



# **D. N. Leathers I History Project Report**

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The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, Texas

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June 2017

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- Gary Allsup, Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Authority
- Lorenzo Buitron, Sr. Vice President CFP/Construction of the Housing Authority
- Ramon Cervantez, Maintenance Tech for D. N. Leathers I in 2016
- Melissa Hinojosa, Office Manager for D. N. Leathers I in 2016
- Dennis Peacock, Construction Office of the Housing Authority
- Deborah Sherrill, Sr. Vice President Housing/Community Development for the Housing Authority

The historian would also like to express appreciation to the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners whose names are listed in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Housing Authority Board of Commissioners (April 2017)**

Name	Title
Frank "Rocco" Montesano	Chair
Harvey S. Lopez	Vice Chair
Marsha Hardeman	Commissioner
Kristina Leal	Commissioner
Cathy Mehne	Commissioner

In addition, many thanks to the Corpus Christi La Retama Library and the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*<sup>1</sup> for their assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Corpus Christi Caller* was established in 1883 and the *Corpus Christi Times* was established in 1910 as a competing newspaper. The owners of the *Corpus Christi Caller* purchased the *Corpus Christi Times* in 1929 and the *Corpus Christi Caller* was the morning paper and the *Corpus Christi Times* was the afternoon paper. The first combined Sunday edition, the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, was published on November 24, 1929. The last separate issue of the *Corpus Christi Times* was published on May 29, 1987. After that, all issues are the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (Ehrlich, 2015).



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### Oral History Interviewees

The historian recorded oral history interviews in order to better understand the culture of the D. N. Leathers I community and the role of public housing within Corpus Christi. The transcripts of those interview are included in **Appendix A**. The persons interviewed (alphabetical order by last name) were:

- Reverend (Rev.) Claude Axel
- James Bright
- Marsha Shaw Hardeman
- Willie Hardeman
- George N. Hodge Sr.
- George N. Hodge Jr.

### Disclaimer

This report is intended to document the 28 buildings of the D. N. Leathers I public housing campus as well as how those buildings fit into the historic context of public housing nationally and locally. The culture of D. N. Leathers I in the 1940s through the 1960s is also included through the perceptions of the persons who contributed their oral history to the project. This report does not attempt to address the nationwide societal changes that have affected the perception of public housing in recent years.



## Introduction

On November 1, 1940, D. N Leathers Center (the public housing development also sometimes referred to as D. N. Leathers Place) opened for occupancy in a neighborhood known locally as “Northside” in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) established the project as one of the three original public housing developments constructed in the city. The locations of all three original projects are shown in **Figure 1**. The campus of the development was bounded by Winnebago Street (formerly Pearsall Street) on the north; the western boundary of the campus was formed by the Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks that ran parallel to and east of North Port Avenue (tracks no longer extant); the southern boundary was approximately one block north of Buffalo Street; and Coke Street formed the eastern boundary. In 1952, a 200-unit public housing development known as D. N. Leathers II opened on land adjacent and to the north of Winnebago Street. The original project, D. N. Leathers Center, became known as D. N. Leathers I to differentiate it from the 1952 D. N. Leathers II development.<sup>2</sup> The original D. N. Leathers public housing development will be referred to as D. N. Leathers I for the remainder of this report.

This report was prepared on behalf of the Housing Authority as part of the mitigation determined by the Three Party Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) among the City of Corpus Christi, the Texas State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Housing Authority executed in June 2016 prior to the relocation of D. N. Leathers I residents and subsequent demolition of D. N. Leathers I. The MOA stated that the City of Corpus Christi determined that the demolition of D. N. Leathers I would have an adverse effect to the property “which is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places” and the D. N. Leathers I History Project (composed of this report and poster art illustrating the history of D. N. Leathers I) is the mitigation determined by the MOA (City of Corpus Christi, Texas SHPO, Housing Authority, 2016). The demolition was the result of a legal settlement reached by the Federal Highway Administration and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and related to a four party agreement among TxDOT, the Port of Corpus Christi Authority of Nueces County, the City of Corpus Christi, and the Housing Authority for the Harbor Bridge Project.

The D. N. Leathers I History Report research included:

- photographic documentation of all 28 buildings on the campus;
- study of architectural plans stored at the Housing Authority Construction Office;
- study of historic photographs included in the Housing Authority photo collection;
- extensive archival research; and
- recording oral history interviews with six people knowledgeable about D. N. Leathers public housing through having resided there or having worked on the D. N. Leathers I property (and photographing each interviewee).

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<sup>2</sup> The D. N. Leathers II public housing was constructed in 1952 and demolished in 1999; and that housing is not the focus of this report.

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Figure 1: Project location map for the three Corpus Christi public housing developments completed in 1940



Source: HNTB Corporation, March 2017



## **D. N. Leathers I History Project Report**

This report provides a historical context for public housing in the 1940s nationally and locally. It also provides a local historical context for the D. N. Leathers I campus including a timeline of major events that affected D. N. Leathers I and the surrounding area in Northside. This report documents the built resources of the D. N. Leathers I campus and how that campus and individual resources evolved over time. A section that describes proponents and opponents of public housing during the 1950s and 1960s is also included to explore how public sentiment began to favor less government involvement in providing and/or managing low-income housing.

A separate electronic file contains detailed photographic documentation of each building of the D. N. Leathers campus and a photo log that contains: 1) the name and address of building; 2) date of photograph; 3) name of photographer; and 4) description of view including direction of the camera. The electronic file was delivered to the Housing Authority as determined by the MOA (Section B.4) and the Housing Authority agreed to transmit the electronic file to the Corpus Christi La Retama Library and the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History. These depositories will also be given electronic copies of the report. A print copy of the report will be given to the Texas SHPO and an electronic copy of the report will be given to the City of Corpus Christi as well as to the Texas SHPO.

## Overview of Public Housing in the United States through 1940s

Political tension surrounding public housing has existed from the inception of the first “poorhouse”<sup>3</sup> which opened outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1773 (*The Architectural Forum*, May 1938). The conflict resides in the differences between two schools of thought: those who believe it is a social responsibility that resides with the government to provide the opportunity for low-income persons to live in safe, sanitary and affordable housing, and the other school of thought that the government has no responsibility to provide housing for low-income persons and/or the government has no responsibility to oversee housing safety or other housing concerns.

The first step in meaningful housing reform came in the form of more stringent building codes in the late 1800s as a combined result of a cholera epidemic in 1849 that killed 5,000 people and the infamous 1871 Chicago fire. It was soon decided, however, that the reformed building codes would only apply to new construction and the poor were left in existing substandard housing that might consist of a few sheets of corrugated metal leaned together, or a board and batten shotgun house without sanitary facilities (toilets), running water or floors.

A movement of social reform also began in the late 1800s with the goal of increased awareness of the dangers to society posed by slum housing. With the movement came changing societal views about low-income housing, from a function solely of private charity to a view that safe, sanitary and affordable housing was a social responsibility. Three individuals dedicated their lives to advocate for housing reform: Jane Addams from Chicago as well as Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis, both from New York. These individuals worked in the slums and spoke at gatherings around the country to promote changes and improve housing for low-income persons. The result of their labors was that a few wealthy philanthropists in New York financed “limited dividend” housing with the idea to set an example for other businessmen to construct housing that would be marketed to the poor, but would also return a profit on their private investment. In reality, these private housing ventures whose goals were to turn a profit, even a small profit, were too expensive to serve the very poor. In 1926, Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York championed the first law in which a state assumed an active role in the creation of low-income housing rather than just regulating housing offered by private parties. The state law established a board to encourage the construction of low-rent housing and provided tax exemptions for qualifying projects. Fourteen projects were constructed between 1927 and 1935 and housed 6,000 families under the new law, but the rents (\$12.50 per room or less) were still too high for the truly low-income families who could only afford the crowded conditions of slum housing (*The Architectural Forum*, May 1938).

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<sup>3</sup> A “poorhouse” was a locally governed, tax supported residential institution where indigent people were required to go if they were not able to support themselves and they had no family or church to adequately assist them. A poorhouse was sometimes referred to as a “poor farm” because it was often located in a rural area and the residents were required to perform farm labor to support themselves and where any extra vegetables or other goods produced on the farm could be sold to supplement the expenses incurred in operating the facility (Historical Overview of the American Poorhouse System, n.d).

## US Housing Policy Pre-1937

In 1931, President Herbert Hoover announced the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership to be held in December of that year. The conference's report included a consensus that, "There should be public participation, at least to the extent of the exercise of the power of eminent domain [presumably for the purpose of obtaining land for low-income public housing]. If the interests of business groups cannot be aroused...a further exercise of some form of governmental powers may be necessary."

The Emergency Relief and Construction Act, passed in 1932, was the first federal legislation directly related to public housing, but it proved ineffective in encouraging any housing affordable to low-income persons and families living in slums. The 1932 law was "pitched" to legislators as a bill to reduce unemployment in the building trades rather than as a social reform legislation. This packaging of the 1932 legislation was necessary to pass the law because the concept of unsafe and unsanitary housing as a "social obligation" was not yet accepted by the legislators or the general public. The 1932 law may have created some jobs, but it was not effective in creating affordable housing for the poor.

Proponents of public housing tried again to "cloak" the concept of government involvement in public housing with the stated purpose of slum clearance by creating legislation in 1933 that created a Housing Division under the Public Works Administration (PWA) to approve slum clearance projects. The Housing Division was authorized to work with state boards or with limited dividend corporations to develop low-income public housing to replace slum housing. Only seven of the 533 projects submitted to the Housing Division were found to meet the goals of the legislation and were subsequently approved for construction. With the lack of qualified project applications, the Housing Division decided to create the Public Works Emergency Housing Corporation to initiate the PWA housing program, but those efforts were blocked by Comptroller General McCarl who refused to transfer any funds to the new corporation on the grounds that they had exceeded their authority by creating the new corporation. This action forced the Housing Division to seek partnerships with the states to develop housing projects.

The 1933 legislation authorized the Housing Division to give project developers (state boards or limited dividend corporations) capital grants of 30 percent and loans up to 70 percent at 4 percent interest to finance development of low-income housing to replace slum housing. The George-Healy Act passed in June 1936 made it legal for the division to make payments to local governments (for public safety services such as fire, police, etc.) in lieu of property taxes and changed the grant to loan ratio to 45 percent grant and a 55 percent loan. Although well-intentioned, the PWA housing program constructed units that charged rents too high to be affordable by the poor who inhabited the slum housing it was intended to replace. The only Texas project initiated under the PWA program was Cedar Springs Place developed in Dallas with an appropriation of \$1,020,000 for 181 units. The average total cost per unit of housing constructed under the PWA program, was \$6,200, including development costs as well as site acquisition and clearance (National Park Service, 2004).

The PWA housing program ended in September 1937, but it laid the ground work for the decentralization of public housing programs to place the burden of eminent domain with the states



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and place the federal government in an advisory role. Also by 1937, enough public housing projects were constructed through federal and state programs to discover what characteristics made housing projects successful in fulfilling the goal of housing the low-income population and what approaches resulted in projects that were too expensive for the population they were intended to serve.

### **United States Housing Act of 1937**

Effective September 1, 1937, the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, also known as the United States Housing Act of 1937 (Housing Act of 1937), was the first legislation with the stated purpose to develop “decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low income.” Low income families were defined as “families whose net income at the time of admission does not exceed five times the rental (including the value to them of heat, light, water, and cooking fuel) of the dwellings to be furnished [to] such families, except that in the case of families with three or more dependents, such ration shall not exceed six to one” [Section 2(1)]. The act went on to explain, “The term ‘families of low income’ means families who are in the lowest income group and who cannot afford to pay enough to cause private enterprise in their locality or metropolitan area to build an adequate supply of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for their use” [Section 2(2)]. Previous legislation cloaked public housing efforts with promises of creating jobs and stimulating the economy but lacked a mandate to house truly low-income families. The Housing Act of 1937 established the United States Housing Authority (USHA) and contained stringent cost guidelines for public housing. The general guideline was that the cost could not exceed \$4,000 for each dwelling unit or more than \$1,000 per room (excluding land, demolition and non-dwelling facilities) although in very expensive and densely populated areas, the law allowed for some cost flexibility (Wagner-Steagall, 1937).

Under the Housing Act of 1937 the federal government would not own any properties as they had with programs developed under previous legislation, but instead, USHA was empowered to make loans to public housing authorities for up to 90 percent of the development cost which included the funds needed for planning, interest charges, land acquisition, demolition, construction or equipment connected to development of a low-rent housing/slum-clearance project or the acquisition of such a project. To qualify to participate, a local or regional public housing authority had to be created and that entity was responsible for eminent domain actions and associated costs.

USHA was authorized to make annual contributions to public housing authorities to ensure that the housing project rents remained affordable for low-income persons. The law required that in order for a public housing authority to receive annual contributions from USHA to assist in maintaining low rents, the number of units constructed for the public housing project must be equal to the number of existing unsafe and/or unsanitary units eliminated during the construction of the public housing project (through demolition, condemnation and effective closing) or improved (rehabilitated to safe and sanitary condition) (Wagner-Steagall, 1937).

The Housing Act of 1937 mandated a three-year period for the federal housing program to accomplish its work. The original funding appropriated was \$500 million but was increased to \$800 million before the program ended. The political climate began to change with the election of 1938 when the Democratic party lost seats in the House of Representatives and the United States Senate, as a response to a downturn in the national economy and an attitude by many against New Deal programs (set up to stimulate the economy out of the Great Depression), and complaints by the private sector against public housing. Thus, the House of Representatives refused to consider a bill to extend the public housing program beyond the originally mandated three-year period and as a result, public housing received no further funding until 1949. However, during World War II, a housing program with similarities to the Housing Act of 1937 was enacted with the goal of housing defense workers living in the United States. La Armada I was built in Corpus Christi under that program (National Park Service, 2004). La Armada I later became part of the Housing Authority inventory.

### Public Housing Standards

Prior to the Housing Act of 1937, one consistent problem with public housing was that once the housing was complete, rents charged were higher than what had been originally intended in order to recoup the total final cost of the project development. Consequently, the projects (developed before the Housing Act of 1937) failed to serve the intended low-income population. To help meet the new cost guidelines of the Housing Act of 1937 while defining minimum and desirable public housing standards, the National Association of Housing Officials published “Housing Standards” in *The Architectural Forum* in May 1938. These standards addressed site selection, site development and the dwelling plan design. Some of the standards were suggestions and others were mandates with the intent to balance what was desirable with what was attainable given the proposed budget for each public housing project (National Association of Housing Officials, May 1938). The officials of the USHA used the standards to evaluate proposed public housing projects and to provide guidance to local and regional housing authorities who applied for financial assistance through the USHA.

Site selection recommendations included the location of housing sites in areas suitable for residential purposes without conflicts from “existing or probable future public works, transportation, or industrial developments, nor suffer from attendant hazards or nuisances.” The standards also included guidance that the site should be such that the following public services could be economically provided: 1) water supply; 2) transportation; 3) education (access to free schools); 4) recreation (playground within the development or nearby); 5) and disposal of sewage and refuse (National Association of Housing Officials, May 1938).

The site development standard stated: “Each public housing project should be conceived as a neighborhood in itself or as a component part of a neighborhood and the project plan should relate the houses and other facilities to the existing and prospective neighborhood development.” Site development standards included suggestions to: 1) include a range of dwelling sizes to accommodate a variety of family sizes; 2) design site coverage between 20 and 35 percent to provide adequate open space for sunlight and air circulation as well as green space to look at and use; 3) design the site plan to prevent heavy traffic traversing the site; 4) include sidewalks with easy grades to provide good



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access to dwelling unit doors; 5) construct housing with proper drainage; 6) install landscaping on the site; and 7) include community facilities such as an assembly or recreation room.

Some standards for individual dwelling units were mandated: 1) the inclusion of a kitchen, bath and toilet facilities in each unit; 2) the minimum accommodation for a couple with one child was two rooms for sleeping although a living area could be arranged to provide privacy in order to count as one sleeping area; 3) the minimum floor area for a living room to accommodate a family of two or three persons was 150 square feet; 4) the major bedroom was not to have less than 120 square feet; and 5) a minor bedroom was not to be less than 80 square feet in size. The standard mandated that the windows of every room opened and that the arrangement of windows and doors was designed for cross-ventilation to provide adequate daylight and air circulation (National Association of Housing Officials, May 1938).



## Low-Income Housing in Texas from 1937 to 1940

The Corpus Christi Planning Commission gathered on February 14, 1938 to consider a federally-funded and city-sponsored slum clearance project. The meeting was arranged at the suggestion of local attorney Cecil E. Burney, who was familiar with public housing developments underway in other Texas communities including Austin, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Temple, all of which were granted funding from the USHA under the Housing Act of 1937 (*Corpus Christi Caller*, 1938) (*The Architectural Forum*, May 1938).

Other Texas cities that participated in the USHA program between 1938 through 1941 were: Baytown, Brownsville, Dallas, Laredo, Texarkana and Waco (National Park Service, 2004). The population recorded by U.S. Census Bureau for 1940 compared to the number of public housing developments constructed in each city and the number of housing units per project is shown in **Table 2**. Under the Housing Act of 1937, Corpus Christi developed more public housing per capita than most other participating Texas cities.

**Table 2: USHA Projects 1938-1941 in Texas**

City Name	1940 Population*	No. of Public Housing Projects Constructed by USHA under Housing Act of 1937**	No. of Units per City Constructed by USHA under Housing Act of 1937**
Austin	87,930	5	334
Baytown	No Data	2	60
Brownsville	22,083	2	198
Corpus Christi	57,301	3	490
Dallas	294,734	3	1,002
El Paso	96,810	2	660
Fort Worth	177,662	2	502
Houston	384,514	5	1,779
Laredo	39,274	1	272
San Antonio	253,854	5	2,554
Temple	15,344	2 ***	82***
Texarkana	17,019	2	264
Waco	55,982	1	102

Sources: \*Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850-2000; \*\*NRHP - Multiple Property Nomination: Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949 unless otherwise noted; \*\*\*The information for the Temple public housing units was from a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Memo regarding the reconstruction of housing constructed under the Housing Act of 1937 (David M. Cohen, 1993).



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### Assessing the Need for Public Housing in Corpus Christi

Cecil E. Burney brought the concept of public housing before the Corpus Christi Planning Commission on February 4, 1938. Mayor A. C. McCaughan was named chair of a committee to investigate the possibilities of pursuing a preliminary study to identify which slums and how many slums in the city should be cleared in the initial effort. The first step toward public housing in Corpus Christi was to assess the need for low-income housing in the city. If the study confirmed the need for slum clearance, the *Corpus Christi Caller* reported that the next steps would be the creation of a local housing authority, pursuit of federal funding (available through the Housing Act of 1937), and the construction of low-rent units (Slum Clearance Project Studies By Planning Board, 1938). By April 1938, The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) was established and Cecil E. Burney was named as the Housing Authority Chairman. Nat W. Hardy, a local architect, was named as chief architect for three planned public housing developments for three populations, “white persons, negroes and persons of Mexican descent” (Nat Hardy Named Chief Architect For Slum Project, 1938). The development of segregated housing developments was consistent with the practice of segregation prevalent at that time in Texas and across the country, and later abandoned with the Civil Rights Movement and its accompanying legislation. Although Corpus Christi provided public housing for all three populations of low-income citizens, not all cities during that period did so; the 1941 Annual Report of the Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville stated, “no attempt is made to discriminate as to the nationality of tenants in these Projects except that there is no provision for colored tenants” (Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville, Texas, 1941).

The results of the formal housing survey collecting data evaluating slum clearance needs in the city were announced in April 1938 in the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (combined Sunday edition). City-wide, there were more than 500 dwellings in which five to nine persons shared one bedroom, more than 1,200 families only had access to outdoor toilets, 68 dwellings had absolutely no access to toilet facilities, and more than 500 families lived in dwellings with no floors. The newspaper reported the living situations of 517 African American families were surveyed with the following results:

- 182 dwellings had electric lights and 335 were lit with lamps (such as kerosene lamps)
- 311 were using outdoor toilets and 32 had no toilet facilities
- 280 had no running water
- 66 dwellings had no floors
- 144 had some sort of yard whereas the rest had no yard at all
- 364 dwellings were determined to be fire hazards
- 133 dwellings were found to be satisfactory

Photographs taken in 1938 illustrate examples of the types of dwellings surveyed to identify substandard housing (**Figures 2 through 8**). This documentation was important because to construct new housing funded by the Housing Act of 1937, an equal number of substandard housing units had to be destroyed. One purpose of the law was the elimination of slum housing with the purpose of upgrading the housing stock and improving sanitary conditions. **Figure 2** depicts substandard housing on the D. N. Leathers I site prior to their demolition to make room for the D. N. Leathers I public

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housing development. The 1938 housing study data was part of the information required to apply for federal funds to finance public housing developments. A representative from USHA traveled to Corpus Christi to meet with the Housing Authority in April 1938 to discuss the application process for the federal housing funds (Corpus Christi Caller-Times, 1938). This process led to the construction of D. N. Leathers I.

**Figure 2: Northside children in 1938 on the railroad track next to the future D. N. Leathers I site**



Source: Historic photo from Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

Figure 3: Woman and child in substandard housing on April 21, 1938



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photograph by Doc McGregor

Figure 4: Photograph labeled "Typical Negro Housing" and dated April 21, 1938



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photograph by Doc McGregor

Figure 5: Substandard housing near the intersection of Sam Rankin and Antelope Streets c. 1938



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photograph by Karl Swafford Company

Figure 6: Child stands inside screen door of house at Sam Rankin and Antelope Streets, c. 1938



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photograph by Karl Swafford Company

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**Figure 7: Houses surveyed on April 21, 1938, to evaluate housing needs in D. N. Leathers I area**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photograph by Doc McGregor

**Figure 8: Houses photographed in 1938 located on the future D. N. Leathers I site**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

## Advent of Public Housing in Corpus Christi

In response to the housing surveys conducted in 1938, the city of Corpus Christi established The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority), a requirement to apply to participate in the federal program created by the Housing Act of 1937. In 1938, Cecil E. Burney was chairman of the Housing Authority and other members of the Housing Authority Board were John T. Wright, the Rev. Orville Cawker, Henry Couret and G. O. Garrett. The Housing Authority applied to the federal government to fund three public housing developments:

- Kinney Place (now George W. Wiggins Homes) at 2320 Buford St. (USHA Project Tex 8-1R-A)
- Navarro Place at 160 N. 19<sup>th</sup> St. (USHA Project Tex 8-2R)
- D. N. Leathers I at 1001 Coke St. (USHA Project Tex 8-3R)

The Housing Authority Board selected Nat W. Hardy by secret ballot to be the chief architect for all three projects. Three supervising architects were also selected: R. L. Vogler, Westfall & Wade and Brock, Roberts & Anderson. The newspaper reported that each of the supervising architects was to be assigned one of the projects. Assistants to the supervising architects included R. S. Colley, Roy Young, Harmon & Co., Charles Huie, Guy Newhall and Otis Johnson (Nat Hardy Named Chief Architect For Slum Project, 1938). However, per architectural drawings prepared in 1939 for all three projects, the roles changed and Henry H. Wade was the chief architect for all three projects.

The Housing Authority filed an application for \$937,000 to develop all three projects by early July 1938, with the assistance of a representative of USHA (Here Is Why Social Workers Say Slum Clearance Needed, 1938). On July 25, 1938, the *Corpus Christi Caller* reported the construction of Kinney Place was underway and that all the land for Project Tex 8-3R (D. N. Leathers I) had been optioned; also the land for the Navarro Place development had been 70 percent optioned; however, the locations for the latter two had not yet been announced (Officials Study New Housing Plan, 1939).

A USHA administrator, Nathan Straus, traveled to Corpus Christi to dedicate the first public housing site in early March of 1939. The dedication included the demolition of substandard housing located on the site. On March 3, 1939, during Straus' visit, the prominent local photographer, Doc McGregor, took the photograph included in **Figure 9** that shows Cecil E. Burney pointing to the model of Kinney Place/George Wiggins Homes; to Burney's right is Nathan Straus, USHA administrator and to Straus' right in the dark suit and white hair is Mayor A. C. McCaughan (*Corpus Christi Caller*, 1939).

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Figure 9: Cecile E. Burney points to a model of Kinney Place (now George W. Wiggins Homes)



Source: La Retama Library Vertical File for Kinney Place, "Straus Dedicates Site for Local Housing Project," photo by Doc McGregor

By October 29, 1939, the cost of the three projects had risen to \$1,750,000. The actual construction cost for the projects was: \$375,000 for 158 units at Kinney Place; \$600,000 for 212 units at Navarro Place; and \$300,000 for 98 units<sup>4</sup> at D. N. Leathers I. The remainder of the cost was for other development expenses such as land acquisition, administration and construction of recreational facilities associated with the housing units. In 1939, Cecil E. Burney was the chairman of the Housing Authority Board and John T. Wright was the finance chairman. Also on the Housing Authority Board were Henry Courtret, G. O. Garrett, and the Rev. R. O. "Orville" Cawker. The Housing Authority administrative staff included Finley Vinson, Director; George Wiggins, Assistant Director; L. M. Hulburt, Tenant Selection Supervisor; Jim Steele, Jr., Construction Engineer; an office secretary and a stenographer (both un-named in the newspaper article) (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1939).

The projects required the demolition of approximately 450 substandard dwellings to comply with the Housing Act of 1937, 350 of which were eliminated as the land was cleared for construction of the public housing developments. The Housing Authority reported that all but two of the owners of the 450 dwellings selected for demolition had reached an agreement regarding the price the Housing Authority would pay for their residential property. All the residents of the 450 substandard housing

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<sup>4</sup> The original D. N. Leathers Project was planned as 98 units. However, due to the high demand 24 more units were constructed (for a total of 122 units) before the official dedication in 1941 (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1952).





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units were given assistance in relocating upon request and at no cost to themselves, per Director Vinson (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1939).

The site plan for each of the housing projects developed in Corpus Christi under the Housing Act of 1937 utilized the concept of “pedestrian streets” shown in **Figure 10**. The front doors of parallel rows of apartment buildings faced a named pedestrian street such as Fisk Court at D. N. Leathers I. An individual sidewalk connected each unit to the named central pedestrian street/sidewalk. The back doors of parallel rows of buildings faced into back yards for each apartment. Two T-shaped poles supporting a clothes line for each unit was located in the back yard space. This site design was selected to foster a feeling of community and to create a neighborhood atmosphere.

The structure of all three public housing developments consisted of a concrete frame with a concrete floor and concrete roof. All three projects were similar in design and included one, two and three-bedroom units. Each project included water service, sanitary sewer connections, electrical service and natural gas service. The cost of utilities was included in the rent. The 1939 rents were estimated to range from \$12 to \$14.50 per month (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1939). These rental rates offered affordable housing that was also safe and sanitary and gave qualified residents the opportunity to escape substandard housing. Rents charged for the substandard housing surveyed in 1938 were found to average \$12.10 per month for African Americans (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1938), and neighborhood rents for substandard housing might exceed that amount per appraisals conducted in 1938 in preparation for the construction of D. N. Leathers I (Tex 8-3R). The following are three examples of substandard housing with higher rental rates than D. N. Leathers I:

- 1109 ½ Josephine St. - \$25 per month rent (including cost of water) for house in fair condition; three rooms; approximately 500 sq. ft.; gas, electric and water service; and an outdoor toilet.
- 1822 Nueces St. - \$18 per month rent (including cost of water) for a house in fair condition with two rooms; approximately 290 sq. ft.; gas, electricity, and water service; water, toilet and shower located in shared facility outside of the house.
- 1518 Lake St. - \$16 per month rent (including cost of water) for a house in fair condition with three rooms; approximately 440 sq. ft.; gas, electricity, and water service; water inside but no sink and an outdoor toilet (The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi Archives, 1938).

Figure 10: Site Plan of D. N. Leathers showing building locations, building numbers, address numbers, building types and “pedestrian streets”: Tuskegee, Fisk and Xavier Courts



1997 SITE PLAN - D. N. LEATHERS I HOUSING

Source: Site Plan drawn by HNTB, 2017; referenced “Interior Modernization Project” Drawings by Wm. T. Mumme, Architects, Inc. (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

## Historic Events and Themes that Shaped Life at D. N. Leathers I

The timeline in **Table 3** shows the chronology of events related to the evolution of local industry, neighborhood development in the area surrounding D. N. Leathers I, changes to schools, development of infrastructure and evolution of community services that affected the residents of D. N. Leathers I.

**Table 3: Timeline Related to D. N. Leathers I**

Year	Event
1878	Public Free School for Colored established by Solomon Melvin Coles
1910	La Colonia Mexicana neighborhood platted
1916	Hillcrest neighborhood platted
1917	Holy Cross Catholic School opened on N. Staples Street to serve African American children
1925	Solomon M. Coles School completed at 924 Winnebago St. for grades 1-8
1926	Construction of the Port of Corpus Christi (Port) completed
1926	Charles W. Crossley Elementary School opened to serve Hillcrest residents
1930	Oil discovered in Nueces County
1934	Solomon M. Coles School granted full accreditation for both elementary and secondary students
1937	United States Housing Act (Wagner-Steagall Act) passed into law
1938	Corpus Christi undertook a “slum study” of substandard housing
1938	The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi established
1939	Kinney Place (later named “George Wiggins Homes”) opened
1940	Navarro Place opened
1940	Naval Air Station Corpus Christi was established
<b>1940</b>	<b>D. N. Leathers Center (now D. N. Leathers I) opened</b>
1941	U.S. entered World War II
1942	Mary McLeod Bethune Day Nursery opened on Howard Street for low-income families
1945	Booker T. Washington Elementary School opened
1945	Solomon M. Coles became a Junior-Senior High School
1945	T. C. Ayers Recreation Center opened
1948	African Americans first allowed to move into Hillcrest west of Kennedy Avenue
1952	D. N. Leathers II (200 units) constructed
1952	Fire involving two large and ten smaller petroleum tanks at General American Tank Storage Terminal facility located between D. N. Leathers II and the Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks
1954	Schools legally desegregated in Corpus Christi
1959	Harbor Bridge construction completed (to replace old bascule bridge)
1962	Interstate 37 construction completed
1964	Local agency created to assist residents of Hillcrest, Ayers, Leathers, and Coles residents, “HIALCO”
1965	Holy Cross Catholic School closed
1967	Leathers Community Center opened



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Year	Event
1967	Solomon M. Coles Junior-High School closed
1968	Solomon M. Coles School reopened as a junior high to replace Northside Junior High
1969	North Side Manor Apartments opened sponsored by St. Matthew Baptist Church
1970	Mary McLeod Bethune Day Nursery (branch location) opened at 1002 Coke St.
1971	T. C. Ayers Swimming Pool (located across street from D. N. Leathers I Office) is dedicated
1972	T. C. Ayers Recreation Center addition completed including pavilion with a basketball court
1973	Booker T. Washington Elementary School closed and Solomon M. Coles School re-opened as an elementary school
1983	International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) Hall closed in Northside
1987	Elliott Grant Homes (for elderly residents) opened
1990	George N. Hodge, Jr. hired as manager of D. N. Leathers I and II and organized reform
1999	D. N. Leathers II demolished (after repeated flooding)
c. 2000	Charles W. Crossley Elementary School closed
2006	Solomon M. Coles Special Emphasis High School opened
2017	D. N. Leathers I closed*

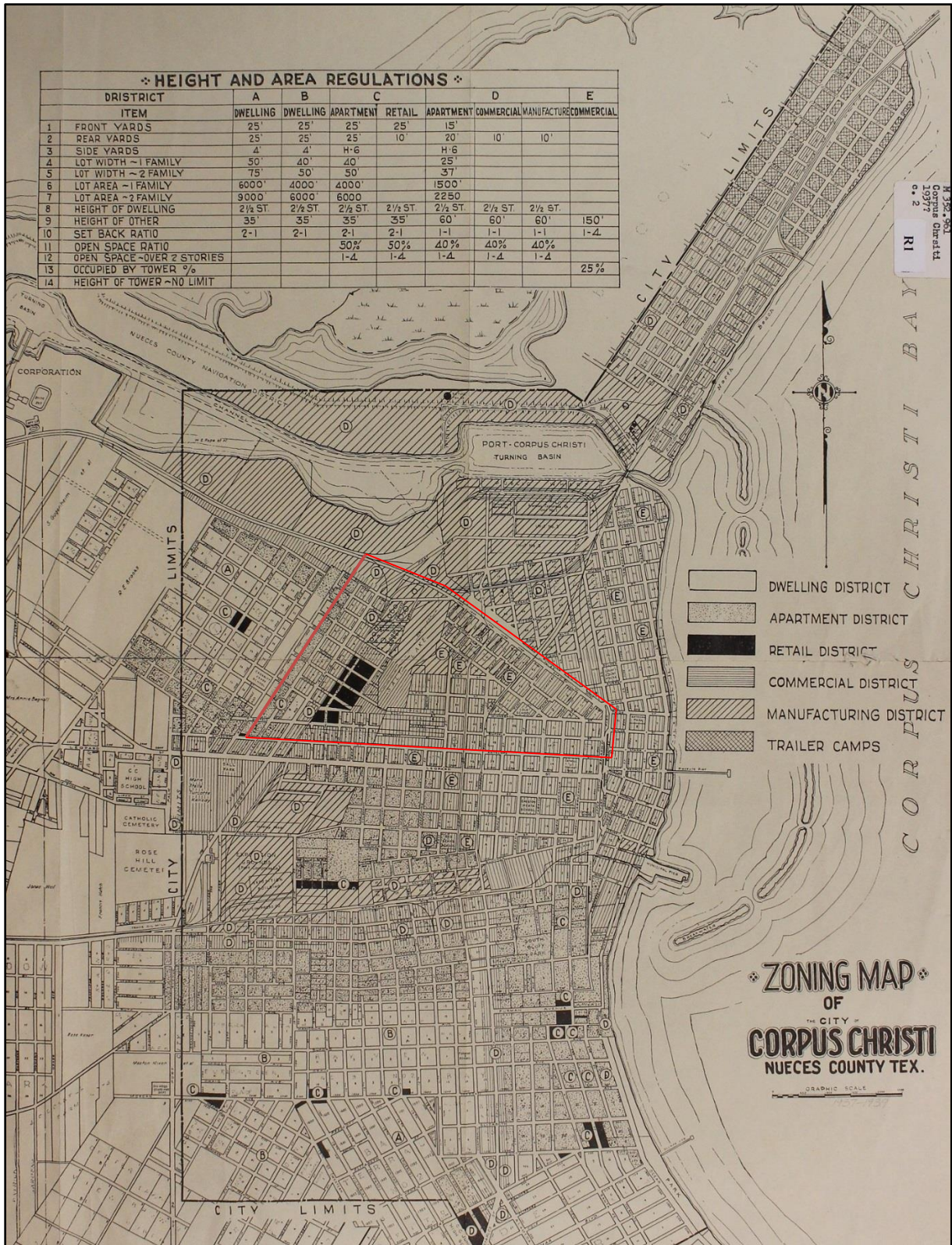
Source: Northside History Project Report (TxDOT - 2016); \*The Housing Authority reported D. N. Leathers I closed in January 2017 after all tenants were relocated.

### Northside Neighborhood Development

The site for the D.N. Leathers I project was in an area just a few blocks west of land platted in the original City Plan drawn in 1852. La Colonia Mexicana was platted in 1910 in the area south of W. Broadway Street and east of Salt Lake. By 1916, the Hillcrest neighborhood west of Kennedy Avenue was platted approximately one-quarter mile west of the future D. N. Leathers site. Construction of the deep- water Port of Corpus Christi (Port), completed in 1926, brought jobs to Corpus Christi during the construction phase and as well as jobs related to shipping and receiving once the Port was operational. The Port was located approximately 0.75 miles north of the future D. N. Leathers I site. The completion of the Port transformed Corpus Christi from a small fishing village to a burgeoning city. The discovery of oil in Nueces County in 1930 brought the construction of oil storage tanks and refineries to the Port area. By 1937, the General American Tank Storage Terminal Company (Co.) facility was located along the western edge of the Salt Lake Tract and about 500 feet north of the D. N. Leathers I site.

The Zoning Map of City of Corpus Christi dated 1937 (**Figure 11**) shows that the city limits included the North Beach area and the Port to the north; the Bay of Corpus Christi on the east; Louisiana Avenue to roughly Baldwin Boulevard to the south; and then the western city limit boundary followed Port Avenue northward until it reached Agnes Street and then went due north to the Port Channel.

Figure 11: Corpus Christi Zoning Map (1937); polygon indicates area open to African Americans



Source: City of Corpus Christi, La Retama Library, Local History Map Collection



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A review of Corpus Christi city directories and the oral history interviews collected for the Northside History Project Report (TxDOT 2016), indicated that the area outlined in red on **Figure 11** was the area open to African Americans to establish residences and businesses from the late 1800s through the 1950s. Prior to the early 1930s, the area had been occupied primarily by persons of Latin American descent, but as that demographic grew, they expanded into areas south of Leopard Street. On the other hand, during the laws and customs of segregation from the 1930s through 1950s (See **Segregation Section** on page 37), the African American population grew within a relatively confined area outlined in red on **Figure 11**; an area generally bounded by Kennedy Avenue on the west; W. Broadway Street on the north and east; and approximately Antelope Street on the south. Within this area is where the African American businesses, churches and schools were located and where Daniel Newton Leathers, the namesake of D. N. Leathers I, lived and operated his businesses.

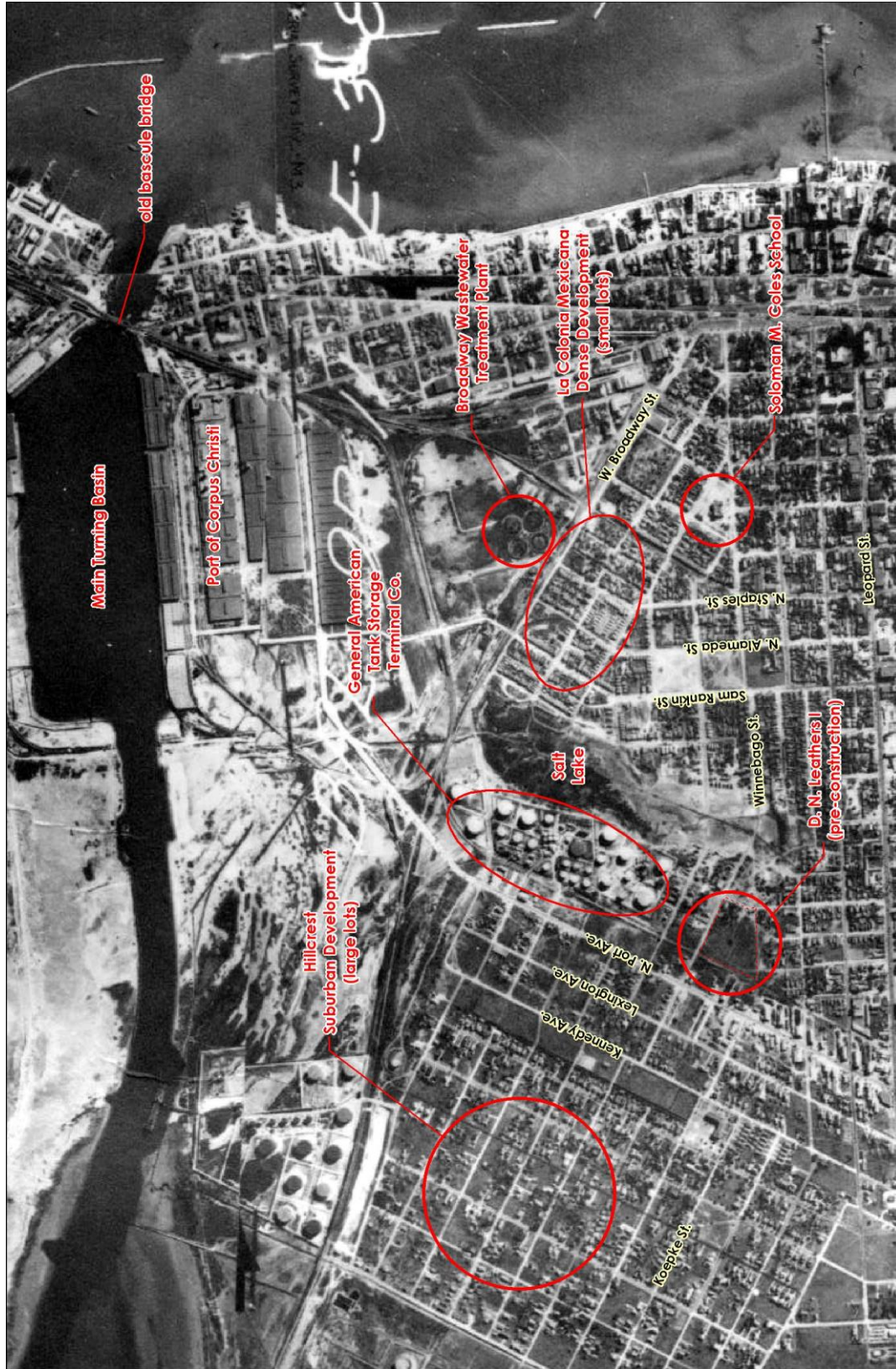
Daniel Newton Leathers was an influential businessman in the Northside community. He was born in Selma, Alabama, and a graduate of Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama. Mr. D. N. Leathers moved to Corpus Christi in the early 1900s and was an active member and supporter of the Congregational Church. In Corpus Christi, he went into partnership with a friend from college to open a grocery. Although that initial business enterprise failed, he subsequently opened a grocery and general merchandise store for which he was the sole proprietor. His store was located on Chipito Street, near the location of his former partner's store. With a customer base that included all races, he eventually built his store into a successful business and then expanded his business enterprises to include a wholesale business and some real estate holdings. He was a member of the Negro Business League of Texas and organized the Corpus Christi Chapter. He was married with two daughters and three sons. Mr. Leathers was an early leader in the Northside community and died on May 1, 1922 (Leathers, 1941).

The area outlined in red on **Figure 11** was a logical area to consider during the planning and construction of D. N. Leathers I during the late 1930s. By 1937, the entire area around the future site of the D. N. Leathers I was densely developed except for the Salt Lake Tract and the site cleared for the construction of D. N. Leathers I as shown in **Figure 12**.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The land along the west side of Kennedy Avenue appears vacant in **Figure 11**; however, that land is New Bayview Cemetery (also known as Hillcrest Cemetery) and Hillcrest Park (later named Dr. H. J. Williams Memorial Park).

Figure 12: Aerial photograph dated 1938 - D. N. Leathers I site before construction



Source: Annotation by HNTB; detail of historic 1938 Index aerial photograph from the Texas Natural Resources Information Service



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### Schools

D. N. Leathers I was originally intended to house African Americans whose children would attend schools located less than a mile from the D. N. Leathers I site. Holy Cross Catholic School opened in 1917 at 1121 N. Staples St. to educate African American children in first through eighth grade. The city of Corpus Christi constructed a permanent brick school at 934 Winnebago St. in 1925. The school was named Solomon M. Coles School in honor of Mr. Solomon Melvin Coles who, in 1878, established the "Public Free School for Colored," the first school to educate African Americans in Corpus Christi. Solomon M. Coles School initially offered first through eighth grade. African American children who desired further education had to leave Corpus Christi (many moved to San Antonio or Prairie View, Texas) to attend grades nine through twelve and to earn their high school diploma. Solomon M. Coles School was granted full accreditation in 1934 for kindergarten through grade twelve and it functioned as a segregated school where African American children could earn their high school diploma without leaving the city. Solomon M. Coles School was important to the development of the children in D N. Leathers I and the surrounding neighborhood. Robert Campbell and other Coles' teachers were influential figures in the lives of many neighborhood children as illustrated by this story reported in 1989 and paraphrased here:

One day when Robert Campbell, principal of Solomon M. Coles School, was standing in the hall between classes, a student stopped beside the principal and admired Campbell's "gleaming leather shoes." Campbell knew that the student's family could not afford sure fine footwear, but decided that did not mean that the student could not at least experience what it felt like to walk in good footwear. So Campbell pulled off his shoes and let the student wear them for awhile and the student tromped around proudly. Mr. Campbell's wife, Elizabeth, explained that the student "needed that warmth, that fatherly touch, and that's what I think those kids got from Coles" (Villafranca, 1989).

Charles W. Crossley Elementary School was completed in 1926 in Hillcrest to serve children who lived in Hillcrest west of Kennedy Avenue. Prior to the integration of Charles W. Crossley Elementary, Booker T. Washington Elementary School was constructed in 1945 for African American children and Solomon M. Coles School became a junior-senior high school. Former D. N. Leathers I resident, Willie Hardeman, reported that Booker T. Washington Elementary was so crowded in the late 1940s that the school operated two shifts, one in the morning and the second shift in the afternoon. Mr. Hardeman attended school from 8 AM – noon and his sister attended the afternoon shift at Booker T. Washington. To alleviate the school crowding, in the early 1950s George Washington Carver Elementary School was opened in the new development created for African Americans known as "New Addition" off Greenwood Drive north of Cliff Maus Field Municipal Airport on the south side of Corpus Christi (Hardeman W., 2017).

Bernice Leonard, wife of D.N. Leathers manager Carlyle Leonard, opened the Mary McLeod Bethune Day Nursery (Bethune Day Nursery) in 1942, the first licensed day care in Corpus Christi. The nursery opened on Howard Street for low-income children of all races. Mrs. Bernice Leonard served as the





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director of the nursery school from its founding until 1986 when she partially retired and handed over the management to Ms. Jimmie McCurn (Rabago, 1993). St. Matthew Baptist Church offered kindergarten classes to African American children in the 1940s and 1950s. By the early 1960s, Charles W. Crossley Elementary was serving children of all races reflecting the integration of the Hillcrest neighborhood.

Soon after integration of schools and neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, schools in Northside began to close. Holy Cross Catholic School closed in 1965. Solomon M. Coles School closed as a junior-senior high school in 1967, but re-opened as a junior high school in the same year to replace Northside Junior High which closed in 1968. Booker T. Washington Elementary School closed its doors in 1973 immediately following Solomon M. Coles' conversion to an elementary school. From 1980 through 2005, Solomon M. Coles functioned as a special emphasis elementary school. Charles W. Crossley closed c. 2000. Solomon M. Coles was repurposed again in 2006, this time as a special emphasis high school.

### Employers

Chemical producer, Southern Alkali Corporation, employed African Americans in the Northside neighborhood beginning before the construction of the Port. Typical jobs of the initial D. N. Leathers residents included barbers, beauticians, janitors, construction workers, domestic servants, and various jobs at downtown hotels (bellmen, housekeepers, etc.). Lichtenstein's Department Store was integrated in the 1950s and hired African Americans for positions including alterations, gift wrapping, and elevator operators. The company promoted people of all races as they gained experience and exhibited the talent and skills required for various positions. Some residents of D. N. Leathers I may have been employed at the Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi after it opened in 1940. Although D. N. Leathers was not located near NAS Corpus Christi, the segregation present at that time would have forced families of African American servicemen stationed at NAS Corpus Christi to live with their extended family in another city or to live in or near D. N. Leathers I. African American teachers, doctors, dentists and other professionals in the neighborhood who earned incomes too high to qualify for public housing, still resided in the neighborhood surrounding D. N. Leathers I where they operated their businesses.

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### Transportation Infrastructure

When D. N. Leathers I was constructed, the western boundary of the site was the Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks (formerly the San Antonio Uvalde and Gulf). Missouri Pacific was later purchased by Union Pacific. Sometime after 1993, after the demolition of the General American Tank Storage Terminal, the Missouri Pacific/Union Pacific tracks were removed from W. Broadway St. to the southwest along the western boundary of D. N. Leathers I.

In 1959, the Harbor Bridge replaced the 1926 bascule bridge. The Harbor Bridge is sometimes called the “high hat bridge” and it changed the view for the residents on the southern and eastern edges of the D. N. Leathers I project. **Figure 13** shows the view from the upstairs hall window of 1813 Tuskegee Court (Ct.); the D. N. Leathers I Office/Community room is in the foreground to the right and the Harbor Bridge is in the background beyond the Office/Community Room.

**Figure 13: View from upstairs window of 1813 Tuskegee Ct., Harbor Bridge in the background**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Interstate 37 (I-37) was completed in 1962 along the southern side of Buffalo Street (now Martin Luther King Drive), approximately one block south of the southern boundary of the D.N. Leathers I parcel. The controlled-access nature of I-37 terminated the direct connections from D. N. Leathers I to Leopard Street via Culberson, Coke, Cleveland, Carlisle, and Lester Streets. Leopard Street was still a major shopping district when I-37 was completed, although most of the major stores were east of

Brownlee Boulevard. Brownlee Boulevard. was the closest eastward connection to Leopard Street from D. N. Leathers I after I-37 was complete.

### Low-Income Housing Development

There was a strong demand for low-income housing in the D. N. Leathers I area in 1940 and the original 122 units proved inadequate to meet the housing needs of low-income families in the area. D. N. Leathers I opened the same year that NAS Corpus Christi opened and just before the United States officially entered World War II. NAS Corpus Christi brought jobs and contributed to a city-wide population increase. Housing was still segregated during World War II and families of African American sailors needed a place to live near the D. N. Leathers I area, but a project home<sup>6</sup> at D. N. Leathers I may have been hard to obtain because all units were leased immediately upon the project's completion.

Another 200-unit housing project opened in 1952, D. N. Leathers II, also called the "new projects." It was constructed north and northeast of D. N. Leathers I. The development included 90 two-bedroom units, 92 three-bedroom units, and 18 four-bedroom units and one maintenance building (Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi, 1998). D. N. Leathers II was constructed on the Salt Lake Tract, the only available land in the area. Some substandard housing was demolished to construct D. N. Leathers II. However, demolition of substandard housing did not seem as imperative in 1952 as it had been in 1938. The Salt Lake Tract was at a low elevation, generally marshy and flooded frequently. The housing was built on the southern end of the tract, the area of the tract with the highest elevation. The Salt Flats Drainage Ditch was deepened and lined with concrete presumably with the goal of controlling the flooding at the site for the new housing. This infrastructure improvement to the drainage ditch may have worked until the early 1960s. In 1967, Ruthmary Price, Executive Director of the Housing Authority reported, "the Leathers Center [D. N. Leathers I and II] has had a drainage problem for five years since drainage from near Up River Road was connected with a ditch which bisects the center [D. N. Leathers II]" (Nelson, 1967). Flooding events caused accumulations of from 8 to 18 inches of water in approximately half of the D. N. Leathers II units on the following dates: June 1, 1978; November 1-2, 1981; May 31, 1992; April of 1997; and October of 1997 (Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi, 1998). D. N. Leathers II was demolished in 1999 as a result of chronic flooding.

Analysis of historic photographs indicates the D. N. Leathers II site plan design differed from D. N. Leathers I in at least two significant ways. First, the units of the 1952 development were orientated towards vehicular streets rather than pedestrian streets. The second difference was that D. N. Leathers II did not include a clothes line in the back yard of each apartment. The first change reflects the increasing importance of the automobile in American culture. An attached garage or carport was a typical feature of American houses built in the 1950s because most families owned a car or planned to purchase a car. The inclusion of more vehicular streets in the D. N. Leathers II site plan allowed more places to park cars because more families owned cars in 1952 than had owned cars in 1940. The omission of a clothes line indicates that by 1952 people were more likely to use washing machines

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<sup>6</sup> Rather than "apartment," the term "project home" was a used by early D. N. Leathers residents.



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and clothes dryers available in a laundromat rather than to launder clothes by hand or with a wringer washer and then hang them on a clothes line to dry. These changes to typical American life, more dependence on the automobile and laundry machines, had consequences to community culture. There was a sharp decline in the interaction between neighbors as they walked from place to place and as they hung their clothes on a line to dry. The strong spirit of community that had been present just 10 years earlier began to erode. As more and more people purchased window air conditioners and televisions, they spent more time indoors rather than visiting with neighbors while sitting on their porches and in their front yards in the evening. These trends were present nationwide, not just within these two public housing developments.

By 1968, public policy had shifted from government-owned public housing to privately-owned low-income housing constructed with the use of government-backed loans and supported by government rent subsidies. North Side Manor was an example of this shift in public policy. The project was sponsored by St. Matthew Missionary Baptist Church led by the church's pastor, the Rev. Elliott Grant. A *Corpus Christi Times* article stated, "Grant said he felt it [North Side Manor] would provide comfortable housing for low-income families without the stigma he associated with public housing projects" (Deswysen, 1968). It is interesting to note that former D. N. Leathers I residents interviewed who lived there in the 1940s and 1950s reported that there was no stigma attached to public housing at that time. However, by 1968, the Reverend Elliott Grant pointed to what he perceived as a stigma attached to public housing as a reason he promoted the North Side Manor apartments project.

### Community Life at D. N. Leathers I in the 1940s and 1950s

The D.N. Leathers I dedication ceremony gives a glimpse into the importance of the project to the neighborhood and the excitement surrounding the availability of public housing to the African American community. The project opened to residents in December 1940, but the official dedication was delayed until August 1941 when a dedication plaque could be completed and the flag pole installed. The program included opening songs, "God Bless America" and "America" and an opening prayer by the Rev. J. W. Williams. The project manager, Carlyle W. Leonard, said a few words and read a letter from the Tenants Association (of D. N. Leathers I). The Rev. J. W. Brown gave an address on "The Negro and National Defense." H. P. Crawford performed a vocal solo followed by C. C. Sampson's (principal of Solomon M. Coles School) introduction of the Honorable A. C. McCaughan, mayor of Corpus Christi, who gave a short speech. Mr. Finley Vinson, the executive director of the Housing Authority introduced the Housing Authority board followed by the dedicatory address by the Rev. E. B. Joshua. Following the hoisting of the flag on the flag pole in front of the D. N. Leathers office at 1001 Coke St., the Rev. R. L. Palmer, pastor of the St. Paul Methodist Church (later St. Paul United Methodist Church), gave the benediction. Florence Brooks also played several selections on the piano (Negro Housing Project Will Be Dedicated Here This Afternoon, 1941).

Mr. Willie Hardeman lived at D. N. Leathers I with his parents from approximately 1943 to 1954. Mr. Hardeman remembered Mr. Carlyle Leonard offering encouragement to read to all the children at D. N. Leathers I (**Figure 14**). Mr. Leonard's grandfather came to Corpus Christi in about 1867 and worked as a barber as did his son, Carlyle Leonard's father (same first name). Mr. Carlyle Leonard who became



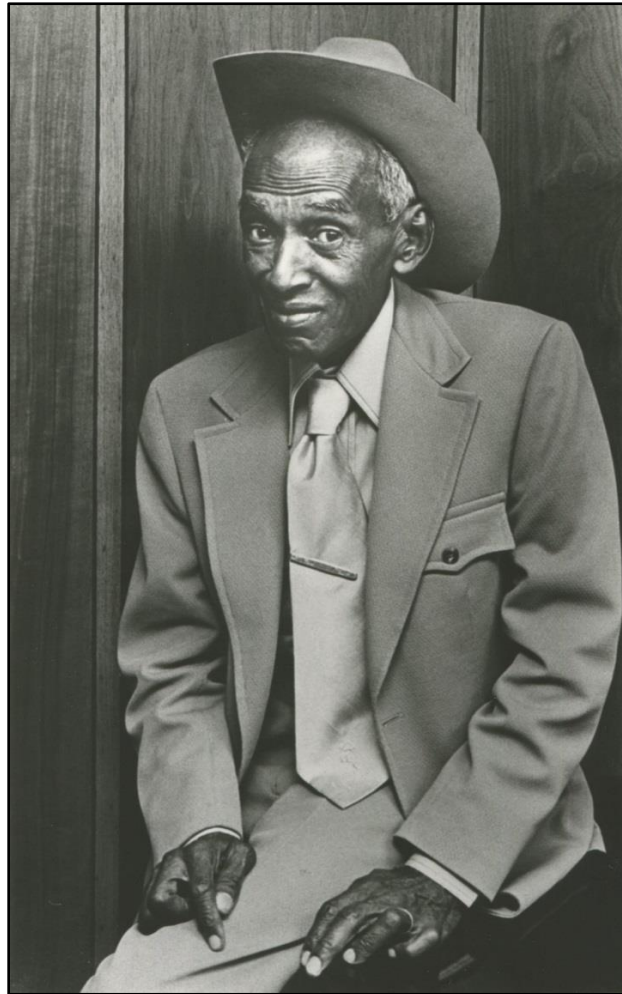
## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

the manager of D. N. Leathers I was born on January 15, 1901 in a house near the intersection of Belden and Tancahua Streets in Corpus Christi. His first job was as an elevator operator at Lichtenstein's Department Store in 1913. The store was owned by the Lichtenstein family who employed Mr. Leonard's mother as a cook. At the age of 16, Leonard decided to leave Corpus Christi to complete preparatory school (grades 9-12) because at that time education for African Americans in Corpus Christi ended at eighth grade. He completed preparatory school and earned a bachelor's degree from Tuskegee Institute while living in a dormitory room next to Dr. George Washington Carver who became famous for his work in education and agricultural advancements. In a 1969 interview for the *Corpus Christi Times*, Leonard said that after graduation from the Tuskegee Institute, he returned to Corpus Christi "to help his people" but he found no work so he traveled to Detroit, attended auto engineering courses and then worked for Chrysler for four years. Next, he traveled to New York and studied at Bodee's School of Prosthetic Dentistry and worked in New York for a year practicing prosthetic dentistry before he again returned to Corpus Christi in 1927 where the only job he could find was as a bell hop at the Nueces Hotel. Leonard met the future President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) and his brother Sam while working at the hotel. With the assistance of LBJ, Leonard secured a job in Fort Worth in the PWA. Leonard returned to Corpus Christi in 1939 where he met Bernice Sanders who was visiting relatives in the city. She was a graduate of Huston College in Austin, taught school in New Orleans and would found the Mary McLeod Bethune Day Nursery in Corpus Christi in 1942. Carlyle Leonard continued to work for the Lichtenstein family and the Johnson family on and off during his life (Blow, 1976) (Ramage, 1969). Mr. Leonard said of the D. N. Leathers' tenants:

They brought their children to the public housing and they took good care of the apartments ...Some of them later had children in college ... They were so proud to have a nice place to live ... Eventually many were able to buy their own homes (Ramage, 1969).

## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

Figure 14: Mr. Carlyle Leonard, manager for D. N. Leathers housing for 15 years beginning in 1940



Source: *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* Photo Archive; donated by Mrs. Carlyle (Bernice) Leonard

In his oral history interview for this project, Mr. Willie Hardeman remembered Mr. Leonard giving him a copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain when Hardeman was about five years old; Hardeman kept the book until he was about 18 years old. He also recalled that an old milk truck was converted to a book mobile to serve the African American community and that while he lived at D. N. Leathers I, African Americans were not allowed to go into the public library. He recalled that the materials in the book mobile that served the African American community consisted of magazines, comic books, and adventure novels about the wild west by Zane Grey. As Mr. Hardeman matured, he recognized the absence of other literature on the book mobile, literature that would have been available to others through the public library.

Persons interviewed for this report who lived in D. N. Leathers in the 1940s and 1950s agreed that it was a strong community consisting of people of all ages. Willie Hardeman recalled, “that whole area was like just one big neighborhood, no matter what street you went on, somebody knew you, and knew where you lived, or knew your parents. ... [It was] one of the best places you could live, at that time ... they kept everything clean. Some of the parents would even plant rose bushes right outside

the door ...” (Hardeman W., 2017). **Figure 15** shows a group of residents posed on Tuskegee Court between landscaping planted by residents next to their front doors and young trees planted by the Housing Authority in the background.

**Figure 15: Residents of D. N. Leathers I on Tuskegee Court, just west of the office, c. 1940**



Source: The Housing Authority Photo Archive; photographer unknown



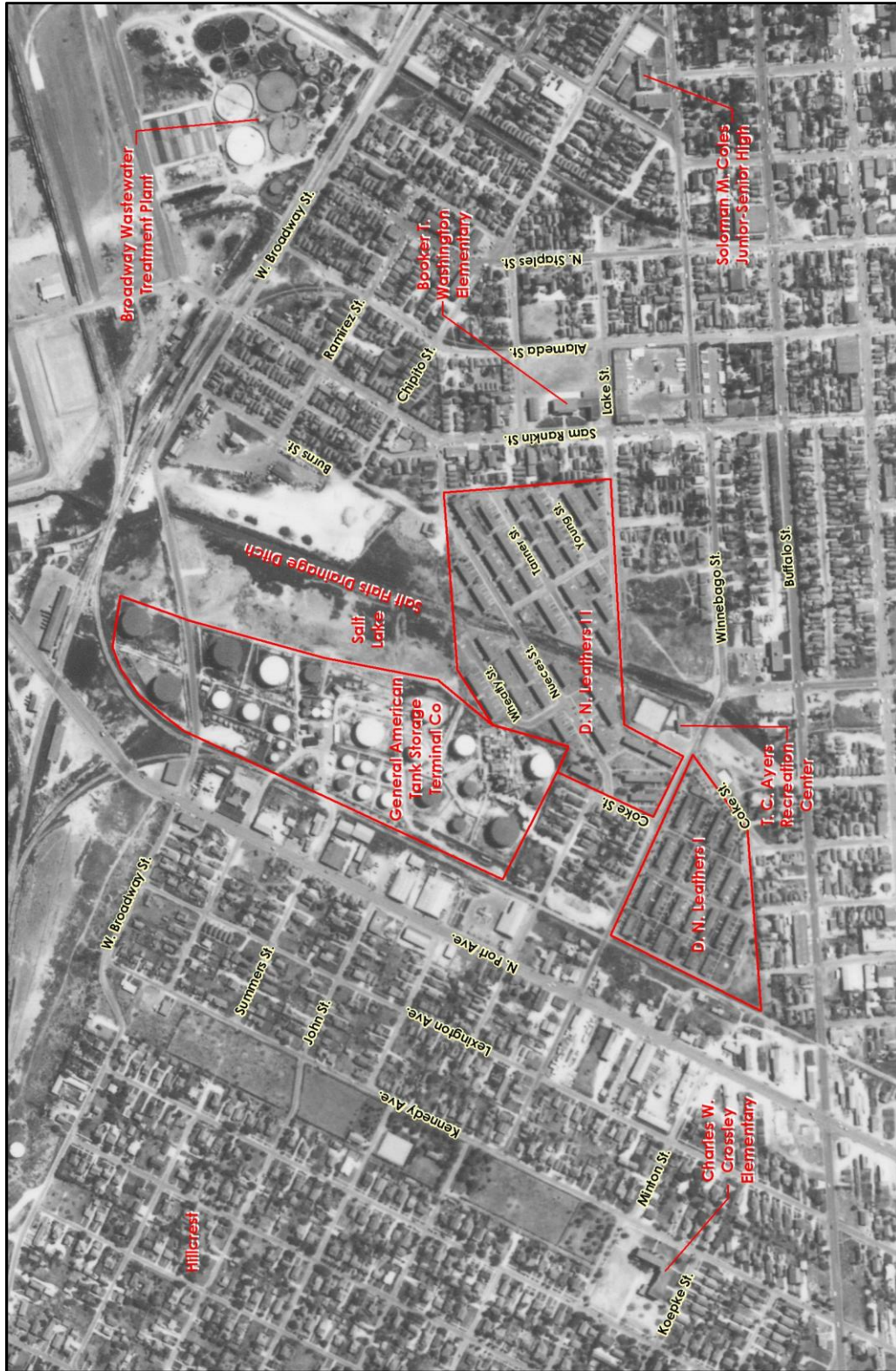
## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Petroleum Tank Fire of 1952

The site selected for D.N. Leathers I was advantageous due to the proximity to employment, schools, and businesses; however, it was also very close to a petroleum tank farm. The location almost became a catastrophic tragedy on May 16, 1952, when a large tank explosion led to a series of tank explosions and an enormous fire at the General American Tank Storage Terminal Co. on a parcel bounded by the Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks on the west and north; the Salt Lake Tract on the east; and the back yards of houses on Nueces Street on the south (about 500 feet north of D. N. Leathers I) (**Figure 16**). The newly constructed D. N. Leathers II was located on the Salt Lake Tract just to the southeast of the petroleum facility. The initial explosion was near the center of the tank storage facility, just northwest of D. N. Leathers II. A 27-block area was evacuated due to threat of smoke and flames. City firemen, U. S. Navy personnel, and volunteers fought the fire for 17 hours (*Corpus Christi Caller*, 1973). Their efforts kept the main fire from spreading beyond the storage facility grounds; however, the initial explosion sent flaming debris onto houses and buildings up to a half a mile away. Flaming oil poured from the ruptured tanks into the Salt Lake Tract just north of the D. N. Leathers II buildings and into the Salt Flats Drainage Ditch. The ditch was dammed at W. Broadway Street to prevent the flaming oil from flowing into the Port Turning Basin (*Corpus Christi Times*, 1952).



Figure 16: Annotated aerial view of D. N. Leathers I and surrounding area in 1956



Source: Annotation by HNTB; detail from historic aerial photograph dated March 17, 1956 from the Texas Natural Resources Information Service



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

The city's safety director, Joseph B. Dunn, recommended legal action in July 1953 against General American Tank Storage Terminal Co. and three other companies for violations of the city's fire prevention ordinance (*Corpus Christi Caller*, 1953). Charges against the four oil companies filed by Fire Marshal Forest Kirby were dropped in early 1955 after the companies came into compliance with city fire ordinances (*Corpus Christi Times*, 1955).

This fire was remembered vividly by oral history interviewees Marsha Shaw Hardeman and Willie Hardeman who were young children living with their families in D. N. Leathers I apartment at that time. Marsha Shaw Hardeman remembers being awakened by a loud boom and she said, "there were police men, running up and down with – with a bull horn, yelling for everyone to, 'Get out, get out, I don't care where you go, but you need to get out of here, because it might blow up, and you'll all be killed.'" Marsha Shaw Hardeman's father drove her mother and sister to Refugio to stay with family until the fire was extinguished, but then her father came back to D. N. Leathers I during the fire to help keep lives and property safe. However, many residents had neither the vehicle to use for evacuation nor a place to which to flee, so they stayed at D. N. Leathers while the fire was fought. Willie Hardeman's family stayed at D. N. Leathers during the fire. Mr. Hardeman remembered Navy men coming to the D. N. Leathers II area by bus every day to fight the fire. He said:

"I would see them in their white uniforms in the morning, and then around five or six o'clock in the afternoon, when they were coming back, those white uniforms would be black with the soot from the fire" (Hardeman W., 2017).

Marsha Shaw Hardeman remembered that their natural gas service for their cook stove was not restored for weeks and they had to cook on hot plates or in relatives' kitchens until their gas stoves were functional again. Ms. Hardeman also remembered a gaseous smell for weeks after the fire was extinguished; and that the smell seemed to give people headaches (Hardeman M. S., 2017). However, neither Marsha Shaw Hardeman nor Willie Hardeman reported any physical damage to the buildings of D. N. Leathers I or II. The public housing was relatively fire-resistant because it was composed of a structural concrete frame and clad with hollow, terra-cotta blocks. However, had the fire not been fought so successfully, the lives and property of D. N. Leathers residents could have been lost. Fire Chief John Carlisle asked photographer Red Moores from the *Corpus Christi Times* to take a photo after the fire to document how close the fire had come to buildings, residences, other storage tanks and oil refineries (*Corpus Christi Times*, 1952).

## Segregation

Legislation commonly referred to as “Jim Crow” laws were enacted primarily in southern and border states between 1877 through the mid-1960s. These laws varied from state to state and city to city but included mandated segregation along racial/ethnic lines of schools, churches, cemeteries, public restrooms, hotels, restaurants, playgrounds, buses and trains and other public places. The segregation laws discriminated against African Americans, and in some places, also against persons of Mexican descent. Some segregation was mandated by law and other segregation was accomplished through customs and social pressure, sometimes referred to as “Jim Crow Etiquette” which was behavior taught by whites and learned by African Americans (and sometimes people of Mexican descent) to establish a social order expected by whites (Pilgrim, 2012). Texas segregation laws required separate train cars for “white and Negro” passengers as well as separate waiting areas in train stations. In 1925, racially segregated schools were mandated as were separate branches of all county free libraries. Separate seating on all buses was mandated in 1943 (Bringing History Home, 2005). Residential segregation was sometimes mandated by local ordinances and in other instances accomplished through deed restrictions established as subdivisions were developed. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, restaurant, hotel, sports venue, theater and other business owners reserved the right to serve or not serve whomever they wished, a practice resulting in widespread segregation. By the mid-1960s, court decisions, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, federal investigations, the Civil Rights Movement as well as a change in attitudes within society brought about the end of Jim Crow laws although individual prejudice continues to produce injustice (Calvert, 2013).

The Housing Authority was established in 1938 when segregation was a societal norm in southern states. The site for D. N. Leathers I was selected because it was within the geographic area in Corpus Christi where African Americans were accepted, although other races and ethnicities were also present. Many African Americans operated businesses in the area near D. N. Leathers I and generally all races and ethnicities were welcome at the restaurants, schools, churches, stores, funeral homes, clubs, and parks located in that area. In the 1940s and 1950s, due to segregation, almost all African Americans lived on the east side of the Northside neighborhood, east of Kennedy Avenue, and the result was a strong, cohesive community.



## **D. N. Leathers I History Project Report**

### **Community Life in the 1940s and 1950s**

Forced segregation had many disadvantages which are easily discernable today such as schools that only received old books with missing pages, band uniforms that might need mending, and limited access to library materials (Hardeman W., 2017). More importantly, segregation meant a lack of freedom of choice in dining, shopping, and entertainment and the underlying racism and fear fostered a lack of opportunity for good paying jobs and blocked the way toward many professional paths for African Americans and others who suffered under segregation.

People interviewed for this project who lived in D. N. Leathers I as children in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s maintain that they were not necessarily aware of the problems of a segregated society as children. As they got older, the problems became more apparent. However, the childhood memories of people interviewed who grew up in D. N. Leathers were predominantly positive because interviewees felt as though they had the things that really mattered. Like living in a clean and safe place surrounded by people who they knew, trusted and generally liked. Oral history interviews for this project revealed that residents of D. N. Leathers looked after each other's children and shared what they had, including groceries and meals, with their neighbors. Local merchants allowed people credit for groceries until they got paid so children did not go hungry. Schools, churches, shops and recreational opportunities were within easy walking distance. Well respected doctors lived in the neighborhood and took care of residents. The teachers and coaches are remembered as being nurturing and for genuinely caring about their students. The sense of being loved and accepted formed the foundation upon which the interviewees built their lives. The interviewees became good citizens, good people, and have helped others to succeed and live good lives. The emphasis on education in the African American community in Corpus Christi enabled many young people to succeed in ways that their parents could barely have dreamed. For example, Marsha Shaw Hardeman was a school teacher in Corpus Christi until she retired, serves as the choir director of Holy Cross Catholic Church, is a Housing Authority Commissioner and a member of many other civic groups in the city. Willie Hardeman worked for the Secretary of the Army Personnel Management Office in the Pentagon and for the Federal Aviation Administration Personnel Office in Washington, D. C. and in Atlanta, Georgia before returning to Corpus Christi to retire.

## Integration – Life in Corpus Christi as an African American in the 1960s

Housing and employment opportunities began to open up for African Americans in the mid-1960s and people started relocating from D. N. Leathers I and II and the surrounding area to the south side of the city or to other cities. In 1968, the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* published a 20-page supplement titled, “The Negro in Corpus Christi.” This supplement offered an insight into the African American perspective in Corpus Christi in 1968 and included articles on the history of the Northside; churches, housing, education, job opportunities, the poor, population distribution of African Americans within the city, businesses, racial tension, voices of youth and other topics related to the lives and opinions of African Americans living in Corpus Christi.

There was an article titled, “The College Graduates Don’t Return” within the 1968 supplement (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1968). The article stated that less than ten percent of Corpus Christi’s college graduates come back to Corpus Christi after getting their degrees. Robert Floyd was a member of the Solomon M. Coles High School class of 1965 that included 37 graduates. Eight of Floyd’s class went on to college, but few were expected to return to Corpus Christi. The article stated that the fact that few graduates returned meant that there was only a “small professional class in the Negro community. It forms a cycle — young Negro graduates don’t return because there are so few here with their education and then, because they don’t come back, the professional group remains small.” On the other hand, Irvin Brown, president of the local chapter of the NAACP in 1968 was quoted in the article as follows:

I don’t think it is the atmosphere here which keeps our young Negro graduates from returning ... I chose Corpus Christi because it seemed more liberal than a lot of cities. The problem here is the lack of jobs and housing. The situation in those areas is enough to keep a bright young Negro who has his degree from coming back here or coming here period.

The article also included a quote about children living in D. N. Leathers:

Many of the youngsters from the project [public housing project] are really motivated to go to college,” said one Negro. “They’ve been told the only way to better themselves is to get a degree, and despite fantastic odds, some are trying hard. They believe what they’ve been told — that a college degree will open doors. They don’t know yet that it really isn’t true. It will make some difference of course, but discrimination is still going to be strong.

The supplement reported on the difficulty that African Americans experienced in finding jobs other than as servants or laborers. The supplement article titled, “Help Wanted, finding a Good Job is Still Difficult, stated, “In 1955, when Corpus Christi hired its first Negro fireman, he had a master’s degree and took the job because he was unable to find a teaching position here.” It went on to say, “Recently, leaders were told that a white insurance company would hire a Negro – provided he had a master’s degree. One applied and was offered a job collecting insurance premiums from Negro customers.” The article explained that if an order would come down from the top of a national company to hire



#### **D. N. Leathers I History Project Report**

more African Americans, the order would filter down to persons actually doing the hiring and if those persons are prejudiced, “then they can effectively keep a man from being employed. There are all kinds of ways, from foot dragging to application juggling. Meanwhile, the guy has to feed his family so he goes and gets a job, usually back in the servant-laborer category, rather than fight all the way back up to the top.” The article went on to note that there were no African American plumbers, electricians, bank tellers, car salesmen, news reporters, or ambulance drivers at that time in Corpus Christi. The city did employ some African Americans and the Steelworkers Union was said to be truly integrated and the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) had a local African American chapter. In general, more good-paying jobs were effectively closed to African Americans than there were jobs open to them (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1968).

In the 1968 supplement, two families recounted their struggles to purchase a home in a neighborhood that did not yet have any African American residents. Both couples were well educated and earned the income needed to live in the neighborhoods where they wanted to purchase a home. They sought housing in the historically white neighborhoods because they wanted to purchase a larger, nicer home than those available in the historically African American neighborhoods. Both families had lived in other states prior to arriving in Corpus Christi and where housing discrimination was not widespread (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1968). They were surprised by the struggle they encountered in the real estate sales community and from the sellers and potential neighbors when they attempted to purchase the homes they desired in Corpus Christi. Mrs. Jean Koh wrote of blatant discrimination that she and her husband experienced in trying to purchase a house in Corpus Christi. She was white and her husband was from Cameroon, West Africa. Both earned degrees from the University of Colorado where they met. Mr. Koh was an engineer and Mrs. Koh was a chemist. Mrs. Koh sent her story of housing discrimination to the City Council in the form of a letter. Her letter expressed, “I cannot help but wonder what the knowledge of this bigotry will do to other young people, like us, at the point when they must decide whether or not to further their education. Why climb a mountain if you know there is no oxygen at the top?” The City Council of Corpus Christi passed an open housing ordinance in 1968 after receiving Mrs. Koh’s letter (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1968).

### **Changes to the Character of the D. N. Leathers I Community**

Oral history interviewee, the Rev. Claude C. Axel, who grew up in D. N. Leathers I, left Corpus Christi in 1964 to live in California. When he returned in 1976, Rev. Axel visited D. N. Leathers I to look at 1836 Xavier Ct., his childhood home. He recalled observing two changes. The property was no longer maintained the way it had been when he lived there, and the housing project was integrated (Axel, 2017). The change in character of D. N. Leathers I as a community was visible through the absence of pride in the way the property was maintained. Most of the Rev. Axel's former neighbors at D. N. Leathers I had moved out of the project as other parts of the city opened to them through integration. The process of integration changed the character of the neighborhood as well as the character of D. N. Leathers I.

The local union chapters of the ILA preferred to stay segregated after integration became law. The local segregated chapters worked well together and unloaded ships by members of the African American chapter beginning at one end of the ship and the white chapter beginning at the other and then meeting in the middle. All of the workers were paid well and got along well. The African American chapters had a seniority system that was not compatible with the other local chapters so they knew it would be difficult to merge the chapters. The African American chapters liked having the ILA Hall in Northside and the hall served as a gathering place for the Longshoremen as well as for the community. President Reagan forced the local chapters to merge/integrate in 1983 and the ILA Hall in Northside was closed. The closing of the ILA Hall seemed to remove the last significant source of steady cash flow to the area and the neighborhood's decline accelerated (TxDOT, 2016). As each person who had a reasonably good and steady job left the Northside community, it was more difficult to find tenants for the public housing project who had the same qualities as the initial group of tenants who were employed but with income low enough to qualify for public housing. The culture of the D. N. Leathers community changed.



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Leadership and Policies Associated with D. N. Leathers I

One key to the quality of life offered for many years at the D. N. Leathers I public housing development was the caliber of the project managers hired and the management oversight by the Housing Authority. A necessary component of good management in successful rental projects is generally careful selection of tenants to ensure a good history of responsible tenancy which generally consists of the following qualities:

- history of timely rent payments to previous landlords
- steady employment history with enough income to cover the cost of rent
- history of taking good care of the property including keeping it clean and doing no intentional damage
- history of obeying the law (no illegal activities such as substance abuse, gambling, etc.)
- history of being a good neighbor to adjacent tenants (not loud or disruptive)

A project filled with tenants that possess these qualities creates a community that is safe for those who live there and which provides a healthy environment in which to raise children. The Housing Authority Executive Director Finley Vinson announced the formation of a Tenant Advisory Committee in September 1940. Members of the selection committee included representatives of “negro – civic, religious and business groups.” The Tenant Advisory Committee members Vinson named were:

- C. C. Sampson, principal of Solomon M. Coles School and president of the “negro Chamber of Commerce”
- Rev. R. L. Palmer, president of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) local chapter (also pastor of St. Paul Methodist Church)
- Rev. E. M. Randon, president of the local Negro Interdenominational Ministers’ Alliance (NIMA)
- Rev. B. E. Joshua, vice president of local NIMA
- Rev. A. I. Henley, pastor of Brooks Chapel Methodist Church (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (Sunday Edition), 1940)

When the project was officially dedicated on August 17, 1941, the flag pole was erected (**Figure 17**) and a dedication plaque (under the porch light) was installed on the administration building (office) at 1001 Coke St. (**Figure 18**) (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1941). Mr. Carlyle Leonard was the manager and a leader and role model in the community.

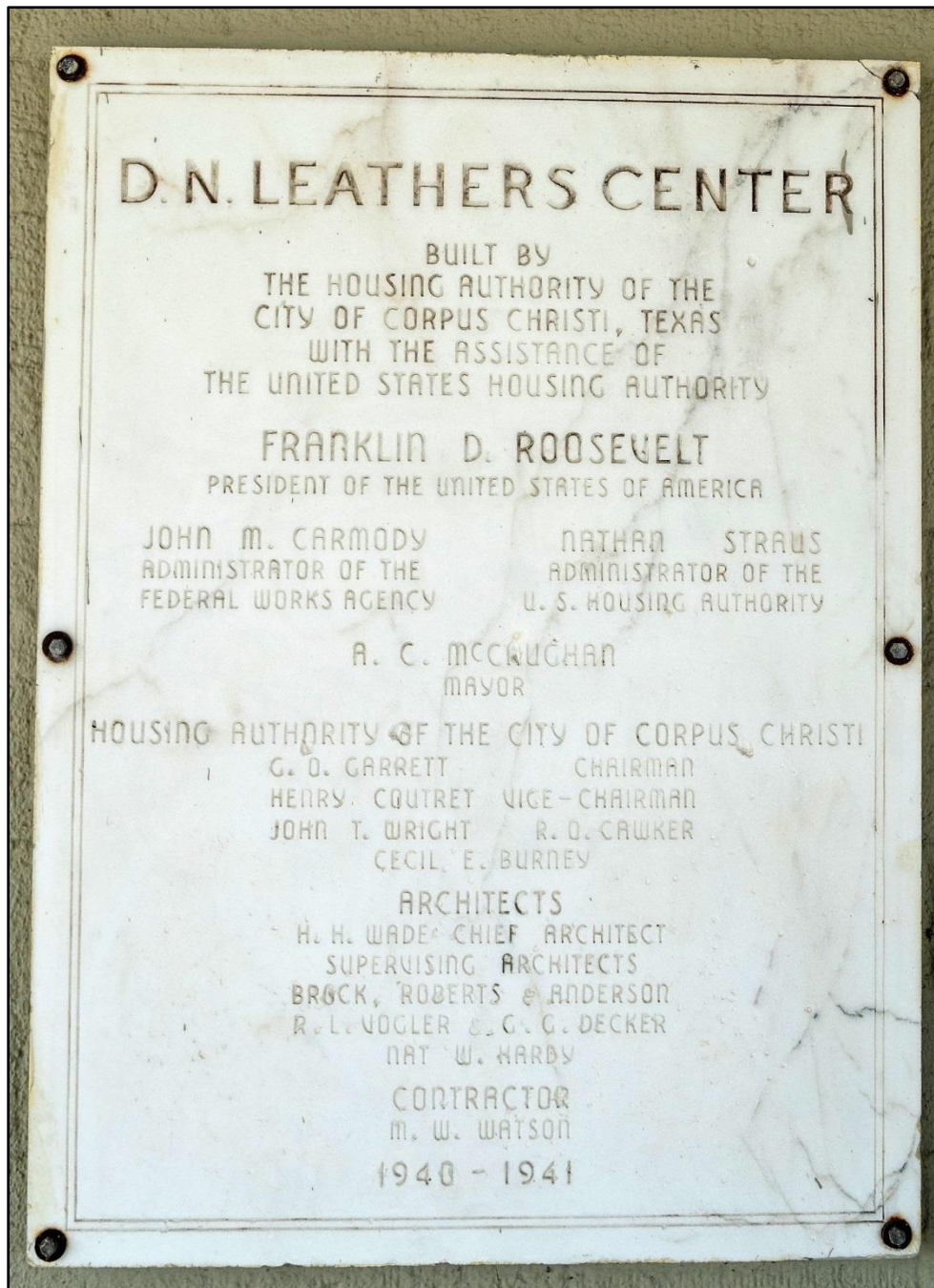


Figure 17: Flag pole in front of the D. N. Leathers I office



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2015

Figure 18: Dedication plaque detail



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

The dedication plaque shows the original name of the project, “D. N. Leathers Center,” constructed by the Housing Authority with assistance from the USHA. Burney was the first chairman of the Housing Authority. Burney became a prominent local attorney, banker, and community leader, but as a young man he championed the advent of public housing in Corpus Christi. He later was a founder and president of the Coastal Bend Community Foundation, a philanthropic organization that gives grants and scholarships in the region (Coastal Bend Community Foundation, 2017).

## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

By the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of D. N. Leathers I in 1952, Carlyle Leonard remained the project manager and Mrs. Edna Garrett was the executive director of the Housing Authority and the board was comprised of Curtis Bell, Chairman; Herbert J. Hebert; A. E. Dabney, Jr.; W. B. McAdams and M. L. Ramirez. Seven of the original tenants were still residents: H. B. Davis, Helen Henderson, Simon Williams, James Gerard, Ethel Rhodes, James Campbell and M.D. Glover. The net annual average income for Leathers' families was \$2,105 in 1952 and the average monthly rent was \$33.85. Mrs. Garret reported that many families had been able to "graduate" into home ownership after living at D. N. Leathers I (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1952).

Ruthmary Price began her career with the Housing Authority as the manager of La Armada I, II, and II, in 1945. By 1962, she was promoted to Executive Director of the Housing Authority and remained in that position until she retired in 1988. **Figure 19** shows her in front of La Armada I just prior to her retirement (Cardenas, Public housing: 'bare necessities', 1983). In an oral history interview, architect James Bright recalled the strong leadership of Ruthmary Price as well as her compassion for public housing residents. Ms. Price described the public housing facilities as "sturdy and sanitary" and added, "Anything more would not be right and anything less would be horrible." She also stated, "The motto of public housing is 'from slums to private housing by way of public housing,' and that is what we hope to accomplish" (Jackson, 1963).

**Figure 19: Ruthmary Price, Executive Director of the Housing Authority, September 28, 1988**



Source: *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* Archive; Photo by Ely Marsh

The Leathers Community Center opened in 1967 when Mrs. Eva Gonzales managed both D. N. Leathers housing projects. The D. N. Leathers Community Center was a former Navy barracks building given to the Housing Authority and moved to a location across the street from the D. N. Leathers I



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

office on Coke Street. The building housed an office for Charles Bolden, coordinator for the neighborhood organization serving residents of Hillcrest, Ayers, Leathers and Coles areas and given the acronym of HIALCO.<sup>7</sup> A well-baby clinic operated by the City – County Health Department was also located in the Leathers Community Center. The Leathers Community Center was also used by the YWCA’s Economic Opportunity Program, classes sponsored by the Texas Employment Commission to teach job skills, and senior citizen recreation groups (*Corpus Christi Times*, 1967). The Leathers Community Center building was demolished between 1985 and 1995 per review of historic aerial photographs (Texas Natural Resource Information Services, 1985) (Google Earth Pro, 1995).

Juan Cardenas of the *Corpus Christi Caller* interviewed Housing Authority management supervisor, Roy C. Cannon, in 1982 about recognition programs for the tenants. One program recognized tenants who kept their apartments in good order and the second recognized tenants who tended and beautified their yards. Many of the lawns on Xavier Court were especially well tended at the time of the article. The article featured:

- Viola Palmer of 1921 Xavier Ct. (**Figure 20**), a D. N. Leathers tenant since 1956;
- Annie Mae Williams of 1923 Xavier Ct., a D. N. Leathers tenant for 20 years;
- Alma Whittaker of 1928 Xavier Ct., a D. N. Leathers tenant for 20 years; and
- Hattie Gipson of 1910 Xavier Ct. a tenant for 10 years.

Resident Alma Whittaker also worked for Housing Authority as a tenant aide (Cardenas, *Seeds of beautification spread at Leathers Center*, 1982).

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Bolden was also the Director of the T. C. Ayers Recreation Center on Winnebago, across the street from D. N. Leathers I. T. C. Ayers Recreation Center offered recreational opportunities (dances, basketball, playground, sports fields) for the entire Northside community.

Figure 20: Viola Palmer outside her residence at 1921 Xavier Ct. in 1982



Source: Juan Cardenas, *Community Life Central*, Seeds of beatification spread at Leathers Center, August 26, 1982 (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times* Archive)

In 1990, D. N. Leathers celebrated National Night Out by decorating the campus with balloons and streamers and by providing jazz music by pianist Atlee Chapman and bassist Carl Melton. That celebration honored the late Alma Whittaker, a former resident of D. N. Leathers, who was instrumental in organizing the Tenant's association at D. N. Leathers and worked for Housing Authority for 27 years to improve community relations (Garcia, 1990).

George Hodge managed the project in 1991. During his tenure, a child was offered money to begin selling crack cocaine; the child told his mother who told the neighborhood block captain who reported the incident to George Hodge. Hodge notified the police and the person responsible was caught within an hour. The community organization of block captains and Hodge's management helped to preserve the safety of the children who lived in D. N. Leathers by working closely with police officers to fight crime (Barrera, 1991).



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Tile Mural at D. N. Leathers – Creation and Preservation

The tile mural titled, “We’ve Come This Far by Faith,” was unveiled and dedicated on March 22, 1997, on the east wall of the D. N. Leathers I Office/Recreation Center (Building 24). The D. N. Leathers Residents Association selected the theme and title for the mural to show the history of public involvement surrounding the D. N. Leathers I and II housing projects, the faith and dedication of the D. N. Leathers residents and Northside community, and the need for low-income public housing in Northside. The mural was designed by artist Ricardo Ruiz and inspired by photographs provided by D. N. Leathers’ residents, Northside residents, the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) (**Figure 21**). Portrayed on the mural are the people and groups listed below (Aloe Tile Works - Press Release, 1997).

**Mr. Daniel Newton Leathers** – Respected, college educated African American business man for whom D. N. Leathers housing is named. He died in 1922.

**Dr. H. Boyd Hall** – A local African American dentist who was very influential in the decision to construct D. N. Leathers II. Dr. Boyd also was president of the local NAACP Chapter and that chapter is named for him.

**Mrs. Alma Whittaker** – A resident of D. N. Leathers I from the 1960s - 1980s, known for carrying her bible and providing information about government assistance programs and for encouraging her neighbors to utilize the available programs to improve their lives. She worked for Housing Authority as a tenant aide for many years.

**Mr. Ernest Carter** – He worked for HIALCO to provide job training and encouragement for Northside residents to gain the education required to qualify for better jobs. He also served as a Housing Authority commissioner per oral history interviewee, James Bright.

**Mrs. Louella Coleman** – President of the D. N. Leathers Residents’ Association in 1997. She worked to “preserve dignity in housing for low-income blacks” (Aloe Tile Works - Press Release, 1997).

**Mr. Albert Sifuentes** and **Mrs. Peggy Beasley** – Shown on the mural as protestors for fair treatment of D. N. Leathers residents.

**Boy Scout Troup 168** and **Solomon M. Coles Drill Team** – These organizations included many residents of D. N. Leathers I and II.

**Rev. Harold Branch** and **Mr. Harold Moore** – Respected men who were included on the mural to represent community support and involvement with D. N. Leathers housing.

Figure 21: Ricardo Ruiz' drawing of the mural design



Source: Ed Gates of Aloe Tile Works; Leonard Fiji provided the image for Mr. Gates

## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

Leathers residents decorated the tiles in the mural following the design created by Ruiz and (Figure 22) under the direction of Aloe Tile Works owned by Ed and Cornelia Gates. Children as well as adults worked on creating the tiles. The images included a woman shown stopping a bulldozer and the press release stated, “the woman stopping the bulldozer represents the unity of Leathers’ residents in refusing to be ‘bulldozed’ by anyone” (Aloe Tile Works - Press Release, 1997).

Figure 22: D. N. Leathers residents working on the mural tiles in the D. N. Leathers Recreation Center



Source: Photo by Ed Gates of Aloe Tile Works; Leonard Fiji provided this image for Mr. Gates

The completed mural was a blending of about 100 years of history, per Ed Gates of Aloe tile Works (Pradier, 2017). Executive Director of Housing Authority, Gary Allsup, contacted Ed Gates of Aloe Tile Works and mural artist, Ricardo Ruiz, for assistance in preserving the “We’ve Come This Far by Faith” tile mural (Figure 23). The preservation of the mural was part of the mitigation determined by the Three-Party MOA regarding D. N. Leathers I executed in June 2016. The removal and preservation of the mural tiles in early 2017 was successful and the tiles are being stored until a decision is reached regarding where the mural should be reconstructed and displayed for generations to come.



Figure 23: "We've Come This Far by Faith" tile mural shortly before it was removed for preservation



Source: Photo contributed by Ed Gates of Aloe Tile Works



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Influence of the Housing Standards of 1938 on D. N. Leathers I

The design of the D. N. Leathers I public housing development incorporated many of the desirable objectives of Housing Standards published by the National Association of Housing Officials in 1938 and featured in *Architectural Forum* magazine in May 1938. These standards were established to keep within the budget constraints of the Housing Act of 1937 while developing the best value possible in safe, sanitary and affordable public housing. The 1938 Housing Standards categories included Site Selection, Site Development and Dwelling Plan (National Association of Housing Officials, May 1938).

#### Site Selection

The site selection for D. N. Leathers I focused on many desired objectives of the Housing Standards as well as practical considerations regarding the culture of Corpus Christi at that time. D. N. Leathers I was sited in an area where the majority of African Americans residents of Corpus Christi lived in 1940, an area roughly bounded by Kennedy Avenue on the west, W. Broadway Street on the north and east, and Leopard Street on the south. Public transportation was available in the neighborhood via the Nueces Transportation Co. established in 1933 (TxDOT, 2016). Employment centers such as the Port of Corpus Christi (Port), Solomon M. Coles School, the ILA Hall (1305 N. Staples St.) and downtown businesses such as the Nueces Hotel were nearby (TxDOT, 2016).

Schools were generally segregated in Texas although some historically white schools allowed Hispanic students in 1938. Schools for African American children were within a few blocks of the D. N. Leathers site. Solomon M. Coles School (924 Winnebago St.) offered free public education to African Americans from first grade through high school. Holy Cross Catholic School (1121 N. Staples St.) also focused on African American students and offered from kindergarten through eighth grade education. St. Matthew Baptist Church (1101 Waco St.) offered kindergarten classes. The Bethune Day Nursery opened in 1942 at 1403 Howard St. (seven blocks south of Winnebago Street near Sam Rankin Street) to serve low-income families. The D. N. Leathers I site also included space for The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) to develop two parks near the southwest corner of the property. The smaller of the two parks was extant in 2016 and located just south of Building 6 on Xavier Court (**Figure 10**). The Reverend Claude C. Axel reported in his oral history interview that the original larger park was replaced by a parking area just to the south of the small park (Axel, 2017).

In early September 1939, after the D. N. Leathers I site was selected, the Corpus Christi Planning Commission objected to the Housing Authority plan to construct D. N. Leathers I in a location that would permanently close Coke Street from the south. The planning commission reported that they had planned to keep Coke Street open to eventually become a main arterial north-south highway through the city (Housing Project Dead-End Street Plans Stymied, 1939). The closing of Coke Street was proposed to prevent a busy street from bisecting the D. N. Leathers site because major traffic would have been in opposition to the 1938 Housing Standards regarding Site Selection. The housing authority explained that the “street had not been designated by the city and was not shown as a street in the authority’s deed records” (Housing Dispute May Be Settled At Meeting Today: Property Owners Oppose Site for Negro Project, 1939).



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

Mr. J. I. Campbell, special project advisor for the USHA, attended the September 1939 Corpus Christi Planning Commission meeting that discussed keeping Coke Street open, bisecting the selected housing site. Campbell expressed concern that USHA would refuse to approve a public housing site with a major thoroughfare running through it and if the city refused to allow the closing of Coke Street to avoid bisecting the Leathers site, then the project would need to be redesigned and shifted west onto land that the Housing Authority had planned to retain either for sale or for future public housing development (Fate of Negro Housing Project Problematical, 1939). On September 15, 1939, the *Corpus Christi Caller* reported more controversy over the location of the proposed site for the D. N. Leathers I project. A petition signed by 50 or 60 residents (not specified, but possibly Hillcrest residents) and filed with the city secretary requested that the city council not allow the project to be built on the selected site and to not allow Coke street to be closed, modified or changed. The paper reported that “negro leaders of the city were circulating petitions requesting that Coke Street be closed or rerouted to enable slum clearance project to proceed without further delay” (Housing Dispute May Be Settled At Meeting Today: Property Owners Oppose Site for Negro Project, 1939). Housing Authority Chairman, Cecil E. Burney issued an invitation to concerned property owners within a two-block area of the proposed D. N. Leathers site to attend an open house on September 15, 1939, immediately after a meeting scheduled at 10:00 AM with the chairman of the planning commission, the Rev. William C. Munds. Chairman Burney reported, “The housing authority is attempting to work for the best interests of the city as a whole and will be glad to hear anyone who has a legitimate interest in location of the project” (Housing Dispute May Be Settled At Meeting Today: Property Owners Oppose Site for Negro Project, 1939). At noon on the same day, the planning commission met and the meeting was attended by Walter Cook, USHA regional project advisor, and J. I. Campbell, a USHA senior project advisor. As predicted by the *Corpus Christi Caller*, an “amicable solution” was reached and Coke Street was re-routed to curve in a northeasterly direction to avoid bisecting the site and the D. N. Leathers I project was constructed as planned.

The site was convenient to connect to city utility services such as water and sewer and was in an area served by city refuse pick up. The site was not ideal because it was near oil refineries, and was bounded by railroad tracks on the west side. The construction of the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant completed in 1938 was conveniently located to the northeast of D. N. Leathers I, below W. Broadway Street (City of Corpus Christi, c. 2012). However, the proximity of the plant produced odors that permeated the air when the wind blew from the northeast. The site was located southwest of the Salt Lake Tract, a foul-smelling marshy area which was later channelized and partially covered with a concrete cap before D. N. Leathers II was constructed on the Salt Lake Tract in 1952.

### Site Development

The 1938 Housing Standard for “Site Development” stated, “Every public housing project should be conceived as a neighborhood itself or as part of a neighborhood.” The D. N. Leathers I project accomplished both because it was a neighborhood within itself located in a larger residential neighborhood that also contained goods and services to form a self-contained community. The housing campus was designed as a residential neighborhood within itself; the site design utilized “pedestrian streets” named after famous historically African American Universities (**Figure 10**);



## **D. N. Leathers I History Project Report**

residents had pride in their address and many remember their exact address to this day such as the Rev. Claude Axel who lived with his family at 1927 Xavier Ct. in the early 1950s (Axel, 2017). The D. N. Leathers I site was in an area that was predominantly residential in character and the project replaced a number of units of substandard housing, a stated purpose of the 1937 Housing Act.

The D. N. Leathers I campus was located within the east side of Northside (east of Kennedy Avenue), a neighborhood where African American schools, churches, grocery stores, a union hall, beauty shops, barber shops, shoe shine parlors, doctor/dentist offices restaurants, liquor stores and drug stores were located. Other businesses in the area were owned and/or operated by other races or ethnic groups, but none of the oral history interviewees reported discrimination against African Americans from any of the neighborhood businesses. Holy Cross Catholic Church has consistently had a diverse congregation. Night clubs in the area featured famous musicians such as Fats Domino and Ray Charles and these performances were open to all people (TxDOT, 2016). Access to these organizations, goods and services made the location of D. N. Leathers I desirable when the site was selected in the late 1930s.

## Building Design

Nat Hardy was named chief architect for the three public housing developments initially developed for The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) (Nat Hardy Named Chief Architect For Slum Project, 1938). However, Henry H. Wade is listed as chief architect on the 1939 architectural plans developed for the three public housing projects constructed in Corpus Christi between 1939 through 1941. The dedication plaque for D. N. Leathers I listed H. H. Wade as the chief architect and supervising architects were Brock, Roberts & Anderson; R. L. Vogler & C. C. Decker; and Nat W. Hardy. The chief architect for each site selected from a set of plan types developed for use in any of the three projects. The variety of plan types allowed for the design layout of buildings appropriate for shape and topography of each site. The D. N. Leathers I project was the third of the three Corpus Christi housing projects developed under the Housing Act of 1937 and may have benefitted from experience gained while constructing the first two projects. Chief architect Henry H. Wade may have made a few modifications to the original plans before the construction of D. N. Leathers I. The local newspaper stated that the foundation for D. N. Leathers I was different from the foundation design used for the two earlier projects (Kinney Place/George W. Wiggins Homes and Navarro Place) (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1940). However, the foundation difference is not obvious from inspection and was not explained in the article. The only minor foundation difference noted was the placement of the foundation vents. At D. N. Leathers I, the vents are generally centered under the windows rather than in the placement shown on the 1939 elevations drawings. The vent placement shown on the elevation drawings is intact at Kinney Place (now George W. Wiggins Homes), the first project constructed.

The historic photos of D. N. Leathers during and shortly after construction show that the original windows of the D. N. Leathers I apartments were wood-frame, double-hung sashes with horizontal lights arranged two over two (**Figure 24**). The general window design was maintained when the windows were replaced by aluminum-frame windows. The double-hung window sashes allowed for cool air to enter through an opened lower sash while warmer interior air exited through an opened upper sash on the opposite side of the building. The original exterior doors were composed of two vertical panels on the bottom and four horizontal fixed-pane lights on the top half of the door to complement the lights of the windows (**Figure 24**). The original screen doors were identical to the exterior doors, with the top half was filled with a screen panel rather than the four fixed-pane horizontal lights. **Figure 24** also shows a typical porch roof made of steel reinforced concrete cantilevered from the second floor of two-story buildings and from the roof structure of one-story buildings.

## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

**Figure 24: Detail of historic construction photo of D. N. Leathers I, Building Type E (09/09/1940) shows original windows and doors as well as the original cantilevered concrete roof above the exterior door and foundation vent placement centered under windows**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection. Photo by Regal Picture Service

The D. N. Leathers I campus includes the following building types:

- Building Type A (5 buildings)
- Building Type B (6 buildings)
- Building Type B2 (3 buildings)
- Building Type E2 (2 buildings)
- Building Type F (3 buildings)
- Building Type F2 (3 buildings)
- Building Type J (1 building)
- Office/Community Center (1 building)
- Storage Buildings (4 buildings, one converted to a laundry)



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

Each of the apartment buildings exhibited defining features of public housing projects funded by USHA under the Housing Act of 1937 such as flat roofs, uniform fenestration and lack of exterior ornamentation (National Park Service, 2004). Described previously in this report, the Housing Standards of 1938 (Housing Standards) published by the National Association of Housing Officials described mandatory standards as well as suggested standards to provide safe and sanitary housing while staying within the budget constrains mandated by the Housing Act of 1937.

The Housing Standards which stated, “Every room which may be occupied for sleeping shall have access to a bathroom or toilet compartment without passing through another room.” This was accomplished in the D. N. Leathers I plans. This standard was likely determined mandatory to provide an improvement from the shotgun-style houses typical in substandard housing. Shotgun houses were narrow, rectangular houses usually no more than 12-ft. wide with rooms arranged one behind the other with no halls and with an exterior door at each end of the house. For example, in a three-room shotgun-style house, a person would enter the house into the front room and go through the front room to access the middle room and then through the middle room to access the back room and through the back room to reach the back door. This arrangement offered no privacy for the people occupying the middle room because their “room” also functioned as a hall. Also, if a person who occupied the front room needed to use a privy (outdoor toilet/outhouse) which was located behind the house, they would have to walk through the middle and the back rooms to reach the back door to use the privy.

One of the problems in substandard housing areas was that houses were typically constructed with barely enough space between the houses for a person to walk between them, therefore leaving little room for air circulation or for the penetration of natural light. The Housing Standards addressed the spacing between buildings and arrangement of windows to provide natural light and good air circulation, conditions necessary to provide a healthy environment for family living. The Housing Standards recommended that the area of glass in windows should be approximately 15 percent of the floor area and that the bottom of a window should be placed more than 30 inches from the floor and extend near the ceiling and to be free from nearby outside obstructions. The height of the top of the windows at D. N. Leathers I was aligned with bottom of the concrete beam components of the structural frame and therefore they were as near to the ceiling as the structural design allowed. The Housing Standards mandated that the “penetration of sunlight into the dwelling must be considered in the planning of the site.” Another mandate stated, “The windows of every room shall so open and be so related to interior doors or to other windows that good natural ventilation (through- or cross-) will result.” The D. N. Leathers I site plan and design of the individual apartment units complied with the mandated standards related to air circulation and natural light. These features are described in the section for each building type and are shown in **Appendix B** interior photos of each building type.

Each apartment contained a kitchen, bath and toilet facilities as required by the Housing Standards. This requirement elevated public housing from the substandard housing it replaced where some people had no running water and many used privies that might be shared by multiple families, or no toilet facilities at all. The modern kitchen (including a gas range), bath and toilet facilities provided within each D. N. Leathers apartment offered safe and sanitary conditions in which families could live



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healthy lives. The electric lighting and power outlets within the units also made them safer and more convenient than substandard housing lit by kerosene lamps that were used in many of the dwellings that D. N. Leathers I replaced.

Each bedroom in D. N. Leathers I complied with the Housing Standards by including a closet and every apartment contained at least one additional closet for the household. The original closet design (for clothes, food, linens) complied with the Housing Standard because the closets were at least 22 inches deep and lacked doors, a design feature deemed acceptable to produce cost savings. Every apartment unit had both a front and a back door and included a kitchen range and a space heater fueled by natural gas.

Four detached storage buildings (Buildings 25-28) were provided on the campus for resident storage of trunks, unused furniture, bicycles, etc. Building 28 was later converted to a laundry room. Building types are described in the following sections.



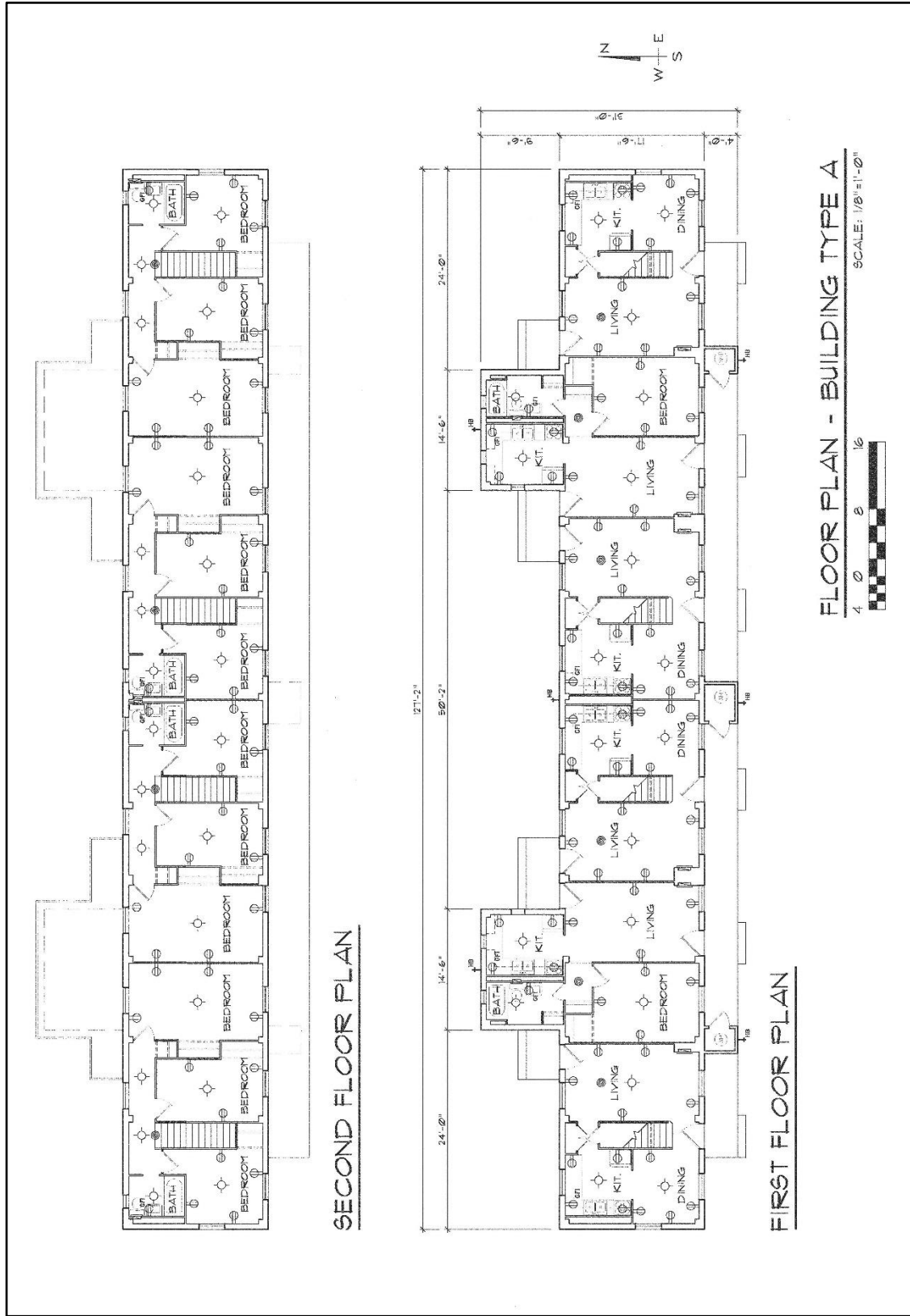
### Building Type A

Building Type A was comprised of a combination of row house (two-story) style units and one-story style units within one building (**Figure 25**). The one bedroom units were located on the first floor. The kitchen and bathroom of the one-bedroom apartment of Building Type A were contained in a rear-facing one-story wing. Two-story, row house style, three-bedroom apartments were located on either side of each of the one bedroom units. Above the living room and bedroom of each one-bedroom unit were bedrooms of the neighboring three-bedroom apartments (**Figure 25**).

Building Type A utilized flow-through ventilation via windows on both the north and south façades as required by the Housing Standards. The living room, kitchen/dining area, and largest bedroom had one window on the south façade and another on the north to allow natural light to illuminate the room and provide cross-ventilation to cool the room. The end units had an additional dining area window (approximately 12 inches further above the floor than standard windows) on the first floor and an additional standard-size bedroom window on the second floor. The smaller bedrooms located upstairs had one window each and the bedroom doors opened to a short hall which had a window to facilitate the cross-ventilation. The bathroom also had a window for light and ventilation and opened into the upstairs hall which was ventilated with a standard window. These windows also provided natural light for each room and hall.

The arrangement of the rooms in Building Type A followed the Housing Standards by using space efficiently and maximizing the size of major rooms while keeping the halls and baths as small as practical. The room sizes of the apartments in Building Type A generally complied with the Housing Standards. The living room for both the one bedroom and the three bedroom units of Building Type A contained approximately 150 sq. ft. as required by the Housing Standard for two to three persons. However, in the one-bedroom unit, the kitchen seems to be too small for dining and therefore living room of that unit also likely served as a dining area. The three-bedroom unit had a separate dining area adjacent to the kitchen so the living area was not needed for dining space. The major bedroom of the three-bedroom unit contained approximately 144 sq. ft. and was larger than the minimum recommended 120 sq. ft. of the Housing Standard. The smallest bedroom of the three-bedroom unit was approximately 115 sq. ft. and exceeded the minimum required 80 sq. ft. per the Housing Standard. The bedroom of the one-bedroom unit was slightly smaller than the Housing Standard of 120 sq. ft. The bathroom contained a tub which was later remodeled to a tub-shower combination as suggested in the Housing Standards. Although the living room for the three-bedroom apartment was smaller than the size suggested for families with four or more people, the weather in Corpus Christi generally allowed outdoor living activities such as sitting outside and watching children play and visiting with neighbors sitting in adjacent yards. Other than the size of the living rooms of the three-bedroom units, the apartments of Building Type A complied with the Housing Standards. Exterior photos of an example of Building Type A are shown in **Figures 26** and **27**. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior and front and rear entry door photos of typical Building Type A apartments, both the three-bedroom and one-bedroom units.

Figure 25: Building Type A - Plan with one-bedroom and three-bedroom units



Source: Detail from Sheet 7 of "Floor Plan – Building Type A" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

Figure 26: Building Type A - Front doors of 1920–1930 Fisk Court (Building 10), facing northwest



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 27: Building Type A - Back yards of 1920–1930 Fisk Court (Building 10), facing southeast



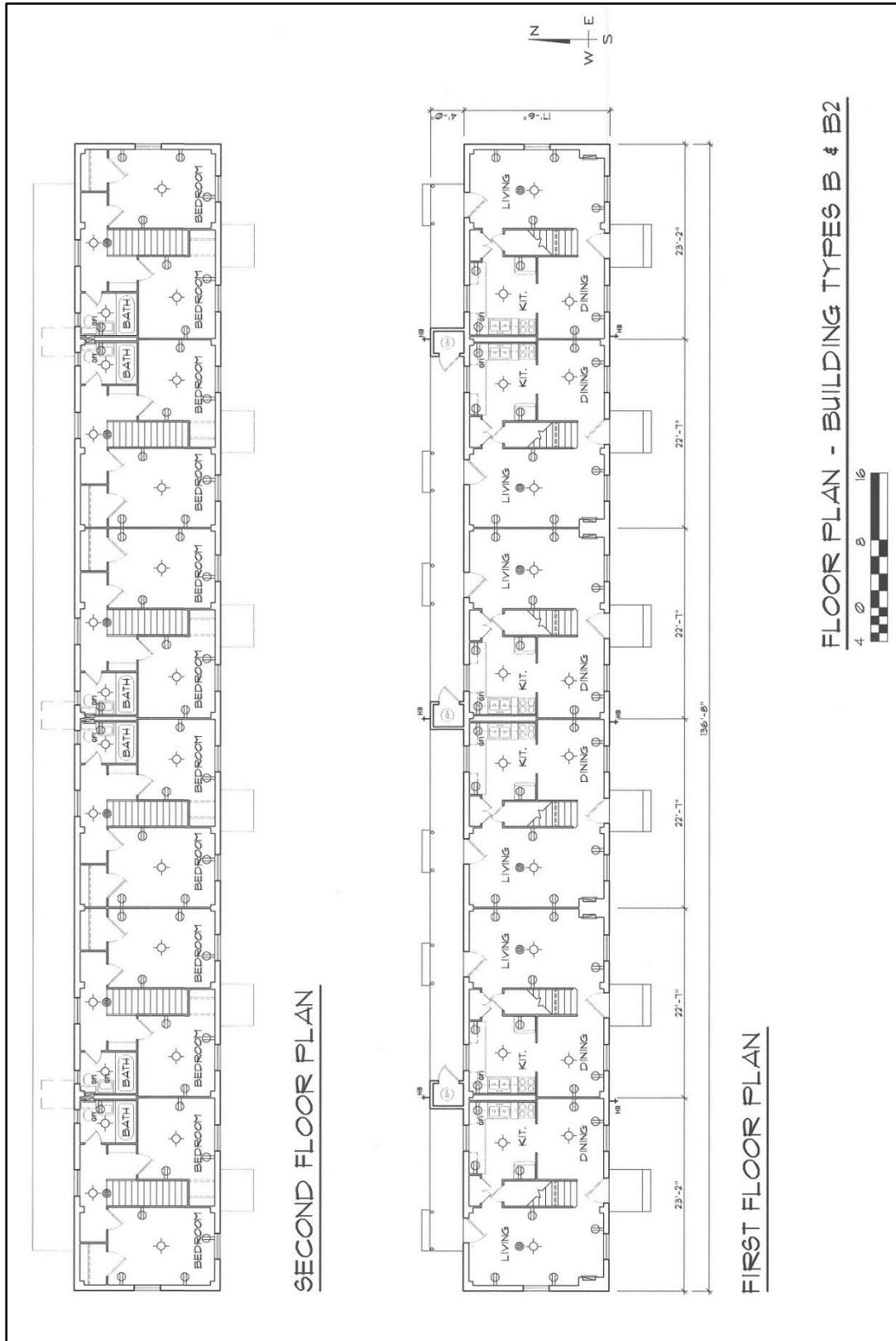
Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

### Building Types B and B2

Building Types B and B2 were designed with a total of six row house style two-bedroom apartments per building. Building Type B faced north (entry sidewalk on north) and Building Type B2 faced south. Another difference between Types B and B2, were that the water heater closets of the Type B units were on the north side of the building and the water heater closets for the Type B2 buildings were on the south side. The first floor of each apartment was bisected by a central stair with a living room on one side and a combination of kitchen and dining area on the other side of the stair (**Figure 28**).

Building Types B and B2 utilized flow-through ventilation via windows on both the north and south façades in an arrangement similar to Building Type A apartments as required by the Housing Standards. Space was used efficiently in the arrangement of the rooms in Building Type B units and the size of major rooms was maximized while keeping the halls and baths as small as practical. The living room contained approximately 150 sq. ft. as required by the Housing Standard for two to three persons. The major bedroom contained approximately 120 sq. ft. which was the minimum recommended size recommended in the Housing Standards. The smaller bedroom was approximately 80 sq. ft., the minimum required size per the Housing Standard. The bathroom contained a tub which was later remodeled to a tub-shower combination as suggested in the Housing Standards. The apartments of Building Types B and B2 complied with the Housing Standards. The end units had an extra window on each level, in the living room on the first floor and in the bedroom on the second level. Exterior photos of an example of Building Type B are shown in **Figures 29** and **30**. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior of typical Building Type B apartments composed of two-bedroom units.

Figure 28: Building Type B - Plan with two-bedroom plans



Source: Detail from Sheet 8 of "Floor Plan – Building Type B" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

Figure 29: Building Type B - Front doors of 1921-1931 Fisk Ct. (Building 7), facing northwest



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 30: Building Type B - Back yards of 1921–1931 Fisk Ct. (Building 11), facing northwest



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

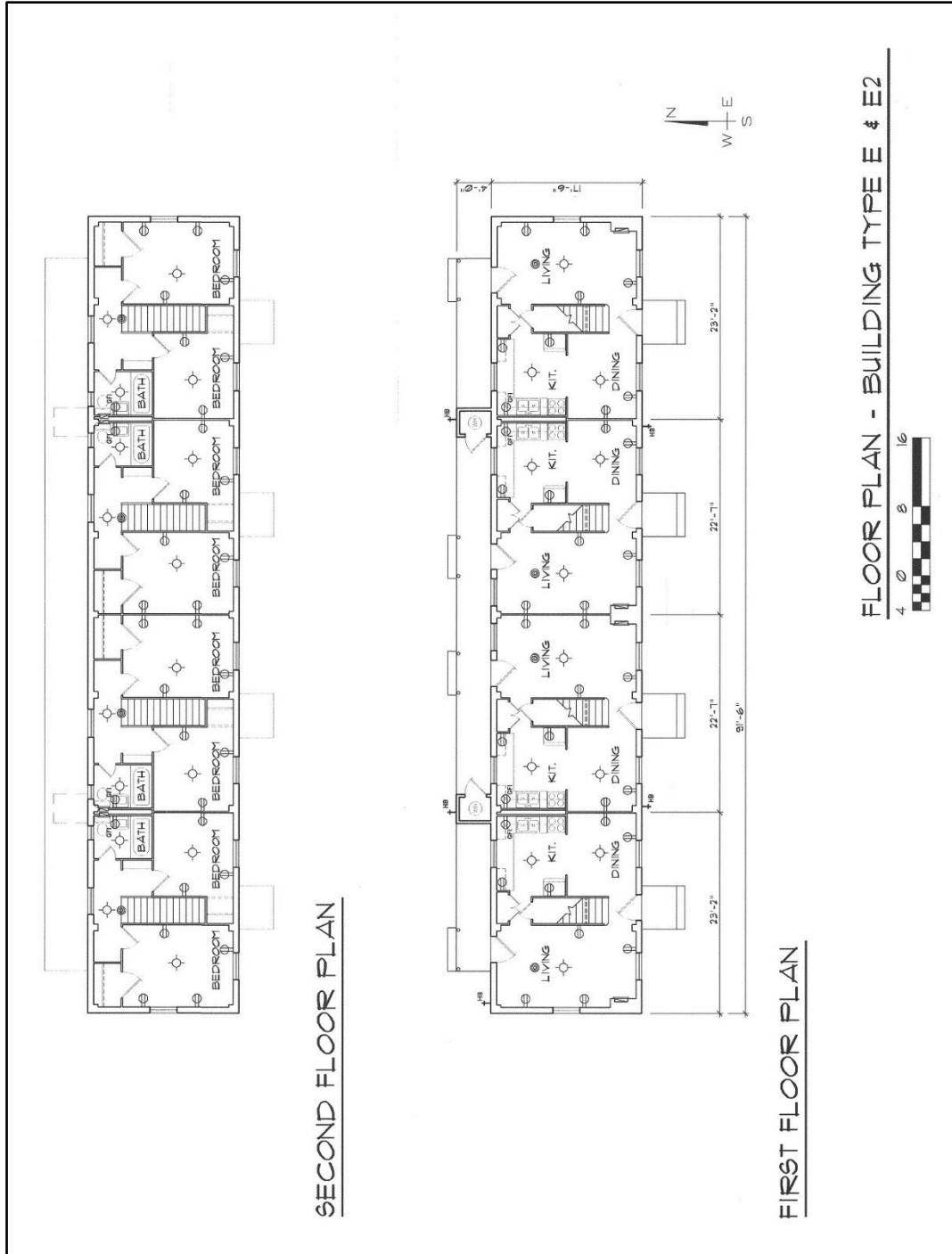


### Building Type E2

Building Type E2 faced south and contained four two-bedroom row house style apartments. As built, the floor plan of Building Type E2 was identical to Building Type B2. However, the E2 plan drawing shows first floor, living room windows for the center two apartments on the north side (kitchen side) of E2 plan in contrast to the B2 plan. However, as built, the living room windows were present on the interior (non-corner) apartments of both types of buildings (**Figure 31**).

Building Type E2 utilized flow-through ventilation via windows on both the north and south façades in an arrangement similar to Building Type A apartments, as required by the Housing Standards. The arrangement of the rooms in Building Type E2 followed the Housing Standards by using space efficiently and maximizing the size of major rooms while keeping the halls and baths as small as practical. The living room contained approximately 150 sq. ft. as required by the Housing Standard for two to three persons. The major bedroom contained approximately 120 sq. ft. which was the minimum recommended size in the Housing Standards. The smaller bedroom was approximately 80 sq. ft., the minimum required size per the Housing Standard. The bathroom contained a tub which was later remodeled to a tub-shower combination as suggested in the Housing Standards. The apartments of Building Type E2 complied with the Housing Standards. The end units had an extra window on each level, in the living room on the first floor and in the bedroom on the second level. Exterior photos of a Building Type E2 are shown in **Figures 32 and 33**. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior of typical Building Type E2 apartments composed of two-bedroom units.

Figure 31: Building Type E and E2 - Plan with two-bedroom plan



Source: Detail from Sheet 9 of "Floor Plan - Building Type E" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office



Figure 32: Building Type E2 - Front doors of 1906–1912 Xavier Ct. (Building 19), facing northwest



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Figure 33: Building Type E2 - Back yards of 1906 – 1912 Xavier Ct. (Building 19), facing southeast



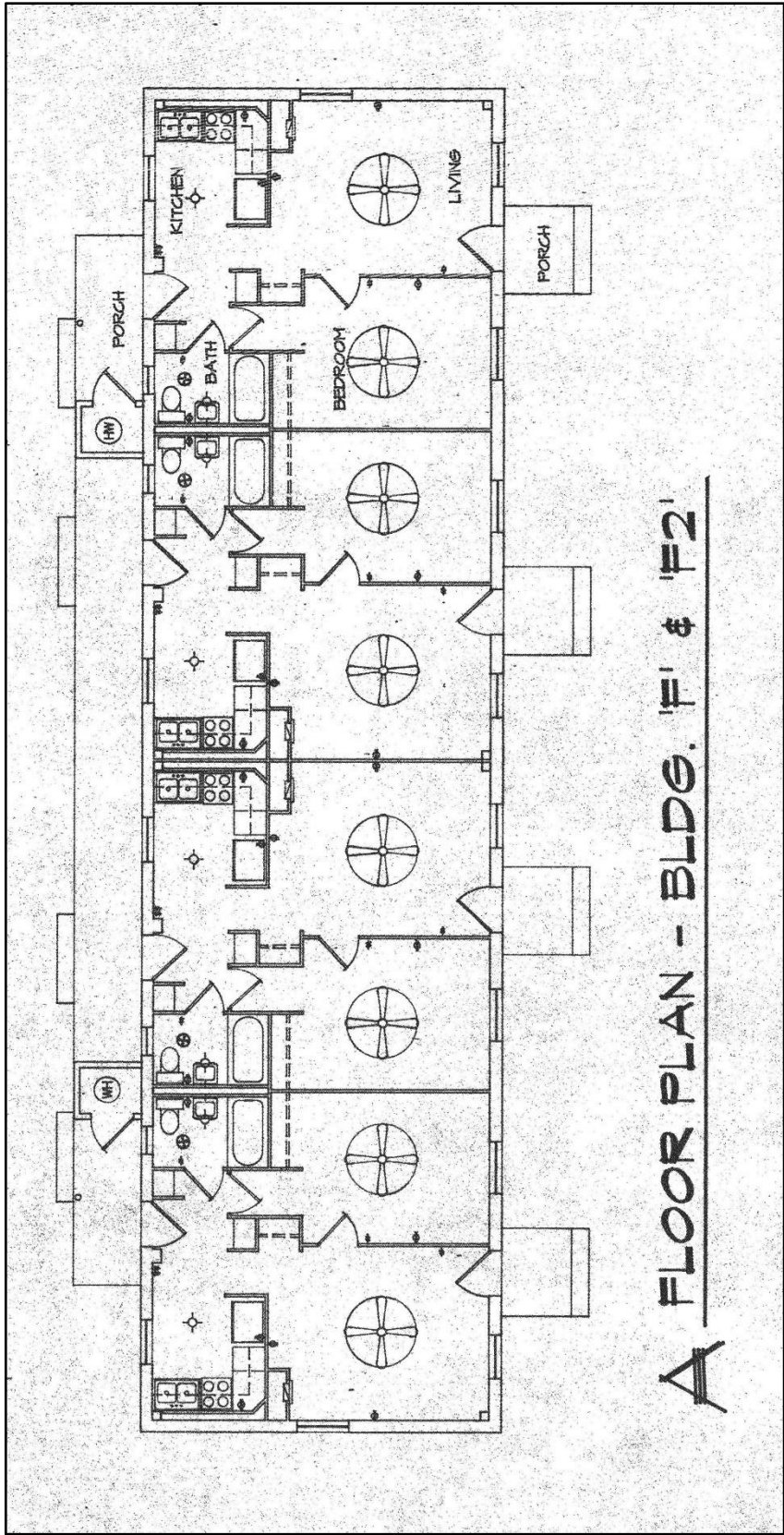
Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith. HNTB. 2016

### Building Types F and F2

Building Types F and F2 each contained four, one-bedroom, one-story apartments (**Figure 34**). The floor plan of Building Type F was identical to Building Type F2 except for the orientation of the building toward the sidewalk entrance. Another difference between Types F and F2, were that the water heater closets of the Type F units were on the north side of the building and the water heater closets for the Type F2 buildings were on the south side. By March 1941, three buildings of Type F and three of Type F2 (a total of 24 apartments) were added to the originally planned 98 units of D. N. Leathers I. These buildings were added in a row along the west side of the property in response to the demand for public housing after the application process began and tenants were screened in the fall of 1940 (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (Sunday Edition), 1940).

Building Types F and F2 utilized flow-through ventilation via windows on both the north and south façades as required by the Housing Standards. The arrangement of the rooms in Building Types F and F2 followed the Housing Standards by using space efficiently and maximizing the size of major rooms while keeping the halls and baths as small as practical. The kitchen was L-shaped and compact and would not have accommodated most kitchen tables. The living room (that also functioned as a dining area) contained approximately 140 sq. ft., slightly smaller than the 150 sq. ft. recommended in the Housing Standard for a living room for two to three persons. The single bedroom contained approximately 115 sq. ft., also slightly below the 120 sq. ft. which was the minimum recommended size recommended in the Housing Standards. The bathroom contained a tub which was later remodeled to a tub-shower combination as suggested in the Housing Standards. The end units had an extra window in the living room. The apartments of Building Types F and F2 complied with many of the housing standards, except for the room sizes which were slightly smaller than recommended. Exterior photos of an example of Building Type F is shown in **Figures 35** and **36**. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior of a typical Building Type F/F2 apartment building composed of one-bedroom units.

Figure 34: Building Type F and F2 Plan with four units of one-bedroom apartment



Source: Detail from Sheet A-7 of "Floor Plan - Building Type F & F2" from "Interior Modernization" drawings by Wm. T. Mumme Architects (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office



Figure 35: Building Type F - Entrance doors of 1937–1943 Winnebago St. (Building 1), facing south



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 36: Building Type F, 1937–1943 Winnebago St. (Building 1), facing northeast



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

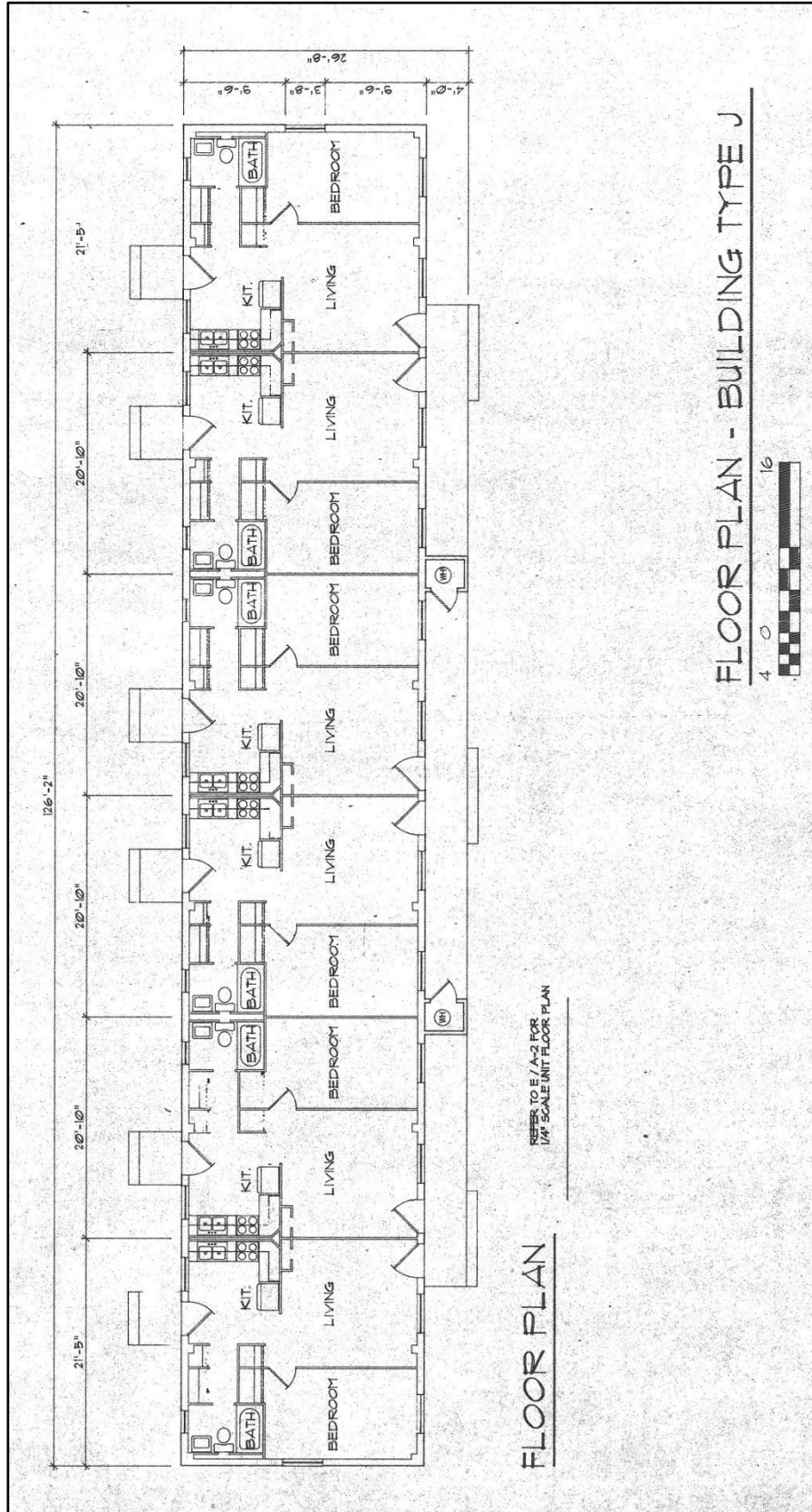


### Building Type J

Building Type J contained six one-story, one-bedroom apartments. The floor plan of Building Type J is shown in **Figure 37**. There is only one example of this building type at D. N. Leathers I.

Building Type J utilized flow-through ventilation via windows on both the north and south façades as required by the Housing Standards. The bedroom door had to be open to allow air to flow from the single bedroom window to the opposite side of the building through the kitchen window or back screen door. The arrangement of the rooms in Building Type J followed the Housing Standards by using space efficiently and maximizing the size of major rooms while keeping the halls and baths as small as practical. The living room contained approximately 150 sq. ft. as required by the Housing Standard for two to three persons. The bedroom contained approximately 120 sq. ft. in compliance with the minimum recommended size per the Housing Standards. The bathroom contained a tub which was later remodeled to a tub-shower combination, a design approved in the Housing Standards. The end units had an extra window in the bedroom. Exterior photos of the Building Type J located on the D. N. Leathers I campus are shown in **Figures 38** and **39**. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior of Building Type J one-bedroom apartments.

Figure 37: Building Type J with six units of one-bedroom apartments



Source: Detail from Sheet A-8 of "Floor Plan - Building Type J" from "Interior Modernization" drawings by Wm. T. Mumme Architects (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

Figure 38: Building Type J, entrance doors of 1812-1822 Tuskegee Ct. (Building 21), facing northwest



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HINTB, 2016

Figure 39: Building Type J, back doors of 1812–1822 Tuskegee Ct. (Building 21), facing northeast



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

### Office/Community Center

The Housing Standards recommended that each housing campus should provide community facilities “with some sort of assembly room” with “electric current” available. The building at 1001 Coke St. included such a room, commonly referred to as the recreation room which was located in the same building as the leasing/administration office (Building 24 at 1001 Coke St.). The original building is shown in **Figure 40** during a final phase of construction in 1940. This building was later expanded to the south and the addition was visible on a 1956 historic aerial image indicating that it was completed by that time. Therefore, it was likely expanded during the construction period for D. N. Leathers II which was completed in 1952 and located to the northeast of D. N. Leathers I. The leasing office was originally on the north end of the building and the community/recreation room was accessed by three sets of double doors seen in **Figure 40**. After the c. 1950s addition, the office was moved to the space added to the south. The former office location (on the north end) was used as storage and workspace for the maintenance staff. **Figure 41** shows the floor plan design for the 1997 modernization of the building which made the building handicap accessible. The original community room had a raised ceiling indicated by the roof profile in **Figures 42** and **43**.

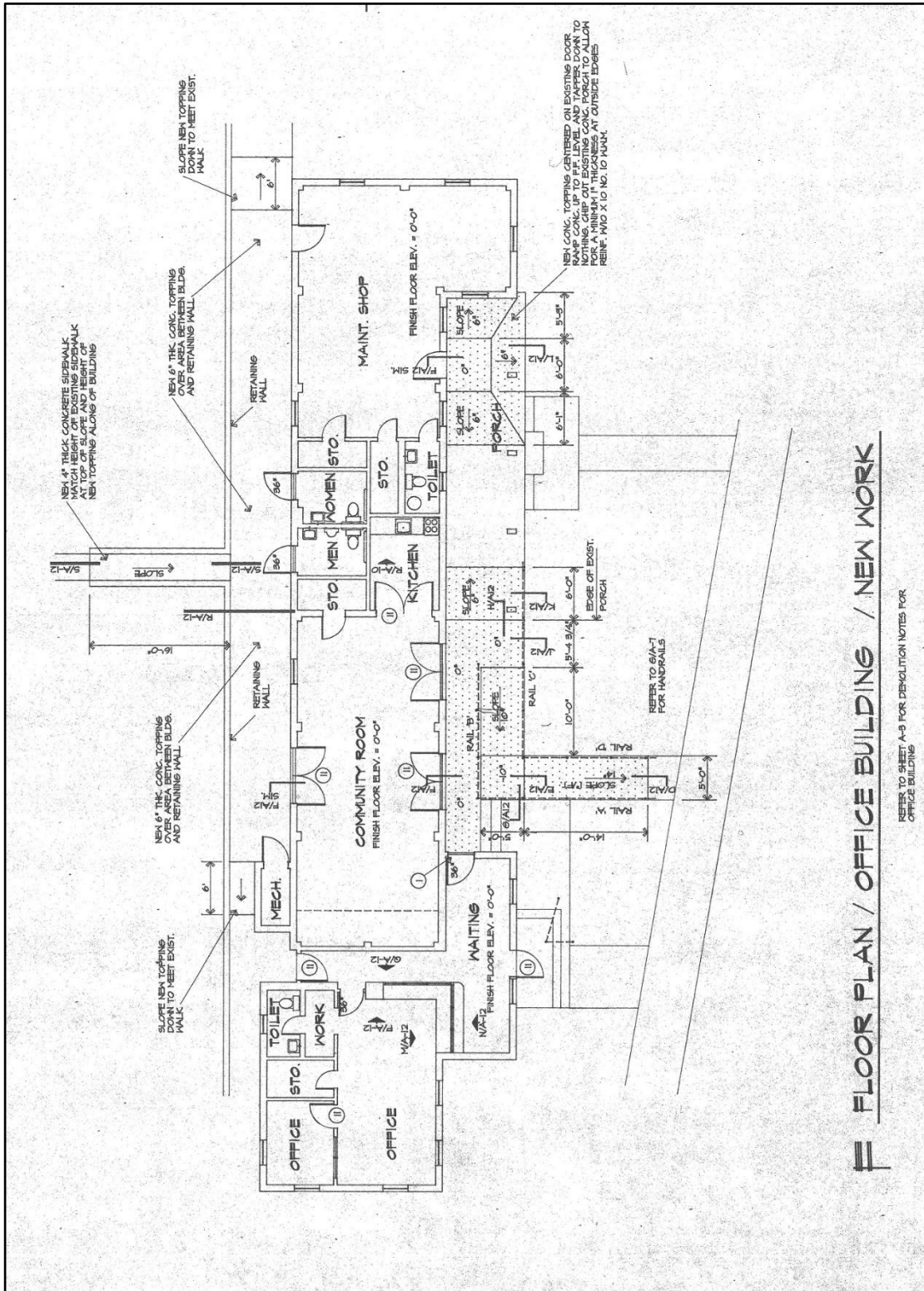
**Figure 40: Office/Community Center of D. N. Leathers on September 9, 1940**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

Exterior photos of the current office are shown in **Figures 42** and **43** and an interior photo of the community room is shown in **Figure 44**. Additional interior photos are included in **Appendix B**.

Figure 41: Office/Community Room (Building 24)



Source: Detail from Sheet A-9 of "Floor Plan / Office Building / New Work" from "Interior Modernization" drawings by Wm. T. Mumme Architects (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction

Figure 42: Office/Community Room Building, view facing west, with tile mural between the central double doors



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

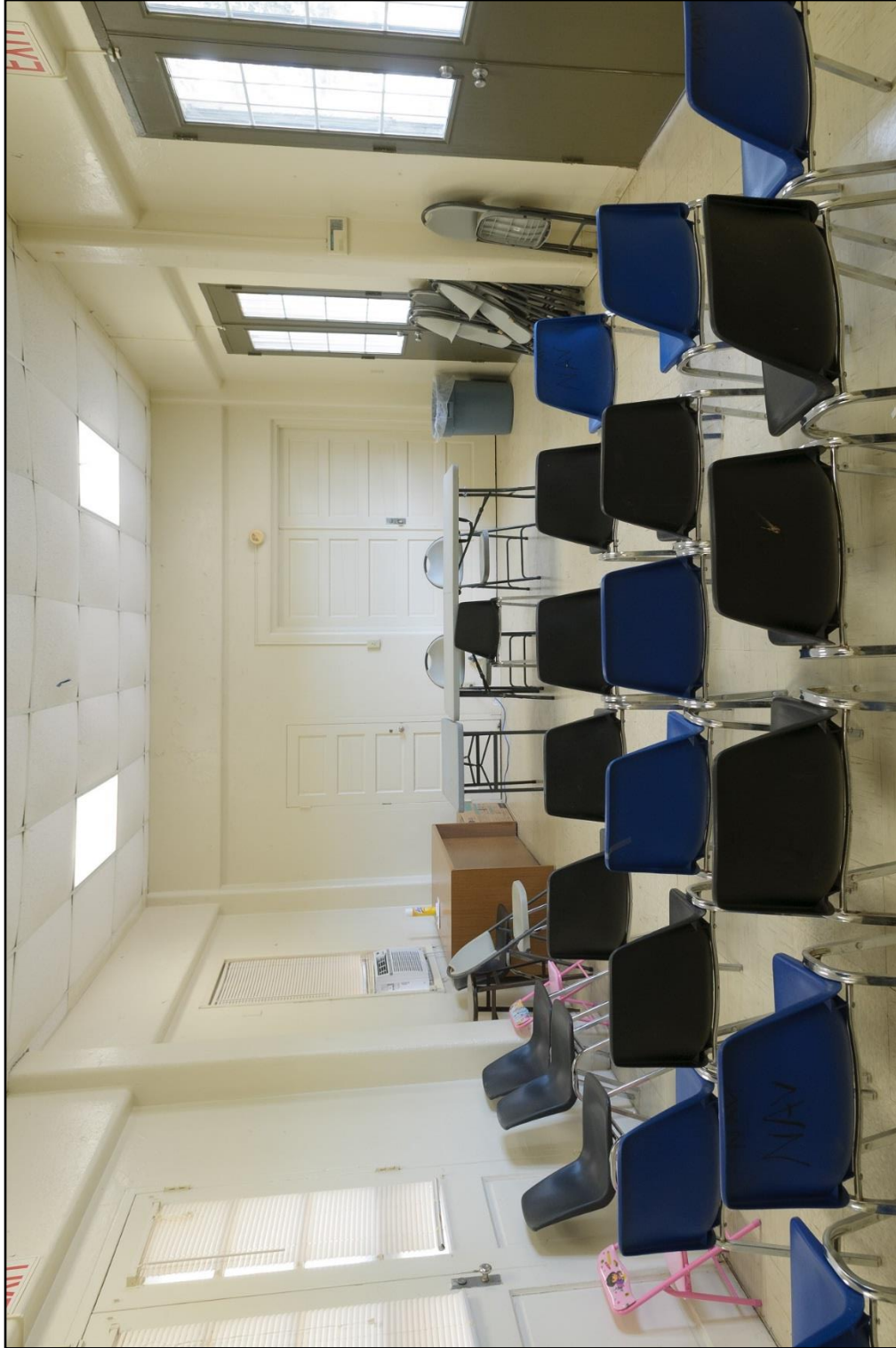
Figure 43: Office addition is in the foreground and the original porch is on the right beyond the ramp, facing northwest



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016



Figure 44: Interior of the recreation room, facing north; original double-doors on the far wall lead to a kitchen



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Storage Building

The Housing Standards mandated storage space for tenant use: “In apartment buildings, central storage facilities shall be provided (usually in the basement) for trunks or unused furniture; storage space for bicycles and baby carriages should be accessible.” Basements are not practical along the Texas Coast so four storage buildings (Buildings 25-28) were constructed for tenant use at D. N. Leathers I. Building 25 was later converted to a golf cart storage building by replacing the single door with a double-door and by bringing electrical power into the building sufficient to recharge the golf cart the maintenance crew used to perform their duties. Building 28 was converted to a laundry with coin-operated washers and dryers. **Figure 45** is a 2016 photograph of a typical storage building. **Figure 46** is a 2016 photograph of the concrete ceiling, concrete frame and terra cotta block construction in one of the storage buildings, construction typical of all buildings on the D. N. Leathers campus. See **Appendix B** for photos of the interior of Building 28.

Figure 45: Typical Storage Building (Building 26), facing southeast



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 46: Typical Storage Building looking toward exposed concrete, poured-in-place ceiling, facing south



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

## Design and Construction Details of D. N. Leathers I

The dedication plaque on the east wall of the D. N. Leathers I office (Building 24) indicates H. H. Wade was the chief architect for the project. Wade was presumably a partner of Westfall & Wade, one of the assisting architectural firms named in a *Corpus Christi Caller* article on April 21, 1938 (*Corpus Christi Caller*, 1938). The original D. N. Leathers I project was to include 98 units (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1939). A historic photo dated July 9, 1940, (**Figure 47**) appears to show the western edge of the 98 units aligned along a fence. Also seen in the photo are the narrow elevations of five buildings (Buildings 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) and part of the north facade of a sixth two-story buildings (Building 13) and small storage buildings (Buildings 25, 26, 27) located just west of the two-story buildings.

**Figure 47: Historic photo of Project Tex 8-3R (D. N. Leathers I), view northeast, July 9, 1940**

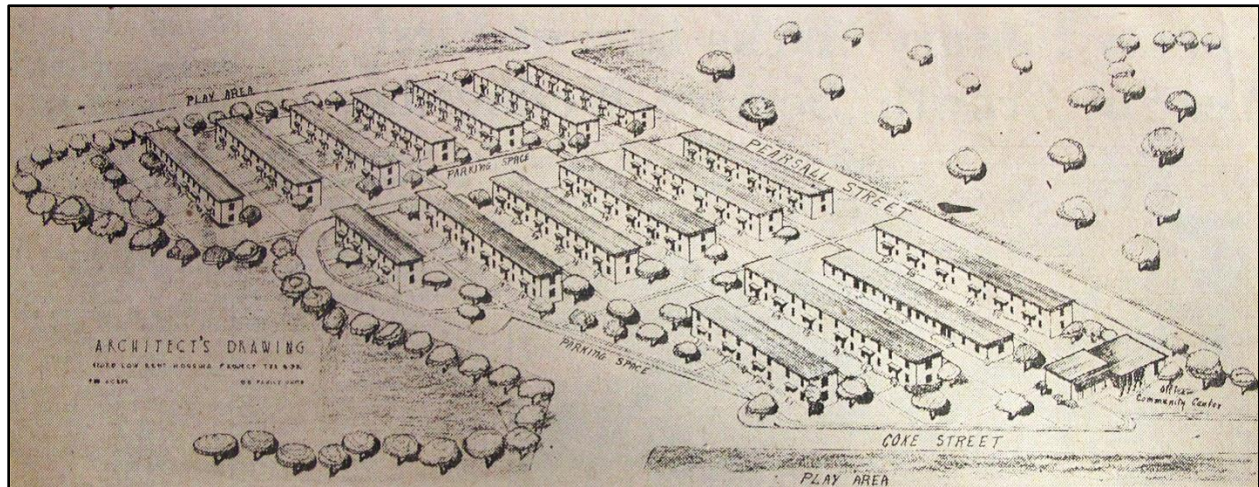


Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

The **Figure 47** photo corresponds to the architectural rendering of the project published on July 2, 1940, shown in **Figure 48**. None of the one-story buildings constructed along the west side of the project are present in this view; therefore, this appears to be a rendering of the project with the original 98 units.

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Figure 48: Architectural rendering of D. N. Leathers published in 1940, view northwest



Source: *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, "Layout of Negro Housing Center," July 2, 1940

By March 11, 1941, six more buildings, all one-story, were under construction along the expanded western edge of the project site (**Figure 49**). The second-phase construction consisted of a total of 24 one bedroom units contained in three Building Type F buildings and three Building Type F2 buildings. Initially, the only difference between building Type F and Type F2 were that Building Type F had primary entrances (indicated by entrance sidewalks) on the north and Type F2 had primary entrances (indicated by entrance sidewalks) on the south side of the building. Other changes occurred over time as buildings were modernized. The historic photograph in **Figure 49** shows the six, one-story, buildings (four units per building) constructed in a second phase on the west end of the site; these 24 additional units were constructed in response to low-cost housing need and brought the total number of units at D. N. Leathers I to 122. **Figure 49** shows original screen doors, original double-hung windows, cantilevered porch roofs, and project sign for D. N. Leathers I (Tex 8 3-R). An aerial view of the completed D. N. Leathers I campus is shown in **Figure 50**.

Figure 49: Construction photo taken from Winnebago Street on March 11, 1941



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

Figure 50: Aerial photograph taken March 30, 1941, shows the completed campus of D. N. Leathers I



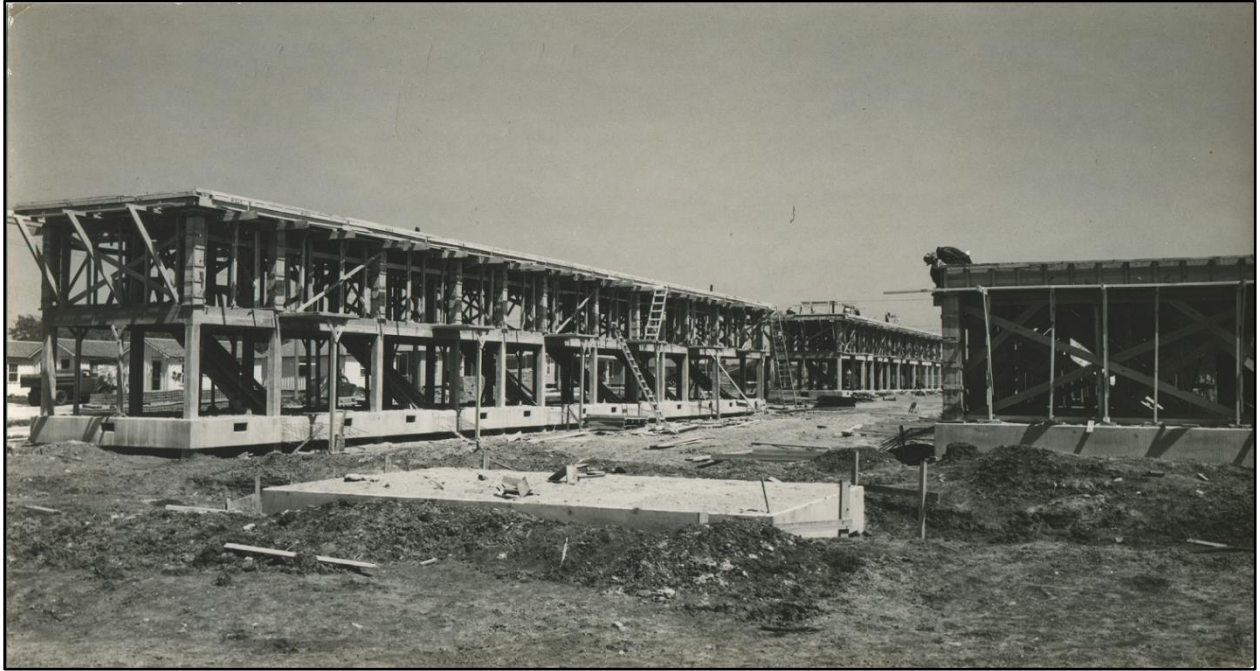
Source: Historic photo from Housing Authority Photo Collection; Annotation by HNTB, 2017



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

Construction photos of D. N. Leathers I show that the foundation piers, perimeter beam, floor of the second level and the roof were all steel-reinforced concrete, poured-in-place (**Figure 51**). A crawl space under the first floor is vented with foundation ventilation grates with a grid pattern (**Figure 52**).

**Figure 51: Historic D. N. Leathers I photo showing the concrete structural system under construction in 1940**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

**Figure 52: East facade of Building 16 (Building Type A), showing an original foundation vent**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

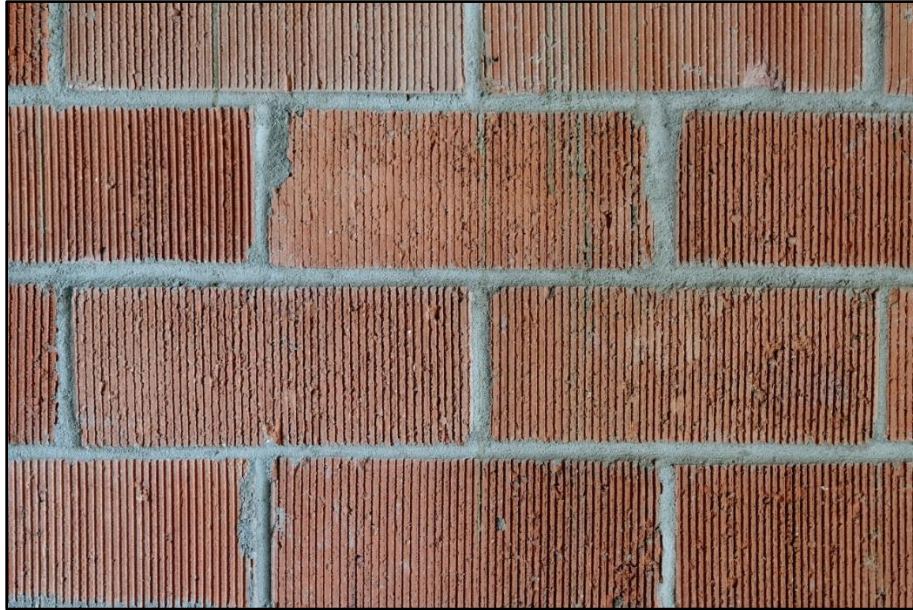
Construction photos from 1940 show that the exterior concrete structural frame was clad and infilled with hollow terracotta tile blocks (**Figure 53**). This construction material was confirmed during an on-site inspection in 2016 (**Figure 54**). The terracotta tile blocks were coated on the outside with stucco and with plaster on all interiors except for the storage buildings.

**Figure 53: Installation of hollow clay tile cladding over concrete structure on Winnebago Street on May 8, 1940**



Source: Historic photo from the Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

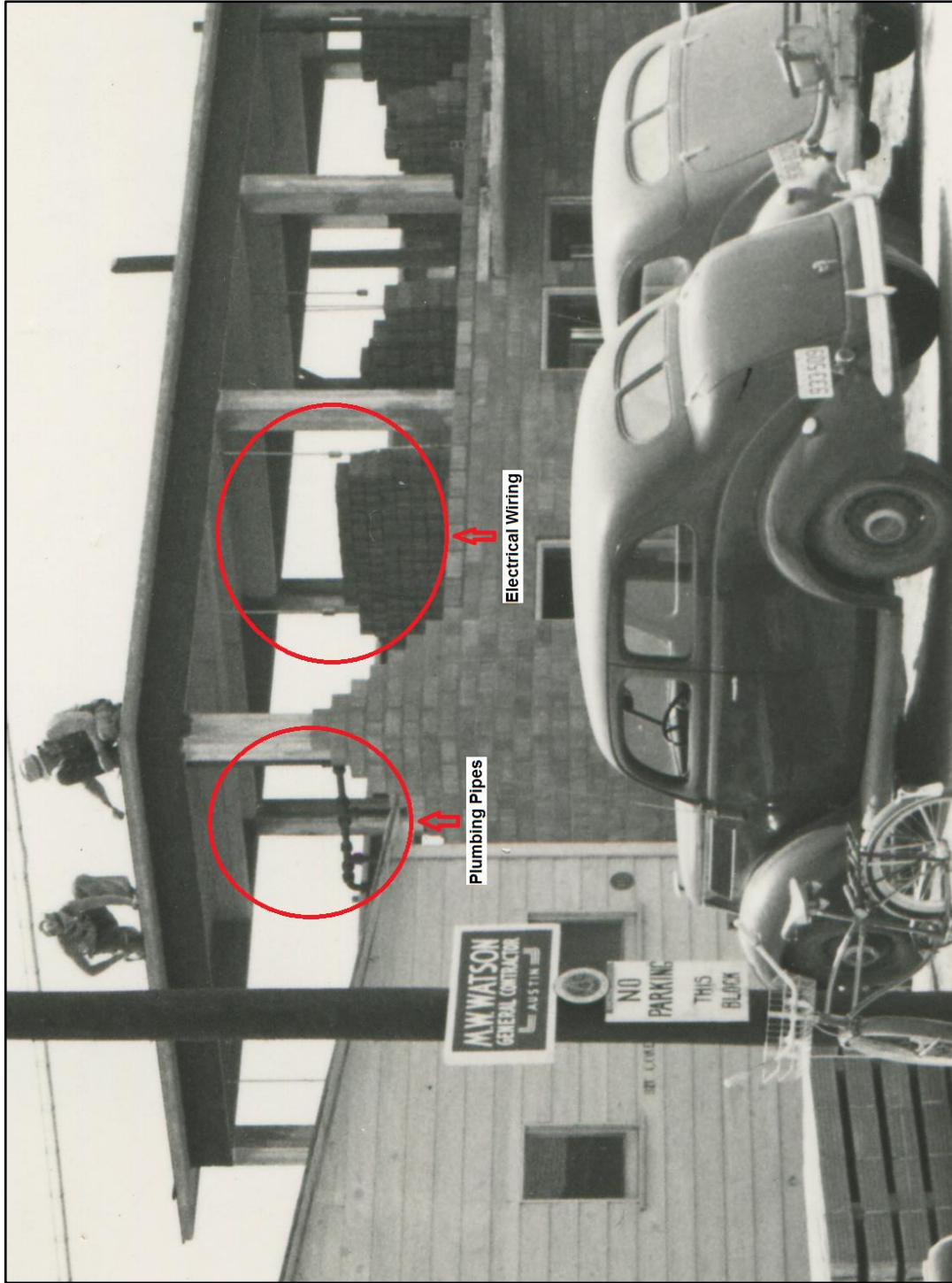
Figure 54: Original terracotta hollow blocks visible inside Building 25, a building used for storage



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Each apartment had electric, natural gas and water service. **Figure 55** shows a detail of a construction photo of Building Type A (1903–1913 Winnebago St.) with the exposed plumbing pipes and electrical wiring shown as the walls were under construction.

Figure 55: Detail of Building Type A showing exposed plumbing and electrical on May 8, 1940



Source: Annotation by HNTB, 2017; historic photo from Housing Authority Photo Collection; photo by Regal Picture Service

The interior wall partitions were about two inches thick and composed of metal lath attached to non-load bearing metal studs secured in runners/tracks. The metal framework and lath were covered with plaster. The ends of the partition walls were reinforced with U-shaped metal caps. During the modernization project in 1997, the original wall end caps and door frames were covered with new metal enclosures (secured with screws) to encapsulate lead paint on the original caps (**Figure 56**). The edge of the stair wall was reinforced with a curved steel cap that appears to be original (**Figure 57**).

**Figure 56: Interior partition wall detail with U-shaped cap over original cap**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 57: Stair detail showing original curved steel cap over stair wall partition



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Each interior wall had a horizontal groove about one foot from the ceiling. The groove provided a place to insert wire supports for pictures to decorate the walls without damaging the wall plaster (**Figure 58**). **Figure 58** also shows the intersection of the ceiling and the structural concrete beam where conduit used to route electrical service added in recent years to supplement the sparse initial electrical service. Supplemental electrical service had been routed to additional electrical outlets and ceiling fans when surveyed in 2016.

Figure 58: Interior room detail looking up at an exposed structural concrete beam



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Originally, doors were not added to interior closets to keep within budget constraints (**Figures 59** and **60**). Curtain rods were installed in the closet openings so the residents could hang curtains to screen their belongings.

Figure 60: Second floor linen closet with rod for curtain "door"



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure 59: Living room coat closet with no door door to bedroom to the right

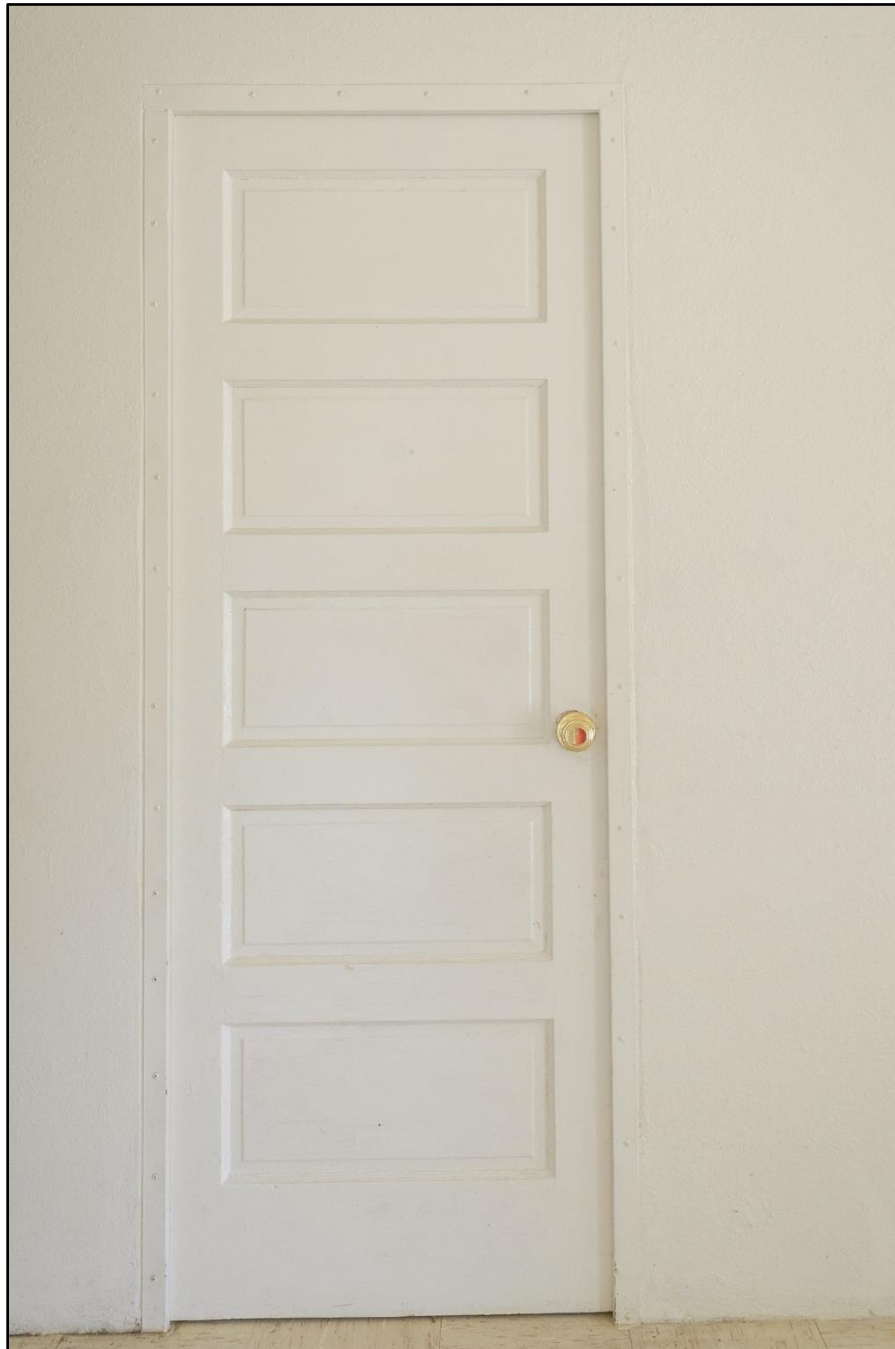


Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



Each original interior bedroom door was composed of six, horizontal wood panels (Figure 61).

Figure 61: Example of an original, six-panel, interior wood door



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

The door hardware likely included Yale-brand nickel plated rim lock sets such as the one still visible in the Building 24 recreation room closet (Figures 62 and 63).

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**Figure 62: Example of exterior view of Yale-brand rim lock thought to be typical original lock**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure 63: Example of interior view of Yale-brand rim lock thought to be typical original lock**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

## Building Modifications Over Time

A modernization project at D.N. Leathers I was undertaken in 1972. During this modernization, the water heaters were relocated from the kitchen area to a newly constructed closet accessed from the new covered porch additions to each building. The gas space heaters were also removed and new, natural gas fueled wall heaters were installed in the same general area where the water heater had been removed in each unit.

The porch stoop of some units exhibits a vertical metal pipe secured to porch roof and stoop. On January 20, 2017, architect James Bright mentioned that these pipes, which are often bent, were installed to act as a screen door stop and are not intended to support the porch roof. The original porch roofs were cantilevered over the porch stoop and did not require any additional support.

A 1998 *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* article indicated a \$1.6 million modernization project was scheduled for completion by January 31, 1999 (Strasburg, 1998). The modernization project plans were dated August 28, 1997 and the cover page shows that the project was designed by Wm. T. Mumme, Architects; the engineer was GPM Engineering and the industrial hygiene consultants were Health & Safety Management, Inc. (Wm T. Mumme, 1997). The plans indicate the D. N. Leathers I modernization project completed in 1999 included the following modifications to the apartments:

1. Flooring replaced
2. Exterior doors replaced
3. Apartments re-painted
4. Remove plaster walls and replace with gypsum board in the kitchen and bath as indicated on the plans where plumbing is located
5. Remove and replace all plumbing and gas lines
6. Repair damaged plaster at strike side of doors
7. closet door framing and closet doors added to some units
8. Repair concrete ceilings as needed
9. Remove and replace all kitchen cabinets and counter tops
10. Install new grease shield behind each kitchen range
11. Remove and replace kitchen sinks drain lines and supply and stops
12. Remove and replace all water closets (toilets, tank and supply lines and brass floor flange)
13. Remove and replace all bath lavatories, fittings, supply and drain lines
14. Remove and replace all bath tubs, drains, shower valves and shower heads
15. Remove and replace all ceramic tile in the bathrooms
16. Replacement of all front porch light fixtures with street address number applied to light
17. Replacement of rear porch lights (without address numbers)
18. All interior lights removed and replaced and ceiling fans with light kits added
19. Remove and replace smoke detectors
20. Remove and replace all toilet accessories such as towel bars, soap dishes, tooth brush holder, and toilet paper holder
21. Installed new metal door frames and end wall enclosures to enclose lead-based paint

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22. Remove front cover of wall furnaces, strip paint and repaint and then reinstall
23. Remove all existing window coverings and install mini-blinds

### Handicap Apartments:

The modernization completed in 1999 included modifications to six one-bedroom apartments within Type A buildings to be handicap accessible per requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) signed into law by President George H. W. Bush in 1990, but allowed time to phase-in compliance as modernization projects were scheduled.

Ramps were added leading to the front and the rear entrance doors (**Figure 64**). The under concrete foundation piping was removed and replaced to accommodate an accessible kitchen sink, lavatory sink, toilet, and shower with fold-down bench and adjustable height showerhead. Grab bars were installed around the toilet and within the shower. The bathroom door opening was widened, the swing was reversed and hinge side of the bathroom door was reversed to facilitate entry to the bathroom. The bathroom fixtures were rearranged after the linen shelves in the bathroom were removed. The closet in the hall was removed to accommodate the wider doors leading to the bathroom and bedroom. Door hardware was changed from knob to lever door handles. Photographs of the interior of a handicap accessible unit are contained in **Appendix B**.

**Figure 64: Ramp leading to handicap accessible unit at 1904 Fisk Ct. in Building No. 17, Type A**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Office (Building 24)**

The modernization project completed in 1999 also included changes to the D. N. Leathers I office (Building 24) as follows:

- Remove and replace kitchen cabinets and countertops in a manner that complies with ADA requirements
- Remove and replace kitchen sinks, fittings and pipes
- Install ramp and railing

The restrooms to serve Building 24 were also modernized in 1999 as follows:

- Remove and replace lavatory faucets, sinks, supply and drain lines
- Install new water closets and associated piping and parts
- Install new toilet accessories and grab bars
- Paint walls, ceilings and trim

## Controversy: Publicly or Privately Developed Low-Income Housing

The *Corpus Christi Press* interviewed Fred Quaile, president of the Corpus Christi Real Estate Board in 1949. Quaile voiced the opinion that the housing needs of the citizens of Corpus Christi should be provided through private industry rather than public housing. Quaile maintained that, “The National Real Estate Board, sided by local boards, has been waging a continuous effort to prevent further expenditures for public housing throughout the nation, because the cost is too high in comparison to value received and results in increased taxes.” He maintained that local private industry could construct new duplexes at a cost of \$5,000 per unit and that “similar units built by the government cost about \$8,000 per unit.” Quaile concluded, “Private industry and capital are adequate to provide all future housing needs in this city” (*Corpus Christi Press*, 1949). This claim contradicts the fact that the first three public housing developments in Corpus Christi were constructed at a cost of \$1,750,000 for a total of 468 units resulting in an average cost per unit of under \$3,800 including: 1) the cost of acquisition of substandard housing and other buildings on the land selected for housing development; 2) demolition of the substandard housing; 3) establishment of adjacent parks and community facilities; 4) construction of the units and infrastructure to support the units; 5) and administration of the project construction (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1939). Although costs had certainly risen in ten years following the construction of the first three projects, the figure of \$8,000 per public housing unit as opposed to \$5,000 for a privately constructed duplex may have been a generalization that did not reflect projects comparable to D. N. Leathers I or the other two public housing developments constructed in Corpus Christi under the Housing Act of 1937.

Public pressure to leave the job of housing the poor to the private sector seems to have come during the planning phase of the D. N. Leathers II project completed in 1952. The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority) published a booklet titled *Dollars and Sense: A Citizen Looks at Low-Rent Public Housing in Corpus Christi* (*Dollars and Sense* booklet) in an apparent response to public criticism. A copy of this booklet was given to the University of Texas Library on August 28, 1953, presumably near the time of its publication (Corpus Christi Housing Authority, 1953). The purpose of the publication appears to have been to inform and persuade the reader that public housing served a different market than the market served by the privately owned standard rental housing. Also, that public housing served an important function to promote public health by supplying affordable housing that provided hot and cold running water, indoor toilets, a cooking stove, and a heater for each apartment at an affordable price. Public housing also provided a housing campus that supported the safety of low income families and their children. The average family income and rent paid in Corpus Christi public housing at the time of the publication is shown in **Table 4**.



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**Table 4: Income and Rent in Corpus Christi Public Housing Projects c. 1952**

Name of Public Housing Project	Total Number of Units?	Average Family Income	Average Monthly Rent Paid
George W. Wiggins Homes (formerly Kinney Place)	158	\$2,101	\$33
Navarro Place	212	\$1,776	\$30
D. N. Leathers Center I	122	\$2,022	\$33
La Armada I	250	\$2,230	\$35

*Source: Dollars and Sense: A Citizen Looks at Low-Rent Public Housing in Corpus Christi, a booklet from the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History in Austin, Texas.*

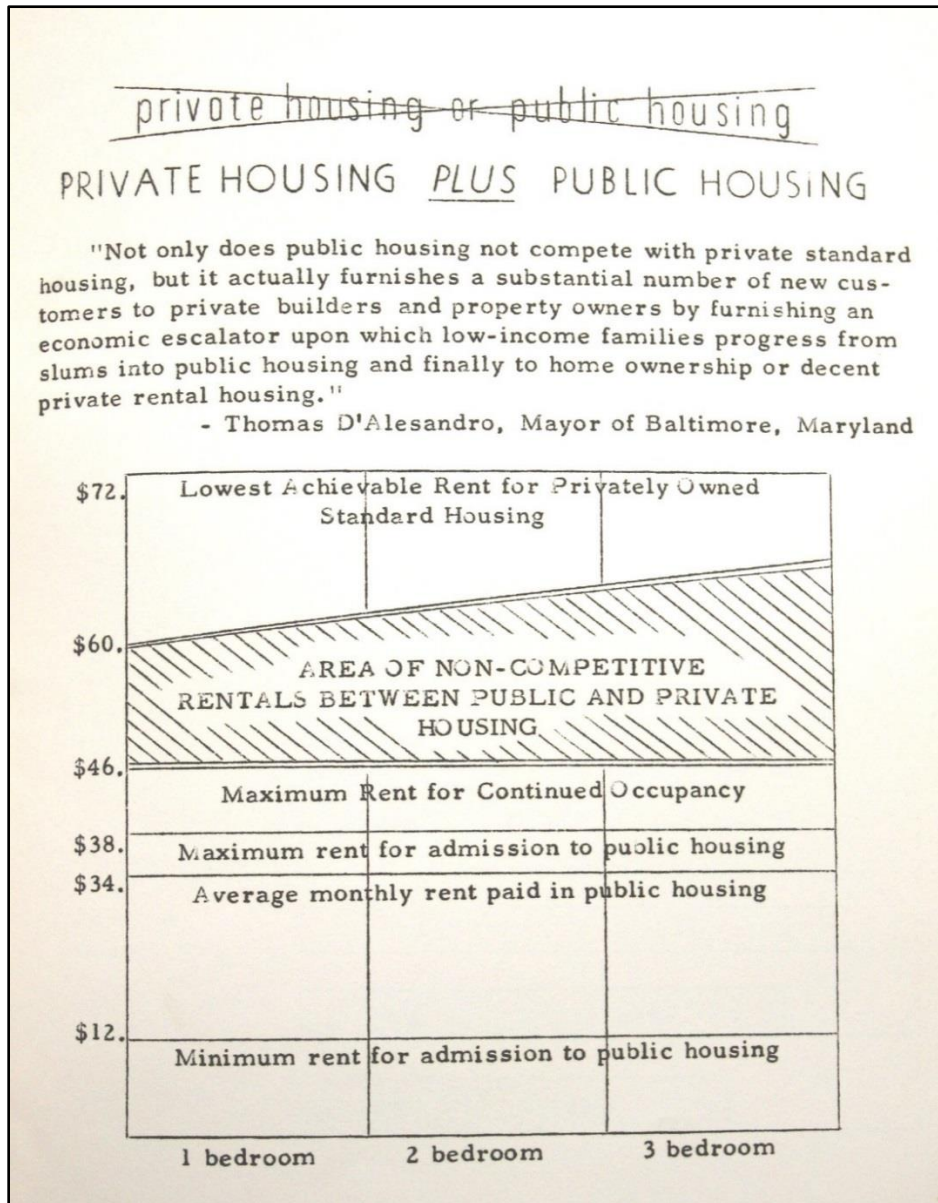
The *Dollars and Sense* booklet stated that from 1944 through the date of the publication, no federal subsidy had been required to operate the public housing in Corpus Christi and that the rents collected covered the vast majority of the expenses incurred. The small gap between the rents collected and the cost of the program was made up in the form of a tax exemption because the Housing Authority was not legally obligated to pay real property taxes. However, the Housing Authority was committed to a payment in lieu of taxes each year to the taxing bodies for police and fire protection and municipal services provided to families within the projects as well as every other citizen in the city. The Housing Authority payment in lieu of taxes in 1952 was \$26,214.28 divided proportionally to the city, school district, a county and state. The *Dollars and Sense* booklet compared the cost of public services provided in “blighted” areas to the taxpayer burden of public housing. The publication claimed that 90 percent of city funds were spent on “protective” services to blighted areas in the form of responses to fire alarms, police arrests, court citations, juvenile delinquency, health services, and treatment of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis. The cost of these services actually subsidized slum housing because the lack of building maintenance and management by the slum building owners contributed to conditions that caused fires, encouraged crime, and spread disease. On the other hand, public housing provided sanitary and safe housing in projects that encouraged healthy community activities for an affordable price to low-income families. Rental prices were kept affordable through efficient management, annual audits of tenant income verified by the employers, tight budgets on management and equipment expenses, and requiring tenants to assist in property maintenance such as mowing their own lawn, keeping their apartments clean, and prompt reporting of maintenance issues (caused by normal wear and tear) before small problems became larger and more costly issues. The cost of deliberate damage or damage caused by carelessness was charged to the tenant who caused the damage (Corpus Christi Housing Authority, 1953).

The *Dollars and Sense* booklet claimed that according to the 1950 census, 10,042 dwellings of the 29,700 total dwellings in Corpus Christi were substandard. The criteria for the category of substandard housing was that the dwellings were either dilapidated, had no indoor running water, no inside flush toilet, and/or no shower or bathtub inside the dwelling. Therefore, although the construction of public housing had eliminated some substandard housing, there were still many families living in conditions that were not sanitary and/or safe (Corpus Christi Housing Authority, 1953). Furthermore, the publication addressed the issue of public versus private housing and made a case that there was a

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place for both. The publication included a graphic that illustrated the gap between the highest rent paid for public housing compared to the lowest rent that could be charged for standard (rather than substandard) housing (**Figure 65**). The publication seemed to imply that although public housing might have competed with “substandard” housing, it did not compete with “standard” housing because the cost of owning and maintaining standard housing required rents (in order to yield a rental income that would cover costs and provide a reasonable profit) that were higher than the highest rent charged for public housing.

**Figure 65: Graphic illustrating how public and private housing could work together**



Source: Dollars and Sense: A Citizen Looks at Low-Rent Public Housing in Corpus Christi, Texas, published by the Housing Authority, c. 1952





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The public housing available in the 1940s and 1950s offered a way for people to live in a safe and sanitary dwelling while they had the opportunity to work toward being able to afford standard, privately owned rental housing or toward home ownership. As people were able to afford better housing, they moved out of public housing, creating vacancies so that other people could move out of substandard housing to public housing. The demand for public housing continued to exceed the available supply. More public housing units were constructed in the 1950s. D. N. Leathers II opened in March of 1952 with an additional 200 units (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1952).

A new government housing program was underway by 1968 which partnered with non-government entities to construct low-income housing using loans issued by the Federal Housing Administration. The Rev. Elliott Grant, pastor of St. Matthew Baptist Church, spearheaded the church sponsorship of the construction of North Side Manor Apartments containing 120 units. The rent for each family was reduced to one-fourth of the families' income through federal subsidies (Deswysen, 1968). The apartments opened in August 1969 (*Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, 1969). North Side Manor apartments were in such disrepair by 2014 that they were demolished after families were moved to The Palms at Leopard Street, a 120-unit apartment complex constructed near Roy Miller High School and owned and operated by San Antonio-based Housing and Community Services (Willden, 2013).

Mr. James Bright, a Corpus Christi architect who worked with the Housing Authority for many years, shared his perspective on public housing in the oral history interview he recorded for this project. He expressed that he believed in the public housing system because it was governed by local people, the system was not really political and it provided housing to people who would find it difficult to obtain safe and sanitary housing through any other avenue.



## D. N. Leathers I History Project Report

### Summary

The D. N. Leathers I public housing development provided affordable and sanitary housing for 76 years from 1940 through 2016. It was an example of one of the three initial public housing developments in Corpus Christi and was originally intended for occupancy by African Americans during a period of racial segregation. Throughout its history, the affordable housing available at D. N. Leathers I offered individuals and families a stepping stone toward better housing, through private sector rentals or home ownership. The project also offered stable affordable housing for the elderly and disabled with limited income.

In the 1940s and 1950s community life at D. N. Leathers I was rich with fellowship and neighborliness. The housing project residents viewed life at D. N. Leathers as a step up from the substandard housing in the surrounding neighborhood and they took pride in their project homes. As society changed, the character of D. N. Leathers I changed as well. The emerging demand for television entertainment and air conditioning drew residents indoors rather than sitting outside and visiting with neighbors and watching children play. Integration brought diversity to the resident population of D. N. Leathers I. The tight-knit African American community of the 1940s and 1950s began to dissolve as community members moved to other parts of the city or to other cities/states to seek higher education and jobs that paid better than those available to them in Corpus Christi.

In the 1940s and 1950s, strict housekeeping standards were a societal norm reinforced through Home Economics classes taught in high schools. By the early 2000s, few people took the same pride in the cleanliness of their home as their parents and grandparents. Substandard housing with no sanitary facilities had largely been abolished and public housing was no longer viewed as a step up. Instead, many people attached a stigma to public housing.

The character of the Northside neighborhood changed as the housing stock aged and people with good jobs moved to newer and more modern homes in other parts of the city. The people who remained in the area found that their neighbors might not have the same values and interests as their previous neighbors, so the community became more fragmented and less supportive. Although some D. N. Leathers I tenants maintained high standards for the maintenance of their project home and yard, fewer and fewer of the new tenants shared the same standards as the original tenants and the overall look of the facility declined over time and the cost to maintain the property grew.

The forces of change accelerated as the plans to replace the Harbor Bridge took shape and the The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi decided it was time to assist the D. N. Leathers I residents to find alternate housing. By January 2017, all the residents of D. N. Leathers I had been relocated either to private housing (with available Section 8 vouchers providing a government subsidy for the rent), to other public housing communities or to other places of their choosing. Demolition of the property began March 6, 2017.



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In his oral history interview, the Rev. Claude C. Axel summed up his feelings about the demolition of D. N. Leathers I in this way:

And so, in one sense, it saddens me because history is being removed/demolished. (people, parks, buildings). It's also depressing, but it is also reality in another sense, because, if things are not kept up, then this is always the outcome.

Marsha Shaw Hardeman, a Housing Authority Commissioner and oral history interviewee, was asked if it was a hard decision to vote to demolish D. N. Leathers I. Her response seems a fitting way to close this report:

Not really [a hard decision], because it had changed so much. I mean, it had been – more than 50 years, and it was not the same as when I lived there. Of course there's a bit of nostalgia because living in the Leathers housing project was a happy time for me and my family. We learned a sense of community and how to share and treat others with respect and dignity. Respect for the neighborhood by keeping our yard and surroundings neat and clean; and teaching the children that respecting the yard and the property where we lived showed respect for ourselves. And we, as citizens of the community are duty-bound to instill these “life-lessons” in our children, grandchildren and beyond.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **D. N. Leathers I – Oral History Interview Transcripts**



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Rev. Claude C. Axel – Edited Oral History Interview Transcript

Figure A - 1: Rev. Claude C. Axel at Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith. I'm interviewing the Rev. Claude Axel for the D. N. Leathers History Project being prepared on behalf of The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority). The interview is taking place on March 14, 2017 in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm interviewing the Rev. Axel, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to D. N. Leathers I housing project in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, would you just please state your name.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: My name is Rev. Claude C. Axel.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And when were you born?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I was born November 20, 1943, in Taylor, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well the reason we're here today, is to learn about D. N. Leathers. And so, first of all, just tell me where you lived in D. N. Leathers?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I resided at 1927 Xavier Court. It was called the "Old Projects".

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And who – who was with you?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: During that duration, I lived with my mother and my brother, who is 2 years younger than me.

LYNN SMITH: And what were their names?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: My mother's name is Essie Jordan, and my brother's name is Clifton Axel.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Great. Now you had some other family that lived in D. N. Leathers right?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, my grandmother, Pearline Johnson and step-grandfather, Johnnie Johnson. They lived in what we called the "Flats" [one-story buildings at D. N. Leathers]. As a matter of fact, they lived at 1936 Xavier Court.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I also had an aunt and a cousin, and both of them lived on Tuskegee Court. I think my Aunt Jean lived at 1925 Tuskegee Court. But, I don't recall the address of my cousin, Joan.



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LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, you had quite – quite uh, you could do a family reunion right there at D.N. Leathers, it sounds like.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Well, somewhat.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you were telling me earlier that you played, that was one of your activities. Of course, you were how old when you all moved in?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: About six or seven years old when I – when I moved in.

LYNN SMITH: And that was 1950, right?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: It was either 1949 or 1950.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, where did you play?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: We played directly across the street from our house, 1927 Xavier Court, in the park.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: There were two parks. The one we played in just about everyday was what we called, the “big park.” The other park was referred to as the “little park.” And I noticed here on the map [pointing to a site plan of D. N. Leathers I in the report] it has a playground. But it was a small park, directly across from where my grandmother resided, 1936 Xavier Court.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So that was in the “small park?”

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I think it had a swing set there. I do not recall if there were any additional [play equipment]. It would have been somewhat of a barrier to our playing ball there. However, the biggest single barrier to us playing ball in that small park really was 1936 Xavier[Court] where my grandmother lived. Anytime we hit a foul ball, and the ball went over into her yard, we were not allowed to get the ball. She would not even let her husband, who frequently sat of the porch and watched us play, to get the ball without a big fuss. And so, we had a lot of trouble getting – getting the ball from her yard. Matter of fact, sometimes I would run over as fast as I could to retrieve the ball, and, of course, quickly run back to the park – hoping that she would not catch me or any other person who ran to over to her yard in an effort to retrieve the ball.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So were you all playing baseball?



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REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, we played baseball just about everyday.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: As a matter of fact, that's basically what we played in both of those parks --- baseball.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: But we enjoyed the larger park, because it was larger and more guys could participate. Most of the time, there would be as many as seven to eight boys per team playing at the big park. And so it was more fun, because we were able to utilize that "big park."

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, who organized the – the games? Was it just spontaneous or?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: It was more like a spontaneous thing. Matter of fact, when we would get together to play, guys from Hillcrest, as well as from the "New Projects" [D. N. Leathers II constructed in 1952], and, of course, those of us who lived in the "Old Projects" participated in those games. We sometimes organized these games by location, i.e. Hillcrest v.s. "the Old Project", and other times teams were chosen by our preselected team captains.

Now there were some days (summer or Saturdays) when we played two or three games. Once we were chosen to be on a team, we stayed on that team throughout the entire day. We would play a game, get a little rest, play another game, and then sometimes come back for a third game. All in one day!

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So the teams were decided in the morning, and whatever you - whatever team you were on, and whatever position you were playing in the morning, did you stick with that position all – all day?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, we kept our same positions but there were a few occasions when we switched positions.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I was an outfielder (either left of center field) due to my speed and ability to catch fly balls hit in the outfield. Because we played so much we were quite cognizant of each individual player's strengths/weaknesses. And that's – that's what we did. There was very little arguing about anything. And even on close plays, we didn't argue about whether or not a runner was "out" or "safe." We resolved this matter by having the batter to bat again.





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LYNN SMITH: So, no umpires, just you all were your own?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: No, we were our own umpires or referees (when we played football).

LYNN SMITH: Your own umpires/referees.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Well, you have to get along, to make that work.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: We got along very well. And again, it was so much fun, so much continuity and companionship. It was just absolutely great.

LYNN SMITH: Wonderful. So, I think I understand a little bit better about how you played. What else did you do? What – what else made it fun to live there, or what was it like to live there?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Well, for me, the fun to live there was because it was a safe place. It was our “home.” We had great neighbors. Anytime my mother needed to borrow salt, eggs, sugar, or flour etc., it was no problem for her to send me to one of the neighbors to get it. She simply told me to go over to Ms. William’s house and get a teaspoon of sugar. And instead of coming back with a teaspoon, I usually came back with a cup of flour, sugar etc. That was wonderful. Another great thing about living there was that the adults looked out for – for all the kids who lived in the neighborhood. And we were very respectful. As kids we always addressed grownups with dignity and respect. We said, “Mr. or Mrs.,” “Yes Ma'am” and “No Ma'am,” “Yes, Sir,” and “No, Sir.” Ironically, there weren’t a lot of fathers in the neighborhood. There were some, but not a lot. However, the respect that we had for the parents, especially those single mothers was admirable.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So those moms had a big job didn't they?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes. They played a phenomenal role in our lives. I am eternally grateful for them and their contributions in my life. You asked me earlier where there any other games that we played. Another game we frequently played was, “Hide and Go Seek”. This game was generally a co-ed game that was played between the two parks, and 1921 Xavier [Court] and 1942 Xavier [Court]. And so all the “Hide and Go Seek” was – was done in those areas. Yes, but we stayed away from 1936, my Grandmother’s house. Everybody in the neighborhood knew that her house was off limits (even to her grandkids).



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LYNN SMITH: So, the one bedroom apartments, was that were the older single women mostly lived?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: No, it really depended on the number of children in the family.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Most of the adults who lived in the “Flats” didn't have kids.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: And again, I heard you say “apartments”. We never referred to where we lived, as apartments. We always referred to them as, “Projects” or our homes. Matter of fact, that word [apartment] wasn't even in my vocabulary back in the 1950's, as best I can recall.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, uh, were there any particular people that you really remember, names or personalities that really stood out for you?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I remember a woman by the name of Ms. Zola Mae (can't recall her last name) but whenever my mother sent me to her to borrow some flour or sugar, she was always so nice to us. Whatever, she gave me to take home, she would always ask me, “Are you sure that that's enough. If you need any more just tell Essie (my mother) to send you back.” I remember Mrs. Mamie Williams. She lived at 1922 Xavier [Court]. She had 2 daughters, Barbara and Betty Jean. We also went to the same church Saint John Baptist Church. I also remember at 1930 Xavier [Court], the ‘Pullams’ [SP] who were an older family lived there. Mr. Roosevelt Pullam [SP], was a deacon at St. John where most of us from the projects attended. I don't recall his wife's name but they had a daughter - I think her name was Mary Nell, but she played the piano. I remember cutting the lawn for about 4-5 neighbors. One was Mrs. Scott who lived at the corner, (1920 Xavier). I don't recall Mrs. Scott's first name, but that was one of the lawns that I would cut.

LYNN SMITH: So, that was, excuse me, that was 1920 Xavier [Court]?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, 1920 Xavier [Court].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I think I mowed 1920 [Xavier Court], 1922 [Xavier Court] where Mrs. Mamie Williams lived. I believe I also did 1925 and 1923 [Xavier Court]. So as best as I can recall, those were the four lawns that I cut, most of the times.



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LYNN SMITH: So, how did that work? What kind of mower did you have?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: The good old fashioned push lawn mower.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: And that's what I used. Those mowers didn't have the kind of electronic power that's known today. We supplied the power.

LYNN SMITH: So, did you just cut the lawn? Or did you do other things?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I also did the trimming, the edging, and flower beds.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: And I probably made \$15-\$25, per lawn.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, were there a lot of flowers?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: These yards were small; so the flower beds were small,. But the pride those adults had was amazing. They wanted their flower beds to look good. I don't recall what type of flowers they had, but I do recall them having a lot of pride in keeping their lawns cut at least once or twice a month .

LYNN SMITH: Great. Okay. While you were living there, you lived there for 11 years, I think till - -

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes we live their until my senior year at Miller High School.

LYNN SMITH: Till 1961. So, were there changes that you noticed while you were living there from when you were smaller, 7 [years old] to?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I don't remember that many changes. We knew one another. And, there was not a lot, especially where we stayed, of moving in and out of the projects. It was pretty stable, so we knew most of the neighbors. I recall that most of the neighbors did not have televisions in those days. I think I was around 12 [years old] when we got our first TV.



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It was a 25 or 27 inch RCA. This was huge in our neighborhood, because we had neighbors who would sometimes come over to our house and watch TV. Back then we had two TV stations. I believe it was Channel 6 and Channel 10. Every night at midnight we would hear the National Anthem and then the TV would go out (a buzz sound until the next day).

LYNN SMITH: So, what were the most popular shows? Do you remember?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I used to enjoy watching cowboy movies. My favorite three cowboy shows were Roy Rogers, the Gene Autry Show, and Lash LaRue. Then there was the, Groucho Marx Show, the Ed Sullivan Show, and the American Bandstand Show. Later on Soul Train came in. But for most of us (boys) we actually had more fun playing ball than watching TV. And so, playing baseball was my thing. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Good for you.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: That's what we did. We played ball and enjoyed ourselves, outside in the cool breeze or the bright sunshine on sunny or even windy days. We were not inside like the most of the kids today. Everything we basically did was at either that small playground, or at the big park across the street from my house. Sometimes we would go to T. C. Ayres Recreational Center.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. A couple other people have mentioned the 1952 fire. And when I mentioned it to you, you said, "Oh, yes."

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, yes, I definitely remember that fire. I believe the fire occurred sometimes after midnight. It shook – the whole building. We were asleep. And, of course, - it woke us up. And I remember somebody hollering, "The tanks are on fire." I remember jumping from the top of the stairs to the bottom. We (my mother, brother, and I) went outside to see what was going on. We could see in the flames from the explosion where the tanks had blown up. We stayed outside for what seemed like a long time, because we didn't know what was going to – happen next. Finally, someone told us that, it was okay for us to go back inside the house. Of course, we didn't go back to sleep that night. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] I bet not.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh no, we were too afraid to go back to sleep. And then the next day, there were still some flames and ashes from the area of the explosion. We could still feel the heat from the fire that was still partially burning. I'm really not sure, but I believe we went to school that day. And I think most people went to their jobs – as normal. And, you know, when we came back home that afternoon, I don't recall if the fire was totally out - but it was nowhere like it was that previous night.



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LYNN SMITH: Yeah. Okay. And then, you said that there was another fire after that in 1955.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yeah, I think in 1955, there was another fire - from the tanks. At that particular fire, I was in either a fourth or fifth grade student at Booker T. Washington School. We didn't call it "lock down", but the school did go on "lock down," and no one was allowed to leave the school building, until their parent or some adult came and picked them up. And the irony to this was that most of the parents/adults who picked us up that day walked to the school because most of them did not have vehicles.

LYNN SMITH: So, they – they walked over and picked you up?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, they walked to the school and picked us up.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now when you left Corpus Christi, what year was that? Do you remember?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: 1964.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I went to California.

LYNN SMITH: And so you were out – out of the state for a while.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes. About 12 years.

LYNN SMITH: And then when you came back, and you went over to D. N. Leathers, right?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Because you had fond memories of there. So, how was it different then? And – and what year do you think that was when you first came back?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, I came back in 1976.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: When I first returned I went to three places. I went to my alma mater, Roy Miller High School, Booker T. Washington (my first school), and D.N. Leathers. I then drove by where we once lived. One of the things that I observed was that the upkeep



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was nowhere near – the way it was when we lived there. I also observed that the Projects were integrated. When I left in 1961, D.N. Leathers was an all-Black neighborhood. And when I returned, it was integrated. And so the main things that I observed was the upkeep of the property/lawns were different; and D.N. Leathers was no longer segregated, but it was now integrated.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. You also said something about when – when you lived there, that you didn't feel the need to lock your doors.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, that was one of the best things. Back in those days, in the 1950s, you didn't have to lock your door. We slept with our windows open, because we didn't have air conditioners. We also slept with our front door and sometimes even the back door – opened. All we did was locked our screen doors. Although we left the doors opened we never felt threatened by any violence or theft. By the way our bedrooms were upstairs, yet we still felt safe.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Right.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Well – that was the beauty of knowing that you could sleep with your doors open without the fear of someone coming in either to rob you or injure you. We didn't have that problem.

LYNN SMITH: Neighbors looked out for neighbors.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Neighbors – the neighbors looked out for neighbors. We just didn't have the stealing, or break-ins, and/or destruction of property. We just did not have that.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Do you want to make any observations about what changed? I mean?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I think a lot has changed - from the fifties and sixties [1950s and 1960s] until now. One of the major changes was that there is no longer a “community concept.” There is so much mobility in society today. Families are constantly moving in and out of this area [Northside]. There's no longer seems to be a sense of ownership or even pride in regards to families who currently live in what is now known as affordable housing. As a result, you see a lot of property destruction and graffiti because only a few people have bought in to the concept of “this is my home “. You also see a lot of destruction, because “family ties” that were once there, the “village concept” that was once there, no longer exists. Adults no longer are free, in this day and age, to help discipline another parent's child. Matter of fact, it has gotten to the point where parents no longer say anything to a child because of the fear of the unknown; how will the parent react or how will the kid act or react. So rather than get



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involved, a lot of times parents remain silent and/or completely ignore the situation for fear of jeopardizing their own life.

LYNN SMITH: Whereas, when you were growing up.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: It – it was a “village.”

LYNN SMITH: It was a village.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, when we were growing up, our neighbors would discipline us by either talking or spanking us, although most of them didn’t. But if they did spank us, they would always follow up with these infamous ten words : “I’m gone to tell your momma when she gets home.” They would do that and of course that meant a second spanking or punishment from our parents.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] So, if you did something wrong, you were just – you were gonna get it from at least two people.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yeah, yeah. And the thing is that they all knew us.

LYNN SMITH: Right. [laughter]

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: So, we couldn't get away with anything, because the neighborhood was truly a “village” and we were well acquainted with each other.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: And – and, of course, they knew the parents.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, one – one other thing, just while we're on it. Where did you live, before you moved to “The Projects?” And how did that compare to -- ?

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, I lived in Granger, but I was born in Taylor. I also lived in Temple for about 2-3 years. I do not recall my Temple days but have fond memories of my days in the Granger because of my summer trips to my Grandfather’s home. My entire public schooling (1-12) took place in Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. Anything else you can think of that you would like to add?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I think this is a great project D.N. Leathers is doing. One of the main reasons is because D. N. Leathers [I public housing project] will no longer be here. I thank God that several prominent former residents of D.N. Leathers have been selected to share their memories of the great history of D.N. Leathers. You see, unless there is documented research that has been generated and shared by persons who once resided in the Projects, valuable history would have become a “lost art.” I also think that this is important, because of my family and other families who lived there. For example, I have a one-year-old grandson, a one-year-old granddaughter, and a four-year-old granddaughter. These grandkids will not be able to visibly see where their Pawpaw lived, because the Projects no longer exist. So I thank God for the history of Northside being documented and recorded for future usage. By the way, one of my greatest thrills has always been my showing my wife and friends from California, Mississippi, Dallas, Houston, etc. where I once lived. I rejoiced in being able to take them to D. N. Leathers [I public housing project], and showing them my old home (because to me that’s what it was) 1927 Xavier Court, showing my first school, Booker T. Washington School; showing my alma mater, Roy Miller High School, and showing what we used to call, “The Cuts.” There are so, so many great memories, the park, where we played ball. Those memories will now be shattered because nothing will be there. Finally, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be an active participant in providing research to TXDOT and D.N. Leathers, and others my experience while living in the PROJECTS! By the way, you do know that Xavier, and Fisk, and Tuskegee, are Black college names.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: And so, in one sense, it saddens me because history, the legacy of D. N. Leathers is being removed/demolished. (people, parks, buildings), It's also depressing, but it is also reality in another sense, which is a valuable lesson if things are not kept up, then this is always the outcome.

LYNN SMITH: And I believe you were telling me something about the Rev. Branch.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes. Yes. We went to Saint John Baptist Church near Waco Street, at 1305 Ramirez, I think 1305 Ramirez [Street].

LYNN SMITH: Sounds right.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Anyway, we went to Saint John Baptist, and in the early [1960s], Rev. [Harold] Branch shared the vision he had for Saint John [Baptist Church] to move toward the south side of town. He talked about how he had gone to the - city planners, and gotten information from the engineers, city planners, and others, and thus, he recommended the Church to move. Although there was some resistance by some of the members,





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

the majority of the members agreed. And so, Saint John [Baptist Church] moved out to Greenwood, and the rest is history. And sure enough, everything has gone southward, just as Rev. Branch predicted.

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's interesting how those things turn out.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes, it is.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well thank you so much for spending time with me today.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And telling us about the D. N. Leathers.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Okay. I didn't mention names. I wish I could remember some of the persons who have come out of the “old projects”, and have gone on to do very well. I do remember Matthew McGruder who lived on Winnebago Street at the time. He is now a prominent pastor in Grand Prairie, TX.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I know that there are some who later became teachers, doctors lawyers, and/or outstanding athletes. I just don't recall their names right now. As for me, I'm very proud of the fact that I came from the projects. And to see how much the Lord has blessed me, from a little nappy headed boy, from the PROJECTS to where I am now, it was nothing but the Grace of an Almighty God who granted favor on my life through the years. Thank about it. Everywhere we went, we walked. We walked to school, walked to the grocery store, barber shop, and walked to church. By the way, during the time that I went to school - I walked, I never missed a day. But since that time, I have been able to purchase approximately eight new cars.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: In the 12 years of school. I was recognized at Roy Miller [High School] at an honors assembly. About two years ago, one of the guys who went to Miller High School with me said, “I remember you, you're Claude Axel. You are the one that they had talked about at school, at our assembly. You didn't miss a day out of school.” That fact sharing moment RE: me--- really made me feel good to know that someone actually remembered me being honored for something that happened over 50 years ago.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Well, and obviously that kept you healthy enough, so you didn't have to miss school.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: [laughter] Rain, [laughter] Rain or Shine. [laughter] We walked right on to school.

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's a good thing you lived in Corpus Christi, and not New York.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: You're on target. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Well, no, because when the weather is bad, they close the schools. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Oh, that's true. So, you probably still would have perfect - -

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: I still would have had perfect attendance, maybe. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: There you go. Alright. Well, thank you again. It's – it's a pleasure, to speak with you.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Oh, you're welcome.

LYNN SMITH: And – and to hear about how this [housing] project affected your life, and – the atmosphere there.

REV. CLAUDE C. AXEL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Thanks.

## James Bright – Edited Oral History Interview Transcript

Figure A - 2: James Bright in his Corpus Christi home



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Mr. Bright, for the D. N. Leathers History Project, being prepared on behalf of The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority). And the interview is taking place on January 19, 2017, in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm interviewing Mr. Bright, who is an architect, in order to learn more about his knowledge and experience with D. N. Leathers, and just with the Housing Authority, in general. And first of all, could you just please state your name?

JAMES BRIGHT: James Bright.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when were you? Well, let's go with where were you born first?

JAMES BRIGHT: Devils Lake, North Dakota.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And what's your birthday?

JAMES BRIGHT: July 14, 1925.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. Thank you very much. So, how did you end up in Corpus Christi? What brought you here?

JAMES BRIGHT: Well, I worked for O'Neil Ford in San Antonio, who I thought was certainly the number one architect in Texas, and nationally known. And at some point, I said, I've got to leave San Antonio. I was living at home. And O'Neil said, "Where would you like to go, Dallas or Corpus Christi?" And I didn't want to go to Dallas, so I went, "Here I am, Corpus Christi." So my life began in Devils Lake but I lived it in Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

JAMES BRIGHT: And I was told by O'Neil, "There was a young woman down there you'll like, but she's a bit too old for you." And so that became a contest, [laughter] and that was Ann.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, wow. [laughter] So, you met your wife here in Corpus Christi?

JAMES BRIGHT: Yes, and she was a year *younger* than me. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, that's not old. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, goodness. And you were – you were married for a long time.

JAMES BRIGHT: Oh, my goodness, one of my daughters asked my wife, or my wife asked her. How long have I been married? And she said, well, let's see, 63 years. And Ann said, Oh, my goodness, that's too long to be married to one man.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Oh, goodness. Alright. Well, you – you uh, came down to Corpus Christi, and you worked initially for whom?

JAMES BRIGHT: Richard Colley.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: Who, I would say was probably the premier architect in Corpus Christi.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Great. And then you decided to go out on your own?

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right, I had my own firm for a few years. And then I formed Christian, Bright, and Pennington --

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: And that was well done for about 20 years, so.

LYNN SMITH: That's a long time.

JAMES BRIGHT: It – it doesn't seem so now, but at the time it was.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Okay. And then you formed another firm after that?

JAMES BRIGHT: Correct. Bright + Dykemas. That was my daughter and her husband, who are both architects.

LYNN SMITH: And so her name is?

JAMES BRIGHT: Biby Dykema – Biby Bright Dykema.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: I shouldn't say Biby, that's an abbreviation, Bibiana.

LYNN SMITH: Bibiana. Okay, and what is her husband's full name?

JAMES BRIGHT: John.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, John Dykema.

JAMES BRIGHT: And he is from a long family of attorneys in Michigan.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. But they met in architecture school at the University of Texas, is that correct?

JAMES BRIGHT: Yes, architecture – he – he was working on his Master's Degree, she was working on her Bachelor's Degree.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

JAMES BRIGHT: And they met, and they married afterwards.

LYNN SMITH: Nice. And – and she brought him to Corpus?

JAMES BRIGHT: Yes, and they were married in Holy Cross.

LYNN SMITH: Holy Cross Catholic Church over there in the Northside.

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right. We brought in Father Gough.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: He was a good, dear friend, his picture's on the table over there.

LYNN SMITH: I was wondering who that was?

JAMES BRIGHT: He was a good Irish Priest, and I would say, if I had to name, a true intellectual, he was one.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

JAMES BRIGHT: And – they read a little note at Ann's funeral mass, that Father Gough had written. And he said, "Jim you have grandchildren, and a smashing wife." And then he said, "P.S. she makes the best tea in the territory," so.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. [laughter] Well, in – in Texas, it is important to make good tea. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: [laughter] that's right.

LYNN SMITH: Very good – very good. [laughter]  
Alright, well you started working with the housing authority pretty early, in your time in Corpus, right?

JAMES BRIGHT: Quite early, the – the director, at the time, was Edna Garrett.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: And she was very supportive, but she retired very soon after we joined. And Ruthmary Price, became her successor. She had been her assistant, and she took over.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Now, did you meet Edna Garrett in relationship to the D. N. Leathers II project? Is that correct? The second D. N. Leathers housing project?

JAMES BRIGHT: I was trying to think what it was – what the project was? I don't really know, remember what – what the project was. It was, - -

LYNN SMITH: But, whatever it was, it began your relationship, which has been a very long relationship.

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right. Oh, my goodness, yes.

LYNN SMITH: With the Housing Authority?

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right. Almost, well, I'm gonna say the relationship was longer than my existence with it. I retired and my successor firm [Dykema Architects] continues to work for them.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: So, it's – it's been fascinating.

LYNN SMITH: Quite a legacy with that. So, tell me about Ms. Price. You – you were telling – telling me a little bit.

JAMES BRIGHT: Yeah, she – she was, I thought all housing directors were like that. She really knew the tenants. If one of them got sick, she would take them a pot of soup. She really kept up with them.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: If they got in trouble she went to the police and spoke for em. I mean, she was - -

LYNN SMITH: Really involved.

JAMES BRIGHT: She was really hands on.

LYNN SMITH: Right.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

JAMES BRIGHT: Not only, you know, whether that would be possible now, but it seemed impossible then, but boy she sure did it.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. That is something.

LYNN SMITH: So, one of the – one of the things that we talked about a little bit in the pre-interview was that you have been a – a, as well as, you've done work for the housing authority, you've also been sort of their expert when they've had issues – issues with – with problems, right? Architectural problems?

JAMES BRIGHT: I did two things. Yes, I did, when Celia tore things up.

LYNN SMITH: Hurricane Celia. [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: Hurricane Celia, I was hired by the housing authority to supervise. And their insurance policy said that, they could have local contractors. Or, the insurance company could come in and do the work. So, the insurance company chose to do the work. So, I was hired to be the supervision. When the project started out, the son of the owner of the insurance company and the contractor were big buddies. They weren't the most scrupulous people in the world. And, as far as the owner was concerned, I was an adversary.

Very shortly he came over to my side, and we were against the contractor. At one point, I remember the contractor; we were withholding ten percent. He said he could not operate; he needed that for operating funds. So, I wrote a letter, that if the housing authority is responsible for paying the contractor, I insist on ten percent. If the insurance company is responsible, I don't care.

LYNN SMITH: Awwhh.

JAMES BRIGHT: When the job was finished, there was a big lawsuit, the contractor was suing the insurance company and the housing authority, for I'll say, \$400,000.

LYNN SMITH: Close enough anyway. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right. [laughter] And Bob Sorrell, who was their attorney, I handed him a copy of the letter, and he said, "Oh, my God." So the housing authority was dismissed from the suit. And that's when I became good friends with Sorrell and Anderson.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, wow. So, you were – you were uh, in good stead with their attorneys.

JAMES BRIGHT: [laughter] I was with everybody. [laughter]





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Well, I guess so. Oh, goodness. Well, you were also involved in some local movements, or politics. I mean, you were – you were the Secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] right?

JAMES BRIGHT: Treasurer.

LYNN SMITH: Treasurer, sorry. The treasurer, I wrote down the wrong thing. And so, how did that happen? How – that's – that's unusual, because you're not African American, right?

JAMES BRIGHT: Right. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] You don't look it. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: Mostly not. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Mostly not. [laughter] Most of us don't know really what we're – we're – what our background is. Right? Many are getting a DNA test to find out. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: I went to Holy – we went to Holy Cross.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

JAMES BRIGHT: And the reason we did that, was Father McNaboe was made Pastor, the good Irish friend of Father Gough.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: And so, - -

LYNN SMITH: So, Holy Cross is a very diverse congregation, right? There's African Americans, and Hispanics, - -

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right; it was the most tri-ethnic group that I ever saw. I mean, it was, and had so many good qualities. You could go to Mass dressed up or overalls, or – I remember at a parish council meeting. I fussed because the pastor read the bulletin. I said, "We all – we all got the bulletin."

LYNN SMITH: We can all read the bulletin, right?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

JAMES BRIGHT: Why – why do we have to listen to it? And the pastor didn't say anything, one of the men and a good friend said, “Some of the members can't read, but they didn't want anybody to know it.”

LYNN SMITH: Oh, dear. Oh, so you felt, yeah. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: Fire away. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Oh, goodness.

JAMES BRIGHT: But uh, I'd have to go get the medal, I got something from the local N.A.A.C.P. For my work, and I just recently got the President's Award [Bright named as a Presidential Awards honoree on January 14, 2017, at the NAACP Corpus Christi Chapter 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Freedom Fund Banquet].

LYNN SMITH: Very nice.

JAMES BRIGHT: Which happens very seldom.

LYNN SMITH: That's wonderful.

JAMES BRIGHT: And uh, I – I can't remember what the other one is. I've got the medal in there; I'll show it to you.

LYNN SMITH: That would be great.

JAMES BRIGHT: And uh.

LYNN SMITH: Maybe we will get a picture of you holding the medal?

JAMES BRIGHT: So, I can tell you the – the local housing authority, Ruthmary Price; the board members are appointed by the mayor. But the housing authority recommends the people. So, when they wanted a Black member, she would ask me to recommend somebody, cause she knew it was gonna be a good person. So, I – I recommended several people, I'm sure. I know one particularly, Ernest Carter who was probably my closest friend. And he just loved the housing authority, he served on the board forever, and chairman, participated quite fully in it.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

JAMES BRIGHT: He loved it.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: And why do you think he loved it? Tell me what – what about the housing authority do you think he loved?

JAMES BRIGHT: I think he loved the – the whole process, providing housing, in Ernest's case, for people he knew. And it was – he really believed in the public housing system. He appreciated the fact that it was governed by local people. There wasn't anything political about it, really. It seemed so, appointed by the mayor, but it really wasn't. And so he – he liked it very much. He was – he and his wife attended all the – the functions they were supposed to. And he really loved it.

LYNN SMITH: So, do you think he loved it for the same reasons you loved it?

JAMES BRIGHT: I'm sure. We loved it together.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

JAMES BRIGHT: I'm sure that – that's why Ernest loved it so much, because it provides a service that – well, I wonder why they can't do the housing for the homeless people? There's an awful lot of people. I used to go out with a Salvation Army wagon in the evenings, with coffee and maybe sweet rolls, or something.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: And it would pull up under a bridge, and blow the horn, and people would come down like ants.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: And we would, “Cream and sugar, black? How do you like your coffee?” And they knew all the places people were, which astonished me.

LYNN SMITH: Cause you would have never known it by driving by?

JAMES BRIGHT: Oh, my, you know, you know where they – the pre cast members go into the side, and there are holes in - -

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: And people living up there.

LYNN SMITH: In the bridge in the – in the overpasses?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

JAMES BRIGHT: Yes, and up there in the holes.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: I could show you where we went through like a loading area, and a bunch of loading docks in the building, and they were up under there.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: You know, and the – the fellow driving for the Salvation Army knew where everybody was. And he [making honking horn noise], and they would come out. I remember there was an abandoned building on the Sears and Roebuck property, and he would pull up where Sears and Roebuck had been. The building was torn down; I don't know what this was. One little thing in the middle of the property, "toot," people would come out, there would be several families inside the damn thing.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: And this - -

LYNN SMITH: There was just a lot of need for housing.

JAMES BRIGHT: It's quite amazing. The rent in Public Housing is gauged on your income. I personally don't know of anybody that's with no income. There may be some, but I don't know them. And I wonder if that's not why they don't have housing for the homeless, because there wouldn't be any income.

LYNN SMITH: That's possible. That's a difficult question.

JAMES BRIGHT: I always follow the bucks. [laughter] And, you know, you just – I'd have to assume that- -

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's certainly, I think, the homeless population is a different population than the working poor.

JAMES BRIGHT: Absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: And – and the working poor are – are, I am assuming.

JAMES BRIGHT: Supporting, and they worked their selves out of the housing authority.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

JAMES BRIGHT: They worked not only from where they are, but as they improve their status, they moved to a different housing project. One we worked on was a private apartment project. Quite handsome.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: It had a few defects, we worked on them, and you ought to see it now.

LYNN SMITH: Is it public housing now, or is it?

JAMES BRIGHT: Oh, yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: And I don't know what the name of it is -- I can take you and show you.

LYNN SMITH: Well, we can figure that out. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: And it's -- it's quite beautiful.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

JAMES BRIGHT: And, as I understand it, what it used to be, somebody did better in one of the other projects; they promote them to this one.

LYNN SMITH: I see. If they were good tenants, and -- and did a good job in paying the rent, and --

JAMES BRIGHT: That's right, and then, --

LYNN SMITH: Then they got a better place.

JAMES BRIGHT: Instead of getting --

LYNN SMITH: Kicked out?

JAMES BRIGHT: Moved out in the -- the, who knows what.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Right. Right.

JAMES BRIGHT: They were moved into this – this project.

LYNN SMITH: Interesting.

JAMES BRIGHT: And the housing authority looked at another project that was available.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: And they would hire me, and I looked at it, and said, “You don't have enough money to fix this up.” [laughter] They're – there's some of the minimum requirements for the housing authority demands. And that one, they couldn't – couldn't get there.

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's interesting that you mentioned that, because I actually have been reading about the Housing Standards for 1938, when the D. N. Leathers I project was conceived. So, there's a – there's a long, I guess, history of – of housing authority requirements for housing.

JAMES BRIGHT: I'm sure. Well, then you get handicapped requirements.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

JAMES BRIGHT: And the - -

LYNN SMITH: Well, if you've got a government housing project, you need it to last, right? I mean, it - -

JAMES BRIGHT: Well, I was thinking, when I mentioned housing for the elderly, or handicapped, we had to put the cooking unit at the end of a cabinet, and then it didn't have to have a self-cleaning oven. But if it was in the middle of the cabinet, it had a self-cleaning oven.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, interesting.

JAMES BRIGHT: Because somebody in a wheelchair couldn't clean the damn thing.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, yeah, I wouldn't have thought of that.

JAMES BRIGHT: Oh.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: I'm very good. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Right. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: The whip straps for the first time I didn't, [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh. [laughter] You learned the hard way. [laughter] Well, some lessons, that's the way it goes.

JAMES BRIGHT: Well, I did housing work for Robstown, Taft, Mathis.

LYNN SMITH: So, you really know the system. You know what's needed.

JAMES BRIGHT: I've gotten involved in it, yes.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: And I've found some of them that were built originally, unbelievably bad. We were putting in new utilities in one in Mathis, and it was a local contractor that I knew very well, and he's very good. And he has a backhoe operator that can, I mean do anything. And he said, "We're having a terrible time." And I said, "Why?" He said, "We know the water goes from here to there, so we figured out where it went, but the first thing we did was hit the water line."

LYNN SMITH: Uh ooh.

JAMES BRIGHT: And they had used garden hose, and it was just, instead of to a joint, and then a joint. And stringed it out the way they needed it.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

JAMES BRIGHT: And the backhoe operator just, it wasn't that he was doing anything wrong. He [laughter] he couldn't anticipate where he was going. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Right, cause it wasn't logical.

JAMES BRIGHT: And that's the way it was built, so.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. Well, this is has – this has been really interesting. I'm wondering if there's – if there's anything else we want to touch on? I think we've – we've really talked about a lot of interesting things. Is there anything else you want to tell me?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

JAMES BRIGHT: Oh, my goodness.

JAMES BRIGHT: Well, I've kind of lost contact with the housing authority, so. When I drive around by it, all the projects look different, and somebody's been working on them. And I'm real pleased. I know that one, I was working on Wiggins putting in a new kitchen. And, of course, the cabinets had to be made for each unit.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: And the trucks would come in, and the cabinets, got no end cabinet.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

JAMES BRIGHT: So, I said, "Go to The Cabinetmaker, on Ayers [Street]. Take him to the job, and show him what you need. He will make you a cabinet, that you can't tell from the existing."

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

JAMES BRIGHT: And so, The Cabinetmaker ended up with a nice little job. He made these cabinets [in Mr. Bright's home], but he – he ended up with a nice little job. And saved the superintendent's life, because he would make all these odd cabinets, to fit the space, and they would look just like the other cabinets.

LYNN SMITH: So, they – so they didn't have to replace them all, they just - -

JAMES BRIGHT: Yeah, they didn't have to wait until Republic could come up with a weird cabinet.

LYNN SMITH: Right. [laughter] Well, that was a good solution.

JAMES BRIGHT: It was.

LYNN SMITH: It takes common sense, doesn't it sometimes?

JAMES BRIGHT: Yeah. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] And a lot of expertise.



JAMES BRIGHT: That's very nice. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Common sense and experience. [laughter] Experience and contacts, I guess, too. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: I enjoyed it thoroughly, I mean, and there was - -

LYNN SMITH: Well, I've certainly enjoyed visiting with you.

JAMES BRIGHT: They were very nice clients, the housing authority.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

JAMES BRIGHT: I'm sorry, I can't remember all the names.

LYNN SMITH: That's okay.

JAMES BRIGHT: Because we worked with the maintenance people, and - - When Ruthmary [Price] first took over, she also got the money man, and he became a very good friend, even though I didn't have anything to do with him. He was – he sat in on a lot of the meetings.

LYNN SMITH: Well, that makes sense. [laughter]

JAMES BRIGHT: His name was John Mengle.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, I think you did a great job. And I really appreciate your meeting with me today.

JAMES BRIGHT: Well, it's been fascinating. I've enjoyed it.

LYNN SMITH: Well, like wise. I've enjoyed it, as well. Thanks.

## Marsha Shaw Hardeman – Edited Oral History Interview Transcript

Figure A - 3: Marsha Shaw Hardeman at CCHA



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Marsha Shaw Hardeman, for the D. N. Leathers I History Project, being prepared on behalf of The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority). The interview is taking place on January 20, 2017, in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm interviewing Mrs. Hardeman, in order to learn more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the D. N. Leathers I public housing project in Corpus Christi. Okay, first would you just state your name?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My name is Marsha Shaw Hardeman.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when were you born?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: October 21, 1948.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And where were you born?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Corpus Christi, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: In Dr. White's Maternity Hospital.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: During that time, Blacks were not allowed to use Spohn or Memorial Hospital. Dr. White opened a small hospital for Black women to have their babies if they could afford it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Okay. I have a photograph later; I may want you to look at to, uh, to see if that's Dr. White. Do you remember what he looked like?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: No.

LYNN SMITH: No, okay, well, anyway. So, you were at D. N. Leathers I, and I think you told me you lived at 1817 Tuskegee Court. [The streets (Tuskegee, Fisk and Xavier) were called "Courts" except for Winnebago.]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right.

LYNN SMITH: So, tell me a little bit about when you moved in, and how long you lived there?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I don't remember moving – moving in, because I was probably maybe two years old or so.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Two or three. And, I just remember that being our home, that was where we lived. I remember this apartment had an upstairs. My mom was very apprehensive about us going up and down the stairs. And so, she would always stack boxes there as a barrier so we couldn't climb up, and fall, since the stairs were very steep. There were probably about 19 or 20 steps. My mom would share this story about when my older sister Carolyn, who was just a year older, and she was trying to get me to go upstairs. I was just learning to walk. My mom had left the room to get something. Carolyn had this one kernel of popcorn that she used to get me to climb up the stairs. And she would say, "Come on Marshee, come on Marshee." I was halfway up the stairs when my mother returned and saw what could have happened. She almost had a fit because she just knew I was going to fall backwards. I think that was probably when my parents decided to put boxes at the bottom of the stairs. So we lived there from about 1950 to 1955.

LYNN SMITH: Tell me about your memories of when you were there.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I remember that it was a pretty happy time. I mean there were kids all around, and everybody knew who lived where. We would always play out in the backyard. And it was just a fun time, I mean you see these kids now-a-days, and you say, “Remember when we lived in the projects ....” They were nice. They were really a “step up” from the “shotgun houses” from the old neighborhood. They didn't use the word “ghetto” back then. You would hear the grown-ups talking about the “old line.” I learned later that they were talking about the area of town where Blacks had to live due to segregation.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And over the years .... But they were just nice apartments, and they – they were very sturdy. When there were storms, heavy rain and hurricanes, we weren't afraid of being blown away, because the projects were really very sturdy and made of bricks and concrete. And being two-story apartments, there was not much concern about being swept away by flooding. Everybody kept their apartment clean. And it was just a nice living space. There wasn't a negative stigma to live there. The neighbors were friendly and caring and you knew who to talk to and who not to talk to. You knew whose mother would watch over you, who had older children in the neighborhood, and they would watch out for the younger ones. An unwritten rule that everyone followed was that you would never run across anyone's lawn, you always had to walk on the sidewalk. It was really mean-spirited and rude, if you ran across anyone's yard, because you were taught not to do that. When moms would hang the washed clothes out on the clothes line to dry because clothes dryers were unaffordable, you never ever ran in between somebody's sheets, or their clothes that were hanging on the line, because that was just a “no no” and very disrespectful. And you just could not do that. And so, we all knew and followed the rule. And everybody would pick up papers in the yards even if it was not your yard; they would put their trash out to be picked up, and keep things clean. Everybody had a day that they would clean their windows, and – and you had to open up the screens and everything – and scrub the screens with detergent and use ammonia to clean the window glass. And I can remember all those times, doing that, and keeping the sidewalks clean, and planting flowers. There was a man across the sidewalk, Mr. Smith, and he had, he had a really good green thumb. And he had flowers galore and everybody admired his yard, and –and if you didn't have the tools to do the yard work, you could go and check out tools from the apartment tool house. It was on the honor system and everyone followed the rule. You could only keep the tools for so many days. Residents used the tools, and then they would return them. You could never return dirty tools, or tools with mud on them. I remember scrubbing the tools with a brush before returning them. I remember there was a little park across the street with a swing on Coke Street. It had kind of a little covered area where – where there was a picnic table, and we would always go over there to play. I had to be pretty young, because I can remember standing on the picnic table. My mom has a picture, somewhere in my parents' house, of me standing on top of the picnic table. All of the neighborhood kids played there and – Coke Street was pretty. There wasn't a lot of traffic. And back then, not that many people could afford to have cars, so it was safe to walk across the street. Some grown up or teenager always had to walk you across the street, and walk you back home. It wasn't very far from our apartment. It was a nice time. In thinking about the families that lived there, I am able to remember some of the names. I think the some parents who lived near us were from Jamaica or some island thereabouts, which was kind of new to us and different, because we weren't used to hearing – that kind of accent.

LYNN SMITH: So, it sounded – it sounded different.



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MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] The mom and dad had a different manner of speaking, and we knew they were from another place. They had some chickens in a pen. They would kill the chickens by ringing their necks. Then their mom would pluck the feathers. Oooh, oooh! But that's what they were doing, jerk chicken, I – I don't know. But, as you grow older, you figure out what they were doing. They were really nice people. And everybody in the neighborhood pretty much got along. There was one lady that lived in the corner apartment at the end of the row. And there was a big kind of a drainage thing near the last apartments on the end of a block of apartments. And it had water in it. And I guess it was a sewer or some kind of drainage but it never smelled bad. I don't know what it was. But – it had something to do with the water. And it was covered, with two big metal doors that were locked with a chain and padlock over it. And as kids, we liked to run and jump on it, because it made a loud, echoing sound, like a drum. The lady who lived next to it would always fuss at us kids – and if any kids went and jumped on that big covering, the echoing noise disturbed her, because it was right there next to her window.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And there was one at the end of every – every set of apartments. And so we would – we would jump on it, just to be mischievous, and run away. And she would yell out, "I'm gonna tell your mother on you. I'm gonna tell your mother." And she would always fuss at us about that, I remember that big old thing for the water. And I think of it now-a-days, I mean, even though covered, and it was pad-locked and real heavy to open. It took two or three men to lift the doors. Parents always warned us not to go near that "water thing" (for lack of a better word). You were not supposed to go there, and back then kids obeyed their parents, so. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So, was it a man hole cover? Or, was it?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: It was about as big as this table [about 3 feet x 6 feet].

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah, it – it must have been; but it didn't stink.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I don't know if it was sewage, or, I don't know what. But I know it was really big, and I know we used to jump on it all the time. And when kids jumped on it, it made a really loud echoing type of sound. This ditch full of water was covered by two heavy doors. There was a padlock on the doors and it took two or three men to lift the doors open. They would have to clean it or do some kind of maintenance involving the water.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Now that I think about it, they are probably not still there. They probably covered it over. It was probably toxic waste. [When Mrs. Hardeman visited the Leathers neighborhood in early March 2017, she saw that those old pad-locked doors were still there.]

LYNN SMITH: Oh.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: When playing outside, like most kids, we had to be inside before dark. So right before going inside, we would run down and jump on the “ditch thing” one last time before going inside for dinner, just to irritate her, and run away. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, wow. So, a couple of things I wanted to – to come back to was - -

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: One thing was the windows, because we have windows now that are replacements of the originals. So, I wanted you to tell me a little bit about the windows that you remember.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Well, the outside of the windows had screens. The inside part was a pane of glass with a wooden frame with a lock on top. The windows had to be raised and lowered.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: There was the screen part and then there was a window sill. And then there was a latch down at the base of the screen frame so the screens would not fly open.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And uh, sometimes they [the window sashes] wouldn't stay up, and when they wouldn't stay up, we had to have a stick (like a bar of wood) there to – to hold them up, so they wouldn't, come down, or fall down on your fingers. My parents cautioned us to be very careful about not letting the window fall on our fingers.

And then sometimes in – in Corpus Christi weather, when it was “in between,” it was too hot to be cold, and too cold to be hot.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So when we were having the “in between weather,” the stick was used to hold up the window about 12 inches or so.

LYNN SMITH: Just a little bit.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: There was a great breeze that kept the whole apartment cool. There was no air conditioning, and we used window fans. But when it was really hot, we would go upstairs, because that's where the breeze was. And we would open up all the windows both upstairs and down.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And – it cooled down the entire apartment. It was a good cross breeze. But if you were in your bedroom, there was no cross breeze, because the windows were only on one side of the bedroom upstairs. However, there was a window in the hallway to the bedrooms, - - that provided a nice cross breeze.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The apartment inspections were a really big deal. That meant that the apartment managers had to make sure that everything was clean, and in order, and that – that tenants were following the rules. There was a list of rules that had to be followed, and they were tacked up on the back of the door that led to the kitchen. All of the tenants had to make sure that the rules were followed. My mom made sure that we followed these directions, because – you could get evicted from the apartment, if the rules were not followed. And so, all the tenants received a date of inspection. It was probably every quarter, or so. The notice would include a date of inspection. And the managers would come in, and inspect every single thing: your closets, the kitchen, the stove, the refrigerator. We had to make sure that everything was clean, and in order. There was a checklist, and tenants used the checklist, to do the cleaning, make sure everything was in order. So, it was a big deal for the clean up. It was very important to follow the checklist. Not following the checklist could lead to eviction.

My dad was a barber by profession. He also worked as a custodian at the Post Office and a bartender on weekends at the Corpus Christi Country Club to save up money to buy a house. Everybody in the house did their part, made sure everything was in order. If your residence failed to pass inspection, everyone in the neighborhood would know about it. And so, the women were very cognizant about that, they didn't want anybody to know that they were crummy house keepers, so they made sure that everything was clean and in good order. We all had to pitch in and we all had to clean and help out. I remember, since it was a two story apartment, we even had to clean underneath the stair nosing. All of the children had their part to clean. I remember cleaning, not only the window sills, but the entire space around the window frame. We also had to clean the bannisters, and – and just every little nook and cranny of the entire apartment. In the kitchen, there was a double sink. We had to clean everything underneath it. If the apartment had roaches, ants or any insects or varmints, you were considered to be a horrible house keeper, and the word would get out into the neighborhood. “Oh, she had roaches”, they would whisper, and everybody knew what you lost points for not having a clean house/apartment.

LYNN SMITH: And you said it wasn't just the word of mouth though. You either got a – your - -

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: You got a sticker - -

LYNN SMITH: You got a sticker - that said, you passed, or a sticker that said, You did not pass.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And so, all the ladies wanted to make sure that they passed inspection, because if not, it became the gossip of the neighborhood, that you were a crummy housekeeper, if you didn't “Pass Inspection.” Inspection, was important and the housing authority did provide tenants with cleaning tools. There was a huge storehouse of tools that tenants could borrow and check out like library books. And then, and I don't think you had to pay for them. But you had to bring them back at a certain time. They loaned them to you for a week or two.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Tenants also had to make sure that the tools were returned clean and in good condition. They could not be returned with mud on them. Otherwise there would be a fee.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

I don't recall— how that worked. But you would get demerits or something, if the rules were not followed. It was a good process. We didn't know or understand that it was, public housing. We thought the system just worked and all of the neighbors got along for the most part.

LYNN SMITH: That's just the way it worked.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, that's just the way it worked. And – everyone wanted their living space to look nice and be comfortable. And the entire family was expected to pitch in and make sure the work was done.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So you wanted it to be nice and clean. Oh, one thing I will never forget. Since the floor was concrete, we had linoleum all through the apartment. The linoleum came in one long six-foot roll rather than in individual squares. Over time the edges of the linoleum would become frayed at the ends. And when it became frayed around the edges, that linoleum became really sharp, like a knife.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And I remember one time we were playing jacks on the floor, and the linoleum cut into my leg. And – and it was from when we were playing jacks on the floor. And we liked to play jacks on the floor, because, well for one thing, the floor was concrete. And so, we always used it. The ball always bounced better on concrete.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: But anyway, it cut me and my leg started bleeding quite a bit. The cut probably required stitches but, I remember my mom poured a lot of peroxide on the cut. It foamed up and she cleaned it up and put three bandages on it. I got a lot of “tea and sympathy” for that ordeal. I milked it for all it was worth. I don't recall how long it took to heal, but I never went to a doctor. To this day, I still have a small scar near my knee.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And it probably needed stitches. But, we didn't just run to the doctor for every little thing. My mom was a good “physician's assistant” as are most mothers.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So, I remember my mom bandaging it up, and it took, what seemed like forever, to heal. I got to show everybody and tell the story about how it happened. It can still be seen but it's a whole lot smaller now. I looked at it the other day; it shrunk. [laughter] It has faded away to almost nothing; but it's still visible.

LYNN SMITH: Sure.





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] So, anyway. That was – it was fun, I mean, when you think about it now. It was – it was nice, and that's how we got our good habits of – of cleanliness. Of everything in your house always being in its place. It was our (the children's) job to keep the bedroom neat and tidy. Shoes lined up side-by-side in the closet. There was no closet door on the closet. So my mom made these pretty curtains and hung them in front of the closet to serve as the door.

And we were one of the first ones to get a washing machine. My dad worked long hours to get ahead. He had two jobs, well he really had three jobs. He worked at the [U.S.] Post Office, as a janitor; at Southwestern Oil Refinery as the “yard man”; and on weekends he worked as a barber by profession and that's what he went to school for. So, as the adults would say, he made “pretty good money.” I can remember our dad bought a washing machine. It had a “wringer” that squeezed the water out of the clothes as they (the clothes) were “fed” through two rollers located on top of the washer.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: It was our job, my older sister and I, to slide the clothes through the wringer so the wringer could squeeze out the excess water. And one time, somebody, I don't know, it might have been me, decided to see if a knife will go through the wringer.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, no.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And so, we stuck the knife in, and – and, it went through until it got to the handle – the handle of course couldn't go through, and so, it started making a loud screeching noise. My mother came running into the kitchen, “What are ya'll doing?” Needless to say, with the water spilled out all over the floor. What a mess! Of course we had to clean up the mess, and of course we got spanked.

After we started Bethune Day Nursery School, my mom was hired at a big new department store downtown, Lichtenstein's, as an elevator operator. She soon moved up to the gift wrap department and over time to the Ladies' Alterations Department. [Side note: My mom became the manager of the Ladies' Alterations Department at Lichtenstein's.] My Dad was hired at the Southwestern Oil Refinery as the “yard man.” From those two jobs, in 1955, my parents were able to move us to a housing subdivision called Greenwood Park. I mean, we bought a new – a brand new house. And we had our own room, and new beds and curtains and Venetian blinds rather than window shades and a shower in the tub. And we got a new washing machine. And it was, oh, so different, and a Westinghouse. It was really nice. And, of course, it was a move up. I was in third grade, when we moved, and I – I can remember my mother and dad sat us down and said, “Okay, we're going to get this brand new house, and it's going to cost a lot of money. And so that means we're going to have to cut back on things. We're not going to be able to have a whole lot of extras. And there's not going to be any birthday parties for a while. But we'll have a family party.”

[Side note: There was no local bank or lending institution who would finance the houses in Greenwood Park. The new neighborhood offering newly built homes for African Americans. The “rumor” was that Mr. Albert Lichtenstein (department store owner in Corpus Christi) contacted this lender in Harlingen, Annie Cox Shaw Mortgage Company, and persuaded the lender to finance the homes in this new neighborhood in Corpus Christi. It turned out to be a good investment because the Greenwood residents paid the loans back in full and on time.]

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My mom said we'll have our birthday parties with our cousins at your grandmother's house. We called my grandmother "Mamma Susie." And we would have the parties there, but, everybody has to do their part. My mom also said, we're going to be eating a lot of beans and rice, [laughter] and we did. Every Saturday, beans and rice, and I can remember it took us about two to three months to save our allowance, at 25 cents per week. I decided we were going to have "hamburgers or bust!" I collected those quarters from my sisters for what seemed like forever until we had enough to buy one package of hamburger buns, one tomato, one head of lettuce, two potatoes (for fries) and a dollar's worth of hamburger meat from Henry Garza's neighborhood grocery store on Sam Rankin Street [1219 Sam Rankin St.].

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So, I collected those quarters from my sisters. I said, "We're going to buy buns, and we're going to buy everything to make hamburgers. We're not going to have beans on Saturday. We're gonna have a burger party." I can remember collecting the money, and giving it to my grandmother, and saying, "We want to have hamburgers on Saturday," (because my grandmother kept us on Saturdays).

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So on Saturday – we had a party. We had the hamburgers, and fries, and it was so good not to have beans and rice.

LYNN SMITH: So, you were organizing?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: That's right, we - -

LYNN SMITH: Even then.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Well it had to do with food, so you know that I was all in.

LYNN SMITH: You were all in. Okay. [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Well, tell me about your fifth birthday party.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Oh, my fifth birthday party was wonderful. I was telling you about my grandmother who lived in Refugio, Texas. She was my dad's mom. Her name was Lona Shaw. She went to heaven way too soon. I was a sophomore in high school at Incarnate Word Academy. My grandmother had breast cancer and she was 56 years of age. She was the big baker, and she made me this huge cake, and it was four layers.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: A huge bottom layer, then a big layer next, and then a little smaller layer, and a little one on top. And at the top one was a clown's face. And it had orange slices for the



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mouth, and it had all candy, different kinds of candy for the decorations, and it was beautiful. It was pink, and it had all these decorations on it. My grandmother used these little silver – these little silver candy beads that she would put on wedding cakes. But she put those on my cake too, and – and it had pineapple filling in the middle. Oh, I love yellow cake with pineapple filling to this day. And everybody in the neighborhood came. Remember the unwritten rule was that you could only invite those in your “block of apartments.” Because families couldn't afford to feed the whole neighborhood, only those who were invited. We invited the Smith's (Esther, Olivia, and Honey-Bea, their parents were from Jamaica); the Lasley's (Ruthie and Dolores); Terry Boyd (who got into an argument with my sister Carolyn and she bit him in his back). We could even see her teeth marks on his back); Pat and Rickey Demerson; Ray, Marvin and Shirley Barnes; and Cleo Campbell.

LYNN SMITH: So, the cake had tiers - -

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, four tiers.

LYNN SMITH: Four tiers. And then layered in between each tier there was filling?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, pineapple.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I just wanted to make sure I had the full picture here.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes. She put icing on an ice cream cone and that was the little hat for the clown. And the lips for the mouth were made from the orange slices candy. The eyes were jelly beans and the buttons on the clown's outfit were jelly beans also.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Oh how I remember that cake. It was wonderful. And we didn't want to really have it outside, and I still have a picture of me and my Mom and the cake. My mom made the party invitations. Her creativity was off the chart. She got probably 20 small white bags from the neighborhood store that my grandparents owned on North Staples Street. We drew pictures on the bags and decorated and colored them. And those became the party invitations. We passed them out. And it was the best birthday party I ever had. [Figure A - 4]

LYNN SMITH: Great.

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Figure A - 4: Eula Shaw and her daughter, Marsha Shaw [Hardeman] at Marsha's fifth birthday party



Source: Courtesy of Marsha Shaw Hardeman

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We played outside but we had the decorations and cake inside because they didn't want all the decorations to clutter up the yards. We had to be very cognizant about keeping our yard clean, and keeping everything straight and in good order. And that's kind of what's different now, I mean, over the years, you could see the changes, of the responsibility of keeping things up.

LYNN SMITH: So, when you were living there, did each individual, like your dad, or whoever do your yard? I mean, it wasn't the maintenance guy that came by and did your yard, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Correct, everybody did their own yard. Many people planted flowers. And the Jamican and Cuban families planted vegetables and spices. If you didn't have tools, you went and – and checked them out from the – “tool-shed library” so to speak.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Or, if you had a leak or something, any tools (rakes, hammers, ladders, etc.) that you needed, they loaned them to you, but you had to return them, or they would charge you, just like at the public library.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We did the minor maintenance on the plumbing, but maintenance people from the housing authority would come, if it was more than a little minor maintenance problem.

LYNN SMITH: More than just a minor repair?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, [Agreeing], the dads would do the minor maintenance. Or, even the moms. My mom was very handy with tools. But, you didn't have to buy tools, and they trusted you with them. A lot of the people came from backgrounds where they kept their yard in good order. And I remember in the pink buildings [D. N. Leathers II were painted pink at that time], they're the ones on the other side of Winnebago, so I called them the pink ones, cause these [pointing to a site plan of D.N. Leathers I] were green.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah, we saw photographs of the pink ones. And I was wondering if it was discoloration of the photograph, or if they were truly pink? So now we know.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, they were truly pink.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And these were painted green?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Ours [D. N. Leathers I apartments] were painted green.

LYNN SMITH: Kind of what color of green? Were they light green, dark green, mint green?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: As I recall, they were kind of kelly green.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, sort of kelly green or medium green.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And white, yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My grandmother, Susie Williams, was basically forced to move from her home on North Staples Street due to the building of the freeway. It was called urban renewal. After all was said and done, her property was never used for the freeway and still sits vacant.



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LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The city, county, or TxDOT bought all that property.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And so, she had to move, and she moved to housing authority apartments, D. N. Leathers II. And by then we had already moved out, and so by then,— I don't remember them doing it when we were there. But when my grandmother moved in, they had begun contests awarding prizes for “The Best Yard” on every street, and she always tried to win, but she could never beat Mr. Bunton.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing] [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Mr. Bunton won it every year, and he was good. He had a fantastic green thumb, and he lived in the corner apartment. So, he had all this extra lawn, and all this extra yard. His yard was second to none with a variety of flowers and shrubbery. It was really beautiful.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Make no mistake you better not ever walk on his grass. Because he was always sitting out on the front porch, or inside by the window. He would yell at the kids, “Get off my grass,” and then, - -

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And us kids would run on the grass just to be brats; and to get a rise out of him.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And – and so, he had the best yard on Nueces Street. It was so pretty, he had flowers, he had trees, and shrubs, and it was just beautiful, and his pride and joy.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. Well, and when you were living at D. N. Leathers, this was – this was the best housing around, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] Yes, but of course Hillcrest had nice homes as well. I talked to a lady from our church, who happened to be white, and who lived in Hillcrest for a long time., and remembered that one refinery was there before the houses were built. More houses were built and the neighborhood expanded and so did the refinery; and on a much larger scale. As the refineries expanded, the white people moved out of Hillcrest and the Black people, because they wanted a



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house rather than an apartment, moved into the Hillcrest neighborhood. Over the years the larger houses were literally cut in half and made apartments by absentee landlords.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The houses in Hillcrest were nice, and a step up from public housing. And they weren't apartments.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Many whites moved out of Hillcrest, but many seniors chose to remain. So Hillcrest became a multi-cultural neighborhood as Hispanics moved in as well. But our family was able to move to Greenwood Park.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Greenwood Park was brand new housing from the ground up, where Black people could move in and own rather than rent.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, so you went to a Catholic school, where – was it at Holy Cross or?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, it was at Holy Cross. And we also participated in the work study program at Incarnate Word Academy High School. They had work study. They called it work study back then, which was a good way to say it.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: A lot of us did, not just the Black students, but, because there weren't that many Blacks that went to Incarnate Word Academy. But a lot of, all the students, both whites and Hispanics alike, were afforded the opportunity by the Incarnate Word Sisters to participate in the work study program in order to defray the cost of tuition. My sister Carolyn and I cleaned one of the classrooms after school. We received such a great education there. And made a lot of lasting friendships that are ongoing and continue to this day.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, a couple of – a couple of things, I wanted to make sure we touched on. Mrs. House, you said was the Avon lady.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] She was the Avon lady for the Leathers apartments. The Leathers apartments, both Leathers I and Leathers II, were her territory.

LYNN SMITH: Tell me – tell me about her.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: She was really nice, but she was strict and stern. So since she walked the neighborhood to sell Avon, she would report back to our parents if she saw any children acting up. She was kind of the unofficial “Leathers Police Patrol.” Many of the ladies bought Avon products from Mrs. House.



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LYNN SMITH: So, tell me about the television next door.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Not everyone could afford a TV, because they were really expensive. But the – the family next door, the Demerson's, they had a TV with the rabbit-ears antenna, and it had probably an antenna sticking out the window. And so they would watch, one night a week, when the Amos and Andy Show would come on [this show had all Black actors]. I think it came on at 8:00 p.m. And we were supposed to be in bed by then. But my parents wanted to see it and they didn't want to leave us home alone, even though it was right next door. And so, that meant, if we wanted to go next door and watch TV we had to make sure we had taken our bath and had everything done, homework done, etc. , so we could go next door and watch the Amos and Andy Show. It was a comedy. And it was fun for us, because they were the only Black people on TV who were not servants or in the jungle with Tarzan. They were very comedic and goofy. My parents and all the adults loved it. And they would laugh, and repeat the lines and we would laugh as well. The show aired on a school night, I think it was on Wednesday night. So we had to have our homework done, have our baths taken and have everything ready for school the next day. And I remember going next door in our robes and slippers to go to the Demerson's house and watching the show on their TV. And as soon as it was over, we had to come home and go straight to bed because we had to get up early to go to school the following day. And when they [Amos and Andy] would say stuff that was kind of off the wall, or kind of risqué, we – we would have to cover our ears, and – they, would turn the sound down. It was really funny. Also on some Saturdays, we would go next door early in the morning, to watch The Howdy Doody Show.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: yes, that was a really fun time. We would wake up early in the morning, because my daddy would go to work. He was a barber. He did that on the weekends. And when my mom didn't have to work on some Saturdays, we would all get in the bed with her and snuggle, and listen to the radio. There was this children's show on the radio called Sparky. I loved Sparky. I think it was a dog who could talk. We would go in – and listen, and there was a lot of singing. “I loved that show, and it was part of our entertainment on the radio. And always with a positive message: obey your parents; don't lie, help others; etc.

Growing up with working mothers, many young children attended a local nursery school called Bethune Day Nursery, named for Mary McLeod Bethune (founder of Bethune-Cookman University). Mary McLeod Bethune was a staunch fighter for civil rights, especially for women and children.

Mrs. Bernice Leonard, a local power house and advocate for civil rights [wife of Carlyle Leonard, first manager of D.N. Leathers I], could see that there was a need for daycare for young Black mothers. She was the driving force and founder of this nursery school named in honor of Mary McLeod Bethune. Mrs. Leonard had the drive and the foresight to do what was needed to found the nursery school, and get financing for it as well. All the ladies – the families that had young children would send their children to the Bethune Day Nursery School, now called pre-school. But, it was called nursery school back then. A group of parents would get together, and share the cost of the cab, for all the kids. It was about six of us in the back seat and three or four adults in the front seat. The cab would take us to nursery school and drop the adults off at work downtown. We were all scrunched together, like sardines, to take us to the nursery school. And – and we shared the ride, all the mothers that were involved in it, Bertha Barnes, Irene Demerson, and Eula Shaw. We all shared a ride, and the cab driver





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took us all to school and he would pick us up in the afternoon. And so that it wouldn't be a big pay out, the parents shared the fare and paid the driver monthly.

LYNN SMITH: So, you were one of the children that went to Bethune Day Nursery School.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, Bethune Day Nursery.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The taxi driver would take us to school at Bethune and pick us up at the end of the day, and take my sister and I to our grandmother's house, Susie Williams' house, located at 1306 N. Staples St., because my mom worked until 6:00 p.m. Bethune Day Nursery is still there. The current administrator of Mary McLeod Bethune Day Nursery [the full name] was a former student there when she was a child, Jimmie Bibbs McCurn. Her mom, Ernestine Bibbs, and my mom were good friends. Since my birthday was in October, I wasn't really old enough to go to nursery school, but they allowed me to attend anyway. Ms. Harris was the cook, and I had to stay in the kitchen with her. Ms. Harris always gave me something to eat. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I remember she made this rice pudding, that she would give me to eat while she did the cooking. She would say, "You sit over here, honey, while I finish cooking."

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And I don't know how I can still remember Ms. Harris's name, but she was really nice, and she took care of me.

LYNN SMITH: There you go. Okay. So, now you're all grown up.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And uh, I believe you told me that the former mayor - -

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The former mayor, Nelda Martinez, I don't know how we came together. I really don't remember, but I would attend a few community service meetings. I'm guessing she saw me at one of my public service projects. Because I've always been involved in public service. And she said, "Well, I want to meet with you, because your name keeps coming up every time I come to a meeting." And I said, "Oh really," so she said, "I want to take you out to dinner, you and your family, and I have something I want to talk to you about." She didn't say anything about running for mayor because she had just been elected to the city council. I [as a retired teacher] was and am still involved in A.F.T., the American Federation of Teachers. I think she wanted an advocate to help bring her message to the Black community. And so – she took us to dinner at the Old Mexico Restaurant. My dad was there, and, of course, he's a good talker too. And so we kind of talked, and we immediately hit it off. And as it turned out, I knew her brother, Father Frank Martinez, a priest with the Diocese of Corpus Christi. We had worked on some projects together. And so, that's how we kind of came together, and then after that, I worked on her campaign, but not out – out front, but writing letters and things like that. I didn't, I wasn't really in the – in the decision making "Think Tank" with her, but anybody that I knew, I would share



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Nelda's work ethic and vision for Corpus Christi because I know her to be a good person and honest person of integrity. And so, that's how we kind of came to know each other over the years. So, when she ran for mayor of Corpus Christi, I was out there with her and campaigned for her. Not so much out front, but kind of in the background and within my community involvement activities. I would recommend Nelda to anyone who asked my opinion of her. And that's how we kind of garnered this relationship. And one thing about Nelda, she always remembered my name and greeted me no matter where I saw her. And good politicians do that.

LYNN SMITH: That's right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And – and so, and so we kind of had a friendship. Every time I would run into her, she would, she would always greet me and say, “Well, hello Marsha Hardeman.” And, of course, you remember that, if somebody knows and remembers your name. So, after she became mayor, one of her tasks was to fill seats on city boards by nominating citizens willing to share their time and talents. It's a volunteer position, so it's difficult to get people to commit to the time requirements.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: She asked me if I would be interested in serving on The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi Board (Housing Authority Board) [Mrs. Hardeman had retired from teaching school by that time]. And I asked her, “Well, what do I do?” And she said, “Oh, it's not really hard, you can learn it, as you go.” I soon received an official letter of appointment in the mail and was appointed. Everybody on the board is really nice and helpful. The position requires a lot of listening and attention to detail. The training is really intense and there are a lot of HUD [Housing and Urban Development] rules and regulations to become familiar with. The silver lining is that the Housing Authority staff is really helpful and are always willing to answer any questions. You can tell that the staff takes their cue from CEO, Gary Allsup. He is a top of the line administrator and takes pride in doing a good job for the community.

LYNN SMITH: And you've been on the Housing Authority Board how long now?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Three years.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: There is still a learning curve that I am on track to master, but with staff assistance, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Both my parents were very civic-minded and always active in the community and in our church. So I stand accused of inheriting their sense of duty to ensure that the community becomes a better place by becoming active in solving problems rather than complaining about them. When people find out you're retired, and they know you're a hard worker, they seek you out. So I'm proud and honored to be in that group.

LYNN SMITH: Right. So, we have discussed that as a child you lived at D. N. Leathers I public housing.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]



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LYNN SMITH: And then, there came a time when the Housing Authority Board had to vote whether or not to demolish D. N. Leathers I. Right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And so, was that a hard decision?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Not really, because it had changed so much. I mean, it had been – more than 50 years, and it was not the same as when I lived there. Of course there's a bit of nostalgia because living in the Leathers housing project was a happy time for me and my family. We learned a sense of community and how to share and treat others with respect and dignity. Respect for the neighborhood by keeping our yard and surroundings neat and clean; and teaching the children that respecting the yard and the property where we lived showed respect for ourselves. And we, as citizens of the community are duty-bound to instill these “life-lessons” in our children, grandchildren and beyond.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, there was one more thing I wanted to ask you about.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] Okay.

LYNN SMITH: When you were a child, there was uh, there was a fire, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: There was a fire. It was night-time and our family had already gone to bed.

LYNN SMITH: The fire wasn't at D. N. Leathers I, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: No. No.

LYNN SMITH: No.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: It was on the other side of Port Street– back by Hillcrest.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: It was on the other side, where it is now.  
And - -

LYNN SMITH: Where the refinery was?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right, where the refinery was. And there was a loud boom, but we didn't really know what it was or where it came from. We were asleep, it had to happen like at midnight, or after midnight. We were already in bed, I know that. And I can remember, my parents getting up, and everybody ran out of their house. I can remember, because – we woke up, but we were told to stay inside. And so, we were looking out of the window, and seeing what was going on. Everybody was running, and screaming, and yelling, “It's a big fire.” You could see this huge flame of fire in the sky. And we could hear all this noise, and – and everybody was screaming, “We've got to



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get out here because it's going to blow up!" -- And so, there were police men, running up and down with – with a bull horn, yelling for everyone to, "Get out, get out, I don't care where you go, but you need to get out of here, because it might blow up, and you'll all be killed."

LYNN SMITH: Wooh.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I can remember my dad waking us up, and we just had to get whatever clothes – and get out of town. We were throwing clothes into paper bags and suitcases and we left town. My mom was really scared. I remember her crying. We had a power glide Chevrolet, a little black car. We just grabbed whatever we could. I remember us packing toys, [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My dad drove us to Refugio. That's where our grandparents, his parents, lived. My dad said, "We're gonna go to Refugio, and then I'll come back to Corpus Christi, and see what is going on." My mother didn't want him to return to Corpus Christi. She begged him not to go. She was crying, but she didn't want us to see her crying. That was the first time I ever saw my mom cry. So, we went to Refugio, and we kids thought it was a big lark. I was – probably in second grade. Everybody was running out of their houses, and getting their belongings, and running for safety. In those days, everybody didn't have a car. We happened to have a car because my dad worked day and night to pay for one. And so we – we drove to Refugio. My Dad called my grandparents and said we were coming. And so they were glad to have us stay with them.

LYNN SMITH: Sure.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And, I remember taking all of our toys, or stuffed animals, or whatever, and just some clothes, and we just threw them in a suitcase, or bag, or whatever. And left, and my mother didn't want my dad to come back, and he said, "No, I've got to come back, and check the property, and see what's going on." As we were leaving, we could see that the sky was just lit up with this huge fire. I can still see it. And –everybody was running, and moving, and, just like you see in the movies. And – and nobody knew what to do. People were ...running in circles not knowing what to do. My mom was real nervous, but – she didn't talk. When she's nervous, she paces. And so, she kept pacing, and she was trying to be upbeat and positive. I can remember her kind of crying with my grandmother, and but they didn't want us to see it. So, they put us in the bedroom, and we went to sleep. We had our stuff, and I can remember having stuffed animals, and – all the way to Refugio they were talking, but my mother wasn't talking. My dad was doing all the talking. And we could not talk. Mother said, "Don't talk." So, we obeyed. We really didn't know how serious it was. We thought it was a lark. We stayed in Refugio for awhile, I don't remember how long. My dad said he was going to call, but it seemed like the phones went out, or something, because he was unable to call. The phones in Refugio weren't that great because it was a small country town. [As a side note ... my cousin, Wanda Dukes is now Mayor of Refugio, Texas.]

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: You know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]



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MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My dad came back to get us in Refugio. I don't remember how long we stayed there. The city officials gave clearance for us to return to Corpus Christi. I don't remember how long we were gone. The adults said they thought the projects were going to blow up. Thankfully, by the grace of God, they did not.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I remember we stayed in Refugio for awhile until my dad came back to get us. I don't know, we may have stayed a week or more, I don't even remember how long. But we ended up coming back to Corpus Christi – and everything was in tack, it just had this real gaseous smell. You could smell gas for days, and probably weeks, it was a gaseous smell for a long time.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: There was a very strong smell of gas. We kind of got headaches and such. But you could always hear the grown ups talking about it. And they didn't want us to hear though, because they didn't want to scare us, but they were all talking about what happened and what they encountered. It was daylight when we returned. It could have been a week, I don't even remember. But, everybody was talking about the fire, whatever happened stayed at the refinery in that area. I don't think it crossed Hillcrest to affect D. N. Leathers.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: But it was scary. I can still remember us carrying all of our toys, and my dolls and stuff, and – and everybody running frantically. I could see everybody running up and down, and people yelling, “Get out of here.” And people knocking on doors and waking up neighbors, and – and it wasn't the police, it was the neighbors, saying it.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And so, but when we came back, it was okay. It didn't reach the projects– it just had the smell of gas for weeks and weeks. And –but after a while, it was – it was okay. I really hate that I didn't ever talk to my mom about it. They – they probably talked to us later about it. And it didn't – it didn't touch the part of town where my grandmother (my mother's mother) lived. She lived on North Staples Street near Holy Cross Church. And, it didn't affect them. There weren't any electric stoves [in the projects], and we didn't have any gas for the gas stove. We couldn't use our stove for a long time.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I remember we had two hot plates. And, we cooked at my grandmothers' house, and brought food to our house. I just remember that the night of the fire, the whole sky was just lit up with flames, and fire, and – and we were all scared, holding onto my mom.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]



## **D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A**

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And it seemed like somebody, the cops or somebody, were driving up and down with a bull horn, or microphone. Get up, get out right now. It was scary. But at least we had some place to go, because some people didn't have a place to go.

LYNN SMITH: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Well, thanks, that's – that's quite a vivid memory, and.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

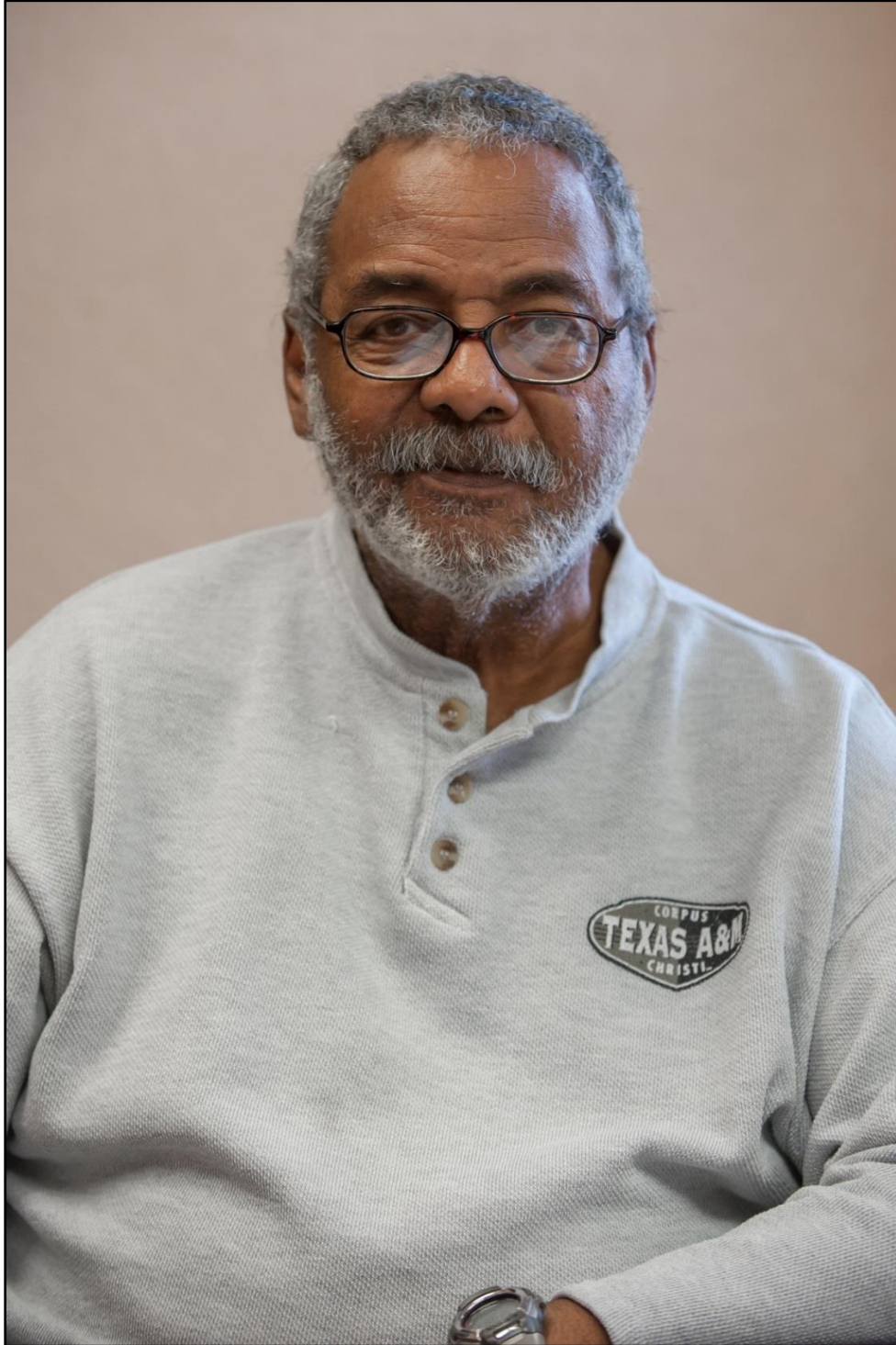
LYNN SMITH: And – and I appreciate you're sharing that.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Sure. Sure. It was my pleasure.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Thanks so much for sharing your memories about D. N. Leathers.

## Willie Hardeman – Edited Oral History Interview Transcript

Figure A - 5: Willie Hardeman in 2017



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Mr. Willie Hardeman, for the D. N. Leathers I History Project, being prepared on behalf of The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority). The interview is taking place on January 19, 2017, in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm asking Mr. Hardeman questions in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the D. N. Leathers I public housing project in Corpus Christi. Okay, so, as we begin, would you just please state your name?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: My name is Willie Hardeman.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when and where were you born?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: I was born here in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1941, at 904 Parkers Alley.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. When is your birthday?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: December 3, 1941.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, one of the reasons that we're here, talking today is that as a child, you lived in the D. N. Leathers original housing project. And so, how old were you when you moved in? What year was that?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: It was probably 1943. I remember, well, I know, based upon some of the things my mother told me, that I was two years old when we moved into the projects. And I remember I lived in the projects from the age of two until thirteen. When I was thirteen, my father got a job at Reynolds Aluminum Company, and they told us, told him, that we were making too much money to live in the projects at that time. And we moved.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And I think you told me you had a sister born, while you'll were living there.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, Bonnie – Bonnie Ella Hardeman, my youngest sister.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And so, you originally were in a two-bedroom unit, right? And I think we talked about 1813 Winnebago, does that sound right?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] Yes, and then we moved down to the next building on the same street.  
1903 - -

LYNN SMITH: Three?





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WILLIE HARDEMAN: 1903 Winnebago [Street, a three-bedroom unit].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. 1903 Winnebago, great. And so, what were some of the things you remembered about living – about living there at D. N. Leathers I?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Some of the things I remember is that, when I lived at the first unit, living next door to us was Reverend Dillworth and his family. And on this other side of Reverend Dillworth was my cousins, Carl and Charles Hardeman, my – my Father's brother, Earnest Hardeman was renting that unit. And, I remember probably the games that we kids used to make up, and play in the neighborhood.

Mostly we played “hide and seek,” but, we had to be very careful in running in the backyards, because there were a lot of clothes lines. And on one occasion, when one of the kids was running, he was a little bit taller, he ran into the clothes line, and it knocked him down. But, we shorties, we didn't have to worry about that, we could run under them. I remember one of my best friends, he and I used to play marbles, and – and spinning tops. And that was a lot of the games; we just kind of made up our games, as we went along. One of the other things we used to, there was a little creek right down the street from the house, there on Winnebago. And we used to go down there and catch tadpoles, put them in little jars, and eventually they would turn into small frogs, and we would release them. On occasion, we would catch crawfish, and we thought they were shrimp. But they told us no, they were crawfish, and they told us the water was polluted, and we, you couldn't eat anything from that water. But, you know, as kids, we would play in the water, because it really wasn't that deep. It was probably ankle deep. And other games we would make up, we would play baseball, but we would go up to Booker T. Washington [Elementary School] to play baseball. The baseball field that's next to the T. C. Ayers Recreational Center, it was there, at the time, but we never played there at – at that ball park. T. C. Ayers Recreational Center wasn't built at the time I was living there.

One of the things I remember is that every Saturday, the library would send around a van. It was an old milk truck that they had converted a mobile library. And they called it the book mobile, and every Saturday morning they would come around, and we would go check books out. The only books available were magazines, comic books, and Zane Grey westerns. We were not allowed to enter the public library until after integration, sometime in the late 1950s.

Mr. Leonard, who was the manager of the D. N. Leathers Center, at the time, he would encourage all of us young kids to read as much as we could. Matter of fact, when I was five years old, he gave me a book by Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I'm amazed that you remember the book, so, I – I'm impressed.



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WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: With that.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, it had to do with, gosh, I mean, I can see it in my head now. Cause I kept the book. I had the book until I was probably about 18 years old.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: And the back started falling off of it, and I just got rid of it. But Mr. Leonard used to talk to us kids all the time, and encourage to do as much as we could, and – and strive for things, and try to become more than – than we, you know, we could imagine we could be. But I remember him always encouraging us, and always being very friendly. When I was growing up in the projects, one thing I remembered is that you knew all of the kids that lived in the projects, and you knew their parents. And if you were there playing at that time, if the – if the mother cooks cookies, or whatever she cooked, if she was gonna give cookies to her kids, you got to eat cookies, or you got to eat dinner, or whatever it was. Everybody shared everything they had, that's one of the things I remembered. And every parent looked out, not only for their kids, but they looked out for the other kids in the neighborhood. If you were in another area, and you were throwing rocks, or whatever you were doing, your mother would get a phone call. And when you got home, she would know exactly what you were doing, when you were out of her sight. So, we made sure we obeyed all of the adults, and that we tried to do the best we could to be on our best behavior, whenever someone told us what to do. We would always say, "Yes, mam," or "no, mam," or "yes, sir," or "no, sir." We were always courteous, our parents taught us to be as courteous as we could. And because we knew all of the parents of all the kids, it made it seem like one big community, where we felt very comfortable. We never felt threatened in any way. My best friend, at the time, Crockett Williams, he had polio, and kids used to tease him, and I would take up for him. I didn't know anything about bullying, at that time, but now that I've heard all these kids talking about bullying, that was to me, thinking about it now, was a prime example of bullying. Because of the fact that he was crippled, and they used to make fun of him, and I used to tell them, don't – don't do that. So, that made me very conscious of how people will treat other people different – differently, because they are different. But my experience of growing in the projects, what I can remember is I had a very happy childhood, and I remember all the kids being very happy. None of us wanted or lacked anything, we didn't know – we only knew the projects, we didn't know anything else. And, as a kid, I remember once I rode the bus, from where I was living over to Oso Golf Club, Golf Course rather. One of my friends said, "Let's go caddy." I said, "Okay." I think I was probably about 12 years old, maybe 10 or 12, at the time. And one of the things that I remember is that we were driving down Staples [Street], going into that area and I saw the big beautiful homes. And I said, "Man, all these people are rich, man. Look at all these big beautiful homes." You know, and so, when – only when the only thing you knew is the projects. You didn't know all that other stuff existed, because I only



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

knew what I saw on the north of town, I didn't know anything beyond that. It was a happy childhood though, and everyone I knew was happy. We all walked to school together, up to Booker T. [Washington Elementary School], and we all walked to church together on Sunday morning, either Saint Matthew or Saint John. And we had, in our neighborhood, we had a theater, and we had a confectionery - Regal Confectionery, so when you saved a little money, by collecting bottles and turning them in for the deposit, you had a little money then to go to the movies. So, we would go to the movies, we had a good time growing up. We didn't – we didn't see, we didn't see anything negative about being in the projects, as some people may try to make you think. To us, it was a very positive experience, because we were happy there. And when it's all you know, you don't know anything different. You don't know what –what life is like outside of what you grew up with.

LYNN SMITH: One of things, I think you mentioned earlier, was Ray's Corner Store. You want to tell us about that?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, right across the street, when we moved down to 1903 Winnebago [Street], in the lot, up right in front of our house, was a store. Well, the name of the store was Rays, and we could go there, and purchase items that you may need for the rest of the week. Like my Mother would send me over to get lunch meat and bread, or sugar, and Ray would ring it up, and I would sign the ticket, and then when my Dad got paid, he would go over and pay the bill. But Ray helped people out by doing that, and the other thing is too, I remember in our neighborhood, if – if your neighbor needed eggs, or sugar, or anything, they would come next door, and they'll say, "Can I borrow eggs, or can I borrow some sugar?" So, people helped each other out back during that time. Cause one of the things I remember during World War II is that they had rationing stamps. So, whenever my mother would go to the grocery store, she had stamps, and you had to have stamps to buy sugar, and certain items. And I remember the booklet that my mother had, those rationing stamps. In order to buy stuff, at that time, because of the war [World War II], you had to have the stamps to be able to purchase items. I remember that as a child growing up in the neighborhood, cause, at the time, on Leopard Street, we had Bill's Grocery Store, and on the corner of Port [Ave.] and Leopard [St.] was H.E.B. And I remember – remember, as a child, walking to H.E.B. sometimes to purchase items for my mother.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And you said something about, you were living at D. N. Leathers I when you heard your first jet airplane.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Oh, yeah, when I heard my first jet aircraft, my friend, Crockett and I, we were playing marbles. And we hear the roar of a jet engine; we didn't know what it was, at the time. So, because we had been going through exercises in school, where we would have to get up under our desk, on the exercise they would do in case of a nuclear war. So, we – we heard the roar of the engines, so we fell flat on the ground, we didn't know what it



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was. We thought it was a bomb or something coming. And we both laughed, after we looked up and saw that it was an airplane. But we had never seen a jet before, and it was moving so fast, and we still didn't understand that it was a jet, because all we had seen, up to that time, was the prop aircraft. And – then we realized what it was, but it was interesting, because we both had the same reaction, and our reaction was based upon what we had been trained to do in school. Every day we would go through our exercises of preparation for a, I guess, a nuclear war or a bomb, or anything. Cause I know, during the time, I was growing up in the projects, my mother said that, the police would come by and tell them. Once it got dark, they had to cover all their windows, there could be no lights, so they had what they called “blackouts.” So, if you had your lights on inside, you had to have shades to your windows, to make sure that no light would shine out. And if – if they saw light, they would knock on your door, and tell you to turn off the light, and to close, to pull the shades, because you couldn't, they didn't want any – any, light showing or shining, in case some enemy aircraft, I guess, that's what we thought it to be. Would fly over, and be able to identify where the city was.

LYNN SMITH: And that was during World War II?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: That was during World War II.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. And you also said that there was a lot of commotion near where you lived when an oil tank caught fire.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah – yeah, when the oil tank caught fire, up at the refinery, every morning for about two weeks, the Navy would send a bus load of Navy, military men, in their white uniforms to help fight the fire. And they would park the bus down near the project area there, near the baseball field.

And then the guys would get out, and march up to the Hillcrest area where the fire was taking place around the refineries. I would see them in their white uniforms in the morning, and then around five or six o'clock in the afternoon, when they were coming back, those white uniforms would be black with the soot from the fire.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: And – and that happened for about two weeks, until they were able to get the fire under control.

LYNN SMITH: So, there were people that lived in the neighborhood, but not in the projects. So, what was the difference between the – the housing around the projects, and the – the housing at the projects?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

WILLIE HARDEMAN: The housing around the projects, they were called, shotgun houses. Those were houses; I guess they call them shotgun, because all the rooms are in a row. And you could open the front door, and see out the back door. And that's what the neighborhood consisted of. If you didn't live in the projects, you lived in those houses in the area surrounding the Booker T. Washington Elementary School or the Solomon Coles High School. In many instances, there would be maybe three houses, that would occupy maybe what would be considered a one-home lot. You'd have three homes, back to back, the homes were so close that you could look out your back door right through your neighbor's front door. And they would be so close you could, open your window and talk through the window to the neighbor right next door, and there were little small alleys in between.

LYNN SMITH: And when you're talking small alleys, you're talking about how many feet?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Probably the homes were no more than two feet apart, maybe two to three feet apart.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: You could reach out and touch both homes, if you walked through.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. So, your – your apartment in the projects, how – how did you consider it compared to a shotgun house?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: It was nice, because we had – we had the kitchen area, we had the restrooms. We had individual bedrooms, and we had a little bit more room than the shotgun houses. I would estimate that the most, some of those shotgun houses had, the total footage could have been anywhere from maybe 150 to 200 [square] feet. And that would be the living space for a family. And in the projects, we had – we had the restrooms, and in some of the shotgun houses, they had out-houses, they didn't have indoor plumbing or indoor restrooms. The city didn't require that in that neighborhood, until sometime in the 1960's, I believe it was, or the late 1950's, before they had to have indoor plumbing, so that was the major difference. Matter of fact, the project housing, at that time, was probably the best housing for Blacks in the city. Because they were well constructed. We didn't have air conditioning, but we had warmth during the winter, cause we – we had gas heaters. The projects offered, I mean, the old projects, I don't know how many people were living there, all I know is that almost all the kids I went to school with, at the time, lived in the projects, the old projects.

LYNN SMITH: D. N. Leathers I?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: D. N. Leathers I, and - -



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: They're calling it now.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, D. N. Leathers I, and then they built the new projects [D. N. Leathers II], and a lot of people moved into that area, they moved out of a lot of the shotgun housing, into the new projects that they had built. But, at that time, they provided very adequate housing, for people who could not find housing anywhere else but the projects. So we had people who moved to the city, based upon their income, this would be the first place they would look. We had no apartment areas; there were no apartments you could live in back during the 1940s or 1950s. So, you had to come either to the shotgun housing or to the project housing. And many people with kids chose the project housing, because of the cleanliness and because of, I guess, the affordability, based upon the jobs that many people had.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I think you've given us a really good idea of what it was like to live there. I guess the only other thing that you might just want to touch on is, the – playground area that was dedicated to the D. N. Leathers I project.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, the playground area was at the very rear of the projects. And, as I recall, there was a swing set, and there may have been a slide. I don't remember, it wasn't a very large park, it was a small park. And a lot of kids would play there, and one of the reasons they felt safe there is because there were always parents, other parents who lived in the housing near there was always watching out for the kids. We never had any fear of – of anyone, while we were living there, because everybody watched out for all the kids, and all – all the adults knew who the kids were, and who the kids belonged to, they knew the kids' parents. So, that whole area was like just one big neighborhood, no matter what street you went on, somebody knew you, and knew where you lived, or knew your parents. And when you look at the neighborhood itself, it was truly a neighborhood, because we never thought anything less than that. We – we just enjoyed living there. And we didn't – we didn't think – we had no negative vibes about living in the projects. There was nothing negative about it, at that time, cause really – one of the best places you could live, at that time. There were not a lot of choices, so, if your income fell within the requirements, that would be the place to live. It was, they were clean, they kept up the grass area, they kept everything clean. Some of the parents would even plant rose bushes right outside the door, and they would make little flower beds. I remember my father, my mother loved roses, so my father would make her rose beds in the front, and he would plant roses next to the house, next to the front door. So, we had rose bushes. And other people, we – we didn't do anything to the grass. We planted no trees or anything like that, but you could plant flowers. And beautified area, in the front, and you could always, I remember that we all just loved to sit out in the front yard, or sit on the front steps. Everybody did that, it was just like – like I say, it was like one big neighborhood, everybody enjoyed speaking to everyone they saw, and talking to everyone all the time. So it was a good experience for me.



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LYNN SMITH: That's great. I guess, one other thing that you talked about a little bit was Reverend – Reverend Dillworth, was a neighbor. And you want to tell us a little bit his significance to the community?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, Reverend Dillworth, was the Pastor of a Church. And Reverend Dillworth and Mr. Kitchen went to the mayor. I don't know exactly when they approached the mayor or the city council. And asked them about an area off of Greenwood Drive that became, what they called, "New Addition." It was a large plot of land, at the time, there were cotton fields. And they approached them about that land – land being utilized to provide housing, additional housing for African Americans, for Blacks, cause, at the time, there was only one elementary school. And that was Booker T. Washington, and with all the people who lived on the north side, that school became over crowded, and kids would attend partial days. I was attending from eight in the morning till twelve noon. And then my sister would go from noon to three o'clock. So, Reverend Dillworth and Mr. Kitchen, when they approached – approached the city, about allowing that land to be used to build a development for Blacks, they gave the approval. And then a lot of Blacks who could afford it, bought lots in the area and built homes. And then the city built a second school, Carver Elementary. So that took some of the pressure off of Booker T. Washington, cause many of the families with kids moved to that neighborhood. And Reverend Dillworth was instrumental in getting that area built. Matter of fact, in the New Addition area now, they have a large park, that they just finished refurbishing. They put, some of the people in the neighborhood, there – they went in there, and put swings, and different toys for the kids to play on. They have a little jogging track that they built, and they made a real nice park in honor of him and the work he did in the Black community.

LYNN SMITH: The other thing I didn't ask you were the names of your parents.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Ross Hardeman and Marjorie Hardeman.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Were my parents, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alrighty. And uh, so when your dad got the job at Reynolds Aluminum, you all had to move out of – of D. N. Leathers I.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, we – we had to move out. And we moved from, the home on Winnebago to one of the rent houses that Ms. Callahan, a Black lady named Callahan owned, on Ramirez Street. It was a one-bedroom shotgun. Matter of fact, at that time, I slept in the living room of my home, on a rollaway bed.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: So, that's ironic that your dad got a better job, and you all had to move to a shotgun house.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, cause we, he couldn't – you couldn't move anywhere but in that – that particular neighborhood. At the time, housing was still segregated, and so, it didn't matter how much money you made, you had to live in either, one the first two streets of Hillcrest [Lexington Ave. and Kennedy Ave.], New Addition, or on the north side of town. And then when they built Greenwood Park, that enabled Blacks to – to buy their homes, so my father then bought a home out on Hickory Street, out in Greenwood Park. That's where the Moody High School is now located, right out from that neighborhood.

LYNN SMITH: So, where was New Addition?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: New Addition is right off of Greenwood.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: It's between Port Avenue and, at the time, where the old airport used to be, it was right in the little square of land right in that area where New Addition was built.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, I think you've given us a great idea of what it was like to live there. Is there anything else you can think of, that you want to add?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Anything, I can't think of anything.

LYNN SMITH: Well, you – you've done a great job. And I really appreciate it. Thanks for coming today.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]



George N. Hodge, Sr. and George N. Hodge, Jr. –  
Edited Oral History Interview Transcript

Figure A - 6: George N. Hodge, Sr.



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017

Figure A - 7: George N. Hodge, Jr.



Source: Photograph by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2017



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing George Hodge Sr. and George Hodge Jr. for the D. N. Leathers I History Project and it's being prepared on behalf of The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi (Housing Authority). The Interview is taking place on January 20, 2017, in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm interviewing them, in order to learn about their knowledge and personal experiences related to the D. N. Leathers public housing project in Corpus Christi, Texas, and things related to that. George Sr., would you please tell me your full name, and uh, when and where you were born?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: George Needam Hodge, Senior (Sr.).

LYNN SMITH: Great.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: I was born in Uvalde, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And I came here in nineteen fifty-two [1952].

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And what is your birthday?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: April 12, 1940.

LYNN SMITH: Of 1940, alright.

Okay. And so, when you moved here, where did you move – live first?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: First place we moved to was a project, the new projects [D. N. Leathers II].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when you say the - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: On Nueces Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, those are also known as Leathers II or D.N. Leathers II?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, D. N. Leathers II.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you were living in the projects as a youth?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: I was living with my parents.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Oh, you were living with your parents. Okay, so what were your parents' names?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Aaron Hodge and Doris Hodge.

LYNN SMITH: And where – where did they work?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And uh, Doris Hodge worked at for Mr. Cecil Burney– Cecil E. Burney.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And uh, my Dad, Aaron Hodge, he was working for E. E. Harrison Construction Company.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: He was a carpenter.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, he was a carpenter, and she was working for the Burney family.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: For the Burney family, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. That sounds good. So, so, you were living with your parents. Did you have any other siblings living with you?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, I had a sister.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Two sisters and a brother.

LYNN SMITH: And so, what are their names?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Aaron Hodge, was his name, my brother's name.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And Ernestine Hodge was my sister, oldest sister's name.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And my baby sister's name was Patricia Hodge.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Patsy, we called her.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, what was it like for you to live in the projects?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: It was something different. [laughter] 'Cause we had never been in nothing like this. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Like out in West Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, yeah. So, - - so, was it a good different?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes, it was a good difference.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. So, because those apartments were pretty new then?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes, everything was new. Yeah, the project was new. New, where we moved.

LYNN SMITH: Right. So, - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: The project we moved into.

LYNN SMITH: So, so, it was uh, probably one of the better places to live in town, I would think.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes, it was.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, what was your favorite thing about it?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: It was a brick home, [laughter].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Was it solid – solidly built?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Solid brick, yes. Solid brick place.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And we never did have any outdoor chores [farm chores, feeding chickens, etc.], or nothing to do.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: The only thing that we did was cut the grass.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Had to go to the office and get a lawnmower, and come back and cut our grass.

LYNN SMITH: That's not bad. Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: But I had to work with my father, construction work, that's where my part-time job was.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: In the evenings, [laughter] when I get out of school, [laughter] and then on Saturdays, and weekends.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: That's what I was doing.

LYNN SMITH: So, where did you go to school?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Solomon Coles [Solomon M. Coles Junior-Senior High School].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. So, uh, so how old were you when you moved into the projects?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Twelve.

LYNN SMITH: Twelve. Okay. And - - and what brought you'll to Corpus? Was it work for your Dad or?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: That, and better schooling for us.

LYNN SMITH: Ah, okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Because in Uvalde, they only went up to the eighth grade, and then we had to leave from there and go to San Antonio, or other places to go to high school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. But Solomon M. Coles was a full – full high school.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Went through twelfth grade.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And did it – did it have a pretty good reputation? Solomon Coles [School]?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes. They had a good reputation.

LYNN SMITH: That's what I was thinking.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And what about the sports?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And the sports, they was great.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. [laughter] That's what I heard.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Well, that was the only black school in this district from Robstown all the way from Aransas Pass, brought kids from all around.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: That's the only school they had.

LYNN SMITH: So, they bussed them in?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: For high school. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE SR.: From Melina [SP] and all that.

LYNN SMITH: Cool. And what sport did you play?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Football, baseball.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And boxing.

LYNN SMITH: What year did you graduate?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: In fifty-eight [1958].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. So, was there anything about living at the D. N. Leathers II that you didn't like?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: No.

LYNN SMITH: No. [laughter] Was it fun?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, I had no, it was wonderful. I had no faults about it. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Everybody knew everybody, and got along good.

LYNN SMITH: That's great. Did you know people at D. N. Leathers I also?  
Or, just D. N. Leathers II?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Some in D. N. Leathers II, because of the school. You know, we went to school together.

LYNN SMITH: Right. Right. Okay, that makes sense. Yeah. So, who – who was, do you remember who was the manager was when you were there?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Uh, no, I can't remember.

LYNN SMITH: Was it? I was wondering if it was still Carlyle Leonard, or if it was somebody else?





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Do you remember Carlyle Leonard or maybe it would have been somebody else by then.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: I think it was somebody else. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. Okay. Can you think of anything else you want to tell us about living there, or?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Well, we had a doctor right around the corner from us there, Doctor Williams.

LYNN SMITH: Yes.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: We had two – two doctors there. Two Black doctors there.

LYNN SMITH: Dr. Brownlow, and - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Dr. Brownlow, and Dr. Williams.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And then we had a drugstore, which was Leathers Drug Store.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Next door to it was Henry Garza's Grocery Store. And then uh, on the other corner was Alex [SP] Grocery Store. [laughter] On the opposite corner. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: On which – which grocery store was that?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Alex.

LYNN SMITH: Alex [SP], okay. Cool.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: That's where we did some of our shopping. Then all of a sudden, we had to start going to H.E.B.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: They were going, coming up.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Well, I bet they were uh, yeah, I bet they were a big competition, H.E.B., wherever they come in, it's big competition.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Oh, yeah. That was like on the weekend store.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: When we go to, but every day, during the day time, you know, we just go right up the street, it wasn't even a block, a block and a half.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: To the grocery store. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So everything was right there.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Right there within D. N. Leathers Housing II. Okay. That makes sense. And when you were there, uh, what about T. C. Ayers Park? Was that - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: T. C. Ayers?

LYNN SMITH: Was that there yet?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah. Yeah, it was there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: The [T. C. Ayers Recreation] Center, we used to call it the Center.

LYNN SMITH: The Center, okay. And was Mr. Bolden there?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes, Mr. Bolden, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: He was there.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, uh, and was there a dairy farm near there?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: A dairy farm?

LYNN SMITH: Yeah, I don't know why I'm asking that, but [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Not that I remember.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] And you didn't remember it there?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Canalas, Canalas Dairy Farm, yeah, they went into - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Canalas Dairy Farm.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: They weren't down here.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Never mind.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: That was probably out in the New Addition somewhere.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright.

Well, is there anything else you can think of that you can remember?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Well, the only thing I remember about that is like when I was working with my Dad, you know, I was making lots of money, cause, to me it was a lots of money then.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Oh, yeah. At that – at that age, yeah.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, doing concrete - - concrete work, and all that stuff. Came home, one day, and I tell my mother. I said, "Momma I ain't going to school, I'm gonna work with my Dad.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: She said, "No, you're not, you're gonna get your butt to school."  
[laughter]



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: “And get you an education.” [laughter] “That's why we moved here.”  
[laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, now that makes sense. Yeah. You're not gonna give that up for sure. So, so, did you like school most of the time?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Oh, yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: You just decided that, at that point and time, you were thinking. Oh, I'm making all this money, I don't need the school. Huh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Right. And a lot of the boys that I played football with and baseball with, they said, they worked in the Country Club and making X amount of money, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, yeah.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And making all them tips.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: So, I told them, I said, well, let me go and get with you'll. And I went out to the golf course.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Country club out there, and uh, the guys there said they wanted to talk to the manager.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And he wanted, he interviewed me. And he said, “Where you been working at?”

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And I said, “I’ve been working construction work.” He said, “Well, I’m not gonna hire you”. I said, “What do you mean, you’re not gonna hire me?” He said, “Them guys been telling you they’ve been making X amount of money.”

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: I said, “Yeah.” He said, “No way.” [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: “Cause you get hired here, in your first check, you’ll get - - you’re gonna cuss me out, or something.”

LYNN SMITH: Oh, no.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: “Because you don’t – you make more in one week than they make in a month.” [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, that’s funny.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And that was it.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, -so uh, when you were in high school, how did your baseball team do with you on it?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Oh, we came out, and uh, went to the state on baseball.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And then the semi-state in football.

LYNN SMITH: That’s something else.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And that’s - -

LYNN SMITH: So, you did well.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And we did good in school.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Alright.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And then by me being seventeen when I graduated, - -

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: They, my coaches wanted me to stay for another year, because I could have played another year.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: In football, and I told them, No. No way, I did my twelve years.

LYNN SMITH: And you - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: In school and I'm gone.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Your – your Mom was fighting to keep you in there for the twelfth year, wasn't she?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, that is terrific. Okay. And then – and then you got married, at some point.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yes, I got married.

LYNN SMITH: And uh, and you – you, I know you went to Del Mar, so - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, I went to Del Mar. I went to Tech School in Del Mar, auto mechanic.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Tech School, and after that, I went back to work, you know, well it was during the time I was working I went to Del Mar at night.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And then I went to, went to work for Barry [SP], when I was driving a truck for Barry [SP]. And then they had me servicing equipment for them, and I work for them all the way up until sixty-six [1966].

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And seven, yeah, sixty-six [1966].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And then that's when we moved to Houston.

LYNN SMITH: Oh. Everybody has to live in Houston for a while, I think. [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: A lot of us have had to. [laughter] And so, you did your Houston time, okay. So, where was your son, George Junior born?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Oh, he was born in Corpus.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay. Alright. Well, I'll ask him more about that in a minute. Is there anything else you can think of you want to tell me about?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: No, that's about it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And mostly I like fishing, you know. [laughter] We would go fishing all the time.

[laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well that's - -

GEORGE HODGE SR.: And we would go hunting, we'd go way back to West Texas, right there and go hunting.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: All the fishing, we just go right down on the T-head. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: That's pretty good fishing.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, everything I guess the fishing was within walking distance of – of Leathers housing project?

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Yeah, we walked, yeah; you could just walk down the hill.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: The only thing about going back home, just remember to walk back up the hill.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Right. [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [laughter] You couldn't get lost.

LYNN SMITH: You couldn't get lost. [laughter] It wasn't that big of a – big of a place. Alright. Well, that – that's great. That gives us a good idea. Alright. So, now we're gonna turn to George Hodge, Jr. and ask you a few things, like let's just start with you stating your full name.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Okay. My name is George Needam Hodge, Junior [Jr.].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I was born on October 8, 1959, in Corpus Christi, Texas. Spohn Hospital. My doctor was James Bernard.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. And not too many people know who the doctor was.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, my parents talked about it. Well, one other reason why I remembered about James Bernard, was when I got older I met him and he told me he had nicknamed me “Speedy.” The family called me “Speedy” because of the nickname he gave me.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, is that right?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes he did.

LYNN SMITH: Did you come into the world quickly?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Actually I was born before my mother could get to the delivery room. [laughter]



LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I was born in the elevator.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It was fast.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: My Mother said I just slid out and it was no need for anything else except to cut the umbilical cord.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: In the elevator.

LYNN SMITH: Well that was - -

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And that's when Dr. Bernard gave me that name.

LYNN SMITH: You had earned – you earned that name.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: From the beginning.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, when you were a child - -

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: You didn't live in the projects, did you?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I did live in the projects from 1962 to 1964.

LYNN SMITH: You did?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I did live in the projects, the “new projects” [D. N. Leathers II]. We lived on Young Street. Yes, it was Young Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And, I played with a lot of the kids. I would go around the corner to Sam's and Elmo's Barber Shop. Those were the two barbers, Mr. Elmo and Sam.

LYNN SMITH: Sam – Sam Johnson?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Sam Johnson, yes. He also employed several individuals including my Aunt at one time, Ernestine Henry.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Old Man Sam. Yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, he's still there in our old neighborhood [Northside].

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, [Agreeing] Exactly. Matter of fact, he's a minister, fine man of God.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Sam used to cut my hair and Elmo used to cut my hair. My Aunt worked with those guys, back in the day.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And it was every week, every Friday, I would go to the neighborhood barber shop. Dad and Mom would send me to the barber shop to get my hair cut. And that's where I landed in Sam's or sometimes Elmo's barber shop. Those were very fond memories. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And being young, I was able to walk there. You know, I was four or five years old, being able to walk to the barber shop. And it was a good experience every time I went. You know, I heard the latest gossip. That's how I knew what was going on in town.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

It was just like an old man told me, “It was a hot time in the old town tonight.” And I knew what was coming up, and what was going on.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So – so, your family moved away to Los Angeles.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Yes, our whole family, my dad, mom, and two sisters moved in 1964.

LYNN SMITH: And then you all came back to Corpus Christi.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And then, and then you all lived in the D. N. Leathers projects, again. Cause you knew it was good place to live obviously.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Well, yes. It was a very short period again, maybe one year, then we left, we moved to Houston, as Dad said, back in 1966. And after that, as I was growing up, my parents used to ship me back to Corpus every summer, and I stayed with my grandparents, with both sets of my grandparents. I would stay one summer with my mother's mother and my Dad's mother, the other summers. But I just always came back to Corpus, you know, growing up, as a kid. And I'd get a chance to play baseball like Dad did. I played it for a short period of time. But it wasn't like Dad, you know, they went to state two years in a row. He attended Solomon M. Coles High School. He was a great athlete.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It was through Coach [Vance] Heard that's how I heard that my Dad was in two state championships, they lost one, and won his Senior year.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Right. So, he ended up winning the game. He was a catcher and he threw the last out. Which won the game, yeah. They were up by one point. He threw a player out on third base and prevented a tie or home run hitter from beating them.

LYNN SMITH: Cool.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah! Other than that,

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: I always wanted to be a Roy Campanella. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. George, Sr. wanted to be Roy Campanella. Well, alright. So, George, Jr., tell us - - tell us about your – your thoughts about living at D. N. Leathers II.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Well, when I was a kid, I'll never forget, one Christmas. Christmas was always my favorite time, as a kid, because we got a lot of things during that time. But I got a pair of roller skates, I had my blue jeans on, I got a pair of boots. I got a bandana, and I got cap guns. I loved westerns and I had my chance to pretend to be Roy Rogers.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And so, that was a fun Christmas in the projects.

LYNN SMITH: Wow, you were set. [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [laughter] Yes – I was the Black Roy Rogers. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And sometimes I acted as if I was the Lone Ranger, too. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Of course. [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: So, that – that was a good time. And with Dad being from West Texas, and, you know, growing up in West Texas. We ate, slept, played, and drank pretending to be cowboys. And - - and hunting, and that kind of thing, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You know, so having cap guns, and shooting BB guns, those were things that I liked back in the day. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Yeah.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, and I had two sisters who didn't want to play cowboys.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE SR.: Now days you can't do that. [laughter] No, you can't do it now days. [laughter] No.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I had two younger sisters, and – it was a joy, actually being the oldest, and helping, my parents rear them. And it wasn't – it wasn't bad times then, you know, we can all just walk to the store, or wherever to visit friends and family, walk just about everywhere.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And it wasn't, like it is today. It was actually safe as I grew up. These days it is a very different D. N. Leathers.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It was very interesting. But I, we got by. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay, so, uh, so when you were uh, growing up there.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: What was your favorite – favorite thing, I guess, to do there?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: The favorite thing, the thing that I liked most was actually being able to go outside, and play. We could be in the streets, didn't have to worry about anything. We didn't have to worry about cars, cause there wasn't a lot of them. You know, but everybody respected and cared about each other. Everybody worked also [during the day when we played].

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You know, --

LYNN SMITH: So, the cars were gone.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: The cars were gone. Saturdays was a chore day, because we knew that after we did our chores, we would get paid. It wasn't a lot, but it was good.

LYNN SMITH: Your allowance?



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Our allowances, yeah. We had allowances.

And we would go and have ice cream and go to the store, and basically do what we wanted to do, with some of the money, not all the money. We had to put some money in church.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You know, part of the money was given at church., That was a real good time.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, it was real good.

LYNN SMITH: So, did you notice any differences between D. N. Leathers II and D. N. Leathers I, while you were growing up?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I did. It was a big difference. It was the older people in D. N. Leathers I, and there were the younger families in D. N. Leathers II.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, so we would usually play with a lot of the kids in D. N. Leathers II. And – and the people in D. N. Leathers I, there were some families, but not as many. We knew, there was a much older group of people there, and we had to be kind of careful about what we did near D. N. Leathers I.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So, they were more interested in keeping you all in line?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, my God, yes.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And now, Saint Matthew Baptist Church was near it, not too far from us.

LYNN SMITH: Sure.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I don't know, we went, my parents we – sometimes we would go to church by ourselves. They would send us to church, and we could walk to church by ourselves, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And there was Saint John's Baptist Church near D. N. Leathers housing also.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And there was Saint Paul United Methodist Church, those were the three churches. And they are still the three churches that are in those neighborhoods right now.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Well, Saint Paul, I think they're disbanding it or relocating it, I forget which.

There was Holy Cross – Holy Cross was another church. My Dad and Grandmother attended Holy Cross.

LYNN SMITH: Of course, yeah.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Holy Cross, yeah. I'll never forget that too. Other family members of mine attended Holy Cross.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I remember them very well.

LYNN SMITH: So, I'm trying to think. Can you remember kind of the dates, cause I'm getting confused, and you probably said it. But you were in, as a kid, you were in D. N. Leathers housing from about what year to what year?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I would say 1962 to 1964, because we moved from D. N. Leathers II housing when my Dad and Mom, they bought a house off of Prescott [Street].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: But we had family members still there in the D. N. Leathers, and that was another good thing about it. We had family members not too far from us, around the



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

corner. Housing [public housing] was one of the starting places for families. It was affordable housing, giving folks a hand up.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: For a lot of families, D. N. Leathers housing was a great opportunity to have housing. It was clean, it was vibrant, it was just nice, a nice place to live.

LYNN SMITH: Now, were – were the families responsible for keeping – taking care of their own yards?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, at that time, families did that.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Everyone had to go get a lawn mower to mow their own lawns. I don't know if we had to give the housing office something to exchange for them. But I know we had to get a lawn mower from the office.

LYNN SMITH: So, they – they kept equipment for you to borrow, and bring back?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, exactly. Push mowers.

LYNN SMITH: Push mowers. Oh, okay.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: They were all push mowers.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: Well, your yards weren't super big, right?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, no, no, they weren't.

LYNN SMITH: So, those push mowers probably worked just fine.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Exactly. And everybody kept their yards beautifully. And the community had pride in having nice lawns.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I mean, you know, people were taking pride in their place. It was something we looked forward to do, to cut the yard.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah. Okay. Was that part of your allowance?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It was bigger than we was, but, you know, the lawn mower was bigger than we were, but we had fun cutting the lawn. Just glad to do it.

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] That's great.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, T. C. Ayers Recreation Center was right there. Right?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You know, my parents didn't really allow us to go to The [T. C. Ayers Recreation] Center.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Too much, cause we couldn't really stray from home that much, without their permission, or without them.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You know, we were just able to go outside. We weren't able to just romp and roam, and just go anywhere we wanted to go. We had some restrictions.

GEORGE HODGE SR.: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: We could not go as we pleased. That was a “no no.”

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: But we only did what we could do, with permission.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Maybe some kids went without their parents' permission, but not very many.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I remember we played stick ball.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: We played marbles, jacks, Simon Says, hopscotch, probably dodge ball, or something of that nature. And football, that was about – about it, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Well, that sounds like that was enough to keep you pretty busy.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, it was very, it was enough.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Besides, we had to learn our ABC's, and numbers, and try reading, and other table games to help learn how to become better children.

LYNN SMITH: So, so, was that homework that your parents assigned you on top of your regular homework?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Absolutely, always, always, yes.

LYNN SMITH: So, education was really stressed in your home?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, yes, absolutely, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And was it stressed with your friend's parents too?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Uh, I – I didn't really get into them. And what they were doing, but I knew what we had to do.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: Made clear to you.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Yes.

LYNN SMITH: So, what school did you graduate from?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I graduated from Forest Brook High School.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I actually attended school in Houston. And then I came here and attended Del Mar for some time. I attended a bible school there in Houston, Gethsemane Bible College and Howard Payne Bible College. And I obtained credit and higher educational opportunities at some tech schools.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, --

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, so, when did you uh, go back to D. N. Leathers housing, as – as a manager?

What – What – what brought that about?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, from 1985 through 1993 I worked for The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi. I was a manager at D. N. Leathers and worked as Director of Resident Services and as the Relocation Director.

Yeah, I moved back to Corpus in the eighties [1980s]. And uh, I – I started attending Del Mar. I lived in Portland. But I didn't live in -- D. N. Leathers, at that time. During that time, when I moved back [to Corpus Christi], D. N. Leathers was like an off-limits place really, where you didn't really want to go, you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, the character had really changed?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh,-- it was like night and day. I mean, it was like Mardi Gras. I actually lived in San Pat [Patricio] County, and we would come to Corpus. There were numerous homicides, numerous drug activities, and things of that nature, in D. N. Leathers. It was not safe at all. And, D. N. Leathers was the place you really didn't want to go. You know, especially, if you didn't know anybody.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I got a job working for San Patricio County Sheriff's Department, I was there one year. I was a correctional officer. And, Henry Flores, and a gentleman by the name of, Ken Chastain, which was one of my neighbors in Portland, approached me. And asked me, would I be interested in working for The Housing Authority [of the City of Corpus Christi]? Ken came to me several times. I had a step son, named Michael Jackson, at the time. And Michael was a football player at Gregory-Portland, and Michael was a heck of an athlete. If Mike touched the ball, something was gonna happen. The crowd stood up, they knew something was gonna happen. He was a running back, an explosive runner and a great kid loved by many. And some wanted to tell Mike, "Please get it together. You are a great kid."

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Mike ran the ball up the field, down the field. And, the coach told Michael, he said, either you're gonna go to jail, when you grow up, or you're gonna be a heck of an athlete, or you're gonna be dead. It's gonna be one of the three.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, no.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And so he hit it on the mark. Mike got in trouble quite a bit, you know. Mike is a very likeable young man even today.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Unfortunately, he's still learning, you know, Mike, but he's – he's a good young man though. I can just say that.

LYNN SMITH: Good.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: With all his mishaps, and things I experienced, I was recruited to become the manager of D. N. Leathers. That was when I met Shirley Jordan [SP] who was the manager, prior to me, coming there. Shirley Jordan was the manager. Then I came in. Shirley was ready to retire. You know, and she probably had enough of all the changes and challenges.

LYNN SMITH: How long do you think she had been there? Any idea?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, my God, I would say well over twenty something, yes. Twenty something years.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Ms. Shirley Jordan, being a female, and she did all that she can do with the hand that she was dealt at D. N. Leathers I. I believe it was about a hundred and thirty-three units total with D. N. Leathers I and two hundred units at D. N. Leathers II, so there was over three hundred and some odd units in that complex. And me coming on, as the manager, and coming from San Patricio County Sheriff's Department, there had to be some things done. Something to bring about a change in that neighborhood. So, as a manager, what I did, I came in there, and I handed out eviction notices to just about everybody in the development, [D. N. Leathers] I and II, eviction notices just for whatever reason, just to get their attention, and I got the attention from them, and from that point on, I started working with those tenants who wanted to restore and bring restoration to that community.

But it wasn't fast enough. Because I saw what I was doing wasn't going to be enough. So, what I did with help, I called a town hall meeting. The meeting was with all the local social authorities, the police department, the sheriff department, the fire departments, social services, agencies, and on and on. And uh, the [Housing Authority] Board just went bizerk, they called over, "George, what are you doing?" It was myself and Ken Chastain, behind the helm, I'll say it like that. And it had to be done. In the mist of it being done, that brought a change within that community. We started a Boy Scout Troop. We came up with the safest route to school. The police started coming in, and started doing things, and started working with the people. The police department starting having a stronger presence instead of handing out warrants, they started handing out barbecue plates, because we did a social event and it became a yearly thing, within the Housing Authority. And the families started working together. The city's various departments came in, and started making the improvements that needed to be made like cleaning streets and code enforcement that dealt with houses around and near the Leathers housing development.

The Housing Authority stepped up as well. They started doing what they needed to do. But it was a "Labor of Love", but at the same time too, there were risks, it was a lot of risk involved with what we as a community were doing, because I was threatened, while I was doing what I was doing. That was the cost of bringing a change in a drug infested community

LYNN SMITH: You were threatened by drug dealers?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Well, I – well, not only by drug dealers. It was mom's receiving drug dealers monies too, as well.

LYNN SMITH: Hum.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Some people living on the property depended on drug money as a source of income.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: But the good thing about it, not everybody was involved, or depended on drug money. I told the guys, I said, “If you're going to deal drugs, you don't bring the drugs in the neighborhood.” Or, you don't bother the kids, while they're going to school. Or, allow the kids to do it. If you're gonna deal your drugs, deal your drugs beyond the – the [D. N.] Leathers [housing] area. Just don't do it here. And they got it, we formed a relationship, you know, the guys, “George, I see you're trying to help our neighborhood. We're trying too,” like I got respect from those guys. I couldn't ask for anything more. You know. I remember when I was there, and I called the police department out the first time. And the police department, it was a domestic violence thing. And in San Pat [Patricio] County, somebody was going to jail. And so, the police came out, and they wanted to kind of, slap it on the wrist, or just tell the guys and the girls, “No, you all stop.” But I said, “No, no, no, please come back. Please somebody needs to go to jail.” I said, “Because when you leave, it's gonna escalate even more.” And from that point on, it – it was some changes even in family relationships around there, because they knew we were not playing, you know. But it all worked out for the good.

Another instance, while I was there I was looking to form a Boy Scout Troop. And behold, I was trying to find somebody in the community to become a Scout Master. And so, every day, I said, “Lord, please come on, help me now. Help me to find a Scout Master.” And later on, to no avail, I – I just couldn't find one. Then one day, I was looking in the mirror, and something said, “There is your Boy Scout Master.”

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And I said, “Oh, no.” [laughter]

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [laughter] So, I became a Scout Master, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And my Dad helped me with my truck, because I had worn the transmission out of my truck going different places with the boys to various events and camp outs.

LYNN SMITH: Right.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I would take the boys camping, I would take them to various regional district events and things of that nature. There were some young boys in the community that really liked it. But they were not used to being in competition with other kids at that level. They did learn from other scouts and troops as we attended the different events and competitions. When it came to discipline, the mothers gave me permission to whip them. And I said, “No, I'm not gonna whip them. But I know what to do, with them.”

LYNN SMITH: [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: So, I would take them camping, and they would just want to act a fool at night. And I told them about camping and we went to Camp Carancahua, which is just a few miles up the highway. And John Thurston [SP], which was the Scout Director, there for the Boy Scouts of America, here in Corpus Christi. Lewis Sitton [SP] was one of the Scout Directors, and others. I'm trying to think of his name, from the Refinery, Chuck Caslasis, was another individual that stepped forward to help. There were quite a few people, and a quite of few positions that actually helped me with those kids. I would take them to church once a month, we would go to various churches. I said sometimes, “you guys know you can't just go looking like anything to church.” I said, “What I want you to do: I want you to press your uniforms, and put the uniforms on, and we're all gonna go.” Cause I had black boys, white boys, and brown boys, and so we all went to church.

LYNN SMITH: Cause by that time D. N. Leathers was integrated.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, oh, yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes, it was a good thing. It was a real good thing. But we had actually gained the respect and the trust of the community, you know, those kids, those boys were well respected.

Ken Chastain helped me, as much as he could, cause Ken wasn't into the scouting, he was the five star hotel kind of guy. [laughter] He was my right hand man.

LYNN SMITH: Oh. [laughter]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [laughter]



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: [laughter] He wasn't gonna go camping.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, no, no, no, no. Ken, I mean, he, the guy helped me raise as much money as we could raise. Him and his wife, Jeanne Chastain, she was a local attorney in town. And, they helped me quite a bit with those kids. And there was another guy with the city, George Oresco. We were the two Georges that actually got involved, and one other parent was involved actually with his son's camping and with the Scouts. My Dad helped with a lot of equipment, cause he had a lot of things that we did. We used to go hunting, and things of that nature. So, it – it all worked out. Yeah, it worked out.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, after you were the manager of D. N. Leathers.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: D. N. Leathers. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: You – you stayed connected?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: I stayed connected; I left D. N. Leathers. I left the job, as a manager there, and I took on other responsibilities, with the Housing Authority. And during that time, the residents really, uh, they really, they were a little upset with me, for leaving, you know. Because I was helping them through so many difficult times, to more or less to better themselves, and to bring the changes within their lives. There were some ladies who lived there too, three ladies, Peggy Beasley, Louella Coleman, and uh, Raythella [SP] Rice. Yeah, those were some ladies who more or less, they cooked for me. They helped with scouts and community events because when we had meetings, we would have snacks and things of that nature. And various friends would help out, as well, with these kids. But I did that, after I left, as a manager. I came back and I did other community projects. Well, I did that for some years, yeah. And, a few of the boys, they were able to obtain various awards, and various places within the scout system. But I did it for seven years, yeah. For seven years. And it was not only that, I – I worked with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and served on various boards. I helped with Boy Scouts, a Boys and Girls Club, and the Salvation Army. I worked with the Salvation Army, a place called, Gods Gym. And a lot of other non-profit agencies, who more or less did various contributions to the community. So, it was – it was all “A Labor of Love”.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.





## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It was “All a Labor of Love”, yeah. And then, for Mayor [Mary] Rhodes, I served on the Mayor's Tea Cap Program [SP], where we were working among other city projects, where I was actually still doing, making changes, and also working with the police department. And the police department and the fire department, because they would come over, with events and things of that nature, and help us out quite a bit. And the police FOP, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Corpus Christi Police Association, they all used to help out quite a bit. But we were always bridging the gap, between the police and the community. As I became the director of the Weed and Seed Program for the city, I got appointed to the National Crime Prevention Board, there in Washington, D.C. So, I just kept continuing to just move up, and move up, and continue to do things, not only on a local level, but on a state and national level. We got our kids involved in national programs. We were able, Ken Chastain, and I, we were able to get involved with state programs. We took the kids, with the help of David Perry [SP] and Renee Haas [SP], we used to take kids to the Capitol, during various administrations, and probably went to two administrations. We went when uh, oh, what's her name?

LYNN SMITH: Ann Richards?

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Ann Richards was, yes, when she was Governor we – we toured the Governor's Mansion then. And then when George Bush was the Governor, we attended it - - we took kids to Austin, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It just wasn't Boy Scouts, it was various kids. A lot of kids. We took at least sixty some odd kids to the Capitol during Ann Richards' term and Governor George Bush.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Right. And so that was a good time. It was a good time. And then when, with me being involved with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which is now the National Conference [for Community and Justice], we would take kids to Leadership Camp. So, we got them involved with leadership. And with team leadership, and, the Nueces County Criminal Justice Program. We were involved with programs with – with the county, with the juvenile system. Actually, I worked there, for a while, part time.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: So, there was a lot going on. There was a lot going on.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's – it's interesting, because, you know, your Dad came here.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: To Corpus Christi, because of the good schools.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And – and did – did a lot of things to help his family succeed.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And – and then pass it on to you, and you.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And you have done a lot with the community, and – and uh, tried to help more people succeed that were - -

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: That were born here.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Exactly, God, Yeah. Yeah.

Cause it was – it was just not, you know, it was just not kids, it was seniors, it was young adults, it was teens. I mean, the list just goes on, you know, and it wasn't just Black folks. It was all races. You know what I'm saying?

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

GEORGE HODGE JR.: It was just a community thing, all across the board, you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, tell – tell us the story about when you – you noticed the dedication plaque, and really read it.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Uh, oh, my God. I'll – I'll never forget, one day, I guess, you know how sometimes you just take a – a minute to just – just kind of look at things around you. So, I went outside, and I just started walking. I walked up the – the complex, and I came back. And this was D. N. Leathers. My office was there, in D. N. Leathers I. So, I came back, and I just started looking at some of the things that was there around me. And I just noticed the plaque, and I saw on the plaque, it had the founding board members for the Housing Authority. And then I



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

noticed the name, Cecil Burney. I just stood there in amazement, and just was speechless. You know, I couldn't, and I just said, Cecil Burney. I said, my Grandmother used to work for Cecil. I know this man, I know this man's family. You know, his wife died of leukemia? Leukemia, yes. And one of his son's died, uh, of suicide. Or, if it wasn't suicide, he died, it was a tragic death. And Mr. Burney, I knew that family. And I knew that family stood for good, and everything. And with Cecil Burney being one of the former mayors of this town, you know, I'll never forget being in Cecil Burney's home, as a kid, in the 1960s, and John F. Kennedy died. And how we all huddled around the television, and just got together, and just said a prayer for the family, you know, and for this country, as well. And I mean, it was just things like that. I was just taken back by that moment, you know, when I saw his name. And it just reminded me of some things that we experienced, as – as a people coming up, growing up, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Well, and it seems to me like it also sort of uh, captures the spirit of the city.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, absolutely. You know, Corpus Christi, the name, it's the name itself, the Body of Christ, and when you think of the Body of Christ, you think of what Christ did. He made, he was the ultimate sacrifice. You know, he was the lamb, you know. He was the balm in Gilead. So, with that said, I mean, Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, you know. Oh, my God, Jesus. It says it all. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Thank you so much.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, after we quit the recording a few minutes ago, of course, we thought of one other thing.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And that is uh, we were talking about the fact that D. N. Leathers I, their last tenant.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Just moved out, within the last few days.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: The last tenant that just moved out within the last week, I happened to run across her. She moved into one of my best friend's home. And his home is a three-bedroom home. Now he's a retired, he's retired. He's a retired director of maintenance for the Naval Air Station in Kingsville. Him and his wife, she worked for the Corpus Christi Naval



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

Air Station, and he worked in the Naval Air Station in Kingsville. And he was an electrician also, by trade. So, their home was a beautiful home. Three-bedroom, actually it was, with a bonus room, a four-bedroom home. And they were concerned who was gonna move into their home. And it just dawned on me, it was a resident from the D. N. Leathers housing development. And when the girl saw the home, me and my wife actually it, showed the home to her, because they [the home owners] live in Houston now. We showed her the home, and her mother is a minister. And when they saw this home, they, [getting emotional at this point]. Uh, they went, Awh!

LYNN SMITH: So, this was a home that your friends had moved out of.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: They had moved out of, [Agreeing] Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, they're renting it out.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, they were renting – they were renting it out. And then, you know, the way it went, they went from, from a project home to a Section Eight voucher, and a beautiful home with a yard.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And so, the voucher afforded them to move into their very first home.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: And she has two girls and two sons. And I mean, the home, the house is, I mean, it's a home, you know. A beautiful home.

LYNN SMITH: So, so, wow, this is a real - - that's a really wonderful note that the last tenant to move out of D. N. Leathers is now sort of in their dream home.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. Yeah. [Agreeing]  
In their dream home, that's correct.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: You couldn't have said it any better, Lynn.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.



## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A

LYNN SMITH: Well, we're, I was hoping, as – as Sean and I, Sean Wray and I had walked around D. N. Leathers I taking pictures.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Of the 28 buildings of D. N. Leathers I that are still there.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And we saw a few of the tenants.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And we were just - -

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Hoping good things for them.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And it's so wonderful to hear the story.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: That you told about the, you know. Sometimes you have to wait for the right thing, and – and - -

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Oh, my, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And even though she was the last one to move out.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: It was worth the wait.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: [Agreeing] Oh, it was worth the wait. It was truly worth the wait. Yes, absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.



**D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix A**

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah, [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Thank you so much for sharing that too.

GEORGE HODGE JR.: Yeah. [Agreeing]

Not a problem. Not a problem.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **D. N. Leathers I – Interior Details of Sample Units**



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## D. N. Leathers I History Report – Appendix B

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## Introduction

The photographs included in **Appendix B** were taken in November and December 2016, after most of the tenants had relocated to other housing, either public or private. At that time, the staff at D. N. Leathers I knew that the project was scheduled for demolition and therefore the apartments were not being cleaned and maintained as they would have been under normal circumstances. Instead the condition of the apartment reflected the way the last tenant had left the apartment. The tenants were also aware of the impending demolition of the units. In some cases, The Housing Authority of the City of Corpus Christi had gathered items like screen doors and stoves for re-use at their other housing developments. Nonetheless, these photographs illustrate the basic design elements of each apartment unit type.



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Type A Three-Bedroom Unit

Figure B - 1: Type A, Three-Bedroom Floorplan – Second Floor, Corner Unit

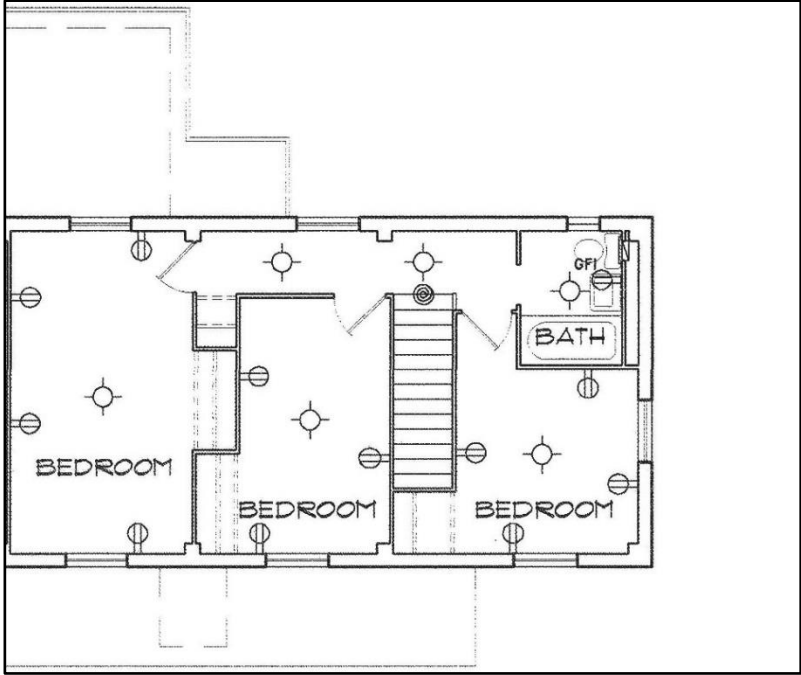
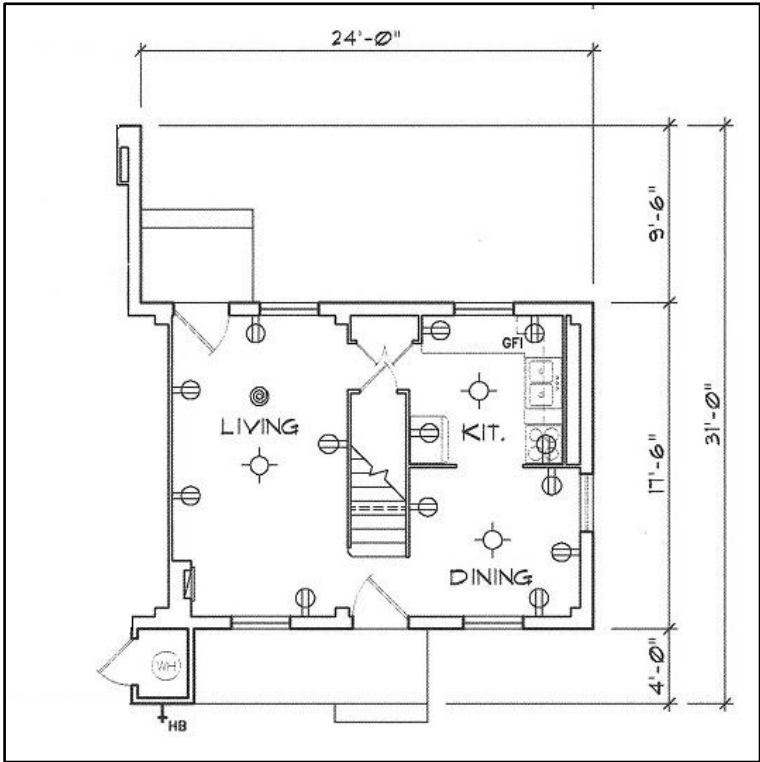


Figure B - 2: Type A, Three-Bedroom Floorplan – First Floor, Corner Unit



Source: Detail from Sheet 7 of "Floor Plan – Building Type A" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B - 3: Primary entry door of each unit faces the “street”;**  
**Either a vehicular or pedestrian street (as applicable) is used in the address for the unit**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 4: Second entry door for Building Type A unit on the opposite side of the building;**  
**The back door opens into a yard area that contains a clothes line for each unit**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.

Figure B - 5: Living room of three-bedroom unit, facing north



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure B - 6: Stairway view from living room, facing east;  
To the left is pantry and kitchen beyond; to the right is the dining area window



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

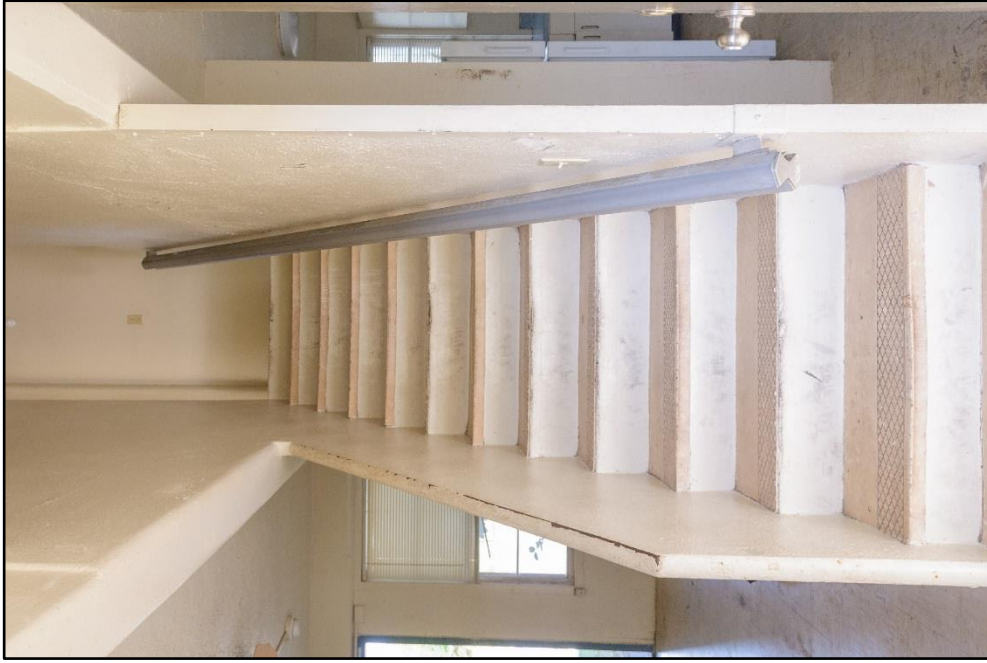
Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.

Figure B – 7: Living room wall heater, view facing southwest



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure – 8: Stairway, view facing north



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 9: Upstairs hall view from the bathroom, facing west**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 10: Bathroom, view facing east**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 11: Largest bedroom in unit; replacement entry door; Also, closet door added, view facing northeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 12: Largest bedroom with concrete structural beams visible; View facing southwest**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 14: Middle bedroom with exposed concrete structural beams; Original, six-panel, bedroom door, view facing northeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 13: Upstairs hall storage closet with shelves; Closet with no door, view facing south**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 15: Upstairs corner bedroom with concrete beams;  
View facing southeast showing replacement aluminum windows**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 16: Water heater closet addition with electrical closet;  
Electrical closet to the right, view facing west**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type A sample three-bedroom unit at 1903 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 17: Original electric service closet on Building 14; Original two-panel wooden door, view facing northwest**



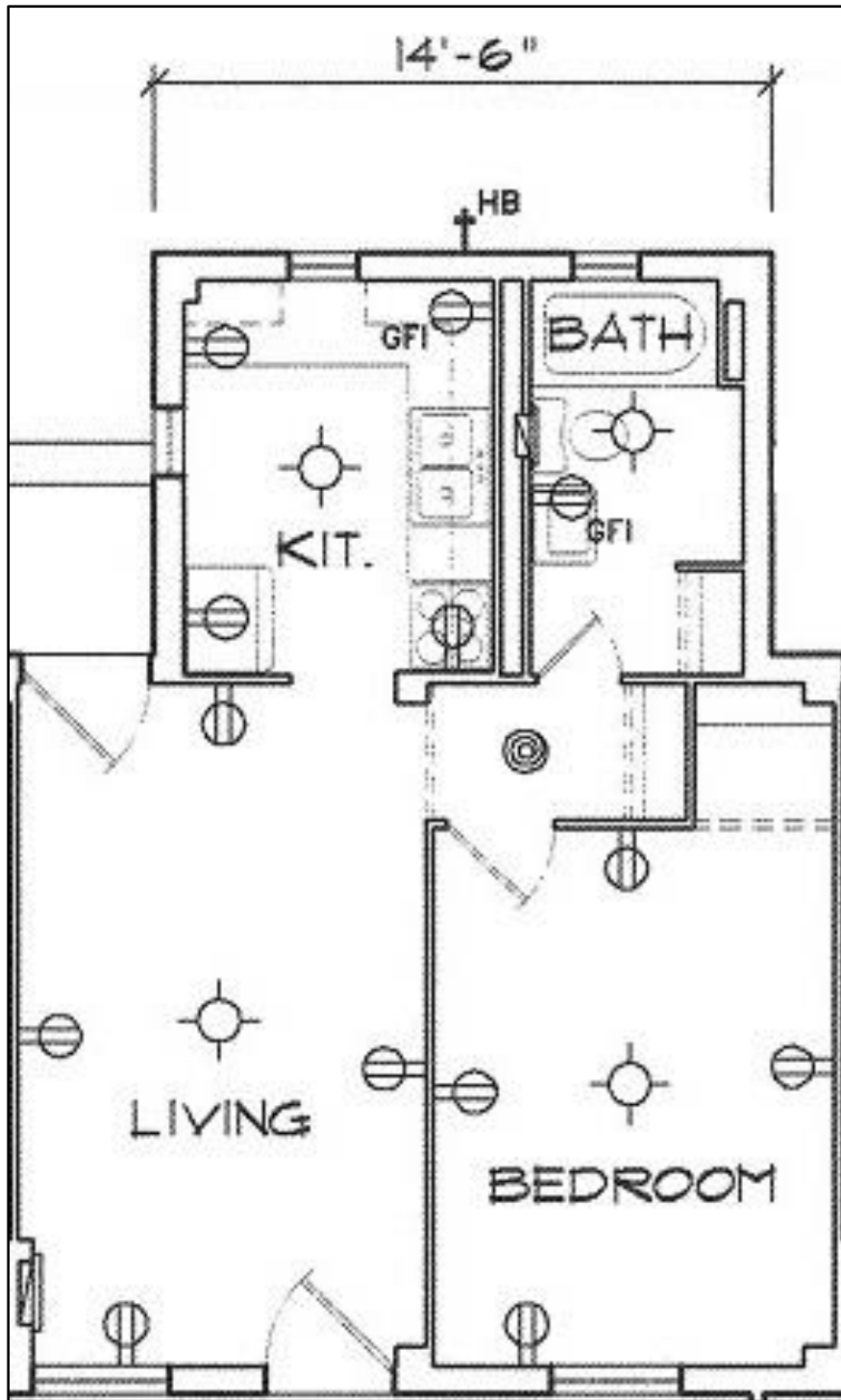
Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 18: Interior of typical electrical closet, view facing northwest; Electrical closet located inside water heater closet addition**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type A One-Bedroom Unit  
Figure B - 19: Type A, One-Bedroom Floorplan



Source: Detail from Sheet 7 of "Floor Plan – Building Type A" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

Type A sample one-bedroom unit at 1929 Tuskegee Ct.

Figure B - 20: Living room with kitchen in background and back door to the right, view facing north



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Figure B - 21: Living room with wall heater and surface-mounted electrical conduit, view facing southeast



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Type A sample one-bedroom unit at 1929 Tuskegee Ct.**

**Figure B – 22: Kitchen modernized with cabinets installed c. 1997;  
View facing north**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 23: Original design hall closet without door;  
Linen shelves to right beyond typical plaster wall, view facing west**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016



**Type A sample one-bedroom unit at 1929 Tuskegee Ct.**

**Figure B – 24: Bathroom modernized c. 1997, view facing north**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 25: Bedroom with exposed concrete structure; Also, surface-mounted electrical conduit, view facing southwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

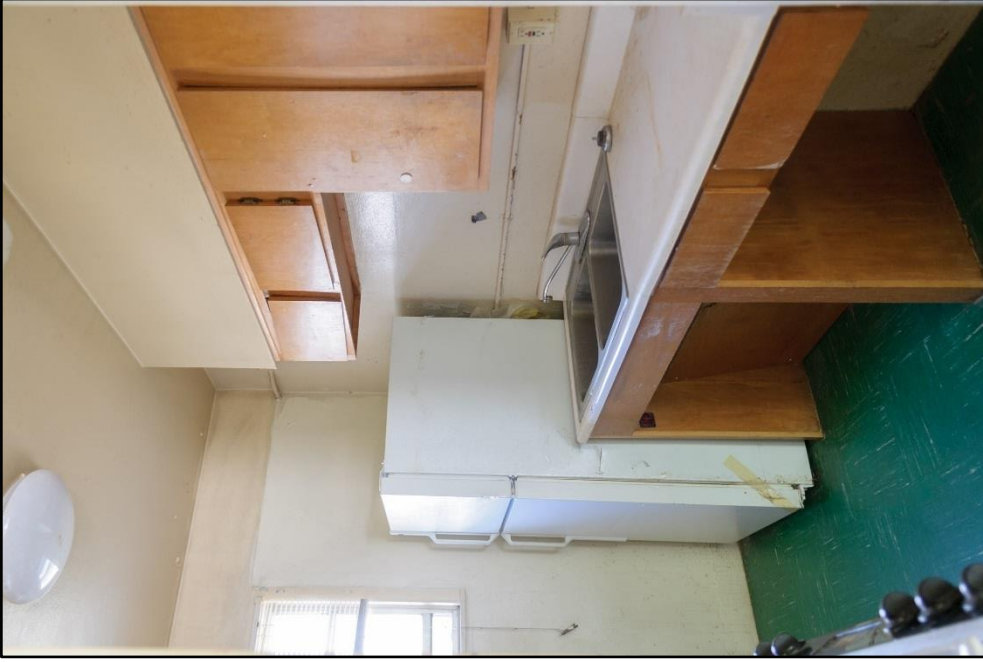
**Note: A floorplan of this handicap-accessible unit was not available, but it is similar to the previous Type A one-bedroom plan**

**Figure B – 26: Kitchen modified to be handicap accessible; Modifications c. 1997, view facing northwest**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

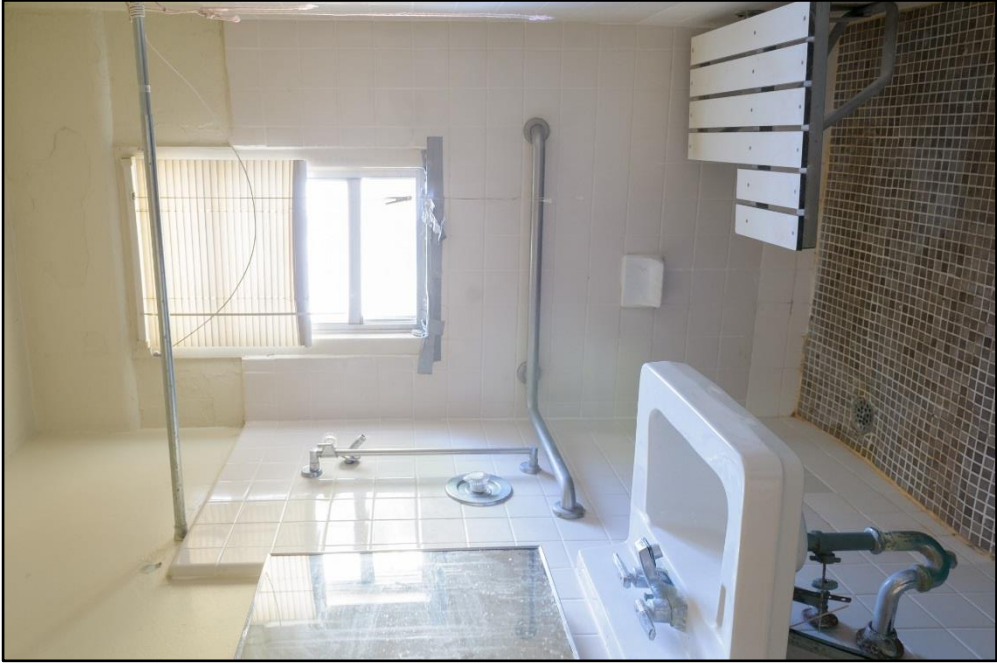
**Figure B – 27: Kitchen modified to be handicap accessible, c. 1997; View facing northeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

No floorplan of this handicap-accessible unit was not available, but it is similar to the previous Type A one-bedroom plan

Figure B – 28: Bathroom modified to be handicap accessible;  
View facing north



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure B – 27: Bathroom modified to be handicap accessible c. 1997;  
View facing south toward bedroom showing widened doorways



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type B Two-Bedroom Unit

Figure B - 30: Type B, Two-Bedroom Floorplan – Second Floor, not a Corner Unit

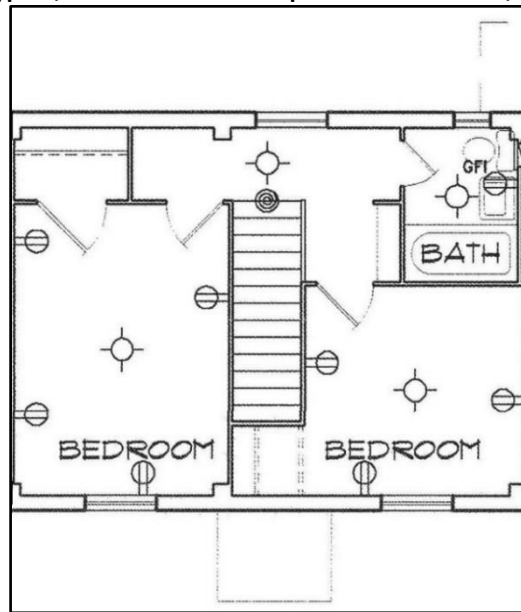
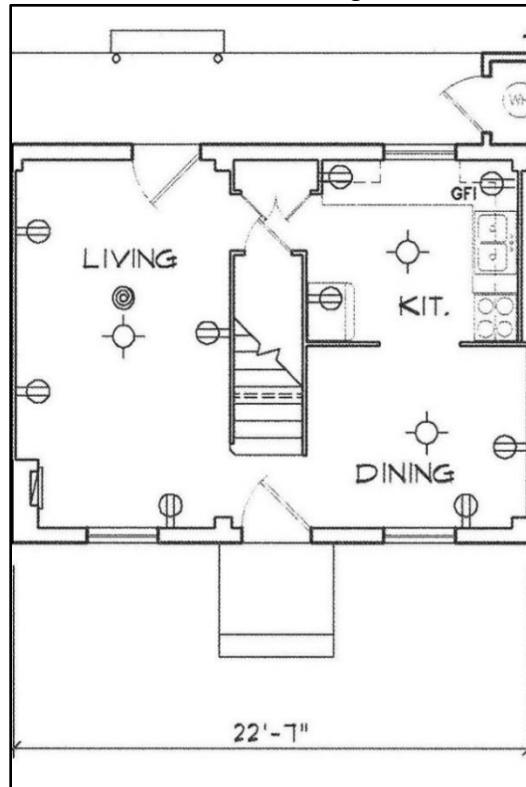


Figure B - 31: Type B, Two-Bedroom Floorplan – First Floor;  
Note: Extant window to left of living room door not drawn



Source: Detail from Sheet 7 of "Floor Plan – Building Type A" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

**Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B - 32: Living room view showing window to left of door (not shown in plan), facing northwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 33: Living room with wall heater, exposed concrete structure and surface-mounted electrical conduit; View facing northwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.

Figure B - 34: Kitchen of two-bedroom unit with c. 1997 cabinets, facing north



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

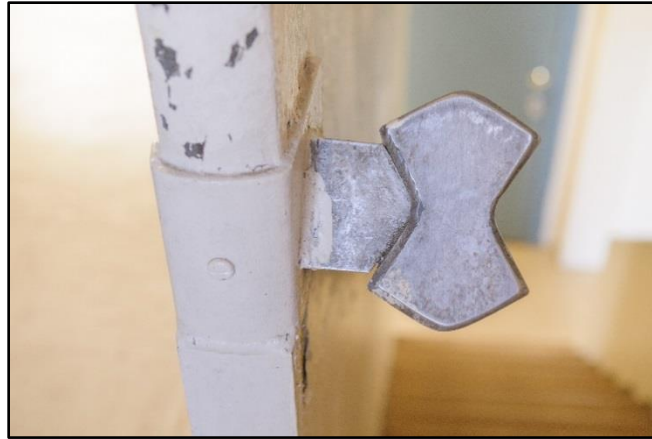
Figure B - 35: Dining area with typical replacement window, view facing southeast



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

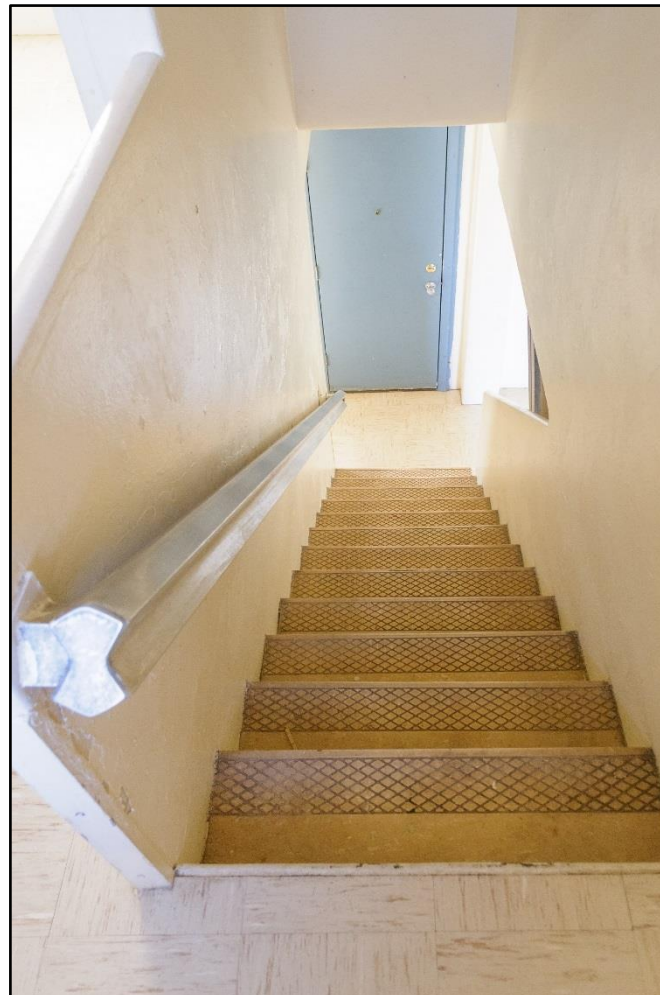
Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.

Figure B - 36: Typical stair rail detail, facing south



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure B - 37: Stairway facing down (south) toward an entry door



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 38: Closet without a door in largest bedroom, facing west**      **Figure B – 39: Second floor linen closet with curtain rod, view facing east**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



**Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 41: Bathroom tub-shower and lavatory sink, facing southeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 40: Bathroom with c. 1997 modernization, facing east**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 42: Smallest bedroom in unit, facing southeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 43: Smallest bedroom in unit, facing northwest**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type B sample two-bedroom unit at 1815 Winnebago St.

Figure B - 44: Largest bedroom with closet modified (door added) and hall to the right, facing northwest



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Figure B - 45: Largest bedroom in unit showing exposed concrete structure, facing southeast



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Type E Two-Bedroom Unit

Figure B - 46: Type E, Two-Bedroom Floorplan – Second Floor, Corner Unit

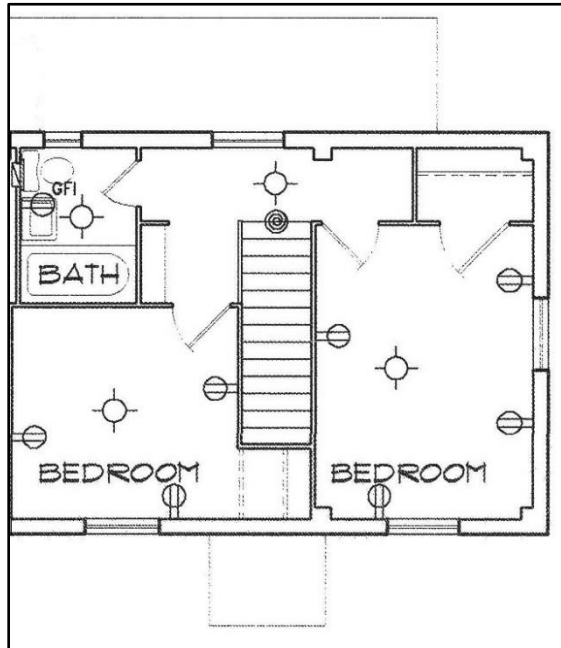
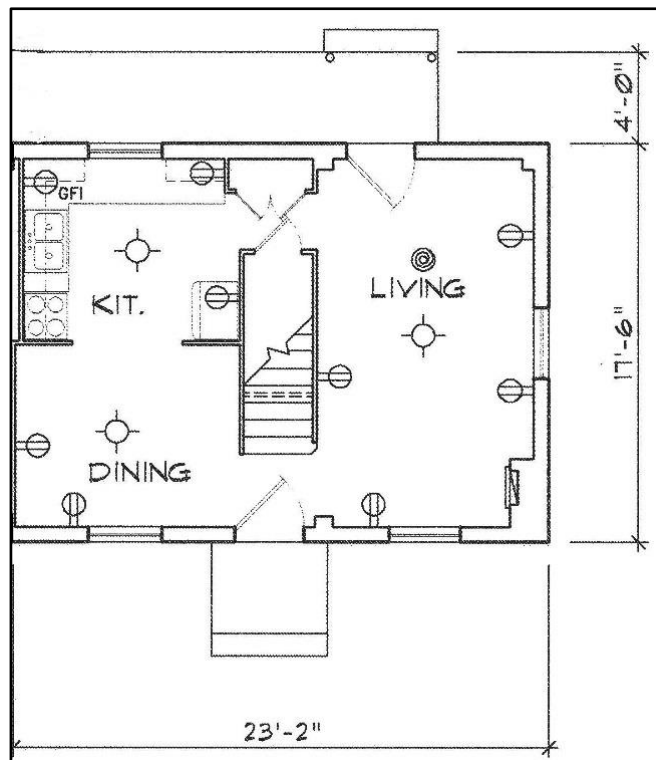


Figure B - 47: Type E, Two-Bedroom Floorplan – First Floor;  
Note: Type E2 has water heater and larger porch on south side



Source: Detail from Sheet 9 of "Floor Plan – Building Type A" from "As Built" Drawings by Bright + Dykemas Architects, Inc. (September 30, 1992), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

**Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.**

**Figure B - 48: View from front door of living room showing wall heater;  
Part of stair rail visible to the left, view facing northeast**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 49: Living room of corner unit with reinforced screen doors stacked to the left;  
Screen doors removed and stored as tenants vacated unit, view facing southeast**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.**

**Figure B - 50: View of kitchen from dining area with cabinets and grease shield;  
Grease shield behind where cooking stove once stood, facing northwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 51: View of kitchen looking toward party closet under the stairway;  
View toward the back door that leads into the living room, facing northeast**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.**

**Figure B - 52: View of dining area from kitchen;  
Grease shield and range hood to the right, facing southwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 53: View of dining area looking toward south wall and entry door, facing southeast**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.**

**Figure B - 54: View of bathroom from hall with linen shelves to the left in the foreground, facing west**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B - 55: View of smaller bedroom from hall with hall linen shelves to the right, facing southwest**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016



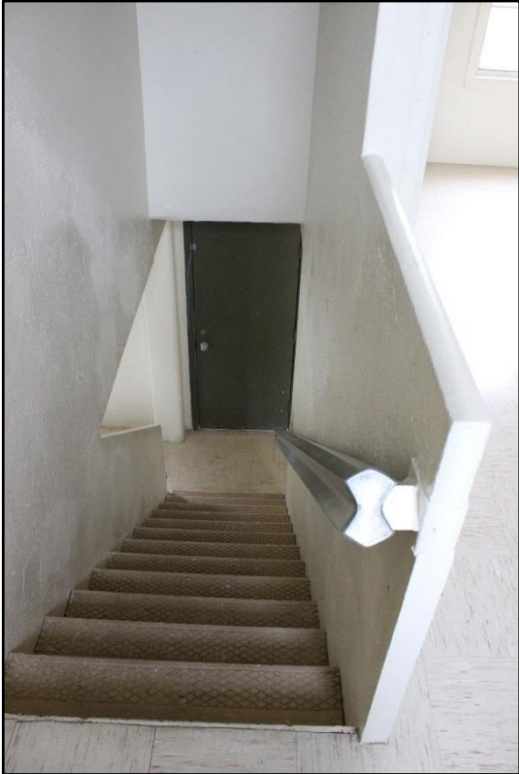
Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.

Figure B - 56: View of smaller bedroom with closet modified (closet door added), facing southeast



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Figure B - 57: View of stairway from second level leading to entry door on first floor; Smaller bedroom on right, facing south



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

**Type E2 sample two-bedroom unit at 1906 Xavier Ct.**

**Figure B - 58: View of larger bedroom, facing north;  
Replacement bedroom door and closet on right, both modified with added door**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

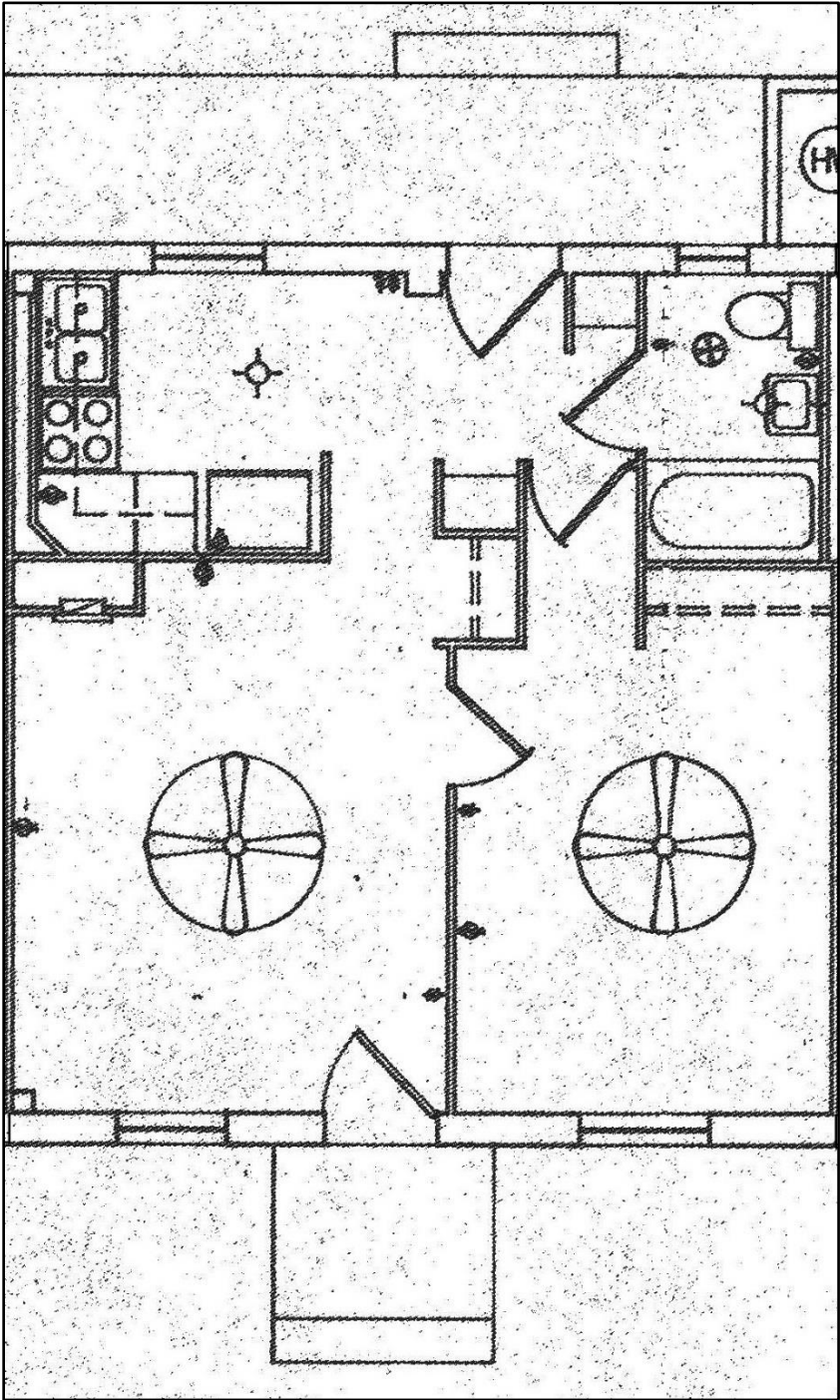
**Figure B - 59: View of larger bedroom of corner unit and exposed concrete structure, facing southeast**



Source: Photo by C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Type F One-Bedroom Unit

Figure B - 60: Type F, One-Bedroom Floorplan – Not a Corner Unit



Source: Detail from Sheet A-7 of "Floor Plan – Building Type F & F2" from "Interior Modernization" drawings by Wm. T. Mumme Architects (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office

**Type F/F2 sample one-bedroom unit at 1939 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 62: View from living room toward entry door;  
Coat closet is to the right of hall to kitchen and bath, facing northeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 61: Living room with corner wall heater;  
Ceiling fan mounted on concrete beam, facing northwest**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

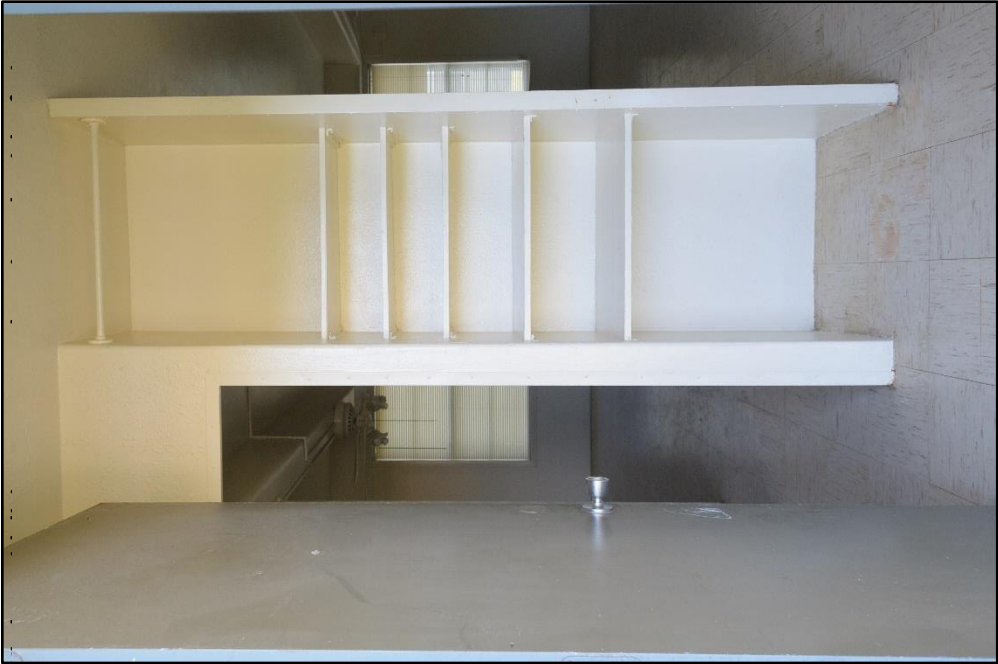
Type F/F2 sample one-bedroom unit at 1939 Winnebago St.

Figure B – 63: Kitchen with c. 1997 cabinets, cooking stove and refrigerator;



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure B – 64: View from entry door to kitchen hall with pantry shelves; View facing south



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type F/F2 sample one-bedroom unit at 1939 Winnebago St.**

**Figure B – 65: Bathroom with c. 1997 modernized fixtures and tile; View facing east**  
**Figure B – 66: Bedroom toward closet (with door added), facing northeast; Original bedroom door and hall beyond with linen shelves**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type F/F2 sample one-bedroom unit at 1939 Winnebago St.**

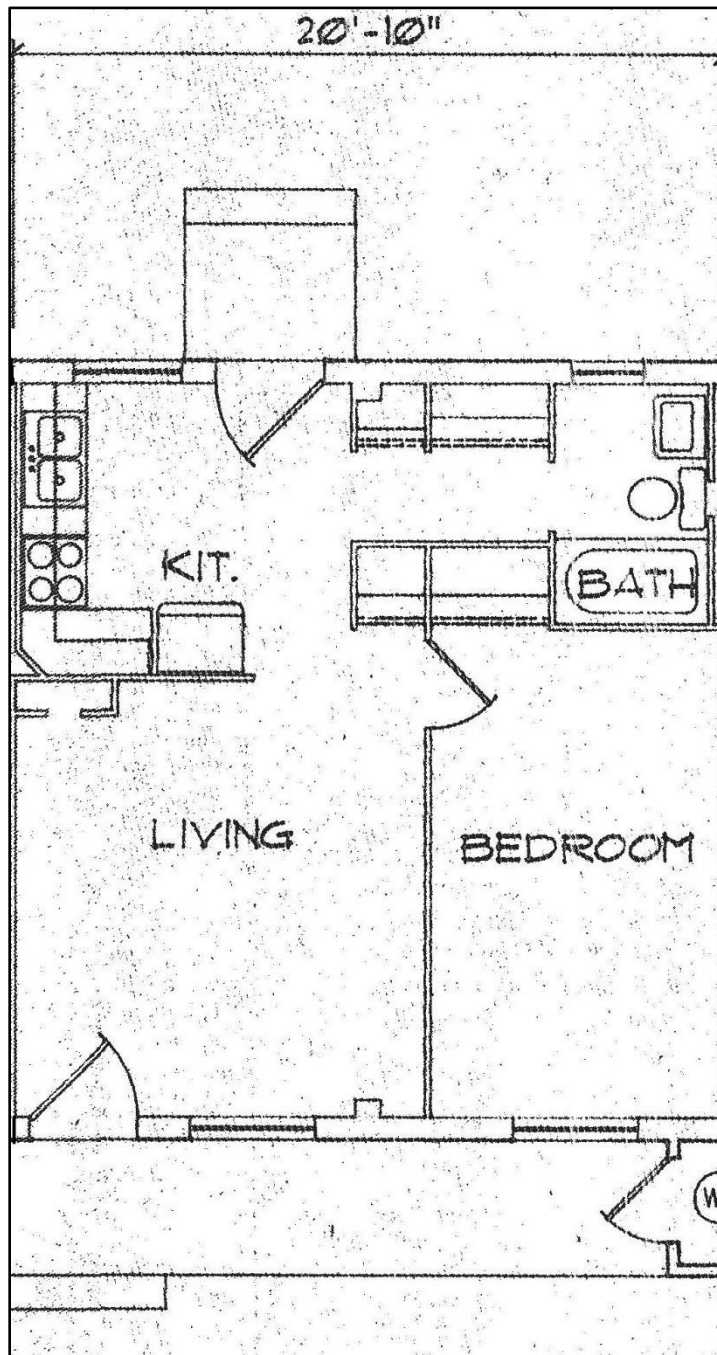
**Figure B - 67: Bedroom with exposed concrete structure, surface-mounted electrical conduit;  
Also ceiling fan shown, view facing southeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type J One-Bedroom Unit

Figure B - 68: Type J, One-Bedroom Floorplan – Not a Corner Unit



Source: Detail from Sheet A-8 of "Floor Plan – Building Type F & F2" from "Interior Modernization" drawings by Wm. T. Mumme Architects (August 20, 1997), courtesy of the Housing Authority Construction Office



**Type J sample one-bedroom unit at 1812 Tuskegee Ct.**

**Figure B – 69: Living room with corner wall heater and original coat closet;  
Original bedroom door on right, view facing northeast**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Figure B – 70: View from living room toward back door;  
Back door leads into kitchen, view facing north**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type J sample one-bedroom unit at 1812 Tuskegee Ct.**

**Figure B – 71: Kitchen with c. 1997 modernized cabinets and grease shield; View facing northwest**  
**Figure B – 72: Shelving in hall to bathroom, view facing northeast; Linen shelving to right modified through addition of a closet door**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Type J sample one-bedroom unit at 1812 Tuskegee Ct.

Figure B – 73: Bathroom modernized c. 1997, view facing east



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

Figure B – 74: Bedroom with original six-panel door, exposed beam; Also, surface-mounted electrical conduit, view facing northwest



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016

**Type J sample one-bedroom unit at 1812 Tuskegee Ct.**

**Figure B - 75: Bedroom with exposed concrete structure and plaster walls, facing southwest**



Source: Photo by Sean Wray, HNTB, 2016