



# Investigating the CHPC archives

## Alfred T White and his impact today

*“There will be no dispute that every working-man should own his own home, if possible, or, next to that, should hire and live in a seperate house” -*

*Alfred T. White*



### Citizens Housing & Planning Council

Founded in 1937, CHPC is a non-profit policy research organization dedicated to improving housing and neighborhood conditions through cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors.

### Background

Alfred Tredway White was a leading American housing reformer in the late 19th Century, who pioneered good quality, affordable housing, that would strengthen society as a whole, while still profiting landlords.

Born into a wealthy merchant family in Brooklyn in 1846, he was inspired to build quality housing for working families after helping with the settlement school program of the First Unitarian Church in Brooklyn Heights and witnessing the shockingly poor living conditions of the children.

Between 1876 and 1879, he built the Home and the Tower Buildings on Hicks Street at Baltic Street in Brooklyn, described as ‘model tenements’ by Jacob Riis. With their fireproof construction, private toilets, balconies and landscaped courtyards, they were considered the most advanced tenements of their age.

In addition, White developed an innovative business plan for the Home and the Tower Buildings to demonstrate to other developers that a profit could still be made from affordable housing.

The ‘Cobble Hill Towers’ remain in modern-day Brooklyn having survived the development of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

Real estate firm Hudson Companies, whose principal is a CHPC Board Member, has recently entered into a joint venture with the owner of this historic property and has taken over property management responsibilities.

Cobble Hill Towers today



### CHPC Archive

While continuing CHPC’s mammoth project to catalogue and preserve its archival collection, we recently unearthed several key books and documents relating to Alfred T White and the Cobble Hill Towers.

The most remarkable discovery was a book that linked White’s work with many influential housing advocates in England at the time.

We uncovered a bound series of articles dated 1875, written by Octavia Hill, an eminent British housing reformer and philanthropist, titled ‘Homes of the London Poor’. It details her influential, hands-on approach to the development and management of housing for low income families in London, and is designed as an advice booklet for New York City.

The delightful Best Practice preface can be seen in the following pages.

Specifically, Octavia Hill placed emphasis on the role of the landlord as a positive influence on the ‘moral behaviour of the tenants’. In return, landlords would receive rents on time and fewer vacancies and repairs.

The influence of Hill’s work can clearly be seen in White’s ‘Improved Dwellings for the Working Classes’ article from 1879, which discusses the Home and the Tower Buildings. The rules for its original tenants can also be seen in the following pages.

In addition, the Alfred T White documents that we have unearthed are proving to be useful to housing providers working in NYC today. Hudson Companies is currently using the CHPC archives to research the original floor plans and renderings of the Cobble Hill Towers.

*Sarah Watson & Sulin Carling*

IN reprinting the following articles, by Miss Octavia Hill, of London, it is not proposed that the system described is, in all its details, applicable to this country. The conditions of poverty in America and in England differ widely. The Municipal forms of Government there are very unlike our own. But the broad truths of humanity are the same everywhere, and the principles which underlie Miss Hill's efforts, those of helping the poor towards self-support and self-respect; of bringing to their aid an unwearied patience, a true sympathy, and a large hope; of loving them and trusting them; above all, of realizing that they and we are children of One Father; these principles are applicable to all countries and to every people.

LOUISA LEE SCHUYLER,

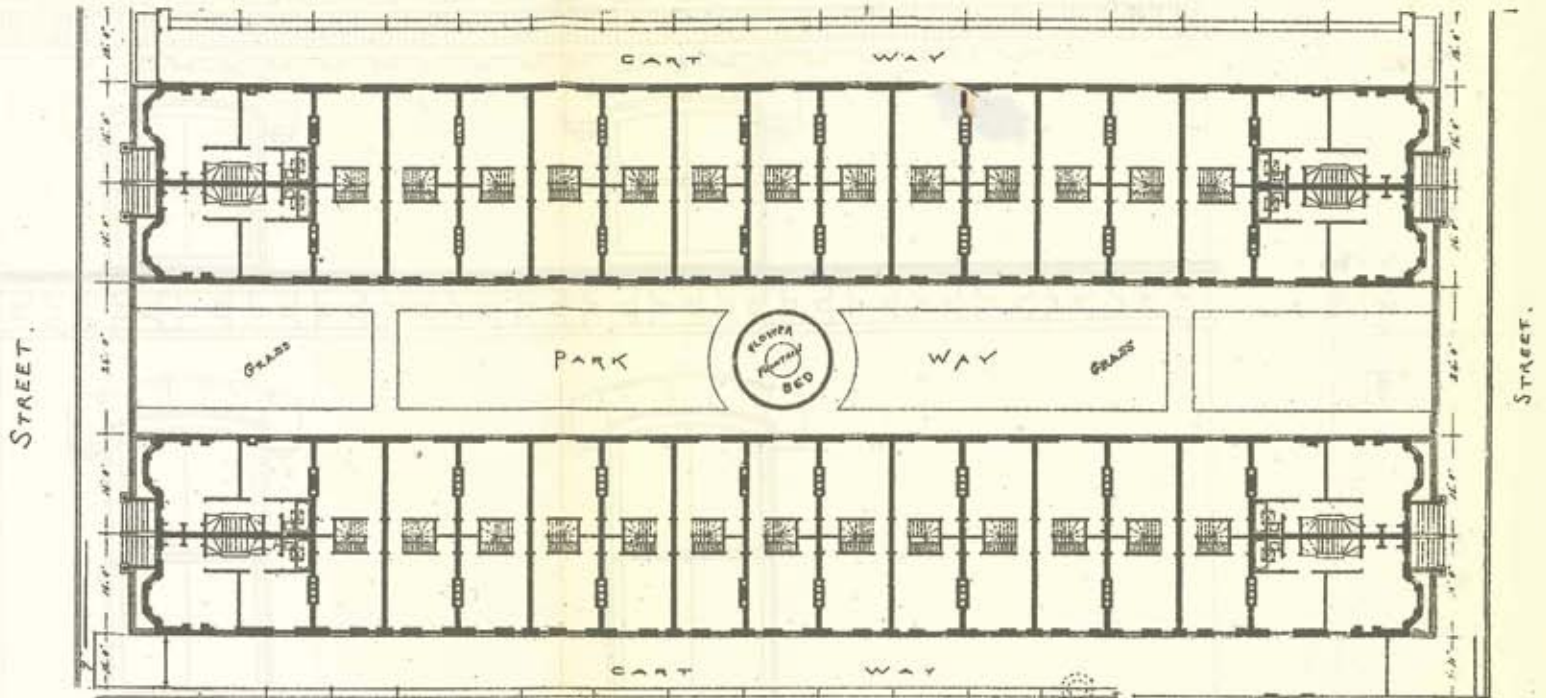
President,

State Charities Aid Association.

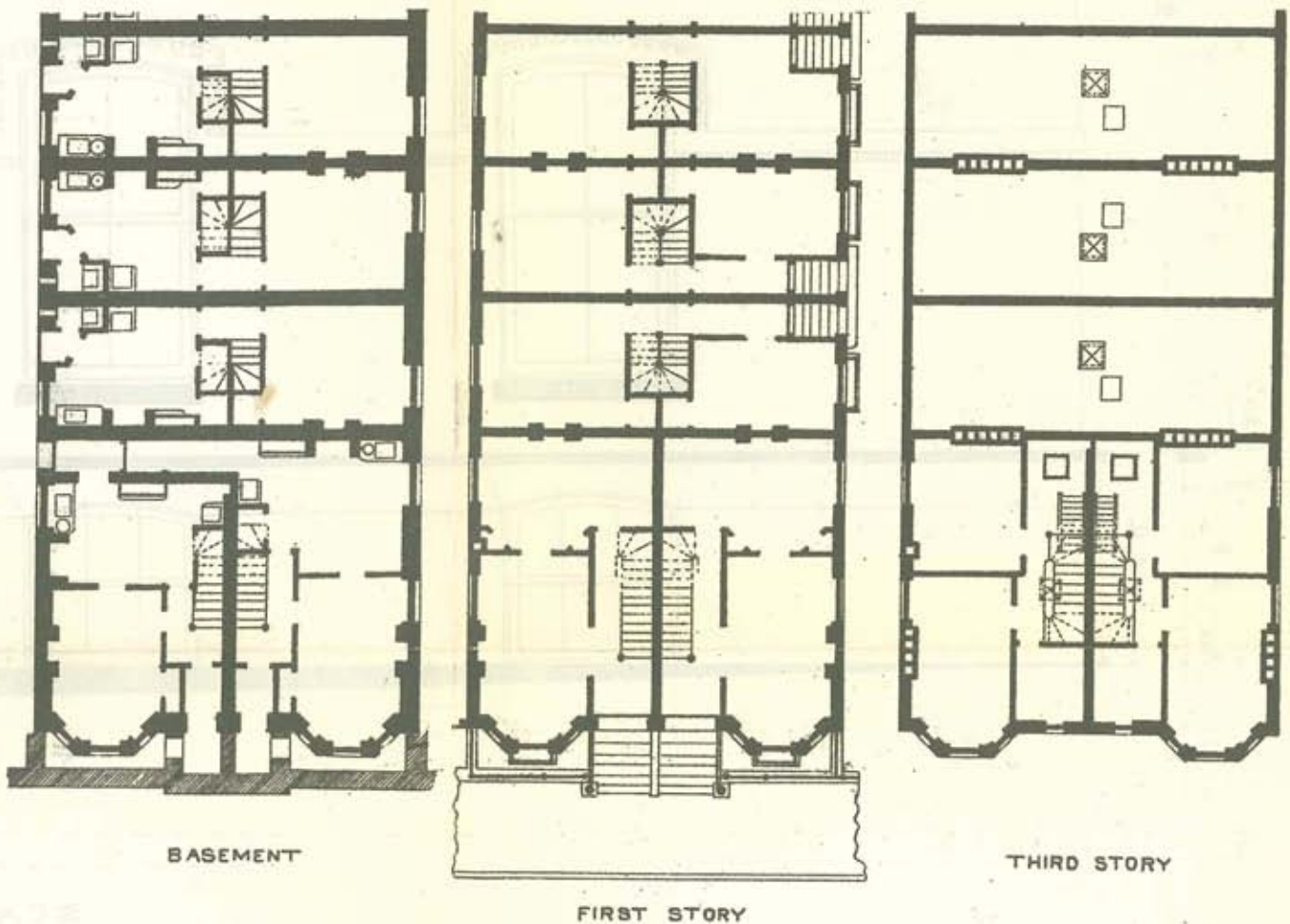
NEW YORK, *April* 14, 1875.



COTTAGES FOR WORKINGMEN, ERECTED 1878.  
WARREN PLACE, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

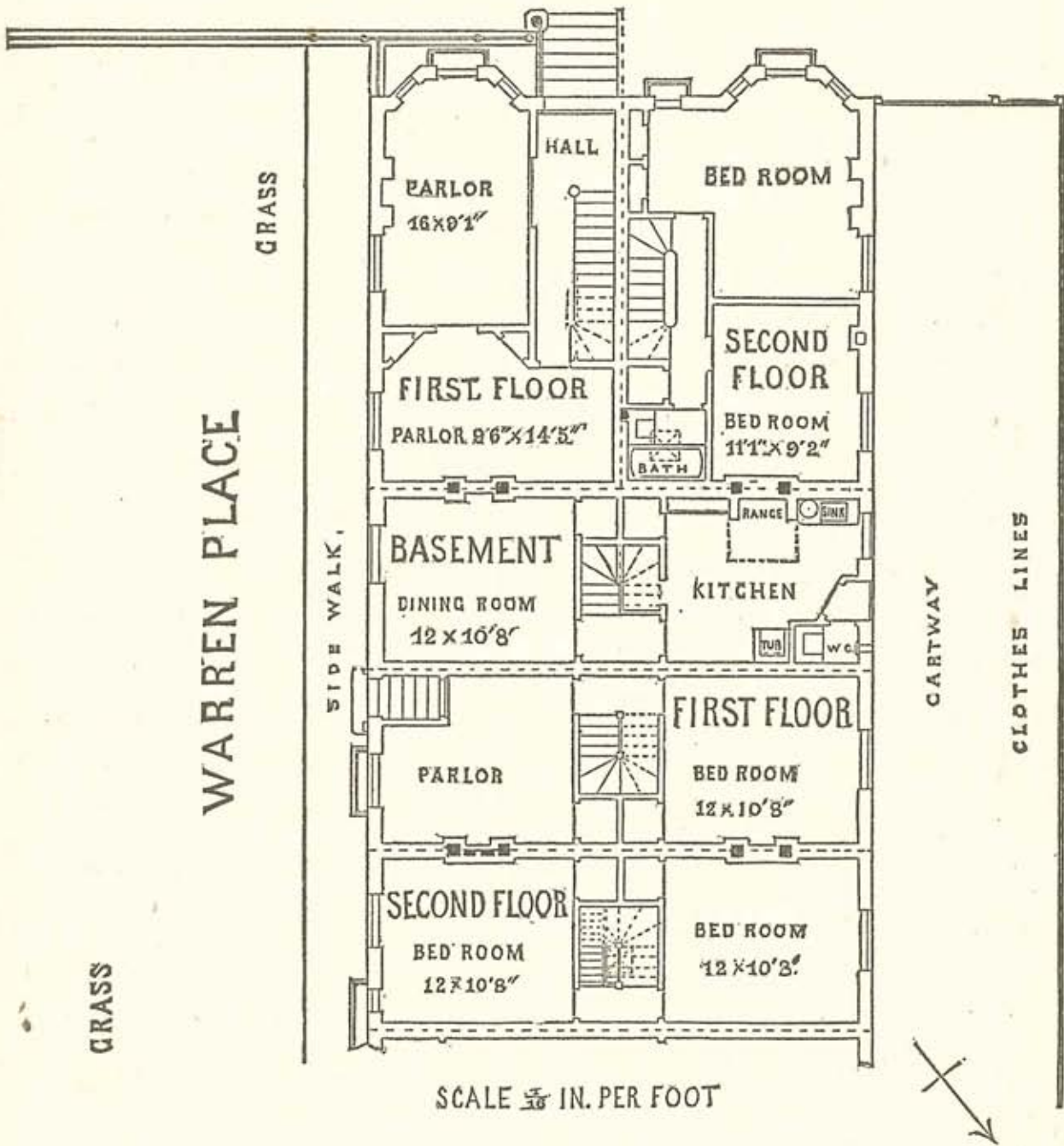


General Ground Plan (Showing Second Stories) Scale  $\frac{1}{32}$ " per foot.



FLOOR PLANS - Scale  $\frac{1}{16}$ " per foot.

BALTIC STREET



And the *lowest* rentals are—

Four-room Dwellings	-	1 50	6 09
Three-room “	-	1 30	5 21

The lowest rentals are of course on the top floor, and all rentals are increased ten cents per week for each floor, moving downwards.

Every tenant in these buildings is provided with a rent book, in which his weekly payments are entered, containing the following notices :

All rents to be paid weekly, Saturday evenings, *in advance*, between 7 and 10 o'clock, to the agent, at his rooms in the building.

Tenants desiring at any one time to pay the rent for four or more weeks in advance, will be allowed a deduction of ten cents per week on the rent so paid.

Tenants not paying in advance will be at once notified to leave.

Tenants will be required to make good any damage arising from their carelessness, and in case of accident to plumbing, glass, etc., *immediate notice* must be given to the agent, who will have the necessary repairs made at cost of the tenant.

No tenant is permitted to underlet any portion of his apartments or to take in lodgers.

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The attention of tenants is particularly called to the following notices, and they are desired to co-operate with the agent in observing and enforcing them, for the comfort and health of all.

1.—Halls and balconies to be swept every morning, in turn, by the tenants of the apartments using them. All sweeping, shaking mats, etc., to be done before 10 A. M.

2.—*No solid matter shall be thrown into the water pipes. All garbage to be burned, and all ashes thrown into the ash flues.*

3.—No clothes shall be hung out of the windows. No animals shall be kept on the premises. No nails shall be driven in walls or woodwork, except by express permission of the agent. Wood must not be sawed or split anywhere but in the cellars.

4.—Children are not allowed on the roof, nor to play on the stairs and balconies.

5.—Disorderly tenants will not be allowed to remain. The agent is directed to enforce the above regulations, and will be immediately discharged if he neglect to do so.