

**HOUSING BETTERMENT,
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VARIOUS

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HOUSING BETTERMENT

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105 East 22d Street, New York City.

VOL. 4

FEBRUARY, 1915

No. 1

THE FIRST HOUSING INSTITUTE.

The National Housing Association held its first Housing Institute in Boston on January 15, 1915. The purpose of the Institute was to gather together the active housing workers from a limited territory so that they might have opportunity to exchange advice and opinion regarding common problems. At such an Institute it is assumed that everyone is familiar with the questions under discussion and qualified by experience to contribute to the discussion. Consequently the sessions were confined to discussion, there were no prepared papers which go over old ground, no introductory addresses which repeat what everyone present knows. Instead one of the members was asked to give in seven minutes a terse statement of the points on the subject that to him seem of the most importance. Then others supplemented this with comment or question.

With a programme of such purely professional interest it was expected that attendance at the Institute held in Boston would not exceed thirty or forty, as it was drawn only from the New England States, New York and New Jersey. The attendance, however, reached one hundred and six, representing thirty-nine cities and towns. In spite of this large number the discussions were kept informal and to the point, and the participation was so general that as one of the New Jersey delegation enthusiastically expressed it, "there was almost no audience." So successfully did the Institute fulfill its purpose that it is proposed to hold one or two more during the winter in other sections of the country, so that other workers may secure these benefits.

The programme of the Boston Institute was carefully prepared with the needs of this section of the country particularly in mind, though most of the subjects would fit as well in any other section, the treatment and the emphasis being the chief variants. These subjects were:

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MORNING.

AROUSING AND HOLDING LOCAL INTEREST.

- 1.—Organizing.
First steps; persons who should be interested; organizations which should be interested.
- 2.—Attitude Toward the City Administration.
- 3.—The Facts and How to Use Them.
Investigation; education; follow-up work.
- 4.—Making Results Definite.
Standards set by law; increased effectiveness of administration; definite statement of purpose by volunteer associations.

AFTERNOON.

LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT.

- 1.—Why Housing Laws Are Needed.
- 2.—A Tenement House Law *vs.* A Housing Law.
- 3.—The Necessary Scope of a Housing Law.
- 4.—Standards Which Must Be Set.
- 5.—The Administration of a Housing Law.
- 6.—State *vs.* Local Enforcement.

EVENING.

CONSTRUCTION AND MANAGEMENT.

- 1.—Best Types of House.
- 2.—Floor Plans.
Minimum number of rooms per family.
What rooms are most needed and their arrangement.
- 3.—Construction and Maintenance.
Can a dwelling be too substantial and endure too long?
Initial cost *vs.* depreciation and fire loss.
- 4.—Management.
Financial.
Social.

The Massachusetts Civic League and the Women's Municipal League were the hosts of the Institute, and made all the local arrangements.

MICHIGAN WANTS A STATE LAW.

The experience of Grand Rapids under one of the best housing codes in the country, the efforts of Detroit to secure like advantages, have aroused other Michigan cities. During the fall and winter Saginaw, Lansing, Flint and Kalamazoo have all become awakened to the benefit such legislation confers and citizens of other cities, Jackson, Battle Creek, Ann Arbor, Muskegon and Marquette, have begun to show an interest. So widespread has the demand become that a state housing code is now being framed which will be submitted to the legislature with the endorsement of Gov. Ferris. In his message on January 6, 1915, the Governor said:

"The housing problem is the problem of enabling the great mass of the people who want to live in decent surroundings and bring up their children under proper conditions to have such opportunities. It is also to a very large extent the problem of preventing other people who either do not care for decent conditions or are unable to achieve them from maintaining conditions which are a menace to their neighbors, to the community and civilization.

"The larger cities of Michigan are especially interested in the solution of this problem. Already the states of California, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have housing laws. I suggest that this Legislature enact a housing law of state-wide application. 'A Model Housing Law,' by Lawrence Veiller, Secretary National Housing Association, furnishes a scientific basis for this much needed law."

In Detroit there has been a Housing Association for the past five years. This association has carried on a campaign of education which has clearly shown the need for better standards than now prevail and has aroused an interest that is manifesting itself in various ways. Under the leadership of its secretary, Robert E. Todd, the movement for a state-wide housing law is being developed. In addition, a Home Building Association has been started by the Twentieth Century Club, which is raising \$25,000 with which to purchase and manage improved dwellings for wage-earners. The association will be on a limited dividend basis like the Washington Sanitary Housing Company.

In Grand Rapids the housing code which went into effect last March seems to be meeting with enthusiastic approval. There

have, of course, been complaints from some owners who were forced to improve old, unsanitary dwellings; but so general is the understanding of the purpose of the law and approval of the standards it sets, that these complaints have been few and scattering. Yet so good are these standards that an observer in the neighboring city of Muskegon declared that "if enforced" they will certainly make Grand Rapids a model town.

That they are enforced is shown by the reports of the housing inspectors and by a story published a few days ago in one of the local newspapers. Its headings: Other Half Learns How to Live Right; New Housing Ordinance Compels Sanitary Conditions in the Furniture City; Improvement Is Noted; form the introduction to a story of progress of which the city may be proud. As a result of the ordinance, it says: "Some of the 'other half' has been compelled to move into better quarters, another portion has been helped by landlords spurred to action by orders from the Board of Health." Unsanitary houses have been razed, vacated or brought up to standard; even the "house of all nations"—nearly every city has one—"which has figured in many a police court case," has been brightened up a little, water closets and sinks have been installed in houses that previously provided only the primitive yard closet and outdoor hydrant, room overcrowding has been lessened, combination stable and dwelling have been devoted exclusively to one purpose or the other.

"The inspectors have met with all kinds of excuses in their work of calling the attention of landlords to the needed improvements in their premises," says *The Press*, "but have forced compliance with the provisions of the ordinance in every case where it was needed. The older buildings are the ones with which there is trouble, the ones whose erection has been begun since the ordinance went into effect being built along lines rigidly drawn in the new ordinance.

"From the results of the work done to date the inspectors are grateful for the new housing code, and the 'other half,' well—

"The 'other half' is still more grateful."

FROM A GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE.

Governor Martin G. Brumbaugh, of Pennsylvania, like Governor Ferris, of Michigan, has made housing a definite part of

his programme. In his first message to the legislature Gov. Brumbaugh said:

"In this great industrial State it is our duty to pay definite attention to the housing problem. Every family should be housed in a home that is private, sanitary, safe and attainable at a reasonable rental. I urge your attention to this important problem. We cannot breed good citizens in disgraceful houses. It would be a great pleasure to me and a great blessing to our workmen if this problem were adequately met now."

EDUCATING THE TENANT.

In the preceding number Housing Betterment published a description of the pamphlet "For You" issued by the Tenement House Department of New York City and the Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society. The interest that has been shown in this booklet, as indicated by the number of inquiries that have come in, has been very great. Some of these have come even from abroad; Glasgow, York, England; and Paris, Saskatoon, Montreal and Ottawa. In the United States, Boston, Cambridge, Chicago and Pittsburgh are already preparing for a campaign along the same lines, and Bridgeport is printing a similar booklet to use in its present campaign of education. Panama has asked for more information.

Among the inquiries received are ones from individuals and organizations in the following cities:

CALIFORNIA	Jersey City	Columbus
San Francisco	Newark	PENNSYLVANIA
MARYLAND	Perth Amboy	Easton
Baltimore	NEW YORK	Philadelphia
MASSACHUSETTS	Albany	TENNESSEE
Fitchburg	Elmira	Murfreesboro
Haverhill	Mt. Vernon	TEXAS
Holyoke	Syracuse	Dublin
Lawrence	Troy	WEST VIRGINIA
Wellesley	OHIO	Wheeling
NEW JERSEY	Cincinnati	WISCONSIN
Hoboken	Cleveland	Madison

COMMENT BY OUR ALLIES.

The Work of the National Housing Association.

"In our conventions of 1911, 1912 and 1913 the so-called Housing question has been discussed. This great subject, in its various ramifications, includes more than one-half of the total sum of human comfort, happiness, morality and possessions. A great awakening in this matter is in progress in America, and from every section of our land, both officials and public-spirited citizens are engaged in arousing the sense and the conscience and the soul of our people to the vital importance of this subject as a public, a community and a national question. Our community spirit is found to be at a low ebb. It has suffered through the ultra and violent individualism of our people, which threatens now to rush to the opposite extreme. This aroused public spirit on the subject of homes has, however, been crystallized into a national movement organized into a permanent association, which in its discussions treats of our tenement house degradation, of garden cities, co-operative housing, city planning, transit facilities, public health and sanitation and all other related topics and last, but of the first importance, the financing of the housing question. This last branch of the subject lags behind, because the financial phase of the question is largely in our hands and we have formulated no comprehensive plan for its solution. The field which this National Housing Association covers is a vast one, and the task of beating back the inroads of tenement life, which, at its worst, houses sixteen hundred human beings on each acre square, and has its blighting symptoms recognizable everywhere in this great land, is a stupendous undertaking. Enrolled in that society, however, are agencies of vast power and influence and resource. I want to emphasize and impress you with the fact that back of this National Housing Association is arrayed every force that lends itself to altruistic effort, and behind that, the reform sentiment of every municipality of importance in the United States and Canada. This United States League of Building and Loan Association is a member of the National Housing Association (members of the League are also members of the N. H. A.), and we should be proud that we are thus affiliated and represent the financial factor of housing reform." Edwin F. Howell, New York, in Proceedings of the Twenty-second

Annual Meeting of the United States League of Local Building and Loan Associations, Washington, D. C., July 27, 28 and 29, 1914.

CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH HOUSING.

The informal conference on English Housing announced in the preceding issue of Housing Betterment, was held on November 23. The attendance was double that expected, so it was necessary for those who introduced a subject to come to the speaker's table. The discussion was kept informal, however, and was so keen that there was some difficulty in stopping discussion on one subject in order to begin that on the next. The programme was as follows:

MORNING

Conference opened by

MR. ROBERT W. DE FOREST

President of the National Housing Association

IMPROVEMENTS DUE TO LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

1. The English Housing and Town Planning Law of 1909 and Its Results

FRANK B. WILLIAMS

Chairman, City Planning Committee, City Club

2. Housing Work of Local Authorities—Health and Building Departments

JOHN J. MURPHY

Commissioner of the New York City Tenement
House Department

Municipal Dwellings

JAMES JENKINS, JR.

Director, Department of Social Betterment,
Brooklyn Bureau of Charities

3. Distribution of Population

EDWARD M. BASSETT

Chairman, New York Commission on Building
Districts and Restrictions