Abraham E. Kazan [1]

This is the story of the Seward Park Housing Corporation, a cooperative development, built, owned and operated for the benefit of 1,728 families who decided to use the method of mutual self-help to solve their housing problem. The project was conceived and completed under the guidance of the United Housing Foundation, a federation of cooperative housing societies, non-profit organizations and labor unions interested in promoting better housing through the consumer cooperative method.

In 1957 the Seward Park Houses was the second Title I development undertaken by the United Housing Federation. It owes its existence to the successful completion in 1956 of the East River Housing Corporation, a housing cooperative for 1,672 families which was financed and sponsored by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The East River Housing cooperative in turn came into being after the completion of the Hillman Houses, located in the immediate vicinity. This cooperative, for 807 families, was completed in 1950. It was built as a redevelopment Company under the sponsorship of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. The same organization is also responsible for the erection of Amalgamated Dwellings, a Limited Dividend housing cooperative for 236 families, completed in 1930 under the supervision of the State Board of Housing of the State of New York.

Together, these four cooperative enterprises, legally and financially operate as separate entities; they occupy the southeast section of the lower part of Manhattan from the East River bend known as Corlears Hook to Essex Street of the west, Delancey Street on the north and East Broadway and Cherry Street on the south. The entire area comprises about 32 acres. The four cooperatives are providing homes for 4,443 families with a population of approximately 20,000. The Seward Park Houses is the latest member to be added to the group.

For decades this part of New York City was the center of the melting pot for newcomers to these shores. It is one of the oldest sections in the City. Grand Street was at one time the Mecca of the department stores and other commercial enterprises. Up to about fifty years ago East Broadway was the neighborhood of the elite of the assimilating immigrants. It provided housing and offices for the intellectuals and professionals. Gradually the second and third generations moved to the other parts of the city leaving behind the old and the weak. The neighborhood gradually deteriorated into a slum area.

It is our hope that the experience of the Seward Park cooperative will benefit others. We trust that they will follow your example and adopt the idea of self-help in solving many problems which otherwise go unsolved. It is also our hope that the method adopted to finance this development will be followed by other organizations who are interested in helping the man who wants to help himself. [...]

Another slum area of the city has been replaced by moderate cost decent homes. But our task is far from finished. For we seek more than good housing, gardens and shopping facilities. Our goal is a better way of life for those who have joined this cooperative venture. Housing is but one step toward a larger objective.

The Seward Park Housing cooperative demonstrates what people can do for themselves when they work together. Without cooperation this development would not have been built, the old tenements would have remained. It has taken a half of a life time to rid the city of only 32 acres of slums in this section and to provide good housing for nearly twenty thousand people. All of these people are consumers; they share many other common needs. It is our hope that from cooperative ventures they will learn to apply the same techniques of self-help not only to housing but to meet their other needs.

Each member of this cooperative has contributed toward its initial success. If it is to remain successful, each member must diligently exercise his responsibilities as a member for years to come. As a democratic institution it requires responsible citizenship on the part of its members. In seeking a better way of life for the members of this organization we are endeavoring to demonstrate that people have the ability to successfully own and operate their own business – to help themselves.

This cooperative is another practical demonstration of not only how people can help themselves, but how the city can encourage public and private groups to engage in the battle against blighted areas. From the example of what has been accomplished by the Seward Park cooperative we hope many other consumers and organizations will draw inspiration to duplicate what has been done here.

United Housing Foundation 570 Grand Street New York 2, New York

[www.sphc.net/Orig\_Story\_html\_version.htm]

# [1] ABRAHAM E. KAZAN

(1889-1971)

Abraham E. Kazan was among the pioneers of the idea of cooperative housing. Growing up as an eyewitness to appalling tenement conditions, Kazan believed that housing was a vital obstacle for the average person. As the president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) Credit Union, Kazan understood that most people, rich and poor, usually considered a home as "purely a product of his own efforts." Yet, unlike all other routine necessities, owning a home required a sizable initial investment that was usually beyond that of those with moderate means or salaries. He felt that this made newly constructed buildings often out of reach for the poorer earners, causing harsher social and moral conditions with the tenement communities where the poorer people lived in tightly congested clusters. Kazan believed that good housing conditions would not guarantee normal, healthy people and families. Yet, he was convinced that substandard housing does directly and adversely affect health, morale, and the social conditions of those who live there within it. He was president of the Seward Park Housing Corporation.

## IANE IACOBS

Footnote from: The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York 1961, p. 334

We trust that they will follow your example and adopt the idea of self-help in solving A word here about rats. This is one of the elementary evils that new housing is supposed to eliminate and the presence of old housing to perpetuate. But rats do not know that. Unless they are exterminated, when old rat-infested buildings are torn down, the rats simply move into the next inhabited area. One of the severe problems in the Lower East Side of New York, as this is written, is the influx of rats and other vermin from the demolished buildings on the site of a huge new cooperative project, Seward Houses. When a large part of the downtown of St. Louis was demolished, this displaced rats invaded building over many square miles. If extermination is not practiced in new buildings, the progeny of the rats come right back there too. Most cities have legal requirements that rats be exterminated in any building demolished; in New York, the going rate in 1960 for lying certificate of extermination, paid by corrupt owners to corrupt exterminators, is \$ 5. How public agencies, like the Housing Authority, evade the law I do not know, but to know that they do evade it one need only go look at fearful rat festivals and exoduses at twilight from their sites in process of demolition. New buildings do not get rid of rats. Only people get rid of rats. This can be done in old buildings about as easily as in new ones. Our building was overrun with rats – big ones - when we got it. It costs \$ 48 a year to keep it thoroughly rid of them and all vermin. A live man does it. The notion that buildings get rid of rats is worse than a delusion because it becomes an excuse for not exterminating rats. ["We are soon going to get rid of these rat-infested buildings." We expect too much of new buildings, and too little of

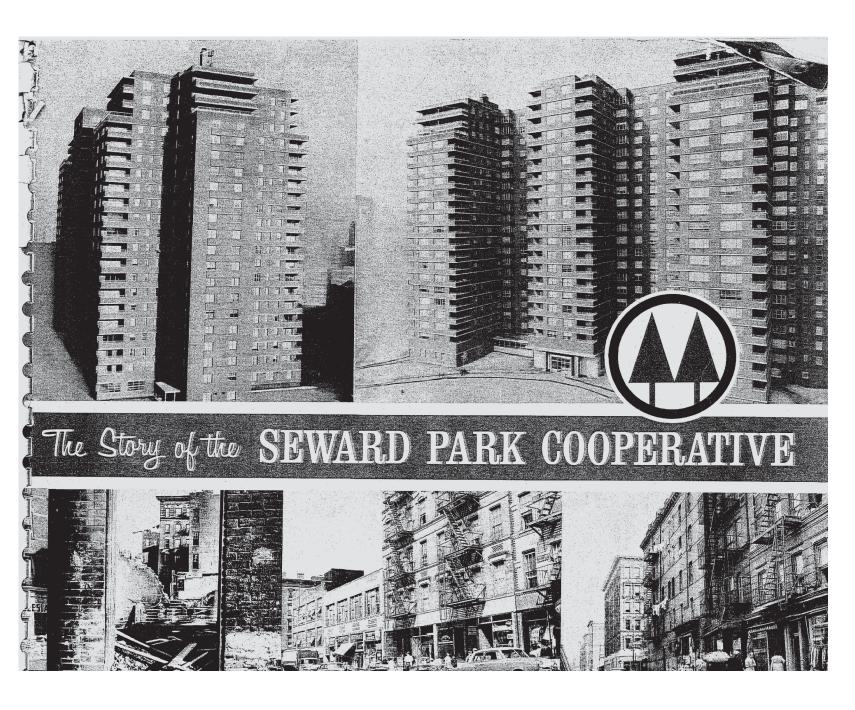
Many thanks to the Seward Park Housing Corporation, Anthony Schuman and Eric Mandelbaum for generously supporting the research on the history of Seward Park Housing.



FORM GROUPS

ifau & Jesko Fezer Exhibition: November 21 - December 20, 2008 Opening Reception: Friday, November 21, 6-8pm COMMON ROOM 2 465 Grand Street New York, NY 10002 T: 212.358.8605 info@common-room.net

zeitung.indd 1



THE STORY OF THE SEWARD PARK COOPERATIVE, AB-RAHAM E. KAZAN, UNITED HOUSING FOUNDATION, NEW YORK, 1961 [Courtesy of Eric Mandelbaum]

One of the most difficult cases was a family with eight children - all were living in two rooms. This family wanted to move into a public housing project. However, they did not qualify. The family went on "strike" and were determined not to move anywhere else. It took several months before they finally accepted a large size apartment

Forty-six families were relocated quite a distance from the site. These were the families whose transportation was paid back to Puerto Rico. They were a happy group when they left the airport.

These are but a few examples of the human side of relocation. Each family had problems, some more serious than others; we tried in each case to handle the problems with sympathetic understanding. By July 1, 1959, eighteen months after acquisition of the site, the last family to be rehoused was relocated.

To rehouse 1500 families under the best of conditions is a difficult task. For a family to move from one place to another is generally considered an unpleasant task. When 1471 families, in one neighborhood, are faced with the problem of vacating their apartments the task is more difficult than usual. This is particularly true when one is told that he has no choice in the matter and that he has to move irrespective of whether or not he likes his present living quarters.

The preference given to site tenants in the proposed new development appeased some, the largest number of families did not take advantage of the opportunity.

There was a lapse of about three years between the time when the development was announced and when title to the site was transferred to the cooperative. During this period sentiment against the project developed among families living on the site. This made the relocation problem more difficult. Little, if any, support was extended to the cooperative in its efforts to improve living con in this slum section by the local political groups, social agencies or religious institutions.

With the exception of a few individuals, at no time did any of these groups take the definite position that the neighborhood had to be rebuilt. At best, they remained silent and avoided the subject. The small businessmen in the area, a good many of whom did not live on the site, were not particularly concerned about the new development. They would have preferred the neighborhood to remain as it was as

Each relocation problem was handled on a personal and individual basis.



long as the business activities they conducted remained undisturbed. They too added their sentiments in opposing the construction of the

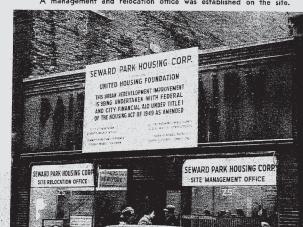
The Housing and Home Finance Agency and the Slum Clearance Committee, the two public agencies involved in the promotion of the project, prescribed definite plans to be followed in relocating site tenants. Families must be advised of their rights and no family could be arbitrarily moved to another location unless the new dwelling met specific standards. The Seward Park Housing Corporation in undertaking the redevelopment of the area assumed the responsibility of rehousing all families in accordance with the prescribed regulations.

After the Board of Estimate had approved the Seward Park development and shortly before title to the site was acquired, the corporation sent the following letter to the families on the site:

As you already know, the building in which you now reside is part of the pro-posed Seward Park Redevelopment Project. Inasmuch as the site is expected to be acquired in the month of November, the following information regarding relocation is being sent for your information and guidance.

A relocation and management office will soon be established on the site. The Urban Relocation Company, Inc. has been retained by the Seward Park Housing Corporation as relocation agent to facilitate the program of site clearance and aid you in your relocation problems. Very shortly, a member of their relocation staff will visit you as part of the program of surveying all site tenants. These people will all have proper identification. Your cooperation in furnishing the information required, is most important so that they may determine how best to assist you. The representative calling on you will be reported to anyway requestions, and drive not of the second content of the s ing on you will be prepared to answer your questions and advise you of your reloca-tion rights. Each family's problem will be considered on an individual basis.

A management and relocation office was established on the site.



## RELOCATION

At the time the site for the Seward Park project was acquired there were living in the buildings on the site 1471 families with a total population of 4304. These families had to be rehoused before construction could start.

Who were the 1,471 families that occupied the 138 buildings on the site? What was the composition of the families? How long had they lived in the neighborhood and in the buildings which they occupied? How deep were the roots they had established in the neighborhood? Why were they living in a slum area? Did they constitute a homogeneous group in a compact community which would be broken up by moving to other sections of the city?

A survey made immediately after the site was acquired revealed the following composition of the families as follows:

	0			
Total Number of families	Number of persons in family	Number of adults in families	Number of children in families	Number of families w/o children
370	1	370	0	366
366	2	719	13	353
245	. 3	. 598	137	123
196	4	509	275	40
130	5	352	298	. 10
77	. 6	204	258	0
39	7	105	170	0
25	8	77	. 121	2
5	9	17	28	0
4	10	10	30	0
0	11	0	0	0
0	12	0	0	. 0
1	13	1	12	0
13	Unknown	?	? • .	?
tal 1,471		2,962	1,342	894
The su	rvev also rev	ealed that the	neighborhood	was comprise

largely of a mixture of racial minority groups. 18.6 per cent of the families lived on the site one year or less. Evidently they could not find housing within their financial means elsewhere and were forced to move into this section. 41.4 per cent of the families had lived on the site less than three years, whereas 53.6 per cent were residents for less than five years. This is a comparatively short period of time when taking into consideration that there has been a shortage of housing for almost a quarter of a century. The fact that over forty per cent had lived in the neighborhood less than three years and almost 20 per cent for less than a year indicates that the site was a transitory neighborhood.

Rehousing 1,471 families is not only a problem of housing but

perhaps, even more, a problem in human relations. 1,471 human problems, no two exactly alike. From the very beginning the sponsor recognized that the relocation program required physical and emotional adjustments and that each family's problems must be handled individually with sympathetic and courteous understanding. The sponsor also recognized the opportunity and his obligation to use the relocation program as a means of providing the families with better living accommodations than they had on the site.

It was the older people in the community who found relocation particularly difficult. It was this group too, who had lived on the site for the longest period of time. Rehousing this group often presented a pathetic picture. Most of them were living on small pensions or were supported by their children who lived elsewhere. A good many were maintained by the Welfare Department of the City of New York. To some, the forcible rehousing proved to be a blessing. They could not summon enough courage on their own free will to find another and better place to live; the relocation program made action necessary. Citing a few cases will illustrate the point.

Living on the sixth floor of a walk-up house on Suffolk Street was an old woman. Her husband and children had been dead for a long time. She occupied four tiny rooms. Not that she needed all that space, for her wants were very simple. She had occupied the same place for a long number of years. A metal folding bed, two chairs and a kitchen table were all the furniture she possessed. An outmoded gas range, a sink and tub were the only equipment in the kitchen. As decrepit as her home was, she was frightened at the prospect of being forced to move. She feared having to go to a public institution or home. We rehoused her in a decent building where she no longer had to climb stairs to reach her apartment. When moving day arrived, it was pitiful to observe that all her belongings filled the space of a peddler's pushcart. As her belongings were moved, she carefully watched the two bundles that held her personal possessions.

One of the saddest cases was an old man, a photographer by profesion in his younger days, who lived in miserable conditions in one of the worst buildings on the site. His only friends, three dogs, shared his humble home. He refused to be separated from his animals. The Welfare Department on whom he depended for support could do nothing to make him give up his dogs. Sickness and death finally separated this kindly man from his friends.

Page 6

## Public Housing

All site families will receive a preliminary application for Public Housing at the time the relocation program commences. Interested families should complete this application and return it to the site office as quickly as possible. After these applications have been reviewed, appointments will be made for a personal interview with a representative of the New York City Housing Authority at the site office. Cooperation in appearing for interviews when scheduled and in furnishing the necessary information required by the Housing Authority to establish eligibility, is most important. Eligible families will receive priority for apartments in Public Housing Projects. Families who move into public housing will have their moving expenses paid by the stoonsor.

## Private Listings

The site relocation office will obtain and maintain listings of standard apartments. These apartments will be offered to site families who cannot be relocated to public bousing. The apartments to be provided by the site relocation office will be decent, safe and sanitary, and within the site families' financial means.

The families who accept apartments so offered will have the apartment painted and their moving expenses paid by the sponsor.

## Self Relocation

Site families who prefer to relocate themselves to accommodations of their own choosing, will be assisted by a cash bonus payment. To qualify for this cash bonus payment, families must turn over a completely vacant apartment to the site relocation office. No moving expenses will be paid to families who qualify for the cash bonus

Sevard Park Housing Corporation sends this letter as an expression of policy and hopes that this will answer many of the questions that may have arisen in your mind regarding relocation problems. While the fact remains that you will soon be required to vacate your present apartment, please be assured that you will find the relocation staff helpful, courteous, and understanding at all times.

Very truly yours,

SEWARD PARK HOUSING CORPORATION

Through real estate brokers housing for many families was found. Each dwelling was approved by the Department of Real Estate of the City of New York. The corporation assumed the costs of painting the apartments, moving the tenants and paid the brokers from \$150 to \$250 for each dwelling which was located. The site tenants had the final say in accepting or rejecting the housing which was found for them. Each apartment had to be within the financial means





Site families also had the option of finding their own housing, for which they were paid cash bonuses. Before bonuses were paid, the dwellings had to be approved by the Department of Real Estate as being standard housing. Many families elected this method to relocate themselves. The bonuses paid were on the basis of the number of rooms the family vacated and included the moving expenses of the families. The schedule was as follows:

\$275 up to 3 rooms

\$425 up to 5 rooms \$350 up to 4 rooms \$500 up to 6 rooms

A second source of housing for some of the site families was obtained through the New York City Housing Authority. This agency worked closely with the housing corporation to provide housing for those who could qualify for low cost housing.

## HOW FAMILIES WERE RELOCATED

Self-Relocated545	tamilies
	families
In Public Housing	families
Evicted 5	families
	families*
	families
* Moved from the site without notifying the office.	
I Remained on the site until the new buildings were complete	d.

## WHERE THEY MOVED

Location	Number of f
Manhattan	975
Bronx	56
Queens	
Brooklyn	226
Staten Island	9
Total in New York City 1,324	
New York State outside New York City	5
Other States	24
Puerto Rico	46
Outside U.S.A.	14
Institutionalized	6
Evicted	5
Deceased	7
Unknown	40
Onknown	

Orientation meetings were held with cooperators.



12.11.2008 11:54:37