

## Urban History Review

# A Model Suburb for Model Suburbanites: Order, Control, and Expertise in Thorncrest Village

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The Urban Space of the Elites  
Volume 40, numéro 1, fall 2011

URI : [id.erudit.org/iderudit/1006405ar](http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1006405ar)  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1006405ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN 0703-0428 (imprimé)  
1918-5138 (numérique)

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### Citer cet article

Vitale, P. (2011). A Model Suburb for Model Suburbanites: Order, Control, and Expertise in Thorncrest Village. *Urban History Review*, 40 (1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1006405ar>

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### Résumé de l'article

En 1945, Marshall Foss débute la construction de Thorncrest Village, une localité d'Etoobicoke bordant l'ouest de Toronto. Selon la vision de Marshall Foss et du planificateur urbain Eugene Faludi, ce village ne serait rien de moins qu'un prototype de banlieue modèle pour le Canada de l'après-guerre et incarnerait les idéaux de la planification banlieusarde moderne : le conformisme, le sens de la communauté, la stabilité, le respect de la vie privée ainsi qu'un prudent mélange de nature et de ville. Les deux fondateurs développent une banlieue ordonnée et contrôlée destinée à garantir les investissements financiers et le statut social des résidents de la classe moyenne élevée. En retour, ces résidents témoignent d'une foi incroyable en leur expertise et s'identifient au village, créant ainsi une expérience charnière dans la planification du mode de vie banlieusard moderne. Thorncrest Village devient alors un site clé dans le développement de l'expertise urbanistique moderne et dans la constitution de l'identité de l'élite banlieusarde. Les valeurs cultivées par les planificateurs urbains et par les résidents du village — notamment le maintien de l'ordre et du contrôle — apparaissent bientôt comme des composantes majeures de la suburbanisation au Canada et ailleurs dans le monde.

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# *A Model Suburb for Model Suburbanites: Order, Control, and Expertise in Thorncrest Village*

*Patrick Vitale*

*In 1945, Marshall Foss began construction of Thorncrest Village, a subdivision in Etobicoke just to the west of Toronto. Foss and urban planner Eugene Faludi envisioned Thorncrest Village as nothing less than a model suburb for postwar Canada. They created a community that embodied the ideals of modern suburban planning: conformity, community, privacy, stability, and a careful mixture of nature and city. They developed an orderly and controlled suburb that secured upper-middle-class residents' financial investments and their social status. These residents, in turn, placed unbounded faith in Foss and Faludi's expertise and identified with the Village as a landmark experiment in modern suburban living. Thorncrest Village became a key site that intertwined the expertise of modern urban planning and the identities of elite suburbanites. The values that developers and residents put into place in Thorncrest Village—particularly the pursuit of order and control—are significant components of suburbanization in Canada and elsewhere.*

*En 1945, Marshall Foss débute la construction de Thorncrest Village, une localité d'Etobicoke bordant l'ouest de Toronto. Selon la vision de Marshall Foss et du planificateur urbain Eugene Faludi, ce village ne serait rien de moins qu'un prototype de banlieue modèle pour le Canada de l'après-guerre et incarnerait les idéaux de la planification banlieusarde moderne : le conformisme, le sens de la communauté, la stabilité, le respect de la vie privée ainsi qu'un prudent mélange de nature et de ville. Les deux fondateurs développent une banlieue ordonnée et contrôlée destinée à garantir les investissements financiers et le statut social des résidents de la classe moyenne élevée. En retour, ces résidents témoignent d'une foi incroyable en leur expertise et s'identifient au village, créant ainsi une expérience charnière dans la planification du mode de vie banlieusard moderne. Thorncrest Village devient alors un site clé dans le développement de l'expertise urbanistique moderne et dans la constitution de l'identité de l'élite banlieusarde. Les valeurs cultivées par les planificateurs urbains et par les résidents du village — notamment le maintien de l'ordre et du contrôle — apparaissent bientôt comme des composantes majeures de la suburbanisation au Canada et ailleurs dans le monde.*

Today, traveling north from Islington station on a number thirty-seven bus, it is difficult to imagine the rural landscape that greeted Marshall Foss in 1945. Newly returned from service as a wing commander in the Royal Canadian Air Force in the autumn

of 1945, Foss began to develop the subdivision of Thorncrest Village at the corner of Islington Avenue and Radburn Road in the township of Etobicoke, just east of Toronto (see figure 1). Now subsumed by the condo towers and traffic of metropolitan Toronto, a small nondescript shopping plaza marks the spot where Foss began his development. When Foss first visited this corner in 1945, it was occupied by rolling farmers' fields, which seemed the optimal site on which to build a "modern community" dedicated to "country living."

Foss developed a community devoted to the central ideals of suburban living: conformity, community, privacy, stability, and a careful mixture of nature and city. These ideals clearly motivated Thorncrest Village's design and development and had a substantial, albeit lesser, impact on suburban design in Toronto and other cities. In the late 1940s, Thorncrest Village was a model for other suburban developments, and newspapers and magazines highlighted it frequently, including the *Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Standard*, *Toronto Daily Star*, *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *Architectural Forum*, and the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. Its planner, Eugene Faludi, would go on to have a prominent career, developing plans for cities and suburbs across Canada.<sup>1</sup> The national attention focused on Thorncrest Village may have been unusual, but its design and social life were not. Thorncrest Village exemplified the clichés of suburbia, and the principles applied there are apparent throughout suburban Canada. Thorncrest Village and hundreds of other Canadian suburbs provide ample evidence to support Robert Fishman's claim that the residential suburb was an "archetypical middle-class creation."<sup>2</sup>

This paper focuses on Thorncrest Village as a key location and moment for the genesis of modern suburban planning in Canada. By understanding the search for order and control that motivated the designers, developers, and residents of Thorncrest Village, we can better understand the broader forces that shaped post-Second World War Canadian cities. During the postwar period, the middle class invested increasing faith in professionals' abilities to solve a wide range of problems from war to famine to sickness. The problems of the city were in no way different, and in Thorncrest Village and throughout Toronto, professional planners, with the support of the middle class, went to work rationally clearing old neighbourhoods and

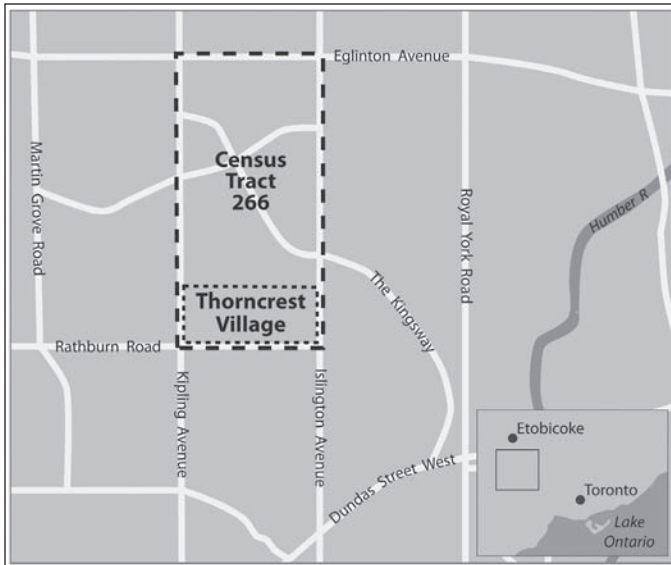


Figure 1: Map of Thorncrest Village and census tract 266

creating new ones.<sup>3</sup> The development of Thorncrest Village was a key moment and place where middle-class Torontonians invested not only their savings, but also their identities in the modern project of developing a more orderly city. The developers and residents of Thorncrest Village saw themselves as suburban pioneers who would demonstrate to all of Canada a modern and more rational way of living.

This article is based on my analysis of the records of the Thorncrest Village Homes Association (TVHA). These records show how the pursuit of control and order motivated the designer, developers, and early residents of the subdivision.<sup>4</sup> I begin by placing the Village within the context of the historiography of suburbanization in Canada. Past writing on suburbanization in Canada has offered important counter-examples to the meta-history of white middle-class suburbanization. But, as a result, it has rarely analyzed the search for power and control that drove much residential suburbanization. Historians and historical geographers have provided an exhaustive survey of diverse forms of suburbanization but have less frequently described the role of suburbs as key sites for the reproduction of the power and prestige of the Canadian elite. Following this review, I turn to the developers' attempt to build a model community in Thorncrest Village. I argue that Foss and Faludi concretized the middle class's intense desire for a tightly controlled and orderly neighbourhood within their design. The developers consistently described Thorncrest Village as an escape from and contrast to the disorderly city. Not only did they offer Thorncrest Village as a carefully controlled and ordered place, but also as a community that reflected the highest ideals of suburban living—ideals that would reflect well on the residents of the neighbourhood. The developers intentionally linked the value of the community to the reputations of its residents, and as a result homebuyers invested not only in a home, but also in an identity as Thorncrest Villagers. The final sections of the article will follow the early history of

residents' efforts to realize the ideals put forward by Faludi and Foss. It will show, as did sociologist S. D. Clark in his study of Thorncrest Village, that the residents struggled to create shared norms and a sense of belonging within the community,<sup>5</sup> as part of an active effort to realize their vision of an orderly and rationally planned community. To ignore their search for order—a search that is indicative of middle-class life in postwar Canada—would only mask the power relations that both produce and are reproduced by middle-class suburbanization.

### *History of Postwar Suburbanization in Canada*

Most recent writing on suburbanization in Canada takes two distinct, yet parallel approaches, focusing on either the history of women and domesticity in suburbia or the history of working-class and industrial suburbanization.<sup>6</sup> Most of this work has focused on pre-1945 suburbanization, rather than the massive tide of suburbanization that followed the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> Much of it can be broadly categorized within the framework of new suburban history. New suburban historians are a disparate group who question traditional meta-histories of suburbanization.<sup>8</sup> They argue that prior studies of suburbia, particularly classic syntheses by Fishman and Jackson, have concentrated exclusively on white middle-class residential suburbanization and have ignored the presence of working-class, industrial, and non-white suburbanization.<sup>9</sup> They also question the classic trope of the suburban dupe—the middle-class suburbanite who is drawn to a place of conformity, consumerism, and affluence. These scholars provide an important reformulation of suburban history in Canada and the United States. They show, on one hand, that suburbanization was diverse and did not involve merely the middle class. On the other hand, they provide a more humane account of suburbia in the face of a long history of elite intellectual critique that described the dreary lives of suburbanites who succumbed to false consciousness and became “organization men.”

There is good reason to embrace the critiques of these new suburban historians and their understanding of suburbanization from the bottom up, but it is also essential to question the power relations that they tend to overlook. While suburbanization in Canada was *and* remains very diverse, a certain type of suburb has been *and* remains dominated by the white middle class. The suburban myth of the lawn-obsessed, conformist, exclusive, white middle-class community, like any myth, was rooted in material processes and everyday experience. The suburban myth resulted from a long history of white middle-class flight from the city and the pursuit of more ordered and controlled residential space. Mary Corbin Sies argues that suburbanization is united by certain suburban ideals that are “fashioned by a social class to serve its own needs, pleasures, and interests as a group.” Suburbanization is an “ideology” that “represents a historically specific set of built forms and values as the best universal approach to the housing needs of the citizenry.”<sup>10</sup> These suburban ideals are rooted in a specific history of white middle-class residential suburbanization. When new suburban historians do not acknowledge these ideals and the particular suburbs

that they correspond to, they overlook the power relations that produce and structure much of suburban life.

In a recent synthesis of Canadian urban history in relation to that of the United States, Richard Harris argues that the 1990s were the “golden age” of research on the history of Canadian housing and that at their end, “few areas remain untouched.”<sup>11</sup> There is no question that new suburban historians have complicated our understanding of suburbanization. They have produced a profound range of insight into the multifaceted nature of suburbanization in the period prior to the Second World War. However, as a result of their work, the nuance of particular forms of suburbanization has come to stand as the norm. The narrative of the hardy owner-builder on the suburban fringe has unintentionally eclipsed that of the middle-class accountant who purchased a fully constructed home in an exclusive suburban community. The “thrift and individual self-reliance” of particular suburbanites have eclipsed the excess and exclusivity of many of their counterparts.<sup>12</sup> This paper makes a small contribution to the enormous gap in the scholarly literature on postwar and middle-class Canadian suburbs. It focuses on Thorncrest Village, as a quintessentially middle-class suburb, in order to understand how developers, planners, and residents actively created a community devoted to the central suburban ideals of conformity, security, order, and control. They did so in order to create residential spaces that would help to reproduce their power and prestige. Thorncrest Village is representative of many middle-class suburbanites’ long pursuit of a bourgeois utopia of their own. This pursuit is an integral aspect of the history suburbanization in Canada.

### ***Building a Model Suburb***

Thorncrest Village was the product of the combined efforts of several developers, among them Marshall Foss, the principal developer; E. G. Faludi, the planner of the village; and E. S. Cox, the architect of many of the Village’s homes. Several early documents point to the outlandish potential that the developers envisioned for the Village. The most interesting of these documents is a mimeographed paper titled “Home Horizons.” While the authorship of this paper is unclear, its presence in a TVHA file titled “Copy Materials” suggest that Thorncrest Village’s developers were its authors. “Home Horizons” is a suburban planning manifesto, suggesting not only how developers would use scientifically informed practices of urban planning, but also their belief that Thorncrest Village would serve as a model for a broader expansion of modern community-planning principles in Canada and internationally.

The author of “Home Horizons” claimed that most suburban developments in Canada left aspiring suburbanites with neighbourhoods that differed little from the cities they were moving away from. These potential homebuyers faced “problems and pitfalls” and “want the one best of every component, and there is naught but contradiction available to them.”<sup>13</sup> The designers of Thorncrest Village hoped to meet suburbanites’ “dream of dreams” by both mechanizing and organizing suburban

development within a corporate structure. Identifying the department store as a model, they argued that vertical and horizontal integration would have the dual effect of providing suburbanites with an ordered and desirous residential community and developers with windfall profits. The efficiencies brought about by mass production and comprehensive urban planning would allow for the expansion of suburban living to a wider segment of the population. More was at stake than corporate profits. As “Home Horizons” noted, “The opportunity offered ... to a corporation geared to produce really modern complete living units in well planned development areas on a parity with present day production of other items for living enjoyment, with a sales organization on par with the product, can reap a golden harvest while making a unique contribution to human welfare, peace and the happiness of the middle classes, the backbone of our civilization.”<sup>14</sup> The developers envisioned (or at least sold) Thorncrest Village as a model of how to produce homes for an expanding middle-class population.<sup>15</sup>

“Home Horizons” offered an exaggerated account of the innovative character of Thorncrest Village’s design. Foss and Faludi drew directly from the Garden City planning movement, Clarence Perry’s neighbourhood unit theory, and the boom of planned suburban communities in the United States during the interwar years. Following the example of “community builders” in the United States, they described Thorncrest Village as an explicit departure from previous forms of piecemeal speculative suburban development.<sup>16</sup> In turn, the Village’s design mimicked similar subdivisions in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Thorncrest Village was not, as Faludi and Foss claimed, the first planned suburb in Canada. While less common than grid-based speculative subdivisions, there were planned suburbs in cities from Halifax to Victoria. Most of these suburbs were built prior to the First World War, including several developed in the west by the Canadian Pacific Railroad and designed by John C. Olmsted and his associates.<sup>18</sup> Yet regardless of the veracity of Foss and Faludi’s claim about the revolutionary nature of the Village’s design, there is little doubt that they used the national attention it earned both to sell houses and to enlist residents’ participation in what they marketed as an innovative experiment in suburban planning.

Despite the fact that Thorncrest Village was not revolutionary, various media outlets nonetheless pronounced the innovative character of its design. For example, a November 1945 article in *Architectural Forum* indicated that Foss had “discovered” the “incredible fact that production of homes had never been organized.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise an article in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* described how communities prior to Thorncrest Village “just grew” at right angles. Based on the example of Thorncrest Village, communities “in the future ... must be planned” to “be suitable for good living.”<sup>20</sup>

According to Foss and Faludi, they were creating Thorncrest Village for the benefit of Canada, which, unlike the United States and Britain, lacked a long history of innovative urban planning.<sup>21</sup> Faludi noted that Canada was a country “of immense land and



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vast distances” that lacked a revolutionary past. In response to Canada’s unique nationhood, he called for “a [planning] philosophy of our own which must be derived from a consideration of the nature of this country and its people.”<sup>22</sup> He claimed that Thorncrest Village was Canada’s first planned suburban community and as such was intended to stand as a model for future subdivisions. Advertisements described it as “already famous” and “a new experience unique in Canada.”<sup>23</sup> As the neighbourhood grew in fame, a letter from Foss warned residents to take “caution in supplying photographs and details of homes for publication in home magazines.” While Thorncrest had “received splendid editorial publicity,” Foss was concerned that contact with the media be “expertly handled.”<sup>24</sup> To this end, residents were instructed to refer all media inquiries to Foss. Foss carefully orchestrated a media spectacle around Thorncrest Village, and its fame became one of its primary selling points. When residents described the Village, they also adopted Foss’s language of national fame and model community building. During a ten-year anniversary celebration, the residents gave Foss a leather-bound commemorative book and thanked him for being a “man with an idea,” “whose enthusiasm, conviction and effort created a community that is unique in Canada.”<sup>25</sup>

While the designers of Thorncrest Village were well aware of its potential, they claimed that prospective suburbanites needed to be educated through a flurry of advertisements and brochures. An emphasis on potential suburbanites’ lack of sound insight into the principles of orderly suburban planning was implicit in much of the advertising and planning literature created by the designers of the Village. The developers argued that the “common man” would ultimately learn to value the experience of living in a planned community, but first had to be taught the benefits of modern suburban planning. Reflecting on the experience of planning the Village, Faludi wrote, “The ‘common man,’ for whom we intended this community, was against everything. He disapproved the design of the houses in general. He disliked the free placement in relation to lot lines and neighbouring houses. He utterly rejected the idea of the living room being oriented towards the south and not towards the street. He did not believe that curved streets would slow down the speed of cars.”<sup>26</sup> According to Faludi, as a result of this innate ignorance, most suburbanites needed to be taught the values of modern suburban living.

Foss ran a series of advertisements in the *Globe and Mail* in the spring and early summer of 1948 that attempted to teach potential homebuyers about the values of planned suburban living. These advertisements drew from a brochure that Foss created about the development entitled “How to find a suitable location for a HOME.” This two-page brochure presented prospective homebuyers with a list of considerations when choosing a home and community. Broken into four parts the key factors were “The Future of the Area,” “The Location of the Area,” “Municipal Organization of the Area,” and “The Land.” Within each of these sections the brochure asked homebuyers to consider myriad

factors, including the presence of nearby industry and smoke and how the “present homes suggest the future character of the area.”<sup>27</sup> The *Globe and Mail* advertisements emphasized a number of factors, including the advantages of Thorncrest in relation to other suburban and urban neighbourhoods, the value of country living, the efficiencies delivered by modern scientific planning, and the financial and social security of a planned and restricted community.

In educating suburbanites about the value of Thorncrest Village’s design, the developers often maligned the speculative development that was predominant throughout metropolitan Toronto.<sup>28</sup> They noted that developers created dense suburban neighbourhoods that differed little in density or form from urban Toronto. In an “Introduction to *Country Club Community*,” Foss argued that most subdivisions in Etobicoke Township were composed of “small lots, over exploiting the countryside in this potential country home paradise, and despite the high price, offer only the same front and back yard, crowded row house plans of the central city.”<sup>29</sup> Unlike these developers, Foss described himself as a “slightly modest pirate” who realized that home purchasers would “pay a premium for this type of home location, with its added protection of property values and its invaluable community co-operative services.”<sup>30</sup> Foss walked a fine line between describing Thorncrest Village as profitable and as a project with social benefits that were far more important than mere moneymaking. He aimed to signal to potential buyers that Thorncrest was not just another speculative housing development; it was a place that was carefully engineered, not mass-produced. This engineering offered residents a stable financial investment and secure social status (figures 2 and 3).

Advertisements described Thorncrest Village as a place where modern planning principles would paradoxically allow for country living—a carefully orchestrated blend of city and country. Thorncrest Village offered its residents “a ‘country home,’ true—yet one with not only the most modern conveniences of city living but with the added advantages of planned recreational and community facilities and services.”<sup>31</sup> Thorncrest provided “the warmth of the sun ... the whispers of leaves in the breeze ... the song of birds and the beauty of a graceful countryside,” all within a twenty-minute commute to downtown Toronto.<sup>32</sup> Advertisements proffered the aesthetics of country life along with the fellowship of small-town life and access to shared modern facilities like a shopping plaza, pool, and clubhouse. Homebuyers purchased a carefully constructed hybrid of country and city.

A promotional brochure told readers, “Thorncrest Village is a dream come true ... but a dream based on the expert advice of consulting engineers, architects, and authorities with long experience in town planning.”<sup>33</sup> In various planning documents and advertisements Foss and Faludi placed great emphasis on the expertise and scientific methods used to design Thorncrest Village and gave it the title “The Modern Community” innumerable times. As a result of the corporate structure of the developer and detailed planning, the Village was “scientifically geared for success.”<sup>34</sup> According to the developers, a planned community ...



Figure 2: A typical Thorncrest Village home

offered numerous efficiencies, including greater standardization, increased buying power for a developer who built many homes at once, and the possibility for communal buying of fuel, food, and shared services like security and snow plowing. All of this led to greater profitability for the developer and secure home values for residents.

Thorncrest Village's developers repeatedly argued that the "common man" needed to be taught the value of modern, expertly planned communities. Residents were not urban planners or architects, but if they could appreciate the expertise and methods applied in the design of the Village, this would reflect well on both their own status and that of the wider community. In other words, the stature of the community was intrinsically tied to a strong faith in expertise. In order to maintain this status, residents had to develop at least a partial appreciation of principles used in its design. A reciprocal relationship developed between the neighbourhood's status as expert-designed and residents' status as people who could comprehend this expertise. The developers and fellow residents encouraged Thorncrest Villagers to develop at least a pedestrian appreciation of the methods used to develop the community. Local resident Larry Dack urged residents to read E. G. Faludi's article in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, and the Thorncrest Village Homes Association provided copies at its office. Dack wrote to residents, "We are used to hearing our Village made the subject of debate. After all it is rather unique in Canada and decided pro and con views are to be expected. But when we extol the virtues of Thorncrest living are we quite sure we know 'whereof we speak'? How many of us, for instance, are acquainted with the original objectives of the planner or have any conception of the tremendous problems facing them in putting this experiment in community living to work?"<sup>35</sup>

Residents were offered opportunities to educate themselves about the principles that made Thorncrest Village great. Thorncrest's first resident and architect, "Mr. E. C. S. Cox," distributed



Figure 3: A second typical Village home

flyers throughout the community announcing a talk that he planned to give at the Engineering Institute of Canada, noting that the talk would "cover up-to-date methods of residence construction" and that "visitors were welcome—including the ladies."<sup>36</sup> Marshall Foss attempted to spread the gospel of Thorncrest more widely by posting an ad in the *Globe and Mail* for an exhibit at the University of Toronto School of Architecture. The ad told readers that the exhibit was a "must," "if you dream of better living in a better home."<sup>37</sup> Foss also extolled the virtues of Thorncrest Village on the radio program *C.I.L. Serenade* on CJBC.<sup>38</sup>

One basic principle of the modern, planned subdivision was that it offered a controlled environment and a secure investment for its residents.<sup>39</sup> Thorncrest Village advertisements contrasted this control and security to the uncontrolled space and financial risk of housing in downtown Toronto or in speculatively built suburbs. As various advertisements and brochures repeatedly pointed out, "Home is what you make it ... and where you place it."<sup>40</sup> Another ad described Thorncrest as "the stabilized community" and informed potential residents that "no house and lot has any real independent existence, permanent quality, or even monetary value apart from its neighbourhood. Modern planning ensures good neighbourhoods."<sup>41</sup> The protection afforded by Thorncrest Village was one of the neighbourhood's key selling points. The developers explained the link between the lifestyle of the community and the financial value of the home. As they told prospective tenants, Thorncrest Village was a place where "your property values and your living values are secure and stabilized."<sup>42</sup> The security of property values in Thorncrest resulted from two mutually reinforcing protections. First, residence in Thorncrest was restricted and "all owners must be approved by vote as in an exclusive club."<sup>43</sup> Second, the comprehensive nature of Thorncrest's planning ensured that noxious uses could not be placed in close proximity. The possibility of noxious uses and noxious residents was eliminated. The security of investment offered by Thorncrest was a product

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of its “sensible restrictions” and the ability of its planners to scientifically account for potential threats. This all stood in contrast to the uncontrolled city characterized by “noise ... smoke ... and ceaseless traffic.” Unlike the city, Thorncrest was planned, and its planners’ paramount concern was to create “maximum enjoyment value and value protection.”<sup>44</sup> Given the success of Thorncrest and other planned suburban communities, the developer’s promotion of community control and freedom from the city clearly struck a chord with middle-class Canadians.

From the beginning, the developers of Thorncrest Village imagined it as a model community, a place brought into being by the best of scientific planning and supported from within by residents’ commitment to the planners’ designs. Unlike most suburban communities, two of the developers, architect E. C. S. Cox and principle developer Marshall Foss, were the first residents of Thorncrest Village. The developers sought residents who were committed to the ideals of modern suburban living. In fact, the first point of a section of “Home Horizons” entitled “How to Proceed” suggests that developers “form a group of kindred spirits.”<sup>45</sup> This group was to develop the neighbourhood gradually, accumulating capital along the way. This is the model that Foss and his partners followed, and Thorncrest developed slowly from 1945 until its completion in 1960. Recruitment of kindred spirits ensured that the status of the neighbourhood was maintained, and this status ensured the security of property values. The Village thrived by incorporating its residents into the daily reproduction of its value, status, and exceptionality. As Faludi recounted in his evaluation of the Village’s planning, “The community belongs to them and they belong to the community.”<sup>46</sup> The key question is who *they* were, how *they* were selected, and what was at stake for them in Thorncrest Village.

### *Selecting “Kindred Spirits”*

Thorncrest Village’s developers put in place several restrictions to ensure that the neighbourhood maintained its bucolic and middle-class character.<sup>47</sup> The most rigorous was a careful vetting of all potential residents. The Thorncrest Village Homes Association approved all homeowners and tenants before granting them the right to live in the community. This process began with a detailed two-page application that the prospective homebuyer submitted to the association. The application explained to the applicant that it aimed to protect “the heart of a neighbourhood,” which is “the people, not the homes or grounds.” The application was necessary to ensure an “advanced type of neighbourhood,” because “it is imperative that the members be congenial in the sense that they have similar aspirations in regarding their home and home life and a consciousness of the importance of the locale on their family’s welfare.”<sup>48</sup> Applicants were assured that the process was for their own protection, as well as the community’s. The application simply aimed to determine whether the applicant’s aspirations were compatible with the community’s. As it explained, “The following questions are intended solely to aid the membership committee formed of present members, in selecting new residents. This is at once obviously the greatest protection from every point

of view, for the stability of the community as a whole and the individual home, the owner’s investment and the happiness of the family.”<sup>49</sup> The application went on to ask a page’s worth of questions, among them the applicant’s present address and type of home, cash available for home purchase, occupation and employer, banker, number of children, address prior to marriage, spare time activities, and what features attracted them to Thorncrest Village.<sup>50</sup>

Following completion of the application and the submission of a 100 dollar application fee, the name of the prospective resident, occupation, employer, and present address were posted in the community’s newsletter, the *Bulletin*. The posting of all potential residents was mandatory, in accordance with paragraph 4 of Article 3 of the By-Laws, which stated, “The directors shall make ... a diligent investigation of the applicant. The Secretary of the Corporation shall cause all regular members to be notified of each application, and if any Regular Member has any objection ... he shall within three days ... deliver to the Secretary of the Corporation written notice of such objection.”<sup>51</sup> The final decision lay with the Board of Directors, who reviewed the application and any objections and then determined whether to give the resident status as a waiting member. If waiting members did not purchase a home within three months, their status would expire and they would be forced to reapply.

The files of the TVHA provide no evidence that residents or the Board of Directors ever exercised their ability to restrict residence in the community. There was probably rarely an objectionable applicant, as the potential residents listed in the TVHA *Bulletin* reveal a roster of professionals and executives working for downtown-based Toronto corporations.<sup>52</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s most prospective residents hailed from the Toronto metropolitan area and already resided in suburban neighbourhoods. Fourteen per cent of those surveyed by S. D. Clark were transplants from outside of Toronto, mostly from Montreal, Ottawa, and the United States. He likened these highly mobile residents to “organization men” who “moved from city to city” but stayed in the same “social world” wherever they lived. According to Clark, 57.6 per cent of those who moved to the Village had previously owned a home—a much higher rate than in the eleven other Toronto subdivisions he surveyed. He argued that a greater proportion of residents of Thorncrest Village moved in order to “secure an improvement in their residential environment.” Clark collected comments from residents about why they moved from Toronto to Thorncrest Village. One told him he moved because their previous home was not in a “good area” and “foreigners were starting to get in.” Another, “We were driven out by immigrants.” Other residents described their previous neighbourhoods as “a working man’s district,” “working and lower middle class,” and “average.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite certain residents’ racist perceptions of their previous neighbourhoods, the ability to restrict residence was a little-used safeguard that was probably redundant, given the 100 dollar application fee and the cost of purchasing a home in the Village.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, the application process surely discouraged



some potential residents from applying. The application process is indicative of the emphasis that the community's designers and residents placed on limiting access, as well as the participatory process through which existing members granted entry to the community.

Membership in the TVHA was mandatory in order to purchase or rent a home in the community. However, the association's control of residents did not end with their admission into the neighbourhood. The bylaws of the TVHA enumerated "schedules, stipulations, restrictions, and provisions" that governed life in the neighbourhood, including prohibitions of signs, apartment buildings, duplexes, and fences and walls. All plans and renovations had to be approved by the TVHA. All utilities had to be placed in the rear of the lots. The bylaws required residents not to oppose public utilities if they were made available to the community. And the bylaws included a mechanism for expulsion of any non-agreeable residents if they engaged in conduct "injurious or prejudicial to the best interests of the corporation."<sup>55</sup> In such a case, the Board of Directors could call for a general meeting with ten days' notice, and if two-thirds of residents approved, the resident would be forced to sell their home within one month to either a waiting member or the corporation. There is no evidence from the records of the TVHA that this expulsion mechanism was ever used, but it was consistently included in the bylaws.

The *Bulletin* also reminded residents that they must notify the corporation if they intended to sell or rent their home. This restriction exposed a consistent conflict at the crux of life in a "modern planned community." While residents appreciated the security provided by the bylaws, they often found them stifling when they inhibited their own ability to sell, rent, or make a modification to their home. This was the central conflict of life in a suburban planned community—a conflict between suburbanites' emphasis on their freedom and independence and the need to rein in this freedom in order to ensure the security and stability of their community.<sup>56</sup> This contradiction would be alleviated only if the residents began to identify with and enforce the disciplinary mechanisms put in place by the developer. Restrictions seemed less onerous to residents when they were mutually agreed upon norms, rather than infringements imposed on residents by an external force. As we will see below, in the early years of the development, the TVHA consistently worked on a variety of fronts to ensure that all residents developed shared norms about the need for an orderly neighbourhood.

### ***"Men of the World"***

Before moving to a discussion of the systems of social control and normalization that the residents of Thorncrest Village developed, it is useful to briefly consider the social characteristics of the residents of the Village. It is difficult to carry out this task with absolute certainty, given the changing shape of census tracts and the imperfection of existing data. However, on the basis of analysis of census tract and enumeration area (EA) data, it is incontrovertible that the Village's predominant adult

residents were white, middle-class professionals who were employed in business or worked in highly educated professions like medicine, law, and academe. This point is easily validated using 1961 census data for census tract 266, which encompassed all of Thorncrest Village and the much larger affluent subdivision of Princess Anne Manor to the north (see figure 1 for the boundaries of tract 266).<sup>57</sup> The upper-middle-class character of Thorncrest Village is further confirmed through my analysis of enumeration areas 106 and 107, which encompassed the southern third of census tract 266 and included all of Thorncrest Village and portions of Princess Anne Manor.<sup>58</sup>

Tables 1, 2, and 3 reveal with absolute clarity the middle-class character of Thorncrest Village and its surroundings, in relation to the city of Toronto and the metropolitan area. Residents had substantially higher levels of home and automobile ownership than other Torontonians. The income differences between tract 266 and the rest of Toronto are equally stark, with an average man's income in tract 266 more than double that of the average in Metro Toronto (\$9,811 versus \$4,330). Even more impressive is the proportion of men who worked in managerial positions: 60 per cent in census tract 266 and 57.4 per cent in the EAs. The percentage of professionals in the EAs (19.1%) was even higher than that of census tract 266 (16.6%). Tract 266's low level of women's participation in paid labour suggests a number of factors, including the difficulty of accessing work on the suburban fringe, the proportion of families with children, and the overall high earnings of male income earners. Census and qualitative data confirm that Toronto's business and professional elite and their families were the predominant residents of Thorncrest Village. These figures are validated by S. D. Clark's 1964 study of suburbanization in Toronto, in which he describes the residents of Thorncrest Village as middle-class "men of the world" who were a "status conscious social group."<sup>59</sup> E. G. Faludi argued that the residents of Thorncrest Village, like its developers and designers, were visionaries "who always supported progress and advanced thought."<sup>60</sup> In his study, Clark concurred, stating, "Thorncrest Village began as the creation of a social class, and there was a very vigorous effort to maintain in the population a character of social homogeneity."<sup>61</sup>

As table 4 shows, most residents of the EAs (80.2%) and Etobicoke (70.9%) were of British origin. A higher percentage of Thorncrest Village residents identified as Protestants, compared to the rest of Toronto and Etobicoke. Thorncrest Village's design was not the only aspect of the neighbourhood imported from the United States. A greater proportion of the residents of tract 266 (7.2%) and the EAs (7.3%) than the city (1.2%) or the metropolitan area (1.3%) were born in the United States. This concentration was likely the result of the significant presence of American managers in the branch plants and offices of American corporations based in Toronto. While the census does identify the presence of a small number of respondents who identified as Italian and Asiatic, these proportions were significantly lower than for Toronto as a whole. No residents of the EAs identified as Jewish. In sum, the average adult male



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*Table 1: General demographics (1961)*

	Metro Toronto	Toronto	Etobicoke	Tract 266	EAs 106 & 107
Population change 1956–1961 (%)	21.4	0.7	50.6	362.6	N/A*
One or more years of university (%)	5.5	5.5	6.6	13.9	15.9
Single detached homes (%)	55.7	28.5	82.8	95.5	100
Owner-occupied homes (%)	67.4	56.3	81.8	93.7	97.4
Median home value (\$)	17,301	17,253	19,355	34,573	N/A
Reporting a mortgage (%)	34.7	11.5	63.3	75.5	N/A
Households with an automobile (%)	72.9	53.5	90.6	98.9	98.4
Men's paid labour participation (%)	83.6	80.2	86.2	83.3	N/A
Women's paid labour participation (%)	39.3	45.3	32.2	17.3	N/A
Men's average wage (\$)	4,330	3,583	5,516	9,811	N/A
Women's average wage (\$)	2,338	2,323	2,435	2,758	N/A

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census of Canada

\* Data are not easily available at the enumeration-area level

*Table 2: Men's occupations (1961<sup>62</sup>)*

	Metro Toronto	Toronto	Etobicoke	Tract 266	EAs 106 & 107
Managerial (%)	13.8	8.5	21.6	60.2	57.4
Professional (%)	11.0	8.8	14.3	16.6	19.1
Clerical (%)	10.7	11.3	10.1	3.9	4.2
Sales (%)	7.8	5.7	10.3	7.5	6.9
Service and recreation (%)	8.3	11.6	5.1	2.5	1.2
Transportation (%)	7.1	7.7	6.1	1.5	1.7
Craftsmen and related (%)	31.8	33.4	27.1	5.0	5.4
Labourers (%)	5.4	7.8	2.9	1.0	0.7

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census of Canada

*Table 3: Women's occupations (1961)*

	Metro Toronto	Toronto	Etobicoke	Tract 266	EAs 106 & 107
Managerial (%)	2.6	2.3	3.1	11.5	6.9
Professional (%)	11.4	11.4	12.2	26.4	31.0
Clerical (%)	40.9	36.0	47.0	38.3	43.7
Sales (%)	7.4	6.4	8.9	8.8	9.2
Service and recreation (%)	18.1	22.7	10.7	11.5	8.0
Transportation (%)	2.1	2.0	2.2	2.1	1.1
Craftsmen and related (%)	14.6	15.9	13.2	1.5	0.0
Labourers (%)	1.4	1.6	1.4	0.4	0.0

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census of Canada

*Table 4: Ethnicity and religion (1961)*

	Metro Toronto	Toronto	Etobicoke	Tract 266	EAs 106 & 107
Born in Canada (%)	66.7	58.1	77.1	80.1	81.5
Born in United States (%)	1.3	1.2	1.8	7.2	7.3
British Isles origins (%)	60.7	51.8	70.9	74.6	80.2
Italian origin (%)	7.7	11.6	4.7	6.0	3.2
Asiatic origin (%)	1.1	1.9	0.7	0.4	0.4
United Church of Canada	23.8	18.9	29.9	39.9	34.3
Church of England (%)	21.8	18.3	24.9	26.1	33.0
Roman Catholic (%)	26.2	34.7	22.1	18.8	19.2
Presbyterian (%)	8.2	7.2	9.8	5.2	4.6
Jewish (%)	4.9	2.8	0.3	0.5	0.0

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1961 Census of Canada

resident of Thorncrest Village was significantly more likely to be white, wealthy, employed in a professional or managerial occupation, be of British or American origin, and worship at a Protestant church, than Toronto area residents.

### *Normalizing the Neighbourhood*

Thorncrest Village developed as a quintessentially middle-class suburban space, and residents worked hard to maintain its status as such. Reminders of how to properly behave and maintain one's home appeared regularly in the neighbourhood's newsletter, the *Bulletin*.<sup>63</sup> My analysis of extant copies of the *Bulletin* reveals several key aspects of life in Thorncrest Village. First, there were frequent discussions of conditions in the neighbourhood and attempts to prescribe proper behaviour for residents. Many of these discussions hinged on how individual decision-making violated communal aspects of the neighbourhood. Through the *Bulletin*, residents attempted to create norms that mediated their often-contradictory desires to respect the rights of property owners *and* to develop an orderly and controlled community. Second, the *Bulletin* provides evidence of Thorncrest Villagers constructing norms based on their shared identities as residents of the subdivision. Thorncrest Villagers saw the neighbourhood as an essential aspect of their identities as, what S. D. Clark called, "men of the world." In order to fulfil the neighbourhood's potential, residents needed to believe in the shared expertise and prestige of fellow residents. Residents needed to see themselves and their neighbours as contributing to and identifying with this great experiment in community planning. While residents' expertise and prestige were undoubtedly complicated and multifaceted, they in part took a racialized form in which Thorncrest Villagers' whiteness allowed them to navigate and perform a variety of ethnic identities. In sum, the *Bulletin* shows the integral connections, in postwar Toronto, between the dual project of constructing modern suburbia *and* white middle-class identities.

In the early years, some of the TVHA's clearest directives on how to keep Thorncrest Village orderly arrived in the form of bulletins from Harvey the rabbit. Harvey was the pet of Village residents the Despardes and was so beloved that he attended the Home Association's 1947 annual meeting in a black velvet box. At this meeting, the residents decided to name Harvey the Thorncrest mascot, and he began to adorn signs, as well as helpful "Harvey Says" and "Harvey Suggests" bulletins.<sup>64</sup> The TVHA's Information Committee and the Improvement and Maintenance Committee distributed these index-card-sized flyers to residents' homes. While many flyers contained innocuous announcements of "symphonic concerts," movies at the tennis courts, and changes to bus service, others spoke to more controversial issues concerning home maintenance and residents' behaviour. These flyers often bore a slogan along the bottom of the card, "Issued by your 'Improvement and Maintenance' committee in the interest of a tidy, orderly, well-kept Thorncrest."<sup>65</sup> On the flyers Harvey repeatedly asked residents to close their garage doors—"Your garage doors are gaping!"—because "garage doors left open make the Village ill-spoken." He also

requested that people not pick flowers, bring in their garbage cans promptly—"Pails left out ... spoil a neighbour's view"—and restrain their dogs. For residents who spotted drivers violating the Village's "Drive Slowly" campaign, Harvey suggested that they "warn a thoughtless person and report them to the directors."<sup>66</sup>

Harvey's heyday was from 1948 to 1950 prior to the start of regular mail service in the community. As a brief history of Harvey remembered, "His suggestions continued until mail delivery and other modern things invaded Thorncrest, but his ghost just won't lie down."<sup>67</sup> Always attuned to tradition and history, the authors of the *Bulletin* frequently resurrected Harvey in times of moral crisis. Harvey's ghost re-emerged in November 1961 to suggest that residents "be thoughtful of your neighbours—don't hang your washing on Sundays!"<sup>68</sup> In May 1967, he issued an "Annual Spring Plea" that asked, among other things, that people "take mercy of soft lawns" by restraining their dogs and children, "*Be kind* to your neighbours who don't have dandelions and spray yours," and "*Be considerate* and don't cut your lawn on Sunday."<sup>69</sup> While Harvey served as a useful proxy for moralizing and disciplining the neighbourhood, the authors of the *Bulletin* managed to carry on without him, and helpful reminders on home maintenance and other matters appeared frequently throughout the fifties and sixties, including pronouncements that all tennis players were required to wear white and that pool-goers were to wear "proper dress" to and from the pool.<sup>70</sup> The *bête noire* of suburbanites everywhere, clotheslines came under particular scrutiny, and residents were reminded to remove them when not in use.<sup>71</sup>

One of the more contentious and long-running debates in the *Bulletin* concerned the preservation of private property rights that conflicted with the communal design of the development. Residents used the newsletter to mediate the contradictions implicit in the designer's attempt to leave "room for both privacy and neighbourliness."<sup>72</sup> E. G. Faludi intentionally designed the community without fences in order to maximize the site's rolling country aesthetic. As he described it, one primary goal was to provide "the loose appearance of a village" in which the "houses fitted into the countryside."<sup>73</sup> As a condition of the by-laws, all residents had to seek approval from the Property Control Committee before erecting any fences and walls. The committee almost never approved them, and the neighbourhood remains fenceless today.

The inadvertent result of the restriction on fences and walls was free access to neighbours' yards for marauding children and dogs. Throughout the 1960s, the TVHA issued editorials in the *Bulletin* and distributed *Resident Information Services* (RIS) Bulletins in mailboxes calling on residents to not transgress the rights of property owners. The TVHA continually attempted to enforce a norm that was not being impressed upon neighbourhood children and dogs. The September 1960 *Bulletin* asked residents to "please restrain your dogs and warn your children not to cut through our neighbours' property."<sup>74</sup> Months later, an *RIS Bulletin* again noted that residents needed to "respect your

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neighbour's property" and that dogs were damaging "valuable shrubs" and children were taking shortcuts that damaged lawns and flowerbeds.<sup>75</sup> By June 1961, the TVHA began to declare that aggrieved residents might need to take "drastic action" against roaming dogs.<sup>76</sup> In March 1962, another *RIS Bulletin* again called on residents to "please be kind to neighbours, come on, let's curb our children and restrain our pets."<sup>77</sup> In April 1963 the *Bulletin*, clearly invoking the law, described children who crossed yards as "trespassers."<sup>78</sup> The discussion of lawn crossing slowed for a few years, only to re-emerge with renewed vigour in 1967. In March, the TVHA again described the "annoying" problem of "trespassing" and called on residents to self-police and "report on the trespassers and discourage this habit."<sup>79</sup> Weeks later, an extended editorial appeared in the *Bulletin*, noting that trespassers wilfully violated the norms of the neighbourhood: "Offenders today have in most cases grown up in the Village, and know its rules." It declared, "*Property and privacy must be respected*" and went to a new level to deter potential "offenders." It noted that the TVHA was collecting their names and, "unless this practice ceases forthwith, your board may authorize the publication of the names concerned, and if this fails other steps will be taken."<sup>80</sup>

The ongoing discussion about lawn crossing in the *Bulletin* reveals several aspects of the limits of communal thinking in the community. While the TVHA readily defended the fenceless design of the neighbourhood, it also worked to ensure that residents shared the norm of not entering another's property without permission. Physical property demarcation would be unnecessary if this norm was widely respected. In instances when the norm was not shared, the TVHA resorted to two measures. It attempted to publicly police and shame offenders, describing lawn crossing as a transgressive act that violated the deeply held ideals of the neighbourhood. When internal policing failed, the TVHA resorted to the threat of official police power, whether in the form of citing trespassers or having the dogcatcher apprehend roaming dogs. Like many communities of homeowners, the TVHA's ultimate resource was the power of the state.

The struggle over lawns was not limited to the fight against lawn crossers. The lack of a clean demarcation between neighbouring lawns resulted in frequent conflicts about weeds and lawn conditions. This is a point well made by Paul Robbins in his analysis of the power of the lawn as a social force in suburban life. He notes that lawn care is part of a "normative communitarian practice" that partially results from weeds' abilities to travel from yard to yard. As a result, those who care for their lawns are seen as contributing to a "civic good," and those who do not, exhibit "a form of free riding, civic neglect, and moral weakness."<sup>81</sup> The *Bulletin's* authors did not shy away from pressing residents to take proper care of their yards. One announcement described how many residents were complaining about their neighbours' long grass and lack of watering, which was upsetting to residents, it explained, because "many ... are entertaining their guests and ... it is discouraging to have a

burnt out, weedy neighbour's yard to look at." Another notice observed that some residents "have allowed weeds to overtake their backyards." This was "unsightly" and "not very thoughtful towards adjoining neighbours who have tended their properties all summer and are now faced with the spreading of weeds in their own yards."<sup>82</sup> The authors of the *Bulletin* told residents that if they required help, the TVHA's office would gladly provide the names of "reliable weed sprayers and lawn maintenance men."<sup>83</sup> As always, the TVHA placed faith in experts' abilities to address any lawn care problem.

Lawn maintenance was one of numerous neighbourhood affairs in which it was essential for residents to participate if Thorncrest Village was to maintain its reputation as an ideal middle-class community. The TVHA implored residents to partake in myriad activities, from swimming to sewing with the Village's chapter of the Red Cross to attending meetings, exercise classes, and stag parties. Residents were expected to support neighbourhood institutions financially and with their participation. In the early years of the subdivision, there were several attempts to develop communal services in the neighbourhood, such as snowplowing and lawn mowing, but these attempts failed for lack of participation. Frustrated calls in the *Bulletin* for residents' full participation in the life of the community came to a head in residents' multi-year battle to finance the construction and maintenance of a clubhouse and swimming pool (see figure 4). The first attempt to finance both failed in 1948 but passed in 1949, and the pool and clubhouse officially opened a year later. Some residents, who made less use of the pool and clubhouse, complained about their contribution to maintenance costs. Typical of the communitarian spirit of the neighbourhood, a response appeared in the *Bulletin* arguing that "democratic rights is a phrase used too glibly" and that in Thorncrest it is an "individual's responsibility to comply with the majority." The article went on to argue, "Coming to live in Thorncrest Village is ... a personal approval of this experiment in community living and carries with it the responsibility of graciously accepting commitments approved by the majority."<sup>84</sup> Throughout the *Bulletin*, there are constant references to the importance of resident participation in order for the Thorncrest experiment to succeed. In November 1959, during his annual president's address, Mr. Douglas called on residents to not become complacent, because if they did, Thorncrest would "become just another average community."<sup>85</sup> In her monthly "Norm's Notes," Norma Despard asked residents why participation at the Annual Meeting had been so low and told them that "to lose interest would be a great catastrophe."<sup>86</sup>

All of these statements and many more suggest that residents were pressed to participate in the affairs of the Village. Given the large number of activities organized and advertised in the *Bulletin*, this pressure was probably effective. S. D. Clark's research echoes this point when he notes that in Thorncrest, "to seek to live apart from other persons ... was to court the risk of ostracism."<sup>87</sup> Participation and a sense of belonging were essential to Thorncrest Village's success. "Identification of people in the community was readily maintained through the activities of the

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Figure 4: The Thorncrest Village Clubhouse. The stone in the bottom right corner is dedicated to Marshall Foss.

village clubhouse and through the physical compactness of the area. Almost everyone came to know everyone else. There was scarcely anyone interviewed in the area who did not indicate considerable involvement in the life of the neighbourhood.... No one could plead ignorance of what was going on. The means of disseminating information were built into the structure of the community.... There developed highly effective techniques to bring people together, make them acquainted, and weld them into a social group.<sup>88</sup> Such techniques ranged widely, from the *Bulletin* itself to welcome tea parties to the Thorncrest Village crests that the TVHA offered to attach to residents' cars.<sup>89</sup> In Thorncrest Village, suburbia was not a place of anonymity, but rather one where the viability of the community rested on the active participation and shared identities of neighbours. The viability of the neighbourhood rested on residents' ability to ensure each other's willingness to adhere to and identify with the established norms of the community.

As shown in table 4, in comparison to Metropolitan Toronto, the population of Thorncrest Village was overwhelmingly of British ancestry, native-born, white, and Protestant. A prevalent thread running across much of critical race theory is the notion that whiteness is an unspoken, invisible, and taken-for-granted identity. Whiteness seems identifiable only as an absence, which is constructed in relation to visible and exoticized others. In other words, whiteness appears as an invisible norm that is constructed in relation to those whose racialized identities are made visible.<sup>90</sup> In a classic essay, bell hooks argues that whiteness is both a position of subjugation and domination. This sense of white subjugation—that whiteness is representative of absence and lifelessness—results in a white desire to “eat the other” in order to “enhance the bleak landscape of whiteness.” At the same time, white peoples' ability to wilfully transcend, identify, and consume varied racial identities (other than their own) is an obvious assertion of power and privilege.<sup>91</sup> In the case of Thorncrest Village, residents' privilege was in part the product of their

whiteness and their ability to assert control over their own and others' racial identities.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, while never referring to their own racial identities, Thorncrest Villagers made frequent reference to those who did not live in the neighbourhood, most commonly through references to the exoticism of other ethnicities at parties held at the clubhouse. These parties were consistently organized around an ethnocultural theme, including Hungarian, Italian, Chinese, Hawaiian, Mexican, Québécois, and a Calypso Party with West Indian dancers. The invitations for the parties often called on residents to dress and perform a racialized part. The flyer for the Chinese party requested that attendees “Dress Occidental or Accidental.”<sup>92</sup> An article recounting the tropically themed “Narcissus Festival” described “ingenious decorations,” including “sea shells, netting with a Hawaiian flare, Chinese gods.” “Gaily costumed guests” attended dressed in “sarongs, hula skirts, mandarin kimonos, and Chinese dresses.” One attendee wore a green Buddha costume.<sup>93</sup> Another article described attendees at a party as “all those original looking Thorncrest Mexicans.”<sup>94</sup> The announcements for these parties, as well as later summaries that appeared in the *Bulletin*, reveal how the residents felt the authority to play with and perform a variety of ethnic and racialized identities, other than their own.

Ethnicity was not the only theme explored at the parties held at the clubhouse. At a hillbilly party, attendees dressed in “Dog-patch style” and dined on “Hush Puppies, Corn Pones and Turnip Greens,” as well as a mysterious drink called “Kickapoo Joy Juice.”<sup>95</sup> Worth quoting at length, a summary of the “Beatnik Ball” described it as “a *real gasser!* Man, a howlin' success, cute chicks all decked out in leotards, black pony tails, cigarette holders and each having a sultry air of mystery behind dark, real dark sun-specks. Dad—dig those cool cats, beards, berets, sandals, turtle neck sweaters, and to top it all off—poetry, flutes and bongas [*sic*] to send those chicks. Dig the hall—there was art for all, plenty of crates for those cats to sit with their mates, and how can you forget the real gone abstract painting that everyone had their mitt in, enough to make you flip your lid.”<sup>96</sup> The author of this passage adopted a caricatured version of the slang of the Beat generation and, by extension, urban African Americans. The description of people sitting on crates was clearly intended to invoke images of urban idleness.

Through their parties, Thorncrest residents positioned themselves as worldly people of power and white privilege, who had the ability to access and perform a wide variety of identities. This performance was a complicated product of their class and white privilege and their corresponding ability to move through space via travel, education, and status.<sup>97</sup> The residents were able to peer into other identities and strip them down to their stereotyped and visible parts. Thorncrest Villagers' obsession with publicly enacting race and ethnicity (other than their own) suggests that historians of suburbanization in Canada must focus greater attention on the importance of whiteness, even in the absence of large-scale white flight like that in the United States. Toni Morrison argues that for white Americans, “there is



no escape from racially inflected language.<sup>98</sup> A similar argument could be made for American and Canadian suburbanites. Through the performance of ethnic and racialized others, Thorncrest residents intentionally defined themselves as people of privilege. The legitimacy to engage in such performances was the product of their class and white privilege and their ability to move freely throughout metropolitan Toronto, North America, and the globe.

### **Conclusion**

New suburban historians have pointed out the diversity of forms of suburbanization and interesting exceptions to the suburban myth, but the example of Thorncrest Village validates many of the clichés that we associate with the suburbs. The designers, developers, and middle-class residents of the subdivision all envisioned it as a model community—a place that embodied their faith that expert planning could deliver control and order. Residents and the developers put in place a series of controls that limited who could live in the neighbourhood and the design and appearance of its homes. As a result of these controls, the Village developed as a racially and economically exclusive community that policed the appearance of homes and the behaviour of residents.

Developers did not subject residents to these controls; rather, residents participated in their reproduction. Residents served on committees that approved house designs, used the *Bulletin* to police behaviour, and fostered a sense of belonging through the activities of the TVHA. Residents developed a shared belief that their community was an important experiment in suburban living and that their own participation was vital to its continued success. They and the developers proclaimed the neighbourhood as a model for all of Canada—an expertly designed suburb that represented the best of modern urban planning. Residents shared the developers' vision of a stable and controlled modern suburban community and believed in the expertise of the planners and architects who designed it. In Thorncrest Village, a faith in the power of modern expertise and the development of a suburban middle-class identity developed hand in hand.

Thorncrest Village suggests many similarities to both the clichéd conformist suburb of literature and film and the exclusive white-middle class suburbs of the postwar United States. White middle-class Canadians fled the city during the period following the Second World War. This flight may have been less dramatic and racially inflected than it was in cities like Detroit and Chicago, but white suburbanites in Canada also sought out race and class privilege in the suburbs. Suburbs in Canada, like those in the United States, were specifically designed to reproduce the privilege and power of the white middle class. They offered the middle class control and order, and the security of their investment and social status. In turn, the residents of Thorncrest Village helped create an orderly and controlled model suburban community. Their efforts were no doubt typical of many suburbanites throughout post-war Canada.

The influence of Thorncrest Village and similar elite suburbs has hardly diminished in twenty-first-century Toronto. As David Hulchancki shows in his much-discussed report *The Three Cities within Toronto*, Toronto, now amalgamated with its inner suburbs including Etobicoke, increasingly contains three types of neighbourhoods: elite suburbs and gentrifying downtown neighbourhoods, middle-income neighbourhoods, and low-income neighbourhoods increasingly located in the inner suburbs.<sup>99</sup> Despite the increase of poverty in the suburbs, Thorncrest Village and much of central Etobicoke, a place spotted with country clubs, remains securely ensconced within the first category. Many current residents have replaced or substantially enlarged the original houses and many of the previous restrictions on housing and social life have diminished, yet with its carefully manicured lawns and opulent homes, Thorncrest Village remains an emblem of the upper-middle-class pursuit of order and control in the suburbs. While the city changes around it, Thorncrest Village looks very much the same.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Harold Bérubé, Robert Lewis, Katie Mazer, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper; to the archivists at the Toronto City Archives for their assistance; to Berenica Vejvoda of the University of Toronto's Map and Data Library for help obtaining EA data; and to Elizabeth Lord for help with translation.

### **Notes**

1. Faludi was the lead author of Master Plans for Toronto in 1943, and Hamilton in 1947. Among other projects, he developed plans for Humber Valley Village, a subdivision immediately to the east of Thorncrest Village, and Terrace Bay, Ontario, a company town for Kimberly-Clarke Pulp and Paper Company. Faludi was an extremely influential planner in postwar Ontario, and his imprint is on numerous projects ranging from public housing to shopping plazas to suburban subdivisions. On the Toronto Master Plan, see Stephen Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise: Professional and Political Authority in Toronto, 1940–1970," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 2 (2006): 51–76. For an overview of Faludi's career, see John Sewell, *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).
2. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 1.
3. See Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise"; Sewell, *Shape of the City*. Of course middle-class faith in expertise dates well prior to the 1940s and at least to the Progressive Reform era. See Sean Purdy, "Industrial Efficiency, Social Order and Moral Purity: Housing Reform Thought in English Canada, 1900–1950," *Urban History Review* 25, no. 2 (1997): 30–40; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).
4. The records are located at the Toronto City Archives (TCA). Totalling four boxes, they include photographs, newsletters, correspondence, clippings files, original plans, and other sources. The fonds number is 55; the series numbers are 251, 252, 253, and 254; and the box numbers are 117682, 119033, 119034, and 119035.
5. S. D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).
6. Some recent writing on Canadian suburban history includes Richard Harris, "From 'Black-balling' to 'Marking': The Suburban Origin of Redlining in Canada, 1930s–1950s," *Canadian Geographer* 47, no. 3 (2003): 338–350; Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy 1900 to*

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- 1950 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Franca Iacovetta, "Gossip, Contest, and Power in the Making of Suburban Bad Girls: Toronto, 1945–1960," *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (1999): 585–623; V. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Robert Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); V. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945–60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1991): 471–504; V. Strong-Boag, "'Their side of the story': Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945–60," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980*, ed. J. Parr, 46–74 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). For an overview, see Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).
7. The literature on pre-First World War residential suburbanization includes Richard Harris and Matt Sendbuehler, "The Making of a Working-class Suburb in Hamilton's East End, 1900–1945," *Journal of Urban History* 20, no. 4 (1994): 486–511; L. D. McCann, "Planning and Building the Corporate Suburb of Mount Royal," *Planning Perspectives* 11 (1996): 259–301; Ross Paterson, "The Development of an Interwar Suburb: Kingsway Park, Etobicoke," *Urban History Review* 13, no. 3 (1985): 225–234; John Weaver, "From Land Assembly to Social Maturity: The Suburban Life of Westdale (Hamilton), Ontario, 1911–1951," *Historie Sociale / Social History* 22 (1978): 411–440.
  8. For typical examples of this approach, see the introduction and essays in Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
  9. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
  10. Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Cities and Suburbs, 1880–1950: Cultural and Social Considerations," *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 3 (2001): 313–346.
  11. Richard Harris, "More American Than the United States: Housing in Urban Canada in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 4 (2000): 458, 461.
  12. *Ibid.*, 457.
  13. "Home Horizons," box 119034–7, TCA.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. In his reappraisal of Thorncrest Village, Faludi suggests that the neighbourhood failed to live up to its original mission of creating a place where "the segregation of income groups is eliminated." He wrote, "We obviously failed in assuming and undertaking a community for all income classes. We succeeded in building one for a privileged group." This statement seems disingenuous, since there is no indication in any of the records the TVHA that the developers ever attempted to build a mixed income community. E. G. Faludi, "Designing New Canadian Communities Theory and Practice," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 16 (1950): 74, 79.
  16. Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
  17. Prior to the Village's development, Etobicoke had designated four 500-acre concession lots as sites for "self-contained communities." Faludi designed Thorncrest Village, with its own commercial and recreational facilities, as a "unit" of one of these larger communities. Thus the Village may have been one of the first applications of neighbourhood unit theory in Canada. Larry McCann, taking from P. J. Smith's account of Edmonton's extensive use of neighbourhood units, argues that the first application of neighbourhood units in Canada was in the late 1940s, several years after Faludi designed Thorncrest Village. Faludi, "Designing New," 74; McCann, "Suburbs of Desire: The Suburban Landscape of Canadian cities, c. 1900–1950," in *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form, and Function*, ed. Richard Harris and Peter J. Larkham, 111–145 (New York: Routledge, 1999); P. J. Smith, "Planning for Residential Growth since the 1940s," in *Edmonton: Life of a City*, ed. B. Hesketh and F. Swyripa, 243–255 (Edmonton: NeWest, 1995).
  18. For an account of this earlier period of suburban planning, see Harris, *Creeping Conformity*; McCann, "Suburbs of Desire."
  19. "Residential Community: Planned Neighbourhood Offers Mass Purchase and Building Economy, Owner Association Protection," *Architectural Forum* (November 1945), box 119034–1.
  20. "Communities Must Lose Their 'Topsy' Mentality," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, March 1945, 33, 35.
  21. For example, Foss argued that the community's clubhouse should serve as a model for future Canadian suburbs. The clubhouse and similar facilities in other communities would, he argued, "improve home life and the progress of the nation." M. Foss, "The Club House," 6 May 1947, box 119034–1.
  22. Faludi, "Designing New," 71.
  23. Advertisement, *Globe and Mail*, 4 February 1948, 8; Advertisement, *Globe and Mail*, 7 April 1948, 9.
  24. M. Foss, "Memo to Those with Homes Nearing Completion," 8 December 1948, box 119034–1.
  25. "A Tribute to a Man with an Idea," 3 October 1953, box 119034–10.
  26. Faludi, "Designing New," 77.
  27. "How to Find a Suitable location for a HOME," 10 March 1948, box 119034–1.
  28. The attack on less-planned suburbs was not unique to Foss and Faludi. Marc Weiss shows that large-scale "community builders" often organized within trade associations and through the state against the interests of "curb stoners" and "speculative" developers. Weiss, *Rise of the Community Builders*.
  29. M. Foss, "Introduction to *Country Club Community*," box 119034–7.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. Thorncrest Development Company Ltd., "Thorncrest Village: A Country Home Community," box 119034–1.
  32. *Ibid.*
  33. *Ibid.*
  34. "Home Horizons."
  35. *THVA Bulletin*, April 1951, 4–5, box 117682–1.
  36. Poster, "Planning for Use," box 119034–1.
  37. Advertisement, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 26 January 1948, 2.
  38. Advertisement, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1948.
  39. See Weiss, *Rise of the Community Builders*.
  40. Advertisement, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 21 November 1947.
  41. Advertisement, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 28 February 1948.
  42. Advertisement, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 13 March 1948.
  43. See below for a more detailed description of this process. "Thorncrest Village: A Country Home Community," box 119034–1.
  44. *Ibid.*
  45. "Home Horizons."
  46. Faludi, "Designing New," 78.
  47. Such restrictions were not uncommon in earlier Canadian suburbs, including Hamilton's Westdale, Toronto's Lawrence Park, and Victoria's Upland. For a comprehensive account of property restrictions and residential covenants, see R. Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870–1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For Canadian examples, see Harris, *Creeping*

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- Conformity*, 85–89.
48. "Thorncrest Development Company Ltd.: 1947–1950," box 119034–3.
  49. *Ibid.*
  50. *Ibid.*
  51. "By-Laws: 1963, 1975, 1982," box 119032–15.
  52. Data are not available to complete an exhaustive survey of all residents who moved into Thorncrest during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. However, I did review all bulletins that are available from January 1959 to November 1970 and recorded all applicants' names, former addresses, employers, and occupations. The following descriptions of applicants are drawn from this imperfect but convenient sample.
  53. Clark, *Suburban Society*, 92, 34, 51, and 60.
  54. Of course, there were many moments prior to the application process in which the TVHA could have discouraged Jews and those of Southern and Eastern European ancestry, for example, from applying. While I cannot provide documentation of racial and ethnic exclusion, in the early years, people of British ancestry were an overwhelming majority of the residents and there were no Jewish residents. See the section below for a discussion of the ethnic and racial composition of the neighbourhood.
  55. "By-Laws."
  56. Catherine Jurca takes up a similar contradiction in her excellent survey of literature set in the suburbs. She argues that the suburb serves as a site for middle-class "abasement" and "advantage." She shows that there is a long history of descriptions of the suburbs as places that produce white middle-class privilege and simultaneously stifle the freedoms of the privileged. See Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburbs and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
  57. Tract 266 was bound by Rathburn Road, Kipling Avenue, Richview Side Road (now Eglinton Avenue West), and Islington Avenue, encompassing an area much larger than just Thorncrest Village. In 1961 the population of the tract was 4,575. At that time, all 180 lots in Thorncrest Village were occupied, except for a small addition called The Woods that was developed in the late 1960s. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *1961 Census of Canada, Population and Housing Characteristics by Census Tracts, Toronto, Bulletin CT-15* (Ottawa: Minister of Trade and Commerce, 1963).
  58. Enumeration areas (EAs) were the smallest geographic unit used by Statistics Canada and were first used during the 1961 census. Each EA corresponds to the area that a census enumerator would have had responsibility for. Streets or physical features, such as streams, typically form the boundaries of EAs. While EA data are available for the 1961 census, corresponding maps that tell where each EA was located are not. However, it is possible to determine the EAs that correspond to each census tract. In the case of census tract 266, the EAs are 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, and 111. Census tract 206 was composed of Thorncrest Village and the much larger upper-middle-class subdivision of Princess Anne Manor. No housing was built in Princess Anne Manor prior to 1954. According to aerial photography, the only housing in tract 266 built before 1954 was located in Thorncrest Village. Using this information, I was able to determine that EAs 106 and 107, the only EAs that include housing built prior to 1950, encompassed the southern portion of the tract 266 where Thorncrest Village was located. However EAs 106 and 107 account for 382 units of housing and are substantially bigger than the 180 lots that had been developed in Thorncrest Village in 1961.
  59. Clark, *Suburban Society*, 94 and 105.
  60. Faludi, "Designing New," 77.
  61. Clark, *Suburban Society*, 215.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. The following discussion is based on an extensive but incomplete collection of past issues of the *Bulletin*. This *Bulletin* first appeared on 15 October 1946 and was published until at least 1970. Thorncrest Village residents took responsibility for writing, publishing, printing, and distributing the newsletter. As a result, it is a reasonable barometer of everyday life in the subdivision in the postwar period. The content and form of the *Bulletin* bears marked similarities to a similar newsletter published by working-class residents of the suburb of Westwood Hills, Pennsylvania. See Patrick Vitale, "Learning to Be Suburban: The Production of Community in Westwood Hills, Pennsylvania, 1952–1958," *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009): 743–768.
  64. "How Harvey Happened," *THVA Bulletin*, April 1961, box 117682–3.
  65. Numerous "Harvey Says" and "Harvey Suggests" flyers are collected in box 119032–19.
  66. *Ibid.* According to the *Bulletin*, speeding and reckless driving were frequent problems in Thorncrest Village, and at one point it published a "note of appreciation" for two "courageous Villagers" who appeared as witnesses against two boys who drove through a stop sign on Pheasant Lane. *Resident Information Services (RIS) Bulletin*, 16 February 1961, box 119034–4.
  67. "How Harvey Happened." Norma Despard, Harvey's owner, also wrote a monthly gossip column called "Norm's Notes" for the *Bulletin*. Harvey's frequent reappearances are probably a result of her long participation with the newsletter.
  68. *RIS Bulletin*, 9 November 1961, box 119034–4.
  69. *RIS Bulletin*, 19 May 1967, box 117682–9.
  70. *RIS Bulletin*, 16 July 1959, box 119034–3; *TVHA Bulletin*, June 1959, box 119034–3.
  71. *RIS Bulletin*, 29 November 1960, box 119034–4.
  72. Faludi, "Designing New," 74.
  73. *Ibid.*, 77.
  74. *TVHA Bulletin*, September 1960, box 119034–4.
  75. *RIS Bulletin*, 13 April 1961, box 119034–4.
  76. *RIS Bulletin*, 16 June 1961, box 119034–4.
  77. *RIS Bulletin*, March 16, 1962, box 119034–5.
  78. *RIS Bulletin*, 26 April 1963, box 119034–5.
  79. *RIS Bulletin*, 2 March 1967, box 117682–9.
  80. *RIS Bulletin*, 29 March 1967, box 117682–9.
  81. As both Robbins and Kristoffer Whitney demonstrate, the pressure to keep a verdant lawn has serious environmental ramifications. See Paul Robbins, *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 99; Kristoffer Whitney, "Living Lawns, Dying Waters: The Suburban Boom, Nitrogenous Fertilizers, and the Nonpoint Source Pollution Dilemma," *Technology and Culture* 51 (2010): 652–674.
  82. *RIS Bulletin*, 25 August 1959, box 119034–3.
  83. *TVHA Bulletin*, September 1960, box 119034–4.
  84. *TVHA Bulletin*, December 1952, box 117682–1.
  85. *TVHA Bulletin*, November 1959, box 1190343.
  86. *TVHA Bulletin*, December 1957, box 117682–1.
  87. Clark, *Suburban Society*, 175.
  88. *Ibid.*, 177.
  89. In an article in the *Toronto Star*, one resident, H. R. Despard, claimed that she nearly "die[d] of loneliness" when she lived in North York, but when she moved to Thorncrest Village it was, what the *Star* called, an "answer to a housewife's prayer." She cited the series of four welcome teas as particularly helpful in integrating new residents into the community. As she told the *Star*, the Village was "like living in a big clubhouse, only instead of having a room, you live in your own home." "First Planned Community in the Land, 'Prayer Answered,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, 7 January 1949, 24.

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90. See A. Bonnet, *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2000); Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29 (1988): 44–64; Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
91. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992), 29.
92. *TVHA Bulletin*, April 1960, box 119034–3.
93. *TVHA Bulletin*, February 1962, box 117682–4.
94. *RIS Bulletin*, 5 August 1967, box 117682–9.
95. *TVHA Bulletin*, February 1964, box 117682–6.
96. *RIS Bulletin*, 7 November 1959, box 119034–3.
97. Described as the "traveling Thorncresters" in the *Bulletin*, many residents took frequent trips abroad, particularly to New York City and Europe.
98. Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 13.
99. David Hulchanski, *The Three Cities within Toronto: Income Polarization among Toronto's Neighbourhoods, 1970–2005* (Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto, 2010). As Deborah Cowen and Vanessa Parlette show in their recent report, there is a spatial mismatch between the lack of social services and infrastructure in Toronto's inner suburb and the growing population in need of those services. This is a direct legacy of postwar suburbs like Thorncrest Village, which, with its private community clubhouse, pool, and park, intentionally brought public resources into the private realm. Deborah Cowen and Vanessa Parlette, *Toronto's Inner Suburbs: Investing in Social Infrastructure in Scarborough* (Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto, 2011).