

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: **Compton Park Apartments**

Other names/site number: **DE CRS # N14859**

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: **610-650 N. Walnut Street**

City or town: **Wilmington** State: **DE** County: **New Castle**

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

	Division Director and SHPO	09/20/2024
Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

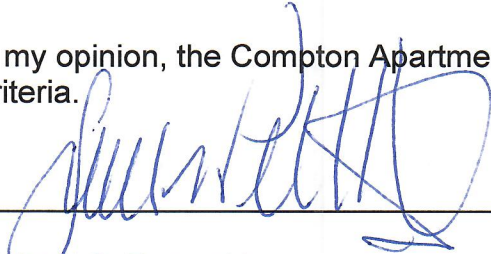
**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Compton Park Apartments
Name of Property
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County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

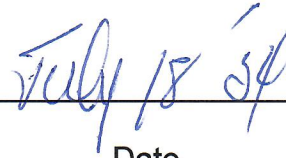
Section number 3 Page 1

Agency Certification

In my opinion, the Compton Apartments X meets / does not meet the National Register Criteria.



Michael S. Purzycki
Mayor
City of Wilmington, Delaware



Date

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – Multiple Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: **Brick, stucco**

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Compton Park Apartments is a garden apartment complex with five three-story brick and stucco buildings at the southeast corner of North Walnut Street and East 7th Street in Wilmington, Delaware. Designed by architect Theodore Brandow in the Modern style, the complex was built as part of the Compton Village urban renewal project between 1967 and 1968. The five buildings, which contain a total of 55 apartments, sit on a single parcel despite each building having a separate address: 610, 620, 630, 640, and 650 North Walnut Street.

Setting

The setting of the Compton Park Apartments is urban. The property, which is L-shaped, wraps around the historic Bethel A.M.E. Church to the southwest and sits just east of Wilmington's downtown commercial area and the city, state, and federal office buildings that line the west side of North Walnut Street. To the east is Herman Holloway, Sr., Park, which was originally known as Spencer Compton Park. To the north is St. Michael's Day Nursery and to the south are two high-rise, 1970s-era apartment buildings. Farther to the north, east, and south, there are other low-scale residential developments, including rowhouses and apartment buildings, dating to the urban renewal period of the 1960s and 1970s.

The five Compton Park Apartments buildings are each rectangular in plan and arranged irregularly within a park-like setting of grass lawns, which are crisscrossed by concrete walkways that provide pedestrian access throughout the property (Photos 1, 2, 12, 13). The primary walkway is along the north-south axis, creating a continuous vista lined by large deciduous trees between East 7th Street and the southern boundary of the property. Directly east of the primary walkway are 620 and 630 North Walnut Street, which share a party wall. West of the primary walkway are (from south to north) 610, 620, and 650 North Walnut Street. The corners of 640 and 650 North Walnut Street touch, forming an L shape, but 610 North Walnut stands on its own at the southwest corner of the property.

Along the northern boundary of the property, adjacent to East 7th Street, there are three asphalt parking areas: two parking lots for residents at the northwest and northeast corners, west of 650 North Walnut Street and north of 630 Walnut Street, respectively, and a smaller parking area for property management staff between them, just east of 650 North Walnut Street. Except along the 7th Street side, most of the property is surrounded by a short, non-historic metal picket fence.

Exterior

There are two building types in the Compton Park Apartments complex, which were designated Type A and Type B in the architect's original drawings. Type A contains one-bedroom apartments. Type B is simply an elongated version of Type A and has two-bedroom apartments;

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Otherwise, the two types are identical. Type A applies to 610 and 640 North Walnut Street (Photos 3, 4, 11, 14). Type B applies to 620, 630, and 650 North Walnut Street (Photos 5-8, 15, 16).

The long elevations of both building types are seven bays wide and are symmetrical. As explained in greater detail below, the center bays of each elevation are the most transparent, reflecting the most public of the interior uses: vestibules, stairways, and corridors. Moving outward, the more private living rooms are given sliding glass doors, which are recessed at the back of the balconies. In the outermost bays, the most private spaces, the bedrooms, have much smaller window openings within the otherwise solid masonry walls.

The center bay contains an aluminum-framed glass door with sidelights and transom. Although the doors themselves are late-twentieth century replacements, the sidelights and transom appear to be original. Located above grade, the entrance is reached by original concrete steps with simple, painted black metal railings, which are late-twentieth century replacements. The entrance assembly is set deeply within the wall. Above the entrance is a brick spandrel, a single-light aluminum window, and a painted stucco band with aluminum coping, all of which are original. The bays that flank the entrance, which mirror each other, are framed along the sides and top by an original painted stucco band with aluminum coping at the top. Within the stucco frame are deeply recessed patios (on the ground floor) and balconies with simple painted black metal railings (on the second and third floors). The patios and balconies do not span the full width of the stucco frame, but rather are interrupted on the outer sides by a brick wall that sits slightly forward of the patios and balconies but still slightly recessed from the stucco frame. The back walls of the patios and balconies are brick with inset stucco areas containing two-light aluminum sliding doors, which are late-twentieth century replacements. The two outermost bays, which are set well behind the three central bays, are identical to each other. They consist of vertical stacks of two-light, sliding vinyl replacement windows with painted stucco spandrel panels between them. The window bays are framed by brick fins on the sides, which extend out from the main brick wall behind and slightly above the roofline. At the top of the window bays, there are stucco bulkheads with aluminum coping that sit below the top of the brick fins but extend out slightly in front of them.

The narrow elevations of both building types are two bays wide. The south elevation of 620 North Walnut Street, the north elevation of 630 North Walnut Street, and the west elevation of 650 North Walnut Street each have a pair of two-light, sliding vinyl replacement windows, which match the configuration of the original two-light, sliding aluminum windows. All of the other narrow elevations consist simply of blank brick walls with no openings.

Interior

The interiors of all five buildings are largely the same, consisting of a central corridor with apartments on both sides (two on each side on each floor, with the exception of the ground floor where one of the four quadrants consists of a laundry room). Inside each of the ten entrances, which sit between the ground and second floors, there are small vestibules with original slate tile floors and painted gypsum walls and ceilings (Photos 18, 22). On the interior side of the vestibules are U-return metal stairs with rubber treads, simple metal picket railings, and

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checkerboard vinyl tile landings, leading down to the ground floor and up to the second and third floors (Photo 18). The corridors on each floor have checkerboard vinyl tile floors and painted gypsum walls and ceilings (Photos 21, 23). The apartment entries have painted flat metal doors.

All 55 apartments retain their original layouts, but the finishes vary (Photos 19, 20, 24-26). Most of the apartments have carpeted and checkerboard vinyl tile floors with painted gypsum walls and ceilings. In a small number of apartments, vinyl plank floors with a wood grain pattern have been installed. The finishes and fixtures in the kitchens and bathrooms, while these spaces sit in their original locations, have been replaced over the last twenty to thirty years.

Integrity

The Compton Park Apartments possess a high degree of integrity. All five buildings convey the identical aspects of design and materials. The original design intent of the architect Theodore Brandow continues to be expressed through the building's strongly articulated Modern form, which relies on the interplay of materials (primarily brick and stucco), light and shadow, and public and private space. As explained in the statement of significance, the architect designed the facade in part to reflect interior uses, the most public (the vestibules and stairways) having the most transparency and the bedrooms having the least. These relationships remain intact. Virtually no changes have been made to the original exterior masonry surfaces, although the stucco has been painted (it is not known if the stucco was originally painted). Although the original windows have been replaced, the new windows, installed sometime in the last 20-30 years, match the configuration and sliding operation of the original units. This change, therefore, has had an extremely minimal effect on the ability of the complex to convey its architectural significance. Inside, the original layout of the interior spaces remains intact. Except for the vestibules, where the original slate tile floors have been preserved, the flooring finishes in the corridors and apartments have largely been replaced with later but still compatible materials like carpeting and vinyl tile. The original painted gypsum board walls and ceilings remain intact, however.

The Compton Park Apartments also retains integrity through its location and setting. The property remains in its original location and the setting has changed little either within or outside of the property's boundaries since the mid-twentieth century. Notably, the park-like grounds, which help the viewer to understand the twentieth century garden apartment planning concepts that governed the layout of the site, are intact and have been well maintained since 1968. Beyond the property itself, virtually all of the other residential projects that were built as part of Wilmington's 1960s and 70s urban renewal efforts, still stand and have not been significantly altered. Additionally, no major new construction has occurred in the immediate vicinity of the Compton Park Apartments since the Compton Village urban renewal project was considered complete in the 1970s.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1968

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Theodore Brandow (architect)

Leon & Weiner & Associates (builders)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Compton Park Apartments are significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of community planning and development as the first apartments built in an Urban Renewal Area in Wilmington, Delaware. Begun in 1967 and completed in the spring of 1968, the apartments were one of several distinct and separate housing projects built as part of Wilmington's earliest urban renewal undertaking, Compton Village on the city's East Side (Figure 2). The project, led by Leon N. Weiner, a Wilmington builder who became a nationally known advocate for fair housing, represented the city's efforts to create a racially integrated, middle-class neighborhood in an era when there was little hope of reversing urban decline. Although urban renewal in Compton Village has an imperfect legacy – many poor Black families were displaced when the neighborhood was cleared for redevelopment – the Compton Park Apartments nonetheless served as a bright spot of stability in a city where social conditions were rapidly deteriorating during the 1960s. The period of significance under Criterion A is 1968, the year the Compton Park Apartments were completed and had their most direct impact on the progress of urban renewal in Compton Village.

The Compton Park Apartments are also significant at the local level under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a major work in the Modern style by architect Theodore Brandow. Reflecting ideas about architecture that emerged with the work of Louis Kahn in the early 1960s, the Compton Park Apartments looked beyond the cold glass boxes of the International Style, offering instead a new kind of modernism that was more expressive of internal functions and historical and environmental contexts. The period of significance under Criterion C is 1968, the year the project was completed.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Compton Park Apartments and Urban Renewal on Wilmington's East Side

Starting in the 1950s, as rapid suburban expansion led to the decline of downtown Wilmington and neighboring residential areas, the city pursued urban renewal in an attempt to stabilize its tax base, keep jobs in the city, and improve living conditions. Like many other cities, Wilmington hoped to take advantage of federal funding for urban renewal that was made possible by the Housing Act of 1949, the legislation that first established loan and grant programs to aid cities in clearing slums and in building new housing to replace them. In Wilmington, city leaders focused their attention on what became known as the Poplar Street area or Poplar Street Project A, a 38-acre site with 21-1/2 blocks just east of downtown, roughly bounded by Walnut Street to the west, 4th Street to the south, Spruce Street to the east, and 9th Street to the north. A predominantly residential neighborhood of nineteenth-century brick rowhouses interspersed with churches, the area had the highest concentration of Black residents in Wilmington, most of whom were poor. Due in large part to absentee landlords – only 23% of homes were owner-occupied – many of the more than 600 buildings in the area were considered blighted, creating

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whom were poor. Due in large part to absentee landlords – only 23% of homes were owner-occupied – many of the more than 600 buildings in the area were considered blighted, creating what many believed were the worst living conditions in the city.¹ Starting in 1953, the Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) began to study how to improve the East Side through urban renewal. After several years of planning and coordination with the federal government, in May 1957 the WHA was awarded \$2 million by the Urban Renewal Administration for property acquisition and clearance in the Poplar Street area.²

With the goal of rebuilding the deteriorating neighborhood, the WHA began to acquire, condemn, and demolish properties in the Poplar Street area in 1960, forcing the relocation of hundreds of Black families. Many residents were accommodated in the new Riverside public housing complex on the DuPont Highway, about a mile to the northeast, which the WHA started building in 1958. Many others found homes on Wilmington’s West Side, a predominantly white neighborhood whose residents were increasingly fleeing the city for the suburbs. By the end of 1961, in the face of opposition from the East Side Home Owners Association, all residents had been removed and all but a small handful of buildings in the Poplar Street area – churches, schools, etc. – had been demolished, clearing the way for redevelopment (Figure 1).³

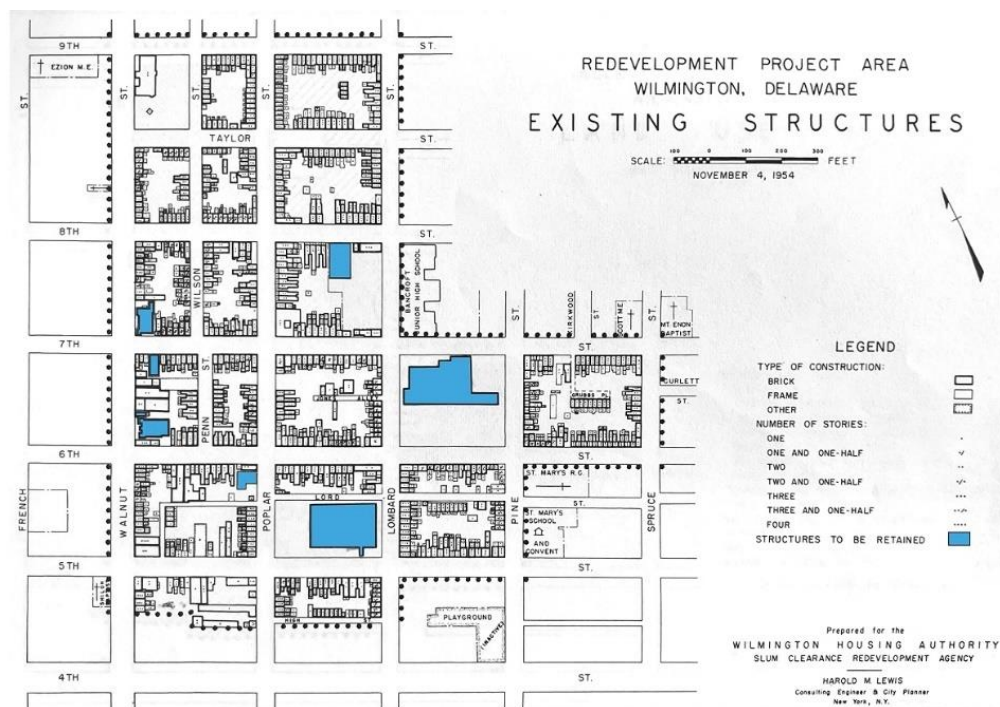


Figure 1 – Map of the Poplar Street Project A Urban Renewal Area prior to demolition (Wilmington Housing Authority, 1954). The buildings shaded in blue are the only ones not demolished after clearance began in 1960.

¹ Wilmington Planning Commission, “A Report on Blighted Areas in the City of Wilmington, Delaware,” May 1954.

² “Suit to Test City’s Slum Act Validity,” *Wilmington Morning News*, May 1, 1957.

³ Carol E. Hoffecker, *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 159-162.

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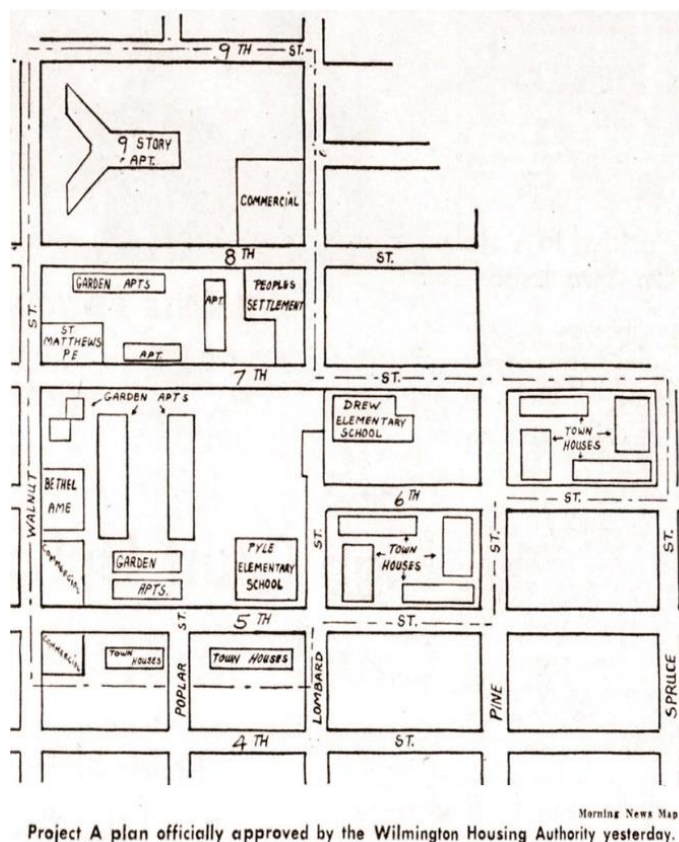
While the WHA's goal had always been to build new housing in the Poplar Street area, there were no definite plans for construction when demolition began in 1960. It was only that year that the WHA began to seriously consider what form urban renewal should take, seeking advice from the Jackson-Cross Company, a Philadelphia-based real estate firm that the WHA hired to study the problem and make recommendations. In their final report, presented to the WHA in June 1960, Jackson-Cross tied the redevelopment of the Poplar Street area to the future survival of the entire downtown, claiming that the only way to give the central business district a chance at a comeback and of starting to regrow the city's tax base, both of which were major goals of city leaders, was to attract middle- and upper-income (i.e. white) residents back to the downtown area. This meant building housing for families making more than \$7,500 per year, well above the threshold to be considered low-income. Although Jackson-Cross acknowledged the importance of low-income groups to the economy and life of the city, it would not be possible to rehouse displaced residents in the renewal area without major subsidies of which there was no clear source. Federal regulations prohibited the construction of low-income public housing in slum clearance areas, and while Jackson-Cross claimed that the development of 180 to 200 rowhouses for low-income residents by a private builder was financially feasible, the houses would have to be built to a minimum standard. Apart from concerns about the potential for low-quality construction, city leaders already feared that repopulating the renewal area with exclusively low-income residents would simply result in a new slum.⁴

In 1961, following the election of Mayor John E. Babiarz, the reform-minded businessman who was determined to tackle Wilmington's most pressing issues, there was a greater sense of urgency surrounding the city's urban renewal efforts. That autumn, the WHA, apparently in agreement with the recommendations made by Jackson-Cross, finally invited proposals from developers interested in managing the redevelopment of the Poplar Street area as a middle-income neighborhood. Five teams submitted proposals. In March 1962, the WHA awarded the project to Wilmington Renewal Associates, a syndicate led by Leon N. Weiner whose Wilmington-based company, Franklin Builders, was among the best-known builders of housing in the region (Weiner and Franklin Builders are discussed in greater detail in the next section). Key to the success of Wilmington Renewal's bid was its emphasis on residential development – the team proposed 655 middle-income housing units spread among a variety of building types: townhouses, garden apartments, and high-rises – which aligned with the recommendations made by Jackson-Cross and with the city's other major urban renewal project: a new civic center just west of the Poplar Street area ([Figure 2](#)).

⁴ Jackson-Cross Company, "Market Study and Feasibility Analysis, Poplar Street Project A, Wilmington, DE," 1960. A copy of the Jackson-Cross report can be found in the archives of Wilmington's Department of Land Use and Planning.

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Project A plan officially approved by the Wilmington Housing Authority yesterday.

Figure 2 – A sketch plan of Wilmington Renewal Associates’ proposal for Poplar Street Project A (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, March 9, 1962).

Aside from new housing, part of attracting middle-income families to the rebuilt neighborhood had to be the proximity of decent-paying jobs. The city’s hope was that a civic center along King and Walnut Streets, where new municipal, state, and federal office buildings were proposed, would bring jobs that residents of Compton Village could walk to.⁵ Bolstered by the efforts of the Greater Wilmington Development Council, a group representing local business interests, planning for the new civic center began in earnest in 1961 after the General Services Administration chose the project area for a new federal building. Little substantive progress in the civic center effort was made in the coming years, however.⁶

Because of challenges in coordinating local, state, and federal funding and other bureaucratic hurdles, not to mention vocal protests by the area’s former residents who organized citizens’ groups to demand change, as explained below, construction of new housing in the Poplar Street area did not begin until the end of 1964. The first phase, completed in August 1965, consisted of 34 rowhouses on the block bounded by 5th, 6th, Lombard, and Pine Streets (**Figure 3**). Directly to the west, across Lombard Street, was the new Spencer Compton Park (now known as Herman

⁵ Hoffecker, 176-177.

⁶ The saga of the civic center urban renewal project was recently explored by reporter Joran Howell in an online story published by the Delaware Call. See “A New Downtown for Wilmington,” August 24, 2023, delawarecall.com/2023/08/24/a-new-downtown-for-wilmington/.

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Holloway, Senior, Park), a public greenspace built as part of the renewal effort. It was after Compton Park that the city, at the urging of Wilmington Renewal, renamed the Poplar Street area as Compton Village. Although the townhouses were modestly priced, selling for around \$16,000, and could be financed with FHA-insured, low interest rate mortgages, few of the families who had lived in the Poplar Street area before clearance began in 1960 could afford them. While residency in Compton Village was never restricted by race – in fact, integration became one of the project’s goals – initially only six of the new rowhouses were occupied by Black owners. Today, the rowhouses remain standing, but numerous alterations, including the painting of original brickwork, the installation of incompatible windows, and the replacement of siding materials have had a detrimental effect on the integrity of the property.

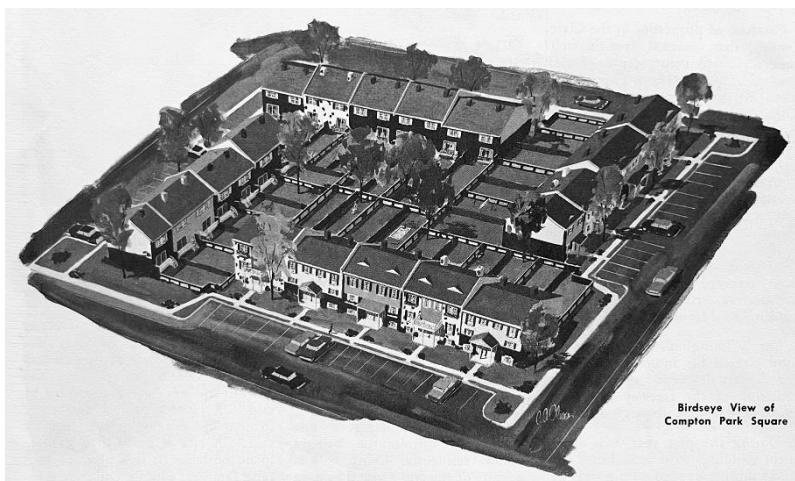


Figure 3 – Rendering of Compton Park Square (From the *Compton Village News*, vol. 1, undated. Located in the archives of Wilmington’s Department of Land Use and Planning).

After the completion of the townhouses, Wilmington Renewal moved on to the second phase of Compton Village, a garden apartment complex with 55 one- and two-bedroom units east of Walnut Street between 5th and 7th Streets (Figs. 4 and 5). Named the Compton Park Apartments, construction on the project began in June 1967 and was completed in the spring of 1968. Bookending the west side of Spencer Compton Park, the Compton Park Apartments were notable in that they extended the redevelopment effort in a contiguous thrust to its western boundary, closest to the proposed civic center and downtown. Although, like the townhouses, the apartments were targeted toward middle-income residents – rents started at \$135 per month – they made it possible for those without the means to own a home, or the ability to obtain a mortgage because of discriminatory redlining practices, to live in Compton Village. It was likely for this reason that the Compton Park Apartments were much more successful in drawing Black tenants than the earlier townhouses were in drawing Black buyers. Initially, about two-thirds of the residents were Black and one-third were white, making the Compton Park Apartments a model of racial coexistence in an era when battles over integration in housing were being fought in cities across the country.⁷ It is not known how many of the Black tenants were formerly residents of the area prior to its clearance in 1960. The large share of Black residents in the

⁷ Bob Whitcomb, “Compton Village, ‘Damn Nice Urban Neighborhood,’” *The News Journal*, May 29, 1976.

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Compton Park Apartments somewhat dispelled the idea that middle-income whites were needed to make urban renewal a success; there was demand for housing among Wilmington's middle-income Black residents, too.



Figure 4 (left) – One of the Compton Park buildings (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, April 23, 1968).

Figure 5 (right) – Ad for the Compton Park Apartments (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, April 20, 1968).

While the Compton Park Apartments were unusually successful in attracting an integrated tenancy, less economically secure residents were still left with few options in Compton Village. This began to change in 1966. That year, even before construction on the Compton Park Apartments began, the city started to face calls by newly organized citizen groups, especially the East and South Wilmington Housing Council and the United Neighbors for Progress, to reverse course on the plan to build exclusively middle-income housing in the area. Both organizations were vocal in their demands, angered by the fact that decisions about the future of the neighborhood were being made without the input of residents, and that many of the families who were displaced by urban renewal could not afford to move back into the area.⁸ While the Housing Authority initially stood by its “obligation” to build middle-income housing, the city ultimately acquiesced, with Mayor Babiarz announcing in late June 1967 that an agreement had been reached in which Wilmington Renewal would release a parcel on the west side of Lombard Street between 8th and 9th Streets for the construction of 18 townhouses for lower-income families.⁹ That number soon grew to 24 townhouses. In an unusually expedient process, groundbreaking on the project, which was developed by Peninsula Methodist Homes and Hospitals, took place in August and the houses were largely complete by early 1968 (Figure 6). Priced at around \$12,000, the houses cost 25% less than those at Compton Park Square and were affordable to moderate-income families or those with an income of at least 50% and less than 80% of the area median income (middle-income families, by comparison, had incomes of at least 80% and less than 120% of the median area income). At the time middle-income families were

⁸ “2 Groups Hit City’s Role in Housing,” *The News Journal*, May 31, 1966.

⁹ Sidney C. Schaer, “Middle-Income Housing Plan Called City Obligation by WHA,” *The News Journal*, June 1, 1967; Ralph S. Moyed, “Ok on Low-Priced Compton Units Set,” *Wilmington Morning News*, June 21, 1967.

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those making between about \$4,000 and \$6,000 per year. Although still not affordable to low-income groups, the Peninsula Methodist houses were viewed as progress in making Compton Village affordable to more of the families who had been displaced by urban renewal.¹⁰

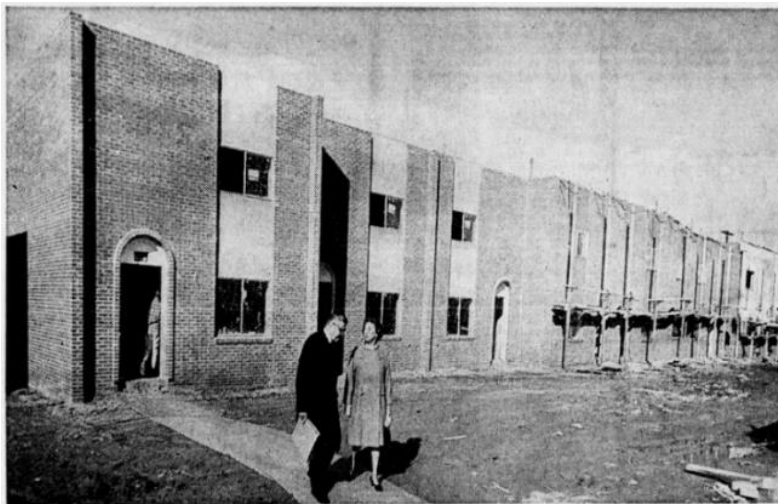


Figure 6 – The Peninsula Methodist Houses at 8th and Lombard Streets (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, November 28, 1967).

The opening of the Compton Park Apartments and Peninsula Methodist Townhouses in early 1968 coincided with the violent protests that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This tragic event would further alter the course of development in Compton Village. For years, racial tensions in Wilmington had been mounting over the lack of economic opportunity, mistreatment by police, and displacement by urban renewal that had plagued the city's poor Black neighborhoods. With the community already in a state of agitation, the assassination of Dr. King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, sparked protests and demonstrations among the city's younger Black residents that in some cases escalated into a rebellion in downtown Wilmington and the West Side on April 9th and 10th, events that were repeated in cities across the country that week. Following reports of widespread and violent destruction of property, Delaware governor Charles L. Terry called in the National Guard to restore order in the city. Against the wishes of Mayor Babiarz, over the next nine months Governor Terry insisted the Guard remain in Wilmington, claiming the action was necessary to ensure the safety of residents and protection of property. It was only toward the end of January 1969 that the Guard was finally recalled.

Compton Village and the East Side were spared the worst of the unrest and subsequent National Guard occupation, but the events of 1968 marked a turning point in the redevelopment of the area. The rebellion highlighted the stark inequalities in the city, and protestors' demands led to the construction of many more moderate-income and even some low-income housing options. Among the new projects were the Bethel Villa Apartments (extant), a three-block-long garden apartment complex with 150 units between 4th and 5th Streets that was aimed at moderate-

¹⁰ Cy Liberman, "Only-the-beginning' Plea Given at Home Ceremony," *Wilmington Morning News*, December 9, 1967.

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income tenants. Although not officially part of Compton Village – Bethel Villa was located in Mulberry Run, a separate urban renewal area just to the south – it tied into the earlier project in several ways. Built by the Bethel A.M.E. Church Housing Corporation – the Bethel A.M.E. Church, located just west of the Compton Park Apartments, was one of the few buildings spared by demolition in 1960 – Bethel Villa represented the growing involvement of the area’s original residents in planning its future. In Mulberry Run, Bethel Villa was joined by the Mulberry Run Townhouses (extant), built by the non-profit Community Housing, Inc., on Spruce Street between 5th and 6th Streets in 1973 (Figure 7). On both properties, various alterations, especially the replacement of windows and siding materials, have negatively affected their integrity in recent years.

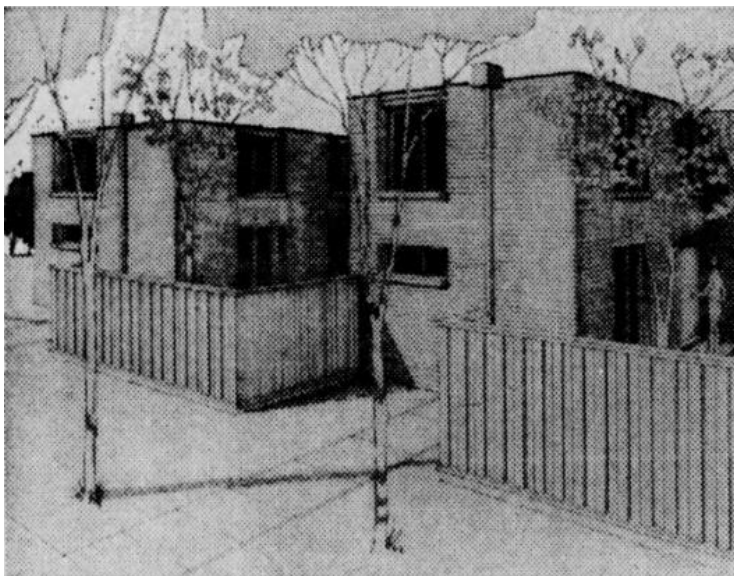


Figure 7 – Illustration of the Mulberry Run Townhouses at 5th and Spruce Streets (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, October 7, 1972).

In Compton Village proper, later projects included two high-rise apartment houses built by Wilmington Renewal Associates for low-income seniors – Compton Tower (1972; extant) and the Windsor Apartments (1974; extant) – located just south of the Compton Park Apartments, and Compton Towne, a complex of 92 courtyard-facing townhouses for moderate- and middle-income buyers at 9th and Walnut Streets, completed in 1973 (Figures 8 and 9). The high-rises were the first of the so-called “turnkey” public housing projects in the city, a model, authorized by the 1965 Federal Housing Act, in which a private developer built housing to the specifications of the Housing Authority, then sold the project to the city once completed. The turnkey model, which Leon N. Weiner pioneered in Wilmington, became a popular method of achieving public housing goals in Wilmington and other cities because it often resulted in lower costs and a shorter project timeline. Both buildings retain a fair degree of integrity. Although the original form of both buildings has not changed, the original facades, which consisted predominantly of red brick, were completely painted in a light neutral color sometime in the last ten to twenty years. This significant change in appearance has affected the integrity of these two buildings.

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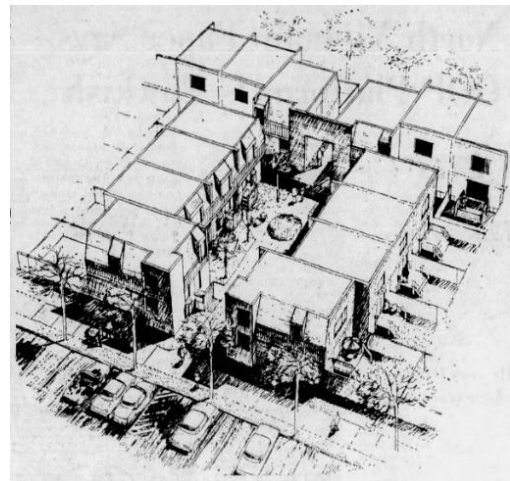


Figure 8 (left) – Illustration of the proposed Compton Tower at 5th and Walnut Streets (from *The News Journal* on October 30, 1968). The building was completed in 1972. The Windsor Apartments, built directly to the west in 1974, is identical.

Figure 9 (right) – Illustration of the Compton Towne development at 9th and Walnut Streets, completed in 1973 (from *The News Journal*, August 25, 1972).

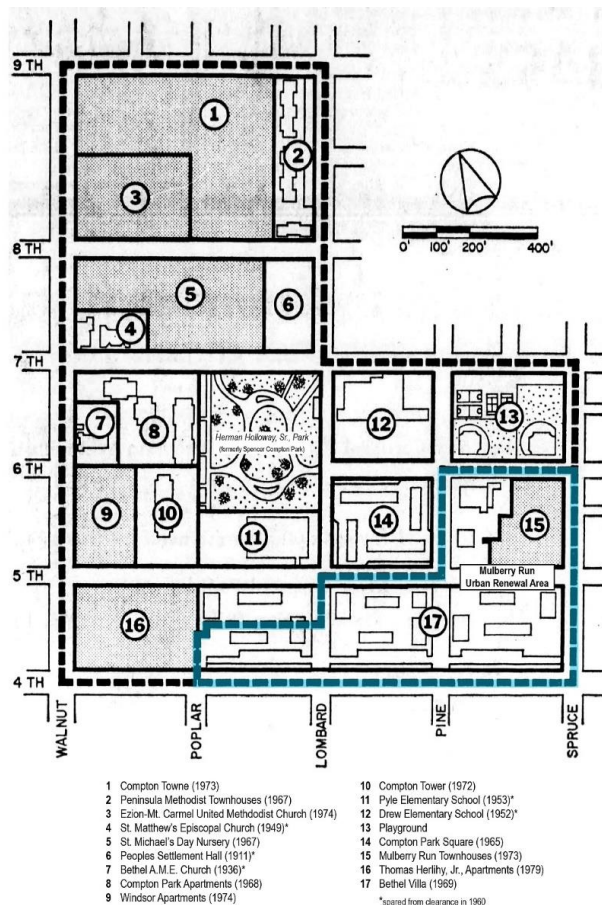


Figure 10 – Map of projects in Compton Village and Mulberry Run (from *The News Journal*, March 17, 1972).

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Despite a complex maze of bureaucracy that surrounded the project and often caused major delays in construction, Compton Village finally achieved the goal of rebuilding this part of the East Side by the mid-1970s, when renewal was considered complete. Although the city had hoped to build exclusively middle-income housing, the project ultimately resulted in hundreds of new housing units for a mix of income levels and residency types, making it possible for a larger share of residents displaced by urban renewal to move back into the East Side than was initially expected. Apart from economic considerations, Compton Park Square and especially the Compton Park Apartments were models of how urban renewal could result in a stable, racially integrated neighborhood despite the effort's unfortunate legacy of displacement. Although both projects remained integrated into the late 1970s – most of the Compton Park Square townhouses were later sold on to Black buyers. In fact, the number of white residents in the area gradually declined, a long-term trend that began following the unrest of 1968.¹¹ The failure of the civic center project, too – several new government buildings were built in the area, but the project never achieved its full promise – likely affected the prospects of Compton Village.¹² While the neighborhood never became truly integrated for these reasons, many of the projects that were initially targeted to middle-income buyers today serve as an important source of housing for Wilmington's moderate- and low-income residents. The Compton Park Apartments, for example, were converted into federally subsidized housing in 1981 under Section 8, a program established by the Nixon administration in 1974, and remains federally subsidized today.¹³

Although virtually all of the projects completed in the urban renewal area remain standing today, the integrity of most of these buildings has been negatively impacted by later alterations, as explained above. With the exception of the Compton Park Apartments, which retain a high level of integrity, an overall lack of integrity in the surrounding area would complicate any attempt to nominate Compton Village as a historic district. Therefore, the Compton Park Apartments are being individually nominated to the National Register.

Leon N. Weiner, Builder

The Compton Park Apartments were built by Leon N. Weiner, a Wilmington-based builder who headed Wilmington Renewal Associates, the syndicate awarded the contract for the redevelopment of the Poplar Street area in 1962. Weiner, whose eponymous company, Leon N. Weiner & Associates, was one of the most prominent real estate developers in Wilmington and regionally during the 1960s and later, was also a widely respected national authority on housing and urban renewal during this period. Weiner's advocacy for affordable housing, in particular, as well as his leading role in the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which finally banned discrimination in housing, made him, in the view of some, "the conscience of the housing industry."¹⁴ The Compton Park Apartments, which were a major component of Wilmington,

¹¹ Bob Whitcomb, "Compton Village, 'Damn Nice Urban Neighborhood,'" *The News Journal*, May 29, 1976.

¹² The failure of the civic center was recently explored by reporter Joran Howell in an online story published by the Delaware Call. See "Wilmington's Biggest Boondoggle," September 5, 2023, delawarecall.com/2023/09/05/wilmingtons-biggest-boondoggle/.

¹³ Michael Jackson, "Federal Rent Subsidies Help Poor Take Housing From Middle Class," *Wilmington Morning News*, March 9, 1981.

¹⁴ "Leon N. Weiner," obituary, *New York Times*, November 27, 2002.

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Delaware's Compton Village urban renewal project during the 1960s, are a physical reminder of Weiner's commitment to fair housing.

Born in Philadelphia in 1920, Leon Norbert Weiner was educated at the city's Overbrook High School before attending the University of Pennsylvania. In 1948, following military service in World War II, Weiner joined his uncle William J. Medgebow's Wilmington-based company, Franklin Builders. At the time, a postwar building boom was just beginning, and Franklin Builders was poised to become one of the leaders in developing Wilmington's suburbs. Franklin Builders' first big subdivision project was Leedom Estates, a community of 200 small houses west of Route 13 in Wilmington Manor, about four miles south of Wilmington. Weiner was the supervisor of construction on the project, which began in 1948 and was completed in stages between 1950 and 1952. Under Weiner's leadership – he became president of the company in 1954 – Franklin became one of Delaware's largest home builders, leading the development of dozens more subdivisions and transforming the countryside around Wilmington and Newark. One estimate placed the total number of homes built by Franklin Builders at more than 5,000.¹⁵ Among Franklin Builders' best-known projects during this period are Green Acres, a subdivision with 376 homes on Silverside Road, four miles north of Wilmington (opened in 1958), and Oakmont, a community of 261 townhouse-style homes on Rogers Road just two miles south of downtown Wilmington. Opened in 1959, Oakmont was only the second of the very small number of racially integrated suburban developments in Delaware, and an important manifestation of Weiner's "ardent belief in equal treatment for members of all races."¹⁶ Reflecting his significant accomplishments in the housing industry, Weiner became president of the Home Builders Association of Delaware in 1957, remaining in this position for several years.

While Weiner concentrated much of his efforts on middle-class suburban housing during the 1950s, he became increasingly focused on affordable housing and urban renewal by the end of the decade. At the time, industry groups like the influential and conservative National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) remained opposed to the public housing measures instituted by the federal Housing Act of 1949. Signed into law by President Harry Truman, the Act established federal grant and loan programs to fund the wholesale clearance of urban areas considered to be slums – often displacing residents who were poor and Black – and the construction of hundreds of thousands of new public housing units. During the administration of Dwight Eisenhower, however, groups like the NAHB who were opposed to government intervention in the housing industry lobbied congress and the president to curtail funding for public housing, leading to the Housing Act of 1954. On the other hand, Weiner, whose national profile was growing, became a prominent voice in support of affordable housing and urban renewal, arguing that better housing was the key to the economic and social stability, and health, of low-income, inner-city communities.

In 1957, Weiner led a Homebuilders Association of Delaware conference on lower-cost housing. In his speech at the event, Weiner expressed concern about slum conditions in the inner city and

¹⁵ Maureen Milford, "Leon Weiner, Champion of Low-cost Housing, Dies," *News-Journal*, November 19, 2002.

¹⁶ Alexander von Hoffman, "Calling Upon the Genius: Housing Policy in the Great Society, Part Three," a paper published by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2010, pp. 26.

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stressed the need to remove obstacles to stimulate urban renewal and create new affordable housing.¹⁷ One such obstacle, New Castle County's ban on rowhouses less than 21 feet in width, he viewed as particularly challenging because rowhouses could not be made affordable at that size. Over the next year, Weiner pressed county officials on the matter, with some strongly opposed to reducing the minimum width. In 1958, however, Franklin Builders was finally permitted to build 16-foot wide rowhouses at Oakmont, making it possible to create new housing affordable to Black families displaced by Wilmington's clearance of the residential Poplar Street Redevelopment Area in the mid-1950s. Widely reported on nationally, the success of the Oakmont project brought increased attention to Weiner's idea that suburban rowhouse developments could play a role in rehousing those displaced by urban renewal.

During the early 1960s, Weiner continued to fight for policy changes to encourage the construction of affordable housing. Reflecting his growing influence in the housing industry, Weiner was elected vice-president of the NAHB in 1962, despite "rampant antisemitism and conservatism," not to mention some members' skepticism of his ideas on housing lower-income communities.¹⁸ In this role, Weiner became one of the chief proponents of affordable housing in the United States. In editorials printed in newspapers across the country, Weiner pushed back against common stereotypes about slums and the idea that public housing was a government handout. In January 1963, Weiner made his case on NBC's Today Show, appearing as a panelist in a discussion on housing that was moderated by Hugh Downs.¹⁹

Due in part to Weiner's advocacy, federal funding for urban renewal and public housing was largely restored with the Housing Act of 1961, signed into law by President John F. Kennedy, and greatly expanded in the mid-1960s, during the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson. The legislation made it easier for new housing to be built in low-income areas. In this new climate of housing-friendly federal policy, Franklin Builders, which was renamed Franklin Associates in 1961, started to pursue low- and moderate-income projects in cities across the northeastern United States even as the company continued to build standard suburban housing.

One of Franklin Associates' first big urban renewal projects came in 1961, when the company was selected to build Towne Gardens, the first section of Eastwick in southwest Philadelphia, then the largest urban renewal project in the country with 10,000 housing units planned. The 558 rowhouses Franklin Associates built as part of this undertaking first went on sale in 1962. That year, Franklin Associates, which was soon after renamed Leon N. Weiner & Associates (LNWA), was also selected out of five bidders to manage the redevelopment of the Poplar Street area east of downtown Wilmington, which was later renamed Compton Village. Over the next fifteen years, LNWA and others built over 700 residential units in this area, both apartments and rowhouses, helping to repopulate a neighborhood that once had, until its clearance by the City of Wilmington in the early 1960s, the highest concentration of Black residents in the city. The Compton Park Apartments, which were completed in 1968, were a major component of the

¹⁷ "County Limit on Row Homes Questioned at Housing Parley," *Journal-Every Evening*, June 27, 1957.

¹⁸ Von Hoffman, 26.

¹⁹ "Weiner Hails Builders On TV's 'Today,'" *Morning News* (Wilmington, DE), January 19, 1963.

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Compton Village plan, offering the first rental housing units in the urban renewal area and becoming a model of racially integrated housing.

One of LNWA's largest urban renewal undertakings came in 1969 when the company was selected to lead a consortium of developers and builders in the redevelopment of the Centre City area in Camden, New Jersey. The city hoped to build 2,000 housing units in this 160-acre area. Due to local opposition, a poor economy, and President Richard Nixon's freeze of urban renewal funding in 1973, the consortium ultimately completed only two projects with a total of 198 units by 1975 when the LNWA-led group handed off the project to the City of Camden. LNWA did complete one additional project in the redevelopment area – a fifteen-story high-rise building with 225 apartments for low-income seniors – in 1977.

In addition to these sprawling urban renewal projects, LNWA was hired by local housing authorities across the northeastern United States and beyond to develop dozens of stand-alone low-income and senior housing facilities during the 1960s and 70s. During this period, the company completed major apartment and rowhouse projects in Lancaster and Hazleton, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; St. Louis, Missouri; and New London, Connecticut. Many of these developments were so-called "turnkey" projects, a model, pioneered by LNWA, in which public housing was privately built but later sold to the local housing authority. This type of public-private partnership would later become an important component of federal housing policy. Codified in the Housing Act of 1968, which, as explained below, Weiner helped to formulate, the turnkey model allowed public housing to be built in less time and with fewer bureaucratic hurdles than typically required for such projects.²⁰

Reflecting his growing influence in the housing industry, Weiner was elected president of NAHB in December 1966. In this role, Weiner played a major role in the continuing evolution of federal housing policy. In addition to regularly testifying before the House Subcommittee on Housing and participating in White House meetings on housing, Weiner served as a member of the President's Committee on Urban Housing to which he was appointed by President Johnson in 1967. Among other accomplishments, the committee helped write the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which banned discrimination in housing. Weiner has been credited as one of the driving forces behind this landmark legislation.²¹ Later in 1968, Weiner was invited by President Johnson to be one of the sixteen incorporators of the National Housing Partnerships, an organization set up to promote the involvement of large corporations in financing low-income housing. For his commitment to building homes for low-income Americans, one observer called Weiner "the leading developer of subsidized housing in the nation."²²

Weiner continued to fight for the cause of affordable housing during the 1970s and later. In 1974, after the Nixon administration suspended funding for the construction of new housing through urban renewal and replaced it with housing allowances – direct payments to families to make up the difference between the cost of a home and what they could afford, also known as

²⁰ "Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, Report of the Committee on Banking and Currency, United States Senate," Washington, D.C., 1968, pp. 26.

²¹ Von Hoffman, 23.

²² Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 136.

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Section 8 vouchers – Weiner became a vocal critic of the president’s housing policy. Weiner argued that the federal government needed to build more housing, not just hand out money to families and force them to find housing on their own, especially when many cities did not have an adequate supply of homes.²³ Although the Section 8 program has frequently been criticized for trapping families in poverty, it remains a cornerstone of U.S. housing policy. For his sustained commitment to the cause of affordable housing, in 1974 Weiner was elected president of the National Housing Conference, the national non-profit organization dedicated to affordable housing, a position he held until 1982. Weiner remained active in his business into his early 80s. He died in Philadelphia in 2002.

Theodore Brandow, Architect

The Compton Park Apartments were designed by Philadelphia-based architect Theodore Brandow (1925-2023) who was widely known in his lifetime for his prolific residential work. Employed by many of the largest builders in and around Wilmington and Philadelphia, Brandow produced hundreds of house and apartment designs that were replicated thousands of times across the region during the 1950s and 1960s, making him one of the area’s most popular residential designers in the decades following World War II. In this way, Brandow helped to define what the architectural expression of the suburban house and urban apartment building should be in the postwar era.

Brandow was born in Philadelphia in 1925. After attending Girard College, Brandow earned a Bachelor of Architecture degree at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1949. After working for several years as a draftsman and project manager at several Philadelphia firms, including that of Oskar Stonorov (1905-1970), the nationally known modernist architect, Brandow founded his own practice in 1953. Despite being relatively new to the field, Brandow quickly earned a reputation as an adept residential architect, winning commission after commission to design residential subdivisions and apartment buildings across northern Delaware, southeastern Pennsylvania, and farther afield.

While Brandow appears to have been as comfortable designing in a traditional Colonial Revival manner as he did in the Modern style, most of his suburban houses, of which more than 3,000 were built between 1955 and 1970, fell into the latter category. Two of the best examples in northern Delaware are Nottingham Green, a 69-home development on West Main Street outside of Newark (opened in 1957), and Green Acres, a subdivision with 376 homes on Silverside Road, four miles north of Wilmington (opened in 1958). In both locations, Brandow designed houses that were forward-looking but expressed their modernity in an approachable way. With their asymmetrical forms, broad gabled roofs, overhanging eaves, exposed roof beams, and various combinations of materials, Brandow’s houses were clearly of the postwar age (Figures 11, 12). At the same time, these characteristics, as suggested by architectural historian Virginia McAlester, tied the houses to the earlier Craftsman and Prairie styles, which had become so admired by Americans in the decades before World War II.²⁴ Like other residential designers of the period, Brandow referred back to these established building traditions to create a residential

²³ John Betz, “Builder Shakes Up U.S. Housing Officials,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1974.

²⁴ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 482.

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architecture that was exciting and new, but familiar at the same time. While Brandow may not be solely responsible for the emergence of this suburban form of modernism, his work helped to popularize modern design among middle-class Americans and to make the split-level house a ubiquitous and now iconic feature of the postwar suburban landscape.



Figure 11 (left) – Illustration of a typical house at Nottingham Green, near Newark, Delaware, designed by Theodore Brandow in 1958 (from *The News Journal*, 1958).

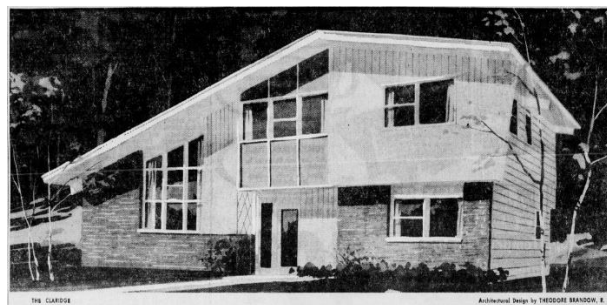


Figure 12 (right) – Illustration of a typical house at Green Acres, near Wilmington, designed by Theodore Brandow in 1958 (from the *Wilmington Morning News*, June 21, 1958).

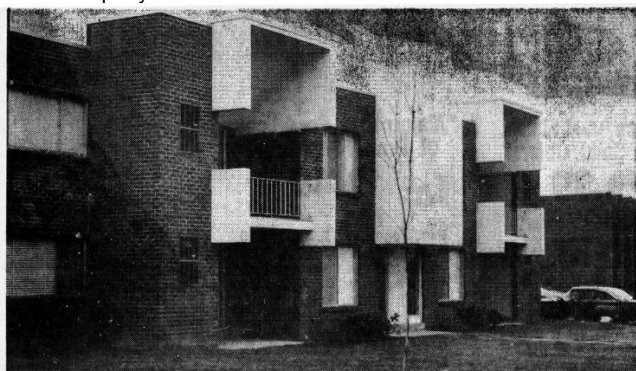
Like his suburban houses, Brandow's numerous apartment projects largely leaned into modernism. The architect's first successful commission for an apartment building came somewhat late in his career, in 1965, when he was hired to design the Stonehenge Apartments in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania ([Figure 13](#)). This complex of nineteen two-story buildings with a total of 86 apartments offered a preview of the site planning concepts and architectural treatment that Brandow would employ at the Compton Park Apartments the following year. Like the Wilmington project, the Stonehenge Apartments are laid out as a garden apartment complex; typical of this type, the staggered arrangement of the buildings emphasizes privacy and access to natural light and fresh air. In terms of architecture, the Stonehenge Apartments, like Compton Park, suggest the influence of the Philadelphia School of Architecture. This loose coalition of designers, led by Louis Kahn during the 1950s and 60s, challenged modernist orthodoxy, drawing on use, context, and history to create a more formally expressive type of architecture. Several of Brandow's later apartment projects, including the Conestoga West Apartments (1966) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (1966), and Marshall Square (1968) in Philadelphia, followed the same model, one that was more assertive in its expression of modern form than the architect's suburban houses ([Figure 14](#)).

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MOD LOOK — This is a view of the Stonehenge Court apartments on Catasaqua Road in Bethlehem, one of the many complexes built in the past five years.



Figure 13 (left) – The Stonehenge Apartments in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, designed by Theodore Brandow in 1965 (from *The Morning Call*, January 29, 1968).

Figure 14 (right) – Illustration of the Conestoga West Apartments in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, designed by Theodore Brandow in 1966 (from the *Intelligencer Journal*, September 30, 1966).

Brandow's top client during the 1950s and 60s, the most active period of the architect's career, was Franklin Builders, a Wilmington-based developer that later became Leon N. Weiner & Associates (LNWA). As discussed earlier, Franklin/LNWA was one of the largest residential builders in Delaware during this period, completing thousands of suburban single-family homes and urban apartment complexes for middle- and lower-middle-class families, including those discussed above – Nottingham Green, Green Acres, and Oakmont – as well as the Compton Park Apartments, the subject of this nomination. Aside from these four projects, Brandow designed at least a dozen other large subdivisions and numerous apartment buildings for Franklin and LNWA.

Among Brandow's other big clients were Madway Engineers & Constructors and Becker & Lipschutz, both of which built thousands of homes in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia and in Northeast Philadelphia. Like the region around Wilmington, these areas developed rapidly with housing after World War II. Although most of Brandow's commissions were located in northern Delaware and Southeastern Pennsylvania, he is known to have designed sprawling suburban communities – of both single-family houses and apartment buildings – as far north as Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as far west as Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and as far south as suburban Washington, D.C.

The architectural press regularly featured Brandow's work, illustrating and commenting on the architect's houses and apartment buildings many times during the 1950s and 60s. In one 1956 edition of *House & Home*, a national periodical focused on residential design, Brandow was credited in part with the trend of "ultra-conservative" Wilmington buyers starting to prefer homes designed in a contemporary rather than traditional style, and included numerous illustrations of the architect's recent work in the area.²⁵ In 1957, a Brandow-designed house was one of eleven selected as a winner in the Homes for Better Living Awards, a competition sponsored by the magazine with the American Institute of Architects, *Better Homes and Gardens*

²⁵ "Buyers Swing to Contemporary," *House & Home* (February 1956), 144-149.

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magazine, and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).²⁶ Perhaps most notable among Brandow's many awards was the American Institute of Architects' citation, made at the organization's annual convention in 1961, of Brandow's work at Oakmont, which was only the second of a small number of suburban developments during this period that were open to Black buyers ([Figure 15](#)).



Figure 15 – A group of rowhouses in the Oakmont development outside Wilmington, Delaware, designed by Theodore Brandow and built by Franklin Builders (Leon N. Weiner) in 1959 (from *House & Home*, August 1959).

Brandow appears to have stopped practicing architecture around 1970, the final year of his membership in the American Institute of Architects. In 1971, Brandow published a novel, *Closer to Saturday*, a chronicle of Jewish slum life in 1930s Philadelphia that was based on his own experiences. During the 1970s and 80s, Brandow traveled extensively through Israel, volunteering there during the Yom Kippur and Lebanon Wars. Later in life, Brandow lived in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, where he died in 2023.

The Architecture of the Compton Park Apartments

In designing the Compton Park Apartments, Theodore Brandow was clearly influenced by the work of another Philadelphia architect, Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974). By the mid-1960s, Kahn had earned international renown for his work, such as the Richards Medical Research Laboratories ([Figure 16](#)) at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, completed in 1965, which rejected the prevailing International Style, its repudiation of historical sources, and its insistence on universal form. Rather, Kahn reestablished architecture's relationship with history and with the human being. As in the Richards Labs, Kahn's best work relied on primal or fundamental architectural forms – the architectural historian Vincent Scully suggested Kahn was influenced by the towers of medieval hill towns in Italy, such as San Gimignano – to evoke a sense of monumentality and timelessness and to reconnect architecture to the past. At the same time, Kahn's work was shaped by the activity that occurred within; it was built at a human scale and conveyed a deep relationship between function and form. Over the previous few decades, these characteristics had been lost in the homogenous glass boxes of International Style architects like

²⁶ "Winners of the Homes for Better Living Awards," *House & Home* (June 1957), 139-151.

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Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson, and others. For these reasons, Kahn is widely considered to be one of the most influential architects of the twentieth century.



Figure 16 – The Richards Medical Research Laboratories Building at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, designed by Louis I. Kahn and completed in 1965 (from the Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania).

Practicing in the same city at the same time as Kahn, Brandow would have been well aware of the work Kahn was producing, especially because his former employer, Oskar Stonorov, had been an early partner of Kahn's, from 1942 to 1947. In addition to the Richards Labs, two other buildings designed by Kahn appear to have influenced Brandow during his design of the Compton Park Apartments and later projects. In 1961, Kahn completed the Margaret Esherick House, a small commission in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia ([Figure 17](#)). And in 1965, the same year as the Richards Labs and one year prior to Brandow's work on Compton Park, Kahn completed the Eleanor Donnelly Erdman Hall, a dormitory at Bryn Mawr University outside Philadelphia ([Figure 18](#)).



Figure 17 (left) – The Margaret Esherick House in Philadelphia, designed by Louis I. Kahn and completed in 1961. Photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1966 (from *The Picture Show*, NPR)

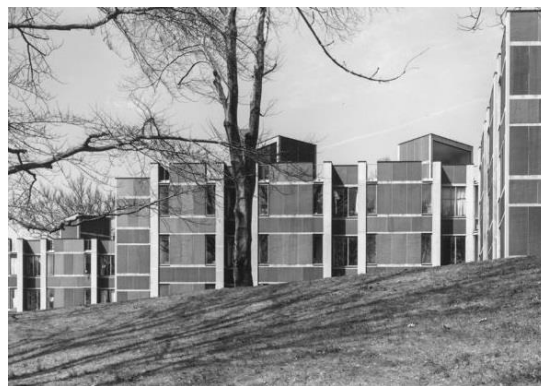


Figure 18 (right) – Eleanor Donnelly Erdman Hall at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, designed by Louis I. Kahn and completed in 1965 (from the *SAH Archipedia*).

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Aspects of all three works, especially their disposition of distinct geometric forms, are present in the Compton Park Apartments (Figure 19). The exterior expression of the apartments' interior uses – the public vestibules have fully transparent glass walls; the semi-private living spaces of the apartments have a degree of transparency in the form of sliding glass doors, but these are pushed into the building, at the back of the balconies; and the most private spaces, the bedrooms, have only small window openings set within otherwise solid brick and stucco walls, which themselves are set slightly behind the adjacent living spaces. Each part of the facade, therefore, is clearly differentiated according to the function that occurs inside, in much the same way that Kahn's buildings were. The interplay between light and shadow, as well as solid and void, that this type of composition creates is also a key characteristic of the Compton Park Apartments and one commonly found in the work of Louis Kahn. The visual breaks between each vertical section of the facade might too be Brandow's attempt of channeling the most common historical building type on the East Side, the three-story rowhouse, despite the multi-family nature of the apartment buildings. In this way, Brandow may have been emulating Kahn's distillation of the most fundamental geometrical forms found in architecture of the past.

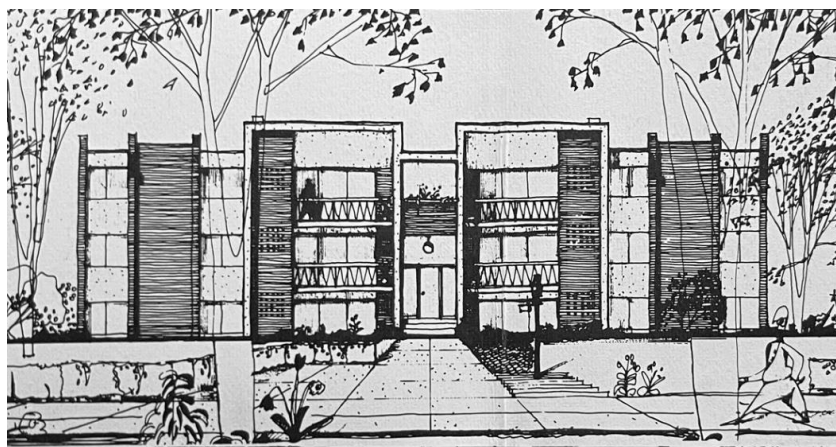


Figure 19 – Sketch of the Compton Park Apartments by Theodore Brandow, likely made in 1967. This image was used in promotional materials for the project, copies of which are found in the files of the Wilmington Department of Land Use and Planning.

The Compton Park Apartments represent a level of architectural quality and attention to detail that is not as easily found in the other residential projects built in Compton Village between 1964 and 1973. The Colonial Revival design of the rowhouses at Compton Park Square, for example, which ironically are also a work of Brandow, was somewhat routine and signaled an attempt to bring suburbia to the inner city rather than create a neighborhood with more compelling, forward-looking architecture. While the later projects did yield to modernism, they are all fairly prosaic in form, lacking the skillful manipulation of massing, surface, and materials that characterizes the design of Compton Park Apartments.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

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Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N14859

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property ~1.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 39.740808 Longitude: -75.546578

2. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

3. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

4. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the property is shown as a red line on the accompanying map entitled “**Figure 21: Site Plan with National Register Boundary.**” Starting at the southeast corner of East 7th and North Walnut Streets, the boundary extends southeastwardly along the south side of East 7th Street a distance of approximately 367’. The boundary then extends southwestwardly at a right angle, along the west side of Herman Holloway, Sr. Park, a distance of approximately 280’. The boundary then turns again, extending northwestwardly at a right angle a distance of approximately 242’ to a point at the southeast corner of the property of Bethel Church.

Continuing northeastwardly at a right angle, along the east side of the property of Bethel Church, the boundary extends a distance of approximately 181’ to a point. Forming an L-shape around the property of Bethel Church, the boundary then continues northwestwardly at a right angle to North Walnut Street a distance of approximately 125’ before turning at a right angle and continuing a distance of approximately 94’6” along the east side of North Walnut Street to the starting point.

Compton Park Apartments
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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed National Register Boundary corresponds to the historic and current parcel, which are the same.

Form Prepared By

name/title: Kevin McMahon, Senior Associate
organization: Powers & Company, Inc.
street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717
city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19107
e-mail: kevin@powersco.net
telephone: (215) 636-0192
date: April 23, 2024, revised June 11, 2024

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Compton Park Apartments

City or Vicinity: Wilmington

County: New Castle

State: DE

Photographer: Kevin McMahon

Compton Park Apartments
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Date Photographed: November 14, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	Central courtyard and walkway, looking south.
2.	Central courtyard and walkway, looking north.
3.	610 N. Walnut St: north elevation, looking southwest.
4.	610 N. Walnut St: south elevation, looking northeast.
5.	620 N. Walnut St: west elevation, looking northeast.
6.	620 N. Walnut St: east elevation, looking southwest.
7.	630 N. Walnut St: west elevation, looking northeast.
8.	630 N. Walnut St: east elevation, looking west.
9.	Walkway and landscape east of 620/630 N. Walnut St, looking north.
10.	630 N. Walnut St: north elevation, looking south.
11.	640 N. Walnut St: east elevation, looking southwest.
12.	Landscaping and walkway west of 640 N. Walnut St, looking north.
13.	640 N. Walnut St: west elevation, looking southeast.
14.	640 N. Walnut St: west elevation, looking east.
15.	650 N. Walnut St: south elevation, looking northwest.
16.	650 N. Walnut St: north elevation, looking south.
17.	Parking lot west of 650 N. Walnut St, looking north.
18.	Interior of 610 N. Walnut St (Type A Typical): 1st floor vestibule, looking southwest.
19.	Interior of 610 N. Walnut St (Type A Typical): 2nd floor, apartment, looking southeast.
20.	Interior of 610 N. Walnut St (Type A Typical): 2nd floor, apartment, looking southeast.
21.	Interior of 610 N. Walnut St (Type A Typical): 3rd floor, corridor, looking south.
22.	Interior of 650 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 1st floor vestibule, looking northeast.
23.	Interior of 650 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 2nd floor corridor, looking north.
24.	Interior of 650 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 3rd floor, apartment, looking southeast.
25.	Interior of 650 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 3rd floor, apartment, looking southwest.
26.	Interior of 650 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 3rd floor, apartment, looking southeast.
27.	620 N. Walnut St (Type B Typical): 3rd floor, apartment balcony, looking northeast.

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Index of Figures

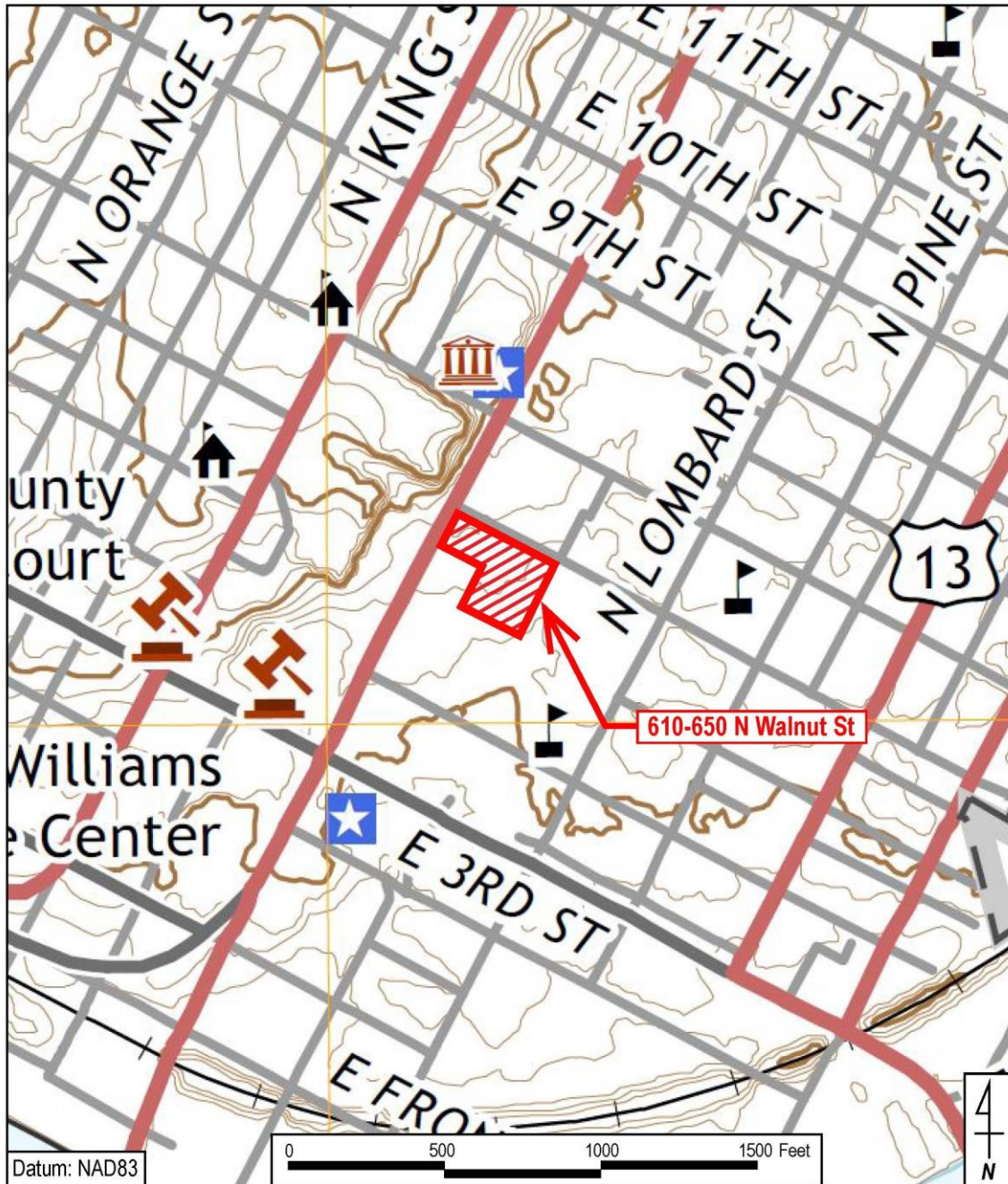
<i>Figure #</i>	<i>Description of Figure</i>
1.	Map of the Poplar Street Project A Urban Renewal Area prior to demolition.
2.	Plan of Wilmington Renewal Associates' proposal for Poplar Street Project A.
3.	Rendering of Compton Park Square.
4.	One of the Compton Park buildings, pictured in 1968.
5.	Ad for the Compton Park Apartments, 1968.
6.	Peninsula Methodist Houses at 8th and Lombard Streets.
7.	Illustration of the Mulberry Run Townhouses at 5th and Spruce Streets.
8.	Illustration of the proposed Compton Tower at 5th and Walnut Streets.
9.	Illustration of the Compton Towne development at 9th and Walnut Streets.
10.	Map of projects in Compton Village and Mulberry Run.
11.	Illustration of a typical house at Nottingham Green, near Newark, Delaware.
12.	Illustration of a typical house at Green Acres, near Wilmington.
13.	Stonehenge Apartments in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
14.	Illustration of the Conestoga West Apartments in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
15.	Rowhouses in the Oakmont development outside Wilmington, Delaware.
16.	Richards Medical Research Labs Building at the University of Pennsylvania.
17.	Margaret Esherick House in Philadelphia.
18.	Eleanor Donnelly Erdman Hall at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr.
19.	Sketch of the Compton Park Apartments by Theodore Brandow.
20.	USGS Map.
21.	Site Plan with National Register Boundary.
22.	Photo Key – Site
23.	Photo Key – Typical for Type A (610 and 640 N. Walnut Street)
24.	Photo Key – Typical for Type B (620, 630, and 650 N. Walnut Street)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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USGS Map - Wilmington South Quadrangle - DE, NJ (2019)

Latitude, Longitude
39.740808, -75.546578

Compton Park Apartments
610-650 N. Walnut Street
Wilmington, New Castle County, DE

Figure 20: USGS Map (excerpt).

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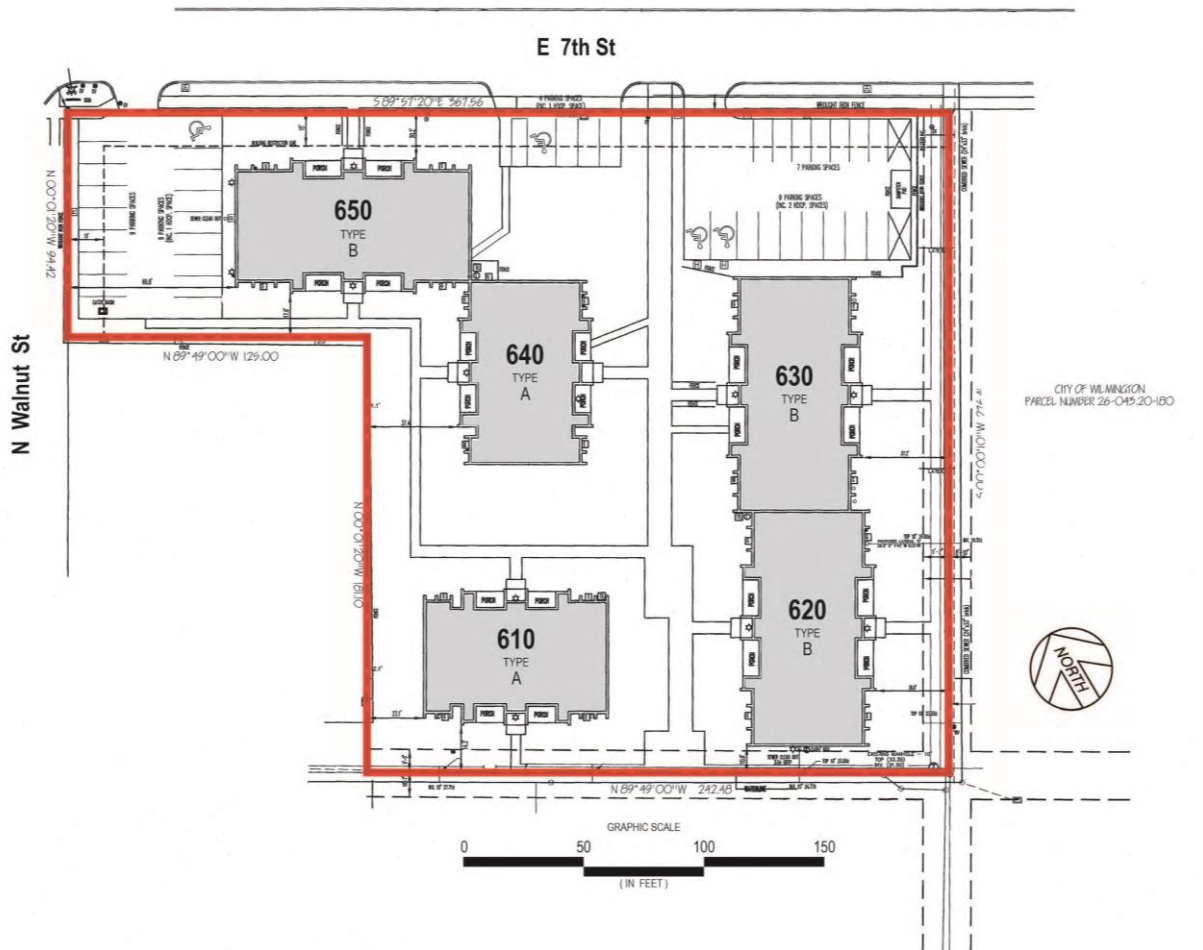


Figure 21: Site plan with National Register Boundary (in red).

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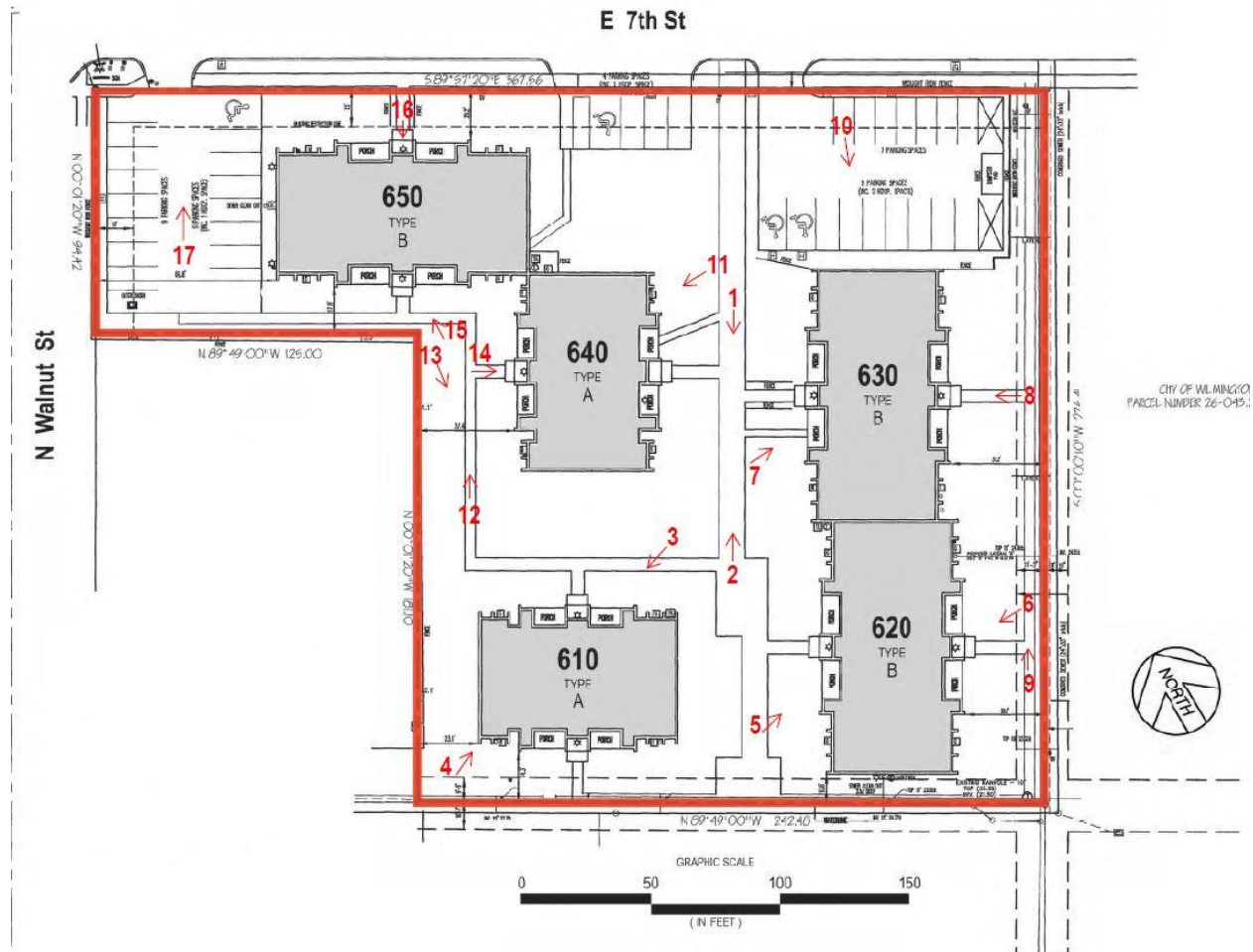
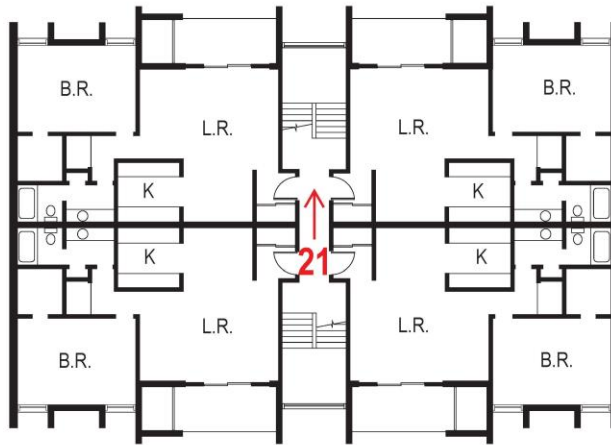


Figure 22: Site plan with photo key.

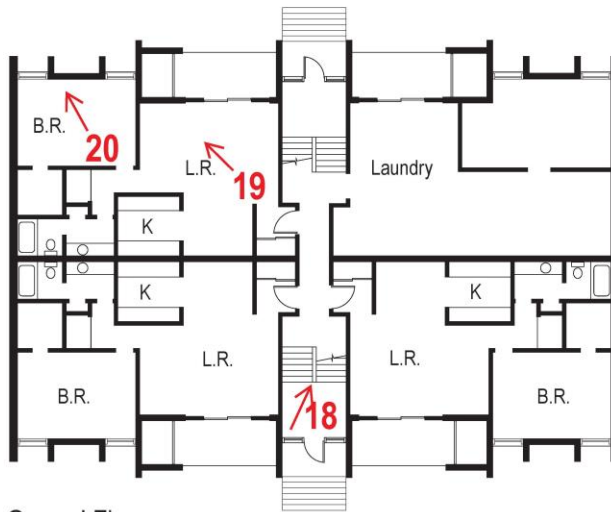
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2nd and 3rd Floors

Type A
(610 and 640)

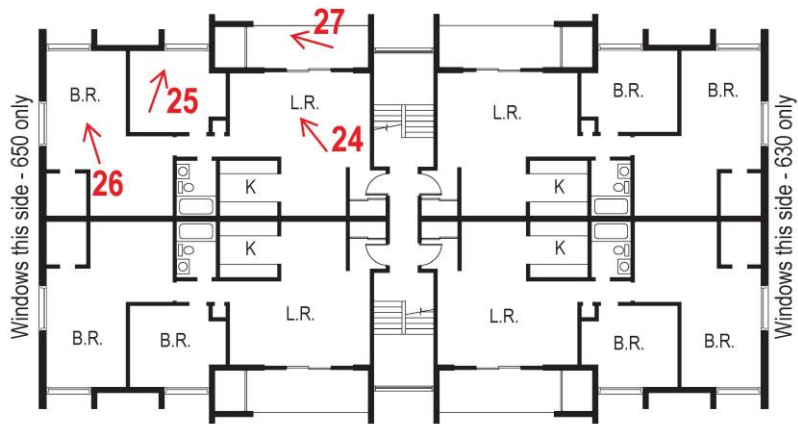


Ground Floor

Figure 23: Photo Key – Typical for Type A (610 and 640 N. Walnut Street).

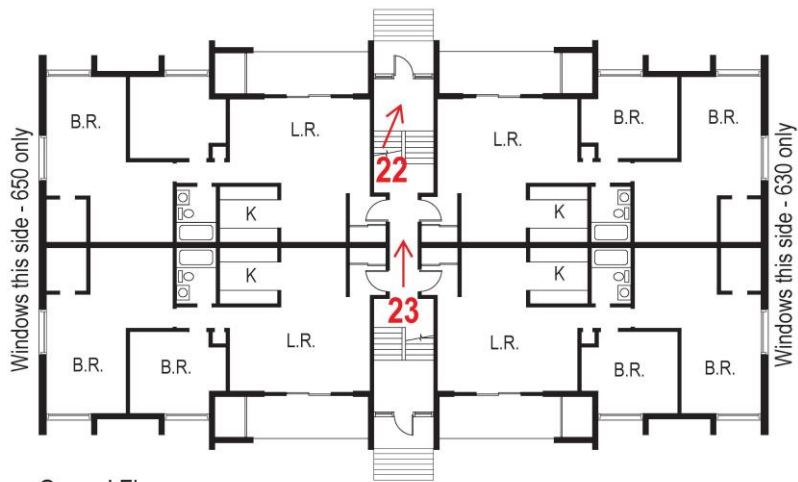
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2nd and 3rd Floors

Type B
(620, 630, 650)



Ground Floor

Figure 24: Photo Key – Typical for Type B (620, 630, and 650 N. Walnut Street)