

**RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION:
HOUSING REFORM: A
HAND-BOOK FOR PRACTICAL
USE IN AMERICAN CITIES**

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Russell Sage Foundation: Housing Reform: A Hand-Book for Practical Use in American Cities
by Lawrence Veiller

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LAWRENCE VEILLER

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HOUSING REFORM

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FOREWORD

BY ROBERT W. DE FOREST

THIS book is a practical handbook on tenement reform in America. Public spirited citizens of every American city are asking themselves what to do to prevent in their community the housing evils that have grown up elsewhere and to remedy those that have come into existence around their own homes. This book is intended to answer that question. There is no more of theory about it than is essential to intelligent conclusion and effective action. It has been written at the instance of the Russell Sage Foundation by the person who is most competent, by knowledge and experience, to answer that question.

Lawrence Veiller has made a lifelong study of this subject. As a settlement worker in New York he acquired an intimate knowledge of how the wage earners of that city live. He was secretary and practical director of the Tenement House Committee of the New York Charity Organization Society when it was first organized in 1898. He became secretary of the New York State Tenement House Commission of 1900, which drafted the present Tenement Law for cities of the first class

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and created the Tenement Department of New York City. And as First Deputy Tenement Commissioner during the two years after the Department came into existence he had a large part in the initial enforcement of that law.

The last chapter in the book contains a collection of negative "Don'ts." All the previous chapters deal with affirmative "Do's."

If I were to emphasize any particular line of affirmative action in housing reform, it would be the prevention of the tenement disease before any city begins to suffer from it.

We Americans have an unhappy faculty of not remembering until after we have forgotten, of not beginning to conserve our resources and save our forests until after we have lost them. But we are surely practical enough to profit by experience. And experience applied to housing reform establishes the proposition which should be printed in large type that **NO GROWING AMERICAN CITY, HOWEVER FREE FROM TENEMENTS NOW, CAN AFFORD TO BE WITHOUT BUILDING REGULATIONS TO PREVENT DARK ROOMS AND UNSANITARY CONDITIONS.** There is no hardship to anyone in so regulating the future building of all houses intended to contain three or more families as to ensure an open space in the rear, a window for every room, opening either on the street or an open rear or an open court proportioned to height, also water supply, sewer connection and a separate toilet. There can be no intelligent

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opposition to such a regulation, be it by state law or city ordinance. Such regulation, however much tenement evils may have come to exist, will safeguard the future, even if some of the past is lost. It is in the line of least resistance and greatest accomplishment.

There is nothing inherently objectionable in the tenement as a type of city dwelling; that is, in a multiple house intended to be occupied by three or more families living independently. The objection lies in permitting them to be built without proper regulation. It is the wellnigh universal form in many European cities. It is likely to be increasingly the form in American cities.

There comes a time in the growth of every city when it begins to feel the need of building laws to guard against fire, and appropriate enactment is made. If destruction to life and property by disease were as spectacular as destruction by fire, protection against disease-breeding houses would precede protection against those that spread only fire. Both kinds of protection are essential and cannot be ensured too early in a city's development.