

CONCRETE CITY

Model of Industrial Housing

WHEN?
1911--1924

WHERE?
Nanticoke, Pa.



EVENT
A new concept in employee housing

VOCABULARY
culm shanties
colliery

Housing for mine workers was usually freezing in the winter and hot in the summer. Often made of the cheapest wood possible, poorly constructed and erected as quickly as possible, places where miners and their families lived were often called shanties.

In 1911, the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad Coal Division built experimental housing for a select group of their workers called the “Garden City of the Anthracite Region”. Local residents have dubbed it “Concrete City” for good reason—it was made out of concrete. Built on a thirty-nine-acre parcel in Nanticoke, forty families could live in the new houses which contained seven rooms each. They were used to house supervisors and critical mine workers such as foremen and blacksmiths of the Truesdale Colliery. Many people believed these newly constructed homes with sidewalks, electric lighting, surrounded by trees and shrubbery, playgrounds, tennis courts, and a pool would be the housing of the future.

The men chosen out of the more than 1700 employees had to meet certain requirements such as be a native English language speaker, as well as hold an important position such as shopman or foreman (Explore Pa. history). Rent was \$8 a month for the 7 rooms that included 4 bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and dining room. According to William Kashatus in *Valley With A Heart*, the coal company “sponsored annual garden contests and awarded cash prizes”



(Kashatus 58). A garden hose was required equipment for each family to wash the culm dust off the outside of the house and they were supposed to hose down the inside of the house after removing the furniture every year. Kashatus also points out that company employees painted the houses every two years and took care of all repairs (58).

Coal provided the warmth though complaints still arose that the houses were damp—so damp that condensation dripped from the walls. According to Explore Pa history, “One former

resident recalled that her father's shirts froze in an upstairs closet during the wintertime, and her mother had to iron them every morning just so he could put them on. By 1920, paint and plaster were peeling from the walls." However, by 1924 the experiment was abandoned due to the refusal of the railroad to fund \$200,000 for a new sewer system.

In recent years according to Kashatus, the complex has been used by the military, police, and firefighters for training. Though it was damaged, and vandals have left their mark on the buildings, a state historical marker was established in 1998 that "commemorates the early use of International Style architectural concepts in creating 'model' industrial housing" (Kashatus 58).



ONLINE RESOURCES

[Explore PA History](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Kashatus, William. *Valley With A Heart*.
Luzerne County, PA: Luzerne county
Historical Society and Luzerne County
Community College. 2012.