With the onset of the Great Depression in 1930, the nation was in crisis. Between 1929 and 1933, Cincinnati lost 41 percent of all its wage-earning jobs. According to David Stradling in Cincinnati from River City to Highway Metropolis, “Although bank failures did not plague Cincinnati the way they did other areas, the loss of industrial jobs and the reduction of wages crippled the city’s economy.” Many were driven to desperation and crime. “In 1934, Cincinnati ranked well above the national average in murders and aggravated assaults. More than 70 percent of the murders occurred in the town, particularly in the West End, as did more than 75 percent of the aggravated assaults.”

A survey of 13,000 apartments and 26,000 rooms in the West End the same year found that fewer than one in five had adequate sanitation. Shared privies served 60% of the population. Mortality rates in this area were two to five times higher than in the rest of the city. Population density, at 116 people per acre, was more than five times the city average.

In 1931 Franklin Roosevelt’s administration established the Public Works Administration to provide work for the unemployed. Among its projects was construction of sub-sidized housing in 51 cities, including Cincinnati. These projects emphasized standardization of design, low site density, communal values, social and recreational opportunities, ample automobile parking and attention to health, light and air.

Laurel Homes was the city’s first and largest attempt to improve living conditions in the inner city by replacing urban blight with modern, sanitary, low-rent apartments for low-income tenants. The project consisted of 27 buildings, flat-roofed, three and four stories tall, in a variety of right-angled shapes. The buildings occupied only 24 percent of the property, with the remainder devoted to open space with plants and playgrounds. Laurel Homes was also the second largest housing project built by the PWA in the U.S.

In recognition of its local and national historic significance and a desire of the community to mark the 50th anniversary of the complex, Laurel Homes was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. In 1989 it was also locally designated by City Council.

**Union Terminal**

When Union Terminal was built in the early Depression years, many questioned whether it was too large and too late, but today it is one of our most beloved landmarks. The stunning Art Deco design by architect Paul Cret was completed in 1933. The terminal was busy immediately after its completion until the end of World War II. But after the war, the number of trains passing through daily declined. This decline continued until the terminal was closed in 1972. After a short-lived stint as a shopping mall, the terminal was given new life as the Cincinnati Museum Center after voters approved a $33 million bond issue in 1986. Train service has also been restored.

**Laurel Homes and Lincoln Court**

The Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority was created and quickly advanced a plan for “slum clearance” in the West End. Using federal funds, the city began to buy property and clear a site just east of Union Terminal for construction of public housing. Laurel Homes, with 1,039 apartments mostly for whites, was completed in 1938.

At first African Americans were excluded from the new housing, but after bitter protest, another 264 units exclusively for blacks were added, two years later. In 1942, the 1,015-unit Lincoln Court, exclusively for blacks, was finished. The late mayor Theodore M. Berry, Cincinnati’s first African-American mayor, described Laurel Homes as “one facet in the emergence of unified action to pursue economic and social justice for blacks.”

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