

Cost of Home Here Has Soared in Decade

Highest Apartment Rent Ten Years Ago \$6,000, Now Above \$30,000—Private Houses Are No Longer Choicest Residences

A NEW YORK ideal is undergoing a transformation that a few years ago would not have been considered possible. It concerns the home, and the conflict between the experience of the past and the tendency of the present is brought out in the question, Given ample means to have in New York the kind of home one prefers, would the choice be a private residence or an apartment?

Measured by the tendency of today, the answer is an apartment. In the list of those who live in New York apartments and thus testify to that preference are Elihu Root, Mrs. Alfred Vanderbilt, Robert W. Golet, August Belmont, Newcomb Carlton, Murry Guggenheim, Charles Stone, August Heckscher, Charles E. Hughes, Daniel Reid, C. K. G. Billings, and Dr. W. Seward Webb.

From the time when New York became a great city and the restricted area of Manhattan made itself felt it has been recognized until recently that one of the marks of exceptional success in New York was to own a home in the residence district of Manhattan. Only those of great ability and energy, or the inheritors of large wealth, could hope to win such a prize.

It was an ideal that stimulated highly endowed men in their struggle to the top—finally to escape from apartments into a home of their own. So the resolute and able ones advanced from one grade of apartments to a better, some from a starting point in the tenements even, until the goal was reached. The high-priced ground was purchased, the house was built, all to suit the tastes of the family. Farewell, apartments!

Not so—only au revoir apartments, for many of those who achieved private residences ten, five years ago, are now returning to apartments. Some have sold their homes outright, frequently at considerable loss; others have leased them to families newly arrived with a zest for such residences. With sufficient imagination applied to this tendency, one may behold a vision of the residence section of the city of the future as one vast apartment house, the streets serving as hallways, and Manhattan crowned with the distinction of being a city without a private house. Dwellings which house three or more families are classed as tenements under the law. Of the 5,750,000 population of the City of New York, 4,500,000 now live in tenements legally defined. Last year new buildings under the tenement house law provided

homes for 21,359 families. New tenements, that is, dwellings erected since the new law went into effect in 1901, house 1,000,000 persons.

New York, in a true sense, is being made in the image of its once despised tenement, for that was the original multiple dwelling of New York. The apartment house, with all its wonderful achievements in comfort and luxury, is but a development of its first group dwelling. The necessity that in the early days of the city pushed the tenement up in the air has also exerted its influence on the skyscraper apartment house.

But never was necessity the mother of more gracious invention. That the housing of many families under one roof should have been made tolerable was an achievement; that it has been made attractive, so attractive that apartments now successfully challenge private residences, shows what genius and energy can do in the solution of a great problem.

For those who are moving into apartments from private residences are not going into apartments of the kind found in this city ten years ago, when the ideal that the private residence was the home most to be desired in Manhattan was questioned by none.

Ten years ago \$3,000 a year was a high price for an apartment, and eight rooms was about the limit in size. Most of them had only one bath and no special arrangement for servants' quarters. Six thousand dollars a year was the top price for apartments in those days. One elevator served all.

Now New York has apartments that rent for \$30,000 a year. There are numerous suites with rentals ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000 a year. One of the \$30,000 apartments has twenty-eight rooms. In contrast to the one bath of ten years ago, this apartment has eight. There are nine servant bedrooms, not including a servants' hall, where they may rest and entertain themselves. The apartment is served by a private elevator.

Throughout the apartment is the same sense of spaciousness that is found in the mansion; some of the vistas of the living rooms even suggest scenes in famous palaces in Europe—how far removed such an abode from its progenitor the "flat" of other days! The gallery opening from the entrance lobby is 55 by 13 feet; the drawing room 40 by 20; the living room the same; the library, 30 by 20; dining room, 25 by 20, and master's bed chamber, 26 by 20. This apartment occupies the top floor, the twelfth, of the house at 907 Fifth Avenue.

In a sense apartments of this class are mansions set one on top of the other. They are usually leased for a period of from five to ten years and with the privilege of renewal the lessees spare no money in making them luxurious homes.

As much as \$40,000 has been spent on interior decorations. Tapestries, Oriental rugs, and antiques of great value adorn the rooms. In the culinary department every equipment that can add to sanitation is provided. One of these is an incinerator which burns all garbage as fast as it accumulates. The ice man need not come around. An artificial refrigeration room makes all the ice for the family.

The greatest contrast of all is the difference in the quality and price of apartments found now with those on the same sites ten years ago. A family that a decade ago moved out of a \$1,600 apartment on Park Avenue into a home may now return to the same number and pay \$14,000 a year for an apartment. Instead of the old house with four apartments to the floor, renting at from \$1,200 to \$1,600 a year, the family will find a seventeen-story building, with apartments ranging in size from 12 to 22 rooms, the lowest being \$4,500. The building is nearing completion, and the change in the prices and the quality of the apartments illustrates the transformation that in ten years has taken place on Park Avenue, and is also characteristic of the transformation in the whole apartment house district.

At another Park Avenue address the best seven-room apartment could formerly be rented for \$1,500, but there is now a twelve-story building on the spot with one fourteen-room apartment to the floor at an annual rental of \$7,000.

The increasing popularity of apartments is marked by two effects—first, by the number of private residences on the market for sale or lease; second, by the most active demand for high-priced apartments in the history of the city. Fifth Avenue itself bears prominent marks of this change. Houses of more than one family, famous in the social annals of the city, have been torn down to make room for an apartment house, and those who have watched this development and know the prodigious economic force behind it, say that the owners of the great homes on upper Fifth Avenue, in order to protect themselves from a steady increase of encroachments, will have to buy property near them.

There are now four large apartment houses of new construction on upper Fifth Avenue, and another is under way. As an instance of the effect of this movement, in the half block below Sixty-third Street one house bears the sign "To let," a second, "For sale," and a third, "Sold."

There are now fifty modern apartment houses on Park Avenue, the development of the last decade. Eight large ones are being built, one of which will be the largest in the world, occupying a block. In the cross streets in this and other residential sections are many apartments of recent construction. Yet the demand

is short of the supply. This year prices have advanced from 10 to 15 per cent., with the prospect of another increase next year. A representative of one of the largest agencies of high-class apartment houses says there are practically no vacancies from \$6,000 up; that in \$3,000 to \$4,500 apartments of six, seven and eight rooms there are only a few vacancies, and these chiefly in new buildings soon to be taken up; and that in the \$1,200 to \$2,500 list there is a great scarcity.

A man conversant with the whole situation, when asked why some families who could afford private houses preferred apartments, said:

"It is due to the change in the mode of life of families of wealth and the accommodation of the apartment to that change. Until a few years ago families with houses in town lived in them most of the year. Now the average time spent in the city is between four and five months. The rest is passed at country homes. The automobile has been a big influence.

"A house in the city is not easy to close up, and to a certain extent at least must be looked after during absence. On the other hand, a flat may be closed on short notice and reopened as readily. Then the servant problem is more easily handled in the apartment. Servants much prefer service in apartments, and maintaining an efficient staff of servants is an important factor in the homes of families of wealth.

"Also, better air is obtained in the apartment; it is higher up. Every attention is given to having plenty of light, and an apartment can be so designed that the rooms afford better facilities for it than most private residences. There are fewer bills. Instead of bills for water, heat, light, and taxes, and so forth, there is usually just one bill, which includes rental. Many find it a smoother life, with less friction, therefore more restful. For these reasons men of affairs, occupied in offices, prefer an apartment to a private residence. Of course, there will always be private residences in New York, as fine as in the world, but our increasing population will have to be taken care of by apartment houses, and this development is just getting well started.

"No, there are no \$100,000 apartments in New York, nor \$50,000 ones in apartment houses proper. There have been some inquiries for apartments at \$50,000 and a few at \$100,000, I believe, but a clientele like this is necessarily so limited that investors have not felt justified in putting up buildings to meet these requirements. The loss of one \$100,000 tenant would cut quite a hole in income. I think the \$100,000 apartment is a good way off—it may never come—but I would not be surprised to see the \$50,000 apartment."