

INTRODUCTION

This book is a study of the design of American company towns. Spanning the 150-year evolution of the company town as a distinctive urban form, it focuses on the transformation of company town planning from a vernacular building activity to a professional design task, undertaken by architects, landscape architects, and city planners. This culminated in the years 1913–25, when the “new” company town flourished. This book is the first history of the “new” company town, but in order to explain fully the shift between these two essentially different eras, it is necessary to retell the earlier history of the company town, reframed within a comprehensive and critical framework. The result is a new interpretation of the American company town. Although focusing specifically on the physical form of the company towns, this book breaks new ground by locating design within the constraints set by social and economic determinants. This portrays the built environment of the company town not as a static physical object, but as the product of a dynamic process, shaped by industrial transformation, class struggle, and reformers’ efforts to control and direct these forces.

First, any history of the company town must answer a basic question: What is a company town? The *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*’ definition serves the purposes of this book: “a community inhabited chiefly by the employees of a single company or group of companies which also owns a substantial part of the real estate and houses.”¹ This excludes other common uses of the term to describe locales with a dominant “industry,” such as Detroit or Washington DC, or a dominant business enterprise. It also eliminates other types of industrial communities that are often confused with company towns – industrial towns like Homestead, Pennsylvania, that depended on a single employer, but were developed by private interests;² experimental and communitarian settlements, such as New Harmony, Indiana, Amana, Iowa, and Oneida, New York, that were economically based on industry or agriculture, but were communally owned; and housing projects or suburbs intended for industrial workers but developed separately from industrial facilities.

Historically, company towns, dependent on the nature and viability of the industry that supported them, have appeared in many different forms, locations, and situations. They constituted an early form of urbanization: in 1645, the Braintree Iron Works established the first company town in America. After this, settlements based on mining, timber-cutting and sawmilling, iron manufacturing, and rope and gun production spread across the land. The introduction of mechanized production at the beginning of the nineteenth century spawned even more towns, following industrial frontiers from the textile mills of New England to the coalmines of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia, south to Alabama's coalfields and iron mines, west to the copper mines of upper Michigan, the silver and copper mines of the Far West, and, finally, to the cotton mills of the South. By the beginning of the twentieth century, suburban company towns were proliferating on the boundaries of large manufacturing cities and, during World War I, the Federal Government built its own industrial suburbs near shipyards and munitions plants. In 1930 the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that more than two million people were living in company towns. But shortly after, the effects of the Depression and changes in labor laws, decreased their number, and the company town gradually disappeared from the American landscape.³

Underlying the enormous diversity of the American company town is a basic division that is of fundamental importance in interpreting its physical form. On one side is the industrial landscape, shaped by the processes that engendered it; and on the other, the model town, a concrete demonstration of a social or physical ideology.⁴ The industrial landscape represents the direct translation of the technical and social necessities of a particular method of industrial production into a settlement form. Based on expediency, the industrial landscape, like most vernacular forms, depended on precedent. As the pragmatic sponsors of new company towns endlessly reproduced successful buildings and plans, so they produced multiple versions of the same settlement or housing types. This process, highly responsive to the demands of industrial processes or regional circumstances, produced generalized company town typologies. In contrast, model towns, usually the product of a single individual's ideology of religion, labor, or design, tended to be specific and unique. Attempts to mitigate the effects of economic logic by imposing social and physical planning, these towns emphasized conceptual order and symbolic form over the demands of industry. Intent on introducing social or physical innovation, their sponsors often ignored local conditions and followed the dictates of larger philosophical, social, or religious movements.

Alexander Hamilton proposed the first model town in 1792, but over the next century economic landscapes were the dominant form of company town. To relieve the harshness of industrial necessity, a minority of company town owners improved living and working conditions. They accompanied their reforms with a "discourse of benevolence," initially grounded in notions of Christian stewardship but increasingly justified by economic

rationality. Built in 1883, the town of Pullman, Illinois, George Pullman's answer to the widening rift between capital and labor, represented a new model. A watershed between older styles of paternalism and the professionalized welfare methods of the twentieth century, Pullman influenced a new generation of "model" company towns, based on Progressive concepts of management and labor relations administered by trained professionals. In order to deter unionization and reduce labor turnover, the "new" company town attempted to attract workers by providing significantly better working and living conditions.⁵

By 1910, architects, planners, and landscape architects had taken over the design of the "new" company town. Unlike vernacular expression, professional design explicitly effaced the visual connection between the living environment and its industrial origins. Overlays of social and physical planning rendered the company town's industrial origins almost unrecognizable. This study examines this significant but little known chapter of company town history. Part I describes the gradual transformation of the industrial landscape into the "new" company town. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the evolution of the company town in an era of rapidly increasing industrial productivity, beginning in 1790 when Samuel Slater started spinning yarn with machines propelled by waterpower and culminating just over a century later, when the Pullman strike dramatized the conflicts of a fully capitalist economy and society. Chapter 1 examines the growth and decline of the New England textile industry and Chapter 2 covers the boom period following the Civil War, fueled by the iron and steel industries. The Pullman strike, the product of a period of increasing labor struggles, led industrialists and reformers to rethink the premises of the company town. Their proposals are discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Beginning with the Progressive era, a succession of different groups undertook the reform of the company town – urban and political reformers, the industrial betterment movement, proponents of Frederick Taylor's scientific management theories, tenement reformers, and finally, architects, landscape designers, and urban planners.

Part II consists of detailed studies of four designers of "new" company towns: Grosvenor Atterbury, Bertram Goodhue, John Nolen, and Earle S. Draper. Representing all three design professions – architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning – they built company towns across America. Building on the Norton Company's extensive welfare program, Atterbury "Americanized" the English garden city as an industrial garden suburb: Indian Hill, Massachusetts, one in a series of idealized New England company towns. Goodhue applied a similar approach to his design for Tyrone, New Mexico, introducing Mexican imagery in keeping with the region and the climate. Tyrone brought urban sophistication to the mining frontier, previously known for its primitive living conditions. Nolen, a city planner, standardized their approaches, creating a generalized method for planning

company towns, that he adapted in numerous plans for towns as diverse as Kistler, Pennsylvania, Kingsport, Tennessee, and Union Park Gardens, Wilmington, Delaware. Earle S. Draper, a former employee of Nolen's, settled in the South and specialized in planning textile mill towns. In towns like Chicopee, Georgia, Draper redesigned the mill town as a rural landscape. Employing a range of social and physical strategies, each of these designers drew very different conclusions from their experiences in company towns.

REREADING THE COMPANY TOWN

Despite the extent and importance of company towns, a general history of American company towns has yet to appear. The subject has attracted the interest of a broad range of disciplines, including economics, geography, political science, sociology, labor and social history, as well as the histories of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning. In the absence of general works, there are a number of notable small-scale studies, interdisciplinary works focusing on single industrial communities. These range from studies of New England textile towns to mid-Atlantic iron plantations to Southern mill villages. Their community focus allows an in-depth examination of the multiple dimensions of a company town, emphasizing the interactions between a particular industry, a specific firm, a regional setting, and a group of workers.⁶

These works, however, deal primarily with nineteenth-century towns. By the end of the century an increasingly concentrated economy, specialized industrial structure, and complex corporate organization made it more difficult for historians to present such a coherent picture. Industrial communities began to respond to national rather than to regional economies, corporate decisions affecting towns were based on industry-wide strategies, and professionals applied standardized management and industrial relations policies. Labor began to organize on a national scale and architects' and planners' designs complicated the direct expression of the industrial needs that had characterized vernacular settlements. In response, historical approaches became more specialized, focusing on specific aspects of the company town. Some works dealt only with planning or architecture, while others portrayed company towns as episodes in the larger history of labor, industrial relations, or firms. A particularly wide gap exists between those who look at the company town as a physical environment and those who address its economic, labor, and social aspects.⁷

The aim of this study is to bridge this gap and serve as a corrective to overspecialized studies of company town design. In general, discussions of the physical form of company towns have fallen into four categories, focusing on formal, professional, economic, or

INTRODUCTION

social control issues. The first treats the company town as a chapter in the formal evolution of American urban or suburban planning, or as an episode in the career of notable architects and planners.⁸ This emphasizes the continuity of design traditions, presented in exclusively aesthetic terms, while ignoring the specific design issues presented by the social and economic conditions of the company town. A second, overlapping category depicts the history of company town design as a demonstration of professional achievement.⁹ Histories of landscape architecture and planning treat company town commissions as significant contributions to the development of the professions. Many biographers also present company town commissions as landmarks in individual careers.

The last two categories, responding to the narrow focus of previous scholarship, take more critical positions. Marxist historians make a direct link between the evolution of company town design and broad transformations in the American economy, while others portray the company town as a mechanism to control the unruly masses, and the designer as a physical agent of social control.¹⁰ In spite of their opposing points of view, both approaches suffer from overgeneralization. On the one hand, writers who ignore the social and economic forces portray designers as all-powerful creators, while on the other, writers who do take these issues into consideration depict the designers as powerless, pawns in the hands of capitalist development or individual capitalists. Both schools tend to view the company town as a one-dimensional phenomenon, rarely differentiating between different types of company town or the widely varying regional, industrial, social, and labor contexts in which they developed.

In order to situate the physical form of the company town in a more complete and flexible explanatory framework, I discuss company town design as part of several larger contexts, one element in a complex configuration where economic development, industrial restructuring, geographical shifts, immigration, ethnic divisions, and labor struggles are as significant as reform, aesthetics, and professional advancement. By including both a broad survey and detailed case studies, I hope to address two scales of explanation, presenting the big picture without neglecting the significance of individual company towns. At both scales, I introduce three historical discussions that illuminate the actions and motivations of the three main groups who shaped the "new" company town: capitalists, workers, and reformers, including designers. These focus on industrial restructuring, labor history, and the critical history of progressive reform.

One difficulty scholars of company towns face is accounting for the process that creates, alters, and destroys company towns: the dynamic of capitalist development.¹¹ To emphasize the importance of change as an inherent aspect of the company town, I have drawn on studies of industrial restructuring, a body of economic literature that attempts to explain large-scale changes in industrial organization, involving the introduction of new

technologies, changes in the labor process, and new patterns of geographic location during a particular period. To ensure the continued expansion of industrial growth, which was threatened by recurring economic and political crises, industrial firms and sectors went through periods of extensive restructuring. In each period, the particular form industrial restructuring took was shaped not only by the demands of capital for the reorganization of production, but also by the history of class relations and ongoing changes in social organization.¹²

This study attempts to locate the development of new and different types of company town within this broad dynamic of capitalist development. Michel Aglietta has divided the history of American capitalism into three discrete periods. The first, from 1800 to 1873, was marked by the gradual penetration of the United States by the capitalist organization of production, the second, lasting until World War I, introduced an extensive regime of accumulation based on competitive capitalism, and the third, lasting until the mid-1960s, was an intensive regime known as Fordism, characterized by mass production and mass consumption, regulated by the state. In Aglietta's periodization, shifts from one regime to the next occurred through transitional phases of restructuring.¹³ These phases correspond to the appearance of significant new models for company towns: the first, around 1825, coincides with the appearance of Lowell, Massachusetts, the second, with the founding of Pullman in 1883, and the third, in 1914, with the appearance of the "new" company town. This suggests that employers utilized the company town as a regulatory mechanism, a physical setting that aided in accommodating specific groups of workers to new forms of industrial production.

Restructuring took place in space as well as in time. Geographer David Harvey has pointed out the importance of the "spatial fix" for successful industrial restructuring.¹⁴ Changing location or reorganizing space creates new spatial settings that renew possibilities for industrial growth and expansion. The specific characteristics and histories of these different settings made their own demands on industrial development. As it expanded into new regions, each industrial sector continually generated new settlement typologies. Their changing forms and locations reflected both the temporal instability and the "inconstant geography" of capitalism.¹⁵ Company towns were often outposts introducing industrial capitalism into previously unexploited territory and, later, nostalgic ruins of the same industry, abandoned in a continuing cycle of creation and destruction. Over the course of more than a century, a series of shifts in industry and geography generated a succession of company town types: the mill village, the corporate city, the lumber camp, the mining town, the industrial suburb, and the satellite city.

Aglietta's concept of industrial restructuring, which stresses the importance of social organization and class relations in structuring industrial production, suggests that workers

played active roles in shaping company towns. However, most studies of early company towns overemphasize the role of technology as the overriding factor in the organization of the town, while scholars of later towns exaggerate the power of the employer, depicting his relationship to his employees, whether benevolent or overbearing, as almost completely unilateral. Adding labor history to the history of the company town points out the inaccuracy of these interpretations. Although company towns created a "diffuse" relationship between employers and workers, blurring the boundaries between working and living spheres, and making employees more than usually vulnerable to their employers' control, workers rarely were passive.¹⁶ In company towns across the country, they actively participated in struggles to define their living and working conditions. Company towns became important sites of labor strife, dramatizing the continuing conflicts between capital and labor, ethnicity and Americanization, and discipline and democracy that marked industrializing America.¹⁷

Paradoxically, however, the "new" company town was widely publicized as a solution to labor unrest. Although acutely aware of the Pullman strike and other labor upheavals in company towns, many employers also saw company towns as a way of avoiding labor problems. The record of labor organizing, unionization, and strikes during this period reveals labor activity as the specific incentive to many "new" company town commissions. After 1900, there is a startling correlation between strikes and other labor struggles and the subsequent appearance of new company towns. Trying to forestall strikes, prevent unionization, and improve labor relations, employers hoped that "new" company towns would serve as *tabulae rasa* on which they could renegotiate their relationship with their employees. These negotiations usually included significant concessions to workers' interests, such as better living conditions, home ownership, parks, and recreational facilities.

Problematizing the discourse of reform adds another necessary critical dimension to the story of the "new" company town. After 1900, social reformers, scientific management experts, welfare secretaries, and design professionals, each claiming expert knowledge of industrial life, began to introduce changes into the company town. Their presence further complicated the already complex relationship between capital and labor. Their mission of "efficiency and uplift" combined social concern and self-interest in equal parts.¹⁸ Attempting to mediate between capital and labor, they expanded the realm of middle-class professional values into the industrial environment. Critical studies of the Progressive era, looking beyond its often self-serving ideology, have revised our picture of this ethos of reform, bringing their assumptions to the surface and describing the limitations of their reforms.¹⁹ The design professions, sharing a similar commitment to imposing physical order, fostering social efficiency, and extending professional mandates, have rarely been subjected to such critical scrutiny.

This study approaches design with a similar skepticism. Many scholars of company town architecture and town planning have played the role of tourist in company towns, focusing primarily on what is visible. This allows them to make what Eric Monkonnen has called the "architectural fallacy," reading economics, politics, and society through buildings.²⁰ As a result, they have been unduly impressed by the deceptive attractions of physical appearance. As the Commission that investigated the Pullman strike observed, "aesthetic features are admired by visitors, but have little money value to employees, especially when they lack bread."²¹ Thus, rather than using design excellence as the primary framework of analysis and evaluation as many previous scholars have done, this study locates the major determinants of physical design in the external needs that generated them. However, although the designers' role was highly structured by factors beyond their control, it would be a mistake simply to view them as physical agents of the employers' desire to control their workers. Company sponsorship removed many conventional obstacles to town planning, such as individual ownership, the need for profit, and the lack of centralized control, without necessarily imposing any formal or physical definitions on the result. This gave designers the freedom to decide exactly how social and economic components could be translated into aesthetic choices and allowed them to define their own position toward both the client – the capitalist – and the user – the worker.

CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE COMPANY TOWN

The year 1929 marked the end of the "new" company town. Over the preceding twenty years, designers had produced more than forty new industrial towns.¹ These towns, significantly different from earlier company towns, constitute a distinct chapter in the history of the American company town. Although many were never finished as planned, virtually all had been designed as complete communities, including housing, shops and services, public spaces, and recreational facilities. In addition, nearly all were physically and conceptually separate from their industrial purpose – the factory or mine. Almost obsessively avoiding the monotonous gridirons and repetitious rows of identical houses typical of earlier company towns, architects designed numerous varieties of inexpensive, single family houses while planners and landscape architects perfected site plans complete with parks and extensive landscaping. Architects, planners, and landscape architects collaborated to produce comprehensively designed company towns whose appearance denied their industrial origins, resembling exclusive suburbs more than earlier industrial towns such as Lowell or Pullman.

FROM WELFARE CAPITALISM TO FORDISM

In spite of their increasing sophistication, by the mid-1920s such towns had become less necessary to their sponsors. During the 1920s, William Wood, chairman of the American Woolen Company, began construction of Shawsheen Village in Andover, Mass., an ambitious project that housed both unskilled workers and executives. Other firms, such as the Endicott Johnson Company of Binghamton, New York, expanded their housing and welfare programs, known as the "Square Deal." However, these projects were exceptions to a general decline in company housing, the result of charismatic management styles rather than

a trend. Many other firms began to eliminate or reduce programs providing housing, medical care, and recreation. A National Industrial Conference Board study showed that few companies added new welfare programs between 1925 and 1930 and many companies dropped their existing programs. Employers replaced housing and welfare activities with other company ventures that produced more directly practical results: pension plans, personnel departments, or, more importantly, employee representation schemes or company unions. Unlike the delayed effects and variable results of welfare work, these methods were inexpensive and confronted the threat of unions head on. During the war, many companies had introduced employee representation programs to comply with government regulations, and, finding them a useful means of improving labor relations and an effective safety-valve for grievances, continued them voluntarily. At a moment when the spread of "Bolshevism" was alarming capitalists, they adopted company unions as a safe way to introduce at least nominally democratic principles into the workplace.²

During the prosperous 1920s, the implicit assumption behind many welfare programs – that employees could not afford these services for themselves – was also eroding. In spite of great income inequality and a relatively low standard of living, overall, most workers' material well-being improved. National distribution of increasing numbers of consumer goods gradually incorporated workers into the market. Installment buying allowed even cash-poor workers to acquire products such as automobiles, radios, vacuum cleaners, and electric ice boxes as well as improved medical care and life insurance. As they became part of a national culture linked by the popular media of radio, magazines, and advertising, workers began to find welfare capitalism's offerings demeaning rather than welcome. Employees increasingly demanded a larger paycheck in lieu of company expenditures on welfare programs.³

The availability of inexpensive automobiles greatly reduced the workers' dependence on their employer. Used cars or Model T and A Fords bought on credit freed workers from the need to shop at the company store, worship at the company church, and, finally, to live in company houses. Visitors to company towns during the 1920s reported finding numerous houses left vacant by employees who had moved away and now commuted to work. The automobile affected company towns in a number of ways. Increasingly mobile workers gained access to a broader range of job opportunities. Automobiles lessened both the physical and social distances between residents of company towns and their neighbors. By connecting residents with the world outside, the automobile mitigated the repressive aspects of the company town. This new mobility encouraged individual mores instead of the community ethos that formed the social basis of the company town. As a consumer durable and a form of transportation, the automobile tended to blur class consciousness, an apparent equality of consumption and mobility masking continuing economic inequalities.⁴

Company-sponsored services became less important than they had been earlier. As automobiles reduced their isolation, company town residents gained access to greatly improved social services that state and municipal governments were beginning to provide: public schools, libraries, parks, playgrounds, and recreation programs.⁵

Welfare capitalism, always responsive to changes in labor conditions and business cycles, contracted during the 1920s as the rate of labor turnover significantly slowed and the incidence of strikes became much lower. As the strike wave of the early 1920s ebbed, employers increasingly dispensed with welfare expenditures. After 1929, the dramatic economic downturn and the deterioration of business conditions affected welfare capitalism more profoundly. Welfare expenditures were usually the first item to be eliminated as companies reduced spending and contracted production simply in order to survive. Business conditions did not begin to improve until more than a decade later, but few firms reinstated their welfare programs.⁶

If company towns and welfare capitalism declined during the 1920s, the New Deal dealt them a more serious blow. Early in the "hundred days," the new Roosevelt administration began a vigorous attack on company-sponsored housing and welfare programs. The Cotton Textile Code stated bluntly:

There is something feudal and repugnant to American principles in the practice of employer ownership of employee homes It is hoped that, with the creation of real industrial self-government and improvement in the minimum wage, an impetus will be given by employers to independent home ownership and the conversion of the differential into a wage equivalent.

The Code required textile companies to "consider the question of plans for eventual employee ownership of homes in mill villages." The Bituminous Coal Industry Code also sought to end company requirements that miners live in company houses and shop at company stores. Legislation culminating in the Buffey-Vinson Bituminous Coal Act 1937 protected the coal miners' right to peaceful assembly and to their choice of housing. It also permitted independent stores to locate in mining towns.⁷

Even more significantly, repeated government attempts to guarantee the workers' right to collective bargaining attacked the anti-union premisses of many company towns. Although Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act declared "that employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing," a loophole allowed company-sponsored employee representation plans to satisfy the requirement. The Supreme Court declared the NIRA unconstitutional in May 1935, but two months later the far stronger Wagner Act reassured the workers' right to collective bargaining and reclassified company-run employee representation as an unfair labor practice. The new National Labor Relations Board began to issue cease and desist

orders which eliminated company social and recreational clubs, stating: "Good business, fair play and good sportsmanship demand that the employer divorce from his recreation programs any attempt to interfere with the serious business of self-organization and collective bargaining."⁸ These policies cleared the way for unions to expand their membership dramatically. From 1935 to 1943, union membership tripled. Having lost the battle against unions, companies discontinued welfare programs and gradually began to sell off their houses.⁹

Less directly, New Deal mortgage insurance programs also affected company housing by transforming housing finance. The National Housing Act of 1934 established the Federal Housing Administration to stimulate the moderate-cost private housing market by insuring low-interest long-term mortgages. FHA-insured loans covered up to 80 percent of a house's value and were repayable over twenty years with low monthly payments of 5-6 percent interest. These programs replaced bank loans that had covered less than 50 percent of a house's value and were repayable in only three to five years at much higher interest rates. Although the growth of the program was interrupted by the Second World War, the FHA eventually extended the possibility of home ownership to a large segment of the working class, thus eliminating the need for industry-subsidized home ownership programs. Postwar Veterans Administration mortgage guarantee programs, which eliminated even the need for a down-payment, expanded home ownership even further.

The New Deal also dramatically expanded the roles professionals could play in providing low-income housing and town planning. Beginning with the TVA, new government programs such as the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Housing Division of the Public Works Administrations, and the Resettlement Administration began to construct housing and entire communities. The government initially focused on housing three separate groups: distressed rural families, the unemployed in large cities, and "stranded populations," those who had lost their jobs in single-industry communities.¹⁰ These programs acknowledged, for the first time, the government's responsibility to provide shelter for low-wage workers and the unemployed. New Deal community development programs built on the experiences of the designers who had created the "new" company towns. John Nolen served as an adviser to the Subsistence Homesteads program and designed several of its settlements. Earle Draper, Tracy Augur, Russell Van Ness Black, and Clarence Stein served as advisers to the best-known New Deal program, the Greenbelt communities sponsored by the Suburban Resettlement Division under Rexford Tugwell.¹¹ The towns of Greenbelt, Maryland, Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin – the latter designed by Elbert Peets, planner of the company town of Kohler, Wisconsin – incorporated many of the planning concepts developed in "new" company towns twenty years earlier. Increasing levels of Federal support reflected Interior

Secretary Harold Ickes's conviction that "it is not possible without a subsidy to produce housing for the lower income groups."¹² Subsidies previously supplied by employers now became the responsibility of federal and state governments.

As World War I housing programs had done, the New Deal agencies brought architects, planners, and landscape architects together in collaborative projects. Government work not only enhanced the status of the design professions but expanded their professional domain. This produced different results in each profession. Although increased government involvement in housing and community planning provided architects with a new group of clients, state support did not alter the structure of the profession. For landscape architects and city planners, however, the New Deal transformed their professional possibilities. Programs such as the Public Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration supplied both funds and workers to national and state park systems, providing new jobs in park planning for landscape architects. By 1940 the National Park Service became the largest employer of landscape architects in the history of the profession. Working with large-scale land development also expanded the scope of the landscape profession, adding regional and environmental planning to designers' skills. For city planners, the benefits of the New Deal were even more pronounced. Public patronage almost completely replaced private clients. In spite of its *ex officio* status, the National Resource Planning Board, active from 1933 to 1942, represented the first permanent Federal commitment to publicly supported planning at all levels of government. This legitimized planning activities that had previously existed only at the sufferance of municipal governments. Planning acquired a widely recognized value as, all over the country, government agencies began to produce all types of plan. Encouraged by the New Deal's broad definition of planning, these were no longer limited to coordinating physical growth but now dealt with social and economic policies.¹³

EVALUATING THE "NEW" COMPANY TOWN

The New Deal also sponsored the first serious evaluation of the "new" company town. The Urbanism Committee, set up by the National Resource Planning Board, conducted an exhaustive survey of 144 planned towns, garden suburbs, and residential areas under the direction of landscape architect Arthur Comey – planner of Billerica Garden Suburb – and researcher Max S. Wehrly.¹⁴ The largest percentage (53.3 percent) of the towns the committee examined were industrial company towns. They selected Fairfield, Torrance, Goodyear Heights, Indian Hill, Kingsport, and Chicopee for detailed case-studies. Based on questionnaires, interviews, and site visits, the committee analyzed the physical, social, and

economic development of the towns as well as conducting post-occupancy evaluations. The report reflected the biases of New Deal planners, who supported community planning but were critical of paternalism and company ownership. Nevertheless, the authors concluded that the planned company towns they had studied, in spite of the social and economic restrictions imposed by their industrial sponsors, were successful communities. The main beneficiaries of the expense and expertise that had gone into the construction of these towns were their residents: "free from overcrowding . . . their inhabitants enjoy greater efficiency, greater safety, and a more healthful and in *very great measure*, a more attractive environment."¹⁵

It is difficult to disagree with this assessment. From 1910 to 1925, the "new" company town significantly raised the standard of living in company towns. Industrial houses were larger, better built, and provided with more services than ever before. Architectural attention to planning and comfort gradually reduced the previously wide gap between company housing and middle-class dwellings. Since the housing in the earliest "new" company towns was designed to be sold to workers, designers had to treat skilled workers as clients and consumers. With the workers' rather than the capitalists' tastes and preferences establishing the criteria for housing design, single family houses, "artistic" styles, and large lots became standard features in company towns. First introduced into higher priced workers' housing, these design standards trickled down into rental housing built for unskilled laborers. For both groups, the economic advantages of company housing were clear. Since affordability had been a fundamental consideration in their design, these improvements in quality did not raise the cost of housing. The percentage of workers' salaries necessary to cover housing costs remained stable, or, in many instances, was actually lowered.

Comprehensive planning offered other advantages. Designed to be a unified and coherent community, the "new" company town had a distinctive identity separate from the factory or mine. Like the garden city, these towns balanced a naturalistic setting with contour planning, curving streets, and extensive landscaping with communal spaces such as parks, recreation areas, shops, and services. In terms of design and environmental quality the closest equivalents were expensive middle-class suburbs. At the same time, of course, these communities were fundamentally coercive, their unified design expressing the employers' desire for control. How well these controls operated is not clear, however. The Urbanism Committee's report suggests that, by the mid-1930s, employers no longer operated many of the "new" company towns. Owner-occupied housing, political incorporation, and labor struggles had reduced the employers' degree of control and, as a result, their interest in maintaining their towns.

Thus, for employers, the benefits of the "new" company town were ambiguous. Historians disagree about the effectiveness of industrial welfare. Some scholars, such as Stewart

Brandes and Irving Bernstein, conclude that welfare capitalism was not successful in capturing workers' loyalty. Emphasizing that employers were increasingly confronted with evidence that employees instinctively rejected welfare work, they see welfare capitalism as an unstable and temporary system that could not stave off the inevitability of unionization. Others, such as Daniel Nelson and David Brody, argue that welfare capitalism succeeded in increasing management's control over workers and in generating worker loyalty. Asserting that millions of workers gladly accepted paternalism, Brody claimed that, if the Depression had not shattered the prevailing assumptions of corporate paternalism, welfare capitalism rather than unionization might have become the dominant feature of American industrialism. A recent study by Gerald Zahavi takes a third position. After intensive study of a major welfare employer, the Endicott Johnson Corporation, Zahavi claims that welfare created mutual loyalty between labor and management. In exchange for their loyalty, workers were able to extract the maximum advantages from their employer.¹⁶

This study does not support such clear alternatives, but suggests that other issues need to be considered to evaluate the company town's effectiveness from the employer's point of view. Searching for general conclusions, all these arguments ignore the economic, social, and geographic diversity of American industry during the early decades of the twentieth century. Like most managerial and reform ideologies of the Progressive era, the "new" company town proposed generalized and standardized solutions for situations that were local and specific. This research suggests that the success or failure of company towns usually depended on the industrial context in which they were introduced. Rather than occupying an abstract setting, every firm is located in a unique industrial context composed of a number of elements. Production processes, the size and organization of the firm, as well as such considerations as local labor markets, the local economy, and the socio-cultural environment, all shape the nature of an industrial enterprise. Designed by outsiders unfamiliar with industrial processes, unacquainted with local conditions and already committed to standard solutions, "new" company towns rarely addressed these issues. Thus, as Zahavi's study of a single firm suggests, in some industrial settings, workers can acquire the power to negotiate over a firm's welfare responsibilities. In other situations, however, different relationships between employers and workers can result in different policies and responses.

The "new" company town followed a similar pattern. Some northern manufacturing towns, such as Indian Hill and Kistler, and many southern textile villages attracted stable populations of long-term residents who resisted the unions. Other companies, building company towns in the hope of maintaining a stable group of workers and avoiding unions, were largely disappointed. In some industries improved living conditions and attractive settings in company towns had little effect on labor relations: Vandergrift, Fairfield, and Morgan Park joined other steel towns in the massive 1919 steel strike. In other places,

company towns exacerbated labor disputes and intensified conflict. During the 1930s, for example, after an intense struggle, Kingsport's plants became unionized and Kohler's workers began a long and bitter strike.¹⁷

From the designers' point of view, the "new" company town produced equally inconclusive results. As a single commission, company towns proved disappointing. Although they appeared to offer designers the freedom to design complete communities without the restrictions of the marketplace, in practice this did not usually occur. Cost-conscious clients rarely followed plans completely. Short-term changes in labor relations and profitability affected the implementation of long-term plans. As a result, towns like Torrance, Indian Hill, Tyrone, and Kistler were never more than partial – and therefore frustrating – realizations of their designers' intentions. As a demonstration of professional achievement, the "new" company town was more successful. Designing entire communities, even in collaboration with other professions, gave credence to professional assertions of social commitment and technical expertise. Focused on the problem of the industrial community and the workers' house, designers had produced an impressive body of systematized and standardized information. Textbooks, plans, housing designs, and, most importantly, actual towns bolstered the newly expanded professional claims of architects, landscape architects, and city planners.

The "new" company town was most successful in expanding the formal and technical scope of the design professions. Placed in the larger historical context of housing design and town planning, these towns represented a significant advancement. In a period when architecture and planning operated exclusively in the marketplace, these towns provided important opportunities to plan and build comprehensively designed communities. Unlike the other main venue for community planning – the upper-middle-class suburb – industrial sponsorship at least partially removed the necessity to realize profits. As a result, company towns were testing grounds for the design of small, low-cost houses. This kept interest in low-income housing alive in the absence of state subsidies and moved architects away from the narrow concerns of tenement reform to address the entire living environment. Although the social and economic premises under which these towns were built were highly restrictive, nonetheless company town commissions encouraged designers to consider social and economic factors as fundamental elements of physical design. The boom in company town construction focused an enormous amount of professional interest and expertise on important issues of low-cost housing and community development. The need to work within exacting cost margins made these tasks even more challenging. The "new" company town greatly expanded the designers' arena and directly informed subsequent housing and community design.

Critical and historical discussions of American architecture and planning have tended to

ignore the "new" company town, instead identifying the Regional Planning Association of America as the real pioneers of community planning in the United States. In 1923 Alexander Bing, Henry Wright, and Clarence Stein, who would later become members of the RPAA, praised the "new" company town in an unpublished proposal for Sunnyside, specifically singling out Neponset Garden Village, Indian Hill, Tyrone, and Kistler for their high quality design.¹⁸ However, in general, the RPAA's insistence on a narrow definition of "community" and Lewis Mumford's dislike of industrialism limited their appreciation of the important role company town design had played in creating new housing and planning solutions.¹⁹ Supported by limited profit financing, RPAA designers like Wright and Stein, had little reason to respond to the preferences of working-class occupants, and insisted on building group housing and communal open spaces. The RPAA's interest in regionalism did not extend to housing typologies or architectural styles. Instead, they increasingly looked to Dutch and German examples of large-scale, state-supported housing projects for inspiration.²⁰

The appearance of European modernism further obscured the role of the "new" company town in the history of American planning. By the end of the 1930s, the new abstract style and powerful ideology of modernism, which equated standardization and repetition with an egalitarian social order, overshadowed earlier attempts to incorporate historical and regional influences and provide individualized dwellings for industrial workers. In the 1970s, the advent of post-modernism reversed this critical tide, fostering a renewed interest in regional imagery and housing typologies, Beaux Arts urban design, and picturesque urban planning.²¹ The plans of "new" company towns were rediscovered and republished, along with the work of Parker and Unwin and Camillo Sitte. Robert A.M. Stern's *The Anglo-American Suburb*, published in 1981, and Hegemann and Peet's *American Vitruvius*, reissued in 1989, served as inspiration for a new generation of neo-traditional town planners attempting to give American cities and suburbs a new coherence and unity.

Thus, in hindsight, the "new" company town can be recognized as an episode in the continuing tradition of picturesque design. Rather than constituting a specific style, the picturesque is a method of using and combining different styles chosen for their associative meanings. As an artificially created "instant" place simulating an older form of community, the "new" company town is a direct descendant of picturesque planned villages such as Blaise Hamlet. Designed by John Nash in 1810, Blaise was an apparently casual assemblage of carefully designed, "quaint" rural cottages. Built to house the banker John Harford's retired employees, the absence of schools, church, inn, and shop underlined the village's unreal quality. According to architectural historian David Watkin, this quality of deception is one of the dominant themes of the picturesque.²² In picturesque villages, the element of make-believe usually took the form of a preoccupation with the past

and with the creation of a *genius loci*. Expressed through architectural form and landscape design, cliché, nostalgia, and escapism served as defenses against the dramatic social and environmental changes brought by industrialization. The picturesque village conveyed a reassuring social meaning by projecting a heightened image of a carefully structured society, held together by traditional values. Throughout the nineteenth century picturesque images were repeatedly invoked at moments of acute social and economic upheaval to defuse class conflict, successively producing Central Park, Riverside, and the "new" company town. Today, this tradition of fictional landscape continues in "themed" environments, such as Disneyland, Las Vegas, and shopping malls, as well as in neo-traditional towns like Seaside, Florida.

REMAINS AND SURVIVALS

The company town slowly disappeared from the American landscape. Employees who purchased company houses altered them to fit their needs, so undermining the unique physical coherence characteristic of company towns. The remains of company towns can be found all over the United States. Even as fragments, they are still recognizable from their homogeneous quality, rare in the American landscape. Their ruins are often long-lived. As the New England textile industry slowly died, its substantial mills and housing, built to last, endured long after the machinery had been shipped to the South or the Third World, mute testimony to a now anachronistic productive system. As firms went into liquidation, they often put entire towns under the auctioneer's hammer. Abandoned factories littered the region, but some textile production remained, although with far smaller workforces than in the industry's prime. Some enterprising towns succeeded in attracting new high-technology industries to occupy vacant mills. Nashua, New Hampshire, and North Andover and Lawrence, Massachusetts, became regional centers for electronics and plastics firms. In prosperous areas, mills were adapted and reused as residential, office, or commercial space. In other towns, however, textile mills have been converted into shoe and garment factories with sweatshop conditions and low wages. Other mills have simply been left to decay, corpses of industrial progress.²³

In other parts of the country, companies continued to rent houses to their workers. A survey of Georgia mills in 1952 showed that many still retained and rented housing, although only 40 percent of their workers lived in them. A surprising number of companies continued to operate old-style company towns. In 1968, the US Civil Rights Commission discovered Bellamy, Georgia, completely owned by the American Can Company, who operated a high-priced company store and company school, and rented company houses to

workers who, after deductions for rent and food, received minimal paychecks.²⁴ From 1887 until 1982, when it finally sold its 1,785 clapboard mill houses, the Cannon family, owners of Cannon Textile Mills, completely controlled Kannapolis, North Carolina. In the west, mining and lumber companies operated numerous resource-extraction towns until the 1980s. The mining industry, restructuring after a dramatic downtown in the early 1980s, eliminated more than 50 percent of their workers, shut down plants, and left rows of company houses to decay.²⁵ Since the late 1960s, the number of lumber towns in the northwest has declined along with the wood products industry.²⁶ In 1991, the Bechtel Corporation purchased Gilchrist, Oregon's last remaining company town, saving it from destruction. Scotia, the last company town in California, was recently acquired by the Maxxam Group, narrowly escaping a similar fate.²⁷ Tourism is bringing new life to western company towns in scenic areas. Scotia's neat white houses have begun to attract travelers on Interstate highway 101 in northern California. Southwestern mining towns are being resettled by artists and other self-employed residents. After the Phelps-Dodge mine closed, Ajo, Arizona became a popular destination for "snowbirds," retirees seeking inexpensive winter lodging.

Beginning in the 1960s, trends in historical scholarship have also renewed interest in company towns. Focusing on groups and issues previously neglected by mainstream American history, scholars began to examine the history of ordinary people. New approaches in urban, social and labor history focused attention on the history of "the masses, not the classes." Faced with new subjects of history, scholars posed new questions, discovered new sources, and created new methodologies such as oral history. These approaches encouraged detailed studies of working-class communities including company towns, and provided a deeper knowledge of working-class life, in particular revealing the enormous diversity of ethnic subcultures and the range of their responses to industrial life. Gradually, this historical orientation expanded to include the built environment. Using measured drawings and artifacts as the basis for interpretation, scholars of vernacular architecture and material culture studies discovered social and cultural meaning in the everyday environment. Architectural history, a discipline traditionally devoted to the study of monuments, gradually widened its scope to include industrial structures and company towns.

Influenced by this scholarship, in the 1960s the historic preservation movement looked beyond landmarks and notable houses to consider as historically significant the architectural fabric of entire neighborhoods and districts. Industrial sites and company towns were part of this newly discovered heritage. In 1976, the National Trust for Historic Preservation asserted that "workers' housing in the shadow of a factory is as much a part of America's architectural heritage as more readily acknowledged landmarks."²⁸ By the end of the decade, the National Park Service, the Federal agency responsible for historic landmarks,

designated many of the towns discussed in the early chapters of this book as historical monuments, historic districts, or heritage areas. This included the Slater Mill and other early mills along the Blackstone River Valley in Rhode Island, Lowell, Massachusetts, Homestead, Pennsylvania, the Calumet Industrial District in Michigan, and Pullman. Other National Park Service programs such as the Historic American Building Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record are in the process of documenting industrial projects and company towns by means of photographs, drawings, and written histories. America's Industrial Heritage Project, a detailed survey of industrial sites in southwestern Pennsylvania, has produced publications on the steel mill city of Johnstown, and Iron, Coal, and Refactory company towns. Local groups like the Illinois Labor History Society produced a series of interpretive guides to Chicago labor history sites, written from the workers' point of view. In Connecticut, the Brass Workers History Project have also produced several books and a documentary film based on oral histories with workers in the Naugatuck Valley.²⁹ This has helped generate a growing public interest in the industrial past and working-class life, leading to the creation and expansion of local and regional museums. In New England the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum and Old Sturbridge Village attract both scholars and tourists. A recent Federal initiative designated several industrial regions as historic sites to encourage local and regional economic development. If this strategy is effective, company towns may acquire a new economic role as anchors for tourism, recreation, and commercial revitalization.³⁰

THE REBIRTH OF THE COMPANY TOWN?

The impulses that generated company towns during the early decades of the twentieth century have not completely vanished. In 1980 Charles Crowder, a Texas real-estate developer, began planning an ambitious new industrial town, Santa Teresa, to be built on the border near El Paso, half in Mexico, half in the United States. Santa Teresa's industrial base was to be based on *maquiladoras*, American and Japanese-owned assembly plants that locate just across the Mexican border to take advantage of low-wage Mexican workers. Crowder's plan for the town included an industrial district on the Mexican side of the border, a border crossing, and a complete living environment for the entire workforce. Santa Teresa resembles earlier company towns in many respects. Like those towns it attempts to improve efficiency and reduce labor turnover among low-wage, unskilled workers. In Ciudad Juarez, where most *maquiladora* workers live, water is in short supply and cholera is a constant threat. The annual turnover rate at *maquiladoras* is over 100 percent. Crowder's rhetoric is reminiscent of earlier employers: "How can you be efficient if you wake up with no plumbing, walk

through a slum to work, and worry about your grandmother's safety?"³¹ Santa Teresa, providing good housing at low rents near workplaces and ample supplies of water, would significantly improve living and working conditions for Mexican *maquiladora* workers.³²

Santa Teresa's planning also recalls western mining towns such as Tyrone and Ajo in its explicit provision of dual housing and services for Mexican and American workers. Management, mostly American, will live north of the border, provided with suburban houses and golf courses. On the other side, Mexican workers will be housed in dense urban dwellings, organized around a central plaza. Significantly, like earlier capitalists, Crowder called on professionals to design the town. In 1992, teams of students and professors from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and the University of New Mexico's School of Architecture and Urban Planning visited the site and prepared proposals for town plans, housing and neighborhood development. Beaux Arts town centers, central plazas surrounded by arcades, parks, landscaping, and recreational areas figured prominently in all of the schemes.³³ In 1992, however, Sunwest Bank foreclosed on Charles Crowder's multi-million-dollar loans, making it unlikely that Santa Teresa will become the first of a new generation of company towns.³⁴ The enthusiastic participation of designers, unconcerned about the social and economic issues the town's premises raise, suggests that, seventy-five years after the "new" company town, the lack of awareness among a new generation of architects and planners of their own professional circumstances could allow history to repeat itself.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Horace P. Davis, "Company Towns," in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 4, New York: The Macmillan Co. 1930, p. 119.

2. Carnegie Steel intentionally located its Homestead plant outside town limits and only later, after the 1909 steel strike, began building housing. By this time, the town was almost completely developed. Eric Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1988, p. 224; Margaret Byington, *Homestead: the Households of a Mill Town*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation 1910.

3. Leifur Magnussen, "Company Housing," in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 4, pp. 117-19.

4. This definition of the "model town" comes from Arthur C. Comey and Max Wehrly, *Planned Communities*, Part 1, vol. II of the *Supplementary Report of the Urbanism Committee*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office 1938: "a concrete demonstration of a definite preconceived theory of physical or social planning" (p. 70). A less specific, but common use of the term "model" is John S. Garner's explanation: "some of these towns were superior to others and therefore termed 'models'". *The Model Company Town*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press 1984, p. xii. This usage is exemplified in numerous articles and books dealing with company towns and industrial welfare published during the late nineteenth century.

5. Accounts of industrial betterment include Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1976; Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1975; Gerald Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism: The Shoeworkers and Tanners of Endicott-Johnson*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1988.

6. See Tamara K. Haraven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City*, New York: Pantheon Books 1978; John Borden Armstrong, *Factory under the Elms: A History of Harrisville, New Hampshire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1976; Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Penn, eds, *The New England Mill Village, 1790-1860*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1982; John Coolidge, *Mill and Mansion: A Study of Architecture and Society in Lowell, 1820-1865*, New York: Columbia University Press 1942; Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City, Lawrence, Mass. 1845-1921*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1963; Katherine A. Harvey, *The Best Dressed Miners*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1968; Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale*, New York: Columbia University Press 1978; Joseph Walker, *Hopewell Village, A Social and Economic History of an Ironmaking Community*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1966; David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina*, Baton Rouge: Southern Louisiana University Press 1982; and Stanley Buder,