W HILE Washington, D.C. policymakers in the 1970s and 1980s scorned public housing and other vestiges of Progressive era housing reform, scholars began viewing these unloved artifacts of the mid-twentieth century as rich terrain for historical inquiry. Studies such as Fairbanks’s, despite falling chronologically short of the recently scandalous Department of Housing and Urban Development era, afford insight into the ongoing dilemma of federal housing policy. Rather than concentrating on this important and timely issue, however, this review will emphasize the pertinent fact that, despite its focus on Cincinnati, Fairbanks’s study can also afford insight into the history of Pittsburgh housing reform. Here, the linkage exists in twentieth century modernization that is in the Progressive origins of housing reform, especially the movement’s obsession with professionalization, efficiency, and bureaucratic means.

In his history of progressivism and housing reform, Roy Lubove traced the evolution of Progressive housing thought to the nineteenth century crusade against the tenement house. Lubove highlighted in particular the role of New York City’s Lawrence Veiller, who not only wrote Gotham’s 1901 Tenement House law, but in 1910 founded the National Housing Association, which led the battle to abolish tenements nationwide. As undisputed dean of American “housers,” Veiller schooled in housing not only Cincinnati’s Bleecker Marquette and Philadelphia’s Bernard Newman, but also John Ihlder, first field secretary of the National Housing Association, and the first executive secretary of the fledgling Pittsburgh Housing Association, founded in 1928.

A deeper significance underlies the conjunction of these names, Veiller, Marquette, Newman and Ihlder. Progressivism reflected not only the professional values of housing experts trained in the sanitary sciences but also a belief that housing was a national cause transcending a particular geography, or the social, political and economic peculiarities of a given city. Housing reformers saw themselves as cosmopolites. They communicated with each other regularly and voiced familiarity with the housing problems and experiences of numerous cities in America and abroad. By 1930 the community of housers had been considerably expanded to include people like Edith Elmer Wood, Lewis Mumford, Henry Wright and Catherine Bauer, all deeply influenced by the English garden city movement and by Europe’s flirtation during the 1920s with socialistic housing schemes. It is understandable, then, that when American housers declared a national crisis at the President’s Conference on Housing and Homebuilding, convened by Herbert Hoover in 1931, many — but not including Veiller, Marquette, Newman and Ihlder — demanded federal involvement to overcome the nation’s critical shortage of decent, affordable housing for the growing population of low income families.

In Making Better Citizens, Fairbanks looks at one city where, like Philadelphia and New York, housing reform had rooted itself early. He especially focuses on the community development strategy implicit in Progressive housing reform. Early in the twentieth century Cincinnati’s Chamber of Commerce, and the Better Housing League, which the Chamber helped launch, undertook to outlaw tenement housing in the city’s notorious Basin area. During the 1920s Cincinnati housers helped develop Mariemont, a model, limited-dividend housing community, and in the 1930s they spearheaded the building of Laurel Homes, a federal housing project undertaken by Harold Ickes’s Public Works Administration. Fair-
banks concludes by discussing post-war urban redevelopment, which he correctly sees as a significant departure from the community development strategy.

The author argues that from the 1890s till the 1950s Cincinnati housers emphasized community development as the primary goal of housing reform. Whether waging war on the city’s fléde Basin slums or promoting metropolitan-wide housing plans such as Mariemont, these reformers, Fairbanks contends, sought to socially engineer good neighborhoods that would positively affect human behavior. This belief in the salutary effect of good school-centered neighborhoods was at the core of Progressive environmentalism popularized early by New York’s Jacob Riis, Elgin R.L. Gould, and Carol Arnovici, and later by Marquette, Wright, Perry and other housers. These ideas, as Fairbanks notes, were given firm social scientific underpinning by such Chicago School social scientists as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie. During the 1920s Cincinnati housers mortared their beliefs about the normative function of good housing and good neighborhoods into the community development design of such places as Mariemont. In Pittsburgh, housers incorporated modern housing principles into Chatham Village, a celebrated limited-dividend housing development on Mt. Washington undertaken by the Buhl Foundation. In characterizing Cincinnati’s housing movement in the 1920s, Fairbanks notes — but almost in passing — the more prosaic role of the Better Housing League (BHL) in enforcing the city’s housing code, counting the number of tenement demolitions, and tabulating housing vacancies and housing starts. Pittsburgh’s Ihlder was a dedicated enforcer of the steel city’s housing code. Fairbanks emphasizes more the BHL’s role in promoting regional housing schemes. In fact, the author finds the BHL during the 1920s turning its back on the slums. According to Fairbanks, after World War I housers and social scientists increasingly discounted the power of heterogeneous — albeit reconstructed — urban neighborhoods to build good citizens. Clarence Perry, the architect of the neighborhood unit idea, argued that effective modern communities must be spacious, self-contained, and above all, homogeneous, rather than socially and ethnically diverse. Not surprisingly, the modern housers of the 1920s envisioned this “housing for the machine age,” as Perry called it, constructed on vacant land located on the urban periphery — suburbia, if you will.

At the same time housers, including Marquette, as Fairbanks observes, broadened their perspective to encompass the whole metropolitan region. In New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as in Cincinnati, the private homebuilding industry boomed during the flapper era. Historians of modern suburbanization such as Kenneth Jackson have observed that much of this homebuilding in the 1920s consisted of the in-filling or extension of early twentieth century streetcar suburbs — Pittsburgh’s Mt. Lebanon, for example. Slums, reasoned the housers, would disappear as better housing filtered from the middle class to the poor. However, reformers still bemoaned the fact that new private dwellings were priced well beyond the reach of the working class. Therefore, in the 1920s, the housing problem of the low-paid factory worker, the begrimed mechanic and his family, most preoccupied housers of all stripes, from Bleecker Marquette and Bernard Newman to Edith Elmer Wood, Robert Kohn, Clarence Perry and Catherine Bauer. Moreover, it was the houser’s conviction that social order hinged on the working class being safely and sanitarily housed in well-designed community developments. It was this same concern that compelled Marquette to favor such limited dividend housing ventures as Mariemont, Ohio, Radburn, New Jersey and Chatham Village, Pennsylvania. However, to Marquette’s chagrin, none of these limited-dividend plans supplied housing affordable to the typical working man.

The Great Depression transformed this concern about working class housing and community development into a crusade for government involvement. Some of Fairbanks’s strongest chapters examine the birth of public housing in Cincinnati. Like so many recent historians writing about the 1930s, he stresses that despite centralizing tendencies, the New Deal besought local input. Cincinnati’s Metropolitan Housing Authority, like Philadelphia’s Advisory Committee on Housing (later the Philadelphia Housing Authority), and Pittsburgh’s Housing Authority, fully participated in the public housing decision-making process; therefore, local policy reflected a mixture of modern housing ideology and provincial socio-economic and racial biases. Cincinnati’s Laurel Homes, for example, epitomized modern housing principles in both design and management. Strict tenant admission and retention standards assured homogeneity. Only model families were admitted, and pets, gambling and home enterprises were proscribed. Pittsburgh’s Terrace Village project,
located in the Hill District, not only forbade pets and gambling, but also cooking cabbage.

It was in the area of racial policy, as Fairbanks makes clear, that local bias intruded most blatantly. Fairbanks positions the race issue where it properly belongs — near the heart of the housing conundrum. Although Fairbanks applauds the Cincinnati Housing Authority for its assimilationist goals (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh authorities had similar ideals during and after World War II), in the end, all three authorities produced segregated public housing. Blacks and whites lived together at Cincinnati's Laurel Homes and in Pittsburgh's Terrace Village; but they lived in separate buildings, with separate recreation areas.

Racism particularly dictated where public housing projects were to be built. Blacks were the most wretchedly housed population in Cincinnati, as they were in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, and they suffered disproportionately from depression era slum demolition projects. However, local neighborhoods, where inexpensive vacant land existed, barred low-cost housing for blacks. Therefore, black projects whose names themselves (Lincoln Homes in Cincinnati, Richard Allen in Philadelphia, Ida Wells Barnett in Chicago and Frederick Douglass in Baltimore) offered egregious testimony to the project's segregationist purpose, sat on slum-cleared land. Fairbanks emphasizes that Cincinnati's World War II defense and war housing was not only segregated, but conspicuously failed to address black housing needs. An excellent recent article in this journal about the war time housing experience in Homestead makes a similar point about black housing needs there.

Fairbanks concludes his study by looking at post-World War II housing reform in Cincinnati. Here again his points are echoed by the experiences of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago and other northern "rust belt" cities, where by 1950 a combination of industrial decline, highway building, "ghettoization" and suburbanization had already girdled the central city with a belt of black slums. While Fairbanks finds less evidence of a downtown-oriented pro-growth coalition in Cincinnati than historian Arnold Hirsch found in Chicago, strong parallels do exist with the experience of other cities, including Pittsburgh: individualism replaced community as the ideological underpinning of housing policy, and downtown renaissance supplanted both regionalism and low-income housing needs as the focus of planning.

Fairbanks's study of the housing movement in Cincinnati is richly documented local history. While it downplays the critical national context of the Progressive housing movement, the New Deal and post-war redevelopment, it rightfully stresses the important role of local participation in the shaping of modern housing policy. The author has provided an extremely useful analytical scaffold for examining this local dimension in the housing movement. He reveals that while this movement was led by housing cosmopolites who subscribed to national housing goals, it thrived, nevertheless, on local initiative. Moreover, as the black housing imbroglio in Cincinnati and elsewhere illustrates, it also mirrored the depth of entrenched social and racial bias. This is an important book, and a useful model for the yet unwritten definitive study of housing reform in Pittsburgh. It also, as noted earlier, provides a vantage point from which to better understand the dilemma of contemporary low-income housing policy.


6 Lubove discusses Chatham Village in his Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, 7-82.

7 See Bauman, Public Housing, Race
A Perfect Bable of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies

By Randall Balmer


Randall Balmer has written a solidly researched, well-crafted monograph that should appeal to general readers interested in the ethnic and religious history of colonial America. His book describes the decline of Dutch language and culture in New York and later New Jersey, from the English conquest in 1664 to the later eighteenth century, through a careful examination of the development of the most important Dutch cultural institution, its Reformed church. The state church of the Netherlands and its new world colony, this denomination faced difficult times during the later seventeenth century as wealthier members became attracted to the Anglican denomination and English ways, while others, usually poorer, attempted to defend their Dutch identity.

This division eventually helped fuel Leisler's Rebellion. (Leisler represented the more staunchly Dutch Reformed religious sentiments in the larger social-economic rebellion that bore his name.) Many of the poorer Dutch who backed Leisler migrated westward into New Jersey, but enough remained in New York to continue the divisions among the Dutch. With time this dispute died down, but many prominent Dutch, and especially women, became interested in defending their denomination and language against Anglicization. The Dutch who migrated to New Jersey found themselves without ministers in a rapidly changing situation, and thanks to the efforts of ministers such as Theodorus Frelinghuysen and his relatives, became receptive to an evangelical pietism that extended across national and denominational lines. By the American Revolution, the Dutch in New York had begun to surrender their language, and despite some resistance, had become Anglicized and ready to stand by the British Empire. At the same time, their pietistic, evangelical cousins in New Jersey, who had become Americanized, backed independence. Despite different itineraries, both groups had arrived at the same place, or as Balmer explains, "after more than a century of English rule the Dutch finally succumbed to the twin pressures of Anglicization, after the manner of the Church of England on the one hand, and assimilation to the broader, heterogeneous culture of the Middle Colonies on the other."

Balmer’s work opens up a series of vistas for the general reader. His interest in Dutch acculturation to English and American patterns prevents it from becoming a narrow ethnic or denominational study. Having a fine political sense, he also gives a concise, well-written account of Leisler’s Rebellion. In reading the work one will also realize the importance of the Dutch Reformed tradition and its ministers to the broader movement of evangelicalism known as the Great Awakening. In short, this well-written and organized book will be a good read for someone who has been looking for books about the Dutch, the middle colonies, or colonial religion. My only caution to the general reader is that Balmer fails to give a sufficient account of the organization or theological development of the Dutch church, and fails to indicate the links between that Calvinistic, reformed denomination and all those other Calvinists, from the Ulster Presbyterians to the Hungarian Reformed. This makes it difficult to place Frelinghuysen and the other Dutch evangelicals and pietists within a perspective of their own and other.