

★ planning advisory service

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLANNING OFFICIALS

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THE CHANGING FUNCTION OF TRAILER PARKS*

There is no doubt that mobile home ownership is on the rise. Some 2 million Americans today live in house trailers. Figures for the first half of 1955 show sales to be the highest for any six-month period in the 25-year history of the industry. From sales totaling \$1.3 million in 1930, they rose to \$39 million for the year 1945, and to a high of \$324 million in 1954. Latest estimates from the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, which represents companies producing 75 per cent of the house trailers manufactured in this country, place unit sales for the year ending December 1955 at some 102,000, with a retail value of approximately \$435 million.

Of some 11,000 trailer parks in the United States, only 5,500 meet the standards recommended by MHMA and received mention in the association's official trailer park guide. The greatest concentration of trailer parks is found in California, with Florida in second place and Arizona third. Groups of trailer parks are found in or near most of the large industrial cities of the country.

Trailer courts vary from luxurious to shoddy. In one California park, trailerites pay as much as \$100 a month rent for the privilege of "blocking in" there. Facilities include a swimming pool, underground utility lines to each trailer space (including TV and telephone service), a clubhouse, and complete shopping center.

But another writer** describes a trailer camp in Pennsylvania:

[The camp site was formerly] a deep hollow receiving for years the accumulation of dump-truck refuse. Upon this foundation of tin cans, old papers, broken bottles, and what not, earth was

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**Alexander C. Wellington, "Trailer Camp Slums," Survey, October 1951; pp. 418 and 419.

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dumped and leveled off to make the site. . . .

. . . drainage is solved in primitive ways. . . . One large deep hole (covered at night by planks and guarded by a red lantern) receives all dish water and other liquid refuse which is supposed to seep through the clay side and bottom and finally disappear. . . .

Rubbish disposal is left up to the individual families, who burn it where they can. Garbage disposal, more difficult, usually involves some attempt at regulation. . . . Each family is required to supply its own garbage can and to dump the contents about a quarter mile away in an unconverted part of the same hollow on which the camp site is located. . . .

This overcrowded camp is unlandscaped, a sea of mud in the spring and fall, and has no play space for children.

The average trailer court falls somewhere between these two extremes, with monthly rental charges coming to about \$ 30,

The trailer park business is a rapidly growing one -- at the rate of 1,000 a year, according to latest estimates. However, the supply of well regulated, attractive courts is not keeping up with the demand. The most desirable parks have months-long waiting lists.

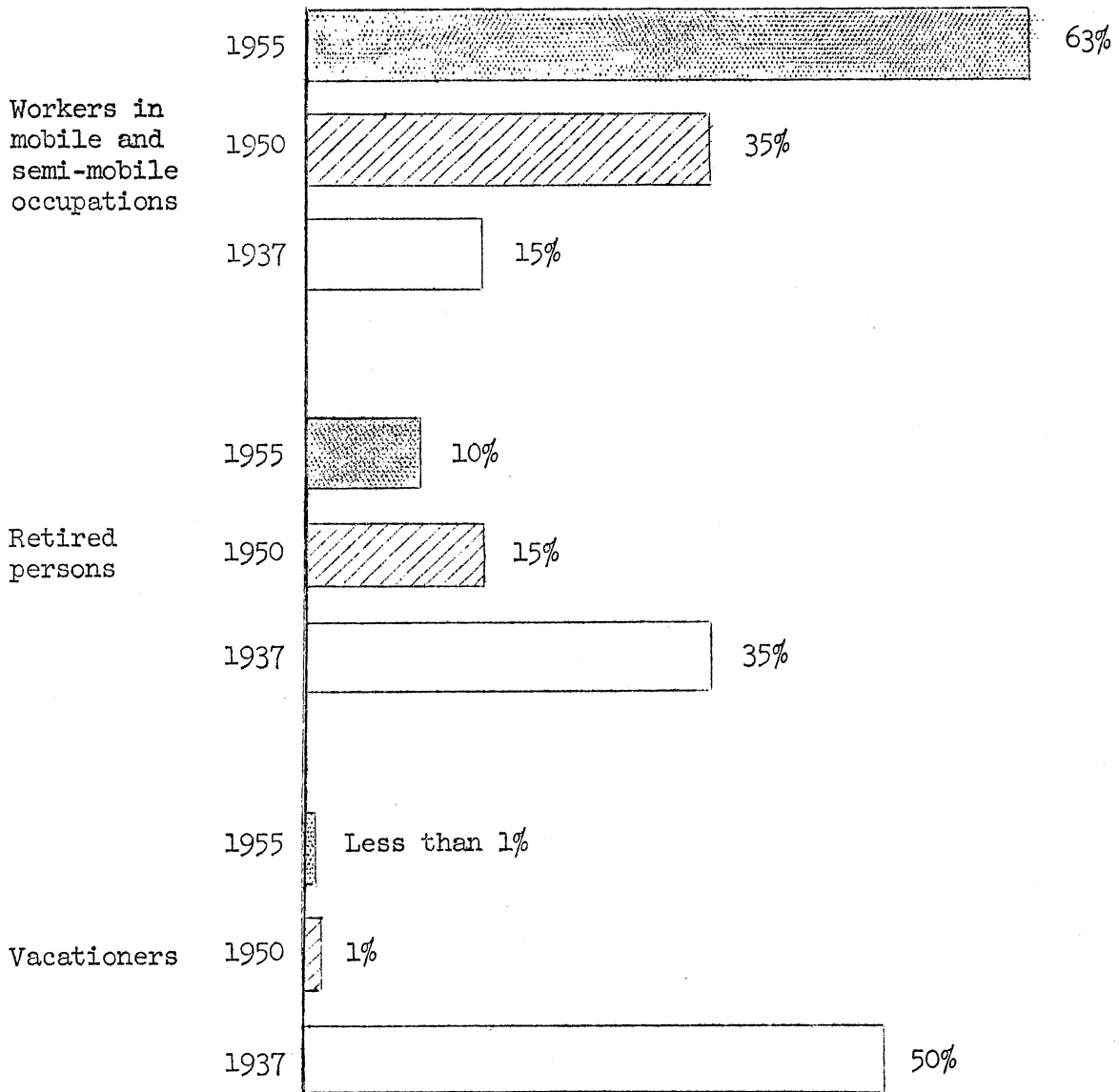
There is reason to hope that more and better planned and designed parks will be built in the future. Financial stimulus to trailer park development was provided in housing amendments, passed by Congress in August 1955, that make it possible for the Federal Housing Administration to insure mortgages on park sites and facilities. Since developers of parks who get FHA insured mortgages will have to meet FHA requirements for density, amenities, and sanitary, electrical, and water facilities, standards will probably be higher than they have been in many parks. Moreover, park developers who use conventional financing will, in turn, have to build to such standards if they are to meet the competition. Thus, fly-by-night enterprises, spotty development of small, shoddy camps, and uneconomical operations requiring side-line businesses in order to remain solvent will be discouraged.

Trailers for "Permanent" Living

While increased trailer park development may relieve to some extent the overtaxed capacities of existing camp facilities, it also seems probable that more attractive park accommodations for mobile homes will encourage more and more people to turn to "trailerling" as a way of year-around living.

Information gathered from various sources on trailers -- their size and kinds of amenities; on who trailerites are -- their occupations, why they

USERS OF TRAILER COACHES



1955 percentages based on estimates of the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, Chicago, February 1956.

1950 and 1937 percentages from "Trailer Coach Industry Survey for the Year 1950," Housing Research, Spring 1952, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Washington 25, D. C.

Percentages for the different years will not total 100 per cent, as all occupation groups have not been included. Military personnel have been omitted because figures were not available for each year shown on the graph (they were 20 per cent of the total in 1955); figures for "miscellaneous," a small percentage in each case, have also been omitted.

live as they do, their attitudes; on how much "turnover" there is among trailer court occupants; and on changes in trailer taxation point up a growing trend toward use of trailers as a part of the "permanent" housing supply, rather than primarily as tourist accommodations.

The trend toward permanency is evident also in the preference given these days to the term "mobile homes." And even here, the accent is on the "homes" rather than on the "mobile." Moreover, FHA in its Minimum Property Requirements for Mobile Home Courts (October 1955) emphasizes permanency in its definitions of "mobile home" and "mobile home courts":

Mobile Home: A movable living unit designed for year-round occupancy, sometimes termed a trailer home.

Mobile Home Court: A parcel of land under single ownership which has been planned and improved for the placement of mobile homes for non-transient use. [E ditors' underscoring]

The figures in the preceding bar chart substantiate the trend away from trailers primarily as tourist accommodations and toward the use of them as a part of the housing supply.

Two interesting contradictions are pointed up by the graph: (1) since 1937 the percentage of trailers bought by retired people has fallen off steadily -- although the percentage of persons in the total population who are 65 or older has increased by 298 per cent since 1900; and (2) the decline in sales of trailers to vacationers has been rapid -- although two-day weekends and paid vacations have become more common.

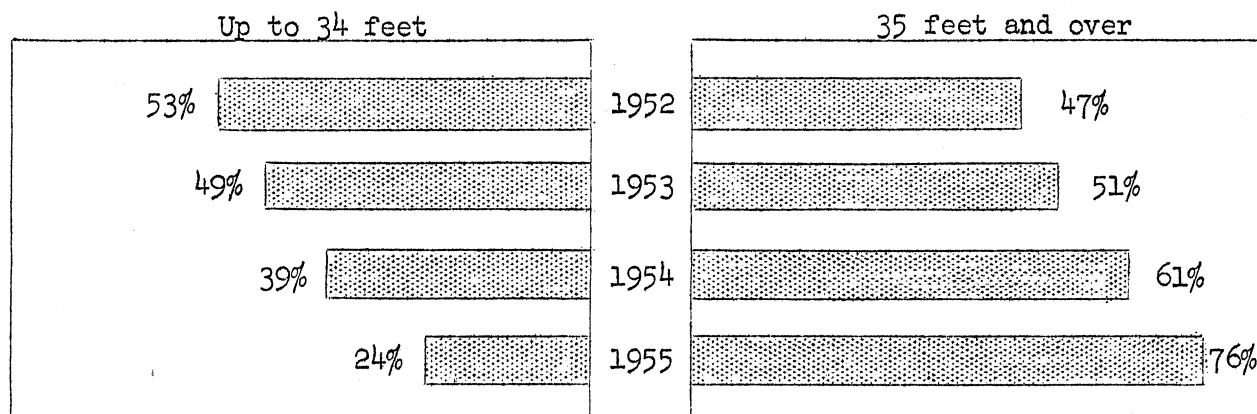
Low-cost air travel may have considerably changed the vacation picture. And the increasing concern shown today for the construction of housing particularly suited to the aged, plus increased social security and retirement benefits, are probably factors that have altered sales to retired persons. However, there is no concrete evidence as to whether trailer life is proving less than satisfactory for these groups or whether their needs are being met in other ways.

At any rate, the whole changing pattern of use of trailers indicates a need for a change in trailer park planning concepts.

Trailer Size and Amenities

A far cry from the seven- or eight-foot sleeping trailers of the thirties are the 50-foot mobile dwellings manufactured today. As the bar chart below indicates, the percentage of trailers manufactured that are 35 feet or more has steadily increased in recent years.

LENGTHS OF TRAILER COACHES



Based on figures supplied by the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, Chicago, 1955.

Most states regulate lengths of trailers allowed on highways, these restrictions varying from 35 to 45 feet. With most "legal" lengths under 40 feet, few of the larger trailers are hauled further than from the manufacturer to the show room, and from the show room to a permanent site. In fact, many mobile homes today are so large they require special towing -- not a car -- to haul them, with the result that few are bought for their "mobility."

An extreme is a \$75,000 model for the "busy executive with a yen for extra good living while conducting business on the run." It is 65 feet long, weighs 18 tons, houses six persons, and its accoutrements include a portable 10,000-gallon swimming pool with diving board, a sun deck, observation lounge, wall safe, air conditioner, movie screen, powder room, and luxury furnishings.

The great majority of trailer owners pay somewhere between \$2,800 and \$7,000 for mobile homes, but, nevertheless, such added attractions as washing machines, built-in television sets, and garbage disposal units are not uncommon in modern trailers. And almost every new trailer on the market includes bathroom fixtures, which in turn require sewer and water hook-ups.

Two-story, three-bedroom models are becoming more and more popular, following the conventional housing pattern of the times -- a pattern that calls for larger, personally owned, detached, single-family dwellings.

According to the January 1956 issue of Construction Review (United States Department of Labor, Washington 25, D. C.), "there was a strong uptrend everywhere [in 1955] in the number of three-bedroom houses, and a corresponding decline in two-bedroom houses."

And now at least one manufacturer has come out with a mobile home with a pitched roof, guaranteed to look like an ordinary house once anchored and the site landscaped!

Who the "Trailerite" Is; Why He Lives as He Does

The average trailer dweller is not a poor man, unable to afford conventional housing. On the contrary, his annual income is slightly more than \$1,000 above the national average.

Nor is he a nomadic "gypsy," as was once popularly thought. His mobility is primarily the result of his occupation. A study made by MHMA in 1955 showed that 63 per cent of all trailer residents surveyed were workers in mobile or semi-mobile occupations, 20 per cent were military personnel, 10 per cent were retired persons, and "all others" made up the remaining 7 per cent. This link between mobility and job was also brought out in a recent survey of trailer parks in a part of a Midwestern state.* Here it was found that 63 per cent of those surveyed said a job transfer was the chief reason they moved -- a finding that corresponds closely to MHMA's statistics on trailerites with mobile or semi-mobile occupations.

Many construction workers, for instance, who have relatively high wages, are able to pay enough to live in conventional housing. However, because their occupation is mobile, they want the mobility convenience of trailer homes. Convenience is the motivating factor in their use of trailers, and low-cost living -- though an attractive by-product -- is secondary.

There are, of course, trailerites who take up trailer living primarily because it is inexpensive. With persons whose annual incomes are considerably below national averages -- for example, young married students or elderly people living on pensions or other sources -- low cost is primary and mobility incidental. But low cost in many of these cases is not the only motive. For retired persons who want to go south in the winter and live north in the summer, mobility is a consideration, along with low cost. The desire for home ownership and a dislike of apartment type living also enters the picture. Some elderly couples who have owned a home for years but find it too large for them after their children are grown still want to own a home, although at less cost -- and may also want to travel.

Trailer dwelling, then, seems to meet many needs today: mobility convenience is one; low cost another; home ownership and the desire to live in separate, rather than multi-family structures, still others.

*The main findings of this survey, conducted by a Midwest utility company, are reproduced at the end of this Information Report.

Initially, the typical trailer dweller of today may have been driven to his mode of living by lack of sufficient moderately priced housing. He may have been one of thousands of skilled laborers attracted by wartime or postwar defense industry jobs who found that without adequate housing in the area in which work was available, trailer living was a solution to his problem.

Housing at the Atomic Energy Commission's Savannah River plant in South Carolina is a case in point. Some 4,000 trailers were supplied by the government through its contractor as temporary living quarters to help alleviate the housing emergency created by the great influx of construction workers in the area. It is unfortunate that in most cases the camps were bleak, unlandscaped affairs, with recreational facilities all but nonexistent. Trailer court rules and regulations, often the whim of the park operator, were arbitrary and sometimes unfair to the occupants; and rents were high. (See Planning Problems in the Vicinity of the A.E.C. Savannah River Plant, PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE Special Report, February 1953.)

Others were introduced to trailer living after the Kansas floods of 1951 and 1952 and the New England tornadoes in 1953, when trailers provided temporary emergency housing.

Whatever his reasons may have been for taking up trailering, the trailerite seems to be sold on his way of living. According to Homes for the Mobile Population (Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago 6; 1955), "mobile homes are a matter of preference with most of their owners." It goes on to say:

In a continuing market survey of mobile home buyers, 19 out of every 20 purchasers queried said they would not leave their mobile homes even if offered a house or apartment at what they consider a reasonable price. Sixty per cent of these purchasers had lived in mobile homes before, and their new purchase indicates a preference based on first-hand experience. This preference for mobile living was noted in all groups of mobile home owners -- retired persons, construction workers, military personnel, students, salesmen and many others. Even though the mobile home owner may never move his apartment on wheels -- the average mobile home is moved only once in 12 months -- the advantage of being able to do so if necessary or desirable is an important factor in the popularity of mobile homes.

Although most trailerites report that initial adjustment to the trailer way of life is difficult -- lack of privacy and cramped quarters are, of course, some of the problems -- the general attitude regarding their manner of existence is positive. If the trailerite is a construction worker he can follow the "booms," he is less likely to be out of a job, and he is never without a place to live. He can move about from job to job with his family. His wife finds

housework greatly simplified and is relieved of the repeated problems involved in moving from one conventional house to another.

Some of the reasons people choose to live in trailers are summed up in a statement made by a construction worker living in a trailer in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.*

For 11 years I lived in one lousy rooming house after another. I never felt good and lots of the men were getting into trouble. No more of that now. We have good housing, my family is always with me and we live better than most people. I wouldn't go back to the old way for anything -- we're independent and don't have to put up with looking for housing and with landlords who won't rent to transients or to people with children.

Those trailerites who have skilled jobs and good incomes are likely to spend a generous part of their incomes in the communities where they locate.

Sociological studies indicate that the ideals of trailerites in general do not set them apart from the great majority of the American middle class families, who want their children to be college graduates and "successful." Many trailer dwellers own real estate in their "home" state; are registered voters. The construction worker in particular takes pride in his work and feels that he plays an important role in the community in which he works.

The trailerite may also be a part of a close-knit trailer community composed of old friends with whom he has a great deal in common. According to Dr. Hager's article on trailer life in Bucks County:

Many construction workers reported that they were impressed with the favorable experiences in trailering that seemed to obtain among their acquaintances. Many of these workers are employed by the same company, and many of them have worked together on various jobs throughout the nation. By purchasing a trailer, they would be traveling in the company of friends and sharing experiences and social circumstances with them. . . .

While trailerites on the national scale represent a diversity of occupations and interests, at the local level each trailer park may have a predominance of one group with similar occupations. One trailer park may have a high proportion of military personnel, another factory workers, still others construction workers or students or retired persons. In one city it was

*Dr. Don J. Hager, "The Construction Worker and Trailer Living in Bucks County, Pennsylvania," Housing Research, No. 7, April 1954, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Washington 25, D. C. Reprint available from Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, Chicago,

found that a great many of the trailer court occupants were professional workers and military personnel, and in another area a significant percentage were found to be clerical workers.

What groups will settle in what communities depends on the location, attractions, rate of growth and development, and what facilities and attractions a community has -- industry, military post, university, resort areas, and so forth.

"Turnover"

These groups also will vary widely in the rate of "turnover," depending to a large extent on the occupations of the trailer dwellers.

In the attached study, a turnover of 45 per cent a year was reported, although there was a wide variation between districts. One district, which caters primarily to the tourist trade, reported a turnover of more than 246 per cent, while in others, where the occupants of trailer parks were primarily factory or construction workers, the turnover varied between 31 and 80 per cent a year.

The MHMA says that there are approximately 750,000 mobile homes in use, which are moved on an average of only once a year. (Actually, there may be a higher proportion of trailers moving more frequently than once a year than these figures indicate. Because long-term occupancies were included when the average was derived, the figure may have been thrown off somewhat.)

There are not enough studies that show what proportion of the trailer population is geographically mobile to draw any final conclusions. However, on the basis of MHMA's statistics and the Midwest state study, a guess is that some 70 to 85 per cent of the total are.

Of the categories listed in the Midwest state study, construction workers (19.7 per cent), factory workers (49.6 per cent), and military personnel (1 per cent) may be considered to be in mobile or semi-mobile occupations. In addition, some of the "retirees" (5 per cent), a few of the students (3.5 per cent), and some of the "others" (9 per cent) may also be mobile to some extent. Clerical workers (12.2 per cent) and professional workers (4.7 per cent) are probably the least mobile.

The MHMA statistics for 1955 show 63 per cent of the trailer population in mobile and semi-mobile occupations. However, it also shows 20 per cent are military personnel, who may also be considered mobile; 10 per cent are "retirees," some of whom may be mobile; and 7 per cent are "miscellaneous," a category that includes vacationers.

At any rate, of those who are mobile, whatever the reason, workers in

mobile and semi-mobile occupations are more likely to be "permanent" trailer dwellers than any other group. That is, although they move their trailer homes from one community to another fairly frequently, they are more likely to adopt trailering as a permanent way of living than other groups. Their mobile homes are a convenience in their jobs -- to them and often to the communities in which they are employed.

Mobile workers, if they are trailer dwellers, leave no ghost towns in their wake, although they may do so if permanent dwellings are built for them at the site of a new factory or plant. Construction workers generally outnumber the plant workers who come in later, and seldom can all permanent dwellings built for construction workers be used by the factory workers. (As automatic processes are used to a greater and greater extent, this differential will increase in some industries.)

Waverly, Ohio, a small town near a postwar Atomic Energy Commission plant, is an example. By March 1956, more than half of some 1,500 houses built for construction workers and permanent employees were vacant; some were never occupied. But the more than 3,500 trailers used by construction workers were practically gone.

Of course, even the most "permanent" trailer dweller, who claims he never wants to move out of a mobile home, may, nevertheless, do so when his children reach high school age. The few statistics there are on trailer children show that a high proportion of them are in pre-school, kindergarten, and primary age groups; few are of high school age. Whether this indicates that trailer dwellers eventually move into conventional housing because they want their high school age children to have an uninterrupted education -- or because they decide to "settle down," -- or because they have conflicts about trailer life itself -- is uncertain.

The most mobile of the trailer population, then, are in the majority; and they are also the long-term users of trailer coaches as permanent housing.

The other 15 to 30 per cent is an assorted group composed of a few salesmen and professional people, clerical workers, students, retirees, and vacationers, who have little in common except the fact that they are trailer users.

With the exception of the vacationers, it is unlikely that this group will move from trailer park to trailer park frequently. On the other hand, they are likely to be only temporary trailer dwellers. Members of this group are more likely to move to conventional housing than are those in mobile groups.

For them mobile home dwellings are not a necessity. That is to say, mobility is not a necessity. They apparently have adopted this way of living for reasons other than occupation or desire to be mobile.

But this group's apparent satisfaction with trailer living may be misleading. Frequently their attitudes toward trailering are fuzzy. Nor does direct questioning always bring out their reasons for living in trailers. Many of the questions asked them have been on subjects on which they have no basis for comparison. It is meaningless, for instance, to ask a young couple who have lived all their married lives in a trailer if trailer living produces problems in their married life that they would not have in conventional housing.

It may be that trailering offers some in this group a kind of flexibility in meeting their housing needs. When one of this group finds his mobile home is not adequate from a space standpoint, he may simply sell his old trailer (which is transferred from his site to a new owner's site) purchase a larger trailer, and remain in the same location. In some cases among this group, trailer living is the line of least resistance. In others, lack of sufficient information on available conventional housing may keep them in trailers, even though they are not completely satisfied with it. In his chapter called "The Choice of New Dwelling" in Why Families Move (The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois; 1955), Peter Rossi says that before a family can move from one house to another it must be informed of a vacancy that meets its needs. He also points out that the conventional sources of information on housing -- newspaper ads, real estate agents, first hand searching by walking or riding around in residential neighborhoods -- require active steps on the part of the seekers. Moreover, he says, the most effective means of obtaining a new dwelling is by personal contacts and by "windfalls" from acquaintances and neighbors who mention a vacancy they know of.

Rossi was speaking of conventional housing dwellers. However, his comments are also applicable to the trailer dweller. As has already been pointed out, trailerites form strong ties among themselves. While this tendency may contribute to stability within a group, it may also be a limiting factor in that it cuts off some of the contacts with the larger community. Those among the trailer population who could benefit most from "neighborly" contacts with conventional housing users are deprived of at least some of them.

For the most part, this 15 to 30 per cent of the trailer population, who are not in mobile or semi-mobile occupations, are marginal trailerites, who under some circumstances and given sufficient information will become conventional housing users. There is little reason to believe that these people are confirmed trailer dwellers.

Trailer Studies

The objective research done on trailerites and trailer courts has increased in volume in recent years but it is still scanty and sometimes conflicting.

The authors of one report, for instance, say in one breath that trailer people

are "familiar with community customs" and in almost the next observe that "few of the communities surrounding trailer parks make an effort to bring the trailer resident into community functions." The same report, in commenting on trailer park owners, says "they have a strong sense of community identity and investment; consequently they are seriously disturbed by the appearance of restrictive ordinances and tax assessments -- and by charges that they are harboring undesirables and that trailer parks are rapidly growing into slums." Remarks of this sort only serve to point up the ambiguous attitudes of trailer dwellers and court operators in relation to the community.

Because people who live in conventional dwellings have tended to display prejudiced or uninformed attitudes about trailer life, there is real need for unbiased inventories. The trailerite is a new breed of city dweller, who, it seems, will remain for some time. It would be useful to know, in addition to how many years Mr. A. has lived in a trailer park, how many more years he plans to live in a trailer, under what conditions he would find trailer life more satisfactory or less satisfactory, and under what conditions he would be attracted to a different type of housing.

In determining who trailerites are and what their attitudes are, it might prove fruitful to question them on what they think the attitudes of other trailer dwellers are. For instance, the trailer dweller may give a "halo" reply about himself -- "Oh, I live in a trailer because it gives me the chance to really get to know the country." But he may "project" his real reasons in replying to questions about his neighbor -- "Oh, he lives in a trailer because he just drifts from job to job."

Personal interviews, which may elicit prejudiced or inaccurate judgments, can be supplemented by information from such sources as the records of schools, churches, police departments, and welfare agencies. These data will indicate how and to what extent trailer court occupants differ from or resemble other groups in a community.

Perhaps most needed, however, is factual information at the local level on the composition, size, age, and condition of trailer courts. The attached study is an example of this kind of straightforward, unbiased survey of which there is, unfortunately, a dearth. It might well serve as a point of departure for investigation for any community where a better understanding of the trailer situation is needed for realistic and reasonable planning of trailer parks.

Taxation

Over the years, a change of emphasis in the taxation of trailers has also taken place. Once taxed primarily as vehicles, trailers are now mainly

~~nonmobile and for tax purposes considered a part of the housing supply of a community.~~

Municipal legislators think that trailerites, as a permanent part of the community in which they locate, should contribute their fair share of support toward the schools that their children attend and toward the many other municipal services -- police, fire protection, health, to name a few from which they benefit.

Both city officials and private groups have frequently protested the establishment of trailer camps, using the argument that trailer dwellers do not pay an adequate share of community costs.

In Chicago Ridge, Illinois the village board refused to issue a permit for a trailer court on the grounds that educational facilities would be burdened beyond the school district's revenues. The establishment of a 400-trailer park was opposed by the school board. The board argued, using the national average of 1.5 children for each trailer, that the school, already on a double shift, would have almost twice as many pupils. In this particular school district, adequate funds to finance additional schools were not available, partly because trailer camps were taxed as unimproved property.

In some communities, however, trailer dwellers are paying taxes proportionate to those of conventional housing owners. Consumers Report for March 1956 (consumers Union of the U. S., Inc., Mount Vernon, New York) shows that in Fairfield, Connecticut the owner of a house valued at \$14,000 paid \$17.08 a month in taxes; and that a trailer owner in the same community paid taxes of \$5.08 a month on a mobile home valued at \$4,800.

Certainly, total lack of community responsibility and support cannot be condoned. According to one study, a "well-to-do" dentist living in a trailer park on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area was asked his reasons for living in a trailer. He admitted frankly that he had owned a house in another part of the state but had sold it and taken up trailer life to avoid paying property taxes. Few trailerites are as outspoken. Most, in fact, protest that they are "for" support of community services.

Taxation of trailer homes is a controversial subject. The questions that arise are numerous:

1 - Should trailers be taxed as personal property, as real property, as motor vehicles, or should there be a flat-rate trailer tax?

2 - Should the trailer park operator be taxed for the trailer? And should any property owner, whether a trailer park operator or not, be taxed for a trailer if it is used on his property as a dwelling?

3 - Should the trailer owner be taxed? And what procedures should be used for collecting taxes, since the property can so easily be moved away?

Problems closely related to taxation have to do with registration: should a trailer, whether registered as a vehicle or not, be registered with the state if it is used as a dwelling? What procedures should be employed for reregistering in a different state?

C. L. Chamberlain, associate counsel for the Department of Audit and Control of the State of New York, has outlined one solution to the trailer and trailer camp taxation problem. The American City for April 1953 summarized his plan as follows:

. . .Mr. Chamberlain said that the real property on which the trailer camp is located should be liable. He suggested that the owner of a trailer camp be required to obtain a certificate for using the property as a camp, that it be in conformance with the zoning ordinance, that legislation should provide the area to be determined as a lot for a trailer and specify the amount of tax for each such lot. The owner would have a chance to object to the assessment, the same as a home owner. The method of distribution should be provided in the statute when determined.

Mr. Chamberlain concluded that if the method suggested is followed, it will result in a special trailer-camp tax, which the owner can pass along to the owners of the trailers, so that they will indirectly bear a part of the cost of government.

The trend in legislation concerning trailer taxation is not clear-cut. According to the December 1955 Assessors' News Letter (National Association of Assessing Officers, 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago 37):

In New York, house trailers which are occupied and located in one district for more than 60 days become taxable, as real property, to the owner of the land, under a law which became effective April 15, 1955. A recent court decision (Trailer Coach, Monroe Co. Sup. Ct. 9-2-55) has held that this law is invalid.

The states that tax house trailers as "realty" include California and Pennsylvania; also, Michigan makes the landowner liable for the tax.

States that tax house trailers as "personalty" and make the trailer owner taxable include: Arizona, Colorado (exempt if specific ownership tax is paid), Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Virginia.

~~By legislation enacted this year, the states of Maine and Washington imposed an excise tax on house trailers in lieu of property taxes.~~

The trailer industry, represented by MHMA, * supports the principles that:

. . . the mobile home owner and the mobile home park operator should pay their fair share of the cost of local police and fire protection, schooling and other community services.

. . . this reasonable share of governmental costs should be determined for mobile home residents on the same basis as for other residents of the community. [Editors' underscoring]

The most extensive discussion to date on the taxation of trailers is Richard D. Duke's The Taxation of Mobile Homes (Research Report No. 12, Bureau of Business Research, School of Business and Public Service, Michigan State College, Lansing; 1955). This study gives general background information on taxation of mobile homes, includes a discussion of the relationships of public services to taxation, and lists possible solutions to the problems.

Planning and Zoning

In an earlier PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE Information Report, Trailers and Trailer Camps in the Community (No. 12, March 1950), the opinion was given that a zoning ordinance should be confined to regulating the location of trailers and trailer camps. With the refinement of detailed standards by federal agencies, the legislative principle expressed in this recommendation is even more appropriate today. Construction standards of all sorts -- sanitation, design, site location, to name a few -- belong in a special trailer ordinance, not in the zoning ordinance.

Considerable information on construction standards is available in the publications of three federal agencies:

Housing and Home Finance Agency -- Recommended Standards for Trailer Courts. 1952. 24 pp. 15 cents. Superintendent of Documents, United States Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C.

Federal Security Agency, Public Health Service -- Trailer Court Sanitation. 1953. 29 pp. Available from Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago 6.

*Homes for the Mobile Population, Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, Chicago; 1955.

Federal Housing Administration -- Minimum Property Requirements for Mobile Home Courts, 1955. And, Mobile Home Courts -- Land Planning Bulletin No. 5, 1955. 10 pp. Federal Housing Administration, Washington 25, D. C.

Although parts of the first two publications are similar, their aims and emphases are somewhat different. The HHFA standards, according to the foreword "are comprehensive in nature, broader in their application than any of the works used as sources. . . . The intention here is to indicate standards that are high enough to provide the full degree of livability that can be afforded by the modern trailer coach for temporary housing, and yet not so high as to discourage or prevent sound private investment in trailer courts needed for defense expansion. . . ."

The Public Health Service booklet is more specifically concerned with standards for "environmental sanitation" -- a term covering all phases of sanitation, including water supply, sewage and refuse disposal, insect and rodent control, as well as accident prevention and fire protection. Suggested ordinances for trailer court regulation are included in the appendix.

City officials drawing up special trailer regulations will find these two pamphlets indispensable.

The FHA publications go further than the others, in some respects. Their emphasis is on mobile homes as part of the supply of permanent housing in the community. The minimum property requirements booklet includes regulations for land planning and for construction and improvement of mobile home courts on which FHA will insure mortgages.

The purpose of the bulletin, Mobile Home Courts, is "to aid sponsors of mobile home courts in the development of projects which are profitable to build and operate, attractive to prospective tenants, sound as a financial investment and creditable to the community."

PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE believes that the adoption by a community of detailed trailer court standards -- whether by separate ordinance or incorporation in the zoning ordinance -- is essential if trailers are to be permitted in the community. Without these standards, trailer courts can be a health menace and can exert a blighting influence over a wide area. The following discussion of zoning for trailer courts assumes the existence of sanitary and design standards, duly adopted by a city or county legislative body.

The first thing that should be clarified by a zoning ordinance is what constitutes a trailer court or camp. Both HHFA and PHS recommend the following definition:

A trailer court is any plot of ground upon which two or more occupied trailer coaches are located.

The value of this definition is that trailer coach groups of all sizes come under the terms of the zoning ordinance. If enforced, it makes impossible casual camping of more than one trailer* on a vacant lot -- a situation that immediately creates a health problem and an eyesore.

The second function of the zoning ordinance is to designate the zones in which trailer courts are permitted. Formerly, the prejudiced attitude of communities that all trailer courts were "slums" and that all trailerites were of "dubious reputation" resulted in restricting trailer courts to nonresidential districts or even excluding them altogether from land within corporate boundaries.

In 1950 the majority of zoning ordinances that permitted trailer camps specified commercial zones as the location for trailer camps. In some cases they were first permitted in industrial districts.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence today that trailers are primarily a part of the permanent housing supply, rather than tourist accommodations, most zoning ordinances continue to treat trailers as tourist quarters. At any rate, a large number of zoning ordinances received by ASPO since 1950 would indicate this is so. In a few ordinances it is recognized that situations may exist where trailer courts provide housing occupied over extended periods. For example, in Muskegon, Michigan a trailer court is permitted in a neighborhood business district as a special exception when authorized by the board of appeals. And in Los Angeles trailer parks are permitted as a conditional use in any agricultural or residential zone. Previously, they were first permitted as a conditional use in a C2 commercial zone.

This failure to treat trailers as housing represents a time lag between a changed social situation and recognition of the change by amendments to the law. While it would probably not be advisable to permit a trailer court as a use by right in all conventional residence zones, its dwelling function should be given positive recognition in the zoning ordinance.

One approach has been to class a trailer court as a special use whose location is left to the discretion of the board of zoning adjustment,

Special uses generally have one or more (and sometimes all) of the following characteristics:

*Regulation of a single, dismounted trailer coach is a problem somewhat different from that of a trailer court and has been the subject of much litigation. Single coaches in particular involve the distinction between "vehicle" and "dwelling" and a limitation on the duration of stay.

- 1 - They require large land areas.
- 2 - They are infrequent.
- 3 - They sometimes create an unusual amount or kind of traffic.
- 4 - They are sometimes obnoxious or hazardous.
- 5 - They are required for public safety and convenience.

Typical special uses are airports, public utility buildings, and cemeteries. Trailer courts also usually possess most of these characteristics. In granting a special use permit, the board of appeals is required to determine what the effects of the special use would be on the neighborhood and the city as a whole. Often public hearings are required. (See PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE Information Report No. 40, Exceptions and Variances in Zoning, July 1952.) To assign trailer courts to the class of special uses would probably be appropriate in a community where the uses to which trailers will be put is undetermined (for "permanent" or "temporary" housing; for students or military or others) and where they cannot, therefore, be allocated to one zone or another in advance. For example, to classify trailers as a special use would be reasonable in a city within a metropolitan region where a large amount of new industrial construction is taking place. However, in areas where the pattern of trailer occupancy has been established over a period of years, and where trailer courts fill what seems to be a continuing need, it should be possible to designate appropriate zones. As a general rule "special use" classifications in a zoning ordinance should be kept to a minimum, and it is believed that in most areas specific trailer camp standards can be stated unequivocally and appropriate zones specified. In some cases a high-density, multiple-family residential district might be a proper location for trailer courts. In others, a single-family district might even be suitable. Regardless of zone location, the trailer court should not be an "island" completely surrounded by conventional residences, because of the massive vehicles that must reach it. Weight limits for vehicles on local streets will restrict the site location to some extent, but these limits should not be relied upon to fix an appropriate site.

It is relevant to note here that FHA stresses the residential character of the trailer courts on which it will insure mortgages. For example, the following recommendations appear under the heading "Site Selection" in the FHA land planning bulletin, Mobile Home Courts:

Zoning

1. Site should be in a residential zone if mobile home courts are permitted, or in a heavier zone provided the site is not subject to unhealthful or adverse influences.
2. If unzoned, the location chosen should be such that the mobile home court will not be subject to unhealthful or adverse influences and will not itself adversely affect adjacent neighborhoods.

Community Facilities

1. Accessible to schools, churches, shopping facilities, as for other residential uses.
2. Reasonable commuting distance to employment.

Again, under "Site Planning," the resemblance of well planned and regulated trailer courts to conventional dwelling areas is brought out:

Planning principles combine those used for subdivisions for typical single-family homes and those used for multi-family projects with common facilities and managements. Unusual characteristics are as follows:

1. All facilities planned for development in single ownership. Precise lot lines, street right-of-way lines and utility easements are unnecessary.
2. Lot area for each mobile home typically is much smaller than for customary single-family detached homes. More compact development at higher densities necessitates special planning methods to achieve livability at reasonable costs.
3. Super-block pattern with mobile home lots arranged in courts and double tiers along streets reduce paved areas and street costs. Also reduces the amount of grading, destruction of existing trees and blemish of other natural site features. Block widths can be set to allow use of streets and utilities in possible future conversion of property to other uses. Single tier plans affording street frontage for each mobile home should be used only to fit a topographic condition or a part of plan where space is restricted.

Other types of site plans differing from conventional residential site planning are described, as well as other special characteristics, such as common facilities, fewer street connections to surrounding subdivisions, and limited number of street entrances.

A third function of the zoning ordinance in regulating trailer courts is to establish the relationship between the trailer court and surrounding land uses. However, standards regulating exterior conditions do not need to be in the zoning ordinance if they are clearly detailed in a separate trailer court ordinance. In either case, it is desirable to make a check list of requirements that are necessary to insure trailer court development that is harmonious with surrounding land uses. Fencing, landscaping, setbacks, signs, and lighting are among the things that may be regulated. Site location with respect to residential neighborhoods has already been mentioned. It

may also be advisable to require a minimum over-all area for the court in order to prevent development of many small courts throughout a district. This has been done in Prince Georges County, Maryland, for example, where at least five acres are required for a trailer court.

One of the main objections to trailer courts is their often unattractive appearance. Trailer courts may have good facilities, be well laid out and constructed, but still be offensive to their neighbors.

How the trailer park appears as a whole will depend a great deal on the type of awnings used, on the design of sheds on trailer lots, and on the architecture of public buildings on the park site.

Perhaps more significant than any of these is what is done in the way of interior landscaping and design. An informal plan that leaves as much land undisturbed as possible -- woods, ravines, and the like -- is desirable. Additional shrubs, trees, and vines should be planted if necessary to provide adequate screening for privacy, for shade in summer, to prevent erosion, to reduce glare from metal surfaces, and to provide an attractive area for the occupants of the camp and for the community as well. Good looking and durable fencing, harmonious with the landscape, may be used to advantage to set apart individual trailer lots. The spacing of the trailer coaches will make a great difference in the appearance of the court.

Trailer parks on which FHA will insure mortgages must have at least 50 trailer sites. Of these sites, at least 80 per cent must contain a minimum of 3,000 square feet and the other 20 per cent must have no less than 2,400 square feet. (The MHMA, incidentally, recommends a minimum of 50 trailer sites for a park on the basis that "because of construction and land costs, a mobile home park community must be able to accommodate 50 mobile homes in order to be a profitable business venture.") Side yards, clothes drying facilities, and paved patios are among the other FHA requirements.

In a point by point discussion of property requirements for mobile home courts, FHA says in its Minimum Property Requirements for Mobile Home Courts:

Any nonresidential use of the property shall be subordinate to the residential use and character of the property.

The land area devoted to nonresidential use shall not exceed a small percentage of the total area as determined by the chief underwriter. Any portion of such project which is devoted to nonresidential use shall be primarily for the use of or service to the project occupants and shall be incidental and related to the residential use and character of the project. Such use is

limited to stores, appropriate community buildings and accessory buildings or spaces such as laundry compounds. The residential portion of a project shall be for occupancy by families for extended tenure 30 days or longer and shall not include facilities designed for transient occupancy.

Other FHA requirements or recommendations can be expected to exert a beneficial influence upon the appearance of trailer courts. Evidence of this is the following statement (also from the minimum property requirements booklet) on arrangement of buildings, facilities, and site amenities:

The plot, including mobile home stands, patios, buildings and all site improvements shall be harmoniously and efficiently organized in relation to topography, the shape of plot, and the shape, size, and position of buildings and with full regard to use and appearance. A gridiron layout or other regimented, unimaginative type of site planning is not acceptable where it would result in a monotonous, unattractive development, such as on a level unwooded site or on a large project. Plot planning shall provide for safe, comfortable, efficient and sanitary use by the occupants, under all weather conditions, and services appropriate to the needs of the occupants. Full advantage shall be taken of favorable views, existing trees and other desirable site features. Adequate protection shall be provided against any undesirable off-site views or any adverse influence from adjoining streets and areas.

In the final analysis, the zoning regulation of trailer courts should reflect the realities of the situation. If trailer coaches constitute semi-permanent housing for construction workers or permanent housing for factory workers, then the trailer court should be treated as a form of residential facility, rather than a tourist or commercial enterprise. These people as much as any others need to be near schools, churches, and shopping facilities, and within reasonable commuting distance from employment centers.

Trailer courts have certain unique characteristics that set them off from other residential areas, chief among which is the trailer coach itself -- an immense vehicle, perhaps one of the largest on the American road. For this reason, trailer courts should be located on or near main arteries, whether in a residential or other district.

For at least five years, trailer courts have served a predominantly residential function. The recent decision of FHA to insure mortgages on qualified new trailer courts emphasizes this function. It is only reasonable for the zoning ordinance to admit the existence of a new type of residential accommodation. However, prior to the zoning ordinance amendment, a separate trailer court ordinance embodying high design and construction

standards in as much detail as necessary should be adopted.

Conclusion

If trailer courts are forced into fringe areas where land is cheap, where regulation may be difficult, and where a minimal initial investment is all that is needed to establish a park, profiteering trailer park operators may go a long way towards creating overcrowded, unsanitary trailer slums.

On the other hand, careful regulation of the many aspects of trailers and trailer court operations may overcome to a great extent the deleterious effects that they have had on communities. This may be done by recognizing and planning appropriately for that segment of the population that uses trailers as year-around dwellings. Insofar as is practicable, the amenities that conventional home owners enjoy in the community should not be denied the trailer dweller.

Mobile workers deserve the same considerations as other members of the communities where they locate. The community has a stake in them, and reasonably convenient and attractive sites for their trailer coaches should be planned for.

Whether the once existing prejudice against trailerites was ever justified is questionable; certainly today such a prejudice is unreasonable. The trailer population is composed of such a wide cross-section of the total population that to stereotype the trailer dweller is unjust. The trailerite undergoes hardship in being forced to live in nonresidential areas. As has been said, up until now most zoning ordinances have shunted trailers to zones other than residential. But commercial or industrial zones are not necessarily the most appropriate locations. There is scarcely any incentive for trailer court owners and tenants to maintain high residential standards when they are forced into areas that by their very nature are densely built up, dirty, noisy, and congested with traffic.

MIDWEST STATE TRAILER PARK SURVEY

April 1955

TRAILER PARK SURVEY

Persons living in mobile homes in Midwest State today constitute a significant and important segment of the total population. In 1953, the latest year for which figures are available, there were approximately 26,000 mobile homes located in the state, housing more than 65,000 people -- almost 1-1/2 per cent of all persons living in that state. And this number continues to grow at the rate of about 2,000 trailers a year, with no indication of any slow-down, since the conventional housing industry is not supplying the homes demanded by this population.

In spite of all this, very little is known about mobile homes in Midwest State and about the type of families that live in them. Communities faced with the problem of providing adequate school facilities for children living in their areas have no way of determining accurately the provisions they should make for school-age youngsters living in trailer parks. Likewise, no information is available for communities in which trailer parks may be located in the future.

Therefore, it was proposed that a survey be conducted in the area served by a Midwest utility company in order to obtain general information on mobile homes. The survey was designed to answer such questions as: what is the average size of trailer parks? what is the average size of a trailer park family? how many children do they have? in what age groups are these children? what types of jobs do people living in trailer parks have? how often do people who live in trailers move? and for what reasons do they move?

This study attempts to answer these questions and presents in addition some other information obtained while conducting the survey of mobile homes.

Information for this study was obtained by the use of a mail questionnaire, coupled with a personal interview follow-up. Questionnaires were sent to the owners or managers of 119 trailer parks located in the area served by the utility company. Approximately three weeks from the date the forms were sent out, a survey representative made a personal call at each park to collect the questionnaires, and if necessary to review them and answer any questions that might have come up.

Of the 119 contacts made, responses were received from 98. Six of these had to be discarded because of incomplete or incorrect data, leaving a total of 92 interviews on which to base the report of this study.

In order to present a clearer and more accurate picture of mobile home living as it exists in the various communities in the region surveyed, the information obtained was broken down and is presented by area or district.* Figures showing the totals for all districts are also given.

*[Editors' note: a breakdown for only one district -- Central City -- is included in this report. It is shown as a sample of the breakdowns done for each of the eight districts studied.]

On several questions, the data submitted were so incomplete that it was difficult to get information that had much objective value. Statements based on this data are so noted in the report.

SUMMARY

General Data

Information solicited from 92 trailer parks was used in this survey. There were a total of 6,086 trailers in these parks, housing 15,300 persons of whom 3,833, or 25 per cent, were children of school age or younger.

These parks have been in operation an average of 9.2 years each. Age of individual parks varied from a low of less than one year to a high of more than 25 years.

There is a median of 50 trailers per park with an average of 166.3 persons, of which 41.7 are children. Average size of the parks is 5.1 acres.

Population Characteristics

The average trailer park family, as determined by this survey, has approximately three members -- two adults and one child. Chances are better than 50 per cent that the head of the household is employed in a factory and that he has been in his present job about 1-1/2 years. The child in the family is probably under 13 years of age, and, again, chances are about even that he or she will be of school age.

Of the 3,833 children in the parks, 2,209 of them are of school age. Of this latter number, more than 82 per cent are in the 5-13 years age bracket. These figures would seem to indicate that so far as trailer parks are concerned the major school load for the communities in which the parks are located will be in kindergarten and the first eight grades. Children of high school age constitute less than 10 per cent of the total number and, therefore, this age group would seemingly present no problem.

Some rather interesting statistics were obtained in connection with occupations of tenants living in mobile homes. As would be expected, about half of the tenants were factory workers. However, almost every other occupational group was represented in significant numbers. For example, in district A the tenants were predominantly students; in the C district 55 per cent of them were construction workers; in the G district more than 20 per cent were clerical workers; and in Central City a great many of them were professional workers and military personnel.

The average turnover per year of trailers in the parks surveyed is slightly more than 45 per cent. There was, however, quite a variation among the several districts. For example, F district, which caters primarily to the summer tourist trade, reported a turnover of more than 246 per cent. Central City, on the other hand, where the trailer park occupants were principally working people, had a turnover of only 36 per cent.

Growth

Of the 92 park operators contacted, 57 per cent stated that they planned to enlarge their facilities within the next five years. The average number of acres available for expansion per park is approximately four, on which operators plan to have space for about 24 trailers.

Applying these figures across the board to the 119 trailer parks located in the study area means that 67 parks will add a total of 1,608 trailers within the next five years. Again applying the average figures, as determined in this study, the trailer park population will increase about 4,000 in this same period of time.

Reasons for Moving

An attempt was made in this survey to find out why people who live in mobile homes move and what happens to them after they move. Unfortunately, response to this question was very sketchy. Most of those who did answer the question did not have accurate, detailed records and, therefore, the reliability of the figures presented is questionable. However, in this case, opinion is probably superior to the alternative -- nothing.

The principal reason why tenants move from trailer parks would appear to be job transfers. Sixty-three per cent were in this category. Of the 1,730 trailer occupants reporting, 19 per cent established permanent homes in Midwest State after leaving trailer parks and 2 per cent established homes outside of Midwest State. The remaining 16 per cent moved for other reasons.

TABLE 1

TOTAL -- ALL DISTRICTS

Number of parks		92
Average age of parks (years).		9.2
Average size of parks (acres)		5.1
Total number of trailers.		6,086
Median number of trailers (per park).		50
Total population of parks		15,300
Average number of persons per park	166.3	
Average number of persons per trailer.	2.5	
Total number of children.		3,833
Total number of children of school age.		2,029
Average number of children per park.	41.7	
Average number of children per trailer7	
Occupation of tenants -- Largest group -- Factory		49.6%
Median tenure (years)		1-2
Average turnover (per year)		45.7%
Expansion		
Plan to enlarge park	57%	
Number of acres available (average per park)	3.8	
Additional trailers planned (average per park)	23.7	

Table 1 -- Total - All Districts (continued)

Age of Parks

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Less than 1 year	6	6.5
1- 3 years	18	19.6
4- 7 years	19	20.7
8-11 years	8	8.7
12-15 years	25	27.2
16-19 years	11	12.0
20-24 years	4	4.3
More than 24 years	1	1.1

Age of Children

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Under 5 years	1,804	47.1
5-13 years	1,657	43.2
High school	372	9.7

Occupations of Tenants

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Factory	2,437	49.6
Construction	969	19.7
Clerical	370	7.5
Retirees	244	5.0
Professional	232	4.7
Student	171	3.5
Military	49	1.0
Other	446	9.0

Tenure

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Less than 1 year	1,949	33.8
1-2 years	1,410	24.5
2-3 years	931	16.2
3-5 years	657	11.4
More than 5 years	817	14.2

Turnover (based on less than 50 per cent response)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
1954	44.2
1953	44.0
1952	52.2
1951	45.8
1950	43.3

TABLE 2

CENTRAL CITY DISTRICT*

Number of parks	20
Average age of parks (years).	13.7
Average size of parks (acres)	3.2
Total number of trailers.	1,850
Median number of trailers (per park).	92.5
Total population of parks	4,234
Average number of persons per park	211.7
Average number of persons per trailer.	2.3
Total number of children.	756
Total number of children of school age.	405
Average number of children per park.	37.8
Average number of children per trailer41
Occupation of tenants -- Largest group -- Factory	54.9%
Median tenure (years)	2-3
Average turnover (per year)	36.6%
Expansion	
Plan to enlarge park	40.0%
Number of acres available (average per park)	2.6
Additional trailers planned (average per park)	40.5

*[Sample breakdown; see page 25.]

Table 2 — Central City District (continued)

Age of Parks

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Less than 1 year	1	5
1- 3 years	2	10
4- 7 years	-	-
8-11 years	-	-
12-15 years	10	50
16-19 years	4	20
20-24 years	3	15
More than 24 years	-	-

Age of Children

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Under 5 years	351	46.4
5-13 years	313	41.4
High school	92	12.2

Occupation of Tenants

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Factory	1,002	54.9
Construction	181	9.9
Clerical	138	7.6
Retirees	106	5.8
Professional	69	3.8
Student	34	1.9
Military	37	2.0
Other	257	14.1

Tenure

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent of total</u>
Less than 1 year	485	26.5
1-2 years	360	19.6
2-3 years	273	14.9
3-5 years	266	14.5
More than 5 years	449	24.5

Turnover (based on 75 per cent of response)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
1954	32.0
1953	35.4
1952	46.1
1951	37.5
1950	32.1

TABLE 3

COMPARATIVE DATA SHEET

	A (City)	B (County)	C (County)	D (County)	E (County)	F (County)	G (County)	Central City	Total All District
Number of parks	15	9	2	21	10	3	12	20	9%
Average age of parks (years)	8.8	10.2	3	9.8	4.8	4.5	6.2	13.7	9.4
Median number of trailers (per park)	30	103	47	57	13	28	55	92.5	5
Average number of persons (per park)	82.1	319.4	139.6	196.5	44.7	42.7	165	211.7	166.
Average number of school age child- ren (per park)	11.2	52.8	21.0	30.5	6.4	4.3	18.4	79.7	22.
Median temure (years)	1-2	1-2	Less than 2	1-2	Less than 1	1-2	1-2	2-3	1-
Average turnover	31.2%	80.1%	48.4%	48.7%	40.7%	246.4%	31.2%	36.6%	45.7