

The Character of a New Haven Garden Apartment

A Matter of Revival¹ Bucolic
Idealism² The Self-Conscious
Neighbor³ A New Commons⁴
In Response to a Need⁵

Origins

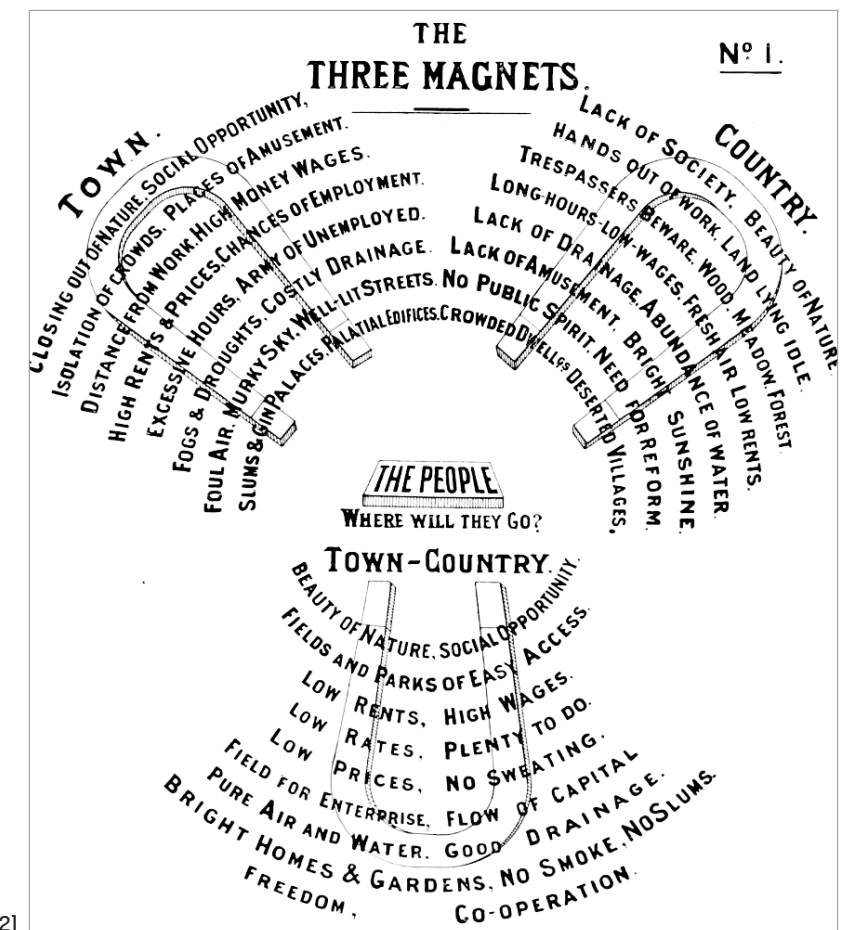
New Haven is a city that is often characterized by the potency and presence of dominant attributes - it is the city of the 9-square grid, it is the city of Yale University, or it is the city of Sally's, Pepe's and Modern. Beyond these prominent characteristics, it appears as a typical Northeast American city with a familiar grain, neighborhoods of colonial single-family homes giving way to rural towns and suburban sprawl. However, within the relatively banal urban fabric of the city, New Haven presents a notable 20th-century attitude towards housing, subtle in its presence but vital in its contribution to the character of its residential neighborhoods, often overshadowed by the dominant cultural and institutional narratives. This is the history of the New Haven Garden Apartment, a quiet and understated character in our city, but one that is constantly in attendance, a vessel of urban history, and a reference for the future.

The garden apartment typology was a product of early 20th-century American urban expansion. Amidst industrialization and rapid population growth, cities grappled with how to provide housing that merged urban convenience with the pastoral idealism foundational to an American sense of individualism. As cities expanded, they consumed the bucolic farmlands at their fringes. Figure 1 shows a George Henry Durrie painting depicting East Rock in 1853 – within 40 years, this landscape was lost to the demands of a growing city, with the memory of a rural ideal imprinted in the minds of its residents.

The expansion of cities like New Haven followed the trends of progressive-era urban planning, principles founded on the theories of Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement (Fig. 2). These frameworks placed the industrialized modern city and the rural natural landscape at opposite ends of a spectrum, speculating on how we might fill in the space between with modern solutions to the plight of urban life. How does one define the “town-country” and what typifies a new way of life in nascent suburbia? From this context emerges the garden apartment. Typologically speaking, the garden apartment or courtyard apartment is a multi-story apartment building with a U, H, or L form, presenting a minor facade to the street and creating a pocket of semi-public green space within the major shape of the building. According to Richard Gnat, in his writing on the proliferation of the courtyard apartment typology in Chicago at the turn of the century, the typology can be defined through five traits: 1) figure ground relationship between the block and the court 2) a articulated public facade with ornament and craft and a marginalized secondary facade 3) public entrances from the court 4) cross-ventilation through the court 5) parcellation of units, as a counter-form to a detached single-family home. In totality, this typology theoretically supports a healthier and more dynamic way of life than the cramped tenements which defined urban living at the time. A resident would have access to green space and fresh air, the feeling of ownership within a more affordable housing model, and an urban experience that was the marriage of town and city. It was for these reasons that the courtyard apartment typology became a staple of the Garden City movement and a solution for urban growth through the early decades of the 1900s.



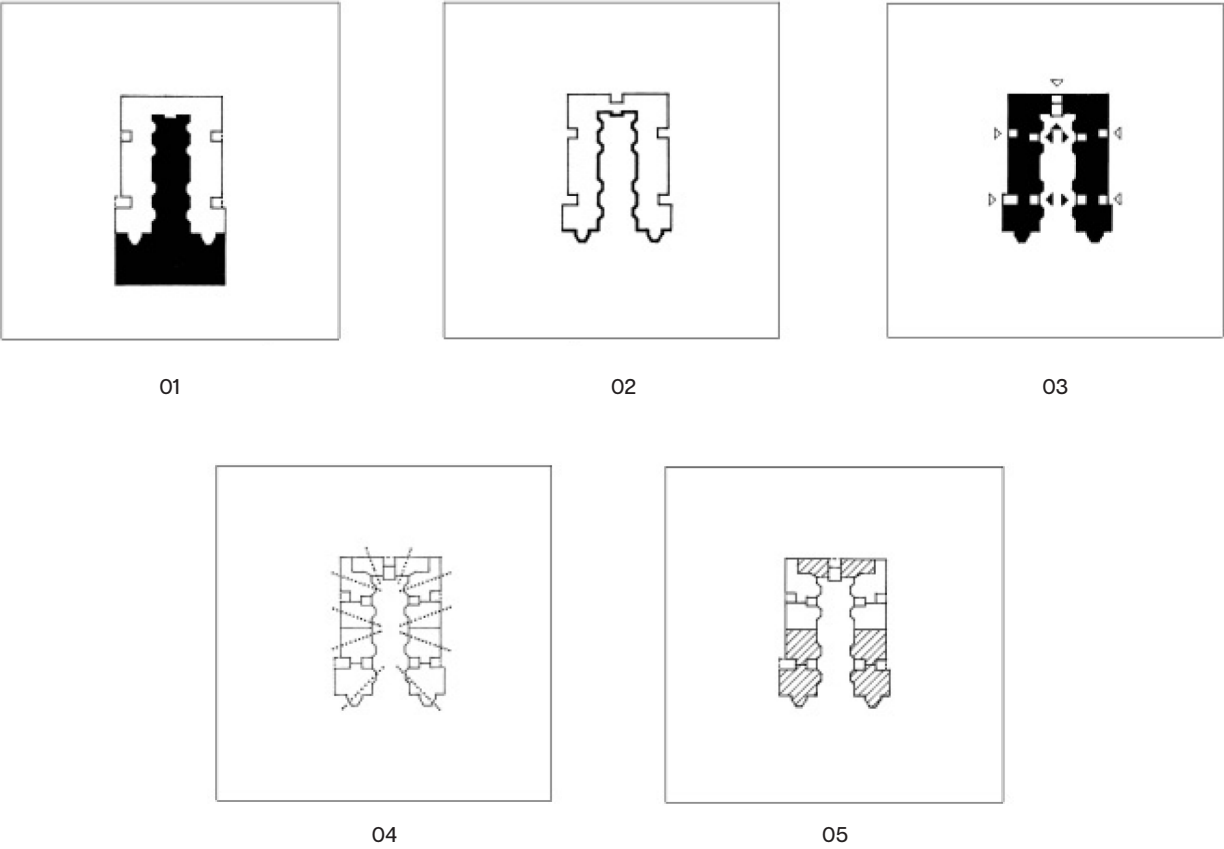
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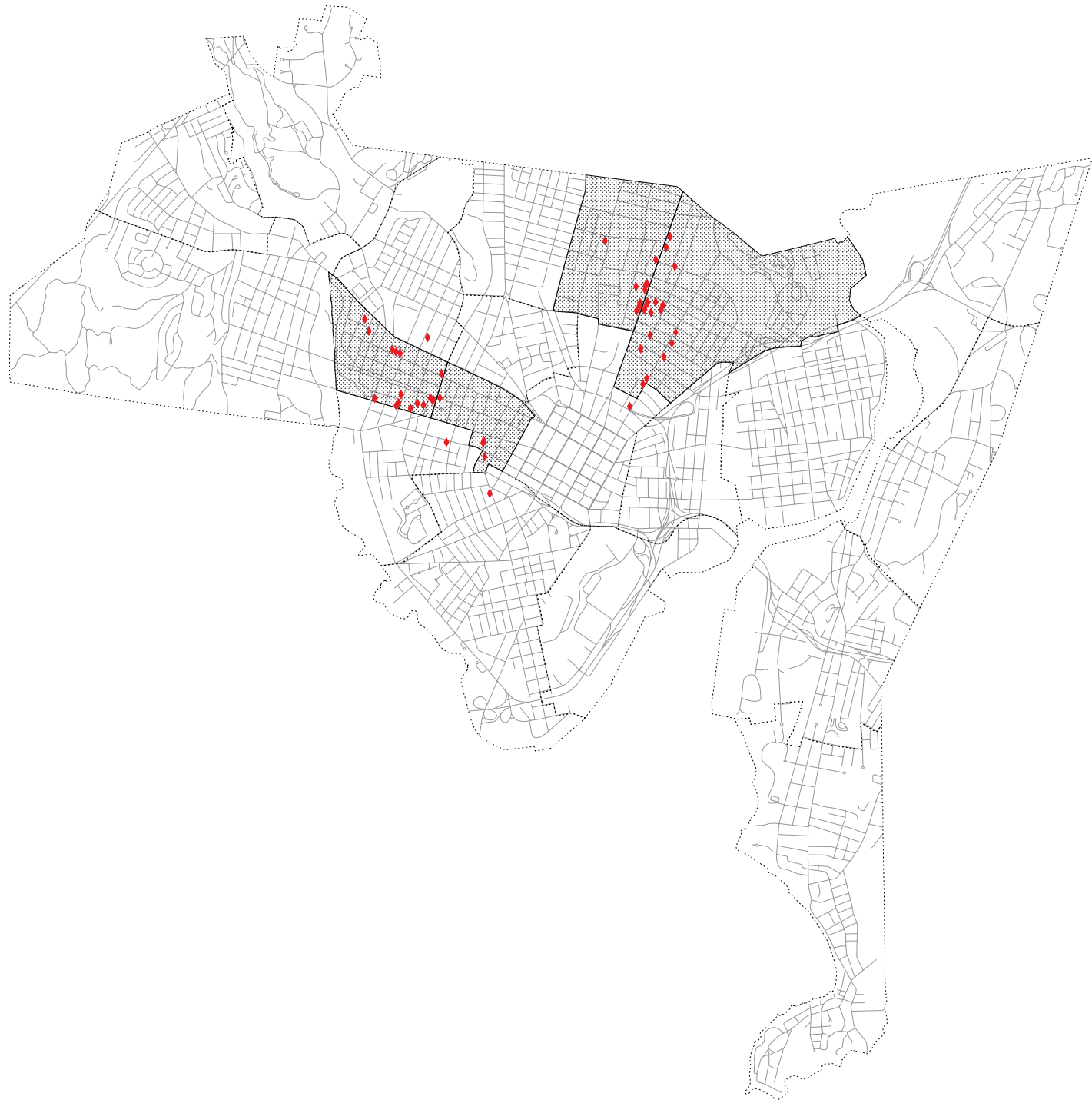
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In New Haven, the courtyard apartment typology introduced a new grain of housing to neighborhoods dominated by detached single-family homes. To this end, they were linked to city planning initiatives emphasizing the benefits of urban life (walkability, community, and the appeal of not having to maintain a detached property). In the modern day, courtyard typologies and other similar models fall into the category of “middle housing” (duplex, fourplex, live work, garden apartment, courtyard apartment, etc.). This category adds density through a variety of housing typologies that fit within the formal and scalar expectations of single-family residential districts. The streets then become activated by a larger and more diverse population, in turn driving commercial activity and making for a more welcoming and walkable area. This remains an important consideration in contemporary urban planning and is one of the reasons why we value this historical type.

In the scope of this study, I prioritized an analysis of East Rock and Prospect Hill, and Edgewood and Dwight. It is in these neighborhoods that we see the garden apartment subtly blending with the historic fabric, matching the street presence of its neighbors and quietly enhancing the public urban experience. To walk in East Rock means to feel the pleasures of quiet, domestic streets, a byproduct not of a monotonous and universal scale of building, but a delicately proportioned mix of humble colonial single-family homes, grand Victorian mansions, and the ever-present courtyard block. The legacy of this type in New Haven is a deep, something evident in the mid-century experiments of Paul Rudolph (Fig. 3) as he developed the Oriental Masonic Gardens. His vision was a distinctly modernist take on the model of the 1920s, doomed in its conception as a prefabricated landscape of mass-produced material, but it implies a greater meaning behind the garden apartment type. It has been, and ought to continue to be, a reference point and inspiration. Imperfect in many ways as a typology, what we find in New Haven is a particularly successful application. This booklet serves to highlight the typical characteristics of the model, but within the highly specific temporal and physical context of our city.



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A Matter of Revival On Stylization and Ornament

While the garden apartments of Dwight and East Rock may blend in with the street scape in form and scale, they are distinctly unique in their architectural style and articulation. Amidst a sea of understated colonial homes, with their typical stacked porches and painted clapboards, the garden apartments of New Haven present a distinctly different architectural flavor. In an era enamored with revivalist architecture, the apartments developed during the first decades of the 1900s adopted the in-vogue styles of Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and Georgian Colonial Revival. The act of revival is, in essence, in service of nostalgia. It is an attempt to reference an ideal of the past or import a romanticized ideal from afar. The Tudor style, born in England, or the Spanish Colonial style, finding a foothold on the American West Coast, are woefully inappropriate aesthetics for the context of New England, but they bring with them a certain exoticism and allure of something new, something designed, or something novel. The stylization of the courtyard type is a de-stigmatization of the apartment block, both for the sake of the neighbor and the sake of the resident. At right, we see an image from 1977 of the Tudor type from the *Old House Journal*, stylistically appealing in American culture perennially, and evident in our New Haven fabric at nearly every block. The Livingston Apartments on Livingston Street, the New Amsterdam Apartments on Cottage Street, at 309 St. Ronan Street, or 166 Linden Street, the garden apartments of New Haven present their Tudor facade to the public.

In a similar vein, the ornamentation of the garden apartment defines the character of the building. Articulated brick work, stone detailing, parapets, statuettes, ornate wrought iron gates, lamp posts, and molded cornices lend the public facades grandeur and craft. The Wellington Apartments on Orange present highly articulated porticos over private entries and ornate number plates. The Armory Court adopts a medieval aesthetic, with a crenelated gate. In other New Haven instances, ornamentation extends from the body of the building to the courtyard itself. Numerous Spanish Revival buildings along Whitney offering highly refined plantings, fountains, and garden promenades, all in service of a decadent transition from public to private.

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Bucolic Idealism On Naming and History

Until the mid-1800s, the fringe neighborhoods of New Haven, outside the core of the 9-square, were pastoral landscapes. Figure 5 shows an 1859 map of East Rock, where the grain of the city streets begins to break down past Humphry Street, opening into large swaths of undeveloped land after Edwards. At the edge of the Mill River, the map is adorned with the hatch pattern of trees, implying the edge of the wild and natural landscape. Between Edwards and Canner, we see a lone building, the Henry Whitney estate, an iconic historical reference that gives context to the character of East Rock prior to its 20th-century development.

In many instances, New Haven garden apartments are literal and figurative references to the bucolic idealism of the past. As a typology, borne from the Garden City movement, they aim to capture and reframe the pastoral ideals of a bygone era. In architectural formation, they recast the expansive natural world as an interior landscape, a real estate asset, and something for shared ownership and consumption. And in naming, they allude to this pastoral history. In apartment developments across America, we see the usage of words like “terrace”, “glen”, “vale”, “moor”, and “brook”, all evoking a landscape that once was. Alternatively, they might employ words like “estate”, “commons”, “homestead” or “manor”, in reference to the aristocratic ownership of the very land they now occupy. In New Haven, this is very much the case, perhaps with the addition of names such as “armory”, which begin to hint at the industrial history of the city.

As general as this trope may be, it represents an essential quality of the New Haven garden apartment. These developments, due to their locations and their ideals, aim to inspire a romantic view of what was, and what might be. They offer meaning and pride through title, much like the architectural stylization and ornamentation. They provide narrative value to a resident. One does not live at simply a street address, 431 Whitney, but rather, one lives at Alden Court. In other instances, naming can become an appropriative tool to reference something foreign. The Monticello Apartments on Dwight allude to Jefferson’s estate, or the Montowese Apartments on Orange co-opt an indigenous Quinnipiac name. In both instances, the naming becomes a way to modify the meaning of place beyond the literal and physical.



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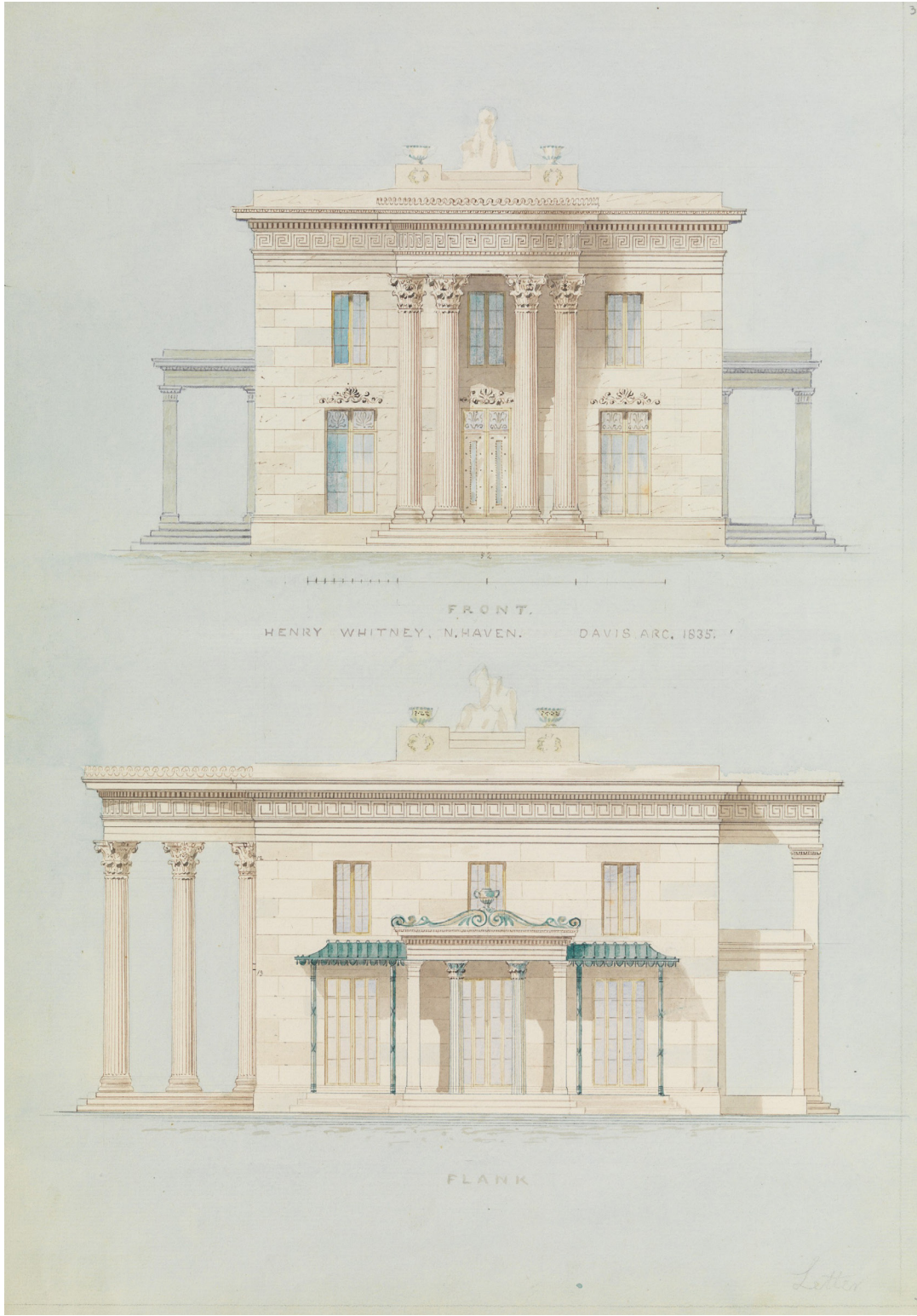
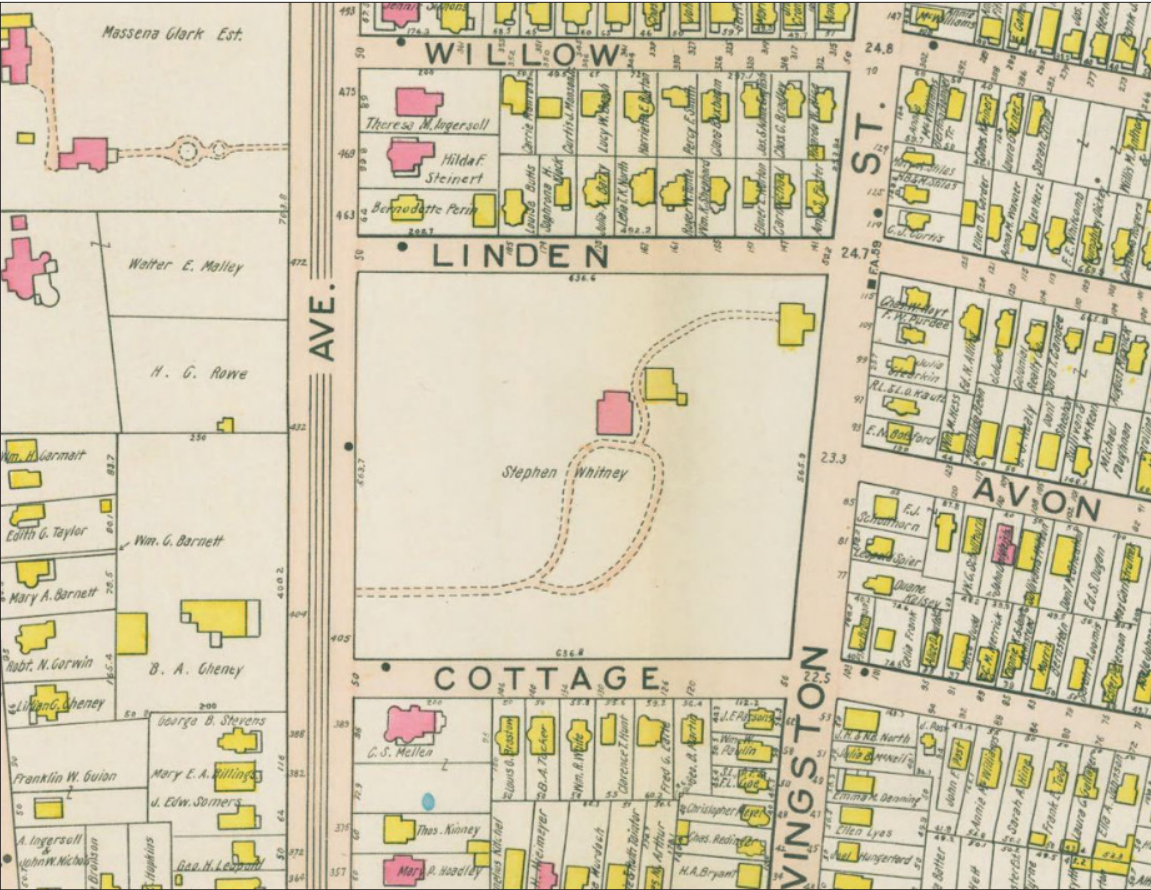
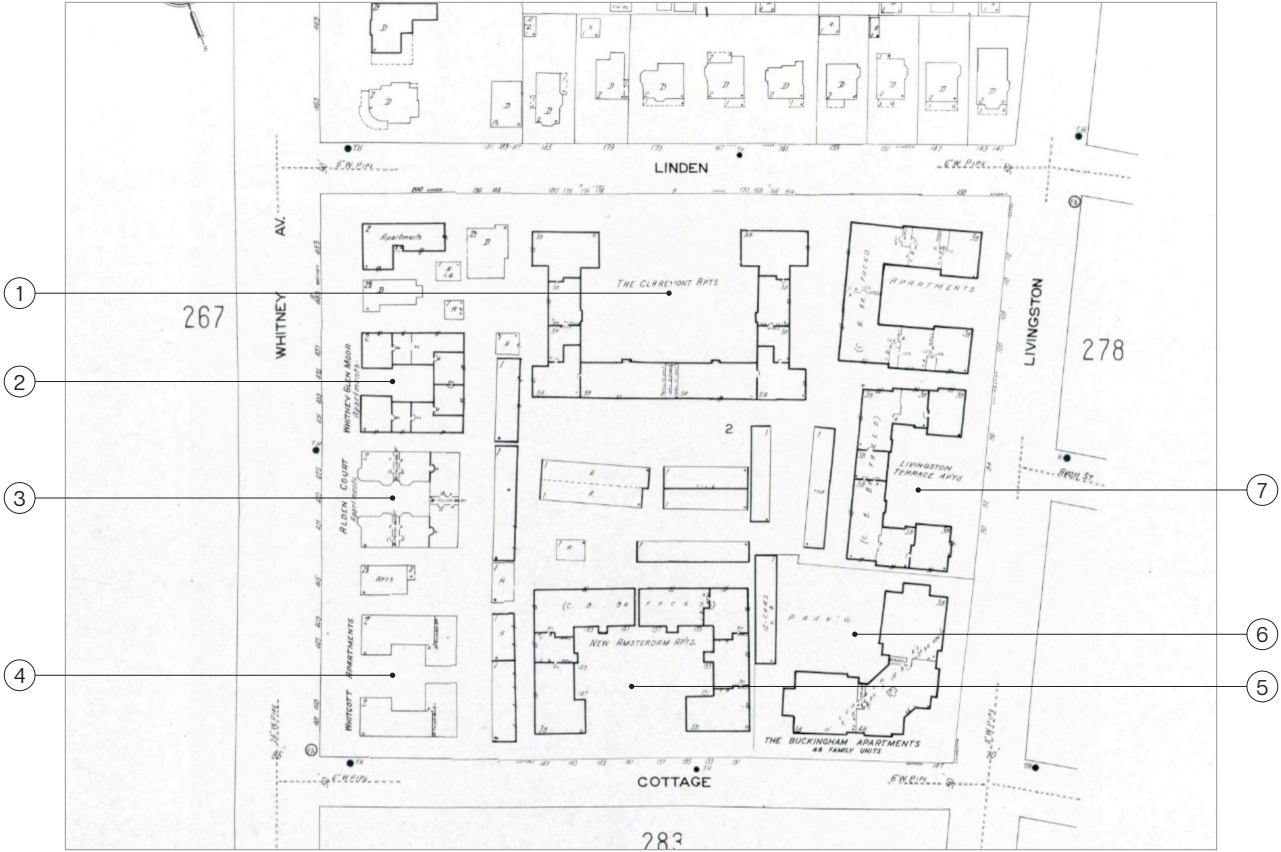


Figure 6 shows plates from the 1835 Henry Whitney Estate and the main architectural project on site. Once standing at the center of the block bounded by Whitney Ave and Livingston Street to the East and West, and Linden and Cottage to the North and South, it holds a significant place in the history of New Haven aristocracy. Demolished in 1924 to make way for eight new garden apartments, the legacy of the estate lives on in the grandeur of naming. On the Southeast corner of the block stands *The Buckingham*, an overt allusion to the royal palace of the English monarchy. *The Claremont* evokes ideas of prestige, and *Whitney Glen Moor* speaks to the pastoral legacy of the site.



Henry Whitney Estate (c. 1911)



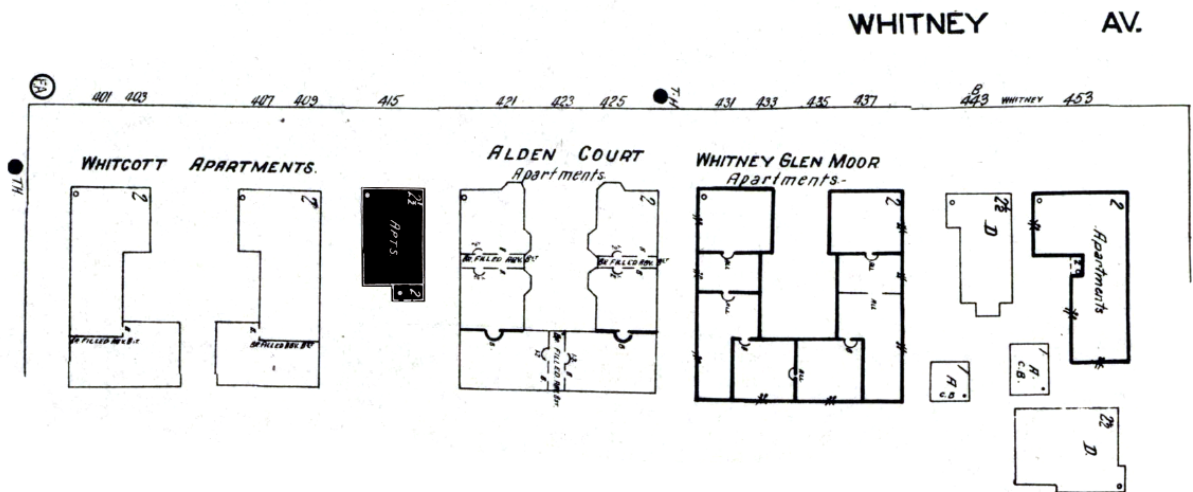
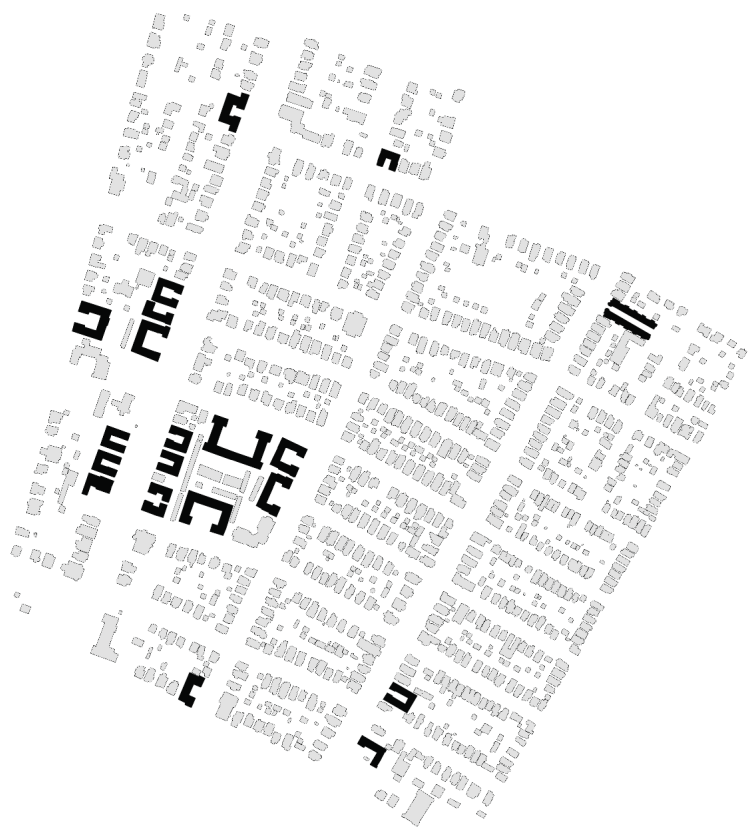
1. The Claremont 2. Whitney Glen Moor 3. Alden Court 4. The Whitcott
5. New Amsterdam 6. The Buckingham 7. Livingston Terrace

The Self-Conscious Neighbor On Scale and Context

By nature, an apartment block inserted into a well-defined residential neighborhood introduces a disruptive scale of building. This is apparent when examining the blocks of East Rock as figure-ground, where the garden apartments appear as monolithic insertions, dwarfing the grain of the area. At the corner of Whitney and Cottage, a trio of garden apartments flank a lone detached single-family home, appearing diminutive against the repeated footprints of the U-shaped buildings. This is, to some degree, a fallacy. In most instances, the garden apartments of New Haven manage scale and street presence gracefully, leveraging the inherent qualities of their foundational form, where minor facades create street frontage and the core of the building wraps inward upon itself.

The garden apartment is a self-conscious neighbor. It takes after the scale of its peers, mirroring the eave heights, the proportions, and frontage width. No instance in New Haven is a better case study than the Whitney and Cottage intersection, where we see the Whitcott Apartments, Alden Court, and Whitney Glen Moor imitating the rhythm of a typical East Rock residential block. The twin facades of the Whitcott, whilst slightly wider than normal, are disrupted by the equally wide gap in the block entering onto the court. In instances where the facades might dwarf their neighbors, the court responds appropriately, swelling to introduce a gap in the block that offers relief from the monotony of a continuous street front. When the court is overwhelmingly large, like that of the New Amsterdam Apartments along Cottage, or the Claremont along Linden, the edge of the street is maintained by a stair, a gate, or signage, filling in a gap that would otherwise disrupt the pacing of the street. Alternatively, the courtyard garden itself spills outward, with trees and shrubs planted at the edge of the lot line. In the residential neighborhoods of New Haven, where street trees are particularly important, the intermingling of the public and private green space is a welcome addition to the character of the street.

The articulation of the street-facing facades is equally important in mediating scale. On these faces, the garden apartments are notably more ornamented, with gable ends emulating their neighbors and architectural detailing creating variation in light and shadow. On the following pages, two streetscapes are compared. One, from 3-191 Livingston, stitching together the familiar rhythm of colonial facades. The next, the lone detached facade of 415 Whitney amidst the facades of Whitney Glen Moor, Alden Court, and the Whitcott, unmistakably courtyard apartments but enmeshed in the street with a polite presence.







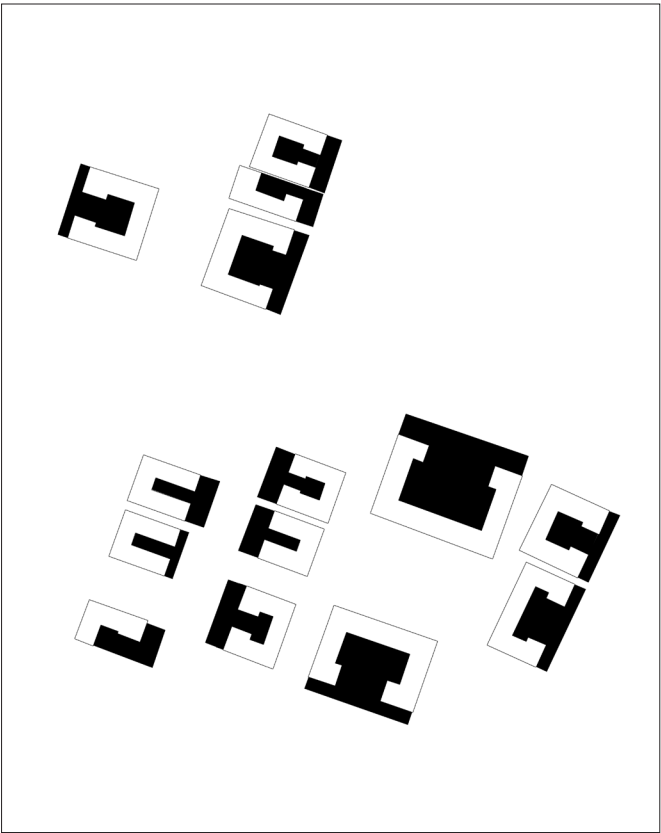
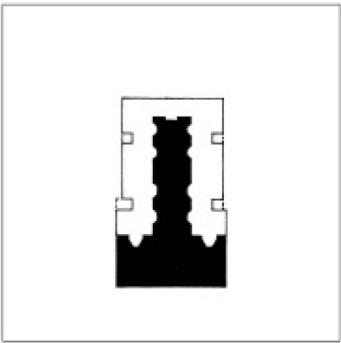
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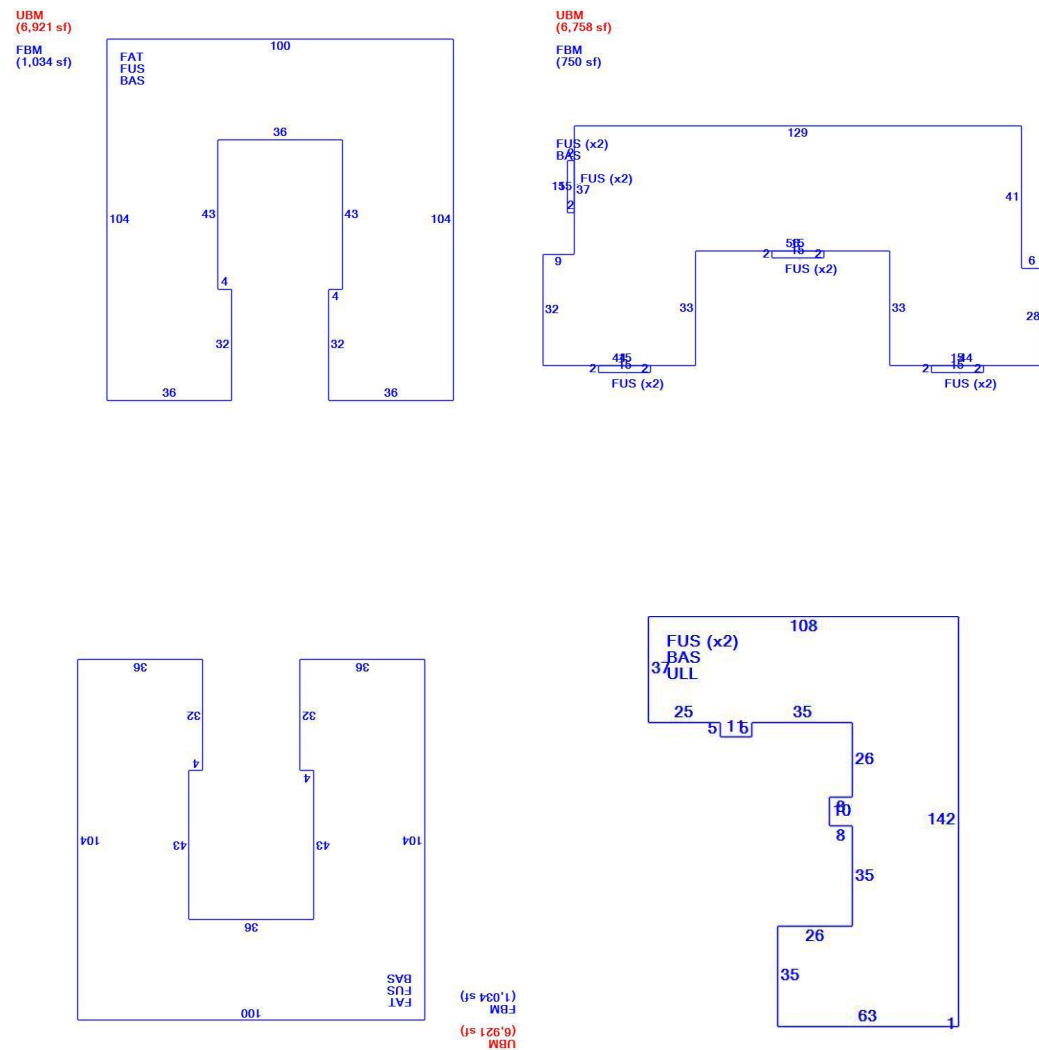
On Communal Urban Space

The block and the court represent the public interface between the garden apartment and the street. It is an elongated greeting, buffered not just by a front garden or a stoop, but the entire length of the building, a secondary facade, and a semi-public garden. Walk down a New Haven Street and stop before a garden apartment. Assess the interior court. It exists in purgatory, an urban grey-area. It is neither public nor private. In theory, you could walk into the courtyard, sit on a bench, lie in the grass, but you would unequivocally be an intruder. It is not for public occupation, yet still for public consumption. Without becoming a literal public space, the courtyard offers something valuable to the public realm. It becomes a character on the street, a part of the public rhythm of the sidewalk, a small, highly curated offering of nature within a dense built environment.

For the residents of a courtyard apartment, the court itself is a vital attribute. In places like East Rock, where so many of the detached single-family dwellings offer a private rear yard or front garden, the apartment court becomes a communal asset. It creates a sense of shared ownership without overburdening a single resident, and in much the same way as architectural ornament or romanticized labels give a sense of place, the garden court becomes a source of individual pride.

The common court is not always a success. Depending on the care and attention given to the shared spaces by the entities that own the building, the court can become a site of disuse and neglect. Along Norton Street, in Edgewood, two courtyard apartments show apparent wear and low tenancy, and the result is a desolate court. In other instances, the courtyard is something that has become explicitly privatized. At the Armory Court on Orange, the wrought iron gate is adorned with “No Trespassing” signs, and surveillance cameras are aimed towards the public street. Depending on the nature of the building, or perhaps the intentions of the owners or the occupants, the court can become a fiercely foreboding presence.





Within the context of New Haven, the courtyard holds special significance. Yale Colleges are defined by the court, a symbol both of the prosperity of the university and the privatization of the downtown blocks. In the architectural language of James Gamble Rogers, the courtyard was a distinctly public space, an access point for private dormitories, but the nexus of communal interaction. The courtyards of the New Haven garden apartment follow in this legacy with varying degrees of success. Above, the footprints of Whitney Avenue apartments show the parcellation of the buildings and arrangement of private entrances. Almost always accessed from the court, the architectural form projects an ideal of how one might live in a semi-communal setting. The Embassy Apartments on Dwight employ a similarly formal articulation of court, with classical motifs akin to those found in Yale College courtyards, like Pierson's College (Figure 7).





In Response to a Need On Urban Growth

The New Haven garden apartment emerged not only out of an architectural and urban ideology but out of necessity. The development of the typology was hyper-specific to a short and intense time of growth within the city. Almost all the cataloged instances of the type mapped in this project were built between 1915 and 1930, aligning with decades during which a near doubling of the population occurred. Its presence is not incidental nor aesthetic, but a response to a need. Figure 8, an 1880 bird’s-eye drawing of East Rock, shows the beginnings of this urban expansion. In Figure 9, an aerial photo from 1934, the grain of the city has drastically changed. The form of the city stretched outward, following the logic of the streetcar, replacing pastoral land and large estates with gridded blocks and subdivided lots. In this context, the detached single-family home – the default mechanism of domestic urban life – failed to absorb the expansion, and a new typology emerged.

The garden apartment offered a medium ground. It was a model of housing that balanced quantity with a sense of quality, economy with a form of elegance. It gave its residents the privacy of a unit, the pleasure of a garden, and the proximity of neighbors. It was a recalibration of domestic scale in response to demographic shifts and social and cultural needs of the moment. In East Rock and Edgewood, neighborhoods with some of the most dramatic growth, the typology established its strongest foothold. The legacy of this development is present today, where these neighborhoods exist in the desirable middle ground between urban and suburban. The courtyard typology is noticeably lacking in adjacent neighborhoods. Beaver Hills slides into typical suburban formation after a matter of blocks. Dixwell is hijacked by industrial complexes and outsized institutional developments. The urban residential quality of Edgewood and East Rock is anchored, in some part, by the presence of middle housing.

The narrative of the New Haven garden apartment is as much about its typological ascent as it is about its dramatic halt. With the adoption of Euclidean Zoning in the late 1920s, highly restrictive and designated classifications for urban districts promoted homogeneous development. This separation of uses, the distinction between single-family residential, mixed-use, multi-family residential, etc., undercuts one of the more optimistic aspirations of the courtyard typology, as a dynamic diversification in form and type. Today, New Haven still follows some semblance of Euclidean Zoning, encouraging sprawl, reinforcing racial and economic segregation, and limiting urban adaptability. Within this contemporary context, the garden apartment becomes a humble reminder of a historic solution, imperfect but aspirational, but most importantly, an omnipresent character within our New Haven urban fabric.

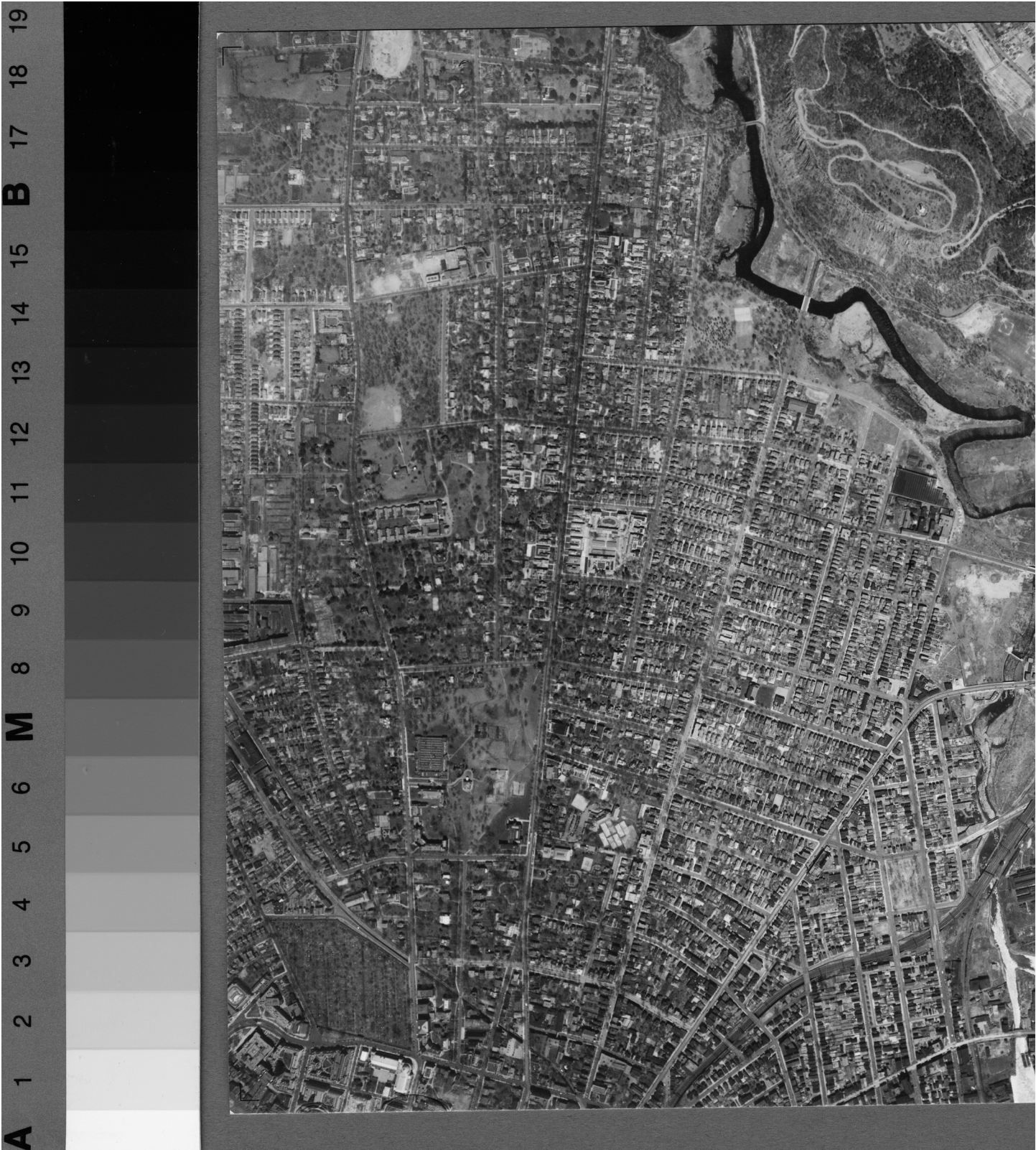
Ward	Population 1890	Δ 1890–1920	Percent Change
Nine Squares (I)	4928	-1856	-37.66%
West River (II)	6227	8511	136.68%
Hill (III)	9714	4047	41.66%
City Point (IV)	10525	8435	80.14%
East Long Wharf (V)	4174	2944	70.53%
Wooster Square South (VI)	5691	2941	51.68%
Wooster Square North (VII)	8594	2496	29.04%
East Rock (VIII)	5920	5354	90.44%
Prospect Hill (IX)	8451	14155	167.49%
Dwight-Edgewood (X)	5754	8508	147.86%
Fair Haven South (XI)	4850	3870	79.79%
Fair Haven North (XII)	6470	8830	136.48%
Westville (XIII)	1975	4016	203.34%
Fair Haven Heights (XIV)	1696	1021	60.20%
Morris Cove (XV)	1076	3220	299.26%
Total	86045	76492	88.90%

Ward	Population 1920	Δ 1920–1930	Percent Change
Nine Squares (I)	3072	-1559	-50.75%
West River (II)	14738	677	4.59%
Hill (III)	13761	-1684	-12.24%
City Point (IV)	18960	-2654	-14.00%
East Long Wharf (V)	7118	-1809	-25.41%
Wooster Square South (VI)	8632	-2154	-24.95%
Wooster Square North (VII)	11090	-2107	-19.00%
East Rock (VIII)	11274	910	8.07%
Prospect Hill (IX)	22606	-658	-2.91%
Dwight-Edgewood (X)	14262	2756	19.32%
Fair Haven South (XI)	8720	-589	-6.75%
Fair Haven North (XII)	15300	529	3.46%
Westville (XIII)	5991	4793	80.00%
Fair Haven Heights (XIV)	2717	871	32.06%
Morris Cove (XV)	4296	2796	65.08%
Total	162537	118	0.07%



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