CHAPTER 2

BRIGHTMOOR

The Case of the Absent Architect

The use of borrowed construction workers on the Ford Homes project signals dramatic changes that occurred over the previous decades, reshaping building-craftsmen's role in housing development. Perhaps the lack of professional architectural involvement in Brightmoor's creation points to a similar historical shift in that group's experience. At the Ford Homes, Wood's contribution was important but also more limited than the one he had been prepared to offer; his abilities or interests determined his involvement less than the developer's needs. Brightmoor's developer went a step further and dispensed with the services of an architect altogether. The absence of an architect at Brightmoor draws attention to the role architects played in suburban residential development and how this role changed. What impact did the absence of an architect have on Brightmoor's development?

Brightmoor, like the Ford Homes project, is located in the Detroit metropolitan area. Its creation responded to some of the same needs for housing for newly arrived workers attracted to the city's expanding industrial sector that was noted in chapter 1. This project assumed, however, a specific niche within Detroit's housing market—one that makes its similarities to the other subdivisions examined here that much more intriguing and suggestive. It is useful to return to the consideration of Detroit's development to begin to see how Brightmoor fit into it.

Brightmoor: Background and Overview

The massive growth of Detroit's population in response to industrial development put such severe pressure on the housing stock of the old city that it mounted to crisis proportions. The Annual Report for the
City of Detroit for the Year 1919 estimated that there was a shortage of 30,402 dwellings, a figure that historians consider conservative. In 1920, 30 percent of the families in Detroit were underserved by existing housing, a situation that led to overcrowding and the use of inadequate structures. Few initiatives were taken to deal with this problem even after it became an issue of public discussion. Instead, it was left to market forces, which finally responded in the years between 1923 and 1926 with an unprecedented surge in subdividing and construction activity. At this point, according to Detroit historian Sidney Glazer, “realty subdividing became highly specialized, calling for large capital requirements. Builders developed models for the construction of single-residence homes on a mass basis.”

Many studies of Detroit’s response to this housing crisis have focused on the “wave of excessive subdividing” that outdistanced actual construction. One work published by the Michigan Planning Commission compared the speculative mania of the period to that which took place contemporaneously in Florida, the symbol of runaway speculation. It noted that during the three years from 1924 to 1926 alone, “54.3% of all lots of record, representing 45% of all acreage subdivided in the entire history of the [Detroit] metropolitan area, were platted.” The Northwestern Business Booster reported in October 1925 that “at present, plats are being filed at the rate of ten to twelve daily, a figure unprecedented in the history of the country.” The surplus of subdivided lots could be inferred from the relation between the 479 percent increase in population in the metropolitan area between 1900 and 1930 and the 1,105 percent increase in subdivided acreage for the same period. Analysts felt that such speculation undermined the provision of sound housing, since it drove prices up without assuming responsibility for the coordination or improvement of neighborhoods and resulted in pockets of vacant land when the economy turned toward depression.

Few writers, however, examined the housing that, too, was a product of this boom period. Little has been written on the “models for the construction of single-residence homes on a mass basis” that Glazer refers to in the above quotation. The 1920s saw a succession of record-breaking years for suburban building, beginning in 1923 with
the construction of eleven thousand houses between Detroit’s city limit and the twelve-mile arc from downtown. Many builders contributed to this process, and there has been no close analysis of the impact of their work on the formation of the built environment in the Detroit area.

Aspects of the activities of realtor B. E. Taylor, the developer of Brightmoor, bear out some of the critiques of rampant subdividing that were made in studies of real-estate development in Detroit in the 1920s. The scale of his enterprise was enormous. As one account from the early 1920s states, “Mr. Taylor has developed and improved building lots in the Grand River Avenue district which total one-third of all present vacant improved building lots in the city of Detroit under fifteen hundred dollars in value.” Between 1921 and 1925, Taylor bought twenty-eight parcels of land in this district and subdivided them into 15,511 lots, not including areas subdivided for light industrial uses. As late as 1938, only 25 percent of these 4,580 acres of lots had been developed, indicating that many of the lots were bought for purposes of speculation alone and resulting in numerous pockets of vacant land. Taylor encouraged this by requiring home buyers to purchase one and sometimes two lots in addition to that on which their houses would be built.

These facts represent only part of Taylor’s activities, however. He also built houses, enticed businesses to the area, and constructed neighborhood facilities. In March 1922, the first family moved into Brightmoor; by the end of 1925, the district had a population of 11,319 living in 3,958 houses, and there were 190 businesses in operation. A number of the neighborhood institutions that Taylor fostered continue to operate today. These include the local newspaper and the community center, the latter having been established in 1922 as a settlement house. Although construction of Interstate 96 in the post–World War II period physically divided the neighborhood, its identity remained intact.

Partly as a result of the presence of its settlement house, Brightmoor was an object of study—mainly conducted by social workers—almost from its inception. A 1925 study by the Michigan Department of Health found a high incidence of diarrheal infections in Brightmoor
children due to the lack of adequate sewage disposal. Taylor’s houses did not include indoor bathrooms; as late as 1938, only three-quarters of Brightmoor homes had flush toilets.

Brightmoor houses were not unique in their lack of amenities. In its 1939 Study of Subdivision Development in the Detroit Metropolitan Area, the Michigan Planning Commission analyzed the efficacy of existing patterns of building restrictions. It found that there were no attempts to insure minimum standards for the 91 percent of houses citywide that cost less than $3,000, more than half of which were constructed without furnaces, bathrooms, or basements. Brightmoor houses included none of these features.

Minimal standards characterized suburban housing elsewhere in Michigan. In Flint, for example, this pattern continued into the 1940s when, one scholar notes, “half the fringe area homes had no running water; three-quarters had no flush toilets.”

Clearly, Taylor’s willingness to build in this way was not an isolated phenomenon. J. C. Nichols, a prominent realtor and later developer of Kansas City’s Country Club District, built his first houses in 1903 and 1904; small cottages for workers, they did not include indoor plumbing. Indeed, an address delivered to the 1915 National Conference on Housing reflects the professional acceptance of such a lack of amenities in workers’ housing. Discussing standards for low-cost housing, one architect referred to the need for light, air, and usable space; none of the amenities missing from Brightmoor were included among his minimal requirements for working-class homes.

At its start, Brightmoor had no paved streets, no street lights, and no water connections; water was provided by a water wagon. By 1924, water was piped in from the city of Detroit and electrical connections were installed. This conforms to the pattern of urban expansion in the United States in the 1920s analyzed by historian Jon Teaford. In the case of Detroit, he notes that the city “did not annex Hamtramck with its massive Dodge plant, Highland Park with its huge Ford factory, or the string of Grosse Pointes with their handsome mansions. Instead it absorbed miles of open country to the northwest with a low tax valuation and with no water mains, paved streets, or street lights.”
This latter area includes Brightmoor; in that part of Brightmoor not annexed by Detroit in 1926, and included today as part of Redford Township, the streets remain unpaved. In other words, developers such as Taylor purchased less-expensive unincorporated acreage and avoided infrastructural costs by relying on its eventual absorption by the municipality for the permanent provision of essential utilities and services.

The houses in Brightmoor cost just less than $2,000 in 1924—a price affordable to the working-class population that Taylor attracted.\(^{20}\) A typical ad for the subdivision in the *Detroit Free Press* in April 1924 mentioned among its features that “Twelfth Street (paved)—one of the main streets of the neighborhood—“runs directly to the front door of the Ford Highland Park plant.”\(^{21}\) The plant lies about seven miles due east from the intersection of Twelfth (now Fenkell) and Burt Road (see fig. 2).

As noted earlier, the Detroit area was a magnet for people looking for work in the industrial sector in the period before and after World War I. In the years from 1920 to 1930, most of these newcomers were between the ages of fifteen and thirty.\(^{22}\) In 1920, although 29.6 percent of the population of the United States was between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four, in Detroit 40 percent of the population was in this range.\(^{23}\) Thus, Detroit attracted settlers who were in their prime working years and beginning to establish families.

Within this broad group of newcomers, it appears that Brightmoor primarily attracted migrants from within the United States, especially from Appalachia and southern states. According to the Fifteenth Decennial Census of the United States in 1930, 7.6 percent of the total native white population of Detroit was born in those regions, and almost all of the 79,274 individuals represented by this figure came north in the decade of the 1920s.\(^{24}\) At least one ad for Brightmoor describes it as a “100% American neighborhood,” suggesting that foreigners were not encouraged to settle there.\(^{25}\) As late as 1938, the foreign-born accounted for more than 10 percent but less than 19 percent of the registered voters of this area.\(^{26}\) A report written by the Wayne University School of Public Affairs and Social Work in
1941 described Brightmoor as a predominantly white, Protestant, working-class community. In his talk at the first annual convention of the Homebuilders and Subdividers Division of the National Association of Real Estate Boards in 1923, Taylor stated that the sale of Brightmoor houses was restricted to whites. Taylor also may have actively solicited migrants from other states. One account claims that he hired salesmen in distant cities and “Greyhound busses, six or ten a week, would bring people from Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan and farther to Detroit. They would be put up in a nice downtown hotel, taken to a good dinner and show, and the next morning they would be brought to Brightmoor to look over the propositions that had been made to them in their home towns.” Such courting of prospective home buyers has its roots in nineteenth-century town boosterism. It also recalls practices during the early years of the auto industry aimed at overcoming the shortage of workers, when “the Employers’ Association [of Detroit] systematically exerted itself through agents, circulators, and news stories to draw men to the city.”

Relatively young families, then, usually from rural, undeveloped areas, were among the early purchasers of homes in Brightmoor. The conditions they found there may not have been substantially different from those they had left, but the threats that a lack of amenities posed to public health in a denser, urban setting were both more visible and potentially more dangerous. To some extent Taylor recognized this, for in May 1924 he commissioned the Committee on Nursing Activities of the American Red Cross to operate at the community center. The center also provided recreational programs for children, cooking, sewing, gardening, and other classes for women, a small library, and counseling by social workers to integrate the residents of Brightmoor into a new environment. It is useful to recall that Albert Wood’s proposals for community design were inspired by the achievements of the Progressive Era social reform movement at Hull House. At Brightmoor, Taylor introduced a settlement house to provide a focus for neighborhood activities and to support newcomers’ assimilation to urban life. Taylor’s experience and his outlook on housing shed light on his use of this feature and his conception of Brightmoor.
B. E. Taylor and the Development of Brightmoor

Burt Eddy Taylor was born in Sandusky, Ohio, in 1877. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1899. His business career began at the American Crayon Company, in Sandusky, where he rose to vice president. Beginning in 1908, he surveyed real-estate projects and possibilities in large Great Lakes cities and determined that, as a result of the new automobile industry, Detroit held the greatest potential for growth. At some point, in Sandusky, he had sold bicycles on the installment plan, and he thought that the same principle could be applied successfully to the sale of real estate and housing. It is not known whether Taylor was aware of the activities of W. E. Harmon in Cincinnati, whom realtors considered to have been the first to introduce real-estate sales on the installment plan in the 1880s, or of Chicago developer Samuel E. Gross’s use of the installment plan in the same decade. Installment sales of autos, by comparison, emerged as a strategy in 1910.

It seems that Taylor developed subdivisions along these lines in Akron, Ohio, and in Kentucky. Around 1913–14, Taylor settled in Detroit and began to purchase tracts of land near Grand River Avenue close to the Detroit city limit. His enterprise flourished and grew and he extended his activities throughout the northwestern section of the area. In 1922, his career as a realtor was sufficiently established locally for him to serve as general chairman of the Detroit Better Homes and Building exhibition. He addressed the Homebuilders and Subdividers Division of the National Association of Real Estate Boards at their first annual national convention in 1923 and again in 1925.

A listing of Taylor’s subdivisions totals ninety-five tracts, including the twenty-eight that became Brightmoor. In the course of the 1920s, Taylor developed higher-priced properties, including some that were contiguous with golf courses, and his firm hired architects to design the houses for these. These later subdivisions follow more closely the precedent established by Kansas City developer Nichols’s influential Country Club District. The business suffered reversals during the Great Depression, but began to revive just before World War II.
THREE SUBDIVISIONS AND THEIR BUILDERS

War II. Taylor’s son, Burt Eddy Taylor Jr., continued the work of the firm.

In a report written in 1925, Taylor explained that in creating Brightmoor he was “trying to do (without any comparison at all) what Henry Ford has done in the manufacture of the Ford car. . . . The greater part of his [Ford’s] success has been due to the fact that he made something that the masses could buy. . . . There is not so much personal pride in building the inexpensive home, and developing and building such a community of homes, but it is a real service and one that is soulsatisfying to us.” Taylor’s goals, like Ford’s in both housing and automobile production, were efficiency and cost reduction. Many of the decisions Taylor made concerning the provision of services and amenities were calculated with those ends in view. What was their impact on the overall site of Brightmoor as well as on its houses?

Brightmoor lies about twelve miles northwest of the Detroit City Hall, its streets, for the most part, conforming to the direction of the rectilinear grid that characterizes all but the oldest part of the city. Whereas early French settlement was oriented to the riverfronts, the street plan of most of the Detroit metropolitan area followed the section lines of the territorial land survey that began in 1815 and was oriented to the points of the compass. The River Rouge, one of the few geographical features of this flat expanse, snakes through the western part of Brightmoor. The band of parkland flanking it is the northern extension of River Rouge Park, whose development was completed in the 1920s.

In 1921, when Taylor began to buy tracts for what would become Brightmoor, this area was farmland. Located within Redford Township, its eastern edge was about a mile from the Detroit city limit. In January 1926, Detroit concluded its geographical growth by annexing a block of land that included Brightmoor as far west as Telegraph Road, which remains virtually the city limit. This brought Brightmoor residents under the umbrella of city services, such as police and fire protection; before annexation, the latter had been provided by a volunteer company, but there had been no police or governmental structure. Other benefits of annexation included paved streets and streetlights.
The Pere Marquette (now C&O) railroad tracks marked the southern boundary of Brightmoor. When Brightmoor was developed, the fastest access to downtown was along Grand River Avenue, one of the radial thoroughfares that follow original Native American trails, widened by the territorial governor, Lewis Cass, in 1830 to serve as military roads. Now, Interstate 96 provides a direct route to downtown, as well as connections to other directions, though it also segments the neighborhood. Aside from thoroughfares following the section lines, the other major road linking Brightmoor with various sectors of the city is Outer Drive. This forty-five-mile boulevard grew out of a proposal made by Edward A. Bennett in the city plan that he prepared for Detroit in 1915. It runs an eccentric course, weaving through the grid from the Detroit River at Ecorse, through Dearborn and along the River Rouge, across northwestern Detroit, and ends at the traditionally fashionable north-central section of the city. It was completed in the 1920s.

The location of Brightmoor on lots that originally were farmland and at some distance from built-up areas helped keep Taylor’s costs down. This made it possible for him to target the working-class market for which Brightmoor was well sited, equidistant as it was from the Ford plants at Highland Park to the east and at River Rouge to the southwest. Taylor ensured that workers with modest incomes could travel easily from Brightmoor to their jobs by subsidizing a bus system; it operated for two years, until a local bus company took over its routes.47 Perhaps Taylor was aware of the importance of linking working-class housing to industrial sites based on the failure of developments such as Benjamin J. Rosenthal’s 175-unit tract constructed in Chicago in 1919; its isolation resulted in high turnover and instability.48

Taylor had bought thirty-three parcels of land before he purchased his first Brightmoor tract, the plat for which he registered in June 1921.49 He filed each of the twenty-seven succeeding subdivisions under the name Brightmoor, usually using the names of farmers from whom he bought the land as subtitles. He subdivided each tract into uniform lots that generally measured from 30 to 34 feet by 100 to 125 feet; business lots, on the major streets, typically measured 20 feet,
although corner lots were larger. The smallest tract, Elmoor, was filed in August 1921 and yielded 175 lots; the largest, Mercier, was registered in February 1925 and amounted to 1,440 lots. Central alleys generally divided blocks, which were laid out according to “the speculative gridiron . . . the most ubiquitous method of urban edge expansion prior to World War II.”

Lots could be bought without improvement, as an investment, or by speculative builders, but many purchasers had Taylor build a house on their lot (fig. 15, a and b). According to the account of the development published in Building Age in April 1924, “the cry for houses swelled and swelled until the construction department [of the Taylor firm] had to work feverish overtime hours to keep abreast of the demand.” However, house purchasers were required to buy one or two lots in addition to the one they were building upon. As Taylor explained this strategy to a group of fellow developers in 1923, “I build the houses to sell the lots . . . . It just happens that there is a great big demand in Detroit for houses and there is more demand for houses than there is for lots, so like the standard [sic] Oil company I am taking advantage of the situation by selling three lots with a house.” This was a recognized practice among realtors. As one of the early professional texts noted in 1923, “the building of homes greatly facilitates the sale of lots.”

Taylor had bought the land for about $1,000 per acre; he sold each lot for $1,000. Using a house that cost $1,595 as his example, Taylor outlined his financing procedures in 1923. After a down payment of from $300 to $350 on this house and two lots, monthly payments came to $38, well within the range of contemporary rental costs.

Taylor contracted with carpenters for the construction of the houses. Each contracted carpenter hired from three to eight men, and at the

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Figure 15, a and b. These Brightmoor streetscapes from the April 1924 issue of Building Age provide overviews of the standardized houses that B. E. Taylor constructed. Gaps between houses indicate additional lots purchased by home owners. This was one of Taylor’s sales strategies; as he said, “I build the houses to sell the lots.”
peak of construction as many as thirty-two carpenters’ crews were at work in the subdivision. Separate contractors handled plumbing, wiring, painting, and paperhanging.

Taylor provided all of the materials used in the construction of the houses, buying them in quantity to reduce costs. The houses were built to plans that followed as closely as possible the standard sizes of materials so as to expend the minimum amount of time preparing them and to minimize waste.

The houses were built on cedar posts and timber foundations and did not include basements. Taylor was questioned about this practice at the 1923 Housebuilders and Subdividers conference, but he did not see it as problematic. The exchange that is recorded in the transcript of the discussion is worth recounting:

Mr. J. J. Swartz (Plainfield, New Jersey): You stated a moment ago that you put these houses on cedar posts. That does not seem to be conducive to a real good healthy proposition, especially in Detroit, does it? Don’t they require foundations under their houses out there? It gets pretty cold there, doesn’t it?

Mr. B. E. Taylor: Who do you mean require?

Mr. J. J. Swartz: Why, the occupants of the home.

Mr. B. E. Taylor: No, these homes have gone through two winters. I never heard anybody say they were cold. (Laughter.)

The only word that concerned Taylor here was “require”; short of building-code standards to ensure full basements and foundations, there was no obstacle to keeping costs down by using Taylor’s methods.

Plans were designed for houses with four, five, and six rooms. This included the kitchen; there were no indoor bathrooms. All the bungalows (as Taylor and the press called these houses) had a front porch. Living rooms generally had two windows, but bedrooms were designed with one window even when it would have been feasible to install another on an adjacent wall (figs. 16, 17, and 18). One window per room was one of the “minimum criteria for clean, safe, and comfortable working-class housing” established by Lawrence Veiller in the “Standards Recommended for Permanent Industrial
Housing Developments” that he created for the United States Housing Corporation during World War I. Indoor bathrooms were also recommended.56

The massing of these undecorated houses is consistent, shaped by the main pitched roof and porch extension. The only variation derives from the orientation of the ridgeline—parallel to the street in some houses, in others perpendicular so that the gable end faces the street. Regardless of this shift, the plans are the same (figs. 19, 20, and 21).

The approach that Taylor took toward efficiency and cost reduction, it is clear, was different from that taken by the Dearborn Realty & Construction Company at the Ford Homes. The houses at Brightmoor were very small; the four-room models measured 440 square feet, and the six-room model slightly less than 600 square feet. Only the largest approached the dimensions of four-room houses built by cost-conscious federal agencies during World War I, which varied from 616 to 943 square feet.57 In addition to trimming size, however, Taylor also cut back on infrastructural elements so much that Brightmoor houses contributed to their inhabitants’ physical discomfort and, ultimately, health risks.

But it is possible to note similarities between Brightmoor and the Ford Homes. Both provided single-family houses with garden space within a neighborhood that was defined in part by local institutions or amenities put in place by the developer. Brightmoor was a much larger-scaled subdivision, however, with a wider array of neighborhood services and organizations supporting its population.

Brightmoor, in short, offers a seemingly contradictory housing solution. On the one hand, it exemplifies the roughly 45 percent of Michigan housing in this period that was constructed without meeting minimum standards, including the lack of furnaces, bathrooms, and basements.58 Yet in contrast to the indifference to inhabitants’ welfare that this suggests, Taylor did foster a neighborhood identity and solicit a range of institutions to locate there to support home owners’ social, educational, and commercial needs.

What accounts for the discrepancy between these two sides of Taylor’s development activity? To answer this question we must look
Figure 16. This Brightmoor living room (above) is described as “neat and comfy” in the April 1924 issue of *Building Age*. As the table indicates, it doubled as a dining room. The other focus of attention within the room is the stove, the main source of heat in the house.

Figure 17. In a typical, compact Brightmoor bedroom (*top right*), ca. 1924, *Building Age* noted that there is “nothing crowded.” Taylor finished all rooms but the kitchen with wallpaper.

Figure 18. Brightmoor kitchens (*bottom right*) came equipped with a sink and a freestanding cupboard with a drop shelf. They typically measured eight by ten feet.
more closely at the kinds of activities developers typically engaged in. Chapter 1 considered how responsibilities for conceptualizing and organizing construction processes were increasingly transferred from building-craftsmen to developers. At Brightmoor, the developer also assumed responsibility for house design; Taylor was able to dispense with the services and advice of an architect. By considering the relationship of architects to small house design, we gain a clearer view of the evolution of architects’ interactions with developers.

The Absent Architect

How architects defined their profession’s concerns affected their involvement in residential development. The view of the profession presented through its press and by recent scholars suggests that the process of professional self-definition was a contentious one; agreement tended to be based on narrow definitions of the profession’s role. The bases for the stresses that shaped the history of the architectural profession in the West go back to the seventeenth century. Here it is sufficient, however, to focus on the development of the profession in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in the United States.

From the time of their founding the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1857, leaders of the architectural profession allied their field with the traditions of Beaux Arts theory and practice. These derived from the rigorously classical and systematizing orientation toward the visual arts and architecture promoted by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Calvert Vaux’s suggestion, around 1865, that a special membership category of the AIA be created for painters, carpenters, masons, and others involved in architecture was opposed because “it would amount to a confession that the Institute members

Figure 19, a and b. The gable end of Brightmoor’s model 614 faces the street; inside the house, the partitions that divide the interior lengthways are aligned with the ridgeline. This four-room model measures 440 square feet. Despite the general lack of amenities, every house included a porch.
Figure 20, a and b. Model 514 is the same size as 614; it differs only in the disposition of spaces. The ridgeline parallels the street and the bisecting wall divides the interior equally between front and back. Broad, stark external wall surfaces reflect the general practice at Brightmoor of including only one window per room.
Figure 21. In Brightmoor's largest, six-room model, measuring slightly less than 600 square feet, all room sizes were reduced to contribute to the creation of the additional two rooms. The compact, side-by-side plan of abutting spaces, without transitional zones or hallways, remains the same.

were in need of the information supposed to be imparted by the technicians and craftsmen. Instead, by emphasizing academic principles, architects defined their activities so that, as one put it, "real architectural interest is almost as esoteric and professional as an interest in abstract law or medicine." The terms of the definition distinguished architects from both building-craftsmen and engineers, whose activities, however, accounted for the majority of actual construction. As late as the teens of the twentieth century, roughly sixty years after the initial organization of the profession, it was estimated that almost 90 percent of the buildings in the United States were constructed without the aid of architects. And yet this situation had been created, in a sense, both by the narrow theoretical and aesthetic definition of architecture and by the devaluation of types of buildings that were seen as unsuitable to receive the attention of architects.

For our purposes, it is of special interest that the architectural profession tended to assert itself not through residential design for the middle and working classes, but through the design of public and
monumental structures and homes for the wealthy. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright admirably charts the devaluation of domestic building by the architectural elite during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Building-craftsmen dominated the residential field, challenging architects’ claims to professional recognition on the basis of a special competency. Architects articulated their expertise in different terms, designing public monuments that lent themselves to the application of classicizing formulas that made use of their Beaux Arts training. They also distanced themselves from the activities of building-craftsmen both by disparaging the mass of housing produced through their efforts and by relegating housing as a form to a realm beneath the concern of architects. An 1876 editorial in the American Architect and Building News, for example, used this disdain for domestic architecture to diminish the professional contribution of women who specialized in such areas: “The planning of houses, at least so far as the convenience of their arrangement is concerned, though a very necessary part of an architect’s duty, is not architecture at all; and the ability to arrange a house conveniently does not in the least make an architect.”

By the 1890s, this attitude was entrenched within the leadership of the profession. Inland Architect, a major journal for the Midwest, announced in 1894 that it would no longer carry notices of buildings under construction that cost less than $5,000, which included the majority of domestic building. The ideal architectural firm became Daniel Burnham’s, in which specialized aspects of the commissions that came from municipalities and from the business community were allocated to staff architects and to the one hundred draftsmen employed by the office, and little residential design was undertaken.

The devaluation of housing, however, created tensions within the architectural profession. The type of construction that was most widespread and with which most people would come into contact throughout the course of their lives was designed by individuals who were able to call themselves architects, and yet who had neither the training nor the ideals recognized by the professional elite. On the other hand, a young architect who modeled his career development on the pattern of the elite had difficulty acquiring small residential
commissions using professional standards, since building-craftsmen dominated the market for modest dwellings. Around the turn of the century, professional dismay with the work of building-craftsmen and new efforts to tighten professional controls yielded a solution that heightened these tensions.

The first strategy to secure control over architectural standards was to achieve state endorsement for architects through licensing. In 1897, Illinois passed the first state licensing law. Other states followed suit, although it was not until 1951 that all states had instituted licensing requirements. The criteria for registration included education in an accredited architectural school or success in an examination. Although aimed at regulating the design of structures that involved new and complicated technologies, licensing also addressed housing. Only the design of single houses was exempt from architectural control; the purpose of this exemption was to protect owner-builders. A speculative builder who constructed more than one house a year was required to enlist the services of an architect or to apprentice to qualify to take the licensing exam.

Monitoring the education of architects was another avenue to the establishment of tighter professional controls. In 1907, the AIA's Committee on Education recommended that an architectural degree be conferred only on those who demonstrated a proficiency in Latin, completed a year of preparatory study and four years in a school of architecture, had at least a year of advanced study in ateliers in Paris, Rome, or the United States, and traveled for at least a year in Europe. Reflecting this emphasis on formal education, twenty-one new architectural programs were established between 1893 and 1914, bringing the total in the United States to twenty-eight, and their “curriculum and methods of teaching were either directly controlled by ‘imported’ French architects or dominated by Beaux-Arts programs.” This type of training was not designed to address the kinds of problems encountered in the field of small-house construction, nor was it created to attract to the study of architecture students who had an interest in that field.

In 1909, the AIA drew up a canon of ethics that also was designed to regulate professional activities. It included an injunction against
architects engaging in the building trades. This mechanism was intended to ensure the disinterestedness of architects by prohibiting the possibility of seeking financial gain through the construction process. It also formalized the desire of the professional elite to separate the role of the designer from that of the builder.

Significantly, this ethical position was not incorporated into state licensing laws because it was opposed by many practicing architects and builders. There was also opposition to licensing proposals. The actions of the professional elite met resistance from the many architectural practitioners whose relations with building activities did not conform to the Beaux Arts ideal. In tightening professional controls, the elite was widening the breach between design and building and forcing many designers to choose between entering the ranks of the profession or working outside it by supplementing their design activities with commercial endeavors. Many architects, working in small and still-rugged communities throughout the nation, chose the latter route, rejecting professional distinctions in order to design and build within the framework of existing commercial realities.

Conflicts within the AIA over the Architects’ Small House Service Bureau (ASHSB) in the 1920s underscore the tension created by defining the architectural profession in these ways, a tension that was especially strong in the area of housing. Architect Edwin H. Brown, of Minneapolis, founded the ASHSB in 1919 as a limited dividend corporation with the participation of eighty-five small architectural firms. It published a plan magazine, Small House, and sold stock plans. The basis for the controversy over these activities lies in the tradition of such plan books and in the independence of building-craftsmen and clients from architectural oversight that they fostered. Throughout the nineteenth century, published pattern and plan books provided building-craftsmen with stylistic and construction guidelines. Stock plan services, beginning with the magazine Godey’s Lady Book in 1846 and continued by lumber companies and building-supply dealers into the twentieth century, offered drawings for model home designs. Access to these plans enabled building-craftsmen to keep up with changing styles and meet the needs and desires of their clients. They were, in other words, an important
mechanism for the transmission of architectural ideas. From the standpoint of the architectural elite as they embarked upon the project of professionalization, they were also an important mechanism for maintaining the independence of building-craftsmen from architectural control. Armed with a stock plan, the builder or prospective home owner did not need to hire an architect. Designers from a variety of backgrounds produced the plans, but even when architects created them, the process of populist dissemination of architectural ideas was anathema to the elite. And the stock plan turned the process of design into a commodity, whereas, as Magali Larson notes, “professionalization movements are attempts to subtract certain areas of social life from the naked operation of market forces.” Selling the design “product,” as opposed to being involved with the individual commission from beginning to end and designing for the particular situation, ran counter to the definition of professional service that architects were striving to enforce.

The activities of the ASHSB raised these issues once again. As Arthur Holden wrote in his defense of the project in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* in 1925, the AIA was the “moral sponsor” of the organization, although their endorsement, as this suggests, was controversial. Indeed, in their statement of support the board of directors of the AIA made clear the limits of their endorsement by asserting that the AIA “approves the idea only.” A clear distance was maintained from the concrete work of the ASHSB, for this organization represented an attempt to reclaim a large portion of the built environment for the profession by acknowledging and reaching an accommodation with existing market arrangements. Accepting the practices of building-craftsmen, however, and working with them as designers of stock plans, was still repugnant, and even unethical, to many professionals. To preserve the “morality” of the profession in this sense, the elite was prepared, at the least, to deny professional recognition to dissenting fellow practitioners, if they could not also succeed in withdrawing professional services from the small-house field.

This tension was evident in the documents of the ASHSB itself. In his introductory remarks to a compilation of plans, for example, one writer felt constrained to remind potential homebuilders of modest
means that the ASHSB “is not a complete service. That can only be obtained from the individual architect who is engaged to manage the home building operation from first to last.” As a result of the firmness with which professional boundaries were asserted, the ASHSB was forced to tread a very fine line and to acknowledge the limitations of their project to those very clients for whom any alternative architectural advice was beyond financial, and perhaps even geographical, reach.

While there was conflict within the profession, then, over architects’ involvement in stock plan services, another definition of the profession in relation to housing evolved during the first decade of the twentieth century. Instead of focusing on the design of individual houses, this approach concentrated on the overall planning of entire residential communities. Wright discusses this development, noting that when architects had designed whole communities in the nineteenth century, as, for example, Solon Beman did in the Chicago area, their work received no recognition in the professional press. By 1913, the year of the Chicago City Club competition and exhibition of schemes for a model suburb, and the year in which a regular feature on town and city planning was added to the monthly *Journal* of the AIA, the attitude within the profession had changed. Single residential commissions for the wealthy continued to be presented as unique and individualized objects, but the profession began to conceive of housing for the middle and working classes in terms of aggregates. Beaux Arts principles that architects applied to the design of civic centers could also determine the design of neighborhoods and subdivisions. Other planning principles were formulated and rapidly disseminated following the turn of the century, notably garden-suburb design and, later, neighborhood unit planning.

Albert Wood’s booklet “Community Homes” exemplifies the recasting of the profession’s concern with housing into planning terms. His scheme is characteristic of the new emphasis in the way it ignores the design of individual houses and concentrates on the organization of space on a larger scale, embracing many units (see fig. 3). It looks to the development of the neighborhood for the creation of an environ-
ment nestled in nature, separated from the flow of traffic and commerce, instead of trying to achieve this ideal in terms of individualized dwellings.

But who would be the clients for these planning services provided by architects? By reconceiving their role as designers of residential totalities, architects shifted the issue of patronage from individual home owners, who relied upon building-craftsmen more than architects, to necessarily corporate bodies capable of organizing community building on a large scale. Albert Wood, it is useful to recall, urged the creation of development companies, associations of prospective home owners whose pooled resources could finance the services of an architect at the same time as they would achieve the design of more amenities through economies of scale. Despite wide discussion of such ideas following World War I, these did not evolve in the United States. Nor did philanthropic entities, such as the Russell Sage Foundation, sponsor of the model development of Forest Hills Gardens, emerge in significant numbers. In the aftermath of the strife at Pullman on Chicago’s edge, employers were less likely to undertake community development, unless they included a number of controls to avoid the appearance of establishing a company town, as in the Ford Homes. Instead of these, the major client became the developer, the realtor who engaged in building large-scale subdivisions. The next chapter considers more closely the rise of the professional realtor and the nature of his role as a developer. For now, it is possible to note that the reconceptualization of the architect’s contribution to housing as a planner had its parallel in the reformulation of the role of the speculative realtor as a community builder, which took place at the same historical moment. When projects were developed at very low cost, as Brightmoor was, the realtor assumed the architect’s role as well.

The only other body that had the potential to serve as client for such a scale of architectural services was the state. Earlier discussion noted that the profession did look to the state for legitimation through the establishment of licensing laws around the turn of the century. Otherwise, however, relations between the architectural profession and gov-
ernment tended to be conflictual. The principal issue was the profession’s struggle to eliminate the role of governmental staff architects in favor of assigning state commissions to architects working in private practice. Although by 1912 this dispute seemed to have been resolved for federal projects, on the state level it continued to be a point of contention. An editorial in the first issue of the *Michigan Architect and Engineer* in 1919, for example, opposed a bill in the state legislature that proposed the creation of an office of state architect. Such an office “would deprive the taxpayers,” the editor wrote, of the “specialized experience, expert knowledge and individualized master architectural technique” of Michigan’s private practitioners.

During the crisis of World War I, the architectural profession was able to enforce its position in favor of independent practice. Paradoxically, however, its experiences at that time seemed to move it further along the route of collaboration with large-scale developers. A number of architects served in the federal agencies that were responsible for the development of housing for war workers; for example, a principal in the firm of McKim, Mead, & White was the general manager of the United States Housing Corporation, and an architect who later served as president of the AIA headed the Emergency Fleet Corporation. However, whereas the government had intended to use its staff architects to design the needed housing, the AIA persuaded it to commission private architectural firms for this work. The general principle of maintaining the separation between public and private sectors was observed: federal war housing was designed by architects not employed by the government; it was also built by private developers.

Nevertheless, this context provided many more architects with firsthand experience of large-scale housing projects. And it seems to have impressed upon them the values of efficiency, of businesslike organization, and of collaborative work with engineers and builders. Articles in the professional press following the war reflect these new emphases. In 1919, one writer urged, “Let us cease to be artists and become builders, losing our desire for individual fame in the greater desire of perfect production.” Another acknowledged that engaging in such residential projects required abandoning “the desire for aloof professionalism.” Few looked to the government as a patron for
large-scale enterprises. The architect who directed one of the most successful war-worker housing projects observed that this had been “an outstanding opportunity . . . for the Government to produce an industrial community which should be, as far as reasonable economy and the urgency of the case would permit, an example to private enterprise throughout the land.” The experience that the profession had had within the context created by the state prepared it for closer relations with private developers in the future.

The absence of an architect at Brightmoor, then, grows out of the longstanding practice of the architectural elite of devaluing the small house as an arena for the establishment of professional competence and prestige. Typically, building-craftsmen and not architects were involved in the design of the modest home; Taylor's design of Brightmoor's houses follows this tradition. Although he was not a trained building-craftsman, he may have assumed that he could block out the designs for structures as simple as the ones he planned to put on the market. Conversely, working on his own without the advice of an architect, Taylor encountered neither restraints on nor alternative low-cost solutions to the minimal dwellings he constructed.

Given the scale of Brightmoor as a new residential district and the neighborhood services and facilities with which Taylor provided it—both of which reflect Taylor's ambitions as a self-described “community-builder”—questions remain concerning these minimal dwellings. How did such impoverished housing succeed in anchoring this new subdivision? Looking at the historical distance that the architectural profession maintained from small-house design suggests the vacuum that existed in this field, but it does not indicate the needs filled by Brightmoor's housing—beyond their low cost—that made the development viable. There are other features of Taylor's activities as a developer that can establish what the context was that made this possible.

**Situating Brightmoor**

Simplicity of form, lack of detailing, small size, and absence of amenities characterize the “bungalows” that Taylor built at Bright-
moor. Despite these features, Taylor was able to use them to undergird and promote sales of Brightmoor lots and the establishment of a residential neighborhood. Two historical contexts for these dwellings illuminate further meanings embodied in Brightmoor’s houses that help us to situate this subdivision and Taylor’s role as its developer in a larger analytic framework. By considering the market for which Taylor built these houses, it is possible to see that such structures represent an intersection of folk-traditional and working-class cultures with mass production.

One of the aspects of the history of housing in Detroit that historian Olivier Zunz discusses in his study of community building is what he calls the “dual housing market,” consisting of the formal housing market, on the one hand, and of owner-builders on the other. He finds that home ownership was prevalent throughout the period of his study, 1880 to 1920, especially within ethnic working-class neighborhoods often made up of recent immigrants. The formal housing market, composed of realtors, architects, and professional building-craftsmen, served the middle and upper classes, but hiring these experts was too expensive an undertaking for the majority of those who wanted houses. Their desires for houses did not go unmet, however: an alternative system developed, within the ethnic communities, to provide housing. This drew somewhat on local craftsmen and businesses, but principally it was forged by the home owners themselves, who built their own houses. Zunz found that the commitment to home ownership was so strong within these communities that house building was the focus of peoples’ energies. Amenities such as pavements and sewer connections, which would have increased basic expenses, were secondary considerations, and often were not installed until years after houses had been constructed. In contrast, the formal housing market used such infrastructural elements to shape the growth of the city into new areas, such as along the Woodward corridor, in advance of residential construction. And, as historian Ann Durkin Keating has shown in relation to typical developments elsewhere, this uneven availability of infrastructure shaped urban growth socially as well as physically, helping to establish class-segregated neighborhoods.
_seen in the light of this historical context, Taylor’s development at Brightmoor represents the merger of these parallel activities. Taylor used professional resources to reproduce the level of very basic house building that traditionally characterized working-class neighborhoods. The housing that he provided was not substantially different from what people had constructed for themselves within their ethnic neighborhoods. But by subdividing and building on a large scale, he extended the services of the formal housing market to a class that had previously been independent of it, aligning its access to housing to the structure of speculative real-estate development. Detroit’s rapid growth in population and the accompanying housing crisis made this more feasible in the 1920s than it had been earlier. At the same time, by limiting his development’s amenities, he preserved the stratification by residential area that the uneven provision of infrastructural services created. Also, Taylor addressed a migrant group that did not already have a developed neighborhood network into which its members could fit. Taylor’s activities as a “community-builder,” which was how he characterized his business, supplanted the matrix of neighborhood institutions usually built up over time with a combination of ready-made commercial and welfare facilities.

The houses at Brightmoor thus share features with those historically constructed by working-class owner-builders within evolving ethnic communities in Detroit. What differentiates them from this tradition, however, is their assimilation into the processes of the formal housing market, which simultaneously took over the responsibility for shaping neighborhood life. In light of this analysis, the housing developments that Brightmoor might seem to resemble are company towns, in which housing and community facilities are created from scratch for a population of newcomers. The trend in company towns, in the aftermath of Pullman, was in fact to minimize the control of the employer and to try to approach as closely as possible the free-market model of speculative development. Also, period discussions of company towns, as in the essays collected by Leifur Magnusson in *Homes for Workmen*, emphasize the garden-suburb tradition in which the design of the neighborhood and houses is seen to contribute to the moral development of the residents, obviating the need
for more direct paternalistic interventions. Taylor, on the other hand, preserved many of the deficiencies of working-class owner-builder housing, which were also found in some of the company-provided housing critiqued by reformers such as Magnusson. Taylor solicited already-existing institutions—churches, businesses, and especially the state, for its educational and welfare services—to mold the subdivision into a community.

The specific form that Brightmoor houses took suggests a relationship to another aspect of the tradition of owner-builder housing. It is possible that Taylor built houses that would be familiar in a number of respects to the people who would be buying them, many of whom came from Appalachia. Evidence linking Taylor himself with the Appalachian region is sketchy—he seems to have worked in Kentucky before settling in the Detroit area—and no definite source for the Brightmoor houses can be specified. But in a number of ways, they recall the folk-traditional architecture of the rural upland South, the region extending from western Arkansas to eastern Pennsylvania.

Scholars have documented Appalachian housing. While it is not possible to say that Taylor's houses drew on such specific models, there are significant parallels between the house type found at Brightmoor and the type that Henry Glassie refers to as the southern mountain cabin. This was constructed of log or frame, built as a single square or rectangular unit, and stood less than two stories high. While Glassie is concerned with defining this type and tracing its origins, others explore this housing's evolution, as Charles Martin does in his study of Hollybush, a small community in eastern Kentucky that existed from 1881 to 1960 (fig. 22).

Far from claiming that the houses at Brightmoor reflect any architectural source with precision, the comparison between Taylor's design and the Appalachian cabin tradition can only be suggestive; even folk-traditional buildings underwent significant change, especially over the decades flanking the turn of the century. One of the achievements of Martin's study is his discussion of the transformations in Hollybush's architectural forms as a result of the change in livelihood of its residents from self-sufficiency to wage labor, and their concomitant greater contact with town life. Some changes occurred when
Figure 22. A 1949 house from the Appalachian community of Hollybush, photographed in 1979 by Charles E. Martin. Southern mountain cabins like this may have served as models for the severe simplicity of Taylor’s Brightmoor houses. Their small scale, lack of amenities, combination of roof pitches, porches, plain exterior surfaces, and papered interiors are echoed at Brightmoor, but there these features were mass-produced and made with commercial materials.

Hollybush people embraced new forms (such as board-and-batten exteriors) that they became familiar with outside the community, either nearby or in industrial centers further north. It is possible that Brightmoor, as a type of Appalachian community in the north, represents one link in this chain of mutual influences. Thus, its forms can be seen as echoing Hollybush’s, but also as altering them in ways that then may have affected later building in Appalachia.

It is possible to identify five features that seem to link Brightmoor’s dwellings and Appalachian cabins: scale, amenities, silhouette and massing, interior treatment, and the appearance of the exterior. Southern mountain cabins were small; Glassie documented a range in size from 300 to 416 square feet. The houses at Hollybush were often smaller than 300 square feet. Brightmoor’s bungalows, if larger than
THREE SUBDIVISIONS AND THEIR BUILDERS

these, are also small, measuring from 440 to 600 square feet and divided into from four to six rooms. Rectangular cabins were usually divided into two rooms; Hollybush’s houses frequently consisted of only one room, although there was a trend toward dividing this during the later part of the area’s history. Beyond a fireplace or stove, there were no indoor amenities at Hollybush.

In massing and silhouette, the houses studied by Glassie and Martin are strongly echoed by Brightmoor’s. All are simple rectangles with gable roofs and few windows. Most telling are the different slopes at which all three groups of houses set their pitched front porch and main roofs.

The spareness of Brightmoor’s interiors, too, becomes inflected in the context of Appalachian practices. In Appalachian examples, the principal ornamental elements were paper. Glassie notes that walls and ceilings were papered with newspaper. At Hollybush, pages from catalogs and magazines were carefully applied and arranged on the walls; single pictures were sometimes centered or otherwise highlighted within the composition of a wall, but patterns were frequently created through the arrangement of colors, and other decorative effects were achieved by rubbing granulated white sandstone into floorboards and door and window facings, creating a clean appearance; interior cabin walls were whitewashed. At Brightmoor, kitchens were painted and the other rooms hung with wallpaper, commercial equivalents of the Appalachian practices.

Appalachian exteriors received no decorative treatment. Visually, one was confronted with the strength and simplicity of the raw wood and of the craft techniques that were used to shape it. The lack of decoration of Brightmoor’s exteriors achieves the same effect in relation to a different technology, for it allows a clear reading of their standardized and machined elements.

It is possible, then, to see Brightmoor as a project that, at a particular historical moment, accomplished a rather complex series of acculturations, through its creation of neighborhood institutions—its settlement house, but also the other social and commercial services that Taylor drew to the development—and through its architectural forms. Its housing reproduced qualities that would have been familiar
to its residents, including scale, lack of amenities, and lack of embellishment. But these were taken out of their previous context of owner-builder processes and community resources and rendered, instead, through the formal real-estate system and standardized construction practices. This recast them in terms that were urban, commercial, and mass-produced.

It may seem that Taylor operated at the margins of the realty profession by adding to the stock of excess lots, by relying on eventual annexation for the provision of utilities and other services, and by building houses that did not meet minimal standards. And yet it is possible to note that he achieved a measure of prestige within both local and national professional organizations. In fact, his ability to shape a new neighborhood, designed for a specific market, exemplifies the goals that inspired realtor-developers in this period. The next chapter looks at how these goals were formulated and achieved within a more conventional subdivision.