

Chapter 2

Defying the Slum Label: “Branded Spaces” and the Agency of Toronto’s Inner-City Poor, 1900-1960

We lived our lives the same as the rest of the people in Toronto did, we just did it with less.

Lloyd Cully, Cabbagetown Resident in the 1940s¹

The fact that stigmatizing discourses of slums prevailed in the middle-class reform movement of the mid-twentieth century did not signify that the objects of study themselves accepted or adhered to the pejorative characterizations of their homes and lives. Indeed, residents of Toronto’s “slums” were not only victims of reproachful reformers and the larger urban restructuring programmes of the state. They responded, sometimes passively and at other times more stridently, to the derogatory portrayals of their homes and lives, demonstrating that they had vibrant community ties and valued neighbourhoods worthy of maintaining. This chapter first looks at the responses of Toronto’s inner-city poor to the affordable housing crisis and the damning representations of “slum” homes before and during the campaign for RP in the 1940s. It then discusses political resistance to the project by those who would lose their homes in the name of urban renewal and early tenant activism in the project. Finally, I consider some of the reasons why people moved in to public housing and their initial impressions of life in the project. I thus focus on two areas of agency among the poor: outright resistance to slum depictions and urban renewal as well as responses to the tight housing market that forced low-income families to seek the public housing option.

Economic Strategies, Internal Representations of Place and Political Resistance to Urban Renewal

For the first decades of the twentieth century, there is little concrete evidence of the values and interests of workers and poor people regarding strategies for securing decent housing and making meaningful habitations, but some inferences and tentative arguments may be made on the basis of existing evidence. Despite material hardship and landlords who refused to reform dilapidated properties, immigrant groups such as Macedonians, Italians and Jews lived together in overcrowded rooming houses or lodged in family homes as a practical and necessary economic adjustment to pitifully low incomes and lack of affordable dwellings.² Neither were they dupes of greedy landlords. Lillian Petroff discovered Bulgarian-English translations used by immigrants which included references on making enquiries about prospective landlords and how to request an extension on rent payment.³ Self-built houses on the urban fringe, while praised by some observers as making a “contribution to citizenship and civic and national consciousness,”⁴ were also targets of moralizing reformers. Yet, as Richard Harris has meticulously detailed, building your own house, regardless of the deprivations, was as much a conscious economic and cultural choice as a necessity forced upon workers by a tight inner-city housing market and the shifting employment geography.⁵ Furthermore, attempts by public health officials and architects in Toronto to “Canadianize” housekeeping and internal spatial arrangements in gendered ways, also suggest that working-class women and families more generally were retaining their own traditional, class- and culturally-specific notions of domestic living.⁶ Finally, poor housing quality, affordability and landlord negligence were central grievances expressed by the working class in the tumultuous

revolt of the immediate post-WWI period, indicating that workers had their own conceptions of the palpable shelter difficulties of the era, and as evidenced by their presentations in support of rent controls and state-sponsored housing, their own solutions.⁷

A rich repository of memoirs and recollections of life in Cabbagetown in the first half of the century also paint a strikingly different portrait than that offered up by housing reform ideology. J.M.S. Careless writes that in Victorian Toronto, “Cabbagetown was a place of small-town family and neighbourly focuses, of mutual aid and accepted, bonding obligations. It was equally a place of arduous work, often in adjacent industries; of stringency, layoffs, and all-too-frequent hardship; of contending constantly with dirt, cold and diseases.”⁸ He argues that by the Depression, the neighbourhood suffered from both terminal physical and moral decay. Some residents begged to differ. While former Cabbagetowners from this period acknowledge economic deprivation, ramshackle housing, social problems and divisions, they, too, emphasize a vibrant community life and ties of solidarity that linked residents to each other, a narrative at odds with the trope of disorganization so beloved of slumology. For some, such as Lloyd Cully, who lived in the area during the 1940s and 1950s, the stories of former area residents have been erased from the historical record by the substantial gentrification of the area since the 1970s: “I punch Cabbagetown into a search engine and all I get is a bunch of pages on trendy restaurants and high priced stores, real estate agents...No old friends, no familiar places, nothing that reminded me of that once great little community where I used to live.”⁹ Many testimonies attest to the fact that people felt part of a close community,

distinguishing themselves from more affluent areas of the city by their shared socio-economic circumstances, how they thought of themselves and how they experienced the familiar places of the neighbourhood.

Residents remember a close and familiar use of private and shared communal space. In summer, adults used their front steps, verandas and shared street spaces to gather and converse with family, friends and neighbours. Children not only monopolized the streets and explored the numerous alleyways of the area (and later the many boarded-up houses waiting to be demolished for RPN and RPS) but were frequent visitors to Riverdale Park and the Don River area, noted green spaces within walking distance of the neighbourhood where children played, swam and rafted. They put the lie to Herbert Bruce's pontifications on residents' supposed lack of appreciation of green space. Small commercial establishments – groceries, clothing stores, public baths, movie theatres, sporting venues and taverns – were sites of rich social interaction.¹⁰ Sophie Stransman's vivid collection of nostalgia, *Mama and Her Mitzvahs*, recounts how her parent's small Cabbagetown grocery store functioned as a gathering place for area residents during the 1930s and speaks to the vitality of working-class life and reciprocity of social relations among area residents.¹¹

Paul Ringer, a housing relocation officer in the 1950s, was struck by how cooperative Cabbagetown residents were with each other. If somebody were in trouble, he remarked, they would help each other out with food and money or lie to assist neighbours. He described this as a 'code' that urban renewal had unfortunately broken.¹² This extended to

an informal commitment to avoid outside intervention by the police in legal disputes. Some residents frowned upon illegal “boozecans” and other criminal activity, but “One of the unwritten rules of Cabbagetown was to never, ever call the police to settle any dispute. To do so would relegate the offender to the level of snitch or rat.” Those who transgressed this form of community sanction were subject to social approbation. There were self-imposed limits to these “rules.” According to Cully, domestic abuse was popularly subject to police intervention.¹³ The Boyd Gang, an infamous group of bank robbers which included some Cabbagetown residents, were revered locally as heroes for their daring non-violent robberies and prison escapes but became outlaws in the neighbourhood when they murdered two policemen in Toronto in cold blood.¹⁴

Cully voices the common sentiment that there was a “snobbish Us against Them attitude” prevalent in Toronto and that Cabbagetowners were looked down upon as social and moral misfits. One of his mother’s favourite stories was overhearing a woman say to a friend on the streetcar that was passing through the area, “You know, none of the people living here can read or write.”¹⁵ Memoirs and journalistic reports from the period stress, however, that residents resented “the slumming parties of town planners, architects, clergymen, and public-spirited people who roamed their streets and peered into their windows, closets, and lives.”¹⁶ Hugh Garner commented in the *Canadian Forum* in 1936 that Cabbagetowners believed that “this slum clearance scheme [the Bruce Report] is one to make the sight of the poor districts easier on the eyes of the beholder” and were resolutely sceptical that decent, affordable housing would be the end result.¹⁷ Suspicious of interventions by the state and reformers during the campaign for RPN ten years later,

some voted with their feet by abandoning the area before slum clearance as a result of disagreement with the idea of public housing, fear or confusion about what was in store for them. A 1948 survey by the Housing Authority of Toronto (HAT) of 96 families whose homes lay in the redevelopment area discovered “just ordinary folk, trying to get along,” and noted a strong attachment to the neighbourhood and the “clean and tidy” homes they maintained. Residents also revealed their scepticism of outside intervention: “Most of them regard the project a boon but feel that it is ‘too good to be true.’ They expect it will get shelved; or the rents will be too high.”¹⁸ A 1949 *Canadian Forum* article by Albert Rose and Alison Hopwood admitted that Cabbagetown residents were deservedly upset: “Their homes have been described as slums, their children potential, if not actual delinquents, and the whole area a centre of crime, disease and blight.”¹⁹

Even before slum clearance began, the much-maligned “slum-dwellers” of the area resisted the stereotyping efforts and urban renewal initiatives of the local state and the reform movement in an organized and active manner. The Regent Park Ratepayers’ Association (RPRA), formed by working-class home owners in the slum clearance area, resented the “slum” label, were dissatisfied with the compensation for their houses offered by the city²⁰, and demanded a democratic say in the redevelopment process. They claimed that 80 percent of area residents “were opposed to the scheme if there was any way they could avoid it.”²¹ As Kevin Brushett shows, the RPRA “hounded City Hall throughout the planning, clearance and reconstruction stages.”²² There was neither public consultation on the process nor community representation on the housing authority. Both state officials and the reform movement pigeonholed all opposition as greedy property

owners trying to thwart urban modernization. HAT secretary Henry Matson even wrote the Detroit Housing Commission asking for advice on how to “counteract misinformation and adverse publicity” by which he meant the opposition of local homeowners.²³ The RPRA was supported by sections of the labour movement, but the bulk of the communist and social democratic influenced left were supportive of the wider reconstruction efforts and, in practice if not in rhetoric, was unfavourable to rank-and-file resistance to authoritarian modernization plans.²⁴

In addition to the continuing issues of house prices, rental rates in the new project and citizen participation, defiance of the “slum” designation stood out. At a small RPRA protest at City Hall barely two weeks after the project was inaugurated in 1949, one woman said she resented, “Mrs. Bessie Luffman being paid to go around to teas and tell everyone what slum conditions there are in the area and what poor housekeepers we are.” A chorus of women roared their approval.²⁵ In his many dealings with area residents in this period, Paul Ringer recalls that they resented being called “slum-dwellers.”²⁶

The RPRA was unable to turn the tide of slum clearance yet it continued to organize even after the first tenants moved into the new project. In 1951, the renamed Regent Park Ratepayers’ and Tenants’ Association (RPRTA), which included some of RP’s first tenants, spearheaded a campaign against the HAT’s draconian policy of disallowing television in the project. The arrival of television to Toronto in the early 1950s sparked one of the first public conflicts between tenant and management and unmistakably highlighted the moral and financial preoccupations of the state towards tenants. The RPN

Rules and Regulations stated that the installation of exterior antennas was forbidden. Tenant requests to erect antennas and a commercial proposal to erect a Master Antenna on each building were repeatedly denied by the authority. A scant two years after the project's opening, the very first family head to move into RP, the much photographed poster boy for the project's success, Alf Bluett, was active in the RPRTA. In open defiance of the authorities, Bluett erected an aerial on his house in 1951 to challenge the policy. He desisted after a stern threat of eviction but by 1954 an estimated 60 percent of the units had aerials erected in clear defiance of regulations. Albert Rose commented that, "...as many as fifteen or twenty antennae were erected after nightfall on many occasions and were noted the following day."²⁷ Paul Ringer remembered amusingly that when he arrived for work in the morning, he would frequently notice new antennas protruding from apartment windows. It got to be a running joke among project staff.²⁸ By 1954, the HAT was effectively forced to provide a central antenna system that received both Canadian and U.S. networks for a connection fee of \$5.00 and a monthly charge of \$2.50.²⁹

Publicly, HAT officials stated that they were concerned with the "unsightly mess of odd looking T.V. aerials projecting from balconies and windows, which not only gave unsatisfactory reception but also spoiled the appearances of our vast apartment project."³⁰ Behind the scenes, however, there was pressure on RPN manager, Frank Dearlove, from members of the municipal government, the real estate industry and the middle-class members of the HAT itself. They alleged that the general public would look unfavourably on tenants with television sets since in a publicly-funded venture they should not have

been able to afford such luxuries.³¹ The Chairman of HAT, William Dies, even recommended in late 1953 that those tenants not paying the full economic rental, i.e. relief recipients, be prohibited from hooking into the new Master system.³² A staunch opponent of public housing, the Toronto Metropolitan Home Builders Association, argued, “Undoubtedly the majority of families accommodated in this publicly subsidized housing project are legitimate welfare cases. However, it is obvious from the recent controversy over television sets that a percentage of tenants receive incomes considerably higher than the majority of taxpayers who are helping to pay their rent.”³³

Tenants, of course, thought quite differently. Acting alone or in conjunction with the political group, the RPRTA, they defied the Authority and installed aerials on their own. The RPRTA vigorously opposed HAT’s moralizing, seeing it as an attempt to create “second-class” citizens in the project with restricted rights. Rose Salson, secretary of the group, argued succinctly that:

The right of a citizen in a democracy to a free choice in what he buys is fundamental. The tenants in the project are paying their way. The argument that those who want television or some other ‘luxury’ should move out is unsound. For one thing, the housing crisis is chronic and for that reason the right of the established residents of the area to remain in the project constitutes a permanent situation for all practical purposes. Secondly, the constant implication by spokesmen for the Authority that the project is or should be inhabited solely by ‘second class’ citizens or charity cases is unwholesome. To attempt to stamp ‘charity’ heavily upon all the residents of an area is to create a sort of ‘ghetto’ in which it would be difficult for a person to have any self-respect.³⁴

Shirley Harris, another activist, wrote in response to Dies’ attempt to limit television access, “We maintain that it is no business of the Authority what private possessions any tenant of the project has.”³⁵ Thanks to the efforts of tenants in RPN, the residents of RPS would enjoy a centralized system from the outset of the project in 1957 for \$2.00 a month.

The question of the service charge paid for the Master aerial system was also controversial. According to Albert Rose, \$2.50 per month was “as high as any regular charge for such service in Canada, yet there were and are few objections.”³⁶ Rose was mistaken about the latter claim. The RPRTA opposed the \$2.50 charge especially, “at a time when the income of many tenants has been sharply curtailed by being on short time at work.”³⁷ Some attempted to connect to the service illegally to avoid the monthly charges.³⁸ The original deal between HAT and the service provider, MUL-TV Sales Corporation, called for the company to turn over the entire installation to the Authority after ten years free of charge. By the 1960s, however, tenants in RP and other HAT projects raised concerns that they were paying an onerous charge for a service that most families received with a cheap aerial.³⁹ In response, Dearlove negotiated a reduction of the connection fee to \$1 in 1960 and the monthly charge to \$2 in 1961 for the 80 per cent of households that subscribed, but he also agreed to extend MUL-TV’s contract until 1968.⁴⁰ Even though the Authority had not paid one cent for the television service, they traded away the tenants’ rights by extending a burdensome contract for another four years.

Stories of Housing Need: Why Tenants Sought Public Housing

We know that Toronto experienced a crisis of low-income housing availability and affordability in the post-war period, but we know little of the individual stories and experiences of the actual families who lived through this bleak experience. Fortunately,

the archival repositories contain numerous public housing resident case files, letters by prospective tenants and written comments on both these groups by housing authority officials from the 1940s and 1950s. Along with oral testimony, these valuable sources allow us to recover some aspects of the lives of the hitherto marginalized low-income families that searched for decent dwelling spaces.⁴¹

Despite a general boom in the economy in the late 1940s and 1950s, there was still a sizable number of workers who searched in vain for affordable housing opportunities. Take Ernest Lambert, a returned soldier who worked as a salesman at Eaton's department store for \$63 a week, a relatively good salary at the time. With two young daughters, he and his wife were living in a two-room apartment with no bathroom and a shared kitchen when they received a notice to vacate from the landlord in 1953.⁴² Zachary Thompson, a clerk with the City of Toronto, along with his wife and four children, was served with a notice to vacate order in 1952 from his two-room apartment with shared kitchen and bathroom.⁴³ Simon Petersen, a laid-off letter carrier, was on unemployment insurance, living with his wife and daughter in a one-room flat with no kitchen and a shared bath, when they filled out the application for RPN. They were paying over 40 percent of their income in rent.⁴⁴ Taida Hambleton, her sister and parents arrived from war-torn Eastern Europe in 1950. They applied to RP because "it was the only independent and separate apartment [where] my parents found...they could afford the rent."⁴⁵ Larry Quinto's parents and his two sisters also found public housing a viable option. Larry's father was a lineman at the huge Massey Ferguson plant and his mother worked as a cook in a local

diner. He recalls, “We moved because of the affordable housing, and the project [RPS] was new, and close to schools.”⁴⁶

Families frequently complained that landlords disliked families with children and refused to rent dwellings to them.⁴⁷ One early RPN tenant recalled landlords in the 1940s-50s, saying, “...we can’t take you,” when prospective tenants told them they had children.⁴⁸ Larry Furlan, a self-employed bailiff with three kids, shared a four-room duplex with another family when the landlord asked him to leave because “children not wanted.”⁴⁹ Steve Rohan, a shipper and receiver, applied to RP because his wife was pregnant with their third child; they feared that no landlord would rent to them. Nancy Boudreau, a twenty-one year old mother of two whose husband worked as a clerk, stated in her 1961 application to RP that the reason she was applying was that “landlords will not take children.”⁵⁰ One family, citing landlord obstinacy with children, wrote the Mayor for help, signing their letter, “We remain a despaired Family of Seven.”⁵¹

Unsanitary, rundown living quarters were also a widespread concern. Theresa and Richard Lampston wrote the THA pleading with them to provide healthy accommodations for their two children. The inspection report in their apartment noted an open sewer trap on the kitchen floor, few windows and an unfavorable location next to a boiler room.⁵² Marie Corbeil, who lived with her husband and four children in a badly maintained East Toronto house, wrote the housing authorities articulately describing her family’s gloomy housing state:

The house is very hard to heat and we are cold all the time. There are no heat vents in either kitchens and we have both to turn on gas stoves to heat the kitchen making both our heat (which is at 80-85 degrees all the time) and our gas bill too high and then we are still not warm. The children have running noses since we moved in and my 3-month old girl caught a bad cough and kept bringing up her milk. The bills are piling up and we are having a hard time to keep up... We have been looking for another place but no one is interested in our four children.⁵³

In some cases, families were physically separated due to miserable housing circumstances and desired public housing to assist reunification. Jim Johnson, an operator at the Dominion Electric plant was living in one-room in a larger house while his wife and three children lived elsewhere.⁵⁴ Emma Talbot, a teenage girl, lived away from home while her parents and two brothers lived with three other families in a 9-room house.⁵⁵ In 1955, Belinda Koslosky, daughter of a clerk at Massey Ferguson, lived with her grandparents while her parents shared an apartment in “very crowded conditions.”⁵⁶ In 1960, James McPhee, a local factory operator, wrote the THA saying that his parents were arriving from the Maritimes and that, “They are both in poor health. I would like very much to have a place for them to live as I will be looking after them.”⁵⁷

Families in the very worst shelter situations risked losing their children to the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), the state agency responsible for “neglected” children. One woman beseeched the THA for a vacancy, citing a CAS threat to take her children into care unless she provided a letter stating she had a place in public housing.⁵⁸ Certain families willingly gave up their children to foster parents while they sorted out decent accommodation. This extreme predicament is described in the following exchange between an agency official and the father of the family:

When your children were put into the foster home, was it you who arranged it?

-Oh yes, I had to arrange it myself...

Why did your children have to leave your place?

-Well, we didn't have the housing accommodation at the time, to get someone to come in and look after them at home. The only solution at the time was to have them placed in foster homes – until such time as we could take care of them ourselves.

The place where you were living in at that time wasn't equipped to deal with this kind of problem?

-Well, the place we were living in at the time wasn't equipped for anything. Definitely we couldn't get anyone to come in and help out...It was what you might call a lean-to – in fact it has been described as a garage. It consisted of one room roughly 20 feet long by 10 feet wide, and that's about all except there was a small water closet in an additional lean-to.⁵⁹

In an era before the state provided health insurance, medical problems could severely compound general housing difficulties. Walter Davies worked for 25 years in the British coalmines. He took sick after he immigrated to Toronto and was forced to rely on \$21 a week from Unemployment Insurance, “[I] never knew a day’s sickness till this last two years...I’d like to say that honestly, two years I had lots of trouble, lots of sickness, my expenses have been very heavy and my banking account happens to be nil.” As the hospital bills and living expenses mounted, the family began a desperate search for accommodation.⁶⁰ David Blackmore’s family migrated from the East coast province of Newfoundland with similar impediments to decent shelter. With five children and a father suffering from persistent medical problems, they moved to Toronto in search of “greater economic opportunities” in the late 1950s. After a lengthy period on the waiting list, they eventually landed a unit at RP.⁶¹ The family of Al Ford, a maintenance worker, lived in a 5-room house on the outskirts of RP when the landlord gave them a notice to vacate. His wife and daughter both suffered from medical conditions. Their four-year-old daughter had chronic tonsillitis and Osgood Shlatter’s disease, prompting their doctor to write a

letter recommending them for admission to RP.⁶² Hazel Meere, one of the first residents to move into RPN, described for *Maclean's* magazine how housing conditions could be worsened by illness. During the 1930s, her family had relied on relief for long stretches and in a period of 22 years had moved eight separate times. When her husband, Albert, contracted tuberculosis in the late 1940s, the family of eight struggled in vain to find a healthy dwelling for three years before they found a place in RPN.⁶³

If public housing was an attractive choice for the working poor needing housing, it would also become a central option for those living on the minimal incomes of social assistance payments. Scrambling to find stable housing can be a singularly disconcerting experience for those on social assistance payments, principally for single-parent families. As Margaret Little aptly puts it, “Without stable housing, your life is thrown into constant upheaval, and life is reduced to a desperate scramble to find shelter: temporary, permanent, good or bad. Health suffers and damages your ability to make any long-term plans.”⁶⁴ Josephine Thomas, a widow with one son and one daughter, had to pester the HAT every month, asking for a spot in RPN. She described the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of the large house her family was occupying along with 17 other people and articulated the desperate plight of many families on welfare: “I need a place for my kids...I sincerely hope you will do something for me as I am alone with no relatives anywhere to help me. I have to depend on welfare now as my husband left no insurances of any kind at all...I hope you will help me in the near future.”⁶⁵ When Sandy Elster separated, her husband refused to provide support. She and her four children, surviving on welfare and Mother’s Allowance, had few choices but to apply for public

housing.⁶⁶ When she wrote the authorities for a public housing unit, abandoned spouse, Janice Bukowski, and her five children, were living in an unwinterized cottage.⁶⁷ Neil Ruttle's family found themselves in a similarly thorny situation. With five brothers and two sisters, he remembers the chaotic situation of his father's employment and, after his parents' separation and their move into RP, the difficulties of making do on the limited resources of social assistance.⁶⁸

Racial discrimination would become a key factor in housing need in the 1980s-90s (see Chapter 4), but it existed before this period and often intersected with gender oppression. Fallis and Murray argue convincingly that in a low vacancy market, landlords can discriminate against those considered to be unreliable tenants: "families with children, especially single-parent families, those with psychological disabilities, or those without long job histories...Landlords can more readily exercise their racial, religious, or other prejudices."⁶⁹ During the slum clearance and relocation plans for RPS in the mid-1950s, one family of "New Canadians" told interviewers that discrimination in the housing market influenced their place of a choice to live.⁷⁰ John Talbot wrote the HAT in 1966 detailing the racial discrimination his family faced in the housing market. He would frequently answer advertisements for rental vacancies but no landlord would offer his family a spot. He concluded it was because of "their colour."⁷¹ As Sylvia Novac and Frances Henry have documented, both "overt" and "mediated" cases of outright racial discrimination directed towards immigrant women and men in Toronto continued through the 1990s.⁷²

The stories of families interested in public housing reveal a rich array of people and situations of housing hardship. In the early period, the vast majority of these families were fully-employed workers, confronting serious housing availability and affordability issues. Those families relying on the state for their incomes, of course, faced more urgent housing need since state benefits were always nominal. More than anything, the stories of housing need demonstrate that in the midst of plenty, it was always a struggle for low-income families to find a decent place to live. As Thelma Pilkey earnestly recalled: "...it was tough on everybody."⁷³

RP's First Tenants and the Built Environment

In spite of the paternalistic attempts by planners and architects to impose their own conception of "community" from above on low-income families and resistance to the project itself, it is imperative to distinguish between what the first tenants themselves thought of the new environment and the onslaught of criticism that modernist architecture and planning in general and of the design of both RPN and RPS, in particular, would receive from the 1960s onwards. Almost all recent commentary on the design of RPN and RPS highlights the "ugliness" of the buildings, the unsuitability of high-rises for children, the segregation of the development from the surrounding neighbourhood and the lack of individually definable, private space within the project.⁷⁴ Yet, until a series of redesign projects were proposed in the 1990s, most tenants seemed to have expressed no sustained interest in changing the design of the buildings or layout of the project, focusing instead on management neglect and restrictive internal policies (see Chapter 6).

There is substantial evidence from the first decades of the project, furthermore, that residents, most of whom were former renters living in substandard housing, were fond of their dwelling units. Early newspaper reports show that people were genuinely pleased with the new spacious accommodations and facilities, a finding shared by oral histories of the early days of American housing projects.⁷⁵ Teresa Bluett expressed in 1949 that in the row houses of RPN, “everything is modern and we are really happy.”⁷⁶ More recent oral and documentary testimony gathered by the author confirm these sentiments. Many found the apartments spacious, well kept and in sound condition.⁷⁷ Thelma Pilkey, who moved into a RPS apartment with her two daughters in 1958, recalled: “It was a lovely, beautiful, beautiful apartment. Brand new, clean...”⁷⁸ One tenant wrote Toronto area Member of Parliament George Hees, who had helped him secure a vacancy in RPN, saying, “We are pleased to say that we are now settled in a cozy, warm 3-room apartment plus a modern bath room, and heat, it is like moving to Florida it is grand.”⁷⁹

Bathtubs, modern appliances, hot and cold running water, indoor toilets – all these amenities were not taken lightly by residents given that many of their previous residences lacked basic sanitary facilities. Even having a bathtub within the apartment was considered progress; many Cabbagetowners were forced in summer to wash in the backyard and/or use the local public bathhouse. Brian McAteer, who moved into RPN with his family in the early 1950s, had this to say about the amenities:

And, yes, we moved from one of those downtown cottages without indoor plumbing and hot water. And, yes, heat and hot water were novelties, but excitement was soon replaced by the awesome reality of being warm, with hot water to wash in, of having a refrigerator that ran on electricity, instead of an ice box that left us wondering which would run out first, the food or the ice to cool it. The Regent Park district heating plant with its six mammoth boilers weren't impressive: What was impressive was standing beside the radiators that first cold winter and feeling the heat fill each and every room.⁸⁰

Even with rents often higher than in previous dwellings, RPN offered an important measure of stability for working-class families. Forced by a tight housing market to constantly move from one sub-standard dwelling to another disrupted economic and family planning, complicated steady employment and could be a singularly disconcerting experience for families. Indeed, as Brian McActeer remembers, RP gave “self-esteem, pride and hope.”⁸¹

Conclusion

Externally-imposed stigmatization of poor inner-city neighbourhoods and their residents showed a remarkable continuity over the first half of the twentieth century: consistently “othered” as physically, culturally and morally problematic, they were always considered a larger threat to what the middle-class urban reform movement considered to be proper homes, families and social life. Yet the Cabbagetown working class and poor were not solely victims of the urban renewal juggernaut of the 1930s and 1940s: they had their own distinct, positive conceptions of community and neighbourhood and a sizable number resisted the efforts of state officials and middle-class reformers to destroy their homes in the name of modernization and progress. The available evidence suggests that

the local population constructed extensive social networks and a dignified sense of working-class community.

For other families, however, RP offered a real measure of security in the context of a depressing low-income housing market. The first tenants to move into RP, for example, defied the later typecasting of their homes by academics and the media, asserting they were a real step up over their previous dwellings. Nonetheless, the physical bettering of the home environment was tied to the wider ideological goal of moral reconstruction in the eyes of the reform movement and local state. In the first decade of RP's life, the reform movement would continue to propagate clichéd images of inner-city dwellers and of the first tenants in the project, boasting of the unequivocal success of public housing in stamping out the bad habits of the slum.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ Lloyd Cully, "My Cabbagetown Memories," in Cabbagetown Chronicles website, <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Club/7400/> (11 October 2002).

² See Stephen A. Speisman, "St. John's Shtetl: the Ward in 1911," Lillian Petroff, "Sojourner and Settler," and John Zucchi, "Italian Hometown Settlements and the Development of an Italian Community in Toronto, 1875-1935," in Robert F. Harney, ed., *Gathering Places: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985), 134.

³ Petroff, "Sojourner and Settler," 185, 195.

⁴ Kennedy Crane, "Housing Montreal," *Social Welfare*, November 1920, 41.

⁵ Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900-1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), chap.5.

⁶ For a more detailed analysis see Sean Purdy, "Building Homes, Building Citizens: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900-1920," *Canadian Historical Review*, 79 (September 1998), 513-522. In the American case, note Lizabeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," *Journal of American Culture*, 3 (Winter 1980), 752-775.

⁷ See Purdy, "Building Homes," 499-505.

⁸ J.M.S. Careless, "Cabbagetown," *Polyphony*, 9 (Summer 1984), 15 and "The Emergence of Cabbagetown in Victorian Toronto," in Harney ed., *Gathering Places*, 31-39.

⁹ Cabbagetown Chronicles website.

¹⁰ Note Patricia Crofts-Lagree, "My Time in Cabbagetown"; Lloyd Cully, "The End of Cabbagetown and the Beginning of Regent Park," and "My Last Summer in Old Cabbagetown" all found on the website cited in Note 1. Hugh Garner's novel *Cabbagetown: the classic novel of the Depression in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1968) and Colleen Kelly's *Cabbagetown in Pictures*, Toronto Public Library Local History Booklet No.4 (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1984) similarly highlight this close use of communal space.

¹¹ Sophie Stransman, *Mama and Her Mitzvahs* (Toronto: the Author, 2001). Also note for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, V. McAree, *The Cabbagetown Store* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1953).

¹² Paul Ringer, interview with author, tape recorded, Toronto, Ontario, 12 November 1996.

¹³ Lloyd Cully, "Law and Disorder in Cabbagetown" in Cabbagetown Chronicles website.

¹⁴ "The Boyd Gang" in *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Lloyd Cully, "The End of Cabbagetown and the Beginning of Regent Park."

¹⁶ Kevin Brushett, "'Blots on the Face of the City': The Politics of Slum Housing and Urban Renewal in Toronto, 1940-1970," Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 2001, 115.

¹⁷ Hugh Garner, "Cabbagetown," in J.L. Granatstein and P.Stevens, eds., *Forum: Canadian Life and Letters, 1920-1970, Selections from Canadian Forum* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 147.

¹⁸ City of Toronto Archives (hereafter CTA), Housing Authority of Toronto Papers (hereafter HAT), RG 28, B, Box 32, File: Regent Park North Study, E.S. Bishop, Rent Capacity, 1948-1949, "Final Report, Rent Capacity Study," 7.

¹⁹ Alison Hopwood and Albert Rose, "Regent Park: Millstone or Milestone?," *Canadian Forum*, May 1949, 35.

²⁰ Toronto Mayor Robert H. Saunders wrote the powerful C.D. Howe, federal Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, saying, "It evidently is possible to purchase much of the property at a most reasonable price." CTA, RG 28 B, Box 28, File: CMHC Progress Reports 1947-49, Saunders to Howe, 28 August 28 1947.

²¹ For the demands of the RPRA see CTA, RG28, Box 7, File: Miscellaneous 1947-51, "Presentation of a Deputation from the Regent Park Ratepayers' Association May 1947,"; *Ibid.*, Box 33, File: Regent Park Ratepayers' Association 1947-1954, "Deputation Brief of the Regent Park Ratepayers' Association to the Board of Control," April 13, 1949; Dennis Braithwaite, "City Hall Falls Down on Housing, Labor Says, Cites Regent Park Rents," *Toronto Daily Star*, 1 March 1949, 9.

²² Kevin Brushett, "'People and Government Travelling Together': Community Organization, Urban Planning and the Politics of Post-War Reconstruction, 1943-1953" *Urban History Review*, 27 (March 1999), 55.

- ²³ CTA, HAT, RG 28, Box 33, File: Regent Park Ratepayers' Association, 1947-54, Letter from Henry Matson to Mr. Inglis, 15 May 1949.
- ²⁴ The CHPA was ambivalent on the issue of community participation. They raised this issue in their propaganda and criticized the arbitrary nature of redevelopment, but largely resigned themselves to a top-down approach to urban renewal. See Albert Rose, *Regent Park: A Study in Slum Clearance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), chap. 6 and Clark Papers, CTA, SC61, Box 4, File: Housing Digest, 1946-53.
- ²⁵ "Regent Park Files Protest Though Only 26 in 'March'," *Toronto Daily Star*, 13 April 1949, 2.
- ²⁶ Paul Ringer, interview with author.
- ²⁷ Rose, *Regent Park*, 174.
- ²⁸ Paul Ringer, interview with author.
- ²⁹ CTA, HAT, RG 28, Box 7, File: Miscellaneous 1947-51, H. Matson to Charles E. Greenlay, Minister of Labour, Province of Manitoba, 26 October 1951. For the 60 per cent figure see Rose, *Regent Park*, 175.
- ³⁰ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 36, File: Administration – Television, 1953-1958, Dearlove to MUL-TV Sales Corporation, 21 November 1955.
- ³¹ Rose, *Regent Park*, 173.
- ³² See the response by the tenants' association in CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 45, File: MUL-TV Sales Corporation, 1953-1960, Shirley Harris, Secretary, RPRTA to *Toronto Daily Star*, 15 December 1953.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, Box 33, File: Toronto Metropolitan Home Builders' Association (TMHBA), TMHBA to Mayor and the Board of Control, 4 October 1951. For a flavour of the media debate surrounding the controversy, see Albert Rose, "Television and Public Housing," *Canadian Forum*, October 1951, 145-146 and "Televisions at Regent Park," *Toronto Star*, 11 September 1951, 2.
- ³⁴ CTA, HAT, RG 28, Box 7, File: Miscellaneous 1947-51, Rose Salson to H. Matson, Secretary of the THA, 14 September 1951.
- ³⁵ Shirley Harris to *Toronto Daily Star*, 15 December 1953.
- ³⁶ Rose, *Regent Park*, 175.
- ³⁷ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 33, File: RPRTA, 1947-1954, RPRTA to HAT, 10 April 1954.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, Box 36, File: Administration – Television, 1953-1958, Memo, 13 December 1956.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, Box 18, File: 1963 Sub-Committee Report, Greenwood Park Apartments Tenants, Brief to the Mayor and the Board of Control reprinted in 1963 Sub-Committee Report.
- ⁴⁰ Ron Haggart, "North Regent Park Gets the Picture," *Toronto Daily Star*, 29 January 1963, 15.
- ⁴¹ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Boxes 29-30. See note 187 in Chapter 1 for a discussion of Access to Information Guidelines and these particular Tenant Case Files.
- ⁴² Tenant Case File 2.
- ⁴³ Tenant Case File 13. For other families who were asked or ordered to leave by landlords see Tenant Case Files 4, 12, 17, 22-23, 36, 46, 48-49, 57, 59-61, 68, 75, 77, 80, 82, 87, 89, 91, and 99. For one interesting case of a rich woman pleading for public housing for her servant who was evicted, see CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 36, File: City of Toronto Mayor's Office, 1950-1957, Mrs. C to the Mayor, 25 June 1956.
- ⁴⁴ Tenant Case File 24. For other families who were paying more than 30 percent of their income in rent, see Tenant Case Files 6, 7, 20, 36, 37, 52, 64, and 116. For overcrowding see Files 3, 17, 33, 56, 58, 71, 79-81, 83, 85-86, 88, 93, 101, 104, 115.
- ⁴⁵ Taida Hambleton, letter to the author, 15 January 1996.
- ⁴⁶ Larry Quinto, letter to the author, 2 January 2002.
- ⁴⁷ This was a long-standing practice of landlords dating to the nineteenth century. See "Evidence of Arthur Short," in Greg Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, 1889* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), 254.
- ⁴⁸ Interview, anonymous, circa 1956 cited in Albert Rose, *Regent Park*, 109.
- ⁴⁹ Tenant Case File 61.
- ⁵⁰ Tenant Case File 110. For other residents who explicitly moved into RP because of landlord dislike of children see Files 14, 19, 44, 84, 94, 99, 103, and 110.
- ⁵¹ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 36, File: City of Toronto Mayor's Office, 1950-57, Tenants to Mayor Lamport, 11 February 1952. See in the same file, Mr. And Mrs. GC to Mayor Lamport, 11 February, 1952.
- ⁵² Tenant Case File 35.

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- ⁵³ Tenant Case File 19. For other cases of dilapidated housing see Files 6, 8, 24, 27, 37, 39, 40, 51, 56, 58-59, 60-64, 66, 69, 70, 72-76, 78, 97, 100, 103, 105, 108, and 115. See as well evidence from a 1954 report from a doctor describing housing conditions “hardly fit to house animals,” in CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 36, File: City of Toronto, Department of Buildings, 1953-55, Frank Dearlove to Commissioner of Buildings, 31 December 1954.
- ⁵⁴ Tenant Case File 36.
- ⁵⁵ Tenant Case File 81.
- ⁵⁶ Tenant Case File 93.
- ⁵⁷ Tenant Case File 18.
- ⁵⁸ CTA, RG 28, B, Box 8, File: 1965-68 B, R. Bradley to Mr. Borins, Counsel to the Judicial Inquiry on Housing, 15 September 1965.
- ⁵⁹ Interview, anonymous, circa 1956 cited in full in Rose, *Regent Park*, 110-111.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 109. For more families with medical problems see Files 26, 44, 52-53, 62, 99.
- ⁶¹ David Blackmore, interview with author, tape recorded, Richmond Hill, Ontario, 6 May 1996.
- ⁶² Tenant Case File 15.
- ⁶³ Hal Tennant, “Our Second Chance at Public Housing,” *Maclean’s*, 20 March 1965, 20.
- ⁶⁴ Margaret Little, “A Litmus Test for Democracy: The Impact of Ontario Welfare Changes on Single Mothers,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 66 (August 2001), 18.
- ⁶⁵ Tenant Case File 37.
- ⁶⁶ Tenant Case File 80.
- ⁶⁷ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 11, File: 1965–1968, MP to Robert Bradley, 7 October 1965.
- ⁶⁸ Neil Ruttle, interview with author, tape recorded, Toronto, Ontario, 15 May 1995.
- ⁶⁹ George Fallis and Alex Murray, eds. *Housing the Homeless and Poor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 54-55 cited in Sewell, *Houses and Homes*, 33.
- ⁷⁰ MTHA, *Regent Park South Relocation Study: Interim Report* (Toronto: Housing Branch, Ontario Department of Planning and Development, 1958), 40.
- ⁷¹ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 8, File: 1965-1968 D, VD to Robert Bradley, 2 March 1966.
- ⁷² Sylvia Novac, *A Place To Call One’s Own; New Voices of Dislocation and Dispossession* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1996) and Frances Henry, *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 230.
- ⁷³ Thelma Pilkey, interview with author, tape recorded, Lakefield, Ontario, 21 March 1996.
- ⁷⁴ Robert Fulford, “The making of a neighbourhood,” *Toronto Life*, March 1995, 27-28; Brushett, “‘Blots on the Face of the City,’” 224-225; Sewell, *Houses and Homes*, 149-151.
- ⁷⁵ See Rose, *Regent Park*, chaps. 8-9; “Bluetts Find New Life Across the Street,” *The Globe and Mail*, 31 March 1949, 3; Jack Brehl, “Heaven in New Homes, Regent Park Dwellers Sure,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 July 1948, 15, 33; Harold Greer, “Seven Families Get Preview of ‘Heaven’ in Regent Park,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 16 March 1949, 3; “Slums Behind, First Family Enters New Regent Park Apartment Project,” *Globe and Mail*, 31 March 1949, 3. On residents’ satisfaction with dwellings in US projects note Rhonda Y. Williams, “Living Just Enough in the City: Change and Activism in Baltimore’s Public Housing, 1940-1980,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998, chap.2; Sudhir Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 20-21; Jane Roessner, *A Decent Place to Live, From Columbia Point to Harbor Point, A Community History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), chap.4.
- ⁷⁶ “Slums Behind, First Family Enters New Regent Park Apartment Project;” “‘Like a Palace’, Bluetts Happy First to Get Regent Park Home,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 March 1949, 2.
- ⁷⁷ Christene Brown, letter to author, 5 August 2002; Taida Hambleton, letter to author; David Blackmore, interview with author; Ken Dear, interview with author, tape recorded, Toronto, 20 March 1996; Neil Ruttle, interview with author.
- ⁷⁸ Thelma Pilkey, interview with author. See also the comments of a visitor to RPS. Norma Penner, interview with author, tape recorded, Toronto, 14 November 1996.
- ⁷⁹ CTA, HAT, RG 28, B, Box 36, File: George Hees, MP, Correspondence, Mr. M to George Hees, 28 November 1954.
- ⁸⁰ Brian McAteer, “Letter to the Editor,” *Toronto Star*, 19 May 2003, 11.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*