4 AT HOME IN THE FIRST APARTMENT HOUSES

Families searching for appropriately genteel housing must have been happy indeed to see the first apartment houses go up on the streets of New York. Yet as tenants they had a lot to become accustomed to. The acceptability of the first apartments depended upon both practical, utilitarian concerns and association- al, symbolic meanings. How could the idea of "home" be attached to a large building shared with numerous others? What were the practical daily life and housekeeping implications of this new kind of home? What kinds of people in addition to the nuclear family deserved special consideration from those who were designing apartment houses? And how could an apartment house affect the tone of the city around it? By the end of the 1870s a whole new set of living patterns had been installed in New York, taken up by thousands of middle-class people. The fact that they did take to apartment life suggests that the new housing form offered many advantages.

Meanings of Home

Among the problems presented by apartments was their relation to already held images of "home." Residential hotels, French flats, boardinghouses, parts of houses, tenements, and specialized clublike buildings for bachelors or hotels for working people each represented a changed image and a potential new definition of what "homelife" must mean. Yet images of "home" did not accommodate comfortably to changed customs and circumstances. How did apartment residents construct their images of "home," and how did architects design to convey homelike messages?21

The words "home" and "homelife" occurred in the 1860s and 1870s in a context of warnings explaining how easily home values might be lost. Those who went to live in hotels would see "an utter upsetting of all home habits, an entire disregard of old-fashioned domesticity and comfort." Should they live in a boardinghouse, they would be "forced into a manner of living which violates the very first requirements of the life we most affect, namely, individual privacy and family seclusion." When several families lived together in a boardinghouse, the "privacy of the home is invaded," and "'home' becomes an empty name."22

Privacy appears to be the very keystone of successful Victorian family life. Descriptions of "home" pointed to the "beneficent influence of its delightful seclusion," where the family members could thrive because they lived separate from others. This prized privacy, it should be noted, was sought for the family unit; it was not a question of assuring individuals within the family privacy from each other. The ordinarily understood family consisted of husband and wife, children, and servants; this group required complete privacy for their own family activities. Bachelors too, even though their commitments to "home" were not secured by marital bonds, regretted the loss of privacy and individuality in boardinghouses and hotels.3

Beyond its ability to guarantee precious privacy, a true home also was the place where individuality could be established. The private expression of individuality took place inside: a married couple would decide upon and act on their own rules of decorum and bring up their children to follow their principles. In the home they could also surround themselves with the furniture, books, and pictures that asserted their individual taste. In the home, as a family established its individuality from other families, it also built up its own coherence.

Home, wrote a New England minister, John Ware, was above all a moral place where true values could be maintained, usually through the dedication of women, in the face of the world's darker aspects. Home, believed Ware, is "an anchor by which he [the male house owner] holds amid the tossings of temptation, a place of refuge and of love, whose charm, whose solid, pure delights, prevail against all that pleasure offers or appetite suggests."4 Home as a refuge suggests both a moral quality and a location away from all temptation, but such a location- al refuge could never be part of the apartment-dweller's home.

Apartments might harbor within themselves dangers to familial success. Howells's protagonists Mr. and Mrs. March discussed their feelings about "family consciousness" as they reflected on apartment buildings. They condemned the show that went into fancy lobbies and was reiterated in the social pretenses of drawing rooms where middle-class apartment dwellers were expected to entertain and impress their guests. Such pretensions were absurd when apartments did not have a single family room for quiet togetherness, nowhere "where the family can all come together and feel the sweetness of being a family." Mr. March felt that even tenement dwellers had a better family life in their rental quarters, because at least there, there was a true "living" room. "There the whole family lives in the kitchen and has its consciousness of being; but the flat abolishes the family consciousness."5

The idea of the home as a valued family center has been characterized by the cultural geographer David Sopher as the "domesticentric" view. This view poses
home values as good, in opposition to "rootlessness," which is bad. Sopher quotes both nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources to show persistent associations between homelessness, understood as rootlessness, and criminal behavior. Sopher also points out that a "domifugial," or home-leaving, myth has a central position, but usually not for families. Frontiersmen, cowboys, and other adventurers characterized the male myth of leaving the "confines" of home, striking out into the "freedom" of the wilderness.

In the mid-nineteenth century, movement from one home to another was endemic, and everyone in New York City was reputed to move every May 1. Immigrants from many countries, families of pioneers, and upwardly mobile middle-class families in the nineteenth-century city left home to improve, or at least change, their circumstances. They left not "home," but specific homes in order to find others more fitting. Apparently, then, Americans held domicentric and domifugial myths at the same time. If these myths were legitimized, then apartment buildings would provide the ideal home, a home both permanent and transient. Once settled in, a family could easily move; rented quarters are perfect for departures and quick landings and that was, in fact, how tenants behaved. However, the literature on apartment life did not always support domicentric aims. Socially established people regarded flats, how the image of home was credible to first-generation apartment dwellers, then they must have felt some tension between the home ideal and the facts that their new dwelling presented to them. No apartment home was excluded from all others except by its front door in a public hallway. Waves waiting at home could be envisioned as the anchor saving drifting men from the world's temptation, but such temptation might live just down the hall and might tempt the wife just as easily. The solidity and stability linked to home images was permanently undercut by short leases and annual moving day in apartments.

**Built Images of Home**

"A house to be a true home must be strictly adapted to the owner's position in society," asserted John Ware in his 1866 book on the home. The home, because it had to be an appropriate representation of a family's social status, needed to be separate and individualized. Since the private house had been the only kind of architecture that provided mid-century New Yorkers with the image of home, designers of apartments were faced with serious problems. How were they to make larger-than-house-size multiple dwellings fit that image? Smaller apartment houses might be more in scale with a private house idea, but even there the building was clearly no longer private.

Transferring signs of individuality to an apartment building was full of difficulties. For small, single-lot buildings such as Bruce Price's French flat (fig. 24), the architect relied upon the house-like scale of the building and its ornament to give tenants a feeling that these flats were home-like. The building sat comfortably with neighboring houses on Twenty-first Street. Its roof began at the same height as its neighbors' cornicles, and while the roof rose above adjoining houses, its gable shape and dormer kept it within the realm of domestic imagery. In a French-flat building such as Price's, where a full floor belonged to each individual family, identification of that family's quarters from the exterior was easy for every tenant. While they may not have had the resources to rent or purchase a full building of their own, at least tenants could identify with a full floor, their own territory in a shared building. But of course they lost the capacity of a private house to declare to the public its owner's social standing.

For a larger French-flat building such as the Stuyvesant (fig. 23), house-like heights were maintained, but other elements of individualization had to be interpreted. The top of the Stuyvesant was given a prominent mansard roof and four overscaled studio windows to supply light to the artists' studios on the top floor. This roof both unifies the whole, through its imposing size, and reiterates the four-part division of the interior seen in plan, four parts representing four family units per floor. Hunt does indicate, by means of window changes and ornamental details, that there are breaks between individual family units on each floor, but the first-time viewer might easily find the image ambiguous. There are no clear clues by which residents could identify the extent of their individual domains from the exterior. It is very difficult to think of this building's features as representing any one family's status—only a generic social status for all the tenants at once.

The architect Henry Hudson Holly tried to remedy the loss of individuality by creating a "family hotel," which had apartments reached by public corridors on the upper floors but private apartments with their own front entrances from the street on the first floor (fig. 33). He thought that the series of front doors and high stoops would convincingly represent familiar private houses with their reassuring individuality. A central entrance for all the other tenants led to the upper stories of the large building where concealed apartments lay behind this screen of private-house imagery.

Tenement designers and reformers subscribed to the same values as the tenants and designers of middle-class apartments. They believed that individualization was good for working-class tenants and would give them a sense of self-worth. Even the standard 25-foot-wide tenement house tended to follow the individualizing model of private row-house facades with a side or center stoop, and a strong cornice cut short of the party walls on each side. Often these tenement buildings further emphasized their "individual" nature with a central decorative feature on the cornice carrying the name of the building (fig. 38). A large tenement block like White's Riverside or the Astral represented "dangerous communal tendencies," but a house-sized building maintained the proper image of home.

For all these new buildings in the city, creating an image of home was difficult.
because buildings that had initially established that image for city dwellers were so much smaller than the new, large multiple dwellings. On the positive side, the repetitive brownstone fronts, the landscapes of urban architecture that had seemed so homogeneous, were now being supplanted with variety. The new streets of flats had more diversity, and the new types of flats ranged through many styles, many sizes, many strata of tenants. City residents could create new images of home for themselves from these architectural offerings, replacing seclusion, for example, with stylishness as a desired home quality.

Social Rank and Strangers

Throughout the 1870s, New Yorkers saw apartment houses erected in ever-increasing numbers, and many families whose backgrounds and social position would have led them to private houses in an earlier generation now lived in apartments. Given the beliefs in privacy and individuality attached to ideas of home, how could an apartment house allow a family the opportunity to declare its social rank, and how could family members sustain their privacy while brought into daily and close proximity to others?

Imagine tenants who were attempting apartment life for the first time moving into the Bella Flats, a small French-flat building that opened in the 1870s on the corner of Twenty-sixth Street at 358 Fourth Avenue. The people who found themselves living together in this building comprised fourteen household units and included married couples with and without children, a widower, single men sharing a "bachelor flat," a janitor, and servants. Among the male heads of households living at the Bella, three were lawyers, two were in banking, and one was a physician, one a clergyman, one a stockbroker, one a bookkeeper, and one a gentleman at leisure. In addition there were several businessmen engaged in wine importing, silks, and produce. Of the married women tenants, all but one listed their occupations as "housekeeping"; the remaining one was an artist. The children living in the Bella Flats ranged in age from infancy to twenty-two years. Most of the families with children had one, two, or three children, but one family, headed by a widower, had six.

Every Bella household but one had at least one live-in servant, several had two, and one family had three; all the servants at the Bella were Irish. Four of the households also had lodgers living with them; a single lodger in two cases, and three lodgers in two other cases. The last family in residence was the janitor with his wife, son, and daughter. They lodged two servants who worked at the general upkeep of the Bella Flats. This cross section of genteel occupations and a fairly homogeneous tenancy of mostly small families would have characterized "the neighbors" for anyone moving into the Bella Flats. Living among clergymen, physicians, stockbrokers, and lawyers could be socially comfortable for these tenants; yet nonetheless every other family was still made up of "strangers." Did the married people find their...
with modest dwellings, she said, but Americans had to purchase their distinction through material display, and looked upon a fine house as a mark of social success. The house in question might be elaborate and showy or subdued and tasteful, depending on how the owners wished to present themselves; still, it remained the place where monetary success could be exhibited. This tendency to purchase the signs of social rank resulted in a pervasive feeling that people's "true" social rank was always hidden, that people were passing themselves off as "better than they really were," and that social intercourse was fraught with risk. Of course, for those who counted on signaling their success through their houses, apartment buildings seemed to defeat their ambitions.

American writers looked to Europe for a way to deal with the social mixture in apartment houses, but found that there apartment dwellers got along without the same anxieties. Sarah Gilman Young claimed that Europeans were oblivious to who lived over or under them in an apartment building, because Europeans, born into a social rank, were never threatened by contiguous living arrangements. Parisians lived happily with the well-to-do on the lower floors and the poor in the garret. But mixing classes in one building in America, reported the French-trained architect Philip Hubert, was thought to be impossible because of "jealousy from the bottom and exclusivity from the top."

European apartments, of course, had the same mixture of people who were strangers, yet given their years of experience of living in apartments, strangers did not seem a problem. "It may be urged as an objection to living on floors," wrote Sarah Gilman Young, "that it is not pleasant to meet people one does not know in the halls." But she felt it not particularly different from meeting such people on the street. In any case one did not often meet one's neighbors on the stairs, and if one did, "courteous salutations, which give no right to recognition elsewhere" were exchanged and that was the end of it. Parisians were used to regarding the halls and stairs of apartment houses "as a continuation of the public street . . . used for generations by all manner of people," but to Americans it made no sense to allow interior spaces to be called "public" and given over to outsiders.

Many middle-class families resisted the move to apartments for such reasons of social rank, according to a reporter who was enthusiastic about apartment houses. It was not until a few successful buildings for the rich demonstrated to those of moderate means the possibility of multiple tenancy without the risk of social debasement, he asserted in 1874, that large numbers of middle-class families felt comfortable in apartment buildings. The success of the Stuyvesant Apartments demonstrated "how the most respectable people can live upon flats precisely as the gentry and even the nobility do in many of the leading capitals of Europe," asserted a real estate spokesman, who urged capitalists to understand the value of such buildings and invest in them.

These responses to the social acceptability of multiple dwellings reflected the diversity of standards held by the several strata of the middle class. For one person, moving into a tenement implied the risk of losing his social standing; for
another, moving into an apartment of any kind carried social risk. In spite of
doubts about losing social rank, however, New Yorkers by the mid-1870s
seemed happy to move into multiple dwellings and only wished there were more
of them to choose from.

**Who Can Make a Home?**

As the design of physical settings for "home" expanded beyond the single-
family house, attention was directed beyond the nuclear family to the variety of
persons who constituted "households," leading designers to produce alternatives
to the full family apartment. The people who shared an apartment house could
be seen not just as an accidental gathering of tenants but as a group that shared a
common social status or lifestyle. This was the way developers pictured them
when they established the income level of prospective tenants or when they
determined rents, building location, and elaboration of design. It was also a
choice of tenants who selected buildings to live in on the basis of congenial
neighborhoods and culturally familiar fellow tenants.

A collective dwelling for large numbers of people with related interes-
t or circumstances was not a new idea. Earlier in the nineteenth century
philanthropists and social reformers had created some dwellings for special
tenant groups such as the Working Women's Home of the 1850s, created out of
rehabilitated tenement buildings at 45 Elizabeth Street. There some 500 women
were provided with a bed in a dormitory setting, with curtains rather than walls
for privacy. On the main floor were parlors, a reading room, a laundry, and a
common dining room, which served meals paid for by the week along with the
rent. In the basement were a common kitchen and the bathrooms. The age
range of these tenants was eighteen to thirty-five, and they made $6 to $7 a
week. For $1.25 women could get a bed and their laundry done; for another
$1.75 to $3.25 they could get meals. For an extra $0.25, tenants could be let in
after 11 P.M.

A group home without real walls was hardly acceptable to working women
who could afford to maintain a middle-class style of life. For them, the
department-store owner A. T. Stewart and the architect John Kelham planned a
"hotel for women of modest means" on Park Avenue, begun in 1869 (figs. 39,
40). The "hotel," intended for sales clerks, included bedrooms of 16 by 18 feet
for two women to share, and rooms for single women of 8 by 9 feet. A grand
derence portico with columns, a marble floor, and elevators added elegance and
convenience to Stewart's hotel; interiors were to be enhanced with good-quality
furniture and even fine paintings.

Shared facilities such as parlors and reading rooms made Stewart's similar to
an ordinary hotel, as did a central dining room and kitchen. Since it was just for
women, however, it would have escaped the moral criticism leveled at hotels
where both sexes lived. Stewart had planned a duplicate building for young men
that was never built. Unfortunately the hotel for women did not fulfill its original aims; construction lagged and the hotel did not actually open until 1877. By then the set rents were too high for store clerks, and the intended tenants were also beleaguered by too many rules and regulations. The experimental was converted to the conventional: the women's home became the Park Avenue Hotel. A greater impediment to producing a good apartment building for single women was the fact that in the 1870s, young, respectable women did not have society's blessing to make independent homes of their own.20

In contrast to young working women, men alone in the city endured no social stigma for their marital abstinence. Bachelors, some 125,000 strong in the New York of 1870, constituted a group acknowledged to have more active social lives than the traditional family, but like the women, they did lack suitable housing. Hotels were available to bachelors, but critics complained that only the wealthy could afford them, while boardinghouses were an unacceptable alternative for those who valued privacy.21

Solving the bachelor's housing problem required a suite of rooms scaled to the needs of a single person, perhaps consisting only of a parlor, a bedroom, a bath, and closets. The architect E. T. Littell proposed in 1876 that developers create a bachelor dwelling unit with a parlor, 14 by 16 feet; a bedroom, 8 by 10 feet; a bathroom, 5 by 8 feet (with perhaps a bigger parlor for those who wished to "chum together"). Some suites could be connected so two friends could share quarters if desired. Bachelors usually took their meals in clubs and restaurants, or with friends, so Littell suggested that a bachelor-flat building be run like a club, with membership fees and dues and a common dining room where the bachelor could find good food as well as privacy.

Bachelor flats and Stewart's Hotel for Working Women both suggested a modification to the assumed set of rooms for family needs, and with that modification some redefinitions of the boundary between collective and private spaces. Bachelors' apartments kept the private definition of a parlor, a bedroom, and a bathroom as other middle-class apartments of the 1870s had done. The women's hotel retained only private bedrooms, more like a college dormitory. Entertainment and dining activities were shifted to public spaces (dining rooms, clubs, restaurants, and roof terrace). Cooking was not considered a likely skill for bachelors to possess, so kitchens were omitted in proposals for bachelor-flat buildings. Young women (who were supposed to possess cooking skills) could not afford the space and equipment that private kitchens required on their meager salaries, so they were provided with collective dining facilities.

The lack of housing for these special groups had encouraged the production of designs especially developed for their needs, which were perceived to be different from those of families. However, not much was actually built during this period for tenants whose needs diverged from the family norm. The project to design for single people met with larger success at the turn of the century, when one finds many bachelor-apartment buildings for both men and women. By then one also finds the rigid notions of women's roles shifting so as to allow young single women to rent apartments like their male counterparts.22

Housework

Social uneasiness accompanied the first generation of apartments but so did appreciation of a new ease in the mechanics of running a household. If collective social interactions seemed at cross-purposes with images of home, the opportunities that communal settings and new household technologies opened up
made housekeeping less of a problem than ever before. New architectural designs of household space in apartment buildings allowed for improved efficiency in basic household work. The ways that apartment designers and clients understood the work of the household as it took shape in apartment buildings enabled a redefinition of the place of servants. Designers and clients reassessed the role of domestic work done outside the home and focused on the ways that architectural planning and newly available equipment could make housekeeping easier.

Modern readers in houses with running water and electrical equipment may find it difficult to realize the extent of the burdens of housekeeping, but nineteenth-century writers have recorded how hard housekeeping really was. “Our system of living in America makes life a tyranny to every woman,” wrote Sarah Gilman Young in 1872, “so that, as John Stuart Mill justly remarks, there remain no legal slaves except the mistress of every house.” Young stated that American women lost “their bloom and youth” before their European counterparts did specifically because American houses were so badly designed and managed. Young based her recommendations for improved housekeeping on her experiences of living in European flats, where one-floor living, combined with citywide aids like bakeries and laundries, made all the difference. Intelligent layout of the household space could save women time, energy, and health.

In the years before indoor plumbing and central heating, the housekeeper and her servants carried fuel up stairs to every room that needed heat, lighted and maintained the fires, carried water whenever it was needed, probably from an outdoor source; and heated the water when hot water was required. They used outhouses during the day and emptied chamber pots in the morning. They made various kinds of soaps and preparations to do all their own cleaning—not just of clothing but also of upholstery and drapes, and bedding. If urban life had its drawbacks, at least city dwellers had easier access to manufactured products such as soap and bread and clothing, as well as to indoor plumbing. Still, even urban household work encompassed both production and maintenance, so servants were essential.

“Housekeeping isn’t fun,” wrote Nora to the New York Times in 1874. “Already we young women do in one day work indoors that would have killed our grand mothers. We want flats.” Nora’s preference for a home on one floor echoed early reports from apartment dwellers and designers who agreed that one-floor living was always easier for the housekeeper. A private house of four stories required constant climbing up and down stairs to cook, clean, oversee children, and entertain. An apartment on one floor eliminated much of this effort involved in carrying things and moving from room to room. Indeed, an architect, looking back from 1901, claimed that New Yorkers would never have taken to apartment life had they not “tasted the sweets” of easy housekeeping.

Convenience as a theme of apartment life developed over the first generation of experience with these buildings, the 1860s and 1870s. By the time of the early middle-class apartment-house designs of about 1870, potential clients for apartments were already familiar with convenience and efficiency through elevators, gas lighting, and other urban-scale technologies. But, because of the large labor pool of servants available to perform household work, new technologies were not yet much in demand at home.

Instead in this early period of apartment design, efficiency and convenience were understood to be present in the defining character of the apartment unit itself—its being on one floor. Having everything on one floor meant less running up and down and that the housekeeper had less trouble overseeing her servant’s work. A flat was usually smaller than a whole house, and so required a smaller investment in furniture. Smaller and fewer rooms than a whole house and less furniture meant less cleaning and upkeep. Less cleaning meant fewer servants. In descriptions of apartments in the 1870s, convenience was one of the virtues claimed for apartment life, but this virtue was grounded in the new design idea of a one-floor unit, rather than in new technological conveniences.

The housekeeping chores of the new tenants at the Stuyvesant Apartments in 1870 were formidable by today’s standards. The only services supplied to the building as a whole were gas for lighting and running water. Tenants had their own coal bins and had to light their own fires in individual fireplaces. There was no passenger or service elevator, although a rope-and-pulley dumbwaiter aided in bringing goods up, trash down, and laundry from basement washrooms to rooftop drying areas. Coal or wood had to be carried up to run the cooking stove in each kitchen, and ice had to be delivered to individual iceboxes. Families were expected to employ their own live-in servants. Compared with the technological conveniences introduced over the subsequent few years, the Stuyvesant’s offerings were minimal. Each apartment unit in the Stuyvesant worked like a miniature private house of the period, conceiving of housekeeping as a labor-intensive problem and one internal to the household.

Like the Stuyvesant, Bruce Price’s French flat at 21 East Twenty-first Street provided individual kitchens in each family unit and no centralized cooking or dining. John Babcock at the Albany also conceived of its three- and four-bedroom apartments as designed for individual housekeeping. All of these buildings provided rooms for live-in servants but none of the additional services like meal service or cleaning that families living in hotels would have had. The apartment building of that era that did have centralized dining rooms and kitchens was the Stevens, and it was early converted to the Hotel Victoria, thereby stressing the public and collective nature of its facilities.

The Place of Servants

Middle-class households expected to have servants when the first apartment houses were built in New York. This requirement, of course, had an effect on apartment planning. Family privacy demanded that servants be as invisible as
possible, yet American families also mistrusted their servants enough to want to keep an eye on them. Servants' rooms were common in middle-class apartments and usually were labeled as such in plans. They were the smallest rooms, and usually were located on the upper floors of the house. When they had bathrooms of their own they had the smallest bathrooms. A servant's room was often placed so its window overlooked the light shaft and was usually linked to, or close to, the kitchen.

An alternative, based on European practice, was to provide a servants' dormitory in the attic of an apartment house, supplemented with dormitories, usually for male servants, in the basement. Mistresses feared that their servants, when living in dormitories together with other families' servants, would both misbehave and gossip, spreading the family secrets to neighboring households. However, designers had to observe spatial constraints and were open to Continental ideas: servants' rooms were built in the attics and mansards of many New York buildings such as Price's 21 East Twenty-first Street French flat and the well-known Dakota, built in 1884. The attic seemed a likely place for servants to sleep because, in early apartment buildings, the roof was typically the servant's territory already. The roof itself had places for drying the laundry, and garret rooms or penthouses provided work space for servants. Whether bedrooms for servants belonged inside a family unit or in a special servants' zone remained an issue for apartment designers into the twentieth century, even as numbers of servants dwindled and technological aids to housekeeping increased.

In New York during the era of apartment-building development, having and keeping servants was widely discussed as a problem. Some people explained that competent servants were hard to find, that too many were dishonest, and that they "took over" the household and ended up bossing around the mistress of the house. Furthermore, householders often expressed contempt for immigrants, who were "lower" than the native-born and who often came in for verbal (or worse) abuse from xenophobic employers. Florence Hartley's 1872 etiquette book reminded ladies that servants "come here from the lowest ranks of English and Irish peasantry, with as much idea of politeness as the pig domesticated in the cabin of the latter." These attitudes must be balanced by an understanding of the social context of the time. Most servants were recent arrivals to the city—either country girls who had few urban skills, or European immigrants whose cultures held different standards of both family privacy and housekeeping methods. New Yorkers, as we have seen, were especially conscious of privacy as a requirement for good family life and therefore resented having strangers in the household, even when their work was essential.

Gwendolyn Wright suggests that after 1880 more and more servants who did work in American households lived in their own homes and that the preponderance of "servant's rooms" in architectural plans of the late nineteenth century was "servant's moral rooms" in architectural plans of the late nineteenth century. The loss of a servant is used in Sater Carrie to mark the transition into poverty that Carrie and Hurstwood experience when he becomes unemployed. In their modest West Side flat they pay $55 a month and employ a "girl" to do the cleaning and some cooking. To save money they move to a $80-a-month flat and let the maid go. The New York City 1880 and 1900 federal census data and letters to local newspapers written by apartment dwellers in New York indicate that even moderate-income families did employ a servant and had to house her—especially when there were children.

A special feature of apartment houses enhanced their ability to make housekeeping easier: the opportunities for collective, building-wide work, making use of new inventions. The era of apartment-house development coincides with the era of new mechanical conveniences and services for the house. Siegfried Giedion, in Mechanization Takes Command, gave a summary of the appliances developed in the especially inventive decades of the 1850s and 1860s in the United States. Carpet sweepers had mechanical brushes patented in 1858 and 1859; in 1859 a patent was taken out on a vacuum cleaner. A dishwasher was invented in 1865; several washing-machine patents were taken out between 1850 and 1869; paring and coring machines made home food preserving easier; a gas-heated clothes iron was for sale in the 1850s; even a small artificial ice machine was patented in France in 1860.

In their modern, powered form, these machines were developed and sold first for large-scale commercial use. Laundry machines that washed and ironed first appeared for commercial laundering establishments and did not receive their smaller household forms until decades later. In 1869 in their book American Women's Home, Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe recommended that every dozen families band together and establish a community laundry for themselves. In 1872 in The Home, Frank and Marian Stockton express surprise that more householders do not "club together" to establish their own laundries, buying the washing machines and hiring the labor to run them. The New York City 1880 and 1900 federal census data and letters to local newspapers written by apartment dwellers in New York indicate that even moderate-income families did employ a servant and had to house her—especially when there were children.

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ers, dumbwaiters, bells, and speaking tubes, which replaced the labor of lighting fires, carrying water, and running downstairs to answer the door.

A British observer in 1874 pointed to America as the inventor of a particular kind of modernity: that arising from collective effort. Contrasting American habits, the writer asserted that Americans banded together to get things done: a postal service replaced the individual messenger helped by the sender to carry a letter; central heating systems replaced the individual fire lit in each room and saved the individual servant’s labor involved in that task. Deliveries could be made to the building’s superintendent or door attendant and not to the individual household, once again saving the servant’s efforts. “Modern life” was clearly heading toward collective effort to save costs and labor. Apartment houses provided a perfect field for developing collective advantages.

Convenience to an individual family was often achieved by means of centralized labor: work done by apartment building staff rather than within the individual household. At the Bella Flats, almost every family had its own live-in servants to perform household work, but there was also a janitor in permanent residence. He, his family, and two additional servants in the employ of building management did all the general upkeep of halls and public spaces and the repair to individual units.

The Haight House, the fashionable apartment conversion at Fifteenth Street and Fifth Avenue, offered its 1870s tenants even more collectively organized services, more opportunities to have household work taken care of by servants employed by the house as a whole, not by individual families. One single-family unit at the Haight House consisted of antechamber, parlor, dining room capable of seating eighteen, kitchen, pantry, three main bedrooms, two servants’ rooms, bathrooms, and “water conveniences.” There was a fireplace in each room; a steam heating system warmed the halls and was also available for private rooms if desired. Among the conveniences at the Haight House were hot and cold water day and night, a serviced steam laundry in the basement connected to the main building providing facilities for cooking, laundry, and housekeeping for all in common. While these arrangements at the Haight House raised some troublesome questions about the proper boundaries of the public and the private, at the same time they suggested a high level of convenience and comfort.

Although many tenants and critics welcomed the centralized management of household work, it also led to centralized rules, as recognized by the architect P. B. Wight in 1870. He observed that the maintenance of good order in an apartment house is extremely important and is not just the result of controlling who is allowed to rent an apartment. It also depends on the efforts of a janitor or porter who enforces proper conduct and must perform “no inconsiderable amount of police duty.” The journalist Christine Herrick noted that in her family’s flat building the hall door was locked and the public corridor lights turned off at 9:45 each evening, a practice that she found in conflict with her social life. The benefits of collectively supported work were counterbalanced by infringements on private choice, an ongoing issue in apartment life.

### Collective Cooking

With the support of mechanical inventions, apartment buildings offered the potential of a housekeeping innovation: collective cooking. Many writers agreed that centralized food preparation was an ideal way to combine the efforts of many individual households for a savings of time, labor, and money. Considering the advantages of eliminating private kitchens in favor of collective efforts in cooking, E. T. Littell, writing in 1876, suggested: “to accommodate those who are willing to sacrifice a sentiment for substantial advantage, another form of apartment should be constructed; each suite to consist merely of hall, parlor, dining room, bedrooms and bathroom, with possibly a five by eight cooking closet furnished with a gas range. A restaurant should be provided for dining meals should be forwarded, in felt-lined boxes, to the private dining rooms of the tenants.” The family desiring its own meals privately cooked and eaten is in thrall to “a sentiment,” as opposed to a real advantage. A cook hired by the house could buy in bulk, prepare food to order, and save individual families the expense of hiring their own cooks.

An apartment dweller writing to the New York Times in 1876 reported that she loved apartment living except for her private kitchen. Kitchens attracted bugs, she said, and spread cooking odors through the apartment. Her recommendation was a central kitchen and cook who could send up prepared meals in the dumbwaiter. This system had the added advantage of keeping her own maid free from cooking chores and always presentable to answer the door. Both of these 1870s writers favored the idea of centralized cooking, but eating in private. The family members gathered together around their meals and did not want to share their dinners under public scrutiny, as the suspect families of Paris did.

Writing in favor of collectivized housework in 1881, the New York Times pointed out the waste involved in building a “baking fire” for just a dozen muffins, when the same fire could cook for a dozen families. They doubted, however, that collective cooking could be made practical except in the case where the combined households are “collected under one roof” in apartment buildings.

The experience of dining in a fairly expensive apartment house of the later 1870s was described by a writer for Appleton’s Journal. An apartment-dwelling family invites their visitor to stay for dinner, happy that they can spontaneously extend the hospitality that their collective dining arrangements allow. The hostess, a New York housekeeper exhausted from coping with her servant problems,
speak, "what a relief not to know what we are going to have for dinner!" They take
the elevator down to the house dining room, encountering on route well-dressed
tenants from other floors in the building. The ground-floor dining room is
"handsomely furnished and frescoed," has separate, rather than group-sized,
tables with fine napery, china, and silver. A menu and wine list are just like those
in a good hotel, and meals are served by attentive waiters.

As in hotels, and meals are served by attentive waiters: "the

in every

the house

and silver. A menu and wine list are just like those
in lunch;

A menu and wine list are just like those
in every

The writer praised the way such an apartment house could lessen
so many of the housekeeping burdens of middle-class families. But, he
cautions, there is an unavoidably high level of socializing with one's neighbors
because of collective dining, and the small size of individual apartment units
makes large-scale entertaining impossible to accomplish privately.

Many apartment houses provided such a restaurant-like dining room, either
off the lobby or on a high floor, raising questions about the relation between
collective and private values. Should family meals be private events? Then
centrally located and staffed kitchens could cook meals for tenants to eat in
private. At the thirty-five-unit Haight House, for tenants who wanted such pri-
vacy, a house steward received marketing orders for the family's favorite foods.

The Sherwood Houses on Fifth Avenue at Forty-fourth Street advertised its
apartments in 1875: "Suites of 3 to 8 rooms . . . with every comfort and luxury,
without the cares of housekeeping; meals supplied at table d'hote or by private
table." The Sherwood Houses are an example of the many apartment buildings
where individual private kitchens were replaced by a single kitchen for the whole
building. But buildings with elaborate food services were far too expensive to
meet the needs of average families and were also defined by some as not true
apartment houses, but rather some sort of "family-hotel," not quite a real home
because of some loss of privacy.

Between the lines of contemporary descriptions, one finds hints that women
more than men preferred the collective dining potentials of apartment houses.
The housekeeper who is relieved not to know what's for dinner has her burdens
lifted; but the male breadwinner returning from his day at the bank wants the
private atmosphere of a home-prepared meal. Although apartment buildings
seem to have been ideally organized for an experiment in collective cooking,
it was an idea that met with only sporadic approval. For one reason, dining in the
apartment-house restaurant every night was expensive; then, some said, the
menus became predictable and appetite was lost. Perhaps another reason was
that collective cooking evoked "un-homelike" associations with dormitories,
hotels, and other kinds of alternative, perhaps lower-middle-class, residential
arrangements such as the 1850s Working Woman's Home. Apartment-house
dining rooms also suggested restaurants, which the New York Times had con-
demned as destroying family values. None of these associations was necessarily
repugnant, but all were antifamilial according to critics in the 1870s.

Neighboring

Inside the collective home simplified housekeeping and group dining pro-
vided advantages to those willing to try out the new apartment house. Another
idea that helped apartment buildings become acceptable was the notion of seeing
an apartment house as a neighborhood unto itself and partaking of the safety
and comfort that the idea of neighborhood implied. "Neighborhood" has two
meanings pertinent to this discussion: it means both "nearby location," and
"community of interest." The first meaning of proximity and the second mean-
ing of community preserve a historical change in the meaning of the word.

In the New York of 1800, the word "neighborhood" indicated proximity
alone; for example, people would advertise a house for sale "in the neighbor-
hood of the docks." The social homogeneity suggested by the second meaning
of "neighborhood" developed in the early nineteenth century when real estate
practice began to create districts of a purely residential nature. The New neigh-
borhoods, such as St. John's Park, Washington Square, and Gramercy Park,
created by developers between 1800 and 1840 could be counted on to contain
only residential uses and the church that such usage required. Both proximity
and social homogeneity were absorbed into the meaning of neighborhood in this
new residential context. Such a neighborhood was of value because it could be
relied upon as a safe and predictable place. Further control over the social homo-
genity of Gramercy Park was provided by limiting access to its central green
square, gated and locked, to which only residents of the neighborhood could
have keys. People of similar circumstances and incomes could feel assured of
familiar neighbors; the turmoil of the city streets could be kept at a distance.

While the well-to-do could afford to indulge their desire for social homoge-
nity, less-established middle-class people were caught in the tumultuous real
estate development of the post-Civil War years. The piecemeal, even chaotic,
development of New York blocks, the portraits of which are preserved in the
Buildings Department records, often resulted in the very opposite of neighbor-
hood comfort and safety. The developer Benjamin Weber proposed plans for
five contiguous lots on West Fifty-fifth Street, filed with the Buildings Depart-
ment in 1869 (the same year as Hunt's Stuyvesant Apartments). He planned to
erect five buildings containing a mix of stables, stores and warehouses, and
family residential units. The intermingling of uses was the kind of thing that
temporary house hunters complained about as not encouraging to home life.

The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide, reporting on building activity on the
Upper West Side in New York, lamented that such mixtures of uses in the 1880s
drove away developers who wanted to erect high-quality, expensive buildings,
because they feared that the value of their investments would be diminished by
"poor" developments on nearby lots (fig. 41). Widespread unease about such
mixed uses eventually led to the 1916 zoning law in New York, restricting partic-
ular uses to their own specific districts.
In the face of such mixed urban development, a large apartment building offered itself as constituting its own neighborhood. For those who could not afford the expensive social homogeneity of a Gramercy Park, apartments could be a refuge from the chaotic developments on normal mixed-use streets. Thus if tenants could be persuaded to view each other not as strangers but as neighbors, many desired qualities of social comfort would result from apartment living.

The potential of social homogeneity had been recognized by contemporary writers as a positive feature of apartments in the earliest years of apartment development. The Haight House was described in 1874 as an example of a New York trend toward "the clustering of particular social sets about particular centers." The writer felt that apartment houses had the capacity to encourage such groupings of like-minded people. In the case of Haight House, these were "artistic and literary people who are able to find home, society, recreation,—everything almost which goes to distinguish civilized life,—without passing from under their own roof."51

While most New York apartment houses did not develop such extensive shared interests as are hinted at here, they often facilitated the social cohesiveness that at least a controlled income range of tenants could give. For any class with rising social expectations, an apartment building could have offered some welcome limits to the random pollution of a big city with a diverse population. "An apartment house must be built to accommodate a class of tenants who are in a nearly uniform social scale," stated the architect P. B. Wight.52 Nineteenth-century writers theorized that an apartment house, to be successful, must have more or less the same level of accommodations throughout, not cheaper apartments on the top floor and more expensive at the first and second levels, so that the tenants would feel comfortable with each other. The authors of the pamphlet "The Central Park Apartments" asserted that Americans insisted on preserving the boundaries of social classes.53 They intended their apartment house for people "socially suited to each other."

Still, the broader neighborhood character continued to be important throughout the end of the century in developers' calculations. "A careful study of the requirements of the class of tenants making their homes in the vicinity where the apartment is to be erected," cautioned Charles Israels in 1901, "is also absolutely essential to the successful plan." He advised that one could get such information through local realtors and carefully fit the social status of the building and its projected tenants to that of the existing neighborhood. Advertisements used the quality of a neighborhood as a selling point, sometimes suggesting that a neighborhood of private residences enhanced the social value of their buildings.54 Even so, such conditions could never be guaranteed as permanent, and "degeneration from the better to the poorer type of house is always possible with the ever changing conditions in a large city."55

Builders showed a propensity to build similar-class apartment houses near each other, such as the development near the Central Park Apartments on Central Park South. By 1890 hundreds of middle-class tenants found homes on
that street in the Hawthorne, the Alhambra, the Dalhousie, the Parkview, and several others. The same clustering went on along the west side of Central Park, which was seen in the late 1890s as a specifically middle-class apartment neighborhood (Fig. 49). Later, other like-class neighborhoods of apartments would develop on West End Avenue and again on Riverside Drive. Apartment houses and neighborhoods, therefore, did not have to be viewed as risky; they could be seen through the lens of neighborliness as a means to combat exposure to strangers and live in social safety.

"The tendency of the population to classify itself may be taken as irrevocable," reported an editorial in American Architect and Building News. The wealthy are sure to end up in one quarter, the poor in another, and the people of "moderate means" in their own part of town. This theory about the economic geography of the city was a residue of private-house habits of thinking where a history of trickle-down housing accompanied changes in class. But a well-executed apartment house could apparently establish a high-quality neighborhood unto itself, even when not in a well-to-do quarter. Not only did builders choose their locations carefully to match class of building with class of district. They also found to their surprise that a good-quality apartment building could convert a neighborhood's class associations. In districts of the West Side where "single family houses of the better kind could not have been leased" at all, reported Harper's New Monthly Magazine, "high rents were obtained from "comfortable and elegant flats." Flats constructed "in different parts of the city near stables, rum-shops, tenement-houses, rookeries, are occupied by refined, fastidious people," who find a district less objectionable if they share an apartment house in it. Experience proved, against the common sense of private-house developers, that an apartment house could constitute a neighborhood within itself, one that had sufficient strength to defeat a socially questionable context.

Flats have introduced a new way of life, reported the New York Times in 1880, providing housing not just for those unable to rent a whole house, but for those in "easy, even affluent circumstances." The Times reported that women, once they got used to flat life, were unwilling to give it up because it made for much easier housekeeping. Flats were also ideal for families who traveled a lot, as many New Yorkers did, since the janitor kept an eye on the family abode, and leaving the country was as simple as locking the door. They housed increasing numbers of genteel New Yorkers, even while tenants, journalists, and the building profession expressed doubts about their ability to encourage properly private home-life. And amid doubts, these apartments also suggested a newly efficient and convenient housekeeping based on a combination of collectivized work and the beginnings of modern household technology. The small single- or double-lot French-flat type would continue to be erected for middle-class tenants on through the 1890s. The Times protested that, far from having too many apartment houses, Manhattan could hardly have enough; they foresaw that apartments would always be in demand.