AMERICAN SUBURB HOUSES

WE HAVE A KIND QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE ABROAD.

People Here Want Good Plumbing, Clear Light and Lots of Heat in Winter, With a Chance to Be Cool in Summer—Some Ways of Keeping Down Cost.

It doesn't take much of an eye to see the changes that have overtaken one another with surprising swiftness of late years in the field of suburban architecture. You can spot the decade in which a house was built from its bare outlines.

"That house was built in the '70s," you say with a gasp. "Isn't it strange that human beings could think in terms like those?"

As a matter of fact a good many houses put up forty years ago have served a generation of Americans faithfully, whereas some of the flimsy structures built row on row to-day won't last a fifth of that time. Still most of to-day's grist are good to look at, and some of them, perhaps the majority, will last until they are forced out by the advance of business or the coming other changes in the character of a neighborhood.

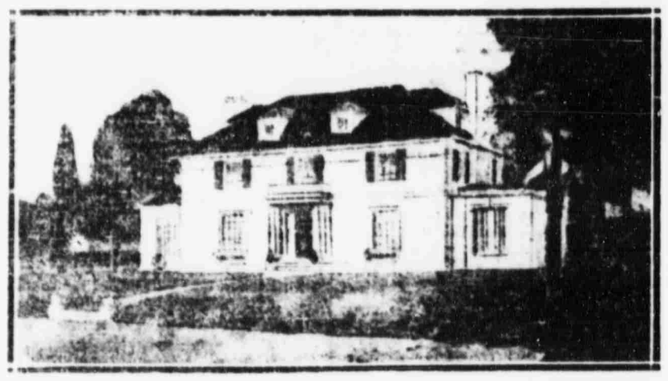
We have developed an architecture of our own in suburban houses, just as the American basement house, built in the narrow quarters of a city lot has a character distinct from its progenitor, the English basement house. Nowadays we aren't building any more high stoop brownstone fronts, and heaven be praised. They were unnecessarily wasteful in space, lacked individuality, and to most men's eyes were displeasing to look at. Little by little they are disappearing from New York streets and the result is a far less dreary outlook.

The development of the suburban house in New York in the last few years is attributable of course to the increased ease of transportation. In the memory of most of us places like Montclair have developed from hamlets into cities. It wasn't so very long ago that anybody who wanted to spend the winter in the country was thought insane. Folks willingly went there for the summer, but winters in the country were considered beyond intelligent consideration.

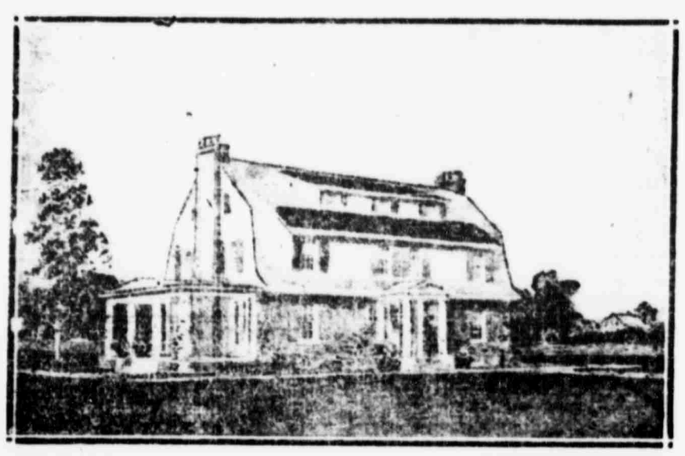
Things are different now. Railroads tell you that suburban traffic, traffic, that is, covering twenty miles, say, from New York, is about the same in the winter as it is in the summer. That means that suburbanites aren't merely summering in the country. They've found that winter has something good about it just as summer has.

The result has been a great increase in the number of suburban houses constructed for use the year through. The schemes of architecture according to which they were built developed experiences little by little until at last what amounts to a new type in suburban architecture was evolved. Architects will tell you that this or that house is an "adaptation" of the Italian villa or the Dutch colonial or something else. The chances are, though, that you haven't the vaguest idea in the world what they mean beyond the fact that one house is apt to have stucco outside and the other a clapboard front door. But you know for a certainty that you would recognize either house as an American planned dwelling even if you saw it on the shores of Lake Como.

That is what architectural writers mean nowadays when they speak of an indigenous scheme of suburban architecture. It is something that has been developed here to meet American needs and American ideas. Our architects haven't been fettered by the custom



A GOOD TYPE OF AMERICAN SUBURBAN ARCHITECTURE, AT GARDEN CITY, L. I. IT COST $13,500 TO BUILD AND HAS TWELVE ROOMS AND THREE BATH ROOMS.



IN THE COLONIAL STYLE, GARDEN CITY, L. I. COST $12,000 TO BUILD HAS THIRTEEN ROOMS AND THREE BATHS.

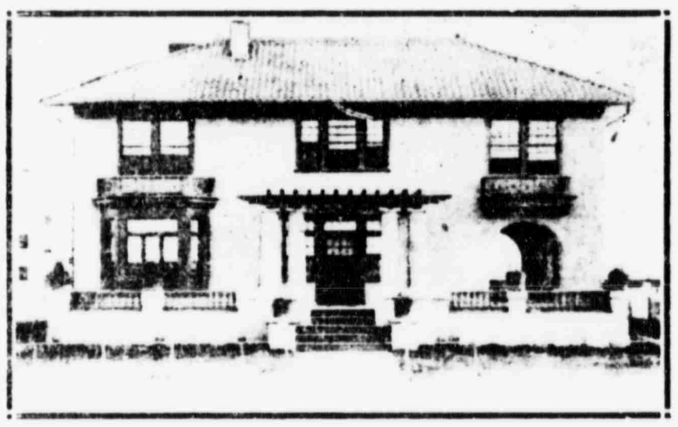
of a hundred years ago. We don't want two electric lights and gas for cooking. How many houses, newly built but make any pretension at all haven't electric lights.

Piazza room is another feature of the American home which isn't thought necessary or desirable abroad. Conventions in Europe don't favor the democracy of piazza life. It has been said that retirement is identical with respectability there. Foreigners dine out of doors perhaps as much as Americans do, but their tables are apt to be set in an arbor protected by a high wall, and as for sitting out of doors of an evening they don't want that kind. A wall to lean a chair against is enough, provided the wall hides the sitter.

The cost of American suburban houses is more than the cost of dwellings built in the suburbs of London or Paris. Our labor is more expensive and so are our materials. But the American, so competent authorities advise, must not try to make up the difference by leaving out the architect.

"What's the use of hiring somebody to do what you and I know how to do for ourselves," asks the builder. "You know what you want and I know what to make it with."

But it's a bad economy. You may waste more in missing trails with your items than a good architect's fees would amount to. More than that, a competent architect supervises the construction with a care which a builder, even if he is fairly conscientious, might forego. They say that practical builders are likely to have eyes to gold. They'll use stock sizes for your windows in order to save mill costs and the result is that you will lose the graceful dimensions in doors and windows which a good architect would



TYPE OF THE STUCCO AND HOLLOW TILE HOUSE, AT LONG BEACH, L. I. COST $10,000 TO BUILD. HAS EIGHT ROOMS.

HOUSE AT LONG BEACH, L. I. COST $8,500 TO BUILD. HAS NINE ROOMS. THE PIAZZAS ARE UNUSUALLY SPACIOUS.

about $10,000 to build and at the same time are large enough to satisfy the needs of a growing family. A nine or ten room house can be built within this figure and yet subserve all the demands of beauty and permanency. The lot on which you build it is another matter. It can cost as much or as little, within a certain reasonable range, as you please.

There are advantages, of course, in living in a so-called restricted neighborhood. You won't run the chance of having a grocery store go up next door or a factory across the street. It may be that in the long run it would be far cheaper to buy a lot in such a district. But it isn't necessary to pay the fee of a real estate corporation for doing the restricting that you might do yourself, provided you can interest enough others to form a landholding corporation.

Out in one of the Jersey suburbs is a community which was started by a company of young men who didn't have the means to buy land in a region already highly developed. They organized a corporation, and each subscribed for stock to the amount that he thought of putting into a building lot. The company bought a tract overlooking a bit of a lake and each stockholder in the corporation was allotted building room, according to the size of his stock holding. In the early experimental days, before the young men had got enough money together to have their own stables and garages they had a barn in common which had facilities enough to get them to the train in the morning and to get them back at night. The restrictions protecting the property from unpleasant encroachments were thus obtained for no outlay at all, and, at least, so they argue to-day, with an increase in conveniences.

There is probably no city in the United States, possibly in the world, which offers such variety of sites as does New York. There are miles of waterfront, with ocean, sound, lake or river. There are mountains and rolling country, little hills and big hills, villages and little cities. A house that will go in one place won't go in another. It's a matter of your own taste or your architect's whether or not you have a house which is in keeping with its environment, and you can have it without paying a great deal for it.

SOLD TWICE AT WRONG TIME.

John Curtin Was a Better Judge of Horseflesh Than of Real Estate.

About sixty years ago, when New York was not so big as it is now, there were few owners of valuable horseflesh in the town who failed to send their nags at least once a month to John Curtin's, near the present Columbus Circle. Curtin was an expert horseshoer, and his skill helped to establish many a fast record on the turf.

He made good money, and being a man of thrift his earnings went into the land. In time, on the advice of friends who had taken profits out of real estate, Curtin bought a tract on Long Island where now the Queensboro Bridge approach joins Jackson avenue in Long Island City. He kept it only a few months before reaching the conclusion that he had made a mistake and sold out inside of a year.

Some of his wealthy patrons then urged him to invest on Washington Heights. John Whalen, father of ex-Corporation Counsel Whalen, told him the city was going to build a bridge across the Harlem connecting Washington Heights with The Bronx, but Curtin put little stock in the bridge tip and preferred, he said, to buy somewhere within a day's ride of City Hall.

A tract comprising what are now the three blocks bounded by 102d and 105th streets and Madison and Park avenues happened to be for sale and Curtin took an option on it for ninety days. Before the option expired Andrew Jackson Downing, the landscape gardener, in a letter from London to the editor of the *Horticulturist*, criticised New York for its lack of recreation grounds and suggested the idea afterward realized in Central Park.

Curtin exercised his option, gave up his shop and went to live on the property. Early in the civil war, when real estate was depressed, Curtin decided that his second investment had been a mistake too and traded the holding for a blacksmith shop in Fifty-seventh street near Seventh avenue.

Soon after the war the Tweed ring got busy with its grand scheme of public improvements uptown. If Curtin had held on to his tract until the extension of Madison avenue was authorized in 1867 he might have realized a fortune, which could have been turned over several times in the same neighborhood in the great lot boom that culminated in 1873. As it was Curtin, the horseshoer, lived to realize that he had thrown away two fine chances of ranking in wealth with some of the best of his patrons.

To-day there are just 100 houses on the old Curtin property in Harlem. On the block between 102d and 103d streets are twenty big apartment houses. The other blocks are built up with brownstone dwellings and flats. The city values the property at $1,361,000. Mr. Curtin died about ten years ago.

Sales in Garden City Estates.

The Garden City Estates report the sale of eight lots in its development during the last week, also a house and lot, Section 3, on the east side of Kilburn road north of Hilbert avenue.

A STRONGHOLD OF FASHION

THREATENED WITH AN INVASION OF RETAIL SHOPS.

Two Business Concerns Have Already Acquired Sites in the Murray Hill End of Madison Avenue—A Famous Property Owners' Agreement of 1847.

The fashionable residence quarter on Murray Hill has narrowed down of late to a mere fraction of its former area. The hill extends from Thirty-second to Forty-fifth street between Third and Sixth avenues. At one time the greater part of it was occupied by private dwellings, churches, clubs and other houses compatible with residential exclusiveness. However, for several years now the idea of exclusiveness has been associated mainly with a short stretch in Madison avenue from Thirty-fifth to Forty-first street. The residents there have until recently prevented intrusion by paying handsome prices for such adjacent sites as happened to come upon the market, but a deal closed about a fortnight ago foreshadows the conversion of one of the finest of the remaining Murray Hill dwellings to business use and as this transaction was followed last week by another of the same character it would seem as if property owners in Madison avenue may be about ready to give up the effort to bar out trade.

Mrs. Clarence M. Hyde, who leased the northwest corner of Fortieth street to the Anderson Auction Company, was regarded as one of the stanchest defenders of the colony. Mrs. Hyde bought the property in 1897 for $255,000 and three years later replaced the existing house with a new residence the cost of which was estimated at $135,000. In 1906 to protect this valuable holding she bought the adjacent dwelling on the southwest corner of Fortieth street for $280,000. The letting of her residence for business occupancy opened a breach which was widened a few days ago when the dwelling 274 Madison avenue, near Thirty-ninth street, passed into the hands of George F. Of, the art dealer, under a long term lease.

These transactions indicate a departure from the tradition of protective buying heretofore maintained. Thus in 1908 the houses at 211 and 213 Madison avenue, in the block just south of J. P. Morgan's residence, were advertised for sale at auction, but on the day of the sale it was announced that the houses had been withdrawn. Subsequently it developed that they had been bought by a syndicate, quickly organized by fifteen neighboring owners, who were not willing that the properties should go into the open market. What they paid was not stated, but report placed the figure at $350,000.

Mr. Morgan was said to be a member of the syndicate. Indeed, by reason of his ownership of the easterly block front between Thirty-sixth and Thirty-seventh streets he had the largest property interests to protect. Two years earlier he had bought the Dodge and Stokes mansions, which together with his own occupied the block front. The Stokes house was transferred for a nominal consideration, but for the Dodge house Mr. Morgan paid $500,000. Besides the block front he owned nearly the entire north side of Thirty-sixth street from Madison to Park avenue, so that the aggregate value of his combined holdings was estimated at about $3,000,000.

Still another purchase which served to protect the neighborhood was that by George F. Baker of the northwest corner of Thirty-eighth street, where a big apartment building was about to go up in place of the Allston, an old fashioned apartment house that had differed but little in appearance from the private dwellings next door. The Allston had been the only apartment house in the quarter, and when it was announced last fall that Mr. Baker had acquired the site and would build a residence on it the neighborhood was thought to be safeguarded for some time at least.

However, a canvass undertaken since the unexpected leasing of the Hyde residence shows that quite a number of sites in the avenue are to let or for sale. Besides two private dwellings have been turned into boarding houses, an unmistakable sign of deterioration. The Astor property at the southwest corner of Thirty-fifth street controlled by Benjamin Altman under a long term lease is to let for business, while the Howard property at the northwest corner of Thirty-fourth street is for sale. The South Church also is on the market, along with half a dozen dwellings at the lower and upper ends of the quarter.

South of Thirty-eighth street business may possibly be kept out under the famous Murray Hill restriction. The document setting forth the restriction was filed in the Register's office in 1847. It records an agreement entered into by nearly all the property holders in the area between Thirty-fourth and Thirty-eighth streets, Lexington and Madison avenues. The covenant binds all the owners "and their heirs and assigns forever not to erect or permit to be erected on any of their holdings any building other than a brick or stone dwelling at least two stories in height, a private stable or a church."

As a result of the restriction Murray Hill developed into one of the most fashionable residential neighborhoods in the city. The first definite encroachment of the surrounding business district upon the restricted area in Madison avenue occurred in 1908. Mrs. Margaret S. E. Cameron filed plans for a six story office building to be erected on land which she owned at the northeast corner of Madison avenue and Thirty-fourth street. The plot which measures 19 by 103 feet, adjoins 180 Madison avenue, the residence of Mrs. Sarah C. Goodhue, and 43 East Thirty-fourth street, her private stable.

Frederic De P. Foster, attorney for Mrs. Goodhue, served upon Mrs. Cameron a summons asking for a perpetual injunction restraining the defendant from erecting a building of the type contemplated or any other structure not sanctioned by the agreement drawn up in 1847. A similar action was brought by other neighboring property owners, including J. P. Morgan and J. P. Morgan, Jr., Mrs. Morris K. Jesup, John E. Parsons, Charles Lanier and Mrs. Mary A. Hoyt. In December, 1908, the referee, Charles F. Brown, reported adversely to the plaintiffs with respect to granting a permanent injunction, but permitted them to sue Mrs. Cameron for breach of agreement.

In his report Mr. Brown said that while the reference was pending Mrs. Cameron's building was up as far as the first floor, and before the case was closed the walls were up all the way and the roof on. He found that Mrs. Cameron had torn down two houses to build the skyscraper and that one of the houses was outside of the district covered by the agreement, although part of the lot at the northeast corner of Madison avenue and Thirty-fourth street was in the district. He held that Mrs. Cameron could have put her high building on the southerly lot without restriction, and it would have annoyed the plaintiffs as much as when it covered both lots.

Mr. Brown held that the property in the district will produce a much larger rental when used for business purposes and said that if Mrs. Cameron had tried to rent the two houses she tore down she could not have got "tenants of the character of those residing elsewhere in the district" and would not have been able to get an adequate return on her investment.

The referee decided that the change in the character of the Murray Hill district began in 1899 with the operation of electric cars through Thirty-fourth street, and found that "the buildings have generally maintained their external appearance, but the residents have moved away; a considerable part of the property is now used for business and many still residing in Thirty-fourth street are desirous of moving out and selling for business purposes.

"The injunction would be of no benefit to the plaintiffs and would be a great hardship to the defendant and cause serious loss," concluded the referee.

Exceptions were filed by the plaintiffs, who declared that all of Mrs. Cameron's property was in the restricted section, and not half of it, as the referee found; and they objected to the finding that the Murray Hill neighborhood had changed since the agreement was made sixty years ago from a residential to a business district and that Thirty-fourth street had become a business thoroughfare.

Whatever the issue of this case, which is still in litigation, it is interesting to note that the restriction was agreed upon so far back as 1847. At that time the neighborhood was quite undeveloped and it was years before it began to be built up. Madison avenue did not extend beyond Forty-second street, and the Dripps map of 1852 shows only five buildings in the avenue between Thirty-second and Forty-second streets. Three of these occupied the block front now owned by Mr. Morgan.

Eight years later "Valentine's Manual" printed a wood cut with this legend:

VIEW ON MADISON AVENUE, 1859.

The view on the opposite page illustrates the character of the improvements in a section of this city which presents more changes from its original character than probably any other. It is on the east side of Madison avenue, between Fortieth and Forty-first streets, being property owned by our esteemed fellow citizen, Jacob Vanderpoel, Esq., a descendant from one of our old Knickerbocker families. Not far distant formerly stood the House of Refuge. This entire section of the city is being rapidly converted into the court end of the town and is beautified by costly and elegant residences occupied by many of our principal citizens. It is but a few years since that cultivated fields extended far below the site here indicated.

Murray Hill shared of course in the building boom which followed the civil war. Fortunes had been made in great numbers in that period of amazing prosperity at the North and West and the new rich invaded Murray Hill just as at a later day Western captains of industry invaded Millionaire Row in upper Fifth avenue. The panic of 1873 brought the boom to an end, but the neighborhood was then built up.

A FINE MURRAY HILL RESIDENCE IN 1859.

Building News.

Plans have been filed by Herts & Tallant, architects, for a twelve story commercial building, to be built at the southwest corner of Fourth avenue and Thirty-first street, for the Goodman Land Holding Company, lessee. The building will have a frontage of 49 2 feet on the avenue by 115 feet on the street, and is estimated to cost $300,000. The De Forest Realty Corporation is the owner.

Mitchell & Michael Bernstein, architects, have filed plans for a six story apartment house, to be built on the north side of 121st street, 100 feet west of Lenox avenue, for the Diva Realty Company. The building will have a frontage of 100 feet and a depth of 88 11 feet, and is estimated to cost $175,000.

Le Farge & Morris, architects, have filed plans for building a four story brick fireproof building on the south side of Twenty-sixth street, 215 8 feet east of Eighth avenue, for the Wells Fargo Co., at a cost of $75,000. The building will have a frontage of 81 8 feet and a depth of 88 9 feet.

Kafka & Lindenmeyer, architects, have filed plans for building a four story and basement loft and store building at No. 80 Park place, at a cost of $7,000, for Henry N. Kunsel, who holds a Columbia University leasehold on the property.

Henry C. Wiseman, as architect, has filed plans for building a one story and basement church on the north side of Broome street, 90 feet west of Varick street. The church will have a frontage of 61 feet and a depth of 75 feet. The Rev. Joseph Sheptokas is the pastor. The cost is estimated at $7,000.

George L. Pelham, architect, has filed plans for the erection of a seven story brick store and loft building on the west side of Varick street, 63 9 feet north of Watts street, for the Charles I. Weinstein Realty Company, at a cost of $60,000. The building will have a frontage of 41 9 feet and a depth of 80 feet.

Sommerfeld & Steckler, architects, have filed plans for remodelling the interior and building a one story rear extension to the four story brick tenement house at the northeast corner of Avenue B and Fifteenth street, at a cost of $5,000, for William Hyman, owner of record.

C. A. Valentine, as architect for the Hyde Realty Company, has filed plans for making improvements to the four four story flat houses at No. 161 to 169 East Seventy-fourth street, by making them over into single dwellings, at a cost of $2,000.

Paul C. Hunter, architect, has filed plans for putting in new doorways and remodelling the interior of the two story stable of Herman Kohr on the south side of Twenty-fourth street, 275 feet east of Eleventh avenue, at a cost of $5,000.

Woodruff Leeming, architect, has filed plans for removing the stoop so as to make a basement entrance in the four story dwelling on the south side of Fifty-sixth street, 100 feet east of Sixth avenue, which is occupied by Dr. Smith Ely Jelliffe, as lessee, and is owned by Miss Mabel Smith of Shaneateles, N. Y. The cost of this change is placed at $1,000.

Building at Jamaica Estates.

M. J. Degnon's residence at Jamaica Estates is practically finished and he expects to occupy it in September. Judge Morgan J. O'Brien's Italian villa is also rapidly nearing completion and shows a most fascinating effect. Alfred Langsfeld expects to open up his residence early in August and Hart Wheldon and others having his finished by September 15.

Sales on Long Island.

The Windsor Land and Improvement Company has sold at Rockville Centre to C. J. Susskind a plot 100x150 on Fox avenue and a plot 100x100 on Nassau Parkway, to John Meyer, a plot 100x115, and to Bernard Irving, a plot 60x100 on Nassau Parkway, to Matthew Moran, a plot 50x150 on Kensington avenue, to Hugh Gallagher and F. H. Ortlman, each a plot 60x100 on Nassau Parkway, to M. T. Regan, a plot 60x100 on Soper avenue, to Edward M. Maholy and James Dennigan, each a plot 60x100 on Columbus avenue, to A. E. Ebert, a plot 60x100 on Washington avenue, to Samuel Mannix, a plot 60x100 on Oceanside avenue, to Warren Lewis, a plot 60x100 on Rockville Centre Parkway.

The same company has sold at Valley Stream to Louis Isaacs a plot 60x100 on Valley Stream boulevard, to James Fruhs, a plot 50x100 on Merrick boulevard, at Floral Park, to J. J. Hand, a plot 50x115, corner of Lily street and Carnation avenue.

The McKnight Realty Company reports the following sales: At Hollywood, estate of Great Neck, to the Robin Realty Company, a plot, 100x150 on Elm street between Hillcrest avenue and Middle Neck road, and a plot 125x100 on Elm street between Hillcrest avenue and Middle Neck road, also to Lila Blaine a plot, 60x100, at Maple street and Hillcrest avenue, also, at Oakside (Flushing), to Hoggard & Sizler, a house on plot 60x100 on Stewart avenue between Lawrence and Dalton boulevards, also, to John F. Falls, a plot 60x130 on Odell avenue between Palace boulevard and the railroad, and to Edward Justin, a plot 50x100 on Woodland avenue between Palace boulevard and the railroad, also at Cedarhurst, North to A. E. Falley, a plot 60x100 at Cedarhurst avenue and Linden street, and at New York avenue, Inwood, to Joseph Reilly, a lot 50x100 on Rider place between New York and Globe avenues.

Wants the City to Take the Astor House Block for the New Court House.

A correspondent makes the suggestion that the city should build a court house on the site of the old Astor House by taking all the property, as far west as the Evening Post Building in Vesey street, the suggestion being based of course on the assumption that most of this property will have to be condemned for the benefit of the Broadway subway, which cuts under this corner. This suggestion has already been made in the *Record and Guide*, and is well worth careful consideration. The assessment for subway purposes which the city will be obliged to condemn is not equivalent to the whole value of the property, as the sales of Lower Center street parcels prove, but it is equivalent to a very large part of it, and by using the surface as a site for a county court house New York would obtain a comparatively inexpensive location, inexpensive, that is, compared to its great convenience.

Upon this site a skyscraper could be erected, the upper floors of which would have the guarantee of good light on two sides and half of a third side. The expense would be less than that of the Chambers street location. Of course there would be one difficulty. A thirty story skyscraper would need room below the surface for its power plant, and it might be difficult to arrange for such a plant below the level of the subway. But this difficulty should not be beyond solution by engineering skill, particularly in view of the fact that the subway would not occupy the whole of the site. Before any decision is reached about the court house this possible alternative should be fully weighed by the commission.—*Record and Guide.*

The Baychester Avenue Improvement Opposed as Unnecessary.

The policy of the present administration seems to tolerate unnecessary local improvements has been widely announced, and therefore it will surprise real estate owners to learn that the Board of Estimate has decided to authorize the preliminary work for regulating and grading Baychester avenue between Boston road and Pelham Bay Park, a street which is according to the report of the city's Chief Engineer, Nelson P. Lewis, "impassable at any time it is at present unbelievable."

The street has a length of less than two miles and crosses branches of Oyster creek that fall within the class of waterways held by the Federal Government to be navigable and which cannot be filled in at this time without violating the United States statutes. In the vicinity of the creeks the ground is low and swampy. With the anticipation that legislation will ultimately be secured which will admit of the filling in of at least as much of this waterway as falls to the west of Baychester avenue it is planned to make the necessary bridge construction only of a temporary character.

The cost of the proposed improvement is estimated to be $170,000, and the assessed valuation of the property to be benefited is $80,000. Mr. Lewis says that each city lot would be assessed $75. The assessed valuation of each lot is $450. Some of the property in the neighborhood has been valued at $400 an acre.—*Record and Guide.*

To Celebrate Opening of Trolley Line.

Residents and property owners in Flushing, Whitestone and Malba are preparing to celebrate the opening of the first trolley line connecting the Sound and East River fronts of Queens with the rest of that borough and establishing connections with the trolley lines which will soon cross the Queensboro Bridge. The New York and North Shore Traction Company has completed its entire line from Prince street, Flushing, through Chestnut street, the private right of way purchased through the McCreery estate, Eighth avenue to Twenty-first street, the southern boundary of Malba, and thence to Eleventh avenue. Tracks have been laid, poles set and wires strung. The company is negotiating for the purchase of a power house on the Bay side. Members of the company expect to open the Flushing Whitestone line about August 1.

Brightwaters.

The opening of two new sections, called The Oaks and Pine Terrace, by the I. B. Ackerson Company at Brightwaters has a close and important relation to the development of the town of Bay Shore, which these two, or both, immediately adjoin. The area involved comprises a portion of the old Lawrence estate of about 300 acres which for the present has prevented the growth of the town toward the west, and the residential development of Bay Shore had pushed up to the very line of the estate.

The Ackerson company is planning to build eighteen cottages of the same substantial construction and type of architecture as those in the last section of Brightwaters. A large number of other cottages are also being planned for these two new plots reserved by the company for its own building operations.

Manhattan Beach.

Joseph P. Day reports the following sales at Manhattan Beach: To James Sabine, a plot of three lots on Exeter street, and M. Estelle Platt, a plot of three lots on Hastings street.

THE REAL ESTATE MARKET

RENTS AND THE ADVANCE IN THE TAX RATE.

Builders Will Be Hard Put to Find Investment Buyers for New Constructions—Need of Serious Budget Study This Year by Taxpayers' Associations.

Last week's advance in the tax rate was not unexpected. That circumstance, however, failed to make it less objectionable. An advance of eight points in the rate, coupled with an increase of $273,000,000 in the assessed valuation of real estate, would be burdensome enough at any time, but it will be especially onerous at present. The augmented tax will have to be taken out of the earnings of real estate, except of course when the property is not improved; but the earnings of real estate are as a rule falling instead of rising. For most property owners they are bound to be at a minimum for some time to come.

In Manhattan, for example, there has been a great deal of building in the midtown section and on Washington Heights. Each of these quarters of the borough has more housing for rent than can possibly be filled in the course of a year. The new constructions are for the most part in the hands of speculative builders, whose chance of disposing of them on an investment basis is impaired by this excessive increase of taxation. To find buyers and escape foreclosure their owners will be compelled to fill the new houses at any cost, a process certain to depopulate older sections. Instead of a moderate and gradual reduction of rents, a violent readjustment is thus threatened, with much liquidation in prospect.

You would have to go back many years to find a time when the proportion of vacant premises was so large as it is now and when so much real estate was held on borrowed capital at high rates of interest. The real estate boom of the last year and a half has been occasioned not by any deficiency in the total supply of housing but by an extensive shifting, present and prospective, of population and trade under the influence of new transportation, an influence which is of itself a disturbing factor in its bearing on rents. It is particularly unfortunate therefore that a big tax increase should have been found necessary this year.

The increase is in no way attributable to the present administration. Nor, probably, is it larger than some other increases under past administrations. It is indeed merely the latest of a discouragingly long series and comes at a critical period. Is it not possible to check for a year or two this heretofore uninterrupted and excessive growth of the tax levy? Under the old system of city bookkeeping the growth was in a measure blindly automatic. It will be a great disappointment if the new system does not enable the Board of Estimate to keep within the limits of last year's appropriation in the budget which is to be adopted next October.

Meanwhile all that the new bookkeeping can do is to reveal how money is spent and whether or not the money is used with proper economy. It is a means of discovering and punishing unauthorized expenditures, but it does not prevent extravagance in making appropriations. It has no bearing on questions of public policy involving resort to taxation except to show the probable cost, for example, of undertaking a new municipal function. The expediency of undertaking that function must depend very largely upon the financial situation of those who are to pay the taxes.

The bulk of the tax levy falls upon real estate. A tax increase imposed when the supply of housing is normal is distributed in the form of higher rents and is paid by the entire population. Being universally distributed it is scarcely felt by the individual or by any one class of the population. However, a new tax exacted when rents are stationary or declining owing to an oversupply of housing falls exclusively on the land holding class, including builders. It prevents builders from disposing of their stock to investors and puts an end to construction work, throwing labor out of employment.

In other words, it may be expedient to undertake a new governmental function involving taxation when population and industry are prosperous and growing and the supply of housing is normal. It may be a ruinous extravagance to undertake the same function when speculative builders, taking advantage of the opportunity to borrow capital lying idle in the banks owing to industrial stagnation, have built extensively in anticipation of a future expansion of population and trade.

The great increases in recent budgets have been due to a constant enlargement of the scope of activity of the city government, for one thing philanthropic work formerly left to private charity has been taken over by the municipality. Such work has been assumed in a haphazard way without any clear notion as to the kinds of activity which it is expedient for the city to carry on.

The question has never been brought up for public discussion and determination whether this town shall first be put in a sanitary physical condition before heavy outlays are made for less obvious sanitary needs.

There is every reason consequently for property owners to make serious use this year of the opportunity offered by the Board of Estimate to study the department estimates submitted for 1911. The Board of Estimate is anxious to determine questions of financial policy with reference to public sentiment and is organizing a budget exhibit in order to create interest in the matter. The main thing, however, is that the department estimates are to be published in full. It is evident that these estimates, which will take up four bulky volumes, can be of but slight service to the average man working on them independently. The average man has neither the time nor the knowledge to master this more or less technical material, but he is able to form reasonable conclusions when the purport of the material is explained to him.

To pave the way for a complete discussion of the budget it is recommended that some one of the strongest taxpayers' associations engage a commission of recognized authorities on municipal government, taxation, finance and other pertinent specialties to report on the budget estimates. The report should embrace a classification of the kinds of activities in which the city is engaged and the proportion of money demanded for each kind, and the chief aim of the commission should be to formulate an instructive principle of classification.

Private Sales.

EIGHTY FIRST STREET. The Title Guarantee and Mortgage Company has sold for Better president Bas bunger for the Sacks Land Company, J. Werter president, Nos. 37 and 39 West Eighty-first street, a dwelling and extension lot, 50x100, a plot 20x100, directly opposite the Museum of Natural History. The property will be improved with a twelve family apartment house. William Lane Booth, who owned No. 37, purchased from Robert A. Loring the adjoining lot at No. 39. The combined plot was then sold to the Sacks Land Company, which transferred it to the Legal Realty and Mortgage Company.

SIXTY FIFTH STREET. Pease & Elizabeth, in conjunction with Edwin Gomez, have sold for Mrs. Nellie Barnes Sandiner, No. 110 East Sixty-fifth street, a five story American basement dwelling on lot 20x100.5, to Mrs. J. K. Fraser, present tenant.

NINETIETH STREET. Nathan B. Wright sold for Joseph Winsch to a client of Dwight Lauer, No. 121 East Ninetieth street, a five story double flat on lot 25x100.5.

Miscellaneous.

J. G. McCrory & Sons, who operate a chain of five and ten cent stores in Western