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NEGRO HOUSING SURVEY OF CHARLESTON

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BUREAU OF NEGRO WELFARE AND STATISTICS
CHARLESTON

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I. M. CARPER, DIRECTOR



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OF THE

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

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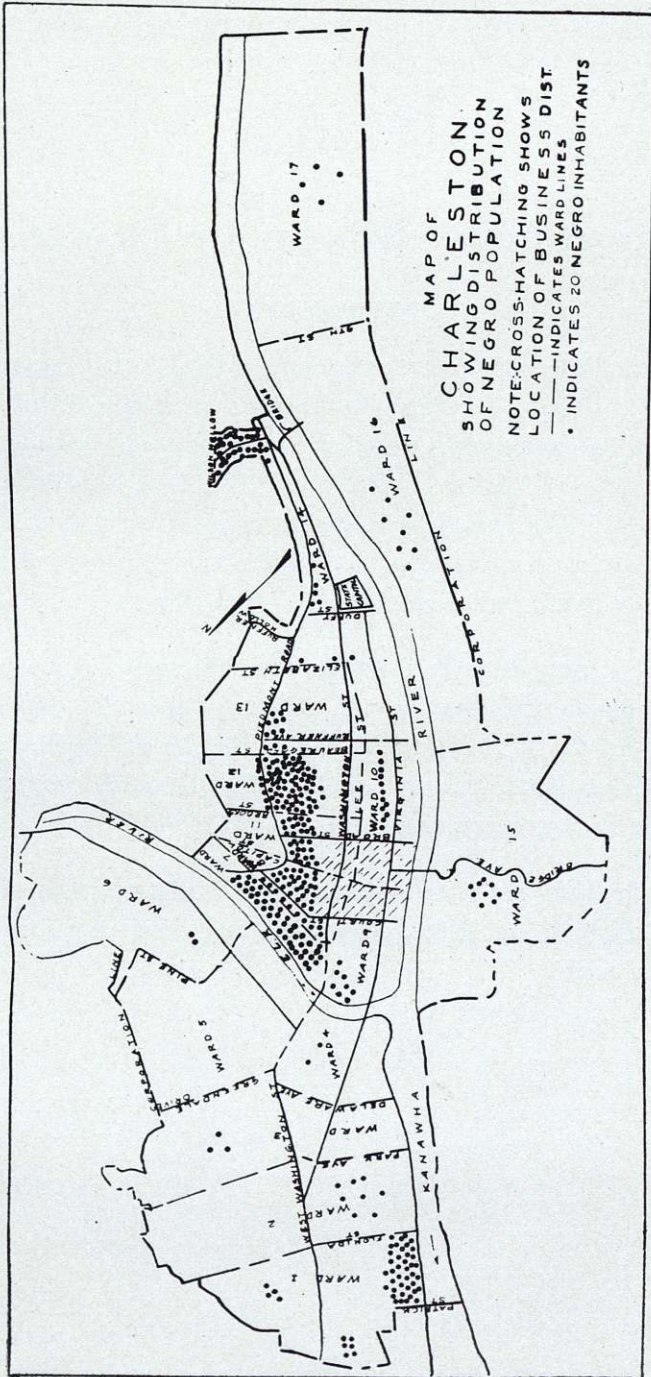
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INTRODUCTION

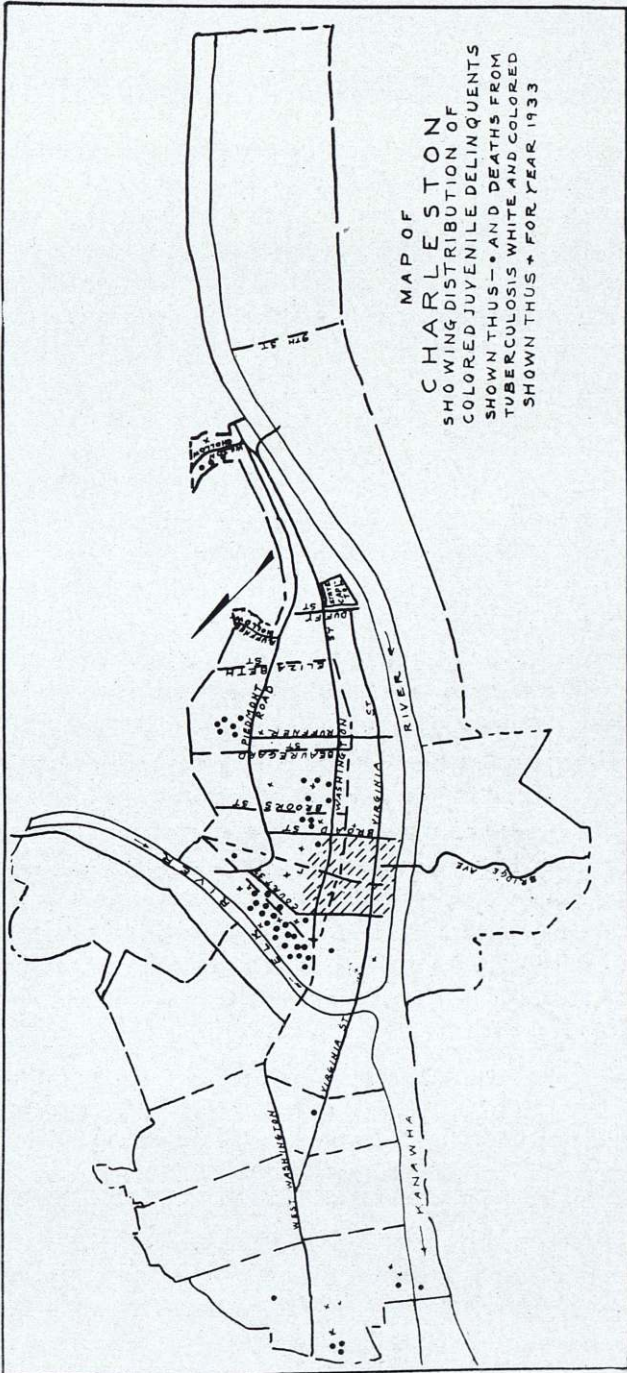
To understand better the housing problems that confront the citizens of West Virginia, the Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics has undertaken a survey to ascertain the types of homes and the general living conditions of the Negro population of Charleston. The survey is intended to serve as a guide for the entire state in an effort to promote and stimulate means of providing better living conditions for the Negro citizens.

In the comparatively short time that the survey was conducted much valuable information was collected from the 490 families visited. Of the 1,900 Negro families in the city of Charleston, over 850 questionnaires were filled, sufficient in detail to warrant their inclusion in the report.

In the endeavor to achieve the objective of the survey an intensive analysis of the social, economical and occupational activities has been made.



MAP NO. 1



MAP NO. 2

THE PRESENT NEGRO HOUSING PROBLEM

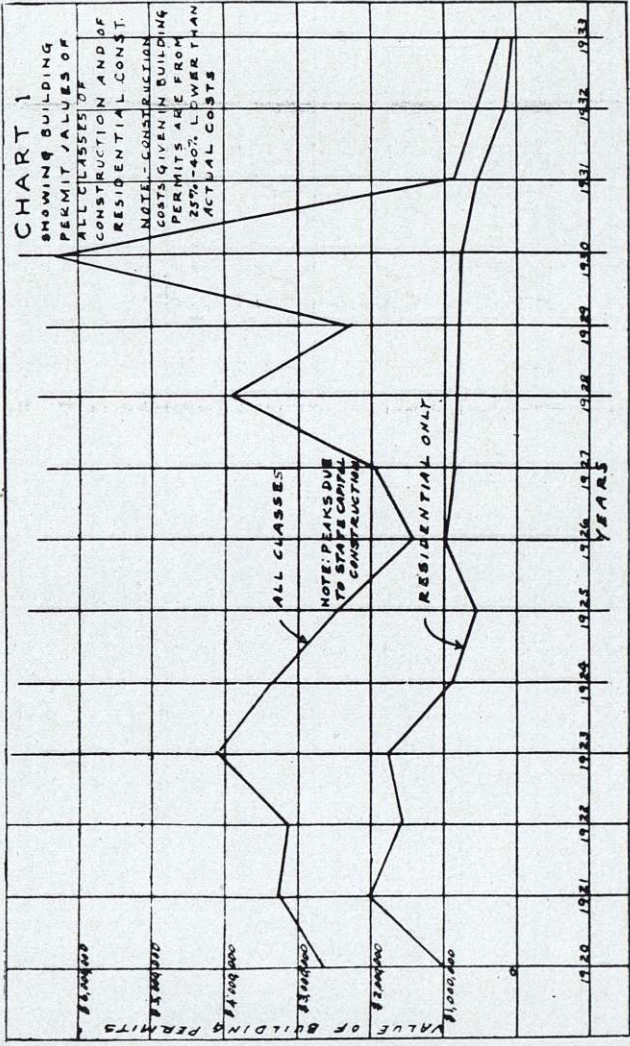
Housing is a true barometer of the economic condition of any people. Henry George in his book, "Progress and Poverty," says: "The man who now uses coarse food and lives in a small house will, as a rule, if his income be increased use more costly food and move into a costlier house. . . . If he grows richer and richer he will procure houses, servants, gardens, his demand for the use of land constantly increasing with his wealth." Although this was written in 1879 it still applies to present-day conditions, and conversely when a man's income decreases he moves into a smaller house. We can, therefore, safely say that economic conditions of the occupants determine the state and condition of housing.

The downward trend of economic conditions which began about 1924 and culminated in the present depression, and its attendant lack of new construction, depreciation and disrepair of existing homes and over-crowding caused by these conditions are amply shown in the following survey made in Charleston by this Bureau with reference to Negro housing conditions.

Map No. 1 is an outline map of Charleston showing the location of the Negro population. This population which, according to the 1930 census, was 6,734 or 11% of the whole population, has since that time increased at the rate of 5% per year, and now comprises 1,900 families. The great bulk of this population as shown on the map lives fairly close to the business section, with the greater portion of the balance divided into two parts. One part lives in Wilson Hollow at the extreme east end of the city, and the other lives near the Patrick Street bridge at the extreme west end of the city.

In 1920 the Negro population consisted of approximately 1,025 families (in the survey the family will be taken as a unit). Up to the end of 1933 the Negro families have increased to 1,900 an increase of 875 or approximately 85%. At the same time the number of families provided for by new construction during the same period has been only 235 or approximately 23%.

Charts 1, 2 and 3 explain themselves. Chart 1 shows the general drop in construction since 1923. Chart 2 shows the general drop in housing construction for both white and Negro. An



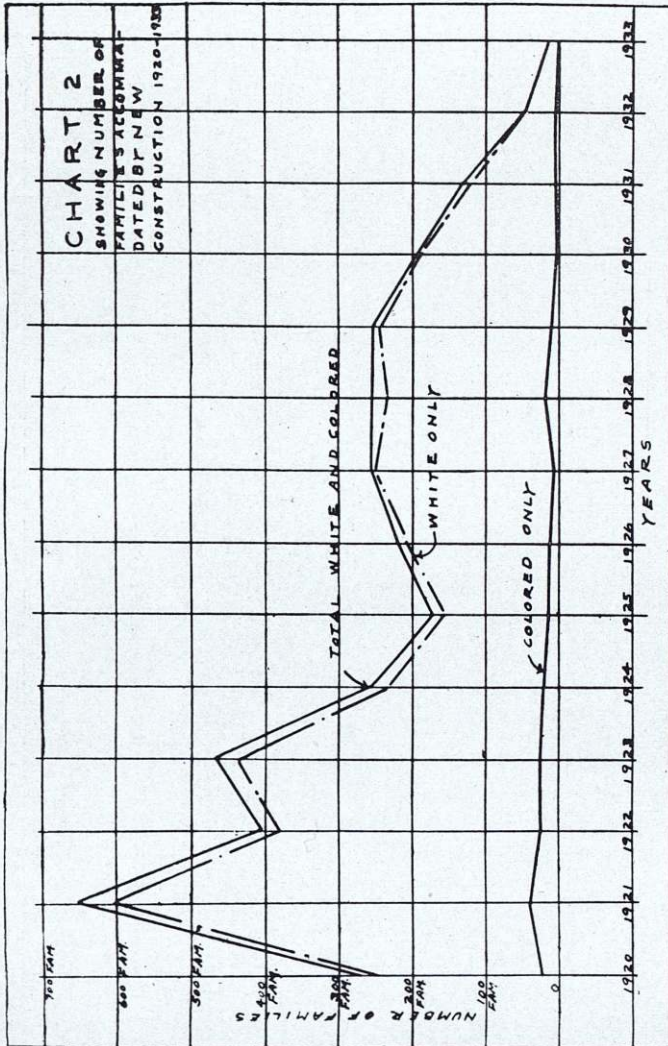
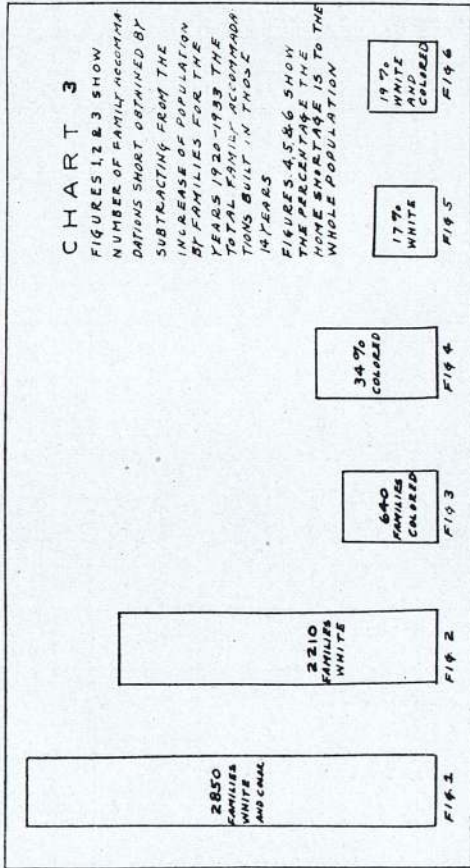
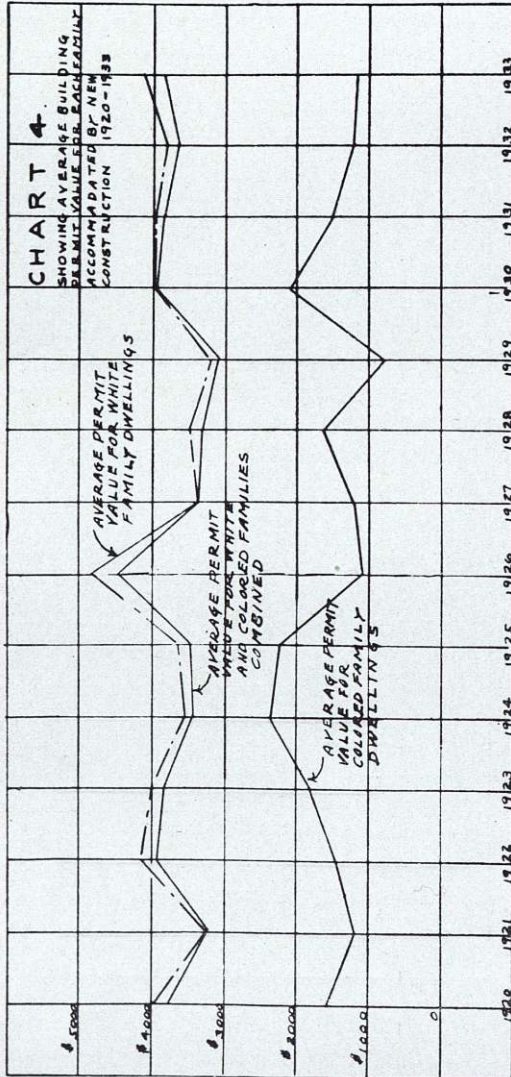


CHART 3

FIGURES 1, 2 & 3 SHOW NUMBER OF FAMILY ACCOMMODATIONS SHORT OBTAINED BY SUBTRACTING FROM THE INCREASE OF POPULATION BY FAMILIES FOR THE YEARS 1920-1933 THE TOTAL FAMILY ACCOMMODATIONS BUILT IN THOSE 14 YEARS

FIGURES 4, 5 & 6 SHOW THE PERCENTAGE THE HOME SHARE TAKE IS TO THE WHOLE POPULATION





analysis of Chart 2 shows that although the Negro population is about 11% of the whole population, and the Negro families are 13% of the total number of families, it has increased as rapidly in proportion with the whole population. The number of Negro families provided with houses through new construction during the years 1920 to 1933 has averaged only 6% of the total provided for white and Negroes.

Chart 3 shows that during the years 1920 to 1933, inclusive, there has been an increase of 640 Negro families more than the increase in building of houses for the Negro. It also shows the percentage of the whole Negro population for which no provisions have been made.

Chart 4 shows the unwholesome conditions caused by the lack of an adequate number of new houses, and added to this was the cheapness of construction of those built. The average permit value of a Negro resident runs as low as \$980, and never exceeds \$2,500. While that of the whites ran as high as \$4,800 and never lower than \$3,300. A further examination revealed that the accommodations for white families average nearly six rooms per family. The average Negro residence was around four rooms per family.

The class of construction built during the period 1920 to 1933 to rent to Negroes is shown in pictures A, B and C, while those built to sell to Negroes are shown in pictures D, E and F.

The charts alone will indicate over-crowding and bad housing conditions. If we add to this fact that practically all dwellings now occupied by Negro families which were in existence prior to 1920 are of frame construction of the cottage type and very cheaply built, and upon whose repair and upkeep very little has been done, the results from a decent housing standard can better be imagined than described.

DOOR TO DOOR SURVEY

In order to get a better picture of housing conditions, a door to door survey was made in the district bounded by Court Street and Elk River, around Jacob and Lewis Streets and in the Patrick Street section. The number of families included in this survey was 490, which represents 26% of the total Negro population and consisted of 85 families who own their homes and 405 families who



A



B



C



E



D



F

rent homes. The families who rent live as follows: 34% live in three-room houses, 32% in four-room houses, 23% in five-room houses, and 11% live in six-room houses. The average number of people per room is 1.2 or about five persons living in four rooms. Among those who own their homes it was found that 11% live in three-room houses, 15% in four-room houses, 35% in five-room houses, and 39% live in six-room houses. The average number of persons per room is 0.8 or about three persons in four rooms. The renters, therefore, are 50% more crowded than home owners and 50% more crowded than decent living standards require.

It was further found that 31% of the houses were in a bad state of repair, requiring either total demolition or very extensive repairs, while 35% were in fair condition requiring a few repairs. The balance, which is 34%, are in good condition with a few minor repairs necessary. The survey also discloses that 35% of the houses are without baths, 3% without toilets, 20% without gas, 41% without electricity, and 10% without water.

CROWDED CONDITION OF DWELLINGS

In addition to the conditions stated above, the Negro population is the victim of another form of over-crowding which is a menace to the health and well-being of the community, and that form is the building of houses too close together. The Charleston area is comparatively large. The average number of persons living in its territory per acre is 13 or approximately three families per acre. The section inhabited by the middle class of white people averages 22 persons per acre or about five families per acre, while that inhabited by the Negroes averages around 36 persons per acre or about eight families per acre.

The following is the average number of persons living in fairly densely settled wards of the city:

Ward 2.....	25 persons per acre
Ward 4.....	32 persons per acre
Ward 7.....	40 persons per acre
Ward 8.....	32 persons per acre
Ward 11.....	26 persons per acre
Ward 12.....	31 persons per acre
Ward 13.....	19 persons per acre

It is to be noted that the bulk of the Negro population live in wards 7, 8, 11 and 12.

This crowded condition is partly due to the unprecedented boom in real estate between the years 1917-1923. During this period it was believed that all property between Elk River and Broad Street, and between Kanawha River and Piedmont Road was business property and part of the Negro population lived in this territory. Being potential business territory led many to believe that lots there were worth as much as \$75 a foot and a large number of the owners hoped to sell at figures even greater. Holding on as they did after the boom began to recede they endeavored to earn as much from the property as possible, and the only way by which this could be accomplished was to crowd as many buildings on the lots as they could possibly stand. Those who now own the property occupied by Negroes have very exaggerated ideas of its value, and as the ability of the occupants to pay rent is not great, rents must necessarily be low. Therefore, owners are not receiving a return on their property sufficient to pay the insurance, taxes, upkeep and a return on the assumed investment. Since insurance and taxes must be paid, the landlords are reluctant about making repairs, which results in bad housing conditions.

We do not believe it is necessary to add more proof than that stated above and in the several pictures included to prove that the time is not far off when steps will have to be taken to improve the housing conditions of the Negro, if not that of the whole population.

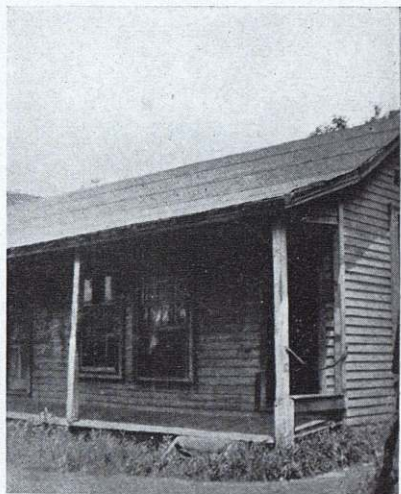
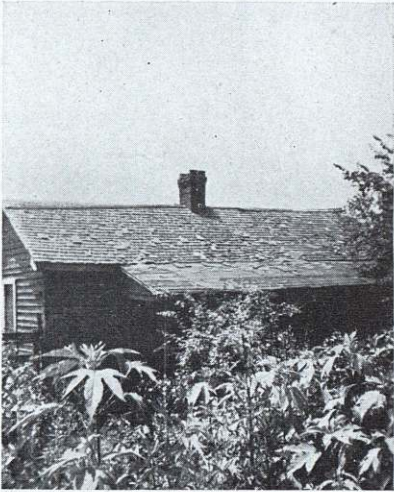
INCOME AND RENT

The income of any family determines the amount of rent it can pay. Usually the rent should be not greater than 30% of the income and preferably not more than 25% of the income. The survey discloses that 26% of the Negro families have incomes less than \$60, 12% have incomes between \$60 and \$80, 17% have incomes between \$80 and \$100, 17% have incomes over \$100 per month, and 30% have no regular incomes. The occupations engaged in by the Negroes are as follows:

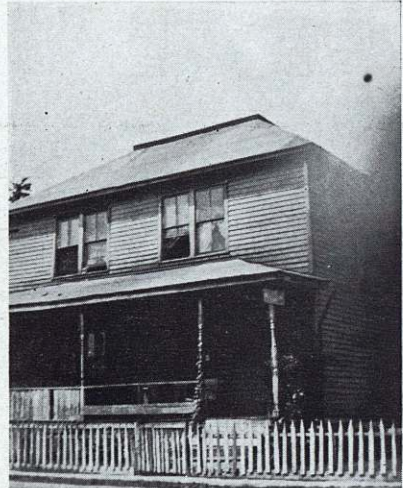
- 35% employed in domestic service
- 21% employed in miscellaneous service
- 11% employed as janitors and porters
- 9% employed as miners
- 8% employed as laborers
- 6% employed as chauffeurs
- 5% employed in government service
- 5% employed as construction mechanics



BAD HOUSING IN CHARLESTON



UPPER RIGHT WITHOUT TOILET, WATER OR ELECTRICITY



IN NEED OF REPAIR

The lowness of the income is borne out by the rent paid; 15% of the renters pay less than \$10 per month, 36% pay between \$10 and \$15 per month, 36% pay between \$15 and \$20 per month, 7% pay between \$20 and \$25 per month, and 6% pay above \$20 per month. The average amount paid per room per month is \$3.67. With 1.2 persons occupying one room, the average rent paid per month per room per person is \$3.30.

The average Negro family consists of 4.1 persons and the average number of rooms required for decent housing for a family of four people is five rooms. By multiplying the average number of persons per family (4.1) by the average amount paid per month per person per room (\$3.30) determines the amount the average Negro family can pay per month for rent.

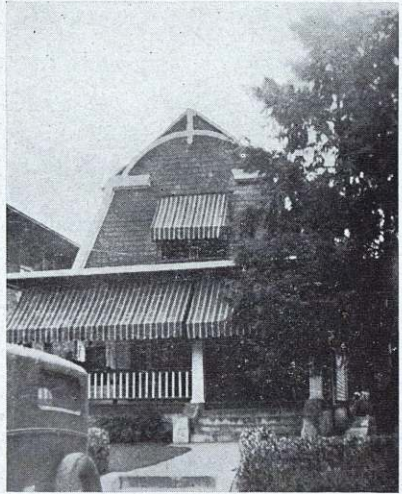
The desideratum is five families per acre of ground, which means in general one family to a lot 50 by 150 in a five-room house paying from \$12 to \$15 per month rent. This would eliminate slums and improve the health of the Negro population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that low cost housing must be provided for the Negro. The question naturally arises, How can low cost housing be provided in the territory now occupied by the bulk of the Negro population?

The survey shows that in the territory occupied by the Negroes the number of vacant dwellings is 4% of the total. Most of these vacant dwellings are not available to Negro renters, as they are reserved for whites. The percentage of vacant dwellings for the use of the Negro is almost negligible, being less than 2%, which further emphasizes the fact that, as time goes on, with the Negro population increasing at the rate of 5% per year, steps must be taken to house the Negro properly in the very immediate future.

Construction must be increased to provide for normal population increase, to take care of the normal obsolescence of buildings, and to make up the deficit caused by lack of construction of the last eight years. To safeguard the community from a health or fire menace standpoint, the demolition of obsolescent homes should be brought about by legal steps if necessary. There are many



A GROUP OF MODERN HOMES

homes which by the expenditure of comparatively small amounts of money could be rebuilt in such a manner as to provide better accommodations than they now provide and at lower rentals due to reduced maintenance costs.

There is an urgent need for a Municipal Board of Housing to carry on studies of all phases of the housing problem, including those on rents, assessments, taxes, health, sanitation, disease and low cost housing. These facts are submitted to the public that they may approve the necessary legislation, assure the constituted authorities of moral backing and urge them to provide the necessary capital for rebuilding and rehabilitating run down properties as well as to erect new dwellings on territory previously unoccupied.

