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Landmarks Preservation Commission
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CENTRAL INTAKE
DEPT. OF CITY PLANNING

UNITED WORKERS' COOPERATIVE COLONY ("The Coops"), Borough of The Bronx.
2700-2774 Bronx Park East; Designed 1925, Built 1926-27; Springsteen & Goldhammer, architects.
2846-2870 Bronx Park East; Designed 1927, Built 1927-29; Herman Jessor, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 4506, Lots 1, 7, 20, 27, 40, and 50.

On July 10, 1990, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the United Workers' Cooperative Colony ("The Coops") and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing has been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There was one speaker in favor of designation. The owner of the property took no position at the time of the public hearing, but subsequently expressed willingness to work with the Commission. The Commission has received a letter of support from Borough President Fernando Ferrer.¹

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The United Worker's Cooperative Colony (often referred to as "The Coops" or the "Allerton Coops") in the Bronx is not only distinguished for its architectural merit, but is also historically significant as one of the most important of the non-profit cooperative housing complexes built in New York City during the 1920s. The two-square-block colony, erected in two construction campaigns (1926-27 and 1927-29), was built by the United Workers' Association, a group which was at the forefront of the cooperative housing movement. Composed primarily of secular Jewish needle-trade workers with communist political leanings, the group sought to improve living conditions for its members and to create a vibrant community of socially and politically active individuals. The Association erected its buildings in an undeveloped region of the Bronx, adjacent to the open space of Bronx Park. The new apartment houses were designed to meet high standards, with apartment layouts, open space, and amenities rivaling and, in some instances, surpassing those provided in contemporary middle-class housing. The Colony encouraged cooperative activity in all aspects of life and was therefore equipped with classrooms, a library, a gymnasium, and other facilities for social interaction. The first complex, built in 1926-27, is a fine example of traditional neo-Tudor design with unusual ornamentation reflective of the Colony's political and social ideals; it was designed by Springsteen & Goldhammer, an important firm involved in progressive housing projects in the Bronx. The second complex, built in 1927-29, was designed in an avant-garde architectural mode inspired by Northern European Expressionist architecture; it is a significant work by Herman Jessor, an architect who was to become the most prolific designer of non-profit cooperative buildings in New York City. Together the Colony's complexes housed over 700 families. These quality, cooperatively-owned residences, in which all members had an equal voice in management and were prohibited from selling apartments at a profit, represent the efforts of an idealistic group of primarily young Eastern European Jewish immigrants to provide affordable housing that would be an alternative to the tenements of the Lower East Side. Although financially the Colony failed, architecturally and socially it was a success.

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TECHNICAL REVIEW DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

ANNALS

The United Workers' Cooperative Association²

The United Workers' Cooperative Colony was erected as a response to the appalling living conditions that many new immigrants experienced in New York. During the final decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century (before immigration was halted in 1924) approximately two million Eastern European Jews immigrated to the United States. Many of these people initially settled in the overcrowded and deteriorating tenements of New York's Lower East Side.³ A large percentage of these Jewish immigrants were employed in the rapidly expanding garment industry where they toiled in sweatshops with abysmal working conditions or undertook piecework in their homes.⁴

The intolerable living and working environments experienced by these immigrants led to the radicalization of a significant portion of the Jewish community. This was especially true of the immigrants who arrived between 1904 and 1914, including most of the founders of the United Workers' Cooperative Association. Many of these people had already become politicized in Europe, where discrimination under the czar, pogroms (notably between 1903 and 1906), and the suppression of the 1905 revolution in Russia had aroused political consciousness.⁵ This radical inclination, coupled with the circumstances of life in America, placed Jewish immigrants in the forefront of radical political activism in this country, first in the Socialist Party, and, after its establishment in 1919, in the American Communist Party. As might be expected, much of this activity manifested itself in the labor movement, especially the organization of garment unions. The United Workers' Association was founded out of this development of a radical labor movement.

The genesis of the United Workers' Cooperative Association is somewhat obscure, but it appears that by the middle of the 1910s a group of young, politically active, left-wing, secular Jewish, Yiddish-speaking, immigrant garment workers had joined together to live in a cooperative environment. A major early venture was the leasing of a five-story apartment house at 1815 Madison Avenue on the corner of East 118th Street where the members had ten cooperative apartments, a cooperative restaurant, and a library.⁶ In addition, the new organization

purchased 250 acres overlooking the Hudson River near Beacon, New York, and in 1922 opened Camp Nitgedaaget (Yiddish for "Camp Don't Worry") where members could spend time in the country.⁷ An advertisement published in 1930 recommended Camp Nitgedaaget as "the first proletarian camp for workers."⁸ The success of the small cooperative in Harlem and of the camp, as well as the pressing need for decent housing, prompted the United Workers' Association to venture into the construction of cooperative housing in 1925. This was a natural outgrowth of the organization's ideology. The idea of building a residential community where all residents would share equally in ownership and management and where there would be no profit motive, appealed to these communist-inspired workers.

The Neighborhood

In 1925, the United Workers' Association purchased land on Bronx Park East. The site was located near the eastern edge of what had been the Lorillard estate, most of which earlier had been incorporated into Bronx Park. At the time of this purchase, the immediate area was sparsely settled, but ripe for development. In reminiscing about her experiences, one original resident, Bella Halebsky, described the surroundings:

The very first time I visited this area, we saw absolutely a virgin neighborhood, unpopulated with the exception of Bronx Park East going south: about two blocks before Pelham Parkway there already existed a couple of private houses. There were no apartment houses. The elevated line was up, and the streets were already laid out, with the water lines in, and things like that.⁹

Real estate development in the Bronx Park East area was inevitable following the 1917 opening of the elevated White Plains Line of the I.R.T. subway which ran only two blocks east of the park; World War I and the real estate depression that followed dampened development interest before the mid-1920s. The elevated White Plains Line (now part of the Nos. 2 and 5 lines) connected the North Central Bronx to the older

Seventh Avenue and Lexington Avenue subway lines. The area was especially convenient for members of the United Workers' Association since the train provided easy commuting to the new garment factories near Seventh Avenue in Midtown Manhattan where most members worked.

Non-Profit Cooperative Housing in America¹⁰

Cooperative apartment houses began to appear in New York in the 1880s, at about the same time as multiple dwellings gained acceptance by affluent people.¹¹ These early cooperatives were profit-making ventures. In a traditional profit-making cooperative the building is owned by a corporation in which each buyer purchases a number of shares and pays a monthly fee for the maintenance of the property. This fee is relative to the apartment's size and its location within the building. The shareholders vote for members of the cooperative's board of directors; the number of votes held by each shareholder is relative to the number of shares owned. When a cooperator chooses to sell, he or she is free to sell the shares at a profit, as long as the Board of the cooperative corporation approves the buyer.

The first cooperative apartment house in New York was the Rembrandt (Philip G. Hubert, architect), erected by Jared Flagg on West 57th Street in 1880-81.¹² Flagg promoted the idea of "group ownership" in several later buildings and the idea was also appropriated by other builders. A second wave of cooperative development occurred in the early years of the twentieth century. This included the construction of a series of cooperative duplex studio buildings intended for artists.¹³ The success of these duplex cooperatives led to the increasing popularity of cooperatives among the city's wealthiest residents. During the 1920s, the construction of cooperatives expanded into the middle-class housing market with such projects as the Queensboro Corporation's buildings in Jackson Heights, Queens, and developer Charles Paterno's Hudson View Gardens complex in Washington Heights.¹⁴ These profit-making cooperative projects were among the finest housing in New York City, but none had an impact on the housing conditions of the vast majority of New York residents who could not afford to move into these new buildings or who were, for ethnic reasons, often denied residence in the restricted cooperatives.¹⁵

Non-profit cooperatives were built exclusively by societies or associations composed of working people and were part of a larger movement in the United States that sought to organize cooperative ventures in all aspects of life.¹⁶ Unlike traditional cooperatives, non-profit cooperatives were founded on a belief that all shareholders should be equal and that the members should be "home-seekers, not profit-seekers."¹⁷ In a cooperative society, the association owns the building, with each resident allotted a single share, regardless of the price paid, or the size and location of an apartment. Thus, each shareholder has an equal voice in the running of the cooperative. If a cooperator wishes to sell his or her apartment, the society repurchases the unit at the same price originally paid (often with interest); no profit is made on the sale. The Cooperative League of the United States of America summed up the aims of the non-profit cooperative movement in 1924 by stating that a cooperative housing association is "composed of people who unite to secure attractive homes; homes built and run, not for profit but for the service of the occupants."¹⁸

The earliest housing cooperatives in the United States were organized by Finnish immigrants who settled in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn.¹⁹ Early in the twentieth century, Finnish enclaves appeared in Harlem and in Brooklyn; by 1910, Brooklyn's "Finntown" is thought to have had a population of over 10,000.²⁰ Decent housing was difficult to find in Sunset Park so, in 1916, twenty Finnish families organized a non-profit housing society called the Finnish Home Building Association "Alku" (*Alku* is Finnish for beginning). Although a novel idea in America, the organization of such a society by Finns was a logical outgrowth of the popularity of cooperative ventures in Finland. The success of the small four-story building, located at 816 43rd Street, led to the construction of the adjacent Alku II and then to the appearance of over twenty-five other Finnish cooperatives.²¹

The 1920s saw the establishment of many cooperative housing societies, as Jewish garment workers became involved in the movement. Almost all of their projects were erected in the northern parts of the Bronx, where land was relatively inexpensive, the extensive parkland provided open space for recreation, and the subway

lines allowed rapid commutation to Manhattan's garment factories. Most of the cooperative societies purchased land adjacent to parks indicating just how important light, air, and recreational opportunity were to people who had lived on the Lower East Side and worked in sweatshops.

At the same time that the Communist-aligned United Workers' Association was erecting its first complex, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACW), a large union closely allied with the Socialist Party, was planning its first cooperative housing on Van Cortlandt Park South (Springsteen & Goldhammer, architects). Amalgamated purchased the land in 1924 (prior to the United Workers' purchase) and erected a large five-story walk-up complex that opened in 1927. With the addition of other buildings, Amalgamated Houses eventually became the largest cooperative housing society. In addition, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and five other garment unions organized the Labor Home Building Corporation in 1925. With the backing of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., this organization began construction of the Thomas Garden Apartments (Andrew J. Thomas, architect) at 840 Grand Concourse opposite Franz Sigel Park (this section of the park is now the site of the Bronx County Building). In the following year ground was broken for the Yiddish Cooperative Heim Gesellschaft (better known as the Sholom Aleichem Houses; Springsteen & Goldhammer, architects) on Jerome Park, a complex erected by Jews who wished to preserve Yiddish culture. Simultaneously, the Jewish National Workers Cooperative Home Association, an organization dedicated to furthering the Zionist cause, erected its first building (generally referred to as Farband Houses; Meisner & Uffner, architects) on Williamsbridge Road.²²

The Buildings and Their Architects

The First Project (2700-2774 Bronx Park East)

Design apparently began on the United Workers' Colony's first buildings in 1925, with construction initiated in 1926. The apartments were ready for occupancy early in the next year.²³ The siting and planning were carefully arranged to maximize light, air, and privacy, three amenities

that were lacking in the tenement apartments from which most of the original cooperators moved. The complex consists of four, five-story and basement walk-up buildings, grouped as two almost identical structures, each planned in a modified C-shape, with large open courts facing each other on the inside of the block; sizable light courts punctuate all four street elevations. The landscaped court -- with trees, flowers, serpentine walks, and a fountain -- is entered from the east (Barker Avenue) and west (Bronx Park East), permitting access to the many building entrances. Designed by the architectural firm of Springsteen & Goldhammer, the buildings are neo-Tudor in style, superficially not unlike many others erected in the Bronx during the 1920s.

Springsteen & Goldhammer was responsible for a large number of apartment houses in the Bronx during the 1920s, including many non-profit cooperatives of the period. George W. Springsteen (1879-1954) studied architecture at Cooper Union and Pratt Institute and then worked in the office of Rouse & Goldstone, a firm known for its apartment house designs. In 1919 he joined with Albert Goldhammer (1890-1956), also a former Cooper Union student, in the firm of Springsteen & Goldhammer. Although most of its commissions were for buildings in the Bronx, the firm maintained offices in Manhattan and was responsible for several notable buildings in that borough as well.²⁴ Springsteen & Goldhammer specialized in the design of apartment buildings in traditional historically derivative styles, including Mediterranean (Concourse Gardens North and South at 940 and 960 Grand Concourse, 1927), Colonial Revival (1215 Grand Concourse, 1919), Spanish (Alhambra Gardens, 750-760 Pelham Parkway, c.1927), and neo-Tudor. The neo-Tudor was used for conventional speculative apartment buildings, such as 3224 Grand Concourse (1923), as well as for the United Workers', Amalgamated, and Sholom Aleichem cooperative projects.

The individual in Springsteen & Goldhammer's office who was responsible for the design of the United Workers' Colony project is unclear. According to Beatrice and Philip Amron, founders of the cooperative society, writing in 1977, "a young architect named Jessor was hired to make plans for our building."²⁵ Herman Jessor, in fact, has claimed to have been the architect of these buildings.²⁶ However, according to Richard Plunz, the complex "was apparently the

work of Benjamin Loeschke, a German *émigré* who was the chief designer for this project within the Springsteen & Goldhammer office.²⁷ Although the actual architect in charge is not known, stylistically the project is well within the mainstream of Springsteen & Goldhammer's work and was undoubtedly overseen by the partners.

It is clear that the cooperative society was intimately involved with the project; the Amrons report that "they made Jessor change the plans several times: more window space, larger rooms, more space outside for greenery."²⁸ However, since radical politics permeated every aspect of the members' lives, it appears surprising that the neo-Tudor, a style that had come to symbolize traditional, conservative American home life (especially upper middle-class suburban home life), was used at the United Workers' Colony. When used for middle-class urban apartment houses (notably at Tudor City and Hudson View Gardens), the intent of the builders and architects was often to create a specifically suburban ambiance. Richard Plunz has stated that "apparently the Workers Cooperative was oblivious to any class associations attached to the style."²⁹ It is difficult, however, to believe that these politically aware people endorsed the neo-Tudor style without any consideration of its symbolic associations. It is possible that the style was seen as a representation of the comforts of home life.³⁰ The United Workers' and the other cooperative societies which erected neo-Tudor complexes at this time were all seeking to erect buildings that would be ideal homes for working people. In addition, the United Workers' Colony was erected adjacent to a large public park and was planned with a lot coverage of only fifty-six percent of the site. Thus, a style that conveyed a country-like ambiance was not inappropriate. While incorporating such traditional neo-Tudor elements as pointed arches and half timbering, the buildings also feature such motifs as a hammer and sickle, symbols of learning, and smoking factories in the spandrels of several of the pointed-arched entrances. These transform the homey neo-Tudor structures into a political statement.

Each of 963 rooms in the 339 apartments within the complex either overlooks the street or the landscaped court. Privacy was a significant issue; a major complaint of housing reformers was that tenements, with their multiplicity of closely-

packed apartments and their small rooms, led to "promiscuous" living arrangements. In order to limit the number of families using halls, stairs, and other common spaces in multiple dwellings, reformers adopted the form of the English university residence hall, with its multiple entrances and stairways. This meant that only a small number of families (usually only three or four per floor) would be using each stairway. In addition, a vestibule was placed between the public hall and private living quarters to increase a family's privacy. In the plan of the initial United Workers' Colony complex, the courtyard provides access to sixteen separate entrances, each with its own stair, while vestibules are included in each apartment. In addition, to assure privacy to residents on the first floor, the lowest floor was "set fully ten or twelve feet above the ground level, thus removing the people on the first floor from the immediate contact with the street and sidewalk."³¹

Most of the original residents of the complex were young families, but unmarried people were also welcome. The buildings contained a group of fifty-seven "bachelor apartments," planned for single men and women or married couples without children. These apartments were arranged in groups (generally of twelve individual rooms) with a single shared kitchen.

The construction of the buildings was financed in a traditional manner.³² Each cooperator paid \$250 per room for an apartment, half of which was paid upon joining the cooperative and the remainder within a year. Because this totalled less than \$250,000 of the \$1,600,000 cost of the first complex, a one million dollar mortgage was obtained from the New York Title and Mortgage Company. The remaining funds were raised through a bond issue.

The Second Project (2846-2870 Bronx Park East)

In 1927 construction began on the second portion of the United Workers' Cooperative Colony, sited on the block immediately to the north of the original complex.³³ This project consists of two, five-story, U-shaped buildings, each with a large central landscaped courtyard looking out onto Bronx Park. These buildings cover even less land than the earlier complex, only forty-six percent of the site; the remainder of the site

contains the courtyards, a wide landscaped passage between the structures, and light courts on the street elevations. The design of the new buildings was commissioned from Herman Jessor.

Herman Jessor (c.1895-1990) was born in Russia and came to the United States as a youth. Like Springsteen and Goldhammer, for whom he worked in the 1920s, Jessor attended Cooper Union. Jessor not only worked for the United Workers' Association, but according to his obituary in the *New York Times*, was also hired by the Amalgamated Cooperative Houses in 1927.³⁴ He continued to design non-profit cooperatives after World War II and was responsible for such monumental cooperative projects as the ILGWU's Penn Station South buildings on West 23rd Street in Manhattan; Co-op City in the Bronx; and Starrett City in Brooklyn. In total, he is said to have "helped build more than 40,000 units of cooperative housing in New York City."³⁵

The second complex differs from the first in both layout and style. Unlike the first buildings which were designed with a street wall along Bronx Park East that is pierced only by a modest entrance leading to the inner courtyard, the later buildings open onto Bronx Park East so that the gardens appear to be a continuation of the parkland. The private courtyard is separated from the street by a raised podium accessible from Bronx Park East by stairs. This maintains the privacy of the complex from the outside, but from within the court, accentuates the visual connection to the parkland by making the sidewalk and street unobtrusive. In order to continue the east-west axis introduced in the earlier buildings, the solid Barker Avenue street wall is pierced by arched tunnels.

Unlike the traditional neo-Tudor style of the original buildings, the second complex was designed in an avant-garde Expressionist mode reminiscent of the progressive housing complexes that had recently been erected in Northern Europe, especially in Amsterdam.³⁶ Of special interest on the Bronx buildings is the use of brick to create texture and pattern, a hallmark of the Amsterdam School. Corbelled and faceted brick forms and soldier courses accentuate elements of the design, such as entrances, piers, and parapets at the roofline. It is probable that members of the United Workers' Association became aware of the progressive housing complexes erected by and for

politically-active workers in Europe during the 1910s and 1920s and consciously chose the style as a reflection of their own similar progressive ideals; this complex appears to be the earliest appearance of expressionist design motifs in New York.³⁷

As in the earlier complex, light, air, and privacy were of utmost importance in the planning of the second project. All of the rooms in the 356 apartments overlook the courtyards, the street, or the landscaped passageway between the buildings; ground-floor apartments are raised above street level; and multiple entrances are provided.

The construction of these buildings was financed through a mortgage and a second bond issue. Financial problems had begun to occur as early as 1927 since the association's funds could not adequately cover the purchase of the highest quality goods and, ironically, the high cost of doing business only with union contractors. Following a foreclosure action in 1928, ownership, but not management, was transferred to the mortgage company.³⁸ In 1933, the mortgage company went bankrupt; the new mortgage holder allowed what was then known as the Workers Colony Corporation to continue management until 1943. In that year, the project was sold to a private landlord and a tenant association was formed to work with the new management.

The Cooperative Community³⁹

More than just a place to live, the United Workers Cooperative Colony was a community of like-minded people who organized a complex social network with a variety of activities that furthered the members' ideological aims. Spaces within the buildings, generally at the basement level, were set aside to accommodate the various social, educational, and cultural programs undertaken by the cooperators. Since the buildings are raised above ground level (to provide privacy to first floor apartments), these rooms have high ceilings and receive natural light.

Many of the activities were geared toward the children in the complex, with particular emphasis placed on training them as the future leaders of the masses. A 1934 issue of the cooperative's monthly *Bulletin* noted that one of its goals was "the education of our children in the Leninist spirit . . . the bringing up of our children to be healthy, strong proletarian fighters."⁴⁰ In the *Schules*

children learned about progressive politics and about secular Jewish culture. *Schule No. 1* was organized for children between the ages of six and twelve, while older children could attend the *Mittel Schule*. At these schools pupils were taught to read and write Yiddish (most children already spoke Yiddish), the language of the Jewish people, as opposed to Hebrew which was considered to be a language of the elite. In the 1930s *Schule No. 1*, with over 250 students, was thought to be the largest secular Jewish school in the United States. Preschool age children were enrolled in a kindergarten and day nursery, open from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. so that working parents could leave their children in a safe environment. The nursery teachers were bilingual, since in many families Yiddish was the first language.

The needs of the colony's children were also accommodated in a youth center with a director hired by the cultural committee of the Colony. The director organized discussions and special events, such as Negro History Week, and coordinated various clubs (photography, science, writing, weight lifting, baseball and other sports, fife and drum, etc.), each with its own basement room. Even in these clubs politics was not forgotten; Ernie Rymer, who grew up in the complex, recounted:

the "Roy Wrights" club, for example, was named after one of the Scottsboro Boys; the "Ella May Wiggins" girls took their name from a murdered leader of textile strikers in Gastonia, North Carolina; the Science Club's formal title was "The J.B.S. Haldane Scientific Society," honoring the British Biologist. Even the fife and drum corps claimed an illustrious name -- The Haywood Maroons -- after "Big Bill" Haywood, a long-time leader of the Western miners.⁴¹

The cooperative also offered an extensive programs for adults, with at least one activity almost every evening. These included discussion groups, lectures, dance groups, theater groups, a chorus, a music school, a balalaika and mandolin orchestra, and the Russian Club (for the study of

Russian politics). Many activities took place in the colony's assembly hall or its gymnasium. The cooperative also had an extensive library with books in English, Yiddish, and Russian for children and adults; it ran a health clinic with a doctor and a dentist; and organized a group of cooperative stores on Allerton Avenue.⁴²

Description

The First Project (2700-2774 Bronx Park East)

The first project at the United Workers' Cooperative Colony, erected on the block bounded by Bronx Park East on the west, Barker Avenue on the east, Allerton Avenue on the south, and Britton Street on the north, consists of four five-story and raised basement apartment houses designed in the neo-Tudor style. The walk-up buildings are arranged in two groups, each with a modified C-shaped footprint; their open sides face each other to create a large landscaped courtyard. Light courts punctuate the street fronts; two courts are cut into the long facades on Allerton Avenue and Britton Street and a single court is found on the east and west facade of each building. On Bronx Park East and Barker Avenue, the buildings are separated by forty-five-foot-wide openings that lead to the multiple building entrances located within the courtyard. On Bronx Park East the courtyard is separated from the street by a low stair flanked by stuccoed walls; on Barker Avenue, the courtyard entrance is at street level and is flanked by stuccoed walls.

The buildings are faced almost entirely in burned brick (dark bricks that were given a burned appearance in firing) laid in Flemish bond. On the street facades, the basement level is stuccoed and the upper walls are enlivened with Tudor-inspired stucco and wooden half-timber elements. All of the street facades are similar in their fenestration and detail. Each is anchored by low corner towers with corbelled brickwork and open parapets. The light court openings are flanked, at the fourth and fifth stories, by pseudo-half-timbered gables, each of which incorporates two window bays (on Britton Street, only one side of each court has a gable); the slopes of the gables have slate siding. An ornamental chimney rises from the side of each gable. Additional half-timbering is found on the fifth story between the gables; these timbered

bands are capped by parapets clad in vari-colored slate. Within the light courts are modest towers and ornamental brick parapets. Some of the courts are ornamented with fields of stucco that rise from the second story to the fifth story. All of the windows originally had multipane double-hung wood sash (two-over-two, six-over-six, or eight-over-eight, depending on the size of the window). As part of a rehabilitation project begun in 1986 the windows were replaced by aluminum sash with applied exterior muntin grids that reflect the configuration of the original sash. In the western light court facing Allerton Avenue is an entrance door that now leads into the building's management office; this apparently was the location of the original health clinic. Fire escapes are attached to the facades at various locations.

The courtyard facades are also faced with brick, but they are ornamented with fields of stucco and lack the half-timbered gables of the street facades. These stuccoed areas, with irregular brick borders, are generally two bays wide and rise the full height of the building. The roofline of the courtyard elevations is enlivened by corbelled parapets and chimneys. At their entrance passages, the courtyards are relatively narrow (forty-five feet wide), but the width of the court expands in the center, where it encompasses about half the width of the block. The paths in the courtyard are aligned around lawns and flower beds, with a large built-up bed in the center; there are two stone constructions in the court that were originally part of fountains.

Arrayed around the courtyard are the building entrances, which occur individually and in pairs and take various forms. For example, near the Bronx Park entry are shallow projecting rubblestone entries articulated by round-arched doorways flanked with small round-arched windows, all capped by gabled hoods with slate roofing; further within the courtyard are paired round-arched entrances, each with a gabled hood. The majority of the entrances are set within Tudor-arched limestone enframements, each capped by a drip lintel; these entries have either a single door or are wider and have paired doors (the original wooden doors have been replaced by steel doors that maintain the original configuration). The spandrels of some of these arched entries are unornamented, while others are carved with symbols reflecting the political or cultural ideals of the residents: entrance H has a

curtain and comedy and tragedy masks (theater and culture); entrance J has a hammer, sickle, and compass (communism); entrance L has figs and palm leaves (Jewish culture); entrance WXY has smoking factories (the working class); and entrance Z has books, a globe, and a compass (learning).

The Second Project (2846-2870 Bronx Park East)

The second group of buildings erected as part of the United Workers' Cooperative Colony is located on the block bounded by Bronx Park East on the west, Barker Avenue on the east, Britton Street on the south, and Arnow Avenue on the north. It consists of two five-story and raised basement, U-shaped, walk-up buildings designed in an Expressionist style derived from Northern European sources. A wide landscaped passage, running between Bronx Park East and Barker Avenue, separates the two buildings. The outer facades, facing onto the streets and the passage, are articulated by a series of light courts -- three on each of the long east-west elevations and two on the east elevation of each building. The two buildings are similar in design and plan. Large landscaped courtyards open onto Bronx Park East. These courtyards are set above the street level and are entered from stairs flanked by buttressed, stepped brick walls. The courtyards can also be entered from Barker Avenue via short steps leading to segmentally-arched tunnels with complex brick surrounds.

The buildings are clad in brick laid in patterns that accentuate the texture of the material, using an unusual bond formed by two rows of headers and a single row of stretchers alternating with headers that are pulled forward. Many of the bricks (including most of the headers) are burned. Additional texture is provided by soldier courses, corbelled parapets, and panels of patterned brick. The buildings have eccentric silhouettes formed with stepped parapets, complex pediments, piers, and corbelled towers. Many of these roof forms have white terra-cotta coping, but others are capped by Spanish tile. Near the roofline are several small round openings covered with iron guards. Fire escapes are attached to the facades at various locations.

Single and paired windows are arranged in vertical and horizontal groups, many demarcated by brick patterns. The original multipane double-

hung wood sash was replaced by multipane aluminum sash in conjunction with the rehabilitation project in 1986. Within each of the courtyards are separate entrances, many with complex brick surrounds. Each of these originally contained single or paired wood doors with eccentrically-shaped windows. They have been replaced by steel doors; several copy the original design. Within each courtyard is a large central lawn, with smaller lawns adjacent to the buildings. Straight sidewalks lead from the courtyard entrances to the apartment doors.

Later History

Although the cooperative failed financially early in the Depression, and became a rental complex in 1943, the community continued to function in much the same manner as it had in its early years. However, dramatic changes occurred in the outside world that had a profound affect on the colony. These included the success of the garment unions in gaining better working conditions and advances in wage, health, retirement, and other benefits, thus dampening some of the activist fervor of the members. The American entry into World War II and the colony's support of United States government in the fight to defeat Hitler (a number of colony residents were killed in the war), as well as the residents' increasing disillusionment with Stalin also affected the political outlook of colony residents. During the immediate post-war era, when Senator Joseph McCarthy and others undertook Communist "witch hunts," all residents

of the colony became suspect. This apparently led some residents to move and others to become less vocal in their advocacy of progressive politics. The most profound changes, however, came about because the children of the colony's original residents did not become leaders of the masses as had been anticipated and did not, in general, settle in the colony's buildings. Education had always been encouraged in the colony, and most colony children went on to college and graduate school, entered the professions, and dispersed throughout the country; few became industrial workers. As the original residents moved out or died, as new apolitical residents moved in, and as times and issues changed, the political activism of the colony ebbed, although as late as the 1960s, the remaining residents were involved in the peace, civil rights, and other progressive political movements.

By the late 1970s almost all of the original residents were gone. The buildings were deteriorating, as a succession of landlords had neglected maintenance. In the mid-1980s, a new owner, Allerton Associates, purchased the complex and undertook an extensive rehabilitation project that included new systems, facade restoration, new windows, and other improvements to the physical character of the buildings.

Report prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart
Landmarks Consultant

Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli
Research Department Editor

NOTES

1. An earlier public hearing on the proposed designation of the United Workers' Cooperative Colony was held on January 11, 1983 (Item No. 6). At that hearing the owner requested that the property not be designated for at least a year while rehabilitation was underway. The architect of the second complex, Herman Jessor, also spoke at that hearing.
2. There are variants to the spelling of United Workers' Cooperative Colony. Many sources, including works written by members of the colony, drop the apostrophe after "workers". Sources from the 1920s often spell cooperative with a hyphen (i.e. co-operative). The major sources for the history of the United Workers' Cooperative Association and the United Workers' Cooperative Colony are Andrew S. Dolkart, "Homes for People; Non-Profit Cooperatives in New York City 1916-1929," *SITES* 21/22 (1989), 30-42; Dolkart, "United Workers Cooperatives," National Register nomination (1986); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 253-258; Richard Plunz, "Reading Bronx Housing, 1890-1940," in *Building a Borough: Architecture and Planning in the Bronx 1890-1940* (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1986), 30-76; Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 151-159; Anita Schwartz, "The Colony: The Study of the Process of Culture Change," unpublished Master's thesis (New York University, 1969); *The United Workers Cooperative Colony 50th Anniversary 1927-1977* (New York: Semi-Centennial

Coop Reunion, 1977).

3. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), xix. Howe notes that in 1870 the Jewish population of New York was about 60,000. By 1880 it was 80,000, and by 1910 had grown to 1,100,000. In Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 34, the authors note that the Jewish population in the United States rose from 250,000 in 1877 to over four million in 1927.
4. The most comprehensive history of the garment industry is Joel Seidman, *The Needle Trades* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942).
5. For information on conditions in Europe and the impact of radical politics on Jewish immigrants, see Schwartz, 22-27; Melesh Epstein, *The Jews and Communism 1919-1941* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, c.1941); Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The Political Behavior of American Jews* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1956); and Arthur Liebman, "The Ties That Bind: The Jewish Support for the Left in the United States," *American Jewish History Quarterly* 66 (Dec., 1976) 285-321.
6. In David Tucker, "What is the United Workers' Co-operative Association and What are its Aims?," *Cooperation* 9(July, 1923) 115-116, it states that "several years ago" a group of people who lived as boarders got together and rented a building to accommodate 50 or 60 people plus a cooperative kitchen, dining room, reception room, and library. Eventually three such houses appeared independently of one another. They united to form the United Workers' Cooperative Association. In a later issue of *Cooperation*, an article entitled "Co-operative Housing De Luxe," 12(Dec., 1926) 222-224, reports that the United Workers' first leased the building on Madison Avenue. In *A History of Housing*, 152, and "Reading Bronx Housing," 70-71, Plunz notes that the organization was founded in 1913 "when a group of Jewish workers leased a small tenement house on East 13th Street and initiated a housing cooperative."
7. "A Co-operative Camp," *Cooperation* 12 (Sept., 1926), 173.
8. *Yearbook of the Cooperative League* (1930), 325.
9. Bella Halebsky, quoted in *The United Workers Cooperative Colony*, 7.
10. The major sources for non-profit cooperative housing ventures are Florence E. Parker, "Beneficial Activities of American Trade-Unions," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, no. 465 (Sept., 1928), and Parker, "Cooperative Movement in the United States in 1925 (other than agriculture)," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, no. 437 (Mar., 1927), as well as books by housing reformers, including Louis H. Pink, *The New Day in Housing* (New York: John Day Co., 1928) and Edith Elmer Wood, *Recent Trends in American Housing* (New York: Macmillan, 1931).
11. The history of the cooperative in New York is discussed in Christopher Gray, "The 'Revolution' of 1881 Is Now in Its 2d Century," *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1984, XII, pp. 57-64 and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 156-158.
12. Gray, 57, and Mardges Bacon, *Ernest Flagg: Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1986), 11. Among the early cooperatives were the Gramercy (George DaCunha, 1883) at 34 Gramercy Park East and the Chelsea (now the Hotel Chelsea; Hubert, Pirsson & Co., 1883-85) at 222 West 23rd Street. The Gramercy is located within the Gramercy Park Historic District; the Chelsea is an individual New York City Landmark.
13. Examples include the Studio (Simonson & Sturgis, 1901-03) and related buildings on the north side of West 67th Street between Columbus Avenue and Central Park West; they are located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.
14. For Jackson Heights, see Daniel Karatzas, *Jackson Heights: A Garden in the City* (1990) and Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 479-485. For Hudson View Gardens, see Dolkart, "Hudson View Gardens: A Home in the City," *SITES* 20(1988) 34-44; Hayden, 260-261; and Stern, et. al., 436-437.

15. Jews, who were to become the most active group in the non-profit cooperative movement, were excluded from most profit-making cooperatives built in the 1920s.
16. The major source for information on the cooperative movement are the publications of the Cooperative League of the United States of America founded in 1916, especially those of its president Dr. James P. Warbasse and his wife Agnes D. Warbasse. These include the League's *Yearbook* and articles in the monthly magazine *Cooperation*.
17. Wood, 193.
18. Agnes D. Warbasse, *The ABC of Co-Operative Housing* (New York: The Co-Operative League, 1924), 1. The Cooperative League outlined the principles of cooperative housing in "Cooperative Housing Principles," *Cooperation* 16 (Jan., 1930), 3.
19. Katri Ekman, "The Co-operative Movement in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and The Bronx," in *A History of Finnish American Organizations in Greater New York 1891-1976* (New York: Finnish Bicentennial Planning Committee, Inc., 1976), 59-68; Dolkart, "Sunset Park Historic District" National Register nomination (1988), 8-9 - 8-10.
20. Esa Arra, "Finnish Aid Society Imatra (Kansallisseura Imatra), Brooklyn, New York," translated by Unto Jalovaara, in Ekman, 119.
21. For a list of cooperatives (primarily Finnish cooperatives) in Brooklyn, see "Co-operative Home Builders in New York," *Cooperation* 12 (Dec., 1926) 24.
22. Most of these projects are discussed in Plunz, "Reading Bronx Housing," Plunz, *A History of Housing*, 151-159, and Wood, 171-184; for Amalgamated Houses, see Amalgamated Housing Corporation, *30 Years of Amalgamated Cooperative Housing, 1927-1957* (New York: Amalgamated Housing Corporation, 1958); "Amalgamated Cooperative Apartments," *Cooperation* 14 (Feb., 1928), 22-25; "Amalgamated Dwellings," *Cooperation* 17 (Feb., 1931), 22; "Amalgamated Expands its Housing Development," *Cooperation* 15 (Mar., 1929), 49; "Bronx Model Apartments to be dedicated," *New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1927, XI and XII, 1; "Clothing Workers' Model Apartments Finished," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 120 (Dec. 31, 1927), 8; "Cooperative Housing on the March," *Cooperation* 18 (Mar., 1932), 41-42. The original Amalgamated building has been demolished, but other buildings, erected between 1927 and 1971 on Van Cortlandt Park South are still extant. They are still run as a cooperative society but the union is longer involved. For Thomas Garden Apartments, see "Cooperative Houses for Garment Workers," *New York Times*, July 26, 1925, XI, 2; "Thomas Garden Apartments, New York City," *Architecture and Building* 59 (Apr., 1927), 111-112, 123-125; "Thomas Garden Apartments," prospectus, collection Avery Library, Columbia University, New York; Thomas Garden Apartments public relations release, collection Avery Library. For the Jewish National Workers Cooperative Homes (Farband Houses), see "The Farband Housing Corporation," *Cooperation* 17 (June, 1931), cover; "More Cooperative Housing in New York," *Cooperation* 14 (Dec., 1928), 230-231.
23. Officially, the first complex consists of four buildings; the buildings were erected under New Building permits 828-1926, 829-1926, 830-1926, and 831-1926. The four buildings are located on Block 4506, lots 1, 7, 20, and 27.
24. During the period work was undertaken on the United Workers' complex, Springsteen & Goldhammer had offices at 32 Union Square East; see James Ward, *Architects in Practice New York City 1900-1940* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989), 29, 73. For information on Springsteen & Goldhammer, see Brian Danforth and Victor Caliandro, *Perception of Housing and Community: Bronx Architecture of the 1920's* (New York: Hunter College, 1977), n.p.; and "George W. Springsteen, Architect, 75, Dies," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1954, p. 25. The partners established independent offices in 1934.
25. *50th Anniversary*, 21.
26. At a public hearing held by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on January 11, 1983, Jessor spoke in favor of designation and stated that he was the architect of the buildings. Jessor died in 1990; see his obituary, cited in Note 34.
27. Plunz, *A History of Housing*, 52.

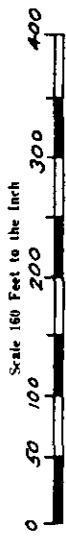
28. *50th Anniversary*, p. 21.
29. Plunz, *A History of Housing*, 52.
30. For contemporary views of the neo-Tudor style, see Allen W. Jackson, *Building the Half-Timber House: Its Origin, Design, Modern Plan and Construction* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1929), and Julius Gregory, "On the Charm and Character of the English Cottage," *Architectural Forum* 44 (Mar., 1926), 147-152.
31. "Co-operative Housing De Luxe," *Cooperation* 12 (Dec., 1926), 222.
32. Information on financing based on "Nonprofit Housing Projects in the United States," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, no. 896 (1947), 28-31.
33. The second complex is officially two buildings, erected under New Building permits 898-1927 and 899-1927.
34. "Herman Jessor, 95, New York Architect for Co-op Buildings," *New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1990, D21. The architect of record for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' cooperatives erected in 1927-31 is Springsteen & Goldhammer; if Jessor was involved with the design of these buildings he must have been working in the Springsteen & Goldhammer office.
35. Ibid.
36. For housing in Amsterdam, see Wim de Wit, editor, *The Amsterdam School: Dutch Expressionist Architecture, 1915-1930* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum and Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).
37. Springsteen & Goldhammer designed the Amalgamated Dwellings on Grand Street in Manhattan, a second major cooperative in the Expressionist mode, erected in 1930.
38. The foreclosure occurred after the second project was begun. The cooperative was bailed out by donations from its members and sympathetic groups throughout the country, however, it had to agree to cancel a planned third project and sell its remaining land holdings.
39. The major sources for the cooperative's activities are Schwartz; Parker, *Beneficial Activities...*, 130-132; and *50th Anniversary*.
40. Schwartz, 52.
41. *50th Anniversary*, 37-38.
42. The stores included a produce market, a grocery store, a tailor, a laundry, a butcher, a fish shop, and a cafeteria. They were not successful since non-union stores which soon appeared in the neighborhood were able to undersell the cooperative. For more information on the stores, see "Cooperative Stores Run By Cooperative Housing Societies," *Cooperation* 14 (June, 1928), 101-102.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

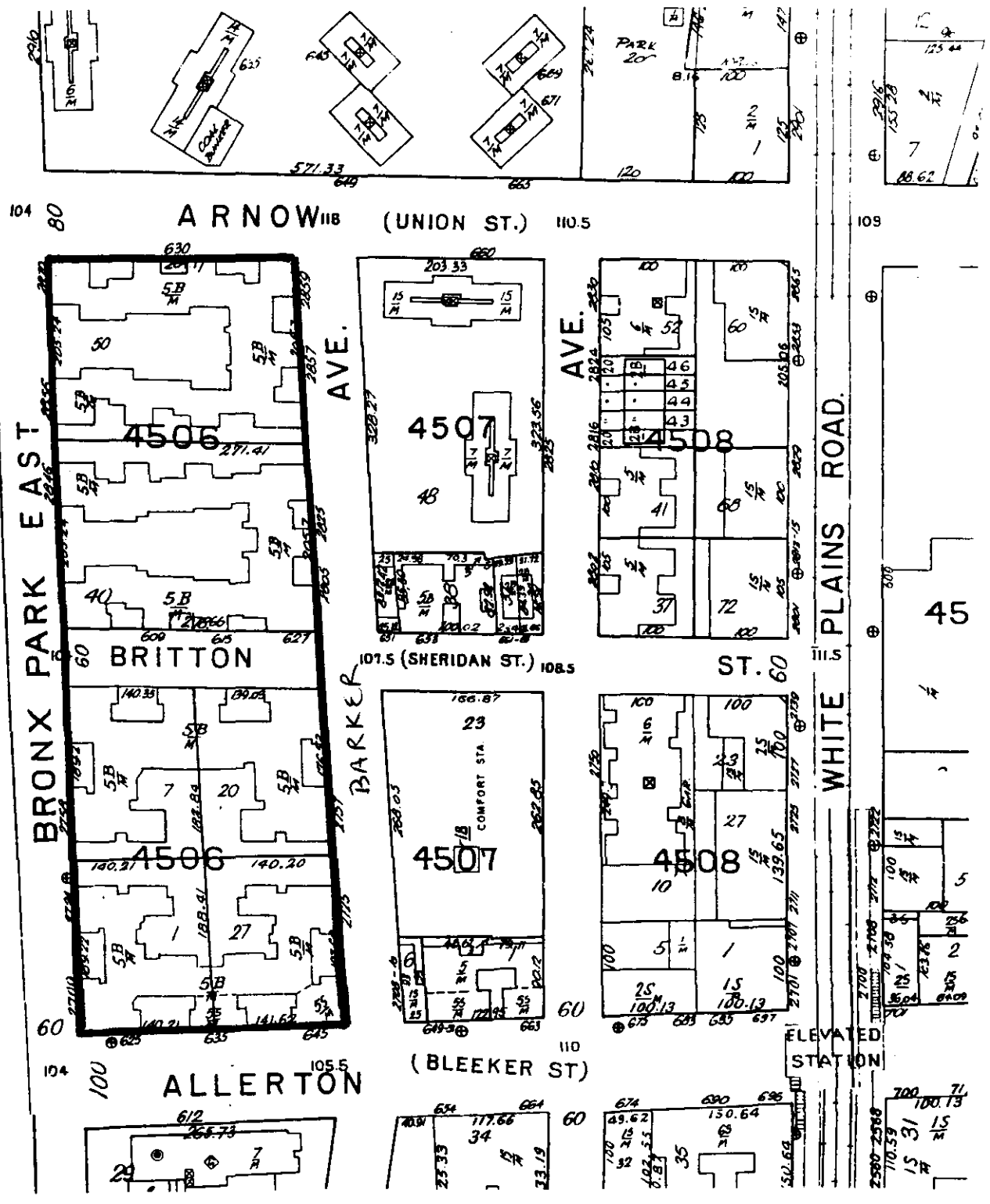
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of these buildings, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the United Workers' Cooperative Colony ("The Coops") has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the United Workers' Cooperative Colony (often referred to as "The Coops") in the Bronx is not only distinguished for its architectural merit, but is also historically significant as one of the most important of the non-profit cooperative housing complexes built in New York City during the 1920s; that the two-square-block colony, erected in two construction campaigns (1926-27 and 1927-29), was built by the United Workers' Association, a group which was at the forefront of the cooperative housing movement; that the association was composed primarily of secular Jewish needle-trade workers with communist political leanings who sought to improve living conditions for its members and to create a vibrant community of like-minded individuals; that the buildings erected at the Colony were designed to meet high standards, with layouts, open space, and amenities rivaling those of contemporary middle-class housing; that the Colony encouraged cooperative activity in all aspects of life and was therefore equipped with classrooms, a library, a gymnasium, and other facilities for social interaction; that the first complex, built in 1926-27, exemplifies traditional neo-Tudor design accented with unusual ornamentation reflective of the Colony's political and social ideals; that the second complex, built in 1927-29, was constructed in an avant-garde architectural mode inspired by Northern European Expressionist architecture; that the first complex of apartments is an excellent example of the work of Springsteen & Goldhammer, an important firm involved with the design of progressive housing projects in the Bronx; that the second complex is a significant work by Herman Jessor, an architect who was to become the most prolific designer of non-profit cooperative buildings in New York City; and that the Colony's complexes, together housing over 700 families, represent the efforts of an idealistic group of primarily young Eastern European Jewish immigrants to provide affordable housing that would be an alternative to the tenements of the Lower East Side.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the United Workers' Cooperative Colony ("The Coops"), 2700-2774 and 2846-2870 Bronx Park East, The Bronx, and designates Tax Map Block 4506, Lots 1, 7, 20, 27, 40, and 50, as its Landmark Site.



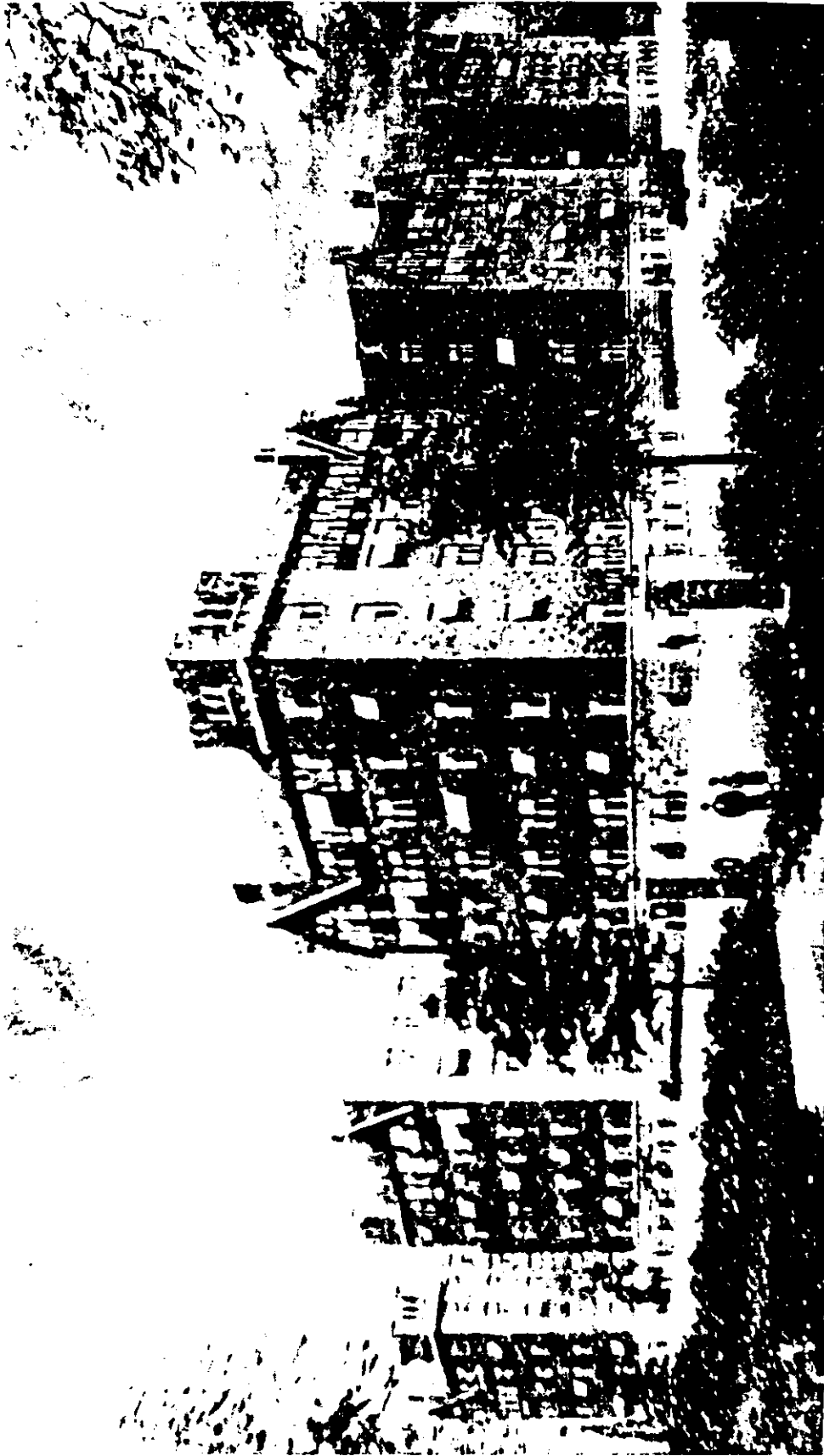
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United Workers' Cooperative Colony
 2700-2774 and 2846-2870 Bronx Park East, The Bronx

Landmark Site: Bronx Tax Map Block 4506, Lots 1, 7, 20, 27, 40, and 50

Graphic Source: *Bronx Land Book* (New York: Real Estate Data, Inc., 1983), vol. 4, plate 105.



United Workers' Cooperative Colony
Historic view

Source: *Cooperation* vol. 12 (Dec., 1926).



United Workers' Cooperative Colony
First Project, 1926-27
Allerton Avenue frontage

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart



United Workers' Cooperative Colony
First Project, 1926-27
Courtyard

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart



Detail,
entrance JK



Detail,
entrance WXY

United Workers' Cooperative Colony
First Project, 1926-27

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart



United Workers' Cooperative Colony
Second Project, 1927-29
Courtyard, from Bronx Park East

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart



United Workers' Cooperative Colony
Second Project, 1927-29
Courtyard entrance, from Barker Avenue

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart



Detail,
entrances



Detail,
entrance

United Workers' Cooperative Colony
Second Project, 1927-29

Photo credit: Andrew S. Dolkart