

# Introduction to HOUSING Facts and Principles

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By EDITH ELMER WOOD



FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY

UNITED STATES HOUSING AUTHORITY

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A trio of Uncle Sam's tenants.

Growing chicks . . . need comfortable houses . . . with plenty of fresh air and sunlight." *Farmer's Bulletin No. 1554.*

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**HOUSING**  
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## Foreword

THIS BOOKLET is designed to present a simple and yet authoritative discussion of basic housing facts and principles which are of concern to every community determined to clear its slums and provide decent homes for families of low income. Its contents should be of interest not only to those who are actively associated with the housing movement but also to the public at large. As Dr. Wood points out in the opening pages, the housing problem is important to all of us: It affects the individual, the family, the community, and the Nation.

Time was, of course, when the housing problem seemed exclusively the property of professional "housers," of social workers, architects, governmental officials, and a handful of civic-minded citizens. Today, happily, that is no longer the case. As a result of an aroused public opinion, the housing problem and the low-rent housing program have become public property in a very profound sense. Today, organizations of every sort—trade unions, religious organizations, veterans' groups, educators, women's clubs, welfare societies, parent-teachers' associations, business and professional groups—are making slum clearance and low-rent housing the subjects of conventions, resolutions, studies, and conferences.

Possibly no person is better equipped to discuss the subject of this booklet than Dr. Edith Elmer Wood. A veteran in the housing movement for many years, she has known about the housing

problem from the point of view of the housewife, the alert citizen, and the social economist. As the author of several important books on housing, as University lecturer on the economic and social aspects of housing, and more recently as an adviser to the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, Dr. Wood speaks with authority on this subject. Although Dr. Wood is a consultant to the United States Housing Authority, it should be pointed out that the *opinions* expressed in this booklet are hers, and not necessarily those of the United States Housing Authority.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nathan Straus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "N".

NATHAN STRAUS,  
*Administrator.*

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
UNITED STATES HOUSING AUTHORITY  
DECEMBER, 1939

## Introduction

### Why is the housing problem important?

#### A. *To the individual?*

Because:

1. A man working 44 hours a week, 50 weeks in the year, 30 minutes distant from home, spends from a minimum of one-third to a maximum of substantially over two-thirds of his time at home. Illness or unemployment increases the fraction.

2. A homemaking woman spends from two-thirds to nineteen-twentieths of her time at home.

3. A preschool child spends from two-thirds to nineteen-twentieths of his time there.

4. A school child spends from half to more than three-fourths of his time there.

#### B. *To the family?*

Because:

1. All its functions, biological, social, and administrative, center in the home—eating, sleeping, procreation, child nurture, preparation of food, and care of clothing.

2. Its health, comfort, social and civic life, in short its degree of civilization, depend very largely on qualities inherent in the structural plant which forms its shelter.

### C. *To the community?*

Not only because:

1. More of its area is used for housing than for any other purpose.
2. Residential property contributes about half of its real-property-tax income.
3. Services for residential areas (including schools) consume somewhat more than half of the community income from real-property taxes.

But also because:

4. The most important function of any community is to build, maintain, and protect its homes and the families within them. Industry, business, and government are means toward this end.

### D. *To the Nation?*

Not only because:

1. Residential construction is one of its major industries and one worst hit by the depression of the early 1930's.
2. Past cycles of activity and inactivity in residential construction have preceded eras of national prosperity and hard times with a rhythm suggestive of some causal relationship.

But also because:

3. The fundamental purpose of organized society is to produce a better crop of children <sup>1</sup> by teamwork

<sup>1</sup> U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DIVISION, *Farmers' Bulletin No. 1350, Beef Cattle Barns*: "There are three elements which are essential to animal life, namely, feed, water, and air, and upon the quantity and quality of all three depends the physical welfare of the animal . . . In order that they may be productive they must . . . have an abundance of fresh air."

*Farmers' Bulletin No. 1393, Principles of Dairy Barn Ventilation*: "The stabling of animals in dark, poorly ventilated, damp barns affects their health

and technology than was attainable through the rugged individualism of the stone-age hunter.

4. Homemaking women, raising children, are the largest occupational group in the population. They are producing, by all odds, the most important national asset. Their working places should conform *at least* to the requirements of industrial hygiene.<sup>2</sup>

and helps to spread tuberculosis among the stock whenever the germs are present."

*Farmers' Bulletin No. 1419, Care and Management of Farm Work Horses:* "Abundance of light and proper ventilation of the stables are essential for complete sanitation and the health of the horse."

*Farmers' Bulletin No. 810, Equipment for Farm Sheep Raising:* "Dryness, good ventilation, and freedom from drafts are the first requisites of buildings for sheep."

*Farmers' Bulletin No. 1487, Practical Hog Houses:* "Proper housing is an important factor in the successful raising of hogs. If little pigs are to get the right kind of a start in life, they must have plenty of sunshine."

*Farmers' Bulletin No. 1554, Poultry Houses and Fixtures:* "Growing chicks and laying hens need comfortable houses that are dry and roomy, with plenty of fresh air and sunlight. It never pays to overcrowd them. The houses in which chicks are brooded and reared should be so constructed as to promote the most efficient growth in the chicks."

<sup>2</sup> U. S. DEPT. OF LABOR, BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, *Minimum Standards or the Safety and Health of Workers in Manufacturing Industries, 1935:* These cover provisions for lighting, natural and artificial; ventilation, temperature, humidity, air space; number, type, and location of toilet facilities; cleanliness of premises and provisions for waste disposal; protection against fire; and prevention of accidents.