

WASHINGTON HOUSING:

A NATIONAL EXAMPLE



Alley dwellings, "home" for hundreds of Washingtonians.



Shopping Center.



A once-fashionable address. Haphazard business development blights many a good neighborhood.

• Twenty years ago, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson got her first horrified glimpse of the squalor which sprawls behind hundreds of Washington's pretentious streets. The spectacle shocked her -- as it has many another conscientious citizen -- into an earnest campaign to "reform" or "clean up" the slums.

• Today, after two decades of effort, Washington housing remains a public scandal, worse in many respects than it was in 1915. Its shortcomings are particularly notorious because they disfigure the one city which was intended from its beginning to be a planned community, a fit capital for America.

• Washington really has two housing problems. The most glaring evil is its slums -- notably the congested Second Precinct and the 194 inhabited alleys, where as many as eight persons sometimes live in one squalid room.

• Less conspicuous but no less urgent is the need for ordinary, inexpensive homes. A chronic house famine has pushed rents a third higher than the national average, and is forcing low-waged government workers to pay as much as half of their salaries to keep any kind of roof over their heads.

• The majority of federal employees in Washington fall definitely within the low income groups. Sixty-one percent of them earn less than \$2,000 a year, and 25 percent earn less than \$1,500. (Monthly Labor Review, March, 1934.) If they set aside the customary one-fifth of their salaries for rent, what could these people afford to pay for their homes? A detailed answer is given in the following table:

\$16.66 monthly for those earning \$1000 a year
\$25.00 monthly for those earning \$1500 a year
\$33.33 monthly for those earning \$2000 a year

• In brief, 61 percent of all government employees cannot afford to pay more than \$33.33 a month for rent, and 25 percent cannot afford more than \$25.00 per month.*

• What do they actually pay? Well over \$40 a month, according to two reliable estimates. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated the average rent for Washington at \$42.63 in November, 1934. In January of the same year the Public Utilities Commission of the District made a city-wide housing census with the help of 400 field men.

*Strictly speaking, we cannot assume that there is only one income per family. Inability of one wage earner to meet the chief costs of the family is, however, the most common reason for other members of the family going to work; so we still are able to contrast the budgeted item with the actual cost.



The only water supply in a typical low-rent home.