, in the end it was the interests of business that were served: the call for steel and coal workers, female domestics and the businesses to service these

⁹⁵ "Debates", 1901, 1899, 1900, cited in Mary Jane Lipkin, "Reluctant Recruitment: Nova Scotian Immigration Policy, 1867-1914", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1982, Chapter 3, fns. 55, 56, 57, 58.

⁹⁶ "Steel Co. and Home Labour", Record, Apr. 11, 1902; "Foreign Labour in Cape Breton: Italians Displacing Native Workers", Record, Feb. 8, 1902. In 1902, the Record published a response by DISCO superintendent Baker to a protest against English workmen.

⁹⁷ See, J. Granatstein, I. Abella, D. Bercuson, C. Brown, B. Neatby, *Twentieth Century Canada*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1986) 2nd.ed., p. 37; John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965); J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers within our Gates* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) 2nd.ed. (1st printing, 1909); Valarie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992).

workers was so strong that the immigration was quietly encouraged, and even Blacks were admitted.

With the construction and start-up of the steel plant, the labour force became strongly identified as "skilled" or "mechanics", or they were called "labourers". The designation was usually based on the actual expertise of the workers in specific areas, especially as applied to workers that originated in the Maritime region. But the designation was also based on ethnicity: non-Anglo-Celtic workers were often classed as "labourers" even though they had been brought to Sydney by the steel company for their specific expertise. With the arrival of non-Anglo-Celtic workers via Quebec or Halifax, or by rail from the United States,⁹⁸ a work place class structure based on skill and perceptions of skill was beginning to emerge.

Most of the highly skilled workers lived in areas of Sydney colloquially known as Ashby, Hardwood Hill, or the Shipyard. But a small number lived in Whitney Pier: recorded are an iron-roller and several blast furnace workers from the Pictou County iron works, as well as maintenance workers from Pictou and the United States.⁹⁹ Gradually, the managerial sector took up many of the Maritime men, -- those who were

⁹⁸ **The Pier 21 Story: Halifax 1924-1971** (prepared by Public Affairs, Nova Scotia Region, Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, {n.d.}), gives some background on immigrants' arrival in Halifax.

⁹⁹ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

English-speaking, rather than Gaelic or French-speaking. The construction workers from the Maritimes, especially bricklayers, were supplemented by tradesmen from Britain and even a few Scandinavian bricklayers are listed.¹⁰⁰

The greater part of the work of plant construction was completed by contractors. They might sub-contract locally to small groups or to Sydney-based lumber and building companies such as Stephen's or Chapell's. Rhodes and Curry of Amherst, Nova Scotia was a major contracting firm functioning throughout the Maritimes, but especially in Industrial Cape Breton. They built both company housing and industrial buildings. In 1902, Rhodes and Curry had expanded to the extent that it had its own harbour pier and warehouses in Sydney's North End.¹⁰¹

Another contractor, an Italian named Thomas Cozzolino who worked out of Malden, near Boston, brought some of the first continental European immigrant workers to Whitney Pier.¹⁰² Cozzolino is often described as a beneficent person, reputedly saving "indigent" Italians from deportation by giving them jobs, and he seemed to have a concern for the living

¹⁰⁰ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

¹⁰¹ Plan of the Town of Sydney, 1902(ca.), published by McAlpine, 1892 [1902 ca.]. See, Diane Tye, "Housing the Work Force: Workers' Housing in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1900-1914", *Bulletin, Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, vol.XI, no.3, 1986, pp. 14-16.

¹⁰² Thomas Cozzolino, "Autobiography", (typescript) [1935], MG1 Vol. 1191C, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

conditions and wages of his men.¹⁰³ In one recorded case his wages were higher than standard, and other workers went on strike for equity.¹⁰⁴ In many ways Cozzolino fit the definition of padrone as it applied to the North American Italian immigration experience.¹⁰⁵ It is believed locally that Cozzolino was instrumental in arranging for "sojourner" Italians (mainly southern Italians) to stay on at the Sydney steel plant, and helping them to bring their families either from the United States or Italy.¹⁰⁶

Cozzolino was well established as a contractor for railway excavation construction in both Canada and the United States long before he brought men to Cape Breton at the

¹⁰³ Informal interview with local historian Ron DiPenta.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Cozzolino, "Autobiography", p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ There are many studies of padronism in Canada, including, Bruno Ramirez, **On the Move: French Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Region** (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Robert Harney, "The Commerce of Migration", **Canadian Ethnic Studies**, IX (1977), pp. 44-53; Robert Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism", **Labour/Le Travail**, 4(1979), pp. 57-84.

¹⁰⁶ Bodnar, in **The Transplanted**, p.21, notes that of the immigrants from the southern Italian region of Abruzzi, over 50% were found in the construction and excavation trades of America. The Canadian Censuses reveal that these industrial migrants were not the first Italians to live in Sydney: the Dipenti's, the Martinello's, the Giovannetti's and Di Pistone's all had businesses in Sydney starting in the 1880's. According to E.J. Julian, "Brief History of the Italian Colony of Cape Breton", for the Italo-Canadian Ethnic and Historical Research Centre - in connection with a Centennial Project, Report, Beaton Institute, [1967], the spokesperson and official interpreter of the "colony" was Antonio Di Pistone, who started an early chain of drugstores.

construction of the DISCO plant.¹⁰⁷ His first work in Cape Breton was on the Intercolonial Railway from Port Hawkesbury to Sydney. In 1900, he obtained the excavation contract at DISCO and brought "a few hundred men" from New York and Montreal.¹⁰⁸ The excavation over the next three years included work for the coke ovens, the open hearth, the blooming mill, and the round house, as well as the construction of a short railway between the blast furnace and the coke ovens. His workers also went to Marble Mountain to quarry dolomite for the steel plant, but they did not stay. Cozzolino is credited with laying the water line from Sydney River that fed the steel plant; his workers also did much of the brickwork required for the steel plant and coke ovens.¹⁰⁹ In 1909, he did further work at the Sydney steel plant, constructing a spur line and some highway and the subway which separates Sydney from Whitney Pier. While excavation obviously required "pick and shovel" work, it also required heavy machinery operators, "shooters" (dynamite blasters), and

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Cozzolino, "Autobiography". Cozzolino came to the United States in 1880 at the age of 14. Son of an Italian highways contractor, he immediately sought work in construction camps. In 1887, he was in charge of Italian workers on the construction of the ICR in Cape Breton; He came again in 1889 on another job. In 1901, he moved his family to Sydney and maintained a permanent residence there until he died in 1947.

¹⁰⁸ Cozzolino, page 29.

¹⁰⁹ Information given here comes from the "tradition" of families descended from Italian workers brought by Cozzolino, namely Rosie Delorenzo and from local historian Ron Di Penta.

dozens of other highly skilled workers, along with the experience and efficiency required for successful contract work.¹¹⁰

Judging by the many reports of hundreds of Italians working at the construction of the steel plant, it is evident that they worked for a number of contractors. They also came through the work of agents who worked either privately or for the steel company. A Mr. Marazza who in 1901 had been in Nova Scotia for eight years, was an "employment agent" who had "handled thousands of Italians for local contractors".¹¹¹ The Italians came to Canada both from Europe and the United States. Immigration Branch records show that Italians coming to work in Eastern Canada crossed the borders at Rouse' Point, St. Leonards, McAdam Junction, or other railway connections with the United States. Others arrived by boat and went through Immigration at St. John.¹¹² The normal rules for entry into Canada -- continuous journey, sufficient money, literacy, -- were, at certain times, foregone in order to allow Italians to enter. The "continuous journey" requirement

¹¹⁰ Cozzolino, p. 38. The Italians' access to explosive materials was a concern recorded in the *Record*, Sept. 17, 1900, p.5 and again on Apr. 13, 1901, p. 2.

¹¹¹ "Local Topics", *Record*, Aug. 22, 1901, p.2.

¹¹² Annand, Nova Scotia, p.54 and Lantalan, New Brunswick, p.45, Immigration Report, Dept. of the Interior, 1900 report the entry of Italians, and the portion of them going to the "lower provinces"; also, the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Reports for 1901 and 1902-03 which discuss immigration of Italians in the context of coal mining development and railway construction.

was of particular importance to the Italians, since almost all had worked in the U.S. for a period of time before attempting to enter Canada. When there was a great demand for Italian navvies, all that was needed was a letter from the contractor guaranteeing work, and assurance that they would be allowed back into the U.S. on completion of their work.¹¹³ One unverified source states that their fare was paid if they undertook to work for one year, but adds that citizenship cost only one dollar "and could be secured within hours provided the immigrant promised his vote!".¹¹⁴ While there is no early documentation between the steel company and the Immigration Branch concerning the importation of Italian labour, there is correspondence with the Dominion Coal in 1920s concerning bringing Italian miners directly from Italy (with brief references to DISCO and steel workers).¹¹⁵

It would appear that Italians migrated in and out of Sydney all during the construction period and into the operational period of the steel plant's history, and that many came to Sydney on their own after the initial construction. They were most often found in the coke ovens, possibly because of their knowledge of brickworks, although any real status as

¹¹³ W.D. Scott to E.P. Nadeau, RG76, c-10, 627, vol. 539, file no. 803901.

¹¹⁴ A.V. Spada, *The Italians in Canada* (Ottawa: Riviera, 1969), p.218.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum from the Immigration Commissioner to Mr. Scott, RG76, vol. 499, file 775789, National Archives.

bricklayers was closed to them.¹¹⁶ They were more probably at the coke ovens because it was the least desirable place to work in the entire plant. Italians also worked at the George's River dolomite mine and for the Town of Sydney.¹¹⁷

Their comings and goings were haphazard, depending on available employment. Winter restricted their work, and there was often a waiting period between one construction project at the steel plant and the next.¹¹⁸ Some were "black-listed" and forced to leave when they were involved in 1901 and 1903 strikes at the coke ovens.¹¹⁹ But as they left town by the trainload, they were soon replaced by hundreds of other Italians.¹²⁰ They also took an active part in the 1904

¹¹⁶ An informal interview with African-Canadian (West Indian) brickworker, Worrie Ettienne, 1992 indicates that the bricklayers union was strictly WASP in its membership until much later in the century.

¹¹⁷ "Warehouse and Shack Burned at George's River", Record, Apr. 2, 1903, p. 1; "Fight Between Indians and Italians", Record, May 2, 1901, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ "200 construction workers laid off... no work till spring...", Record, Jan. 8, 1901, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ "One Hundred Italians Armed with Clubs in Clash with Policemen at Coke Ovens: Italians with Grievances on Strike try to Prevent Workmen from Entering Plant", Record, Mar. 2, 1903, p. 1.

¹²⁰ "Strike at an End", Record, Nov. 7, 1900, p. 5; "Local Brevities: A number of Italians who were employed on construction work at the steel company's plant left for Boston by the last express this morning", Record, Nov. 17, 1900, p. 5; Ad for 250 labourers at Dominion Iron and Steel Company, Nov. 27, 1900, p.3; "Strike at the Coke Ovens, Over 100 Out", Record, Aug. 9, 1901, p. 2; "Incipient Strike at Coke Ovens... striking foreigners left for US", Record, Feb. 17, 1903, p. 1; "Immigrants Come by the Hundred[s]... mostly Italian, few English...", Record, Mar. 17, 1903, p.1.

strike at the steel plant, causing a number of disturbances.¹²¹ This group was subsequently refused employment and left Sydney for the United States, and other parts of Canada.¹²² Throughout the period, Italians returned to Italy from Sydney, either for lack of work or to visit families.¹²³

Canada's negative attitude toward foreign workers, especially Italians, gained the force of law in 1897 with the Alien Labour Act which forbade the importation of foreign labour. But many Italians entered Canada before and after the Act was passed, mainly because of the needs created by Canadian development; indeed, some 50,000 entered Canada between 1890 and 1914. Even at that, the Immigration Branch allowed their admission only as sojourners.¹²⁴ There was at least one instance in which DISCO fought the Alien Labour Act in order to bring in Italian workers.¹²⁵ In 1905, an amendment to the Alien Labour Act made it a crime to import

¹²¹ Joe MacDonald, "The 1904 Strike at the Sydney Steel Plant: Unskilled Labour Faces the Establishment", unpublished paper, Carleton University, 1977.

¹²² *Post*, July 21, 1904; July 28, 1904; Aug. 16, 1904.

¹²³ *Post*, Nov. 17, 1905.

¹²⁴ Donald Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Alien Labour Question", Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Western Ontario, 1973, pp. 120, 211.

¹²⁵ "Alien Labour Case", *Record*, Sept. 14, 1901, followed by a "Petition to the Privy Council re the Alien Labour Laws", *Record*, Sept. 20, 1901.

foreign labour without the permission of a judge.¹²⁶

The antipathy toward Italians was strong in Cape Breton as it was across the country. The notes made by Thomas Cozzolino refer to his fight for credibility in overseeing construction work at the plant, and also to local attitudes when he arrived with his gang of men to Cape Breton.¹²⁷ Newspapers of the time were far more critical of Italians than any other group of immigrant workers. They were called "Dagos", and were frequently blamed for acts of violence, for robbery and even for disease.¹²⁸ In February 1901, Sydney appointed two Italians to the local police force to ensure the "prompt arrest and conviction of their countrymen".¹²⁹ The negative attention paid to the Italian workers in Sydney by the local newspapers ironically gives an vivid picture of their immigration and work experience. The agent Marazza, in defending his countrymen against the denigration heaped upon them declared that the Italians were most law abiding people in the United States: "...they come out here to labour for the

¹²⁶ *Post*, July 30, 1905.

¹²⁷ Cozzolino, "Autobiography".

¹²⁸ "Italians to Blame for Smallpox Cases..." *Post*, May 7, 1901, p.1; "Stole Six Hens, Got six Months: Cokovia Italian caught robbing after robbing a hencoop...", *Record*, Feb. 20, 1904, p.1; "Local Brevities: Italian sent up for stealing from a trunk", *Record*, Aug. 10, 1900, p.5; "Wanted for Murder", *Record*, Sept. 24, 1900, p. 1. See also Ralph Ripley, "The Attraction of Immigrant Workers to Cape Breton County, 1893-1914", M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1980.

¹²⁹ *Record*, Feb. 25, 1901, p.5.

sake of feeding their dear ones; they never give any trouble or ask for anything but work, and in this way are not afraid however hard or difficult it may be so long as they can make money to send to their families".¹³⁰

It is impossible to get any idea of the real numbers of Italians in Sydney during the early years of the steel plant's history: as sojourners and tenants (rather than property owners), they were not included in the 1901 census. Their exclusion from the census may also have been a signal of the local feeling toward them. Several hundred of the workers stayed; they eventually brought their families and established a vibrant South Italian ethnic community in Whitney Pier.¹³¹

Another European group of workers brought to Sydney expressly for their skills were Hungarian iron workers. They were met in Halifax by the DISCO employment clerk in October, 1901.¹³² More were due to arrive in November of 1901, encouraged by the steel company's agent, W.P. Briggs.¹³³

¹³⁰ "Local Topics", *Record*, Aug. 22, 1901.

¹³¹ Despite the range of writing on Italians in Canada, little has been written on Italians in Nova Scotia, except for a study on coal-mining North Italian immigrants by E. M. Razzolini, *All Our Fathers: The North Italian Colony in Industrial Cape Breton* (Halifax: Saint Mary's University, 1983). For a listing of publications on Italians in Canada, see, Bruno Ramirez, *The Italians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Society, 1989), *Canada's Ethnic Groups Series*.

¹³² "Iron Workers from Austria", *Record*, Oct. 5, 1901, p.5.

¹³³ "Austrian and German Steelworkers for Sydney", *Record*, Nov. 23, 1901, p.1.

According to the 1901 Census, there were seven households of Hungarians, sometimes referred to as "Austrians" in the Coke Ovens area of Whitney Pier, with a total of six adult females, eight children and 48 adult males; all of the men are referred to as "labourers", not one as an iron worker.¹³⁴ Newspaper reports indicate that there were also single male Hungarians living in shacks, but the numbers were not given. The Hungarians had the unfavourable attention of the press, but not nearly to the extent of the Italians.¹³⁵ They, with the Italians, were involved in the strikes at the coke ovens, and were "discharged" because of their participation: "A number of Hungarians who were in the strike at the steel works yesterday left for points in the United States and Upper Canada".¹³⁶ However, a number of families stayed on in Whitney Pier and established ethnic institutions which defined their community.

Other "contract" construction work was carried out by Russian heavy wood construction workers in the first decade of the 20th century. Brought to Sydney as part of an agreement

¹³⁴ Canada Census, Sydney, 1901.

¹³⁵ For instance, a note referring to "recent Hungarian in court for drunkenness and carrying weapons" was in *Record*, Nov. 11, 1901, p.5; "Four Arrests in Assault Case", *Record*, May 3, 1904; "Stabbed to the Heart Hungarian Falls Dead", *Post*, Sept. 26, 1911.

¹³⁶ *Record*, Mar. 4, 1903, p. 3. Also, Peter A. Vay, *Amerikai napolkivnatok: utijegyzetek, leveltoredekek* [American Diary Excerpts: Travel Notes, Letters] (Budapest, 1910) pp.110 ff., cited in N.F. Dreisziger et al, *Stuggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart with Canadian Multiculturalism Directorate, 1982), chapter four, "Years of Growth and Change, p.95, fn.4.

between the Canadian and Russian Imperial governments,¹³⁷ they built the wood piers the remnants of which still exist. As a result of pressure from this group of workers in Sydney, the Russian Consulate (Halifax and Montreal) arranged for the construction of a Russian Orthodox Church on Breton Street in the central area of Whitney Pier. At the beginning of the Russian Revolution, these workers left Sydney and descendants of some of them were reputedly found in rural Maine.¹³⁸

Because of the American technology of the new steel plant, most of the direction for the construction and start-up came from imported Americans. Many came for only brief periods, and by 1903, most of the supervisory personnel had left Sydney. For instance, in 1904, J.W. Brophy, foreman of the blooming mill mechanical department was presented with a gift in a "do" at the Savoy Theatre in Glace Bay on his departure to work in Buffalo's Lackawanna plant after a few years' stay in Sydney.¹³⁹ Blast Furnace Superintendent J.H. Means left Sydney in February of 1903 after playing an important role in

¹³⁷ Li-Ra-Ma Collection, MG 30, E 406, vol. 15, National Archives.

¹³⁸ Li-Ra-Ma Collection, vols. 21, 27, National Archives; Elizabeth Beaton, "Ukrainian Radicalism and Religion in Cape Breton", presented at Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Edinburgh, 1987, Report, Elizabeth Beaton Collection, MG, 12, 198, Beaton Institute.

¹³⁹ "Presentation to J.W. Brophy", Record, Apr. 5, 1904; also, "Five iron workers registered from New York staying at the Bellevue", Record, Jan. 7, 1901; "American Superintendents Leaving: Griems [coke ovens], and Carlson [blooming mills]", Record, Jan. 7, 1901.

the start-up of several new blast furnaces since 1901.¹⁴⁰ These upper level managers recruited many experienced workers from their own networks in the United States steel industry.

Notable among these skilled migrants were several hundred Black iron workers, part of an extended South-to-North diaspora of ex-slaves. Many had at least a generation of experience of work in the blast furnaces of steel plants across the United States. Recruited by Superintendent Means during 1901-1902 for the start-up of the DISCO blast furnaces,¹⁴¹ they appeared to have entered Canada under more or less the same border arrangements as the Italians. Although the African-Americans are referred to as "labourers"¹⁴², the steel company regarded these experienced workers as "skilled" and arranged their transportation, housing and gave them the opportunity to bring their families. They came with women and children and even some older relations. Despite a generally negative attitude toward them, they managed to form a relatively stable community, with a school, church, businesses, and recreational centres. Their contribution to DISCO was acknowledged in a huge parade celebrating the

¹⁴⁰ *Record*, Feb. 8, 1903,

¹⁴¹ Most of the information dealing with this phenomenon comes from DISCO [Blast] Furnace Letterbooks, 1901-1903, MG. 14, 38, Beaton Institute. The daily newspapers in Sydney commented regularly on the arrival of the American Black iron workers, for instance, "60 Negroes on their way to Sydney", *Post*, Dec. 21, 1901.

¹⁴² "Coloured Furnace Men", *Post*, Oct. 16, 1901;

coronation of King Edward in 1902 in which the American Blacks are in charge of a float depicting the steel company's blast furnace. Their presence beside the float suggests that they built the replica of the blast furnace and verifies their specific skills.¹⁴³ By 1905, most appear to have returned to the United States, some travelling in a large group through Maine in the winter of 1903.¹⁴⁴ Local tradition holds that some African-American business people stayed on until the 1930s. It is also likely that they intermarried with other Blacks who came from Nova Scotia and the Caribbean. Although the African-Americans did not have a protracted effect on the landscape of Whitney Pier, they were significant in its early housing patterns.¹⁴⁵

The hiring of non-Canadian skilled workers caused considerable dissatisfaction in Cape Breton. There were disputes between Canadian tradesmen and American contractors or management on questions of pay and even of morality. Americans were accused of failing to reciprocate the good will of locals, of introducing foul language to the workplace and

¹⁴³ "Preparation for Big Celebration: Coronation of King Edward", *Record*, Aug. 8, 1902, p. 5. Joe Beaton Photo Collection, photo no. 91-602-2253, Beaton Institute.

¹⁴⁴ "Their Promised Land was one of despair: Sad Plight of 250 Alabama negroes who came North in search of riches", *Bangor Daily News*, Jan. 13, 1903, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ For more detailed information, see, Elizabeth Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904", in *Acadiensis*, vol. XXIV, no. 2(Spring, 1995), pp. 65-97.

doing unnecessary work on Sunday.¹⁴⁶ But most of all, those who protested were acutely aware of the high subsidies given to DISCO by the federal and provincial governments and by the town of Sydney, and felt that local hiring was appropriate. In response to the company's declaration that Canadians could not do the work, a letter to the editor declared, "any competent... honest foreman ...[knows]... that the Cape Bretoners, Prince Edward Islanders or Newfoundlanders, if properly treated, and with a little instruction could be made... as capable and immensely more reliable than the Alabama niggers who are here today and gone tomorrow."¹⁴⁷ DISCO openly admitted to bringing in mechanics or skilled tradesmen in a variety of areas, including carpentry, fitters, machinists, etc, as well people experienced in steel making, but denied offering passage. For skilled workers from Britain, they maintained that this was done in an arrangement with the Commissioner of Immigration in Britain, through an agent of DISCO.¹⁴⁸

After the plant began operation, the range of workers'

¹⁴⁶ "Local Brevities: mechanics dissatisfied with pay...", *Record*, Jan. 8, 1901, p.5; "A Cape Breton Conscience: Nova Scotia foreman refuses to work with his gang in the brickyard on Sunday... plaintiff is American", *Record*, Jan. 13, 1902, p. 5; "Steel Co. and Home Labour", *Record*, April 11, 1902, p.1,5.

¹⁴⁷ "Steel Co. and Native Labour", *Record*, Apr. 14, 1902, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ "The Importation of English Workmen", *Record*, Apr. 7, 1902, p.1.

origins was much broader than previously. While many rural Cape Bretoners, Maritimers, and Newfoundlanders continued to flood into Sydney, there were also labourers coming from all over the world. They came singly or in groups as part of the migration chain which had begun through the active recruitment of steel company agents, but continued because of letters home, the narratives of returning workers and sponsorship by relations.¹⁴⁹ In contrast to the skilled workers, these men were not met by agents of the company, nor was their housing arranged by the company. They usually came without their families. On the job, they had the status of "helpers" or "yard workers" who did "bull work". This situation continued for many years, even though they became highly experienced in many areas of steel making.

Virtually every national state and ethnic group in Continental Europe was represented, but the majority were Polish, Ukrainian, and Italian; also included were Croations, Serbs, Czechs, German, Swedes, Rumanians, and Hungarians. They were a "second wave" immigration to Canada, following on the enormous push into the Canadian West by farming immigrants

¹⁴⁹ There is a plethora of studies and publications documenting this phenomenon. For primary sources, see Ethnic Manuscripts, MG 7, Beaton Institute including tapes recordings and written documents. For published works, see, the **Generation Series** and John Bodnar, **The Transplanted**, to name just a few sources.

from Middle Europe.¹⁵⁰ Some had gone first to the West as farm labour, but came east upon hearing of higher wages in industrial cities. Although they were mainly from peasant stock, many came as part of the industrial work migrations that carried workers all over Europe, to the United States and to Canada.¹⁵¹ The Europeans settled in the Coke Ovens area; shortly, many of the Slavs moved to the side of the hill facing the west side of the steel plant. This area became known to English-speaking residents as "Hunky Town"; to Slavs as "Kolonia" or "The Colony". Many Slavs and other Europeans purchased farm land in the rural areas around Sydney as insurance against unemployment. Some of them retired there, or more often, they turned the land over to their children and the farm areas became suburbs of Sydney in the years following 1950.

The story of Mike Oleschuk effectively summarizes the immigration experience of Slavs in Whitney Pier and in the steel industry.¹⁵² Oleschuk, an ethnic Ukrainian, grew up

¹⁵⁰ Stella Hryniuk, "A Peasant Society in Transition: Ukrainian Peasant Life in Five Galician Communities", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Univ. of Manitoba, 1984.

¹⁵¹ This phenomenon is amply documented in a variety of sources. For the experience of immigrants to Cape Breton in the Ethnic Archives of the Beaton Institute, see, Tape 332: Roman Siwak interviewed by Betty Lynch (n.d.); Report: Steve Melnick, "A Family History of the Melnyks-Melnicks", 1979.

¹⁵² "How Mike Oleschuk got his Farm", in Ron Caplan (ed.) *Cape Breton Lives* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1988), *Canada's Atlantic Folklore-Folklife Series*, pp. 20-28.

with the realization that the 12 acre farm plot owned by his father would leave him with no option to farm after it was divided amongst the family. So he sold his small legacy and left for Canada under a Polish passport in 1929. He landed at Quebec and went on to Western Canada where he spent all his money on 80 acres of land with a house. However, it was the Depression: his farm was not successful and he was unable to pay his mortgage. He worked as a farm labourer for a time at \$0.25 per day, but soon decided to go to Sydney where his brother-in-law was working at the steel plant. Despite protestations from his brother that there were no jobs in Sydney, he "rode the rails" into the steel city and finding his way to Whitney Pier, managed to find his brother-in-law and others from his home region in Europe. Sydney was also in the bind of the Depression and Oleschuk, like many others, had to receive "relief" until 1933 when the plant started to "pick up". Oleschuk's wife, a Canadian-born woman, worked as a domestic for the wife of a local agent for the company, a Ukrainian named Melnick. Oleschuk was able to get a job at the plant through Melnick with a bribe of a bottle of rum (bought incidentally by Melnick's wife!). Oleschuk worked first in the Coke Ovens, shovelling coal from the cars; later he was able to get work in the brick yard. It was always shift work, awarded on a daily basis, but the pay was good, \$1.25 per day. He became active with the Ukrainian Labour Temple and the Labour Movement, and was involved in the strike

by the Seamen's Union during World War II. Accused of being a Communist as a result of these activities, he was blacklisted at the steel plant. A local Jewish merchant, also a labour activist, assisted him in buying a farm so he would be able to support his family.

Another large group of labouring people came to Whitney Pier from the West Indies.¹⁵³ This influx was an extension of inter-island migration within the Caribbean resulting from land reform, over-population and poverty following Emancipation. Although the West Indians came from all parts of the Caribbean, most of those who stayed in Whitney Pier and other parts of industrial Cape Breton are descended from immigrants from Barbados. When West Indian Blacks began to come to Cape Breton by way of the "cod and molasses trade", the Immigration Branch undertook a major investigation into the situation and initially attempted to stop the flow of both male and female Blacks to Nova Scotia.¹⁵⁴ However, the need for labour in industry and in domestic service caused this group to be tolerated. That the West Indians spoke English and were relatively well-educated and "well-mannered" were also factors in their acceptance.¹⁵⁵ The West Indians, a

¹⁵³ West Indian also came to work in the coal industry; they settled in the mining towns surrounding Sydney.

¹⁵⁴ Canadian Immigration Branch Records, Fortier to Scott, File 81066, National Archives of Canada.

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Beaton, "Alienation and Upward Mobility: West Indian Migration to Cape Breton", paper presented at Canadian Ethnic Studies Conference, Calgary, 1989.

very few of whom were white, settled in the Coke Ovens area of Whitney Pier where the men were employed primarily in the Coke Ovens operation of the steel plant. Despite an institutional racism that showed in housing and in city services, the community thrived with businesses, places of worship, and recreational facilities and a strong belief in the value of education. However, the community was "ghetto-ized" in the sense that its Black inhabitants were not allowed "out" if they wished to live in another part of Sydney.¹⁵⁶

Coincidental with the influx of workers was arrival of commercial immigrants to provide necessary services for the steel and coal transportation workers, and their families as they arrived. While almost every group was represented in the commercial sector of Whitney Pier, the Jews formed the majority commercial group, conforming to their previously fixed patterns of being denied industrial jobs. Chinese - part of the railroad construction diaspora - were also understood to be unacceptable as steel plant workers: they

¹⁵⁶ For greater detail on the circumstances of the West Indians' immigration and settlement, see, Elizabeth Beaton, "The Basis of West Indian Immigration to Cape Breton: Is Cape Breton Caribbean Island?", Report, Beaton Institute; given at 350 Years of Black History, Multicultural History Society of Ontario Conference, Toronto, 1990. For a more complete picture of the experience of West Indian Blacks in Whitney Pier, see, Elizabeth Beaton-Planetta, "A Tale of three Churches: Ethnic Architecture in Sydney, Nova Scotia"; Elizabeth Beaton, "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians in Whitney Pier".

provided laundry and food services to industrial workers.¹⁵⁷ It is believed that the "first wave" of West Indians to Whitney Pier involved as many commercial immigrants as industrial workers, including tailors, a jeweller, a bookstore operator, and those interested in being landlords.¹⁵⁸ "Assyrians" (Lebanese/Syrians) also came as both business people and as industrial workers.¹⁵⁹ The Assyrians and Jews travelled the countryside selling their wares until they were able to set up businesses in Sydney and Whitney Pier.¹⁶⁰ The immigrant business people established barber shops, groceries, bakeries, laundries, bookstores and jewellery stores which supplied both necessity and luxury for the swelling population. The Sydney City Directory shows 18 Jewish merchants of different types, two Chinese laundries, and

¹⁵⁷ Edgar Wickberg (ed.), *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982); Anthony Chan, *Gold Mountain: the Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983); Elizabeth Beaton, "The Chinese in Eastern Nova Scotia", Report, Beaton Institute, 1985.

¹⁵⁸ Beryl Braithwaite, "A Woman's View", (transcribed and edited interview by Diane Chisholm), *In the Pier Dear*, pp. 83-86.

¹⁵⁹ Nancy W. Jabbra and Joseph G. Jabbra, *Voyageurs to a Rocky Shore: The Lebanese and Syrians of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Institute of Public Affairs of Dalhousie University, 1984); also see Beaton Institute Ethnic Archives tape 486: Mrs. Ferris interviewed by Betty Lynch, 1972.

¹⁶⁰ Sheva Medjuck, *The Jews of Atlantic Canada* (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 1986); "A Visit with Dave Epstein" in *Cape Breton's Magazine*, no. 35. See also Beaton Institute Ethnic Archives tape 55: Dave Epstein interviewed by Margaret Beaton, 1968; tape 332: Mrs. Land interviewed by Betty Lynch, 1972.

several Assyrian peddlers in Whitney Pier in 1903-04.¹⁶¹ Drinking establishments were also part of the business and social underpinning of the community, their location and clientele based on ethnic or regional ties. Business establishments tended to be initially scattered through the Coke Ovens area between and including Lingan Road and Victoria Road, whereas most of the Anglo-Celtic businesses were found on Victoria Road.¹⁶² Businesses and homes almost invariably shared the same building, the family proprietors living above or behind the commercial operation.

The business of answering the newcomers' accommodation need was primary. Boarding houses and hotels, and well as rented rooms in family-owned homes were the predominant forms of accommodation. Most of the hotels and rooming housing were initially run by Newfoundlanders and Anglo-Celtic Cape Bretoners, but this changed as more and more foreigners entered the scene. Usually the families kept boarders of the same geographic, religious, linguistic origin as themselves. One male household head of Scottish descent was a "farmer" from Victoria County, Cape Breton, who lived with his wife and six children in the along the north end of Victoria Road; there were 21 "boarders" at their house, 20 of Scottish descent from rural Cape Breton and seventeen of whom were

¹⁶¹ McAlpine's Directory, Sydney. 1903-1904.

¹⁶² Toby Morris, "Study of Whitney Pier Ethnic Groups and Early Businesses", MG 7, 2, Beaton Institute, 1984.

credited with construction or coal transportation trades.¹⁶³ One of several "french" households from both Inverness and Richmond Counties was an Acadian family from Inverness County which put up 15 Acadian boarders.¹⁶⁴

Women were key to the commercial activities of the boom town, particularly with regard to providing accommodation for workers. If they were wives in families that owned or rented homes, then they were usually housekeepers, not only to their children and husbands, but also to single male boarders. Outside the home, women worked most commonly as domestics, either in boarding houses or hotels or for the plant's upper management or the city's middle class. The 1901 census indicates that 5 female heads of families in Whitney Pier ran boarding houses; one ran a restaurant. Several wives and sisters of family heads were housekeepers for boarders. Fourteen other women, mainly young and unmarried, worked as domestics, either for families in middle or skilled class, or for boarding houses. A few women also worked as telephone-operators, teachers, seamstresses, and as prostitutes.¹⁶⁵

The settlement patterns of Whitney Pier were readily definable by 1910. The division between "skilled" and "unskilled" workers established a class system that was crystallized by the influx of immigrant workers, and was

¹⁶³ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

¹⁶⁴ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

¹⁶⁵ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

signalled by the location of workers. Close to the steel plant on its east and north side (Cokeovia and Hunky Town) were the labourers or yard workers. This population was predominantly male and immigrant. The central area, around Bay Street, was initially settled by skilled construction workers of Anglo-Celtic background, by experienced steel and iron workers from other steel making areas of North America (excluding African-Americans), and by supervisory plant personnel. In the "lower end" or the "pier" were mainly coal transportation workers and supervisory personnel and their families who were reasonably well established by the time the steel plant was built. The areas were served by business people corresponding to their patrons: Jews and Lebanese served the needs of Europeans; American and West Indian Blacks supplied specialty foods for Black workers; Anglo-Celtic businesses dominated Victoria Road in the early part of the century.

From this picture of Whitney Pier's urban and industrial development, and its settlement patterns, we can envision a community that had all the worst attributes of a turbulent boom town society. It was over crowded, it had public health problems, and the urban services supplied from Sydney were inadequate; crime and violence appeared to be prevalent; it was male dominated with a generally suspect or subservient small female population. Housing was in short supply.

Yet newcomers poured into Whitney Pier, for there was an

excitement in the air, as though it was bursting with vitality. State subsidies for business and an open immigration policy seemed to encourage a belief that the new steel industry would bring an era of prosperity; promise of a place that could be good for living in and for raising families.

They were to find, however, that the type and quality their dwelling places and the standard of their living depended, not only on their work status as skilled or labourer, but also upon status associated with their ethnicity or race.

CHAPTER 3

HOUSING A BOOMTOWN SOCIETY.

At present there is a hugh unsettled population. Hundreds of men and women who throng our streets have but one clearly defined object in view, that is to make the dollar and to make it if possible with promptness and despatch. Outside of business they have made no ties that bind them to the place.¹ Cape Breton Post, 1902

Boom towns all across North America have shared several characteristics, all adding up to rapid development and impermanence. They came about, usually, because of a single industry; they tended to be structurally chaotic with inadequate public services; they held a predominantly male, transient population with a high percentage of non-white or non-Anglo-Celtic peoples. Probably the most outstanding visual feature of boom town society was its housing which was ostentatious for the wealthy, reasonably comfortable for skilled workers, and simple and sometimes sub-standard for the labouring class.²

¹ "Sydney of To-Morrow", Post, May 18, 1902.

² There is a wide range of publication demonstrating the features of booms towns. Roger M. Olien and Diana Davis Olien, **Oil Booms: Social Change in Five Texas Towns** (Lincoln, Nbr.: University of Nebraska, 1982) directly define such towns. Others who deal with the implications of boom town life include Margaret F. Byington, **Homestead**; Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, **Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City** (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); James B. Allen, **The Company Town in the American West** (Norman, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University, 1966).

Whitney Pier's housing in the first decade of the 20th century, as was the rest of Sydney, controlled or influenced to a great extent by the steel and coal companies. The mobility that characterized the newcomers to Whitney Pier was a significant factor in that much of their housing was rented rather than owned. The type of rented accommodation depended to a great extent on the status of the worker.³

Town and Company

In the early 20th century the town of Sydney openly identified itself as a boom town, mainly through positive reinforcement of the idea of rapid development and the immense influx of rural Cape Bretoners, Maritimers, and foreigners. Building construction was the primary focus of Sydney's boom experience. The town boasted that over 400 structures were completed or were under construction in 1900, only a year after the beginning of construction of the steel plant. In that year, 560 deeds were recorded in the registry office. In 1901, the major building contractor, Rhodes Curry of Amherst, built 231 buildings, many of which were for the steel company. Other contractors, 19 counted in 1900, claimed similar

³ Weaver and Doucet, *Housing the North American City*, esp. "The Rented House: Landlords and Tenants, 1830-1960s", pp. 343-387, discusses, in general terms, the variations in the status of renters over the years.

success.⁴

Because land for homes in Sydney proper was very expensive, most of the construction was commercial or financial buildings. However, homes of "a better class", costing \$2,000, were being built in the more suburban Ashby area, along Whitney Avenue, Brooklands, and other new streets.⁵ The famous Moxham Castle on King's Road, completed in 1900 by the General Manager of the steel plant, was amongst these. In 1902, the town assured itself with confidence that the "Building Boom is Not Abating ... the general opinion [being] to the effect that building operations within the city were being carried on fully as large, if not a larger scale than in last year...".⁶ Throughout the period, Sydney was protective of its boom town status, on one occasion denouncing as an "evil story" the suggestion that Sydney's growth in terms of population and construction was far lower than predicted.⁷ A decade into the 20th century, the boosterism

⁴ "Past Year's Buildings: Prospects for the Year", *Record*, Jan. 6, 1901; "Contractors", *Record*, Aug. 22, 1900; "Rhodes Curry Erected 231 Buildings", *Record*, Feb. 3, 1902, p. 8. See also, "The Steady Growth of Sydney", a full page ad inserted by the city in the *Post*, Sept. 11, 1905.

⁵ "New Buildings", *Record*, Aug. 23, 1900.

⁶ "Building Boom is Not Abating", *Record*, Sept. 16, 1902, p.1

⁷ "Local Topics", *Record*, July 12, 1901.

of the construction industry still held importance.⁸

Whitney Pier, being part of Sydney and sharing firsthand in its accelerated development, was especially characterized by its housing. The *Sydney Record* noted in 1902 that Whitney Pier was experiencing a "building boom of which not a few towns in the province might well be proud."⁹ But the boom affected Whitney Pier in a particular way because almost the entire foreign-born workforce at the steel plant, including Newfoundlanders, lived in that area. Despite the widespread settlement of rural Cape Bretoners in the area, and an early presence of carpenters, "mechanics" and skilled steelworkers, Whitney Pier very shortly became acknowledged as a place primarily for immigrant workers, for men without families, for unskilled labourers.¹⁰ The status of the workers -- skilled or labouring, foreign or native, black or white -- was a factor in the styles and quality of their housing.

Although worker housing was the main thrust of the construction in Whitney Pier, it was most often rented accommodation before the 1920s. The Methodist and Presbyterian Survey of 1913 found a high rate of tenancy in what was called the "Laurier Block" in 1913. There were four double houses, a three-family house, a five-family house, nine

⁸ "Big Building Boom for Sydney during Next Year" , *Post*, Nov. 25, 1911; "Building Boom in Sydney in 1909", *Post*, July 13, 1909.

⁹ "Cokovia as a Suburb", *Record*, June 24, 1902, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Sydney Directory*, 1903, 1907, 1914, 1918.

one-family houses including two shacks, a one-family home over a store. Curiously, there were three vacant houses in this block at a time when accommodation was crowded and housing was scarce.¹¹

The high rate of rented accommodation was perceived as a problem by city administrators for it represented a transient population, one without commitment to place. Furthermore, although it was rarely stated except in terms of reported crimes, that there was a "moral" implication in providing and living in rented accommodation.

But contractor/developers, hoteliers and boarding house keepers welcomed a mobile workforce, "... the class who will not do anything but rent ... to get what they can while the 'boom' lasts."¹² Developers built a range of rented accommodation in Whitney Pier: tenement buildings, hotels, and "shacks" or bunkhouses. In some cases they constructed double occupancy houses in response to the needs of skilled workers with families who were unlikely to remain in the area. Hotels of varying quality sprang up throughout Whitney Pier the services depending on the status of their occupants. But, by far, the most common type of accommodation in Whitney Pier was

¹¹ [Bryce Stewart], **Sydney, Nova Scotia: The Report of a Brief Investigation of Social Conditions** (The Board of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church and the Board of Social Service and Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church [Toronto, 1913], p. 14.

¹² "Question of House Accommodation", **Record**, Sept. 15, 1902, p.8.

boarding in private homes, either owned or rented. These local entrepreneurs all took understandable advantage of this boom period in Whitney Pier, their participation being closely paralleled to the activities of the company and the numbers of workers drawn to the work.¹³

If profit was the unabashedly essential aim of the local developers, contractors, hoteliers, and boarding house keepers, then the apparent agenda of the company in its housing initiatives was a combination of benevolence and business sense. In 1902 the company's response to the sluggishness in the home building market, was to promise through the Sydney Real Estate Company that 1200 houses would "be erected for the employees of the Dominion Iron and Steel Industry".¹⁴ This action was an inevitable source of conflict with property developers and construction interests who saw some of their potential business disappearing. In 1903, they made legal objection claiming that the steel company had no right to build dwellings on land expropriated

¹³ This was the case all across North America during the period. See, Doucet and Weaver, *Housing the North American City*; Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream*, ch. seven, "Americanization and Ethnicity in Urban Tenements" pp.114-151; R.H. Harney, "Boarding and Belonging: Thoughts on Sojourner Institutions" in *Urban History Review*, no. 2(1978), pp.8-37; J. Modell and T. Hareven, "Urbanization and Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families" in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, no. 35 (Aug. 1973), pp. 467-478; Edmun W. Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man* (Toronto: U. of T. Press, 1968).

¹⁴ "Steel Company to Erect 1200 houses...", *Post*, June 7, 1902.

for the steel industry.¹⁵ The plant's General Manager, David Baker, responded to the controversy by reminding the town of its unfulfilled promise to provide adequate worker housing, but was instead, charging exorbitant rents to workers. He stated that the steel company was unable to get skilled construction workers or mechanics to start up the new rail mill because of the severe housing shortage. Furthermore, he pointed out the advantage to Sydney: that the town would benefit from the taxes of the residents.¹⁶

DISCO's action in providing worker housing was long a part of the North American industrialization, especially during the period when philanthropy was important to industrial leadership.¹⁷ From the 1880s there were international housing congresses and exhibits in which industrialists competed for prizes for the best design of

¹⁵ "Steel Co. has Legal Right to Build Houses", *Post*, Oct. 3, 1902. Legal counsel advised the town that the steel company was indeed within its right to build dwelling on the expropriated property, the town's only advantage was the right to collect taxes.

¹⁶ "Steel Co. of House Question", *Record*, Sept. 27, 1902, p. 1. The article, "Steel Company to Erect 1200 Houses for its employees", *Post*, June 7, 1902, probably precipitated the discussion: it is doubtful that this many houses were actually constructed. Additional claims against the company occurred in 1900 when two MLA's from Cape Breton initiated legislation which would prevent DISCO from opening company stores. Cited in *Record*, Oct. 13, 1900.

¹⁷ Probably the best example of industrial philanthropism in terms of housing was in the textile machinery manufacturing town of Hopedale, Massachusetts. It is superbly documented by John S. Garner, *Model Company Town: Urban Design Through Private Enterprise in Nineteenth Century New England* (Amherst, Mass.: Univ. of Massachusetts, 1984).

worker housing, in terms of the "evolution of thought and human need".¹⁸ In Niagara Falls (U.S.A.) and Hopedale, Massachusetts, architects were engaged by companies to "improve the character of ...communities".¹⁹ Throughout North America, worker housing was divided into three general areas and corresponding qualities: those rented to single male labourers, those rented to married labourers and their families, and those initially rented, but with the intention of selling them to the employees through company financing.

In 1922, representatives of major steel companies addressed the American Iron and Steel Institute regarding the past and future of company housing, stressing that company housing was originally the result of housing shortages in industrial areas. But the view that housing was the lure which brought the workers to industry was also well entrenched in the thinking and practice of early 20 century industrial leadership. The summary rationale for company housing was to "[i]ncrease the number of home owners, stabilize plant labor

¹⁸ Garner, *Model Company Town*, p.114. The first congress was in Paris in 1889; no congresses were held in America although many American firms competed for awards, and many houses were exhibited in the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, pp. 110 -15.

¹⁹ Leland L. Roth, "Three Industrial Towns by McKim, Mead and White", *Society of Architecture Historians Journal*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1979, p. 320.

conditions, and thereby reduce production costs."²⁰ It is interesting to realize that industrial leaders met and discussed a variety of housing issues such as building costs versus housing quality, the need to consult the female homemaker on house design, the relationship between company housing and labor strife, and house size and utilities vis-a-vis the level worker skill. They recommended offering prizes for useful yards and "beautification" of gardens and lawns; they wanted to encourage consideration of the woman's role in the home with attention to the kitchen and the basement -- the work places of the woman; also for the women, market places should be provided by the company if not already available.²¹

The inclusion of central heating, running water and bath facilities was universally based on the status of the worker. In the case of labourer's housing, it was most often not provided. Business leaders at the 1922 Iron and Steel Institute of America rationalized this by claiming the workers' lack of sophistication in the use of modern conveniences.

One of the difficulties in providing a bathroom for the average labourer is the fact that he will not keep the room sufficiently heated if it is added as a separate unit... In this development for common labor, while we provided bathrooms for the workmen they were not always used for this purpose. Some were used for the storage of coal, other for the storage of beer... We, however, were

²⁰ C.L. Woolridge, R.H. Stevens, P.C. Kruegle, W.J. Riley, "Industrial Housing", *Year Book of the American Iron and Steel Institute* (New York: 1922), p. 120.

²¹ "Industrial Housing", *Yearbook, AISI*, p. 90-100.

not discouraged because of this fact, as we believe the children in these homes will eventually bring their parents to realize the proper use of the bathroom, and they will insist upon the use of it themselves, which all tends to make future desirable citizens.²²

The industrialists' views of immigrants' attitudes towards housing conditions further supported their rationalization: "[i]t was our general conclusion that comparatively few foreigners appreciate the value of sanitary surroundings, comfortable adequate houses, and an opportunity to really improve their manner of living".²³ Moreover, as their "foreign colony" had no "race trouble of any kind", it would seem unwise to introduce revolutionary changes into the domestic customs of employees, i.e. better to "produce the substandard type of American home, rather than to carry standardization to too great an extent."²⁴

Despite many indications to the contrary, the industrial philanthropists insisted that they were not promoting paternalism.

As long as the industrial corporation must play the part of landlord, an inevitable result is the accusation of paternalism, which is heaped upon it in an most unjust manner... This plague is a greater source of grief to the employer than it is a cause of resentment on the part of workman."²⁵

Their response to this problem was the admonition to build

²² "Industrial Housing", Year Book, AISI, p.102.

²³ "Industrial Housing", Yearbook, AISI, p.112.

²⁴ "Industrial Housing", Yearbook, AISI, p.112.

²⁵ "Industrial Housing", Yearbook, AISI, p. 119.

houses to sell, and to avoid operating stores.

Much of the literature critical of company housing stresses the dull and drab unpainted sameness of the buildings, without trees or flowers, with no indoor privies and only a communal outdoor water supply; it also suggests that the companies sought the cheapest means of providing housing for workers, using substandard materials and workmanship.²⁶ The Sydney company houses were described as "dismal sentinels" in a 1950 study of industrial Cape Breton housing.²⁷ However, other studies point out that although substandard conditions were true of the early industrial housing in America (pre-1850), later construction displayed greater regard for both the aesthetic and physical needs of the occupants.²⁸ Margaret Byington pointed out in 1910 that the houses in Homestead, Pennsylvania represented "effective, inexpensive house building" for which there was great demand

²⁶ Margaret Mulrooney, "A Legacy of Coal: The Coal Company Towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania" in Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman (eds.), *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV* (Columbia and London: Univ. of Missouri Press), 1991, pp. 130-42; James B. Allen, *The Company Town*, pp.84-9; Richard MacKinnon, "Tompkinsville, Cape Breton: Co-operativism and Vernacular Architecture", forthcoming, *Material History Bulletin*, 1996.

²⁷ Francis J. Rowe, "A Negro Community in Nova Scotia" B.A. Essay, St. F. X. Univ., 1950, p. 1.

²⁸ Leland M. Roth, "Three Industrial Towns by McKim, Mead and White", pp.317-35; Leifur Magnusson, "Company Housing in the Bituminous Coal Fields", *Monthly Labour Review*, vol. 10, no. 4(1920), pp.215-22; Leifur Magnusson, "Company Housing in the Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania", vol. 10, no. 5(1920), pp. 186-95.

by workers and always a waiting list.

In view of the unenviable reputation of 'Company houses' everywhere, it is interesting to note that those owned and rented by the Carnegie Land Company in Munhall are the best houses for the money in town. Though built in solid row and wearisomely uniform they are immaculately clean, with squares of lawn and shade trees in front.²⁹

The Homestead houses were four and five room homes with bathroom and running water only in a few cases. The 1922 convention of industrialists interested in company housing stressed that the monotony of company housing must be avoided. They suggested changes in elevations, types, colours, etc., which "add charm to group housing and in consequence enhance the possibilities of home sales".³⁰ Despite any good intentions to enliven the visual aspects of the company housing, it must be remembered that few houses of working people were painted at the turn of the century. Later, when they were painted, they were most likely black or brown to disguise the constant soot and smoke that coated them. In terms of the services at the time, outdoor privies were common as were communal water taps. The problem was not so much that these means were used, but that the civil authorities and industry did not provide for proper cleaning and maintenance of the facilities. On the whole the company houses of Sydney were of a high construction quality that was certainly up to the standards of the time. They have endured to the present,

²⁹ Byington, *Homestead*, p. 48.

³⁰ "Industrial Housing", *Yearbook AISI*, p.119.

having been constructed by highly skilled carpenters, either contractors or elite tradesmen hired by the company.

Double- and Single- Family Dwellings

Dominion Street, originally called "Pier Road", which began on Victoria Road and ended at the coal loading pier, was the only street in Whitney Pier whose landscape was dominated by company housing. All told there were probably about a dozen such houses built on the south side of the street. Built by the Dominion Coal Company in the 1890s, most were double houses, but several were single family dwellings. All were wood frame structures, with unpainted shingle sheathing. The double houses were intended for the ordinary workers, while the single family dwellings were for middle management or highly skilled trades people who worked for the coal company. The men who lived in the houses worked mainly as coal trimmers, but their occupations and trades also included coal shipper, oiler, engineer, pay master, black smith, carpenter, pier foreman, clerk, yard master, and fireman. Some rented the houses and lived there with their families; others boarded. The few labourers on the street were boarding. Dominion Street was settled almost entirely Anglo-Celtic people, the exception being two Cape Breton Acadians.³¹

³¹ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5; also MacAlpine Sydney Directory, 1903.

Today, Dominion Street continues to have houses only on its south side. The north side of the street is unoccupied except for a huge rectangular structure which, for many years, was a "Sailors' Home", housing seamen while boats loaded with coal or supplies: more recently, until 1994, it was a senior citizens' residence. There is a large field, called the Dominion Field, used for soccer on the east side of the seniors' residence complex: on its west side a grassy hill dotted with wild scrubs and flowers slopes down to the ocean to the Shore Road and the ocean. Until 1993, the steel plant continued to own the vacant land on the north side of Dominion Street.

There are six double houses extant at the bottom part of the street. All of the same style, the houses are one and one-half storey rectangular wood frame with a long facade, and a gable roof with a central dormer gable or both the front and rear sides of the roof. Each side of the double house has a chimney centrally located on the roofline. The entrances on several houses are at the centre of the facade: some lead directly to the outside; other entrances are contained within a porch that either extends the lower part of the length of the facade, or simply covers the doorways. The two halves of the house are partitioned by a brick firewall. (Fig. 3-1)

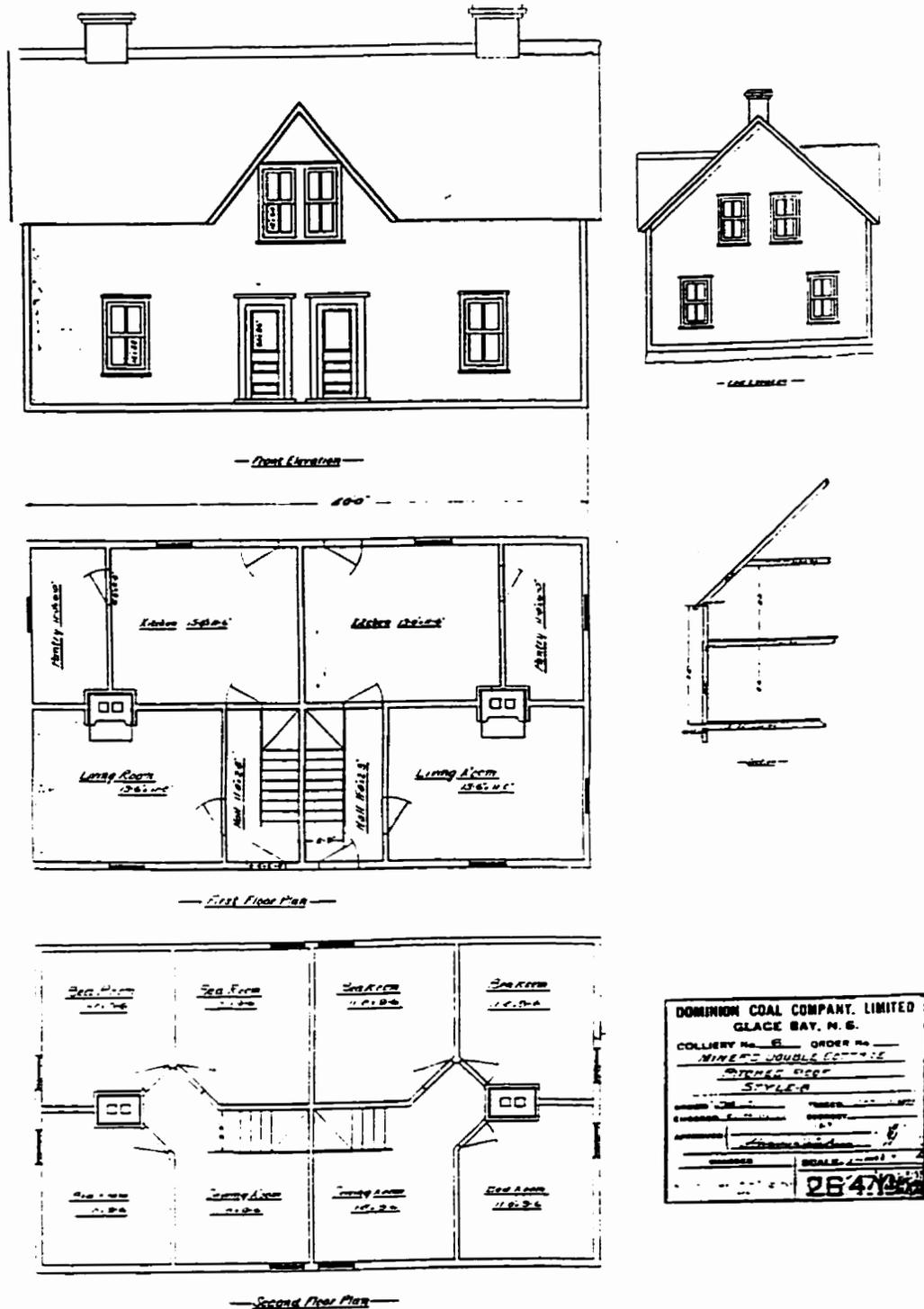


Figure 3-1: elevation and floorplan of double Company house. Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) Papers, Beaton Institute Archives.

The floorplan is mirror-imaged with the entry opening to a hallway which leads to a kitchen at the back of the house. A pantry or porch was often added where the back door entered the kitchen. There is a stairway to the first floor beside the brick firewall. A doorway to the parlour is directly across from the bottom of the stairway. Through the parlour one can pass through "french doors" or more usually, a wide simple archway to the dining room which shares the back of the house with the kitchen. The floorplan is sometimes referred to as "two-thirds Georgian", the predominant floorplan in Whitney Pier for much of the 20th century. At the time these houses were built on Dominion Street, they did not have interior bathrooms. The lack of a proper foundation in the double houses was the one outstanding short-coming in the construction of company houses in Whitney Pier. Instead, there was a shallow crawl space, with winter protection consisting of "banking" with sawdust or sea weed. This had later repercussions with roof sag and rotting sills as the years passed.

The single family dwellings built by the coal company were ell-shaped houses, much the same as rural farm houses of the time in Nova Scotia. None of the Dominion Street single family company houses are extant at this time, but until four years ago, there were three such houses located on the street east of the double houses. They were removed in 1989 to make way for a power line for the modernized steel plant.

In most cases, these houses consisted of a moderately large core form with a smaller integral ell, both sections with gable roofs. The larger form was two storeys, but the ell, with a lower roofline, was usually one and one-half storeys. The gable end of the larger section formed the facade, with a front entrance and stairway, and hallway. This part was two rooms deep (parlour in front and dining room in back). The front hallway usually led to the dining room. The ell contained the kitchen, usually the full width of the dining room and sometimes longer. Sometimes there was a small pantry off the kitchen, either as part of the ell, or as a later addition to it.

Most of the houses on Dominion Street were purchased by their occupants after World War II, but the option to buy was there as early as 1902, at the cost of \$1200.00 over a period of ten years on a monthly instalment plan.³² In 1945, because the company was particularly anxious to get rid of the houses, the cost of a one-half double house was nine hundred dollars. When they were sold as a single unit; the owner often rented out the other half. The cost of the single-family ell-houses was \$1400. The payments were made to the steel company as "rent", slightly increased from the current rate.³³

³² Post, June 7, 1902.

³³ Discussion with Leo Jessome, who family began renting a single-family unit on Dominion Street in 1936. They bought the house after WWII.

Ownership, combined with post-war "home" values³⁴, had the effect of enhancing both the exterior look and the infrastructure of company houses, especially the double houses. Bathrooms were built under the dormer gables, one on each side on the dividing wall. In some cases, the owners raised the houses and put full basements under them, undoubtedly replacing the sills in the process. The different styles and sizes of porches are accountable in this way as well. The fenestration is another noticeable change, with the replacement of the original large one-over-one windows with smaller single panes, or complete removal. With ownership, the houses came to reflect the colour tastes of their owners, sometimes in disagreement with the owner of the other side of the house. When the entire house was of one colour, it may be assumed that either the two owners agreed to share the cost and task of painting, or that the house was owned by one family. Also, the large lots surrounding the houses were put to horticultural use as trees and flowers were planted, and fences were added, depending on the preferences of the occupants.

The company houses in Whitney Pier are understandably similar to those in the coal towns of Cape Breton dominated in the early 20th century by the Dominion Coal Company -- New Waterford, Glace Bay, Reserve Mines, Bridgeport, Donkin, etc - - where both single and double family dwellings of a wide

³⁴ See, Wetherell and Kmet, pp.46-49.

variety of size and style can still be seen.³⁵ Houses of these types, especially the ell-shaped single, are extant at Wabana, Newfoundland, where Dominion Iron and Steel and its subsequent companies mined iron ore for use at the Sydney steel plant until 1950. The company houses built at Mabou Mines and a few on the Main Street of Inverness Town were almost identical to the ones on Dominion Street.³⁶ But they do not resemble the half-masonry row houses of the earlier General Mining Association (British) in Sydney Mines and in Pictou County, or most of the double houses of coal miners in Inverness Town built by the MacKenzie and Mann Company at the turn of the 20th century.³⁷ Furthermore, the houses on Dominion Street have little in common with the company houses

³⁵ Angus W. MacDonald, in his testimony to, The Royal Commission Investigating the Coal Industry of Nova Scotia (1925), (the "Duncan Commission" documented conditions in the company housing in the coal towns of Cape Breton, pp. 2735-2738. In the same Commission, Mr. McCann provided an inventory of the company housing owned and rented by the coal company in 1925, pp.1990-1991. The Commission testimony is available at the Canadian Dept of Labour, Ottawa).

³⁶ See Richard MacKinnon, "Company Housing in Wabana, Bell Island, Newfoundland", *Material History Bulletin*, Vol.14, 1982 (Spring), pp. 67-71, esp. p.69, type vi; Beaton Institute Photograph, Mabou Mines, 91-1004-22965. Mabou and Inverness Town are located in Inverness County on the western side of Cape Breton Island.

³⁷ Danny Samson, "The Making of a Cape Breton Coal Town: dependent development in Inverness, Nova Scotia", Ph. D. Thesis, M.A. Univ. of New Brunswick, 1988. For a sense of the variety of company housing in Nova Scotia, see Joanne Latremouille, *Pride of Home: The Working Class Housing Tradition in Nova Scotia 1749-1949* (Hantsport, N.S.:Lancelot Press, 1988), ch. 4, "Company Houses, Company Towns", pp. 55-64.

of many coal mining towns in the United States.³⁸ And they have only vague similarities to the company houses in steel making centres in the U.S. - Pittsburgh, Wilson, Johnstown, and Youngstown.³⁹

Interestingly, the origins of the company housing in Whitney Pier are readily found in towns prominent in the New England textile industry. Almost exact replicas of the style were recorded in Hopedale, Massachusetts: seven identical two-family dwellings known as "Union Row", dated 1874. They were professionally designed, the rent in 1883 being one dollar per month; twenty years later it had gone up to \$8.80. The porches which covered the front doors were not added until 1887.⁴⁰ An apparent reason for the affinity to the New England styles of company housing is the Massachusetts origin of Whitney, the founder of the Dominion Coal Company and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company. As well, Maritime carpenters who worked in New England during the expansion and peak years of its textile industry would have returned home with a ready "mental template" of this type of housing. But it is well to

³⁸ Leifur Magnusson, "Company Housing in the Bituminous Coal Fields", and "Company Housing in the Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania".

³⁹ David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1975 [5th printing], p. 113.

⁴⁰ Research carried out in 1991. The houses now are located on Freedom Street, having been moved from Union street in 1907. See also, John Garner, *Model Company Town*, pp.209-11.

consider that the basis of the styles had been in Nova Scotia for over 100 years vis-a-vis materials, wood frame construction techniques, and leanings toward the gable roof style.⁴¹

The Dominion Street houses were same design as the DISCO houses on "New" Victoria Road on the Sydney side of the steel plant. Construction of these houses commenced in 1902 after David Baker, Trustee in charge of all housing, proposed an extension of Whitney Pier's Victoria Road as the site of double houses for steel workers, with the possibility of them being moved at a later time to make way for the expansion of the steel plant.⁴² These were the least comfortable of all the company housing built in Sydney by the steel company. By comparison, DISCO built twenty eight "fairly good houses" 2 1/2 storey singles on Whitney Avenue for top level management in 1901. This was followed by substantial doubles for skilled tradesmen and their families on Park and Union Streets. By 1909, the company owned 142 houses "more or less" in 1909 with 393 applications on file for these houses.⁴³ In 1912

⁴¹ Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, "Vernacular Architecture and the Culture Landscape of the Maritime Provinces -- A Reconnaissance", *Acadiensis*, vol. 10, no. 2(1981), pp. 86-100, state that there is a shared building tradition between the two areas, but a major difference is in the "economy of materials and a plainness of decoration ... in striking contrast to American houses" based in a cultural difference in attitudes toward displays of wealth. p.100.

⁴² "Steel Co. on House Question", *Record*, Sept. 27, 1902, p. 1.

⁴³ *Brief Investigation of Social Conditions*, p.14.

Richmond Street was erected with company housing of a better grade than the Victoria Road dwellings with which they were paralleled." These houses of various styles and sizes were for married Anglo-Celtic workers (not usually Newfoundlanders) with families; they were for skilled tradesmen, and skilled or semi-skilled steel workers. Notably, all of the steel company's dwellings were built in Ashby, on the Sydney side of the steel plant, although the company held hundreds of acres of unoccupied land in Whitney Pier.

It is often observed that there have been curiously few company houses built in Whitney Pier, a part of Sydney so heavily affected by the coal and steel industries. The housing provided by Dominion Coal was not representative of its many employees living in Whitney Pier. Similarly, the steel company tended not provide worker housing in areas that were mainly inhabited by labourers. In 1912, Church representatives noted: "The company has provided different classes of houses for officials, skilled workers and labourers, but a large number, especially of the latter, have to find shelter for themselves."⁴⁵

The unsuitability of Whitney Pier as a place for company housing was partly based on its geographic position in relation to the steel plant, which made it an undesirable

⁴⁴ "Steel Company Building 29 houses for Employees", *Post*, Oct. 10, 1912, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Brief Investigation of Social Conditions*, p.14.

place to live for those who could afford to leave. Virtually surrounded as it was by the docks, railway tracks, the blast furnace, the open hearth, mills and shops, and the coke ovens, it was ironically too close to the working operations of the plant. It received the prevailing winds which carried the effluence of the plant. Even the quiet farmlands developed near the piers lost their attractiveness with the expansion of coal shipment as the inevitable coal dust blew from the trains and docks. The attitude of the town of Sydney toward Whitney Pier as an immigrant community must also account for fewer and fewer skilled workers and the subsequent lack of company housing. The long struggle for adequate sewage and water facilities, and better streets set up a further negative view of that part of Sydney.

Despite its reluctance to construct company housing in Whitney Pier, the steel company did provide single family housing for some of the skilled immigrants who came during the construction and start-up of the plant. The experience of the African-Americans iron workers is an example.⁴⁶ Whether the company actually built, or merely renovated houses for the African-Americans is unclear, but the concern for their housing was documented. Furnace Superintendent John Means, who recruited the men, arranged for their lodging. Based on incomplete sources, it is apparent that there are problems

⁴⁶ E. Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904".

with regard to heating some of the houses. On two occasions Superintendent Means asked the time keeper to arrange to have stove piping re-routed through the cellar and the unheated rooms. (The obvious fire risk of this solution was not mentioned). Means also endeavoured to hurry the construction of alternate housing. Means' urgent tone appears to suggest that a commitment of proper housing was given to the black workers, or that the operation of furnaces was in great need of their skills and he was therefore concerned that they would not leave.

I wish you would send a carpenter over to the houses occupied by the Niggers and have the stove pipes led through the rooms that have no fire in them so that they may be partially heated by the radiation. Please get this done for me at once as it is important that I make these men as comfortable as possible. Also, please let me know what Mr. Baker thought of the scheme for the two big houses with the furnaces in the cellar.⁴⁷

A few days later, a memo to the General Superintendent Baker seems to suggest that houses good enough for white workers will be built by the company for the African-Americans:

I beg to hand you herewith specification of a house that I would like to have for the Negros[sic] and which I am sure would please most white men with small families. This house possibly will cost here about here about \$225. and will rent for \$5.00 a month.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ J.H. Means to Bart Bryan, **Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) Furnace Letterbooks** October 24, 1901, MG 14.38 1.

⁴⁸ J.H. Means to David Baker, **DISCO Letterbooks**, October 28, 1901.

It is unclear where the houses were located. It can be certain that they were somewhere in the coke ovens area, the least desirable area of Whitney Pier. Two of the original African-American iron workers, William Bolden ("labourer") and Isaiah Robinson, ("employee of Disco"), had rented homes on Henry Street and Tupper Streets respectively. Another, a "furnaceman" named Louis Fletcher boarded at 37 Lingan Road.⁴⁹

Double-occupancy housing of a different sort was used for rental purposes by local contractors in the centre of Whitney Pier. One of those extant is a large structure built by contractor and builder, John Morley, located at 98-100 Bay Street at the corner of Summit Street overlooking the steel plant. Morley bought the land from Henry F. Muggah in 1899, and then gave up the property in a sheriff's sale in 1905 to a trust company, evidently because the rents were insufficient to cover the cost of construction and maintenance.⁵⁰ Local tradition has it that this building served as the original General Office for DISCO before 1903.⁵¹ Whether it was actually the DISCO General Office for a period of time is

⁴⁹ Sydney Directory, 1903; list from Means to Bryan, DISCO Letterbooks, October 29, 1901.

⁵⁰ Muggah Plan; Registry of Deeds, Cape Breton County.

⁵¹ Informal discussions with Bay Street resident and owner of the house, Archie Stewart. He was relating information from an elderly resident of the street, John Sernyk. An imposing stone and brick construction General Office was built on Sydney Harbour in front of the steel plant in 1903.

unclear; it is clear that it was a double-occupancy residence of very high quality for many years, housing a foreman of the Open Hearth and a machinist in 1903; also, an "employee" of Disco and an "employee" of Dominion Coal Company in 1907. By 1923, the building apparently had two apartments on each side. This was the case until the 1980s.⁵²

The house, unique in Whitney Pier, is an imposing two and one-half storey rectangular structure (40'x 24') with a long facade and a medium truncated hipped roof. It is reminiscent of a large box, or like two square blocks standing together, with each square enclosing a living area. The facade has two doorways, centrally located, and a large bay window on each end the facade. On the second floor facade there are three 2 over 2 windows on each "square" with a more recent bathroom window on each as well. Lighting for the third floor is permitted through two dormer gable windows, located midway in the front length of roof above each half of the building. The back of the building has a small porchway at each doorway. Like many of the houses of the time, it does not have a foundation, but rather a crawl space of 3-4 feet. There is a double out-building in the back yard. The house is remarkably similar to the "Bancroft Park" houses designed by Edwin J. Lewis, Jr. of Boston for the Draper Machine Company

⁵² Sydney Directory, 1903, 1907, 1923.

in Hopedale, Massachusetts.⁵³ The main exterior difference between the two is the gabled hip roof of the Bancroft House.

The original floor plan of the Bay Street house is no longer extant, the succession of tenancies until the 1980s resulting in many changes. But it is evident that it was originally more or less like the floorplan of the Bancroft houses, except that the Bancroft "front" doors were located on the side of the building. It was the floor plan of the period with parlour in front, kitchen and dining room in the rear of the house, three bedrooms upstairs; the added bathroom used up bedroom and storage space. The third floor was finished on one side: two bedrooms (probably finished since 1950) with sloped walls; storage space on the other side. There was once access between the two sides through doorway openings in the dividing partition. This supports the speculation that it was once the General Office. Little has been changed on the exterior of the building, except for small bathroom windows, one on each side of the facade, that were added with the bathrooms probably in the first or second decade of the 20th century.

The building remains solid despite a shallow foundation and two-by-four framing and rafters, both spaced at 30". There is little or no rot in the sills, roof, framing, boarding or double shingle sheathing. The most noticeable

⁵³ Field research in Hopedale, 1991. The house was also observed by Garner, *Model Company Town*, p.214-5.

features are the staircases which have thick and ornately lathed newels, balustrades and hand rails. It is likely that the house will be demolished in 1996 despite its extraordinary stamina in the face of multiple tenants and owners and general neglect.

Just beside the "double square" building is another two and one-half storey house (92-94 Bay Street), which was reputedly inhabited by a DISCO foreman or superintendent on one side and his assistant on the other. It was constructed by the Lewis family who seem to have been actively speculating in properties at the time.⁵⁴ Except for being a double occupancy house, it is remarkably different from the first one discussed. It has a rectangular core form with an integral wing on each side on the length of the building, giving the house a "T" shape. It has a gable roof and a short facade; the wings have lower gable roofs. But in its gable features, this one is more in keeping with the styles common to Whitney Pier. The elevation is rather curious in that the main entryways are on the side wings, on the length of the building.

The floorplan is distinctive with a corner doorway leading to a front living room which fills the core area. A dining room takes up the rear part of the core area, while the side central ell accommodates the kitchen and hallway. Stairs lead up from the hallway through the centre of the house

⁵⁴ Registry of Deeds, Cape Breton County.

turning twice before the second floor. There are three bedrooms on the second floor. The quality of workmanship in this house is not as high as for the large double square next door. A similar house, with a larger core area, found closer to Victoria Road at 114-116 Bay Street was also built by the Lewis family. Both houses were obviously built for rental purposes. They changed hands many times in the first two decades of the century; 114-116 Bay was sold seven times before 1918 by speculators.⁵⁵ (Fig. 3-2)

A similar type to these was recorded in Ludlow, Massachusetts, dated at 1878, in which had two bay windows on the facade.⁵⁶ One of five styles developed by Ludlow Associates for their workers, the houses were designated the best worker housing in the United States by the Labour Commission in 1883 and were copied in Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island. Labelled the "housekeepers' houses" the Ludlow houses were said to be "planned entirely from the point of view of one woman who has to do all the work in them".⁵⁷ The floorplan differs from the Bay Street houses in the position of the front doorway and the stairs. There are

⁵⁵ Registry of Deeds. The 1917 buyer, Clifford B. Travis was involved in 71 property transactions in the period 1918-1921. Many of the transfers in the early years were to Investment and Loan companies, the control of which were not identified.

⁵⁶ John Garner, *Model Company Town*, p.100, 101.

⁵⁷ John Garner, p.101.

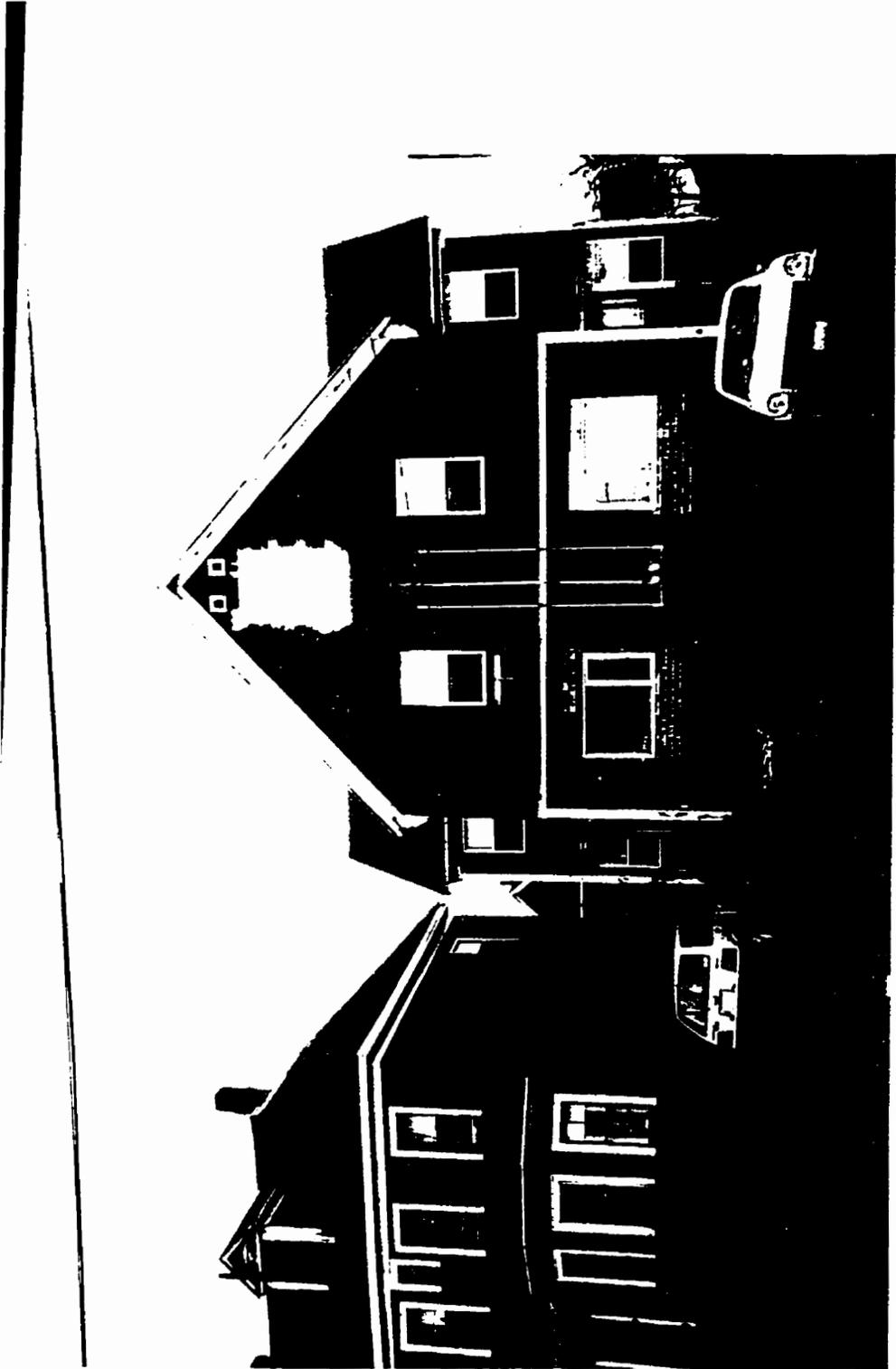


Figure 3-2: Summit/Bay Streets double houses. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

several other double-family houses in this area of Whitney Pier. A slightly similar type to the Dominion Street company doubles is found on Henry Street; there are two small double flat roof types on Webster, and on Mt Pleasant Street past Summit.

The most notable non-company double housing in Whitney Pier was on Railroad Street, also variously called Fitzgerald Row, Widows Lane, and Scab Avenue. The six houses are one and one-half storey, two family dwellings with entrances on the outside edges of the gable end. The roofs are noticeably more flat than most of the houses of Whitney Pier. The rear of the houses have small porches over each entrance which occurs almost in line with the front door. These buildings are often mistaken for company houses because they are close to number 5 gate, and because they are identical doubles. The absence of houses on the opposite side of the street make these houses all the more noticeable, especially from the end of the overpass.

Bunkhouses and Shacks

The story of the Breton Hotel is a fine example of the provision worker accommodation during the construction and start-up phase of the steel industry in Sydney. A bunkhouse that was turned into a neighbourhood of "company houses", the "hotel" was built by the United Coke and Gas Co. which constructed the coke ovens in 1899-1900. It was located just

inside the gate and across the Intercolonial Railway tracks at the end of Lingan Road, east of the coke ovens battery. It was variously named the "Briton Hotel", the "Grand Lake Hotel" and the "Coke Ovens Hotel".⁵⁸

The Breton Hotel accommodated over 600 workers in 1901, but "during the construction work of the coke ovens, had about a thousand boarders".⁵⁹ The structure was comprised of five paralleled core sections -- four long, narrow sections, and one central shorter and wider section which might have served as a dining room. They were all joined at the centre of each by a narrow section.⁶⁰ By 1901, the United Coke and Gas Co. had finished their sojourn in Sydney and began offering the contents of the buildings for sale.⁶¹ An advertisement in the *Daily Record* ran:

For sale: The entire contents of the Hotel Briton, consisting of beds, bedding, table linen, cutlery, crockery ware, chairs, bureaus, etc., etc., are offered for sale, either in one lot or in lots to suit purchasers... Apply to Boarding House Department of the Dominion Iron and Steel Co. Limited, Sydney, C.B.⁶²

⁵⁸ *Albert Almon's Map of Sydney, 1901*, Beaton Institute. A name is pencilled on the map identifying the hotel as the "Grand Lake Hotel"; *Sydney Telephone Directory, 1901*. A significant portion of information on this hotel and its subsequent history is from a paper by Joe Black, "Hunky Town: The Immigrant Family and Its Company Home", Beaton Institute Report, 1990.

⁵⁹ "The Passing of Hotel Breton", *Post*, May 23, 1901.

⁶⁰ "The Passing of Hotel Breton", *Post*, May 23, 1901.

⁶¹ "For sale", *Record*, Sept. 19, 1901.

⁶² *Post*, Jan. 18, 1901, p. 1, cited by J. Black, "Hunky Town", p. 3.

In May, 1901 the "Passing of Hotel Breton" was significant news, the Daily Post announcing removal of the structure from the Coke Ovens "down to near the yards of the D.I. & S. Co. at the pier. The building has been broken up into 42 sections, and the sections removed one at a time to the pier on cars. Each section will now be converted into a dwelling and will be occupied by men in connection with the works".⁶³ Most of the pieces of the former hotel were carried to company property located east and south of the piers and the blast furnace to fill the land enclosed by several new streets. Robert, Ferris, and Henry Streets, and the steel plant fence bounded the "interesting cluster of homes for 43 families"⁶⁴. (Fig. 3-3)

The pieces of the Breton Hotel were renovated by steel company carpenters. The original building was made up of a variety of sizes and shapes, all of them rectangular wood frame construction with wood-shingle sheathing, gable entry, one and one-half storey, with a varying size of second half-storey. None had foundations. All were originally unadorned, but over the years there are some additions of dormer windows, verandas and porches. Most were originally for double family occupancy.

The front and back elevations of the "new" homes were

⁶³ Post, May 23, 1901.

⁶⁴ Record, Sept. 19, 1901; also DISCO General Manager David Baker, "Steel Company on House Question", Record, Sept. 27, 1902, p. 1.

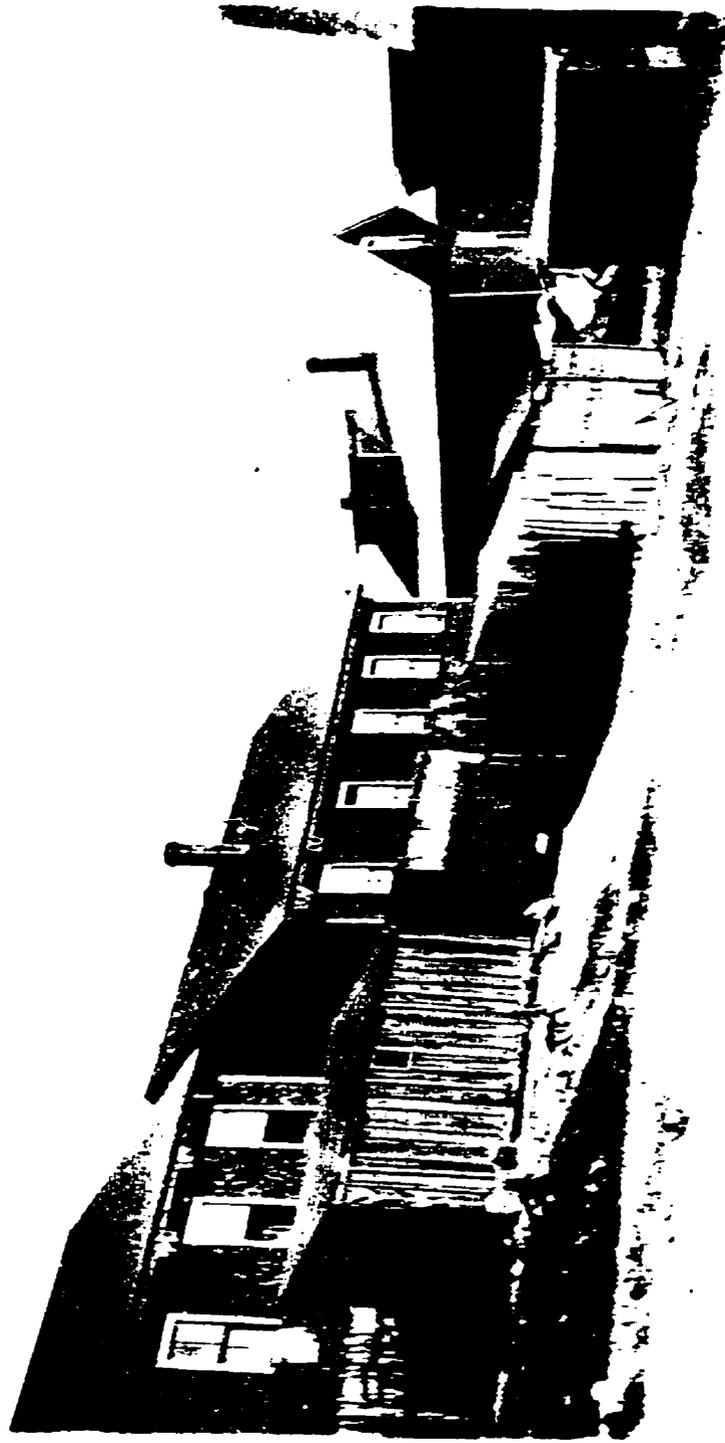


Figure 3-3: Hunky Town. United Church of Canada Archives.

variable, conforming to the physical features of the land. On Robert Street the length of the houses faced on to the street, with the doorways on the ends of the buildings, almost tucked-in between the houses. The backs of these houses were precariously perched on the slope of the hill, allowing for a foundation of sorts on the east side. The houses on the lower area were placed flat on the ground. The unnamed laneways connecting the houses responded to the orientations of the houses, especially to the back door leading to the kitchen.

The interior of the former bunkhouses had softwood wall boarding with plastering over lathes, and hardwood flooring. They were heated with coal stoves located in the "sitting room". Another stove, used for cooking, was located on the other side of the wall separating the kitchen from the sitting room. There were no inside toilets in the original structures; outhouses were cleaned on a weekly basis by the "man with the honey wagon". Electrical and other supplementary construction jobs were done either by the occupants or by friends who worked at the steel plant.⁶⁵

The houses were initially inhabited by Cape Bretoners and Newfoundlanders, probably skilled or semi-skilled construction or steel workers.⁶⁶ Sydney Poll Tax collectors referred to

⁶⁵ Fieldwork carried out 1980-1985. See also, Joe Black, "'Hunky Town'", for a description of Steve Dziubek's duplex on 13-15 Ferris Street.

⁶⁶ *Sydney Directory*, 1903; "Yesterday's Fire on Ferris Street", *Record* May 13, 1904. The inhabitants of the burned double house were MacDonalds and Corbets.

Slavs living in the houses and to their housekeeping situations in 1905:

The Ferris Street Huns who live all in sections of the old Hotel Breton, keep their houses in some state of cleanliness. ... Two families occupy a double house and have from four to six rooms on it. The family, if they don't keep boarders, usually occupy two or three rooms at the rear of the building. The front room is filled with coal kindlings and the upstairs rooms are used for storing vegetables and livestock, almost every family having two or three ducks in a barrel. ... If the interior conditions are fairly clean, the exterior conditions on Ferris Street certainly are not. It is the prevailing custom there for each family to empty its dish water at the back door and let it take its own course in getting to a ditch by the side of the street, and as a general thing it doesn't get there at all, but stays near the house and forms a filthy, ill-smelling pool.⁶⁷

By 1912, the area was almost exclusively populated by Slavic immigrants and was called "Hunky Town" by outsiders. It held 19 houses -- single, two and three and four family houses occupied by 331 people in one and a half acres. Of these, 165 people were boarders. The rent, which included water supplied by the steel company and taxes, was \$4 per family or \$8.00 per single-family house per month. The average salary for immigrant labourers was \$1.61 per day.⁶⁸ Crowding as common and proper sewage disposal was as much a problem as it had been in 1905.⁶⁹

The houses were sold to the occupants in the 1930s.

⁶⁷ "Condition of the Coloured Shacks", Post Nov. 26, 1905.

⁶⁸ Brief Investigation of Social Conditions, pp.14-15. Also, interview with S. Dziubek, 1986; J. Black Report.

⁶⁹ Brief Investigation of Social Conditions, pp.14-15.

When the occupants did not buy, the houses were made available to other buyers. Most of the houses are extant and occupied today, attesting to the workmanship of the carpenters who built and renovated them 85 years earlier. Some of the modernized houses have added full foundations. The neighbourhood still exists as "Hunky Town" or the "Valley" or "Kolonia", and is inhabited by Slavic immigrants and their descendants, as well as several families of Newfoundland descent.

Since only 19 of the 42 pieces of the Breton Hotel houses were placed in the "Valley", it may be assumed that the other structures are elsewhere. Indeed, there are several buildings that closely resemble the various styles of the former bunkhouses scattered throughout Whitney Pier, especially at the "bottom of Henry Street" near the number 8 gate of the steel plant.

"Shacks" referred as well to other bunkhouse accommodations located on the plant grounds or on plant property within the area of Whitney Pier. The shacks were the most common shelter supplied by the steel company for unskilled Cape Bretoners and Newfoundlanders and for foreign workers, skilled and unskilled. Some of the earliest of these were specifically for African-American and Hungarian iron workers who, despite their negatively viewed ethnic and racial characteristics, were nevertheless also distinctive because they had been invited specifically by DISCO. Some shacks were

also located at various rural areas: at gravel and limestone quarries at Crawley's Creek and George's River; and at the origin of the water lines at Sydney River. Most of the rural shacks were occupied by Italian workers.⁷⁰ (Fig. 3-4)

There are innumerable references to "shacks" in relation to DISCO's Boarding Dept. When specific jobs were finished, or the shack materials were well used, the DISCO Boarding House Dept. would sell the shacks and/or their contents to the general public. For instance, in 1900, DISCO advertised a shack at Sydney River: "For Sale: furniture, sheets, blankets, mattresses, pillows, heating and cooking stoves ... very cheap, and a shack building 160 feet by 40 feet."⁷¹

When the shacks were used to house contract labour, it appeared to be the responsibility of the agent to feed the men; and the responsibility of the steel company to provide adequate housing, bedding, etc. In his descriptions of the work camps which held several hundred single men, Italian contractor Thomas Cozzolino recalled that he arranged for food for his men, and for an oven to cook bread. When he contracted to do work for DISCO in 1900 he noted: "I was ... permitted to ... supply my men with their necessary needs and was given free camps and room for my store to keep the

⁷⁰ Informal interviews with Ron DiPenta, 1990-1993. Also, "Warehouse and Shack for 50 Italians burned at George's River", *Record*, April 2, 1903, p.1.

⁷¹ Thomas Cozzolino Autobiography, p. 33; also, "For Sale", *Record*, August 14, 1900.

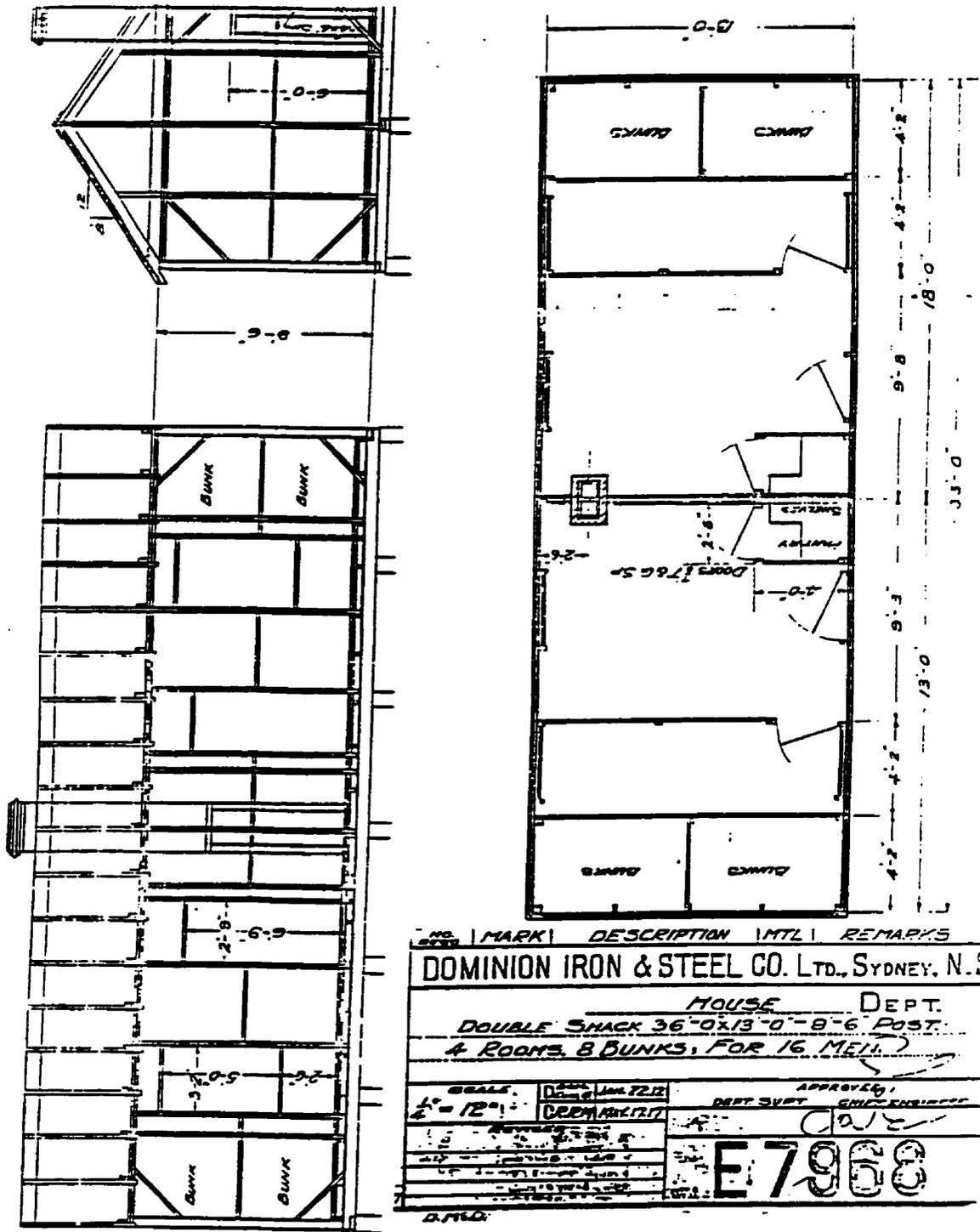


Figure 3-4: Elevation and floorplan for bunkhouse shacks. DISCO Plans. Elizabeth Beaton Collection MG 12, 198. Beaton Institute Archives.

provisions ... The company even built me a large oven to bake bread, all this free of charge." But when his Italians were sent to work at the DISCO limestone quarries at Marble Mountain in 1902 they returned to the U.S. because there were no living accommodations provided by DISCO.⁷²

According to oral tradition, the bunk houses for Cozzolino's construction workers were located on the steel plant property located across the S & L tracks just inside gate number five at Railroad Street. A 1907 Goad Fire Insurance Atlas of Sydney verifies this area as "Shackville" and shows a cluster of about twenty buildings of various shapes and sizes.⁷³ The newspapers of the time frequently found a connection between the Italians in their "shacks", and disease, violence, thievery, stupidity, or simply primitive living: "some Italians, while fooling with an explosive at their shack near the light station came near to setting a fire to the building"; "[A]n Italian charged with stabbing another at one of the shacks on Friday night was arrested this morning and subsequently released on bail."; "Italian charged with stabbing a woman named Ward at the shacks."; "Italian puts powder in stove at shacks; shack blows up."⁷⁴

⁷² Thomas Cozzolino Autobiography, pp. 29, 33. Cozzolino had stores in Montreal and other areas of Quebec which supplied provisions for eight Italian camps in eastern Canada.

⁷³ NMC 0026087, Map of Sydney, dated 1910. Also informal discussions with Ron DiPenta, 1985-1990.

⁷⁴ *Record*, Sept. 17, 1900; Sept. 25, 1900; Jan. 26, 1901; Feb. 14, 1901; April 13, 1901; August 8, 1901; April 2, 1903.

In 1905 there was an announcement in the *Sydney Post* that "the Italian shacks that crowned the hill near the S & L road [railroad?] near the coke ovens are being removed to near the pier where they are being fitted up into dwelling houses."⁷⁵ It can be assumed from this that at least some the buildings of Shackville had been moved to what is now an empty hillside area behind Fitzgerald Place. Either Italians continued to live in the shacks in their new location, or, the shacks simply took on the name, "Italian Shacks" because of the strongly negative feelings toward their first occupants. There is evidence that workers from other backgrounds lived there as well, as will be demonstrated later. One source on the various locations of these particular shacks is that they were used initially as bunk houses by the wire mills, then as horse stables, and were then carried on flat car to what is now called "Hunky Town" where plant carpenters converted the buildings into double family dwellings. It is likely that these buildings were set up in the same general area as the pieces of the Breton Hotel in what became known as "Hunky Town".⁷⁶

There is a 1902 reference to "coloured shacks" or to "old Steel Co.'s shacks" located "near the Steel Co.'s fence at the

⁷⁵ *Record*, Sept. 7, 1905.

⁷⁶ Interview, Steve Dziubek, 1986.

blooming mills".⁷⁷ A reporter accompanying police on a shooting investigation gave the following description of the building in which apparently both male and female Afro-Americans lived:

"... shacks where a delegation of coloured people of both sexes met them and took them up a dark stairway and through a hall to a room where they saw the dead man lay... Just going around the corner of this house they entered another equally dark and went up a flight of stairs and a door being pushed open revealed a crowd of men both white and coloured."⁷⁸

These "coloured shacks" appear to have been the former Italian shacks or "Shackville" on the 1902 map. Possibly they were the shacks moved to the hill behind present Fitzgerald Place. Or they were possibly the "shacks (mostly coloured tenants)", which remained on the plant property between Railroad Street and the blooming mills.⁷⁹ (Fig. 3-5) There is obvious confusion over the number and placement of company shacks, but it seems clear that there were a great number of workers houses on plant property in the early years of the plant's history, and that the bunkhouses were moved around as needed, both on and off the plant grounds.

The meagreness of the housing for black workers was

⁷⁷ "Squabble at Dance ends in Tragedy", Record, October 10, 1902., p.1.

⁷⁸ "Squabble at Dance...", Record, October 10, 1902; also, Record, July 9, 1903, has a reference to John Mayfield, a coloured man and his wife ... near their home in the steel co. shacks", p. 8.

⁷⁹ E. Goad Fire Insurance Atlas for Sydney, 1907, p. 14.

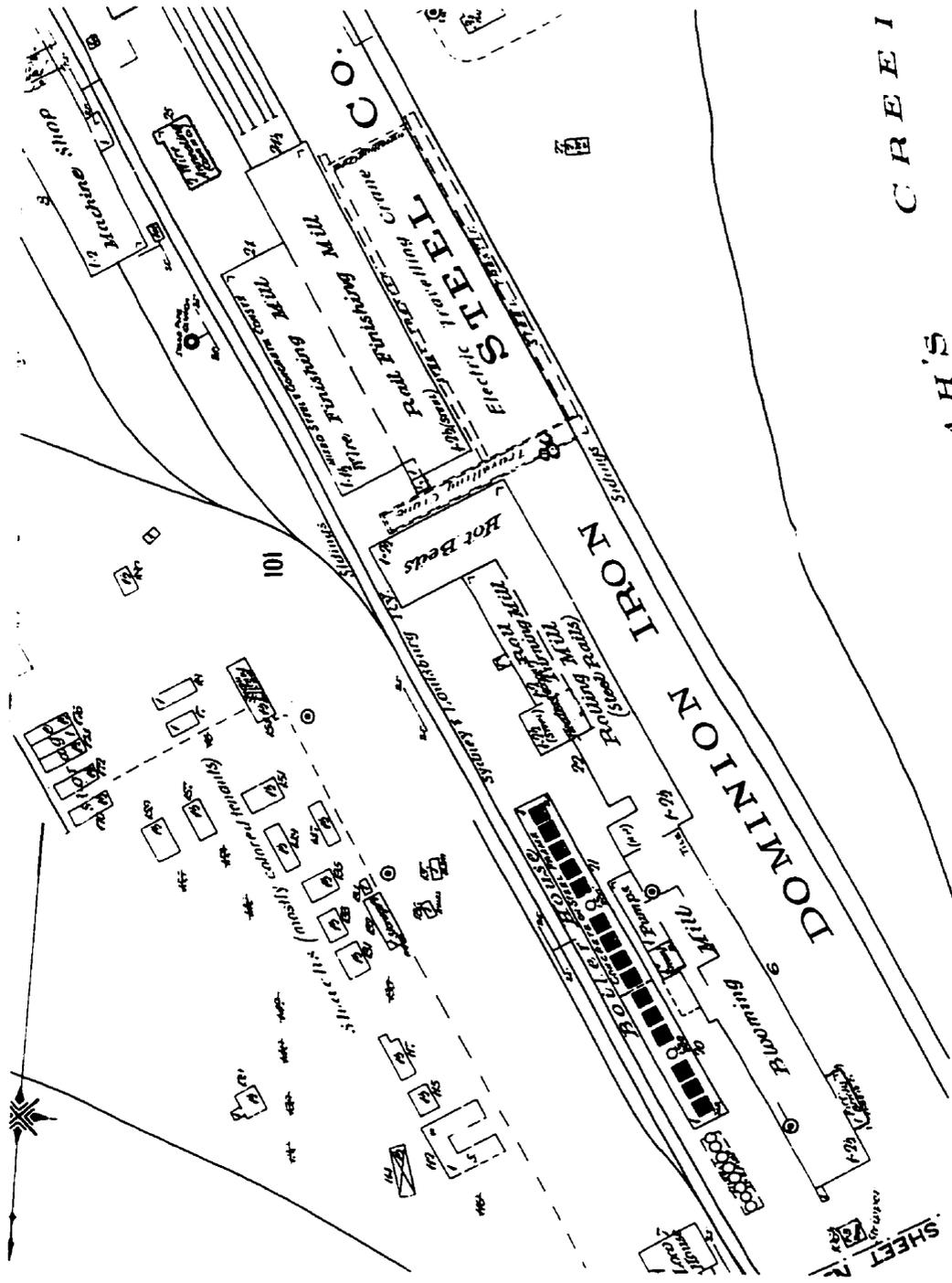


Figure 3-5: 1907 Goad Fire Insurance Atlas indicating "shacks, mostly coloured tenants". Beaton Institute Archives.

apparently for the cause of departure for 250 of them back to Alabama in January, 1903, after almost a year of unfulfilled promises. A spokesperson for the group, Walter Griffin, was quoted that "alluring promises of fine houses to live in, garden spots, and cheap living was held out to them".⁸⁰ A number of Hungarians also left around the same time because of dissatisfaction with their conditions.⁸¹ The Italians were in a slightly better position concerning accommodation because their agent seemed to be responsible for their welfare in a modified "padrone system".

The Poll Tax collectors appeared to express surprise in 1905 when they found that the "coloured quarters" in the Coke ovens was occupied "not by negros (sic), but by Hungarians, Poles and Newfoundlanders".⁸² This coincides with the possibility that most of the American black steel workers had left the area by 1904. In any case, their description of the "coloured quarters" in gives a picture of conditions in the shacks:

The conditions in some of these places are bad beyond description. Some of the houses are fairly clean, but the majority are exceedingly filthy. There is no sewage or water connection and the ventilation is foul. The beds are simply a big deal table about seven feet broad which runs down the whole length of the room. The men wrap themselves up in their blankets and lie on this

⁸⁰ "Negroes Walking Back to Alabama", *Record*, Jan. 17, 1903, p. 7.

⁸¹ *Record*, March 4, 1903, p. 3.

⁸² "Condition of the Coloured Shacks", *Post*, Nov. 26, 1905.

shelf as close as they can pack. There is also in the room a stove, which the inmates seem to think it a point of humour to keep as hot as possible, and hanging from the ceiling which is about ten feet high, are the spare clothes of the men. None of the beds are ever aired, for as soon as one shift is out of them, another is in.

⁸³

It is not clear whether Disco owned these shacks in 1905, or whether they were rented from the company by the workers who were responsible for supplies and conditions, or whether they were sold to local entrepreneurs to be rented to workers. We do know that only two years after the beginning of construction of the steel plant, shacks were less and less owned and controlled by DISCO. The steel company, in a 1901 statement regarding health conditions in Whitney Pier, noted that it "had only a few men in the shacks".⁸⁴ But evidently, the company held on to some shacks: during a strike in 1903, "the strikers, mainly Italians, got notice to quit their shacks".⁸⁵

The 1901 Census records seventeen "shacks", all of them accommodating Newfoundlanders labourers with an occasional foremen. There are cases of up to six fishermen from Newfoundland sharing lodgings in what must some sort of

⁸³ "Condition of the Coloured Shacks", *Post*, Nov. 26, 1905.

⁸⁴ "Board of Health", *Record*, May 1, 1901, p. 8.

⁸⁵ *Record*, March 4, 1903.

bunkhousing.⁸⁶ They were located at various places throughout Whitney Pier, especially the piers area, along Victoria Road, Lingan Road and Tupper Streets, Frederick Street, and adjacent to the coke ovens.

Although some of the shacks outside the plant property was owned by the steel company, most of them were owned by Whitney Pier business people. These shacks were rented by workers usually of the same ethnic or national background as the owners of the shacks. The Gallivan shacks, accommodating many Newfoundlanders, were on Tupper Street, just off Lingan Road, near his store. Buckley rented shacks near his drugstore on Buckley's Lane (now called Curry's Lane) near the Coke Ovens. Jewish merchants Nathanson and Brodie probably rented their respective shacks initially to Slavic workers. The Brodie shacks were located off Victoria Road behind his store, what is now Feder's Jewellery Store. They were two storey affairs enclosing an outdoor compound with a water tap and shared privies. The shacks were wooden structures with shingled or boarding sheathing, a veranda railing on the upper level and unfinished interiors. Each room had a double metal "bunk", a "pot-bellied" stove, a table and a chair.⁸⁷

An example provided by a photograph from a Social Gospel survey shows a detached, single storey wooden building, with

⁸⁶ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5. Also see Goad Fire Insurance Plans for Sydney, 1944 (1947), sheet no. 14 B.

⁸⁷ Frank Murphy, informal discussion, 1990. Joe Keller, interviewed by Toby Morris, MG 7, 2.

shingled siding and a shed roof.(Fig. 3-6) It has two entrances suggesting that it was intended for two people. The doors are panelled, leading to a low wide step that served both entrances. The steps seem to indicate some sort of shallow crawl space under the building. There are two-over-two windows on the side and front of the building. One assumes that they were furnished in the way described previously with the same outdoor facilities."⁸⁸

Throughout the boom period, concerns were raised about the health hazards and general appearance of the shacks. A reporter from the Post visited the Newfoundlanders' shacks or "shanties" in 1901 and saw:

nothing in all his life to equal some of them for reeking filth. It would appear as if the shacks had never seen a drop of water for years. When a man is sick in any of these, he is left all alone without care or attendance until his fellow workmen return at noon or in the evening. The offal and refuse of these shacks are simply thrown about the door or in fact anywhere. The place is low and marshy and the drinking water must necessarily be impure. The swamps about the area are filled with everything that is offensive. A dead cat has been lying on Low Point Road for weeks and no effort has been made to remove it. Perhaps the people themselves should make an effort to improve these things, but they say that they are paying the town for officials to do that work, and consequently nothing is done in the matter."⁸⁹

In 1904, the situation was exacerbated by an outbreak of small pox which seemed to be centred on Ward V, Whitney

⁸⁸ United Church of Canada Archives, "Shack", 1912 ca.

⁸⁹ "Coke Ovens District", Post, Sept.7, 1907.

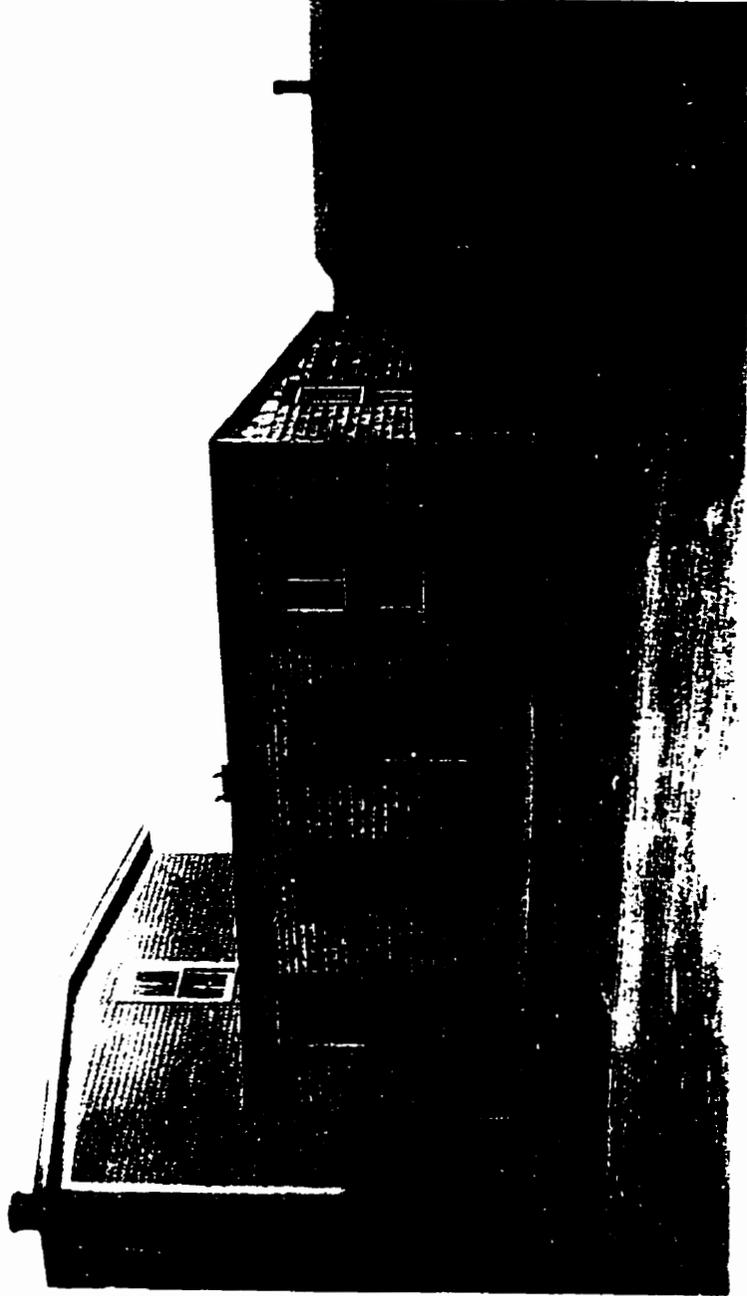


Figure 3-6: Shack, 1912 (ca.) United Church of Canada Archives.

Pier.⁹⁰ The mayor of Sydney declared the shacks to be a menace to the city and authorized the sanitary inspector to begin work in Whitney Pier. "Owing to there being no sewage system in the ward the conditions are worse than they would otherwise be. Sections of small shacks are distributed throughout the ward and it is claimed that they are none too clean, inside or outside."⁹¹ The mayor of Sydney noted that the workers claimed poor wages to be the reason for their living in the shacks. This was apparently a controversial point as other workers who lived in standard housing said that the willingness of workers to live in shacks kept wages down. Others said that shack dwellers refused to live in standard housing so that they could save more money.⁹² None of the points of views changed the fact that there was no sewage system in the area. The point about the lack of proper sewage and other city services was further made by firemen in reference to Hunky Town:

The fire on Ferris Street yesterday revealed a startling state of affairs with regard to the sanitary conditions allowed to exist in the block of buildings in which the fire took place. So great was the stench from badly kept outhouses, stopped drains and old garbage heaps, that the firemen found it almost impossible to work between the buildings for more than a few minutes at a time. It was the opinion of those who visited the scene yesterday that something should be done to provide a system of sewerage

⁹⁰ "Small Pox Situation", *Record*, April 1, 1904; "More Small Pox in Ward V", *Record*, April 2, 1904; "City Vaccination", *Record*, April 4, 1904.

⁹¹ "Ward V to be Inspected", *Record*, April 4, 1904.

⁹² "Ward V to be Inspected", *Record*, April 4, 1904.

for this place."⁹³

With the passing of time and the filling of Whitney Pier with immigrants, the term "shacks" was taking on a wider, more ambiguous, but still negative, connotation in Whitney Pier. Shacks were no longer only for single male labourers, but could refer to any buildings of what appeared to be insubstantial construction that housed immigrants, women and children as well as men. In February of 1901, an outbreak of diphtheria was reported in the "Hungarian shacks" in which a child died and in which seven "boarders" refused inoculation.

This may have been a 1901 census reference to eight Hungarian households, each with a "head" and a wife), a total of 11 children and 41 boarders; one house had 10 boarders. They appear sequentially and so probably are side by side along a street or in a close cluster of buildings."⁹⁴

Shacks continued to function as residences far into the 20th century. The Board of Health noted that the Gallivan and Nathanson shacks were "a nuisance" in 1914.⁹⁵ A 1930s "mental map" of Lingan Road shows shacks both on and off the plant property at the end on Lingan Road.⁹⁶ The Gallivan shacks were still in use during World war II while the Brodie

⁹³ "Yesterday's Fire on Ferris Street", Record, May 13, 1904.

⁹⁴ Canada Census, 1901, Sydney, District 5.

⁹⁵ "Board of Health Meets", Post, May 7, 1924.

⁹⁶ "Lingan Road: What it Looked like 60 Years Ago", by John Strasser (Sr.), Elizabeth Beaton Collection, MG12, 198.

and Nathanson shacks closed in the 1930s.⁹⁷ As recently as the 1970s, shacks previously used for single men and located on or near the plant were inhabited by single female parent black families at various places in the Coke Ovens neighbourhood.⁹⁸ In the mining towns of Cape Breton, shacks continued to be used as housing to the 1970s as well.⁹⁹ In other parts of Canada shack-type housing was observed as "slums" in a "western Canadian town" by Canada's Governor General Lord Byng of Vimy in 1927. It is described in the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* as, "Up this 3 ft alley there are 10 dwellings, with two insanitary toilets at the [end] rear end. At the front are two stores - all on a 255 ft lot. A bakery is next door."¹⁰⁰ What is particularly interesting about the illustrations is that it depicts the style of many of the Sydney shacks as they were portrayed in the 1907 and 1944 (1947) fire insurance plans.

It is clear that there was a social stigma attached to living in shacks in Whitney Pier. The very name of "shack", instead of "bunkhouse" -- or "hotel" in the case of the coke

⁹⁷ Informal discussions with Frank Murphy, 1985-1995.

⁹⁸ **Someone Should do something... to help improve our neighbourhood**, published by the Neighbourhood Improvement Program, Sydney, Nova Scotia, [1979], photo j.

⁹⁹ Jars Balan, **Salt and Braided Bread: Ukrainian Life in Canada** (Toronto: Oxford, 1984), p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Governor General Lord Byng of Vimy, speech to the Women's Canadian Club in Montreal, *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, Feb., 1927, p. 60.

ovens construction workers -- implied a class distinction that signalled transient single labourers and immigrants by the quality of their housing.

Hotels, Boarding Houses And Tenement Buildings

In Whitney Pier's boom period, there was a certain amount of cross-over in the definitions of hotel, boarding house and tenement accommodation. The demarcations often depended upon the relationship (in terms of kinship and services) between owners and the renters of the accommodations. But it might be said that most hotels and boarding houses accommodated single men and women, while tenements were more likely to house families, though they also served the needs of single tenants. Unlike the shacks and double- and single- family dwellings, the hotels, boarding houses and tenements were exclusively owned by local rather than corporate interests. All varied greatly in size and quality and in the perceptions of their status.

The Bonny View Hotel was located on the crest of a hill overlooking the whole plant, just above the old coal wash plant and the blast furnace area. Owned and operated by a widow, Mrs. Jane Drummond, the Bonnie View was probably one of the more comfortable hotels in Whitney Pier. It operated for a few years in the first decade of the century. At first it was called a hotel, by 1907, it was relegated to "boarding

house".¹⁰¹ It was, according to tradition, the stopping place of "visiting dignitaries" to the steel plant who probably had some hands-on consultancy function at the plant.¹⁰²

The construction was simple: a two and one-half storey wood frame building with a high gable roof. The front elevation faced the steel plant, and probably had a veranda and balcony from which to view the industrial masterpiece. The building is still extant, now serving as an ordinary dwelling; a Polish family owned the house from 1918 (ca.) until the 1980s.

The Atlantic Hotel was the other well-known hotel in Whitney Pier. Owned and operated by the O'Dell family, it was located on Victoria Road just up from gate number five, near the corner of Hankard Street. It was a squarish building with three full storeys and a mansard roof. Like almost all the other buildings in Whitney Pier, it was wood frame with shingle sheathing; the foundation was of stone. The two-over-two windows in the sides of the roof were within dormer gables, probably one for each room on the top floor. There are several regularly-spaced two-over-two windows on the first

¹⁰¹ **Sydney Directory**, 1903, 1907.

¹⁰² Honoured guests of the company were more likely to stay at the comparatively luxurious hotels in downtown Sydney, such as the Sydney Hotel on the Esplanade, the Windsor on Dorchester, or the Walcott on Ferry Street where the daily rates were as high as \$1.25. See, **Plan of the Town of Sydney** by McAlpine, 1902 (ca.); **Sydney Directory**, 1907.

and second floors, also indicating rooms. The hotel had a dining room, not only for its boarders, but also for roomers in nearby accommodations.¹⁰³ The Atlantic Hotel was distinctive in its longevity. It was run as a boarding house until the early 1950s by the original owner's widow, Mary O'Dell. Then it was torn down to make way for a gas station.¹⁰⁴

As a rule, hotels came and went in Whitney Pier. Most lasted only a few years; few that began early in the century lasted much beyond 1918. Those that persevered until the end of the First World War included the Royal Oak, on the corner of Laurier Street and Victoria Road; Hotel Frederick, also on Victoria Road; and Martinello's Hotel on Tupper Street. Others of more fleeting existence, from 1907(ca.) to 1914(ca.), included the Globe, the Castle, Quirk's, and Brunswick House "over Marshes store", all on Victoria Road near the overpass. In 1907 the Scandinavian Hotel was on the Shore Road near the Piers. The Tremont Hotel was on Tupper Street. In 1901, Christie MacAulay, Mary MacDonald and Mary Ann MacDonald are described as "hotel keepers" on the Shore Road near the International Pier. They employed a domestic,

¹⁰³ Description of Atlantic Hotel is from a photograph depicting a portion of the hotel at the Whitney Pier Historical Society Museum.

¹⁰⁴ Description and other details are based on informal discussions with Frank Murphy, 1985-1995.

Annie MacDonald, and kept eleven boarders.¹⁰⁵ Some of the hotel had bars, even during times of legally restricted selling of liquor. In 1905, there were 29 recognized "bar rooms", including those in 16 hotels.¹⁰⁶ Other hotels simply ran quiet bootlegging operations.

Less "fancy" hotels with a semi-permanent clientele were more common. They generally started off renting rooms by the day or week, but they usually devolved into cheap boarding houses where the tenants made their own meals in their rooms. One such hotel was the Scotia House, located near the bottom end of Lingan Road near the coke ovens, on the corner of Hankard Street. (Fig. 3-7) It was operated in 1901 by F.B.J. Nichols. When it opened it was advertised as accommodation "within easy reach of the Coke Ovens and the Steel Works. Good rooms, good table. Rate 4\$ per week... Good girls wanted."¹⁰⁷ It was a three story woodframe building, almost square, with a very low gable (almost flat) roof, and the main entrance on the gable end. It had one window on each side of the entrance, three windows each on the second and third levels. By 1912 the condition of the building was very deleterious and gives the impression that the patrons were not

¹⁰⁵ Some of these were considered to be dignified to be listed in the *Sydney Directory*, 1903, 1907, 1914, 1918; Canada Census Sydney, 1901.

¹⁰⁶ "Eighty Saloons in the City", *Post*, Sept. 26, 1905.

¹⁰⁷ *Record*, Feb. 26, 1901. Also, John Strasser (Sr.), map of "Lingan Road, Sixty Years Ago".



Figure 3-7: Hotel/boarding house. United Church of Canada Archives

especially comfortable. That it was not mentioned in the city directories suggests that its downhill slide began shortly after it went into service. These formal but not elaborate rooming and boarding houses persisted well into the 20th century, many to the end of World War II.

There were literally dozens of instances of boarding in private homes all over Whitney Pier. Of the 364 households recorded in Whitney Pier in 1901, 185 of them kept boarders.¹⁰⁸ These situations supplied meals and possibly laundry services for boarders as well as sleeping accommodation. The familiar story of more than one person per bed, sleeping in shifts, was frequently applicable in these cases. The 1901 Board of Health report on housing readily applied to these places, "In the Pier and the coke ovens districts, the boarding houses were overcrowded, beds were being constantly slept in, the night workmen turning in as soon as the day workers got up".¹⁰⁹ A boarding house remembered by a Polish immigrant was run by a Russian woman in Hunky Town. There were as many as sixteen men living in the small house. Meals were served in one large pot and each man, having his own spoon and bowl, serve himself in the communal setting.¹¹⁰ Others included Mrs. Riley's rooming house on the corner of Mt Pleasant Street and Victoria Road, Roddy

¹⁰⁸ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5.

¹⁰⁹ "Board of Health", Record, May 1, 1901, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Thomas Chmiel and Steve Dziubek, 1986.

Eldridge's Rooming House (and bar) near the Subway, and Jimmy Delorenzo's rooming house, also near the Subway.¹¹¹ There were also boarders in houses with no women, men "batching" it on a temporary basis.

The presence of females in a household -- whether wife, daughter, sister or "housekeeper", whether immigrant or locally born -- almost inevitably suggested a boarding house situation. This was especially true when the head of the household was single or widowed: the business was obviously an essential source of income.¹¹² Women who worked in or ran boarding houses frequently were implicated in sexual innuendo in the traditional lore of Whitney Pier. Often, the suggestion that these women were prostitutes was accurate, their pay being too meagre to live otherwise.¹¹³ Even the crowding in the hotels and boarding houses and other rented accommodation, the cause of the spread of disease, was associated with women. For instance, a small pox outbreak in April, 1904 spread through several boarding houses. It was

¹¹¹ Based on informal discussions with Frank Murphy, 1995.

¹¹² Much has been written on both the contribution and limitations of the role of women in the operation of boarding houses in immigrant/boom societies. For examples, Robert Harney, "Boarding and Belonging: Thoughts on Sojourner Institutions", in *Urban History Review*, vol. 78, no. 2 (1978), pp. 8-37; Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*.

¹¹³ For a broader perspective on prostitution in boomtown situations, see, Richard Symanski, *The Immoral Landscape: Female Prostitution in Western Societies* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1981); Marion Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1981).

suggested that the carrier of the disease was a maid, implying that she had sexual relations with several of the boarders.¹¹⁴

Tenements and other rented properties were considered by developers to have the best return for their high expenditure for land and for building. Not only were buyers were reluctant, but also renting was simply more profitable than selling: an eight room house rented in 1902 for \$22 per month.¹¹⁵ Many of the houses offered by developers for sale were large, often double, houses with as many as 17 "large" rooms. For instance:

Amongst the best class of ... tenements were those erected by F. L. Dixon. Mr. Dixon, in partnership with Mr. Gilpin, has built on Tupper Street, which by the way has been greatly improved lately, three large tenement houses of the latest type. Each of these houses contains three tenements all of which are equipped with every convenience."¹¹⁶

The tenements in the early years of Whitney Pier's development were often sold to prospective landlords who never lived in them or near them in many cases. Within a short time, however, immigrant entrepreneurs, even steel workers, began to be Whitney Pier landlords. A Barbadian arriving in 1906 found that being a landlord was a good back-up for his other enterprises:

¹¹⁴ "More Smallpox in Ward Five", Record, April 1, 1904; "Smallpox Situation", Record, April 2, 1904.

¹¹⁵ "Question of House Accommodation", Record, Sept. 15, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ "Cokeovia as a Suburb", Record, June 24, 1902, p. 5.

My father came here as a shoemaker. He worked at the steel plant for so long and then he went into business on his own. He brought a big building on Tupper Street with five bedrooms. Then he opened a shoemaker shop. Then we had a grocery store on Tupper Street in the same building and we had a confectionary across the street which was a confectionary. And then another building with four apartments. He always said, if anything ever happened to him, at least we'd have an income coming in.¹¹⁷

Many of the reports of fires in Whitney Pier during the first decade of the century suggest that a number of rented properties were of poor quality, or were allowed to run down, or were crowded on to small properties. The fires frequently started as a result of faulty stoves or wiring, and they quickly destroyed flimsy and crowded wooden buildings before the fire department could be effective. The buildings were often either not insured or insured for very little.¹¹⁸

Thomas Cozzolino maintained several "tenement" houses located on Tupper Street midway between Victoria Road and Lingan Road. Owned by a landlord who resided in Italy, the tenements were occupied by fifty Italian labourers employed at the steel works. They consisted of "a rather large building and the others, one of which was attached to the larger, were of ordinary size." The buildings were built of wood, like almost every building in Whitney Pier, and had upper storeys. The buildings were destroyed by fire in 1904 to a loss of

¹¹⁷ Beryl Braithwaite, "A Women's View", p. 83.

¹¹⁸ "For example, House Guttred on Henry Street", *Record*, March 8, 1904; "Two More Fires at Coke Ovens", *Record*, Oct. 4, 1904; "Yesterday's Fire on Ferris Street", *Record*, May 13, 1904.

about five thousand dollars.¹¹⁹

After the first two decades of the 20th century, many of the larger original single-family dwellings were made over into multi-unit rentals. The original owners were native Cape Bretoners who came to Whitney Pier to work as skilled tradespeople, but who soon moved across to Sydney. Although they apparently felt that their status was above living in Whitney Pier, they maintained their original homes as rental properties.

These places represented "low living" in terms of both architectural aesthetics and behaviour, as when there was a "shooting in front of Italian hotels" in 1901.¹²⁰ A journalist observed in the same year:

"Little Italy" and the Italian hotels are a unique feature of Cokeovia. These are four oblong, dull red, one storied structures, with windows few and small, small doors, and altogether of a most cheerless and depressing appearance. Their aspect on a dull rainy day would give an indigo tinge to the mind of the most optimistic and robust mortals. Here are lodged the Italian labourers, who live their sociable, contented if squalid lives, in the way they like best.¹²¹

Although the term "hotel" is used for this type of accommodation, they were in reality rented rooms. Photographic evidence indicates that there were few services

¹¹⁹ "3 Houses burned at Coke Ovens", *Record*, Oct. 21, 1904.

¹²⁰ "Tragedy at Coke Ovens", *Record*, August. 8, 1901.

¹²¹ "Local Topics", *Record*, June 25, 1901.

for the lodgers; the men had to cook in their rooms, hang their laundry from their windows and their bathrooms and privies were primitive and unsanitary if they existed at all.¹²² A correspondent for the Halifax Herald reported on the conditions of housing provided by another Italian agent:

The Italian quarter at the coke ovens is squalid, but not tough dives... Mr. Marazza (an employment agent) maintains a number of dwellings for the men which are orderly and in good condition. The men do their own cooking, are frugal livers trying to save every cent they can to send away.¹²³

The 1913 survey carried out by Methodists and Presbyterian social reformers showed clearly that ethnicity was a factor in renting or ownership, in overcrowding, in availability of utilities and in the price of rents. In the three areas surveyed -- two blocks in the Coke Ovens and one in Hunky Town, they discovered that Anglo Celtic peoples fared far better than non-Anglo-Celtic. In the Tupper, Lingan. Laurier block, where European and black immigrants predominated, 2/3 of the families rented, there were 130 boarders in a total population of 257, a higher ratio than in other Canadian cities of comparable size. In this block, there were a total of 144 rooms for 257 people. There were 11 inside toilets, nearly all of which had water connections. The average number of persons per house was 13.5 and nine per

¹²² Photograph of "hotel" on Ferry Street, 1912(ca.). United Church Archives of Canada Photo Collection.

¹²³ Cited in "Local Topics", *Record*, August 22, 1901, p.2.

apartment, and average rent per unit was \$11.94 per month.¹²⁴

The Laurier and Tupper street sections closer to Victoria Road had a considerable number of Canadians and Newfoundlanders, "a better class of workers". When the houses were put up for sale, there usually was an option to rent. An ad in 1902 offered a house on Laurier with eight rooms, ideal for two small families. "a rare opportunity" which was "also for rent " at \$53.00 per month.¹²⁵ About half the people in this district owned their houses, "the best in the district, many having electric light as well as bath and toilet". In this area, there were 46 boarders in 136 people; the average rent in smaller, older buildings was \$10.30. But there was less over-crowding with an average 8 persons per house and 121 rooms for 136 people. In both sections, the city ignored any civic duty toward the area: yards were strewn with rubbish and "absence of sanitary precautions in some cases [were] quite alarming".¹²⁶

We have seen that rented accommodation was the hall mark of the boom period in Whitney Pier. Rental situations provided acceptable accommodation for the early skilled workers involved in the construction and start-up of the Sydney Steel plant and also for the Dominion Coal Company workers.

¹²⁴ Brief Investigation of Social Conditions, pp.14-15.

¹²⁵ Record, Feb. 5, 1902.

¹²⁶ Brief Investigation of Social Conditions, pp. 14-15.

But as Whitney Pier filled with labourers, especially immigrant labourers -- most of whom were single males -- the status of renting changed. Many of the skilled workers who stayed in the region made their way to Sydney where they bought homes or were provided with company housing in Ashby. The labouring class which now made up most of Whitney Pier were not provided with company housing, but instead were accommodated in cheap hotels, boarding houses, tenement buildings or shacks. It is clear that rented accommodation was a signal, not only of transiency, but of reduced status in a general sense, in the context of Whitney Pier. The cause-and-effect relationship between class status, poverty, and lack of water and sewage services was evident in almost every case of rented housing. Correspondingly, disease and crime were often associated with rented housing and its occupants.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING A STABLE COMMUNITY

When a man looks around him and sees that this is his home, the place where, in addition to the mere problem of bread and butter, he must enjoy and bind these elements together in a civic union, a common purpose and a common end.¹ Cape Breton Post, 1902

In contrast to the transient society of the boom town, the stable period implied families and communities, and the belonging that came with a permanent "home".² For the people in Whitney Pier the choice to become "stable" hinged on whether to stay in Whitney Pier or to move to Sydney, or indeed, to move to another city. The building of homes in Whitney Pier coincided with the establishment of ethnic churches and mutual benefit societies. As locations were selected for permanent homes and communities were more firmly established on ethnic lines, then the lower status of multi-ethnic Whitney Pier was affirmed.

The signal of stability was home building. In Whitney Pier, this took different forms for different classes. Contractors built the houses of the middle class. Developers were active in building and selling to some skilled and semi-

¹ "Sydney of Tomorrow", Post, May 18, 1902.

² David E. Sopher, "The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social meaning", in D.W. Meinig(ed.), **The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays** (New York: Oxford University, 1979), pp.129-149. See also, Allen G. Noble(ed.), **To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes of North America**(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992).

skilled workers of Anglo-Celtic back ground. But, for the most part, houses were owner-built, especially those of the labouring or semi-skilled workers. For workers of limited means and their families, building a home was a mixture of tradition and innovation.

Defining "Stable" as Social Belonging

The definition of "stable" in the context of Whitney Pier must be seen in relationship to the "boom" period described in the previous chapter. Whereas the boom period indicated temporary living accommodations and a predominantly male population in which women were of suspect respectability, the stable period presented a situation that encompassed men, woman and children in familial circumstances, in permanent housing that they themselves owned and which they often had a hand in building.

In the definition of "stable", the Cape Breton economic situation must be taken in consideration of a more world-wide political economy. One might rightly expect that the economic and labour problems following the First World War had a negative effect on Whitney Pier, the events of this time bringing home the realization that the boom -- including the stimulation of the war years -- was over. Indeed, many trades and business people of Anglo-Celtic descent left the Pier during this period. But, for people coming from war-torn countries, who lost homes and families, and could look forward

only to the formidable task of rebuilding life in a devastated economy, Whitney Pier offered a safe haven beyond their fondest dreams. (Fig. 4-1) Their immigration chain was bringing them to family members who held jobs in industry, and who had prospects far greater than those left behind.

In Whitney Pier, the beginnings of a stable community were further characterized by co-existence with social and religious institutions which promised a supplement to family life and could lead to generational permanency.³ The mainstream Christian congregations, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and Anglican were functioning in Whitney Pier since the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, by the City's incorporation, Whitney Pier already had several Protestant churches or "missions": Victoria Methodist, St. James Presbyterian, St. Alban's Anglican, African Methodist Episcopalian, -- and a Salvation Army Citadel. Holy Redeemer Catholic Church was built in 1902. Shortly afterwards, the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches became active in providing religious, social and educational services for rural migrants and immigrants through St. Mark's Presbyterian Mission on

³ J.W. Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Burlington, Ontario: Welch, 1988) aptly outlines the function of the mainline Christian churches in the "dawn of Canada's Century", esp. pp.91-112. The importance of religion to immigrants is presented in the *Generations Series: A History of Canada's Peoples*; see also Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Bodnar, *The Transplanted*.



Figure 4-1: Immigrant family in front of home. United Church of Canada Archives.

Fisher Street. As early as 1901, the Social Gospel Movement of the Presbyterians and the Methodists was active with "foreigners", particularly in the Coke Ovens area; they probably contributed to the establishment of St. Stephen's Hungarian Presbyterian church located on the corner of Lingan Road and Tupper Street and to an Italian Presbyterian Mission on Lingan Road in 1912. The Methodists and Presbyterians subsequently established a "United Mission" at the Italian mission, and a Community House was built on Victoria Road by 1920. In the early teens, there was almost an explosion of "ethnic" religious and social institutions as each immigrant group undertook to build its own place of worship. St. Nicholas Italian Catholic Church was built on Hankard Street in 1912; the construction of St. Mary's Polish Catholic and Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Churches began in 1913. These Catholic "ethnic" churches apparently were built in response to the 1912 destruction by fire of the large Roman Catholic Church, which, incidentally, was almost immediately rebuilt. The Adath Israel Hebrew Synagogue was built on Mt Pleasant Street in 1913. The Russian Consulate built St. George's Russian Orthodox Church on Breton Street in 1916 which also served many Ukrainian Orthodox parishioners; St. Phillip's African Orthodox Congregation operated out of a series of buildings until it built a permanent place on Hankard Street

in 1921.⁴ For the immigrants, mutual benefit societies were established and halls built even before the construction of church and the synagogue; indeed, the need for a place of worship usually sparked the formation of benefit societies. The benefit societies, male dominated, undertook the building of religious buildings in order to make the community more amenable to families.

Readily described in social terms, Whitney Pier as a stable community has ambiguous temporal parameters. It might be said that the stabilizing period was an on-going process that has extended over the first four decades of the history of Whitney Pier. It was not an event that stabilized the community, but a series of conscious actions that spoke of group and individual attachment and commitment to place and common sense responses to the human need for shelter.

The housing that became homes gave these people their first important symbol of belonging in a new environment. Owner-built, permanent homes, more than any other material object, symbolized commitment. Homes meant commitment, not only in their original intent to house families, but also in superior workmanship and their survival as well-kept buildings

⁴ Elizabeth Beaton, "A Tale of Three Churches"; "Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity of West Indians"; "St. George's Russian/Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Whitney Pier", Report, MG12, 198, Beaton Institute, 1985; "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904"; "Churches of the Pier", in Elizabeth Beaton and Mary Keating, *From the Pier, Dear: Images of a Multicultural Community* (Sydney: Whitney Pier Historical Society, 1993), pp. 39-52.

to the present day. Homes, maintained to the acceptable standards of their cultural context, become part of neighbourhoods which "provide a familiar place, a focus for daily activities, and a set of informal social networks".⁵ Homeownership also responded to a desire for respectability and stability, particularly valued in a time of economic instability and economic insecurity.⁶

The house and family as a symbol of belonging held through the good and bad times of Whitney Pier. To be sure, the periods of down times at the steel plant -- the Depression, dozens of lay-off periods, and a number of strikes -- accounted for departures of workers and their families. But with their faith in the future of steel in Cape Breton, the roots of the family remained, along with the family home.

Deciding to Stay

It might be suggested that the middle class farmers of the pre-Whitney Pier period represented "stability" in their establishment of a solid community base within the context of farming and the early shipment of coal through the area and

⁵ L.S. Bourne and T. Bunting, "Housing Markets, Community Development, and Neighbourhood Change", in L.S. Bourne and D. Ley(eds.), *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities*(Montreal:McGill-Queen's, 1993), p. 186. See also, Agnew, "Home Ownership and Identity in Capitalist Societies", in which he points out links between homeownership and community consciousness.

⁶ Duncan, "Home Ownership and Social Theory", pp. 119-120.

from its piers in the 19th century. But, as we have seen, their particular farming society disintegrated with the boom - - the coming of H.M. Whitney, the building of additional piers, and the steel plant -- and the subdivision of their agricultural land for the use of newcomers. These elite landowners and their descendants found themselves in a "sizing-up" of Whitney Pier as a new industrial, ethnically-mixed area, and many of them decided to move across the creek to Sydney. Some stayed however, at least for a time, contributing to community within the industrializing period by being either municipal authority figures or part of the commercial activities of the Pier.

The arrival of tradespeople and mechanics and their families, particularly rural migrants and returned workers from the United States, beginning as early as 1893 and peaking about 1900, also presented circumstances suggesting a stable community. Like the landowners in their search for appropriate status, many tradesmen and skilled industrial workers decided to move to Sydney as time passed. For both groups, those who went to Sydney and those who stayed in Whitney Pier, stabilization was a gradual process, based in good jobs and the luxury of extended decision-making. Despite the large number who left, it was the homes of these two groups that signified the beginnings of a settled community in the first two decades of the 20th century.

Young, single labourers and semi-skilled workers -- often

immigrants -- experienced the most dramatic change in living conditions in Whitney Pier. Having made Whitney Pier one of their stops as they travelled across the North American continent finding working wherever they could, they stopped their wandering after World war I and made their decision to stay in Whitney Pier as women and children joined them and families took shape. The immigrants' decision to stay was probably not as spontaneous as it was charged with the on-going drama of struggle for survival, for they had to make a judgement as to whether the steel industry would support them over an extended period of time. Most did not build permanent homes as soon as women arrived; rather, many spent several years staying with relatives or renting while they saved their money. Like the Anglo-Celtic peoples, they too were "sizing up" the possibilities of staying permanently in Whitney Pier. Their decision was undoubtedly forced by the birth of children, or their children's arrival from overseas. But moving to Sydney was not an option for those who decided not to stay; instead they moved on to larger centres like Toronto or Montreal. Those who stayed formed the stable core of the modern Ward Five community.⁷

⁷ Byington, *Homestead*, chapter IV, "Rent in the Household Budget", discusses the various economic factors for both native Americans and immigrants in the decision to settle in an industrial town.

Mass Production, Building Practices and Financing

The house types to be discussed here, like the housing in the previous chapter, were not unique to Whitney Pier. They were to be found in other places in North America in more or less matching time spans, for these forms were ubiquitous as part of the continent's entry into the new era of suburbanism, beginning about 1870 - 80 in the United States and rather later in Canada. Within this context, one of the greatest changes to the building trades was the availability of house plan catalogues or pattern books through the major lumber suppliers or by mail order. Although catalogues of plans were being mailed out as early as the 1840s, they became a *tour de force* in the 1870s and 1880s with the "suburbanization" of North America cities, with developers and catalogue distributors all the while claiming adherence to "rural" values and aesthetics.⁸

The text of the pattern books consistently strove for a tone of dignified economy and where possible, added some touches of elegance. Pattern books discussed the finishings of the proposed home, outlining the importance of the woman's work as a housewife or possibly as a woman with servants:

Pantries should be ample... and connected with a separate china closet by a slide. Abundance of drawers and shelving, a closet to hold a flour barrel, another for

⁸ Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, pp. 41, 42. Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962) [1969], p. 90, also observed the search for the "rural ideal" in the housing of new suburban areas in Boston.

jugs and demijohns, plenty of pot hooks, and a cupboard with four or more shelves.... A china closet should be fitted with a case of drawers.... I mention all these things because a good house keeper's rule is, 'A place for everything and every thing in its place'. ... If a woman is well pleased with her kitchen and its appointments, she will overlook many shortcomings in other departments. ... let the house be elegant and convenient in its other parts and its kitchen cramped and poorly arranged, she will never be content.⁹

The importance of the front hall as a measure of status was implicitly stressed in both the patterns and the text: "Let the house be ever so large, if the entrance hall is narrow and dark, there is at once a sense of suffocating on entering; and though other apartments might be spacious, the visitor does not leave with that impression".¹⁰ The piano was also considered, in the proper suburban home, to be a way to keep the women happy and a basic essential of family life.

In some cases, undoubtedly to appeal to immigrants, the catalogues openly or covertly promoted an ethnic aesthetic. Alan Gowans noted that Jens Pederson's 1922 edition of worker's cottages had designs, with "not surprisingly, a Scandinavian flavour, things much like them being built in Sweden, especially in those same years, and Pederson may well have been importing ideas direct. Certainly the ethnic origins of so many Minnesotans could have made Pederson's vaguely Scandinavian designs appealing". In the pattern book,

⁹ Frank Smith, *A Cosy Home: How it was Built* (Boston: T.O. Metcalf and Co., 1887), p. 16.

¹⁰ Frank Smith, *Cosy Home*, p. 20.

Pedersen declared that his primary object in publishing the plans was to allow the worker to build for himself, "for by doing, he is creating for himself a standing of permanency and prestige in the community".¹¹

Despite the extravagant illustrations and extended textual explanations, the pattern books advanced a limited selection of basic styles: classical or gothic revival, the four-square, adaptations of American and British "colonial", bungalow and semi-bungalow. The challenge for customer interest seemed to be in the illustration of distinctive style variations or decorative additions, and in presenting interesting text regarding building methods and costs. The message delivered by the "democratic" titles and by the text was not only that the houses were affordable, but that they could be built without an architect or a contractor.¹²

Like the varieties of styles, the floor plans in the pattern books were more standard than innovative, based on

¹¹ Gowans, *Comfortable House*, pp. 13, 45.

¹² A few examples: Frank Smith, *A Cosy Home: How it was Built*; The Cooperative Building Plan Association, *The Complete House Builder with Hints on Building* (Chicago: Donohue, Hennebury and Co., 1890); D.S. Hopkins, *Houses and Cottages: A Collection of House and Cottage Designs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: D.S. Hopkins, 1893); S.B. Reed, *House Plans for Everybody: For Village and County Residences... with Practical Suggestions* (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1882); *Dustman's Book of Plans and Building Construction* (Chicago: Charles C. Thompson Co., 1910). Also, Alan Gowans, *Comfortable House*, gives a comprehensive list in bibliographic notes, including a catalogue from the Alladin Company: *Low Cost Homes Designed especially for Industrial Purposes* (1920), which also sold ready-cut houses for "cold climates", pp. 61, 62.

earlier styles and in keeping with the transitional period from rural to urban. The two-storey plans were a narrowed-down "Georgian" style: front entrance hall with a stairway against the wall; living room off entrance hall; dining room off living room, kitchen at the rear of the house with entry from the entrance hall and the dining room; rear entry to the kitchen. The floorplan for the four-square house was almost identical. The "colonial" style, with doorway centrally placed on a long facade, had a dining room opposite the living room off the entrance hallway, making a very large living room. Sometimes a four-square houses had pretensions to the colonial style. The recommended "bungalow" form had the living room, dining room, and kitchen on one side of the house with two bedrooms separated by a bathroom on the other side.

The "colonial" style was relatively rare in the early years of Whitney Pier. The floor plans for the foursquare and classical/gothic revival gable entry houses remained pretty standard, with some changes occurring in the relative size of rooms. In the gable entry styles, the plan did not change considerably either, unless there was an ell which contained the kitchen and porch, leaving the core area for the living room and dining room.

The changes in the bungalow plans in Whitney Pier were the most dramatic. The most common adjustment was to make it a "semi" bungalow or one and one-half storey home instead of one living level and an attic. The modified form had two

bedrooms and bath upstairs, downstairs had living room and dining room on one side of the houses, and a bedroom and kitchen on the other side. The change allowed for a kitchen twice the size suggested in the plan.¹³ Furthermore, the "breakfast nook" so popular in the pattern books of the 1930s was lost on working class people: that space was either used as pantry, or to make the kitchen larger. Because of the tendency of the bungalow plans to depict the second half storey as "attic" space, the stairs went from the kitchen. In practice, the stairway was usually, but not always, just inside the front entrance, centrally located. This was a concession to the apparent preeminence of the front entrance and hallway, but the hall was narrow and primarily a way to the kitchen rather than a receiving area. The bungalow floorplan was particularly subject to change, because as one Ukrainian immigrant stated, in reference to the entrance hall, "The English (English-speaking peoples) waste space".¹⁴

Gowans discusses these new styles and less new floorplans in the context of the suburbanization of North America and suggests that new tastes and styles of living dictated changes in the "social function" of houses -- such as the more

¹³ The large kitchen is in keeping with farm and working class homes across Canada. Wetherell and Kmet discuss the importance of kitchens in *Homes in Alberta*, pp. 85-87; Marc Denhez, *The Canadian Home: From Cave to Electronic Cocoon* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1994), p. 45, suggests that the social importance of the kitchen emanated from the fact that it was often the only warm room in the house.

¹⁴ Interview with Joseph Mulak, 1987.

democratic use of the parlour, previously reserved for strangers or the clergy.¹⁵ In Whitney Pier, this new approach to the use of space was true for the entrepreneurial and managerial classes. The elements of the basic floorplan that most clearly depicted status were the front hallway, the dining room, and the living room. In elite houses these areas were large and "used". However, for most of the industrial community of Whitney Pier, the respect for the parlour or "front room" held firm as it did in the farming era: it was for clergy or other special people on special occasions. Even in modern times, when entry from the street to the front door became more common, visitors continued to be entertained in the kitchen. Some house-owners didn't bother with front steps, so little use was there for these "good" rooms. The steel or coal transportation workers always returned home by way of the back entrance to the kitchen where they dumped their sooty or muddy work clothes in the back porch.

The dining room usage was perhaps of even greater importance as a statement of status and class than the living room. Despite the existence of an ornate dining room table and matching chairs, eating was done by the working class at the large kitchen table. The possible exceptions were Christmas or Easter family celebrations. In families where the living room began to acquire some social function, the dining room continued to be virtually ignored, except as a

¹⁵ Gowans, *Comfortable House*, p.28.

repository for family memorabilia and the "good" dishes. One resident of Polish descent declared, "Some days I don't go in there at all."¹⁶

The chief differences between older style buildings and the types that took hold around 1880 through the proliferation of catalogues were in construction techniques. They included the finishings which were mass produced. These were closely related to the types of skills required and the requirement that the cost be within the reach of the working man with a family. Of the dozens of contractors in Sydney in the first three decades of the 20th century, there were several who offered standard or custom-cut building materials including doors, sashes, mouldings, etc. Rhodes and Curry, Stephenson's, and Chappell's were the chief manufacturers of these products and they surpassed the other builders in terms of contracts and success. In 1913, the Daily Post in proclaiming Sydney's success in 1912, announced that Chappell Bros. had enough manufacturing orders to keep it through the 1913 winter and that it was building an additional warehouse; furthermore, Rhodes, Curry and Co. had business amounting to more than a half million dollars in 1912.¹⁷

Another revolutionary building innovation was the replacement of the old heavy timber mortise and tenon/wooden

¹⁶ Discussion with Antonina Ryba, 1993. Gerald Pocius, In **A Place to Belong**, notes similar attitudes toward the parlour and dining room in Newfoundland homes, pp. 221-222.

¹⁷ "Sydney Progresses during 1912", *Post*, March 22, 1913.

pegging technology with balloon framing or "half-balloon framing". The old way was regarded as sacred by some: "many timbers of small dimensions, securely fastened in place by spiking... with long angle braces, the studs and joists close together... the plates that lay upon the studs of two thicknesses securely spiked".¹⁸ And changes did not happen without resistance. In 1882 a New York architect deplored the balloon framing as "really not framing at all", a method requiring little or no skill, "hiding deficiencies" by an inexpert "helper" or "rough carpenter", an "RC".¹⁹ However, balloon framing with its speed and relative efficiency became accepted with minimal concession to the old style, i.e., the posts and sometimes the studs were tenoned into the sills. The number of nails, rather than heaviness of timbers, was believed to give strength to the building, but perhaps more importantly, nails saved money and time.

The heating system and cooking facilities in the homes of Whitney Pier of this period reflected both mass production and local industries. Stoves had been common in Cape Breton since about 1860, but mass production made the basement furnace the heating innovation of the early 20th century. Coal, the fuel of choice across North America, was even more accessible to the people of Whitney Pier, for employees of both the coal and steel companies received coal at a special price for many

¹⁸ Smith, *A Cosy Home*, pp.45, 50.

¹⁹ S.B. Reed, Architect, *House-Plans for Everyone*, p.73.

years. They used it for both cooking and heating until the 1950s and 1960s. At that time electric stoves became more common for cooking and the furnace used both coal and oil. Until very recently, coal was used extensively as a heating fuel in Whitney Pier.

The plant offered yet another advantage in terms of heating and cooking systems: the forges and foundry made many of the grates and sometimes entire furnaces for steelworkers and their extended families. These jobs, known as "rabbit jobs", were winked at by the company and were commonplace until the plant's foundry closed in 1990.²⁰

Class status decided who did the actual construction of the homes. Contractors commonly built homes for the middle class elite and the managerial class at the plant, and sometimes for the skilled steelworkers and mechanics. For the contractors in the new industrial community of Whitney Pier, the building of homes for a stable society was simply an extension of the incredible boom which built the steel plant, the docks, commercial and financial establishments, tenements or other temporary housing for workers. But, by the 1920s, there was a marked decrease in the construction of homes in Whitney Pier built by Chappell's, Stephen's, Rhodes and Curry, or smaller building contractors. Instead, the labouring class, including immigrants, began to undertake the

²⁰ Steel Project papers, photos, tapes. Beaton Institute, MG 14, 206. See also *Making Steel*, NFB and Beaton Institute video production, 1993.

construction of their own homes, or at least did not use the services of established contractors. This was a signal of the end of the boom period and an affirmation of Whitney Pier as an area of lesser status.

Within this new context, the distinction between "owner-built" and "contractor-built" became clouded by the levels of skills used and by the systems of informal "contracts" involving kin or ethnic networks. In these arrangements, the builders worked as individuals or as family teams; they might be "real" carpenters, or they might be rough carpenters with some degree of experience. The "contractor's" reputation, spread by word of mouth, was based on a number of factors besides workmanship, such as honesty, reliability, and resistance to alcohol usage.

Sometimes a carpenter might stay with a house-building job to its completion, with varying degrees of assistance from the owner and the owner's friends or relatives. But, more often, the practice was to have the carpenter "start" or "frame" the house; after that, the carpenter became a "consultant", giving advice from time to time as needed. Many of the carpenters combined their work with yard labour at the steel plant. Carpentry was much more lucrative, even when helpers were paid: in 1938, \$2.50 per day at the plant compared to two hundred dollars for two days of framing. An immigrant yard labourer, who learned his trade as a carpenter's helper in Poland, actually turned down a full-time

steel working job. With six children to educate, he could not afford to give up his carpentry job.²¹

The most popular housing styles that represented a stable community in Whitney Pier were the "classical/gothic revival" or "gable entry" and the "four square" house. Both types were common in the Maritime region, representing the period, 1880 - 1930. Indeed, they were common across North America and were available in books of building plans before 1900.²² It was the modification of the core forms of the gable entry and the foursquare types that indicated their status, -- size, additions of wings or extensions, and structural decorations such as bay windows, brackets, etc.

The classical/gothic revival or gable entry appears to have signified the pristine aesthetics of rural living. One of the most popular variations was a "winged" variation of the rectangular core form, illustrated in design 33 in the **Chicago House Wrecking Company** catalogue, described as "a combination of country and city home".²³ It could be considered "country" in the sense that might have two or more facades, (and was therefore not totally "street" oriented)

²¹ Interview with Joseph Mulak, 1987.

²² **The Complete House Builder; Dustman's Book of Plans**, Plan no. 63. They were also included in, **Houses and Cottages: A Collection of Houses and Cottage Designs**, containing 58 designs costing from \$150 - \$1,500 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: D.S. Hopkins, 1893); **The Radford Ideal Homes: 100 Homes** (Chicago: Radford Architectural, 1906).

²³ Cited in Gowans, **Comfortable House**, p. 33.

indicated by dormer gables, extended verandas, or roof pediments on the wings, which could be variable in height, length or depth. The dormer gable on the side facade was especially reminiscent of rural houses of the previous era.²⁴

The four-square house has become known as the "Amherst house" by recent Atlantic Canada scholars because of its popularity in the Nova Scotia town of Amherst in its industrializing years.²⁵ Because of its symmetrical proportions, it became especially popular as a prefabricated house and was available from Sears and Roebuck through one of its earliest catalogues in 1908.²⁶ The "foursquare" house also underwent design variations, depending on the status of the owner. Sometimes the building was elongated by almost half again, still keeping its illusion of "square-ness" because of its facade and hipped roof or roofs. It often sported one or more hipped gable dormers, in keeping with the roof style with usually two windows.

Peterborough, Ontario, provides an interesting comparison to the Sydney experience in its housing vis-a-vis its

²⁴ Gowans, in *The Comfortable House*, p. 30, points out that cultural snobbery decreed that the "back" of the house so important to the working class should be eliminated.

²⁵ Tye, "The Housing of a Workforce"; Muise, "The Great Transformation"; also, Latremouille, *Pride of Home* notes that the type was found in Canso, Nova Scotia, p. 56.

²⁶ Cited in Gowans, *Comfortable House*, p. 52. The mail order prefab was not generally popular in Whitney Pier, probably because lumber was easily accessible, and because the construction could be done more cheaply on the site.

historical context as an industrial city of the nineteenth century. Provided by the General Electric during the period 1880-1910 (ca), Peterborough's houses were earlier versions of the Sydney houses. Brick-sided houses were built close to the G.E. plant, wood frame/shingle sheathing was used farther away. In Peterborough, the foursquare type occurred, especially where middle management was housed; but the most common type is the gable entry house, which was characterized by one or more gable pediments, even in smaller versions.²⁷

The gable entry and the four-square styles were especially familiar to return migrants from New England. The proof of this is found in almost every rural and urban family of Nova Scotia. The migration of young men to New England in the late 19th century, and their return a few years later almost inevitably resulted in the construction of a new such home.²⁸

Finding capital was obviously a factor and sometimes an obstacle to building a home, especially to semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The average cost of buying land and building a house was about \$2000.00, not including some of the finishing required in the second floor. Newspaper

²⁷ Fieldwork carried out in March, 1993. Also see, Elwood Jones, *Peterborough: the Electric City* (Burlington: Windsor press, 1987), and *Scientific American* (1896), for a series of related plans.

²⁸ Ennals and Holdsworth, "The Cultural Landscape of the Maritime Provinces", in D. Day, *Geographical Perspectives on the Maritime Provinces* (Halifax: St. Mary's University, 1988) pp. 1-14; Latremouille, *Pride of Home*, pp.32-33;

advertisements seemed to assure the fully employed skilled steelworkers and mechanics that loans were available for building from developers. DISCO and Dominion Coal, like other major North American industrial companies, provided loans to build or to buy company housing.²⁹ Until the 1920s, the semi-skilled and unskilled workers had to have their supervisors verify their employment. Others had to have someone of means "co-sign" their loans. Still, it appears that finding capital to build in the Pier did not present serious problems in the early period.³⁰

However, after 1930, the attitude toward developing the Pier changed, participated at least in part by the Depression, but also by the outsider view of the community. When Duncan MacKay attempted to get a loan through the National Canada Housing Act (1938, following the Dominion Housing Act of 1935), he was turned down because he planned to build in Ward Six of Whitney Pier, instead of the Ashby area where the Act was concentrating its energy. After World War II, returned

²⁹ Margaret Byington, *Homestead*, p. 58, discusses the loan activities of land developers and the Carnegie Steel corporation in the pittsburgh area during the first decade of the twentieth century.

³⁰ A survey of the Cape Breton County Registry of Deeds indicates the presence of several local loan or "trust" companies; Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, pp. 113-116 discuss the role of local and national trust companies in providing financing for home purchase and construction; see also Weaver and Doucet, *Housing the American City*, especially chapter 6, "Crafting Home Finance: Mortgages as Artifacts of Law, Business and the Interventionist State, 1790s-1980s", pp. 243-304.

veterans ran into the same problem as they tried to get loans through the Veterans Land Act (1942).³¹ In these cases, the workers who built homes went to loan companies such as Eastern Saving and Loan or to the local banks, with the support of a co-signer, where interest was set at three to four per cent. However, the Royal Bank persisted in turning down such requests.

In the angry opinion of Whitney Pier residents, the presence of Slavic immigrants and Blacks from Nova Scotia and the West Indies caused the Pier to be perceived as unsuitable for development and hence for financing. The Slavic immigrants, who built mainly in the 1930s and 1940s, were unaffected by this prejudice. They almost always preferred not to get loans, but rather saved money for each successive segment of their buying and building. Saving and paying cash was probably a necessity given the attitudes toward immigrants and the Depression, but it appears also to have been a cultural norm in keeping with their preference for building their own homes.³²

Farmer/ Landowner/ Middle Class

One of the early landowners was James Carlin whose home

³¹ John R. Miron, *Housing in Post War Canada: Demographic Change, Household Formation and Housing Demand* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1988), p. 243.

³² Interviews with Duncan MacKay, Margaret Fitzgerald, Antonina Ryba, 1993.

provides a unique present-day example of early Whitney Pier. Although he started out as a farmer with 250 acres living on Lingan Road, he was, by 1896, depicted as a "general dealer" on Victoria Road.³³ Along with his farming he would presumably sell his farm produce in the town of Sydney, as well as ship it to Newfoundland. Later his store became a general retail establishment: his store is documented by photographs from in the late 19th century.

James Carlin was, along with the others along Victoria Mines Road and Lingan Road, one of the comfortable and landed elite of the town of Sydney in the 1870s. Later, their sons acquired positions such as harbour master, pier master, yard master, or clerk in the coal and steel companies. James Carlin's son, Peter held the position of postmaster and telephone operator, along with the farm and store inherited from his father.³⁴

James Carlin's home was situated on the crest of a hill overlooking the section of shore which, in the 1870s, was the International Pier, now the DEVCO coal piers. It is perhaps the one house remaining in Whitney Pier with its front doorway facing the ocean, the source of its owner's livelihood. The

³³ Canada Census, 1891: Cape Breton County, Sub-district 5; *Sydney Directory*, 1896.

³⁴ Canada Census, 1901: Sydney, District 5; *Sydney Directory*, 1903. In 1901, Peter took over the 250 acres of land on which stood, besides the store, four dwellings to accommodate his mother, his aunt, three sisters and two brothers.

present address is 13 Church Street. Even though many owners have come and gone since it was built, it continues to be called "the Carlin house".³⁵

The style and dimensions of the wood frame one and one-half storey house are typical of many rural and village homes in Nova Scotia dating 1820 to 1860. The basic features of this house -- rectangular form, wood frame, gable roof, wood sheathing -- were all borrowed from New England through various transmigrations: Pre-Loyalist, Loyalist and work migrations during late 19th century. Because of similarities between the two regions in terms of climate and accessible building materials, this and other similar designs spread all through the Maritime provinces. This style seems to have been common in the Maritimes coincidentally with or just after the variations of the Cape Cod house, though both styles were common throughout the 19th century. The main difference is the replacement of the large central chimney of the Cape Cod variations for two smaller chimneys, each placed half way to the end gable wall. Exact chronology of housing style is virtually impossible because of differing times of settlement and differing preferences within communities. Based on its popularity, Ennals and Holdsworth refer to the style of the Carlin house as "Maritime vernacular"; Gerry Pocius noted the extension of the type into Newfoundland, also recognizing its

³⁵ The present owner is Ivan Boone.

connections with the Cape Cod form.³⁶

The Carlin house is a wood frame structure with two basic sections, the "core" which was presumably built initially and an "ell" which seems to have been added sometime after the original construction. There were small additions which serve as porches on each gable end of the core section. The core is rectangular with a gable roof on a long facade facing west to the water of the harbour. It is about 24' (sides) by 36' (front and back) with a height of 9' from ground to eaves on the length of the house; the end gable peaks at a height of 20' (ca.) The exterior walls are covered in wooden shingles.

The roof of the core section has a pitch of about 45 degrees, and is presently covered with asphalt shingles. A wide gable is centrally located on the facade length of the roof, its top lines not quite reaching the peak of main roof. It is not clear whether it is original, as dormers were often added after the completion of the structure. There are three bays on the facade of the ground level -- one window on each side of a central doorway. There is a window for the second level within the gable dormer. The foundation for the core section consists of a fieldstone-and- mortar wall enclosing shallow crawl-space of three to four feet below ground level. The floor of the foundation is earth.

The floorplan of the Carlin house corresponds to the

³⁶ Ennals and Holdsworth, "Vernacular Architecture and Cultural Landscape of the Maritime Provinces", pp. 92-93; Pocius, *A Place to Belong*, p. 206.

Maritime vernacular style of the exterior as described by Ennals and Holdsworth. There is a central entry hallway and stairway with parlour and dining room on either side backed by two rooms of similar size -- a kitchen off the dining room, and a bedroom off the parlour. Fireplaces and later, stoves, were centrally placed at the partitions of the four rooms. Sometimes the space for the kitchen and bedroom was further divided to make a pantry in the area behind the hall way. A stairway to the cellar is usually under the stairway leading to the first floor. Use of the front hallway in the Carlin house would depend upon the occupation of the current occupant. The present owners run a "backyard mechanic" shop and the back of the house has become the front in Whitney Pier society, so that the front entrance is completely closed off.

The ell at the back of the house is the most evident exterior addition to the house. The ell was probably added in the early 20th century, when the ell was being added to many such houses. The ell extends from the southern half of the house making a rectangle 12' wide and about 18' in length, enclosing an entrance and one room, probably a kitchen or pantry; the earlier kitchen/pantry within the core of the house having been made over into a bedroom. The roof of the ell has a pitch of 35 degrees and has a single dormer gable. The rear porches and changes in rear doors and windows have all been adjusted for the backyard mechanic shop. The foundation of the ell is even less complete than that of the

core form.

Despite the social prominence of the Carlins and other very early families, it was the subsequent middle class of the early 20th century which set the pace for permanent single family dwellings in Whitney Pier. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, this group of Whitney Pier elite had come to include, not only the municipal government and entrepreneurial groups, but also the managerial sector at the steel plant and, depending on their family connections, some of the skilled steelworkers and craftsmen.

The commercial "middle class" of Whitney Pier tended to live on or near Victoria Road, more likely in the northerly half of the Pier rather than the Coke Ovens area. Their relatively elaborate homes underlined the simplicity of the Carlin farm house, and while they retained the traditional embellishments of old wealth and influence, they also gave a strong message of faith in the future of coal transportation and steel production in Cape Breton and particularly in Sydney. After 1925, many of their houses were bought by Jewish business people whose work suggested middle class status, but whose ethnicity left them in a social vacuum. Today, many of the houses are used as multi-family rented dwellings, their owners long since moved to Sydney or further away.

The Fitzgerald house on Rear Laurier Street aptly represents the middle class residential architecture of

Whitney Pier, especially that of Victoria Road. It was a "classical/gothic revival" or "temple" house, or simply put, a "gable entry" house.³⁷ Presently owned by Margaret Fitzgerald, it was built in 1907 for less than \$5000.00 by her father Frank Fitzgerald, a prominent Whitney Pier landowner and superintendent of the coal piers. The house was constructed by a contractor named MacDonald. The house is on a fenced and tree-filled lot facing east. Behind the house are four other houses originally belonging to the Fitzgerald family: at one time the area behind the house included two barns. The facade looks on to Victoria Road, only a few feet from the overpass and two hundred feet from the steel plant's number four gate. The house and its family present an exception to the pattern of the elite either moving to Sydney or living in the northern end of the Pier. In fact, the Fitzgerald family has maintained its original residences on family land through successive generations. (Fig. 4-2)

Margaret Fitzgerald's house is a two and one-half storey, gable entry, wood frame house with a medium gable roof. The wood shingle sheathing is painted dark red. The rectangular core (30'x36') has a front sunporch with twelve windows and decorative door (originally an open veranda), with a front yard within a cement and stone retaining wall. There is a back extension on half of the rear of the house. A narrow square-cornered "bay" on the south side towards the rear of

³⁷ Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, pp.94 -99.

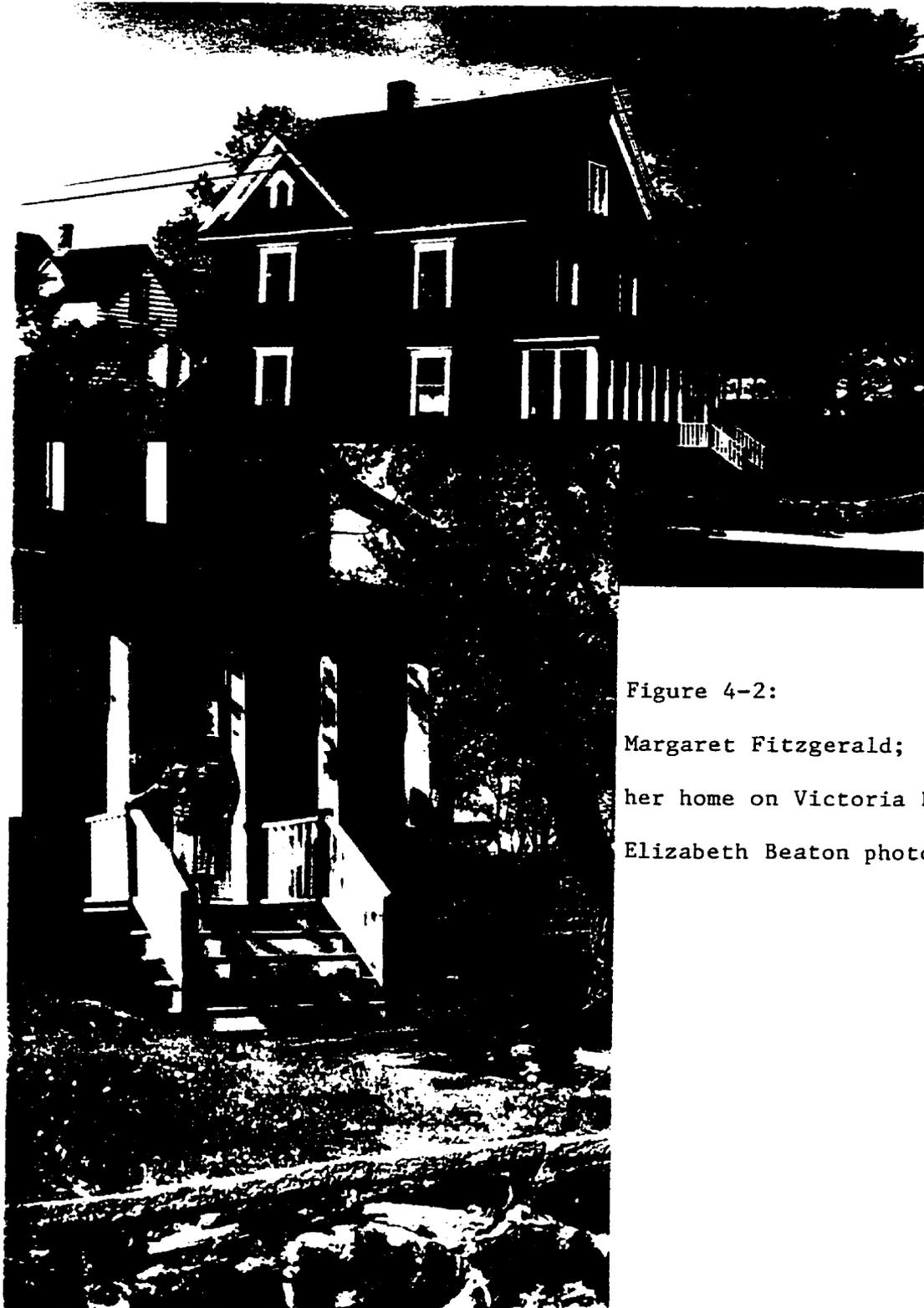


Figure 4-2:
Margaret Fitzgerald;
her home on Victoria Road.
Elizabeth Beaton photo.

the house enhances a set of first and second floors windows. The top of the extension is a dormer gable integrated into the roof rather lower than the ridge, designed to give light to a bathroom on the top floor. The top of the extension is pedimented as are the two gable ends of the houses. It seems to have the "two" facades mentioned earlier, possibly because it is on the corner of two streets.

Like the exterior design, the floorplan implies the wealth and power of the early industrial context of Whitney Pier. The entrance hall is fifteen feet in width and is graced by an elaborate stairway, a writing desk, chairs, lamps, and mirrors. The living room is off the hall, filled with furniture that is old and solid and meant to be used. The piano was there since the house was built, considered essential to the family life of its occupants. The decoration of the living room consists of family portraits and photographs. Through a wide-arched partition is the dining room which is larger than the living room, benefitting from the previously mentioned bay encasing the window. It has a large table and a fire place, both used regularly. The kitchen is relatively small, with a small table and a closed-off "up" staircase. The extension on the rear has three compartments: a china "closet" accessible from the dining room containing elegant sets, wedding gifts from Old Pier Society. The pantry is off the kitchen, and there is a rear entry porch from the kitchen. Given the status of the family, the rear

area of the house was undoubtedly for the servants' use in a previous era. From the narratives told by the owner, there is a sense that little has changed in the exterior and interior design and furnishings since the first decades of the 20th century. The experience of the house is one of gracious living, especially for the women.³⁸

One of the most outstanding "four-square" houses in Whitney Pier is found in Ward Six, at 79 Broadway, just up from the location of the original trading wharf.³⁹ (Fig. 4-3) The house was originally built in 1901 for Alan MacLeod, a very prominent farmer/landowner/ trader. His granddaughter Sophie MacLeod Hertz now owns the house. A house similar in size and decoration is located across the street, an indirect family connection with the MacLeod's. Alan MacLeod built several slightly less grandiose houses for his sons in the area.

The facade of Sophie MacLeod's house faces west, on to MacLeod Street; the south side, also a "facade", faces Broadway. It is a elongated two and one-half storey "square" house with a truncated hipped roof on the front section. At the rear portion of the house is a pronounced wing with a pedimented truncated gable roof, its ridge integrated with the

³⁸ Interview with Margaret Fitzgerald, 1993.

³⁹ The house type was variously called the "box", the "classic box", the "double cube", and the "plain house". See Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, p. pp. 84-93: "The foursquare was a georgian mansion reborn in middle class form".



Figure 4-3: MacLeod-Heartz house. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

ridge of the hipped roof. The rear of the house has a one room deep extension or bay with three windows. On the front apron of its hipped roof is a single window pedimented dormer. The house is further garnished with a three-window bay on its facade, and another on the south side of the house, lighting the dining room. An open veranda once surrounded the south and west sides of the house. Now there is an ornamental open porch around the front entrance, a closed sunporch-balcony over the entrance veranda. Decorative brackets adorn the roof verges and there is an abundance of decorative trim around the veranda and upper sun porch. The house was originally built with a full basement of cement and stone.

The size of the house has allowed for some variation on the standard form. It has an off-centrally placed doorway on its facade, entering into a spacious entrance hall with an ornate staircase leading to the second floor. The living room is off the hallway, but the dining room does not lead from the living room; instead the entrance hall leads directly to the large, dinning room, well-lit from the bay windows. It is furnished with a large table, several china cabinets and some antique heirlooms. Behind the dinning room at the rear of the house is another pleasantly sunny area where Sophie's mother relaxed, probably to sew or read. Beside this room is a small dressing room. There is a large kitchen off the dining room which accommodates a small table, other kitchen utilities and the back stairs. Both the living room and the dining room

have fireplaces which, with the kitchen stove, heated the house.

The second storey has three bedrooms, a trunk room and a large bathroom. The third floor has two large bedrooms. What is striking about the interior of the house is its brightness resulting from numerous and well placed windows. Only the living room and entrance hall are comparatively, but only slightly dimmer, in keeping with the Victorian ambience appropriate to these two areas.⁴⁰

There are other comparable houses in Ward Six which tell of Whitney Pier's history of farming estates and sea trading, and subsequent exploitation of industry. The MacInnis house on Catherine Street (originally owned by a sea captain) is a variation on the gable entry two and on-half storey "ell" house, with a pedimented roof on the wing. The roof on the west side of the gable facade is extended to allow for an inset tower, topped by a free steeple. Both the first and second storey levels of the tower are embellished by fenestration that gives a three-bay over three-bay effect. A similar house is located further up the Catherine street hill. One of these houses is reputed to have a spiral staircase. Probably the most ornate middle class home in Whitney Pier is on Jamieson Street, built by a Provincial Liquor Inspector named Ducksbury. This house was the set of the film, "Something about Love", directed by Whitney Pier

⁴⁰ Interview with Sophie MacLeod Hartz, 1993.

native, Stephan Wodoslawski.

The Working Class

The houses most commonly undertaken by the steelworkers who built for themselves were gable entry types with the standard floorplan. Based on plans from the steel plant or simplified copies of houses of the elite, the workers' houses had a range of sizes, "scaled down versions of more grandiose inventions[,]... gothic cottages stripped of decoration[,]... porches replaced spacious verandas".⁴¹ The plans from the steel company were adjusted to replace the pantry and downstairs bedroom or washroom with a dining room. Often an extra piece was built onto the first level to accommodate a pantry and washroom. Despite the steelworkers claim to upward mobility in the dining room, it was rarely used for dining. As well, "piano windows" were often added to the sides of the houses, usually to give more "space" to the stairway. A wide arched opening often replaced the door between the living room and dining room, and between the hallway and the living room. The variations on this style depended upon the status, hence the pay, of the worker: the number of storeys, the various pitches of the gable roof, including the flat roof (not really flat, but with a very shallow pitch that gave the appearance of being flat). The houses might also vary in the dimensions.

⁴¹ Michael Doucet and John Weaver, "Material Culture and the North American House: The Era of the Common Man", in *Journal of American History*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1985, p. 582.

Their closed-in verandas or front porches did not have foundations and so were used only for "sitting out" in the summer-time. They were undoubtedly closed to keep out the smoky pollution from the steel plant that was always in the Whitney Pier air. Later styles changed the orientation of the gable, with a off-central doorway on the long facade and a side entry under the gable roof: in these cases the floor plan remained the same.

These simple gable entry houses were popular with Newfoundlanders. It is notable, however, that they tended to buy rather than build this type of house in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The houses were built by Cape Bretoners before 1920. For instance, on Connaught and Payne streets, there are at least ten examples of this process of settlement. I have ventured to call this type the "Newfoundland" house within the context of Sydney and Whitney Pier, even though it is in no way similar to "traditional" houses in Newfoundland (in so far as it can be said that there are any Newfoundland "traditional" styles). Interestingly, it was observed by Jerry Pocius that this type is found in Calvert, Newfoundland, carried back to Newfoundland by migrant workers to Cape Breton in the early part of the century.⁴²

As might be expected, there was a decline in home building during the Depression, but when work started up again during and after War II, there was a great rush of house

⁴² Pocius, *A Place to Belong*, p.210.

building in Whitney Pier, with a greater freedom of stylistic choice. Most of the steel workers tended toward houses with smaller overall dimensions than previously, as was the trend across North America. The floorplan prevailed, however, with the only change being in the varying size of the front hallway.

But larger houses were built in the late 1930s as well. The home of Howard and Mary Farrell was an example. (Fig. 4-4) Howard was born in Fortune Bay on the south coast of Newfoundland in 1908; he travelled back and forth to Sydney, "roving" to find work, until he left his birthplace for good in 1923. In Sydney he worked first on the coal bank in the coke ovens, then in the brick plant, and eventually worked his way up to "ship supervisor" at the loading docks; he also worked on construction jobs in northern Quebec when work in Sydney was not available. In 1937, he married Mary Logue of Sydney; they lived with Howard's mother on Robert Street initially, but Howard began building almost immediately and the house was ready the next year. At that time he was making 27 cents an hour and was working 10 hours a day. Howard borrowed \$1200 from the Eastern Trust Company (paid off in four years) to do the foundation, framing, roofing and closing-in on their two and one-half storey house. There were no bulldozers to dig the foundation; instead he "rented two horses and a 'scoop' from a guy up Lingan Road". The basic construction took about six months. Their first child was "on



Figure 4-4: Howard and Mary Farrell; their home on Jamieson Street. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

the way" when he and Mary moved into the first floor during the fall of 1938. Howard continued to work at finishing the house for the next year, adding elements as he saved enough money to buy materials. He estimated the total cost to be about forty-five hundred dollars.⁴³

The four-square house was less popular with the steel workers, but was sometimes built by those with higher work status such as the foremen of departments. In other cases, the four-square houses were originally built by the middle class and were later bought by more well-off members of the working class. For instance, a large 2 1/2 storey four-square on Henry Street in Ward V was built by a member of the Fitzgerald family, and was later bought by a skilled steel worker of Newfoundland descent. As with the gable entry house, the dimensions depended upon the status of the owner.

Developers

The skilled steel workers, carpenters and other skilled craftsmen, called "mechanics" such as machinists, wheelwrights, electricians, etc. were the particular target of developers. A local newspaper reported:

Several local capitalist and builders have brought land in the district and a number of most desirable dwellings are being erected on good sites. Many of these houses are being sold on the instalment plan, which enables the man without sufficient capital to build to secure for himself a home on easy terms. ...On a new street running through the old Muggah property from Lingan Road to Low

⁴³ Discussions with Howard and Mary Farrell.

point Road, Messers Dixon and Gilpin have also built four neat cottages, three of which they have already sold. These cottages are of a class which is very popular in the suburban district. They are well-finished throughout, but are sold at a reasonable figure and are particularly desirable for the man with a small family or a couple who are "setting up house keeping." Many other houses are also being erected in the district... ".⁴⁴

Landowners John Morrison, Alan MacLeod, and J.S. MacLennan, sold lands located on the west side of Victoria Road, adjacent to the Dominion Co. For these landowners, the beginning of workers' stabilization was still a boom period of speculation. At an auction sale offered returning Cape Bretoners an "...exceptional opportunity for OLD HOMECOMERS to own a lot of Land in Sydney, if for no other reason than for sake of old home associations, as well as for a sure speculation; also to HOMESEEEKERS and INVESTORS resident in the city of Sydney".⁴⁵ The sale of land was inevitably connected with the development of the steel industry: potential buyers in Whitney Pier were promised rapid growth of their community, additional piers and increased property values. Muggah and Fitzgerald sold lands closer the coke ovens; Burchell sold his land in the middle part of the Pier between Bay and Columbus Streets. Petrie, a farmer on Lingan Road advertised "100 acres four and one-half miles from DISCO".⁴⁶ The local newspapers noted the development in Whitney Pier in 1901,

⁴⁴ "Cokeovia as a Suburb", *Record*, June 24, 1902, p. 5.

⁴⁵ "Lots in the City of Sydney", *Record*, July 20, 1905.

⁴⁶ "For Sale", *Record*, Oct. 27, 1900.

"where in all directions neat houses for workmen are meeting with ready sale or demanding high rents".⁴⁷

Many of the early landowners actually became developers. L.L. Gallivan, of an early coal shipping and farming family whose land stretched from Lingan Road to the South Bar shore, had a real estate office in Sydney which advertised land in the Pier and in the Ashby area: "Bargains in Real Estate, \$50 each" and "Four Houses in the Coke Ovens, six rooms, \$875.00".⁴⁸ J. E. Burchell advertised in 1913 through the Eastern Land Company: "New Houses for Mechanics and Steel workers in Ward V". The houses, on a 40' by 100' lot in a nice locality... six rooms, including bath, electric lights, a good foundation" would cost \$300.00 down and fifteen dollars per month.⁴⁹ Burchell also offered a set of photographs showing open space for sale and the construction of houses on new streets.⁵⁰

DISCO also offered lots in the area between the Sydney and Louisbourg Railway and the east side of Lingan Road, including lots with frontage on Low Point Road (Victoria Road or Lingan Road. In 1900, they were selling for \$150.00 to \$300.00 with "easy terms" and a promise to lend money for

⁴⁷ "Past Year's Buildings", Record, Jan. 6, 1901. p. 8.

⁴⁸ "For Sale", Record, August 8, 1900, and "For Sale", Record, April 10, 1901.

⁴⁹ Post, June 27, 1913.

⁵⁰ Post, June 27, 1913; Joe Beaton Photo Collection, nos. 91-591-22551 to 91-591-22554, Beaton Institute.

building purposes.⁵¹ The property bought from the steel company had been given to the steel company by the town; it was land previously expropriated from the landowners of the Pier.

The acquisition of building lots and housing was available almost exclusively to skilled workers with steady jobs. We have seen that the point was made explicitly by the Burchell advertisement, but the cost alone would have been implicitly prohibitive to the shift labourer or yard worker in the early years of the century.

When developers built homes for steel workers or skilled tradesmen, the styles were more often of a wider variety than the "owner-built", although they maintained the same "core" styles. They were easily recognized because they were unusually decorative in the generally conservative landscape context of Whitney Pier. Existing two or three or more in a group, they were identical in their decoration or their unique construction features. They were multi-roofed or multi-dormered houses; had gambrelled roofs, or, depending on the lot size, were houses with several wing sections. Another distinguishing feature of the developer houses was their small lots. While owner built houses were usually found in open areas where small lots could expand, developer houses were built in a group on narrow lots with no room for expansion.

⁵¹ " Lots for sale", *Record*, August 14, 1900, advertisement placed by Ross and Ross, Barristers.

This obviously meant more concentrated building and more return for the developer.

Two houses on opposite corners of Henry Street and Summit Street are identical to each other, indicating that they were built by developers: each has an inset front entrance beside a round "bay" section with three windows that takes up the remainder of the facade on the ground floor, giving an "overhang" look to the total elevation of the house. The back of each house has an integral extension, extruding only about four feet from the core of the house. This extension is remarkable because it is mirror-imaged across the street. Five houses located on Wesley Street, built probably by Burchell, had gambrel roofs, a relatively rare roof type in Whitney Pier. (Fig. 4-5) Burchell also built on Harvard Street. Despite the variations in exterior style, the floorplans maintained the standard pattern: front entrance with porch or veranda, hallway with "up" staircase next to wall, living room off hall way, dining room, kitchen off dining room and also from entrance hallway, back porch and or pantry. The upstairs had three bedrooms and a bath. All of the houses built by developers were wood frame construction and most had full foundations.

Permanent Homes for Immigrant Families

The style most popular with Slavic peoples is what many local people call the "Polish" house. Antonina Ryba lives in

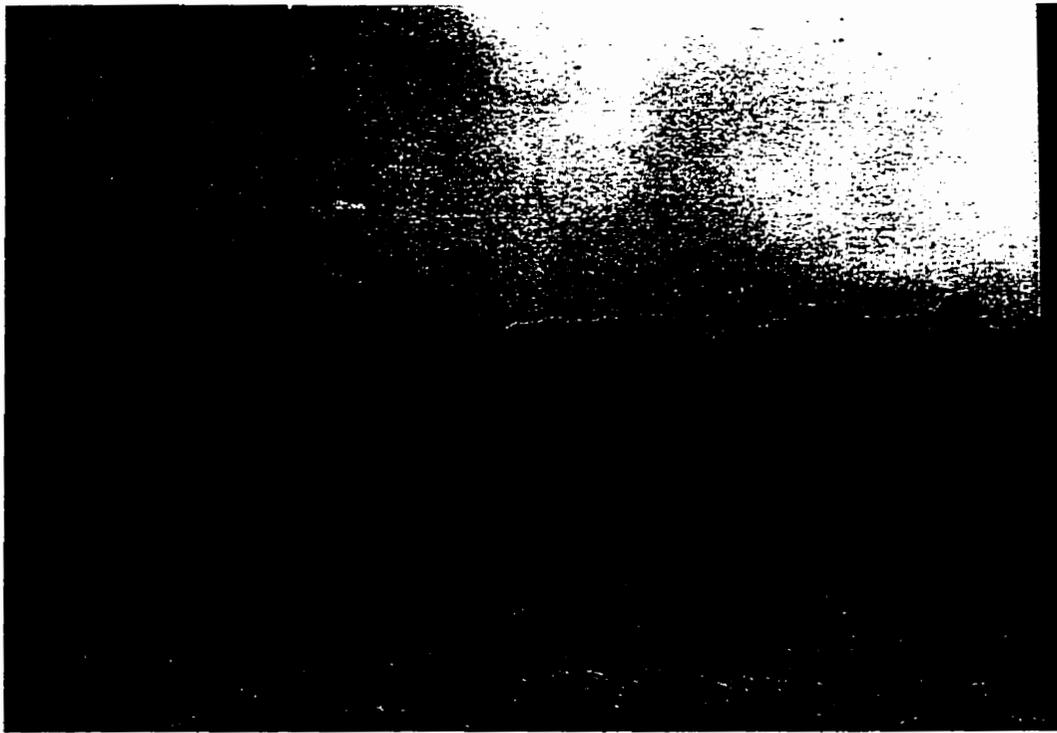


Figure 4-5: Wesley Street development; 1910(ca).
Joe Beaton Collection (No. 34), photos no. 91-591-22553,
no. 91-590-22553 Beaton Institute Archives.

one of these houses at 69 Henry Street, about 300 yards from the steel plant "number eight" gate at the bottom of the street. It a one and one-half storey wood frame "semi-bungalow" house with a rectangular core and a full foundation, without wings, but with a veranda extending the width of the facade, and a back porch extending about a third of the back end of the house. The roof is pitched at about 35 degrees, is half-hipped or "snub-gabled"; the dormer gable which provides sunlight to the bathroom on the west side of the house is also half-hipped. The front elevation has a centrally placed doorway, with a two over two window on each side of the door; there is a window just under the "snub" on the upper level. The fenestration of the side elevations is symmetrical, with two windows on the ground level; the back elevation has a door within the porch; a ground-level window, and a window under the snubbed gable, matching the front elevation. The entry to the porch is by the side. (Fig. 4-6)

The lot for 69 Henry street is double, running south to north: 90' frontage x 85' running back, the Ryba's having expanded their lot twice adding to its width. It is enclosed by a picket fence which appears to be useful only as delineation, or possibly as decoration. Most of lots belonging to immigrants in Whitney Pier are quite large, often double, and contain gardens and several out-buildings. The Ryba lot has a garage at the end of the driveway and a small storage shed used as a "play house" for the grandchildren.

Almost every other available inch of the lot is taken up by flowers, trees, scrubs and vegetables, with small sections of mowed lawn. The flower garden in front of the house is enclosed in a cement retaining wall which raises it and levels it. The perennial flowers overflow the holding wall down the path to the sidewalk. Mrs. Ryba is known for her gardening expertise, and for her willingness to give cuttings to novice gardeners.

From the street, a concrete path leads to the steps up to the veranda; it seems an unusually high veranda, partly because the house is built on the side of a hill, resulting in a good part of the foundation being above ground. From the veranda can be viewed the open hearth area a few hundred years away and the vacant hill just across the street where the children slide in winter. A path goes around to the back door between Mrs. Ryba's bounteous flower beds and hedges and the side of the house. Since Joe Ryba's retirement from the steel plant where he was a blacksmith, and his almost immediate death, the front door has become the commonly used entryway, with the back door being the way to the shed, the garden, or the clothesline.

Within the front door is a rather narrow hallway continues directly to the large and bright kitchen. To the immediate right of left of the front entryway is the door to a bedroom, apparently always the parents' bedroom. To the right of the entry is a doorway to a living room which extends



Figure 4-6: Houses preferred by Galician immigrants; Antonina Ryba at her home on Henry Street. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

through a wide arched doorway to a dining room. The dining room is connected to the kitchen. The entry to the basement is from the kitchen; there is another entry from outside which also serves as a coal chute.

The stairway leads straight to the second storey, where there are two bedrooms, one front and one back, one for the two boys and one for the two girls when the children were growing up. Tucked into the slope of the roof at the top of the stairways is a closet; opposite, under the west slope is the bathroom, made more roomy by a dormer gable.

From the time she arrived in Whitney Pier in 1929, Antonina Ryba always "knew" that her home would be within the sight and sound of the steel plant. When she and her husband looked at the Henry Street site, just on the next street from their rented lodgings, she decided immediately that this was it. There was a building on it earlier, shown on the 1907 Goad's Atlas, which burned during a lightening storm. The land was bought by the City, was more or less cleared, and was sold to Joe and Antonina Ryba in 1937.

The construction of the Ryba home was partly carried out by recognized building tradesmen, but mostly it was a cooperative affair, not only between the men who worked with Joe Ryba at the plant, but also between Joe and his wife. The self-perception of the immigrants is that "they do for themselves", unlike the "English" who pay others to do for them.

To begin, Joe and Antonina completed the preparation of the lot, cleaning out the big stone from the foundation of the previous building, with shovels and pick. Joe then worked with a carpenter to make the forms for the basement. He rented a hand-mixer from Stephen's Building Supplies.⁵² The foundation was poured with the help of ten of his co-workers from the plant who had coordinated their shifts in order to be there. With their four or five wheelbarrows, "a couple of men mixing, a couple of men driving around and pouring the basement". That took one day; they were finished before sundown. Antonina's job was to feed the ten men; she made loaves of rye bread and sausage, bought a big ham, and there were bottles of liquor of indeterminate source. As soon as the basement was ready, and the forms taken off, a carpenter was hired to frame the house. He was a Ukrainian named Ceseski, who had worked as a carpenter in the United States before coming to Whitney Pier. He worked with two helpers and charged two hundred dollars for two days work. They used spruce for all their work: four-by-four posts and two-by-fours for the studding; the floor joists and beams were eight-by-eight; the ceiling joists were four-by-eight. Ceseski also directed the construction of the roof: rafters, boards, shingling.

But the design seemed to be under the direction of the

⁵² If the cement materials were purchased from Stephen's Supplies, then a mixer could be rented at a cost of five dollars, discussion with Duncan MacKay, 1993.

owner. The day the dormer gable was being built, Joe Ryba was working at the plant, all the time watching his house being worked on. From that distance he noticed that they were making a full gable peak on the dormer, instead of the intended "snubbed" or hipped-gable dormer. "So he came from the steel plant calling 'You got to cut it, slant it'. You know, make slope. And wide, you know trimming wide, not narrow".⁵³

Plastering of the interior walls was done by a Mi'kmaq tradesman and his son. It was done with the traditional three coats, "scratch, brown and putty".⁵⁴ For the first coat they put sand, cement and a little lime; the "brown coat was down with horse hair. After it dried for two weeks, the fine "petticoat" was to added to smooth-finish the wall. The chimney was built by a skilled brick-layer from the plant.

Joe and Antonina undertook most of the remaining work that went into the construction of their home, fitting it in as the plant shifts allowed. They nailed on or "banged" all the spruce boards to make exterior walls, then all the small lathing on the inside to take the plaster, and they covered the floor beams with boards. "We bang, every ceiling, every wall. One end, my husband, the other end, me. I tell you we was working... the knees! Oh, the knees! Sometimes you miss

⁵³ Interview with Antonina Ryba, 1993.

⁵⁴ Doucet and Weaver, "Material Culture and the North American House" p. 570.

the [nail]... you hit the knees the same way you hit the fingers". Birch flooring was used throughout the house. It has been covered with linoleum, or some rooms with carpeting, to protect it since the house was built: "People didn't take off their shoes, like now". There was varnished wainscoting throughout the houses as well. But except for the bathroom, it has been removed. "We tear it after, yeah. It's too bad, isn't it? But see, that's the style. And after a couple of years later we were sorry".⁵⁵

They bought almost all of their materials from Stephen's Building Supplies: ready-cut steps, risers, newel posts and bannister for the stairway; the windows; the doors cost ten dollars each and had Douglas fir trim. Antonina declared proudly that her husband "put everything together himself, he knew how. After the work." The Ryba's started building their house in May, 1938 and they moved in on All Saint's Day, November 1 of the same year. They spent the next years completing the upstairs, and gathering furniture and other decoration that suited them. Most of the decoration was memorabilia: souvenirs from Poland, the results of three return journeys after the children were grown, and family photographs.

One decorative feature of the Ryba home, a source of great pride, are the wall murals, done in 1944 by a Ukrainian

⁵⁵ Interview with Antonina Ryba, 1993.

painter, Yaroslavski.⁵⁶ There are twelve murals altogether in hallway, living room and dining room. Yaroslavski lived in "Hunky Town" at the bottom of Henry Street, in the second house from the steel plant. He received art training in Europe, but earned his living in Sydney as a steel worker.⁵⁷

Mrs. Ryba recalled that Yaroslavski received about \$40 for his work:

[Yaroslavski] ...got a job with the steel plant, a good job. So he didn't bother with the painting. But whoever wants him, he ask him. He come and he paints. He got those brushes. He got all kind, those tube paints. that's what they use -- oil paint. Yeah. After the shift if he feels like coming for a couple of hours. And he feel like leaving he left. And leave that room empty, nobody goes there. He painted all those. Only that time we didn't have, we can't buy no patterns, no magazine books, nothing to give to, show to him. And he just, what he feel good from his head he painted, put on the wall. And stays like that. And people likes that. And my children say, 'Oh Ma, paint it over. That's enough, those walls!' But I say, 'Ah, leave it, leave it. Sometime...' And they stay forty five years or more already. {What year did he do it?} I think forty five years because Frania was just a little one. I left her in the crib here and I went in the garden to do something. And that fella was painting here. And when I came back to see how the baby is doing, she was sitting on the floor, not sitting any more. And he says, 'She was screeching and I put her on the floor so she won't fall.' She was about one year, maybe not quite year yet. I don't know how old she is now, maybe forty five or six. But that paint, yeah. And I just wash it and it stays.⁵⁸

The arrangements for the construction and decoration of

⁵⁶ This type of mural decoration is found in a dozen or so houses in Whitney Pier. Others were done by a Newfoundlander named Parsons, and an Italian named Goduto.

⁵⁷ See E. Beaton, "Ukrainian Arts", Report. MG 12, 98.

⁵⁸ Interview with Antonina Ryba, 1994.

the Ryba were based in ethnic and work ties, and in neighbourliness, and they had both positive and negative aspects. Joe Ryba apparently could depend upon the good will of his friends and co-workers at the plant, probably as repayment for his "rabbit jobs" as a black smith.⁵⁹, But the help depended upon the shift work schedules for the full-time steel workers, or the unpredictable availability of work in the yard for the casual labourers at the plant. The murals painted by Yaroslavski demonstrate an unusual sort of barter, perhaps more kind-hearted than practical - that paid the artist/steel worker less in money than a chance to be creative in a world where physical labour and industrial productiveness were the measure of worth.

The practice of "starting" the house was successful only to the extent of the self-sufficiency of owners. The Ryba's were not entirely pleased with their carpenter Ceseski: often he promised to come and help with a specific job, and he didn't show up. The success of this type of arrangement had a great deal to do with the self-sufficiency of the owner. "Ceseski...[after completing the] frame, goes. And then you don't see him any more cause he go here, there, who knows where. And you find him, you say him, you say, 'If you aren't busy....' and he says, 'I'll be up tomorrow'. Tomorrow never

⁵⁹ References to Joe Ryba as a blacksmith in the open hearth forge were always with the greatest respect for him as a worker and as a "good" man. According to Mrs. Ryba, he did "rabbit jobs", not only in blacksmithing, but also as a shoe maker.

come. So you have to do it yourself. But we did it."⁶⁰

At first encounter, Mrs. Ryba's house is reminiscent of the half-hipped, thatched roof houses that were common in some parts of middle Europe, especially in Bukovyna. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the similarity is only impressionistic: the Bukovynian houses had a front elevation on the length of the house, with the one storey carrying to the eaves. Although Mrs. Ryba was aware of traditional Bukovynian houses, and agrees that her roof is rather suggestive of the old thatched houses, she was sure that her house was not meant to "look" Bukovynian.

This style is found in the sixth edition (1932) of Jens Pederson's *Practical Homes*, a patternbook obtainable from Chappell's Building Supplies of Sydney. The catalogue was found in a house identical to Mrs. Ryba's, the home of Ukrainian immigrant, John Ojolick, on Lingan Road. It advertised "95 designs of moderately priced houses ... English and Spanish designs, colonials, bungalows..."⁶¹

Although the pattern book was present and obviously used in Whitney Pier, Antonina Ryba had never seen the pattern book. She wasn't sure where the idea for her house came from, only that she and her husband decided, "[It] look good and didn't cost too much". That Joe Ryba watched from the plant

⁶⁰ Antonina Ryba, 1993.

⁶¹ Jens Pederson, *Practical Homes* (St. Paul's, Minnesota: published by the author, 1932) [6th edition], p. 49.

yard and was so excited about the correct style of the dormer gable suggests that idea for the style originated with him. The Ryba house was the first of that style in the neighbourhood around Henry Street. It is impossible to say whether it was the first in the Pier, but now there are several dozen, and all of them built in the 1930s and 1940s. These include eight such houses on Mt. Pleasant, Bay, Summit and Webster Streets, all immediate to Henry Street and built by Slavic immigrants.

Many of the houses built by Italians around the same period were, like the houses of the Slavic immigrants, based in the "cottage" style found in the pattern books. But the Italians seemed to prefer a one-storey "bungalow" style with a full-hipped roof. Many were built on Lingan Road where the Italians moved as they went from the Coke Ovens.

When West Indian Blacks owned homes in Whitney Pier they showed a preference to the gable entry style of house. Many bought this type simply because it was available in the coke ovens area, where blacks were ghettoized. Some built in this style, locating their homes on the margins of the Coke Ovens.

The houses of immigrant families in Whitney Pier tended to be different from the Anglo-Celtic working class in terms of in roof style and floorplan, and especially in dimension, being considerably less in height and floor space. But they shared a number of characteristics with their Anglo-Celtic neighbours: the designs preferred by both groups were commonly

available in pattern books; many of the builders had a usually informal background in carpentry or other building trades; and their chosen house styles were only marginally traceable to ethnic folk housing tradition. Tradition was important, however, in the process of building.

Choices Within a Limited Context

Home ownership in the period 1890-1945 is of great interest to a wide variety of scholarship which generally agrees that this was the era of the Common Man and that it was the greatest burst of home building in North American history. However, the scholars disagree in terms of the rationale for home ownership. For instance, Weaver and Doucet refer to a "natural yearning" and "a will to possess"; Purdy saw the home as a place of independence, a balance to the workplace where the worker was controlled by capitalist masters.⁶² A third possibility advanced by Purdy is that home-owner is a response to capitalist and nationalistic pressure to stabilize and to reproduce a workforce: "stress was placed on bettering the

⁶² Doucet and Weaver, *Housing the North American City*; Sean Purdy, "A Property-Owning democracy?: House Ownership and the Working Class in Canada", in *Labour/Le Travail*, 3 (Spring 1993), 341-52. See also, Jim Kemeny, "A Critique of Homeownership", in R.G. Bratt, C. Hartman, and A. Meyerson (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1986), pp. 272-276.

physical condition of workers' dwellings in order to improve the protective capacity of the labour force".⁶³ Margaret Byington observed in 1910 that because of their economic and social situation, and the standards imposed by industrial capitalists, workers had little control over their housing.⁶⁴ All of these have validity in the context of industrial capitalism, especially since home ownership followed close upon the predominance of generally degrading temporary living quarters for workers and the class status associated with such housing.

The mass production of building supplies, in the context of home ownership for the working class, is also the subject of debate. Some scholars feel that capitalism, and later the state, not only co-opted the tastes of the workers, but also did serious harm to workers in the builder's trades in favour of corporate building technology.⁶⁵ The changes in building technology displaced the master-builder and the cabinet-maker, just as the standardization of styles and floorplans displaced architects.⁶⁶ But there may be other ways of looking at this situation in terms of the Whitney Pier experience. After

⁶³ Sean Purdy, "Industrial Efficiency, Social Order and Moral Purity: Housing Reform Though in English Canada, 1900-1950", forthcoming.

⁶⁴ *Homestead*, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Doucet and Weaver, "Material Culture and the North American House", p. 566; also, Ian MacKay, *A Craft Transformed*.

⁶⁶ Frank Smith, *Cosy Home*, pp. 5, 6.

World War I, with the downturn in the steel industry and the labour troubles of the 1920s, Whitney Pier became established as a labouring class area where the native-born middle class, craftsmen, mechanics and skilled steel workers were the exception rather than the rule. Home ownership in Whitney Pier represented stabilization and belonging in the making of community, and at the same time represented the power of individuals and groups to recognize their choices and to use them to advantage.

The availability of construction materials offered important choices, for in Whitney Pier only a few of the skilled workers and mechanics, and practically none of the labourers, could afford architects, master-builders or cabinet-makers. Marxist scholars have a valid point in asserting that the wages of the working class, controlled by industrial capitalists, was a factor.⁶⁷ But on a more pragmatic level, affordability was the bottom line for the home owners. Most of the construction of the house was done by the owner and his family and friends under more expert "supervision", based in various life histories of self-sufficiencies. An important self-sufficiency was the role of woman in house building: she not only had a say in decision-making, but also a hand in building.

⁶⁷ MacKay, *A Craft Transformed*; S. Purdy, "A Property-Owning Democracy?: House Ownership and the Working Class in Canada". *Labour/Le Travail*. Vol. 31(Spring 1993). Pp. 341-352.

Some choices were presented by the implications of industrial capitalism and the new suburbanism, including of course, the possibility of steady work at the plant if they "worked" the system, or the advantage of status offered by home ownership. But the obvious way was not necessarily the way chosen. The relative ease of buying ready-made interior finishes, especially cabinets and furniture was utilized as far as possible, but even in these cases, the "convenience" was often off-set by the ability within the family to make one's own at less cost. Pattern books appear to have been a powerful, if indirect and usually unconscious, influence in decisions of home ownership. Yet, as powerful as was that influence, only the rare catalogue was actually seen, especially by immigrant home owners. Either the style was copied from a neighbour's house or a local builder knew it by heart, or someone borrowed a plan sheet from the steel company. In the final analysis, the worker and his family almost inevitably adapted the exterior styles of their houses, their construction, and their interior furnishings to their everyday purposes of work, leisure and ethnic culture. It was often a far cry from what was advertised on a more public consumer level.

The most significant choice made by certain of the middle and managerial class, and skilled steel workers was the decision to stay in Whitney Pier, to assert their belonging to a community, in the face of social pressure to move away from

an undesirable section of Sydney. At the same time, the houses they built adhered strongly to capitalist controlled designs and standards of the new urban or suburbanism that was sweeping North America. For the semi-skilled workers and labourers, whose presence would dominate the landscape, the imperative to build was found in the arrival or the making of families. Their choice to stay in Whitney Pier may have been partly the result of the availability of cheap land: after the initial boom period, negative attitude towards immigrants and proximity to the steel plant would have brought down land values. It was a curious inversion of the discrimination suffered by the immigrants, which allowed them and other easier access to their own homes. The trend in home ownership for Anglo-Celtic workers was to build a home when marriage was planned, and whenever capital requirements could be arranged. For the immigrants, homes were usually built after marriage, depending on the capacity to save money. These trends were not new with industrial capitalism, but were imbedded deeply in the tradition of rural Nova Scotia and in the lives of immigrants from other parts of the world. There can be little doubt that the middle class, the skilled workers and the labourers acted consciously and positively in establishing their permanent presence in Whitney Pier.

CHAPTER 5

CO-OP HOUSING: QUALIFYING TRADITION

Years ago in this country the concept of self-help building was a relatively simple one. Friends and neighbours cooperated in building homes and raising barns. Today, in a more complex economy, it is not so simple. Many rules and regulations of various government departments and building codes, financial procedures, etc., must be followed, and consequently GOOD MANAGEMENT becomes most important.¹ G.E. Topshee, 1969

The Whitney Pier co-op housing of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s was based upon the self-help and kin network of the previous years, but it was also the beginning of state and church intervention in housing. Housing co-ops were suggested as early as 1912 when Dr. Charles J. C. O. Hastings, the Medical officer for Toronto suggested a co-operative housing scheme based on the British experience to rid the landscape of the "deadly tenement" to provide housing for the "decently poor".² Co-operatives in Cape Breton originated with the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department in Antigonish, Nova Scotia in the 1930s, when, because of its "safe"

¹ G.E. Topshee, "Foreword", to the Cooperative Handbook [1969].

² Charles, J. Hastings, "Suggestions for the Housing Problem", *Industrial Canada*, August 1912, pp. 66-69.

political stance, it was equated with Canadian nationalism.³ The "Antigonish Movement" had its roots in the 19th century Roman Catholic Church's answer to the European Social Democratic movement⁴, and was influenced by the Rochdale Weavers' movement in the 1840s and Scandinavian co-operative enterprises.

Although the co-operative movement in Nova Scotia is generally associated with the hard times of the Depression, these housing co-ops span periods of both hard and good times, and poverty was not always a significant factor in their particular development. Yet, class -- in terms of economic status, religion and ethnicity -- was indeed a factor of both leadership and conflict in the particular encounters of the co-op members in their efforts to work together to build their homes.

The Church and State define Co-operation

There were many housing co-ops in Whitney Pier from the 1930s to the 1970s. All were directly or indirectly inspired by the Antigonish Movement, a self-help initiative started by

³ M.M. Coady, *The Antigonish Way: A Series of Broadcasts over CBC* (Antigonish: St. F. X. Extension Dept., 1948), [broadcast in 1943], pp.72-78. Also, M.M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny: The Story of the Antigonish Movement of Adult Education through Economic Co-operation* (New York: Harper, 1939), pp. 136-138; Alex F. Laidlaw (ed.), *The Man from Margaree: Writings and Speeches of M. M. Coady* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. 122-124.

⁴ Papal Encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesima Anno* (1931).

St. Francis Xavier University in the 1920s, and facilitated by priests from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish.⁵ The model for the housing co-ops in Whitney Pier was developed in 1937 by the neighbourhood of "Tompkinsville", the first co-op housing project in the Atlantic region. Named for Father Jimmy Tompkins, one of the original leaders of the Antigonish Movement, the co-op was located in Reserve, a mining town near Glace Bay, the Tompkinsville participants included European mining immigrants who had lived in the "Belgium Town" nearby.⁶

Provincial government financial and other participation in housing co-ops began with the early Cape Breton housing co-ops and it continued for several decades. In accordance with the 1936 Revision of the Nova Scotia Housing Act, the provincial government agreed to recognize co-ops as limited companies and to lend them 75 per cent of construction costs at three and one-half per cent interest. The credit union loaned the group any remaining financial requirement at one percent interest. The loan was arranged for 25 years at a

⁵ "Brief History of Co-op Housing in Nova Scotia", report, St. Francis Xavier Extension Dept., [1970's]. No author is given, but it most likely the work of Fr. William Roach of the St. F.X. Extension Department.

⁶ The housing co-op resulted from the coal company's decision to sell or tear down the houses occupied by the miners, leaving the miners with the choice of buying poorly maintained houses, or building their own homes. See, Richard MacKinnon, "Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island: Co-operativism and Vernacular Architecture".

rate of \$12.15 per member per month.⁷ Most of the other 25 per cent was paid through "sweat equity", an idea that was fundamental to the concept of co-operatives. Father William Roach, St. Francis Xavier Extension worker defined "sweat equity": "Sweat equity was after-hours, every weekend, long, difficult hours that resulted in the pride of home ownership. There was also a sense of responsibility... a labour of love".⁸ The total dollars and cents price of each home in 1940 was about 1650.00.

Commentaries on the co-operative experience emphasize that what became known as the "Reserve Plan" was a continuation of a long sustained pattern of self-help and neighbourliness, the familiar pioneer tradition of communities coming together to "raise" barns and houses. The housing co-ops, like the "raisings" had,

no grand design, no permanent organization, no structure or institutionalization.... There were no guidelines for these men to follow except a desire to own a home and a determination to see this goal achieved... The rules were very simple - buy at the best prices, cooperate with

⁷ Richard MacKinnon, "Tompkinsville...". p.18. One of the MacKinnon's informants for the same study recalls: "One of our members found about housing on the Statute Books of Nova Scotia. We found we could borrow from the government 75% of the cost of a house. We would only have to pay 2 1/2% interest and we would have 25 years to repay the loan. We decided to take advantage of the law." P. 17; See also, **Co-operative housing Handbook**, prepared by J. Duncan MacIntrye (Sydney, N.S. St. Francis Xavier University, [1969], pp. 1,2., and Moses Coady, **Masters of their Own Destiny**, p. 78.

⁸ [William Roach], "Brief History Cooperative Housing in Nova Scotia", p. 5.

your neighbour and exchange skills".⁹

Another states within the same context: "The houses of this neighbourhood show that the builders controlled the entire building process... The architecture of this neighbourhood is clearly a 'product of a place, of a people by a people'."¹⁰

Yet, as we shall see, the co-operatively built landscape in Whitney Pier shows a strict pattern of sizes and design, as well as financial arrangements. Differences between institutional "authority" and builders often evolved into a struggle for control over the home-building process. Both internally and externally, the projects presented a set of relationships based in perceptions of gender, class and ethnicity.

The "Princeville" Housing Co-op

The formal name for this housing co-operative was the "MacArthur Housing Group". It was organized in Whitney Pier about 1938, following shortly after the initiation of the Tompkinsville project. It was named for Neil R. MacArthur, a Sydney lawyer and resident Nova Scotia Housing Commissioner who helped the group draw up their charter and assisted them with other legal questions. The first co-op housing group in Sydney, they built their homes on Matilda Street in Ward Six of the Pier, just up from the steel plant's blast furnaces and

⁹ [Roach], "Brief History Co-operative Housing", pp. 3,4.

¹⁰ Mackinnon, "Tompkinsville", p.22.

the coal loading docks. The planning for the housing co-op began in 1938, and the last family moved into their home in 1940.¹¹

The group was made up of twelve families, headed by steelworkers, coal transportation workers, a carpenter, and a labour leader. The initial members, as they were officially numbered by the houses in the co-op's book-keeping, were (1) Michael Neville (coal/railroad worker), (2) Louis Mombourquette (steel worker), (3) Donald MacDonald (coal pier worker, then manager of the Whitney Pier Co-op Store, later a CCF candidate, and then leader of the Canadian Labour Congress, (4) Mickey MacDonald (bricklayer, coal/railroad worker), (5) Herb Hillier (electrician, steel worker, killed at the plant soon after moving into his house), (6) Jim Neville (coal pier worker), (7) Joe R. MacDonald (coal/railroad worker), (8) Bill MacMullin (steel/railroad worker), (9) Roddie Black (carpenter, coal/railroad worker), (10) Bill George (steelworker), (11) Herb Rogers (steelworker) and (12) Mr. Murphy (steelworker). Mr. Murphy was very old when the project started and he died before it was finished. At that point Laughie MacDonald, a coal transportation worker and the brother of Mickey and Joe R. MacDonald, took over the

¹¹ I am indebted to the residents of Matilda Street for their generous help in my research of this housing group. I am especially grateful to Mary (Babs) Neville, one of the few surviving members of the co-operative, for her assistance. From 1990 to 1992, I lived in one of the co-op houses and was able to view it firsthand.

unfinished house. At the beginning of their project, most of the twelve men had young families with several children. Their ethnic background was mainly Anglo-Celtic with one Acadian, All were of rural Cape Breton or Newfoundland descent. Of the original families, nine were Roman Catholic and three were Protestant.

The group bought the greater portion of the land for the housing project from Michael Neville, descendant of one of the early wealthy landowners of the Pier, and grandfather to the project member of the same name. The remainder was purchased from the City of Sydney. The lots, measuring 43'x80' running north and south, cost each person fifty dollars. Several of the lots on the North side of Matilda Street benefitted by the legacy of haphazard lot division by early farmer/landowners. These lots were arbitrarily lengthened and subsequently fenced on to City land. Originally this land was intended to be part of a street, but it ran into a yard and house. An additional garden lot measuring 43'x600' was set aside by the Coal Company on the south of the house lots for the use of the co-op. The lots for this co-op were larger than subsequent co-ops; and the garden plot was replicated in only a few of the urban co-ops that followed.

The plans for the houses came from the Tompkinsville group. They were wood frame, one and three-quarter storey houses with wood shingle sheathing: some had a gable entry facade, 23'x25'; others had a side-roof facade, 26'x24'; one

gable entry was 22'x26'. This resulted in a few feet difference in the size of rooms, but the interior lay-out of the house was firmly established by A. E. Priest, the Nova Scotia Housing Commission architect who designed the houses.¹²

The design of these co-op houses was the standard "temple" or simple "gothic revival" style that was familiar across the region since the late 19th century: downstairs had a hallway and living room in the front portion of the house; it had a kitchen and dining in the rear portion; upstairs had a bathroom and three bedrooms. The placement of the bathroom and the size of the bedrooms differed from house to house and appeared to have been an optional point. However, when changes were carried out to allow more room, it was on the advice of local carpenters and against the wishes of the architect.¹³ Downstairs, the location of the back door leading into the kitchen varied from house to house, sometimes at the back corner of the house, sometimes centrally located at the side. This resulted in variety in the placement of sinks and cupboards. The stairway to the basement was located off-centre at the side of the house, sometimes leading straight from the back door, sometimes leading from the kitchen. There were two features that made these houses

¹² A.E. Priest was the official architect with the Nova Scotia Housing Commission from 1934 until the 1960's.

¹³ Joe R. MacDonald and Kay MacDonald, interviewed by Elizabeth Beaton, October 28, 1993.

distinctive as co-op built: one was the relatively low-pitched roof; the second was the windows, placed just under the eaves whether they were located on the side or on the facade.(Fig. 5-1)

The co-op housing idea came to Whitney Pier by way of Jim Neville who had attended meetings organized by Mary Arnold of the Tompkinsville project.¹⁴ Donald MacDonald, apparently brought into the co-op by Jim Neville, was named leader of the group. MacDonald subsequently took a job in Ottawa with the Canadian Labour Congress and he gave up his leadership role in the housing co-op to Mike Neville. The co-op members were selected by word of mouth, communication based often in kinship ties, or on-the-job networks. There were two related Nevilles; three MacDonald brothers; one wife was related to participants in the Tompkinsville group. Ten family heads came from mainly from Whitney Pier; two were from Sydney. They all had an urgent need for adequate housing for their growing families, since most of them lived in rented accommodation or in parental homes.

Once selected, the men met on Sunday afternoons, gathering at a different member's house each time. The group contacted people involved in the Tompkinsville project for the information necessary for start-up. Joe Laben was especially

¹⁴ Mary Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville*(New York:The Cooperative League, 1940). Arnold was an American social worker interested in housing who travelled and worked in Canada.

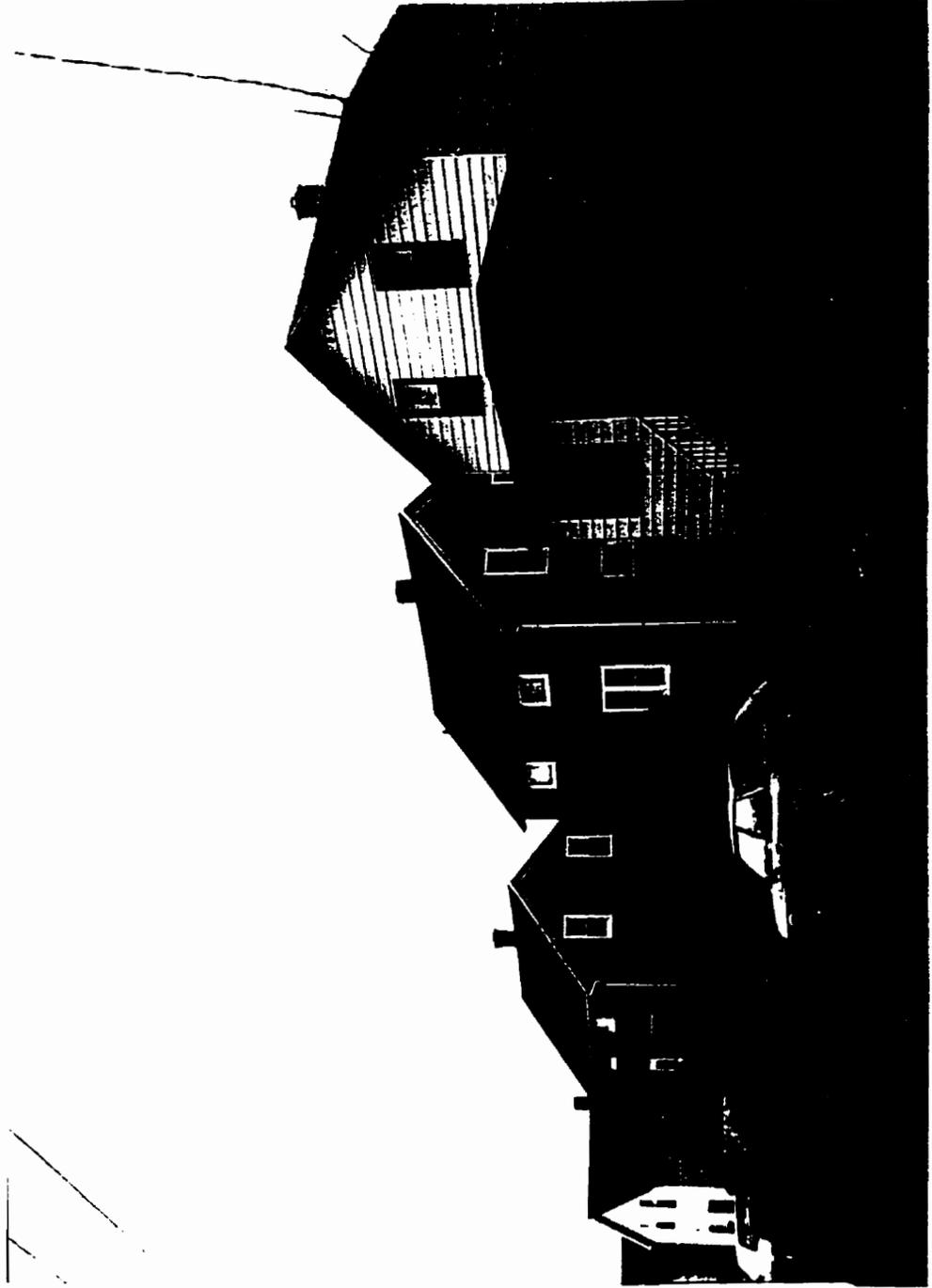


Figure 5-1: Matilda Street co-op houses. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

active in guiding the group; Fr. Moses Coady and Fr. Jimmy Tompkins of the Extension Department came to only a couple of meetings expressing interest and encouragement. There were also representatives from the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. Their role was to supply the group with details about co-operatives, home-building, and gardening.

They were trying to learn the co-operative movement before they even decided to start building. At the meetings Joe Laben would come in sometimes and talk about the co-op movement and I think the doctor ... Fr. Topshee came down one Sunday too.

... [H]e [Joe Laben] was very smart. And he used to come in and tell them what to do, and how to do it, and what procedures to do next, and 'Don't do this ahead of this, now!' You know. He was very good. ¹⁵

Materials for the houses were bought in bulk or as needed from either Chappell's or Stephen's building supply outlets in Sydney. The bills were kept in relation to each house "number 1" to "number 12", and finances were taken care of by the leader, as was the record of each member's "sweat equity" contribution.

The financial backing was arranged in the same way as Tompkinsville housing project with a joint loan from the NSHC covering 75 per cent of the cost of building. The loan was arranged through the Whitney Credit Union. The total cost borrowed for each house was 1600.00. The mortgage was paid off in 1965 with a celebration at the nearby Holy Redeemer Church Hall. Most of the houses "went over" and this extra cost was carried by Chappell's or they got a further mortgage

¹⁵ Babs Neville, interview, September 15, 1993

from the credit union. After all, it was the beginning of World War II; everyone was working and payment was almost assured.

The work on the houses was within the constraints of shift work at the plant or the docks. Some worked their 8 hours, came home to eat, and started immediately to work on one of the houses. They then slept for a few hours and started the routine again.

One of the members, Roddie Black, was a carpenter, but he was not active in the housing co-op in that capacity. He had wife sick with tuberculosis; along with his job, he had the responsibility of their one child. Instead, it was his brother, Francie, who offered expert assistance in building. Francie Black taught carpentry at the military base (later called the "Radar Base"), located on the hill above Whitney Pier. He would frequently bring three or four of his students down to the housing group to learn and to help out at the same time. He also gave valuable guidance to the amateur builders on all aspects of house construction, and each member paid him 25 cents per week for his help. He was fondly referred to as "the Inspector",

The official inspectors were less well appreciated. They came from the NSHC offices in Halifax and Sydney, authoritarian figures who dictated each phase of the building in order to insure that it remain within the \$1600 allotted to each builder. The architect, Priest, also watched closely to

see that his design was followed. The builders were not allowed to use fire-proof roofing, only wood shingles. Extra closet space was forbidden. Another problem in later years was a shared driveway. Joe R. MacDonald is still angry because he was not allowed to put in a newel post worth more than ten dollars.¹⁶ The Halifax visitors also scolded the group members for being behind in their schedule. Babs Neville reported,

...the inspector came down one time and he said the houses should have been away ahead. With the hours they put in. I said, "You must remember they're not professionals, you know. They're just learning the trade, every man that was," I said, "they're not carpenters. And what would take a good carpenter an hour, would take them three, maybe." Dr. Prince was one. ... Well, he was very nice and he used to come to visit the houses from Halifax. And to see that each man did his part. And he was very, very nice to us. But some of them would come down, some of those other supervisors. And they'd say, "Now, you should have got this. That's too expensive. And you know you've only got a certain amount of money to look after your home." Course they [the co-op members] didn't like that sort of comment at all. But nevertheless he was helping them out just the same. ...You know they were right when they's say, "You gotta hold off on this now", and, "Don't get this", and, "Don't do this". ...But Dr. Prince was a very, very nice [man].¹⁷

The Whitney Pier housing group was informally named for Dr. S.H. Prince, who was Chair of NSHC, and apparently the official representative of the Commission on the co-op housing

¹⁶ Joe R. and Kay MacDonald, interview, Oct. 28, 1993.

¹⁷ Babs Neville, interview.

sites.¹⁸ Along with acting as an inspector, Prince had the power to approve loans. The Whitney Pier group maintained a cautionary, if respectful, distance from "Dr. Prince". For some members, Prince and the other inspectors represented the worst part about the co-op experience: being caught between what they wanted and what they were allowed; some "did not like him very much".¹⁹

While the relationship with the inspectors was resentful, there was an underlying, and ultimately unquestioning, respect for their authority, even to the extent of naming the project after one of the inspectors. However, some builders, like Joe R. MacDonald exceeded his allotment by \$2000 in his independent decisions about what he could afford.

It is not entirely clear how the housing groups were named, but it was probably a bureaucratic designation for official purposes. Certainly neither MacArthur or Prince were particularly significant to the co-op movement or to the group in Whitney Pier. On the unofficial level it is also unclear

¹⁸ This "Princeville" was the first of three co-op housing groups named for Samuel Henry Prince in Nova Scotia. A native of New Brunswick (1886), he was the first chairman of the Nova Scotia Housing Commission (1932) and conducted the survey of housing in Nova Scotia that led to the founding of the Commission. He was an ordained priest in the Anglican Church; he established the Department of Sociology at Dalhousie University; he was also the founder of the Maritime School of Social Work. He died in 1960. See, Leonard F. Hatfield, *Sammy, The Prince: The Story of Samuel Henry Prince, One of Canada's Pioneering Sociologists* (Windsor, N.S.: Lancelot, 1990).

¹⁹ Joe R. and Kay MacDonald, interview, October 28, 1993.

why it was named "Princeville", beyond Dr. Prince being "a nice man" who apparently had the last word on both the construction and financing of the houses.

The actual building of the houses was "traditional" wood frame construction with a seven foot concrete foundation two feet above-ground. The foundations were poured in succession, using the same set of forms and mixer for all. The remainder of the house was similar to the balloon-framed houses of the previous 50 years, except for a more prevalent use of two-by-fours, and multiples of two-by-eights to replace the traditional heavier timbering in the sills and plates. The primary wood used for boarding was spruce. All the interior wood work was hardwood.

The interior walls were plaster-finished by the same Mi'kmaq plasterer, a Mr. Marshall, who did the work on Mrs. Ryba's house on Henry Street ten years before. He became known around the Matilda Street housing group for laying claim to used cement or other building materials. "He'd say, 'You don't need this, I take it.', and take it home. He did it with every home. But we didn't mind."²⁰ The Mi'kmaq plasterer's actions probably fit with the home-builders' sense of thrift. Marshall charged \$60 per house for his work. His plastering was considered good at the time, and the quality was commented on years afterward. One co-op member chose to have the plastering done by another person. Both the

²⁰ Babs Neville, interview.

electrical work by a Mr. Cuzsak and the plumbing by Mr. Boutlier (Mike Neville's in-law) also cost \$60 per house.

The floors all through the house had a hardwood finish. This was considered a waste by some of the members because the floors were always covered over with linoleum in order to "keep" them, cleaning and waxing being the maintenance of the time. Steel and coal workers were constantly "tracking dirt" into the house when they returned from work, and furthermore, the outside area and streets were mud and gravel for many years after the homes were built, making linoleum flooring imperative.

Another problem in the proposed design of the houses was the heating system. The \$100 allotted for the heating allowed only for a forced air system using a basement furnace and vents leading to each room on the main floor. The result was extremes of hot and cold, seen by mothers as a danger to children.

And I had little ones, of course, and I said to Mike, "My Lord, if I have to go into that house with those registers on the floor." There were registers on the floor and the heat used to come up and then you'd die with the heat one minute and an hour afterwards, the house'd be frozen. ...And my uncle was a first class plumber. And I asked him one day ...So Mike went to the credit union and got a loan, and he did our heating, hot water heating. We were the only house that had hot water heating.²¹

Another mother reported that her little boy burned the soles of his feet one Sunday morning as he ran through the hallway

²¹ Babs Neville, interview.

and over the vent.²² The other members eventually got hot water heating with large lead radiators as well, also taking out mortgages from the credit union.

While the women had opinions about the quality and usefulness of housing materials and design, they were never part of the official decision-making process. At the beginning they had no part in choosing the design of the houses; the men did this when they visited the Tompkinsville project. During the construction the women never attended meetings and they did not have discussions with any of the inspectors. "...you know, the women had their own ways of getting along. But the men would be [at] meetings and they were here and they were there. And they had somebody coming down this day, and we were never, like, invited. Well, we always had kids to mind."²³ Instead, they were encouraged by an unnamed female St. Francis Xavier Extension or Agricultural College worker to have a womens' organization in which "womanly" crafts were encouraged. They worked on twelve quilts, one for each family in the group; also knitting, crocheting and, briefly, weaving. The women appreciated this chance to get together to converse and work, and to have a

²² Kay MacDonald, interview.

²³ Babs Neville, interview. In some co-operative projects, however, women from outside the community took a leadership role in the financial management and planning of the construction, as well as in the activities of the women. See MacKinnon, P. 16; also, the work by an American social worker, Mary Arnold, *The Story of Tompkinsville*.

little fun at the end of a busy day of housework and caring for children.

We used to go every, once a week ... And we took part every week, we got like a social club together. And somebody would learn how to [sew] ... that knew how to sew real good learned somebody, or crochet or knit. And we'd start about a quarter to eight, and we'd wind up about nine o'clock. Then we'd have lunch and we'd have a game of cards. And that was it. That's what was going on every week.From house to house, yeah. And you know, they'd talk about anything that had any trouble with, or any... You know, we helped each other."²⁴

At the encouragement of a worker from either the Dept. of Agriculture or the Agricultural College, they cooperatively acquired a "canner" for preserving vegetables and fruit, which on one occasion was used to send whisky to a brother overseas under the guise of "apple juice". The Agricultural representatives were, at least for a short while, effective in inspiring the group members to take an interest in gardening. Some of the innovative horticultural methods are still used, and there are memories of huge pumpkins and other successful crops. Unfortunately the land designated for gardening was mainly "fire clay" and after a few years, the effort of cultivation was restricted to the back yards of the co-op members.²⁵

But the contribution of the women of the group did not stop with these domestic functions and past-times. Babs Neville kept the books for her husband Mike when he was the

²⁴ Babs Neville, interview.

²⁵ Joe R. MacDonald and Kay MacDonald, interview.

leader of the group. She had to record every hour put in by each man and regularly send it to Halifax. "I kept their times and... I wrote many a, many a letter concerning the group, and I answered many a letter." She also kept a record of the orders, invoices and payments to the building supply outlets.²⁶ The women also helped significantly with the actual construction of the houses, especially the interior, combining their domestic roles with more non-traditional ones:

I was living over on Dominion Street. I just used to come across the field and come in here... because I came down with Mike and did it. And I had the kids and I... well, I pushed them in some place in the din... well, it wasn't a dining room, it was all just boards. And I'd make sure they were safe and I'd come out and hammer and saw, and saw and hammer... I only had the two then... I built half of them cupboards and... you know, "Hand me this" and "Hand me that". And you know I was always there to hand him everything. And then we'd come home... And painted. I painted all kinds and varnish, like you know.

Kay MacDonald recalled: "After I got the children to bed, I used to sand paper and paint, and shellac and varnish. I remember down on my knees with steel wool. I helped Joe put up the back door."²⁷

For the most part, there were no serious disagreements in this co-operative venture, either between members or even between members and official inspectors. If there were uncomfortable moments, they involved the collection of share

²⁶ Unfortunately she burned these records in 1992, after keeping them for over 50 years.

²⁷ Kay MacDonald, interview.

moneys and the value of the houses. These factor were closely tied to the particular philosophy of co-operative ownership and the type of co-operative financing that was practised nation-wide before 1950. The principle of "all out" co-operation was adhered to in order to prevent "speculation", and it had the intended result of promoting community solidarity.²⁸ This meant that the house was not owned by the co-op member; instead the member owned a share of all the houses, i.e., the houses were owned co-operatively. In the case of the Princeville Housing Co-op, each member owned one-twelfth of each of the twelve houses. Accordingly, all of the members were together responsible for paying the joint mortgage. For 25 years, beginning with the time of building, the members paid \$6.50 per week which was collected by the leader, Mike Neville.

Anyone that, some of them couldn't... They'd say, "Well, I can't pay this month..." Well, they'd have to pay the next month. Or if they let it go three months, they'd get a notice. You know, you just couldn't do things like that. Everybody had to pitch in and do their thing.

At the end of the 25 years, when the mortgage was paid, the houses then belonged individually to the members.

When any of the houses were sold before the mortgage was fully paid, the same principle came into play. The value of the house was decided by the remaining eleven members; the

²⁸ A Guide to Co-operative Housing (Study Text for Co-operative Home Builders, (Ottawa: St. Patrick's College Institute of Social Action, 1954), p.23.

member who was leaving the group had no say in this process because he or she was no longer a member, but also because he or she would profit by the sale of the house over and above what was owing further on the mortgage. Then the remaining eleven members took applications and voted for the admission of the new member, the buyer of the house. The price remained the same, no matter who was buying; the difficulty was in the fact that often relatives of members applied to buy the house, and there was a danger of nepotism. Some members disagreed with the co-operatively appraised value of "their" houses. But, the system was acknowledged and it prevailed.

Of the Princeville Co-op members on Matilda Street, only five original families remained in 1993: Babs Neville, widow of Mike Neville; Laughie MacDonald, widower; Mary Black, widow of Roddie Black; Joe R. and Kay MacDonald. All talk about a sense of achievement and neighbourliness, and even with the annoyance caused by the inspectors, there is a general satisfaction with the quality of the houses. "All the very best of materials, not like after the War when you couldn't get anything. ... The best part was moving in to a brand new house that you built yourself, something that was out of reach before."²⁹

Babs Neville lives in a gable-entry style house, with a driveway shared with the Lee family, who live in the house originally belonging to Louis Mombourquette. The house has a

²⁹ Joe R. MacDonald, interview.

front veranda and porch added about 10 years after the original construction. There is a small back porch-entry leading to the back door leading to the kitchen. This porch was part of the Mike Neville's original design, as it required planning for pouring the foundation. It was not part of the basic house design taken from Tompkinsville. The house now has aluminum siding and asphalt roofing, both products of the CMHC programs of the 1970s. The Neville's yard is large and edged with trees, scrubs and the occasional flower box. Theirs is one of the yards that took advantage of the aborted street directly behind; they decided to make their yard larger, since no one else was using the area.

Inside the house, a couch takes up much of the space in the front porch leading from the veranda. Inside, a hallway gives the familiar choice of going upstairs, into the kitchen, or into the living room. Almost inevitably, the choice is to the kitchen to sit at the table and visit. The kitchen has a sink under a window and cupboards at the end wall, the back door at the corner, on the side of the house. The basement entry, located centrally at the side of the house, has been closed over by a small door. There have been a number of window changes in the dining room since the construction of the house, but it is basically the same as when it was built. Babs Neville has pleasant memories of the co-op housing group; of the hard work, and the camaraderie between the women; the canner still in Ruby MacDonald's

basement. "There wasn't too much friction or anything, you know. There was never anyone had anything ill to say against another man. They all did their work and they all did it as pleasantly as they could." She remembers that the co-operative ladder is still under her veranda for any others who still remember its co-operative purpose, and that once in a while she brought a pie to Roddie Black, when his wife was in the T.B. Annex for over a year during the construction of their house. The house represents a very tangible and worthwhile experience shared with her neighbours, but especially with her husband who died of cancer several years ago; just as important, it gave them a decent house for more than 50 years.

The Future Co-op Housing Group

The "Future" Housing Co-op was touted as the first Black housing co-op in Canada. It began in 1949 and initially involved 9 black families and one white family who lived in the "Coke Ovens" area of Whitney Pier. The members were Eddy and Olive Bowles, Bill and Jeanette Lucas, Harold and Annabel Kirton, Boysie and Eva Mayers, Hugh and Vivian Savoy (non-black), Buddy and Abbie Best, Fitz and Grace Suttles, Tommy and Ethel Miller, Johnny and Delores Chase, Gil and Marion Reid. Only five of the original families actually moved into completed houses: they were Bowles, Savoy, Chase, Miller, and Reid. For various reasons, the other five families dropped

out of the co-operative either before construction began, or during construction. Jim Dawson, Greg Fewer, Ray Pettipas, all non-black, were early replacements in the co-op. The first families moved into the houses in 1950.

The houses of the Future Housing Co-operative are extant, built on Elmwood Ave, just on the northern and eastern edge of the Coke Ovens area. The houses are the same basic design as the Tompkinsville and Princeville housing groups -- one and three-quarter storey "temple" or simple gothic revival with the same dimensions. Eight were 23'x25'; two were 22'x26', with 15 foot posts, and either gable entry facade or side roof facade. They have wood frame construction with original wood shingle sheathing and asphalt roofs; several houses now have aluminum or vinyl siding. The floorplan is also based on the Tompkinsville design, with variations in room and hall sizes depending on the overall dimensions of the house. The windows are characteristically placed just under the eaves. The architect for this project was A.E. Priest, as it was for the Princeville group.

The only original member available and willing to be interviewed was Marion Reid who lived at 7 Elmwood Drive. Marion is the widow of Gil Reid who died of cancer several years ago. Marion and Gil sold their share in the co-op in 1969 and have since lived in other parts of Cape Breton County. The house is now administered as a low rental unit by the Cape Breton Regional Housing Authority. The house is

23'x25' and is the only house in the group with a gable entry facade. It has a shared driveway on a 50'x90' lot which has a number of trees some of which date from before construction. The house is now covered with white aluminum

siding: the coke ovens are closed and no longer send their pollution over the area. The house was originally painted white, but they changed to a darker colour after a few years.

We had to paint often, because where we were living, we were getting all the crap from the coke ovens. And we could paint our house today. And they could bleed the batteries tonight, and a fog would come. You got up the next morning, you'd think that somebody painted it with tar. ... So we ended up painting ours brown, so you couldn't see the stuff from the coke ovens on it.³⁰

The only decorative feature on the otherwise simple house is a large multi-light picture window on the facade. Unlike most of the other houses on the street, it has no porch on the facade, only a concrete step with wrought iron railings. The interior layout is standard: three bedrooms and bath upstairs; and hallway, living room, dining room and kitchen downstairs. All the floors of the house are hardwood. It has a full basement.

Marion Reid's experience with co-operative housing was not entirely positive. When she and her husband sold their co-op home they had no regrets about leaving the memories behind. Many of Mrs. Reid's memories were of conflicts with the architect and the NSHC inspectors, and of tensions with

³⁰ Marion Reid, interview, Sept 15, 1993.

members of her own black community. "When it came to plans and construction and how to do things, there was an awful lot of bickering. No, there's no harmony in housing co-ops believe me!"³¹ When her husband became ill, was frequently laid off, all the while still trying to function as treasurer for the group, Marion found that she no longer wanted anything to do with it. "I was pretty well angry at the whole housing thing." But she did agree that the co-operative housing project did provide a desperately needed alternative for the Reids, both in terms of housing and in social environment for their children.

The social conditions of the community and specific housing conditions of several of the participants is given in a student report in 1950, during the "study group" preparation period of the co-op's activities. Frank Rowe spent two months living with a black family in Whitney Pier in order to study the co-op housing group, and apparently to assess the Catholic Church's role in this project and in the betterment of blacks in general. He describes the sights, sounds and smells as thoroughly distasteful and states, that the Coke Ovens area beside all this industry is "another Harlem in minutae".³²

³¹ Marion Reid, interview.

³² Francis J. Rowe, "A Negro Community in Nova Scotia" The paper is a report on Rowe's summer job with the St. Francis Xavier University the Extension Department. Rowe was delegated to continue the co-op activities set up by the Extension Department and to bring it to success. The tone of his paper is to view the Black man as helpless victim as he develops his opinions on how the Catholic Church's can help

Upon closer inspection, he described the three parallel streets which, in his view, make up the Coke Ovens as six blocks of ugliness and was "a replica of Manchester and Lancashire of the 18th century beauty and sanitation".³³

The Coke Ovens area had a number of crowded tenement buildings and back-alley "shacks" on streets and alleys poorly serviced in terms of sewage systems and garbage disposal. There were also a number of buildings which were owned outright. Rowe reported that coke and slag, being a common road material at the time, covered unpaved streets and paths. There was no playground and children ran about on the street with "no regard for traffic". While the houses of the community had a reputation, at least locally, for clean and neat interiors, the fall-out from the coke ovens made the exteriors a dingy black. Many houses had no running water or indoor flush toilets. Lack of foundations in many houses resulted in a rodent nuisance and the risk of disease.³⁴ Co-op members, Marion and Gil Reid and their three children lived in a tenement building built at the turn of the century, one of the many boarding houses built by the steel company or by local entrepreneurs to house labourers.

We lived on Tupper and Laurier. They were old company

Blacks in Nova Scotia. His comparative base for discussing the conditions of life for Whitney Pier Blacks is the American situation.

³³ Francis Rowe, "A Negro Community".

³⁴ Rowe, p. 1-4

houses that were falling apart They built all those places, by then other individuals had bought them. . . . just for renting, rental purposes afterwards and they didn't care. . . \$15.00 a month. And they were like a butter box. They were cold, they weren't insulated. . . . The children were always sick. And this was one of our reasons for getting out of there. . . . Like we didn't have a shower or tub in those apartments. You were lucky to have a hand sink and a kitchen sink.³⁵

Tom Miller and his wife, both "malatoes" (sic) and related to the Reids, were better off and had a bathtub that was used by the extended family and others. Eddy Bowles' large family lived in a small house with three bedrooms and inconsistent running water. Another couple, Johnny and Delores Chase who lived with their two children in a crowded three-room flat.³⁶

Although Rowe was deeply influenced in his shocked reaction to these conditions by his middle class American Catholic sentiment, his descriptions are sufficiently graphic to give a picture of inferior building maintenance, lack of city services, and social problems attendant to an underemployed and poorly paid society. The social conditions most noticeable to an outsider such as Rowe was the prevalence of prostitution and bootlegging. He reported that the middle class of Sydney would surreptitiously drop in for a few minutes at particular houses throughout the night: "under

³⁵ Marion Reid, interview.

³⁶ Rowe, "A Negro Community", described the conditions of the families, suggesting that Miller's are better off because they are "mixed", pp.5, 13, 14. He fails to mention that several of the other members are mulatto.

cover of darkness, the 'respectable' people left their holes of respectability and became drunken fools in search for more drink and the climax of their carnal desires".³⁷ The co-operative housing was, for the members, as much a chance for the children's moral benefit as for their health. "Like I say, it was a way to get the children off the ...Tupper Street, where they weren't learning the best, that's for sure."³⁸

Substandard housing conditions in the Coke Ovens were almost always within the context of low pay for labouring jobs. Even in the 1950s, most blacks were still not allowed into the semi-skilled or craft areas of the steel plant. Furthermore, the 1950s was the beginning of the downturn of DOSCO's fortunes at Sydney Steel. Eddy Bowles supported his wife and 5 children on a salary of \$46 a week. Gil Reid was laid off many times during his work at the plant, partly because of the steel company's "point system" and partly because of illness. In 1969, while the house was still being paid for, he was laid off permanently because he was unable to work.

The co-op group met weekly during 1950, reading the various publications recommended by the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, such as M.M. Coady's **Master of their Own Destiny** and George Boyle's **Democracy's Second**

³⁷ Rowe, p.12.

³⁸ Marion Reid, interview.

Chance.³⁹ The readings were of less interest to the group members than to the leaders sent by the Extension Department. Marion Reid remembered:

Well, you know, at the beginning, we weren't that interested in what it [co-operation] meant. We were just interested in getting the kids into a decent place. And we weren't that interested in all about how it started ... like Tompkins and them. They used to tell us that, but that would go in one of our ears and out the other. We were just, 'When can we break ground?' and 'When can we get started?' and 'When can we get in there?'

⁴⁰

The meetings were held in the homes of members or in the basement of the African Orthodox Church where Fr. George Francis was parish priest. (Fig. 5-2) Fr. Francis did not take an active part in the co-op beyond offering his facilities for meetings that took in both men and women of the group, and also outside visitors which connected with the Extension Department. Among these, besides Rowe, were Fr. Andy Hogan and Fr. Capstick.

The leaders of the group were men who had some standing in the black community. The president was light-skinned Tom Miller, who was in Rowe's opinion, "in particular of high intellectual calibre".⁴¹ Miller later became involved in civic politics, and became the first black alderman in Nova Scotia. His wife, also of mixed background and light-skinned, was well known all over Cape Breton as a night club singer.

³⁹ George Boyle, *Democracy's Second Chance: Land Work and Co-operation* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1941)

⁴⁰ Marion Reid, interview.

⁴¹ Rowe, p. 14.



Figure 5-2: Future Co-op members and models of houses. St. Francis Xavier University Archives.

Johnny Chase, a non-black of English and Irish Newfoundland ancestry, was secretary. He was, however, part of the black community by virtue of his marriage to a black woman, and was therefore rather outside "white" society in Whitney Pier. The treasurer was Gil Reid, brother-in-law to Tom Miller, who with his wife were obviously "mixed". It is tempting to suggest that the "white" connection gave them advantages in terms of leadership. Certainly, at that time, lighter skin colour made education, jobs and general acceptance more available within both black and white society.

At the start of the housing group's activities, there was at least discussion about an attempt to raise money to buy land. A community picnic was mentioned. But there is no evidence that the group actually raised any money for obtaining land on which to build.⁴² The main problem was not so much in paying for land as it was finding a section of the Pier that was willing to have them. The first possibility was on Broadway in the predominantly white northern end of Ward XI, the street running from Victoria Road to Sydney Harbour. The proposed area was open, making large lots available, and it had a playground nearby on St. Ann's Street.

Investigation of lots was quietly carried out and the owners were formerly [sic] approached. Immediately the information spread and became public with newspaper alacrity. Just as quickly a petition was signed and the Negroes were pointedly told that they were not wanted in the neighbourhood. The matter was pushed no further as the Housing Group withdrew and decided to choose a site

⁴² Rowe, p. 14.

nearer their present quarters.⁴³

Their second choice was a few minutes from their homes in the Coke Ovens, and still within range of the dust and smoke from the coke ovens. However, it too was an open area, and available from the City for expansion. Once again, a petition was signed from a near-by street and presented to city council. To the co-op members it was a strange response to raising the standard of living.

I heard they had a petition out, and I believe that, to try and keep us from getting there. I can't imagine why. Would you believe me if I told you they were all up there with no sewer and water till we went up there. It didn't run that far down on Henry Street, and they were on Gatacre [those who petitioned]. And they all had outside toilets and after we got up there and ran water and sewer, well, they could live like other people. ... And the school was built up there after that. ... Gallagher was mayor then. He was angry with them; he was really incensed, so they didn't get anywhere.⁴⁴

Mayor Gallagher and City Council rejected the petition and the group went ahead with its plans to build on a large field, a horse pasture that would become Elmwood Street. It was by a stream and when they started building there was one house at the beginning of the street, a small residence for Mr. Atkinson of the United Church.

The lots, one to ten, were picked out of a hat. The lots were \$150 each payable to the city. Each member was responsible for financing the cost of the particular lot

⁴³ Rowe, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Marion Reid, interview. See also, Rowe, p.17.

assigned to that family. The cost for building was taken at \$4500.00 per house. The total amount \$45,000 was loaned by the NSHC to the group at three per cent interest for 25 years. That amount did not finish the interior of the house, or any structural additions beyond the basic plan. "It did all the major things, like the plumbing and the wiring, and framing and boarding, closing in the house and shingling it, and your heating system. \$4500 then went a long way. ... like windows and doors..."⁴⁵ (Fig. 5-3)

The requirements for skilled workmanship was left to the individual co-op members. A skilled bricklayer, Gerry Weir, did the chimney for Marion and Gil Reid. "But other men ... knew different people who were chimney builders and that could do it... Once you had the proper materials in the flue lining, they didn't tell you who to hire."⁴⁶ In other cases, qualified plumbers and electricians did all of the houses. Mr. Cusak, the same electrician for the Princeville group, did all the Future group's houses. As well, qualified carpenters came as part of the collective plan, to show the members how to frame in the house and to supervise standards. The interior was pretty much the responsibility of the individual member, who often found a carpenter friend or relative to assist at little or no cost.

The plumbing and heating supplies were bought from

⁴⁵ Marion Reid, interview.

⁴⁶ Marion Reid, interview.

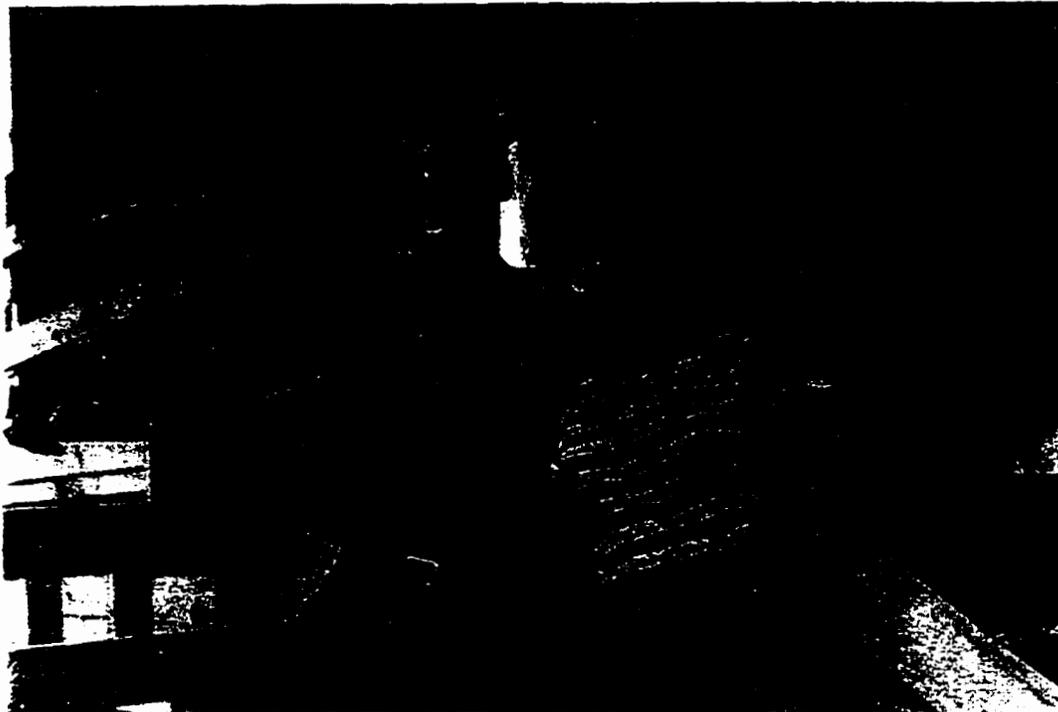
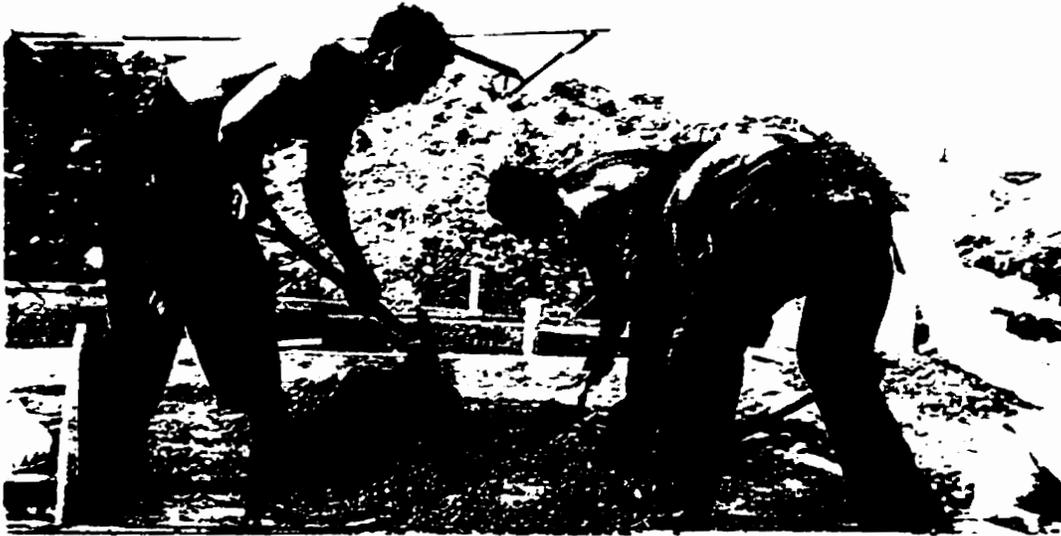


Figure 5-3: Future Housing Co-op construction; Marion and Gil Reid in front of partially built home. St. Francis Xavier University Archives.

Thompson and Sutherland, as were the wood materials from Stephens Building Supplies. "All the materials were ordered in bulk, like ten bathtubs, ten toilets, ten light fixtures, so on and so forth. And ten furnaces ... coke and coal ...with hot water radiators." Nothing was ordered without getting a signed requisition from Joe Laben or Gerald Lewis of the Extension Department. There were often problems with supplies, a result of the demands of the War. With cement enough only for nine houses, the foundation for the tenth house was not poured until after the original member dropped out of the group and that house was turned over to another person.⁴⁷ There was also a shortage of properly cured lumber.

For this housing co-op, the construction was on the uneasy borderline between the old way and the new techniques starting to be recognized by national housing standards. The foundation forms were of boards instead of plywood, and had awkward wires which had to wrapped around the individual boards and then cut off when the boards were removed. Also, traditional plastering of interior walls was still seen as better than gyprock which was used only in cases where green lumber left the stability of walls in doubt, about one half of the buildings. The insulation - a new concept- was "like big rolls of tin foil, that you stapled."⁴⁸ The floors were all

⁴⁷ This was the construction taken over by Greg Fewer. He stated in an interview that in addition to the lack of cement, the foundation had to be cut through solid rock.

⁴⁸ Marion Reid, interview.

hardwood, as in earlier years. The roofs, on the other hand, were covered with asphalt shingles, a result of new Canadian Building Standards rules.

Tensions resulting from building innovations were based both in perceived status and of ease. The Black housing co-op wanted to build bungalows, believing that they were easier to build and to maintain. But the architect insisted that they build the same type of house built on Matilda Street ten years earlier. The group resented Priest's direction to build one and one-half storey houses rather than bungalows. "He thought that lower class people didn't live in bungalows."⁴⁹ The co-op members ignored Priest's wishes when it came to ordering finish items such as bathtubs and windows.

And he tried to make the place as plain as he could. Like when we ordered ... closed-in tubs. And he seen them, he had a proper fit. He thought we should have the tubs with the legs on. The old fashioned tubs. And he said, 'If you're are going to have those kind of tubs, what's Doctor Guam going to have?' Imagine! He was a jerk! That's Doctor Guam's problem, not mine. We were given enough money, we could what ever we wanted! ...like he had all little tiny windows and we put in picture windows. He was so angry when he came up and saw the picture windows, I think he wanted to break them. [laughter] Well, we had gotten so used to that we did our own thing, and we just let him scream."⁵⁰

The role of women in the Future Co-op was similar in some ways to that of the Princeville Co-op. For instance, they worked longside their husbands in the actual construction and

⁴⁹ Marion Reid, interview.

⁵⁰ Marion Reid, interview.

finishing work. In preparation for pouring the forms for the foundation, Marion Reid reflected, "I was putting in spacers and wrapping wires and I don't know what a wire is yet, but I was doing it." She also recalled incidents while she painted the exterior of the house, once watching a horse from the nearby pasture narrowly missed trampling her baby daughter; another time almost missing her chance to vote in the municipal elections because she and her husband were so busy with their work.⁵¹

Like the Princeville group, the women had a social club" organized by the Extension Department, "Just [to] get together and talk about how we were getting along and ... how the house was coming. Just to get to know each other better... I think is what it was really for."⁵² They had an executive and regular "private" meetings, but came together with the men when a special guest was lecturing at the meetings, or to look at models of the houses, as shown in the photo. The women's club was officially responsible for "domestic" discussions such as paint colour or materials for drapes. "Well, the women were more or less interested in what colours of paints they were going to use. Like one of us would be responsible at the next meeting for bringing paint chits from a store or materials [samples] for drapes. ... none had money to buy drapes, but it was something to do and

⁵¹ Marion Reid, interview.

⁵² Marion Reid, interview.

get together."⁵³ But the women also did real work which was unofficial, but very much within the principles of the co-operative.

You have to put in so much sweat equity. Like, a bunch of us women, like we had a meeting, and we had a little shack built up there, the men did, by the [housing] group. And the windows had to be painted before you could put up the foundation. So we'd say, well, you know, we all had children. Well one day it'd be my turn to go up and paint. The next day it'd be someone else's turn to go up and paint. And we did. We got the windows done. But the men seemed to bicker among themselves.⁵⁴

The problem of discord within this group was significant. The main symptom of dissonance was gossip and rumours pitting one member against another. Sometimes, it was a suggestion that some of the members were lazy; another time, it was a real or imagined slight as simple as one member being accused of "not speaking" to another. One of the results of the tension was that a number of families dropped out of the co-op before and during construction and several "bought-out" soon after construction. Another result during construction was a lack of the co-operation that was supposed to be the very backbone of the project.⁵⁵

⁵³ Marion Reid, interview.

⁵⁴ Marion Reid, interview.

⁵⁵ As Janice Dineen, *The Trouble with Co-ops* (Toronto: Green Tree, 1974), p. 7, pointed out, "[T]he trouble with co-ops is that everybody has to cooperate". There is an oblique reference to this potential problem in "The People's Schools - Lecture no. 7 - Co-operative Housing", St.F. X. Archives, RG30-3/10/1612, p. 2. See also, Margaret C. Rodman and Mathew Cooper, *New Neighbours: A Case Study of Cooperative Housing* (Toronto: U. of T. Press, 1992), pp. 268, 272, 273.

Discord is difficult to define beyond the suggestion of "bickering", and it is likewise difficult to pinpoint a particular reason for it. It may be that some of the discord was based in religion, or more precisely, in the various religions that involved members of the black community. Curiously, the Catholic Church, the official leader of the project through the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, seemed to have been regarded as a somewhat distant and benign player. The Church was neither the object of gratitude or anger. Frank Rowe seemed eager to enhance the group's perception of the Church, and in his report repeatedly noted the relationship, slim as it was, between the black community and the Catholic Church. Although the group felt that Rowe "was a character", there is no suggestion that he represented the Church. Nor were the other extension workers such as Joe Laben and Gerald Lewis seen to represent Catholicism, but rather their own communities of Tompkinsville and Coxheath respectively. The Catholic Church was best remembered for its activity following construction when the housing group was visited by many Catholic clergy from all over the world. "He [Fr. Coady] brought most of them from Antigonish, they were there studying. He and Fr. Hogan and a bunch of other priests, and we had Cardinal Agonini at our house at one time. I said I should have sold it to the Catholic Church, he blessed it enough [laughter]".⁵⁶ On the

⁵⁶ Marion Reid, Sept. 15, 1993.

other hand, minor tensions existed between the group members and some members of the United Church within the black community. These were not defined, but considering that the United Church was also involved in community improvement, there was probably competition for the attention of the community. Opposition to the co-operative by Jehovah Witnesses was especially singled out: they held that too much emphasis was being placed on "worldly" things such as housing, rather than on the Kingdom of Heaven. It is also likely that the traditional antipathy of the Jehovah Witnesses toward the Catholic Church was a factor. The African Orthodox Church obviously supported the idea of housing co-operatives while not taking part beyond offering meeting facilities.

The co-operative housing experience of constant hard work and tension spread over almost two years was also a strain on marital relationships. Marion Reid was asked by a local Catholic priest, Fr. Beaton, to "talk to" newly-weds in an attempt to involve them in co-ops. She refused.

You know, to start young people off and putting into a house like that was biting off more than they could chew. They were better off in a tent if they were happy than to be in a place where they were going to be under constant strain. ... It drains. It's not for young people just getting married. You know, like we were married 7 years when we, 8 years, when we moved in here. We pretty well understood each other. And anything that rubbed each other the wrong way, we had already found out about it and we didn't do it. But you take new people starting out. To get into something like this, with all the irritation.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Marion Reid, interview.

One marriage broke up soon after the family moved into their new home, and their house was sold to another family who came into the co-op.

There were several more tangible reasons for stress during the period of construction that were based in the cooperative principles of the housing group. Sometimes the houses of some co-op member were "ahead", whether through hard work, or because they was able to get help from kin or friends. The inspectors, especially the architect, "had a fit" when he saw this happening. These members were ordered to leave the work on their own homes and go to bring another up to speed. Often the lagging member was not pulling his weight, thus leaving the responsibility with the group as a whole. This caused some considerable strain within the group, but there was even more resentment toward the inspector.

The entire group was also responsible for making payments on the mortgage. But when some members were not able to meeting their monthly obligations, then Gil Reid, the treasurer had the unpleasant task of trying to pull together enough money to take to the bank.

Our rent, the payments on the building, they all had to go in together. My husband was treasurer for the group. And like, if anybody was short, we all paid for it. Or the payment'd look like it wasn't complete. They [the bank] weren't dealing with 10 individuals, they were dealing with one company. Which is a mistake.⁵⁸

The problems of managing the financial affairs of the group

⁵⁸ Marion Reid, interview.

became so stressful that the Reids "brought-out" their portion of the mortgage before it was due. The complications of his personal contributions remain unsorted.⁵⁹

The Future Housing Co-op on Elmwood Avenue was one of the last co-ops to come under early set of rules governing housing co-ops. Marion Reid's negative feelings about her particular housing group were reflected in the experience of many of the other co-ops of the time. As a result, by the mid-fifties, the rules began to change allowing member's individual responsibility for their mortgages and fewer restrictions on the location and design of houses.

The Insulite Housing Co-operative

The so-called "slag houses" represented a significant housing movement during the 1950s. During that period, over 500 slag houses were built in Whitney Pier and all of Cape Breton by the Insul-Lite Housing Company. The prototype for these houses was a co-operative housing project unofficially called the Insulite Housing Group under the direction of a resident of Whitney Pier. It was an innovative project in terms of building techniques and materials; however, it was strongly traditional in the many ways that it related to the work culture of its participants.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Marion Reid, interview.

⁶⁰ See Elizabeth Beaton, "Slag Houses in a Steel City", forthcoming, **Material History Review**, Fall, 1996.

The group started their "study groups" at the steel plant in 1950 and meetings were held as needed during the entire project. In 1952 they began construction, and by 1954 the group had completed 15 houses located all over Sydney, including the areas of Sydney River, Ashby, Westmount, and Whitney Pier. The group was made up of 12 Dominion Steel Company employees and two others. The steel workers were Harvey Hodder, Jake Curry, Jim MacCarron, Walter Kenney, Norman Powell, Wally MacKinnon, Bill Fedora, Dave Coady, Duke Gallant, Bill McCabe, and Edmund Anthony; Ted Tracey was a barber and Ernie Johnson worked for J.R. MacDonald Wholesalers. Most were young men at the time of construction, recently married, and fully employed. The plant workers were either skilled steel or mechanical workers, or were foremen in some part of the plant. Except for two families, all are still living in their insulite houses; all houses build in this project are extant. The original study group involved a larger number of steelworkers and others, but only fourteen decided to be in what amounted to an experiment in house construction.

The houses are known as "bungalow" style, some of the first to be erected in the Sydney area.⁶¹ Their dimensions are 28'x40' with nine foot posts. The orientation of the

⁶¹ The meaning of bungalow has changed in the vernacular of this community over the years. By the 1950's, the name meant a "California ranch" style: one storey, rectangular, with a the long facade.

houses depended on the size of the lot. The kitchens are large, in keeping with the tradition of the kitchen as the social centre of the home. This was a major difference from the bungalow kitchens that followed during the 1950s and 1960s in which the kitchens were hardly more than "nooks" where food was prepared.

Edmund and Vida Anthony, whose experience forms a basis for this study, built their slag house at 298 Lingan Road on a 40' (street)x100' deep lot. (Fig. 5-4) The lot cost them \$125 in 1950, purchased from the former estate of one of the early farmer/landowners, L.X. MacDonald. They moved into their house on September, 1954, the last family to do so. They had the obvious disadvantage of waiting almost four years for this day, while helping the others who had priority. However, they had the advantage of learning from the others' mistakes.

The facade of the Anthony's house is on the gable end. There is a veranda around the rear of the house extending from the side kitchen entrance. This entrance is simply decorated by a small gable-roof cover over the door. The Anthony's share a driveway with Vida's brother who lives on their north side. Their floorplan consists of living room and kitchen on each side of the front entrance.⁶² The living room extends to a dining room which was originally a bedroom. There are two bedrooms and a bath at the rear of the house. The side

⁶² Edmund Anthony and his wife, Vida were interviewed at their home on Lingan Road in Whitney Pier on August 11, 1993.

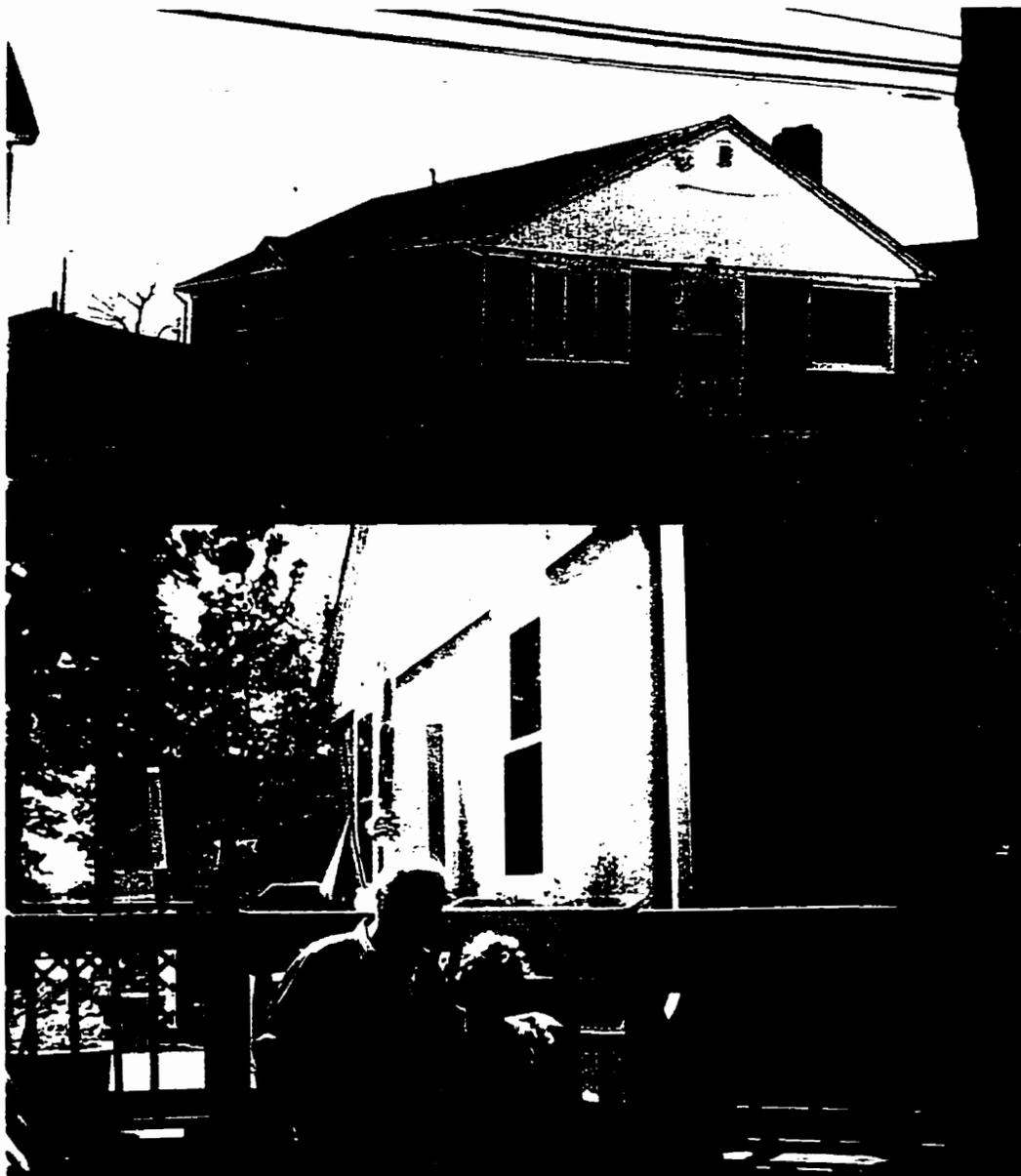


Figure 5-4: Edmund and Vida Anthony; their "slag" house on Lingan Road. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

kitchen entrance has a stairway leading to the finished basement. The kitchen is well-lit with plenty of cupboard space, and has a narrow hall leading through an archway to the bedrooms and bath. Anthony deviated from the recommended design to make the bathroom and one of the bedrooms larger by taking width from the hallway and another bedroom. On the whole, however, the house differed very little from the others in the group.

The housing group was a "co-operative" in practical terms. The participants planned and made decisions about design and construction in a co-operative manner; they bought their materials in bulk to save money; they owned equipment and paid for skilled help co-operatively. However, they did not form a legal co-operative company, they did not hold a joint mortgage, and they were not supervised or governed by any outside institution, other than normal electrical and plumbing standards. There was a plan for each phase at each site, but the progress of construction on each house did not remain the same because some of the home builders found ways of speeding up the process, usually through getting extra help through their kin networks.

The members of this "co-op" had no connection with the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, or with any other public institution. They initially considered seeking guidance from St. Francis Xavier, but decided that this would compromise their independence. They did not want

to be restricted to one location, and they wanted individual mortgages. They did not borrow from NSHC for the cost of building and materials.⁶³

The leader of the Insulite Housing group was Norman Weiner, an metallurgical engineer working in the Research department at Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO). He built his "insulite" house on Taylor Street in Whitney Pier. Weiner left DOSCO shortly after it became SYSCO and moved to Israel. He was highly respected by his contemporaries and is still remembered as a "good steel man", a decent man who was reluctant to speak ill of anyone. He was also deeply religious, an Orthodox Jew. Norman Weiner's diary provides the core of the information available on construction of the houses. Although he used many traditional terms to describe the house building process, the orientation deviates sharply from the "normal" discussion of house building.⁶⁴ Wiener was interviewed for this study in 1990 on a visit from his job in Israel. It is said of Norman Weiner that he wanted everyone to have a good and cheap home, namely the Slag-Insulite house.

The primary ingredient in the Insulite houses was blast furnace slag, a waste by-product of the iron making process at DOSCO. Of virtually no use to the steel company, except

⁶³ Anthoney, interviews, August 11, 1993; Nov. 12, 1993; also Bill McCabe, Nov. 8, 1993.

⁶⁴ Norman Weiner's dairy dates from Saturday, May 30, 1952 when the first foundations were being poured, to Saturday, July 10, 1954, the last day with "the group". The Diary is at the Beaton Institute, MG 12, 261.

minimally for road construction, the slag had been dumped on to the shoreline and into the ocean by the hundreds of thousands of tons, increasing the area of the plant property by over 100 acres in the 93 years since it began production.

But after World War II, the slag began to be processed for construction use. It was made into a substance called "foam slag aggregate" by the Gallai-Hatchard process, developed in Britain during the early years of World War II.

Essentially the process consists of dumping molten Blast Furnace slag into a concrete pit or tank (called a bed). Water is injected into the slag through nozzles located in the floor of the bed and the rapid conversion of the water into steam by the molten slag foams or expands the slag. The Foamed slag in crude form is then removed from the bed, crushed and sized for market use.⁶⁵

The foamed slag became known as "popcorn slag" to the DOSCO steel workers because of its consistency and colour.

In 1942, the Nova Scotia Department of Industry, interested in the British experience of rebuilding Coventry with slag concrete, suggested to DOSCO that foamed slag might be a useful building material in Nova Scotia. After the War, Gallai-Hatchard visited the steel plant in Sydney; visits were made to foamed slag plants in Britain; and DOSCO's Research department worked on improving the technology. DOSCO offered to make foam slag available to any contractor who wanted to develop techniques in this new type of construction. Soon, the steel company was working with L.E. Shaw, a manufacturer

⁶⁵ "New Sydney Steel Plant By-product Now on Market", *Teamwork*, August, 1950, p. 6.

of building products with eight plants in the Maritimes, including one in Sydney. By 1950, L.E. Shaw was producing foamed slag blocks and slabs called "thermocrete" for use in residential and business construction.

Foamed slag wall blocks, partition blocks, floor and roof slabs are made in modern block making machines recently purchased by L.E. Shaw Limited. The blocks and slabs are made with a mixture of foamed slag, portland cement and water and are compacted in the block machine under vibration and pressure. After being steam cured the blocks are stock piled for several weeks before use.⁶⁶

As the names, "insulite" and "thermocrete" suggest, the foamed slag had characteristics which made it a good insulating material. Tests on the foamed slag carried out at the Nova Scotia Technical College showed that eight inches of foamed slag had the same insulation values as 32 to 40 inches of ordinary concrete.⁶⁷ It also provided good sound insulation, was 40 per cent the weight of the equivalent volume of sand-gravel concrete, and was fire resistant. The most talked of characteristic of the foamed slag was its ability to be cut or nailed into, making this material as easy to manage as wood. It was advertised as being 15 per cent cheaper and stronger than a comparable wood frame house.⁶⁸

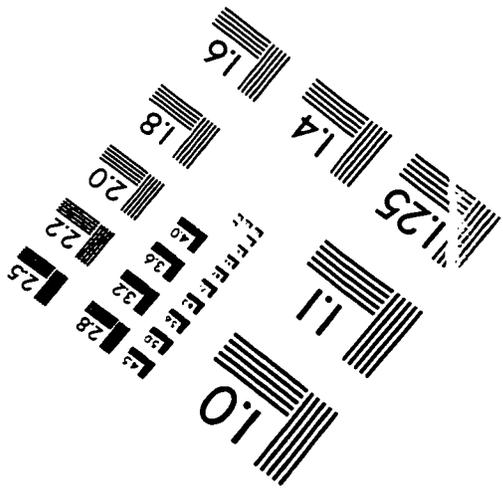
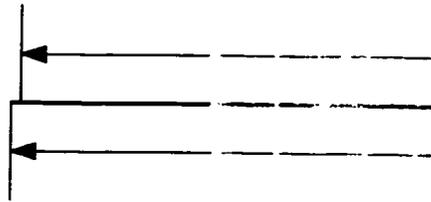
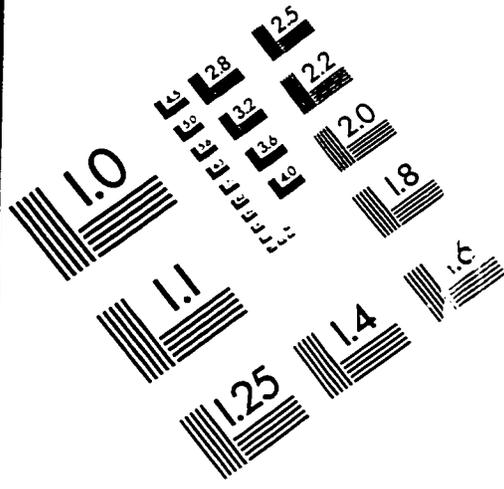
Norman Weiner added an important feature to this type of construction. Influenced partly by articles in **Science and Mechanics Magazine**, but mostly by his curiosity and ingenuity

⁶⁶ **Teamwork**, August, 1950, p.6.

⁶⁷ **Teamwork**, August, 1950, p.7.

⁶⁸ **Teamwork**, August, 1950, pp.6-8.

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as a researcher, he developed a technique by which slabs were used for the walls instead of blocks, or casting-in-place as was being introduced in Halifax.⁶⁹ Weiner proposed a slab eighteen inches by eight feet, the same thickness as a floor slab (eight inches) with a curve or groove down the 12" wide centre part of the slab, giving the thinner part (the "web") about two inches in thickness and three inches of the eight inch thickness on each side or "rib" of the slab. Wire mesh was set into the web, and steel rods set into the ribs, for re-enforcing. Finally, the wall slabs were "finished" by brushing on a coat of stucco with a long-handled fibre brush. Weiner appears to have started the process of obtaining a patent in April 1954.

The wall slabs, along with floor slabs, were made at L.E. Shaw in Sydney with significant contribution from the group members. The group ordered cement by the carload to the lumber supplier's railroad siding and delivered it the Shaw's plant. The gravel for making concrete was delivered from a variety of sources and by a number of different people in the Industrial Area, depending on availability and price of delivery. Slag from the steel plant, "for the hauling away" was used instead of coarse sand in mixing concrete -- it was cheaper and lighter.

The building materials used for the houses were mainly

⁶⁹ Weiner Diary, October 2, 11-14, 1952; "Low Cost Houses from Sydney Foamed Slag: Object to Pour Whole House in Forms like a Basement", *Teamwork*, March, 1951, pp.14-15.

from Stephen's Building Supplies. Later, when Chappell's Building Supplies offered to give the group a "co-op" reduction of 10 per cent, some of the materials were obtained there. These supplies were the traditional wood products needed -- windows and doors, two-by-fours, two-by-fives and two-by-sixes for forms, posts, plates, studding and trusses, and interior finishing requirements. Besides the thermocrete, L.E. Shaw supplied sewer pipes, flue blocks, bricks and tiles, and other concrete materials. Big General Electric kitchen stoves came from Chappell's. Benny Lipkus, who had a hardware and appliance store in Sydney, supplied the oil furnaces for hot air duct heating. Lipkus' warehouse was also used to store many of the materials. Nails and other incidentals were bought wherever good prices could be found. For instance, 60 lb. nails were discovered at Landry's Scrap Yard for 4 cents per lb; three to four tons of the nails were immediately ordered.⁷⁰ All of these were bought as bulk orders on the approval of the carpenter; some items were paid for individually, some jointly from a financial resource pool established by the members. Payment for separately charged materials was required within ten days.

Individual financing required that members made their own mortgage arrangements, usually in smaller amounts from several sources. This created some tensions when the pool ran low and payments were due: pressure was put on individual members to

⁷⁰ Weiner Diary, Tuesday Aug. 26, 1952.

make their contributions. The bookkeeping of each member's sweat and financial equity was a complicated matter requiring the services of professional auditor.

A great deal of the equipment and materials for the housing group came from the steel plant. This "borrowing" by steel workers was a long-standing tradition resulting in many materials and tools finding their way to workers' off-hours life. It was a practice winked at by both the company and on-the-job supervisors. However, Weiner, being of relatively high status at the steel plant, formalized an official arrangement for his group that was based in the DOSCO's interest in experimenting with foamed slag as a building material. Early in the project, President Anson of DOSCO granted the group access to slag and its delivery by a crusher truck, 5 tons of "re-bar" scrap from the bar mill, a concrete mixer, wheelbarrows, and forms. By the next week, the group got the long-term loan of a mixer from the Coke Ovens, which was run by Kopper's, operationally separate from the steel plant. The various pieces of equipment were serviced in the mechanical departments of the steel plant and coke ovens as they inevitably broke down. The list of borrowings and special favours grew and grew over the more than two years of construction, including nails, small tools and even a vacuum cleaner. The old truck bought by the group from the one of the gravel suppliers was constantly breaking down and being fixed on the plant during off-hours. So were the two mixers.

Occasionally a foreman was peeved when some piece of equipment was not returned on time, but on the whole, the privilege was quietly acknowledged and openly used.

Archie MacKenzie, skilled carpenter, was hired by the group for the duration of the project. He was paid at a rate of two dollars per hour for a forty hour week. He did not work a regular day, but instead worked as he was needed, doing specialized jobs, giving direction, and making sure that the construction on several houses continued at a balanced rate: "At the last of it ... he more or less supervised."⁷¹ The other skilled workers on the project were the plasterer, the bricklayer, the plumber, the electrician. Most of the electrical work was done by the three qualified plant electricians in the group, but the work was then inspected by an another authorized electrician.

The actual construction of the houses started, as most houses do, with the excavation for the foundation. The excavation was done by the members' pick-and-shovel work and an excavation specialist named Harris who used a bulldozer. The forms of four-by-eight panels, and some four-by-eight-by-two for irregular spaces were prefabricated at Ted Tracey's father's place in Ashby and moved to each building site as needed. Once in place the form panels were kept from sagging by "walers", a set of two-by-four's placed at half height both inside and outside the forms and braced against the ground in

⁷¹ Edmund Anthoney, interview, August 11, 1993.

each instance. Spacers for the 10" thickness of the walls were wired in. Window boxes were made by the carpenter and situated for the pouring.

Each foundation (outside measurements 28'x40'), including footers, required an average of 140 bags of cement, 28 yards of gravel and 12 yards of slag. The columns (eight inches by eight inches by eight feet) were of steel re-enforced concrete cast in forms on pads placed nine feet from each side wall of the foundation: sometimes they were precast on site and grouted on to the pads. Sometimes there was a problem with the bad bonding between the concrete and the steel rod re-enforcing causing crumbling and breaking of the columns. The floors of the foundations were poured at a later date, a job reserved for poor weather when other more urgent tasks were completed. After some experimentation the "mix" was set at 45 shovels of gravel; 25, 20 or 15 shovels of pre-wetted slag depending on the consistency of the gravel, five to five and one-half gallons water, to one bag of cement. Re-bar was used for re-enforcing. "Screeding", a method of maintaining a level surface, was done using steel rods instead of the usual two-by-four board. On a good pour with a full contingent of member manpower, plus relatives and friends, -- sometimes up to eighteen people -- there might be four men shovelling gravel, two shovelling slag, one shovelling cement, one mixer operator (from the steel plant or coke ovens for the first few pourings), four men tamping, six on wheel barrrows pouring the

mixture into the forms. The first pouring ended with "a good clean party at Mira Ferry".⁷² The last pour, also celebrated with a party, was on Thursday, July 23, 1953 over a year after the first. Throughout that time, there was a constant effort to find the correct mixture, slag being an virtually untested element replacing sand in the concrete. Weiner also endeavoured to shorten the five to six hour pouring time by different arrangements of the mixer and workers, sometimes by pouring two foundations at once, when the second set of forms could be obtained. In the end, it was the weather, manpower, and mood of the workers and their cranky equipment that decided the time and success of foundation pourings.

There were no beams or joists in the main floor. Instead, small 90 lb. rails were used as beams or trimmers.⁷³ They were laid into notches at the top edge of the foundation and went the length of the foundation, cemented into the supporting concrete columns. The grouting was done with cement and sand mixed one:three and one per cent chloride.⁷⁴ The rails were delivered in 19'6" lengths; any required

⁷² Weiner Diary, Saturday, June 28, 1952; Also Tuesday, July 1, 1952.

⁷³ The "poundage " of rails is the weight given per yard of rail. This rail was considered to be small and relatively light, about the same as the weight of a roof support in a coal mine.

⁷⁴ Weiner Diary, Saturday, Oct. 4, 1952.

slicing was done using a "fish plate".⁷⁵ The use of rails was another innovation introduced by Norman Weiner. Through DOSCO, the group was able to obtain scrap rails from Newfoundland, the result of demolition of its narrow gauge railway. The arrangement with DOSCO called for payment in equivalent scrap from local junk dealers.⁷⁶

The main floor was made of nine foot concrete slabs poured at L.E. Shaw originally designed for roofing. The slabs were shaped exactly like the wall slabs mentioned above except for the length. They were laid three lengthwise across the width of the foundation, starting at the notched edge of the foundation wall, across on top of the rail trimmers: the three lengths of nine feet making up the 27' inside width of the house. At the beginning, there was concern about the strength of the floor slabs when cracking was noticed in the "web" or thinner centre part.

Got two loads of slabs from Shaw. Note some cracks in web. Coady tried stomping on them and of course crashed thru (sic). Group became alarmed and took some back to shaw for explanation. Mr. Strang [manager at Shaw's] came out and calmly told group about limitations of roof slabs as floor slab. Slabs o.k. for normal construction loads and walking, but it's intended to put one and one-half to two inch concrete top coat on anyway. Group took rest of slabs back and put a few more on MacCarron's.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Weiner Diary, August 12, 13, 1952; Sept. 11-26, 1952. A "fish plate" is a short piece of steel rolled to fit the bottom edge of a rail. It is used to splice rail pieces and can to nailed to railway ties.

⁷⁶ Weiner Diary, Thursday, Sept. 11, 1952; Monday Sept. 22, 1952; Tuesday, Sept. 23, 1952.

⁷⁷ Weiner Diary, Friday, Oct. 3, 1952.

The floor could take two to three hours to lay with four men laying slabs and two men on grouting the joints between the slabs.

To facilitate electrical wiring, a groove was cut at the end of the slab to allow wire to pass from the basement. Then, the conduit pipe was laid on the top of the slabs and a coat of cement poured over it and the entire slab flooring. To be sure this was a potential nightmare for anyone repairing or changing the electrical system in future years.⁷⁸ Screeding was done to ensure levelling. Tile, linoleum or other flooring was put on top.

Originally, the walls of the houses were to be poured in place, much like the foundation. The idea of slab wall was first brought to the attention of the group's carpenter, Archie MacKenzie, by Weiner on October 10, 1951. MacKenzie was enthusiastic, and Weiner then went to the local building inspector, Malcolm MacIvor who made several suggestions for attaching the slabs to the walls. Weiner went to Halifax where he met with L.E. Shaw to arrange for production. He also met with officials at Eastern Canada Trust in Halifax, presumably to discuss financing a patent.⁷⁹ Immediately upon his return, he called his group together. "Meeting later of all but MacKinnon, plus Archie. Discussed slab-versus-solid

⁷⁸ Edmund Anthoney, interview, November 12, 1993.

⁷⁹ Weiner Diary, Saturday Oct. 11 to Oct. 14, 1951.

walls. Group agreed, reluctantly it seemed. Waiting results of tests..."⁸⁰ The tests carried out at DOSCO's lab showed that a foamed slag wall slab, without wire mesh re-enforcing, could withstand the weight of 3050 lbs. in cement bags, uniformly distributed.⁸¹ The group, satisfied with the idea, ordered the cement and delivered it the Shaw's plant. They also arranged for and delivered slag from the steel plant.⁸² They prepared steel rods and wire mesh for re-enforcing, poured the casts, cut them to size, finished them and delivered them to the building sites. Except for the length and the use of slag in the concrete, the wall slabs were exactly the same as the floor slabs in dimensions and composition. There were some problems with the slag walls: being quite fragile, they sometimes crumbled and broke because the delicate placement of its re-enforcing steel rods occasionally was not correct.

Raising the wall slabs was a much more demanding job than laying floor slabs. First, the carpenter built a sort of "staging" which consisted of corner posts (doubled two-by-four's) which held up the top plate (two-by-six's). Into this space, the slabs were raised, and set on top of the

⁸⁰ Weiner Diary, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 1951.

⁸¹ Reported in Norman Weiner Diary, May 21, 1954.

⁸² According to Weiner's Diary, on Tuesday, July 22, 1952, eight men unloaded 1000 bags of cement at Stephen's siding. They delivered 700 bags to L.E. Shaw, the rest distributed to participants.

foundation, protruding out about one-half inch. The plate was nailed with four inch nails to the tops of the wall slabs.

The best management seems to be to have 4 men carry slabs from the stock pile to the wall. One man is on the ground pushing the base while tilting, and one man is on the ladder above to ensure proper positioning and to nail. The first slab is plumbed both ways, and the rest are simply butted to it, the wall and the plate. ... 6 men can put up about 8 full slabs per hour.⁸³

The slabs were grouted to the foundation and the joints were also grouted. Short slabs were used under and over the windows, and over the doors (lintel slabs). They were notched to allow for a proper fit for the doors and windows. When the walls were in place, the corner posts were removed and thermocrete blocks used to make either squared corners or "bull nose" corners.

On October 29, 1951, a sample "W-type" roof truss was built and pattern pieces cut by Archie MacKenzie.⁸⁴ After that, the group met frequently to build trusses at Ted Tracey's place. The roof was built in the following way: First, the front end truss were set into place, braced and boarded to later be covered with plywood.

Trusses are carried from pile by 4 men. Rope on near end is used to pull up one end. Three men above manhandle it into position. Trusses held by 3 spikes toe nailed into plate [which has been doubled] Time= 10-12 minutes per truss. ... Archie built two strongbacks down length of house, using 2x5 beams and 2x4 posts with scabs. After

⁸³ Weiner Diary, Jan. 6, 1953.

⁸⁴ Weiner Diary.

boarding, these were taken down."⁸⁵

Then the end truss was put into place and boarded. Twenty-two trusses were used on each house. The roof was boarded in with plywood and then tar-papered and shingled with asphalt shingles.

The roof did not require weight-bearing partitioning walls, making possible changes to recommended floorplan after the house was closed in. There were, however, only a few such changes besides Anthony's mentioned earlier. Wally Kenney put his kitchen and bathroom in the front of the house, the livingroom in the back. Being one of the last, he also had the advantage of evaluating the floorplans of the other houses.

The work on the interior began as soon as the house was closed in. The interior work was much more traditional than the exterior. Any foundation floors not poured already, were completed and footings and flues provided for fireplaces. Heating ducts were cut into the floors and furnaces installed. For the ceiling three-quarter inch tongue and groove spruce boards were used. The wall partitions were studded and boarded or gyprocked. The interior walls had two inches of insulation added to the web groove. Strapping, rocklathe insulating board and plaster were then put on. All members

⁸⁵ Weiner Diary, Monday, Jan. 19, 1953. A "scab" is a short piece of lumber used to strengthen a joint. It may be nailed, screwed or bolted.

found that the cost of vermiculite in the plaster raised the plastering costs. In response, Norman Weiner tried out yet another innovation in plastering his house: "I used granulated slag as plaster aggregate in the closets only. Plasterer likes it; says it is not slippery under trowel like vermiculite, easy to finish, light, etc."⁸⁶

The interior work was done mainly by individuals rather than by groups. However, the work continued to be started or guided by the carpenter. It was at this juncture that the wives of the members began to play a significant role in the planning and actual construction. They put up strapping and rock lathe, painted, and helped to build cupboards. Some of the design modifications suggested by the women -- making a kitchen more convenient or enlarging a window -- were not always appreciated by Norman Weiner, but they were implemented just the same.

Almost forty years later, the evaluation of the slag houses remains very positive. Maintenance is minimal, with painting needed about every five years. The heating costs are low. Soon after the completion of construction, almost every member switched over to hot water radiators from the original hot air ducts. When the coke ovens closed in the 1980s, those using coke switched to coal. The only complaints seem to centre around the hardness of the floor, which makes house

⁸⁶ Weiner Diary, Saturday, May 15, 1954.

work tiring when women are "on their feet all day".⁸⁷

The evaluation of the experience of building the insulite houses was also very positive, in retrospect. The members still get together to reminisce and to laugh over the mistakes and other more enjoyable shared experiences. The problems of the old truck and the borrowed mixers were usually the centre of the pleasant memories.⁸⁸

Weiner's contemporary view of the construction treats the problems with the equipment with combined humour and consternation, but in his private log of the group's experience, he was somewhat less assured of the camaraderie of the group and its success as a co-operative. There were complaints of men "hogging" manpower to do low priority jobs, of failure to reach a consensus when ordering the furnaces, of personality problems when one member insisted on getting his work done "next". One of the worst problems was that an individual would do a job working with relatives and friends outside the group; the same individual might then be reluctant to join in group ventures and to help the others with the same job. Weiner was not alone in his concern. There was a "constitutional crises" when group members who strongly believed in co-operative principles became angry and frustrated. The role of the carpenter was often confused, and

⁸⁷ Vida Anthoney, interview, August 11, 1993.

⁸⁸ Anthoney, interviews, August 11, Nov. 12, 1993.

there were disagreements about the quality of workmanship.⁸⁹ Money was often a problem as each member had to finance his own materials as well as contribute to the general fund which paid the carpenter and paid for some bulk-ordered supplies. The carpenter took a large percentage of the fund and there were often changes in the work organization to "get more out of Archie".⁹⁰ Other prices for skilled work, taken at an hourly rates, exceeded initial estimates. ⁹¹ Disagreements were usually dealt with at meetings.

Weiner frequently made notations on the morale of the group, their attendance and degree of exhaustion. Sometimes the end of a phase of work was marked with some sort of social gathering. Once he remarked, "crew spirit lagging badly, no progress"; another time, "this competitive spirit is good for morale".⁹² There is ample evidence that Weiner had respect for the members' family life and religious traditions and also his own. Both Jewish and Christian Holy Days were observed; and the members' illnesses and the birth of their children were noted.

DOSCO had an on-going interest in the progress of the housing project. The photographer from the company's public

⁸⁹ Weiner Dairy, Thursday, April 20, April 23, April 30, 1953; Thursday July 21, 1953.

⁹⁰ Weiner Dairy, July 3, 1952, for example.

⁹¹ Weiner Dairy, Friday, July 24, 1953.

⁹² Weiner Dairy, Tuesday and Wednesday, July 12 and 13, 1952; Tuesday, April 7, 1953.

relations magazine, *Teamwork*, came to take pictures in the earlier stages of construction. The plant's technical photographer, Ray Martheleur, also took photographs for the plant's record later in the construction.⁹³

Weiner had the buildings inspected toward the end of the project by various officials representing NSHC and CMHC. He reported that, on the whole, they seem quite satisfied with houses, except for the rails which were used as beams or trimmers. They felt these were too light, and would not withstand the weight of the house over a long period of time. Edmund Anthony and other members repudiate this criticism, declaring that there have been no stress problems in forty years.⁹⁴

These inspection were probably done for approval of the building technique in view of Weiner's proposal to start a formal company to build a large number of the houses. Archie MacKenzie, the carpenter was part of the company, along with a man named Zelokovitch in Port Hawkesbury. The members of the housing group were also asked to take part, but all declined mainly because after four years of planning and building, they were simply did not have the energy for more.

The company, "Insul-Lite Houses" lasted only for about two years, in which time hundreds of houses were built,

⁹³ Weiner Diary, Thursday, October 23, 1952; Tuesday May 14, 1954. These photos are not available.

⁹⁴ Weiner Diary, Monday, March 22, Tuesday, March 23, Friday, April 9, 1954; Anthoney, interview, Nov. 12, 1993.

including those at the Radar Base in Sydney, many in the Sydney area, and in Port Hawkesbury. There is confusion as to why the company ceased operation, especially since the houses were of proven quality and were relatively cheap. Some say that the successful Insul-Lite business was supporting the less profitable enterprises of Zelokovitch and finally all went bankrupt. Other said that DOSCO, having given generously to the steelworkers in their efforts to build, were not so willing to give free or nearly free materials to a profit-oriented institution. Still others suggested that the company "got greedy" and was over-charging for the houses. Perhaps all were factors. In any case, Weiner soon left Canada, and no more homes of this type have been built in Cape Breton since the initial enthusiasm of the 1950s.

The innovative nature of the slag houses, in terms of both design and materials, made the experience insular on a general level. The traditional house building materials and techniques - wood, platform framing, more than one storey - were still the predominant form in the early 1950s in Cape Breton. Thermocrete bungalows were not within the common paradigm.⁹⁵ Norman Weiner's ideas were considered "crazy" by some. In fact, his deviance from accepted forms of house building was the object of several incidents of vandalism and theft of materials. On April 20, 1953, "some 'children'

⁹⁵ In fact, the ideas developed in this project failed to be incorporated in the Canadian Building Standards in the succeeding years.

picked a large hole in Curry's floor, and dropped a slab in the basement also. At Kenney's they tore up some roofing and knocked holes in the floor too."⁹⁶

The experience of the Insulite housing group given here is mainly a male point of view, unlike the previous studies of co-op housing. There are several possible reasons for this apparent lack of involvement by the women, the most important being the location of the houses. Spread all over the city, there was little chance for the women to have a cohesive group or to discuss and develop their opinions. The basis of discussion for the men was their work place, the steel plant, a place that traditionally excluded women. In the interviews with Edmund Anthony, an effort was made to include his wife Vida in the discussion, but it was very apparent that her opinions were secondary to her husband's. Her comments related to the convenience and comfort of their home. The fact that the project took place in the 1950s meant that many members are still living; in the case of the other houses, the women interviewed were widows and necessarily the only sources. As such, they did not have to defer to the opinions of their husbands. The implications of a predominantly male point of view in understanding this project gives a different focus to the experience. It might be seen as a sort of "bonding" that extended from the work place, based on shared knowledge, particularly about steel making and the steel

⁹⁶ Weiner Dairy, Tuesday, April 20, 1953.

plant, especially in terms of "borrowing" equipment and materials.

A Workable Plan for Low Income Housing?

The fortunes of co-operative housing guided by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department in the Eastern counties of Nova Scotia rose and fell through during its history. In 1938-39, there were 25 houses built through co-ops; between 1940-44 there were 56; between 1945-49 there were 229; between 1950-1954 there were 134; between 1955-59 there were 449; between 1960-64 there were one hundred seventy-seven. A survey carried out by the St Francis Xavier Extension Department of past participants in the co-operative building programs tried to uncover the reasons for the fluctuation and gradual decline of interest in the program. The survey found that NSHC was a major source of dissatisfaction, especially in terms of financial arrangements, but also in the area of information and advice.⁹⁷

The survey's report concluded that, after the first few years of program the loan arrangements through NSHC precluded

⁹⁷ A.A. MacDonald et al, "Eastern Counties Co-operative Housing Survey" (Antigonish: St. Francis Xavier Extension Dept., 1965). Joe Laben, *Co-operative Housing Nova Scotia* (Antigonish: St. Francis Xavier Extension Dept., 1961) [rev. of same title by Alex Laidlaw published in 1951], noted that at the end of 1960 there were 150 co-operative communities with a total of 1350 homes; in 1961, 12 new groups were ready to build.

the possibility of low income families taking part. After 1960, there were a number of changes in the organization of the co-ops which allowed for individual mortgages and individual ownership of the co-op houses. This came about as a result of pressures on the federal government to change its rules regarding financing. One of the consequences of this new financial practice was that mortgages were available only to those higher incomes. In 1965 NSHC stopped giving subsidy priority to this type of project.⁹⁸

In the 1970s the Nova Scotia Housing Commission's "Assisted Home Ownership Plan" opened the door for "co-op" housing again in Whitney Pier. There were four families in the co-op: three built at MacDonald Place in Whitney Pier and one built at Westmount across Sydney Harbour. These were modified co-ops which allowed for individual mortgages and individual design, one of which was a split level bungalows.⁹⁹ The group did not share the work involved in construction; instead each family called upon immediate relatives to pitch in. The only features of this project similar to the early housing co-ops was the joint application for funding (guaranteed by NSHC at eight and one-quarter per cent for 25 years), and the loan was to be matched with the

⁹⁸ "The Nova Scotia Housing Commission, 1932-1965" Published by J.M. Harding, Minister of Public Works, 1965. Pam 131 St. Francis Xavier Univ. Archives.

⁹⁹ Terry and Jane Crawley, interviews during 1990-1993.

sweat equity of the co-op member.¹⁰⁰

Several thousand homes were built under this program in Nova Scotia during the 1960s and 1970s. But the original aim of the co-op housing program started by St. Francis Xavier Extension to provide housing to low income families was lost in the bureaucracy and financial arrangements. Father Bill Roach's "workable plan that [could] be repeated indefinitely when men and women are willing to study and toil together in order to obtain inexpensive homes"¹⁰¹ became a program for middle income people who could prove their ability to pay off mortgages. Nevertheless the co-ops marked the beginning of a new era of state intervention in the housing of low income families in Whitney Pier.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Jane Crawley, May 25, 1994.

¹⁰¹ Joe Laben, Co-operative Housing Nova Scotia.

CHAPTER 6

STATE INTERVENTION: URBAN RENEWAL AND PUBLIC HOUSING

Housing policy has not merely arrived as a political phenomenon in terms of appeals to the electorate for favour or rejection, but is an important component of intergovernmental relationships, and a significant aspect of economic, social and political considerations...¹
Albert Rose, Canadian Housing Policy Critic

In the field of Housing you might easily find three, four or even five separate and independent bureaucracies involved in a single housing project. One must have the shrewdness of a Philadelphia lawyer and the patience of Job to wade through the pool of red tape associated with housing for lower income people.² Father Bill Roach, 1971

State intervention during the 1960s and early 1970s was the cause of radical change in Whitney Pier's long established landscape. Characterized by drastic clearances and relocations, and implemented through strategies designed by bureaucrats, academics and church-based organizers, this intervention, by its very nature, offered a serious threat to the continuing existence of Whitney Pier. Ethnicity and socio/economic status, especially in terms of race, were persistent factors throughout this experience.

The rationale for state intervention in the form of urban renewal and public housing was that private interests were not

¹ Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies, 1935-1980*, p. iv.

² Bill Roach, "Housing for Low Income Groups" (1971).

providing the housing needed for the country: "public investment" was required to take up the slack. There were two major periods of this type of initiative in Canada. One started in 1944, when slum clearance provisions were added to the National Housing Act, and ended in 1964. Then, from 1964 to 1973, some 300 urban development studies were commissioned by federal and municipal governments. The studies resulted in 90 renewal projects, including Whitney Pier.³

The debate about urban renewal began in the 1960s and was a prominent topic across North America.⁴ It was recognized even then, that cultural networks in terms of race and ethnicity were being shattered by urban renewal. Yet, in Whitney Pier and other places, the "slum clearing" and public housing projects went ahead with little sensitivity, either for cultural make-up or for construction quality.

Policy, Governments, and Urban Renewal

Whitney Pier's urban renewal of the 1960s was the direct if delayed result of a sequence of Canadian housing policies. The "filter-down" housing norm of the pre-1930s, co-op

³ See, P.J. Smith and P. W. Moore, "Cities as a Social Responsibility: Planning and Urban Form", in L.S. Bourne and D. Ley (eds.), *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1993), pp. 358-362.

⁴ See Wallace F. Smith, *Housing: The Social and Economic Elements* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1970), p. 482, for criticism of American renewal programs. Also, J.T. Lemon, "Social Planning and the Welfare State", in L.S. Bourne and D. Ley (eds.), *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities*.

housing, the projects of the Depression, World War II and post War, and the Curtis Report of 1944 had finally brought the Canadian government to the realization of its responsibility in housing.⁵ The National Housing Act of 1944 is significant because its Section 35 included the first substantive provision for cooperation with the provinces for slum clearance or "housing reform". Rose, in his review of Canadian housing policies commented, that it was:

a concept that encompassed physical and social planning, the improvement of transportation facilities and a variety of community improvements. Implicit within all of these objectives was the clear drive toward slum clearance, visualized as a simple program whereby the worst housing would be eliminated and those who lived within it would be housed in physical and socially adequate housing accommodation.⁶

The National Housing Act of 1945, Section 35, along with the formation of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, opened doors for action involving the provinces and by extension, local governments. Amendments contained in the 1953-54 National Housing Act continued to emphasize slum clearance and redevelopment for housing, and offered increased financial assistance for urban renewal. Along with grants for up to 75 per cent of study costs for urban renewal, Section

⁵ Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies, 1935-1980*, especially ch. two, "Essential Elements of Canadian Housing Policy"; ch. three, "Canadian Housing Policy, 1940-1968" and ch. four, "National Housing Policies for an Urban Canada, 1970's and Thereafter." For a summary of the Curtis Report, see Canada, Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, *Housing and Community Planning*, Sub-Committee Report, No. 4, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1944), cited in Rose, p. 28.

⁶ Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies*, pp. 164, 165.

23(b) allowed CMHC to contribute half of the cost an urban renewal scheme, provided it was approved by CMHC and the province. This could include expropriation and clearing costs - including employment requirements and owners adjustment assistance, installation of municipal services other than buildings, and assistance in relocating dispossessed persons.⁷

The federal government's strong will regarding urban renewal was matched with promises of funding from Canadian Mortgage and Housing Commission. In Nova Scotia the financial assistance was channelled through various programs of the Nova Scotia Housing Commission. Local government exercised its authority in deciding which houses would be demolished. Subsidies depended on the municipalities taking "clear and definite" initiative in specific communities before federal/provincial partnerships could proceed. Although there were general principles for re-housing within the housing policies of the time in Nova Scotia, there were no strict requirements for arrangements for alternative housing.

The policies appeared to find a response across the country. The federal government further supported the move toward clearance of blighted areas by offering courses in urban renewal during the 1960s. By 1967, grants had been

⁷ N.H. Lithwick, *Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects* (Ottawa: CMHC, 1970), p.204. This report provides a critique of 25 years of Canadian housing policy.

given to 150 municipalities for 44 urban renewal schemes.⁸

But, despite the policy of inter-governmental co-operation, compromises in this regard were difficult to facilitate. In fact, NSHC had, for a long time, found itself unable to coordinate its aims and activities with the National Housing Act. The 1944 Royal Commission "Report on Housing", which reviewed the work of the NSHC, concluded that, well-meaning and effective as NSHC's plan for co-operative housing was, it provided no answers to the problems of slum clearance and low-rental housing. The Report recommended an expanded and paid Nova Scotia Housing Commission which could fill some of the gaps in the 1944 National Housing Act regarding social housing. Aside from recommending that Nova Scotia gear its legislation to be more in line with the National Housing Act, it could only conclude that opportunities existed for the enhancement of public housing, but that they were not being utilized. A major problem, from a provincial perspective, was the "permissive" nature of the National Housing Act: it depended entirely upon the initiating will and matching finances from provincial governments, which in turn depended

⁸ **Urban Renewal and Public Housing in Canada**, vol. 3, no. 4, 1967. Reflections on the urban renewal of the 1960's are found in L.S. Bourne and D. Ley(eds.) **The Changing Geography of Canadian Cities**, especially, P.G. Smith and P.W. Moore, "Cities as a Social responsibility: Planning and Urban Form", pp. 358-359.

upon the will and finances of local governments.⁹ So, despite the legislation in place since the 1930s, housing co-ops represented the only implementation of the National Housing Act in Whitney Pier until the 1960s.

Thus, the role of municipal governments in urban renewal remained the greatest problem in instituting housing reform. The initiative of the municipality concerned was almost always a question of political expediency. "Municipal political considerations may deter renewal action: the introduction of an unpopular urban renewal scheme entailing large disruptive effects may cost the enterprising administration a large segment of its popular support."¹⁰ Local government constraints could be used to either stimulate or forestall both private and public subsidized housing. Adherence to official plans, zoning, subdivision control, and local by-laws governing maintenance and control were part of a time-consuming bureaucratic maze. Over and over the complaint was heard: "government controls add years of time and thousands of dollars to the production of each dwelling house."¹¹

The 1956 amendments to the National Housing Act solved these problems to an extent, by easing the rules which

⁹ Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation: Report XVI on Housing (Halifax: King's Printer, 1944), pp. 32-33.

¹⁰ Lithwick, *Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects*, p. 204.

¹¹ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p.157.

restricted the use of cleared land to the proper re-housing of dispossessed people. Instead, only a "substantial part of redeveloped area must be used for residential purposes; ... it was open to any federal, provincial or municipal public purpose".¹² This legislation was of particular significance in the area slum clearance during late fifties and the 1960s. Toronto's Regent Park North, initiated in 1957, was Canada's first major slum clearance and redevelopment project initiated as a result of this legislation.¹³ Others followed, including Halifax's Africville, and Whitney Pier in Sydney. Despite the generous legislation, however, public housing in Canada was minimal, reaching only five per cent of housing starts in the 1960s.

There were a number of significant amendments to the National Housing Act in 1964. A new Section 16A authorized loans to non-profit corporations owned by a province, municipality, or other agency, presumably any secular or religious group involved in housing improvement. Rose points out the results of the amendments. Section 23 was "broadened to encompass a broad-gauge approach to the prevention and treatment of blighted and slum areas in urban municipalities". This included employment of "persons to assist in the relocation of individuals and families dispossessed of housing

¹² Lithwick, *Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects*, p. 203.

¹³ See Albert Rose, *Regent Park: a Study of Slum Clearance*.

accommodation by urban-renewal programs.". Section 35C further assurances of assistance to acquire land for public housing. Section 36 used the term, "public housing" for the first time in the history of Canadian housing policy.¹⁴ Despite its apparent interest in home improvement, urban renewal, and public housing, the 1964 amendments, in effect, put responsibility for slum clearance, re-location, housing for low income families, and public housing squarely back in the laps of the provinces.

This period "...can be described in terms of the existence or non-existence of local initiatives pressing for public participation in the available legislation and financial programs."¹⁵ "Local initiative" could mean voluntary organizations pressuring the state to take action in housing, or it could mean local governments: the former was community-oriented, the latter was top-down and paternalistic and "could fail to recognize the differential housing requirements from community to community and from region to region."¹⁶ In either case, the action depended on the will of the provincial government to make it happen, i.e. housing must have a high priority in terms of funding.

These constraints often hid the real politics of housing reform which can be ascribed to the stigma attached to public

¹⁴ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p. 38-41.

¹⁵ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p.21.

¹⁶ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p. 21.

housing and poverty. The stigma accounted for a prevailing attitude that related poor people and subsidized housing to substandard dwellings, neglected maintenance, crime and lowered property values. The same attitude accounted for an acceptance of multi-unit rented accommodation for the poor instead of single-family owned homes. The original quality of the housing, combined with local budget constraints for maintenance turned stigma into self-fulfilling prophecy. The municipality which helped house these groups was often committing political suicide.¹⁷ Within the context of housing reform, assumptions about the effects of living styles upon housing extended beyond the simple fact of poverty and included the unemployed, single female parents and people of racial minorities. Alex Laidlaw, co-operative activist called housing "a badge of poverty": "Our cultural tradition have tended to segregate the poor and congregate them in ghettos that makes their poverty visible".¹⁸ Although other parts of Sydney had housing problems, Whitney Pier was always singled out as an identifiable area characterized by these factors which signified poverty and unacceptable behaviour.

The other side of the coin was resistance from within poorer communities toward the various forms of urban renewal. "The residents of most neighbourhoods that were judged to be

¹⁷ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p. 157 for a discussion of "attitude" as a constraint on social housing.

¹⁸ Alex Laidlaw, *A Roof over Your Head: Co-op Housing* (Manitoba: Dept. of Co-operative Development, 1975), p. 34.

blighted or seriously deteriorating fought strongly against the expropriation and clearance of their homes, neighbourhood stores and social and recreational facilities. They bitterly denounced official and press statements that they lived in a slum or blighted area."¹⁹ A 1970 Report by N.H. Lithwick for CMHC summed up the definition of a slum and the aims of urban renewal:

The elimination of slums and blight is a major target of any urban renewal program. A slum is an area in which housing and living conditions are sub-standard by reason of low quality original construction, over-crowding, lack of maintenance, lack of sanitary facilities and so on. Blight generally refers to the process by which a slum evolves, or an area or building becomes sub-standard. Urban renewal aims at clearing up these conditions and providing 'decent, safe and sanitary housing accommodations at rentals that ... are fair and reasonable having regard to the incomes of the persons to be dispossessed.' ... The social costs of slums and blight are high and thus they should be removed; but displacement and relocation are often physically and socially undesirable. Rehabilitation might be a solution, but unfortunately little attention has been paid to this alternative."²⁰

It was not until 1968, and Pierre Trudeau's ascendancy that the federal government appeared ready to assume real responsibility for the housing of the nation. Paul Hellyer was given the responsibility for housing and immediately, with the help of a task force, set about preparing a report of the national situation. Albert Rose's immediate response to the

¹⁹ Rose, *Housing Policies*, p. 32. See also, ch. eight, "Housing for Low Income Families", pp.163-180.

²⁰ N.H. Lithwick, *Urban Canada: Problems and Prospects*, p. 202.

report was that the recommendations were almost entirely political and usurped the authority of the provinces in their jurisdiction over housing.²¹ The report was rejected by the Liberal caucus; Hellyer resigned and was soon replaced in 1970 by Robert Andreas as "Minister Responsible for Housing", changed to "Minister of State for Urban Affairs" in 1971. One of the few recommendations to be retained by the new ministry from Hellyer's report was the ban on further slum clearance; it was in the general context of the ban on large urban renewal projects. "The government seemed to have accepted the view ...that urban renewal was a damaging process, a process in which many low income families were removed from traditional neighbour-hoods, relocated elsewhere -- sometimes in public housing but often in older, less desirable, and sub-standard accommodation ..."²² The ban posed immediate problems for any community in the midst of urban renewal because federal funding was suddenly cut off. Andreas finally agreed to go ahead with renewal projects underway since 1968.

Church-based community workers had active roles in adapting agendas to policies in order to find funding for activities; but often they found themselves involved in critiquing or trying to change housing policy. In 1971, Roman Catholic priest Bill Roach of the St. Francis Xavier Extension

²¹ Albert Rose, "Paul Hellyer on Housing: Fact or Fiction?" in *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 5, 1969, p. 7. Cited Rose, *Housing Policy*, p. 48.

²² Rose, *Housing Policy*, p. 50.

Department carried out a study to try to ascertain the problems in providing public housing and concluded that public housing was in itself a problem: that private housing was social and financially more feasible, leading not only to family and community stability, but also saving money for governments and taxpayers.²³ He emphasized that Canadians have a "native" attitude of self-reliance in house building: "The average Canadian house-holder may not be a journeyman carpenter, but he is almost [always] a fair hammer-and-saw man. Few of us are so unhandy that we cannot help with a wiring job or cut pipe, lay tile, or shingle a roof... this native Canadian attitude... ought to be encouraged and exhibited." The basic problem with the housing policy, according to Father Roach was that it did not recognize that definitions of land use differ from region to region. For instance, lack of available accommodation in large urban centres might make multi-unit subsidized rental housing feasible and even necessary; but in Industrial Cape Breton, for example, there was no shortage of land and it made more sense to build single family dwellings. He believed that low income households should not be forced by legislation into public housing (rented accommodation), but that they should be encouraged socially and financially to build their own homes. He felt that the terms of federally guaranteed lending to low to middle income families defined "low" (taken at \$3000 to

²³ Bill Roach, "Housing for Low Income Groups".

\$5000) were at a much higher level than was reasonable for Cape Breton. In reality, financial assistance was denied to many Cape Breton families because the average wage was so much lower than other parts of Canada. He also felt that government played too strong and complicated a role in the field of housing. Indeed, he declared "... we should keep as far away from government as possible in this area of organization [direction and supervision]".²⁴

Roach's colleague, Father John Capstick, who was involved in almost every housing initiative in Industrial Cape Breton between 1965 and 1985, also had harsh words for the implementation of federal housing policy. Basically, Capstick felt that despite numerous reports, recommendations and policies, government intervention in housing was resisted from within government until other agencies or political bodies forced the government in power to become involved.²⁵ The Protestant churches became involved as well. In 1967, a "Community Forum", organized in 1966 through Trinity United Church to deal with pollution, also criticized the implementation of housing policy, observing that government assistance was being under-used, especially in the area of housing.²⁶

²⁴ Bill Roach, 1971.

²⁵ John Capstick, interview, 1994.

²⁶ Post, Dec. 13, 1967, p.3. The Pier Rink was built through the efforts of the Community Forum.

The Clearances

Slum clearance was clearly on the civic mind of Sydney by 1959, and it is evident that Sydney was finally ready to utilize the urban renewal legislation introduced in 1944 and modified in 1956. That year, under the heading of "Slum Clearance", the Cape Breton Post announced the beginning of a "renewal study on housing" to be directed by Harold Spence-Sales, a professor of Urban Studies at McGill University, who would be assisted by a "seven-man committee appointed by City Council".²⁷ The project cost \$14,000: \$3,500 paid by the City and \$10,500 paid by the federal government. The study started on July 15 and was slated for completion by year-end.²⁸ From his research, which suffered from an insufficient knowledge of the history and demographic/economic make-up of Whitney Pier, he formed the opinion that a significant portion of Whitney Pier was a blighted area that should be demolished. His research and findings are clearly

²⁷ Post, July 13, 1959, p. 7. Spence-Sales is remembered by Alderman Bruce McDonald as "astute, professorial, a smart guy". He was known to be a professor of town planning at a Montreal University.

²⁸ Harold Spence-sales carried out several such studies on Canadian cities during this period, including, **Sydney: The Development of the City** [City of Sydney, 1960]; **Moncton Renewed**, (the City of Moncton, 1958). Other studies in the region included, Gordon Stephenson of the University of Toronto did a study of Halifax in 1957, **A Development Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia** in which he recommended the clearance of Africville to make way for the development of the harbour area. In the 1960's, Norman Pearson did urban renewal studies of Glace Bay and Truro. See also, Harold Spence-Sales, **Planning Legislation in Canada** (Ottawa: CMHC, 1949).

based on National Housing policy which encouraged urban renewal and was flexible about rebuilding. Although individual buildings were demolished all over Sydney, the "tangible area" targeted for clearance or "urban renewal" was the Coke Ovens in Whitney Pier, the residential area adjacent to the coke ovens operations of the steel plant. It was a neighbourhood perceived by outsiders to be inhabited entirely or almost entirely by Blacks.²⁹

Spence-Sales assured readers that the study was carried out with "understanding and affection" and that the resulting proposals were developed with "sensitivity, imagination and daring", dealing with realities and setting objectives "with skill and precision". But he warned, "the fulfilment of these objectives will necessitate a course of action beyond present methods of dealing with urban renewal, in particular the current financial arrangements between federal, provincial and municipal governments."³⁰

The study recognized the industrial history of Sydney and its uncertain prospects in industrial growth. It proposed that the best and perhaps the only place to develop commercially was its "central area", i.e the Charlotte Street, Esplanade, and Prince Street. The central city's residential area needed refurbishing, but the southern part of Sydney had

²⁹ H. Spence-Sales, *Sydney: The Development of the City*, pp. 6, 14.

³⁰ "Introduction", *Sydney: The Development of the City*, [p.1]

possibilities for residential growth. In all Spence Sales predicted a slow but steady civic growth for Sydney, based on the development of the central and southern areas.

The prospects for Whitney Pier, the northern area, were quite different. In a curious opening statement Spence-Sales suggested a relationship between Whitney Pier, large families and steel workers, ignoring the fact that major employer in all of Sydney was the steel plant. Spence-Sales' overall survey of dwelling places in Sydney found that the larger portion or 54 per cent of Whitney Pier households had three to six persons. There was not an overwhelming number of larger households: 17 per cent and 18 per cent respectively in Whitney Pier and Victoria Road compared to 12 per cent in each of the central and Ashby areas of Sydney.¹¹

Spence-Sales was almost totally negative in his description of Whitney Pier, its people and the history of the area:

The northern part of the urban pattern contains a cluster of residential areas built on *arid* [italics mine] land. It is a distinct quarter which has developed since the beginning of the century from groups of homes built for steel workers. It contains a declining commercial and institutional focus; its inhabitants are mostly newcomers of different origins whose conditions are precarious; its houses are inferior; its amenities fragmentary. It is this part that differs from the rest of the city physically, socially, economically.¹²

His interpretation that the Pier was physically, socially and

¹¹ Spence-Sales, p. 16.

¹² Spence-Sales, p. 6.

economically different from the rest of the city is ironic in that it matches the perception of most outsiders toward the area. In making a case for the squalor and poor prospects of Whitney Pier, Spence-Sales showed a remarkable ignorance of the history of Whitney Pier as a productive and important early farming area: he was blatantly mistaken in his assessment of the land as "arid". Furthermore he was mistaken in his assumption that the residents of Whitney Pier were recent and "precarious" immigrants: most had been there for at least one generation, and many for two or three. Like many others before and after him, Spence-Sales appeared to attribute the perceived poor quality of life to the immigrant status of Whitney Pier's inhabitants.

The report noted that no housing in Whitney Pier was "good" although there were a few pockets of "fair" housing too small to include in calculations; instead all of the housing was listed as "poor" (78%) or "bad" (22%). The report cited the income of inhabitants and number of people per house and per room, but it gave no indication whatsoever about the physical structures of the buildings, e.g. building materials and techniques, civic services such as sewer and water.

The unspecified deleterious condition of Whitney Pier, the presence of the steel plant and its 60 years of pollution along with the suggestion of Whitney Pier's long-standing social, economic, and physical differences from the rest of Sydney, gave Spence-Sales reason to propose the inhibition of

further development of Whitney Pier. He suggested that its residential development should be limited in extent because of the impacts of the steel mills upon much of the area, and because "it is necessary to limit tendencies towards separation from the rest of the city".³³

Spence-Sales noted that there were about 450 "substandard" buildings in Whitney Pier in a total of 1,116 buildings occupied by about 520 families. About 130 of these were commercial premises on Victoria Road with living quarters above or behind the business area. There were, in Spence-Sales opinion, 387 obsolete buildings occupied by 447 families; 43 on the Victoria Road commercial area, and 125 in the Coke Ovens. (Fig. 6-1) Several sections of the Pier were singled out by Spence-Sales as "blighted" with recommendations for individual house demolition, including "Hunky Town" and almost the entire commercial/ residential section of Victoria Road.³⁴ But the concentration of obsolescence in the Coke Ovens presented a "case" for total clearance, not just inhibited growth.³⁵

The report drew up a plan for the demolition of the Coke Ovens, calling it a "tangible area" that qualified as a "concentration" that could be dealt with as a "specific

³³ Spence-Sales, p. 34.

³⁴ Spence-Sales, pp. 6, 14.

³⁵ Spence-Sales, pp. 41, 42, 43. The relevant definitions of "substandard" and "obsolete" are not given in the report.

Family and Housing Characteristics (Substandard and Obsolete)

	Whitney Pier		Victoria Road*	
	subst	obsol	subst	obsol
Total Number of Dwelling Units	320	387	129	43
Owner Occupied	212	124	47	14
Tenant Occupied	108	263	82	29
Total Number of Families	378	447	137	47
Ethnic Origin:				
Negro	23	121	-	-
European	68	49	7	2
Other	287	277	130	45
Occupation:				
Steel Workers	160	169	45	18
Pensioners and Unemployed	110	28	28	13
Other	111	168	64	16
Incomes:				
Under \$2,000	106	188	36	12
\$2-3,000	57	80	29	7
\$3-4,000	132	51	51	19
Over \$4,000	83	40	21	9

*Victoria Road, which runs through both Whitney Pier and Sydney, is considered separately from Whitney Pier.

Figure 6-1: Modified from H. Spence-Sales, Sydney: The Development of the City, p. 18.

clearance scheme" under the current legislation.³⁶ Spence-Sales noted that even newly built houses could come down because they were adversely affected by emissions from the steel plant.³⁷ Although he advised that some clearance may be needed in the central and Ashby areas, he asserted that "[I]n the Whitney Pier area, however, where obsolescence is concentrated, clearance and reprovision are the only measures that can be taken."³⁸ (Fig. 6-2)

In all, he recommended the clearance of 48.5 acres: 185 residential buildings, 10 commercial premises and 4 small industries. Of the buildings, he judged that 174 or 86 per cent were in an "advanced state of dilapidation". Of the approximately 360 families in the clearance scheme area, about 287 families were in substandard or obsolete buildings.

Re-accommodating the Coke Ovens population was a concern: "If the 'Coke Oven' area were cleared, 360 families would be displaced and this might well entail the provision of about 200 dwellings..."³⁹ Because the Coke Ovens land was low-lying and in the path of pollution from the steel plant and coke ovens, he advised that "clearances may have to be made

³⁶ Spence-Sales, p. 44.

³⁷ Whereas the obsolescence in Sydney was caused by age, Spence-Sales, p. 17.

³⁸ Spence-Sales, p.19.

³⁹ Spence-Sales, p. 43.



NORTH
 CENTRAL AREA
 CLEARANCE AREA
 RESIDENTIAL
 EXTRACTION AREAS
 SERVICE AREA
 ROADS
 INDUSTRIAL

Figure 6-2 Clearance area in Whitney Pier. From H. Spence-Sales, Sydney: The Development of the City, p.56.

without prospects of economic reuse of the land".⁴⁰ He suggested instead, that the Coke ovens be a "buffer zone" between the steel plant property and the rest of residential Whitney Pier. This was provided for in the 1956 legislation which allowed, instead of residential rebuilding of cleared areas, other urban development such as commercial use or "superstructure" such as roads or bridges.

The racial and ethnic characteristics of the people in the Coke Ovens was also a consideration in re-location. Spence-Sales made oblique reference to these factors in his Introduction: "[t]he mere provision of housing for the majority of those to be displaced from this area would only remedy physical environment and would leave unanswered the far more important issues of the social and economic circumstances of a minority group."⁴¹ Instead of relocating Blacks in housing found in one or two specific groups, he proposed dispersal all over the city, undoubtedly to insure the prevention of another Black "ghetto".

The Spence-Sales' Report was presented to Council of the Whole of Sydney City Council on September 22, 1960.⁴² Three members present at that particular Council of the Whole remembered that the report was discussed at some length;

⁴⁰ Spence-Sales, p. 8.

⁴¹ Spence-Sales, p. 2.

⁴² Sydney City Council Minutes, 1959-1961, MG 14, 27, MB 54, Beaton Institute Archives.

indeed it was "controversial". It was generally well-received, but people remembered that none of its recommendations were implemented at the time because of lack of funds.⁴³ Spence-Sales himself was certain that the municipality would not be able to carry out any extent of the proposed urban renewal unless assisted by the federal and provincial governments to an extent that went beyond the current assistance in urban renewal; that "assistance from superior governments should be sought on the basis of special need".⁴⁴

The surviving member of Council from that period, Bruce McDonald, pointed out that the report was not necessarily for immediate implementation, but was instead "a plan, a framework of what the city would look like... to outline the way in which he felt the city should develop ... not that the city should go out and buy land for development." He added that it was surprising how close it came to what he suggested, "mostly by accident": A good many of the things he recommended [such as] buildings coming down, new uses for land, has come about naturally". McDonald, not a native or resident of Whitney Pier, did not recall any outcry against the suggestion of

⁴³ Charlie Campbell, former City Engineer; Mike Whalley, City Solicitor; and Bruce McDonald, Alderman. Similar comments came from John Campbell, *Cape Breton Post*; Bernie Reppa, former Head of Metro Planning Commission; Duncan MacKay, former Sydney alderman and former member of Cape Breton Housing Authority; Steve MacNeil, former Property Agent for Sydney.

⁴⁴ Spence-Sales, pp. 9, 10.

demolition of the entire Coke Ovens: he felt that acceptance of the idea was based on the terrible pollution that was emitting from the coke ovens operation and that Spence-sales was justified in his plan in terms of quality of life. His main recollection of the report was that it recommended that the city look toward the harbour as the orientation for its development; that the City Library and City Hall were eventually built overlooking the harbour.⁴⁵

The official response to the Spence-Sales' report was presented in 1963 by the City Engineer, stating that it "gave a new awareness and greater appreciation of the general condition of the City".⁴⁶ By 1963, the demolition of some 11 "dilapidated" buildings was stated to be somewhat in response to Spence-Sales' suggestions. However, at that time, the city seemed to approve the "extraction" of buildings, rather than clearances. Even at that, there was reluctance to take action because so little alternative housing was available for displaced persons.⁴⁷

It appears that the main use of the Spence-Sales Report was to provide justification for later community lobbies for better conditions. In 1971 the Whitney Pier Community Forum used the Spence-Sales recommendations extensively to back

⁴⁵ Phone interview, Feb. 14, 1994. Bruce McDonald became the founding chairperson of the Sydney Harbour Board.

⁴⁶ "Report on the Subsidized Rental Housing for Sydney, Nova Scotia" submitted by the City Engineer, Sydney, 1963.

⁴⁷ City Engineer Report, p. 5.

their demands for more and better public housing and to improve recreation facilities. This was in response to the demolition of 692 buildings in Sydney, most of them in Whitney Pier.⁴⁸ The Report also provided background for applications to government agencies for funding for urban renewal activities.

One of the most significant of these urban redevelopment activities was the 1964 construction of the overpass to replace the notorious "subway" which connected Whitney Pier to the rest of Sydney. In Spence-Sales' mind the remedy for Sydney-Whitney Pier's traffic problems was closely connected to slum clearance: "[t]he alleviation of traffic congestion at the underpass along Victoria Road could be most suitably dealt with when clearance operations take place in the 'Coke Oven' area."⁴⁹ However, he warned that the City did not have the resources to carry out such a huge project: "[i]n carrying out traffic improvements, financial assistance will be needed over and above the customary contributions to local government for such works".⁵⁰ Although Spence-Sales does not mention particular National Housing legislation at any point in his report, it is apparent that a trade-off between clearance and superstructure development, based on the 1954-1956 National

⁴⁸ "Local Meeting Stresses Concern Over Housing", *Post*, May 20, 1971.

⁴⁹ Spence-Sales, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Spence-Sales, p. 62.

Housing Act is the basis of his recommendation. The Overpass was discussed at length in City Council during the period of Spence-Sales research and several avenues of funding were explored. The Chief Engineer for the Overpass Project consistently denies any relationship between its construction, the Spence-Sales report, and the proposed clearance of the Coke Ovens. However the final reality, the relationship as outlined by Spence-Sales clearly suggests opportunism based on current funding procedures.

It is very clear that The Spence-Sales report had a significant long-term impact on the urban development of Whitney Pier. By 1973, according to some estimates, almost 700 buildings were demolished in Sydney; other estimates placed the number at over eight hundred. These included dwelling places, barns, warehouses, and commercial establishments, many in Whitney Pier. Although the Coke Ovens area was most affected, it was not entirely cleared as proposed. Also in partial accordance with Spence-Sales' recommendations for the housing of people displaced by demolition, 50 units public housing were built on Church and James Streets, some distance away from the Coke Ovens. The extent to which Spence-Sales' vision of Whitney Pier, and the rest of Sydney, was fulfilled depended more upon the will of the local governments directly involved and less upon the funding sources that the report sees as the main factor.

Urban renewal in Sydney began with a demolition program

that started in the early-sixties and extended well into the 1970s. The spark which seemed to have ignited interest in the movement was the appointment of Pier resident, Bernie Reppa, as the new Development Officer for Sydney's Town Planning Board. Although it did not directly impact on the actions of next decades, Reppa's Polish background and his family's settlement in Whitney Pier were perceived to give him a better understanding of social and economic conditions in this area. A local newspaper noted in 1965 that a demolition program had been in place for the "past few years".⁵¹ By 1963 it was noted that 40 homes had been cleared in the Pier.⁵² The total demolition records are available only for the period beginning in 1968, when there were 19 buildings cleared in the city. The number increased to 25 buildings (27 units) in 1970, and to 30 buildings (50 units) in 1972.⁵³ These official totals are understated: other Engineering Department papers indicate that houses besides those acknowledged in the totals were demolished; a total of 692 was given in 1971.⁵⁴ The actual figures can only be guessed at. (Fig. 6-3, Fig. 6-4)

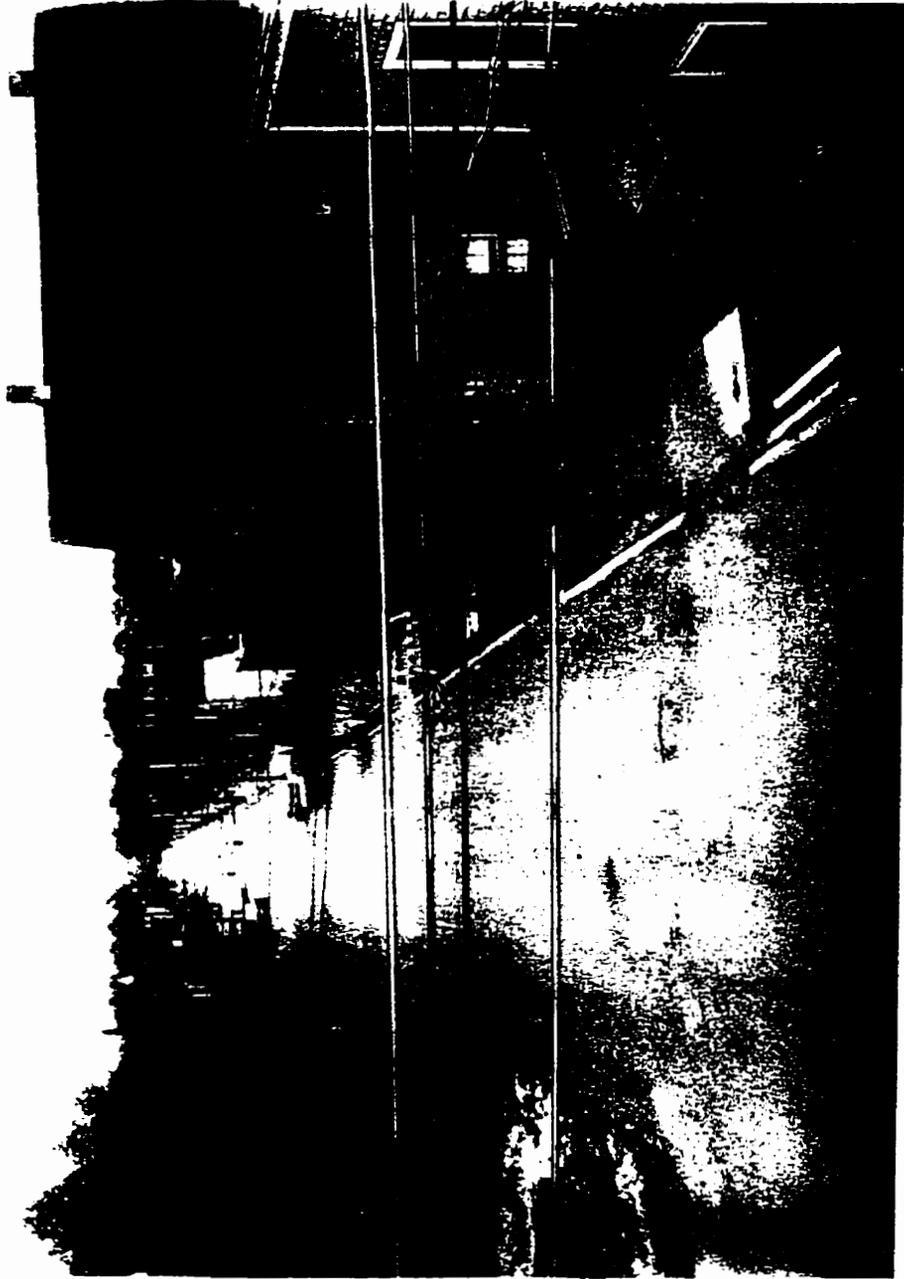
According to the City's Property Agent, there was no

⁵¹ "Sydney Housing Standards too Harsh", **Highlander**, June 30, 1965, p. 1.

⁵² "Pier Housing: Discrimination Charge is Made", **Post**, October 18, 1963, p. 1.

⁵³ City Engineering Papers, 1968, 1970, 1972. [These papers are organized by year only.]

⁵⁴ "Local Meeting Stresses Concern Over Housing", **Post**, May 20, 1971.



RAYTEL PHOTO
12-12-1977

Figure 6-3: Coke Ovens area, before clearance. Raytel photo, Elizabeth Beaton Collection, MG 12, 198.



Figure 6-4: Coke Ovens area, after clearance. Raytel photo, Elizabeth Beaton Collection, MG 12, 198.

planned demolition in the initial phase of urban renewal. The city simply removed dilapidated buildings: one of the main factors in owners selling or allowing their homes to be removed was the down turn of the steel industry in the 1960s, when many families moved from Sydney to find jobs in Central Canada. However, a local newspaper announced in 1964 that "Council was informed that the city had enunciated the policy of continued and progressive demolition of substandard houses and has in the past three years caused the removal of many substandard buildings".⁵⁵ It is unclear whether the earlier program of clearing was funded by CMHC, considering that such funding applied only to particular areas, not to individual properties.⁵⁶ The Verge-Fiske Report of 1965 pointed out that "the urban renewal provisions of the National Housing Act were limited in 1960 when Spence-Sales presented his renewal study... [the] 1964 amendments to the Act offer Sydney a better opportunity to gain federal assistance..."⁵⁷ Under the amendments, Sydney could apply for 50 per cent federal funds to cover the cost of preparation for urban renewal, of acquisition and clearance, of providing essential city services to cleared areas for redevelopment and

⁵⁵ "\$1,500,000 Project: 100 Units Planned", *Post*, February 21, 1964, p.3.

⁵⁶ Steve MacNeil, phone interview, Dec. 20, 1993. Also, Tom Moore, former employee of CMHC phone interview, Dec. 16, 1993.

⁵⁷ John Fiske and Harold Verge, "Traffic Parking Study, Sydney Central Area", April, 1965, p. 7.

rehabilitation. Furthermore, loans of 66 2/3 percent of the total could be made by the federal government toward the share of the city's cost of urban renewal.⁵⁸

The process of demolition, although it sometimes took months to implement, was simple. A decision was made by the Development Officer as to the condition of the building, sometimes in concert with the reports of health and fire inspectors. A notice was sent to the owner of the building recommending demolition, usually on the basis that it was not worth repairing. The Gillis Groceteria Ltd., on Victoria Road, was notified by Bernie Reppa, Building Inspector, Property Department, on February 2, 1968, regarding a property on 26 Connaught St:

An inspection of the above premises was carried out on January 23, 1968. I wish to bring to your attention the unsightly and rundown condition of the building due to decay. In my opinion it's not economically feasible to repair this building to the standards required by the City of Sydney. The building is a fire and health hazard and should be taken down and removed from the property on or before the 12th day of February, 1968. Trusting I shall receive your co-operation in this matter, I remain. Yours truly, ⁵⁹

The decision to demolish was not usually put into effect during the stated time, but eventually demolition tenders were called and awarded for the demolition, disposal and backfilling of specific premises.

Other unsightly premises such as out-buildings, fences,

⁵⁸ Fiske and Verge, "Sydney Central Area", p. 7.

⁵⁹ Engineering Dept., City of Sydney, February 2, 1968.

and yards filled with junk were also brought to the owners' attention. The owner of a fence and shed on 164 Maloney Street risked prosecution unless their deleterious condition was improved; the Universal Negro Improvement Association was required to remove old lumber from its premises on Tupper Street; a building on Victoria partially destroyed by fire was ordered repaired before approval was given to rent the premises.⁶⁰ In another instance of fire at 110 West Street, the owner announced his intention to deed the property to the City, stating he had "no objections to the City demolishing this building while the deed is being prepared."⁶¹ The owner of a derelict building might also give the property over to the city in a tax sale. A Taxi Stand on Victoria was ordered demolished in 1969; in 1970, an old car hauled away from 145 Laurier Street at a cost of ten dollars; a dilapidated coal bin was ordered removed from 823 Victoria Road in 1969.⁶²

There were several instances of redevelopment as a motive for clearances in Whitney Pier. In one case where a wood frame rooming house on Victoria Road was demolished to make

⁶⁰ Engineering Dept., City of Sydney: Bernard Reppa to Cizzella Nicholas, May 1, 1968; Bernard Reppa to E Sargent, cc. Egbert Best, April 28, 1967; Bernard Reppa to A.A. MacLeod, Real Estate Manager Nova Scotia Trust RE: Ray Gillis Property, December 13, 1967.

⁶¹ Benjamin Bailey to Bernie Reppa, February 21, 1967. Engineering Dept., City of Sydney.

⁶² City of Sydney, Engineering Dept.: Bernard Reppa to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hawco, January 27, 1969; Property belonging to City of Sydney, March 4, 1969; Bernard Reppa to Heirs of Effie Slater, August 13, 1969.

way for an Irving Service Station, the empty building was finally cleared for the business expansion only after "numerous complaints" were received from the local citizens.⁶³ There was demolition at the eastern end of Frederick Street, where several small and active farms were removed, apparently to make way for a small industrial park. On William Street, a number of buildings, mainly rented properties, were removed to make way for a Seniors' complex which was built in 1973. At least two of the rented properties were owned by Eddy Scantlebury, of West Indian Black background. His tenants were black as well. When the houses were demolished, Scantlebury bought other properties on Henry Street and his tenants moved there.

Some of the buildings removed were old, empty buildings for which the city invoked the "unsightly premises" law in order to remove them. For most of these, the owners had died and the heirs moved to find jobs in Central Canada. The heirs of Ivan Frankewiez were called upon to demolish his wood frame, five-room home at 10 Curry's Lane in September, 1969. The demolition was done at a cost of \$515 charged to his heirs. Earlier in the same year a ten-room house with two baths at 125 Tupper Street, belonging to the heirs of Esther May Douglas (West Indian background), was demolished at a cost

⁶³ City Engineering Dept., Bernard Reppa to R.F. Sutherland c/o Irving Oil Ltd., November 7, 1969.

of six hundred and thirty-five dollars.⁶⁴

In another case, a sick and aging woman was removed from her home in Ward 6 on the advice of the City Welfare Officer who responded to complaints from neighbours. The officer reported that the woman's house had "inadequate water and toilet conditions; an accumulation of garbage on the property and in the interior of the building". The Public Health Inspector added to this,

The kitchen area of this house was filthy. The living room, dining room, pantry area, and four upstairs bedrooms were dirty and dilapidated. A stove in Mrs. B--'s bedroom provides the only heat in the house, and the rooms are extremely cold. There are no water or washroom facilities in the house. There is a dilapidated outside privy on the property and a well which was not functioning at the time of the inspection.⁶⁵

The authorities concluded that the house was a fire menace, that these conditions were due to the age and physical condition of the home owner, that she was "not capable of looking after herself in such deplorable conditions...that she should be placed in a home where she will be looked after". On May 14, 1970, the order was given to demolish her house, a remnant of the early and elite farming era of Whitney Pier. There were three prices offered for the removal of this house: Harriss and Harriss tendered \$640, Cape Breton Erectors

⁶⁴ "City of Sydney, Demolition of Buildings", City Engineering Dept. Papers, City Warehouse: September 16th, 1969 and February, 6th, 1969.

⁶⁵ J.G. A. Ormiston, Report, Health Inspector, City Engineering Office Papers, March 10, 1969.

tendered \$672, Union Construction Company tendered eight hundred and forty dollars.⁶⁶

The demolition program appeared to offer an opportunity to get up-grading for the city's dilapidated tenement buildings. In many cases, however, "slum landlords" confronted with minimum standards agreed to have their buildings demolished rather than undertake the cost of up-grading. Rental properties belonging to landlords of a range of ethnic backgrounds were affected, but the rented establishments were consistently from the "boom" era of the city. On June 14, 1972, there was a demolition order for 177 St. Ann's Street, a two-unit apartment building owned by Gerald Bruno. It resulted from an inspection on July 26, 1971, which found a wet basement, and a leaking sewer pipe; repair was recommended. There was no repair, and on August 12, 1971, the demolition of the building was recommended, and the requisition for demolition was submitted on July 14, 1972.⁶⁷

The basement apartment of a building at 136 Laurier St. was another instance. It was inspected and declared unfit as a result of a complaint from the Public Health Nurse in February of 1967:

⁶⁶ "City of Sydney, Demolition of Building": May 14, 1970.

⁶⁷ City Engineering Dept., Bernard Reppa to Gerard [also called Gerald], August 12, 1971, ff.

The basement apartment of this building is occupied by a Mrs. H---- and her five children ranging in age from 3 to 9 years, and consists of two bedrooms, living room kitchen, and a small toilet located off the porch. The original complaint was that the water supply had been frozen for several days; however, this had been remedied... The apartment itself is in very poor condition and was quite dirty at the time of inspection. The four rooms are heated by a coal range and a spare heater which creates a definite fire hazard for the occupants. The only washing facility is the kitchen sink and only cold water available.⁶⁸

The Public Health Inspector recommended that the dwelling be "declared unfit and ordered vacated". As a result, two rented buildings on this same lot, belonging to Gustine Chulli (also called Joseph Chuilo) were declared "unsafe, dangerous and a menace to fire and health". The buildings were not demolished until November, 1970, for the tendered price of four hundred and fifty dollars.⁶⁹

Occasionally repairs were carried out by the landlords. Stephen's Construction was given seven days to improve the conditions at its rented properties on East Street found in contravention to the Minimum Standards of Housing Accommodation on June 20th, 1969. The dwelling required major repairs to the roof, basement and plumbing. Stephen's responded a week later that the necessary repairs had been carried out; that the damage had been done by the tenants, who had since been evicted.

⁶⁸ G.W. Harris to William Vincent, Feb. 23, 1967. City Engineering Office Papers, Warehouse, Sydney.

⁶⁹ Harris to Vincent, Feb. 23, 1967.

Many of the early worker housing known as "shacks" which occupied Whitney Pier since the boom period of the first and second decades were finally cleared during this urban renewal. For the most part, it is possible to identify cleared buildings as "shacks" only by local tradition. However, it seems likely that the 12 unit "row" housing demolished at 36 Henry Street were indeed "shacks" from an earlier time.⁷⁰

Community Response to Urban Renewal

Government officials on all levels saw the urban renewal as making the Pier "look" better; improving "the quality of life", getting rid of bad housing. However, as early as 1963, one elected representative, Tom Miller, complained. A Black and a councillor from Ward V, Miller was concerned that attitudes toward areas designed as "renewal" sites could endanger the future of the community.

Ald. Miller said that during the past few years some 40 homes were razed in the Pier area because of fire hazards and no new developments had taken up the slack. "The housing problem in Wards V and VI is acute and unless mortgage companies grant mortgages to prospective builders the problem will become worse", he said. He said that both Central Mortgage and Housing and National Housing have also adopted the attitude that the Pier is an undesirable place to erect new homes. "When these people adopt an attitude like this, it makes it difficult for our young married couples to build new homes in the Pier area", he said. "These couples are forced to leave the Pier and live in the city proper despite the fact that they were born and raised in Whitney Pier". Ald. Miller warned that the Pier area "will be wiped out" if

⁷⁰ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Business Finance Div., "Demolition of Residential Units", September 1971.

mortgages are refused to home builders in the area."⁷¹

The Hellyer Task Force appeared to take note of this problem, observing that "public designations [for demolition] can have near-catastrophic effects on the area and the people involved."⁷² When people are moved, the Report said, "communities are dispersed and long-standing and vital social links shattered."⁷³ The Task Force felt that one problem was the length of time that passed between the time of designation and the time of actual implementation of the urban renewal. During that period, municipal governments tended to let the area "run down", with only minimal enforcement of health and safety standards: "as a result of public policies, minimum standards have been relaxed and potential blight [has] increased."⁷⁴ Furthermore, residents of areas designated for clearance were often not aware of proposed plans beyond the fact that their neighbourhood would undergo major change. As a result, they lost incentive to maintain their properties. "The situation can only be described as 'depressive'... . Community spirit ends and community uncertainty and in some cases, resentment begins." The Task Force recommended that, "the present policy of designating wide areas as 'urban

⁷¹ "Pier Housing: Discrimination Charge is Made", Post, October 18, 1963, p.3.

⁷² Paul Hellyer et al, **Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development** (Ottawa: 1969), p. 68.

⁷³ Hellyer Report, p. 65.

⁷⁴ Hellyer Report, p. 67.

renewal areas' should be discontinued in favour of policies and plans based on a more precise and effective scale of redevelopment".⁷⁵

What the Report failed to recognize was that communities such as the Coke Ovens in Whitney Pier had an even greater predicament. Located longside an "industrial corridors" and inhabited mainly by Blacks, the designation for urban renewal simply added to the long-standing stigma it suffered: the city's view was that people should be glad to leave was now backed by mortgage refusals.

The main criticism of the city's approach in the early period of urban renewal was from both tenants and landlords. The criticism was founded, not so much in the initiative of demolition, but in the city's lack of follow-up development. Rented units were being demolished but not replaced by the City. This forced economically disadvantaged tenants into other equally dilapidated dwellings, or more expensive housing which they could not afford. It must be pointed out that many of the leading business people of Sydney were landlords who had been given notice of unfit rental establishments. In 1965, a local weekly quoted councillor Nathanson on the topic: "it [minimum standards] could force landlords to do costly repairs, driving rents up and hurting poor people who can't afford the higher rent."; the paper went on to suggest that the demolition program "would eliminate existing housing

⁷⁵ Hellyer Report, pp. 68, 69.

without providing alternate housing[.]", and that the standards be sent back for "re-working".⁷⁶ Shortly afterward, the City Council decided that the Minimum Standards by-law was too stringent and impossible to enforce.⁷⁷ The problem of alternate housing for displaced tenants was still there in 1973; in fact it seemed to be reaching crisis proportions. The old buildings with "leaky roofs, cracked walls, drafty windows and sagging floors were still home to a lot of people with nowhere else to go." A female tenant with children said, "You wear a coat in the daytime to keep warm, and you count on each other for warmth at night, and after a winter like this, you figure that the prospect of going out on the street isn't so bad after all. Better than indoors in lots of ways, and it might be better to freeze than to burn to death." A "halfway" house was called for to ease the plight three to five families at a time who faced eviction because of imminent demolition.⁷⁸ The problem was discussed at a community meeting in 1971 at which Bernie Reppa stated that many more than the present total of 692 buildings should be demolished but there was no alternative housing.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ "Minimum Housing Standards Hurt the Poor", *Highlander*, June 2, 1965, p.1; "Housing Standard to be redrafted", June 16, 1965, p.1..

⁷⁷ "Minimum Standards By-Law", *Highlander*, June 30, 1965.

⁷⁸ "The ABC's of Slum Housing in Sydney", *Highlander*, March 3, 1973, p.3.

⁷⁹ Local Meeting...", *Post*, May 20, 1971.

Yet another part of the ambivalence toward the urban renewal was based on the clearance of buildings that were in "decent" shape. The Hellyer Task Force reiterated this concern in its conclusion that, in the proposed demolition of 13,000 units in Canada between 1948 to 1968, there was a "tendency" to demolish buildings that had not outlived their physical usefulness. The task force felt it was particularly disturbing in view of the continuing shortage of housing stock.⁸⁰

Todd Marsman, a member of one of the families renting from the Black landlord, Eddy Scantlebury mentioned above, recalls vividly the house which was demolished, that it came as a surprise considering the condition of the house:

They tore our house down to put Seniors' there. ... Gee, we were kids, I must have been eight or nine.... [What kind of house was it that you were living in?] It was, well I can't really call it a shack. It was a decent house as far as my standards were concerned, like, from what I can even see today. Like you know, some of the old, big old houses. It was a decent house. Panelling on the inside, it was, you know, nice panelling [You mean the old type of panelling, tongue and groove and all that?] No, it was 4x8 sheets of panelling. But it was a lot better than what was around the community at the time.... One family homes.... yeah, I remember when they put up all the windows on the house. And they redone the walls and all that stuff. Put new stuff on them. There was a garage on and they put a door on the garage, that comes right off the house. I remember all that stuff and different carpenters coming to the house. ... I can't remember exactly what the other houses were like, but I know that a lot of them were shacks, you know. I imagine that there were a couple of them that were decent and maybe the owners just seen the money and

⁸⁰ Report, 1969, p.64.

just sold the building.⁸¹

The clearances also uprooted families with deep attachments to their homes and community. Todd Marsman:

Oh, yeah, all my childhood memories were down here, you know. ...I still picture where that Seniors' Complex is there. The Seniors' Complex is where my home used to be and I can remember every room in it and the stairway, oh yeah. There's nothing solid that could remind me of it. The only thing is the curb. I know where the driveway used to be. They never changed the curb yet.⁸²

Steve MacNeil, the City's Property Agent during the 1960s observed that the people of the Pier had pride in their homes. He said there "wasn't too much wrong" with many of the houses in the Coke Ovens, just that there was a lot of pollution coming from the coke ovens operation and the coal that was dumped along the edge of Frederick St. He noted that the Polish and Ukrainian people "had good houses" and that the Black people had "a little something [garden] in the back".⁸³

Black community activist Lem Skeete remembered of the demolished houses some 30 years after the fact: "It was a shame too. They tore houses down there that really shouldn't have been torn down. In fact those homes are better than the ones they're putting up today cause they're better materials."⁸⁴

⁸¹ Todd Marsman, interview, December 2, 1993.

⁸² Todd Marsman, interview.

⁸³ Steve MacNeil, informal interview, Dec. 20, 1993.

⁸⁴ Lem Skeete, interview, 1993.

Indeed, fewer than expected buildings were cleared in the Coke Ovens because a significant number of the buildings were owned outright by their inhabitants. Estimates in the early 1960s of owner-occupied housing in the Coke Ovens was between 60 and eighty per cent. They were naturally reluctant to move, even if their conditions were not ideal, with the alternative being high rent or an extensive mortgage. In some cases, where sections of streets were designated for demolition, homeowners reputedly placed a higher price on their property than the city was willing to pay.⁸⁵

Many remembered the "talk" that houses would be built immediately by the city to replace those demolished. It could be that this was the basis for some community members being willing to accept the clearances. "I know that the city promised them housing down there, right away. To rebuild the land with low income housing. They were planning on putting houses back into the community.... And it just never happened."⁸⁶ Those more closely involved with the urban renewal program knew that replacement housing was not planned.

The city said they wanted to, they wanted to make a buffer zone on that side of Tupper Street. More or less a buffer zone between the steel plant and the houses. On that side of Tupper street they weren't going to build any more homes. They were going to plant trees and make

⁸⁵ The Hellyer Report, 1969, p. 68, discusses the situation where a local government decides to that it is in the public interest to change land use patterns. It suggests that public discussion and adequate compensation are essential for redevelopment.

⁸⁶ Todd Marsman, interview.

like a park garden. And down there they were to build a recreation centre. Yeah, down at the end of the road. So they bought the old homes up there and tore [them] down.⁸⁷

The "park garden" did not materialize, and the construction of a gym for the new Whitney Pier Memorial Junior High School pre-empted the Tupper Street recreation centre. However, a softball field finally did go up at the end of Tupper Street in the late 1980s. Similarly unfulfilled was the city's plan to develop Whitney Pier's commercial area on Victoria Road between the overpass and Henry Street, mentioned in the city's 1974 and 1982 area plans.⁸⁸

Another plan in the urban renewal of Whitney Pier was the location of a light industrial park along Frederick St. This had been proposed by the original Whitney Pier Community Forum. In the 1974 City Plans, it seemed fait accompli: "An industrial park of 350 acres with a road for rail lines and streets has been laid out south east of Frederick Street in the Whitney Pier area... Municipal sewer and water services run within two thousand feet of this industrial park. It has been designed for secondard[sic] manufacturing establishments."⁸⁹

The Frederick Street area was one of the most significant

⁸⁷ Lem Skeete, interview, August 3, 1993.

⁸⁸ "Municipal Development Plan, City of Sydney", 1974; "City of Sydney Municipal Development Plan", 1982.

⁸⁹ "Municipal Development Plan, City of Sydney", 1974.

demolition actions of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program(NIP) of the 1970s -- a program designed to preserve neighbourhoods. According to Sydney's **Conceptual Plan for NIP**, the demolition was primarily a response to the pollution problems caused by the proximity of the community to the coke ovens and the steel plant: "residents are plagued with heavy coal dust fallout, high levels of noise pollution and coping with industrial waste".⁹⁰ The buildings on six lots on Frederick Street on the east side of Lingan Road were removed to provide for a "buffer zone" between the coke ovens and the community. The industrial park did not appear to be a part of this particular plan.

The area demolished included two small farms and several recently built homes. Curiously, the properties were not located between the coke ovens operation and the community, but rather were located beside the coal stock area which might have been moved more easily than the farms and homes that were slated for destruction. The people who lived in the area at the time recall that these buildings were in fair to good condition. Furthermore, the house on the corner of Lingan Road, closest to the coke ovens, is still standing. Belonging to the Bobyk family, it was a popular "corner store" until recently. Accordingly to one member of the family, the intercession of a local politician was sought so that the

⁹⁰ "Projects", **Neighbourhood Improvement Program: Conceptual Plan Ward IV, V, VI**, prepared by the Municipality of the City of Sydney, Development Department (1978).

buildings could remain.

In 1978, "preliminary steps" had been taken to turn the "long-planned industrial site into a serviced area for new industries".⁹¹ The only light industry to go in the park was a small sound-cassette manufacturing outfit established by DEVCO which closed shortly after it opened. By 1982, the industrial park continued to exist only as part of the city's "area plans".⁹² Today it can be observed that the city dump, located on Grand Lake Road is significantly encroaching on the expropriated land near the former coke ovens. The question must be asked whether land for the dump was part of the city's agenda of the 1970s.

It seems probable that the plans for "green space" and recreation on Tupper Street, the commerce on Victoria Road and the light industrial park on Frederick Street, were all part of the planned rehabilitation which qualified the city for the funding needed for the demolition of the Coke Ovens.

Alternative Housing after Demolition

A significant factor in creating a receptive atmosphere toward urban renewal was the announcement in 1964 of low rental apartments, 50 units on land between Church and James Streets in Whitney Pier, and 50 units on Terrace Street in

⁹¹ "Committee to Explore Way to Set Up Industrial Park", *Post*, March 3, 1978.

⁹² "City of Sydney Municipal Development Plan", 1982.

Ashby.⁹³(Fig. 6-5) The James Street project was apparently intended to supply housing for people displaced by the demolitions, but few initially applied for space. Although Father George Francis of the African Orthodox Church was approached to encourage applications from the Black community, only three persons, all black women, from the Coke Ovens area took advantage of the apartments when they opened. They shared a 3 bedroom unit.

The ratepayers of Sydney approved the plan in a plebiscite in October, 1964.⁹⁴ The units, completed in 1967, were a "revolutionary" and controversial design, based on British row housing and introduced to Canada through a Montreal low rental housing project. The apartment blocks are built in parallel rows on the side of the steep and rocky rise at the top of James Street, on three streets named March Terrace, April Terrace and May Terrace, all connected by a road around the northern side of the project. There are five blocks of eight apartments, more aptly called "town houses", and one large building with ten apartments. The sister

⁹³ "\$1,500,000 Project:100 Units Planned", *Post*, February 21, 1964, p.3; "100 Housing Units gets Go-Ahead for Sydney from Provincial/Federal Governments", *Highlander*, March 30, 1966, p. 7. Information about the James Street apartments came from informal interviews with Duncan MacKay, Charlie Campbell, John Campbell, a formal interview with tenant Douglas "Buddy" Dufour on March 7, 1994, and through participant observation. Although the apartment complex is entered from Church Street, it was initially considered part of James Street.

⁹⁴ "Housing Scheme Sites Selected: No Delay by Council", *Post*, November 6, 1964, p.3.



Figure 6-5: James/Church Street apartments. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

project in Ashby had the same design, but with fewer apartments in each block; the Ashby blocks were given the distinguishing names of flowers.

The units are 3-storeys in height: the rise of the hill allows for the bottom floor, containing the kitchen, utility room and toilet. The entrance to the kitchen is the "back" door, opening to the west, facing downhill. Recently, the basement kitchen in most of the units have been changed to recreation and storage areas, with the second floor bedroom being converted to a kitchen. Stairs lead from the kitchen to the second floor where the living room is found, along with a bedroom and a hallway leading to the "front" door facing east.

The third floor has two or three bedrooms and a full bathroom. The buildings are 30 feet to back; four bedroom units are 15 feet wide, three bedroom units are 12 feet wide. The units are separated by walls of cinderblock visible from the interior; the front and back walls are wood. The units are well-lit with relatively large windows in each room.

The exterior impression is quite curious for the facades do not face each other "across the street", as they normally might. Rather, across the street from the front door of one building is the back door of the another, the back door often distinguished by clothes lines and children's toys. Both front and rear "facades" are fronted by a small yard. There is little to distinguish one unit from another, except for contrasting neutrally coloured vinyl siding on each unit. The

contrasting colours emphasize the narrowness of each unit. Previously there was a road which ran around the entire complex and between each building, but the road behind the May Terrace has been eliminated and is now a grassy area. Although the area seems quiet, there is regular movement by both children and adults around the streets and yards, in and out of the units.

The apartments were built by the contractors, Carefoot Holdings of Toronto at a cost of \$1,556,794 for the 100 units. The federal and provincial governments made financial commitments; Sydney's contribution was \$150,000.⁹⁵ It became known that locating the buildings in one small area was not only recommended by CMHC, but that it was built on city-owned land and therefore expected to be cheaper. In reality, because of the rock base, each unit cost \$35,000, substantially more than single units spread all over the city. CMHC, being the primary funder, was responsible for the design of the buildings and its construction supervision. There were problems with the initial construction, about \$60,000 worth of various deficiencies, probably related to the extra cost of extensive blasting required to cut basements into solid rock, and also poorly fitted windows. CMHC paid for the construction shortcomings because the contractor was no longer available. But in 1969, when the projects still appeared

⁹⁵ "Low Rental Housing Project Plans Discussed", Post, February 17, 1964, p.3.

"new and colourful", the tenants continued to deal with "a host of day-to-day annoyances stemming from design and construction faults".⁹⁶

The location of the apartments gave rise to questions about the philosophy of public housing which grouped low income people in dwellings that so obviously said, "poverty".⁹⁷ An editorial commented on the willingness of the city to allow CMHC and NSHC such control over its public housing: "It seems that financial arrangements with the federal and provincial governments were too good to pass up."⁹⁸ Shortly after the completion of construction, City Alderman Ed Johnston called for "individuality" in future low rental housing, suggesting that public housing should be single family dwellings that would eventually be owned by the occupants. The mayor responded, "I don't think CMHC will go for it."⁹⁹ The exterior design was described as "unimaginative"; inside, it was considered by some of the tenants to be awkward and cramped giving a feeling of "living in each others' pockets". Locally, the apartments were the

⁹⁶ "Just beneath the Pretty Surface Trouble Brews", *Highlander*, April 30, 1969, p. 13.

⁹⁷ "Editorial", *Highlander*, April 16, 1969, p.2.

⁹⁸ "Tenants of Public Housing in Sydney feel they are living in each others pockets", *Highlander*, April 23, 1969, p.3, and "Discontent Rising from tenants in City's public Housing Projects", April 16, 1969, p.2.

⁹⁹ "Individuality in Low Rental", *Highlander*, Dec. 10, 1968.

"Chicken Coop", a name that became as much a branding of the occupants as it was a reflection of the appearance of the apartment blocks.

The administration of the apartment blocks was given over to the Sydney Housing Authority just as construction was completed. The Housing Authority consisted of a five-person committee appointed by the Federal Minister of Housing, with only the chairperson having a paid part-time position. There was an immediate reaction to the appointments from local activist, Alec MacInnis, protesting that Labour should have been represented.¹⁰⁰ The Housing Authority decided who would become tenants, based on the applicants income, need and "worthiness" in terms of sober living, etc. Tenants paid a rent that was 25 per cent of the total gross income of everyone living in the apartment. For this reason, and probably for more moral reasons as well, the Authority tried to accept only tenants with legal relationships since there could be no legal financial claim on "casual" relationships. The highest rent during the first ten-year period was about \$700.00. The payment system, according to the *Highlander*, was a dis-incentive to work toward increased income, or it encouraged the poor to hide their extra income. If a tenant's income was \$90 per week, then the rent was \$85.50 per month; if the tenant's income went up to \$100.00 per week, then the

¹⁰⁰ "Questions Low-Rental Authority", *Highlander*, December 6, 1967, p.3.

rent went up to \$100.50 per month. Tenants were required to report any change in their incomes; when income was changing on a weekly basis, the rent was constantly changing as well.¹⁰¹

Although the complaints came from the City as well as the tenants, the Housing Authority insisted that its hands were tied: "that it must charge rents laid down by the City-Provincial-CMHC partnership which built and owned the projects. Tenants suspect however, that the Authority's part-time manager, Capt. J.M. Wilson, is more energetic about checking on overtime pay, etc, than he needs to be."¹⁰² The Housing Authority also took an interest in other aspects of the everyday lives of the tenants, making sure that the tenants understood the heating system and appliances, and they made inspections to insure that proper housekeeping standards were adhered to. At least one tenant is reported to have threatened the Authority member on his inspection visit. One of the duties of the Housing Authority was to evict tenants which their situation changed: for instance, when a family member died or went away to work, then the family was no longer eligible for that particular apartment if it was an incompatible size. Often there was no alternative smaller

¹⁰¹ "Tenants of Public Housing in Sydney Feel They are Living in each Others Pockets", *Highlander*, April 23, 1969, p.3.

¹⁰² "Just Beneath the Pretty Surface Trouble Brews", *Highlander*, April 30, 1968.

apartment available, leaving the unfortunate people to go back to the slum housing they had previously inhabited. There were accusations of inconsistencies in the enforcement of these rules; one such accusation was brought before The Human Rights Commission, but was ultimately dismissed.

The Housing Authority was responsible for policing the behaviour of the tenants, "vandalism" being the most frequent misdemeanour. The Housing Authority committee, made up of middle class men, were well-meaning and moral in the context of their time and class. In the same context, they were often paternalistic and judgmental, failing to recognize that this type of housing perpetrated a culture of poverty and had its own set of strategies for survival. The Housing Authority was criticized by the *Highlander* in 1971 for being made up of political appointments whose efficacy was hampered by petty municipal politics.¹⁰³

It was the feeling of Housing Authority member Duncan Mackay, that although the housing was not perfect, it was far better than what the tenants had previously. Unfortunately, it was the attitude of many that these economically deprived tenants were "lucky" to get what they had and they shouldn't complain. Indeed, the tenants freely acknowledged their good fortune, and they feared "being forced back to the slums by unbearable rents" but they also felt "that the rental pressure

¹⁰³ "Sydney's Housing Problem compounded by Confusion about Who's in Charge", *Highlander*, October 6, 1971.

was getting to be too much..."¹⁰⁴

The dissatisfaction with the project was summed up by the **Highlander**: "Alderman Alec MacInnis, champion of low-rental housing... his early enthusiasm turned to dismay at the rental policy under which the Housing Authority administered the City's two 50 developments; and to alarm at the poor design and shoddy construction of the gaily coloured units."¹⁰⁵

Douglas "Buddy" Dufour was a resident of the complex. He and his family took the "apartment" in 1967, shortly after they were completed. Dufour, his wife and three children originally moved into a three bedroom apartment, but when the couple's family grew to five children, they moved into the four bedroom apartment they have today. Theirs is one of the few remaining units without change in the basement kitchen: they prefer the large and well-lit downstairs kitchen which is comfortably cool in the summer time. Dufour, now retired, held a "steady" seasonal job during most of his working life. Because his lay-off time was predictable, he benefitted by the changes in rent based on income. He told of deficiencies in the construction of the building, but he preferred to "talk things over" with the Housing Authority, finding that to be more effective than going to Alderman MacInnis.

When asked about the "neighbourhood", Dufour remembered

¹⁰⁴ "Sydney's Housing Problem... Who's in Charge", **Highlander**, October 6, 1971.

¹⁰⁵ "... Who's in Charge", **Highlander**.

a broad ethnic mix and very few problems. "Didn't make no difference... didn't matter what you were, coloured or what you were. They all got equal share... You get the odd one... Doesn't matter where you live, you're going to get that". Most of his current neighbours stayed in the project for a short time before they moved on, and he found that he didn't know people the way he used to. However, he remembered a time when the project was a real neighbourhood with yard parties, and Santa Claus visits from house to house. These activities were part of the benefits of the local Tenant's Association, which Dufour believed, was started by the Housing Authority.

The organization by the tenants was, instead, part of a widespread "class movement" across North America. In Sydney, it took shape in late 1968 out of the complaints about the rental system and the construction defects of the project in early 1969 when,

encouraged by Alderman MacInnis, the tenants appeared before City Council...to make their case. ... The revolt of the tenants, North America's latest phenomenon, came to Cape Breton last week, as tenants in Sydney's public housing units launched a campaign for radical revision of the rental system... tenants weren't happy with the layout and design of the units either... suggest bluntly that future units be built by local contractors.¹⁰⁶

Soon the solidarity of tenants was wider than the James Street project. A Tenant's Association was formally started in Halifax and it invited participation by Industrial Cape Breton tenants in 1970. The organization announced that its aim was

¹⁰⁶ "Just below the Pretty Surface Trouble Brews", *Highlander*, April 30, 1969, p. 13.

to deal with problems of legislation relating to public housing, such as rental policies, design, policing of life style, racism and the stigma of poverty.¹⁰⁷ In 1972, a "tenant's union" was established in Whitney Pier. The six founding members voiced their aim of uniting tenants so that "they will hopefully have more power (meaning more ability to act) on behalf of their rights. ... With the support of the tenants, the Pier tenants union hope that a stop can be put to landlords who make a profit on slum housing".¹⁰⁸ The name of the group was soon changed to Tenants United Front (TUF). The organizer and acting president, Malcolm Gamble, declared, "The tenants themselves have the power in their own hands to fight for their rights. There is no substitute for people power.... people have been degraded long enough by being forced to live in slum housing..." TUF set up headquarters next door to Chisholm's hardware on Victoria Road, and began its shoestring operation. By March 1973, tenants in Sydney, New Waterford, Glace Bay, North Sydney and Sydney Mines also had organized, calling themselves the Coalition for Better Housing.¹⁰⁹

Other public housing projects in Whitney Pier met

¹⁰⁷ "Tenant's Association", *Highlander*, June 10, 1970, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ "Tenant's Union Underway at Pier", *Highlander*, March 29, 1972, p.24.

¹⁰⁹ "TUF will be calling on you soon", *Highlander*, April 26, 1972, p.28; "Don't Gamble, Get TUF", *Highlander*, October 11, 1972, p.3; "The ABC's of Slum Housing in Sydney", *Highlander*, March 21, 1973, p.3.

difficulties similar to that on James Street, based on perceived construction standards and the stigma of poverty. In 1971, construction on Taylor Street near a 1960s co-operative housing project, caused an "uproar". Local home owners were apparently concerned about housing quality and the small lot size (two three bedroom units were placed on one 80 by 100 lot), and potential stress on the existing sewer system.¹¹⁰ Built by NSHC, the two small bungalow-type houses located at 104 and 108 Taylor Street were prefabricated by Lundrigan Construction. They were the beginning of a number of individual public housing units to be spread throughout the Pier, to provide alternate housing for people displaced by demolition. Calling the home owners' reaction "prejudice", Development Officer Bernie Reppa reported to the *Highlander* that their real objections were to having welfare families coming into the neighbourhood. At a meeting of the Whitney Pier Community Forum, Reppa insisted that the houses were "top quality", even though the foundation of one of them had to be "spliced" after it was poured.¹¹¹ The construction was completed nonetheless, probably because of Reppa's assurances that adjacent property values would not go down.

The pre-fabricated houses in the 1973 MacDonald Heights public housing project also had construction problems. The

¹¹⁰ "Housing at Pier Sets off Uproar", *Highlander*, May 12, 1971, p. 1.

¹¹¹ "Reppa says Prejudice by Pier Homeowners", *Highlander*, May 19, 1971, p. 1.

famous October Storm of 1974, which wreaked havoc all over the Industrial Area, caused several roofs to blow off a number of the two-family dwellings. No one was injured and the inhabitants were moved to the Isle Royal Hotel until the problem was fixed, but questions were once again raised about the quality of pre-fab houses. Those in charge of the public housing project insisted that the buildings were basically sound; that the incident was a "fluke" caused by improper handling of hinges after the buildings were transported from Mainland Nova Scotia. However, Sydney City Council responded to the incident by passing a by-law covering local inspection of modular homes after their assembly on City properties, this in addition to National Building standards requirements.¹¹² (Fig. 6-6)

The James Street, Taylor Street and MacDonald Heights projects were the beginning of significant public housing component in Whitney Pier, some built directly as public housing such as on Ironside Drive and MacLeod Streets in 1973, Hankard and Laurier Streets in 1975, Shendale Drive and Carroll Crescent in 1976. Others were taken over by the NSHC when they were vacated by original owners. This was true in the case of a number of co-op houses according to the original agreement with the Nova Scotia Housing Commission. Sydney, through its housing authority, (the Cape Breton

¹¹² "Modular Home By-Law Approved by Group", *Post*, December 10, 1974, p. 3.



Figure 6-6: MacDonald Heights public housing. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

Regional Housing Authority since 1973), has continued to build or buy public housing until the present time, through assistance from the provincial and federal governments. Today Whitney Pier has approximately 320 public housing units, about 75 per cent of the total number for the city of Sydney.¹¹³ This is an especially interesting statistic when only 20 per cent of Sydney's population lives in Whitney Pier.

Contrary to what the figures seem to indicate, there has been a tangible reluctance on the part of Pier residents to accept public housing, especially if it moved them out of their immediate neighbourhood. The failure to bring more than three applications from the Black community to the James Street units was indicative of this. A meeting of the community at the African Orthodox Church organized by the pastor, Father George Francis and Black Community leader Neville Gibson, pointed out several facts to the Housing Authority.¹¹⁴ One was that members of the Black community were unwilling to move because many of them owned their own houses and they did not wish to break up their community. Also that older people in the Coke Ovens wished to remain in their homes rather than be moved to senior's housing elsewhere.¹¹⁵ No doubt, past experience told them that they

¹¹³ Statistics through the courtesy of Cathy Burke, Cape Breton Regional Housing Authority, 1994.

¹¹⁴ Informal interview, Dec. 20, 1993.

¹¹⁵ Cited in Capstick and Roach, St. F. X. Extension Dept., "Socio-Economic Survey, Coke Ovens Area...", p. 2.

would be unwelcome in other parts of the Pier or in Sydney. Black community leaders remember that fear of "breaking up the community" was a major concern during the time of the survey; that pressure to move came from "Halifax" (the Nova Scotia government) and local politicians.¹¹⁶

Apparently in response to the Housing Authority's view of the Black community, a "Socio-Economic Survey of the Coke Ovens" was carried out by the St. Francis Xavier Extension workers, Father Bill Roach and Father John Capstick in 1972 using two local field workers. The study, an off-shoot from a short course in community development at St. Francis Xavier, was an assessment of housing conditions and of people's willingness to move. It is now understood that the study was carried out in order to convince the predominantly Black Coke Ovens neighbourhood in Whitney Pier to move to public housing being planned for MacDonald Heights.¹¹⁷

It was a door-to-door survey of family, housing and income information which included a number of streets: Curry's Lane right beside the coke ovens department, Tupper Street,

¹¹⁶ Clo Yakimchuk, informal interview, March 6, 1994, and Lem Skeete, interview, August 9, 1993.

¹¹⁷ Extension Department St. Francis Xavier University, Sydney Campus, Nova Scotia, "Socio-Economic Survey[,] Coke Ovens Area[,] Ward 5[,] City of Sydney[,] 1972". Interviewing was done by two university students, Karen Tull of the Black community and Valerie Bobyk of the nearby Ukrainian community. The survey did an "actual count" of 102 (63.5%)Blacks and 58(36.5%) whites. It applied "black" or "white" to husbands and wives, and "mixed" to appropriate families, failing to take into account generations and perhaps centuries of previous mixing.

Laurier Street and Hankard Street, the part of the streets extending from Victoria Road to Langan Road; and William Street, crossing from Tupper and Hankard. A total of 160 households were surveyed in the area which had a total population of 540; only heads of households were interviewed. Funded by CMHC (\$7,000), the study came out of a 12 week community development course given by the Extension Dept. at the Menelik Hall for the Black community.

The survey concluded that the major problems of the Coke Ovens were housing, employment, and education in that order. The housing was described thus:

"The buildings in the designate area are generally old and run-down. The construction in the beginning was not of a high standard. There are serious problems with insulation, heating systems, plumbing and wiring. [Due to extreme fallout from the coke ovens department],... the exterior of the buildings ... are not maintained".¹¹⁸

It was the impression of the authors of the study that, "with an organized community program it would not be difficult to move most of the residents out of the area. They felt that the lack of knowledge and acceptance of public housing was seen as a result of low education levels in the community. If alternate accommodations could be provided somewhere in the Pier area, wards Five and Six, it would not cause any great psychological break from their present community."¹¹⁹ When asked the question, "If you had the opportunity, would you

¹¹⁸ Survey, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Survey, p. 11.

move?", the Survey reported that 114(71.25 per cent) of the respondents answered "yes", 35(21.87 per cent) said "no" and 11(6.88 per cent) said "I don't know".¹²⁰

The recommendations included special incentives to move to improved housing; special assistance in acquiring public and seniors' housing, and further funding to continue the community development program started by the Extension Department. Like the Spence-Sales Report before it, the St. Francis Xavier study recommended that everyone should be removed from the Coke Ovens target area and that it should be turned into a "buffer one", either a "green area" or a light industrial park.¹²¹

The information gathered would not seem to lead to these conclusions. The survey found that the majority of the buildings were in "fair" condition, that 38 per cent of those interviewed owned their own homes, and that over-crowding was the exception rather than the norm. It conceded that low values for their properties, high-cost rental outside the community, and fear of racism were all part of the reluctance to move. Although steel plant pollution is seen to account for the "over-all drab picture... presented", the survey made no recommendations about the City or the plant taking initiatives in pollution control.¹²²

¹²⁰ Survey, p. 11.

¹²¹ "Survey", p. 12.

¹²² "Survey", p, 14

The socio-economic survey was problematic in its application of middle class notions about family and community. For instance, "a great deal of family instability" was indicated by the large number (39%) of households headed by women; also by the confusion over the relationship of "boarders" to the female household head.¹²³ Because of this "instability", incomes were also difficult to ascertain, for the head of the family was not necessarily male or the breadwinner; nor was steady, full-time employment the norm. The confusion emanating from the "instability" of the family extended to the estimation of family income, so the survey sought an "accurate" assessment of incomes from Sydney's Welfare Department. Immigration was included with age, lack of attention, and emigration as factors in the "blight" of the housing.¹²⁴ The survey's overall description of the neighbourhood is similarly denigrating: "The Coke Ovens is not a typical neighbourhood. It is a place of extremes, contrasts and intensity."¹²⁵

¹²³ "Survey", p. 6. Even today, older common-law partners will protect their reputations, or their pensions, by "letting on" to outsiders that the male partner is a boarder.

¹²⁴ "Survey", p. 12.

¹²⁵ "Survey", p. 5. It is interesting that the views of one of the two field workers in the project differ quite emphatically from the report: Valerie Bobyk found strong family ties in a particularly stable neighbourhood despite social and economic discrimination. Ms. Bobyk did not see the completed report of the survey. Informal interview, Dec. 2, 1993.

The study had inaccuracies in terms of the history and activities of the community. While it may seem trivial that the survey misnamed community organizations and mistakenly stated that the Coke Ovens was the only black community in Cape Breton, these statements nonetheless show careless research and lack of regard for the history of Blacks in Cape Breton.

Reflections on the Success of Urban Renewal in Whitney Pier.

In 1967 the "Cape Breton Regional Planning Commission Brief" laid down guidelines for urban renewal in Industrial Cape Breton.¹²⁶ Given the tradition of home ownership in the industrial area the Commission's aim was to influence changes in legislation to allow for low income families to build and live in their own homes; that rental units were not acceptable. The guidelines, prepared by representatives of eight Municipal Authorities in the Industrial Area and by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, recognized, 1. the importance of housing from both social and economic perspectives; 2. that municipal authorities alone were not able to cope with the housing needs of Cape Breton County; 3. that rental units were not acceptable given the history of home ownership in the region; 4. that municipalities were not able to subsidize public housing because of financial

¹²⁶ "Cape Breton Regional Planning Commission Brief on Regional Housing Policy and Need in the Cape Breton Industrial Region," Report, Housing, Beaton Institute, 1967.

difficulty throughout the 60s; nor were they likely to take any initiatives, especially since it was not required by law. The Brief called for changes in the Housing Act which restricted public housing to "economically viable" regions, and for programs that allowed for subsidized home ownership. It recommended that municipalities be assisted and permitted to purchase, demolish and clear individual sub-standard dwellings with costs paid by the government, not the owner.¹²⁷ From the guidelines, it seemed that urban renewal would be on the right track. Even in Whitney Pier, where demolition had gone on for several years with little provision for alternate housing, the future seemed bright.

Five years later, however, it was evident that the hopes for housing low-income families in Sydney, particularly in Whitney Pier, were in shambles. A considerable number of dwellings units had been demolished, including derelict buildings and a good many buildings which were in decent shape. The proposed redevelopment, in terms of a green areas, light industrial park, and an attractive commercial area did not come to pass, nor did sufficient alternate housing for low income displaced people. An article by Jim MacCormack, Sydney's Welfare Director, declared that "[n]o policy meant no houses"; that the target was 500 new units, [but] the actual number was one hundred and forty-nine. He suggested that there were a number of bottlenecks on all levels of

¹²⁷ "Cape Breton Regional Planning Commission Brief".

government, but that the main responsibility for lack of action lay with the municipality, which did not take advantage of the over \$7 million dollars available for new housing starts in Cape Breton. There was no plan for 1972, and the plan for 1971 was submitted so late that there might be no starts in the current year. He said there seemed to be a problem of acquiring land; yet there was considerable vacant land within the city limits. He concluded that strong leadership was lacking and had to be found or the terrible housing problems in Sydney would continue. The article was headed by a photograph of the Coke Ovens of Whitney Pier showing several drab and derelict buildings.¹²⁸

In virtually ending federal support for the demolition element of urban renewal, the Hellyer Report of 1969 voiced doubts about both the practice and the principles of urban renewal. In effect, it summarized many the problems experienced by Whitney Pier with regard to demolition, such as the tendency to destroy good buildings, and to stigmatize areas ear-marked for demolition. But an even greater worry was that few vacant houses were demolished and that "the fundamental requirement of existing urban renewal provision that groups so affected by these schemes be guaranteed alternate housing before demolition took place providing alternate housing" was not met: "the demolition of inhabited

¹²⁸ "Sydney's Housing Problem compounded by Confusion about Who's in Charge", *Highlander*, October 6, 1971. Photo by Raytel, in E. Beaton Collection, Beaton Institute.

houses meant that some individual, family or groups [was] forced to look elsewhere for accommodation."¹²⁹

There was active community response to the housing problems of tenants in Whitney Pier and other places. However, this action by the tenants' association was usually primarily problem-oriented, often in finding alternate housing for people in need. Although it attempted to change government policy on several levels, it was basically isolated and was not successful in effecting institutional change. The Whitney Pier Community Forum, started by the local United Church, was also isolated in terms of its concerns and activities. Its lonely demand to clean up the pollution from the steel was ignored. The present-day situation of almost three quarters of the City's public housing in Whitney Pier, some of it of questionable quality, continues to reflect the city's view of Whitney Pier as a place where the hopes of low income people can be buried.

It may well be asked why the residents of Whitney Pier and in particular, the residents of the Coke Ovens, were seemingly unable to take a more active role in the policy and action of urban renewal in their community. The answer may be found in a combination of factors. There was, first of all, a basic trust by the people of Whitney Pier in the goodwill of the various levels of government which became involved in housing in Whitney Pier. Secondly, there was a refusal on the

¹²⁹ Hellyer Report, p.64, 65.

part of planners to hear the voices of a people made powerless by the long-standing stigma of poverty and location, and by discrimination based on race, ethnicity and livelihood. Bureaucrats listened instead to outsiders: academics and church/university based community development "leaders", most of whom thought in terms of finding and placing government funding rather than community integrity. The outside experts were consistent in their failure to demand an end to pollution in the area. The bottom line for bureaucrats, academics and community developers was that it would be a good thing to remove the predominantly black people who lived closest to the steel plant. It would be good to have them somewhere else, preferably not in one group.

Yet despite the damage that was done, it is interesting and encouraging that clearance fell far short of the target proposed by the 1960 Spence-Sales Report.¹³⁰ The remainder of the 1970s saw a much more community-oriented approach to the improvement of the housing environment of Whitney Pier.

¹³⁰ Spence-Sales diagram p. 59.

CHAPTER 7

COMMUNITY ACTION AND SOCIAL HOUSING

... we were young and we had energy. The angrier you got the more energy you had.... At that time we believed that every Canadian was important.¹
Jane Crawley, Community Activist

The 1970s saw a new perspective on housing in Whitney Pier. It was a trend toward replacing and renovating buildings instead of demolition, and also of promoting home ownership for low income families, rather than relying on public housing or socially assisted rental units. In contrast to the relatively passive or reactive role of the community in urban renewal and public housing, the social housing in 1970s demonstrated ways in which Whitney Pier took an active role in decision-making, in designing and in critiquing housing and housing policy. Indeed, community action with regard to housing took forms which were recognizable by that time as a "60s" phenomenon. Weaver and Doucet's description of the post-war era of building in Canada could properly be applied to Whitney Pier during this time: "Government policies and programs related to housing matters ...[were] focused on two major goals - the improvement of market efficiency in residential construction and the promotion of social justice

¹ Jane Crawley, interview, 1994.

and equality."² The less obvious government agenda was encouragement of the construction business and employment for Canadians.

The changes of this period took place in a macro-context of an enlivened Canadian economy and a new socially aware political will within the federal government. The micro-context of Whitney Pier was somewhat contradictory: the prospects for the steel plant were in decline, with the final result that the old plant was closed gradually during the 1980s; but on the positive side, there was substantially less pollution in Whitney Pier. Thus housing and sustained neighbourhoods had greater support.³

From Urban Renewal to Neighbourhood "Reinvestment"

Beginning in the 1970s, resistance to displacement made the concept of "neighbourhood" a positive one in terms of housing development for low income families. Accordingly, governments aimed at "deliberate and purposeful" policy and process which responded directly to community needs. While the improvement of housing and civic services, both defining quality of life in a specific locality, continued to be political, the era saw communities taking the initiative in

² Michael Doucet and John Weaver, **Housing the North American City**, p.130.

³ The closure of the integrated steel plant and the coke ovens took place over the period from 1987 to 1992; but it was the subject of discussion for a long time because the process included the construction of a new and modern plant.

terms of local concerns. "Reinvestment" has been used in reference to the renewal of older neighbourhoods by resettlement from outside: however, I use reinvestment in reference to rehabilitating and repairing the existing housing stock of existing neighbourhoods, and where necessary, replacing housing so that people are able to stay in their neighbourhoods. In effect, during this period, maintenance replaced demolition-and-reconstruction as the primary way to provide adequate housing.⁴

One of the main proponents of this change in attitude was Bernie Reppa, Development Officer for the City of Sydney. Whitney Pier-born Reppa expressed strong opposition to the 1972 St. Francis Xavier Extension Department study on the Coke Ovens, which "deemed it better to raze the area and move the people to MacDonald Heights and other areas of Whitney Pier".⁵ Reppa argued that "it would be wrong to break up such as old

⁴ "Reinvestment" is defined as middle class in-fill in Shirley B. Laska and Daphne Spain(eds.), **Back to the City: Issues in Neighbourhood Renovation**(New York: Pergamon, 1980), pp.14-15. However, Part III, "Discourses toward Responsible Policy and Action", pp.239-318 points out that this "middle-classing" on inner cities re-enforced social inequality. See also, P.J. Smith and P.W. Moore, "Cities as Social responsibility: Planning and Urban Form"; Peter Chinloy, "Housing Repair and Housing Stocks", in George Gau and Michael Goldberg(eds.), **North American Housing Markets into the Twenty-First Century**(Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1983), pp. 139-158; Jeffry Patterson, "Housing and Community Development Policies", in John Miron(ed.), **House Home and Community: Progress in Canadian Housing 1945-1986**(Montreal: McGill-Queen's and CMHC, 1993), pp.320-338.

⁵ "Coke Ovens plan, black and white", **Highlander**, December 7, 1974, p. 1.

community and well-knit neighbourhood where blacks and white have lived in harmony for so long".⁶ His views were in sharp contrast to Spence-Sales' suggestion that families from the Coke ovens displaced by demolition should be moved to other parts of Whitney Pier where they would not be grouped together.

In 1972, Bernie Reppa completed a study on the state of housing for all of Sydney. Reppa promised that the study would be "more comprehensive than the Spence-Sales study done 15 years [sic] ago".⁷ Reppa's study, funded by a "Local Initiatives Project"(LIP) grant of \$15,860, was a house-to-house survey which assessed the external elements of dwellings, commercial establishments and institutional/educational buildings. As well, the study conducted personal interviews with heads of households in each dwelling. The researchers found, of the 7244 city buildings surveyed, some 252 or 4 per cent (including 275 dwelling units) were in "poor or obsolete" condition. The remaining buildings were "excellent, good, or fair". Whitney Pier had the lion's share of "poor or obsolete" buildings: 70 single family dwelling units; 51 two or more family units; 22 commercial; and three educational and institutional buildings. The total of 146 was more than half of such buildings in the remainder of the

⁶ "Coke Ovens plan", **Highlander**.

⁷ "Provide Winter Works grant to "most comprehensive" housing survey in Sydney", **Highlander**, Dec. 20, 1971.

city.⁸

Although the study may have given a reasonably accurate view of the general condition of Sydney's housing and confirmed the changed agenda concerning Whitney Pier housing, some questions must be raised about the process of the survey. Six workers went house-to-house with two questionnaires, one relating to the external characteristics of the buildings, the other with personal interview questions.⁹ One person was assigned to each ward for a period of 20 weeks. It is vaguely recalled that the surveyors made an external assessment simply by looking at the houses and "ticking" off the assessments, probably, "excellent, good, fair, poor or obsolete". There is no indication of housing materials in the study's report, but one researcher recalled that they visually assessed roofing, siding, foundation, chimney, etc. It is significant that workers were un-trained, although one claimed some background knowledge of carpentry.

The personal interviews were probably more effective: respondents were asked about ownership of the building, the number of residents, the number of rooms, the type of wiring, assessment value, taxes for the property, intended

⁸ "City of Sydney Building Condition Survey - 1972", prepared by the Cape Breton District Planning Commission, SYD-C01C08.

⁹ Two of the six surveyors were located and they recalled their experience of the project more than 20 years later. They wished not to be named in this study. The actual questionnaires are not available, nor is the collected data.

expenditures for dwelling maintenance, and whether they were interested in subsidized housing. There was an optional question on income. Although the objective of the study was advertised in the local media, respondents were suspicious and unco-operative, in many cases because they felt that the questions were designed to wring more property taxes from them. But, in other cases, they were willing "to stand around talking all day" or invited the interviewer for "tea" so that they, in turn could question the interviewers. Some disgruntled tenants showed the interviewers the condition of their homes, some without fridges and stoves, for which they paid exorbitant rents. The experience of surveying ran between "eye-opening" to "good" to "uncomfortable". It was a "typical grant", with some surveyors doing four houses per day while others did 15; one surveyor was dismissed because he recorded "empty lots" where actual buildings stood. The time limit for the grant ran out before every building was surveyed, but three of the workers were kept on for three weeks to tabulate the data.

Bernie Reppa, in his report on the study, acknowledged that the figures gave "only a crude picture of the housing need", but that it was useful in pinpointing structural deterioration by wards and in determining what future trends might take place. What was particularly important about the report was that it recommended that "all substandard structures in the City be replaced with new and adequate

buildings ...[and] that all homes in the fair category be repaired and maintained in order to prevent them from deteriorating into the substandard classification".¹⁰ He concluded that the substandard condition of buildings in the city was caused by age, poor design, lack of a concrete foundation, and lack of year to year maintenance. Part of his recommendation proceeding from the study was the "instigation" of a Home Improvement Program involving outright grants of up to \$1,000 to repair and improve buildings in the "fair" category. In particular, grants should be made available to persons on fixed incomes such as widows, pensioners, and families on welfare. He repeated the recommendations from the 1960s that tax increases because of improved assessments should be graduated and be based on ability to pay.¹¹

In 1974 Reppa produced a plan which seemed designed specifically to help insure the continued existence of the Coke Ovens. As buildings were demolished, they were to be immediately replaced by new private and public housing. For instance, eight family rental units were built on Laurier Street near Lingan Road in early December of 1974 soon after the older buildings came down. Reppa's plan "caught the eye" of urban planners at a seminar on neighbourhood improvement and residential rehabilitation in Halifax presented by CMHC.

¹⁰ "Summary", "City of Sydney Building Condition Survey", [n.p.]

¹¹ "Summary", "City of Sydney Building Condition Survey".

There, he was credited for acting with a sensitivity that was missing in other urban areas: "Reppa's work on the Ward 5 project, as well as on decaying districts in Wards Three and One was reportedly in sharp contrast to the general unpreparedness of the bigger centres like Halifax and Dartmouth."¹²

Cape Breton Social Housing Association

The Cape Breton Social Housing Association (CBSHA) was a non-governmental agency which was effective in providing housing, and even home ownership, for low income families in Whitney Pier and other areas in Industrial Cape Breton. It was formed out of a meeting of concerned community workers at the Wandlyn Hotel in Sydney in 1970; it was incorporated in 1971. The association's stated purpose was "to get families in the two to five thousand dollar income bracket out of the slum housing syndrome".¹³ The main objective of the CBSHA was to buy older homes and refurbish them to be sold to low income families on a "rent-to-buy" scheme. The organization received loans from CMHC to purchase and up-grade the houses: \$400,000 in 1970, and one million dollars in 1972; in addition, it received occasional small operation grants. By September, 1971, the organization recommended 72 people from

¹² "Coke Ovens plan, black and white" Highlander, December 7, 1974, p.1.

¹³ "Social Housing association has purchased 61 houses to date: looking for more", Highlander, March 8, 1971, p. 25.

Industrial Cape Breton and the eastern mainland of Nova Scotia to its membership. The members were business people or professionals, clergy, and city bureaucrats. Most of the group were men; there were eighteen women, several of whom were Roman Catholic nuns.

Father Bill Roach of the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, who was known as a housing development critic, hailed the Social Housing Association as the "only bright spot" in Sydney housing in the early 70s.¹⁴ A CMHC report also indicated a positive attitude toward the Association, noting that the "program [has] been very successful in providing low income housing... drawing upon mainly volunteer services... 80 properties being acquired over a period of two and one-half years, with a further 20 properties under negotiation. ... [T]his has been accomplished at rents that are well within tenants' ability to pay, and has had no adverse impact on them".¹⁵

The idea for the Social Housing Association grew from another truly remarkable project, the "Neighbourhood Action Committee" organized in 1968 in Whitney Pier to provide homes

¹⁴ "Social Housing is brightest spot in Sydney Housing Picture", *Highlander*, October 27, 1971, p. 6.

¹⁵ Peter Bernard Associates, "Social Housing Association, Sydney, Nova Scotia", *Residential Rehabilitation in Canada - A Survey of Projects* (Ottawa: CMHC, 1973), p. 188.

for low income families.¹⁶ The group was comprised of "six or seven men", all from Whitney Pier and all fully employed at the steel plant, Dominion Coal transportation, the City or other jobs. The men initially worked with Sisters of Charity social worker, Sister Eugenie Delaney. Their aim was to repair houses for people on social assistance. The men's work as carpenters, electricians, or general repair-men for Sr. Eugenie was strictly voluntary. They went on to become the Neighbourhood Action Committee which bought and furnished older homes to be sold at cost to low income families. The Committee worked with the Sydney's Provincial Welfare Officer, Jim MacCormack, who in turn was co-operating with the City's Development Officer, Bernie Reppa, to find housing for the 1000 or so families slated to be displaced by demolition. It must be stressed that neither the Provincial Social Services Department nor the City of Sydney initiated or controlled the project. From the perspective of the men, the official involvement of MacCormack and Reppa was less important than the fact that they were Whitney Pier natives.

The men making up the Committee had their first meeting at the Imperial Hall on Victoria Road. Their second meeting was at Tom Hawco's Restaurant on Victoria Road. Uneducated and unsophisticated though as they were in the ways of

¹⁶ Information about the neighbourhood Action Committee came from Jim MacCormack (formal interview, June 8, 1994); Ralph "Shinny" Young and Ray MacIsaac, (formal interview, not tape recorded, June 15, 1994).

political bureaucracy, they sought financial assistance from the local MLA and provincial Minister of Social Services, Pinky Guame. They managed to get \$3,000 on their first try:

We got a meeting with Pinky on November 11, it was a holiday. We went down to Pinky's office and I remember, I had an old briefcase. One of the guys took the briefcase, and there was nothing in the briefcase, but it looked good and we were all---- [unclear] guys, because he never held a briefcase before in his life...And the pitch was, that we had an idea, we had a plan, but we didn't have any money. I was with them but they did the talking for the most part.¹⁷

Pinky Guame was reluctant to believe that housing was as bad as they said, even though he lived in Whitney Pier. However, when the men "pulled a bunch of pictures out of the briefcase", he was convinced. In this and subsequent meetings, the men found that saying they represented the Neighbourhood Action Committee was effective in reaching politicians who appeared to believe that they represented a large group of people.¹⁸

With the \$3,000 they received from Pinky Guame, the Neighbourhood Action Committee bought their first two homes. They went again to Pinky Guame and to Fred MacKinnon, Deputy Minister of Social Services, this time to receive \$11,000 of "under-the-table" funding, i.e. it wasn't attached to any particular program and it was not cost-shared with the City of Sydney. The money was put into a revolving account which also

¹⁷ Jim MacCormack, interview, June 15, 1994.

¹⁸ "Shiny" Young and Ray MacIsaac, interview, June 15, 1994.

held the "rent" (about \$60 per month) paid by each family. When the rent paid equalled the cost of the purchase and the repairs (no interest), the house was deeded over the its new owners.

The houses were selected for purchase by hear-say. Johnny Hickey, a Committee member, used his position on the City garbage truck to "spot" potential homes for sale. He approached the owners as a "working guy looking to buy something ... and fix it up. That's one of the reason we tried to stay anonymous. We got places for a song".¹⁹ Altogether, 12 homes were purchased by the group Pier under this scheme: ten in Whitney Pier and two in Sydney.

The houses were furnished "by hook or by crook". The men had a letter permitting them to reclaim small motors, furniture, and other essential supplies from the city dump. In other instances, one of the men merely promised to "come up" with the needed item -- likely from the steel plant or the City Warehouse. "... (I)t was a robin hood situation. We were robbing from the rich to give to the poor."²⁰ The appliances were repaired and furniture upholstered at the United Church Community House on Victoria Road. The rent for the space and salaries for the workers were paid through successive LIP grants. Those involved in the repair work were often

¹⁹ Jim MacCormack, interview.

²⁰ Jim MacCormack, interview. Disposal of "hot" goods was vaguely referred to, but was not followed up.

recovering alcoholics employed as part of their rehabilitation. Later, the Committee acquired a building located close to the overpass, from Jewish businessman Seymour Harrison, which they turned it into a repair shop.

There was a criteria for the selection of families for the refurbished homes. Their current homes had to be slated for demolition. There had to be at least seven children in the family. Interviews with Committee members also indicated that families were selected for their initiative and likelihood of achieving "success". Most of the families assisted by the Committee were single parent families headed by women, or they were families with disabled male heads.

The families who went into housing bought by the Committee were further assisted through courses offered at the Whitney School where basic cooking, sewing and health care were taught by Provincial employees. This was organized through the Sydney Welfare Department, not through the Neighbourhood Action Committee.

The Neighbourhood Action Committee never incorporated, and indeed, stayed almost totally anonymous during its entire existence. No money was ever handled by its members. The account and the houses were held in trust to the Welfare Officer, Jim MacCormack. The rent/mortgage for the houses was paid at the office of Jim MacCormack: "...it was all informal. People paid their money to me. They came into my office. When they could pay, they paid, when they didn't, nothing

really happened. In some instances... when they couldn't, I paid it [out of Social Assistance funding]."²¹ The Neighbourhood Action Committee was never audited and the final accounting was not fully cleared till 1989.

The members of the Neighbourhood Action Committee remained more or less anonymous, as did its work, partly because of the unorthodox and informal procedures it employed to get the job done. However, the committee was occasionally mentioned indirectly, in relation to the founding of the Social Housing Association. The *Highlander* weekly newspaper gave a hint when it announced the initiation of the Social Housing Association, giving credit to Jim MacCormack for getting "the idea off the ground", but without mentioning any names of the Neighbourhood Action Committee; the newspaper stated that three older houses in the Pier had been "brought up to standard".²² A publication by CMHC also did not name the Neighbourhood Action Committee, but referred to a "pilot project... involving the Province of Nova Scotia and the City of Sydney...to acquire four existing units in the Sydney area ... to be rehabilitated for the use of large welfare families."²³ It appears in this case, that the independent

²¹ Jim MacCormack, interviews, June 15, June 17, 1994.

²² "Social Housing Association has purchased 61 houses to date: looking for more", *Highlander*, March 8, 1971, p. 25.

²³ Peter Bernard Associates, "Social Housing Association, Sydney, Nova Scotia", *Residential Rehabilitation in Canada - A Survey of Projects* (Ottawa: CMHC, 1973), pp. 170-189.

grass roots details of the initiation of the Neighbourhood Action Committee under Sr. Eugenie had to be subsumed by a top-down rationale for the founding of the Social Housing Association. The "involvement" of the Province of Nova Scotia and the City of Sydney were obvious references to the work of Jim MacCormack and Bernie Reppa. A documentary housing film, titled "The People of Common Street", used by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department for promotional purposes, reputedly dealt with the work of the Neighbourhood Action Committee. However, its members refused contact with the film's producer, leaving Jim MacCormack to guide the movie makers around Whitney Pier.²⁴

It is not clear whether the Neighbourhood Action Committee operated concurrently with the Cape Breton Social Housing Association (CBSHA) which was founded in 1970 and incorporated in 1971. However, it is known that the paperwork and the mortgages relating to the houses bought through the Neighbourhood Action Committee were gradually transferred to the CBSHA. The members of the neighbourhood Action Committee were invited to several CBSHA meetings at the Extension Dept. on George Street, but they decided not to be part of the new organization. They found that it was "too formal" and over-bureaucratized. Instead, the Neighbourhood Action Committee

²⁴ Produced by Kingsley Brown for the St. F. X. Extension Dept. and funded by CMHC, 1970. Phone conversation with Kingsley Brown Jr., Antigonish, July 15, 1994. Also conversations with Jim MacCormack, July, 1994. To date, a copy of the film is not available.

tapered off and the work they started was continued by the paid employees of the CBSHA.

The broadness of the total mandate of the CBSHA and its "division of labours" was very much based on the work of the Neighbourhood Action Committee, but it was extraordinary in terms of involvement at several levels of business, religion and government. The group tracked down houses for sale through various means, including through networking with postal workers. The legal work in acquiring the properties was initially done on a volunteer basis, but by January, 1972, it was decided to pay for legal services. Co-op Building Supplies agreed to provide materials for renovation at 10 per cent above cost, and Stairs Distributors Corporation supplied plumbing materials at 30 per cent below the regular retail price. The Princess Credit Union in Sydney Mines offered bookkeeping services to the group for a limited time. Staff from the NSHC in Sydney volunteered to help in accounting for materials. Housing "rehabilitation crews" were appointed in each sector, usually based on municipal boundaries: this supplied work for crafts people and labourers in each district. Family rehabilitation was also a concern. The Family Service Agencies of the Antigonish Roman Catholic Diocese offered services when required. Money to purchase furniture and household equipment was not available from CMHC so other sources were tapped. Courses in cooking and child care were planned and carried out by local church groups.

By March 1972, the CBSHA had purchased 61 houses in the Industrial Area. The procedure of acquiring and rebuilding houses was, by that time, administered by the Association's executive director, Jane MacDonald. When the Association heard of a house for sale, it was first examined by the city building inspector to determine the extent of needed improvements. The asking price of the house was then compared to its assessment value. If the price of the homes was considered reasonable, and not more than \$8,000, the Association submitted a loan application to CMHC, citing the costs, both of purchasing and of needed improvements. Fire and electrical inspections, and the legal work -- deed search and property survey -- were not completed until CMHC indicated a commitment to make the required loan for acquisition of the property, the repairs and the legal work. The loan was not delivered to the CBSHA until each of these areas were completed. The CBSHA was assisted in its work by volunteers from the Company of Young Canadians who acted as field workers in identifying eligible houses and potential buyers.²⁵

The inspection report for each house was a comprehensive survey of the size, materials, and state of exterior and interior elements; with an estimate of the cost of required

²⁵ "Social Housing Association ... 61 houses ...". See also Minutes, Social Housing Association, January 11, 1971, February 10, 1971, March 29, 1972. Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

repairs.²⁶ For example, extensive repairs were called for to rehabilitate 243 Robert St., Ward V, at a cost of \$1,600: "This houses needs to be jacked up, footers and blocks have to be put under the front end. Posts have to put under the house. Kitchen cupboards need to be built. Back porch needs replacing. Needed - carpenter, mason, handyman."²⁷ The house at 32 West Street, Ward V, was allotted \$2,000 for its repairs: "needs new furnace, needs to be rewired, windows need to be replaced, new doors, basement stairs need replacing, footer around house needs repair. Needed - Electrician, carpenter, furnace man, labour."²⁸ The repair work was carried out by city workers, for the most part. The cost was kept to a minimum and charged to the residents of the house. All of these buildings, with the exception of 32 West Street, were standing in 1994; some were in good repair, others were in need of further maintenance.

The greatest task for the CBSHA was not in acquiring and renovating houses, but in assessing the need and the response of probable applicants for this type of housing. Not only did recipients have to be convinced of their own need, but sometimes people in authority was also unconvinced of need.

²⁶ "Social Housing Association of Cape Breton, Inspection Report", Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

²⁷ "List of SHA homes and Repairs to be Done", Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

²⁸ "List of SHA homes and Repairs to be Done".

For instance, the Welfare Officer of the "Northside" (North Sydney/Sydney Mines/Florence) declared that there was no need for such housing in his area; CBSHA members from area disputed that assessment.

A committee made up of local citizens selected the buyers for CBSHA houses in each area. Selection was based on income, number of children and current living conditions. In the first two years of the program, however, selection ideally aimed at low income families was being redirected toward people with higher incomes. This was because there was a natural reluctance on the part of municipal Welfare administrators to recommend for homes those families who would then require social assistance to make payments for the mortgages. They were, in effect, refusing them the necessary supplements for housing needed to pay their mortgages. The CBSHA responded by noting that social Housing families would require less assistance than families going on the open market for rental or subsidized housing accommodation.

In the end, however, this situation left the association in a position of selecting only the more well-to-do families, which was against the criteria set out by the association: "selection seems to be made on the basis of helping good families to do better instead of helping families who are without any of the social graces or who are without funds and

having a large number of children."²⁹ The situation changed by 1972 when welfare supplements for housing were removed from municipal responsibility and came under jurisdiction of the Provincial Welfare Department.

The "rent" or mortgage payments for the CBSHA housing were spread over 40 years, with the average amount paid each month in 1972 being \$50-\$60. There was some legal confusion about the rental status of the houses: in effect, the CBSHA was the owner of the houses and it was the CHSHA that was responsible for paying the mortgage back to CMHC; but the "tenants" were responsible for paying the taxes and insurance on the houses.³⁰

Payments for rent/mortgage were mailed to the Princess Credit Union, rather than door-to-door collection. Dealing with delinquent payments was a constant concern to the CBSHA. It was suggested at a meeting in September, 1971, that in most instances, "this was a problem of lack of communication and [a lack of] information being supplied to the families".³¹ But in the case of "real" delinquencies, there was a rather stringent policy of collection within seventeen days of default, at which time the "home purchaser" could face

²⁹ Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Social Housing Association, February 10, 1971. Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

³⁰ Minutes, Social Housing Association, January 11, 1971. Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

³¹ Minutes of the Social Housing Association, September 15, 1971. Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

repossession. Again, the responsibility on the CBSHA was passed on to the occupants of the houses; when the occupants defaulted, the CBSHA paid the price. Another problem for the CBSHA that was unique to Whitney Pier was a survey fault in which almost every property line was ten feet "off". When Carmel Butler and her family acquired 47 Matilda Street in Ward VI through the CBSHA, it was the beginning of a long dispute with her neighbours on the north side. She felt that it was the neighbourhood's way of telling her that people in social housing were not acceptable on Matilda Street. After many arguments, she gave up the house and moved elsewhere. The house subsequently was used as a Day Care, again through CHSHA. Its extensive repairs, which cost an estimated \$3,500, required the work of a carpenter, an electrician, a plumber and labourers.³². Once again, there were problems with the property line: the operators of the day care facility were not allowed to have the northern side of the house painted because it would mean that ladders would have to be placed on the neighbour's property. The opinion was expressed that the quiet neighbourhood did not want to have a Day Care situated near them. It is more likely that Carmel Butler's assessment

³² The minutes of the Social Housing Association, September 15, 1971 detailed the required work: exterior painting, replacement of door and windows, general repairs to walls and ceilings, replacement of heating and electrical systems, repairs to plumbing. Social Housing Association file, Sydney City Warehouse.

of a stigma against poverty was correct.³³

Mrs. E. Hawco was involved in the program from its very beginning. As a single parent with 12 children, living on social assistance, she rented the old Brookman farm house, located on Oakville Drive in Ward VI. There was no running water, no electricity, the windows were boarded, and the house was bitterly cold in winter. In 1967, Sr. Eugenie Delaney took responsibility for the Hawcos' situation and she directed the her Neighbourhood Action Committee in attempting to make Mrs. Hawco's house livable. But it was nearly impossible. Mrs. Hawco once killed two rats in her house and took them in a bag the Welfare Officer to make her point about her unacceptable housing. In 1972 she was moved to a two and one-half "four-square" house at 47 West St. in Ward V, one of the first acquisitions of the Social Housing Association. The house was refurbished: it required minor repairs to wiring and general exterior repairs. Although she now came under the CBSHA, Mrs. Hawco continued to be helped in a variety of ways by the Neighbourhood Action Committee who had originally fixed her old rented house on Oakville Drive.

According to Jim MacCormack, the program was a success: "See, the most important ingredient in this whole thing was ownership. The pride of ownership. That was the key." The CMHC gave the Social Housing Association significant

³³ Carmel Butler, informal interview, June 6, 1994. Jim MacCormack, interview, June 15, 1994.

favourable national publicity in the 1970s.³⁴ However, in the early 1980s, CMHC withdrew its support for programs which allowed low income families to own their own homes; CBSHA would be required to "lease" houses instead of making them available for ownership. Members of the CBSHA went to Ottawa to plead for the continuity of the ownership program, but to no avail. So, with some bitterness toward CMHC, the CBSHA decided to phase out its work. As the program terminated, some "acceptable" families were able to get continued mortgages with CMHC; others simply bought out their mortgages. Those unable to manage these options ("high risk families") had their mortgages turned over to an organization called "Housing for '80s" which held the equity left from the Neighbourhood Action Committee and the CBSHA. Any remaining unoccupied properties were turned over the Seton Foundation (discussed in this chapter).³⁵

Shell Housing

Shell Housing was under the auspices of the "Assisted Home Ownership Program" (AHOP) legislated by the federal

³⁴ Robert Lundgren, "Social Housing Association of Cape Breton", *Urban Renewal and Low Income Housing*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1971, pp. 2-8; R. Lightbown, "Social Housing Association of Cape Breton - Part II", *Urban Renewal and Low Income Housing*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1972, pp. 2-8.

³⁵ Dan MacArthur, Inverness County Housing Authority; former Executive Director of the Cape Breton Social Housing Association. Phone interview, June 7, 1994.

government in 1971.³⁶ It was the first significant government programme for new housing for low income families in Whitney Pier since the co-op programme started in the 1930s.³⁷ Although AHOP required a completed house to qualify for an interest reduced mortgage, the "Shell" plan allowed the participant the flexibility of obtaining an interest-reduced loan for a partially completed house, the fact of the incomplete house further reducing the size of the mortgage. Initially the houses were available to applicants with incomes of between \$5,892 and \$8,795; the selected owners would pay for the houses using sweat equity as a down payment, and their mortgage payments, with a 25 year amortization, would be based on their income, amounting to 22 per cent to 25 per cent. Mortgage payments were to be subsidized by the Nova Scotia government. There was financial and policy input from federal, provincial and municipal levels: federal and provincial governments sponsored separate Shell Housing programs with differing levels of contribution from the

³⁶ The first Shell Housing in Canada was an experiment carried out by CMHC in Fortune, Newfoundland, during the early summer of 1969 as part of the Fisheries Resettlement program. The units were financed under section 40 on the NHA. See, R.L. Mersey, "The Shell House: An Experiment in Newfoundland", in *Urban Renewal and Low-Income Housing*, Vol. 6, no. 1 (1970), pp. 14-17.

³⁷ The Assisted Home Ownership Co-op Program, sponsored by Nova Scotia Housing Commission provided housing for families with incomes of \$6500-\$16,000. Families had to participate in a basic education program dealing with various aspects of co-op housing. It was unsuitable for low income families because of the income level required to get a mortgage.

municipalities.

In effect CMHC "loaned" the construction firm a fixed amount for the house and serviced land, an amount that would be paid back by the owners. When the house reached a certain stage of completion, the owners moved in and did the "finishing". The "completion" of the homes was explained by a local newspaper:

A number of small designs are utilized in the shell or phased housing program. Exteriors were completed and either primed or finish painted and the lot roughly graded. The interior walls are insulated and normally are covered with plaster board; joint filling and taping are not included. Interior partitions are installed, except to enclose the bathroom and the stairwell. Floors are plywood and ceilings are insulated and covered with polyethylene. A forced hot air heating system is installed. Doors are hung on exterior entrances and the bathroom only. Kitchens have sinks and faucets and partially completed kitchen cupboards. A counter top is included. Bathroom fixtures include sink, toilet and bathtub. Electrical service is ... normally installed with the exception of light fixtures and some wall switches and wall plugs. Construction is in accordance with the Residential Standards of the National Building Code to the extent that the house is completed.³⁸

It was an idea that caught on quickly. Under the CMHC scheme, some 600 units were planned for Cape Breton County, including Sydney, New Waterford and North Sydney. In early December, 1971, the Bras d'Or Construction Company began building 21 single family units in Whitney Pier. Called Whitney Heights, the group of houses was located on East Broadway in Ward VI and were selling for \$12,372.50. (Fig. 7-1) Mortgage subsidies were obtained from the provincial

³⁸ "Will shell program fill need for low income housing?", *Highlander*, November 10, 1971, p. 27.

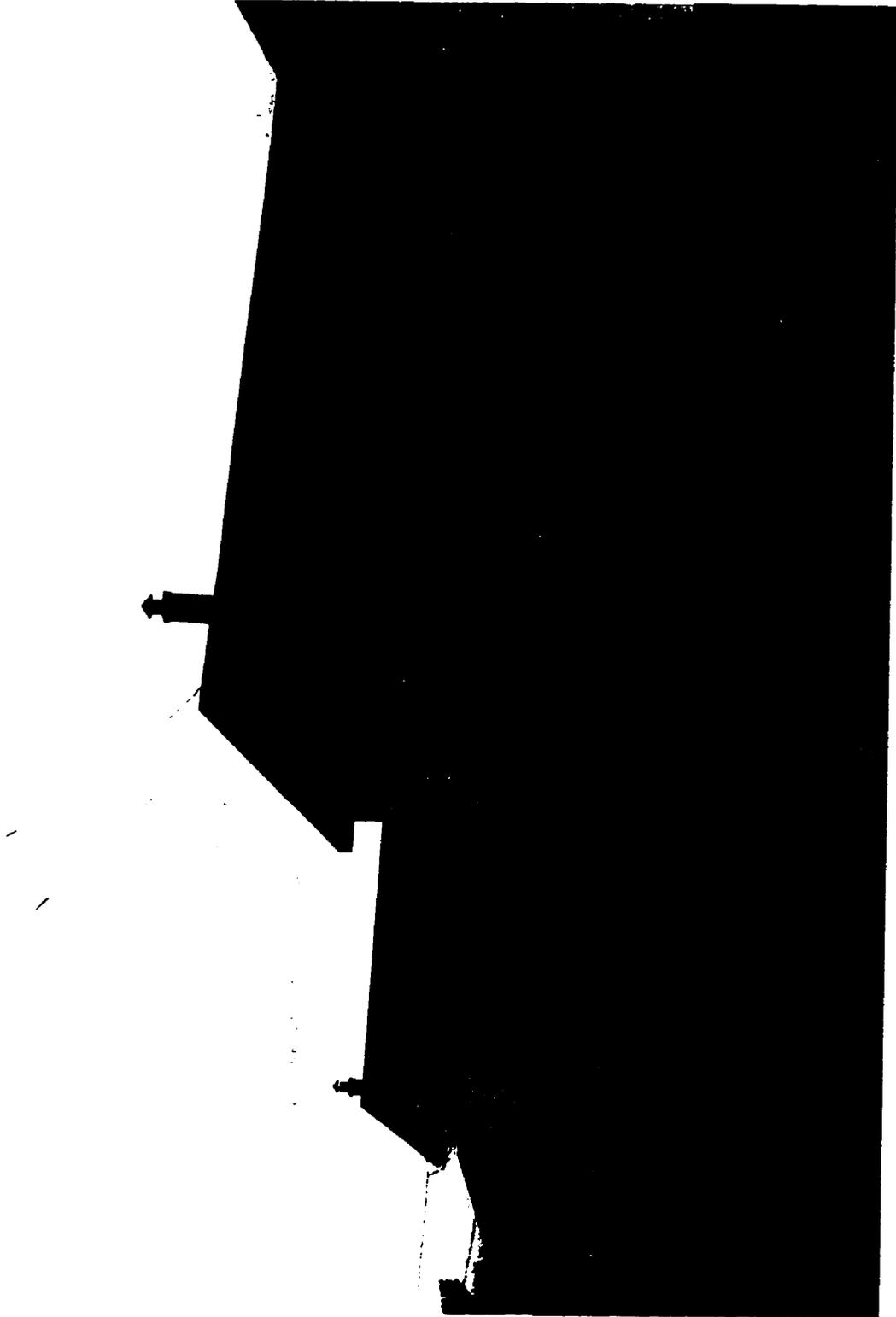


Figure 7-1: Shell houses on East Broadway. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

government.

A few month later, NSHC also became directly involved with Shell Housing and it began the Comet Housing Group, on MacLean Street in Whitney Pier, not far from East Broadway. In this case, subsidies were required from the City. The idea of phased housing was especially attractive to the NSHC who promoted it as an alternative to public housing.³⁹

One of the home owners in the Whitney Heights Project was Jane Crawley, a mother of three children and wife of a steel worker who worked as a scrap-yard crane operator. Crawley was born in Newfoundland and lived most of her life on Mt. Pleasant Street near the Coke Ovens, until she and her family moved to the Shell Housing in Ward VI. For her, "...Shell Housing seemed to be the answer to a prayer because it was set up for low income families". Jane and her husband, Terry, filled out their applications at CMHC, chose a bungalow on the site they wanted and, based on income and number of children, they were selected as one of 21 families to live in Whitney Heights. The three bedroom bungalows were 24'x30', on a long but narrow lot of land, 35'x100'. Most were built side-on to the street, with the doors on each side of the houses; a couple of the houses had the front door facing the street. There was a driveway on each side of the lot. The house and land became theirs as soon as they signed the mortgage with

³⁹ "NSHC pushing shell housing as an alternative to public housing", *Highlander*, February 23, 1972, p.20.

CMHC and they began immediately to finish the incomplete structure.

What they [CMHC] did was, they provided the land and basement and the outer shell and the very basics in wiring... you had pull chains. And the only partitions that were up were to the bathroom. So you had to finish off the inside of the house yourself. That didn't create a great problem. Terry is very handy and I've always been very willing to pitch in and learn anything new and try it, just about anything.

When you look at it, you're doing the whole interior of the house. There was quite a bit of expense involved. I mean, with Terry and I, we wouldn't have been able to ...go to the bank and say, 'Can I borrow ten thousand dollars to finish the house', and pay a mortgage too. So, we bought the gyprock and we filled the gyprock and we sanded it and did everything ourselves. The only thing we paid for someone to do was for the electrician to come in and put the switches on the walls ... and get rid of the pull chains for us."⁴⁰

By July, 1971, when they were almost finished the work, a feeling of neighbourliness already pervaded the housing group. On the day the young couple were to move in, they had only the painting of the kitchen and bedrooms yet to do: when they arrived at the house they found that the neighbours had come in and done the painting for them.

Two months later, the Crawley's realized that all was not well. The windows leaked "horrendously" when it rained; the shingles came off the roof; the siding came loose. The basement walls cracked and leaked, the basement floors were found to be without a gravel base. There were also problems in the non-structural side, such as faucets that fit poorly. The same sort of things happened with the other 21 houses. As

⁴⁰ Jane Crawley, interview, May 15, 1994.

the year wore on, the list of defects grew to include sagging roofs, warped doors, ill-fitting windows, faded siding. Crawley reflected: "I think they put the cheapest of materials into all of them, and sort of threw them together. I mean, why weren't the inspectors there at every phase of the work to make sure it was done properly. ... I don't know. Somebody made a lot of profit, for sure."⁴¹

During the winter of 1971-72, the 21 home owners of Whitney Heights met frequently to discuss the state of their houses. They invited the local senator, Robert Muir to one of the meetings; CMHC representatives came to others. Rollie Mersey, Regional Supervisor of CMHC, who strongly promoted the idea of Shell housing, came to one of the meetings. Jane Crawley remembered: "he ...said it was their mistake, but we had to pay for it."⁴²

In July, 1972, the group held a meeting with CMHC officials who told them that they could not expect more for \$12,000; that \$30,000 homes had the same problems; that the construction passed inspection for mortgage purposes, and that the home owners had to negotiate their complaints with Bras d'Or Construction. The report of the meeting pointed out that the owners were justified in seeking retribution through CMHC since it was CMHC who hired the construction company, awarded the mortgages, and selected the owners whose actual cost for

⁴¹ Jane Crawley, interview.

⁴² Jane Crawley, interview.

each house was about \$41,000.⁴³ Jane Crawley became spokesperson for the group, and over the next several years she wrote numerous letters to politicians and newspapers, and appeared on local television to tell the group's story: "...we thought we could pick up the telephone and call Trudeau and he'd was actually going to come to the phone and talk to us. At that time we believed that every Canadian was important."⁴⁴ Crawley got her chance to talk the matter over with Prime Minister Trudeau when the Whitney Heights group demonstrated against CMHC at gala opening of the Cape Breton Shopping Plaza in September, 1972.

We all went with placards and... And the crowds were there and we couldn't get through and... Anyway this gentleman lifted me right over the heads of some people and plunked me down right in front of him [Trudeau]. So I got to present him with our petition. [laughter] Actually talk to him for a few minutes.⁴⁵

With that incident, it became known that CMHC was threatening to foreclose on the Whitney Heights houses for non-payment of mortgages. The home owners were, instead, banking their mortgage payments until CMHC agreed to correct the problems. In turn, Bras d'Or Construction, in turn, was suing CMHC for non-payment for construction of the houses.⁴⁶

⁴³ "Shell housing owners considering court action", *Highlander*, September 20, 1972, p.4.

⁴⁴ Jane Crawley, interview.

⁴⁵ Jane Crawley, interview.

⁴⁶ "Shell housing owners considering court action", *Highlander*, September 20, 1972, p.4.

The home owners also felt they had to turn to the courts, but found that retaining legal representation was not easy. One lawyer, Jack Gillis, went with them to a meeting with government officials at a local store-front community development centre, but that is all he would agree to do. Altogether, Sydney lawyers "wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole" for fear of losing government business.⁴⁷ However, a firm in Truro, Patterson and Smith, agreed to take the case to court.

In the time leading to the court action, there was considerable interest in the Shell housing on Whitney Heights. One day, Jane Crawley was surprised to find Ron Basford, the federal Minister of State for Urban Affairs and CMHC, walking around her home. Ironically, about that time, the same minister introduced amendments to the National Housing Act which protected home buyers from the poor workshop of contractors.⁴⁸ The Minister's quiet presence in Sydney seemed to add to the anxiety of the situation for the builders of the Shell housing were also obviously worried. Ben Reid, owner of Bras d'Or Construction, offered to buy the Crawley home, but he would not admit to making the offer in the presence of their neighbours.

In 1974, the case finally came to court with the Whitney

⁴⁷ Crawley, interview.

⁴⁸ "New National Housing measures are aimed at giving low income buyers a choice as well as a home", *Highlander*, March, 7, 1973, p. 15. See also, Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies*.

Heights Shell housing group suing both CMHC and Bras d'Or Construction. The case dragged on for two years, the defendants insisting that the defects were reasonable for such cheap housing. Jane Crawley remembered one instance: "...one of the lawyers stood up and said, 'You know, when you buy a Volkswagen, you can't expect to have the quality of a Cadillac.' And the judge came back at him and said, 'No. But Volkswagen is a good quality little car and that's what these people thought they were buying, a good quality shell. And that's what they paid for.'"⁴⁹

The case ended in the housing group's favour: after legal expenses were paid, each family was given \$6,000 to fix the problems in their homes. "We won the case and we set a precedent for housing. I shouldn't say that... I guess we won that battle. Whether we ever really won anything, I don't know."⁵⁰

While the Whitney Heights group were battling CMHC and Bras d'Or Construction, the Comet group on nearby MacLean Street were having the same structural difficulties with their shell homes. However, in their case, NSHC was more receptive to their complaints which were delivered by letter to the Provincial Minister of Housing Scott McNutt. The Comet home owners' champion was Provincial Education Minister Alan Sullivan, a Cape Bretoner. There was a "back yard pow-wow"

⁴⁹ Crawley, interview.

⁵⁰ Crawley, interview.

including the home owners, Sullivan, McNutt, Nova Scotia Housing Commissioner Rae Austin, and "a convoy of commission staffers". The result was a commitment in writing to correct the defects.⁵¹ These events showed the Nova Scotia government in an excellent light and vindicated NSHC's hopes for the Shell concept. In November, 1972, the federal government scrapped talk of foreclosure in the Whitney Heights case in favour of "conciliatory talks and a promise to send another top flight inspector for yet another inspection of the much inspected houses."⁵² It was another four years before CMHC came completely to terms with its responsibility.

One of the interesting twists of the court case was the revelation that although Bras d'Or Construction was ostensibly owned by Ben Reid, the major shareholder in the firm was Sandy Reeves, a local businessman. He along with businessman Harvey Webber were the owners of the Whitney Heights land, having bought it from the City at a reputedly low cost.

The federal Shell Housing programme ended in 1974; the provincial programme was abandoned by 1976. This was mainly because, according to CMHC, because people weren't responding to it -- as salaries went up, so did the percentage of mortgage payment. Later, the eligible income was raised significantly to accommodate for families with incomes \$9,000-

⁵¹ "Shell owners taken, says McNutt; NSHC will act", *Highlander*, November 15, 1972, p. 6.

⁵² "McNutt moves to salvage shell housing; can CMHC be far behind?", *Highlander*, November 15, 1972, p. 1.

\$20,000. The provincial government substituted the NSHC Assisted Home Ownership Program Co-op program which serviced families with incomes \$6,500-\$15,000. The problem with the program was that people with incomes of less than \$9,000.00 were not eligible because it would be impossible to get and pay mortgages.

Housing Societies

In 1972 a group of young Black women were concerned about improving their own lives and that of the entire Black community. The "Black Community Development Organization" began in the kitchen of Clo Coward Yakimchuk when she, Rose Hunt and Marie Desmond met to discuss education, cultural activities, and improved housing. All were single mothers with low paying professional jobs who had been obliged to live with their parents after their respective marital relationships broke up. The idea of "community" was uppermost in their minds as they witnessed the break-up the Whitney Pier Black neighbourhood through the wholesale demolition that was taking place in the Coke Ovens. They were also aware of the negative response, within the Black community, to the 1972 St. Francis Xavier Extension Department study that recommended that Coke Ovens families be moved and the neighbourhood completely razed.⁵³

⁵³ Clo Coward Yakimchuk, interview (not recorded), March 6, 1994.

For these women, the direct result of their meetings was the building of low rental housing: six single family units on Fitzgerald Crescent, located near the Coke Ovens, on a hill just above Rear Laurier Street and Railroad Street. The rents, collected by the Cape Breton Housing Authority, were based on family income. The houses are rectangular bungalows 24'x36' with front yards and shared driveways on lots that are approximately 40'x80'. Each house has three or four bedrooms depending on the size of the family. In 1994 the area was closed in by a metal fence, a curious sight in Whitney Pier, and the houses are referred to as "low rental housing". With their peeling paint on their gable triangles and their damaged aluminum siding, the houses looked tired and worn.

The women's discussions leading to the rental units did not stop with the six houses. It continued, including community leaders such as the pastor of St. Phillip's African Orthodox Church, and soon there were public meetings in the basement of the church. The meetings, in articulating concerns for the future of the Black community in Whitney Pier, projected a strong undertone of memory of the Africville situation in Halifax. Black Community activist Lemuel Skeete, George Chiasson from the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, and City Councillor Tom Moore added their involvement and the concerns of the community became galvanized.

The result was the establishment of the Home Ownership

Made Easy-Sydney programme (HOMES) set up by the City under the Provincial Non-Profit Societies legislation. Under this aegis the community was able to get homes built through AHOP, the federal mortgage subsidy scheme mentioned previously.⁵⁴ The project was, in effect, a "rent-to-buy" scheme with families assuming personal responsibilities for their homes. In November, 1972, there was an announcement of an LIP grant to pay for the labour of 12 men and materials, and subsidized mortgages from CMHC, to begin work on six houses at Fitzgerald Place, an extension of the earlier rental area. To ensure that the project got moving and the foundations dug before the frost, a further \$5,000.00 per house "rushed" loan was obtained from CMHC. However, because of bureaucratic delays involving municipal, provincial and federal decision-making and funding, the foundations weren't actually dug until January of 1973, when the frost already had a hold in the ground. The delays were caused by problems in bringing together the necessary funding from three different levels of government. The Tenants United Front picketed the project to underline the frustration of the people waiting for the homes.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Clo Yakimchuk, interview. Tom Moore, former City Councillor, former HOMES executive director.

⁵⁵ "MacCormack-Reppa plan will produce six needed homes plus work for dozen men", *Highlander*, November 23, 1971, p. 24. Fitzgerald Place is named for the Fitzgeralds, the old Pier family whose property was discussed in chapter 2 (Stable Community). Jane Crawley, interview.

Later in same year, four of the same type of units went up on East Broadway under the same AHOP and HOMES programs. This was followed in 1974 by similar housing on Tupper Street (three units) in the Coke Ovens. In 1975, 18 new units of single family dwellings to be owned by low income families were built at Ironside drive, adjacent to Fitzgerald Place. The houses are distinctive in their wood shingle siding and they show evidence of careful maintenance. They stand in sharp contrast with the low rental units nearby.

Both the low income single family rented units and the HOMES houses represented a very positive time for the people of the Coke Ovens: "it was [a] "recognition that we didn't have to be part of the 'vertical mosaic'".⁵⁶

About the same time, two "semi's" (semi-detached double unit bungalows) were built on Tupper Street and in other parts of Sydney as public housing. They were modular homes built and delivered by Lundrigan's of Newfoundland. Then, four more semi-detached bungalows were built on Hankard Street, making up eight units of public housing built in 1974-75. (Fig. 7-2) As state-controlled rentals, these were a very different situation from the home ownership projects close by.

However, it was similar in that the Tupper and Hankard Street low rental experiences also represented community activism. The controversy over the eight units was based in Provincial Housing Minister Scott McNutt's reluctance to free

⁵⁶ Tom Moore, interview (not recorded), June 23, 1994.

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Figure 7-2: Double family units on Laurier Street. Raytel photo, Elizabeth Beaton Collection, MG 12, 198.

up funding in the face of reports that pollution levels were very high in the Coke Ovens. Thus began a heated discussion between Ward V City Councillors and Sydney's mayor on one side, and provincial government representatives on the other. According to Sydney's Deputy Mayor, Archie MacRury, the pollution reports given to the minister were by "a bunch of fellows who didn't even know what the pollution counter looks like... . Maybe the minister wants to evacuate the whole Whitney Pier area".⁵⁷ Amidst the "environment" vs. "community" question, the issue of home-ownership was again raised. Tom Miller, Black Councillor for Ward V, advocated against the project throughout the discussion because he was against public housing and for home ownership.⁵⁸

The arguments wore on over a period of weeks in which City government represented not only their constituents, but their own political agendas as well. For instance, the white and Anglo-Celtic Ward VI tended to separate itself, as it often did, from the problems of race and class that were inherent in the housing conditions of Ward V: Alderman MacKay (from Ward VI) objected to having to whole of Whitney Pier tainted by government reports.⁵⁹ Mayor Earle Tubrett, who was seeking the provincial Conservative nomination, attacked

⁵⁷ "Reports Unfortunate says Ald. MacKay", Post, October 20, 1973.

⁵⁸ "Statement Incorrect", Post, October 27, 1974.

⁵⁹ "Reports Unfortunate says Ald. MacKay".

the Liberal government for creating and proliferating the pollution problem through its management of the Provincially-owned steel plant. He submitted the challenge that a commitment to housing in Whitney Pier was a commitment to pollution reduction for the whole city:

a positive decision on the Hankard Street housing project will not only help to alleviate the city's critical housing shortage of adequate housing, but also will be a positive demonstration on the government's part that it does not inevitably accept pollution as [an] inevitable factor of life for the citizens of Sydney."⁶⁰

Finally, the project was funded in November, 1974.

The double family rental units are an unusual shape: basically rectangular 24'x60' with a two foot protrusion running the width of each living room (15 feet). Each unit has a door on the front leading to the living room on one side and to a small kitchen on the other. The bedrooms and bathroom are in the back. There is a rear door located centrally at the back of each unit. One of the first families to move into this housing were the Campbell's. They had previously lived in the old Universal Negro Improvement Association Hall on Lingan Road which had been converted to four apartments. The Campbells had seven children when they moved into the double low rentals; later they had another child. In 1994, they were waiting for word to move from the unit because their children are no longer with them. Their

⁶⁰ "City awaiting Official Word from MacNutt on New Project", Post, October 27, 1974.

unit is attractively kept and appears to be comfortable; they speak positively of the experience of living there, saying, "If you ask politely for what you need, you usually get it."⁶¹

NIP/RRAP

Much of the superficial appearance of present-day Whitney Pier housing can be attributed to the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) and its companion, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). These CMHC programs were introduced as replacements for the urban renewal of the 1960s. In these programs, funding was provided for improvements to public infrastructure and housing stock in selected low income residential communities. Under NIP and RRAP, Whitney Pier acquired seniors' complexes and duplexes; the programs replaced older buildings demolished for various reasons with several "new" neighbourhoods and many open spaces. Whitney Pier's infrastructure benefitted through a limited amount of road works, tot lots and green areas. A closer look reveals a preponderance of aluminum and vinyl siding, aluminum doors and windows. Less obvious changes include foundations and replaced roofs, up-graded wiring, plumbing, heating systems, and insulation. Indeed, NIP and RRAP gave Whitney Pier, particularly the Coke Ovens, a 15-20

⁶¹ Discussion with Shirley and Millward "Bricky" Campbell, residents of one of the units, Nov. 1994.

year "face lift".⁶²

The programs were in response to an acknowledgement that older "deteriorating" neighbourhoods were worth saving. Through NIP and RRAP, the federal government announced its intention to become direct participants in social housing and urban renewal, rather than merely facilitators or regulators as they were previously. Legislation leading to the programs amended the National Housing Act to allow for direct subsidies and 100% financing to low-income home owners and non-profit housing organizations; for grants for rehabilitation of substandard dwellings; extension of these aids without requiring contributions from any other level of government. This was the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program which allowed owners in designated low income communities to significantly prolong the usefulness of their homes. The Neighbourhood Improvement Program was designed to improve water, sewage, transportation and recreational services, and to generally enhance the "look" of neighbourhoods; it would "undertake residential and neighbourhood conservation and stabilization"...and "...break the cycle of events contributing to deterioration".⁶³ The Guidelines for RRAP suggested that improvements were intended to last only 15

⁶² CMHC, **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program Evaluation** (Ottawa: CMHC, 1986), p. 11.

⁶³ Deborah Lyon and Lynda H. Newman, **The Neighbourhood Improvement Program, 1973-1983: A National Review of an intergovernmental Initiative** (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Affairs, 1986) [Research Paper no. 15], p. 4.

years.⁶⁴ This was taken to be the life expectancy of the house in question; in reality, it often referred to probable life expectancy of the home-owner recipients of the program. On the one hand, the programs appeared to be the salvation of communities hard hit by economic deprivation; on the other hand the "salvation" had a limitation of 15 years duration.

The policy statement backing the legislation called for the "preservation of the fabric and human scale of city centres, ... minimization of the social costs and conflicts involved in urban change, relief of the pressures on groups and individuals in inner city areas who were least able to bear such pressures".⁶⁵ It strongly articulated democratic and social principles with the stated objective of enabling "local residents to have more control and choice over the future of their communities".⁶⁶ It was to be "community planning" with "common purpose and common goals" suggesting that "with proper foresight a community can solve its problems and control its future".⁶⁷

Like most of their CMHC counterparts discussed in the previous chapter, these federal programs required a

⁶⁴ CMHC, *Inspection Guidelines: Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program*(Ottawa: CMHC, n.d.), pp. 9, 10.

⁶⁵ Lyon and Newman, *Neighbourhood...*, p.4.

⁶⁶ Lyon and Newman, *Neighbourhood...*, p.4.

⁶⁷ Jill Grant, "Helter Shelter: The Housing Crises and the Decline of Community Planning", *New Maritimes*, April 1988, p. 12.

significant commitment from provincial and municipal governments. According to the agreement signed with the federal government by provincial governments, the province approved the selection of NIP areas as they were submitted by the municipalities. The province apportioned funding to each selected area. The municipalities were required to respond to the recommendations of the community-based advisory committees, but they were restricted in achieving this by the limitation of resources as laid out by the province.

Like previous government housing programs, NIP/RRAP suffered from the inevitable confusions, jealousies and delays that came with wringing co-operation from three levels of government. Nevertheless, it was one of the most effective programs ever put to work in Canada. By the time its "sunset clause came into effect in 1978-79 (it was actually continued until 1980-81), some \$500 million had been committed to 479 designated areas across Canada, 26 per cent of the total pledged to projects in the Atlantic Region. RRAP continued to be in effect after the end of the selection of designated NIP areas. To 1985, over 250,000 housing units had been repaired through RRAP.

The Canadian government announced NIP/RRAP in early 1973; the programs came into effect in 1974. Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to put NIP/RRAP in place; Whitney Pier was one of three areas in Sydney first designated in the province to have NIP/RRAP. (Fig. 7-3) Although NIP/RRAP

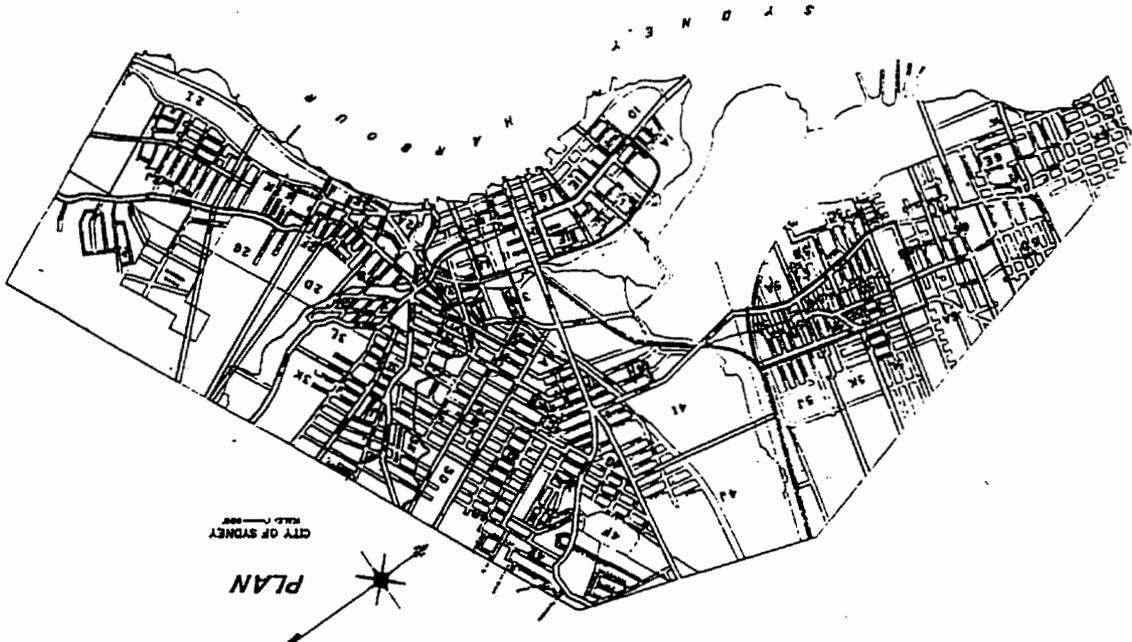
Figure 7-3: Sydney NIP/RRAP areas. Cape Breton Post, May 11, 1974.

PAUL J. ROACH, City Clerk

Any inquiries or further information may be obtained at the Neighbourhood Improvement Center Office, 88 Maloney Street or by phoning 539-9973.

Application forms for a loan under this program may be obtained at City Hall, Bannock Street or at the Neighbourhood Improvement Center office at 88 Maloney Street, Sydney.

In conjunction with Central Mortgage & Housing Corporation, the City of Sydney is prepared to receive applications for loan assistance under the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program within the three designated areas outlined in black on the map below from homeowners whose adjusted gross income is between \$6,000 and \$11,000, and who wish to improve or renovate plumbing, wiring, heating or make structural repairs to their homes. The maximum loan under this program is \$5,000, with a maximum loan forgiveness of \$2,500.



RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NOTICE



started in three places in Sydney, it was actually initially intended only for the Coke Ovens area, based on the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department study carried out in 1972 which identified it as a "suitable target area". The Housing Condition Study carried out by Bernie Reppa (1972) also influenced the selection of the Coke Ovens as the primary area to benefit from NIP/RRAP.

Despite its objective of "direct participation" through NIP/RRAP, the federal government through CMHC had a rather low profile. In fact, the role of the department was played out by a coordinator who did not report directly to CMHC, who facilitated the distribution of financial, technical, information resources. Each municipality had its own system of selection, planning and delivery of the programs. From 1973-1974, selection and planning for the Sydney NIP/RRAP was contracted to the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department. Following this, the Cape Breton Family Services, a Catholic Church-run Social Services organization was contracted for a short period to carry out delivery or "implementation" of the joint programs. The Cape Breton Family Services employed their own inspector for the RRAP activities. In 1976, RRAP delivery was contracted to the City of Sydney, which in turn contracted back the inspection work to CMHC. In 1994, CMHC turned over the delivery of RRAP to the province; in Sydney's case it was hitherto to be carried out by Nova Scotia

Corporate and Consumer Affairs.⁶⁸

The two programs were required to be carried out in combination; that is, RRAP was available only in NIP "designated areas". Although both were intended to be delivered in the Designated areas, it was RRAP rather than NIP that held the particular interest of Sydney's city council. The reason for this was mainly financial: RRAP cost the City nothing while NIP was expensive in terms of matching funding. In fact, when it "delivered" RRAP in 1977, the City actually profited from the program, being awarded several hundred dollars for each application processed. City officials made no secret that the reason they were going along with NIP was to get RRAP money.⁶⁹

The programs and their underlying policies were criticized because they appeared to be primarily directed at large urban areas. Early in the discussions about the programs, representatives from the smaller Nova Scotia municipalities were initially sceptical because of the high municipal contribution requirements - 45 per cent to 75 per

⁶⁸ Background information on these programs is from: Lyon and Newman, **The Neighbourhood Improvement Program, 1973-1983**. Also informal discussions with Mike Birtles, CMHC Cape Breton Office Coordinator, 1992-1994; Jackie Miller, Cape Breton CMHC Field Officer, 1992-1994; Valerie Bobyk, Cape Breton Corporate and Consumer Affairs Office and former CMHC Coordinator for NIP/RRAP, 1974-1982; Francis McDow, City Engineer, City of Sydney.

⁶⁹ "Neighbourhood Improvement Study Pinpoints Problems: NIP Committees Find Many Ways to Spend the Money", Post, August 15, 1978, n.p.

cent. Repeatedly, the Cape Breton Post quoted city councillors who complained that the designations kept otherwise eligible citizens from taking part in RRAP. Bernie Reppa, Sydney's Development Officer, declared that NIP and RRAP should not be related in any way.⁷⁰

The combined nature of the programs meant that residential rehabilitation under RRAP could go ahead, but required further application for the implementation of neighbourhood improvement under NIP. Even after the approval of the "implementation stage" was approved and money allotted, the official requirement that the municipality pay its NIP contribution "up-front" before work could begin usually meant that the work did not begin for some time, if at all. The City of Sydney seemed particularly reluctant to start any NIP projects until RRAP was well under-way. In fact, the City depended to a significant extent on money earned from RRAP (processing applications) to financially back the NIP program. Although officialdom appears to have turned the other way when neither the payment nor the work was delivered, Sydney was occasionally mildly scolded by CMHC and local newspapers for not spending its NIP allotment, instead, "using" it in

⁷⁰ "Cape Breton Municipal Leaders Not Optimistic about NIP Plan", Post, December 2, 1974; "NIP Program Will Help Sydney's Renewal Plans", Post, Thursday, December 5, 1974. "Sydney Looks for More Funds in NIP Programs", Post, October 29, 1976; "NIP Too Costly, Sydney Needs More RRAP Monies", Post, October 20, 1977; "Neighbourhood Improvement Study Pinpoints Problems: "NIP Committees Find Many Ways to Spend the Money", Post, August 15, 1978.

order to take advantage of RRAP. The **Highlander** pointed out in January 1976 "that part of the program (NIP) hadn't yet gotten out of the planning stages."⁷¹ In 1977, when the second NIP area was announced in Whitney Pier, it became known that City had not yet spent its allotment for the first NIP awarded in 1974: the NIP projects usually lasted about 3 years, but flexible extensions were normally granted.⁷² The overall consequence of this practice was a vaguely unexplained gap between the needs outlined in the NIP application for improvements in a particular area, and the actual results of the program in that area.

Sydney's first NIP/RRAP project, worth \$850,000 in federal funding, was announced by Mayor Earl Turbrett in late 1974 shortly after four million dollars was made available to Nova Scotia in federal grants and loans by the Minister of Urban Affairs, Barney Danson, and the Minister responsible for NSHC, Walter Fitzgerald. The city's intended contribution to NIP was \$500,000. A few days earlier, Mayor Turbrett had revealed that the City had been attempting to get NIP/RRAP for Whitney Pier for several months, but he was unsuccessful until two other districts in Sydney were included.⁷³ One district

⁷¹ NIP, RRAP making old houses into new homes", **Highlander**, Jan. 14, 1976, p. 3.

⁷² "Neighbourhood Improvement Study Pinpoints Problems: NIP Committees Find Many Ways to Spend the Money", **Post**, August 15, 1978, n.p.

⁷³ "Cape Breton Municipal Leaders Not Optimistic about NIP Plan", **Post**, December 2, 1974, np.

was around Townsend Street, called the "Central Area"; the other encompassed the North End of George Street, called the "North Area".

The designated Whitney Pier neighbourhood, called "Area V-A" included the area encompassed by Lingan Road, what is now Neville Park, Victoria Road, the Devco Railway and an unnamed street behind MacDonald Heights in Whitney Pier. This area had, in 1974, approximately 885 families on about 150 acres of land.⁷⁴ In 1975 Sydney requested an extension of the Designated Area V-A; this was granted in 1977. The new area, called V-B, had 950 people living in 210 units over 85 acres of land. It included the neighbourhood within Gunn Street, Lingan Road, the DEVCO Railway easterly and an unnamed Street behind Elmwood School. In the same year, a part of Ward VI was also designated. The area, with 995 people living in 200 acres on 102 acres, encompassed by Victoria Road, Gibbons Street, a perpendicular unnamed street leading to Bison Drive, Bison Drive, Seaview Street, Victoria Road, Taylor Street, St. Ann's Street, and James Street. All three of Sydney designated areas had high population ratios of elderly residents who had low fixed incomes. Although the residents of these areas experienced difficulties in maintaining their properties, they had strong "social ties" within these neighbourhoods and they considered their section

⁷⁴ "City of Sydney Concept Plan (NIP, 1974)", Metro Planning Office, 1976.

of the city to be "home".⁷⁵

In applying for the "implementation stage" of NIP in 1975 for the Whitney Pier designated section known as Area V-A, the city concentrated on the Coke Ovens district as the area most in need of "improvement". The application fulfilled the funding criteria of community involvement by referring to suggestions that came out of regular meetings in the Coke Ovens and a door-to-door random survey carried out since the announcement of NIP/1974 in November 1974. The neighbourhood meetings were organized by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department and were held at the United Mission Hall at the lower end of Lingan Road. The application referred to housing assessments carried out by the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department study of 1972 and the Building Survey carried out in 1972 which concluded that the highest proportion of obsolete housing was in the Coke Ovens district. The studies also noted that the Coke Ovens had a low average income, a high percentage of rental units and was the location of a large number of Black families. The application observed, in keeping with the requirements of the program, that notwithstanding the commercial section on Victoria Road, the residential component of the neighbourhood was "stable" despite plans for further demolition for which there were plans for replacement housing. The application did not

⁷⁵ Neighbourhood Improvement Program: Conceptual Plan Wards IV, VB, VI, prepared by Development Department of the Municipality of Sydney, [1978]

mention the pollution from the steel plant and coke ovens as a contributing factor to many of the neighbourhood's ills, but instead pointed out that the moratorium on public housing by NSHC and the end of AHOP "caused a severe problem and severely affected our plan to effectively provide the housing units needed".⁷⁶

It was the view of the application that housing was the greatest need in the Area 5-A, especially for people displaced by demolition in the Coke Ovens. To that time, the requirement that the municipality guarantee alternate accommodation to persons dispossessed by the project, had not been fulfilled. Demolition had been delayed for this reason, or displaced persons simply went to other deteriorating housing. Also because of the previous demolition or proposed demolition of some 60 units, there was need for 40 units of seniors' accommodation in the Coke Ovens area. But the application brought forward still other concerns related to the social and physical environment. There were proposals for a cultural centre containing a library, sports and playground facilities, the planting of trees and erecting of street signs, and improvements in side walks, streets, curbs and gutters. The total amount for requested for NIP, including site selection, planning stages and implementation, in Designated Area V-A was \$995,315.48. It was an expensive

⁷⁶ "Concept Plan, 1974 designated Areas NIP, City of Sydney", Sydney Planning Commission, 1976.

proposition for Sydney. The City was required to pay 45 per cent of the total amount for selection, planning and most implementation activities, and 70 per cent for utilities. CMHC contributed 50% of selection, planning, and implementation except for services/utilities for which it contributed 25 per cent -- a total request of \$451,000; the province contributed only 10 per cent of each amount contributed by CMHC.

A publication by the City of Sydney titled "Somebody should do something to help improve our neighbourhood", gives a sense of the range of NIP activities in area V-A and also the history of the Coke Ovens' urban development in the 1970s." Like the NIP program itself, the booklet is ambiguous about the actual influence and direct participation of NIP as a government program, but it does suggest that NIP was a catalyst in the changes in the community. A "sportsplex" with two tennis courts and a ball field was built at the end of Frederick and Henry Streets. The ball field is still used regularly. However, the tennis courts are used only occasionally, mainly for "ground" hockey. A few years ago, baskets were provided for anyone wishing to use the courts for basketball. A youth worker was hired by the United Mission to try to encourage the young people of the area to become more involved in "organized" activities by bringing the games out of the vacant lots and the streets and into the

⁷⁷ [Valarie Bobyk, NIP/RRAP Coordinator], "Somebody should do something about our neighbourhood".

specified playing areas. "Somebody should do something..." declared a virtual transformation of the neighbourhood attitude in this regard. However, present day observation finds children playing hockey in the side streets, and ball in the vacant lots. Contrary to the conceptual plan of 1974, no library was constructed, nor a community centre: but, the RRAP program assisted in the continuing maintenance of the three community halls already in existence. NIP assisted in several community-based non-profit housing projects by acquiring and clearing land for 14 homes built by the Seton Foundation, for the AHOP houses built on Fitzgerald Place, and also for two semi-detached seniors units. NIP did not contribute to the costs of the actual construction of the houses.

NIP claimed direct credit for two changes in the Area V-A neighbourhood. One was the construction of a 20 unit seniors' complex on Williams Street. This included the costs of acquisition of land, demolition of buildings on the land, and actual construction. The apartment complex continues to serve the seniors in the area to the present time, making it possible for the elderly to stay in their own communities.⁷⁸ The other achievement, according to the booklet, was to change the name, "Coke Ovens", to "Lower Ward Five". The name never really "stuck", except for a short period of official use. Colloquially, "Coke Ovens" was the recognized name of the neighbourhood throughout the 70s and to the present time,

⁷⁸ Lem Skeete, interview, August 9, 1993.

whether with derision or with affection.

The second NIP in the Whitney Pier, which encompassed Designated Areas VI and V-B, approved in 1977, instituted an alternative means for needs assessment. Committees were selected from each area to gather responses from their own neighbourhoods regarding recommendations for neighbourhood improvement. Their reports were used in drawing up the proposals for the NIP money. The committees were made up of 4-6 volunteers from the designated neighbourhood, but there were generally matched or outnumbered by representatives of official capacities: a Community Services worker, representatives from the Development Office, the Recreation Department, the Engineering Department, and Community/Municipality Liaison Officer, with city councillors ex-officio members for their respective wards. The committees saved the cost of extensive studies. As Coordinator Valerie Bobyk pointed out, There was "no need to spend money on studies when the problems are as obvious as they are in Sydney." She also felt that this method might improve that situation where the City failed to take advantage of the NIP money in the past.⁷⁹

The individual names and phone numbers of the committees' neighbourhood members were advertised in the local papers. Rose Grant Young of Taylor Street in Ward VI headed up the

⁷⁹ "Neighbourhood Improvement Study Pinpoints Problems: NIP Committees Find Many Ways to Spend the Money", Post, August 15, 1978.

Area VI committee.⁸⁰ The problems of her area went back to the very beginnings of the formation of Whitney Pier as an urban community when many of the streets were unplanned and "just happened". Payne Street, for instance, was simply a "lane" with no curbs or storm sewers; it had plugged catch basins; it was too narrow for snow removal. There was no sanitary sewer: sewage was pumped out under houses on an adjacent street. In the end, Area VI NIP requested \$50,000 worth of paving, street signs, and tot lots, compared to a total of \$200,000 for the entire NIP/RRAP project in that area. Considering the need and the costs involved, the residents were possibly cynical of the City's commitment to their area, and tended to place more faith in what they themselves could do directly -- in re-habilitating their own homes. They gave a mixed response to the committee's interest in their problems: "... the reaction of many of the people speaking to the Area VI committee was that at last someone was going to do something about their problems. But too often the reaction was simply to ask when money would be available to renovate homes."⁸¹

The committee found the same sorts of needs in Ward V, in the section known as Area V-B. Added to these was a request for improved water using an artesian well. William Tetanish

⁸⁰ Other members for Area VI were: Leo Davis, Wallace MacKenzie, William Fogarty and Therese Stevenson.

⁸¹ "Neighbourhood Improvement Study...".

of 157 Maloney Street, representative for Area V-B, found that his neighbours expected him to do the work or at least control it.⁸² This was certainly not the case, although the committee's suggestions formed part of the application which had to be approved by provincial and federal agencies. In fact, the City has the final say over whether money would be spent and how much would be spent, since they have to contribute 25 per cent of the total amount up-front. Frustration at delays in report writing and getting it passed by all levels of government was compounded by seeing their wish list shrunk by the financial limitations of the city. In the final analysis, the area committees were forums for opinion and suggestion, but they could offer no guarantees of fulfilment of the civic needs of the neighbourhoods.⁸³

The Neighbourhood Improvement Program Conceptual Plan Wards IV, VB and VI by Sydney's Development Department indicates the city's interpretation of the neighbourhood committees' work in assessing the designated areas' needs.⁸⁴ The purpose of the Plan was to "provide a framework in which to improve and strengthen the quality of the physical

⁸² Other committee members for Area V-B were: Bruce Candrilic, George Green, Mary Campbell, Judy Toussaint.

⁸³ "Neighbourhood Improvement Study...", Post.

⁸⁴ Neighbourhood Improvement Program: Conceptual Plan, Wards IV, VB and VI. The plan's concept of NIP activities in Ward IV, in the Ashby District of the main part of Sydney, offers a comparative set of objectives and financing for this NIP application.

environment and the social fabric of the area so as to extend its life as a viable Residential Area for at least 15 years."⁸⁵ The Conceptual Plan pointed out that the "community facilities" were not adequate for either area, although there were a number of halls, tot lots and a tennis court in each area. The areas' residential stock was 50 to 70 years old, of wood frame construction. The City settled on a plan that allowed two per cent of the budget to go toward the construction of new housing. The actual amount was low: \$3,884 for area V-B, and \$4,060 for Area VI. The Plan predicted that the RRAP activity would improve the visual impact of the areas. The total amount allotted for Area V-B was \$294,200; a total of \$203,000 for Area VI. The Ashby area, on the Sydney side of the Overpass, also considered in this Conceptual Plan, was allotted \$302,100. The selection and preliminary planning costs and administrative cost came to 28% of the total budget, a significant amount to be spent apart from the actual "improvement" activities. The City reserved the right to revise the allocation of funding should priorities change.⁸⁶

In Area V-B, one of the most significant actions of NIP was the demolition of buildings on six lots on Frederick Street to provide for a "buffer zone" between the coke ovens

⁸⁵ "Introduction", Neighbourhood improvement Program: Conceptual Plan Wards IV, VB and VI.

⁸⁶ "Introduction", Neighbourhood improvement Program: Conceptual Plan Wards IV, VB and VI.

and the community. This was discussed under state initiatives in the previous chapter. Four other buildings, two on Tupper Street, one on Lingan Road and one on Henry Street were also slated for demolition because they were deemed beyond rehabilitation. The Plan does not mention any commitment to provide new homes for the people displaced by these demolitions, although it does suggest that these properties will be used for new home construction.

There were no demolitions or new construction planned for Area VI, only new or improved infra-structural elements such as paving, curb and gutter, storm sewers, side walks, and tot lots. There was also to be improvement to the existing tennis court which had been built by a local service club on the City Recreation Department lands.

RRAP was a way of "making old houses into new homes."⁸⁷ Both home owners and landlords were eligible for assistance. Initially, home owners with an "adjusted" income of less than \$11,000 per annum could receive loans up to \$5000, \$2500 of which could be forgiven based on income. Landlords could borrow up to \$15,000 for a five unit rental establishment once they agreed to rent controls. By 1976, the maximum loan was increased to \$10,000. Houses or rented establishments taking advantage of RRAP had to be "substandard or deficient and need major repair or lack basic facilities" under one or more of

⁸⁷ NIP, RRAP making old houses into new homes", Highlander, January 14, 1976, p. 3.

five categories: electrical, plumbing, heating, fire safety, and structural.⁸⁸ Those were "shall" or mandatory items. The "should" items such as insulation, painting, siding, windows and doors were added provided there was sufficient funding, or if the home owner was willing to apply for a loan.

After the application for RRAP was filed, an inspector hired by the delivery organization visited the house in question. The especially-trained inspector was responsible for ensuring "that the house proposed for rehabilitation [had] the potential to become a sound satisfactory unit at a cost within the capacity of the applicant and the [municipal] program." The inspector held "the key to a successful rehabilitation program": he (or rarely, she) certified the eligibility of the home owner, checked the house to be sure that it was feasible to repair and that the rehabilitation requested brought it up to minimum standards, made up the appropriate work order and cost estimates, and inspected the completed work.⁸⁹

The mandatory rehabilitation work could be wide-ranging. For example, an unidentified home owner in Whitney Pier proposed the following mandatory repairs: furnace, chimney, and hot water pipe repairs; installation of steel columns in

⁸⁸ CMHC, Homeowner Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, Ottawa:1994.

⁸⁹ "Preface", *Inspection Guidelines*, p. 6.

basement, levelling of floors; replacement/repair of doors, frames, porch entrances; installation and weather proofing of windows; repairs to roof and trim; repairs to foundation, including replacing wall and damp-proofing entire foundation. The "eligible" or "should" items for this home owner included gyprocking, puttying windows, installation of light fixtures, ceiling tiles, bathroom tiles. The total estimated cost for this work was 13,090, of which \$5000 was available in loans, some of which was forgivable.⁹⁰

In each case, the application then went to the "delivery" office (the City) for initial approval after it was drawn up. Approval was based on need and the availability of funding. Final approval had to be obtained from CMHC. Rehabilitation tenders were called and the contractor was selected by the home owner. At the completion of the work, a RRAP inspector viewed the work at least once and often a number of times. However, the home owner was ultimately responsible for assuring that the contractor completed the work to satisfaction.

Although there appeared to be extensive regulation of RRAP activity, the work completed was not always satisfactory and the home owners were often left with seeking redress through the City. A letter to the City Sydney RRAP office in 1981 outlined an elderly widow's displeasure with her RRAP

⁹⁰ Un-named Work Order submitted by Inspector J.R. Smith, 1987. This was kindly given to me by the Sydney CMHC Office as an example of RRAP work done by CMHC.

contractors. She provided photographs and a day-by-day account of the RRAP work to support her claim that she had been cheated by an unscrupulous and incompetent contractor. Her complaints were numerous. They included: broken boards not replaced from the roof repair job, windows that could not be opened because they were painted over, window frames costing \$150 each were left with gaping spaces, a \$50 cost on each simple "putty job" on existing windows, cellar stairs left unusable, holes left in the "repaired" foundation. In addition, the contractor did not come with his own equipment, but borrowed it from the widow and her neighbours as he needed it.⁹¹ The complainant insisted that the inspector came only once and did not discuss the contractor's work with her. There was no indication as to the action taken by the City to rectify the situation. However, the letter (combined with oral testimony) indicates that the costs and the quality of work for RRAP occasionally fell below the standards outlined in the guidelines and that the inspectors, who were allowed a certain "flexibility", did not always demand the best possible renovation jobs. It also suggests that a number of fly-by-night contractors took advantage of the funding offered by RRAP, and that elderly females were potential victims of their

⁹¹ Letter from unidentified Sydney RRAP recipient, RRAP files, Sydney Development Office, City of Sydney, 1982.

scams.⁹²

Aluminum siding, door and window companies also sprang up overnight as a result of RRAP. Their ethics were sometimes questionable as well. According to guidelines, the use of replacement exterior cladding, such as aluminum or vinyl siding, was recommended only if the present cladding, usually wooden shingles, was too deteriorated to take paint. Furthermore, "Replacement of exterior cladding [was] not to be authorized simply for aesthetic reasons or ease of maintenance".⁹³ In fact, CMHC warned the owners of older homes that the opinions of door-to-door salespersons on the condition of their siding should not necessarily be believed.⁹⁴ However, although other municipalities in Canada routinely replaced and painted wooden siding, Sydney and other municipalities in the Atlantic Region allowed a notable amount of aluminum or vinyl siding, far more than was warranted by the condition of the shingles. These considerations were left to the discretion of the inspector whose work "involved a high

⁹² A Consultative Paper on Housing Renovation (Ottawa: CMHC, n.p.[1986]), p. 11, noted a lack of consumer confidence in housing renovation and repair contractors, that many small firms existed, for "entry and exit were easy".

⁹³ Inspection Guidelines, section 10.1. See also, RRAP: Standards for the Rehabilitation of Residential Buildings (Ottawa: CMHC, n.d.), p. 15.

⁹⁴ Harold Kalman, The Sensible Rehabilitation of Older Houses (Ottawa, CMHC, 1979), p.21. Unfortunately this publication was not widespread in its distribution; also it was published too late to provide effective warning in most cases.

degree of judgement".⁹⁵ The inspector often worked under the "operating policy" that older people, particularly widows, would be disinclined to apply successive coats of paint if an alternative was available. These people were significantly influenced by the advertising that they would "never have to paint again" if they took aluminum or vinyl siding.

The same was said of aluminum windows and doors, an innovations of the 50s and introduced to Cape Breton with RRAP. The *Inspection Guidelines* suggested that wooden sashes be repaired or replaced when there were a small number of windows in need. "If, on the other hand, there are a large number of windows to be repaired, the cheaper solution may be to call for aluminum infill windows to replace the existing wooden windows."⁹⁶ While CMHC made no claims for the superior or even equal quality of aluminum versus wood, it was nevertheless willing to encourage the "cheaper" and lower quality route in many cases.

The "no-maintenance" view of aluminum and vinyl siding was perpetuated by door-to-door sales people, who were working for one or more contractors who did various rehabilitation jobs. They carried RRAP application forms with them, assisted the home owners in filling them out, and they also offered bonuses for "referrals" when the respective home owners' neighbours took the siding, doors or windows. So, instead of

⁹⁵ "Preface", *Inspection Guidelines*.

⁹⁶ *Guidelines*, p.34.

paying \$400-\$500 for a paint job every few years, they paid \$1800-\$2000 for siding, windows and doors. There is no evidence that the CMHC, the province or the municipalities attempted to control the advertising or "bonuses", or to research the intrinsic quality of the siding, its effect on the life of the house or its market value.⁹⁷ On the other hand there is oral evidence that contractors often charged the recipients the full amount of their eligible grant whatever the job, and that this amount was usually found acceptable by the inspectors. The result was a veritable boom for contractors, many of them "fly-by-night" operators like the building contractors mentioned previously.⁹⁸ Home insulation was promoted in much the same way. The grants of the 1970s and early 1980s from RRAP and later from the Canadian Home Insulation Program (CHIP) resulted in almost every home in Whitney Pier being insulated, and obtaining aluminum or vinyl siding and aluminum doors and windows.

On the whole, community response in Whitney Pier to both NIP and RRAP projects was very positive. Elderly, low-income people remember the generous grants that put siding on their homes, or new roofs, or installed heating systems that replaced or supplemented their coal stoves and furnaces. The

⁹⁷ CMHC, *Canadian Building Innovations, 1943-1993* (Ottawa: 1993), notes that synthetic non-wood siding came into use in Canada in the 1950's. Ease of maintenance and cheapness were its main positive features; negative features are not discussed.

⁹⁸ Contractor Simon Arsenault, conversations, 1994.

subsequent programs, CHIP also made a marked difference in the appearance of homes because of the changes recommended as a result of the oil crises. "Before and after" photos taken of houses that benefitted from these programs show brightly coloured siding replacing darker shingles, the dark colours having been used to camouflage air pollution. Houses had fewer and smaller windows with sashes of aluminum rather than wood. The effect of the windows is rather peculiar and not aesthetically pleasing. For most of the recipients of RRAP, the program was redundant in that it was not necessary for the survival of the building. In fact, most of the buildings were in good to excellent condition and continue to be so. What RRAP did was allow the pensioners to add low maintenance features to their homes at little or no cost. The generous terms of the programs and the zealousness of the sales representatives apparently off-set home owners' suspicions of aluminum siding and windows and doors. Today many good wooden doors and windows sit in basements.

However, some houses were literally "saved" by RRAP, especially in the Coke Ovens area, where new foundations, roofs, and doors and windows meant that people stayed in their homes and their neighbourhoods when they might otherwise have had to move to public housing.⁹⁹

One of the early criticisms of NIP\RRAP by municipalities in Industrial Cape Breton was that certain areas of

⁹⁹ Valarie Bobyk, tour of RRAP interview, 1994.

municipalities were barred from RRAP through the designation system attached to NIP. However, when this condition was removed in 1978, all low income households in the municipalities were eligible for housing rehabilitation and the great majority took advantage of it. The high proportion of landlords to use the program also meant that low income households benefitted. In fact, Industrial Cape Breton's experience with the program belied a national survey which showed that the design of RRAP did not allow it to meet the housing rehabilitation needs of the lowest income groups.¹⁰⁰

The most important part of the policy statement leading to the implementation of NIP and RRAP was that home owners were to have control over the process and the results. This was generally not the case in Whitney Pier. In reality, the programs were instead something of a reversion back to the acquiescence of the 1960s when there was little questioning of implementation of government housing programs. Despite the meetings, door-to-door surveys, and the neighbourhood committees, the implementation of NIP was not a response to the neighbourhood's unique concerns; instead, it was the common list of items that went into other places. On the one hand the administration of NIP was necessarily heavy-handed in delivering the neighbourhood improvements because of the design of the program and the financial burden on the municipalities. The result was that the involvement of

¹⁰⁰ Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Evaluation.

neighbourhood committees was sometimes wasted as the municipality went ahead with what they could afford, not what was needed or what the neighbourhood specified. On the other hand, the guidelines and standards set out by CMHC were not strictly enough adhered to, with unethical advantage being taken of both the RRAP grants and their recipients. The decisions about RRAP were subtly taken away from the home owners' control by the situation which combined the granting of monies with aggressive sales pitches from contractors anxious to promote renovations and "no-maintenance" siding, windows and doors.

At least one other community in Nova Scotia had a similar experience. In Halifax's North End, heavily populated by Blacks and low income groups, including single mothers, NIP was equated with gentrification. There, like Whitney Pier, demolitions were occurring well into the 1970s, despite the changes in the urban renewal legislation which supposedly ended demolition. A Black Cultural Centre was planned for one of the areas cleared by demolition but the plan was abandoned after years of discussion. A promised legal aid centre and a day care did not materialize until the NIP coordinator threatened to resign in protest against the delays. Jo Stern, in a study of urban planning, called the process "contempt for public process" in which, "although it had the appearance of a community directed program, ... the

key decisions were made downtown."¹⁰¹ Jill Grant, in **New Maritimes**, suggested that it was yet another paternalistic exercise in allowing "government control of resources for the benefit of the people".¹⁰²

There is little hint of "gentrification" in the Whitney Pier experience of NIP except, perhaps, for the concern for tennis courts. The neighbourhood meetings and house-to-house survey of Area V-A did not mention tennis courts; there is no evidence that tennis courts were a concern to the committees set up for Areas V-B and VI. It is to the credit of the Coke Ovens neighbourhood that the courts are now being used for ground hockey and basket ball. The tennis court in Ward VI, located on the swampy area between St. Alban's Street and Catherine Street has been dismantled to the extent that the exterior fences have been taken down. But the concrete remains and the young people of the area have crudely painted markers for basket ball in it. The engineer who directed the building of the courts on St. Albans seems to be one of the few who remembered that court and who mourned its demise.¹⁰³

In the mid-1980s the Ukrainian Men's Club built a set of

¹⁰¹ See Jo Stern, "Gentrification and Community in the North End of Halifax: Re-examining the Issues", Thesis, M.A. Urban and Rural Planning, Technical Univ. of Nova Scotia, 1993.

¹⁰² Jill Grant, "Helter Shelter: The Housing Crisis and Decline of Community Planning", in **New Maritimes** (April, 1988), p. 12.

¹⁰³ Conversations with Francis MacDow, City Engineering Department, Sydney,

two tennis courts and a small park encompassing a grassy area and a small brook. They donated it to the city on the 1988 occasion of the Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine. The area has been virtually unused except for festival occasions in the Ukrainian community when the area was used to celebrate the Ukrainian Catholic Liturgy, to have Ukrainian dancers perform, or for the general Ukrainian community to have a picnic. No tennis is played here. In the past two-three years, the condition of the Ukrainian tennis court and park area has deteriorated significantly. On the stage area, there is anti-police graffiti; one of the wire and steel doors for the tennis court lies in the brook near a broken bridge. The situation sends a disturbing message to the community from the City. Were the tennis courts to be a signal of a changed world view for the residents of Whitney Pier in terms of upward mobility from working class to middle class? Or were tennis courts simply a low-maintenance "green area"?

Seton Foundation

The Seton Foundation was named for Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Founder of the Sisters of Charity Order. When the Order sold St. Elizabeth's Hospital in North Sydney to the Nova Scotia government in 1976, the Sisters established a foundation to provide housing for low income families in Cape Breton's Industrial area. The Foundation built homes individually or in groups. Individual homes in integrated

neighbourhoods were preferred in order to ward off the stigma of social housing. When groups of homes were built, it was because a block of land was available. Sometimes, this had the effect of retaining the co-hesion of communities. It was not the policy of the Seton Foundation to initiate home building for particular individuals or groups; rather the foundation had to be approached by a community group with the idea. This reluctance to put itself forward was seen to account for the success of the program.¹⁰⁴ Bernie Reppa, the City's Development Officer hailed the program in 1978 saying, "It's like the old co-operative movement. We've got to get people working together."¹⁰⁵

The first 50 Seton units were in a "buy-back" scheme which resulted in home ownership through a mortgage with CMHC's Assisted Home Ownership Program. In addition, the Seton Foundation acted as a "landlord" with their houses available on a rent-to-buy basis. In this arrangement, the relationship between the home owners or tenants and the Foundation was informal: the resident tenants were responsible for maintenance, but the Foundation was always ready to give assistance when needed. Improvements and maintenance were considered equity toward the price when a resident wished to buy a house. By 1985, the Seton Foundation had completed 240

¹⁰⁴ Conversations with Joe MacLean, Executive Director, Seton Foundation, 1994.

¹⁰⁵ "People Displaced in Demolition Plan Get Chance to Return to Neighbourhood", Post, September 8, 1978, p. 4.

units, either owned or rented by low/middle income families. Most of the homes were in Glace Bay, but there were a number in Sydney, New Waterford and the North Side (North Sydney and Sydney Mines).¹⁰⁶ In 1977 and 1978, the Seton Foundation was involved in the construction of ten homes for Black or mixed families on Laurier and Tupper Streets; one other home, for a white family, was built further away from the steel plant, "down the Pier". The project started with NIP's demolition of a number of substandard buildings on Laurier and Tupper Streets. As part of the NIP mandate, the cleared land was prepared for rebuilding and plans were set in place for single family homes on the area. Valerie Bobyk, Coordinator of NIP, approached a Coke Ovens community leader, Lem Skeete of the Black United Front (BUF), to draw together people interested in building in the area. NIP was particularly interested in attracting low/middle income families who paid high rents, and also previously displaced families from the Coke Ovens who lived in public housing at MacDonald Heights, who had made very clear their wish to return "home". The group headed by Skeete worked with the Community Development Worker from Family Services on Eastern Nova Scotia, Ken O'Neil, in drawing in the Seton Foundation which in turn sought financial backing from the Assisted Home

¹⁰⁶ Jim Duke, Access Housing Services Association, "Report on Non-Profit Housing Options for the Seton Foundation", 1985. also informal discussion with Sister Peggy Butts, former Board Member, Seton Foundation.

Ownership Plans under CMHC or NSHC. In keeping with its principle of remaining in the background, the Seton Foundation refused acknowledgement for the project, being cited only as "a social agency that wants to be remain unrecognized."¹⁰⁷ The home owners who built the Seton homes were mainly young families selected on the basis of need and income. But from the point of view of the Black community in the Coke Ovens, they were also chosen with a view to revitalizing the community.

Patsy (Green) Meade and her husband Whitney Meade were in the first Seton group in 1977. (Fig. 7-4) Patsy was born and raised on Curry's Lane, daughter of a Hungarian mother and West Indian father. Members of her family still live on Curry's Lane right next to the coke ovens site in the 1990s. Whitney was born in Halifax and came to Sydney as an apprentice mechanic. After their marriage, they lived in a four-unit apartment building on the lower end of Lingan Road. Having already been denied funding by NSHC programs for low/middle income families because they were childless, the Meades were eager to become part of the Seton group. But with a "waiting List" of young families in need of housing they did not become part of the group until another family backed out.

¹⁰⁷ "People Displaced in Demolition Plan Get Chance to Return to Neighbourhood", Post. Also, interview and subsequent conversations with Lemuel Skeete, August 9, 1993 and following; conversations with Valerie Bobyk, former Coordinator of NIP/RRAP; conversation with Joe MacLean, Executive Director, Seton Foundation.



Figure 7-4:
Patsy Meade, Seton house
on Tupper Street.
Elizabeth Beaton photo.

Because both Patsy and Whitney Meade were working at the time of their acceptance into the group, they were slightly above the income level required to qualify. However, they were provisionally accepted and their low income status was soon acquired: "And it just so happened that two weeks after our foundation was poured in August of '77, my husband was laid off work... as an apprentice mechanic at Woolco in Sydney River. And it wasn't until ... the following October '78 that [he got work again]. So we were very lucky."¹⁰⁸

The Meades attended frequent meetings at the United Mission in the fall of 1976 to plan the Seton Homes with the other families. Father John Capstick of the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department chaired and guided the meetings. He answered questions about eligibility, building materials, etc.

"I remember there was a meeting... just before the houses were finished. He had told us about... the aluminum siding. He said, 'Oh there's one thing I must tell you. If you ever hear strange noises, cracking and creaking... That's just your siding expanding and contracting with the cold. I don't want youse (sic) calling me six down the road and telling me your house is falling apart!.' It was like input from him and suggestions and ideas from us. You know, we worked together. Joe Maclean [Executive Director of the Seton Foundation] did most of the running around for prices and things like that. There wasn't much we had to do. Just stay together as group and agree to things as a group. But we had other people doing all that running around for us. Which saved a lot of time and hassle."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Patsy Green Meade, interview, Sept. 15, 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Patsy Green Meade, interview.

The Ron Kennedy Construction Contractor outlined building strategies. The group's lawyer, Russell MacLellan, also attended the meetings to explain legal implications and to fulfil the legal requirements for ownership of the land. The mayor took part in the discussions about the transfer of land from the City to each prospective home owner. On one occasion, the group met with Valarie Bobyk, the coordinator of NIP at the NIP office on Maloney Street.

Of the ten original families, only seven actually built in the first group, starting construction in the spring of 1977. Most of the houses, all on Laurier Street, were finished by November of the same year. One family, recently displaced and desperate for shelter, moved into their home before plumbing was installed. Another family started and finished late because of problems with land ownership: the family wanted to build on their land rather than buying from the City. Yet another family was held up for several months while waiting for financial backing from NSHC. The second group, starting off with four families, finally completed three homes in 1978. Two were on Laurier Street and one was on Tupper Street. Patsy Meade acted as "liaison person" for the second group, coordinating various activities and offering the benefit of the first group's experience.

The group location of the houses was a primary factor toward the goal of revitalizing the community. The prospective home owners chose their lots based on kinship and

friendship. For example, the Meade's chose to live beside the Skeet's because Lem Skeete was Whitney Meade's first friend when he moved to Sydney; Lem was the god-father to the Meade's first child.

Decisions about design were based on the group's visit to an already completed Seton home in Glace Bay. They discussed floor plans, heating systems, types of cupboards, etc. Some of the changes, such as incorporating double kitchen sinks, met with resistance from the organizers. However the group persisted and the improvements became standard items for subsequent housing packages.

The group had a choice of two basic floor plans for their 24'x36' houses. One type for narrow lots had the back entrance and stairs to the basement at the rear of the house, with the main entrance at the gable end. Some chose this type even though their lots were 40 to the street; however they made their front entry on the facade side-on to the street and they retained the rear entry and basement. The second floor plan was for a 40'x100' lot. It had the length of the house facing the street and had a "front" door off-centre on the front facade. The "rear" door and stairs to the basement were on the gable side wall. Both floor plans had three bedrooms, kitchen/dinning room, living room bathroom, and a finished basement. The major interior differences between the two floor plans were found in the shape of the hallway and placement of some of the closets.

The Whitney Pier Seton houses made use of the standard cost and time effective materials and techniques available at the time. The joists, partitions, beams, trusses, and framing were spruce, with steel jack basement columns; the roof and wall sheathing, and sub-flooring were of plywood. Tiling and gyprocking/crack filling and painting were done by the home owners themselves as part of their sweat equity. They also had to frame, insulate and gyprock the basement walls. Door frames were pine with one and three-eighth slab doors; window frames and sills were also pine. Insulation was provided for both the attic and the walls. Instead of the "hardboard" or "ranch wall" siding initially proposed, the houses were sided with aluminum. The houses were heated with forced air, except for one home where an asthmatic child required hot water radiated heating. As with the double sinks, the change in the heating system was not readily accepted by the organizers of the group. The insistence on sameness for the sake of saving money was not a problem for the group members:

That was the idea of the group, that everything was to be built the same. And then you change it yourself as you went along. Whatever you... But everyone was just so grateful to have a home they didn't care what it looked like, you know. Because it was theirs and... They were all tired of... Like some of them had been renting for years and years. They were just tired of renting. Like most of us were young families.¹¹⁰

On the whole, the families were satisfied with the homes, but an older participant reflected in 1993 that "... [I]t's not as

¹¹⁰ Patsy Meade, interview.

solid and the material in them is not as good as it was in the older homes that I had."¹¹¹

In 1992, the Meades made a further statement of their satisfaction with the house and their commitment to the community when they did a major expansion and renovation of their home. They added eight feet to the depth of the house and changed the rear entrance from the side to the back of the house. The addition resulted in a separate and larger kitchen, a back entry "porch" and a larger master bed room. They also replaced the aluminum siding with vinyl.

The families selected for the project had to qualify for mortgages under the federal Assisted Home Ownership Program which subsidized mortgage payments to keep them to 25 per cent of income. The first group's mortgage amounted to \$22,952 with \$2,200 for the land; the second group of seven started in the following year built homes that cost \$27,000 for construction and land. Although both prices represented an increased cost in terms of labour, a conscious decision was made to build from "scratch" rather than to buy modular homes, in order to provide work for local skilled tradesmen.¹¹²

The Seton Foundation built two more homes in the Coke Ovens, on the north side of Tupper Street. But, in a change of organizational policy for low income families, Seton became

¹¹¹ Lem Skeete, interviewed, August, 1993.

¹¹² "People Displaced ... Get Chance..." Post, September 8, 1978.

a subsidized landlord in these cases. These houses are structurally the same as the first Seton group, but it is evident that they have not enjoyed the same upkeep and improvements as the Seton home owners.

Sustaining Community through Housing

The 1970s seemed to create a "turn-around" in the housing experience of Whitney Pier, a change from a chronic situation of inadequate housing since the turn of the century to the crises that it became in the 1960s. Social worker Jim MacCormack said of housing in Whitney Pier in the 1970s: "The scales were tipped for the first time in history for the Pier".¹¹³ He was referring to a number of relatively powerful individuals, natives of Whitney Pier, who worked in or with the political realm to achieve better housing for their community -- MLA Pinky Guame, Mayor Carl Neville, City Planner Bernie Reppa, Director of Social Services Jim MacCormack, NIP Coordinator Valerie Bobyk, community activist Lem Skeete. There is no doubt that these five men and one woman had a role in the assurance of continued existence of parts of Whitney Pier, especially the Coke Ovens neighbourhood-- despite two studies which recommended its destruction. But other factors relating to the demographic make-up of Whitney Pier, and to outside attitudes towards Whitney Pier, also contributed to sustainability of the Coke

¹¹³ Conversations, 1994.

Ovens neighbourhood and indeed to all of Whitney Pier through housing activity. These factors were encouraged by the phenomenon known as the "60s" when powerless people all over North America acted upon new found empowerment that was essentially supported by the general population.

Even though the "60s" came late to Whitney Pier, it still had an invigorating effect on women, racial and ethnic minorities, and the poor, in terms of seeking equity. This was combined with an unprecedented upsurge of secondary and post-secondary education for those segments of the population. The empowerment achieved in the practical and political elements of home building and home ownership also enabled them to critique situations, leadership and housing policy. The experience took the community into the nineties armed with the realization of what had to be done in terms of networking with government and other funding agencies in order to realize their goal of home ownership. Because, no matter that home ownership became an acceptable principle in some cases, it always suffered at the hands of financial institutions who did not budge until government either forced them to, or more commonly, compensated them for their concessions to low income families.

Although government programs were an essential part of the projects discussed in this chapter, the relationship between government and the community was almost as often confrontational as it was co-operative. The difference

between the housing programs of the 1960s and those starting in the 1970s was communities did not back down from confronting or disagreeing with government policy and practice. The only exception was the NIP/RRAP program in which community members did not participate as fully as they might have in the planning, and they allowed decisions to be made in terms of implementations that were harmful on the long term.

Perhaps the final high point of community action in housing occurred in June 1990 when there was a sod-turning ceremony in the Coke Ovens of Whitney Pier which celebrated the final stages of negotiations and planning for the Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing Society (WPNPHS). The project held significant public interest for it was the beginning of four years of construction which resulted in ten new homes in an area cleared in the 1970s. (Fig. 7-5) The Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing project, yet another endeavour to maintain the Black community in the Coke Ovens, had been spearheaded by community activist Lem Skeete in the late 1980s. It was given extensive support, sometimes of dubious value, from outside the community -- from community development organizations, churches and CMHC. That support was countered by the persistence of pressure to put low income families in public housing. The project's success could be attributed to enthusiasm for home ownership as the prior factor of

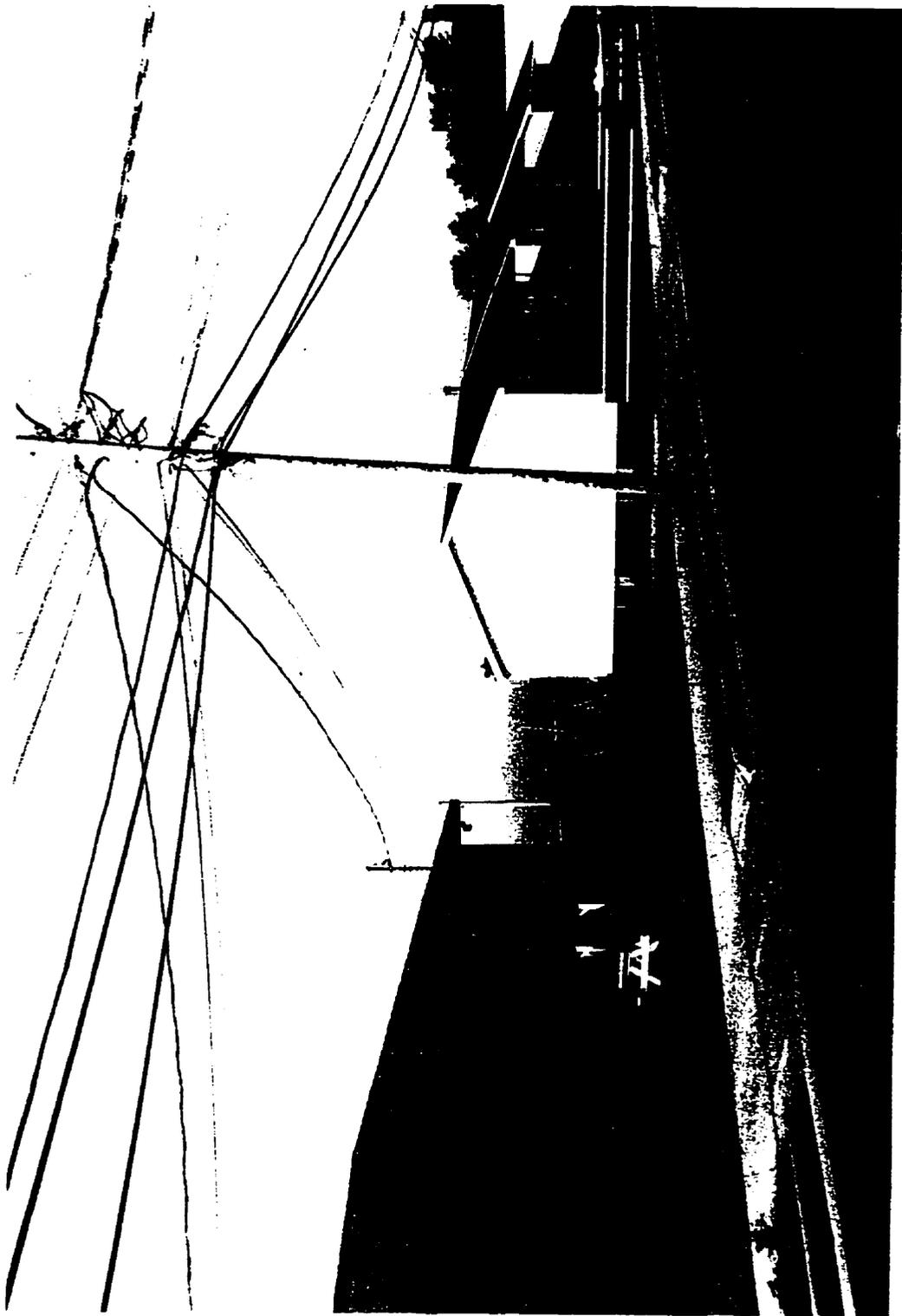


Figure 7-5: Whitney Pier Non-profit Housing Society houses. Elizabeth Beaton photo.

sustaining community life.¹¹⁴

The examples provided in this chapter seem to suggest that Whitney Pier will always find ways to sustain community through its housing. Will the future mean simply another layer of institutional power which the people of Whitney Pier will have to "figure out" and work around in providing housing, or will it bring an era of post-modernism that cannot relate to its past?

The future of Whitney Pier and all of Cape Breton, particularly in terms of its industrial prospects, indeed appears to be uncertain. In 1994, arrangements were made to sell the provincial crown corporation, Sydney Steel, to Min Metals of China. The Chinese agreed to operate the plant for three years in Sydney in co-operation with the Provincial government. It was understood that, after the three years expired, the Chinese would make the choice either to continue to run SYSCO in Nova Scotia, or take it back to China. Given that the plant consists of a newly modernized and compact electric arc furnace and universal mill, it was expected by many that they will take it to China. This would mark the end of almost 100 years steel making in Sydney. In a more recent

¹¹⁴ The experience of the Non-Profit Housing Association was officially documented for CMHC by Eric Levitan in a report, "Building Homes from the Grass Roots: A Report on the Whitney Pier Self-Help Housing Project", prepared for CMHC under the auspices of the Centre for Community Development, 1991. Also, interviews with Lem Skeete and Todd Marsman presented less official views of the experience which dealt with agendas for themselves or for the community.

development, a Canadian consortium has proposed taking over the steel operation, suggesting the possibility that the plant will stay in Sydney.

The coal mines run by the federal crown corporation DEVCO may also see drastic changes in the next two years. There are only two underground mines operating in the industrial area in 1995. Both of these, the Prince and Phalen collieries, have had flooding and mechanical problems, exacerbated by poor relations between miners and management. Lingan, the other major colliery, closed in 1994 because of severe flooding. In 1995, Nova Scotia Power declared it would pay only world prices for Cape Breton coal. A court case has been averted with DEVCO agreeing to take an 18 per cent cut in their price. The provincial government has a "hands-off" attitude toward the situation even though thousands of jobs are in jeopardy if DEVCO loses its major buyer. An American company whose report resulted in the closure of most British mines a few years ago has been hired to "review" DEVCO's economic feasibility. To add to the coal industry's troubles, operations using coal, such as the Lingan power plant and the Point Aconi power plant have not utilized the technology necessary to prevent the pollution common to coal burning. At the same time, improved coal prices have resulted in a call to reopen some of the old Cape Breton mines. However, it may be realistic to realize that coal, like steel, will soon be "history" in Cape Breton.

Although the coal and steel industries may come to an

abrupt end shortly, the industries have been in trouble since the 1920s. The result has been a continued out-flow of people from the industrial area, a "going-down-the-road" culture that has included all Cape Bretoners as fishing, lumbering and farming have gradually declined. The 20th century has left the communities of Cape Breton, including Whitney Pier, with weak economies and strong cultures. There is a remarkable continuity of proud identity, most often carried by the music of Cape Breton. Governments have decided that the future for Cape Breton must be tourism: that its culture must be packaged and sold along with the breath-taking physical beauty of the landscape.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Whitney Pier can serve as a microcosm of 20th century housing in many communities in Canada. This experience evolved from an initial period of capitalist-controlled housing for workers, with arms-length support from different levels of government, to an almost total dependence upon the state for shelter. The interpretation of the progression of Whitney Pier's housing is grounded in the understanding of several objective factors: steel and coal, demography, and government intervention. The consistent and pervasive element running through these factors has been class status based on ethnicity, work and place. The esoteric or subjective components of housing in Whitney Pier are also found in ethnicity, work and place; but they are understood through depictions of strategies found in net-working, self-reliance, and protest.

At the turn of the century, the south side of Sydney Harbour was transformed from a primarily rural orientation, with fishing and some significant commercial port activity, into a bustling place of industrial, residential and commercial development. Coal and steel became the basic livelihood of the area, taking up the entire waterfront and several hundred acres of land in the space between the town of Sydney and the municipal area of Eastmount, soon to become Whitney Pier. The Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO), in

collaboration with middle class farmer/merchants and the local government, came to control large tracts of land within Whitney Pier. That the company built only minimally on those lands for the work force was an indication of the "class" of the workers. It was because of coal and steel that developers had a brief interest in Whitney Pier as the epitome of Sydney's spectacular growth. The steel plant, the coke ovens and the piers defined Whitney Pier's physical boundaries and its status within the City of Sydney.

Coal and steel were responsible for demographic changes in Whitney Pier that were as dramatic as the changes in the landscape. The population of Whitney Pier went from a few hundred well-to-do farmers and a scattering of fishing people in the 1890s, to at least 2500 people in 1901 as a result of an influx of rural migrants. Many of the new arrivals were skilled tradespeople. They were soon followed by literally thousands of immigrants, mostly labourers, from Newfoundland Europe, the West Indies and elsewhere. The first layer of industrial population was overwhelmingly male. Families followed after World War I, coincidental with a heightened perception of opportunity in Whitney Pier. The housing of Whitney Pier followed suit: middle class homes usually built by contractors; hotels, boarding houses, shacks, and a minimum of company housing; developer-built clusters; and owner-built homes. The demarcations of ethnic neighbourhoods occurred coincidentally with the tacit acceptance of a "white" Ward Six

and a "foreign" Ward Five. By 1920 Whitney Pier was firmly established as a multi-ethnic working class area, with strong and positive internal group identities that have lasted to the present time. It was equally clear that outside perceptions of the make-up of Whitney Pier's demography accounted for attitudes of fear and discrimination. Housing, both in reputation and in fact, suffered as a result of these attitudes which were translated into policy and action at various levels of government and business.

In the early years of Whitney Pier the municipal government exercised an arm's-length policy with regard to housing - although it commented negatively on the health and moral implications of immigrant conditions, and it ventured vaguely into the problems of "urban sprawl" in Ward Six. It wasn't until the advent of co-op housing that the provincial government, encouraged by the Catholic Diocese of Eastern Nova Scotia, had a role in housing design and finance. Indeed, co-op housing provided a transition from independent home building to state control of housing. Then, the 1960s with its focus on social justice and the realization of industrial pollution, saw Whitney Pier become the object of urban renewal, more clearly defined as demolition of undesirable areas. The chosen area was the Coke Ovens, where the Blacks of Whitney Pier lived. By the 1970s and continuing into the 1990s, Whitney Pier, demonstrating a high rate of poverty and underemployment, and a growing population of elderly persons,

had become the focus of public and social housing schemes. Community based programs of renovation and repair replaced demolition, and greater emphasis was placed on the provision of public housing for low income families. As a result, public housing on city-owned land in Whitney Pier was developed at a ratio that over-represented the community's population; it was perhaps more a reflection of the outside perception of the community than of need. Also, the national housing policies of the 1970s and 1980s developed a number of community-based projects that encouraged programs of self-help that resulted in homeownership. Although the intervention of the state meant some improvements in housing for the people of Whitney Pier, the requirement of collaboration between municipalities and the province with federal programs often resulted in inequities and frustrations. Furthermore, many good programs were discarded because of the standardization of programs at a national level, and the return of public housing instead of homeownership for low income families.

State and capitalist hegemony was consistently present in the housing experience of Whitney Pier. Faced with the powerful combination of the city's expansion, the development agendas of the mercantile class, and the dubious philanthropism of industrial capitalism, the lower strata of the working class in Whitney Pier appeared to have accepted that they had few choices in their housing in the early years. Consumer capitalism played a major role in homeownership and

independent building, with ready-cut materials and ready-made furnishings. The state was able to decree building standards, decide who should have public housing, and with financial institutions, determine who would be able to afford homes.

Yet, throughout the 20th century, Whitney Pier's people consistently exercised strategies in their housing which enabled them to work through or around many of constraints placed upon them by industry or the state. For the working class, ethnic solidarity was the underlay of many of the strategies. Ethnic clusters of workers could be found in the shacks and boarding houses; as families arrived, the clustering took the form of neighbourhoods which were strengthened by ethnic institutions. Ethnic and workplace networks made it possible for families to build their own homes, and encouraged each group to identify itself with particular types of housing. Ethnicity was an indirect factor in the co-op housing projects; also in several of the assisted homeownership programs. Ethnicity was a definite part of the return to the Coke Ovens by a group of families in the early 1990s.

Other working class "traditions" were implicated in the strategies used to provide housing in Whitney Pier. The Insulite Co-op group openly used the "rabbit job" concept to obtain materials from the steel plant to build their homes. Skills carried to the job, on the piers, in the plant or at the coke ovens, were often carried back home and transferred

to home building. The Neighbourhood Action Committee volunteers, which quietly repaired houses for people in need, had "spotters" in City garbage trucks looking for good buys in old houses; they also scavenged in the City dump for materials that they could fix and re-use. Women, well versed in home management, had an active role in community organization, in decision-making and in actual building. Group action, including marches, a court case, a tenants' organization, loud arguments with inspectors, and long meetings with community developers, were used in a variety of situations. Perhaps the most notable of these was the presentation of complaints about the Shell Housing Project to Prime Minister Trudeau in a mall parking lot in 1972. Often, when discussion did not work, as in the Future Co-op project, then the people simply went ahead with what they saw as reasonable and just.

The sustainability of Whitney Pier as community has been closely tied to the stability of its housing. The relationships between community and housing are integrally bonded to each community's history and culture, not only of housing, but also of work experience, ethnicity or race, and religion. In Whitney Pier, the support found within ethnic groups made the experience of living in shacks or boarding houses more bearable in the boom period. The building of homes was directly related to the availability of work and the cohesiveness of ethnic groups which resulted in the formation of social institutions. As time passed and neighbourhoods

became defined, it was again the ethno/religious and work experience that placed the stamp of distinctiveness on each area of the Pier. In the co-op housing, in the social action groups, in the response to government programs, success again depended upon a co-hesiveness of community. Just so, the future of neighbourhoods and community will depend on the ability of the residents of Whitney Pier to continue to integrate their history and culture with their housing.

This study has sought to understand the vital relationship between housing and the people who live in Whitney Pier. The housing of Whitney Pier -- the bare utilitarian conditions of the boom period; the initiatives and the accommodations found in the stability of homeownership; the challenges in implementing government policy; and the struggles and victories of community action -- expresses this vital connection. The people of Whitney Pier, in their strategies to give dignity to the provision of shelter, became engaged in choices and processes that actively communicated their goals and values, and resulted in a tangible commitment to *their* place.

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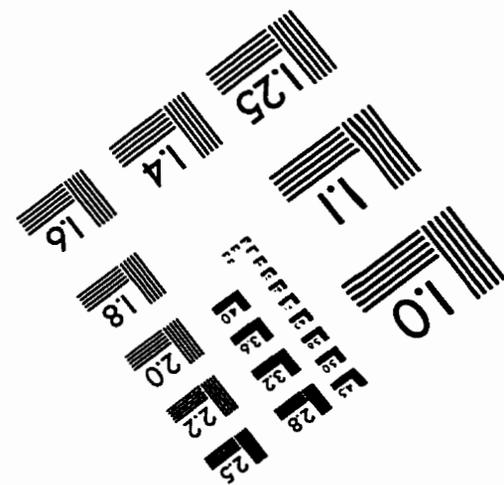
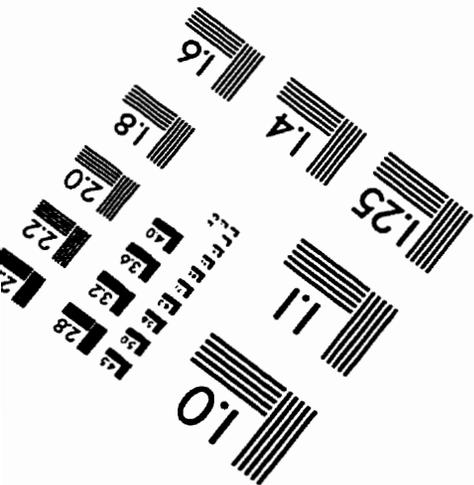
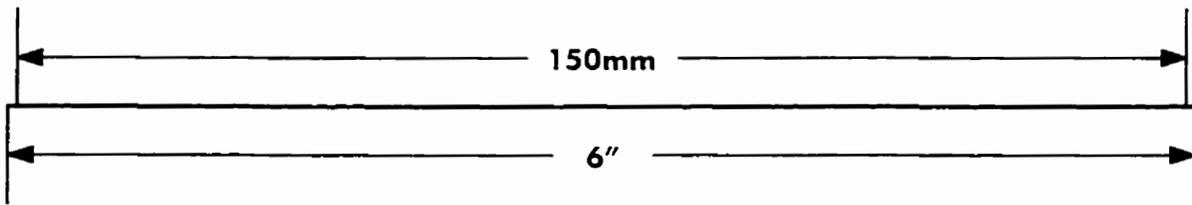
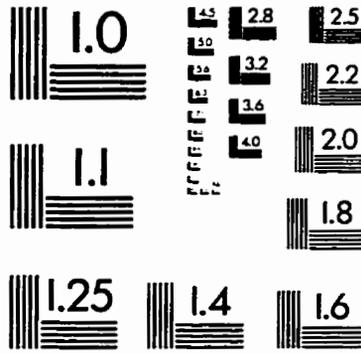
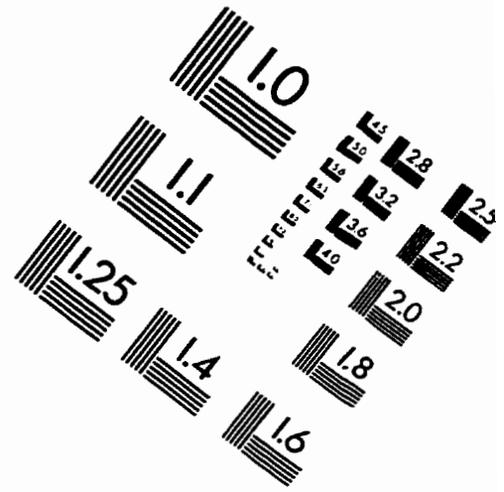
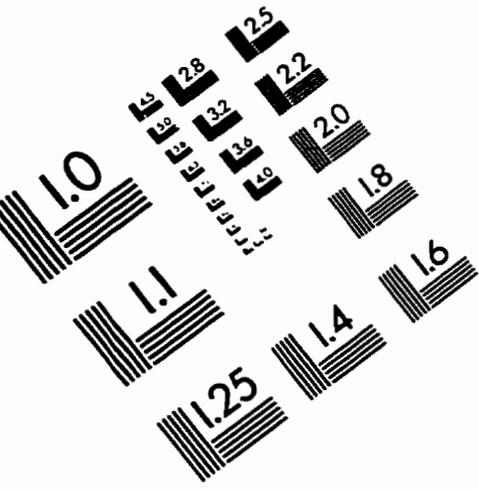
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