

**Determination of National Register Eligibility:**  
**Willert Park Housing Project**

NYSHPO- Daniel P. McEneny- October, 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Significance-**

Constructed in 1938-39, the Willert Park Housing Project (aka, A.D. Price Homes) in the City of Buffalo is the 2<sup>nd</sup> public housing complex in New York State to be built for a solely African American community. The complex is eligible for the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places under Criterion A- Art, Ethnic Heritage, and Community Planning & Development, and Criterion C- Architecture. The significance level has been set at the State level and the period of significance has been set at the original date of construction, 1938-39.

**Criterion A-**

Art: The resource is associated with the Federal Art Project (FAP), which operated between 1935 and 1943 under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). During this time the FAP employed artists to create some of the nation's most significant public art of the era in the form of posters, murals, photographs, paintings, and sculptures. Numerous nationally recognized artists were employed by the FAP including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Ben Shahn, and Willem de Kooning. The work of the FAP is clearly expressed through the resource's abundant sculptural elements, which were crafted by FAP artists Robert Crombach and Herbert Ambellan.

Ethnic Heritage: Willert Park stands as the first publically funded housing project in the City of Buffalo and the second in NYS to identify the growing need for proper housing to address the city's large African American community. At the time of its creation, Blacks were refused admission into other city housing programs, which predominately served the city's Polish, Italian, and Irish immigrant communities. Promoted by the Urban League, the site was chosen specifically because the area represented what was then defined as the emerging heart of the Black community.

Community Planning and Development: Constructed under the Buffalo Housing Municipal Authority, the Willert Park Housing Project received funding from the United States Housing Authority, which was created the year before by the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937. An important aspect of Roosevelt's New Deal program, the USHA established public housing on a firm footing in the United States. The USHA built 100,000 units in 140 cities before 1942 when it was merged with another government agency. The Buffalo project was one of the first to be funded by the USHA and perhaps the first planned for African American residents in mind. (Kowsky)

**Criterion C-**

Architecture- The Willert Park Housing Project was designed by Buffalo architect Frederick C. Backus for the Buffalo Housing Municipal Authority. Stylistically, the buildings reflect aspects of the Modern Movement of architecture, with particular references drawn from European housing projects constructed by Le Corbusier in France and the Bauhaus School in Germany. These projects are generally minimally decorated, with functional designs laid out with buildings facing interior courts to create park-like settings.

The building are further significant for their association with the architect and the work of artists and master craftsmen Robert Crombach and Herbert Ambellan, who provided the numerous sculptural elements found throughout the 1938/39 complex.