

# LONGSHOREMEN AND THEIR HOMES

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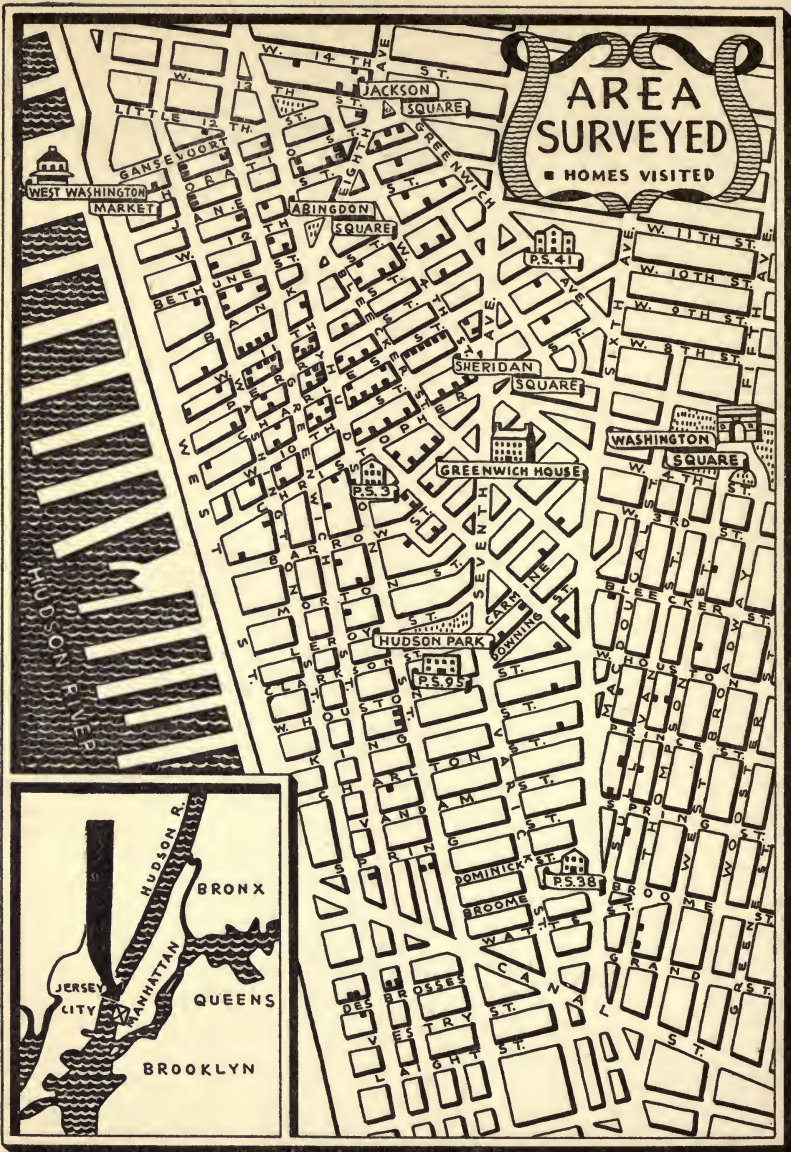
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**LONGSHOREMEN AND THEIR HOMES**

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# LONGSHOREMEN AND THEIR HOMES

*The Story of a Housing "Case" Study  
conducted under the auspices of  
Greenwich House*

Told by  
ELIZABETH OGG

Illustrated by  
BUNJI TAGAWA



GREENWICH HOUSE  
27 BARROW STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

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## FOREWORD

Situated as it is in a neighborhood blighted by some of New York City's worst slums, Greenwich House naturally has sought to do its bit for the housing movement. As its contribution the Settlement offers this study of housing conditions among the longshoremen living in its neighborhood, made possible through a generous grant of funds from the Pierce Foundation.

To Mr. Clarence Woolley, of the Pierce Foundation, goes our sincere appreciation of his very material interest and aid. We are also indebted to Miss Helen Alfred, Executive Director of the National Public Housing Conference, and Mr. George Uhl, of the New York City Housing Authority, for helpful advice and encouraging interest; to the Reverend Daniel Dougherty, of St. Veronica's School, and the Reverend Monsignor John J. Hickey, of St. Joseph's Parish, to the Clyde Mallory Lines, the Savannah Lines, the Morgan Line, the White Star-Cunard Line, and the Anchor Line, for their friendly assistance in securing names of longshoremen; to the Waterfront Research Committee, for information about the longshore industry; and to the many longshoremen who assisted us.

To those young men and women who gave so generously of their time and effort in conducting the survey, we are deeply grateful. Mr. Gardner Cook, who assumed the leading responsibility for the field work, was assisted by Mr. Frank F. Smart, Mrs. Rene Johnson, Mrs. Claire Thorburn, Miss Charlotte

Woodruff, Miss Ruth Fisher, Mr. James Norris, and Mr. Townsend Swalm. Mr. Cook also prepared the greater part of the survey summary. Miss Maida Kolb worked out tables and charts, and Miss Ruth Kessler and Mr. Swalm gave editorial assistance. The survey summary was prepared for publication by Miss Elizabeth Ogg.

MARY ELIZABETH BOOZER  
In charge of the survey for  
Greenwich House

August, 1939



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## I. The Forgotten Man

“One-third of a nation,” once condemned to the slums for life, now look to the government for reprieve. For all over the country, under government auspices, new modern dwellings are going up to rehouse slum dwellers at rents they can afford to pay.

There’s a long row to hoe yet, of course. Public housing in America is still in its infancy. A few years ago it was nothing more than a voice crying in the wilderness. But now at least it’s a familiar presence—visible in a few fortunate city blocks, constantly photographed and headlined in the daily newspapers. And an army of workers—officials, planners, architects, construction engineers, builders, managers—are carrying its banner high.

The danger now is not indifference or opposition, but excess of zeal. The planners have got hold of public housing. With a faraway look in their eyes, dreaming the world of tomorrow, they hatch plan after plan. Plans for administration, plans for getting around money difficulties, plans for scientific lay-out and construction, plans for acquiring sites, plans for enlightened management of completed housing projects. But in the midst of all their plans they tend to overlook the king-pin—or what ought to be the king-pin—of the whole program. That is the tenant.

If we don’t watch out, the tenant will become housing’s forgotten man. The real needs of the people who are to live in America’s new government-built dwellings ought to be one of the chief considerations in planning those dwellings. But what do we find? When there is a choice between a site in the suburbs and a site in the heart of a city, what decides the choice? Ten to one it is the question of cost, or the question of quick

and easy as against long and complicated acquisition. The prospective tenants' needs in the matter of site locations are not consulted.

But what *are* the needs of prospective tenants of public housing? The fact is that we have given them so little thought, apart from establishing minimum standards of health and comfort, that no one really knows the answer to that question. It was with the idea of finding at least a partial answer to it—an answer for one occupational group in one section of New York City—that Greenwich House undertook to investigate the housing conditions of longshoremen in Greenwich Village in the spring of 1938.

This booklet presents the findings of that investigation. It is a study of 278 longshoremen all of whom, in 1938, were living on the Lower West Side waterfront between 14th Street and Desbrosses Street, just below Canal Street. It describes the conditions under which these men work, the kind of people they are, the kind of houses they live in, and the relation between their housing and their work. It demonstrates a specific housing need.

Since the conditions of longshoremen's work are pretty much the same in all coastal cities of any size (except on the West Coast, where some improvements have been won), the need these findings reveal is obviously not confined to our 278 cases. The quality of available housing and the cost of living vary in different cities; some individual longshoremen may make quite a go of things; but longshoremen as a group are beset everywhere by the major difficulty our study shows. Everywhere their work imposes upon them a common need in the matter of housing.

How to meet that need it is the business of housing officials

to decide. We are not trying to do their job for them. We are not even making a plea for a solution designed specifically for longshoremen—in other words, housing projects for one occupational group.

What we *are* concerned to do is, first, to show clearly the conditions in one locality among one group of workers—conditions we hope the City Housing Authority will soon set out to remedy. And, second, to focus the attention of both the officials who determine policies and the public who elect the officials on the whole broad question of the relation of housing to the needs of the people. We should like to point out that people's housing needs are not merely hygienic and economic, but occupational and social as well. We should like to see further studies made of the needs of other occupational groups. And, finally, when enough information has been gathered to be significant for large sections of our under-privileged citizens, we should like to see such information used as one of the guiding factors in planning both our urban and rural public housing.

If this limited survey succeeds, first, in stimulating action in one locality and, second, in bringing back into the housing laboratory that forgotten man—the tenant—it will have served its double purpose. It will then remain for the public everywhere to demand an adequate remedy for the tenant's condition and for the experts to provide it.

## II. Getting Acquainted

You will want to know first of all who conducted this survey and how. In the spring of 1938 Greenwich House appointed a survey committee. After talking with experts in the housing field and with two intelligent local longshoremen, the committee drew up a plan of action and got to work.

## PERSONNEL

First they selected volunteer investigators — all experienced workers, qualified by special training to handle the inquiry and genuinely interested in its aims. Two of the men had had training in social work and sociology and had helped with other surveys. They were also familiar with the Manhattan waterfront and its problems. Four of the women interviewers qualified for similar reasons, and two were especially valuable because they lived near the waterfront and were married to waterfront workers. In all there were eight investigators.

## FINDING THE FORGOTTEN MEN

To get the names of longshoremen on whom to call, the committee used as many sources as possible so that there would be a wide sampling of the waterfront neighborhood. From Greenwich House registers, from shipping companies with docks between 14th Street and Canal Street, and from several of the Roman Catholic parochial schools, they secured names as follows:

Greenwich House files . . . . .	approximately	125	names
Morgan Line (Southern Pacific S. S. Co.) . . . . .	“	72	“
Clyde Mallory Line . . . . .	“	92	“
Savannah Line . . . . .	“	20	“
Cunard Line . . . . .	“	290	“
Anchor Line . . . . .	“	40	“
St. Veronica's School . . . . .	“	50	“
St. Joseph's School . . . . .	“	3	“
		<hr/>	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	“	692 “

We had better look at these sources fairly closely at the outset. The names in the Greenwich House files had originally been gathered when some family member, usually a child, had made use of a service or activity offered there. The names from the shipping companies came from their regular rosters of employees. The names from the parochial schools were taken by the priests in charge who were interested in helping this housing study.

Naturally there were a number of names common to two or more sources, and each source furnished some addresses which turned out to be no good. Many longshoremen had moved to new addresses since the time the shipping companies had registered them, and many of the fathers of school children turned out to be workers in some other industry. (For some reason the children had told their teachers that their fathers were longshoremen when actually they were not!) But despite inaccuracies in some of the addresses and occupations listed, the investigators tracked down and interviewed a fair proportion of the total list.

We realized, of course, that, since both the Greenwich House and parochial school names came from children, we were likely to have a large number of "family" men in the final round-up. And so we did. For 217 longshoremen who are family heads, 19 sons or other relatives living with their families, and 42 independent single longshoremen form the basis of this study.

### TIME AND SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

To find these men the investigators ranged from 14th Street south to Desbrosses Street, and from West Street, abutting on the piers, to Sixth Avenue north of Washington Square and West Broadway south of Washington Square (see frontispiece

map). They sallied forth to their first calls on February 1st, 1938, and by July 15th of the same year had turned in their last reports. The survey thus covers only one season of the year, and we shall see later that this has some bearing on the question of the earnings of the longshoremen interviewed.

## SURVEY METHODS

The survey committee decided that a personal interview in the home would be the best method of getting information. Competent interviewers could thus learn facts at first-hand through talking with various members of the family and at the same time studying the homes. And the families would be able to express themselves more freely than they would have been if summoned to some formal conference. Social workers will bear witness that much information that cannot be foreseen usually comes out in a friendly and informal visit. And so it turned out. As a matter of fact, most of the families seemed to enjoy being interviewed, once they were sure of the purpose and auspices of the survey. Only six families refused to talk to the interviewers, and only eight were too hesitant or evasive to warrant including any information they offered in this report. In fact in many instances the families were so anxious to go on talking that, for lack of time, the interviewers had to cut the visits short.

Naturally in the course of talking with 278 longshoremen and their families, our interviewers picked up a good deal of general information about them. Some of this information has only an indirect bearing on the housing question. We shall, however, give a straightforward account of the facts the survey turned up. And we shall leave all discussion of what those facts mean in relation to housing, and what can be done about them,



to the concluding section of this pamphlet. In other words, we shall let you hear the story through without interruption before we begin to argue about its significance. You will then be able to judge for yourself how valid our arguments are. But before we begin to tell the story of our own survey, we had better take a brief look at the longshore industry as a whole.

### III. The Shape-Up

In this section we want to give a thumb-nail sketch of the longshoring industry as it exists in New York City and other coast towns today.\* Then we shall be able to see how our 278 "cases" fit into the general picture of the industry.

#### WEST STREET — 8 A.M.

Down by the yawning entrance of a Chelsea Pier on West Street we can meet a group of longshoremen any day of the week. Clad in brown lumber jackets in winter, colored shirts in summer, they gather before the pier gates just before eight in the morning—often several hundred of them. They are there to shift cargo, if they can get the chance—to unload and load the vessel which has already docked or may be due to dock in a few hours at that particular pier.

But between the longshoremen and the job he is so eager to get stands another character, not to be confused with the longshoreman—the stevedore. Promptly at five minutes before eight the stevedore (or his foreman) strides out from a pier office to the great entrance doors, blowing a whistle. The huddle of expectant men shifts, takes on the shape of a horse-shoe, three

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\*For greater detail, see *Cargo Handling and Longshore Labor Conditions*, by Boris Stern, Bulletin No. 550, U. S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1932. See also *The Waterfront Labor Problem*, by Edward E. Swanstrom, Fordham University Press 1938.

and four men deep, facing the doors. Then the stevedore begins to shout, "Number three! Number seven! Number ten!" and so on. As he calls each number a group of twenty men breaks away from the horse-shoe and shuffles off on to the pier. Each group of twenty is a regular gang, men who always work together—eight in the hold, three on deck working the winches, eight on the pier, and one foreman or "hatch boss", as a rule. (Each hold or hatch of a ship is supposed to have one gang to work it, and the number of holds varies from two to eight according to the size of the ship.) After he has selected the gangs, the stevedore goes round the horse-shoe, nodding here and there to a man—an "extra" who is being taken on to help the regular gangs. All of these men, whether regular gangs or extras, are hired by the hour and paid by the hour. And they are never sure that their work will last longer than two hours.

Such is the shape-up system of hiring the men needed to load and unload a ship. It is a hangover from times gone by when ships were loaded entirely by hand. In those days the stevedore wanted to hire the biggest and strongest men he could find. He therefore grouped them in a semi-circle so that he could look them over and pick them by their build. Long-shoremen still need stout hearts and strong muscles, for a bag of Cuban sugar weighs 330 pounds and a bale of American cotton 500 pounds. And they sometimes have to shift such loads by hand. But with the many mechanical aids to long-shoring in use today, unusual physical strength is no longer a necessity. Nevertheless the old-fashioned system of hiring goes on—to the shipping companies a convenience but to the long-shoremen a curse.

The irony of it is that though two or three hundred men may be turned away from one pier, another pier, swamped with an

unexpected volume of cargo, may be short of hands. But since as a rule all piers "shape" at the same hours (at 7.55 A.M., 12.55 P.M., and 6.55 P.M. in New York City), when a man is turned away from one pier it is too late for him to try and get work at another.

### ALTERNATIVES TO THE SHAPE-UP

Attempts have been made, particularly in European sea-ports and on the West coast of the United States, to improve on this haphazard method of hiring by ruling that no longshoremen may work on the waterfront without being registered at a central bureau, and that no employer may hire longshore labor except through the central bureau. The central bureau thus



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learns where workers are needed throughout the entire port and can send the right number of workers to each pier. In this way all the waterfront workers are apt to get more rather than less work and to get it more regularly. Although they never know how their hours of work will fall in any given week, most of them can count on a definite minimum number of hours of work per week. They thus cease to be "casual" laborers—men who have no guarantee of work whatever beyond a given day. Such systems are called "decasualization" of a port, and they do much to improve a bad situation.

But complete decasualization of the longshore industry (in the sense that every worker may have absolutely regular hours of work) is really a pipe-dream. For very little can be done to regulate the demand for longshore labor. Ships will continue to dock in greater numbers at one time than at another and to carry the amount of cargo, no more and no less, that the shipping companies' customers happen to have blessed them with. In New York City, for instance, the number of tons of incoming cargo has sometimes been three and a half times as great in one week as it was in another, and the number of tons of outgoing cargo four and a half times as great. Rough estimates of the seasonal flow of goods could be made. But tide, storm and fog will always interfere with the schedule. So you see how uncertain the longshoreman's lot is bound to be.

### SIDELIGHTS ON THE SHAPE-UP

A fair number of longshoremen, however, manage to get rid of part of the uncertainty of their trade. A steady gang sticks to one pier and has an agreement with the stevedore that they will get work whenever there is any on that pier. Although the agreement is unwritten and they cannot enforce it, the gang feel that it gives them some security. This unofficial

“decasualization” is the only kind practiced in New York City. It undoubtedly stabilizes work and income to some extent for a great many men. It serves to stabilize almost completely the handling of cargoes of coastwise ships, which arrive and depart on pretty regular schedules with fairly constant loads. But, being unofficial and dependent on the good will of private individuals, it is unfortunately open to graft.

Where does the graft come in? It may start with the hiring stevedore. The gang foreman or hatch boss (who in New York City is usually allowed to select his own men) may be another offender. Or perhaps the business agent of one of the locals of the longshoremen’s union is present at a shape-up to see that only union men are hired (in accordance with the union contract): he may “speak for” certain men for a consideration. Stevedore, hatch boss, union agent—these men hold the fate of others in their hands. Each may be an honest man, who selects certain men because he has a genuine liking for them or knows them to be good workers. Or he may be the kind of man who likes to be offered an occasional drink or a cigar and remembers these favors at the appropriate time. Or he may go as far as to demand a fixed “kickback” from the men’s earnings.

It is difficult to discover the extent of this kickback racket on the waterfront since it necessarily goes on under cover. Even those who suffer under it—the rank and file longshoremen—are afraid to make revelations since to do so may cost them their jobs. But at all events, when we come to consider what longshoremen earn, we should remember that this racket takes its toll of some, if not all, longshore wages.

### BETWEEN SHAPES

If hope, or promising brawn, or a kickback pledge, or being in with the “right” people has failed to produce a job for a

man at the early morning shape, what does he do? He may go home, if it's near enough. If it isn't, he has no choice but to hang around in a bar-room, pool room or drug-store near the waterfront. In some of these places there are blackboards announcing the time and place of the arrival of ships. Literate longshoremen can also keep themselves posted by following the shipping reports in the daily newspapers. Many, however, depend on a sort of grapevine system, whereby news of a ship's arrival is passed along by word of mouth. But the news, however they get it, never gives them any idea of how much cargo will have to be shifted or how many men are likely to be hired. So there is nothing for the man who lost out at the morning shape to do but to hang around for the afternoon shape and, if he fails again to get a job, for the evening shape.

### THE STEVEDORE

In the West the terms "stevedore" and "longshoreman" are interchangeable, but in the East they are clearly distinguished. In the East the stevedore is a man (or rather a firm) who contracts with a shipping company to load and unload its ships—or one of its ships—and who then hires the labor needed to do the job. Or he may be the man who runs a stevedoring department for the shipping company itself. There are several old and highly respectable stevedoring firms on the New York waterfronts. These firms would never countenance any form of graft on the part of their foremen. Others unfortunately are neither so old nor so highly respectable and the longshoreman has to pay whatever kickback their foremen think they can get away with.

But apart from the vexed question of graft, what kind of work conditions does the stevedore impose on the longshore-



**They live in homes like these . . .**

man? The worst condition is speed-up. Though the longshoreman is paid by the hour (except in one or two ports where there are piece rates for cotton and tobacco), the stevedore is paid by the ton of cargo moved. Here of course are two irreconcilable points of view. The amount of money the stevedore gets is fixed, and the more hours he has to pay his helpers, the smaller grows his margin of profit and, if the job takes too long, his margin of profit will disappear altogether. No wonder he is constantly pushing his men.

### IRREGULAR WORK

Nevertheless, though their work is extremely heavy, sometimes dangerous, and always done under pressure, most longshoremen are willing to stick at it for unbelievably long stretches. Even today men sometimes put in twenty to thirty hours of uninterrupted work, except for short meal periods. They do this because jobs are hard to get and never last, and they naturally want to make as much money as they can while they have the chance. By doing such long stretches of work they earn overtime pay (for all hours other than 8 A.M. to 12 noon and 1 P.M. to 5 P.M. on weekdays, except Saturday afternoon, and for all Sunday hours). Many longshoremen prefer to work at least a twelve- to sixteen-hour day for two or three days, collect their extra pay and then take a rest. And if they could only be sure of three such work days per week, they probably would not complain of the irregularity of their hours.

### THE UNIONS PLAY THEIR PART

When we spoke of a man's chances of getting a job at a shape-up, we mentioned union agents. All New York City longshoremen belong to the International Longshoremen's Association, an in-



ternational craft union affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and headed by Joseph P. Ryan. This union still controls most of the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico ports.

The ILA's chief aims have been a high hourly pay rate and the closed shop. It has been successful in achieving both. Of course a high hourly rate naturally sounds fine to the man looking for longshore work. And the closed shop suggests to him that he has only to join the union to land a job. Yet in the absence of any improvement in the system of hiring and in general working conditions, neither the high hourly rate nor the closed shop can guarantee security or a living annual wage to the average worker. For the ILA accepts into its membership any man who can pay the \$100 initiation fee — even unemployed men from miscellaneous trades who turn to the waterfront in order to have another iron in the fire. Consequently the Association's membership has increased out of all proportion to the demand for longshore labor. According to the 1930 census there were 21,567 longshoremen and stevedores in New York City—11,813 in Brooklyn, 8,521 in Manhattan, 488 in Richmond, 466 in Queens and 279 in the Bronx. But there were not nearly enough jobs for all of them, even at that time. And the decline of both foreign and domestic shipping in the intervening years has made the jobs still fewer. In the process of seeing that the closed shop clause in their contract with the stevedores is carried out, union officials have tended to see that the union members they favored got what jobs were to be had. Those who are "in" with the powers that be therefore benefit both from the high hourly rate and from plenty of hours of work. Those who are not "in" must make what shift they can with a very few hours.

What jobs there are, however, could, through union control, be staggered. This is the purpose of the union-controlled hiring

halls on the West Coast. There the shape-up has vanished into history, and instead the men await their calls in heated buildings where books, music and games offer them more wholesome pastimes than the waterfront bar-rooms. The union hands out jobs in strict rotation and though a man has the right to refuse a job, if he does so he goes down to the bottom of the list to wait his turn again, just as he would if he accepted the offer.

A system of hiring like this seems fair enough, but it has yet to become the rule in East Coast ports. As we turn now to our 278 actual "cases," we shall see that longshoremen on the Lower West Side in Manhattan are still suffering under the old shape-up system, with all its uncertainties and injustices.

#### IV. Longshore Families

What kind of people were the longshoremen we visited? Over three-fourths (217) were family men. We talked also with 19 sons or other relatives who lived in these families and worked on the docks and with 42 single men living independently. In every family several members took part in the interview and often interested neighbors threw in a helpful word.

#### FAMILY HEADS

The average age of the men with families was 42.\* The majority

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\*Throughout this pamphlet we use the term "average" because it is easily understood by the layman. But all our "averages" for our longshoremen are based, not upon "means," but upon "medians." The "mean" is found, in this case, by adding all the ages together and dividing by the number of men. The "median," on the other hand, is the age we find at the halfway point in going down the list of men; in other words, it is the age of the middle man on the list. In dealing with such small groups as ours, statisticians agree that the median gives a safer deduction than the mean.

For age groups, see Appendix, Table 1.



...They might have homes like these.

of them were middle-aged, for most of them had become longshoremen during or soon after the World War, when there was plenty of work on the piers and a great demand for men. They had remained at this trade in spite of its decline because there was nothing else for them to do and because they went on hoping for a revival of trade and improved conditions on the piers. The average family longshoreman had worked at his trade for fourteen years.†

### LONGTIME RESIDENTS

Although the survey schedule did not include the question, "How long have you lived in this neighborhood?", our interviewers obtained and recorded this information in most cases. In spite of the casual nature of longshore work and the transient character of New York City's population, they found that roughly 75 per cent of our families had lived in Greenwich Village for more than ten years. In some cases both the husband and the wife had been born in the Village. Whatever may be the truth about longshoremen in general, the length of both service on the docks and residence in the neighborhood showed our group, at least, to be a pretty stable one.

### FAMILY GROUPS

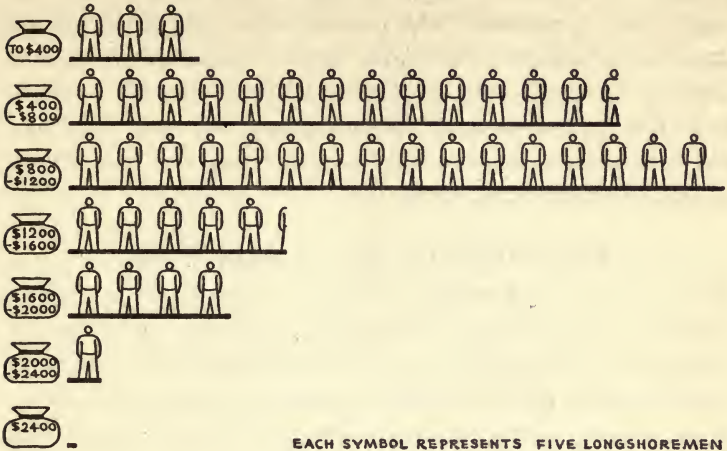
Most of the families had three, four or five members, as the chart opposite shows.\* Only 11.5 per cent were childless, and these were nearly all young, newly married couples. Possibly many of the families with children would have been larger if sons and daughters no longer living at home had been counted. But our figures do not include these departed rela-

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†See Appendix, Table 5.

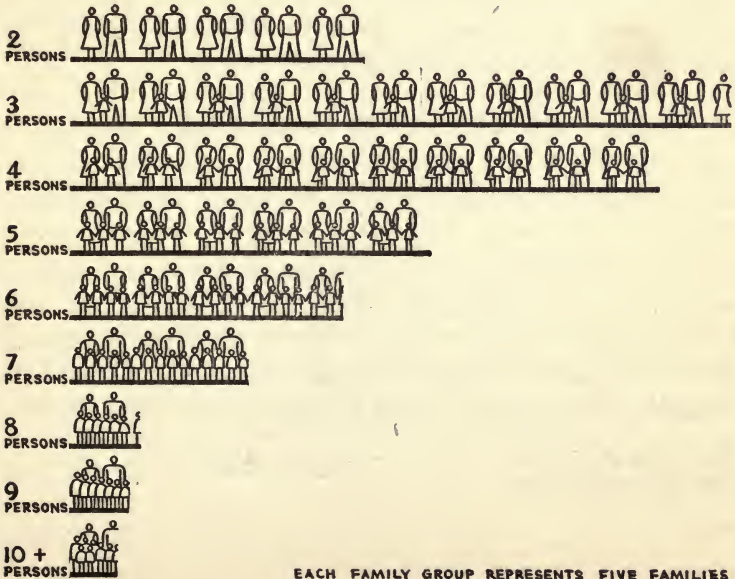
\*See also Appendix, Table 4.

# ANNUAL INCOMES OF 217 FAMILIES



EACH SYMBOL REPRESENTS FIVE LONGSHOREMEN

# SIZE OF 217 FAMILIES



EACH FAMILY GROUP REPRESENTS FIVE FAMILIES

tives. Most of the children, we found, fell into the school age group.† So it was no wonder that parents often spoke of how much they appreciated the conveniently located schools in Greenwich Village. Only 23 per cent of the children were of working age, and only 40 per cent of this number actually had jobs. Parents pointed out that about the time their sons and daughters went to work, most of them also got married and moved away from home.

### IRISH-AMERICANS TO THE FORE

The people of Greenwich Village are now predominantly Italian in origin, and yet a majority of our family longshoremen, we found, were of Irish descent. Traditionally this was to be expected, since the early Irish immigrants took over the waterfront, in many instances displacing Negroes. But in recent years the "waterfront Irish" have been giving way to other nationality or racial groups, notably the Negroes, who are again seeking work on the docks, the Italians and the Croatians. Despite the fact that very few Croatians live in the Village as a whole, we found 22 longshore families of Croatian origin.\*

### NATIONALITY BARRIERS

How did all of these people of different national origins get along together? Not so well. Time and again, the Irish-Americans told interviewers that they did not like to live with or associate with Italians, but the Italians expressed no such feeling toward the Irish or any other group. Interviewers were struck by the strong feeling of superiority of the Irish-Americans, both in neighborhood life and in labor situations on the piers. Probably much of this feeling springs from the fact that in

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†See Appendix, Table 7.

\*See Appendix, Table 8.

times past the Irish were dominant on all New York piers and especially in nearby Chelsea. They resent the intrusion of the Italians, who, they say, are in part to blame for the present bad conditions on the piers. The men's natural tendency to separate themselves into nationality groups, the employers' practice of separating them that way so that they will compete with one another, and the ILA's method of organizing them in locals according to nationality, have all been forces preventing understanding and increasing prejudice.

Yet, despite nationality prejudices, the various longshore groups do live together in the same neighborhood without any serious consequences and mingle at settlement houses, churches and schools. As their children grow up together and are educated in the same schools it is possible that their differences will gradually be ironed out.

### VARIETY OF RELIGIONS

Religion as well as nationality can be a dividing or a harmonizing factor in a community. Of our 217 families, 207 were Roman Catholic, 8 Protestant and 2 Greek Orthodox. We were not surprised to find so many Roman Catholics, since the majority of our cases were of Irish or Italian background. Their religion was typical of the entire neighborhood and so their social and cultural life like that of the entire neighborhood centered round the Roman Catholic Church.

### CITIZENS AND ALIENS

Another sidelight was on the question of citizenship. Just about 82 per cent of the 217 family heads (178 of them) were already citizens. 13 per cent had taken out first papers, and 5 per cent were still aliens. Most of the aliens were Croatians who had migrated to the United States at a later date than the other

groups. In nearly every case the Croatians seemed much less proficient in the English language than the others and, to a man, much less Americanized. They could not understand the purpose of this survey or the problem of housing at all. In many ways their attitude was that of the peasant.

These, then, were the families whose housing conditions and whose housing needs we had set out to investigate. Let's see first of all what their income was so that we can understand what rents they could afford to pay.

## V. What Longshoremen Earn

What did our family men earn toward meeting the needs of themselves, their wives and children?

### RATES OF PAY

A longshoreman's pay depends on the type of ship he works. Men at piers where trans-oceanic ships dock are called "deep-water" men and get \$1.05 per hour between 8 A.M. and 5 P.M. and \$1.60 per hour for overtime work and on holidays or Saturday afternoons. Those on piers where coastwise ships dock are "coastwise" men and receive \$.95 per hour and \$1.50 for overtime. Sometimes the men earn extra pay for handling offensive or dangerous cargoes such as creosote logs, wet hides and explosives.

### ANNUAL EARNINGS

The hourly rates, however, are far from being a guide to the longshoremen's income. For, as we have seen, few of them get steady work and sometimes their earnings are cut down by "kickbacks." The chart on page 27\* shows the average yearly incomes we found among our family men. The average

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\*See also Appendix, Table 2.



annual income for the whole group was \$900. This is too low an annual income to provide a family with adequate housing in New York City at commercial rents. Furthermore, about 39 per cent of the families had an annual income of less than \$800. Only 11.5 per cent, a little more than a tenth of the whole group, earned over \$1600 a year.

Let's try translating these incomes into hours of work. If we average the \$1.05 "deep water" hourly rate and the \$.95 "coast-wise" hourly rate, we get a rate of \$1 per hour. Figuring on this rate, we find that the average longshoremen in our group worked only 1019 hours in an entire year. (If we assumed that he earned part of his income from overtime work at a higher rate of pay, then the number of hours he worked in a year would turn out to be still less.) At best this means he did only half-time work, for a 40-hour week would amount to 2080 hours per year and on a straight-time basis would yield an income of \$2080.

### WHAT ABOUT THE WEEKLY BUDGET?

Half-time work would not be so bad if it were not so irregular. Longshoremen must learn to manage not only on a low yearly income but on a highly irregular weekly one. For they may earn \$40 one week and absolutely nothing the next. In fact, 20 per cent of the men we interviewed had earned nothing at all the week before.\* The reasons for this irregularity in income lie in the haphazard conditions we described in our section on the shape-up.

### SEASONAL VARIATIONS

If we do a little calculating with the figures given in Table 3 in the Appendix, we find that the average of our longshoremen's

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\*See Appendix, Table 3.

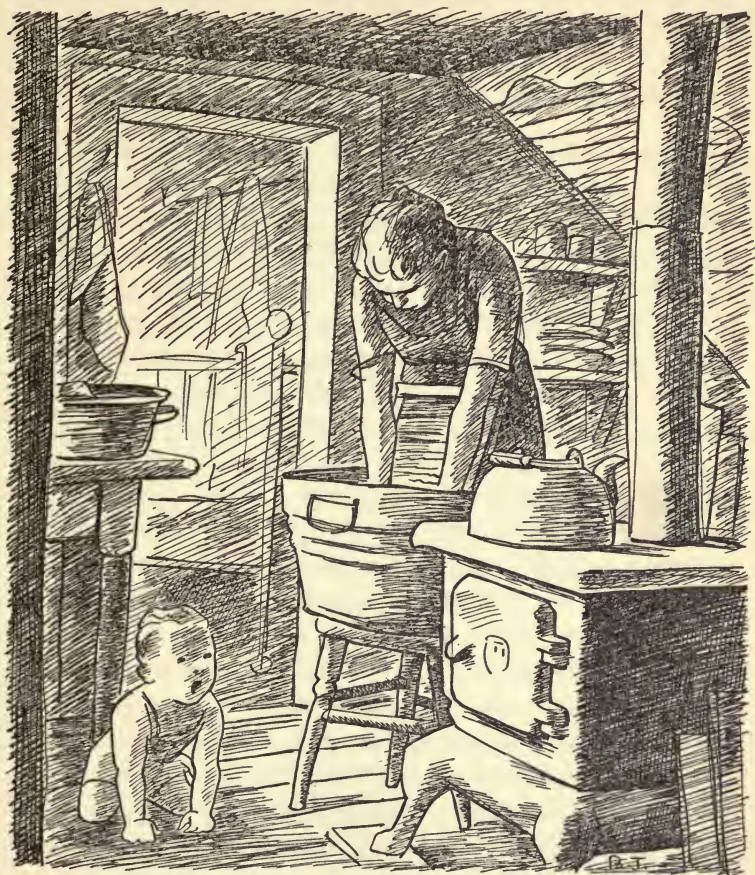
"last week's pay" is \$15. Now the average annual income of \$900 suggests a weekly wage somewhat higher than this. This is a reminder of the seasonal nature of the longshoremen's work. Since we began the survey on February 1, 1938 and completed it by July 15, 1938, the annual income estimates our longshoremen gave covered part of 1937 and part of 1938, while their "last week's pay" was of course earned in 1938. The last few months of 1937, like most fall seasons, were relatively good ones on the piers, but June and July of 1938 like most summer seasons were fairly slack. (October is usually the best month and July the worst.) This explains why the annual incomes our longshoremen quoted were greater than the "last week's pay" average would lead one to expect. If we had made the survey at another time of year, the weekly figures might be quite different but the average for the year would be about the same.

(The period studied in our survey, though not an accurate basis for calculating annual income, was, however, not far out of line. For it covered two work seasons for longshoremen: spring and part of summer. And the picture of their weekly earnings is more nearly accurate as an average than if we had used only one season, since work is usually better in the spring than it is in the summer.)

### PAYING THE RENT IS A PROBLEM

From the point of view of housing, the irregularity of the longshoremen's weekly earnings is a great inconvenience, not to say hardship. For it means that families are often unable to pay rent when it is due and must rely on their landlord's good will to carry them during lean periods. As a rule, landlords in the waterfront neighborhood seem willing to allow moratoriums on rent payments for a month or even longer, for they know

that when work picks up the longshoremen will pay the back rent as soon as possible. There are very few evictions for non-payment of rent. At least 26 families told our interviewers that they would never think of moving out of a neighborhood where



**A tenement kitchen makes work . . .**

they were well known to their landlord and grocer unless they were sure they could have such consideration elsewhere. In fact, they asked whether the management of a government housing project would be willing to accept irregular monthly rent payments provided, of course, the rent were paid in full over a year's time.

### IF THERE ARE SEVERAL BREADWINNERS . . .

Families with an income from more than one of their members have of course greater economic security than those with only one breadwinner. In 61 of our 217 families more than one member was working. Among these families the average family income was \$1550 a year, which is very much higher than the average yearly income we arrived at for the whole group. In the 61 families, however, the average yearly income of the longshoreman head of the family was only \$780, as compared with the \$900 figure for the entire group. The average income of other family members was \$18 a week when they were working. But unemployment and the seasonal nature of their work reduced their annual income to an average figure of \$770.

These 61 families needed their higher incomes because they were large. They averaged 6 persons per family, whereas the average for our whole group was 4 persons. Usually it was a son or daughter who went to work, seldom the wife. And parents reminded our interviewers more than once that the working son or daughter did not turn over his or her entire earnings to the family but merely paid for room and board.

Although we have not yet come to a discussion of the homes our "cases" lived in, we may as well mention here that, despite their higher annual income, the 61 larger families lived in just about the same kind of homes as the others. They required

larger apartments and they had accordingly to pay more rent. Their average rent was \$26 a month for an average home of five rooms, whereas the average rent for the entire group of 217 families was \$23 a month for an average home of four rooms. But the facilities and conditions in the homes of the 61 large families, as we shall see, were just as poor as they were for the group as a whole.

### SINGLE MEN

In contrast to these 61 large families, we interviewed 42 single longshoremen. It is worth repeating that a proportion of 42 single to 217 family men is probably not at all typical throughout the longshore industry, since one of our largest sources was fathers' names registered by children. You might think that single men, being free from family responsibilities, would be in a better financial position than our other "cases." But we did not find that they were. Very few of our single men were earning even good longshore wages. The average annual income for the 42 was between \$660 and \$710. Nevertheless most of these single men had worked on the docks from five to fifteen years, and 86 per cent of them intended to go on working there. In spite of their low incomes, only one of them had ever been on public relief.

### RELIEF — THE LAST RESORT

Relief, for the families as well as the single longshoremen, was only a last desperate resort, dreaded and avoided as long as possible. You would expect that longshore families, with their low and irregular income, casual employment and high accident rate, would often have to go on relief. But among our "cases" this was not so. Only 29.3 per cent of all the families interviewed had ever been on relief, and only 5.5 per cent had re-

ceived relief during the twelve months preceding the survey.

When they did have to apply for relief, they accepted it only for a short time, for four-fifths of the families who had ever been on relief were on for less than one year; in fact, the average length of time on relief was five months. This means that at any given time in the year preceding the survey, even less than 5.5 per cent of the families were on relief, since not all were on at the same time. (These figures compare favorably with the figures for New York City as a whole. For during the same period an average of 16 per cent of the city's total population was continuously on home and work relief.)

The longshoremen's general attitude toward relief strongly impressed our interviewers. Invariably there was a vehement dislike of accepting it, even when they needed it, and they tried every possible way of getting along without it. Repeatedly families stated with obvious pride that they had never been on relief. And they dreaded the thought of ever coming to the pass where they would have to take it, even in the form of work relief.

### IN CASE OF ACCIDENT

We mentioned above the longshoremen's high accident rate. This, too, has an effect on income. Of our family men 24 per cent had lost time from work because of sickness or accident during the preceding year; 13.8 per cent had lost time because of industrial accidents — an inexcusably high percentage. But only 8.7 per cent—about two-thirds of those who had had accidents—received workmen's compensation. The most common accidents were crushed fingers and feet and strained backs. When a man is getting compensation, things are not so bad; it is when he is incapacitated but receives nothing that the family is hard put to it. The average time lost from work by those who

suffered accidents without compensation during the year was six weeks. Families stated that, although they had to put up with hardships, they managed to get along during such periods by skimping on food and clothing and by making use of their



.....Why not a modern kitchen?

credit established through long residence in the neighborhood. Often, as in the case of prolonged unemployment, the landlord allowed the family as much as a month's moratorium on the rent payments, so that they could get back on their feet again after such a stroke of ill luck.

Despite all the hazards of the industry and its low returns, our longshoremen, we found, were pretty well wedded to their trade. When asked, "Do you plan to continue to work on the docks?", 85.7 per cent of the 217 longshoremen in the family group stated that they did. The other 14.3 per cent said they did not want to do so, but admitted that they had no definite prospect of getting other work and so probably they, like the others, would stick to the docks. Our general impression was that most of the men had every intention of making a living as longshoremen as long as possible. They felt it was better for them to take what dock work they could get, even with the low annual income, than to change occupations and run the risk of having no work at all. Once they left the industry their places would of course immediately be filled from the present over-supply of labor, and it would be extremely difficult and expensive to get back into the International Longshoremen's Association.

### THINKING OF THE FUTURE


Considering the lowness and irregularity of their income, you probably would not suspect that our longshoremen carried relatively high life insurance. But of the 217 families, 140 carried some kind of insurance, usually the industrial type which is paid in small weekly premiums. We could not discover the amount of insurance carried in all cases, but 66 of the families told of amounts which varied from \$1,000 to over \$6,000.\*

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\*See Appendix, Table 6.



## RENT (MONTHLY)

NONE\* 


EACH  REPRESENTS TEN FAMILIES

\$10-15 

\$15-25           

\$25-35      

\$35-45   

\$45-55 

\$55+ 

\* SERVED AS JANITORS

Almost all of them explained that they carried this insurance as a protection against the costs of funerals and the economic problems that arise with the death of some member of the family, especially the head. Whether or not it is advisable for families of such low income to buy so much insurance, or to buy insurance at all, is an open question. Whether or not they get their money's worth is another. But since they do buy insurance and thereby reduce the net income they have to spend on housing and other necessities, we must take note of the fact.

The income of longshoremen is the key to their housing problem. They live in poor houses for the very plain reason that they do not earn enough to pay the rents at present demanded for adequate housing. Let's look now into the homes they get for their money.

## VI. Home, Sweet Home

What kind of housing were these 217 longshoremen getting for the rent they paid? Was it a good return for their money? The chart on page 39† shows the rentals they paid. It is well known that for less than \$30 monthly you cannot rent good housing in New York City. And yet 72.8 per cent of the group paid less than \$30 a month for rent. Indeed, half of the families paid less than \$23. They paid these low rents not because they thought they were getting apartment bargains but simply because they could not afford to pay more. A glance back at the chart on page 27 will remind you of why they could not afford to pay more. On the average, they paid more than one-fourth of their income for rent. This did not include gas, electricity or, in many cases, heating.

These 217 families, consisting of 959 persons, lived in 908 rooms—slightly more than one person per room. At first glance that doesn't seem at all bad, but in all cases the families counted the kitchen as a room and, if they were fortunate enough to have a bathroom, they counted that as a room, too. If we eliminate the 217 kitchens (following the rule used in Holland) and the 76 bathrooms from the total of 908 rooms, we have left only 615 rooms in which 959 people slept and lived. This raises the average to 1.48 persons per room. Even such an average wouldn't indicate drastic overcrowding if it were not true that the rooms were universally very small. Interviewers made note of dozens of bedrooms so small that they could hold only one double bed and no other furniture. Very few homes had more than two bedrooms, as you can gather from the chart on page 41.\* And 84 families with more than 4 members had to

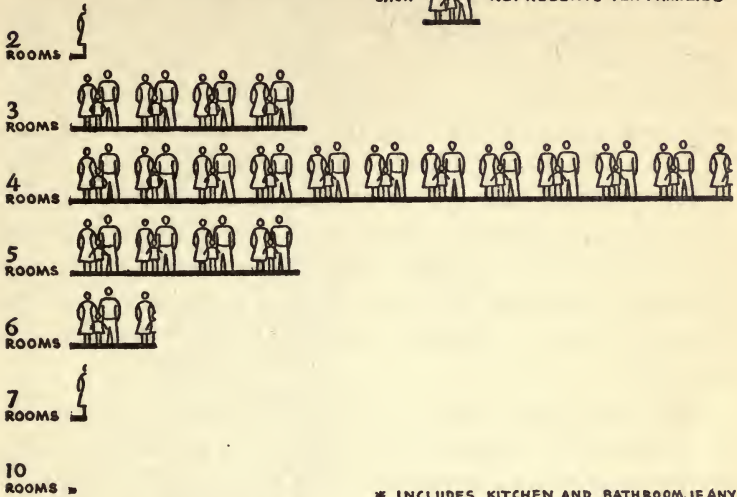
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†See also Appendix, Table 9.

\*See also Appendix, Table 10.

# NUMBER OF ROOMS\*

EACH  REPRESENTS TEN FAMILIES



\* INCLUDES KITCHEN AND BATHROOM, IF ANY

crowd from five to twelve people of all ages and both sexes into two or at most three such tiny, ill-ventilated bedrooms and a living room converted into a bedroom at night.

## FRESH AIR AT A PREMIUM

Of course the only satisfactory method of ventilation is one which provides outside fresh air and light in all rooms. If windows open upon the street or the backyard, there is usually a good chance of getting adequate ventilation. In a few cases windows opening on a large court may be satisfactory, and windows on the side of a building are adequate if they are high enough not to be blocked by the adjoining building. This survey showed, however, that 32 per cent of all the rooms in the 217 homes did *not* have ventilation of the proper type. Over 18 per cent of the rooms were ventilated by closed airshafts

or by an opening into another room.\* Only 75 families out of the 217 had outside fresh air in all their rooms.

Even these inadequate ventilation facilities were not completely used in winter, for in a poorly heated home the natural tendency is to keep out the cold air as much as possible. Furthermore, overcrowding taxed the limited ventilation facilities far beyond their normal power of providing light and air. Most of the apartments we saw were arranged so that the bedrooms were the most poorly ventilated of all: the living room invariably had the best windows, opening on the back or front of the house, while the bedrooms, located in the middle of the building, opened on airshafts or had no direct ventilation of any kind.

We need hardly point out the evils of overcrowding: the ease with which communicable diseases can spread; the impossibility of privacy; the temptation for the younger members of the family to stay away from home as much as they can during the day and only come home at night to go to bed; the frayed tempers and nerves. Interviewers heard plenty of stories of these evils and their effect on family life.

### SEARCH FOR SANITARY FACILITIES

We found some pretty medieval conditions as far as sanitation was concerned. The "shared" toilet, which is a violation of law, was typical. It was located in a small cubicle on the main hall of the tenement floor. An overhead bulb hanging on a cord gave the only light. There was no ventilation except through the doorway. In very few cases was the toilet seat enameled and in most cases was not of the modern sanitary type, open at the front. A ragged old piece of linoleum sometimes covered

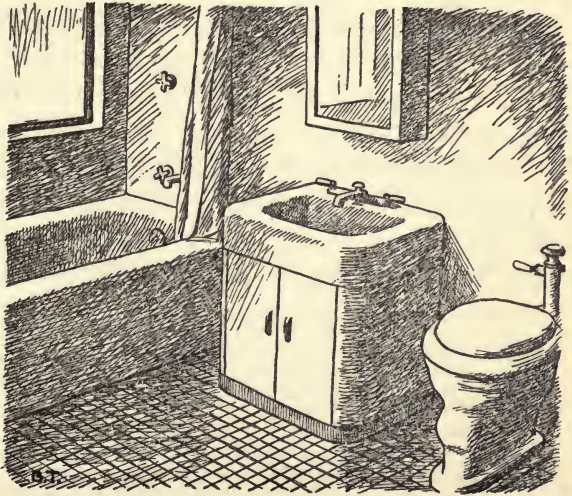
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\*See Appendix, Table 11.



**This or —**

**this?**



the floor of the cubicle, but more often the stained floor boards were bare. An unpleasant odor completed this "sanitary convenience." From two to four families shared this kind of toilet, no matter how many people there were in the families. In many houses the toilets were so neglected by the janitor that foul odors permeated all the poorly ventilated halls. We cannot, of course, measure the bad effects on health and habit of these insanitary and inconvenient toilets, but must leave them to your imagination.

Many of the 115 families who were lucky enough to have private toilets\* had no bathrooms. Although two-thirds of these families did have bathrooms with toilet, tub and wash-bowl, the remaining third had only a toilet situated in a small, unventilated cubicle similar to the "shared" toilet except that it was within the apartment. Families such as these, as well as those who shared toilets, had to make shift with the most inadequate bathing facilities. All that 58 per cent of the 217 families had in the way of bathing facilities was a small laundry tub, raised inconveniently high above the floor and situated in the kitchen. No one but a child could really get into it; and a grown person could hardly know the meaning of a comfortable and relaxing bath in such a tub!

The 35 per cent of the families who could boast of real bathtubs in real bathrooms had to pay high rents for such luxuries. At the other end of the scale were the 7 per cent who had no bathing facilities at all except the kitchen sink.†

### THE HEATING PROBLEM

Only 25.8 per cent of our families lived in houses with central heating. Over half of them (56.7 per cent) relied solely on the

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\*See Appendix, Table 12.

†See Appendix, Table 13.

kitchen stove for heat.† The 17.5 per cent who had oil burners of their own went to considerable expense to heat one room at a time by this antiquated and dangerous method. Most families admitted that in winter they spent their time crowded into the kitchen, making little use of what ventilation facilities they had, even at night; for there was often no way of heating the rooms during the day if they had been thoroughly chilled by being aired out at night.

The lack of proper heating seemed to be a condition with which our longshore families were highly dissatisfied, for most of the interviewers made note of opinions expressed about it. Families who had no steam heat considered the lack one of the most discouraging aspects of their housing. They continually pointed out that steam-heated apartments at prices they could afford were simply not to be found: the few apartments which did have central heat at comparatively low rents were too small for most families.

### WHAT PRICE HOT WATER?

Fortunately, many houses that do not have central heating do have central hot-water plants. And yet 28.6 per cent of our families lived in cold-water flats.‡ This meant that they could get hot water only by heating it on the kitchen stove at their own expense—no small task when it came to family baths or the weekly wash. 8 families had individual gas hot-water heaters. The landlord provided the heater but charged a higher rent on that account, and the tenant paid for the gas. So high was the cost of heating water in this way that 5 of the 8 families declared that they believed it would be more economical for them to move to an apartment where there was a central hot-water

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†See Appendix, Table 14.

‡See Appendix, Table 15.

system than to remain and pay a gas bill as well as additional rent for the use of a heater. Interviewers noticed that families resented cold-water flats even more than they did unheated ones.

So much for the homes of our 217 families, who included, you will remember, not only the 217 longshoremen who were family heads, but also 19 sons or other relatives who worked on the docks. But we have still to consider the 42 single and independent longshoremen who came under this survey.

### HOW THE SINGLE MEN LIVED

Of these 42 men, 8 took room and board with some family and 34 rented rooms or small apartments and either got meals at public eating places or prepared their own. Surprising as it was, these single men with apartments of their own usually went home to cook their own noon meals! The men who boarded with a family did not, however, go home to lunch because this meal was not included in their boarding arrangement.

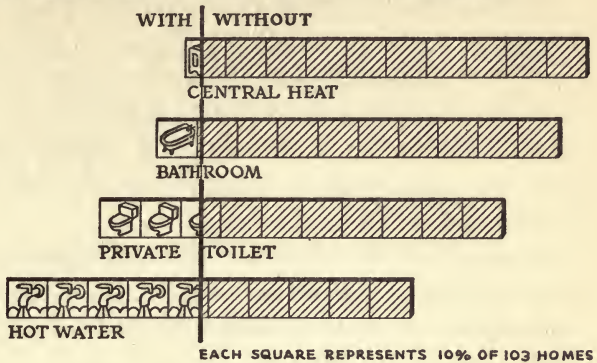
For room and board 5 men paid \$10 weekly and 3 paid \$12. The 34 men who rented rooms paid from \$6 to \$28 monthly, depending on the number of rooms; the majority rented one room and paid between \$10 and \$15 monthly. They all lived in very similar houses: tenements of four to six stories which had been converted into tiny quarters of one or two rooms, usually equipped with a small gas stove. The heating arrangements, toilet and bathing facilities and ventilation were much like those of the 217 families, varying from primitive to passably modern in about the same proportions.

Many of the dwellings we have been discussing were reported by interviewers to be hazardous fire-traps. 91 per cent of the 217 families lived in old-law tenements, and most of the re-

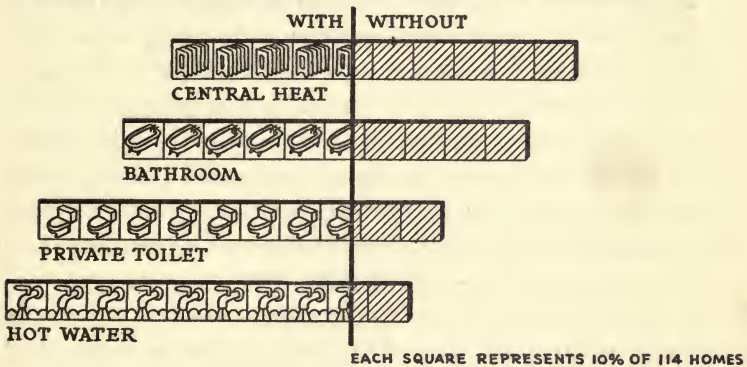


# IMPROVEMENTS IN THE HOMES VISITED

WHERE RENTS ARE LESS THAN \$ 23 (103 HOMES)



WHERE RENTS ARE \$ 23 OR MORE (114 HOMES)



maining 9 per cent occupied dilapidated old one-family and two-family houses.

A dismal picture of "home, sweet home." Sanitary and heating facilities, space and ventilation were largely lacking. There was constant danger of fire. Yet our longshoremen paid on the average slightly more than a fourth of their income for these

quarters. Why didn't they look around in other parts of the city, or in the suburbs, for better bargains for their money?

### LONGSHOREMEN LIVE NEAR THE DOCKS

We asked them that, "Why do you go on living here?" "Why, it's home," just about half the families replied. Many of them, as we have seen, had lived in the neighborhood — even in the same house—from ten to twenty years. Slightly more than half gave low rent as another reason for staying put, and as many mentioned *nearness to work* as still another.

But whether this last reason was mentioned or not, it is a fact that all our longshoremen did live near their work, for all were employed on piers lying between West 14th and Canal Streets.

If a man lives nearby, he can go home between shapes, or at least for meals. Over two-thirds of our family longshoremen told us that they could go home for lunch and, when they worked at night, for dinner, too. It was cheaper, they said, to eat at home than at the crowded and often filthy waterfront bars and grills, where the food is poor. Very few longshoremen take their lunch to work as there is no place to leave lunch pails while they are working and no place to eat, since they are not allowed to remain on the pier during the lunch hour.

But near as the 217 men lived to the piers, only 20.7 per cent of them came home between shape-ups. Actually they could have done so, but they were afraid they might lose a chance to work if they left the vicinity of the pier gates. Then, too, there was always the hope of picking up from other men news about piers where extra hands were needed.

As long as the present shape-up system of hiring survives, there is no dodging the fact that longshoremen have to live near the piers.

## VII. So What's to Be Done?

We have looked into the homes of 278 longshoremen on the Manhattan Lower West Side waterfront and found most of them sadly wanting. A shared toilet, heat only from the kitchen stove, no running hot water, no bath tub, dark, stuffy, cramped quarters in ramshackle tenements that, once afire, would burn like tinder—these are the oft-repeated tale. But having looked is not enough. What can we *do*?

### ARE OUR "CASES" TYPICAL?

Our conclusions will depend to some extent on whether or not we consider the 278 "cases" a valid sampling of the longshore industry. The 42 single men we can scarcely count as such, since there are so few of them that they may be, for all we know, the exceptions rather than the rule. And the 19 sons and other relatives who live with their families need not greatly concern us, either. They may be typical of the younger longshoremen; they may not be. But the 217 longshoremen who are heads of households are quite a different story.

For 217 cases out of so narrow an area as the Greenwich Village waterfront are enough to constitute a fair sampling if selected through sufficiently varied channels. Our channels, you remember, were the settlement house, two schools and five different steamship companies. And, as we have seen, the 217 family heads included representatives of nine nationalities—in itself some indication of the extent to which we "covered" the neighborhood. Furthermore, we know that longshoremen in general suffer periodic unemployment and meagre earnings, so that we can pretty safely assume that not only our 217 cases but many others cannot afford to house themselves and their families in any but substandard dwellings.

## PLATFORM MEN HAVE SIMILAR PROBLEMS

We might note here that the so-called "platform" men—loaders and unloaders of trucks in the markets and warehouses adjoining the docks—are plagued with a hiring system similar to the shape-up. Thus they as well as the longshoremen are obliged to live in the neighborhood and keep tabs on all work-possibilities. They, too, haven't enough jobs to go around. And their rates of pay are much the same as those of the longshoremen. So, taking into account both longshoremen and platform men, we may risk a guess that along the West Side waterfront of Manhattan large numbers of workers and their families are living in conditions that make the good old boast about the American standard of living sound singularly hollow.

## NEEDS OF FAMILIES THE MOST URGENT

Since the housing problem of workers with families is obviously more crucial than that of single men, we need not apologize because the results of our survey seem to be significant only for the family men. Besides, in the long run, as housing standards for the whole population go up, single men also will be able to find better accommodations at prices they can pay. But family housing needs, involving as they do the welfare of the rising generation, must come first.

## WHERE MUST THEY LIVE?

What are the most urgent housing needs of the longshore families we have studied? First, *nearness to the piers*. At the risk of being tedious, we must repeat this fact. For we cannot stress it too strongly. It is a need not only of our 217 cases, but of longshoremen in practically all American sea-ports. As long as and wherever the old-fashioned shape-up system of hiring

persists, the longshoremen must be on hand for any and every chance of a job.

### IN WHAT KIND OF HOMES?

Like other human beings, the longshoremen want light, airy, healthy homes, reasonably safe from fire, with a comfortable amount of space within and without, central heat, modern bathrooms and modern kitchen equipment. They would like their children to be able to play in safe, attractive playgrounds instead of in the streets near the docks, which are crowded with dangerous trucks. They would like parks (which our sample neighborhood lacks). They think that modern homes and pleasant parks and playgrounds would put an end to a lot of the crapshooting and necking that go on in the dark doorways of the boarded-up tenements in dockland. And they think, too, that the gangsterism which flourishes there would lose much of its allure if the young people were given opportunities for sane recreation. Many of our "cases" expressed these sentiments to the investigators time and again.

Nowadays longshoremen know that modern housing is no longer an idle dream for people in their economic class. More than half of the men we talked with had heard of homes going up in other parts of the city with government subsidies to keep the rents down to present old-law tenement levels. But they pointed out that it would be useless for them to apply for apartments so far from the piers. If public housing does not come to them, they cannot go to public housing.

### SOCIAL NEEDS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

The nature of longshore work, then, is a compelling argument for rehousing longshoremen in the neighborhoods where they are living at present. But there is another argument for doing

so which is worth considering. And that argument probably applies to thousands of other slum-dwellers, regardless of their occupation. It is based on the fact that people who have lived for a long time in a given neighborhood have built up associations which are important to them and which they are loth to sever.

Sometimes these associations are rooted in nationality groups. As we saw, the Irish on the waterfront felt themselves distinct from the Italians and made their friends and carried on community activities among themselves. This is not to say that we believe separate nationality groups should be encouraged to keep themselves apart, but merely that where they exist and form the basis for strong community ties they cannot be overlooked. Religious associations, too, bind people to a given neighborhood. In Greenwich Village, for instance, the Roman Catholic churches are a dominant factor, both religious and social, in the lives not only of our Irish and Italian longshoremen but of many other workers. Political affiliations grow up as well and, particularly when mingled with a judicious amount of fun and sociability, add their cementing influence.

After years of such associations — national, religious, social, political—people often develop a strong attachment to their own part of the city. Though they may grumble at its shortcomings, especially in the matter of housing, their neighborhood is home to them, and the idea of moving to some other section of the city is just about as palatable to them as the idea of moving to Timbuctoo.

Now people from time immemorial have moved about the face of the earth in search of better conditions. And earnest “housers,” planning “dream-come-true” houses on the city’s rim—gardens, chickens and all—might well argue that those who

now live in sub-standard dwellings cannot expect to have everything. They must take their choice—old slums, old friends or new homes, new associations. There is a great deal to be said for this view and many slum dwellers who are not tied down by their work will gladly move anywhere within reason for the sake of better living conditions. But slum dwellers who prefer to stay put have a dollars-and-cents argument to back them up. For a neighborhood of long standing can offer already existing material assets in support of its claim to a public housing project—schools, churches, community centers, streets, sewers, police and fire stations, power lines, subways. Greenwich Village, for instance, is already equipped with eight schools and ten churches, in addition to all the regular municipal services. A public housing project in this area of high land values would, in itself, be more costly than one built on cheap vacant land on the city's outskirts. But the city would not have to install new community services for the tenants, as it would for those in an entirely new suburban project. And so the final balance sheet of a Greenwich Village project might compare very favorably with that of an outlying development.

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

What can we do about it all? Well, as we said at the outset, we cannot pretend to do the housing officials job for them. They are experts and are paid to do an expert's job such as the ordinary citizen cannot hope to do. But we *can* make sure that they do the job and do it thoroughly. We can point certain facts out to them and demand action. That is the essence of democracy. So before we leave the subject let's decide exactly how to go about this business of getting action—intelligent action—in the direction of housing workers according to their occupational and social needs.

For the sake of keeping things clear, we may as well divide up the problem. First, we'll map out immediate steps which longshoremen and other interested citizens in Greenwich Village might take on the strength of the facts turned up by this survey. (Citizens elsewhere may find such a program applicable to their own housing situation.) Then we'll look into a factor which would make it necessary for some localities—even those with problems similar to those of our longshoremen—to vary this program. Lastly, we'll put a suggestion up to those whose job is to set standards for the national housing program as a whole.

### THE LOCAL PROBLEM

This survey shows, we believe, that longshoremen on the Lower West Side waterfront of Manhattan need a public housing project right in their own neighborhood. And there are plenty of statistics to prove that other workers there need public housing, too.\* They should voice their need to the city government. But not only the tenants of the old houses, not only the social workers who know and deplore the conditions in which those tenants live, but also the business men, including the real estate operators, may swell the chorus of demand if we put the problem to them in the most persuasive light.

The first step is to give as many people in the neighborhood as possible knowledge of the facts. We need more surveys of the kind here reported. And we need to put the results particularly before organizations such as trade unions, welfare agencies, church and civic groups, political associations and business men's associations. The concerted pressure of these organizations will have more weight with officials than individual voices. Such

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\*See data on family quarters in the Third Assembly District (Chelsea), *Real Property Inventory* (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1934).



organizations should make their demands known to the Mayor, their Councilmen, and the City Housing Authority.

To the small business men who instinctively fear any government venture in a field which they consider the preserve of private enterprise, we can point out that a public housing project will generally improve the character of the neighborhood. We can remind them that they will get additional trade from the building workers who will be in the neighborhood while the project is going up. And since, after it is completed, the rehoused tenants will have heat included in a rental comparable to what they previously paid for quarters without heat, we can suggest that these tenants may have a little more money to spend in the stores.

With real estate men we must use a different tack. We must show them that government housing does not compete with private enterprise, since private enterprise cannot build for the low income groups at a profit, anyway. We can remind these men, too, that the value of their own properties will go up after a public housing project has replaced a slum in their vicinity.

So far so good. We tell all these people the facts. We persuade them to demand action of the officials. But should we ask them to demand specific action? In other words, should they say to the officials, "We want a housing project and that is the place to put it"? This is a question about which a good deal of debate is still going on.

The answer to it should obviously be decided on practical grounds. In New York City at the present time land is assessed for taxation purposes at anywhere from 75 cents to \$20 a square foot, although a few parcels go as high as \$500 a square foot. (Of course centrally located land is never assessed at as low a figure as 75 cents a square foot, and it is centrally located land

that we are concerned with here.) If one branch of the city government — the Tax Commission — values land at, say, \$5, another branch of the city government—the Housing Authority —cannot logically condemn land for public housing at a lower figure. And so the courts, when required in condemnation proceedings to fix the amount of compensation to be paid to the owners of condemned land, usually fix it at a figure roughly the same as the assessed valuation. Yet the market value of the land may be as little as \$3 or even \$2 a square foot. It is therefore to the advantage of the housing program if the Housing Authority can negotiate purchases of land under ordinary buying and selling conditions, instead of having to go into condemnation proceedings.

But to buy land in the ordinary market, the Authority must have a free hand. It must be able to go into a neighborhood, find out what land is available and at what prices, and take options at the lowest prices it can get. Even if owners find out that it is the Authority which is negotiating for their land and stiffen their prices accordingly, the Authority can still line up options on different sites and take the lowest, other things being equal. But if, on the other hand, you insist on a particular site in advance, you give selfish owners a direct invitation to hold out against sale for the sake of getting a much higher-than-market price in condemnation proceedings. And there is nothing particular to be gained, from a housing point of view, by insisting on a particular site. If a neighborhood needs a housing project, it does not matter in the large view whether that project is one block further north, south, east or west than Mr. A. or Mrs. B. thought it should be. So we suggest that the Housing Authority ought to be free to use its judgment and select the best site it can get at a fair price.

In Greenwich Village, for instance, in the area between Gansevoort and King Streets there are several suitable sites which might be acquired. All are conveniently near the piers. Assessed valuations in this area run from \$3.40 to \$17.20 a square foot. The average land assessment for the area is \$7.20 a square foot. Yet if the Housing Authority were free to take options on several of the available sites and compare them, it might in the end be able to acquire a good site at a figure well below the assessed valuation.

### OTHER LOCAL PROBLEMS

Now in some cities the assessed valuation of land for taxation purposes is not any higher than the current market value of the land. In some cities it is even lower than the current market value. Assessment for taxation purposes is merely a device for assuring an income to the city government. It is arbitrary and fixed, whereas market values fluctuate. If the assessed value of land is the same as, or lower than, the market value, condemnation proceedings offer no advantage to a landowner looking for a high price for his land. In Pittsburgh, for instance, the City Housing Authority has been able to select sites purely on the basis of strategic location. It has been able to buy land known in advance to be for public housing, because there was nothing for the owners to gain by waiting for condemnation proceedings and they therefore preferred to take a fair price and avoid delay.

So in different localities the relation of current land values to assessed values must determine whether the campaign for public housing will include naming sites in advance and acquiring them by condemnation, or whether the selection will be left entirely to the housing officials concerned.

## THE NATIONAL PROBLEM

As we said in the beginning, it is not our purpose in this pamphlet to advocate housing projects exclusively for any one occupational group. But where large numbers of low-paid workers in one industry live in one neighborhood and are obliged by the nature of their work to live there, that neighborhood obviously needs a housing project. This is not to say that only those workers should occupy the project. But naturally a great many workers from the local industry *would* occupy it, especially if (as in the projects built with the cooperation of the United States Housing Authority) preference were given to applicants already living in sub-standard housing in the vicinity.

This, then, is our plea to the housing planners throughout the country: *Thousands of men, women and children look to you for the chance to live anew. Consider them in relation to their economic as well as their social backgrounds. Consider where, as well as how, they must be housed.*

*If they need housing in the neighborhood of their jobs, see if you cannot build it there. Sometimes it may turn out to be expensive. But look at the problem as a whole: if the cost of one housing site in a given city is high, another may be low. In the general plan for that city, you can still keep the average project cost down, while you serve the main, the human purpose of the plan.*

*Public housing is for wage-workers and their families. One, at least, out of each of these tenant families has to go to work, and sometimes he can only get the work if he lives close to it. Must he therefore continue to live in a slum-dwelling because public housing has overlooked his special needs?*

# APPENDIX

Table 1

## AGES OF 236 LONGSHOREMEN\*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of Men</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Under 20 years.....	1	.4
20 but less than 30.....	36	15.3
30 but less than 40.....	55	23.3
40 but less than 50.....	71	30.1
50 but less than 60.....	57	24.2
60 but less than 70.....	14	5.9
70 but less than 80.....	2	.8

Table 2

## AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME OF 217 LONGSHOREMEN WITH ONE OR MORE DEPENDENTS

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number of Men</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Under \$400 .....	16	7.4
\$400 and under \$800 .....	68	31.3
\$800 and under \$1200 .....	81	37.3
\$1200 and under \$1600 .....	27	12.5
\$1600 and under \$2000 .....	20	9.2
\$2000 and under \$2400 .....	4	1.8
\$2400 and over .....	1	.5

Table 3

## LAST WEEK'S PAY OF 217 LONGSHOREMEN WITH ONE OR MORE DEPENDENTS

<i>Wages</i>	<i>Number of Men</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Nothing .....	43	19.8
Under \$10 .....	34	15.7
\$10 and under \$20.....	64	29.5
\$20 and under \$30.....	42	19.4
\$30 and under \$40.....	30	13.8
\$40 and under \$50.....	4	1.8

\*All longshoremen who were members of the 217 families are included. In several families sons and other relatives, as well as the head, worked on the docks.

Table 4

## SIZE OF 217 LONGSHORE FAMILIES

<i>Number of Persons in the Family</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
2	25	11.5
3	57	26.3
4	51	23.4
5	31	14.3
6	23	10.6
7	15	6.9
8	6	2.8
9	5	2.3
10	2	.9
11	1	.5
12	1	.5

Table 5

## NUMBER OF YEARS ON THE DOCKS

<i>Number of Years</i>	<i>Number of Men</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Less than 5 years.....	50*	23.0
5 years and less than 10 years	37	17.1
10 years and less than 15 years	37	17.1
15 years but less than 20 years	22	10.1
20 years but less than 25 years	26	12.0
25 years but less than 30 years	14	6.4
30 years but less than 35 years	18	8.3
35 years but less than 40 years	11	5.1
40 years but less than 45 years	0	.0
45 years but less than 50 years	2	.9

Table 6

## LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES

(Amounts given in 66 families)

<i>Amount</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Under \$1000 .....	25	37.9
\$1000 and under \$2000.....	20	30.3
\$2000 and under \$3000.....	10	15.2
\$3000 and under \$4000.....	3	4.5
\$4000 and under \$5000.....	3	4.5
\$5000 and under \$6000.....	4	6.1
\$6000 and under \$7000.....	1	1.5

\*5 of these men had worked on the docks less than 1 year.

Table 7

CHILDREN OF 217 LONGSHOREMEN  
CLASSIFIED AS TO AGE AND SEX

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sons</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Daughters</i>	<i>%</i>
Totals	266	100.0	220	100.0
Under 6 years (Pre-school age)	40	15.0	48	21.8
6-18 years (School age)	152	57.2	134	60.9
19 years and older (Working age)	74	27.8	38	17.3

Table 8

## NATIONALITY GROUPS

<i>Original Nationality</i>	<i>Number of Men</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Total	217	100.0
Irish .....	96	44.3
American .....	36	16.6
Italian .....	28	12.9
Croatian .....	22	10.1
Spanish .....	11	5.1
Mixed .....	6	2.8
German .....	5	2.3
Portuguese .....	5	2.3
Polish .....	4	1.8
Lithuanian .....	4	1.8

Table 9

MONTHLY RENTS PAID BY  
217 LONGSHOREMEN'S FAMILIES

<i>Rent</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Nothing* .....	8	3.7
\$10 but less than \$15.....	9	4.1
\$15 but less than \$20.....	46	21.2
\$20 but less than \$25.....	57	26.3
\$25 but less than \$30.....	38	17.5
\$30 but less than \$35.....	19	8.8
\$35 but less than \$40.....	18	8.3
\$40 but less than \$45.....	10	4.6
\$45 but less than \$50.....	6	2.8
\$50 but less than \$55.....	4	1.8
\$55 but less than \$60.....	2	.9

\*Served as janitors. Received free rent.

Table 10

NUMBER OF ROOMS  
per family

<i>Number of Rooms</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Total	217	100.0
2	2	.9
3	41	18.9
4	115	53.0
5	40	18.4
6	15	6.9
7	3	1.4
10	1	.5

Table 11

METHODS OF VENTILATING ROOMS SHOWN  
AS PER CENT OF TOTAL NUMBER OF ROOMS

<i>Method</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Outside Fresh Air .....	68.0
Open Air Shaft .....	13.5
Closed Air Shaft .....	4.6
Through Another Room .....	13.9

Table 12

TYPES OF TOILETS  
IN 217 FLATS

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number of Flats</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Private .....	115	53
Shared .....	102	47

Table 13

BATHING FACILITIES IN 217 FAMILY FLATS

<i>Location of Tub</i>	<i>Number of Flats</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Kitchen .....	126	58
Bathroom .....	76	35
None .....	15	7



Table 14

## METHOD OF HEATING

<i>Method</i>	<i>Number of Flats</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Total	217	100.0
Steam .....	56	25.8
Oil Burner .....	38	17.5
None* .....	123	56.7

Table 15

## HOT WATER FACILITIES

<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>Number of Flats</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Total	217	100.0
Central hot water system.....	147	67.7
Cold water only .....	62	28.6
Individual water heater.....	8	3.7

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\*Kitchen stove provides some heat.

GREENWICH HOUSE

1. Name.....Address.....Head of family?.....

Family members: *Name*.....*Age*.....*Relation to Head*.....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

2. Rent per mo.....No. rooms.....Heat: Steam.....Stove.....Oil burner.....None.....

Toilet: Private.....Shared.....Yard.....Tub: Kitchen.....Bathroom.....Gas.....

Ventilation: Outside fresh air in.....rooms.

Open airshaft for.....rooms. Electricity.....Hot water.....

Closed airshaft for.....rooms. Running water: In apt.....

Through another room for.....rooms. In hall.....

3. Do you live here because it is near to your work?.....Low rent?.....This is

your "home" neighborhood?.....Any other reason?.....

Are you able to go home for meals?.....Or between calls?.....

4. How much do you earn? From longshore work: Average annual income \$.....

Last week's pay .....

From other work: .....

From other members of family .....

.....  
 .....

Total avg. wkly. income for family .....

5. Do you carry any kind of insurance for yourself or family? .....

How much time in past year have you lost because of sickness? .....

6. How many years have you worked on the docks? .....

Do you plan to continue? .....

7. Has your family ever had to go on relief?.....If so, give approximate dates:

From.....to.....; from.....to.....

8. Any comments:



