

Sherman Garden Cooperative Apartments

A monthly publication for residents of Sherman Garden Apartments, 1856-66 Sherman Avenue, Evanston, IL

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GARDEN ROOTS

By Joan Cotter

In a previous issue we featured SGA architect Henry K. Holsman as designer of the Holsman high-wheeler automobile (1902-1910). We now turn to his contributions to the architectural profession, of which Sherman Garden Apartments are one example.

Born in Dale, Iowa, in 1866, Holsman moved to Chicago in 1892. He started his own Chicago architectural practice in 1900, and married his artistic collaborator Elizabeth Tuttle. In the early decades of the 20th century he designed churches, colleges, banks, schools and commercial buildings, as well as private homes in Oak Park and Beverly Hills (Chicago!). Already before World War I he experimented with apartment designs which incorporated more open space with fewer corridors and much larger windows than was customary. He also emphasized landscape design, with which he had become familiar while he was Chicago park commissioner in 1908-09.

Holsman is best known for his novel concept of mutual ownership by which people with moderate incomes could be beneficiaries of a mutual trust corporation and lease apartments owned by the trust at low costs. By the mid-1920s he had built seven such complexes, one in Milwaukee, and six in Hyde Park. Eventually he applied a similar business plan to affordable housing for low-income persons, the largest project being Parkway Garden Apartments, 694 units in 35 buildings where the White City amusement park had stood.

During the Post World War II housing boom the firm doubled the number of its employees and built more than 3000 mutual ownership apartment units, including the 132 at Sherman Garden. *Architectural Forum* magazine singled out the Holsman firm in 1950, pointing to construction ideas we all recognize: "ranging from reinforced brick walls to radiant heated ceiling beams, saving space, time and money . . . As an apartment-building device, mutual ownership is now a major force in the Chicago area."

In June 1951 the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects gave its Honor Award to the architectural firm of Holsman, Holsman, Klekamp and Taylor for its design of Sherman Garden Apartments. In the award letter to the Trustees, Chapter president L. Morgan Yost also acknowledged the participation of the Trust: *"In making this award the jury is not unmindful of the large part that a client plays in the successful design of any building. You too then are to be congratulated on the achievement of this building which has been selected for the Honor*

Award.” Two of the architects, John Holsman and D. Coder Taylor, were also residents here and Taylor served as Managing Trustee until June 1952.

Stricter government controls and financial difficulties caused the firm to declare bankruptcy at the end of 1952. Henry Holsman died in 1963 shortly before his 93rd birthday. His son John and family lived at Sherman Garden in the early 1950s in 1866 7NE/NW. All three of his sons were in business with him and a grandson, Peter Holsman of Northbrook, is also an architect.

“His mutual-ownership model was among the very earliest prototypes for the future development of co-op apartments and condominiums. . . Mutual-ownership housing still works for those who share his vision of social equality and civic harmony and is once again becoming a popular vehicle for development of affordable housing.” Richard N. Swett, *Leadership by Design: Creating an Architecture of Trust* (Greenway Communications, 2005), 214.