Holland House: Architectural Prototype and Rare Social Glimpse

The century-old neighborhood of Ghent in Norfolk, Virginia, is a bit of an anomaly as far as historic American neighborhoods are concerned. Nestled among the grand homes along Colonial and Pembroke Avenues and the noble townhouses of Mowbray Arch, one finds low-rise apartment buildings of the same era. This is a curious phenomenon for two main reasons: Ghent was an intricately planned community for middle- and upper-middle-class residents and most construction in the district took place in the period between 1892 and 1907 (National Register).

This deviation from the norm produces many questions about the cause and effect of what was a relatively new building type at the time, especially in the South, and the study of a representative structure can begin to answer these questions. One of the early apartment buildings in Norfolk, the Holland House, was introduced to the Ghent landscape in 1904, a mere fourteen years after the new suburb began development. As an architectural prototype, how did the Holland House find its way into the fashionable district of Ghent? Can any conclusions be drawn about the impact that apartments, like the Holland House, had on the early Ghent landscape? How did the introduction of apartments influence the demography of Ghent over the last century?

The Holland House is located in a prominent position on Mowbray Arch, arguably the most photographed section of Ghent, if not Norfolk, at the corner of Botetourt Street and Drummond Place. This also happens to be the place where Ghent Bridge crosses The Hague, a historically significant point in terms of location and transportation. The building itself is credited to the Norfolk firm of Neff and Thompson,
and specifically architect Clarence A. Neff. According to Norfolk history, the architect was inspired by a similar apartment building in the Netherlands, so he located the plans and then replicated the building on The Hague, this side of the Atlantic. The legitimacy of this story is unconfirmed, however, in a 1968 newspaper article tracking the sale of the building, Neff’s son, A. Parker Neff, verified that the exterior appearance, at least, was observed by his father in Holland (Ledger-Star).

Neff and his partner, Thomas P. Thompson, formed a top architectural practice in Norfolk for the first thirty-three years of the twentieth-century. Their first documented commission in Virginia was in Ghent in 1902: the Ghent Clubhouse (Wells, p. 319). Perhaps this prominent social venue provided their entrée into the district and allowed Neff to pursue his apartment building through networking and leveraging opportunities. Neff and Thompson’s second project was an apartment building in Norfolk in 1903, but it is not known which one or where (Wells, p. 319). This building, one of the first of its type in Norfolk, may have inspired Neff to explore the idea of an apartment house in Ghent. In 1904, the firm designed the Holland House for Holland Realty Company (Wells, p. 319), whose president at one time was J. P. Andre Mottu of the Norfolk Company fame. Neff and Thompson earned at least thirteen other apartment building commissions in Norfolk between 1906 and 1919 from firms such as Realty Development Company, S. Q. Collins, A. C. Omohundro, C. J. Rudolph and W. A. Wallace, S. Friedburg and Wm. F. Graff, and O. B. McLean (Wells, p. 319).

Despite the inspiration or influence of the architect, neither the Holland House nor any other apartment building simply appeared in Ghent, a haven of single-family homes in Norfolk’s original suburb. In his book How Cities Work, author Alex Marshall
explores the origins of our cities, suburbs, and neighborhoods. Coincidentally, he lives in Ghent and uses knowledge of his neighborhood to inform his understanding of how places work, or should work. Marshall introduces the idea that “human settlement rests on the three-legged stool of politics, economics, and transportation” (Marshall, p. x). Undoubtedly, these forces affected the origin and development of Ghent. In terms of the introduction of the apartment building specifically, how did they play a role?

Marshall argues, “[o]f these, transportation is the most visible and active in shaping a place” (Marshall, p. xi). From narrow, meandering medieval streets suited to walkers and wagons to today’s suburban sprawl generated by and for an automobile-dependent society, transportation greatly influences settlement patterns. Norfolk is no exception, and the story of Ghent involves one well-known mode of transportation that defined an era and allowed for an escape from the city: the streetcar. The siting of Ghent by the members of the Norfolk Company was no accident. Proximity to downtown and a means of transportation were key to the success of their investment. Though a suburban refuge from downtown, residents of Ghent, especially the businessmen, required access to the urban core. “With the expansion of trolley car routes to the suburbs in 1894, building in Ghent accelerated. By 1900 two trolley lines serviced the area, and over one hundred houses had been completed within the Mowbray Arch district alone (National Resigster, p. 2).

The streetcar, therefore, helps to explain the attractiveness of Ghent for early inhabitants, who lived in posh single-family homes with a European flare, and the steady growth of the area. How, though, does it account for the emergence of apartment buildings in this fabric so early? By placing a heavy premium on location, “the streetcar
jacked up property values enormously, which put pressure on developers to find a way to put more people per square foot of land within walking distance of the streetcar” (Virginian-Pilot, 1997). This allowed for a rare moment in time when apartment houses were built side by side with dignified homes of the detached and town house varieties. While the reception of the Holland House and its descendents by members of the turn of the twentieth-century suburban gentry remains undetermined, reasons for its arrival are becoming clearer. This new form of transportation allowed renters and homeowners alike to commute “by streetcar the half-mile into downtown, and [return] home to apartments and houses packed tightly around the streetcar line” (Marshall, p. 88).

Transportation was not the only compelling force behind the Holland House’s entry into Ghent society, as Marshall suggests. Economic opportunities played a role, as they routinely do where real estate is concerned. The Holland House achieved National Register of Historic Places status in 1980 as a contributing structure to the Ghent Historic District. In regard to the building, the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission staff noted on the nomination form, “The apartments were constructed in anticipation of housing needs for the 1907 Jamestown Exposition held in Norfolk” (National Register, p. 8). Though other sources also cite this as the reason the structure was built, finding conclusive evidence to substantiate this assertion proves difficult. Amy Yarsinske suggests that the residential building boom leading up to the event took the form of apartment buildings rather than single-family homes. Developers “built specifically with Jamestown Exposition visitors in mind, those who might spend weeks, if not months, in the city” (Yarsinske, p. 112).
Looking at The Holland in a national context helps to reconstruct the repercussions of an event, such as the Jamestown Exposition. While large events, such as expositions, certainly acted as catalysts for building spurts in numerous places, “no one purposely built a sixty-year structure for only one year of business – not in San Francisco or any other city” (Groth, p. 76). There had to be other convincing arguments for Neff and his backers, like downtown growth and the streetcar. Careful consideration must be given to the building type itself, as this was a new phenomenon in Norfolk and in the region.

The semantics of the apartment building, or “French flats” as early apartment houses generally came to be known, are important to consider. The foreign origin of the design is understood, but less clear was the categorization of this new mode of habitation by city dwellers and city officials alike. Part of the complication involved a building form that for all intents and purposes architecturally resembled the tenements of the poorest in society. Thus, a sense of class had to be injected into the apartment to distinguish it from its lowly counterpoint if it were to succeed in the United States, a nation that has long revered the single-family home. Early use of the term “French flats” in Boston and New York had the effect of “evoking a cosmopolitan social life, the glamorous influence of the continent, and the slightly risqué practice of living in close proximity to one’s neighbors” (Wright, p. 136). Paradoxically, these were the same characteristics feared by Americans prior to the general acceptance of the apartment building. Nonetheless, there was no doubt an effort “to capitalize on the undeniable allure of things French at the time” (Hawes, p. 25).
The first purpose-built apartment building in the United States appeared in Boston in 1857, the endeavor of a Dr. John Dix who had traveled in Europe during the time of his medical training and was no doubt exposed to this new way of living. While not replete with all the amenities that tenants would come to expect in such a setting, in many respects the Hotel Pelham was simply a variation on the model of a multiple dwelling unit, such as a residential hotel, lived in on a permanent basis. Despite the Pelham’s modest success as the first attempt to transplant the French apartment design to American soil, a full twelve years passed before Boston or, more significantly, New York witnessed another attempt at this arrangement.

The next mile-marker in the story of the American apartment building was the Stuyvesant, which made its debut in New York City in 1869. This was a Richard Morris Hunt design for New York socialite Rutherford Stuyvesant. Hunt was the first American to study at Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and, providentially, began his career on the eve of the Louis Napoleon – Haussmann transformation of medieval Paris into the city of grand boulevards known today. Central to Haussmann’s plan was the deliberate placement of uniform apartment houses, and Hunt had a front row seat to one of the greatest urban redevelopment programs of modern time.

After a slow but steady arrival onto the residential scene, the apartment became a legitimate form of housing by the time it truly was needed to support the growing population of Manhattan. As the apartment house eventually transformed into a socially acceptable mode of habitat for members of the upper class, it slowly became an affordable commodity for the middle-class and even later an option for the lower classes. Thus, a place like New York, comprised of single-family residences, became a city of
apartments in just sixty years, as Elizabeth Hawes describes in her book *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)*. While few urban metamorphoses were as complete, the trend of the apartment house spread “and filtered down to second-tier cities like Norfolk” (Virginian-Pilot, 1997).

Though the Holland House appeared in Ghent thirty-five years after its French-inspired prototype, the two had much in common. The Stuyvesant, a curious foreign implant, was situated in a traditional residential neighborhood known as Irving Place. Though brownstone was the dominant building block of New York residences, this corner of the island preferred brick and consequently Richard Morris Hunt used the same on the exterior of his historic commission. There were other attempts to camouflage the imposing structure, which was no taller than its rowhouse neighbors although it occupied the footprint of four building lots.

Similarly, the Holland House made its place among the individual wooden, stone, and brick residences of Ghent on a prominent lot at the corner of then DeBree Place, Botetourt Street, and Mowbray Arch in much the same way. Like Hunt, Clarence Neff also had the forethought to blend the building architecturally with its neighbors and, in Ghent, this meant having a European provenance, not just a brick façade with stone trimmings. Whether fact or fiction, the Dutch influence provided the building with instant pedigree, as did the name. Nonetheless, it was still taller than all of its neighbors and would take up more space. These were realities harder to mask.

The use of Sanborn Maps can help to track the development of the Holland House and other apartment buildings in Ghent and to illustrate how this building type affected the landscape. Just six years after the first house was built in Ghent by John Graham of
the Norfolk Company, the 1898 map shows forty-two single-family homes in the area bounded by Mowbray Arch, Botetourt, and Mary’s Avenue, later to be renamed Fairfax Avenue. The land on which the Holland House would be built was vacant, but represented by the large, signature corner lot and three adjacent lots on Bridge Street, as DeBree Place was originally known. The only houses constructed on Bridge Street at that time were the two occupying corner lots on Warren Crescent.

By 1910, the Holland Apartments appeared, recognizable by its distinctive C-shape and location at the corner of Mowbray Arch, Botetourt, and what was changed, allegedly in 1910, to DeBree Place, after the original landowner of the Lilliput estate, but still remained “Bridge” on the Sanborn Map (National Register, pg. 8). This section of Ghent, here once again demarcated by Mowbray Arch, Botetourt, and now Fairfax Avenue, largely was developed, as well. The Holland’s neighbors on the east side of DeBree included a single-family home next door and the existing house on the corner of Warren Crescent, which was sub-divided since 1898 to produce a duplex. On the west side of the street, a rear wing was erected for the residence on the corner of Warren Crescent, and the attached town houses of the 400 block of Mowbray Arch were built. In addition to the Holland Apartments, the only other noticeably large structure in this portion of Ghent was the Leache-Wood Seminary at the corner of Botetourt and Fairfax Avenue. The one exception was the Sarah Leigh Hospital on Mowbray Arch, which was just east of the current area of study.

The 1928 Sanborn Map reveals that the Holland House was no longer the lone apartment building in this area of Ghent. Nor were buildings designed specifically for that function the only ones serving as apartments. One noticeable change at the street
level was that the name DeBree changed to Drummond Place in 1912 to recognize the Commodore on whose land, quite literally it is believed, the Holland House and the street now rest (National Register, pg. 8). An alteration to The Holland itself was the addition of garages behind the building, marked “AUTOS” on the map. There seem to have been room for twelve automobiles, and the garages or carports were built on an empty lot behind the building. Furthermore, the single-family home turned duplex on the east corner of Drummond and Warren Crescent was presumably demolished and had become the site of the Leroy Apartments.

Joining the Holland and Leroy Apartments in this area of Ghent were the Warren Apartments, circa 1925, on the northwest side of Warren Crescent, and Leache-Wood Apartment, the former seminary on Botetourt. Additionally, several former single-family residences were functioning as apartments according to the Sanborn Maps: three attached town houses on Mowbray Arch at the corner of Mill, as well as two adjacent units on Pembroke, interestingly next door to the prominent William White residence.

The composite Sanborn Map for 1928 through August 1950 reveals no new apartment buildings in this section of Ghent, yet there were five additional de facto apartments on the landscape. Two were former single-family residences on Warren Crescent near Drummond Place, one was on Pembroke Avenue facing Drummond Place, and one was on Warren Crescent next to the Warren Apartments. The fifth was situated on Colonial Avenue at the corner of Pembroke facing Beechwood Place. A small park in the center of the arc, this was and remains the heart of Ghent.

An original floor plan of the Holland House can be reconstructed through newspaper articles to gain a sense of what life was like inside the building one hundred
years ago. Additionally, such clues can continue to build a picture of why residents lived in an apartment house in Ghent rather than in a single-family home. For example, this four-story building with an English basement originally had “24 units, all of five rooms and a bath” (Ledger-Star). This early 1904 newspaper article announced:

Each apartment will be practically a small private residence, six of them on each floor, which will run the entire length of the building…There will be from two to three bedrooms, a dining-room, kitchen, pantry, bath and living room. On the first floor it is intended to have a general dining-room, private dining-rooms and reception rooms (Virginian-Pilot, 1904).

Presumably, each unit had a fireplace, but today only six remain for decorative purposes.

For rare evidence that The Holland was built as a residential hotel, there is this information regarding the kitchens: “When the building was constructed, each unit had a dumbwaiter kitchen, which connected with a main kitchen on the bottom floor. After the conversion from hotel to apartments, each unit had a tiny, narrow kitchen” (Fouquette).

As for public space, the 1904 article from the Virginian-Pilot boasted that The Holland was to have “a ballroom, one story high, on Botetourt street, built with special care for germans and dances generally. There will be ample dressing-rooms” (Virginian-Pilot, 1904). Germans, in this case, referred to a German Cotillion characterized as “an intricate dance for many couples” (dictionary.com). The less glamorous public space, though quite popular according to later articles, was the café, which was accessible by “guests” of the Holland House “and outsiders as well” (Virginian-Pilot, 1904). Was this use of the term “guest” another indication that the building’s original use was as a residential hotel?
The 1910 Norfolk city directory listed two commercial establishments at Holland Apartments on DeBree Place: Samuel R. Barrett Cleaning and Pressing and The Holland Café. The 1968 newspaper article about the Holland Apartments referred to a “fine restaurant” that initially, “but that perhaps 50 years ago [circa 1918], the space was turned into a living unit” (Ledger-Star). This indicates that the restaurant operated for just fourteen years after the building opened. Adding to the structure’s early mixed-use history, newspaper articles recount amenities like a barbershop, physician’s office, and a store, “known as the Holland Confectionary” (Virginian-Pilot, 1996). Reference was made to two other restaurants, Alice’s Palace, “a lunchtime fixture for the Ghent neighborhood” beginning in the 1930s until the 1950s (Virginian-Pilot, 1996) and Simply Delicious (Norfolk Compass, 1988).

Review of the Holland House’s architectural lineage, both specifically and as a building type, and the effect of buildings like it on early Ghent are one-dimensional without consideration of the people who first occupied the individual apartment units. A study of who they were, where they came from, and what they did can begin to answer the question of why they moved into this new form of housing. Not only was the apartment building new to Ghent, it was new to Norfolk. Furthermore, the housing type was still relatively new to the American landscape, introduced in Boston less than fifty years prior to the Holland House and thirty-five years earlier in New York.

Examination of the business section of the Norfolk city directories from the early part of the twentieth-century reveal that apartments houses were not listed until 1905. In that year three appeared: The Henrietta at 31-33 Plume, Lawler Flats at 97 Bank, and Vendome Apartments near the corner of Colonial Avenue and Olney Road. In the next
year, 1906, the number of apartment houses listed in the city directory quadrupled and included The Holland on DeBree Place at the corner of Botetourt. By 1911, six years after the apartment building appeared on the Norfolk landscape, fifty-eight of them were recorded in the directory.

The street directory for 1906 provides a list of initial residents for the Holland House, and their individual listings in the city directory supplies further information, such as occupation and place of employment. Under The Holland were listed twenty-two residents, the first two being women with dependents of the same name, the only apparent families due to the fact that the heads of house were female and the children were listed separately.

Closer inspection of the residents indicates that among them were a physician, dentist, engineer, two attorneys, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, and a chief clerk with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. There were several officers and administrators of local companies, including superintendent of the Inter-State Typewriter Company, manager of Old Dominion Brewing Company, and president of Norfolk Cold Storage. Executives of other business ventures included industries such as rubber goods, whole butter and cheese, ice cream manufacturing, packing, and a bagging company. Possibly some of these men came to Norfolk in response to the Jamestown Exposition since so many of them are vendors or distributors of various sorts.

A couple of the occupations suggest that some occupants treated the Holland House as a residential hotel, rather than as an entry into the streetcar suburb of Ghent. One of the attorneys, William T. Shannonhouse, was the commissioner of deeds in North Carolina, while John R. Walker was secretary of the North Carolina Pine Association.
Had their work brought them to Norfolk, in which case they needed a semi-permanent place to live? These two men had specific ties to business in North Carolina according to the directory; however, many of the residents could have been involved in interstate commercial dealings considering the prominence of the shipping and railroad industries.

As 1906 was the first year that the Holland House appears in the city directory, this begs the question: where were its residents in 1905? Would their previous living situations, if known, help explain why they would move into a brand new apartment building in Ghent? A search for the individual residents in the 1905 city directory provides some clues. One example is Mrs. Sophie E. Hunter, living with her children Miss Louise and G. C.; she was not a widow in 1905. The family lived with her husband and their father, Mr. Wallace W. Hunter, at 74 York. The passing of Mr. Hunter can certainly explain the need for the family to downsize, possibly, due to a change in their financial situation. William Hardin, vice president of T.S. Southgate and Company, in contrast, lived in the Vendome Apartments near the corner of Colonial Avenue and Olney Road at the edge of Ghent. As he was one of the first apartment residents in Norfolk, maybe Mr. Hardin liked the idea this building type, but wanted a different location or floor plan, since they still were being adapted and perfected to suit the tastes of potential tenants.

Perhaps most interesting is the other early female head of house at the Holland, Mrs. Martha T. Allen, who lived with Miss Emily T. Allen, presumably her daughter. Upon identifying the original residents of the Holland House in 1906, there was no reason to suspect a connection among them; however, upon inspection of the 1905 directory a pattern developed involving Mrs. Allen. Apparently she was a widow who
ran a boarding house at 288 Bute, where Dr. Levi Old, the dentist Elbert White, Samuel Orr, and William Shannonhouse all lived. Did Mrs. Allen determine she needed a change in her living or working arrangement and when her boarding house closed some of her boarders decided to follow her cue? That is a reasonable suspicion, but one thing is more certain. The evidence provided by Mrs. Allen and her former male boarders living in The Holland supports early apartment building history: they often were occupied by widows and bachelors.

Coincidentally, or not, two gentlemen already lived on DeBree Place in 1905, Richard B. Fentress and Fritz L. Sandoz. Mr. Fentress, of the whole butter and cheese producers C.W. Fentress and Company, was also president of Norfolk Cold Storage and Ice Company and vice president of H.W. Rogers Cutlery Company. The year before he moved into the Holland House, Fentress was found next door at 19 DeBree Place with several other individuals, seemingly unconnected. Perhaps this was a boarding house, he enjoyed living in Ghent, and when the opportunity arrived to move into a new apartment house on the same block he seized it. The other individual, Fritz Sandoz, was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy and lived at 21 DeBree Place, a semi-detached house on the other side of number 19 according to the 1910 Sanborn map. Sandoz was listed in the city directory at that address with members of the Smith family, therefore, it is likely he was also a boarder. Boarding and renting, then as now, allowed people who could not afford single-family homes entry into a neighborhood. The question remains, did early Ghent need these supplemental incomes or did the market put pressure on the old, if not new, guard in Ghent allowing these boarders and apartment dwellers access to the exclusive suburb?
Three gentlemen were not listed in the 1905 city directory and, thus, their previous whereabouts are not known; they were Richard R. Pebworth an engineer, Isaac Frank a manager at Old Dominion Brewing Company, and Augustus Pope, a fitter agent. More than likely work opportunities brought these men to Norfolk, and it is possible that those prospects were in connection with the Jamestown Exposition. In that case, men like Pebworth, Frank, and Pope may provide evidence to support the notion that the Holland House was built to provide housing for the Exposition.

Using the 1910 Norfolk city directory to determine who was living in the Holland Apartments, the nineteen residents can then be researched in the corresponding U.S. Census. Turnover in the building persisted between 1906 and 1910, and only two of the original tenants remained: Dr. Levi Old and Richard B. Fentress of C. W. Fentress and Company, who lived on DeBree before The Holland was complete. The possibility exists that Dr. Old not only lived at The Holland, but also occupied the physician’s office in the building, as advertised in the 1904 newspaper article.

While many residents had relocated, many of the same types of people were present in the Holland House, including businessmen and attorneys. One notable addition was the janitor, William C. Cagney, who lived in the building. There were also four women whose occupation was nurse; presumably they worked at the Sarah Leigh Hospital, established in 1903 around the corner on Mowbray Arch. Another person was no longer an occupant of the Holland House, yet still had a connection to the building. Mrs. Martha Allen, former boarding house landlady, was the proprietor of The Holland Café and lived elsewhere on DeBree Place.
Fifteen of the nineteen heads of household were found in the 1910 Census, the four absent being Mrs. Edith M. Smith, widow of P. Xavier Smith, and three of the four nurses, Miss Jennie McGoldrick, Miss Mary Hamilton, and Miss A.M. Wood. With the more comprehensive demographic information supplied by the Census compared to that of the city directory, such as family members and age, a more complete picture of both the occupants as a whole and individually can be formed. For example, for the first time an estimated number of residents could be determined: forty, all of whom were white. There were seventeen males and twenty-three females. Only five occupants were minors eighteen years and younger, the youngest being the three-year-old son of Alonzo B. Carney, an attorney and notary.

Of the thirty-five people for whom birthplace is known, twenty-two were born in Virginia, while five were from North Carolina, and one each from Kentucky and Maryland. One Aaron K. Hughes hailed from New York. A cashier for Mutual Life Insurance Company, work opportunities probably brought this young twenty-nine year old to Norfolk, and his younger sister Helen most likely followed along. The Census revealed that Mr. Cagney, the janitor, was Irish-born, as were his wife Josephine and sister-in-law Julia Sullivan, who lived with him. His six-year-old daughter, Cathleen, however, was born in Washington, D.C.

The average age of the residents, whose ages are known, was thirty-six. The oldest resident was Thomas M. Southgate at seventy-one years old, who lived at The Holland with his thirty-year-old daughter, Helen. Although the Norfolk directory identified him as the harbormaster, a prominent position in any port city, it is unknown whether he was still actively working at this point or retired and retaining his title.
In some respects, the Holland House is a rare monument to a bygone era, yet it continues to function as Clarence Neff intended, as an apartment building. Therefore, a careful analysis of the early residents compared with an evaluation of the types of people living there today can help to establish socio-economic change over time. Privacy laws prohibit a current examination of Holland House residents exclusively, however, analysis of Census 2000 data at the block level provides a useful contrast to the first occupants of this neighborhood prototype. The Holland House is found in Block 3010, Block Group 3, and Census Tract 40.02, an area bounded geographically by Warren Crescent, Pembroke Avenue, Botetourt Street, Mowbray Arch, and Drummond Place. Whereas the data analyzed includes a population outside the physical confines of the Holland House and, therefore, is not a direct comparison to previously investigated early twentieth-century information, consideration of it in terms of greater neighborhood change is highly valuable.

At a glance, the block in which the Holland House is counted had a population of sixty-one in the 2000 Census, comprised of thirty-one men and thirty women. A further breakdown in race revealed that 84% was white, 10% was black or African American, and 3% was Asian. In terms of age, there were only three residents under eighteen years old. The largest cluster of males appeared in the twenty-five to twenty-nine age bracket, where there were eleven. Ten females were found in the thirty to thirty-four year old bracket, their highest concentration. The oldest male appeared in the fifty-five to fifty-nine age bracket, while the oldest female was sixty-two to sixty-four.

The population in this block lived in forty-four households with an average household size of 1.39. Only five households counted were family households, and they
consisted of two 2-person households, two 3-person households, and one 4-person household. The thirty-nine non-family households were made up of a resounding thirty-one 1-person households and eight 2-person households. A look at the householders by age shows that of the family households, three householders were aged twenty-five to thirty-four and two were aged thirty-five to forty-four, thus these were young families. Of the thirty-nine non-family households, the frequency of age of householder occurred as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 to 24 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>2</td>
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This data reinforces the young population in and around the Holland House today.

In the 2000 Census, Block 3010 contained forty-seven housing units, forty-four occupied and three vacant. The most remarkable and probably the most notable change in Ghent since its founding is evident in the tenure statistics. Of the occupied units in this block, forty-three were renter occupied and only one was owner occupied. Obviously evidence exists to support the presence of renters early in Ghent history, in the form of boarders, houses turned into apartments, and the introduction of apartments houses themselves. This example of the nearly complete renter population at the Block level, however, marks a significant demographic transformation in the original Ghent program. Even at the Block Group level (Block Group 3, Census Tract 40.02), the tenure rates in 2000 were 77% renter occupied to 23% owner occupied. Thus, at street level Ghent maintains the appearance of a traditional neighborhood with a variety of housing types.
from single-family homes to rowhouses to apartments. Yet a look at the people who live there tells a different story.

The author of the 1904 Virginian-Pilot article, “Big Apartment House in Ghent,” presumably one of the first published announcements about the Holland House, provided a stern warning for the city. “Norfolk is to become a city of apartment houses, and in that respect will rival Washington, D. C, the home of the flat-dwellers, should buildings of this character be continued at the present rate” (Virginian-Pilot 1904). Norfolk may have fallen short of the writer’s prediction, and undisclosed fear or aspiration, but the apartment building provided housing for a great number of people and made its mark on the city, particularly in one unexpected location, some would argue.

While other structures have come and gone, the Holland House maintains its original function as an apartment building one hundred and three years after it was built. Though the neighborhood in which it is a landmark is no longer a suburb of Norfolk and the streetcar that serviced it ceased operation years ago, Ghent continues to provide convenient and attractive living opportunities for a variety of city dwellers.

Are today’s residents of the Holland House and Ghent, the majority of whom are renters, upwardly mobile professionals? Do they vary greatly from their predecessors in the Holland House, in terms of why they chose to live there? Do they consider themselves the stewards of this historic building and neighborhood? While these and many other questions remain unanswered, deference should be paid to a building like the Holland House for the history it represents.

Alex Marshall remarked, “people aren’t in the habit of gazing at apartment buildings the way they do old homes” (Virginian-Pilot, 1997). Certainly this can be said
of Norfolk’s historic streetcar suburb, however, the Holland House, her sister apartment buildings, and the residents who have inhabited them this last century, are equally important to the story of Ghent.
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