

## WHEATON COMMUNITY SURVEY

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During the past two years the Division of Social Sciences at Wheaton College has been cooperating with the Wheaton Plan Commission in a study of post-war community needs. The project was undertaken at the request of the chairman of the Commission. The members of the Division welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with the Commission, both because of the historical connection of the College with the community and because the Division recognized that college growth and community expansion must be a cooperative enterprise. It also saw in this service an opportunity to acquaint the students with the needs of the community and to give to each of them some firsthand contacts with the processes of community planning. The project was, therefore, entered upon both as a community service and as a means of laboratory training for students in social science. That these aims have been realized is amply demonstrated by the response of the Plan Commission to its findings and the testimony of the students as to the values they have found in this work.

## NATURE OF THE SURVEY

Conferences with the chairman of the Commission revealed the fact that information was desired on (a) population characteristics, (b) the employment habits of the people, (c) the use of present transportation facilities, (d) the degree of saturation in present housing facilities, (e) future plans in housing, employment and transportation for present residents and for those in military serv-

ice, and (f) the possible "sore spots" in community facilities. Preceding studies conducted by the departments of Sociology and of Economics had revealed certain areas of needed change. A tentative schedule of data desired was then drawn up and the assistance of the National Housing Agency in Chicago was sought in formulating a questionnaire that could be readily administered by inexperienced interviewers. The experience of that agency in surveys conducted in other communities was invaluable in the preparation of the schedule ultimately adopted<sup>1</sup>.

Plans for the survey were then formulated by a committee composed of a representative from the departments of Sociology and of Economics acting in cooperation with the Chairman of the division. Zoning and street maps of the city were used in plotting the areas to be sampled and in keeping a record of places interviewed. Volunteer surveyors from the various social science classes (sociology, economics, political science, and history) were given special instruction in interviewing and assigned to specific city blocks. Each student surveyor was supplied with mimeographed instructions and with an identification card signed by the Chairman of the Plan Commission. This card identified the student as an authorized representative of the Commission. Seniors majoring in sociology were required to participate in the interviewing and to make a study of the post-war plans of various institu-

<sup>1</sup> See Clemens M. Roark, "A Preliminary Guide for the Development of Local Housing Planning," 24 pages, mimeographed.

tions in the community. Others in this group were assigned to the task of preparing a map showing the growth of housing in the city by chronological periods, while still others were given the responsibility of collating and evaluating the findings of the surveyors.

Thirty-five students participated in the preparation of the first sample which covered approximately 200 families and residences. Newspaper publicity in the local paper issued by the Plan Commission preceded the interviewing.

The findings of the preliminary study were made available to the Commission in October of last year. At that time the Division was authorized to continue the study during the present year. Forty-five students have participated in the survey this year. The results of the interviews have not yet been collated.

Local school and municipal authorities have been very cooperative in the administration of the project. Members of the National Housing Agency have followed the work of the survey with interest. Through their suggestion, assistance has also been given to the newly created Illinois State Housing Board in setting up its plan of study for community housing needs. The Citizens Research Bureau of Chicago, a private agency, has also expressed an interest in the methods and findings of the survey.

Several of the students who worked on the survey have found the training therein valuable in securing appointments to graduate fellowships or positions with social agencies.

#### METHODS

The Division has sought to use those methods commonly employed by community surveyors. The basic

device has been a three-page questionnaire schedule administered through a personal interview between a member of the survey group and some representative of the household. The findings recorded on these schedules have been supplemented by historical studies of population change within the community, based on a comparative study of statistical data derived from the federal decennial census with the data to be found in the federal sugar census of 1942. It has also sought to determine the historical growth of the residential areas of the community by a careful study of the expansion by time periods. This involved the preparation of a map in symbol showing the period of construction of each residence within the community. Data for such a map were gathered from a sketch map of the city made in 1882 (now in the possession of the City engineer), an air view photograph of the city made in 1906, and by a study of the building permits now on file in the City Hall. Inasmuch as the building permits were not filed prior to 1920, it was necessary to discover the residences constructed during the period 1906 to 1920 through a process of elimination. Another map is now projected to show the type of housing unit constructed in each location within the city.

#### FINDINGS

The findings of the survey, taken from the preliminary sample of some 200 households, revealed some interesting trends and characteristics. Some of these are in harmony with general trends; others are peculiar to this particular community.

a. *Population.* The total population of the community was found to be 9,619 in 1942 as against the 7,389 indicated by the census of 1940. The median family size was found to be

2.7 as compared with the 3.42 recorded in the census of 1930.

b. *Housing Expansion.* The greatest period of housing expansion in the community was found to have taken place during the years 1920-1929 inclusive. That decade witnessed the construction of 39.8 percent of all the housing erected within the community prior to the year 1946. The corporate area of Wheaton is almost evenly divided into a northern and southern area by the Aurora and Elgin and Chicago and Northwestern tracks. The construction of the Aurora and Elgin electric railroad to Wheaton in the early 1900's was found to have had a stimulating effect on the construction of housing in the southern portion of the city near the depot and shops of that line. During the period of 1907 to 1919 inclusive, there were 285 units constructed in that area as compared to 103 in the area north of the tracks. This was the only period wherein the south side increased more rapidly in housing facilities than the north side. The Federal Census data for housing expansion was found to be quite unreliable. The census showed 643 units constructed during the decade from 1920 to 1929, whereas, a study of building permits showed a total of 780. Allowing for some units that may not have been constructed under permits, this still shows a wide variation. Similar variations existed in other periods.

c. *Mobility of Population:* Wheaton has been thought of as a stable community. This study revealed the fact that 18 percent of the 200 families interviewed had lived in Wheaton less than two years, while 34 percent of these families had lived in Wheaton five years or less. This reflects an acceleration of movement to suburban residential areas during the period of war. Some of this turn-over is undoubtedly due to the op-

portunities for employment in the Chicago area. The survey made no attempt to discover the reasons why persons had moved into the community in that period other than to inquire of all persons their reason for choosing Wheaton as a place of residence. Business opportunities in the Chicago area, the facilities of the College, and the residential character of the community were the reasons advanced most frequently. This turn-over in population is verified in part by the school statistics, which, the Superintendent of Schools reports, show an annual change in school population from about 30 to 33 percent.

d. *Residential Ownership.* Eighty-one percent of the households interviewed were found to be in that group which owned their own homes. This percentage may be altered by the findings of this year's study.

e. *Employment Plans and Transportation.* Investigation here showed that no substantial shift was anticipated either in employment or means of transportation used in reaching the place of employment. This was true not only of present residents, but of persons then in the service.

f. *Family Composition.* The presence of 80 children under five years of age out of a total of 255 children 19 years of age and under demonstrated the influence of the economic revival and the war upon population growth. Inasmuch as there were only 44 children in the age bracket from five to nine as compared with 78 in the bracket 10 to 14, and 53 in the bracket 15 to 19, it is reasonable to assume that there will be greater need for community facilities in the next decade to meet the needs of the rise in the birth rate in the last five years. This will be particularly true if families continue to move into the



community at the same rate as they have during the war period.

g. *Future Housing Plans.* This preliminary study revealed the fact that approximately 27 percent of all those interviewed planned some change in housing after the war. Fifty-nine percent of those planning a change were persons who already owned homes. Of this latter group 78 percent were contemplating new construction. Future building plans called for homes costing from \$6,000 and up with the greatest frequency of demand in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 bracket. Houses providing three bedrooms were most frequently projected, with houses providing four bedrooms and two bedrooms proposed in that order of declining frequency. Should these same frequencies appear in the completed study, it would mean that there would be a potential market for at least 540 dwelling units from present residents in the community following the war. Forty percent of these units would be provided through new construction, thus releasing a similar proportion to those desiring to purchase homes and leaving approximately 20 percent to be provided through other channels. Inasmuch as most of the projected housing calls for the construction of the larger and more expensive type of unit, it is quite possible that either private contractors or public agencies must step in to meet the low-cost housing needs of the present Wheaton population. This estimate makes no provision for the natural expansion of population in the community.

h. *Community Services.* Two devices were used on the questionnaire to discover inadequacies in community services. One was to secure an expression from the one interviewed concerning the type of community service wherein he was inconvenienced. He was permitted to express

"no inconvenience," "some inconvenience," or "very much inconvenience." On the basis of this type of expression, the chief areas of community need were found to be in (a) lack of adequate parking facilities, (b) lack of adequate recreational facilities for elementary and high school students, (c) lack of hospital facilities and adequate medical services, and (d) absence of adequate and reasonable housing.

Another device used was to ask the one interviewed to give an answer to this question: "Of all the things which might be done to make Wheaton a better city in which to live, what would you rank as most important?" Most frequent replies referred to better housing in the form of smaller houses and apartments, the need of a hospital, the need of guidance and recreation for the high school group, the need of enforcing the zoning laws, and the necessity of constructing a railroad underpass.

From these preliminary findings, it seems clear that the responsibility of the Plan Commission will center around the following community needs: (1) the construction of reasonably-priced housing facilities of the apartment type; (2) the construction of a hospital; (3) the provision of additional parking space in the shopping area; (4) the provision of additional community recreational facilities for the secondary school group; (5) the elimination of surface transportation hazards through the construction of railroad underpasses at convenient places in the downtown area. It is conceivable that if these needs are met, some of the other areas of friction, such as the need of additional medical facilities and the need for enforcing the zoning laws, together with the inadequacy of the shopping area, might be gradually eliminated.