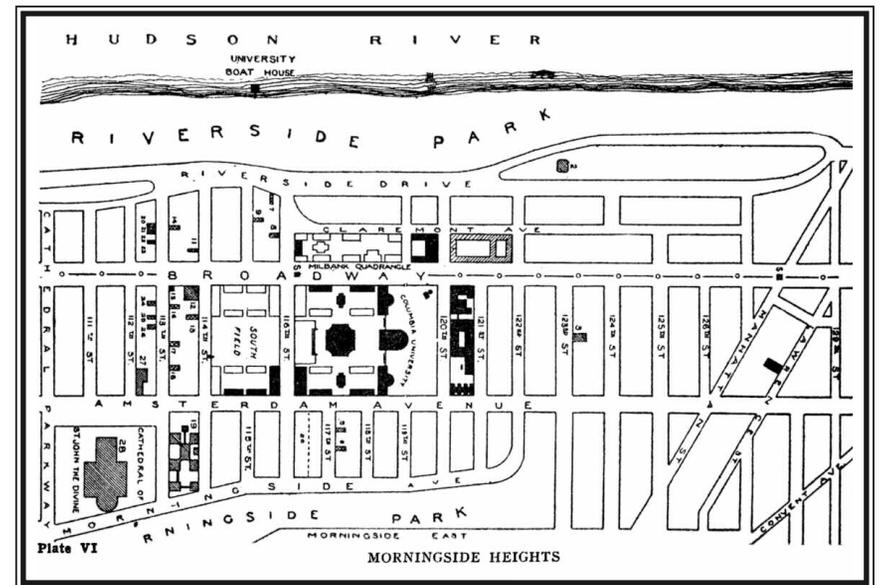


THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND of MORNINGSIDE GARDENS

Beatrice Gottlieb



The Historical Background of Morningside Gardens



Beatrice Gottlieb

2008

COVER: Map of Morningside Heights from a 1916 guidebook to New York City.
(Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries.)



The Historical Background of Morningside Gardens

Thanks go to the 50th Anniversary Committee appointed by the
Board of Directors of MHHC

Layout and production coordination by Roland Hiller
Layout by Doris Halle for Gutenberg Printing

THE LAND ON WHICH MORNINGSID GARDENS is situated is on the edge of a plateau that is itself on the far western edge of Manhattan. Today it seems to be a welcome quiet enclave. As we all know, however, fifty years ago Morningside Gardens was not here, and it was built on ground that had been occupied for a long time.

The history of this site is entwined with the history of both the United States and the City of New York. There may never have been an important and thriving center of anything right here, but it was never isolated from the world around it. It changed and developed in response to social and political forces, and although its early history has faded from memory it has left its mark.

Manhattanville

As early as 1609 Henry Hudson stopped at the cove on the river just down from the high ground and made brief contact with some of the native inhabitants. Over many decades a city grew at the southern tip of the island, first under Dutch rule as New Amsterdam, then under British rule as New York. At the time of the American Revolution, when George Washington led his troops into this area to evade the pursuing British army, the city seemed very far away. Fighting broke out on September 16, 1776, in what was called the Hollow Way, just to the north, and continued as the soldiers moved south. The battle ended with a defeat for the British in a field of buckwheat around what is now Broadway and 120th Street. A plaque on the east side of Broadway commemorates the event, known as the Battle of Harlem Heights.

The battle and its name are revealing. The name tells us that there was already a European settlement not far away that took its name from a town in The Netherlands. Harlem stood on flatter land to the east. On the heights themselves there were only some farms.

In 1806, a few decades after the establishment of the United States, a new village called Manhattanville was founded along the Hollow Way, which became its main street, renamed Manhattan Street.



Manhattanville in 1834.

The view looks northeast from what corresponds more or less to the future site of Morningside Gardens. St. Mary's Church is at the right, on a rise. The houses on the lower land are situated along Manhattan Street. (Lithograph published by George Endicott after a drawing by John William Hill.

Courtesy of St. Mary's Protestant Episcopal Church, Manhattanville.)

In anticipation of a possible attack from the north if war broke out again with England (as it did in 1812), a system of defenses was set up in 1811 that included a barrier with a gate at what is now 123rd Street and Broadway, called the Manhattanville Pass. A fort named Fort Lighthouse was built on the site of Morningside Gardens, and there was also a string of blockhouses, one of which remained in Morningside Park until P.S. 36 was built on its site.

Manhattanville grew rapidly. By 1846 it had 80 houses and 500 inhabitants. There were elegant mansions in the area, the oldest of which was Claremont, built before the Revolution and later serving for many years as a well-known inn until it was destroyed by a fire in 1951. There were also industrial buildings, the most important of which was a paint factory owned by Daniel Tiemann. He lived on a large estate part way up the heights, where there is now a street named for him. St. Mary's Episcopal Church was established in 1823. Its parishioners were not only the wealthy families who owned the big houses and large estates to the north and west of the village but also the families of workers in the various village businesses, a number of whom were African-Americans. There were stagecoach connections to the city and ship connections to New Jersey and elsewhere. Several schools were in operation, including an "academy," a boarding school located approximately where the western portion of Grant Houses is today. A few years later, in 1851, on a rise just to the east of the village was established the Academy and Convent of the Sacred Heart, later to be called Manhattanville College.

In these early years of the nineteenth century the heights to the south of Manhattanville had no particular name and no particular identity, except perhaps as the outskirts of a thriving village. A little farther south was a rural area settled mostly by farms, dating back to Dutch times, called Bloomingdale. Any number of things have taken the name Bloomingdale (no connection with the later department store, however). The most notable was a main road that was a sort of continuation of Broadway, the street that ran through the city at the tip of the island. Bloomingdale Road ran up through the high land, which was sometimes spoken of

as "at Bloomingdale." It was, as we have seen, sometimes called Harlem Heights and sometimes Vanderwater Heights, after one of the large landowners.

There already existed an overall plan for what Manhattan would be like in the future. A commission appointed by the New York State Legislature produced the plan in 1811, laying out a street pattern in the form of a grid, with numbered streets going east and west and numbered avenues going north and south. It clearly anticipated a future when most of Manhattan would be an extension of New York City, with an urban pattern of straight streets instead of open fields and winding lanes. The pattern would continue beyond our heights and beyond Harlem and Manhattanville, although it ended abruptly at 155th Street, in the belief that the rest of Manhattan would remain open country.

The Commissioners' Plan is a remarkable work, and has been adhered to with remarkable fidelity. The old-fashioned streets of the existing city to the south were left as they were, but First Street marked the start of the grid, which ignored existing roads and streets as well as the rough and irregular topography of the island. As an expression of a kind of modern utopianism it totally rejected the organic development of European towns in the Middle Ages. A quipster remarked that the commissioners would gladly have leveled all seven hills of Rome.

If you look for the future site of Morningside Gardens on the Plan you will find two rectangular blocks, exactly like the other blocks on the plan. The name "Manhattanville" is marked on the Plan, with the letters "MAN" superimposed on these two blocks. They are between what are marked as Tenth Avenue and Eleventh Avenue, with 123rd Street on the south, 125th Street on the north, and 124th Street between the two blocks. Except for name changes this is exactly what the street pattern was before Morningside Gardens was built. What looks wrong is "125th Street" where La Salle Street should be. This was not the only discrepancy in Manhattan between what existed on the ground and what appeared on the Plan, because in a number of cases there was a process of adjustment as more and more people came

to live in the spaces marked by the blank rectangles and needed to accommodate the street patterns they were used to with the pattern of the Plan. The process took a very long time. In Manhattanville the diagonal main street that led to the busy waterfront remained Manhattan Street for more than 100 years.

Morningside Heights

From about the middle of the nineteenth century the top of the hill gradually acquired a new identity that had nothing to do with Manhattanville or with the northern slope of the hill that descended from about 120th Street to Manhattan Street. The heights became the site of important institutions—of education, of medicine, and of worship—that earned it the title of New York’s (or even America’s) Acropolis.

The very first institutions that were located in the rural landscape on the heights “at Bloomingdale” were the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum and the Leake and Watts Orphan Asylum. Both were in operation at mid-century, both taking advantage of the salubrious country setting. From about 1870 they gradually gave way to the institutions that were to give the area its distinctive character. Columbia University took over the site of the insane asylum (one of the asylum buildings survived and is still in use on the campus). The Cathedral of St. John the Divine was to be built on the site of the orphanage (the portion of the orphanage, with its Greek Revival facade, that is on the cathedral grounds is the oldest extant structure on the Heights). Eventually the university and the cathedral were joined by St. Luke’s Hospital, Union Theological Seminary, Teachers College, and Barnard College—all in place by the first decade of the twentieth century. The other well-known institutions on the Heights were soon added, as were additions to the first buildings of Columbia, Teachers College, and Barnard. The cathedral’s construction has proceeded slowly, but it has nevertheless been a functioning institution from its earliest days.

There was little residential development on the Heights as the “Acropolis” was taking shape. People in real estate were tempted



Expanding the Acropolis.

An aerial view of the northern part of Morningside Heights in 1926, looking east from the river. Grant's Tomb is in the foreground, International House at the far left, Juilliard to its right at the corner of 122nd Street and Claremont Avenue, Union Seminary across 122nd Street, Teachers College directly to the east, and Barnard at the upper right, with a glimpse of Columbia beyond. The cleared land at the upper left was about to become the Jewish Theological Seminary. The cluster of residential buildings diagonally south of Grant's Tomb includes upper-middle-class apartment buildings typical of the area and two older mansions from the 1880s.

The site of the cluster was soon to become that of Riverside Church.

(Courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center.)

by what someone called “this beautiful hilltop,” with its prestigious institutions, made even more beautiful by the designs of Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted for Morningside and Riverside parks, the transformation of Bloomingdale Road into a Grand Boulevard, and the erection of Grant’s Tomb (on a site that George Washington many years earlier had considered a good one for the national capitol). One of the parks inspired the name Morningside Heights, which became widely used by 1900. Still, residential growth lagged, primarily because there was no convenient transportation. The Ninth Avenue El, which turned east at 110th Street before heading up Eighth Avenue, helped to create a surge in housing all around the Heights, much of it row houses and some less expensive multifamily tenements. Manhattanville, now heavily industrial at its center, had a lot of densely packed working-class housing. This was not what would-be developers had in mind for Morningside Heights, but they found few takers for speculative row houses. In 1896, six tenements appeared on the south side of 123rd Street (they are still there) and in that year a Morningside Protective Association was formed to halt the creep into the area of tenements and industrial buildings. Teachers College and the northernmost of the institutions on Morningside Heights felt particularly threatened.

The Morningside Protective Association’s definition of the boundaries of Morningside Heights was its main accomplishment, since it was completely unsuccessful in doing anything else. The definition turned its back to Manhattanville and what it represented by setting the northern boundary of Morningside Heights at 122nd Street. This remained the de facto boundary in many people’s minds until the 1950s. Meanwhile, Morningside Heights continued to have few private residents, and wealthy New Yorkers who lived elsewhere could drive their carriages up “Riverside Avenue” and over an impressive viaduct, blithely bypassing bustling Manhattanville below.

After 1904

The opening of the first subway in 1904 changed everything, catapulting Morningside Heights into an era when it was one of

the most elegant residential locations in the city. The subway’s route went from City Hall up the East Side, then across 42nd Street to Times Square and up the West Side to 96th Street, where it separated into two branches, one going east to The Bronx and the other continuing up the West Side. On the Heights it ran under the Grand Boulevard and then crossed Manhattan Street on a trestle. There were two stations on Morningside Heights, 110th Street (Cathedral Parkway) and 116th Street (Columbia University). The next station, called Manhattan Street, was in Manhattanville, where it added to a complex of transportation facilities that included a railroad station, a ferry landing, and trolley lines.

As Manhattanville continued its growth and expansion, Morningside Heights suddenly became accessible to those who wanted to live on “the beautiful hilltop” and could afford to do so. By that time the apartment house had become a more attractive investment for speculators than the ubiquitous row house of the West Side below 110th Street. In the course of a few years Morningside Heights turned into the first middle-class apartment-house neighborhood in the city. There were large upper-middle-class buildings on the main avenues, especially on Riverside Drive, and somewhat more modest buildings on the side streets. At the same time the northern outskirts of Manhattanville quickly filled up as far as 122nd Street with a combination of middle-class apartment houses and working-class tenements. Until about 1930 the hypothetical boundary line remained 122nd Street.

The Great Depression of the early thirties, which was a disaster for the whole nation, hit Morningside Heights hard. Instead of remaining a place where affluent people rented comfortable apartments it gradually turned into a place where the less affluent could barely afford the rent for the smaller apartments that desperate landlords had carved out. Many buildings were converted into hotels, most of them cheap, and they acquired the reputation of being seedy and dangerous. After the war better-off New Yorkers tended to avoid what had become an undesirable neighborhood and joined the exodus to the suburbs. As the buildings on the Heights deteriorated, they attracted poor immigrants who needed



Urban density in the twentieth century.

An aerial view of the Morningside Gardens area in the 1950s. The view extends from 121st Street at the right to La Salle Street at the left. Note the closely packed buildings between 123rd Street and La Salle Street, all to be demolished by 1956 for the construction of Morningside Gardens.

(Courtesy of Morningside Heights Housing Corporation.)

affordable housing. In both Manhattanville and the Heights the ethnic composition of the population was very different from what it had been before the postwar influx of African-Americans and Puerto Ricans.

This was the situation in the early 1950s. All American cities had similar problems, which so often manifested themselves as crime statistics. There was wide agreement on the need for urban renewal, for rescuing old cities primarily by changing the physical environment. Getting rid of bad, ugly housing, a breeding ground of crime, would give cities a chance at a fresh start. It was at this point in the history of the United States that Morningside Gardens was conceived.

Making Morningside Gardens

In a manner of speaking, the conception was the work of two fathers, each from a different background. David Rockefeller came from the world of the institutions of the Morningside Heights “Acropolis.” Robert Moses was from the world of state and local government bureaucracy. They bickered often, but Morningside Gardens would never have been born without both of them.

Rockefeller’s association with the neighborhood went back to his earliest years. He attended the Lincoln School on 123rd Street east of Amsterdam Avenue through high school, as did almost all his siblings. Lincoln, in the building now occupied by P.S. 125, opened in 1917 as a private school operated by Teachers College, designed to put into practice the educational philosophy of John Dewey. It “was not a typical private school,” as David Rockefeller said, and he was not a typical rich boy. His father was one of the biggest philanthropists New York has ever seen, whose philanthropies were all carefully thought through and principled. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., supported the Lincoln School because he approved of Dewey’s ideas and wanted his children to be with classmates from varied backgrounds (admission was competitive, and tuition was low). While he was at Lincoln, David Rockefeller got a close look at substandard housing when students were sent to deliver Thanksgiving baskets to families in tenements in Harlem. He has

said he never forgot the experience. During his school years two major institutions with Rockefeller sponsorship were built on Morningside Heights: International House and Riverside Church.

As we all know, David Rockefeller went on to become a successful businessman on a global scale. Yet he was always involved in New York matters. He says that he became convinced that something had to be done about the future of Morningside Heights, which seemed to have reached bottom when the armed forces declared most of it off limits to servicemen because of crime and prostitution. He knew that leaders of the institutions on Morningside Heights were becoming frantic about the increasing difficulty of attracting staff and students to an unsafe and unattractive neighborhood. As chairman of the Executive Committee of International House he ordered a survey of the area (as had been done at the University of Chicago, another institution associated with Rockefellers), which came to the predictable conclusion that the main problems were crime and a dearth of decent affordable housing. Fourteen institutions on the Heights welcomed the report and responded by forming Morningside Heights, Inc. in 1947, with David Rockefeller as chairman.

It got to work on the housing situation. An approach that was gradually put into practice was for the institutions to take over from private landlords and restore deteriorated buildings, both to house students and rent to others. Something else that it did was far more significant for the history of Morningside Gardens. Unlike the 1896 Protective Association, it turned its gaze northward and saw that what was there was very close to the northernmost institutions of Morningside Heights (especially the two seminaries, Juilliard, and Riverside Church). What was there was Harlem. Harlem and Manhattanville had become indistinguishable from each other, and Harlem was synonymous with crime-ridden slum. Harlem's 125th Street now ran into what had been Manhattan Street, whose name disappeared in 1920. A momentous decision was reached by Morningside Heights, Inc. to consider 125th Street, not 122nd Street, the northern boundary of the Heights and to do something about the housing in the previously ignored blocks.

This was when Robert Moses entered the picture. A mighty builder of publicly financed parks, beaches, roads, and bridges, he had already held a number of state and city jobs. At this point he was, among other things, Parks Commissioner, the City's Construction Coordinator, and chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. He got things done, and he did them his way, at least until later in his career, when his projects met more and more effective opposition. He believed his mission was the improvement of New York City, to rescue it from a steady decline into squalor, a spiraling process exacerbated by the exodus of middle-income New Yorkers to the suburbs. He did not want a city limited to the very rich and the very poor, and he did not want anyone to live in housing that cut off light, air, and open space.

The National Housing Act of 1949 was the federal government's response to the problems of the nation's cities, offering them assistance to undertake large-scale slum clearance. Urban renewal now was understood to mean slum clearance. The nation's largest city quickly formed a Committee on Slum Clearance, and its chairman was Robert Moses almost as a matter of course. Title I of the Housing Act envisioned mammoth projects on a scale that suited Moses. Slums were to be razed over large areas and were to be replaced by open spaces in which were to be erected widely separated towers. These newly created campuses, or "superblocks," made no attempt to conform to the urban-grid street pattern. This design was not Moses's idea but a kind of modernist orthodoxy based on the ideas of the architect Le Corbusier. Moses nevertheless embraced it as the only effective way to accomplish the transformation he wanted.

A number of slums around the city were chosen for clearance. The first, and in a way the pacesetter, was the ten-acre area in northern Morningside Heights that Rockefeller's group had singled out. Moses envisioned proposed new housing in the city as both middle-income and low-income, the latter to be owned by the city and run by the New York City Housing Authority. The sponsorship of middle-income housing was to be undertaken largely by labor unions, which had a long tradition of running successful middle-

income cooperatives. Morningside Heights was the exception. Moses was interested in helping its prestigious institutions, and, as we have seen, the institutions themselves were already considering action. In October 1951 Morningside Heights, Inc. announced that the nine northernmost of its participants would sponsor a Title I project between 123rd Street and La Salle Street with the approval of the city's man in charge of Title I and, at his urging, agreed that there would be at the same time a low-income city project north of La Salle, to be called Grant Houses. The urban-renewal area as a whole was called Morningside-Manhattanville; Moses always had in mind getting rid of even more slums to the north. Thus did Rockefeller and Moses come together to conceive what would become Morningside Gardens.

The nine sponsoring institutions were, in alphabetical order, Barnard College, Columbia University, Corpus Christi Church, International House, Jewish Theological Seminary, the Juilliard School of Music, Riverside Church, Teachers College, and Union Theological Seminary. They created the Morningside Heights Housing Corporation and named a prestigious Board of Directors made up of fifteen people mainly from their own institutions. Its first meeting was on July 2, 1952, at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. David Rockefeller, who was a member of the board, was temporary chairman until Millicent C. McIntosh, the president of Barnard, took his place. A president of MHHC was also designated, Leonard J. Beck. Except for some small changes the board membership remained the same until 1957, when the buildings began to be occupied and stockholders themselves could elect a board. A smaller Executive Committee did most of the work, meeting at least once a month and presided over by the president. Beck was president for two years and was succeeded by F. Donald Rickart (of the Bowery Savings Bank), and in 1956 by William H. Lane, Jr. An important paid position of Executive Vice President was created in 1953 and was filled by S. F. Boden.

The first thing MHHC had to do was purchase the site. It extended from the north side of 123rd Street to the south side of La Salle Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue and

was bisected by 124th Street. La Salle Street was the name given to the 1811 Plan's original 125th Street at the time Manhattan Street became 125th Street. (At the same time 126th Street became Moylan Place and 127th Street became Tiemann Place.) The site was completely covered by buildings, mostly residential, containing about 1900 families. Every one of the buildings was to be demolished, and the occupants relocated. Not all the buildings were in the terribly run-down condition that "slum" implies. One of the sponsors, the Jewish Theological Seminary, had occupied a building on the site until 1930, when it moved into its present quarters across the street, later renting the premises to YIVO, the Jewish cultural organization. That building had to be demolished along with the rest because the goal was "clearance" and the space was to be reconfigured into a superblock. With that in mind, MHHC got permission from the City to acquire 124th Street and absorb it into the property. The ceremony marking the start of demolition took place on January 1, 1954, during a blizzard.

In the eyes of many local people that blizzard could have been symbolic. Of all the complex problems MHHC had to deal with, the relocation of the site's inhabitants was the most troublesome. They were given top priority for apartments in the new buildings, but not everyone could afford that, and immediate relocation was needed in any case. As late as 1956 there were still almost thirty families who refused to move. Eventually, what with offering help in finding housing and incentives like paying for the costs of moving and painting, it was possible to tear down the remaining buildings. The corporation also took the step of hiring a public-relations specialist as protests against the planned construction became more audible. A number of local residents and leaders in Harlem formed an organization called Save Our Homes to prevent what they saw as the erection of a hostile barrier against the poor and minority population of Harlem. For David Rockefeller they were "a bothersome bunch," who, although they were partly right, underestimated the commitment of MHHC to diversity and integration.

The costs of relocation turned out to be double what had been anticipated, but when the corporation approached the authorities

(read “Moses”) for additional funds they were turned down. Not surprisingly, other expenses rose, too, and the corporation put much energy into working out both short-term and long-term loans. Moses kept cautioning that too much debt would threaten the ability to maintain the status of Morningside Gardens as middle-income and lower-middle-income housing. He felt that he himself was not getting the cooperation he wanted from some government agencies, especially the Federal Housing Authority, so that not only Morningside Gardens but also other complexes being developed at the same time were compelled to turn to conventional kinds of funding. The entire cost of the project in the end was about \$16 million, somewhat higher than originally planned, but nevertheless the result of steering a narrow course between high standards and strict economies.

The directors considered more than one form of financial structure for the corporation. They had two challenges. One was to raise enough equity to assume ownership of the development. The other was to keep costs of equity shares and ongoing maintenance within a range that middle-income tenant-cooperators (that is what they were usually called) could handle comfortably. In the end the directors pretty much went along with the other Title I cooperatives, but not before they looked at other options, which were exemplified in a number of older cooperative buildings in New York. At that time middle-income cooperatives hardly existed in New York except for the few private large-scale developments sponsored by labor unions (such as the Amalgamated Houses in The Bronx). Another sort of cooperative tended to be on a smaller scale, have large apartments, and be located in high-income areas. The shorthand term for them was “Park Avenue coops.” Their equity costs tended to be high and were based on apartment size and market value. The owner of an apartment was free to make major capital improvements and often had an extremely long-term lease, say for fifty years. To the directors of MHHC this type of coop did not seem appropriate for Morningside Gardens, especially as there was a pattern of disastrous failures during the Great Depression for small middle-income cooperative buildings that

used the Park Avenue model, whereas the Amalgamated Houses and others of the same type survived. It was of course noted that government loans and tax abatements were not compatible with a luxury model.

The prices that the board set in 1955 seem ridiculously low today, but middle income then was said to range from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year. There was no upper limit for the income of tenant-cooperators; this made the work of tenant selection easier, but there is no record of any discussion on the board of that policy. Share price was set at \$10 par. Equity cost per shareholder averaged \$750 a room. Monthly maintenance averaged \$21 a room but varied with height. The largest amount was \$141 a month.

The board adopted the name “Morningside Gardens” in 1953, a name that expressed a vision of verdant spaciousness that has been realized over time. The architectural firm of Harrison and Abramovitz, a world-class company associated with many Rockefeller projects, devised a site plan that allowed ample room for trees and shrubbery. They planned for the six buildings to be arranged to get maximum sunlight, and the garden area would be open to the south, looking toward the sponsoring institutions. Many adjustments were made in the course of construction, and decisions made very early are still with us. For instance, all kitchens were to be the same size, and the idea of having different floor plans for the top floor and the ground floor was rejected, as was central air conditioning. The fateful decision to cover the floors in asphalt tile was made in May 1955.

Before demolition was completed there was a ground-breaking ceremony on September 16, 1955. Shortly before the ceremony a contract had been signed with Joseph A. Blitz & Company to do the construction. Blitz left a copious record of its work, including many photographs of the buildings as they went up. Construction was a challenging job, what with the size and the extreme unevenness of the terrain, and it was not completed in all six buildings until they were almost fully occupied, some time in 1958.

Tenants began moving into Building 3 on June 24, 1957, and there was a cornerstone ceremony in that building a few days



The ground-breaking ceremony on September 16, 1955.

The people are standing on rubble from the demolished buildings. The buildings in the background, on 124th Street, were soon to be torn down. Wielding shovels are F. Donald Rickart (then president of MHHC), David Rockefeller, Hulan Jack (Manhattan Borough President), Robert Wagner (Mayor of New York), and John J. Bennett (chairman of the City Planning Commission).

Millicent McIntosh is looking at Mayor Wagner. To her right are The Reverend George Ford (of Corpus Christi Church), Alan Blumberg (MHHC's legal counsel), Congressman Bill Ryan, and Frank Hogan (Manhattan District Attorney).

The man with the hat is Robert Moses. Other participants have not been adequately identified; if any readers know who they are, please inform Lisa Tucker at the management office (212-865-3631 ext. 202).

(Courtesy of Morningside Heights Housing Corporation.)

earlier. (Grant Houses had opened in August 1956.) During the two years or so of construction many small and large problems came up and revisions were made in consultation with the architects. For example, balcony floors were originally going to be of quarry tile, but that was rejected as too expensive. The same reason was given for not putting fans in the spaces planned for them in the kitchen windows. Professional apartments on the ground floors of Buildings 1 and 6 evolved over a series of decisions, one of which was to have separate ground-floor entrances. Early on there was a proposal for a public elementary school on the ground floor of another building. It remained a possibility for a few years, until the City made a final decision to reject it. The board and the architects decided to go ahead with constructing the space that the school would have occupied in the hope of finding an appropriate use for it.

Some structural problems were real headaches, and they were never completely resolved, as later experience showed. An unusual centralized heating system had to be explained to a possibly skeptical board by the architects as late as 1958: "In mild weather the upper floors will be warmer than the lower floors since the system is designed to provide more radiation for the upper floors to compensate for their greater exposure to the winds in cold weather." The appearance of the brick facades was considered unsatisfactory at first, and the brick had to be sandblasted. There were recurrent reports of water seepage after heavy rains. Needless to say, construction fell behind schedule.

Meanwhile the board kept facing ongoing issues in addition to the fundamental one of financing. There was above all what David Rockefeller called the "broad social point of view of this project," which was to give a "fair trial to inter-racial middle-income cooperatives." The sponsors had envisioned a residential community that would be attractive and convenient for their own employees, and they kept being disappointed by a lukewarm response. There were, however, many applications from others, some of whom expressed interest in the project's social point of view and enthusiasm about a "real cooperative." The board urged the institutions to

encourage their own people to apply, and it approached City College and New York University to do the same. Decisions had to be made on who would occupy the commercial spaces planned for Amsterdam Avenue, especially the largest space, intended as a supermarket. Several national food retailers expressed interest, but in the end it was decided that a cooperative market was an appropriate choice, after a poll was taken of the people who were soon to move into Morningside Gardens. Mid-Eastern Cooperatives, the company chosen, operated large markets in many parts of the country at the time, and already had a smaller store in the neighborhood. A poll also settled the issue of what to do with the space originally intended as an elementary school. A petition presented by incoming tenants suggested that the space be rented to a private nursery school, and a poll showed strong approval.

By 1958 almost all the new tenants were in their apartments. The top priority had been given to people who had lived on the site, and the next highest priority to the staff and employees of the sponsoring institutions. One-third of the tenants were in that category, a result that fell short of what the sponsors had hoped for. (Some apartments were assigned to the institutions themselves, to be used for housing students and temporary faculty.) An even smaller response had come from the displaced residents of the demolished buildings, for several reasons. The cost was too high for some, the long wait for construction to be completed was impractical, and there was lingering resentment about the destruction of buildings that had been their homes for years. The racial make-up of Morningside Gardens' original stockholders was 75 percent white, 20 percent black, 4 percent Asian, and 1 percent Puerto Rican. These proportions were regarded at the time as promising for the achievement of inter-racial housing. Experts tended to believe that there had to be a certain balance, in which not more than 25 percent were black and Puerto Rican. What the numbers do not show is the appeal that the reputation of Morningside Gardens as integrated had to inter-racial couples. One such couple in the early years was Mr. and Mrs. Thurgood Marshall.

The first annual stockholders' meeting was on October 14,

1958, at International House, with Millicent McIntosh presiding. For the first time the new owners of Morningside Gardens elected its Board of Directors, approving a slate of 15 candidates. McIntosh was reelected chair of the board, making this her sixth year in that position, and William H. Lane, Jr., also a public member, was reelected president. There had been a transitional period since the previous year, when the existing Board of Directors named eight new tenants to serve temporarily. After the stockholders' election the proportion of tenant-directors to public directors remained about the same and, perhaps not surprisingly, many of the tenant-directors were affiliated with the sponsoring institutions.

From the moment that the tenant-owners took charge it became clear that running Morningside Gardens would be a demonstration of lively self-government. The long-serving outside directors soon learned that every board decision and recommendation would be closely scrutinized. Tenants almost immediately formed an organization of their own for just that purpose, as well as to bring up other issues. It was called the Morningside Tenant-Cooperators Committee, and it still exists as MGCA (Morningside Gardens Cooperators Assembly). Each building had its own organization, with a representative from each floor, and elected delegates to MGTCC.

Of several controversial issues that came up in the first year or so the thorniest may have been that of the bylaws. When a stockholders' vote was taken in May 1960 on a number of major amendments that had been worked on by a committee for many months, the stockholders supported the committee's proposals in opposition to detailed recommendations made by the board to vote against most of them.

At various times in its half-century of existence the day-to-day management of Morningside Gardens has been carried out by a manager directly employed by the corporation, but at the beginning the decision of the original board was to hire an experienced management company, and a contract was signed with James Felt and Co. right before the first tenants moved in. James Felt was replaced in 1960 by the company of William A. White.

The history of management at Morningside Gardens is a complicated one, and the complicated story of all that happened in the course of the place's existence remains to be told. I have gone only as far as 1960, with the intention of throwing some light on a more remote past, one that has nonetheless contributed to each individual's experience of living here. If we try to define what Morningside Gardens stands for and what its legacy will be we have to face the fact that a lot has changed. With its large diverse population in a broad range of ages and from a variety of ethnic, professional, and educational backgrounds, we are likely to see more changes, but what they will be is impossible to predict. We can be sure that there will always be problems, and it is fairly safe to predict that some problems will cause controversy. Even though the residents may seem to be divided at such times they have been remarkably resourceful in coming together for many things, such as a chorus (no longer in existence), a theater group, and the workshop (both very much alive). In later years the same sort of cooperation and creative energy went into such things as the camera club and Morningside Retirement and Health Services.

There will probably never be any more superblocs, and urban renewal is no longer a matter of massive demolitions, so we stand as a kind of monument to the urbanism of the 1950s. It is not clear whether the creation of Morningside Gardens solved the problems it was meant to solve. What it did do was provide homes for more than one generation of people who found themselves participating in a community that was perpetually defining itself, as all real communities do.

Beatrice Gottlieb has a doctorate in history from Columbia University and has lived in Morningside Gardens since 1958.