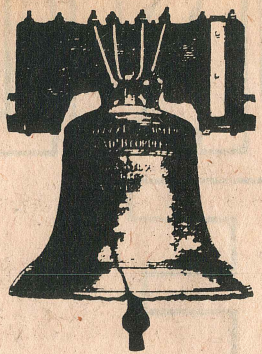
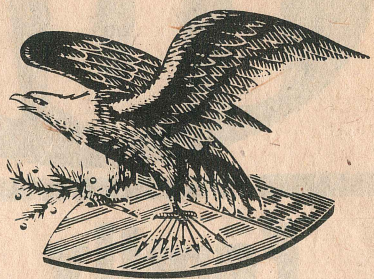


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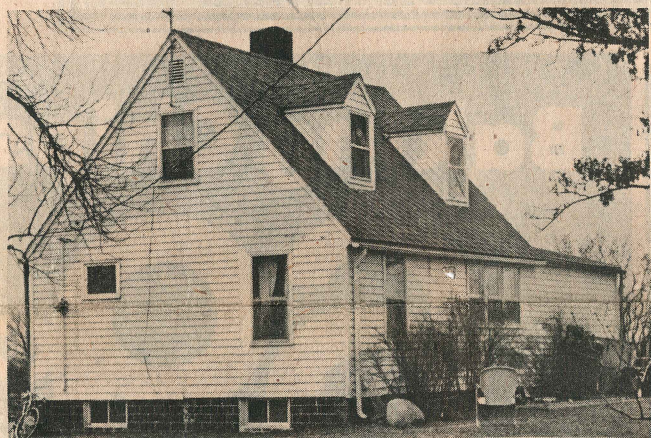
"Remembrances of Days Gone By"

Public Housing in Granger, Iowa

It was in the tiny Dallas County town of Granger, that the first attempt of public housing was tried in the United States. The successful project began in 1933 and was under the watchful guidance of Father Ligutti, one time Catholic priest in that community. The following information was obtained from a taped interview done by Herb Plambeck and Father Ligutti concerning the Homesteading project.

Monsignor Ligutti was affectionately known as the Pope's county agent in Rome and his complete title is Vatican Overseer for the FAO for the Vatican.

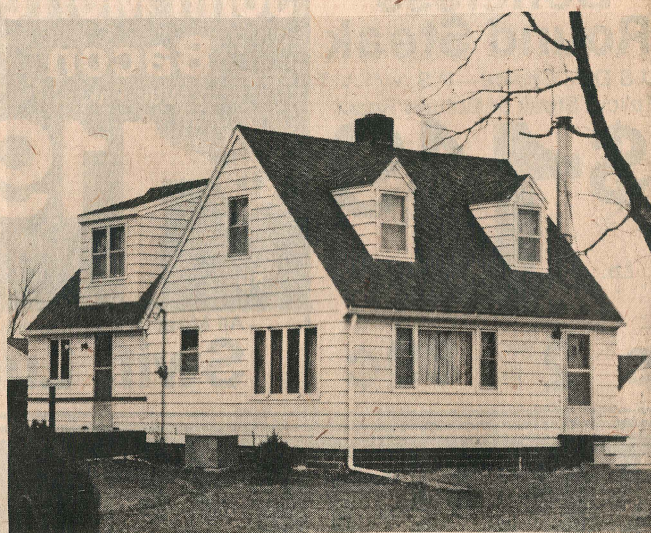
The reasons for the experimental project was both economical and social. Following the Depression of the 30's, housing conditions were poor throughout the country so the government set up the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which stated that anyone earning less than \$800 per year could receive help from the government through the Homestead Subsistence Clause to buy land and build homes with



The four homes shown in this article are all a part of the Granger Public Housing project which dates back to the 1930's and the Franklin Roosevelt administration.

government aid. Father Ligutti saw the poor conditions existing in Granger at that time and took it upon himself to write to the governor to obtain information about this experimental project. He saw it as an ideal situation for the coal miners, who oftentimes worked only four months a year in the mine and spent the remaining eight attempting to find other means of employment. Through the grant he eventually received, 50 people could partake in this experiment and each of the families received three acres of land plus enough funds to build a 4-6 room house equipped with central heating. So, Father Ligutti set out to find the right people for the project and he finally selected Italian and some Croatian families. (Croatians were people from the country of Croatia, now a part of Czechoslovakia.) He urged them to raise money through different projects and build and add improvements to the land and homes.

Father Ligutti became pastor in the Granger parish in 1926 and at this time conditions in the community



The project was begun under the direction of Father Ligutti who wanted to see living conditions improved in the Granger area for the miners and their family.

were far from ideal. The average income was around \$400 a year and working time did not exceed six months of the year. Many of the miners in the camps had sizable families and \$400 was by no means a sufficient income. He felt that these people should have some means of additional income during their non-working days and months. He felt that idle hands and minds get people into trouble.

Before the government act went into effect, the people's homes were nothing better than poor shacks. They were usually four rooms at maximum and had no running water or electricity.

Being pastor of this parish, Father Ligutti felt it his duty to see to it that the conditions were improved. He recalled the words of the British poet Alexander Pope who said: "Happy the man who's love and care, a few paternal acres bound; happy to breathe his native air on his own ground." So in the back of his mind he thought that maybe building up a little house of some sort, a bungalow, might offer some relief and help to these miners. At the same time, maybe two or three acres of land might be beneficial to them. They then could turn their unproductive time into something useful and productive. His ideas were based upon the theory that a man should stand on both of his feet. Whereas, if they should separate, and have one foot on the soil and one in the mine and in industry, we would have people and families actually with space; light, air and property.

Several years before President Roosevelt entered office, some vast social reforms were instituted nationally.

Many people, however, especially financiers, bankers and insurance people saw little good in these miners and phrases like "They will never do anything," or "Don't waste your time, they will never pay anything back," were often heard.

Father Ligutti had tremendous faith in these individuals and as soon as Roosevelt came into power and the bank heads of subsistence homestead act were passed, he went to Washington to push his idea because as he stated, "You have got to push legislation, you know." Senator Herring and Congressman McCuningham were both influential in seeing the bill pass both houses, but equally as important was Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the president.

The surrounding territory was occupied with six or seven coal mines with activity in these businesses limited to six months a year. An estimated 500 families, people were facing this extreme adversity, but the homestead area could accommodate only 50 of them. He stated that 500 homesteads were possible but that his preference was to make a success with 50, rather than fail with 500.

It took two years to attain approval from the government and those times were a continuing struggle for the people of this area.

The following statement was made by Ligutti in regards to the project up to this time, which is probably around 1928. "Well, you know, you have to sell things. You know, first of all, poor people who have been batted around over and over again in one side or the other, just don't trust a great many things you know that are proposed to them. The majority of the people of course knew me as their pastor—their friend whether they were Catholic or non-Catholic, white or colored, it didn't make any difference, they were my friends."

He received particular help from Father Paul Monasco, a one-time Monsignor at Shenandoah. Together, they worked hard for the people setting up religious vacation schools, recreational activities, dramatic activities and so forth.

There were other people involved in helping with the

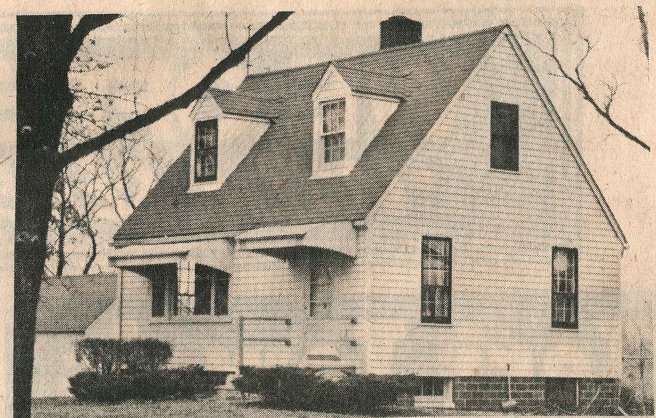


All the houses were built through the cooperation of the National Industrial Recovery Act which said that anyone earning under \$800 could receive help to buy land and eventually a home.

activities from a leadership point of view. A board was selected of local managers to meet government specifications. Others on the board were Dr. Chantingsmith, Johnson, a lawyer and Mr. Freman, the local grocer.

The homes built were very logical type homes for the people of the area. They were practical yet impressive, neat, but not pretentious and mainly, they converted the community from a blighted area to a beauty spot.

"This took a lot of planning, and you have to plan for the people, you have to help them to plan for themselves. And you have to be concerned not only with the material, but also the spiritual. The whole man—the integrated man must be considered. Unless you do that, you are not going to solve the problem of poverty or any other problem that we are facing at the present time especially in the United States and throughout



All the homes are built very similar in structure and a few of the original inhabitants are still living in them today.

the world.

Many of the homes built back at this time are still standing in Granger today and are in as good condition as they were almost 47 years ago.

In summary of the project, he said, "You have to take people where they are and develop them and particularly pay attention to their children and so forth so they can actually come into their own because God has given us a tremendous number of gifts and we can develop them or we can waste them. There must be an opportunity and there must be encouragement provided but the people themselves must also be willing to put forth in terms of work and dedication to the project at hand."

"The problem is man," he continued, "his ability, his intelligence, his ability to work, his willingness to save, his ability to apply his intelligence, his willingness to cooperate, to help other people help themselves and to join with them in helping as a group as a community."