

**HOUSING CONDITIONS IN
PLAINFIELD AND NORTH
PLAINFIELD, NEW JERSEY**

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Housing Conditions in Plainfield and North Plainfield, New Jersey by Udetta D. Brown

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UDETТА D. BROWN

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THE following report is based on an investigation made for the Charity Organization Society and the Anti-Tuberculosis League in January and February, 1914, by Miss Udetta D. Brown. Miss Brown has made similar investigations in many other cities, including Grand Rapids, Mich., and Bridgeport, Conn., and was recommended for this work by the National Housing Association. Her report is printed here without alteration.

PLAINFIELD, N. J.
APRIL 15, 1914

APRIL, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FOURTEEN

HD 9304
PLS B7

PREFATORY NOTE.

The making of this Survey has been greatly facilitated by the co-operation of the committees for whom the work was undertaken and by the assistance of several of the city officials.

Special acknowledgment is due Mr. Chandler and Miss Mattison of the Board of Health, who put at my disposal the records of the office,—thus making possible a history of the tuberculosis situation which could have been obtained otherwise only partially and with difficulty.

For the statistics of tenement conditions in both Plainfield and North Plainfield, I am indebted to Captain Allen of the State Tenement House Department, who kindly supplied all the data from the official records.

To all who have helped with information, suggestion or advice, I am most grateful, and especially to Mr. Ihlder, Field Secretary of the National Housing Association, for advice during the investigation and criticism of the report.

UDETТА D. BROWN.

To visit
Albany, N.Y.

Plainfield and North Plainfield, New Jersey.

Some twenty-five miles from New York is situated the city of Plainfield, New Jersey, which, with the borough of North Plainfield, has a population of nearly 30,000 people. Plainfield, itself, is squeezed into a corner of Union County so that it is difficult for it to absorb the adjacent communities of North and South Plainfield, which are in Somerset and Middlesex Counties respectively.

More fortunate than many suburban towns, Plainfield has a history antedating railroads and rapid transit. Here and there, standing somewhat aloof from the more sociable modern houses, are large, colonial dwellings, suggestive of the early days when Plainfield was on the direct stage route from New York to Philadelphia. The old Quaker Meeting House still stands "shingled on the side," in grounds "well fenced and free from brambles." Trees that proclaim a growth of a century or more add dignity to street and garden. These relics of an older day give a pleasant background to the more hurried life of the present generation.

The building of the railroad has brought rapid changes. From the small pre-Revolutionary hamlet, with busy mills and out-lying farms, Plainfield has grown to be a city of varied interests. In addition to the descendants of the old families, it has now not only a commuting population of considerable wealth, but an industrial community interested in the manufacture of tools, silk, and other products.

This combination of old town, suburban community, and manufacturing centre shows in the population. There are still many representatives of the old families engaged in business in the city, there are sections of fine residences, such as the Netherwood development, given up to the homes of commuters. The factories require more or less skilled workmen, many of whom have comfortable homes in the city and borough. The less skilled work of the community is performed by negroes and immigrants. Among the latter are many Italians, Slavs and Russian Jews.

These unskilled immigrants are peculiarly subject to the effects of bad conditions. Their lack of English puts them at a disadvantage in seeking or picking up information, their lack of knowledge of our customs and our country often causes them to accept, as a matter of course, conditions of work and housing which are really below normal. Where there is a large number of unskilled and uneducated foreigners herded together, there is danger not only to them but to any community in which they live, if these un-American conditions are allowed to persist. So surely as we do not instill our standards of work and living in the immigrant so surely will he drag our standards down toward his. The problem of standards of work is one which has demanded the attention of unions and similar organizations. The problem of housing conditions calls for community action.

The first thing which any community must do to secure adequate and proper housing for all its people, is to learn just what the present conditions are, what state and local laws and ordinances there are to control conditions, and then to devise measures which will set decent standards and stimulate good, while discouraging bad tendencies in house-building.

To find an answer to some of these questions and to study what relation, if any, there is between bad housing and tuberculosis, committees of the Charity Organization Society and the Anti-Tuberculosis League of Plainfield and North Plainfield joined forces to have a Survey made of these conditions in the city and borough.

The method used was one which has been found effective in other cities. Districts were selected in which the conditions were typical of the cheaper dwellings of the community; these were studied in detail and a record made for each house. To this was added a general survey of conditions and especially of recently erected small houses, with the idea of gaining some insight into the present tendencies in small house construction.

For the purposes of this report, certain words are defined as follows:

TERMS DEFINED.

One-family house—a dwelling lived in and arranged to be lived in by one family only.

Two-family house—a dwelling lived in or arranged to be lived in by two families only. Usually each family has one floor, one apartment being above the other. This does not

include semi-detached dwellings in which each family has an entire house except that one wall is common to both houses.

A tenement—a dwelling lived in or arranged to be lived in by three or more families.

A semi-detached house is one having exterior walls on three sides, the fourth side having a wall common to two houses.

A row is three or more houses built together, with common walls between adjoining houses.



COTTAGE PLACE. ROW OF HOUSES, NOT BEAUTIFUL, BUT PLENTY OF LIGHT AND AIR IN THE APARTMENTS.

One-family, two-family houses or tenements may be detached, semi-detached or in rows.

"City water" is used to denote the supply furnished by a private company but conducted to the houses by pipes laid in the streets.

Uninspected house (U. H.) is used in the tables to designate those houses which could not be inspected, for any reason. Several houses were vacant, two were undergoing alterations and others were closed though occupied. The number of houses classified (U. H.) varies in the different tables because some conditions can be noted even though the house is closed.

DISTRICTS SELECTED.

The districts selected for special study were, in Plainfield, Cottage Place, and West Third Street between Plainfield Avenue and Liberty Street. In North Plainfield, one district including both Harmony and Race Streets.

COTTAGE PLACE.

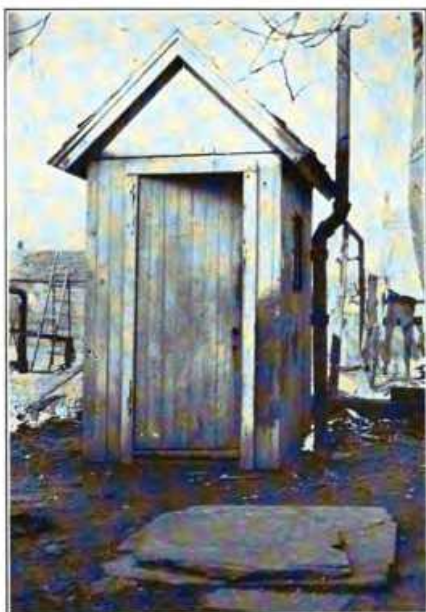
This street nearly parallels the railroad track on the north as one approaches the main station when coming from New York. On one side of the street is the railroad embankment, on the other a straggling line of dingy-looking, cheaply



COTTAGE PLACE. SEMI-DETACHED HOUSES AND COTTAGES.
THE MEN ARE PEDDLING OIL-CLOTH.

constructed houses, the homes of more than forty families. Most of the houses are small one- and two-family dwellings with sufficient space about them to secure good light and abundance of air. Eight of the houses, however, are of the semi-detached type and so poorly planned that two rooms, of the six in each house, have no window to the outer air. More unsightly than these semi-detached houses, but much better supplied with light and ventilation, is the row of two-story and basement dwellings at the end of the street. These houses have been built only a few years and are in good repair though cheaply constructed. Their worst feature is the

cellar closet, in a compartment poorly lighted and not sufficiently ventilated. This convenience is shared by two families, frequently one negro and the other white. The plumbing is too cheap to be kept in good condition easily and the situation is complicated by the presence of boarders in many of the families and the fact that the closets are too accessible from the street.



COTTAGE PLACE, YARD WATER CLOSET WITH VENT PIPE EXTENDING SEVERAL FEET ABOVE THE ROOF.

Connection with the city water has been made for the houses on this street, only one remaining with no trap. All too frequently the fixtures are in the yard instead of in the house. The most unusual feature of the plumbing installed here is the vent pipe which may be seen extending up the outer walls of a house and rearing several feet above the roof. In some instances such pipes have been included even in the construction of yard closets, the size and length of the pipe out of all proportion to actual necessity.