Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island: Co-operativism and Vernacular Architecture

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Abstract

Cape Breton Island's architectural landscape has a high percentage of "company housing" built for coal miners and their families in the early years of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, some of these dwellings were in poor condition. This paper examines one group of miners and their families who decided to embark on their own co-operative housing project in the 1930s, following the philosophy of the Antigonish Co-operative Movement. It explores how this group, while being prompted by a motivation to escape from the poor conditions of the company houses, chose to live in spaces familiar to them, following some of the spatial patterns common in the company houses. This housing development was very influential; it was the first co-operative housing group in Canada and provided a template for other comparable housing developments in eastern Canada.

Résumé

Le paysage architectural de l'île du Cap-Breton comporte un pourcentage élevé de « logements de compagnies » construits pour
abriter les mineurs de charbon et leurs familles au début du vingtième siècle. Dans les années 1930, certaines de ces habitations étaient en mauvais état. L'article porte sur un groupe de mineurs et leurs familles qui ont décidé de lancer leur propre coopérative d'habitations dans les années 1930, suivant la philosophie du Antigonish Co-operative Movement (mouvement coopératif d'Antigonish). L'auteur étudie comment, malgré sa motivation d'échapper aux mauvaises conditions des logements fournis par les entreprises, ce groupe a choisi de vivre dans des espaces qui lui étaient familiers, en respectant certaines structures spatiales fréquentes dans les « logements de compagnie ». Ce projet domiciliaire a eu une grande influence; il constituait la première coopérative d'habitation au Canada et a servi de modèle à d'autres ensembles de logements comparables dans l'est du pays.

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