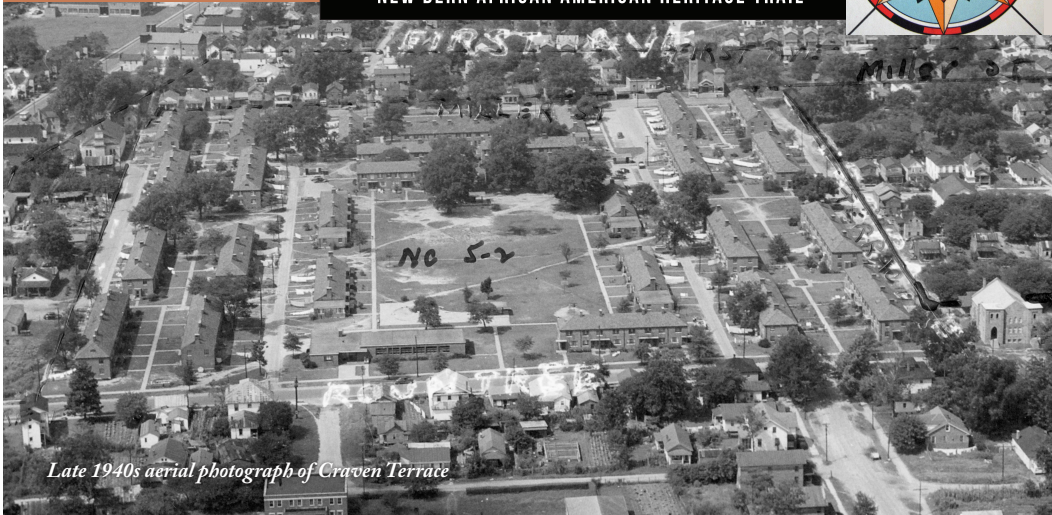
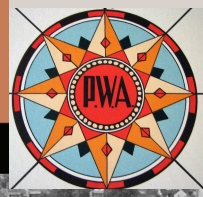


Public Housing for America

NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL



Late 1940s aerial photograph of Craven Terrace

In the midst of the 1930s Great Depression, the Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal program, was authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help reduce unemployment, stimulate the economy, and prevent civil unrest. An important part of the PWA provided funding to local communities for “low-cost housing and slum clearance.”

The federal housing projects that emerged had to follow what was known as the PWA’s “neighborhood composition rule.” The statute required that each new development follow the existing racial makeup of the surrounding community. Dwellings in White areas could house only White tenants. The same was true in African American neighborhoods. The rule reinforced the existing racial composition of communities across the country and was evidence that neither the Roosevelt administration nor Congress was willing to challenge Jim Crow or segregation laws, especially in the South.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt

“In the Public Interest”

In 1939, the New Bern Housing Authority (NBHA) was created to address the city’s “lack of safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations,” and take advantage of the PWA’s public housing program. Kinston, North Carolina, architect A. Mitchell Wooten was hired to design two apartment complexes: Trent Court (White) and Craven Terrace (Black). The NBHA petitioned for and received a “certificate of public convenience and necessity” from the North Carolina Utilities Commission allowing the city to exercise the right of eminent domain to acquire property in both the Long Wharf and Reizensteinville areas of town for the construction of the complexes.



Homes deemed “unsafe or unsanitary” by the New Bern Housing Authority

Images: Library of Congress, National Archives, State Archives of North Carolina

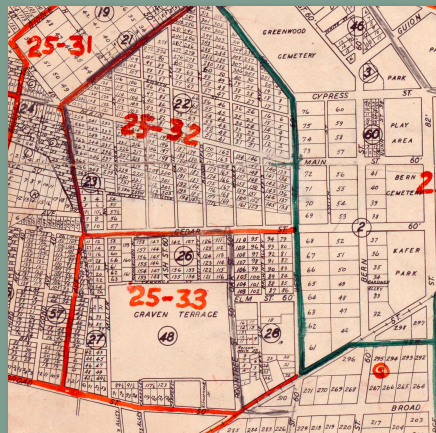
Craven Terrace and Trent Court

On February 21, 1940, the NBHA applied to the United States Housing Authority (USHA) for \$1,500,000 in federal funding to clear what they deemed dilapidated structures and construct new public housing at the Craven Terrace and Trent Court sites. Property owners in the surrounding area opposed the project for fear that it would cause real estate values to decline. Others argued that government housing would depress tax revenues for the city. Despite such objections, 160 structures at Craven Terrace that were deemed “unsafe or unsanitary” by the housing authority were demolished.

The NBHA appointed an African American “housing advisory committee” in September 1940. Given few powers, the group was asked to make recommendations on landscaping and recreational facilities for the new development. One of the outcomes was the construction of a playground at Craven Terrace. The demolition of substandard housing in the Reizensteinville area displaced large numbers of Black families. To avoid a “refugee problem,” the advisory committee pushed the housing authority to relocate families to Craven Terrace while the complex was still under construction.



Construction at Trent Court, 1940



1950 census map of the Craven Terrace and Dryborough areas. The map shows the extent of the housing development in the community.