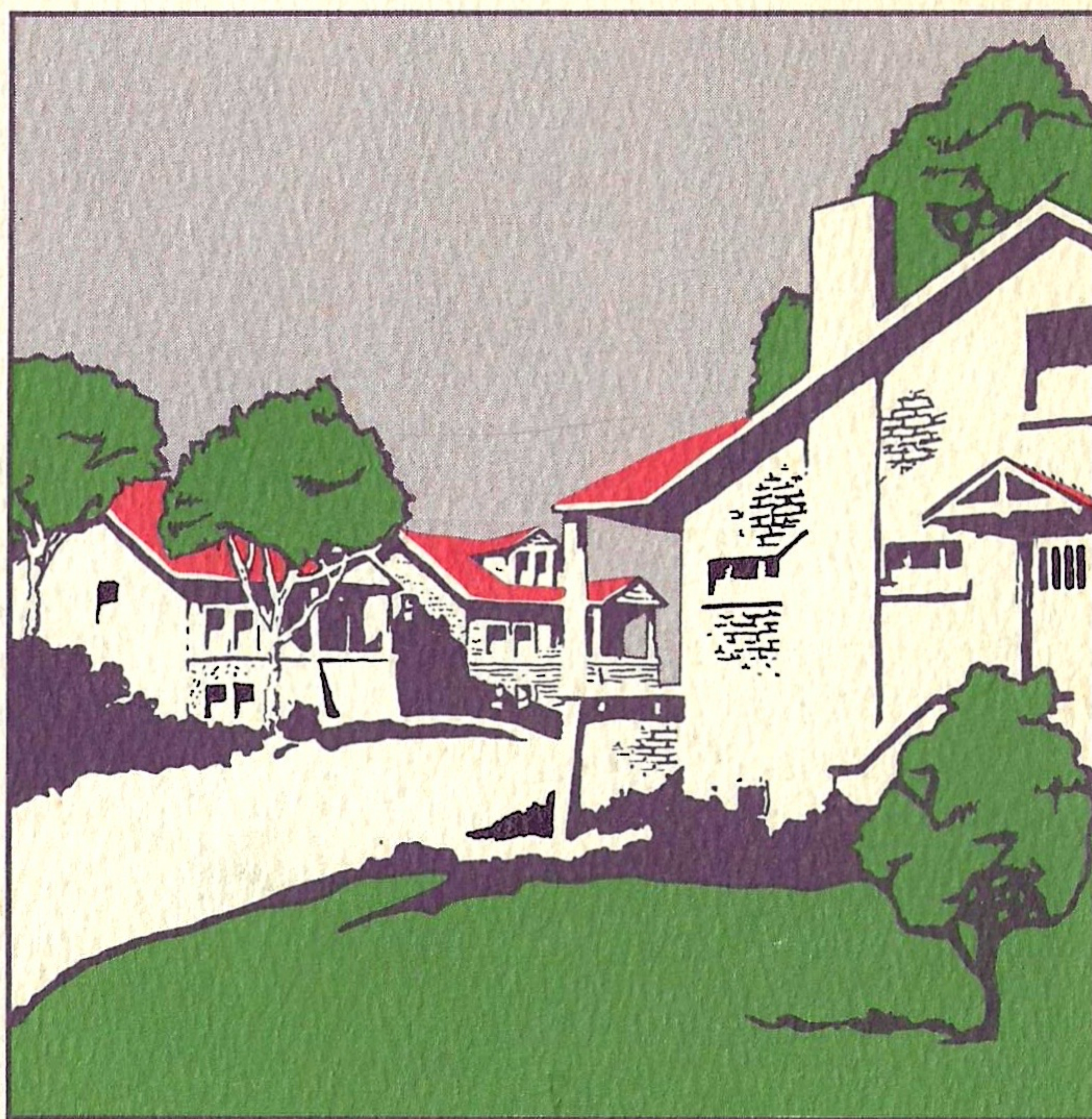


Early Twentieth-Century Suburbs in North Carolina



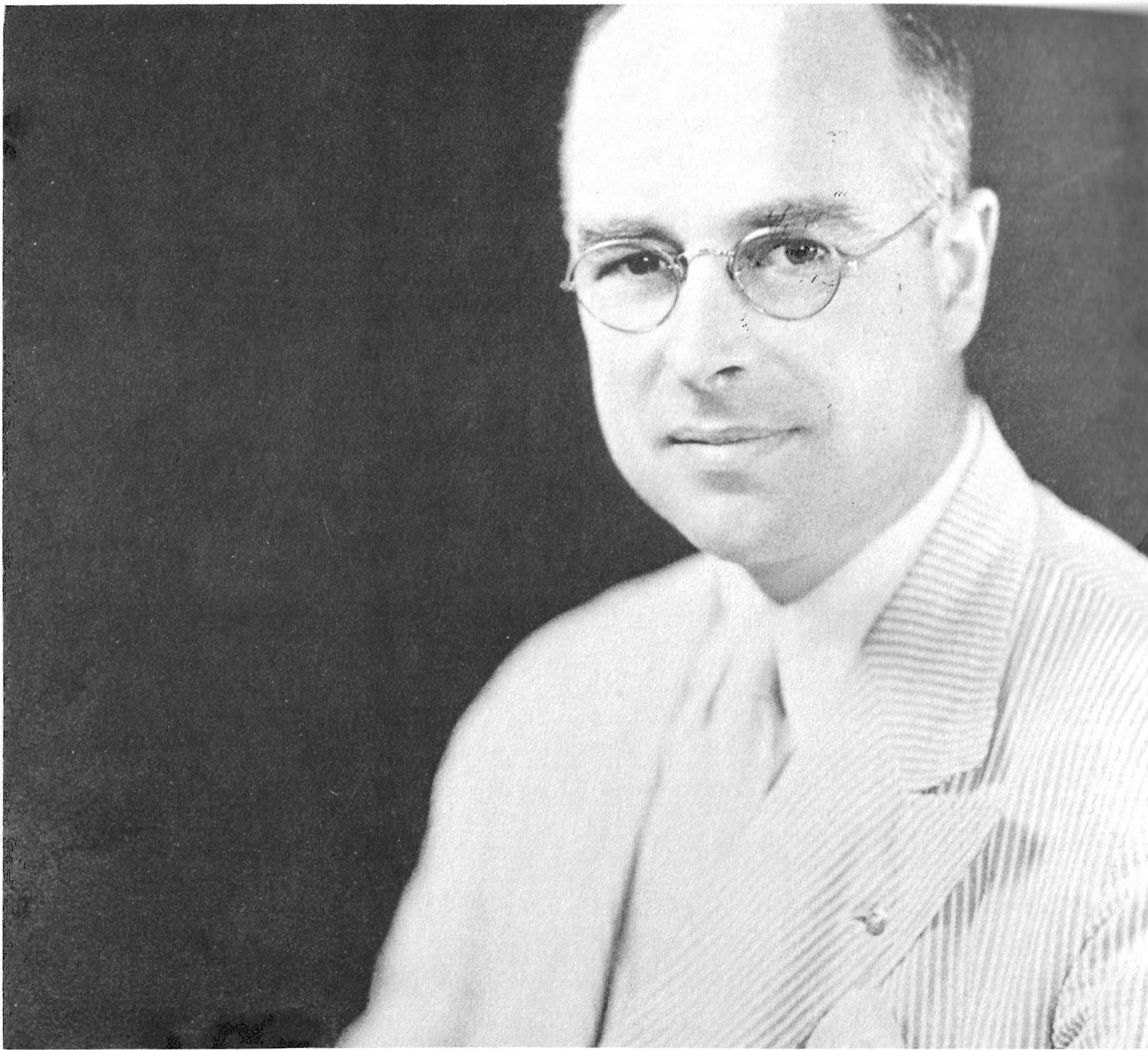
Essays on History, Architecture and Planning

Edited by Catherine W. Bishir and Lawrence S. Earley

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Earle Sumner Draper (b. 1893), planner, who came south in 1915 to oversee construction in Myers Park; he would later design some 250 suburbs and mill villages across the south.

Earle Sumner Draper: City Planner of the New South

—Thomas W. Hanchett

In October, 1915, Earle Sumner Draper arrived in Charlotte, North Carolina to begin a career that would see him become perhaps the foremost planner in the southeastern United States prior to World War II. Born to a New England textile family on October 18, 1893, he had studied landscape architecture at what is now the University of Massachusetts, where he developed a passion for Civic Art—the new field of city planning. He won a position with John Nolen of Boston, a pioneer of professional city planning who later was founding president of the American Planning Association. Nolen sent Draper to Charlotte to oversee development of grand Myers Park and of the Nolen-designed new town of Kingsport, Tennessee.

Draper quickly realized that the booming New South held great opportunities for a planner. In 1917 with Nolen's blessing he formed his own firm, becoming by some accounts the first professionally trained resident landscape architect in the Southeast. By the early 1920s the firm was among the half-dozen busiest in the whole United States, Draper remembers, with twenty to thirty employees in Charlotte and branch offices in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and New York. The firm did parks, cemeteries, private estates, and college campuses, including parts of Davidson and Winthrop colleges near Charlotte.

Draper's two specialties were upper class residential areas modelled on Myers Park, and mill villages embodying "new town" ideals. Between 1917 and 1933 the firm did over 100 suburbs and nearly 150 mill villages and village extensions all over the South from Alabama to Virginia. Among his suburbs were South Roanoke; Farmington outside Charlottesville, Virginia; and Sequoyah Hills near Knoxville, Tennessee. Every major North Carolina city has a Draper neighborhood, including Raleigh's Hayes-Barton, Durham's Forest Hills, Charlotte's Eastover, High Point's Emorywood, and the resort development at Lake Lure. His designs are characterized by tree-shaded streets whose gentle curves follow the topography. "I was of the old school, the Olmsted school," he recalled in 1982, "that said that the best and finest use of the land is the most important thing and that all developments should be keyed to the land itself."

Like his suburban plans, Draper's mill villages were conceived as total communities, a radical approach in the early

twentieth century, with winding tree-lined streets, plentiful parks, churches, and often a community center. In North Carolina he designed Spindale and did work in Salisbury, Gastonia, and other cities. Probably his best design was Chicopee, Georgia. When Harvard's Arthur Comey toured United States new town experiments for a government report in 1939, he praised Draper and wrote that "Chicopee is the best . . . of mill villages visited in the South."

In 1933, based on his industrial new town work, Earle Sumner Draper was chosen first head of planning for the Tennessee Valley Authority, the biggest planning job in America. He turned over his private practice in Charlotte to Harold Bursley, later noted as planner of Greenbelt, Maryland. At TVA, Draper directed land-use planning for the multi-state region, pushed successfully for creation of recreational areas, and supervised design of the much-publicized new town of Norris, Tennessee.

When much of the path-breaking work had been finished at TVA, Draper left to join the recently established Federal Housing Administration. With the outbreak of World War II he took responsibility for war housing all over the United States, and served briefly as acting director of the agency in 1945. After the war he resumed private practice in Washington, D.C., as a consultant helping developers guide projects through the federal bureaucracy. In 1965 he retired after fifty years in the profession and now lives in Vero Beach, Florida.

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