

# THIS TOWN IS NO FIT PLACE FOR AN ARTIST

*There Are Studios in Plenty, in Greenwich Village and Environs, but Where Is the Artist Who Is Rich Enough to Rent a Studio?*

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*When Nobody Else Wants a House an Artist May Live in It. There He "Creates an Atmosphere" Which Finally Smothers Him*

**A** PROBLEM confronts the dwellers in Greenwich Village, all except the millionaire manufacturers and their commercial brethren.

"Where do we go from here?" they sing in consternation. Go they must. The last link in the circle bringing Washington Square and the domains adjacent back to the social prestige which they enjoyed seventy years ago has been forged by the artists. They have learned the truth of O. Henry's assertion that Bohemia is a land of illusion and that if you seek it it will flee from you.

The original rich departed fifty years before the art colony arrived. The bourgeoisie came and went. The humble workman left his marks on the wall, and following him came the immigrants. The glory that was Macdougall Street and the grandeur that was Washington Square faded.

By economic deduction there remained only the artists to share in its crumbling past. They entered and took possession. Their kingdom became a rendezvous of artistic endeavor. It attracted attention. Slummers discovered it. Keen-eyed persons with bobbed hair opened restaurants and pseudo art shops. Within a year the neighborhood was commercialized. Landlords were at work buying leases. Showing their hands slowly, they permitted the artists to make habitable and attractive the tumbling homes they had rented. They raised rents gradually, spreading the artists further and further away from the Square. Slowly the moth of art realized the situation. Its chrysalis had become of greater value than the prospective butterfly. Washington Square had traversed its circle and was once more in the hands of the well to do.

There are no apartments to be had in the central part of the Village for less than \$75 a month, and there are few at that price. Ten years ago, when the district deserved its title of the "Latin Quarter of New York," the best floor in Washington Square South was to be had for \$40 a month. A room overlooking the park scenery and filled with atmosphere was \$5.

Now a room without a private bath is \$60 or \$70 and a whole floor, if you can get one, will cost you in the neighborhood of \$160.

Washington Mews was filled with stables that the owners were glad to let for \$30 or \$40. Last year one of these stables was held at \$4,000, and the agents informed inquirers that tenants would have to invest at least \$500 out of their own pockets in repairs before they could take possession of the place.

A certain noted Dutch painter took over one of these places four years ago at a rental of \$2,000. He succeeded it and made it charming and habitable, with the result that his rent was raised to \$3,000 the next year. He paid the increase, and the year following they tried to charge him \$5,000.

That portion of Eighth Street backing on the Mews has been converted into pseudo-Italian mansions and the rents raised to \$160 a month for one-half a floor.

Macdougall Alley was the first portion of Bohemia to be elevated out of the reach of the ordinary artist. A wealthy amateur artist was responsible for that, but not inten-



The presence of an artist in a studio neighborhood proves almost too much for the patience of the moneyed residents

tionally. However, shrewd owners and agents did use her presence to raise artists' rent right and left. There is one known incident where a young artist rented three houses and was ejected from them in succession just after he had put in weeks of hard labor decorating them.

Macdougall and Fourth streets next came into prominence. Rents there were cheap. An artist was able to eat, as well as pay rent, but today the uptowners are paying the same rent in these localities that they are paying on Washington Square.

Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth streets had retained through all the influx of various classes an air of indigent aristocracy. They made wonderful hunting grounds for the rent raisers. A floor in these streets will



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cost the artistic-souled individual \$200. So wonderful was this field that there is a case on record of a young \$40-a-week clerk, with a propensity for painting, renting two houses with the option of buying and turning them into apartments, from which he realizes fully 1,000 per cent profit.

Recently, four houses on Barrow Street near Hudson Street were remodeled. These places occupied a small court and were rented originally for very little. They were all rented at Greenwich Village prices before repairs ever were started.

And so it goes throughout the district. Every available building has been seized and converted. So many places were prepared during the winter and spring that, due to the summer exodus of the millionaires, about two hundred lay idle throughout the season. Have the rents gone down? They have not. The owners are making so much money that they can take the loss.

gining to have its troubles. Inasmuch as Bohemia has had its lost virtue restored, it must appear respectable. So influence has been brought to bear, with the result that dance halls have been denied licenses. Now, this has been a terrific blow to the Village parasites, because they have danced their way to moderate wealth. It was dancing that brought the slummers down to look over the village and furnished customers for the amateur-made butiks, the painted wooden heads and the uptown manufactured snocks.

What this means to the commercial element can be judged when the writer states from personal knowledge that the owner of one of the dance halls cleared more than \$400 a week during the first winter he was in business.

Of course, the real Village artists not only feel that these people have been instrumental in running them out of their "quartier," but they are not, generally speaking, well treated by these parasites. The artist's dinner

check is never large, and in comparison with the slummer he is considered poor business. Consequently, a restaurant bids for his patronage for the purpose of color only till its uptown clientele is established. Then he is not so cordially received.

The Italian restaurants south of the square were formerly entirely dependent on the artist trade. There are several of these places which it is safe to say have cleared around a quarter million each for their proprietors. If an artist dared go into one of these places now and run up a bill of less than ten several dollars a waiter would spill a dish of ravioli down his shirt front.

In the mean time the artists are homeless. Some of them have forsaken their art for commercial work in order to remain in the

Village and pay their rent. Others, reckoning wisely, have sought the places deserted by the uptowners, and exchanged places with them. A colony has migrated to the vicinity of Spuyten Duyvil. A large group has crossed the river to Brooklyn and has taken up its abode in the former aristocratic Columbia Heights section.

Villagers, as a whole, however, scorn this last move. Columbia Heights bears too much in common with Washington Square. There must be a permanent "quartier."

The great question that now confronts them is: Shall they take over Minetta Lane and the outlet connecting it with Bleecker Street, known as Minetta Alley?

From the artistic angle, or rather, the angle of artistic atmosphere, it is perfect. The lane is narrow and winding, and faced by old-fashioned houses. The alley gives to the south on the old yellow cathedral standing in Bleecker Street.

There are numerous covered passages leading to back courts, in which stand isolated tenements which would delight the soul of any prospective dweller of artistic tendencies.

Farsseeing real estate people who have observed the profitable changes made in the block bounded by Macdougall, Bleecker, Sullivan and Houston streets, only a few yards away, have tried to invade the Minetta district.

The villagers would like to replace the present dwellers in Minetta Street, but they know that lynx eyes are watching them. They calculate sadly that they could last one season or two at the most before they would be dispossessed to make room for the magnates.

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Of course, the vicious circle is great for purposes of social reclamation, but one has to admit that it keeps the artist on the jump. If he spends all his time home seeking and home decorating when he will paint his pictures and whence will come America's contribution to art?

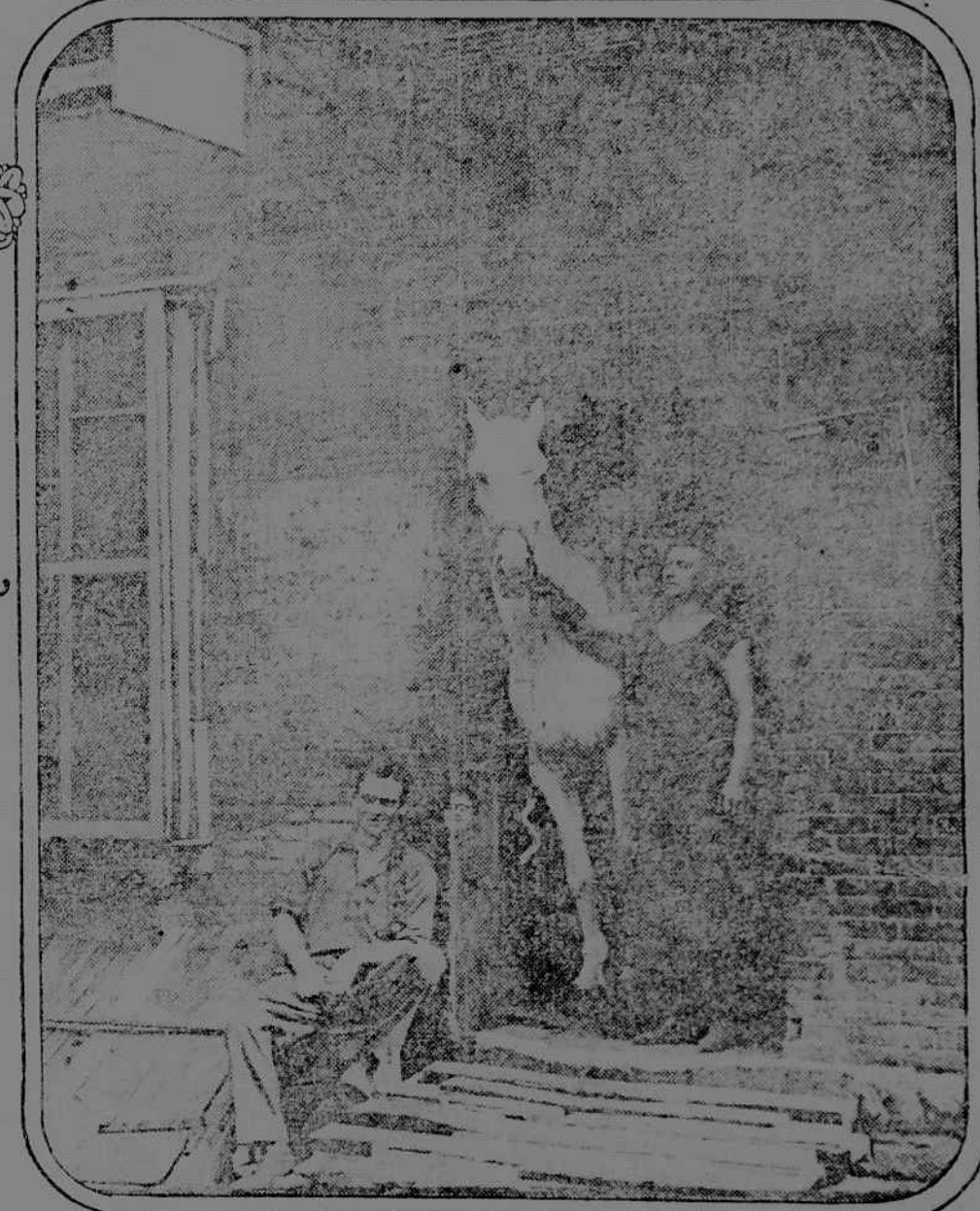
A solution cannot be found in deserting New York for some less commercial city. The parasites will follow or grow. The landlords will awaken to their opportunities, and the history of the New York colony will be repeated.

The old French quarter of New Orleans has been converted by the artists of that city into a rare and charming Bohemia. But there are suspicious afloat that real estate people of that city are behind the scheme, working to reclaim this once beautiful and aristocratic quarter to its former grandeur.

The artist cannot solve his problems by taking them elsewhere. He will have to make his fight in America. And the dispossessed Greenwich Villagers will have to make theirs in New York. Art cannot thrive without "atmosphere" and a group spirit to encourage competitive effort. So, will it be Minetta Street for a year or two? Will it be the catacombs? Or must the art of the next generation die in the larval stage, because the cocoon (excuse repetition) is more appreciated than the potential butterfly?



Unsuavory Minetta Lane, which may be the last stand of the Greenwich Villager in his retreat before advancing rents



Even the horse at the Minetta Lane myth seems to sense the art atmosphere. Note his devil-may-care manner of leaning against the door