CITY, TOWN New York

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES **INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED OCT 2 5 1979

STATE

New York 10007

DATE ENTERED

SEEIN	NSTRUCTIONS IN HOW	TO COMPLETE NATIONA COMPLETE APPLICABL		3
1 NAME	TIPE ALL ENTRIES	COMPLETE AFFLICABL	LE SECTIONS	
Historic Harle	m River Houses			
AND/OR COMMON	in rever nouses	198-14-1		
2 LOCATION				
STREET & NUMBER				
	Street, Macombs Plac	ce/Harlem River Dr.	NOTEDR PUBLICATION	
CITY, TOWN			CONGRESSIONAL DISTR	ICT
New York	<u> </u>	VICINITY OF	19	
New York		O36	COUNTY New York	CODE 061
3 CLASSIFICA	ATION	030	11011 10211	
J GLASSIFICA	ATTON			
CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRES	ENT USE
DISTRICT	X_PUBLIC	_XOCCUPIED	AGRICULTURE	MUSEUM
XBUILDING(S)	PRIVATE	UNOCCUPIED	COMMERCIAL	PARK
STRUCTURE	вотн	_WORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONAL	X-PRIVATE RESIDEN
SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	ENTERTAINMENT	RELIGIOUS
OBJECT	IN PROCESS	YES: RESTRICTED	GOVERNMENT	SCIENTIFIC
	BEING CONSIDERED	XYES: UNRESTRICTED	_INDUSTRIAL	_TRANSPORTATION
		_NO	MILITARY	_OTHER:
TOWNED OF	PROPERTY			
4 OWNER OF	PROPERTY			
NAME New York City H	ousing Authority			
STREET & NUMBER	odbing Addiolicy			
250 Broadway				
CITY, TOWN			STATE	7,000
New York		VICINITY OF	New York	10007
5 LOCATION	OF LEGAL DESCR	RIPTION		
COURTHOUSE.	New York County	Registers Office		
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, E				
STREET & NUMBER 31 Chambers Str	eet			
CITY, TOWN	CCC		STATE	
New York			New York	10007
6 REPRESEN	TATION IN EXIST	ING SURVEYS		
TITLE				
	rvation Commission L	2-0894		
DATE				
Sept. 23, 1975		FEDERALS	STATE _COUNTY XLOCAL	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS	Landmarks Preservation	on Commission. 305 F	Broadway	



CONDITION

__EXCELLENT __DETERIORATED
__GOOD __RUINS
__FAIR __UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

_UNALTERED

CHECK ONE

X_ORIGINAL SITE
__MOVED DATE_____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Harlem River Houses project is comprised of three separate groups of four and five-story buildings which are situated on a nine-acre site with land coverage of 30.16 percent. This was an unusually low figure compared to the 60 percent coverage that prevailed in most of Harlem in 1935. The population density of the project was 225 person per acre. In addition to creating light, airy apartments—each room was on the outside—the low land coverage also allowed for generous landscaping of the site.

The arrangement of the buildings on the relatively spacious, but difficult sloping trapezoidal shaped site, bisected by Seventh Avenue (now Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.), is extremely effective and drew high praise from architectural and urban design critics Talbot Hamlin and Lewis Mumford.

There are three separate groups of buildings—each group composed of Z-, T-, and L-shaped sections—two west of Seventh Avenue and one east. In the western section the two groups of buildings are arranged axially around a large plaza area, basically formal in plan and intersected by the area created by closing West 152nd Street, whereas a zig-zag is effected along Macombs Place where the sections are stepped back to follow the diagonal line of the street. The eastern section, which was designed in relation to the Harlem River, is a more rambling arrangement and is designed around a deep courtyard.

The red brick buildings, varying in height according to the slope of the site, are of a simple, straightforward design. Decorative details are added in the form of raised brick bandcourses at the bases of the buildings. Broad, steel-framed casement windows with horizontal hopper lights punctuate the wall surface. Stairshafts lit by narrow vertical windows rise above the entrances which are sheltered by flat-roofed porticoes.

Of the original 574 apartments, 60 had two rooms with kitchenette, 259 had three rooms, 232 had four rooms, and 23 had five rooms. Each apartment had electric refrigeration and lighting, steam heat, ample closet space, a tile bathroom and cross-ventilation. The apartment layouts emphasized privacy by permitting circulation from a foyer only through the kitchen or living room to the bedroom area. Further privacy and quiet were insured by the structural division of the buildings with no more than four apartments opening on any hallway.

In their overall plan for Harlem River Houses the architects were anxious to promote a sense of community, as well as to provide facilities that would specifically meet the needs of Harlem residents. This resulted in such features as a nursery school for the children of working mothers, a health clinic, which has since closed, four social rooms for adults, four rooms for occupational use and children's inside play, and community laundries. The design of the buildings also resulted in ground floor space which could be used for stores on Seventh Avenue—another community service.

1. The text of this report is taken almost in its entirety from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, Harlem River Houses (LP-0894), September, 1975, by Marjorie Pearson.

Form No. 10-300a (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED OCT 2.5 1979

DATE ENTERED

Harlem River

CONTINUATION SHEET Houses

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

Landscaping, supervised by Michael Rapuano enhances the site. All courtyards are liberally planted with London plane trees and paved with Belgian blocks. Sculpture, executed by Heinz Warnecke with the assistance of T. Barbarossa, R. Barthe, and F. Steinberger, also adds to the attractiveness of the courtyards. In the eastern section is a statue of two bear cubs. Sculptured penguins are placed around a fountain basin in the center of the large plaza in the western section. At the southern end of the plaza is a statue of a black laborer, while a statue of a mother and child with a dog graces the northern end. Also skillfully incorporated into the plan is a natural amphitheater in the eastern section, and below that a playground, as the site slopes down toward the river.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AF	REAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	IECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	X.COMMUNITY PLANNING CONSERVATION	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
_1500-1599	AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1600-1699 1700-1799	_ART	EDUCATIONENGINEERING	MILITARYMUSIC	X_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIANTHEATER
1800-1899 X1900-	COMMERCECOMMUNICATIONS	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT INDUSTRY INVENTION	PHILOSOPHY POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	TRANSPORTATION OTHER (SPECIFY) History

SPECIFIC DATES

1936-37

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Chief architect:

Archibald Manning Brown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Harlem River Houses, both historically and architecturally significant, was the first federally-funded, federally-built, and federally-owned housing project in New York City. It is an example of the early collaboration between the New York City Housing Authority and the Federal Government and was one of the first efforts undertaken by the Roosevelt Administration in recognition of the government's responsibility to provide low-income housing. It was "a recognition in brick and mortar of the special and urgent needs of Harlem" and the Housing Authority actively involved Harlem citizens in the planning of the project including criteria for tenant selection. The arragement of the buildings on the difficult trapezoidal site was extremely effective, drawing high praise from contemporary critics, and the courtyards and plaza were enhanced by handsome landscaping and sculpture. Harlem River Houses not only set a precedent for public housing across the country, but also offered features that could potentially raise the housing standards of all classes. The project was begun early in 1936 and completed in 1937.

The need for government-sponsored housing in urban areas, especially to aid lowerincome groups, had been long recognized by concerned architects and social critics in the United States. Successful experiments in government housing had been carried out since the turn of the century in Great Britain, Holland, Germany, Austria, and Scandinavia; many projects had been designed by distinguished architects. Many people wondered why the United States government could not do the same.

A shortage of urban housing, especially at affordable prices, was intensified by the Depression of the 1930s. Under the Hoover Administration, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) had been established in 1932 with the purpose of advancing funds to limited-dividend corporations to enable them to construct housing. Knickerbocker Village, a middle-income project on the Lower East Side, was financed in this way. Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the powers of the RFC were transferred in 1933 to the Housing Division of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (PWA), making possible the extension of loans to limited-dividend corporations for financing new construction, for the rehabilitation of low-cost housing, and for slumclearance; the agency could make grants and loans to duly-established public bodies, such as city and state housing authorities, for the same purpose; and it could buy, condemn, sell, or lease property to develop new projects itself. Thus, the Roosevelt Administration recognized that low-income housing was a responsibility of governmentdespite bitter complaints by the building and real-estate interests that the government

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Attached Sheet

ECHEPOLE RELIE				
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY NOTE: UTM REFERENCES	ine acres	UTM NOT VI	RHED	9051-0057 ₀ , 1000-1089
	HING	B ZONE EAS	TING NORTHING	
Manhattan Tax Map Block 2037, Manhattan Tax Map Block 2020,				anizari R-y Liezeba Komo air d
See Attached Map				nd the Fol
special and urgent needs of				
LIST ALL STATES AND COUNT	IES FOR PROPER	TIES OVERLAPPING S	TATE OR COUNTY BOUNDAR	RIES
STATE STATE	CODE	COUNTY	on end bus golding to	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY		CODE
Joan R. Olshansky, National F ORGANIZATION Landmarks Preservation Commis			ntact: Elizabeth lph, 518-474-0479 DATE July 11, 1979 TELEPHONE	
305 Broadway	un urban, am simed auchi	patawon bearsance	(070)	notab jemosti ed eum
CITY OR TOWN New York,	el Pesquesvo Su Amation	especialments of n n Ornatis Berkenia.	state New York 100	07003 0311
12 STATE HISTORIC PRES	SERVATIO	N OFFICER C	ERTIFICATION	elvaniford dvsteropad
		F THIS PROPERTY WIT		
NATIONAL X	STA	o, especia <u>lly</u> at	LOCAL	
As the designated State Historic Preservati hereby nominate this property for inclusio criteria and procedures set forth by the Nat STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIG	n in the National ional Park Service (Register and certify the		
TITLE Director, Historic	Preservat	ion Field Services Bure	au DATE 10/17/7	9
FOR NPS USE ONLY I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPE	Shul	O IN THE NATIONAL RE	, ,	8-75
ATTEST: Kustu O' Councl KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	20	PRESERVATION (DATE 12/18/7	9
TELLISITE OF THE OTHER				

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS US	ONLY				
RECEIVED	OCT	25	1979 DEC	18	1979
DATE ENTER	ED				1010

CONTINUATION SHEET Harlem River

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

was encroaching on their domain. Government officials, such as PWA Administrator Harold L. Ickes, effectively argued that private industry could not afford to build housing at affordable rents for the low-income sector.

New York City, through the jurisdiction of the New York City Housing Authority, had already begun its own experiment in low-cost housing in 1935 with the construction of First Houses on the Lower East Side, one of the city's most congested slum areas. Although financed through Housing Authority bonds, it used relief labor paid for through the Federal Government's "work-relief" program.

Harlem presented special problems. Although not as densely built up as the Lower East Side—only 60 percent of the total land area was used for residential purposes, and most residences were Old Law Tenements and one—and—two—family structures converted into rooming houses—the population density per acre was the highest in the city. At that time, Harlem's population, which was predominantly black, was confined by racial barriers — to renting in that area. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had tried to provide the private—industry housing solution when he funded the "Dunbar Apartments," completed in 1928. But at average prices of \$14.50 per room such cooperative apartments were far beyond the means of many Harlem residents.

Riots in Harlem in March 1935 and the subsequent hearings on conditions in Harlem by a committee appointed by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia to determine the causes of the riots, helped focus attention on Harlem's urgent housing needs.

In May of that year, Langdon W. Post, Commissioner of the New York City Housing Authority, asked the Federal Government for \$1,500,000 for low-cost housing and slum clearance as part of a newly enacted work-relief program. Mayor LaGuardia announced that the next model housing project built in New York City with Federal aid would be in West Harlem. In July, PWA Administrator Ickes announced that the PWA would pay for a \$4.7 million housing project in Harlem, but only if the city could acquire a site in thirty days by condemnation and convey it to the Federal Government for purchase on the same terms as those used for the Williamsburg Houses, another PWA project which was just getting under way.

Because of artificially inflated land values on built-up residential sites in Harlem the site chosen for the new housing project was a largely vacant area, located between 151st and 153rd Streets and Macombs Place and the Harlem River and bisected by Seventh Avenue. Most of the site was owned by the Empire Mortagage Company, one of the financial interests of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Both the PWA and the city tried to buy the site directly. Rockefeller refused to sell unless the city also acquired the Dunbar Apartments, which he then owned, and which were just one block south of the proposed housing project site. Rockefeller feared that he would lose tenants from the Punbar Apartments to the new project. The city filed condemnation proceedings, and the owners were eventually awarded \$1,095,000.

Form No. 10-300a (Hev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY			
RECEIVED OT 2 5 1979	DEC	18	1979
DATE ENTERED			

CONTINUATION SHEET

Harlem River Houses

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

Rockefeller was not the only one who had doubts about building on the proposed site. A number of objections were voiced because the new housing was not a slum-clearance project and threatened to bring more people to the area. However, the PWA and the Housing Authority felt that building new housing on vacant land would help alleviate some of the overcrowding in existing buildings and might possibly permit some of the worst buildings in the area to be demolished later. Other real estate owners besides Rockefeller feared that the new housing would draw tenants away from their buildings, and the Real Estate Board asked that the Harlem project be open exclusively to persons of low income.

While condemnation proceedings were under way in 1935, the Housing Authority appointed a team of eight architects, headed by Archibald Manning Brown, to begin work on plans for the Harlem Project. In a early instance of Federal and city cooperation, the Housing Authority provided complete plans and specifications for the PWA which then undertook construction.

The team of architects—Archibald Manning Brown, Charles F. Fuller, Horace Ginsbern, Frank J. Forster, Will Rice Amon, Richard W. Buckley, and black architect John Louis Wilson—skillfully designed Harlem River Houses. Chief architect Brown (1881—1956) later originated plans for the Chelsea Houses and the Elliot Houses, both for the New York City Housing Authority. The recipient of a classical architectural education at Harvard and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, Brown had a long—time interest in civic affairs as evidenced by a three—term membership on the board of the Municipal Art Commission. None of the architects were actually employees of the Housing Authority; all were members of private architectural firms who were assembled by the Housing Authority to design the project.

Commissioner Post appointed a group of prominent Harlem citizens to serve on the Harlem Housing Committee which was to encourage local participation by offering recommendations to the Housing Authority on the new housing project. The committee members were: Walter N. White, author and secretary of the NAACP; Alan Dingle, president of the Harlem Lawyers Association; Mrs. Harriet Shadd Butcher of the Russell Sage Foundation; James Hubert, executive secretary of the New York Urban League; Mrs. Daisy Reed of Utopia House; Donelan J. Phillips, president of the Consolidated Tenants League; Mrs. Minnie Green, vice president of the Consolidated Tenants League; Dr. Edward E. Best; Dr. C.B. Powell; Francis E. Rivers; and Earl Brown.

Title to the property was transferred from the city to the Federal Government at the end of November 1935. The deed stipulated that the city must maintain a park and playground area bordering on the Harlem River for ten years. It also provided for the closing of portions of 151st, 152nd, and 153rd Streets.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS U	SE ONLY			
RECEIVED	OCT 25	1979		
DATE ENTE	DEN	UEG	1-8	1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

Harlem River Houses

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

After the architects completed the plans and specifications, bids for the construction of the foundations were announced in Nov. 1935. The contract was awarded to the Carlton Company of New York, and actual construction began early in 1936. Similarly, contracts for the erection of the Harlem River Houses superstructure were awarded to the Cauldwell-Wingate Company in May 1936. It should be noted in this connection that the Housing Division of the PWA chose those private contractors who employed workmen paid at the union scale in full, in keeping with the PWA goal of building housing projects in order to create employment and stimulate the building industry.

From the beginning, it was planned that the Harlem River Houses would be operated by the New York City Housing Authority although ownership would be retained by the PWA. But in November 1936 the Housing Authority announced that it would not operate the project unless the maximum rents did not exceed \$7.50 per room. Arguing against projected rents of \$8.75 per room, Commissioner Post noted such rents would discriminate precisely against the lowest-income families who were supposed to benefit from the construction of such housing. The problem was resolved when the PWA set the rentals at \$7.10 per room, including heat and water. Rentals were determined according to a formula which would enable 55 percent of the cost of the project to be paid back to the Federal Government over a 60-year period and would also allow the project to pay its own maintenance and operating costs.

A one-year experimental lease--later renewed--transferring the Harlem River Houses from the PWA to the New York City Housing Authority was approved in May 1937. The lease was signed by Commissioner Post, with appropriate ceremonies on June 16, 1937, in the main courtyard of the Harlem River Houses. Special tribute was paid to President Roosevelt for having initiated government aid to housing low-income families.

Today the Harlem River Houses project remains one of the finest developments run by the New York City Housing Authority. There is still a strong sense of community, aided in part by the excellent overall physical planning.

When completed, Harlem River Houses was more than just a step toward solving the problem of housing that one third of a nation which Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in his Second Inaugural Address, described as "ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished." The hope was not only that Harlem River Houses would set a precedent for public housing across the country but would also provide an example which would help raise housing standards of all classes. As Lewis Mumford writing in The New Yorker in 1938 so eloquently stated:

Form No. 10-300a (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVEDOCT 2 5 1979

DEC | 8 1979

Harlem River

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 5

Here, in short, is the equipment for decent living that every modern neighborhood needs: sunlight, air, safety, play space, meeting space, and living space. The families in the Harlem Houses have higher standards of housing, measured in tangible benefits, that most of those on Park Avenue. By contrast every other section of the city is a makeshift, congested, disorderly, dismally inadequate.

This low-cost housing, so much needed in 1935, was a prime instance of cooperation between the city and the Federal Government. It opened the door to the continuation of such policy and the rotational reconstruction of Harlem, which, over the years, has resulted in razing of many blocks of slums and their replacement by clean livable quarters for the residents.

Form No. 10-300a (Hev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED OCT 2 5 1979

DATE ENTERED DEC | 8 1979

Harlem River
CONTINUATION SHEET Houses

ITEM NUMBER Q

PAGE

A more complete bibliography may be found in the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission research file: Harlem River Houses.

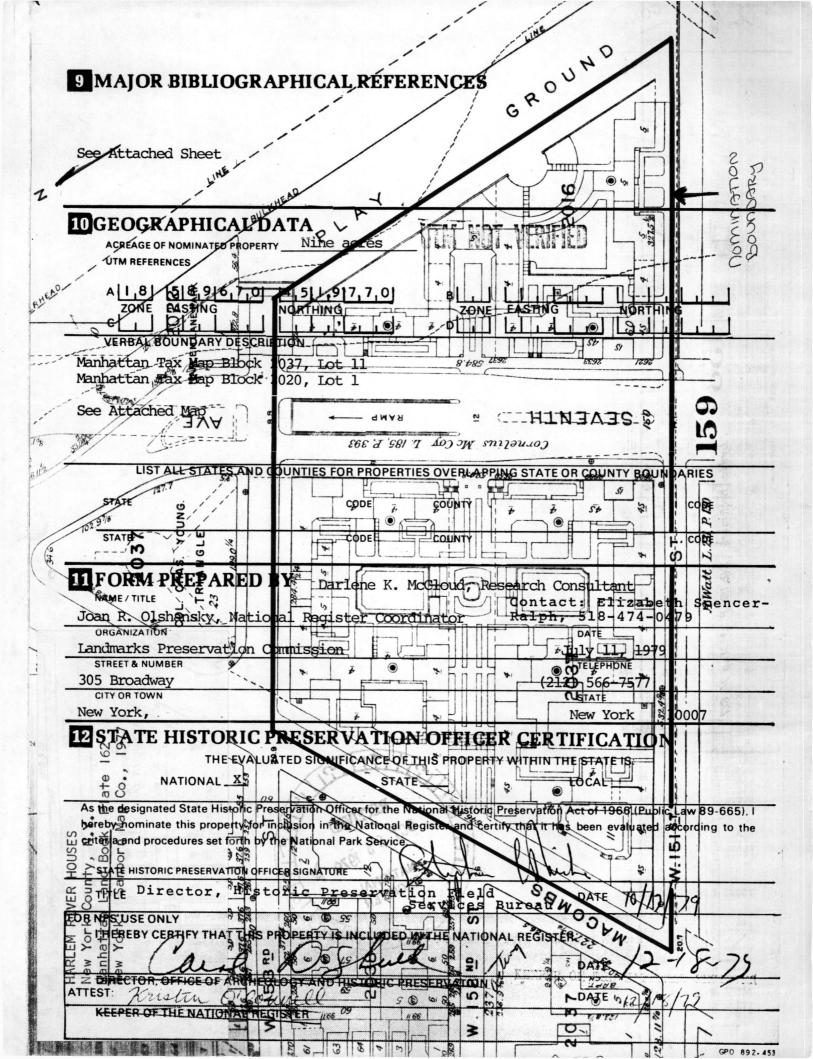
Fisher, Robert. 20 Years of Public Housing. New York: Harper & Row, 1959.

Hamlin, Talbot. "New York Housing - Harlem River Houses and Williamsburg Houses," Pencil Points, 19 (May 1938), 281-212.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Harlem River Houses Designation Report (LP-0894), by Marjorie Pearson. New York: City of New York, 1975.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Skyline - The New Order," New Yorker, 14 (Feb. 26, 1938), 42-44.

New York Times. Numerous articles 1935-1937 and 1975.





. 7	9001605
Property Harlem River Houses	
State 714, 119 Working Number 10, 25.79 25.50	
TECHNICAL Photos 4 Maps 1/1	CONTROL
he first federally-funded, federally built, and federally-owned housing project in N.y. project consists of three separate groups of four and five story brick buildings. Built is lowent housing for Harlem residences, the project was innovative in its design of both house of open spaces, the project set a precedent and a standard for other public house roughout the country. Lodgy the Harlem R. houses remains one of the finest hour	in 1936-7 accept buildings DA. 1
velopments un by N. Y. city. it is nominated for architects. ARCHITECTU	RAL HISTORIAN
imunity planning, and social/humanitarian. Sahoually significant landmark in history of whom planning + housing.	Accept O'Connell 12/18/79
	ARCHEOLOGIST
	OTHER
	HAER
	Inventory
REVI	EW UNIT CHIEF
	BRANCH CHIEF
	WARDEN
	KEEPER

United States Department of the Interior - Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service



1. Harlem River Houses, New York, New York.
Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo, 1979.
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission. 0CT 25 1979

View from Southwest.

#10/1

New york County



2. Harlem River Houses, New York, New York.
Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo, 1979.
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks
Preservation Commission.
View of former amphitheatre. OCT 2 5 1979

#20/2

New York County



3. Harlem River Houses, New York, New York.
Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo, 1979.
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks
OCT 25 1979 Preservation Commission.
View of western interior court.

#393

New york County



4.Harlem River Houses, New York, New York,
Photo by: Stephen L. Senigo, 1979.
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks
Landmarks Commission.
View of eastern interior court. 25 1979

#494

New york County

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Date Entered DEC | 8

Name

Location

Point Gratiot Lighthouse Complex

Harlem River Houses

First Houses

Dunkirk

Chautauqua County

New York

New York County

New York

New York County

Also Notified

Honorable Daniel P. Moynihan

Honorable Jacob K. Javits Honorable Stanley N. Lundine Honorable Charles B. Rangel Honorable John M. Murphy State Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Orin Lehman
Commissioner
Parks and Recreation
Agency Building #1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

Byers/bjr 1/7/80