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# The Vanishing "Vine & Fig Tree"

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*Mrs. Roosevelt is a director of the City Housing Corporation, a home-building organization whose work in relieving congestion in New York is attracting National interest. In this article she explains the plan and purpose of the organization, and tells how its methods may profitably be employed in smaller cities.*

PERHAPS the most alarming tendency of the new social order is the rapid disappearance of real home-life from the cities. In the past, the pride and glory of America has been its homes—their high living standards, their tender family ties, their refining cultural influences and their character building value.

The home has been the fountainhead of our national life, the boast of our statesmen and the pride of every citizen. It is a truism to say that our country's greatness—any country's greatness—is built upon its homes. But surely and steadily, year by year, the number of real homes in the United States is growing smaller. As the country becomes increasingly urban, as the cities become more and more congested, the worth-while home-life is disappearing. We have game laws to protect birds and animals against extinction. Is there no way in which we can prevent or retard the gradual extinction of the old-fashioned American home?

A few of us here in New York, where the ravages of the new apartment house order have been most severe, believe that we have found a plan that will help. On a fairly large scale our plan has worked in the metropolis. We believe that the same methods,

slightly amended, perhaps, to fit local conditions, will afford much needed housing relief in many smaller cities throughout the country.

For it is not alone in New York that the

home, with a lawn, and a flower garden all her own. Conditions which make this impossible stifle the home-making instinct, which is so vital to social well-being. Every child has the right to healthful, happy and stimulating home life. To take this away from childhood is to take a heritage of health and character away from manhood and womanhood.

In the matter of housing conditions, New York is a horrible example. The trouble is not so much that there is not enough housing altogether. The real crux of the matter is that there is far too little housing for those who cannot afford to pay the higher rents.

IT has long been recognized by city dwellers that the family budget ought not to allow more than 25 per cent of the income for rent. In New York it is practically impossible to get a livable two- or three-room and kitchenette apartment for less than \$65, oftener \$85, a month. For the average white collar worker earning \$35 to \$40 a week, it is obvious that the monthly rent levy must consume half his income, leaving the rest to be fought over by the butcher, the baker, the clothier and the purveyor of amusements, leaving not one red cent for saving against a rainy day.

There have been practically no houses put up in New York by speculative builders since the war to rent for less than \$15 a room. The neglect by public agencies to step in where private enterprise has failed may seem surprising to visitors from Europe, where adequate housing has long been regarded as a public care of fundamental importance. But America, in spite of the growth of its cities, still has the attitude of the pioneer. The American concept of building a house is a survival of the day when each man could provide himself with his own home in his own way—though that is now hopelessly beyond the

power of any but the well-to-do.

In default of any public effort to achieve better housing conditions, the City Housing Corporation was formed in New York with \$2,000,000 of private capital. The speculative element of investment was abolished by limiting the possible income of the stockholders to 6 per cent annually. The money was subscribed by those who were interested primarily in the safety of the investment, and who likewise had a social interest in furthering a desirable civic-project.



Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

childless, two-rooms-and-kitchenette abode is superceding the old-fashioned home. In Dallas and Des Moines, in Nashville, Seattle and Omaha, the apartment houses are rapidly replacing the old one-family dwellings. Look up the building permits, if you do not believe me. It is a reflection of economic evolution, and no force is so inexorable as economic law. At the present rate it will not be long before this country can properly be called Sardinia, for we shall be a nation of sardines.

Every woman wants to own her own

**T**HE capital stock was made large so that all the economies of large scale operation could be employed. In order to offer the houses cheap, it was necessary to build them as economically as possible. However, there was no skimping in materials. The object was not to find the bottom cost at which any roof could be put over a family's head, but the least cost at which a satisfactory human environment could be created. In order, then, to build good houses cheaply it was necessary to look for capital at minimum rates, the lowest possible land values, to employ careful planning, and to take every advantage of large-scale construction and continuous operation.

As a site for the project, 1,100 lots were bought at Sunnyside, an undeveloped section of Long Island, which is within fifteen minutes travel of Grand Central terminal in the heart of Manhattan by subway or elevated lines. Architects of the greatest skill were employed to draw the plans. On account of the magnitude of the project, it was possible to employ architects whose services would have been prohibitive to smaller speculative builders. A careful study of other housing projects was made by the architectural staff, so that no lesson previously learned would be lost.

As a final step in the plans, it was decided that the houses should be sold to their occupants. They might have been rented, but that would have largely defeated the purpose of the organization. By selling the houses on long term payments the capital was kept liquid for future building, and the sense of the home ownership was fostered. As it is, one set of houses is sold as soon as it is completed and the money is immediately put back into more building. The City Housing Corporation aims to be a builder of homes, not a landlord. Restrictions have been adopted to prevent speculation in the early years of the development and to protect the residential nature of this community.

In Sunnyside, the emphasis is laid upon

one-, two- and three-family homes. These are of excellent brick construction, two stories high. Only 28 per cent of the land is built on, leaving more than two-thirds of the space open for lawns, tennis courts, gardens and outdoor playgrounds. Each house has a small drying green, and each group has a sand pile for children. The children's play spaces are arranged so that the mothers can watch them at play from their kitchen windows.

**N**ONE of the houses are more than two rooms deep, so that every room is

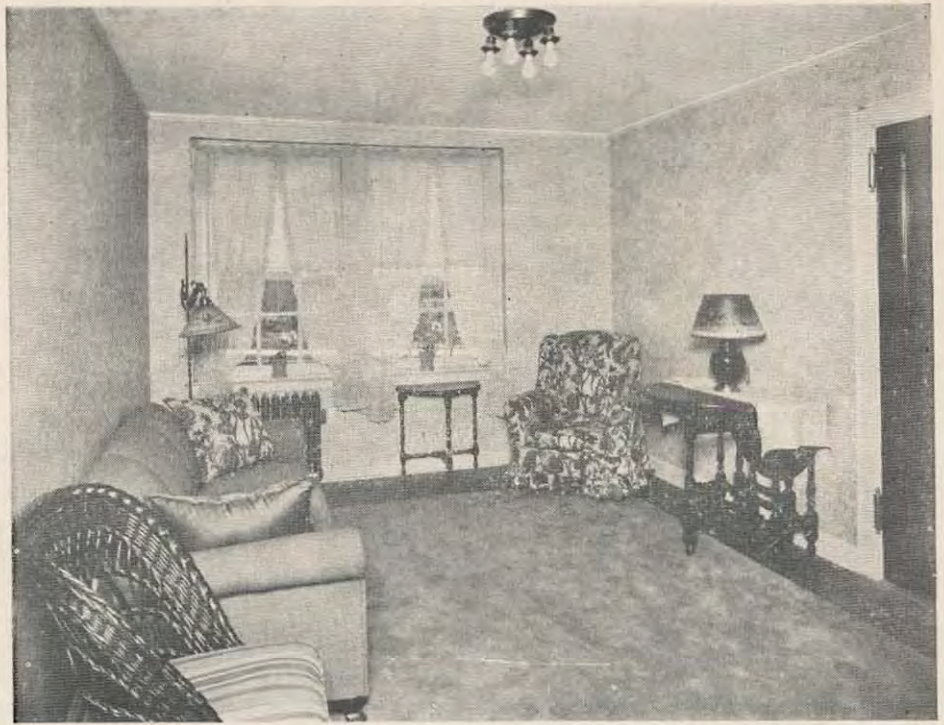
open to outside light and air, without courtyards and narrow spaces between the houses. Nobody's window faces a blank wall, and nobody looks across a narrow alley into the neighbor's window.

Along with the smaller houses, one large apartment building was built, but the apartments are large and airy, and were sold to the tenants just as if they had been separate houses. The building was erected around the outside of an entire block, so that there would be a wide open square in the middle, with an outside opening for every window.

A four-room apartment costs \$4,800, and a five-room apartment \$5,800. The initial payment is 10 per cent in each case. The monthly carrying charge is \$49.92 a month for a four-room apartment and \$60.32 a month for a five-room apartment. The figures are easily 30 per cent under the average rent for apartments of this size in Manhattan, and include a gradual reduction of mortgage, which may be counted toward investment.

One-family brick homes cost \$8,750. The monthly carrying charge is \$64.75—far under the average rental and includes gradual repayment of mortgage in 22 years. The two-family houses cost \$13,500, and the monthly carrying charge is \$102.66. This includes interest, taxes, water, fire insurance, garden upkeep, as well as mortgage installments. Most of the purchasers can rent the upper floor for \$65 a month, leaving only \$37.66 to be paid for their rent and their payment toward final ownership of the property.

**J**UDGED by anything previously done in New York, Sunnyside has justified itself. It has already provided for 353 families, and when completed will have provided for about 1500 families good housing, adequate recreation facilities and community possibilities of a sort not available anywhere else in the city at any price.



*One of the Attractive Rooms in a Sunnyside Home.*



*Children of the Sunnyside Families Planting Their Gardens. Some of these Boys and Girls Had never Seen a Garden until their Parents Moved to Sunnyside.*