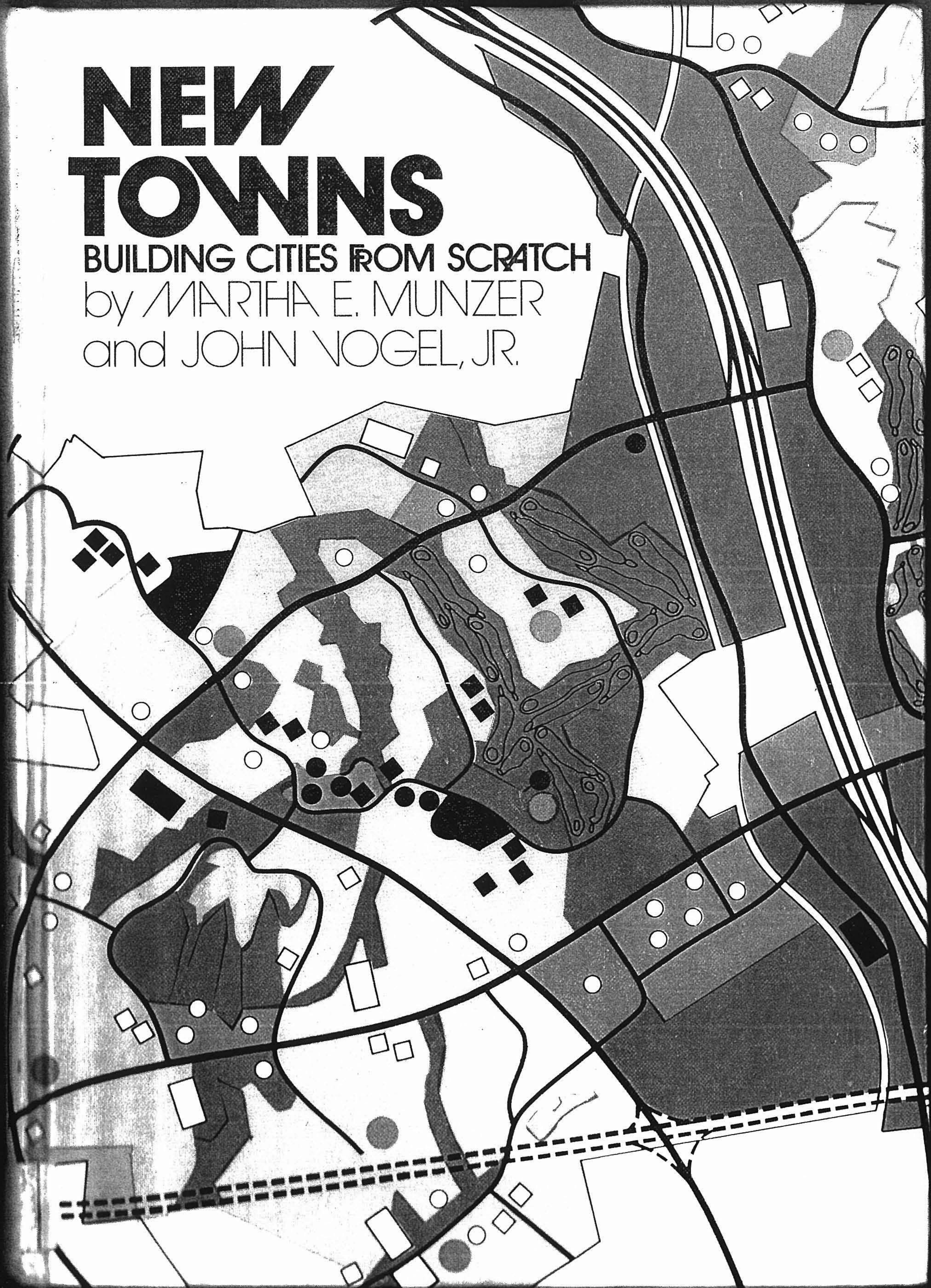
NEW TOWNS
BUILDING CITIES FROM SCRATCH
by MARTHA E. MUNZER
and JOHN VOGEL, JR.

Chapter 4 The Radburn Idea

In recent years, visitors from all over the world have come to see and marvel at the British New Towns. One visitor who came in the early days, however, before it was fashionable, was a young American architect named Clarence Stein. When he arrived in 1920, Letchworth was the only New Town worth seeing. But that was enough to spark his imagination.

He returned determined to build the first American New Town. Radburn, New Jersey was to be the result, and it is still a landmark of New Town building. Not only is it the direct link between Howard's Garden Cities and the American New Town movement, but it is also a dynamic and innovative step forward in New Town planning. In crossing the Atlantic, Howard's ideas were expanded and charged with new life. Elements of the Radburn idea are still being copied in places as distant and diverse as Sweden, Japan, Israel, Brazil, and India.

Clarence Stein, according to his friend and associate Lewis Mumford, was a "rare combination of artist and organizer; a man of fine taste, delicate discrimination, and a background of adequate means that gave him wide opportunities." He was the central magnet and dynamic figure at the center of the New Town movement, as it began in America.

As a young man, Clarence Stein appears to have been drawn to architecture and, at the same time, repelled by the way it was practiced in America. In 1902, he enrolled at Columbia University to study architecture, but left after a year. He then went to Paris to work as an interior decorator, only to decide to try architecture again. This time he enrolled at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. He graduated in 1911 and returned to the United States to begin a seven year stint with a conventional firm of architects in New York City.

Like Howard, Stein became increasingly concerned with the crowded and unlivable conditions he found in the city. This impulse was reinforced, during his seven years in New York, by association with and by the example of Dr. John Lovejoy Elliott, a leader of the Ethical Culture Society. Dr. Elliott was involved with one of the first public housing projects in New York and was also active in the broader issue of making American society responsive to the problems of the poor. Stein came under his influence and became increasingly involved with what he called "social architecture," or the use of architecture to serve social needs, such as providing inexpensive housing in healthy surroundings. At the end of World War I, Stein left his routine job and began to look for a task with more constructive social meaning.

In 1919, Governor Alfred E. Smith appointed a reconstruction committee for New York and Stein volunteered to be secretary

of its housing committee. The job did two things for Stein: It gave him a more precise picture of the housing problems in New York, and it induced him to go abroad to look for useful programs and ideas. In the course of his travels, he made his visit to Letchworth. He also had the opportunity to talk with Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. He returned to America a disciple of these men and a follower of the Garden City movement.

The particular problem to which Stein addressed himself was the high cost and inadequate supply of good housing in the New York area, particularly for workers. This problem reached acute proportions during the post-World War I period. The price of housing always increases when it is in short supply and people are bidding against each other for every available house or apartment. The fact that rents rose by almost eighty-five percent in all major American cities between 1914 and 1924 gives an indication of just how great the shortage was. Even more discouraging was the fact that new housing was not being built.

The explanation for this extraordinary situation was simple. As the report of Stein's reconstruction committee explained, it was "economically impossible for many years past to provide a large part of the population of this State with decent homes according to American standards of living. Decent homes and wholesome environments in which to bring up children cost more than most workers can afford."

What was to be done? One could ask the government to step in and subsidize housing and provide new initiatives for building it. Or one could come up with a new, more economical way to build good housing, so that a developer or builder could make a profit and also fill a need. This latter method is, of course, the

more difficult; but it is the one that would lead to the quickest solution and would result, in the end, in good housing that would take a smaller portion of everyone's paycheck. This was Stein's approach.

In 1920, soon after his return from England, Clarence Stein met with Alexander Bing, a successful New York real estate developer who specialized in apartments and skyscrapers. Bing, a member of the socially sensitive Ethical Culture Society, was looking for something to do that would be of social benefit. He felt that he could be most useful if he were involved in a project that utilized his knowledge and abilities. "I suggested the building of a Garden City," Stein recalls, and "that is how it started."

That is how, at any rate, the City Housing Corporation started. This corporation, like the ones that Howard had used to finance the building of Letchworth and Welwyn, was a strictly limited dividends company. This means that the investors in the company could receive no more than a six percent return on their investment. The purpose of this corporation was to raise capital and handle the other financial aspects of building a Garden City or New Town. First, however, Stein and Bing decided to try something on a smaller scale, so, in 1924, the City Housing Corporation purchased seventy-seven acres of land near Long Island City in the Queens section of New York City, directly across the East River from midtown Manhattan.

On this site, Stein and his architectural partner Henry Wright proposed to build a housing development. This moderate-size project, they hoped, would give them a chance to test ideas, make experiments, and generally prepare themselves for more important ventures. The basic plan for Sunnyside involved placing

the housing units (mostly two and three story brick apartments or single and double family houses) attractively around the perimeter of each block. The variety in the height and bulk of the housing, Stein and Wright believed, would create a pleasant visual effect, although the individual buildings, for economy's sake, would almost all be rectangular. The middle of the block was to be left vacant and would serve as an enclave where people could have private gardens and a small common park.

Just two months after the land was purchased, well before all the plans for the site were drawn, the building began. More important, it continued uninterrupted and at a rapid pace throughout the next four years, and this continuity and speed as much as anything else made the project successful.

The housing shortage that Stein and Bing were so concerned about proved an additional advantage in the economics of this project. As soon as a housing unit was completed, people bought homes and moved in. Though houses were sold at cost, and all the building efficiency therefore directly benefited the buyers, Bing sold a portion of the land at considerable financial advantage. Thus, by 1928, the City Housing Corporation could happily report that Sunnyside was a financial success. More than that, it was an attractive, residential community, inhabited overwhelmingly by nonprofessional workers, and located just fifteen minutes by rapid transit from midtown Manhattan.

In 1928, Sunnyside was producing surplus money that the City Housing Corporation could invest in a new venture. This situa-

Sunnyside—an experiment in housing.

tion suited Stein and his colleagues perfectly. Sunnyside was never more than a preliminary step in their minds, and now they were eager to begin work on something bigger and more innovative. Their goal, as they approached their second project, was to create a "new urban structure," according to Stein, "best suited to the satisfaction of human and biological needs."

Radburn was to be a New Town embodying all of Howard's basic tenets of limited size, advance planning, a proper balance of homes and industry, and an encircling greenbelt. But, in drawing up a master plan for Radburn, Wright and Stein were concerned about three specific problems that Howard either had not solved or had solved only in part. The first was the high cost and inadequate supply of housing. Second, the planners were concerned about the automobile's disruptive and destructive effect on urban living. Radburn must, they felt, find a solution to the problem of how to live with the auto or, rather, how to live in spite of it. Last, they wanted Radburn to become a community, not simply a pleasant physical environment. "How can we plan," they asked, "so that people have a feeling of neighborliness and a wider field of acquaintanceship?"

On all three points, Howard's ideas were useful. His economic scheme, particularly as it involved buying land at low, rural prices, was important to Stein's belief that he could keep down the cost of housing. Also basic to Stein's hopes of creating a community were Howard's ideas about wards or neighborhoods (so ingeniously put into practice by Raymond Unwin at Letchworth) and Howard's insistence on having people both live and work in the town. But Stein and his associates were far too creative to

wish merely to transplant and duplicate the Garden Cities they had seen in England.

Inspiration for a new way to build a New Town came in 1928. Herbert Emmerich, the general manager at Sunnyside, came to one of the Radburn planning sessions with a schematic sketch of a superblock indented with dead end streets. Emmerich's superblock was much larger than an ordinary city block. This extra size created all kinds of possibilities, such as keeping the center of the block as common parkland.

The superblocks that were planned for Radburn were to be thirty-five to fifty acres in size, about eight to ten times the size of a New York City block. The interior section of each superblock was to be left as parkland, free of both traffic and buildings. A main road was to run around the perimeter with dead end streets (cul-de-sacs) branching off. Clustered around each cul-de-sac were the houses. This particular arrangement of homes would avoid the ugliness of straight, monotonous rows, and would mean that each house could face the common parkland and could also be part of a cluster of other houses.

One of the results of the superblock scheme is that the houses must be built on very small lots if the housing density of the whole superblock is to be as high as it is in typical developments. At Radburn, however, the planners wanted to build at an even higher density, in order to have large areas of common parkland. Would people suffer from a lack of privacy? Would they feel cramped? Would they value these houses as much as other houses with more individual, private property?

The Radburn planners thought that they could use the unique

structure of the superblock to overcome all these problems, including the last one. The houses could all be set at angles so that no two faced each other directly. A person looking out his window would look past, not at his neighbor's house; this would increase the feeling of privacy. The real key to the superblock, however, was to utilize all the open space and common land in the middle. The Radburn planners extended the central greenery so that it came right to everyone's house. Then they proposed "turning the house around," so that the living room faced the open space out back. Thus, sitting in the living room of a Radburn house, a person looks out at trees and parkland, and is hardly conscious that there are neighbors at all.

The key economic advantage of the superblock is the amount of money that is saved because the street area and the length of the utility lines can be reduced by twenty-five percent. Grading, leveling, and paving a street is enormously expensive, especially compared with the cost of converting open land into a park. The superblock cuts out a number of cross streets, leaving in their stead well-located parkland. The short dead end streets reduce the noise, the speed, and the amount of traffic near the houses.

The real stroke of genius in the planning of Radburn came in using the superblock to make the car less necessary. What is a better form of transportation than car travel, the planners asked? Their answer, at least for travel in town, was walking. It is healthier and cheaper, and avoids the frustrations of parking and repairs. For the community as a whole, it means a cleaner, quieter atmosphere, and more interaction between neighbors.

At Radburn, Stein and Wright elevated the walker to equal

status with the car driver. They built two completely independent traffic systems: one for cars and one for people on foot. This meant building walkways through the central park away from the roads. The system ran conveniently close to every house, providing the residents with a direct foot path from every point in Radburn to every other point.

The real beauty of this plan was that the independent walkway system was designed to connect the common parkland of one superblock with the common parkland of another. This meant that a person could walk to a shop, to church, to school, to work, or to a friend's home, and spend almost all of his time walking in pleasant, natural surroundings. Where it became necessary to cross the roads running around the perimeter of each superblock, the walkers could use a series of tunnels and bridges. A person would not have to interrupt his walk to cross a street, and, even more important, Radburn would be a much safer place for children.

With all of these exciting plans circulating through the planners' minds, the City Housing Corporation finally settled on a site for the project. In 1929, it purchased a large tract of rural land in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. The site was almost entirely farmland and had the additional advantage of being near the main route leading to the Hudson River's George Washington Bridge, then under construction.

The initial outlines of the Radburn master plan show three neighborhoods, each consisting of at least three residential superblocks and each centered on an elementary school. From the school to the outskirts of each neighborhood was a maximum of

Separating people from cars, a basic New Town concept.

a half mile in any direction. On the hill where the outskirts of the three neighborhoods came together, Wright and Stein planned to build a community center and a high school.

Another section of the Radburn site was marked off as a downtown area with plans for a regional shopping center and a regional theater. The planners also marked off an area conveniently close to both a state highway and a railroad line for industry. Unfortunately, land for a greenbelt could not be purchased. In Britain, so long as land is used for agriculture or open space, purchase rates are low. In the United States, the system of taxing land at its highest potential value makes greenbelt land prohibitively expensive.

As at Sunnyside, there was not enough time to work out the details of Radburn's master plan before starting to build. Every effort was made to get the actual construction under way. Several superblocks were laid out and foundations were poured almost immediately after the purchase. Streets, parks, and utility lines were timed so that they were completed at exactly the same time as the houses. The Sunnyside experience was paying off handsomely.

The first problem the City Housing Corporation faced was one that they had recognized in advance. By wishing to start from scratch, they had gone outside the web of services and utility lines of any major city. Instead of merely adding to the municipal services of a city, as had been done at Sunnyside, Radburn had to build its own sewage disposal plants and set down large utility lines.

The real problem facing Radburn, however, was outside the

realm of city planning and construction. Less then six months after the first residents moved into the unfinished town in 1929, the stock market crashed. At first, Radburn was unaffected and the corporation continued to build houses. But slowly the economic depression forced its way into Radburn.

The first casualty was industry. The Radburn developers counted on getting new industries or expansion-minded older companies to buy sites and build factories and offices in Radburn. But, with world trade at a standstill and money in short supply, industrial expansion had ceased and businesses were struggling simply to stay open.

Then came the problem of credit. The City Housing Corporation needed large sums of money in order to build quickly and efficiently. As the Depression came on, however, credit dried up, and soon there was no money with which to continue building. Each year fewer and fewer houses were built, until in 1933 only twelve new homes were started. Even in the best of times, this slow development could not yield enough income to pay the large debt on the land.

Finally, the housing market collapsed. A great many people needed good housing, but most of them were out of work and could not afford to pay even a modest rent. In addition, some of the people living in Radburn lost their jobs and had to give up their houses. Where was the money to come from to pay off the large debt for the purchase and development of the land at Radburn? No one knew the answer.

In 1936 the City Housing Corporation went into bankruptcy. Except for the parks and open spaces, the undeveloped land—

the greenbelt, the industrial area, the downtown, and even most of the residential land—was sold. All that remained were two superblocks and other fragments of an heroic undertaking.

Radburn's failure to become a New Town is, it seems, one of the significant tragedies that occurred during the Depression. If the experiment had been successful, its example might have encouraged developers during the 1940s and 1950s to build something better than the monotonous land-gobbling suburbs. In the plan for Radburn there was an originality, a perceptiveness, and a boldness that might have caught on. Instead of suburban sprawl, we might have built hundreds of New Towns that would have significantly reduced our present urban and environmental crises.

In one way, however, Radburn was not a failure. The Depression kept it from becoming a New Town, but enough was built to demonstrate the Radburn idea. "The two superblocks that were built, and in which people have lived happily," Clarence Stein claims, "have demonstrated the essentials of the new form of city that is increasingly accepted as the basis for planning urban, residential areas in Europe and America."

Radburn today is still unusual in many ways. The physical design, which can only be appreciated on foot, gives one a sense of great spaciousness and openness. The superblocks built during the 1930s contain 677 family houses and 100 apartment units. These superblocks are connected by a tunnel and give a feeling for what the town might have been, had it been completed.

Radburn houses about 2,500 people, approximately one tenth

of the original Garden City projection. In essence, therefore, Radburn is a large housing development. Nevertheless, it has enormous significance for New Town planners because a number of important concepts have been tried out there. The fact that residents have found Radburn a good place to live means, for example, that people can live harmoniously on small plots close together. We do not need anywhere near a quarter of an acre of land between houses, Radburn has demonstrated, in order to have a quiet, friendly neighborhood.

Radburn today is relentlessly middle class. The Radburn ideal of low cost housing for workers has failed, but, interestingly, the reason is market pressure and not building costs. What happened in Radburn, and what presents a real dilemma for New Town planners everywhere, is that houses that originally sold at prices workers could afford simply increased in market price. When the original owners came to resell their houses, they found the houses could be sold for a much higher price than the owners had paid. Thus, with each resale, the cost of housing in Radburn has gone up and up, and the middle class has taken over.

The age mix of people living in Radburn has changed significantly during the last forty years. New Towns have traditionally started as colonies of the young, and Radburn was no exception. Today, however, Radburn boasts a far more diversified age range than is found in most suburbs. Many of the original inhabitants, now retired, are still around, but the gradual turnover of people has meant that they now live side by side with young married couples, a core of middle-aged people, and lots of children.

More important, Radburn, even as a middle class community,

has maintained an economic diversity that is far greater than most places in our increasingly homogenized society. Here a person may live in a house costing a third or two thirds less than his neighbor's. The cheapest house sold in Radburn during the early seventies, for example, went for $21,000, and nearby the most expensive one sold for $68,000. There is also an apartment complex integrated into one of the superblocks, all of which indicates that a well planned New Town can gracefully and happily accommodate people with a wide range of incomes.

Physical planning, however, is not all that makes Radburn work. The architects and planners were well aware that a physical environment is only the first step in creating a satisfying place to live. The City Housing Corporation, therefore, went far beyond superblocks and cul-de-sacs, and established an organization of residents called the Radburn Association.

This association is essentially a service organization, paid for by the residents of Radburn, that attempts to meet their needs and problems. Each person who buys a house or rents an apartment in Radburn automatically becomes a member of this association and pays a yearly fee based on the value of his or her property. The Radburn Citizen's Association, in turn, takes care of the common parkland, the tennis courts, the swimming pools, and the other shared facilities. Its main function, however, is to serve the human needs of the residents, whether this means organizing a summer program for youngsters, a winter basketball league, or adult classes and discussion groups.

Radburn has some distinct limitations. Not only does it lack industry and appropriate size, but, being largely middle class, it

lacks the excitement and diversity of life styles that make an urban area a rich and rewarding place to live. People seem to walk a good deal there, but the car is still the predominant mode of transportation. The single detached house is also the predominant residential unit, which leads to the conclusion that even a completed Radburn would have made some important concessions to traditional American living patterns. Nevertheless, Radburn still retains a sense of pride and distinctiveness.

Chapter 5 The Government Towns

Though people live comfortably in Radburn today, America's first experimental New Town exists as a fragment of the dream that created it. Furthermore, the depression years that shattered Radburn were in no way conducive to the creation of other New Towns. Private enterprise was struggling to avoid a complete breakdown. No company could afford the risks of a venture like Radburn. In addition, the big problem was no longer housing workers, but housing the unemployed. Masses of people needed shelter, but what private company could afford to build homes for people who could not pay rent?

Some of the destitute were driven to construct their own shelters and to build their own "towns" on bits of vacant city land. Constructed of scraps of metal, tin cans, and packing boxes, these ramshackle clusters of hovels were called Hoovervilles, after the president who was in office during this tragic era. One of the shantytowns sprang up in the nation's capital itself. The plight of the homeless was held up to official and public view in a most dramatic fashion.

In 1933, when the Hoovervilles were a small but vivid illustration of the country's plight, Franklin D. Roosevelt, with his pledge of a New Deal, was swept into the presidency. He promised to "forge new tools for a new role of government in a democracy—a role of new responsibility for new needs and increased responsibility for old needs, long neglected."

In 1935 Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act and the National Industrial Recovery Act. These measures opened the way for direct government action in dealing with such problems as unemployment and the shortage of housing.

Rexford Guy Tugwell, one of Roosevelt's "brain trusters," was selected as head of the newly created Resettlement Administration. He attacked the gigantic problems of the housing shortage in a number of ways. One of the boldest, most controversial, and most far-reaching of his approaches was the building of the Greenbelt Towns.

The name "Greenbelt Town" was derived from Ebenezer Howard's idea of encircling a new community with a girdle of undeveloped land. Tugwell liked this idea and the greenbelt became a prominent feature in the design of these government sponsored towns. What was really significant about the Greenbelt Towns, however, was the government's willingness to become directly involved in their planning and building, and in seeing to it that these new communities met pressing human needs in a creative, life-enhancing way.

The government's goals were a rare and exciting blend of the practical and the idealistic. Pragmatically, the Greenbelt Towns were to provide decent housing for families with incomes as low

as $1,250 a year. They were also to provide jobs for the unemployed, some of whom might then become residents. But the project also aimed to supply more than temporary housing to meet an emergency. According to the Resettlement Administration, one of the official purposes was to "demonstrate in practice the soundness of planning and operating towns according to certain Garden City principles." Rather than create shoddy structures destined for demolition in more prosperous times, the Greenbelt Towns were to be innovatively planned communities that could serve as permanent examples for future city planners.

Though the United States government was behind this project, the Greenbelt Towns were only a small part of the government's strategy for economic recovery. Thus, funds were severely limited. Government officials did not view the enterprise as an ongoing financial obligation, but rather as an investment that should eventually pay for itself. Considering, therefore, how inexpensive the housing would have to be in order to minimize the debt, the project became, in large part, a test of how cheaply sturdy housing could be built when organized along Garden City lines.

Next came the questions of how many towns to build and where to locate them. Four were seriously considered. Tugwell and his associates decided to place the new communities close to big cities where most of the population growth was taking place.

The architects, planners, and technicians who were to create the Greenbelt Towns were divided into teams, each responsible for a single town. This system was used so that every community would become a distinct experiment, utilizing new ideas and

hitherto untried approaches. As a result, each of the towns eventually emerged with a unique individuality.

The first site selected was in Maryland, thirteen miles from Washington, D.C., and the town created on this tract was named Greenbelt. The other new communities were Greendale, Wisconsin, seven miles from the business center of Milwaukee, and Greenhills, Ohio, five miles north of Cincinnati. The fourth town, Greenbrook, New Jersey, never got past the drawing board because of challenges by local residents and a federal court ruling that held this an unconstitutional use of federal funds. Tugwell declared, "O.K., it's unconstitutional in New Jersey," and went ahead with the others.

The three Greenbelt Towns that finally took form did not attract industry and therefore were never complete New Towns in Ebenezer Howard's sense of the term. However, they are all in existence today and continue to reflect the openness and careful use of land that makes a pleasant environment for living.

Greenbelt, Maryland became a great showpiece of Garden City planning. In addition, it developed the Radburn idea of superblocks, with clustering of housing, shared greenery, and separation of traffic, more fully than any of the other towns, and in some ways more than Radburn itself. Thus, rather than tell the story of the three towns, we will concentrate on Greenbelt.

Greenbelt was planned and designed to fit harmoniously into the contours of the open countryside. The site was a curved plateau, a few miles north of Washington. Greenbelt rose on the natural tableland, taking the shape of a graceful crescent, in a vast setting of greenery.

Five superblocks—with their separation of traffic, their central greens, and shaded walkways—were laid out, and the first homes, 885 in number, were built between 1935 and 1937. The middle of the crescent was the focus for communal activity. The shopping center was designed as a modern version of the medieval market square from which all vehicular traffic was banned.

Around this quiet square were grouped the buildings needed for carrying out the various functions of community life—education, government, and recreation. The center, within easy walking distance of each house, became the informal gathering place of the residents. The creation of this multipurpose town center was, in the eyes of Clarence Stein, "the most important forward step made at Greenbelt toward the evolution of New Towns that fit the special problems of these times."

The first inhabitants moved into their well-built, rectangular, attached houses in the fall of 1937 and the summer of 1938. The housing was in such demand that people had to apply well in advance. Preference was given to poorly housed families whose incomes were limited but who could still afford home rentals of about twenty-two to forty-six dollars per month.

The innovative planning, the unusual appearance, and the New Town idea gave many of the people arriving at Greenbelt the feeling of being pioneers. In the first issue of the *Cooperator*, the town's weekly journal, a newly settled resident expressed this sentiment in a vivid way:

> We are pioneers—of a new way of living. . . . This project has given most of us an opportunity we'd never anticipated. We

> are in the process of creating homes! Our families and our children will live under laws of our own making. Only in our fondest and most youthful dreams have we imagined such a chance. What will we make of it?

What they made of it is a long and sometimes turbulent story. The early days brought controversy and attack.

There was the question of architecture. Some heralded the economic achievement: building durable housing in an open, green environment, at unbelievably low cost. Others were sharply critical of the barracks-like three family homes, Greenbelt's predominant type of housing.

Even more controversial was the idea, developed at Radburn, of having the front of the house face the greenery instead of the street. The *Denver Post,* for example, described Greenbelt as "a topsy-turvy town where no one knows whether they are approaching a front or a back door."

Partly because of the general suspicion of "big government," the rumor spread that the people of Greenbelt were being regimented through federal rules and regulations. One large real estate and rental agency, when asked to supply a reference for a person who had applied for housing in Greenbelt, wrote back, "It is not the policy of this office to furnish information for these government projects which it is felt are unAmerican and tend to Communism."

Taking in stride the criticism of their new community, the pioneers of Greenbelt moved forward to develop their own intensive civic life. The New Town atmosphere was conducive to

the testing of experimental ideas. One of those ideas resulted in the organization of all the commercial enterprises on a consumer-cooperative basis. When this experiment succeeded, other cooperatives were quick to follow: the newspaper, the credit union, the nursery school, the health association. In fact, the idea of cooperatives became so infectious that, in the fall of 1937, the elementary school children started a junior cooperative for such items as candy, pencils, and paper.

Several events, national in scope, had major effects on the history of Greenbelt. The first was World War II, with its attendant and aggravated housing shortage. In 1941, one thousand new dwelling units were built for defense workers. Funds were so severely limited that the considerations of aesthetics and even of safety were to some degree sacrificed.

The most crucial happening, however, of Greenbelt's postwar history was the complete withdrawal of the federal government from the scene in 1949. The Greenbelt Towns were established as an emergency measure during the depression years. By 1949 there was an economic boom in the country. That the towns represented more than a makeshift response to a crisis, that they were, in fact, unusual experiments in new ways of community living, did not weigh in the final balance. Thus, when the initial appropriations had been spent, the federal government decided to wash its hands of the Greenbelt Towns. Congress subsequently passed a law for their disposition.

Greenbelters were unwilling to see their towns and their dreams sold to the highest bidder. Each town handled the situation in its own way.

In Maryland, the Greenbelt residents, banding together in a cooperative homeowners' corporation, purchased their homes and land from the government's Public Housing Administration. Subsequently, the PHA deeded to the city the recreational areas, public buildings, and streets. An important part of the greenbelt itself was saved when the government made the 1,400 acres south of the town into a national park.

The opening of a major parkway between Washington and Baltimore, with an exit at Greenbelt, and the placing of a national center for space research within a stone's throw, made the Greenbelt area an increasingly desirable place for living.

As population pressure mounted, land prices started to skyrocket. Developers were quick to snatch up property within the precincts of the city of Greenbelt, and to put up new subdivisions. But these did not follow garden city principles. They were simply attractive, modern, single family suburban developments for people of comfortable means—hardly the original New Town idea.

Nevertheless, the Garden City concept, though fragmented, is still very much alive. In the old section of Greenbelt, the housing built in the late 1930s and early 1940s still has a distinctiveness and style of its own. There are the groups of two story multiple dwelling units clustered around cul-de-sacs. The lack of frills on these plain, rectangular buildings indicates how cost-conscious the planners were. This old part of Greenbelt is unusually open and spacious, with large green areas for relaxing or playing, and nearby woods for exploring. The churches, schools, and homes are well-integrated into the open space and woodland.

Though today's Greenbelt Towns are little more than pleasant suburbs, that "little more" represents an important link in a chain. First came the British New Towns, then Radburn, then the Greenbelt Towns, then a few other Garden City developments that were extensions of cities, and next, America's *new* New Towns. Historically, it took another quarter century before the preplanning of an entire community along Garden City lines was to be tried again.