

TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
New Sprankle Building
Knoxville, Tennessee

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Feb. 5, 1934

A TVA HOUSE OF SIMPLE LINES

By Earle S. Draper
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The objective of the Tennessee Valley Authority's housing development at Norris, Tennessee, is to provide economical and livable houses based upon long-time usefulness -- all, of course, governed by the principle of building a town that will best serve the needs of the people who live in it, both for today and in the future.

The arrangement of this house demonstrates the fact that simplicity and restraint not only keep building costs low, but also contribute to the attractiveness and utility of a house. The design shown here is known as TVA house No. 21, and it contains 11,520 cubic feet of space, including the porch.

The wall construction is of common brick in slightly varied shades of red, laid with fairly rough joints. The roof is of slate having irregular edges to add texture to the surface, or of hand hewn shingles. The hooded doorway, together with the railed stoop or terrace, forms a usable entrance feature. The wide porch at the end is contained under the main roof, thus simplifying construction as well as adding to the apparent length of the house.

In most of the houses at Norris, dining space is provided in the kitchens. In this house, however, one end of the living

room is given over to this purpose. Here the kitchen itself is not entirely closed off from the living room, but forms an alcove opening directly into that end of the room reserved for dining. At one side of the living room is a wood-burning fireplace, and near the front door is a convenient closet for coats.

The kitchen of this house is very compact without being crowded. There is ample work-space, and the kitchen is fully equipped to save both time and energy. There is a large built-in kitchen cabinet with generous working surfaces, and shelf space for dishes, utensils and packaged foods. In one corner of the room is a pantry for storing more bulky articles.

The range, the refrigerator and the hot water heater are of the electric type, as are those of all the houses of Norris. Electricity is also used for heating the rooms throughout the house, thus eliminating the need of a basement for a heating plant and fuel storage.

Unlike the majority of the houses at Norris, design No. 21 does not provide for a separate laundry. Instead, in this house a sink of the combination type is employed. One end of the sink contains the laundry tub, and close beside it space is reserved for the electric washing machine.

The bathroom is accessible from either the bedroom or the kitchen and contains a shower instead of a tub. The location of the linen closet in the bathroom provides a practical and unusually convenient location, serving also as a towel and supply closet.

PRESS RELEASE
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The bedroom contains two closets; one of them with open shelves for hats, shoes and similar articles.

The location of the long, screened porch is such that one end may serve for dining purposes, while the other end may be used as a sleeping porch. There is considerable storage space in the attic which is made accessible from the porch by means of a scuttle and ladder stair.

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4) THE NEW TVA TOWN OF NORRIS, TENNESSEE

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Prominent among other provisions of the Act of the 73rd Congress defining the scope of the Tennessee Valley Authority's work in the Tennessee Valley is this clause: ". . . to provide for the agricultural and industrial development of said valley," and this: ". . . fostering an orderly and proper physical, economic and social development of such areas."

In the development of plans for housing the workers at Norris Dam, the TVA is following this mandate. From the start it was recognized that merely to provide for the temporary housing of 2,000 or more workers during the construction period of the dam would involve the large-scale erection of reasonably durable and habitable buildings, the installation of extensive water supply and sanitary systems, roadbuilding, lighting and other expensive works, most of which would largely be abandoned upon completion of the dam.

To avoid this waste and at the same time to provide for future contemplated developments in the region, the housing program now adopted provides for the building of a permanent town. Further, for the establishment of a community based upon the orderly combination of industrial work and subsistence farming.

In this the TVA is following the growing sentiment which favors the coordination of farm and factory in the productive lives of workers throughout the Nation. The Authority also recognizes that this combination of work fits not only the present tendencies of the local people, but also looks forward to the full expansion of the resources and opportunities to be developed in the Valley.

A number of factors entered into the selection of the site for the new town of Norris: its accessibility to the dam; the avoidance of ground too rugged or rocky for economical development; the inclusion of sufficient land suitable for small-scale agricultural use, and, looking forward, its general suitability for development as a permanent community serving the probable social and industrial development of the locality. After a great deal of exploration and consideration, the present site was chosen as fulfilling all of these conditions to a greater extent than does any other feasible area of ground nearby.

The site chosen for the permanent housing community covers an approximate area of 2,500 acres; the center lying four miles, by way of road, from Norris Dam. It occupies a high, rugged plateau stretching between the Clinch River and Buffalo Creek Valleys. Deep wooded areas are abundant, and vistas and panoramas far across Buffalo Creek Valley on the east and toward the Cumberland Mountains on the west, add constant, ever-changing variety and scenic interest to the view.

Due to conditions at the site, both natural and imposed, the size of the town of Norris will be deliberately limited, and the great majority of the houses will be individual or single-family homes. These will be supplemented by several apartment houses of moderate size, and a boarding house for single workers. There is no apparent need or justification for anticipating the growth of a large

commercial or trading center at this point, either immediately or in the future. In fact, it is considered a real advantage that the town is so definitely limited in size. Otherwise, under the impetus of activity during the construction of the dam, the town might be allowed to overdevelop only to find afterward that it was unable to sustain itself.

One of the major features of the regional development plan for the Valley will be a new, improved road using the top of Norris Dam in crossing the Clinch River. This road - technically a "freeway" - will skirt the new community and connect at either end with important existing highways now leading into the region from various sections of the country. This freeway will offer a new route between Cincinnati and the Midwest, and Knoxville, the Great Smoky Mountains and the South. Also it will be the shortest connection around the 75-mile-long-twin lakes to be formed by Norris Dam. This scenic freeway will no doubt become a popular route among tourists, and it will be fully and perpetually protected against the encroachment of sign-boards, hot dog stands, shacks and all the other roadside clutter so destructive to natural beauty.

The housing site under development not only recognizes that the community's initial and primary reason for being is to provide housing facilities for the force of workers during the Norris Dam construction period; but in addition, it will provide for a permanent community fitting into the social, economic and traditional life of the region, both present and future. Further, it includes either natural barriers or sufficient excess land to form an unbroken protective zone to prevent fringes of hit-or-miss land use and "development" near the community. Finally, the location of the site offers opportunity for the introduction and practicable integration of seasonal local industry and a small-scale, but intensive and adequate farm economy in the working life of the community.

A constant threat to the maintenance of decent standards of building and land use in the vicinity of towns both large and small, is the uncontrolled growth around the outskirts. At Norris, however, this evil has been successfully obviated by surrounding the entire development with a protective zone. To a great extent this consists of steep declivities along river and creek valleys. In addition, this protective belt contains some 2,000 acres of ground, most of which will serve a double purpose; that is, it will also provide space for the subsistence farms. More or less woodland is scattered here and there along the protective zone, but the extensive open spaces have good soil and drainage conditions, making them very suitable for productive cultivation. The 250-foot-right-of-way of the freeway also encircles a large portion of the townsite, and adds its protection to the other barriers against outside influences detrimental to the continuing unity of the town.

In Norris, home-building lots will average about 75 by 200 feet in size, giving an area of about one-third acre in each case. This proportionately narrow frontage tends to reduce the cost of such public improvements as roadways, sewer and water mains, street lighting and so on; while the unusual depth provides more private usable yard space for gardening and other outdoor uses and activities. In addition, subsistence farm plots, averaging about four acres each, will be located within easy access of all dwellers in the town who desire to carry on small-scale farming in connection with their other work.

The natural ruggedness and heavily wooded nature of the site will, from the start, reduce, if not entirely obviate any feeling of rawness in the buildings and surroundings of the new town. Too, the roadways will be moulded into

the natural contours of the ground; sweeping into broad curves and resulting in irregular shaped plots of ground, thus imposing a consequent informal but related grouping of the houses. Cul-de-sac or dead-end streets are introduced wherever practicable to prevent through traffic on residential streets. In placing the houses on the lots, careful consideration will be given to the areas to be devoted to use as lawns, ornamental planting and flower plots on one hand, and vegetable gardens and orchards on the other.

All roadways will be graded and surfaced to prevent washing and costly up-keep. The use of street curbs will be eliminated, and gutters will be used only when necessary to lead storm water into natural drainage channels, thereby again reducing costs.

Instead of an expensive sidewalk system, improved paths, independent of roadways in most cases, will lead through the residential blocks, enabling one to reach any desired destination quickly and safely.

Nor will there be any "white-way" lighting system. Street lighting will be fully adequate, but not studied from the Times Square viewpoint. Electric service lines will extend along the rear boundaries of lots, and will probably be led underground to the houses they serve. It is hoped that the service lines may be kept away from roadways so as not to interfere with the natural growth of street trees.

Ornamental planting will be generous but simple, with no exotic "specimens" or "studied" groupings. Native shrubs and vines giving an evergreen effect expressive of the mild climate will be used merely to supplement the natural growth, which is already extensive in both mass and variety.

Following the completion of Norris Dam, the community will serve adequately to house the permanent forces employed in the operation of the dam and its adjuncts, in reforestation and erosion control, and those in charge of the management of the adjacent TVA properties. Also, within limitations, this community will serve the workers engaged in the various small industries and craft-shops which are expected to be one outgrowth of the TVA work-school system of guiding the native people into farming, not merely a narrow-lived, self-sufficient group of individuals, but a body of highly skilled workers contributing their full share, and even more, to our national unity and well-being.

To serve the entire community, a complete town center has been laid out adjacent to a 14 acre public recreation ground or park. Here will be grouped the public hall and administration building, a small hotel, stores, public market, bus station and service garage and other community features as the need arises. Centered on the main axis of this group will be the public school, away from traffic, yet so located that a designated section of the park may be used as a school playground. On a low ridge, somewhat isolated but easily accessible, is the hospital location. Small, neighborhood parks and playgrounds are also provided for, as is a well equipped demonstration farm.

The utilities, such as the waterworks, electric distribution station, steam laundry, and so on are relegated to nearby but unobtrusive locations.

A complete water supply and sewer system, including a modern sewage disposal plant, will be installed. Water from Clear Creek Spring will be pumped into a high reservoir from which the clear, sparkling, spring water will flow by gravity throughout the community.

In none of its aspects is this to be considered a "model" town development. A thoughtful and conscientious effort has been made here to smooth out and eliminate where practicable, and without wasting money on frills, some of the crudeness and haphazard developments of the typical small town. But the local conditions met with are in many ways unique, and there is no inclination to set forth this new community as a model for all new towns and housing developments. It will, however, demonstrate that the unduly congested, insanitary, matter-of-fact ugliness, and the usual haphazard growth of a small rural community can be avoided inexpensively, and that, instead, a community can be made to render equal benefits to all of its people. In its broadest sense, this is an attempt to make rural conditions more livable for its inhabitants, that is all. True, it has its own distinct values that may be drawn upon and put to use elsewhere -- but it isn't a model.

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