

Philosophy V:
The Country Manufacturing Plant:
A Solution to One Aspect of Housing the Poor

Earl C. Davis

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

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It is not a mere assertion to say that the problem of "Housing of the Poor" is one of most importance. A visit to any city, or even to small villages, indicates that at least a portion of the people live in conditions which would not be satisfactory to the self-respecting person of extremely moderate means. Mr. Jacob Riis' book, *How the Other Half Lives*,² pictures a condition which impresses upon one the indescribable condition of the people of New York City. The same man sums up the whole condition in these sentences from his book, *The Making of an American*. Speaking of the condition of the poor in certain sections of New York City he says,

The trouble was people did not know and had no means of finding out for themselves. But I had. Accordingly I went poking about among the foul alleys and fouler tenements of the Bend when they slept in their filth, sometimes with the policeman on the beat, more often alone, sounding the misery and depravity of it to their depth.³

Mr. F. Spencer Baldwin,⁴ speaking of the same problem from another point of view says,

¹ This is from a collection of manuscripts—mostly class papers—written while Davis was a student at Harvard Divinity School, 1902-1904. This manuscript was for his Philosophy V class taken during the Fall 1902 semester. There is a note by the Professor on the title page: "(Talbot Mills: North Billerica, Mass., G.F.)"

² Jacob Riis (1849-1905) Danish-American social reformer and "muckraking" journalist. Author of *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890.

³ Jacob Riis, *The Making of an American*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1901, p. 236.

⁴ F. Spencer Baldwin (1870-1934) American Political Scientist. Author of *The Housing Problem: A Study of Tenement Reform in Cities*, 1900.

The result of these influences (industrial and economic) has been the continuous and rapid growth of the great cities. This has forced upon the municipalities a multitude of difficult social problems. Among these, the problem of housing of the poorer classes directly and cheaply stands first in importance.⁵

The importance of the problem comes to assume greater dimensions when one considers to what extent it may be regarded as the central question about which the problems of intemperance arise, and crime group themselves. Mr. Riis draws the line between "this half" and the "other half" by the unlocked door. The family whose door is always open to whosoever may come is thereby classified with the "other half." The evils of such lack of privacy, such lack of restraint, are obvious. Mr. W.I. Cole in *The City Wilderness* says,

Tenement house life in general—except the tenements of the highest grade—can hardly escape what is mean and low. In many cases the familiarity shown by children of the tenements with wrong-doing of all descriptions is extremely shocking.⁶

The influence of the association of young people with those evil tendencies works just as strongly for evil as the influence of our teachers and charity people works for good. It is the pressing question of charity.

In Boston, even, the condition is urgent, although less urgent than in any of the larger cities. Mr. W.I. Cole of the South End House says:

There is no great congestion in Boston. We do not find such conditions here as have been found in other cities such as New York and Chicago. While the problem is here, it does not need the immediate action as required in other cities.⁷

While we have this statement from no less an authority than the head of the South End House, yet the question presses even in

⁵ F. Spencer Baldwin, *The Housing Problem: A Study of Tenement Reform in Cities*, 1900, p. 3.

⁶ W.I. Cole, Chapter VII: "Criminal Tendencies," in *The City Wilderness: A Settlement Study*, edited by R.A. Woods, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1898, p. 166

⁷ Davis' footnote for this quote: "Said in conversation at South End House."

Boston. On lower Harrison Avenue I examined from the outside a block. From rough measurements I found the block to be about 800 feet long by one hundred feet wide. At no place was there any spaces between the houses. Whatever of open-air space there may have been within the outer wall of the houses placed one next to the other. There was no way of getting to it, except by way of dark and filthy passageways from the street to the inner court or well. From the outside it presented one solid brick wall. Most of the basement tenements showed signs of being occupied. The streets were narrow and swarmed with children. There was no opportunity for safe recreation for them to say nothing of the filth in which they were playing.

In the fall of 1901, the Health Department (of Boston) ordered a comprehensive examination of all tenement houses in the city. ... A compilation of the reports of twenty-six tenement houses in South Margin Street in the West End, reveals the following situation:

... [T]enements reported upon 118, containing 350 rooms. In these rooms 540 persons are living, though the number allowed by law is only 446. Of the 197 bedrooms, 97 contain less than 600 cubic feet of airspace; 38 of the bedrooms are dark rooms. Thirty-three of the tenements are reported as over-crowded; six of the houses are said to have defective drainage; sixteen have cellars that are damp or filthy or both; eleven yards are in bad condition. Nineteen out of 20 garbage receptacles are reported as defective or insufficient, or both. Seventeen out of 67 water closets are in bad condition. The name of the owner is posted in only nine of the 26 houses.⁸

It is evident from these interesting facts that even Boston has its problem. Each house reported upon would average 20.8 persons. Each house would contain 4.5 tenements. Each tenement would average 3 rooms. Now the condition presented would be that each tenement of 3 rooms must afford shelter for 4.6 persons, and 2.6 persons per sleeping room. These facts, added to [the] reported conditions of sanitation, show the need of some remedy.

⁸ Davis' footnote text: "From ms. of chapter on "Housing" for *Americans in Process* about to be published by Houghton & Mifflin. In case 'Tenement House Conditions,' Library of 20th Century Club, Boston." The full reference to the published book: Robert A. Woods, Ed., *Americans in Process: A Settlement Study*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1903, p. 99.

There are two direct problems involved here in relieving these congested conditions. The old and crowded houses must be replaced, but in replacing them, a certain portion of the land must be reserved as a sort of self-supporting "Fresh Air Fund." So, the first step is to dispose of the old buildings. The Board of Health has been very effective in bringing about this kind of work.

In the year 1900, the number of houses ordered vacated, 274; number of houses actually vacated, 75; number of houses ordered removed, 56; number of houses actually removed, 39.

These figures are taken from a report to Mr. E. H. Chandler of the 20th Century Club of Boston, signed by Mr. Jordan, Chief Inspector, Boston Board of Health, and dated, February 26, 1901. This is the destructive side of the process. The constructive side is shown by a reference to the work of the incorporated societies which represents one method of building good houses.

These incorporated societies are working in a small way, the oldest, the Boston Cooperative Building Company, chartered in 1871. With a capital of \$292,000 it has about \$400,000 invested in seventy-eight houses with 985 rooms, occupied by 311 families containing 1,023 persons. The Harrison Ave., group of twenty-four three-storied brick houses—each, except the corner, arranged for three families—has attracted deserved attention, with its hollow square in the center, tastefully arranged as a playground for the children, and a bit of beauty for the parents.⁹

There still remains the problem of providing for those who are forced out of the congested district. To simply relieve one block and make no provision for those who represent the over-population, but half solves the problem. It is evident that this aspect of the question must find its solution connected in some way with the country. In Boston, for example, a large section about Dorchester and Roxbury has been peopled from this

⁹ Davis' footnote text: "*The Housing Conditions in Boston*, by Robert Treat Paine. "The Assoc. of Am Acad. Of Pol. Sci., 1902, page 125." Full reference, R.T. Paine, "*The Housing Conditions in Boston*," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 20, July 1902, pp. 123-136. This quote from page 125.

overflow. The following figures show the nature of this movement.

Dorchester and West Roxbury have shown great gains in population since 1895, and a large number of small houses have been built in those sections. But it still remains true that Ward 8 of the West End increased in population during the same period faster than any other section of the city, except the two suburbs named. It now has the distinction of containing the largest number of persons per acre, 173.6; Ward 9 in South End ranks second with 132.2, and Ward 6, third with 104.3. The relation of growth of these two wards may be show as follows:

	1895	1900
Ward 6	27,860	30,546 ¹⁰
Ward 8	23,130	28,817
	50,990	59,363

These same figures for Dorchester and West Roxbury are as follows:

	1895	1900
Wards 20 + 24	27,860	30,546
Dorchester		
Ward 23	23,130	28,817
Roxbury		
	50,990	59,363

Let it be noted however that the acreage of Dorchester is 5,590, and of West Roxbury is 7,660. There were then in 1900 only 10.6 persons to the acre in Dorchester as compared with 104.3 in the North End, and 3.1 persons to the acre in West Roxbury in contrast with the 173.6 of the West End.¹¹

¹⁰ The professor has written a comment next to these figures, "persons increase, or ?"

¹¹ Davis' footnote text: "Ms. of chapter on "Housing" for *Americans in Process*, 20th Century Club, Boston." The full reference to the published book: Robert A. Woods, Ed., *Americans in Process: A Settlement Study*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1903, p. 99.

These figures seem to indicate for one reason or another the tendency to take up houses in the suburban districts is not so strong as might be desired. One reason for this may be the attraction for the city life in its ???, or to put it the other way too, a repulsion for the extreme quite of the suburban life. But again, when one considers that it takes nearly one hour on each end of the day to travel to and from these places to work in town, ten hours per day of labor and one hour for the noon recess, it becomes apparent that here is a serious objection to this system as a complete solution to the problem.

There remains another means of relief, viz., the country manufacturing plant, where the plant and the homes of the laborer make a complete village by themselves. The advantages and possibilities of this system will appear in the following description of the Talbot Mills, North Billerica, Mass.¹²

When one considers and tries to discover the efficiency of such a system as the one mentioned, it is necessary to take into account, as a first step, the standing of the industry to which the plant represents from the point of view of the wages paid. It is evident that the corporation which, because of the nature of its industry, pays only an average wage of \$364.11 per year, cannot be expected to provide as high a class of tenements as the one which pays an average way of \$692.57 per year. On the other hand, the laborers who receive the lower wage cannot live upon such a basis as the laborer who receives the higher wage. Again, it must be remembered that, if two corporations have the same grade of tenements for their employees, the one which pays the lower wage is doing a relatively better thing by its employees, the question of rent be discarded.

¹² Talbot Mills in North Billerica was launched in 1839 when the Talbot brothers, Charles P. Talbot (1807-1884) and Thomas T. Talbot (1818-1885) formed the C.P. Talbot and Co., dyewood factory. In 1844 they expanded into chemical manufacturing. In 1851 they purchased land along the Concord River where they built a woolen mill. The company continued in existence until 1956. The district, which includes the mill complex and worker housing, much of which is described in this essay, was added to the National Register of Historic places in 1983. Thomas T. Talbot served a term, 1879-1880, as Governor of Massachusetts.

A comparison of the figures in the following table will show the relative position of the woolen industry as compared with several other industries:

Kind of Industry	No. of Laborers	Total Wages	Average Wage per year	Source of figures in 1900 census ¹³
Tin + Terne Plate	14,826	\$10,288,061	\$692.57	Vol X, p. 100, Sub I
Cars, Steam Railroad	207,105	133,049,623	545.85	Vol X, p. 157, Sub I
Ship Building	46,781	24,839,163	543.78	Vol X, p. 212, Sub I
Iron and Steel	222,607	120,836,338	542.27	Vol X, p. 4, Sub I
Electric Apparatus	40,890	20,190,344	494.01	Vol X, p. 157, Sub I
Textile:Dying/Finish	27,776	12,726,316	458.17	Vol IX, p. 21, Sub I
Flour Grist Mills	37,073	17,703,419	477.56	Vol IX, p. 355, Sub I
Boots and Shoes	142,922	59,175,883	414.04	Vol IX, p. 471, Sub I
Wool	159,108	57,933,817	364.19	Vol IX, p. 12, Sub I
Silk	65,416	20,982,194	320.76	Vol IX, p. 12, Sub I
Hosiery, Knit Goods	83,387	24,358,627	292.11	Vol IX, p. 12, Sub I
Cotton Goods	297,929	85,126,310	285.72	Vol IX, p. 12, Sub I

Out of twelve representative industries we see that stands within average rate of wages paid per year. Therefore, in judging the merits of the system to be described, its efficiency must be judged from what it does with the means at hand.

It is evident too that the labor required for work in woolen mills is less skilled than in the other industries, for in the long run, and upon the basis of general averages, the wages are roughly proportional to the skill of the laborer.

The village of North Billerica, or at least that portion of it which belongs to the Talbot Mills, is [a] small village which has collected about the mills. Its general condition is prosperous and healthy. The town of Billerica stands among the first in the state in the low rate of deaths and has at times stood highest.

The houses owned by the corporation are in general divided into four general classes. They represent in their gradations from lower to higher qualities the evolution of the attitude of the corporation towards its employees. The first class consists of one six-tenement block and one three-tenement block, which are the oldest and poorest of the whole system. Class two

¹³ Davis' footnote text: "Table made up from figures taken from Census. Column headed 'average wages' is worked out from the other two sets of figures."

consists of three six-tenement blocks, next higher in quality. Class three consists of about 20 double tenement houses of a still better type; and class four consists of 10 houses which show the present attitude of the corporation. These will be described later. Every house, with the exception of class I, which are located outside of the village, are connected with a private sewage system. This was built entirely at the expense of the corporation. It cost the sum of \$30,000. The sewer bed system is used. By permission of the company all school buildings and many private houses are connected with it.

The Thomas Talbot Memorial Hall serves as the center of the social life of the town. The only expense involved in running this building is that involved in running expenses. The money which built it was a gift, and consequently there is no interest money to be paid. This Hall is let to residents of the village at a rate which barely pays expenses.

Connected with the Hall is a Library of over 3,000 volumes. This number is being increased each year. The nominal sum of 50 cents per year is charged for the privilege of taking out books, one at a time; a 75-cent membership permits two books to be taken out; \$1.00 permits three. The reading room is open to the public.

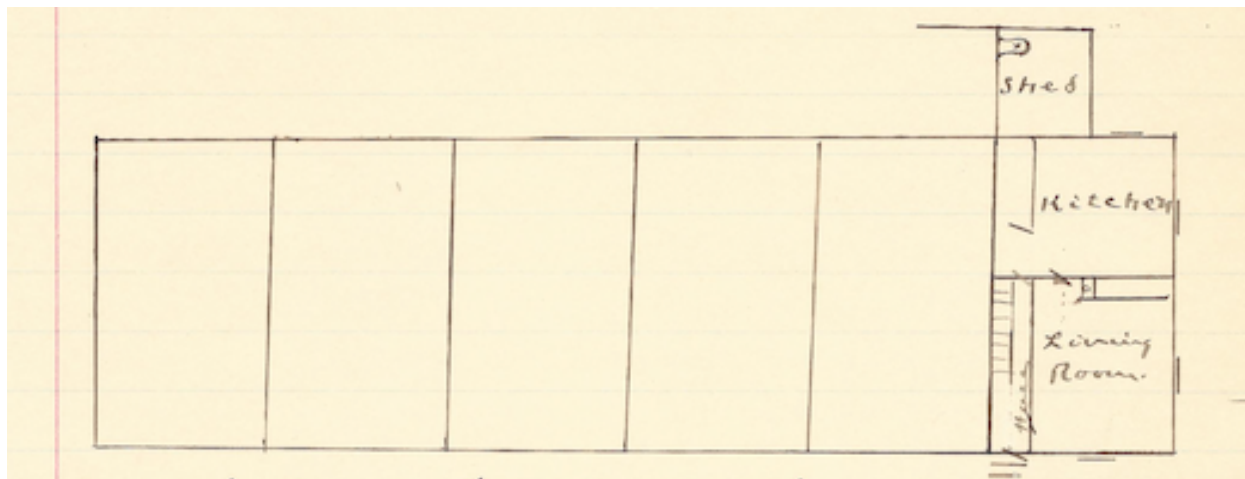
The schools are town schools, with the exception of a kindergarten school, which is run from the income of a fund. The school is free.

This gives a general setting of the town and leads to a study of the four classes of houses.

Of the first class, it is only necessary to say that they represent an early type. They are one and one-half story blocks. Each tenement contains a living room and kitchen, and two sleeping rooms and a cellar. Back of each house is an outbuilding which contains a woodshed and privy. There are but nine tenements of this class.

Class II consists of eighteen tenements in three blocks. These differ from the above in that they are connected with the sewer. The old outhouses have been replaced by an addition which contains a woodshed and water closet. The rent of this house is

about four dollars per month. People of the less skilled type live in them, i.e., men who get about \$8.40 per week.



The "X" in shed is water closet. There are two chambers of [the] same size as corresponding rooms below. I was unable to get the exact dimensions of the rooms in these tenements, but they are about 13 feet long by 12 feet 6 inches wide. There are in all eighteen of such tenements.

Class III presents us with a much better building and represents a later period of construction. There are about 20 houses of this type. They follow the same general architecture. Two tenements in each house, entirely separate one from the other. The rent for such houses varies from \$5.50 to \$7.50 per month according to the location, and the condition of the attic. A finished attic costs more than the unfinished attic. Laborers getting from \$9 to \$12 dollars per week live in these houses, or sometimes laborers of a lower grade, when there is more than one wage earner in the family.

The accompanying plans¹⁴ show the detail of the house for the 1st 2nd and 3rd floors. There are a few of this type of house which have only 1st and 2nd floors. Each house has a water closet connected with the sewer, also a sink in which there is running water. The water rent is included in the rent.

While these houses are very much alike in architecture, an attempt is made to relieve the monotony by an artistic choice of

¹⁴ See Appendix for these plans.

colors in painting. No two of the houses are painted exactly alike. Then too, in as much as the combinations of colors are all made by one person, there is no striking inharmoniousness in the appearance of the street.

Class IV¹⁵ presents the greatest amount of interest. The houses of this class have been built within the last four years. There are ten of them completed and there are others in the process of construction. They are all built upon the same general plan, but no two are alike so far as outside appearances are concerned.

The photograph shows one of these houses.¹⁶ The one next to it has a cottage roof. It is shingled on the sides and has two dormer windows instead of one. While the changes thus made are not very great, and do not materially affect the inside arrangement of the house, the total effect from the outside is entirely different. The photograph also shows the grounds about the house and the effective arrangement of the flowers and shrubs. The details of construction will be shown later, but for the present it is sufficient to say that the best of these houses has a furnace, is piped for hot and cold water, has a bathroom which contains an enameled iron tub, enameled water closet seat, a porcelain set bowl. All the plumbing is open.¹⁷

These houses rent at from \$8 to \$12 per month. Those having all the above noted equipment are \$12. The ones which do not have furnace, and a finished attic and are not piped for hot water are \$8 per month. Skilled laborers getting from \$10 to \$15 per week live in them, but some are occupied by unskilled laborers where there is more than one wage earner in the family.

To write a description of the house when there are plans to study would be superfluous, but one or two things ought to be especially noticed.¹⁸

In the first place the cellar is either carefully cemented or well-graveled with good gravel. Then too the cellar is well

¹⁵ Davis has written "III," but it is clear he meant "IV."

¹⁶ This photograph can be found in the Appendix.

¹⁷ The Professor has written, "(Stairs out: see 1st floor plans. G.F.)" on the back of this sheet of text.

¹⁸ These plans can be found in the Appendix.

ventilated and lighted, containing four windows in each tenement.

On the first floor, the Hall deserves notice for its size. It [is] 11'-4" X 12'-4". On account of its size, it may well serve as a living room. Also, all the rooms are directly connected with the Hall. Again, in connection with the kitchen, there is a cooking room 5'-0" X 8'-8".

On the second floor there are some good features. Each bedroom opens from the hall, and the bathroom opens from the hall also. Each room has a good-sized closet, and there is one general closet of good size. The bathroom too is large and roomy, 6'-8" X 11'-6". It is to be remembered that the bathroom is fitted with tub, seat, and set bowl, all open plumbing.

On the third floor are three more fairly good-sized sleeping rooms.

To sum up, we have here a unit of up ten good-sized rooms and a bath and a good basement, furnished with hot and cold water, kitchen furnishings, such as stove and its equipment, all for the modest sum of \$12 per month. A study of the following extracts from the owners signed copy of specifications for construction will show that the house is not a cheap poorly built shell, but a house constructed upon good honest principles:

Foundations: Foundation walls to be made of dimensions and levels shown by drawings of good field stone formed upon cuts nearby laid dry, well-bonded, bedded, pinned with long through-pinenes, and joints filled with stone chips, laid dry to within twelve inches of grade. To be pointed out the inside with 1-3 lime cement mortar. Level off on top to receive underpinning.

Sides: Cover sides of house throughout with best cedar shingles laid 5" to the weather.

Sheathing: All shingles to be laid over rosin-sized sheathing paper.

Outside Finish: Except as otherwise specified or marked on drawings, all outside finish to be of best quality Canada pine stock, free from large and loose knots.

Blinds: Fit to outside of all windows, except the small ones in the cellar... one and one-fourth inch blinds of No. 1 Michigan Pine.

Inside Finish: Except where otherwise specified or marked on plans, the inside finish is to be of clear North Carolina Pine finishing stock to finish natural.

Upper Floors: Dining rooms, kitchens, pantries, and entries of first floor to be of birch 7-8" by 3" blind-nailed, kiln dried, and scraped after laying. All other floors to be laid with spruce.

Hardwood floors to be hand-scraped in first class manner, and protected by paper until painter finishes them.

Kitchen: Contractor to furnish and set all hardware for the above pantries and kitchens, and some to be approved by owner.

Dining Room Closets: Doors in these closets to be glazed with glass.

Picture Moldings: Picture moldings furnished and put up by owner.

Doors: All doors are to be of Red Cedar.

Glazing: The sashes for the first and second stories are to be glazed with No I quality clear single thick American glass.

In addition to these specifications, it is interesting to note that the corporation rents at a small rental double windows to those who wish them. Also, they procure and sell at cost to the tenants screen doors and screens for the windows. Each house has ample grounds and many of the tenants have vegetable gardens. All these facts and minor details go to indicate the healthy, comfortable and not to say artistic conditions under which these people live. The houses are warm, artistic, and roomy. Each family has its own front door, its own back door, its own yard, and its own home safe and secluded.

Here is one factor in the solution of the great problem of housing the poor. The country village has many disadvantages, but they fade into insignificance when one contrasts such conditions as I have described with the horrible filthy conditions under which people of the same class live in the large city.

In these days when railroad facilities are becoming so convenient, when the transmission of power by electricity is so

simple, is there not here a suggestion which might be of value?¹⁹ Many manufacturing industries might be built up in the country, which would draw people away from the city, and greatly relieve congestion. The Superintendent of the Talbot Mills says, "We aim to get good families, and keep them. Such help pays much better than to get the roving class of help." He also says, "We never have any trouble in getting help. The fact that the plant is in the country does not limit us in this direction." Also, "We get a better class of operatives than the same kind of mills do in a city." Then from the financial standpoint he says, "The difference in rent makes up for all other losses which may result from being located in the country." Again, "Higher wages and country location keep a better grade of workman." We have evidence from the corporation to the effect that they gain rather than lose by being located in the country.

I think that it would be worthwhile for people who are interested in the housing problem to try to interest businessmen in such movements.

After all the great interest in the whole plant is to know the people and to see the kind of life they live. The general condition of the people is indicated by the demand for tenements. As I have shown the only poor houses come in Class I, but these are neat and clean and well built, even if they are not beautiful. The company has great difficulty in keeping these homes filled, even though the rent is so very low. On the other hand, there are waiting lists for all the better tenements, and the company is building four to six houses about every year to meet this demand. The Superintendent says, "All but the very cheapest tenements are full. It is difficult to fill them, but there is a big waiting list for good tenements."

The condition of the people is shown by their interest in finances. The Superintendent says, "Fully one-half of the operatives keep a bank account." He tells of one family which he has followed with interest. The father of the family had never worked for Talbot Mills but had done outside work. They came to North Billerica about 20 years ago. Some of the children come to work in the mill. For the past ten years the wages of the family

¹⁹ The Professor has written, "Do the employees wholly favor the protection and system afforded by the company? G.F." on the back of this sheet of text.

as a whole have amounted to about \$50 per week. They saved their money and five or six years ago the father bought a farm, rather a large one, and paid for it. Now, one of the sons, the mother and daughter stay at home and mind the farm. They make living expenses for the whole family in this way. The father and the rest of the children still work outside and save their wages. They must be quite well to do.

I have called upon and eaten at the homes of many of the people in this village. At one home I was entertained by music on an upright piano of good make by two different children of the family. Of this same family (they earn their money by working in the mill) one daughter is fitting for college, and one son is at Worcester Academy this year.

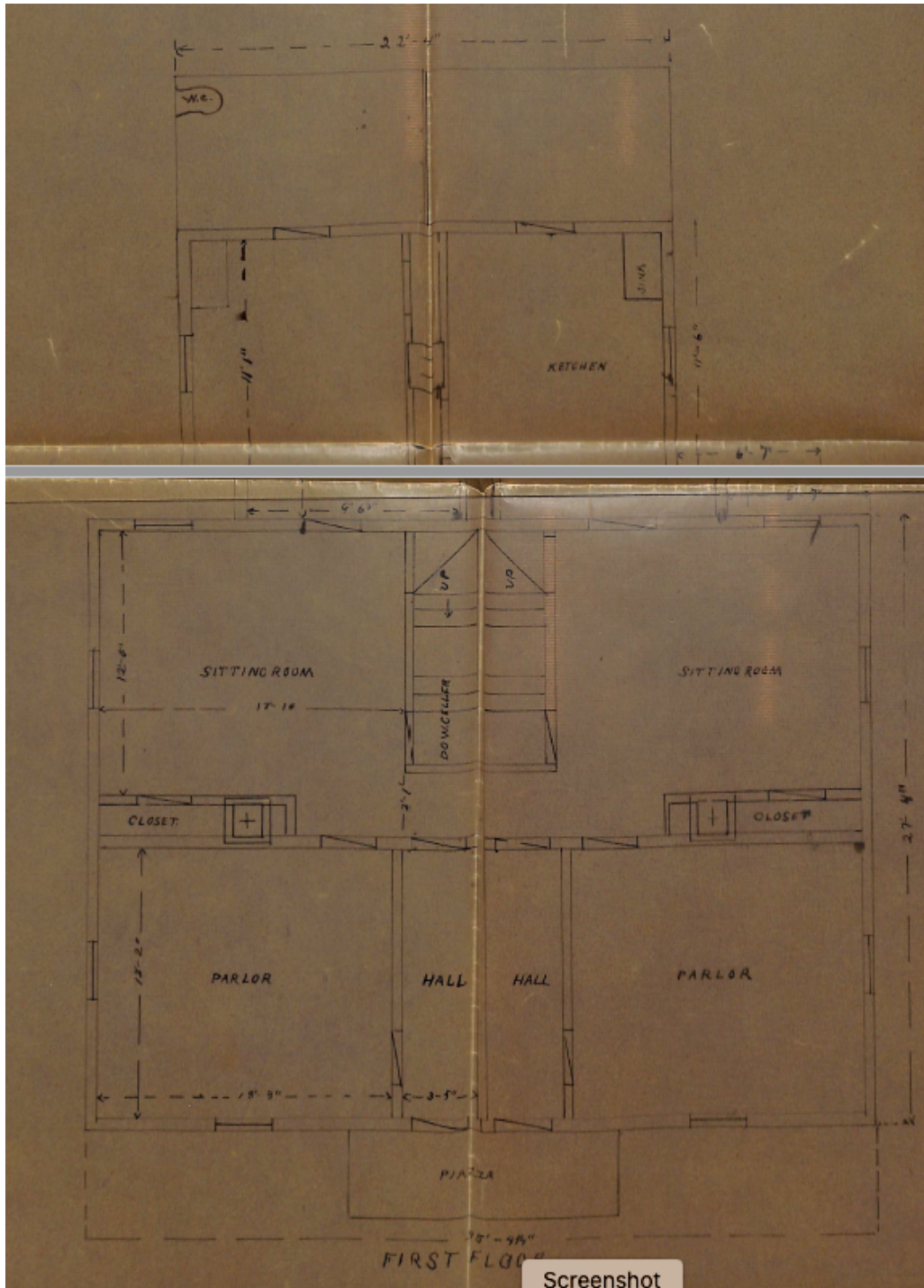
In another family one son has earned all the money, done his studying nights and at evening schools and fitted himself for medical college. He is now in his second year. There are two boys now in colleges in New England, who come from families who work in these mills. They are acquitting themselves with honor.

One father said to me once, "I never had much chance at learning, but if my health holds my children shall have a chance." He has two children, boy and girl. Both play the piano well, both are good scholars, and the boy is about ready for college.

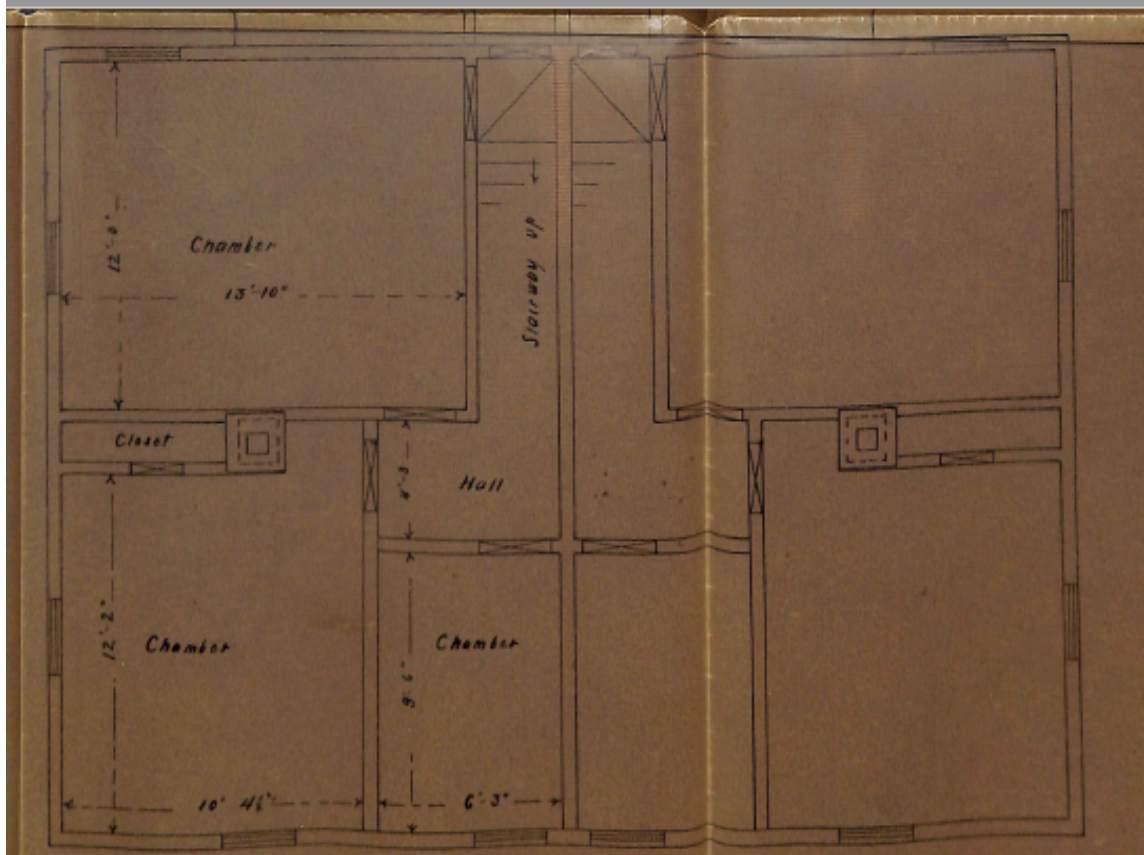
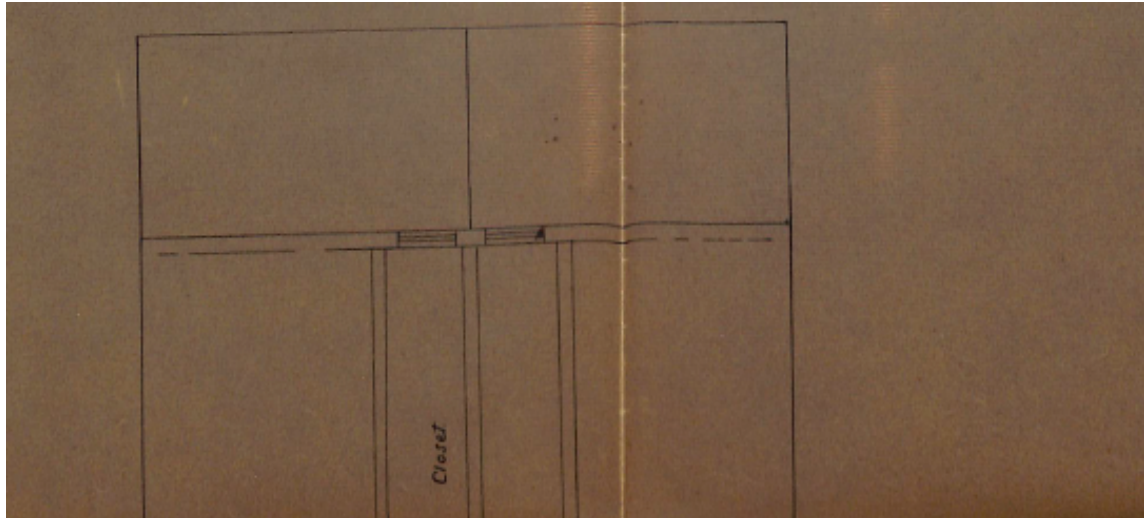
So, I might go on naming incident after incident to show that these influences are having their effect upon the people. It is interesting to go through the village between seven and eight o'clock in the evening in the late spring to see the father working upon a little garden, and the children playing upon clean healthy grass. There is a sharp contrast between the general surroundings here and in the city. And yet this has its dark side. There are a few, but very few, of the men who drink. They have to go out of town to get their liquor, but still evidences of it crop out. The general moral tone is strong and healthy. It gives one hope that perhaps the apparent evils of closely congested city life would be greatly lessened if the people could only be put under better conditions.

Appendix

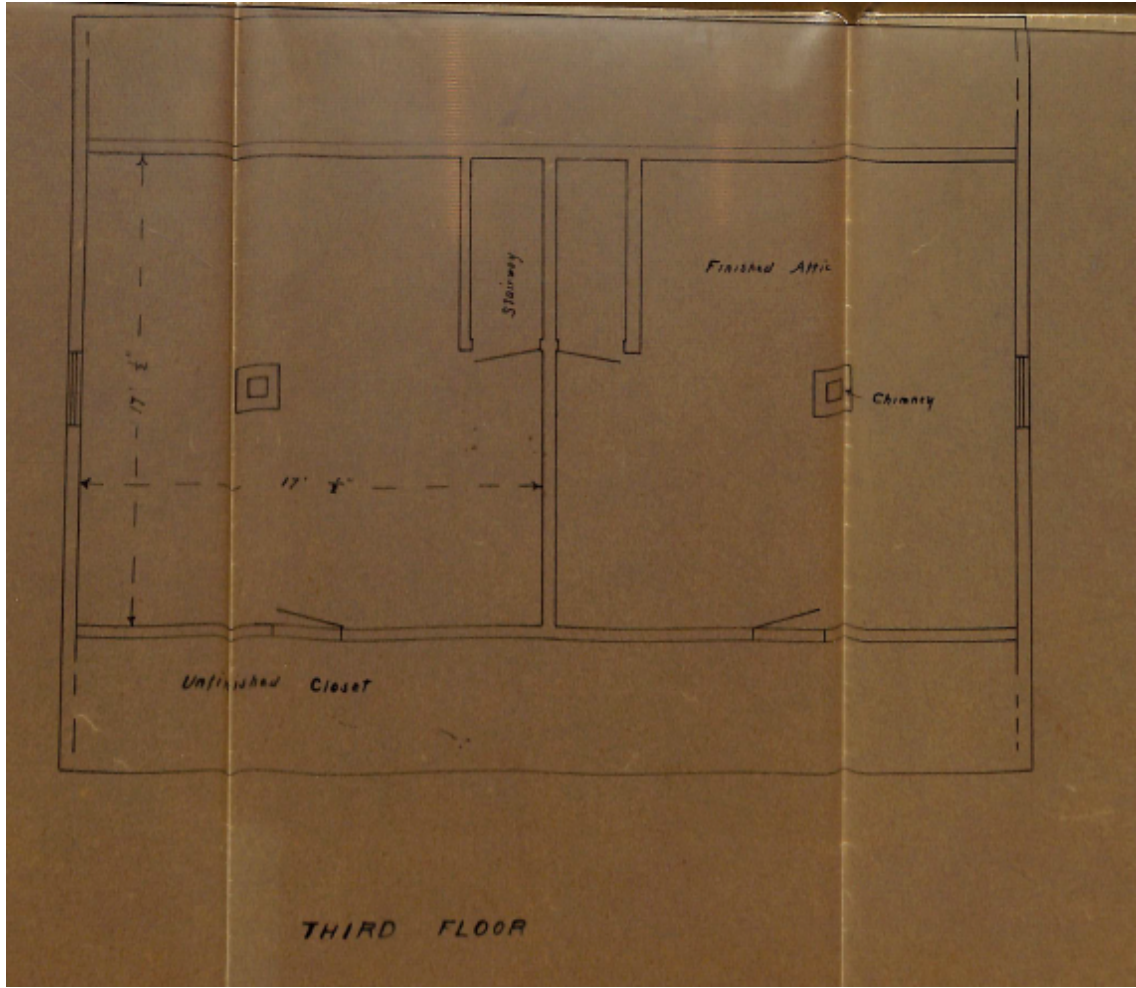
Class III Housing Floorplans:



Screenshot



SECOND FLOOR

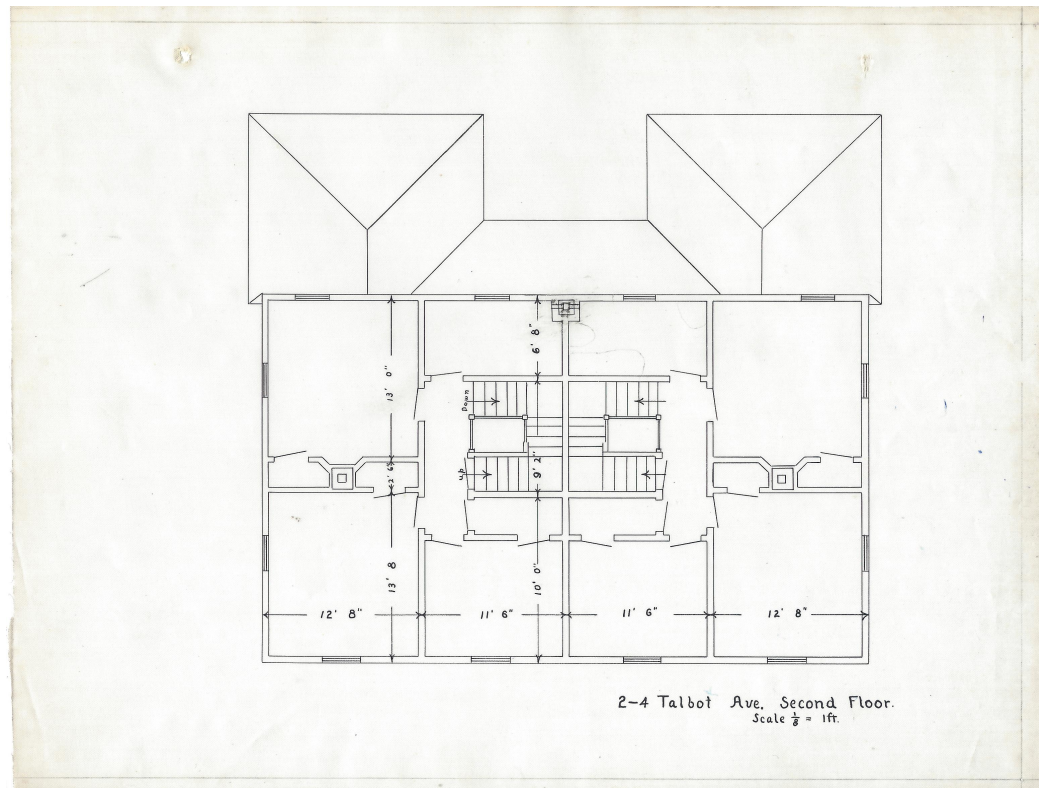
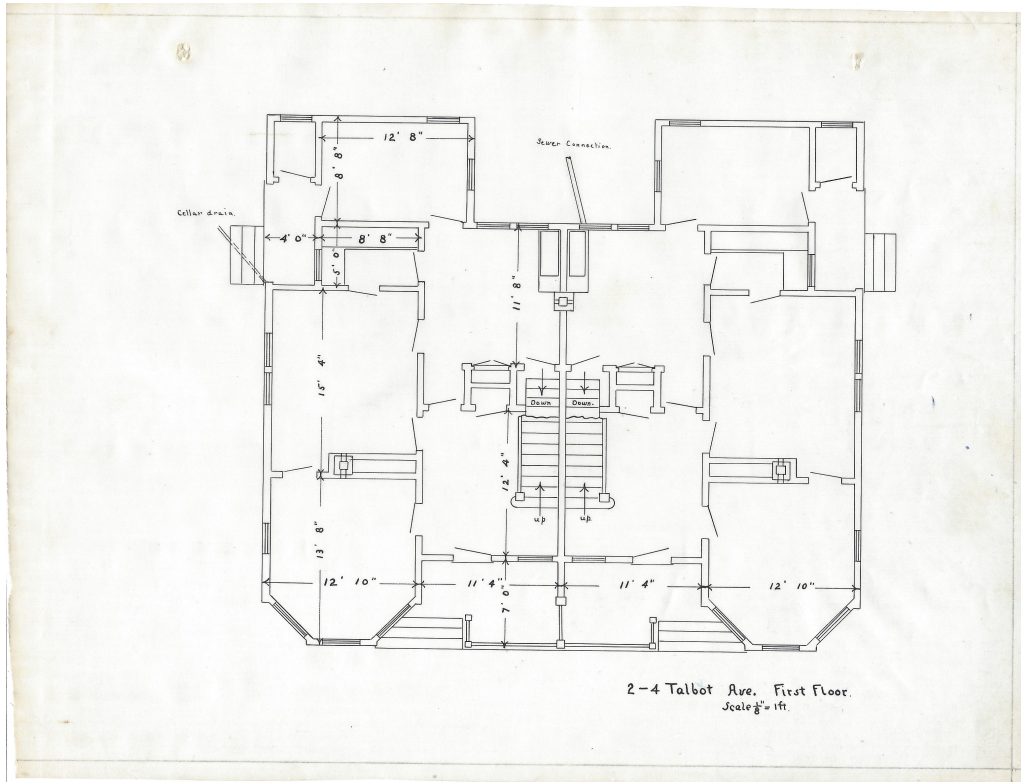


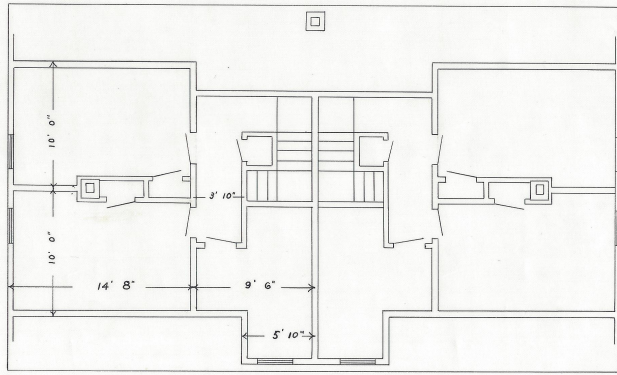
THIRD FLOOR

Photo of Class IV House

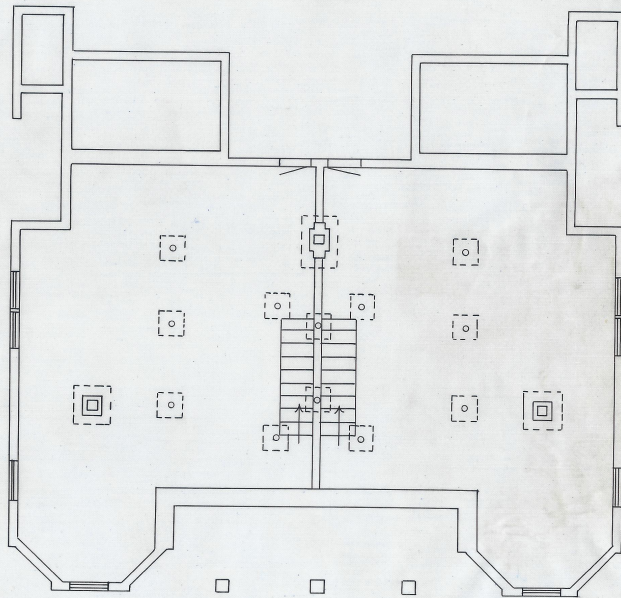


Class IV Housing Floorplans:





2-4 Talbot Ave. Rttic.
Scale $\frac{1}{8} = 1ft.$



Cellar
Scale $\frac{1}{8} = 1ft.$