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FROM CAMPING TO PERMANENCE: A HISTORY OF MONTANA MOBILE AND  
MANUFACTURED HOMES

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, 2002

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in History

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## Abstract

Zoe Ann Stoltz, M. A., May 2011

History

From Camping to Permanence: A History of Montana Mobile and Manufactured Homes

Committee Advisor: Professor Jeffrey Wiltse

This thesis examines the history of Montanans use and perceptions of manufactured homes. Nationally, manufactured housing has enjoyed a dynamic historic and social evolution, as revealed by federal, state, and local documents, newspaper reports, periodicals, and interviews. Yet, manufactured housing struggles to escape its mobile origins and the negative stereotypes acquired during its rich history. In Montana, the housing form has experienced unprecedented success, both as transportable housing in the boom and bust cycles of the State as well as permanent housing. Montana's rural population has embraced mobile home's convenience and affordability. However, public misperceptions persist despite its success as a housing alternative for a diverse population. Their nontraditional appearance and negative stereotypes have led urban governments to pass discriminatory zoning, affecting homeowners, dealers and developers. Responses have included lawsuits, stigmatization, attempts to cooperate with county commissioners to address public concerns, and the imposition of strict community regulations on trailer court tenants to counter negative stereotypes. Montana has made progress, with legislation passed in the 1990s forbidding discriminatory zoning practices and protecting tenant rights. Prejudice, however, continues to influence the housing forms acceptance and to marginalize both manufactured homes and their owners.

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## **Introduction**

As you drive along Missoula's North Russell Street, manufactured homes appear on both sides of the road just short of the railroad tracks. Before Russell turns into Railroad Street, a large, stylish sign announces the Travois Trailer Park, one of Missoula's upscale mobile home parks. The Travois' manufactured homes, mobile homes, and trailers sit on spacious lots surrounded by large communal grounds. Yards appear well kept, as mandated by community ordinances. The Travois also has a community pool that children flood into during the summer. The manufactured homes vary in size, age, and value. Their owners are a diverse group, as is evident by the automobiles parked along the cul-de-sacs. The elderly Mrs. St. John, who owns an upscale, newer home, drives a late-model Ford sedan. Mr. Robertson, a hairdresser and carpenter, prefers a 1980 four-wheel drive Chevy pickup and prides himself on fixing up his ten-year-old fourteen wide. The college students who recently purchased a 1970 home off North Caravan drive an older Volkswagen Beetle. A couple on South Surrey created a sensation when they parked a new Mercedes outside their 1990 Fleetwood. Travois Village is not unique. Similar mobile home courts can be found in most Montana cities, including Billings, Great Falls, Helena, and Bozeman, and even smaller cities such as Bonner, Livingston, Hardin, and Miles City.

The most conspicuous of Montana's mobile home residents are the thousands who reside in these "parks," renting the lots on which they park their homes. However, the vast majority of the more than fourteen percent of Montanans who live in

manufactured homes live on privately owned lots, on their own land.<sup>1</sup> Rik and Diane Rewerts, both schoolteachers, purchased a lot on Bull Lake that included a forty-year-old trailer. It became their summer home. John Peterson, heir to a small ranch on the Sarpy Basin, lives with his family in a mobile home, parked next to the original homestead cabin in which his elderly parents live. Dozens of privately owned lots with mobile homes line Missoula's Third Street and Highway 2 South of Libby. As with the Petersons and Rewerts, these homeowners and thousands more like them live permanently in manufactured homes sited outside of trailer parks. The ubiquity of mobile homes across Montana's landscape, both in parks and beyond, indicates the importance of this housing alternative. Yet, in spite of its proven viability as mainstream housing in Montana, negative stereotypes of manufactured homes and their residents refuse to die. The popular views persist that manufactured homes are marginal and temporary, and their residents are transient and poor.

Contrary to these stereotypes, the phrase "mobile home" is an oxymoron. Nationally, only six percent of mobile home owners in 2002 had moved their homes during the previous three years.<sup>2</sup> Only three percent of Montana "mobile" homes were moved during the same period.<sup>3</sup> Despite these statistics, most people still see transportability as the defining characteristic of manufactured homes. The names of manufactured home parks reinforce that misperception. Missoula's Travois Village, Billing's Covered Wagon Park and other similarly named sites explicitly link today's

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, DP-4 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics:2000 Geographic Area, United States <<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet>> (2/2/2004).

<sup>2</sup> Foremost Insurance Company, Manufactured Homes: The Market Facts. A Special Report on Manufactured Homes and Their Owners For: The University of Montana Mansfield Library on Montana, Marketing Research Department, 2002, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

manufactured homes with the much-romanticized covered wagon and other transient lifestyles of the past. This marketing strategy, reinforced by popular culture, inadvertently supports the misconception that manufactured housing is temporary and, due to the lack of permanence, houses social misfits.

These stereotypes have real life consequences because they lead many Americans to view manufactured home owners as undesirable neighbors. The public views mobile home dwellers as less likely to lead constructive lives with a high tendency for transience. According to some, these characteristics prevent mobile home dwellers from contributing to their communities. Citizens attending city council meetings and zoning hearings across Montana repeatedly express negative perceptions while arguing to exclude mobile homes from particular neighborhoods. They politely explain that they are not personally against manufactured homes but would simply prefer they be located “somewhere else.”<sup>4</sup> Concerned neighbors do not want their communities exposed to the transience and negative elements so often portrayed by popular culture. They also believe that the presence of mobile homes will cause property values to decline.

Local, state, and federal governments have also propagated the negative stereotypes by classifying manufactured homes differently than site built homes. Not until the 1970s did the government officially recognize the viability of manufactured housing and create much needed housing and construction standards. This difficulty in recognizing “trailers” as permanent homes began as early as the 1930s. At that time, with trailers providing permanent housing for a growing number of Americans, The

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<sup>4</sup> Jaci Webb, “Council advances home park plans in Heights,” Billings Gazette, 10 September 2002, <<http://www.Billingsgazette.com/index.php?display=rednews/2002/09/10/build/local/70-council.inc>> (5 March 2004). This quote, or similar quotes, found in numerous newspapers articles reporting the conflicts that arise over zoning and proposed mobile home parks. Articles include those from the Billings Gazette, The Missoulian, Great Falls Tribune and Bozeman Chronicle.

American City magazine ran an article asking, “How can such a potential menace be turned by planning and control into an asset?”<sup>5</sup> Even with this prompting, local and federal governments refused to define mobile homes as homes and largely ignored their growing importance in American housing for decades.

The struggle to accept manufactured housing as permanent homes continues in Montana. In 2000, the Federal Manufactured Housing Improvement Act mandated that within five years all states must design and initiate standards addressing specific manufactured housing issues with the intent of protecting manufactured home buyers and owners. As of February 2004, Montana remained one of only ten states that had not acted on the Federal legislation.<sup>6</sup> Even with fourteen percent of state residents living in manufactured housing, Montana legislators failed to address fundamental issues concerning mobile homes. Although the Manufactured Housing Consensus Committee (MHCC) has drafted baseline recommendations to assist state legislatures in complying with the mandates, Montana legislators have chosen not to act on issues specifically designed to protect homeowners and future buyers. With their failure to act after four years and two legislative sessions, Montana legislators clearly did not consider the protection of manufactured home owners and future buyers as a priority. At the very least, their lack of action on this issue reflected the marginal status of mobile homes. They have been inattentive to issues that directly affected more than 58,000 Montana households.

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<sup>5</sup> “The Trailer – Liberator or Menace?” The American City, 12 December 1936, 66.

<sup>6</sup> See notes from interview with Stuart Doggett, Montana Manufactured Homes and RV Association, Helena, Montana, 27 February 2004, and Mark Nunn, “Implementing the Manufactured Housing Improvement Act,” Modern Homes, January/February 2004, 23-25.



Even with the denigration from popular culture and lack of recognition and concern from Federal and State lawmakers, manufactured homes continue to provide housing for a growing number of Montanans. Thousands of Montanans choose to purchase manufactured homes despite ongoing legal, social, and geographical marginalization. This group defies stereotypes and reflects a myriad of lifestyles, incomes, and personal diversity.

Although trailer houses, and later, manufactured homes, have been a growing part of the United States' landscape since the late 1920s, few scholarly works have addressed the complex national and regional issues surrounding them. The first book attempting a thorough overview was Taylor Meloan's 1954 study Mobile Homes: The Growth and Business Practices of the Industry. As the title suggests, the book was a business and public policy study of mobile homes. Meloan admonished local and federal government for lack of consistent legislation. This inconsistency, according to Meloan, hindered local acceptance of mobile homes as permanent residences. He also criticized the industry for its lack of imaginative designs. He emphasized that while the majority of mobile homes was permanently parked, the industry continued to manufacture "automotive" looking homes with aluminum siding, paint patterns and steel construction.<sup>7</sup> These practices continued to set mobile homes apart from mainstream housing and hindered public acceptance. Meloan also examined the industry's early 1950s advertising strategies. Meloan blamed these strategies for the continuing marginalization of mobile homes. Meloan focused his study on the Midwest, specifically

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<sup>7</sup>Taylor W. Meloan, D.B.A., Mobile Homes: The Growth and Business Practices of the Industry (Homewood, Illinois, 1954), 46.

Indiana. This focus excluded any interpretations regarding the mobile home's popularity in the Rocky Mountain West.

Margaret Drury's 1972 book Mobile Homes: The Unrecognized Revolution on American Housing was an advocacy piece that touted mobile homes as ideal housing alternatives for low-income families.<sup>8</sup> With a special interest in family housing, Drury encouraged the government to restructure housing production, including acceptance and regulations of mobile homes. Although a large percentage of U.S. workers remained mobile in order to follow jobs, mainstream acceptance eluded mobile home owners. Drury discussed this dichotomy between the reality of American citizens' mobility and their perception of home as permanent and stable. Drury was the first to examine society's refusal to accept mobile homes and the roots of its marginalization. Following Professor Drury's 1972 publication, the topic of mobile homes remained largely ignored for almost twenty years.

In 1991, Allan D. Wallis published the first thorough examination of mobile homes. His Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes offered a historical, industrial, legal, and social overview of manufactured housing's development. He convincingly argued that since its conception, the mobile home has provided affordable housing alternatives for a house-starved population. Yet, Wallis argued that the industry, through its efforts to create a more socially acceptable "institutional" home structure was rejecting its traditional function as a lower-class and middle-class housing alternative. In

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret J. Drury, Mobile Homes: The Unrecognized Revolution in American Housing (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972). This edition had been revised from the original, published in 1967. Prof. Drury explained that due to industry growth in the proceeding five years she felt strongly that a revised edition was in order.

response to the need to create more “curb appeal,” he claimed manufacturers were designing and ultimately pricing their traditional customers out of the market.<sup>9</sup>

A more recently published book, Diners, Bowling Alleys and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture, by Andrew Hurley discussed the post-World War II blue-collar class and their attempts to redefine themselves through their newfound power as consumers.<sup>10</sup> Hurley used trailer parks as a lens to examine evolving class issues, including exclusionary zoning laws and pop culture’s portrayal of “trailer trash.”

Drury, Wallis, and Hurley all examined the negative associations surrounding manufactured home history. However, their studies leave many aspects understudied. In particular, they fail to focus on the prevalence of manufactured housing in the West, particularly the regional variations in western housing trends and the persistence of negative perceptions, including transience and poverty.

A final work, The Unknown World of the Mobile Home, examined manufactured homes from the geographers’ point of view.<sup>11</sup> John Fraser, Michelle Rhodes, and John T. Morgan co-authored a collection of essays on manufactured housing’s widespread use and the landscape on which the homes rest. The authors devoted much of their work to close studies of national as well as regional mobile home popularity. As geographers, the authors focused on differing approaches to land use, with particular interest in comparing mobile home parks and private lots. Unlike previous scholarly works, The Unknown

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<sup>9</sup> Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Hurley, Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream on Postwar Consumer Culture (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> John Frazer Hart, Michelle J. Rhodes, and John T. Morgan, The Unknown World of the Mobile Home (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

World of the Mobile Home emphasized regional differences in United States mobile home use. It even contained a section on mobile homes in the Mountain West, using the Evergreen area of the Flathead Valley, Montana as a case study. Rhodes maintained that the improved building and safety standards combined with the rising cost of Western U.S. land and housing make mobile homes a sensible housing option for a growing middle class clientele.<sup>12</sup> This chapter grew out of Rhode's Master's thesis, which is one of the few, if not the only, recent examination of Montana's mobile homes. Rhodes focused on the prevalence of manufactured home use in Montana's Flathead Valley.<sup>13</sup> In it, she argued that due to the population growth experienced by western states, mobile homes have proven a viable source of housing and will continue to enjoy success as populations continue to grow.

However, Professor Rhodes' contribution to The Unknown World of the Mobile Home and the thesis from which it evolved failed to examine the dynamics and history of mobile homes in the entire state.<sup>14</sup> While it is true that portions of Montana, particularly the region centering around the Rocky Mountain front, have experienced population increase, mobile homes make up a significant portion of housing for the entire state. Mobile homes are not just a response to fast-paced population growth along the Rocky Mountain Front. Many Montana counties, which have not experienced increasing

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 59-76.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Rhodes, "The Manufactured West: House Form and Region" (M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> The literature that exists besides Rhodes does little to address the rich history, patterns of use, and prevalence of Montana's manufactured homes. Existing studies focus on narrow aspects of mobile homes. These include a study that compares the adjustment of children raised in site built and mobile homes while another provides an analysis of zoning in Missoula. See Richard T. Landess, "The Social-Emotional Adjustment of Children from Mobile Homes and Traditional Single-Family Dwellings," (Ph.D. diss., University of Montana, 1975) and James Edgecomb, "Zoning for Manufactured Housing: A Case Study in Missoula, Montana," (M.S. Thesis, University of Montana, 1988).

population, depend on manufactured homes. Rather, due to the counties' isolation and low population, manufactured homes offer convenient and affordable alternatives to traditional housing. Because of the diversity in Montana's geography and economy, no single equation can explain the success of mobile homes; rather, the reasons for mobile home use remain quite diverse.

This thesis will rectify the gap in the historiography by examining the success of Montana's manufactured homes. Much of Montana's mobile home history parallels national trends, especially the continued marginalization of this housing option. In Montana, the marginalization not only includes negative stereotypes, but also social, legal, and geographical restrictions. However, many aspects of Montana's manufactured housing are uniquely western. To date no social "history" of mobile home use in Montana exists. While there have been theses on land use, economics, and zoning, there has been no attempt to examine the history, popularity, and ongoing conflicts over manufactured home use in Montana. The state's history of natural resource extraction has much to do with the manufactured home's initial success. However, their continuing popularity cannot be traced solely to lower-middle-class needs or to the need for labor housing. A diverse population of Montanans lives in mobile homes. Yet, the mainstream refuses to acknowledge its viability, and the public refuses to relinquish the negative stereotypes.

Three chapters comprise this thesis. The first examines manufactured housing's historic and social evolution on the national level. The second and third chapters examine manufactured housing's dynamic history and clientele in Montana. Specifically, the second chapter discusses the success of this housing form as transportable shelter in

the boom and bust cycles of many Montana communities. The final chapter analyzes the more prevalent side of Montana's manufactured home use. It will examine the social and legal barriers faced by the thousands of Montanans who permanently live in manufactured homes.

As a means of facilitating the reader's understanding of manufactured homes' evolution, this project will use the historical terminology that correlates with manufactured housing's specific phases of growth. The first term, "**travel trailer**," reflects its initial stage of development from 1928 through 1940. Interestingly, the story of today's manufactured home began in the private workshops of auto campers during the 1910s and 1920s. During this stage, the travel trailer served as a home away from home for retirees and campers, while providing permanent shelter for migrant workers. Often homemade, the trailers were small and did not include bathrooms. By the 1930s, however, industrious entrepreneurs were mass-producing trailers. Numerous contemporaneous publications depicted not only the growing popularity of travel trailers, but also the confusion created by their widespread use. Sociologists, city planners, and citizens attempted to understand and define both these new fangled "mobile homes" and the people who chose to live in them permanently.

By 1940, the trailer's availability had attracted the attention of a population desperate for housing and had proven itself as a viable housing alternative. From 1941 to 1954 "**house trailers**" supplied shelter for thousands of factory workers, returning GIs, college students, and young professionals. During this era, local and state governments established the legal guidelines for which they would tax the thousands of houses on wheels. At the same time, trailer design began to reflect the reality that the majority of

house trailers were purchased for and used as permanent residences. Improvements during this period included up-to-date kitchens and fully functional bathrooms. Improvements and changing highway regulations culminated in the introduction of the ten-foot-wide in 1954. This innovation allowed for halls and a broader range of floor plans. From 1955 to 1974, although less streamlined and even less transportable, “**mobile homes**” enjoyed unprecedented success as designs that were more spacious and affordable attracted larger numbers of homeowners.

In 1974, the federal government passed long overdue safety and construction standards in the form of the Mobile Home Safety Standards and Construction Act. With the initiation of these standards the great grandchildren of the travel trailer officially became today’s “**manufactured housing**.”<sup>15</sup> The diversity of this housing alternative matches the diversity of those who choose to live in them. Fourteen, sixteen and eighteen-wides, double and triple-wides bear little, if any, resemblance to vehicles and very few move again after leaving the factory.

As indicated by the evolving terminology the history of manufactured housing is quite interesting and reveals much about the complexity of the housing form’s history. Through information mined from primary documents, this thesis will examine that history while discussing the evolving public perceptions of manufactured homes, particularly the conflicting opinions surrounding the permanent use of mobile homes and the people who chose to live in them. The regional variations found in the prevalence of Montana’s manufactured home use provide a uniquely western perspective.

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<sup>15</sup> This list and terminology compiled from two articles written by Allan D. Wallis, “Assimilation and Accommodation of a Housing Innovation: A Case Study Approach of the House Trailer,” in The Meaning and Use of Housing, ed. Ernesto G. Arias (Aldershot, England, Avebury Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1993), 430-438 and Allan D. Wallis, “Drawn Quarters,” Natural History 93 , (March 1985): 44-52.

Manufactured housing has not only proven successful in Montana but has earned acceptance under various economical and geographical conditions. Yet, despite its continued success as a housing alternative for a diverse population, public misperceptions and discrimination persist.



## **Chapter 1**

### **From Camping to Permanence, The National Scene**

In its May 1932 edition, Popular Science Monthly announced the winners of a previously advertised Trailer Design Contest. Editors and judges were not only gratified at the simplicity and economic feasibility of the submissions but also explained that construction was “within the reach of anyone who is sufficiently handy with tools.”<sup>16</sup> The judges believed that millions of automobile owners could enjoy constructing their own auto camp-trailer. However, due to the variations in submitted designs, judges created three categories of trailers: folding or collapsible trailers, tent trailers, and house trailers. As the third category indicated, many designers expected their trailers to supply all the conveniences of home. The eventual popularity of these “house trailers” would have surprising and far-reaching consequences.

The three categories of trailers in 1932 reflected not only the ingenuity of the auto trailer’s earlier creators but also anticipated the invention’s diverse and complex future. During the following seven decades, the travel trailer evolved from a homemade camping accessory to mass-produced, government-standard housing. Today, manufactured homes struggle to escape their origins as mobile housing and the negative stereotypes acquired during their rich history. Even though they provide housing to a diverse population, manufactured homes still have not been fully accepted as a viable alternative to site built homes.

#### **Travel Trailer: 1928-1940**

Today’s mobile homes originated during the 1920s and 1930s as an extension of the automobile and met many needs of a society that prided itself on its mobility. In

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<sup>16</sup> “Trailer Contest Brings Out New Ideas in Touring Comfort,” Popular Science Monthly, May 1932, 73.

1910, there were approximately half a million cars registered in the United States. By 1920, the number had increased to more than eight million, and in the next five years, that number more than doubled again. By 1925, there were seventeen and a half million cars registered in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> The United States embraced the automobile and the social changes it initiated. The car dramatically expanded Americans' recreation opportunities. Driving out into the countryside became a popular activity. By the early 1920s, The Outlook magazine had declared autocamping the "fastest growing sport" in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

This new sport appealed to automobile owners for many reasons. For one, it was economical. Travelers bypassed hotels and restaurants. They spent nights in their cars, or in nearby tents or trailers while preparing meals from cans. Most automobile owners could afford to camp. This affordability made autocamping democratic.<sup>19</sup> The Independent reported in 1926 that the average traveler could "rub elbows with a million dollars and perhaps never betray his lowly origin."<sup>20</sup> Autocamping democratized vacationing by giving all classes the same access to the growing network of highways, and national parks. Thirdly, auto touring rekindled a "pioneer spirit." Tourists compared themselves to their Mayflower and covered wagon ancestors. They felt that their explorations and appreciation of the wilderness reflected a unique American spirit. Lastly, autocamping provided vacation opportunities for the whole family. Children accompanied their parents and experienced the same joys and travails of travel.

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<sup>17</sup> J.J. Flink, America Adopts the Automobile: 1895-1910, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1970), quoted in Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Frank E. Brimmer, "Autocamping – the Fastest Growing Sport," The Outlook, July 1925, 437-440.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 437-440; Elon Jessup, "The Flight of the Tin Can Tourists," The Outlook, May 1925, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Robert L. Duffus, "Putting Wheels Under the Old Homestead," The Independent, 13 February 1926, 184.

Autocamping not only enabled parents and children to spend time together, it also offered educational opportunities through exposure to new landscapes and historical landmarks.<sup>21</sup>

The virtues of autocamping captured the public's imagination. Frank Brimmer, a writer for camping magazine The Outlook, explained, "motor camping has spread out its fingers and embrace[d] every class."<sup>22</sup> With this level of popularity and interest came demands for camping equipment that would provide many of the comforts of home. Early innovations included portable stoves, ice chests, and various styles of auto tents, folding furniture, and chemical toilets.

As early as 1917, aeronautical engineer, Glenn Curtis had built a prototype for a travel trailer. However, his model failed to capture the public's interest.<sup>23</sup> The same cannot be said of the early trailers produced by Arthur G. Sherman, credited with engineering the first mass-produced models. Sherman first constructed his own travel trailer for a cross-country family vacation. Because of the interest the trailer attracted during his family's travels, he hired a small group of cabinetmakers to begin constructing trailers for commercial sale. He received multiple orders from his exhibit at the 1930 Detroit Automobile Show. By 1936, Sherman's Covered Wagon Company was producing 6,000 trailers annually. The popularity of Sherman's auto trailer inspired many imitators.

Michigan was the center of auto-trailer production. It was home to approximately seventy factories in 1936. One-third were based in Detroit, including both the Covered Wagon Company and its primary competitor, Silver Dome, Inc. The Aerocar Company

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<sup>21</sup> For discussion of the family vacation perspective see F. E. Brimmer, "Home Away from Home," Woman's Home Companion, May 1923, 47-48, 64; Jessup, 166-167; and Duffus, 183.

<sup>22</sup> Frank E. Brimmer, "Autocamping – the Fastest Growing Sport," The Outlook, July 1925, 437.

<sup>23</sup> "200,000 Trailers," Fortune, March 1937, 105.

of America, Kozy-Coach, Schult Trailers, Inc., and Aladdin Company were among the seventy-five additional manufacturers based outside of Michigan.<sup>24</sup> More prestigious, previously established motor companies, such as Pierce-Arrow, also began producing travel trailers in an attempt to win segments of the “apparently limitless market.”<sup>25</sup>

Initially, these companies produced models designed for camping and temporary comfort. However, by the mid-to-late 1930s, travel trailers began to appeal to a broader base of consumers. While retirees and vacationers used their transportable homes when they were away from their permanent residences, others recognized commercial potential for the trailer as portable offices and show rooms. Travel trailers allowed wholesalers and retailers the convenience of taking both large samples and inventory with them from one small town to the next. Kelvinator wash machines, Singer tools and appliances, as well as clothing, were sold from travel trailer showrooms. Doctors and dentists used trailers as a means of reaching isolated communities. Commercial trailers, often specifically designed for a client, created a small boom for the industry and some experts predicted that commercial trailers would prove to be the cornerstone of the industry’s future.<sup>26</sup> Contrary to industry and economic leaders’ predictions, however, the public’s desire for affordable housing soon overshadowed commercial needs.

During the 1930s, the travel trailer industry was at a crossroads. Most companies believed the future of the business lay in vacation and commercial trailers, while a few mavericks saw greater potential in the growing use of trailers as permanent homes.

Business journals sided with the majority. In a 1937 Fortune article, the magazine

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<sup>24</sup> “200,000 Trailers,” Fortune, March 1937, 107-110; and “Auto Firms Will Make Trailers,” Business Week, 17 March 1936, 24-28.

<sup>25</sup> “Auto Firms Will Make Trailers,” Business Week, 17 March 1936, 24..

<sup>26</sup> “How Business Uses Trailers,” Business Week, 13 February 1937, 24-25; and “200,000 Trailers,” Fortune, March 1937, 214.

concluded that the smart companies were staking their futures on commercial trailers. It went on to mock the idea of trailers succeeding as affordable housing as “high-toned intellectual” speculation and “nonsense.”<sup>27</sup> Fortune denied the possibility of families surviving together in such limited space, in structures originally intended for transportation. Fortune could not fathom vehicles originally designed as auto and camping accessories becoming permanent residences.

The public would prove the pundits wrong. Thousands of Depression-era Americans took advantage of this innovative housing alternative. They did not go unnoticed. By mid-decade dozens of mainstream journals and magazines, including Saturday Evening Post, Time, and Reader’s Digest, reported on the new phenomenon of trailer living. Most articles focused on the positive aspects of trailer living, emphasizing their mobility, comfort and affordability. By 1936, an estimated 100,000 to 250,000 people lived in travel trailers. Many articles quoted economists and other commentators who predicted that these numbers would explode into the millions by the end of the decade.<sup>28</sup>

The reasons so many Americans chose to live in travel trailers varied from the romantic to the practical. Articles titled “Roll Your Own Home,” “Unchaining House from Land,” “Back to the Covered Wagon,” and “Hitch Up and Go,” conveyed Thoreau-

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<sup>27</sup> “200,000 Trailers,” Fortune, March 1937, 214.

<sup>28</sup> Although contested by Fortune (1937) and American City (1936), Time (1936) and Sociology and Social Research (1938) quoted 100,000. An article in Literary Digest (1935) reported an estimated total of permanent trailer residents at nearer to 250,000. A year later, a separate article found in Literary Digest (1936) predicted wide scale acceptance and use by the end of the decade due to the response of workers and their families to the hardships created by the Depression. This article speculated that as many as three million Americans could be living permanently in travel trailers within the next year. See “200,000 Trailers,” Fortune, March 1937, 220; William H. Ludlow, “Trailers and Cities,” American City, December 1936, 66; “Nation of Nomads?” Time, 15 June 1936, 55; Carroll D. Clark and Cleo E. Wilcox, “The House Trailer Movement,” Sociology and Social Research, July-August 1938, 505; “Comforts of Home on Wheels,” Literary Digest, 28 December 1935, 35; and “Nomad’s Land: Trailers of All Kinds a Feature of New York Auto Show,” Literary Digest, 14 November 1936, 40.

like attitudes as well as a renewal of the pioneer spirit. No longer did land ownership and its ensuing responsibilities of taxes, and home maintenance restrict families from a carefree lifestyle. Articles also promoted other familiar themes. Americans, by “hitching up” their homes, were simply carrying on patriotic traditions. Their use of transportable shelters emulated ancestors who had lived in other transportable shelter, including teepees, covered wagons and train cars. A new “adventure” was at every stop. Conversely, several proponents declared that the technology reflected in trailer design, production, and innovations represented the housing wave of the future.<sup>29</sup> Other mainstream periodicals declared trailer living to be a “great life if you’re democratic,” and that it knew “no class range.”<sup>30</sup> Many editorials reflected the belief that people from all walks of life partook of the benefits found in trailer living. Due to its affordability, retirees attempting to live on small pensions or strapped for money could find themselves in the same trailer community with vacationing aristocracy.

On the more practical side, thousands of families took to the road in travel trailers with the intent of following or creating jobs. These included picking fruit from California groves and hoeing beets in Montana and Colorado. Construction workers discovered that trailers enabled them to follow government jobs and still live with their families. Some hardy entrepreneurs served food from their trailers, using their kitchens as traveling restaurants. Traditionally transient professions also embraced the new

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<sup>29</sup> For arguments promoting permanent trailer usage and examinations of issues see Douglas Haskell, “Bringing Shelter Up to Date: Say It with Streamlines,” The Nation, 16 May 1934, 555-557; Douglas Haskell, “Bringing Shelter Up to Date: Unchaining House from Land,” The Nation, 23 May 1934, 586-588; Lawrence Saunders, “Roll Your Own Home,” The Saturday Evening Post, 23 May 1936, 12-13, 88, 91, 94; Dorothy Higgins, “Hitch Up and Go,” Delineator, January 1937, 18-19; H.W. MaGee, “Hitch Your Wagon to a Car,” Popular Mechanics Magazine, January 1937, 9-16, 132-134; and W. Clifford Harvey, “Back to the Covered Wagon,” Christian Science Monitor, October 1936, 3 & 15.

<sup>30</sup> H.I. Phillips, “Home, Swift Home,” Collier’s, 24 April 1937, 32; Dorothy Higgins, “Hitch Up and Go,” Delineator, January 1937, 19.

invention. For example, more than one industrious traveling preacher moved both his home and pulpit from town to town. Orchestras and theatrical groups performed throughout the country while living in travel trailers.<sup>31</sup> Travel trailers became popular as permanent residences because of their mobility, versatility, and affordability. However, these very benefits eventually undermined their acceptance as mainstream housing.

By 1936, the vast number of trailers combined with their conspicuous differences from traditional housing began to create community health concerns. Sanitation and easy transportability became issues. Only the most expensive travel trailers had bathrooms that included self-contained toilets.<sup>32</sup> The remainder of the thousands of occupied travel trailers had chemical toilets, required septic system hook-up, or failed to contain any bathroom facilities. This led the American Journal of Public Health in 1937 to demand uniform health regulations throughout all forty-eight states for travel trailers and trailer camps.<sup>33</sup> With the increasing popularity of travel trailers, health officials and local communities had ample reason to be concerned about where trailers settled and the resulting management of sewage and garbage. This concern accentuated their dissimilarity to standard housing. As a result, communities and their leaders viewed trailer homes as potential public nuisances and targeted them for special regulation.

Many Americans also questioned the community orientation of trailer owners. Families following seasonal jobs often did not enroll their children in local schools. Even those families who conscientiously kept their children in school found themselves

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew R. Boone, "Luxury Trailers Create New Army of Modern Gypsies," Popular Science Monthly, April 1936, 29-32; "200,000 Trailers," Fortune, March 1937; Carroll D. Clark and Cleo E. Wilcox, "The House Trailer Movement," Sociology and Social Research, July-August 1938, 508.

<sup>32</sup> "Trailers: Comfort, Taste, and Sturdiness Distinguish Homes on Wheels at New York Auto Show," Newsweek, 21 November 1936, 26; "200,000 Trailers," Fortune, March 1937, 109.

<sup>33</sup> "The Menace of Automobile Trailers," American Journal of Public Health and The Nation's Health, May 1937, 516-517.

moving to follow jobs, which stigmatized them as transients. Their moves also caused logistic and paperwork problems for local schools. In the years 1936 and 1937, California reported an average of 180,000 travel trailer families inside its borders.<sup>34</sup> Because of the fluctuating population in many areas, the state petitioned the federal government for assistance in supporting education services for 50,000 additional children, most coming from families living in travel trailers.<sup>35</sup> Eleven other states reported similar problems within their educational systems.<sup>36</sup> In addition to public school problems, few if any community and state tax structures were prepared for the financial drains caused by the increased highway maintenance and amplified fire and police department usage demanded by growing travel trailer communities.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, travel trailer owners did not typically pay property taxes. By the second half of the decade, the taxation and regulation of trailers and their residents became major headaches for many communities. To many Americans, it appeared that people who lived in trailers were neither paying their way nor were they part of the communities in which they lived.

Recognizing the problems caused by travel trailers, several periodicals proposed possible solutions. American City, a journal that addressed municipal concerns and planning, urged local officials to keep open minds when dealing with “trailer problems.”<sup>38</sup> The periodical recognized the prevalence of the sanitation, parking and taxation problems. It predicted that those communities that progressively and astutely

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<sup>34</sup> Khyber Forrester, “Trailers Bring Families and Problems,” Nation’s Business, February 1937, 34.

<sup>35</sup> “Wheeled Nomads: Health Hazards,” Literary Digest, 15 May 1937, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Forrester, 32.

<sup>37</sup> For articles describing these community concerns and other anti-trailer sentiments see: “Wheeled Nomads: Health Hazards,” Literary Digest, 15 May 1937, 17-18; “What About Trailer Squatters?” Business Week, 19 December 1936, 20; Khyber Forrester, “Trailers Bring Families and Problems,” Nation’s Business, February 1937, 32-34, 94-96; and W.C. Harvey, “Back to the Covered Wagon,” Christian Science Monitor, 7 October 1936, 3 & 15.

<sup>38</sup> William H. Ludlow, “Trailers and Cities,” American City, December 1936, 62.



addressed trailer issues would successfully make trailers and their occupants “new and integral part(s) of the city pattern.”<sup>39</sup> The Nation’s Business, a journal published by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, also advocated progressive community planning. By accommodating rather than ostracizing trailer populations, communities would benefit from this “permanent change in American life.”<sup>40</sup> Nation’s Business emphasized that although trailer living was embraced by all economic levels, the “poorer trailer migrants” demanded the most attention. They were, according to author Khyber Forrester, “pioneering” a new way of American life and should not be discriminated against. Rather, they deserved community services, including educational opportunities for their children. Although Forrester praised California for establishing well-planned sanitary trailer camps, he expressed frustration with the lack of progressive planning undertaken by government as a whole. The few programs already established were of “doubtful scope and effectiveness.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, cities and states resisted implementation of progressive programs, in part because they sought to discourage trailer owners from settling in their communities.

Just as many localities attempted to discourage permanent trailers with their lack of inviting camps, others restricted them through legislation and the court system. In 1936, the citizens of Orchard Lake, Michigan, took Hildred Gumarsol to court for parking his travel trailer in town for two summers. According to the case, the Gumarsol dwelling was less than the minimum of 400 usable square feet required by city ordinances for private residences and therefore could not be legally defined as a permanent residence. Mr. Gumarsol’s defense rested on the license and registration of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>40</sup> Khyber Forrester, “Trailers Bring Families and Problems,” Nation’s Business,” February 1937, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 94.

his trailer as an “automobile accessory.”<sup>42</sup> According to his defense, as the trailer was licensed as an accessory, it could not be held to the standards of local housing codes. In rejecting Mr. Gumarsol assertion, the court found him guilty of breaking the city ordinance. His trailer, the court declared, was a dwelling and therefore city officials could apply housing codes to it. The ruling forced him to remove his trailer. The court explained because this was a test case, it would be lenient with the defendant and only fine Gumarsol one dollar and court costs. However, Justice Green also advised communities that preferred to avoid trailer traffic to “pass ordinances so drastic” that they would deter future travel trailer problems.<sup>43</sup> The ruling identified the means by which communities would restrict the use of trailers for generations to come: housing code and restrictive zoning.

As Justice Green advised, local and state lawmakers did indeed restrict the use of travel trailers through restrictive housing codes. Stringent enforcement of housing codes successfully kept trailers from settling inside the boundaries of many municipalities. Detroit banned all trailers from all private property except established trailer camps. Camps, in turn, were not allowed inside city limits.<sup>44</sup> Other communities instituted time limits for parked trailers. However, neither of these discouragements succeeded in preventing travel trailers from parking outside city limits. In response to this “problem,” states established restrictive size and weight limits in attempts to keep travel trailers

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<sup>42</sup> “Trailer Test,” Time, 23 November 1936, 66 & 68.

<sup>43</sup> The most significant reference to the Gumarsol case, which includes a copy of the Court’s Decision, is found in The Trailer House, Its Effect on State and Local Government, prepared by the American Municipal Association in cooperation with the American Public Welfare Association, the American Society of Planning Officials, and the National Association of Housing Officials: Report No. 114, February 1937, 13 & 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> “What About Trailer Squatters?” Business Week, 19 December 1936, 20.

outside their borders while others instituted prohibitive trailer registration fees.<sup>45</sup> Many communities chose not to accommodate trailers through progressive measures. Rather, they successfully marginalized travel trailers through legal means.

Meanwhile, the travel trailer industry attempted to come to terms with the growing use of their products as permanent residences by organizing trade associations. East of the Rockies, manufacturing interests came together as the Trailer Coach Manufacturers Association (TCMA), while the second, the Trailer Coach Association (TCA), represented West Coast manufacturers. By 1937, these groups were conducting studies and lobbying for the interests of travel trailer owners and manufacturers.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, even industry representatives were undecided about the future of travel trailers. For example, the TCMA supported a Toledo, Ohio, ordinance limiting the amount of time any trailer could remain parked in one location to three months a year. A TCMA representative reported that the Association believed the ordinance to be “both reasonable and equitable.”<sup>47</sup> In addition to the TCMA, industry leaders quoted in Fortune and other mainstream journals denied the possibility of anyone other than the

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<sup>45</sup> For discussions on the steps taken by local and state governments to restrict permanent travel trailer living see W. Clifford Harvey, “Back to the Covered Wagon,” Christian Science Monitor, October 1936, 3 & 15; “How Will the ‘Trailer-Home’ Be Governed?” American City, 111-113; and The Trailer House, Its Effect on State and Local Government, prepared by the American Municipal Association in cooperation with the American Public Welfare Association, the American Society of Planning Officials, and the National Association of Housing Officials: Report No. 114, February 1937, 2, 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> The formation of the TCMA is mentioned in “Where Are Trailers Going?” Business Week, 19 September 1936, 15. The TCMA would evolve into the most influential of the trade associations, becoming the Mobile Home Manufacturers Association (MHMA) in 1952 and the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) in 1975. For specific information regarding the evolution and actions of these organizations, see Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 71-79, 133, 220 and Taylor Meloan, Mobile Homes: The Growth and Business Practices of the Industry, (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc. 1954), 9.

<sup>47</sup> “Toledo, Ohio, Ordinance Cited by T.C.M.A. as Model,” Travel Trailer, 3 no. 6 (June 1938), 15-16, quoted in Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 71.

most “footloose” considering the possibility of permanent trailer living.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the spokespersons expressed embarrassment over the “very idea of trailers being houses.”<sup>49</sup> In these ways, industry representatives worked with lawmakers and the popular media in an effort to prevent the trailer from becoming permanent housing.

In spite of the intentions of lawmakers and embarrassed industry spokespersons, the travel trailer rapidly evolved beyond its automobile accessory origins. Prior to 1937, auto trailers had been exhibited next to automobiles at annual auto shows. That year trailer manufacturers and designers held their first independent trade shows. The first show, privately sponsored and held in White Plains, New York, attracted positive attention.<sup>50</sup> In response to this triumph, twenty-four dealers and manufacturers organized a show in Manhattan. The organizers of the second show openly admitted that people living in trailers faced challenges, due to the minimal space of the trailer and growing legal restrictions. In response to these difficulties, representatives from the School of Trailer Economics offered classes on how to cope with living in limited spaces, sanitation and heating issues at the exhibit. Show sponsors and participants declared that the travel trailer as permanent home was “here to stay.”<sup>51</sup>

Many industry pioneers agreed. Outside the showroom, progressive manufacturers committed their companies’ futures to the concept of permanent trailers. Companies such as the Aerocar Company, Curtiss Aerocar Company, Kozy Coach and Covered Wagon continued to enlarge their designs as well as apply new technology and materials to improve their new “land yacht” models. They constructed improved travel

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<sup>48</sup> “Where Are Trailers Going?” *Business Week*, 19 September 1936, 15.

<sup>49</sup> “200,000 Trailers,” *Fortune*, March 1937, 220 & 222.

<sup>50</sup> “Setback for Trailers,” *Business Week*, 24 April 1937, 41.

<sup>51</sup> “Trailer Economics,” *Time*, 4 October 1937, 49. Also see “Trailers Are the Whole Show,” *Business Week*, 25 September 1937, 18.

trailers “to be lived in while in motion as well as while standing still.”<sup>52</sup> As if to emphasize their use as homes and the diversity of trailer owners, many of the newer models contained bathrooms and kitchens, as well as servant’s quarters and separate entrances.<sup>53</sup> New designs were intended to attract a wide variety of owners, from seasonal laborers to wealthy vacationers.

While a growing number of customers took advantage of design innovations, other proponents were working with city and state governments to encourage nondiscriminatory laws. While the issues of sanitation and highway safety were of primary concern, advocates also promoted uniform state laws, annual licensing fees, proper wiring and brake systems and most importantly uniform taxation. By the end of the decade, many states grudgingly acknowledged travel trailers as homes by integrating them into the property tax system. More than twenty states taxed trailer residents according to the assessed value of the trailer. Other states, such as Florida, taxed owners a flat fee of twelve dollars annually. To supplement the added burden on school districts, trailers from out of state were taxed additionally only if they had school age children.<sup>54</sup>

With its beginnings in private garages and workshops, the camping trailer took fewer than twenty years to evolve into the travel trailer. Private craftsmen and entrepreneurs, as well as a growing industry, combined the American passion for the automobile with design innovations that made it possible to take a home on the road. With the onset of the Great Depression, a varied clientele took advantage of the invention’s mobility and convenience. A growing number of retirees, vacationers, and workers, however, made their trailers permanent homes. As a result, the traditionally

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<sup>52</sup> “Trailer Industry,” Architectural Record, August 1936, 162.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>54</sup> William H. Ludlow, “Trailers and Cities,” The American City, October 1936, 62.

housed public attempted to understand why neighbors chose to live in trailers. The wonder grew into suspicion as the number of permanent trailer dwellers increased. Their use of trailers as homes strained the budgets and infrastructures of municipalities. These concerns and resistance to the notion that homes could be mobile gave rise to resentment and negative stereotypes. Many localities struggled with questions on how to govern increasing numbers of travel trailers while mainstream society labeled their owners transients and community health threats.

### **House Trailer: 1941-1954**

From a camping accessory to a permanent home, the travel trailer proved its versatility in the decades between 1920 and 1940. After the winter of 1941 -1942, however, both traditional home and travel trailer owners found themselves focused on the war effort. This focus created an ideal environment for the travel trailer's evolution into house trailer. During the early war years, the house trailer enjoyed a grudging acceptance from desperate government and community planners who witnessed its success in filling wartime emergency housing needs. The house trailer's success, however, did not end with the war. Rather, the industry's assembly line efficiency and innovative approach to housing continued to supply thousands of families with permanent housing for decades following World War II.

During the winter of 1941-1942, defense-plants and government facilities attracted tens of thousands of workers. Housing these workers became not only a local issue, but a national one as well. The Army immediately recognized the advantages of trailers and ordered 1,500 for a single plant outside of Wilmington, Illinois.<sup>55</sup> The Defense Housing Law, or Lanham Act, 1941, specifically allocated \$6,750,000 for the

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<sup>55</sup> "Homes on Wheels," Business Week, 7 December 1940, 47.

purchase of “mobile housing.”<sup>56</sup> The Trailer Coach Manufacturers Association (TCMA), which initially voiced concerns regarding how manufacturers would maintain production under the limitations of wartime rationing, anticipated orders for as many as 6,500 house trailers in the early months of 1941.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, the industry overcame these potential problems, and produced 60,000 trailers that year.<sup>58</sup> Just a year later, manufacturers successfully met orders for more than 50,000 house trailers from various private and governmental agencies.<sup>59</sup> The industry’s production success under strict time limits and rationing impressed many governmental officials. Furthermore, the brief period of financial success garnered public attention.

House trailer living became an acceptable alternative for the thousands who found themselves living near naval bases, war construction projects, aircraft factories, and numerous other defense material plants. Esther Collard wrote to the editors of Woman’s Home Companion from near a Seattle, Washington shipyard. She requested advice on how to enhance the livability of the small house trailer she, her husband, and two children called home. One of the magazine’s home decorators was delighted to offer suggestions on color schemes, storage, window treatments, and furnishings.<sup>60</sup> The article treated the home trailer setting as any other home with, not only its decorating advice, but also its emphasis on “warmth and comfort and charm.”<sup>61</sup> Although the decorator pointed out the need to make the most of the limited space offered by trailer living, she made few

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<sup>56</sup> “Housing Impasse,” Business Week, 15 February 1941, 31. The article also offers a description of the Lanham Act, Housing Coordinator C.F. Palmer’s request for more money, and a forecast of how the monies may be spent.

<sup>57</sup> “Defense Trailers,” Business Week, 15 February 1941, 32.

<sup>58</sup> “Trailers Trailing,” Business Week, 16 January 1943, 69-70.

<sup>59</sup> This number is quoted in “2 Tires for 5 Trailers, Says WPB,” Architectural Record, April 1942, 24; Margaret Devereux, “We Live in a Trailer,” Woman’s Home Companion, June 1942, 88; and “No More Trailers,” Business Week, 17, July 1943, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret Devereux, “We Live in a Trailer,” Woman’s Home Companion, June 1942, 88.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

concessions to the home's origins. In the words of Mrs. Collard, the trailer became an "inspiration to gracious living."<sup>62</sup> Both Mrs. Collard and the Woman Home Companion's decorator transferred their traditional homemaker concepts and ideals to trailer living as they created comfortable living spaces and family homes from the limited space offered by trailer living.

The need for efficient, but comfortable trailers was also reflected in contemporary housing projects and trailer designs.<sup>63</sup> Many of the resulting structures were precursors to what would commonly become known as the "double wide." The Tennessee Valley Authority created one of the most successful housing designs in cooperation with the trailer industry. The Authority recruited two trailer veterans, the Covered Wagon Company and Schult Trailers, Inc. to assist in manufacturing and design applications. The resulting hybrid of new design elements and conventional transportation chassis earned the name "trailer-house." Advocates emphasized their lack of similarity to the previously produced travel trailers. These elements included the structures' composition siding and traditionally sized doors and windows.<sup>64</sup> The efficient floor designs and built-in furniture created "gems of compact living," while also proving popular with TVA

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>63</sup> For descriptions of differing approaches to the housing shortage by the trailer industry and governmental agencies see "Two Rooms and Kitchen Fold UP Into Trailers," Popular Mechanics, March 1942, 44. The next two articles describe a trailer designed by the Farm Security Administration, which had collapsing walls that were unfolded once parked on site. A second article emphasized the sameness of thousands of trailers parked outside war plants. These trailers were produced by twenty-five trailer manufacturers, all using the same pattern to enhance productivity and make the most of wartime material shortages. "Like Peas in a Pod," Business Week, 15 May 1943, 30; "Mobile Housing Popular In War Industry Sections," Science News Letter, 26 June 1943, 403-404.

<sup>64</sup> For descriptions and photos of this project see "The Trailer House: The TVA's New Approach to Housing," Architectural Record, February 1943, 49-52; "Footloose and Uninhibited: Will Tomorrow's Home Sweet Home Really Come in a Package?" American Home, February 1943, 18-19. The two previous articles focused on the TVA's role in the trailer house's design. A third article emphasized the role played by Schult Trailers, Inc. See "Two Trailers Combine into One," Popular Mechanics, August 1943, 39.



employees.<sup>65</sup> Both industry designers and housing critics approved of the newly designed trailer-house. They agreed that the new design not only met the challenge of the immediate need for housing, but also prompted speculation about the place house trailers would play in the future of housing.

This success and optimism was short lived, however, as the trailer industry failed to win recognition from the National Housing Agency. By the summer of 1943, material shortages had forced all but the larger trailer manufacturers out of business or at the very least forced them to close their doors with hopes that wartime restrictions on materials and private orders would soon be lifted.<sup>66</sup> In addition to material shortages, politics and prejudices worked against the industry. The National Housing Agency (NHA) rejected plans by the Lanham Committee for additional trailer orders. The Agency refused to recognize “factory built” structures as houses, insisting they could only serve as “stop gap” housing, never as permanent homes.<sup>67</sup> The Agency introduced plans to construct site-built homes around industrial areas. In response to this attack, the trailer industry defended its construction methods and pointed out its previous successes in working with rationed materials.<sup>68</sup> None of the arguments given by proponents, however, succeeded in overcoming wartime politics or decade-old prejudices. With these drastic cuts, the remaining house trailer companies survived the last of the war years with occasional government orders. The losing battle with the National Housing Agency not only

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<sup>65</sup> “Footloose and Uninhibited: Will Tomorrow’s Home Sweet Home Really Come in a Package?” American Home, February 1943, 18.

<sup>66</sup> “Trailers Trailing,” Business Week, 16 January 1943, 70; “No More Trailers,” Business Week, 17 July 1943, 19.

<sup>67</sup> “No More Trailers,” Business Week, 17 July 1943, 19.

<sup>68</sup> “Trailers Trailing,” Business Week, 16 January 1943, 69-70; “No More Trailers,” Business Week, 17 July 1943, 19.

defeated the industry monetarily, it also underscored the widely held prejudices against house trailers.

Not only did their assembly-line production and transportability earn them derision, established communities persisted in identifying trailer residents as outsiders. As described previously, many wartime workers successfully found comfortable accommodations in house trailers. Yet, their house trailers set them apart from their newfound communities and established community members often refused them welcome. One industrial worker interviewed by a labor advocate described this problem in very specific language. She and her family had been “respected members” of their previous community and had given up the comfort of a traditional home to work at a war factory. However, at her new location, she quit going to church because “people turned their noses up” at her and her family because others perceived them as “trailer trash.”<sup>69</sup> According to labor activist and author, Mary Heaton Vorse, trailer residents found the same reception throughout the United States as established inhabitants treated them with “suspicion and dislike.”<sup>70</sup> By the end of World War II, the house trailer had proven its worth in both productivity and comfort, but its unique transportable characteristics continued to undermine both its recognition as housing as well as its residents’ acceptance as valued community members.

Although the dynamics differed, the travel trailer, and a decade later, the house trailer had proven their worth. Both the Depression and World War II demonstrated the home’s virtues but the house trailer’s successes failed to overcome popular prejudice. The war years even cemented the long-standing expletive, “trailer trash.” Although the

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<sup>69</sup> Mary Heaton Vorse, “And the Workers Say . . .” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7 (1943): 451-452.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

majority of house trailer residents were employed and embraced middle class values, this new insult ignored social and income status. Rather, it derogatively defined a large percent of the population because of their housing choice.

Despite the negative stereotypes, many Americans continued prewar trends by enjoying the affordability and conveniences of house trailer living. A municipally designed and operated court in Sarasota, Florida exemplified the continued popularity. With sites for 1,500 trailers, its own fire and police departments, and strict covenants, the community demonstrated that well organized communities could be “dream-boat[s] of proven performance.”<sup>71</sup> The residents, the majority of whom were living off limited retirement incomes, considered their house trailers home and took pride in their community.

Even during the war, Florida, and other states attracted thousands of permanent house trailer residents outside the realm of wartime industry. By 1946, Dade County alone had 10,000 trailers.<sup>72</sup> The growing number of people choosing house trailers as permanent residences forced local and state lawmakers to address trailer issues and attempt to settle the continuing questions regarding their legal status. Florida’s state attorney general ultimately settled the issue by agreeing they could be either permanent housing or vacation accessories. He agreed that house trailers permanently parked on real estate owned by the trailer resident could be taxed as real property. On the other hand, he allowed for a degree of flexibility when trailers were used solely as a vacation accessory or parked in trailer communities. The state taxed these as motor vehicles or

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<sup>71</sup> Josephine Ripley, “Where Needles Flash in the Sun,” Christian Science Monitor, 13 February 1943, 14.

<sup>72</sup> “Trailers Taxable as Real Estate in Florida,” American City, July 1946, 89.

personal property.<sup>73</sup> While this approach exemplified the competing definitions and legal issues, it allowed for a broader range of house trailer use.

Industry advocates also worked with state legislatures to promote basic sanitation and health guidelines for trailer parks. Many states, including Michigan and Colorado, passed laws defining basic guidelines for trailer facilities.<sup>74</sup> Although the war put a temporary hold on private trailer sales, the private sector continued to utilize the house trailer. In turn, by setting standards for health and sanitation, governments assisted in making permanent trailer living more desirable to a broader public. Unfortunately, these steps failed to win over many housing experts and the mainstream public.

With the end of World War II, the house trailer would have another opportunity to prove its usefulness. The year 1943 witnessed the highest birthrates in twenty years.<sup>75</sup> These rates combined with the more than one million returning GI's and their families, who were homeless during the fall of 1945, created an unprecedented national housing shortage.<sup>76</sup> Just two years later, 2,700,000 homes were needed to house the number of growing families.<sup>77</sup> Many housing experts believed the solution to the housing shortage would include the wide spread use of new materials including plywood and aluminum.<sup>78</sup> Experts and social critics also demanded the implementation of mass production methods as a means of overcoming the housing shortage.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>74</sup> "Trailers Lagging," *Business Week*, 1 June 1946, 40-42.

<sup>75</sup> David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 134.

<sup>76</sup> "Homes—in Blueprint," *Business Week*, 19 November 1945, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Gervasi, "Housing: Tomorrow's Answer," *Collier's*, 18 January 1947, 75.

<sup>78</sup> "Homes—in Blueprint," *Business Week*, 19 November 1945, 74-76.

In response, innovators introduced numerous prefabricated and mass produced homes. Most of which failed to win public approval.<sup>79</sup> Two such designs included the “Dynaxion Dwelling Machine” and the “Higgins Home.”<sup>80</sup> The first arranged a steel, plastic and aluminum structure around a central support pole. The second incorporated prefabricated panels of enameled steel constructed off site then transported and incorporated into the house structure. Numerous other attempts at incorporating space age materials or mass production methods into housing proved unsuccessful. However, Levitt & Sons of Manhasset, New York proved the exception. William Levitt, with the assistance of his brother, architect Alfred and father Abraham, designed a moderate approach to mass production. Rather than build homes or major components in a factory, Levitt mass-produced homes on-site by moving subcontractors from site to site.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the mobility and synchronization of specialized crews, Levitt drafted a system in which crews, located at a central shop, measured and precut lumber and plumbing. Each site received a delivery of precut components, from which workers framed and finished individual homes.<sup>82</sup> Levitt successfully overcame the problem of mass production by taking the house off the assembly line and taking the assembly line to the house site. Levitt’s efficiency and resulting low prices combined with every appearance

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<sup>79</sup> For discusses regarding differing approaches to mass produced housing see “Homes—in Blueprint,” Newsweek, 19 November 1945, 74-76; Frank Gervasi, “Housing: Tomorrow’s Answer,” Collier’s, 18 January 1947, 22-23, 74-76; “Where is Prefabrication?” Fortune 33, no. 4 (1946): 127-131, 233-238, 241-250; “The Industry Capitalism Forgot,” Fortune 36, no. 2, (1947): 61-67, 167-170; “Prefabs: Will Next Year Be It?” Business Week, 12 December 1953, 70, 72, 74.

<sup>80</sup> “Homes—in Blueprint,” Business Week, 19 November 1945, 74; “Housing: Tomorrow’s Answer,” Collier’s, 18 January 1947, 22-23, 74-76; “Homes—in Blueprint,” Business Week, 19 November 1945, 74; “Housing: Tomorrow’s Answer,” Collier’s, 18 January 1947, 22-23, 74-76.

<sup>81</sup> “The Industry Capitalism Forgot,” Fortune 36, no. 2, (1947): 63, 66-67, 167-168. Levitt homes were built without cellars or basements. Copper coils imbedded in the concrete pad foundations provided radiant heat. For more discussion on Levitt and his housing approach, see David Halberstam, The Fifties, (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 134 -143.

<sup>82</sup> “The Industry Capitalism Forgot,” Fortune 36, no. 2, (1947): 63.

of a site built home succeeded, while other less traditional pre-fabricated approaches suffered bankruptcy.

While the public refused to embrace innovative approaches to traditional housing, the trailer industry's improved post-war designs and production methods attracted an increasing number of homeowners. Those companies that had survived the shortages of the war years progressively looked to new materials, designs, and technology to improve their product in the post-war housing market. Innovations included integration of new materials. One such design eliminated iron and steel, and replaced traditional materials with plywood, aluminum and magnesium. Another new design incorporated all aluminum kitchen appliances. The newer materials produced a lighter, more easily transportable trailer.<sup>83</sup> Other improvements included folding sun porches, awnings, picture windows, fireplaces and fluorescent lights.<sup>84</sup> Décor took on looks that were more traditional. Customers could choose from colonial, modern and even ranch furnishings.<sup>85</sup> Innovations that were more practical included improved suspension, hitch, and hydraulic braking systems. Improvements, such as electric refrigerators, hot water heaters and full bathrooms, reflected the growing market for permanent housing.<sup>86</sup> As Life magazine reported, the new models looked "more like houses than ever" as many of the newer

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<sup>83</sup> "Light Metal House Trailer Contains a Complete Kitchen," Popular Mechanics, June 1946, 142. Also see "Hit the Trail by Trailer," Popular Mechanics, April 1946, 145.

<sup>84</sup> "Trends in Trailers," Popular Science, June 1947, 141; "Sun Porch Trailer," Popular Mechanics, November 1947, 158; "Highway Yacht With a Sun Deck," Popular Mechanics, June 1949, 130-131; and "1948 Trailers," Life, 2 February 1948, 74.

<sup>85</sup> "Bathtubs, Too: Home, Home in the Trailer," Business Week, 14, March 1953, 30.

<sup>86</sup> "Hit the Trail by Trailer," Popular Mechanics, April 1946, 146 & 149; "Houses on Wheels: They're Tricky Things to Sell," Business Week, 6 September 1952, 99-94; and "Bathtubs, Too: Home, Home in the Trailer," Business Week, 14 March 1953, 28-30.

models grew to as long as 33 feet.<sup>87</sup> This growth allowed room for partitions and more privacy.

In the years between the end of World War II, 1945, and the conclusion of the Korean War, 1953, the industry enjoyed unprecedented success in spite of periodic war-imposed material shortages. Defense and military orders had reached 150,000 in 1946. As with the earlier war years, trailer manufacturers received more orders than construction supplies would allow them to fill. That year existing companies predicted they had the materials to fill orders for only 25,000 homes.<sup>88</sup> In spite of ongoing supply restrictions, home trailer manufacturers had rebounded and by 1948 were producing and selling more than 80,000 house trailers annually. By the end of the 1940s, over one million Americans called house trailers home.<sup>89</sup>

Because of this increased popularity, the U.S. Census Bureau initiated an additional category in its 1950 “Census of Housing.” The new category was labeled “trailer.” The 1940 Census had enumerated house trailer residents under the “Other” category. By 1950, however, the number of Americans living in house trailers required enumeration, and their own designation. Following 1950, the category “Trailer,” and the later title “Mobile home,” became permanent Census “Type(s) of Housing.” Furthermore, the 1950 Census reported that more than 315,000 house trailers were used as permanent residents.<sup>90</sup> By the spring of 1953, that number had more than doubled to 650,000 house trailers providing housing for an estimated 1,850,000 people.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “1948 Trailers,” *Life*, 2 February 1948, 74.

<sup>88</sup> These figures from “Trailers Lagging,” *Business Week*, 1 June 1946, 40. Differing figures were given in a *Time* magazine article. *Time* reported orders for 100,000 trailers, with trailer manufacturers able to produce 15,000. See “Collapsible Trailer,” *Time*, 1 April 1946, 86.

<sup>89</sup> “Where Can You Park a Trailer?” *Nation’s Business*, July 1948, 63.

<sup>90</sup> “U.S. Census of Housing Table – Units in Structure,” U.S. Census Bureau <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/units.html>> (21 January 2004): 6. The same

By the beginning of the 1950s, the families living in house trailers challenged the established stereotypes of owners being poor and transient. A reported 93 percent of new purchasers bought house trailers with the intent of living in them permanently.<sup>92</sup> A large percentage of trailer owners had purchased house trailers in reaction to the housing shortage. Once settled, these families rarely moved their homes.<sup>93</sup> Another large segment of purchasers included military or service personnel, defense and construction workers, and retired couples. Servicemen, construction workers and young professionals were purchasing house trailers as a means of both keeping up with jobs and keeping their families together. Most of these families permanently parked their homes in established trailer parks near defense plants and construction jobs. Those whose jobs demanded mobility moved as infrequently as possible, often settling in one location for up to two years.<sup>94</sup> While these families were mobile, they were consistently employed. In fact, the average trailer owner made more than \$4000 dollars annually, at least \$1000 more than the national average of traditional homeowners with similar occupations.<sup>95</sup> The average income combined with household moves associated with employment contradicted the

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Housing table explains that the U.S. Census for 1940 included trailers under the "Other" category. This category also included boats and vacation cabins. See page 1 of the same report.

<sup>91</sup> "Houses on Wheels: They're Tricky Things to Sell," Business Week, 6 September 1952, 91; "Bathtubs, Too: Home, Home in the Trailer," Business Week, 14 March 1953, 28. In 1952, Collier's and American Magazine reported 1,700,000 people living in 500,000 trailers. Newsweek reported even higher numbers with 1,850,000 people living in 740,000 trailers. See "Home Is Where the Car Is," Collier's, 8 March 1952, 58; "Trailer Facts," American Magazine, July 1952, 86; "Trailers: More and More Americans Call Them Home," Newsweek, 25 August 1952, 70.

<sup>92</sup> This figure cited in "Notes on the Trailer-Coach Industry," Fortune, December 1951, 163 and Christy Borth, "Be It Ever So Mobile," The Rotarian Magazine, October 1952, 35. However, a 1952 issue of Business Week reported that "only 3% of sales" were "really migratory." See "Houses on Wheels: They're Tricky Things to Sell," Business Week, 6 September 1952, 92.

<sup>93</sup> "Trailer Facts," American Magazine, July 1952, 86.

<sup>94</sup> "Notes on the Trailer-Coach Industry," Fortune, December 1951, 163.

<sup>95</sup> "Trailer Facts," American Magazine, July 1952, 86; "Notes on the Trailer-Coach Industry," Fortune, December 1951, 163; and Harold H. Martin, "Don't Call Them Trailer Trash," The Saturday Evening Post, 2 August 1952, 22.



stereotype that only transients, or the poor who had few options, would chose to live in house trailers. Yet those stereotypes persisted in spite of the social realities.

Many magazine articles attempted to counter the widespread negative stereotypes by highlighting who really lived in house trailers. Mainstream magazines, including Time, Life, and the Saturday Evening Post, ran features describing individuals and families who had chosen to make house trailers their permanent homes.<sup>96</sup> In addition to providing income, employment, and mobility statistics, many articles described the one percent of Americans living in house trailers as hard working and industrious.<sup>97</sup> One story interviewed a semi-retired couple who still ran a business with 1,000 employees. The couple, who had permanently parked their trailer, had tired of housework and the high cost of living. They chose house trailer living as a means of simplifying their lives.<sup>98</sup> Other articles focused on engineers, salesmen, and teachers, all typical middle-class professionals.<sup>99</sup>

However, the most significant articles were those that examined and attempted to understand “all-American” families whose chosen homes set them apart from the mainstream. Some described the alternative lifestyles without bias, while others had difficulty in portraying trailer families without perpetuating negative stereotypes. Two magazines, American Magazine and Saturday Evening Post, typified these conflicting approaches. In July 1952, American Magazine introduced the public to the Skaggs family, who, the magazine reported, exemplified the new trend of upper middle class

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<sup>96</sup> See John Kobler, “People in Trailers” Life, 13 December 1948, 18-22, 25-26, 29; “Modern Living: Trailer Life,” Time, 17 November 1952, 112-113; and Harold H. Martin, “Don’t Call Them Trailer Trash,” Saturday Evening Post, 2 August 1952, 21-22, 85-87.

<sup>97</sup> “Modern Living: Trailer Life,” Time, 17 November 1952, 113.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>99</sup> “Trailers: More and More Americans Call Them Home,” Newsweek, 25 August 1952, 70-72; Harold H. Martin, “Don’t Call Them Trailer Trash,” Saturday Evening Post, 2 August 1952, 21-22, 85-87.

house trailer owners.<sup>100</sup> Magazine editors had chosen Jim, Kathryn, and their five-year-old twin boys as the magazine's "Family of the Month" because of their ambition and strong community involvement. Although the couple lived in a 34 by 8 foot home as they followed Jim's job as a heavy equipment operator, they became "active members" in every town in which they settled, regardless of the time restrictions put on them by Jim's job.<sup>101</sup> Kathryn refused to allow her family to be perceived as "gypsies" or "outsiders."<sup>102</sup> The magazine described the Skaggs family as a hard working, all-American family. Their choice of housing was the only thing that set them apart from their neighbors.

While this article characterized trailer homeowners as mainstream Americans, a second article reinforced the negative stereotypes. Saturday Evening Post's article titled "Don't Call Them Trailer Trash" by Harold H. Martin, not only called attention to the disparagement "trailer trash" but also included a description of thousands of "happy gypsies."<sup>103</sup> He assured his readers that while traditional communities may question how the occupants of trailers "sleep and eat and bathe and breed," they were simply families who were utilizing house trailers as a means of making money and keeping families together.<sup>104</sup> They attended church services and participated in local charity organizations. Their children joined local Scout groups, earned good grades and appeared well adjusted.<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, Martin assured his readers that upon completion of their current jobs the thousands of "migrant strangers" would be moving on to the next opportunity. While Martin attempted to reassure the public that trailer resident's personal, family and

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<sup>100</sup> Clarence Woodbury, "They Raised Their Twins in a Trailer," American Magazine, 32-35, 84-89.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>103</sup> Harold H. Martin, "Don't Call Them Trailer Trash," Saturday Evening Post, 2 August 1952, 22-23.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

professional lives were conventionally middle class, his emphasis on nomadic lifestyles and consistent use of negative terminology reinforced many contemporary stereotypes. He listed the current statistics on income and employment, but continued to describe house trailer families as “migrants” and “gypsies,” which implied that they were outsiders, transients, and threats to the community.

As evidenced by the Saturday Evening Post and American Magazine articles, Americans struggled to define the new class of Americans who lived in house trailers. One author asked, “Why do so many thousands of American families, who have the money to buy a house and lot, buy instead a house on wheels, and why do they then elect to move their mobile houses as little as possible?”<sup>106</sup> To communities comprised of long time residents and traditional homes, the seemingly uncontained growth of trailer parks and influx of house trailers was threatening. Although the vast majority of house trailer owners were well employed and considered themselves middle class in income and values, their approach to housing appeared alien to the mainstream.

Hollywood also portrayed trailer living to the American public. In 1954, Vincente Minnelli directed the box office hit The Long, Long, Trailer. The movie, adapted from a 1951 novel by Clinton Twiss, set newlyweds Tacy and Nicky in a house trailer. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz played the couple attempting to create a family home while on the road with their house trailer. The couple experienced one disaster after another, beginning with a honeymoon night spent in a trailer park fending off well meaning, but interfering neighbors. The movie jumped from one chaotic scene to the next as Tacy attempted to establish a domestic routine for Nicky within their new home. Inevitably, the house trailer’s cramped quarters and failing technology caused a

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<sup>106</sup> Christy Borth, “Be It Ever So Mobile,” The Rotarian Magazine, October 1952, 55.

disruption in the couple's marital bliss.<sup>107</sup> Although the newlyweds eventually reconciled with a renewed commitment to love and family, the spoof was on the trailer. The movie showed trailer life as one inconvenience after another, while it portrayed trailer park residents as simple rustics and emphasized their transient nature.

Even though the movie reinforced many negative stereotypes, the industry used the movie to promote sales. In particular, New Moon Homes ran ads picturing Ball and Arnaz waving from an automobile in front of their fictional trailer home. The caption read, "Learn how you too can enjoy Carefree Living . . ." <sup>108</sup> The Long, Long Trailer began a long-lived Hollywood tradition of using house trailers to depict characters as outside the social norm.

The era of the house trailer ended in the mid-1950s, when design changes and increasing popularity relegated the "house trailer" to history. In 1956, two and a half million Americans were living in 850,000 new house trailers.<sup>109</sup> More than 90 percent had complete bathrooms.<sup>110</sup> Only two percent of trailer sales were categorized as vacation or camping trailers with the remainder intended for permanent residence. Construction and industry workers, as well as other skilled craftsmen made up 60 percent of new homebuyers. The house trailer afforded them the opportunity to follow the job market while living with their families. Military personnel made up another 20 percent; many living in government owned and managed trailer parks near military bases. The remaining 20 percent consisted of retirees, newly married couples, engineers,

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<sup>107</sup> Clinton Twiss, "Long, Long Trailer," (Culver City, CA: MGM/UA Home Video, 1990), directed by Vincente Minelli. Original release from MGM, 1954.

<sup>108</sup> Ad for "New Moon Homes, Inc.," National Geographic, 1954, advertising section.

<sup>109</sup> These statistics found in "A Report on Trailer Living," Consumer Reports, March 1956, 113-114; "More Americans on Wheels," Business Week, 28 January 1956, 182.

<sup>110</sup> Taylor W. Meloan, D.B.A., Mobile Homes: The Growth and Business Practices of the Industry (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1954), 29-30.

schoolteachers, salespersons, and numerous other middle-class professionals, the majority of whom permanently parked their house trailers.<sup>111</sup>

### **Mobile Homes: 1955-1976**

From 1955 through the end of the 1960s the mobile home industry enjoyed unprecedented success. During the mid-1950s, mobile home living not only became permanent for the vast majority of owners, new and larger designs attracted an even more diverse group of upper-middle class families. By the end of the 1960s, manufacturers were focusing on a more stable clientele, advertising affordable, convenient, permanent housing. In addition, mobile homes became the means by which thousands of lower middle-class families could own their own land and homes. Due to the growing number of permanent mobile home residents, the federal government acknowledged mobile homes' importance by allowing them to qualify for Federal Housing Administration insured loans. The industry's ongoing success also brought its lack of building standards under public and governmental scrutiny. By the end of the 1960s, with the support of industry groups, most states had adopted mobile home building codes.

Several factors contributed to the mobile home's surge in popularity during this period. The first was the introduction of the ten-foot wide, which increased floor area and provided space for hallways. Before halls, designs demanded walk-through bathrooms and bedrooms to allow for access throughout the house trailer. With the incorporation of a hall, mobile home designs offered broader options, resulting in more privacy. This in turn made the mobile home even more attractive to prospective

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<sup>111</sup> "A Report on Trailer Living," Consumer Reports, March 1956, 113-114; "More Americans on Wheels," Business Week, 28 January 1956, 182.

homebuyers but also much more difficult to transport.<sup>112</sup> Secondly, many financial institutions lowered down payment requirements and extended their loan periods for mobile homes from three to five years.<sup>113</sup> This opened the market to a broader range of prospective homebuyers. Thirdly, in response to hostility from critics, the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association organized and initiated a mobile home park improvement and grading system.<sup>114</sup> Finally, in 1956, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) began insuring 60 percent of the finance value of mobile home park creation.<sup>115</sup> FHA acknowledgement not only allowed more Americans to purchase house trailers, the loan insurance also began the slow process of governmental interest and eventual standardization of manufactured homes.

While the affordable, easily available homes held wide appeal for a growing number of middle-class families, mobile homes continued to attract affluent patrons as well. For example, the Blue Skies Village mobile home park, in Palm Springs, California, attracted millionaires due to its proximity to neighboring golf courses. Bing Crosby, Phil Harris and other Hollywood legends owned homes as well as shares in the affluent park.<sup>116</sup>

The housing form's wide appeal put every aspect of the industry under scrutiny. Consumers and their advocates demanded quality products. During the two decades following 1955, mobile homes became the target for criticisms regarding substandard

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<sup>112</sup> Margaret J. Drury, Mobile Homes: The Unrecognized Revolution in American Housing (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 93; and Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125-132.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>115</sup> The FHA also eliminated the term "trailer park" and established the use of the term "mobile home court." For report on FHA minimums for Mobile Home Courts see J. Ross KcKeever, "The Motionless Mobile Home," Urban Land: News and Trends in City Development, April 1960, 4.

<sup>116</sup> "Variations for the Open Road," Newsweek, 26 July 1968, 73.

construction and lack of trailer park standards from both consumer advocates and governmental agencies. Substandard electrical wiring was a particularly prevalent issue. Some manufacturers used poor quality plastic sheathing for wiring and failed to enclose outlet and fuse boxes in metal. Some used less expensive aluminum wiring rather than safer copper wiring for electrical systems.<sup>117</sup> Other concerns included floor, roof, and wall construction, as well as lack of insulation.<sup>118</sup> Because of the publicity regarding these problems, the public viewed mobile homes as poorly constructed firetraps.

As means of preventing such criticisms, the Mobile Home Manufacturer's Association (MHMA) and its west coast equivalent, the Trailer Coach Association (TCA), cooperated in establishing building codes. By 1960, the codes included specifications for construction, plumbing, heating, and electrical systems. Mobile homes meeting their qualifications were awarded a silver medallion beside the front door. The emblem signaled to consumers a guarantee of MHMA-TCA quality. However, only about a third of the nation's manufacturers belonged to the TCA or MHMA.<sup>119</sup> With a majority of manufacturers not adhering to these industry codes, it was impossible for the two groups to initiate and monitor nationally consistent building standards.

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<sup>117</sup> The use of aluminum wiring became a major issue during the early 1970s following a number of house fires. See "The Cracks in the Mobile Home Market," Business Week, 14 April 1973, 105.

<sup>118</sup> For thorough reports on the issues surrounding mobile homes at this time see: "A Report on Trailer Living," Consumer Reports, March 1956, 113-119; "A Preliminary Report in Trailers," Consumer's Research Bulletin, September 1956, 13-15; "Trailers, or Mobile Homes," Consumer's Research Bulletin, April 1957, 9-12; and "House Trailers," Consumer Bulletin, June 1957, 10-13. The reports continued through the 1970s. See Carl M. Edwards, "Choosing a Mobile Home," Consumer Bulletin, September 1968, 34-39; "The Cracks in the Mobile Home Market," Business Week, 14 April 1973, 105-106; "Important Safety Checks for Mobile Homes," Good Housekeeping, July 1974, 147; Lynda McDonnell, "Mobile Boxes of Ticky-Tacky," The Progressive, May 1974, 25-28; "Now There's a Building Code for Mobile Homes," Changing Times: The Kiplinger Report, June 1976, 33-34; and "New Chance for Mobile Homes," Business Week, 28 June 1976, 96-97.

<sup>119</sup> "Mobile Homes Get Set to Move," Business Week, 19 March 1960, 70. Also see "Mobile Homes," Consumer Bulletin, June 1964, 7-8.

By 1963, however, pressure from consumer groups forced the creation of national standards. In a continuing effort to counter reports on substandard wiring, plumbing, heating, and construction of body and frames, the MHMA-TCA joined the American Standards Association to develop building codes.<sup>120</sup> Within a few years, most states had adopted these codes as law, making it illegal to sell mobile homes that did not meet the quality criteria within state lines.<sup>121</sup> Reasonable prices combined with improved quality attracted a growing number of lower middle-class families. Smaller families, both young and old, saw mobile homes as the means to owning their own homes. With the homes often exceeding twelve feet in width and sixty feet in length, they no longer supported a “mobile” life style for middle-class craftsmen and construction workers. Rather, they became an affordable housing option for lower-income and middle-class families. In the later 1960s the average cost of a single family home was \$23,000; the average mobile home sold for six to seven thousand dollars.<sup>122</sup> While this price did not include land, it gave families the option of owning a home with a minimum down payment. While families buying traditional homes built up more equity, purchasers of mobile homes paid off their homes within a few years, freeing a large amount of money for living expenses or investing. Both offered long-term advantages to their owners.

Mobile homes also offered families the means to own land in addition to a home. During this time, the number of mobile homes settled on private lots increased. Although

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<sup>120</sup> Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 213.

<sup>121</sup> “Mobile Homes,” Consumer Bulletin, June 1964, 7-8; Carl M. Edwards, “Choosing a Mobile Home,” Consumer Bulletin, September 1968, 35-36; and Wallis, 213.

<sup>122</sup> Carl M. Edwards, “Choosing a Mobile Home,” Consumer Bulletin, September 1968, 34-35. These figures held through the early 1970s. By 1973, the average site built house cost \$27,000, while the average price for a furnished mobile home was \$7,000. See Lawrence A. Mayer, “Mobile Homes Move Into the Breach,” Fortune, March 1970, 144; “The Cracks in the Mobile Home Market,” Business Week, 14 April 1973, 105.



some states limited mobile homes to specifically zoned areas and parks, in those states that allowed private locations, 50 percent of new mobile home purchases were located on privately owned lots. Mobile homes' affordability allowed a growing number of middle and lower income families to invest in both a home and land.

From the late 1950s through the 1960s, the mobile home industry enjoyed unprecedented success as mobile homes continued to house a growing number of Americans. During this time, models grew larger and more permanent while owner demographics changed, reflecting the housing form's increasing affordability and permanence. At the beginning of the 1960s, skilled and mobile workers made up only 30 percent of mobile home buyers, a decrease of thirty percent in fewer than ten years. An increasing number of middle-class professionals purchased mobile homes, making up another 40 percent of homeowners. Retirees, students, and young families made up the remaining 30 percent. Approximately 3.25 million Americans lived in mobile homes, the vast majority in 15,000 established parks.<sup>123</sup> Although a fourth of mobile home buyers had an income of more than \$7000, the average income for all mobile home buyers was \$5300. This amount was only three hundred dollars below the national median.<sup>124</sup> As mobile homes' affordability drew the attention of consumers, their mobility became less of an issue. Mobile home residents were even less mobile than in previous decades, with an average stay in one place of around two and a half years. In a nation in which at least

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<sup>123</sup> "Mobile Homes Get Set to Move," Business Week, 19 March 1960, 67-70; "Buying a Mobile Home: You Can Take It With You," Consumer Bulletin, February 1961, 6.

<sup>124</sup> "Buying a Mobile Home: You Can Take It With You," Consumer Bulletin, February 1961, 6; U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Reports: Consumer Income (Washington, D.C.: Series P-60, No. 36, 9 June 1961), 1.

one out of five households moved each year, this figure does not indicate a particularly mobile lifestyle.<sup>125</sup>

### **Manufactured Homes: 1977-1990**

While the fifties and sixties witnessed the increased popularity of mobile homes, the housing alternative's design and construction would "come into their own" during the seventies and eighties.<sup>126</sup> Federally mandated building standards combined with larger designs would broaden their appeal. These advances led to their final incarnation as manufactured home. During these decades, their affordability continued to attract new homeowners and helped the industry survive a series of recessions.

During the mid-1970s, the federal government passed national building codes for mobile homes. In 1974, Congress approved the Mobile Home Construction and Safety Standards Act. By June 1976, funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development cleared the way for development and enforcement of national mobile home building codes.<sup>127</sup> The standardization of building codes allowed the FHA and Veterans Administration to insure purchases for individual homes and mobile home park construction and improvement.<sup>128</sup> Congress acknowledged the industry's improved

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<sup>125</sup> "Buying a Mobile Home: You Can Take It With You," Consumer Bulletin, February 1961, 6; U.S. Department of Commerce, Table 3, Percent Distribution of Mobility Status and Type of Mobility of the Civilian Population, March 1961, <<http://www.census.gov/populaiton/socdemo/migration/p20-118/tab03-04.pdf>> (1 March 2005).

<sup>126</sup> Anthony and Dianne Vasi, "What to Look for In a Mobilehome," 50 Plus, April 1981, 48.

<sup>127</sup> "Now There's a Building Code for Mobile Homes," Changing Times: The Kiplinger Magazine, June 1976, 33-34; "New Chance for Mobile Homes," Business Week, 28 June 1976, 96-97. See also a discussion of the evolution of the Federal Housing Codes by Wallis, 214.

<sup>128</sup> "Mobile Home Sales Roll Toward \$3-Billion," Business Week, 24 January 1970, 74-75; "A Mobile Home vs. a House: How the Costs Compare," Changing Times: The Kiplinger Magazine, January 1971, 20. For additional reading on the evolution of Federal Government's involvement in standards and financing, see Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 208-218.

reputation and broad acceptance with the 1980 Housing Act, which officially changed the legal designation of mobile homes to manufactured homes.<sup>129</sup>

Growing governmental support combined with the appeal of the “ready lifestyle” promoted through the early 1970s proved so successful that the year 1972 marked the industry’s eleventh year in a row of record-breaking production. It sold 43 percent of new single-family homes that year, nearly 600,000 homes.<sup>130</sup> This success, however, did not last throughout the seventies. Two years later, sales decreased almost 25%, with only 425,000 homes sold.<sup>131</sup> Not only did sales decrease, during the recessions of the seventies, late payments and repossessions increased.<sup>132</sup> More than 130,000 mobile homes were repossessed during 1973 and 1974.<sup>133</sup>

Although traditional housing also suffered from the recession, 1974 marked the worst for the mobile home industry. Mobile home companies were confronted with not only falling sales and increased repossessions, but also the need to meet new federal guidelines. The complex governmental standards were expensive to institute, including payments for inspections, new designs and upgraded materials. The expenses combined with recession pressures made it impossible for many companies to adapt. These financial hurdles left many companies bankrupt, and others struggling to remain solvent.

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<sup>129</sup> Russell James, “Module and Mobile Homes: Two Cost—Conscious Housing Alternatives,” Mechanix Illustrated, October 1983, 49; John Hart and John Morgan, “Mobile Homes,” Journal of Cultural Geography, 15 (1995), 43.

<sup>130</sup> “The Cracks in the Mobile Home Market,” Business Week, 14 April 1973, 105.

<sup>131</sup> “The Great American House Party Is Over,” Forbes, 1 November 1974, 22.

<sup>132</sup> Important to note that during this time, mobile home delinquency was at 2.75 percent compared to almost twice that percentage, 5.0, for traditional FHA home loans. See Lynda McDonnell, “Mobile Boxes of Ticky-Tacky,” The Progressive, May 1974, 27.

<sup>133</sup> “Trailers, The Business,” Southern Exposure, Spring 1980, 19.

The market stabilized for those companies that survived into the 1980s.<sup>134</sup> During the recession of 1981 and 1982, the construction of new single-family houses fell to its lowest rate since 1946.<sup>135</sup> These same years, however, new homeowners purchased 250,000 mobile homes, making up 36 percent of new single-family homes.<sup>136</sup> While this was a decline from the sales of a decade earlier, mobile home sales were less adversely affected by later recessions. Through the remainder of the decade, and subsequent recessions, mobile home sales consistently made up approximately 30 percent of U.S. new single-family homes.<sup>137</sup>

Although manufacturers were not able to regain the momentum they had enjoyed during the early 1970s, they continued to produce an appealing product for a significant number of consumers looking for affordable housing. The 1980 U.S. Census reported 4,401,056 manufactured homes, making up 5.1 percent of the total housing stock.<sup>138</sup> With fewer than three percent ever moving from their original sites, they had left behind their mobile roots.<sup>139</sup> In 1981, manufactured homes made up 36 percent of the single-family homes sold, 240,000 of the 666,000.<sup>140</sup> With the average singlewide price at

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<sup>134</sup> Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 222-223.

<sup>135</sup> See ad for the National Association of Home Builders, "Housing—A Priority to Preserve the American Dream," Newsweek, 13 September 1982.

<sup>136</sup> Jack Wynn, "The Upward Mobility of the Mobile Home," Nation's Business, September 1982, 30; and Russell James, "Modular & Mobile Homes: Two Cost—Conscious Housing Alternatives," Mechanix Illustrated, October 1983, 110.

<sup>137</sup> From 1978 through 1981, mobile homes made up an average of 30% of new single-family homes. See Cora McKown, "Tougher Standards for Mobilehomes," 50 Plus, September 1978, 52; Thomas Jaffe and Robert McGough, "Mobile No More," Forbes, 14 September 1981, 140.

<sup>138</sup> "U.S. Census of Housing Table – Units in Structure," U.S. Census Bureau.

<<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/units.html>> (21 January 2004): 4.

<sup>139</sup> The reported 3% mobility is found in "The Upwardly Mobile Homes," Newsweek, 20 December 1982, 64 and "The Mobile Home: A Stepchild No More," U.S. News & World Report, 12 April 1982, 66. However, other articles disagree. A 1980 Southern Exposure article reported less than two percent and in 1981 Forbes reported that less than ten percent moved from their original sites. See "Trailers: The Business," Southern Exposure, Spring 1980, 20; and Thomas Jaffe and Robert McGough, "Mobile No More," Forbes, 14 September 1981, 144.

<sup>140</sup> "The Mobile Home: A Stepchild No More," U.S. News & World Report, 12 April 1982, 66.

\$19,400 compared to the average price of \$78,700 for a conventional home, the price per foot of living space for a manufactured home was approximately half the price for a site-built home.<sup>141</sup>

Although singlewides had been the cornerstone of the manufactured home business, the 1980s witnessed a diversification of design and price. As one magazine reported, the manufactured home industry had “come into [its] own” in spite of the obstacles created by a continuing cycle of recessions.<sup>142</sup> The multi-sectional was the most obvious and successful innovation. Two or more modules joined together created a single structure.<sup>143</sup> A double or triple-wide provided the same square footage as many traditionally designed homes. The increased square footage allowed for floor plans that were more versatile. For example, a doublewide could accommodate a formal dining room or an office. Doublewides also came with a broader range of options. Jacuzzis, fireplaces, or simply higher quality cabinetry and appliances were among the luxuries found in double and triple wides.<sup>144</sup> With the success of the multi-sectionals, the industry continued to attract more first time homeowners as well as higher income buyers, successfully catering to multiple tiers of consumers.

While multi-sectionals attracted a broader base of clientele with prices often two to three times more than singlewides, the industry continued to upgrade the traditional twelve, fourteen, and sixteen wides. Manufacturers used higher quality materials while abandoning the stereotypical “trailer house” components. The automobile-like aluminum

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<sup>141</sup> Jack Wynn, “The Upward Mobility of the Mobile Home,” Nation’s Business, September 1982, 30.

<sup>142</sup> Anthony and Dianne Vasi, “What to Look for In a Mobilehome,” 50 Plus, April 1981, 48.

<sup>143</sup> Russell James, “Modular and Mobile Homes: Two Cost-Conscious Housing Alternatives,” Mechanix Illustrated, October 1983, 48.

<sup>144</sup> Terry Locke, “What You Get in a Mobilehome,” 50 Plus, April 1981, 52-57; “The Mobile Home: A Stepchild No More,” U.S. News and World Report, 12 April 1982, 66-67.

siding was replaced by Masonite siding and wooden trim. The flat metal rooflines that failed to discard snow and emphasized the architectural differences of manufactured homes were replaced by shingle covered pitched roofs. Interiors also enjoyed renovations with better lighting, quality windows and sheet rock walls.<sup>145</sup>

Despite growing popularity and industrial improvements in construction and aesthetics, lawmakers continued to restrict manufactured homes. Although restrictive codes and zoning had existed since the 1930s, the growing number of manufactured homes forced many communities into addressing the question of where to zone for manufactured homes. Not only were the increasing number of new homes an issue, but amazingly, going into the 1980s, the Census Bureau reported that nearly 80 percent of the trailers and mobile homes built before 1949 continued to be in service.<sup>146</sup> With so many older trailers parked either in established parks or on private ground and thousands of new homeowners looking for places to settle, the establishment of new parks became a necessity. However, many communities continued to harbor prejudices against manufactured homes. Most of these negative stereotypes originated in the 1930s and 1940s when community members believed trailers and trailer parks to be a haven for poor and transient workers. Poorly planned parks had contributed to the negative stereotypes. These unsightly and often unregulated parks made them unwanted in many communities.

In spite of a growing demand for manufactured home communities, many city and regional planners continued to believe that a “trailer park” was the lowest form of land

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<sup>145</sup> For detailed discussions regarding the manufactured home’s improved image and designs see Anthony and Dianne Vasi, “What to Look for In a Mobilehome,” *50 Plus*, April 1981, 48-57; “The Mobile Home: A Stepchild No More,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 April 1982, 66-67; Russell James, “Modular & Mobile Homes: Two Cost—Conscious Housing Alternatives,” *Mechanix Illustrated*, October 1983, 46-49, 110-112. On the other hand, as early as 1960, some manufacturers had attempted to introduce more “house-like” mobile homes. They did not sell. See Virginia Held, “Home Is Where You Park It,” *The Reporter*, 18 February 1960, 35.

<sup>146</sup> “New Chance for Mobile Homes,” *Business Week*, 28 June 1976, 97.

usage. Despite decades of arguments from progressive city planners and managers for the addition of manufactured homes in community plans, in the first years of the 1980s, 60 percent of U.S. cities and towns prohibited manufactured homes from permanently parking on private property.<sup>147</sup> Mobile home parks were ghettoized to industrial areas or other locations seen as otherwise worthless. For example, in Michigan, the court upheld a developer's fight to construct a park between a gravel pit and a sewage treatment plant. The court declared that the land was "virtually worthless for any purpose other than a trailer park."<sup>148</sup> In essence, the court concluded that land that was unacceptable for other improvements was properly zoned for manufactured homes. One industry spokesperson described the typical mobile park setting as "undesirable commercial or industrial" areas.<sup>149</sup> Land, otherwise "worthless" for anything other than trailer parks, was exactly where many community planners exiled the local mobile home courts. This exile was a means of protecting the mainstream community from any anticipated ill effects caused by the mobile homes and their residents.

Some communities, however, did accommodate manufactured homes during the 1980s. State legislatures in California, Indiana, Vermont, New Hampshire, Florida, and Texas passed laws prohibiting city and county governments from excluding architecturally similar manufactured homes from areas zoned for single-family homes. The state supreme courts in Michigan, Montana, and New Mexico heard cases that

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<sup>147</sup> The American City magazine is just one example of the sources that had consistently advocated for progressive acceptance and park planning. Their progressive stand for manufactured housing began in the 1930s, and continued for decades. In 1960, the magazine warned community planners that the acceptance of manufactured homes was inevitable, and that they "should not be confined to commercial zones any more than apartment houses. "You Can't Ignore Mobile Homes," The American City, October 1960, 182-183; "Trailers: The Business," Southern Exposure, Spring 1980, 20.

<sup>148</sup> "Trailers: The Business," Southern Exposure, Spring 1980, 20.

<sup>149</sup> "Imagine Yourself In a Trailer House," Changing Times: The Kiplinger Magazine, September 1965, 17.

pertained to exclusionary zoning bans.<sup>150</sup> The Michigan Supreme Court specifically ruled that, “communities [could] not restrict the location of mobile homes just because they [were] ‘manufactured.’”<sup>151</sup> Because building codes demanded builders use materials similar in quality to site-built homes, often the only difference found in manufactured homes were the wheels on which they arrived and the steel frame that acted as the sub floor for the home. In accordance with new laws, and at times in reaction to the growing number of consumers who simply wanted nicer places to settle their new manufactured homes, many rural and suburban communities passed more permissive zoning. This tentatively cleared the way for more manufactured home communities and allowed more manufactured home owners to purchase their own lots or land and place their homes on foundations.

During the 1970s and 1980s, manufactured homes came “into their own.”<sup>152</sup> The success of federal building standards and the homes’ continuing popularity culminated in their official designation as “manufactured home” under the 1980 Housing Act. This legally left behind any doubts as to their permanence. In the meantime, innovations such as double wides, and more traditional building materials gave manufactured homes wider appeal. In some states, mobile homes even became integrated into neighborhoods with site-built homes, as legislatures passed non-discrimination laws.

### **Today’s Manufactured Housing 1990-Present**

The 1990s and beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed manufactured housing’s continued evolution as a successful housing alternative. Its growing popularity

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<sup>150</sup> Thomas Jaffe and Robert McGough, “Mobile No More,” *Forbes*, 14 September 1981, 144; “The Mobile Home: A Stepchild No More,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 12 April 1982, 66; Russell James, “Modular & Mobile Homes: Two Cost—Conscious Housing Alternatives,” *Mechanix Illustrated*, October 1983, 112.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Jaffe and Robert McGough, “Mobile No More,” *Forbes*, 14 September 1981, 144.

<sup>152</sup> Anthony and Dianne Vasi, “What to Look for In a Mobilehome,” *50 Plus*, April 1981, 48.



demanded more manufactured home communities and put pressure on preexisting parks. This tension often led to conflict between landlords and tenants. By 2000, the federal government passed legislation mandating state standards as industry data suggested an increasingly diverse clientele.

Although most communities across the country continued to practice exclusionary zoning, often delegating manufactured homes into industrial areas or areas considered unsuitable for any other purpose, consumers continued to choose them as permanent housing. By 1990, they made up seven percent of the nation's total housing stock.<sup>153</sup> More astoundingly, this constituted a 68 percent increase in ten years. The existing 50,000 manufactured home communities, home to 50 percent of the country's 7.4 million manufactured homes, could not accommodate the growing demands for spaces.<sup>154</sup>

The demand for more manufactured home communities prompted a myriad of reactions. Many investors recognized the financial opportunities in establishing reputable new communities and revitalizing older ones. Occupancy rates for manufactured home communities were at 90 percent, compared to 88 percent occupancy of apartments. Turnover rates for courts also encouraged investment. The average court only experienced 10 to 15 percent turnover, while the annual turnover rate at apartments often exceeded 50 percent.<sup>155</sup> Manufactured home communities became big business, with five hundred national companies and private owners controlling an average of 15 communities and almost 4,000 sites each. While these large companies and smaller investors often looked to establishing new communities, many focused on improving the

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<sup>153</sup> "U.S. Census of Housing Table – Units in Structure," U.S. Census Bureau.

<<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/units.html>> (21 January 2004): 3.

<sup>154</sup> Howard Rudnitsky, "New Life for Old Mobile Home Parks," *Forbes*, 7 November 1994, 44.

<<http://web2infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/707/467/45513192w2/purl=rc1>> (21 January 2004).

<sup>155</sup> Rudnitsky, 44.

image of their current holdings, both for the tenants and surrounding communities. Most established managerial standards and invested in new sewage systems and landscaping.<sup>156</sup> They also initiated stricter covenants in an attempt to attract more upscale clientele and improve their communities' image.<sup>157</sup>

Unfortunately, these efforts often left owners of older and less attractive homes with few options. Due to park shortages and attempts to improve image, long time court residents often found themselves at the mercy of landlords. To less scrupulous proprietors they became known as "captured clients."<sup>158</sup> Property owners and managers, fully aware of the short supply of spaces, often increased rent. Because of the expense in moving manufactured homes, as much as \$3000 for a move and setup to another local court, tenants had little choice but to comply.<sup>159</sup>

New manufactured home community codes, while intended to improve image, disrupted long established communities and routines. Nationally, many manufactured home residents felt threatened. One of the most publicized cases of instituted new codes and the results occurred in Missoula, Montana. In 1993, although 20 percent of Montana residents lived in manufactured homes, the state had yet to adopt regulations addressing park issues. Under these conditions, the new owner of Missoula's Travois Village wrote eleven pages of rules. Many of the regulations seemed reasonable to residents, including

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<sup>156</sup> George Allen, "The Manufactured Home Community Metamorphosis," Journal of Property Management, May-June 1994, 34-37.

<<http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/707/467/45513192w2/purl=rc1>> (21 January 2004).

<sup>157</sup> While the more conservative covenants improved the image of the community, they relegated families who were purchasing older model trailers, and with lower incomes, to locations with less concern for standards. John Hart and John Morgan, "Mobile Homes," Journal of Cultural Geography 15, (1995): 44-45.

<sup>158</sup> Kathleen M. Murphy, "Equity and Respect Issues Related to Manufactured Homeowners in Mobile Home Rental Parks," Housing and Society 20, no. 2 (1993): 22.

<sup>159</sup> Howard Rudnitsky, "New Life for Old Mobile Home Parks," Forbes, 7 November 1994, 44; John Hart and John Morgan, "Mobile Homes," Journal of Cultural Geography 15, (1995): 44.

those that prohibited unused cars from being parked outside homes and large dogs from roaming the small community. However, rules that put a sixty-minute limit on visitors' parked cars or forbade political activity on the premises were objectionable to tenants. Mr. Moore, the new owner, insisted that the new rules were for his "tenants' own good."<sup>160</sup> The new rules led to numerous confrontations between Moore and his tenants. Most tenants agreed upon a compromise offered by Moore. However, a small group thought the new rules were illegal, and took the property owner and his corporation to court.<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, Moore Enterprises won the court case.<sup>162</sup>

Since the late 1980s and through the present, numerous manufactured home communities have suffered the same conflicts as Missoula's Travois Village.<sup>163</sup> Landowners and tenants, often with the aid of advocacy groups, have presented their issues to both courts and state legislatures. In response, state and local governments have slowly begun addressing manufactured home communities' issues, including policies for raising rent, adjusting codes, and eviction processes. Although manufactured homes have proven themselves viable alternatives to traditional housing, renting the plot of land on which their homes sit puts them in a vulnerable position.

While tenants continued to battle for basic renters' rights, governmental interest in quality construction continued. In 1994, consumer pressure prompted HUD to update its manufactured home building codes and in 2000, the Federal Manufactured Housing

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<sup>160</sup> Margaret L. Knox, "Home Sweet Mobile Home," Mother Jones, January/February 1993, 64-65; also see Margaret L. Knox, "Why Mobile Homeowners Want Landlords to Hit the Road," Business and Society Review, Spring 1993, 39-42.

<sup>161</sup> Don Baty, "Residents Sue to Dump Rules," Missoulian, 1 January 1992, 3B.

<sup>162</sup> Derie Kain interview by Zoe Ann Stoltz, 14 April 2003, 7.

<sup>163</sup> "Abuses Rife in Mobile Home Parks," Modern Maturity, February/March 1988, 14; "There's No Place Like (A Mobile) Home," Utne Reader, September/October 1992, 36-38; John Hart and John Morgan, "Mobile Homes," Journal of Cultural Geography 15, (1995): 44-45.

Improvement Act mandated that within five years all states had to design and initiate standards addressing specific issues, such as installation, energy efficiency, and safety. Proper installation is a necessity, because an improperly installed manufactured home can suffer from numerous problems. These can range from issues with plumbing and drainage, resultant structural damage, and to being more susceptible to wind damage. Energy efficiency also became a concern as more consumers of the 1980s and 1990s became interested in energy conservation. They discovered that insulation, as well as window and door quality, varied between manufactures and models. The improved codes assured consumers of a wide range of energy-saving alternatives.<sup>164</sup>

In 2000, manufactured housing's popularity continued its decades' long growth. Their numbers doubled, from 4.4 million in 1980 to 8.8 million at century's end. By then, they constituted 7.6% of American homes.<sup>165</sup> A significant number of those living in manufactured homes made less than \$30,000 a year. However, a slight majority of new manufactured home owners, 52%, made more than \$30,000, with almost half of those with an income of more than \$60,000.<sup>166</sup> Innovative designs, increased quality, and availability of multi-sectionals attracted a more upscale consumer. As in previous decades, the homes' affordability was undisputed. Going into the new century, a square foot for a site-built home cost \$60 or more, compared to \$30 for a square foot in a manufactured home.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> "Manufactured Housing Gaining Acceptance," USA Today, December 1996, 14; "Dream Home . . . or Nightmare?" Consumer Reports, February 1998, 30-35; Mark Nunn, "Implementing the Manufactured Housing Improvement Act," Modern Homes, January/February 2004, 23-25.

<sup>165</sup> "U.S. Census of Housing Table – Units in Structure," U.S. Census Bureau. <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/units.html>> (21 January 2004): 2 & 4.

<sup>166</sup> John Fetto, "Going Mobile," Forecast, 3 September 2001. <<http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/257/649/45533844w2/purl=rc1>> (21 January 2004).

<sup>167</sup> Pamela Sherrid, "An Oxymoron: Trailer Trash," U.S. News and World Report, 16 March 1998, 46. The price for manufactured housing is consistently 40% to 50% less than traditional housing.

As the income figures suggest, mobile home owners were remarkably diverse. In 2002, retired families made up 29 percent. Workers who were professionals or in managerial positions made up thirteen percent and an additional 24 percent made their livings as craftsmen and laborers.<sup>168</sup> A small majority of manufactured home owners, 56 percent were married couples, with average household size at 2.3 people.<sup>169</sup> Eighteen percent of manufactured home owners had college degrees.<sup>170</sup> Students and military personnel made up sixteen percent of manufactured home occupants. A third of occupied homes were constructed before 1980, the remainder were built since the initial HUD regulations. Multi-sectionals constituted a third of occupied homes.<sup>171</sup>

Owners of manufactured homes also have interests as diverse as any Americans. Twelve percent of those who live in manufactured homes reported enjoying hunting and fishing, while an additional 19 percent prefer attending Home Expos and Garden Shows. While 60 percent listen to Country and Western music, eleven percent listens to public radio. *Reader's Digest*, *Family Circle*, and *Woman's Day* are the reported favorite magazines. Yet, a significant number of household members also regularly read *Time*, *Parenting*, *Fortune*, and *Money* magazines.<sup>172</sup>

More importantly, more than half of them own the land on which their homes rest. They change jobs and move to different communities at the same rate as the remainder of the country. Only six percent have "moved" their home in the last three years.<sup>173</sup> The vast majority of manufactured home owners are permanent residents of both their homes

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<sup>168</sup> Manufactured Homes: The Market Facts, 2002 Report, Foremost Insurance Group, 2003, 5.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 5-10.

and communities. They are, in short, just like everyone else, or perhaps better put, they are just as diverse as is the population that lives in site built homes.

## **Conclusions**

The history of mobile then manufactured homes has had two constants. The first, which has been previously discussed, was the housing form's growing success with a diverse clientele. The second was the constant public perception of them as non-mainstream housing and the ensuing battle with negative stereotypes. This resistance to considering mobile homes as real homes reveals much about Americans' concept of home—its construction, design, and supposed purpose and stability. The manufactured home originated as the hybrid offspring of camping equipment and the automobile. Just as its original designers intended it for travel, its designs and construction reflected its automotive roots. Even as mobile homes' use as permanent shelter increased, its designs continued to incorporate automotive components. Manufacturers consistently sheathed them in metal and covered their flat roofs in aluminum. Many companies took pride in their sleek polished metal finishes, while others preferred accentuating the metal bodies with contrasting stripes and other geometric paint designs. Because of transportation laws, most mobile homes constructed before the late 1960s even had tail and brake lights.<sup>174</sup> Even the acquisition of a manufactured home resembled the family car's purchase. Prospective homeowners ordered from a lot or office, and the homes, including desired options, were delivered from a factory.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See ads for TCMA, Holiday Magazine, August 1946, Almanac pages; Spartan Aircraft Company, Saturday Evening Post, 14 March 1953, 118; "M Systems, Inc.," Life, 29 September 1952, 119; Consumer Bulletin, February 1961, Front cover.

<sup>175</sup> Elaine Kendall, "The Invisible Suburbs," Horizon, Winter 1971, 106.

Many commentaries derided the design of manufactured homes. As early as 1948, traditionalists accused housing industry designers and innovators of neglecting “social and aesthetic values” in their attempts to “herd us into enameled trailer camps.”<sup>176</sup> One critic declared that they “combine[d] the worst design features of the automobile and the house.”<sup>177</sup> Another described them as “shoe box-shaped containers.”<sup>178</sup>

Supporters attempted to excuse their looks as a “technological solution.”<sup>179</sup> With these and similar references they hoped to convince people that manufactured home designs reflected advances in modern scientific design, and that to criticize them was to condemn advanced American technology. Unfortunately, this approach consistently failed because manufactured homes had automotive components that could not be overlooked: axles and wheels. No amount of public relations could counter this reality. Despite decades of use as settled homes and miles of skirting to hide evidence of axles and steel frames, the fact that manufactured homes arrived at their sites on wheels made them the antithesis of the mythological American home. For generations, experts had instructed Americans that only a “fixed point of reference” and a “settled, anchored existence” would promote family health and happiness.<sup>180</sup> Wise and conscientious people never thought of housing as temporary; rather a home was a creation intended to last for “20, 30, or perhaps 50 years.”<sup>181</sup> Tradition demanded stable homes. This

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<sup>176</sup> Lindsay Lord, “Modern Housing,” The Scientific Monthly, February 1948, 176. Ms. Lord’s letter to the editor was in response to an earlier article. See C. Theodore Larson, “Toward a Science of Housing,” Scientific Monthly, October 1947, 295-305.

<sup>177</sup> “Immobile and Mundane,” Newsweek, 27 February 1967, 84.

<sup>178</sup> Frank Trippett, “Mobile Homes: The New Ghettos,” Saturday Review of the Society, October 1972, 54.

<sup>179</sup> Elaine Kendall, “The Invisible Suburbs,” Horizon, Winter 1971, 105.

<sup>180</sup> Articles from the 30s and 40s stress these concepts. For examples, see Helen Bott, M.A., “What Home Should Mean,” Parents Magazine, May 1933, 15 & 16.

<sup>181</sup> Emerson Goble, B.S., “Cheap Houses Cost the Most,” Parents’ Magazine, January 1942, 45.

stability had nothing to do with the abstract concept of family dynamics and everything to do with misperceptions of the connection between concrete foundations and permanence.

As powerful as the current American concept of home may be, it is a recent development. Although its roots date back to the Jeffersonian agrarian's idolized, self-sufficient cottage, the U.S. obsession with single-family detached homes did not become the ideal until after the Second World War.<sup>182</sup> The Great Depression had a devastating impact on the housing industry. In attempts to aid the industry, the Roosevelt administration introduced housing programs and policies that encouraged homeownership for a broader base of consumers. Specifically, the Federal Housing Administration doubled the term of home loans and by insuring mortgages reinvigorated private loan institutions.<sup>183</sup> These governmental steps combined with post-war prosperity created a housing boom. By the early 1950s, the country's builders could not keep up with housing demands. Many contractors and entrepreneurs attempted innovations in hopes of making home buying more affordable and convenient.<sup>184</sup> The failures and successes, however, demonstrated the public's strong preference for more traditionally site built homes.

Levitt and Sons' success demonstrated not only the strong preference for site built homes but also the growing public desire to own a home in the suburbs.

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<sup>182</sup> For discussion regarding Jefferson National Survey and the resulting system of land ownership, see Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 21-23. Wright also pointed out that during the conception of Jeffersonian Agrarianism, and the following decades, for every five landholders there were at least five adult males who did not live under the same conditions. She also extensively examined the evolving National movements to develop a "model dwelling" that would "form a good American."

<sup>183</sup> Ronald Tobey, Charles Weherell, and Jay Brigham, "Moving Out and Settling In: Residential Mobility, Home Ownership, and the Public Enframing of Citizenship, 1921-1950," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 5 (December 1990):1395, 1413.

<sup>184</sup> Multiple articles from the period examine both the successful and failed attempts to innovate the U.S. approach to housing. See "Where Is Prefabrication?" *Fortune*, April 1946, 127-131, 233-250; "The Industry Capitalism Forgot," *Fortune*, August 1947, 61-67, 167-170; Frank Gervasi, "Housing: Tomorrow's Answer," *Collier's*, 18 January 1947, 22-23, 74-76.



Contemporary media, the federal government, and financial institutions promoted suburban life as the “only way to provide a good family life.”<sup>185</sup> A suburban house assured families that they had successfully acquired “more room and more privacy for their families.”<sup>186</sup> Houses that included playrooms, family rooms and large yards were particularly coveted.<sup>187</sup> With a successful move into a suburban home, families earned both a private sense of accomplishment and “public symbol of achievement.”<sup>188</sup>

Inevitably, homeowners develop a sense of identity and status through the public recognition of their homes and the private pride they take in this recognition. Joan Kron in her extensive psychological study, Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration, discusses the psychological dynamics of home ownership. Kron argues that the home – including its contents, architecture, and landscape – provides a “system of symbols” through which homeowners identify themselves.<sup>189</sup> Not only do homeowners identify themselves through their homes, but those very homes and the neighborhoods in which they are located define their owners’ comfort levels. Property owners are more comfortable and less suspicious of those who have achieved similar home buying goals and status. According to Kron, similarity breeds a homogeneous population in which

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<sup>185</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 258.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>187</sup> Rudard A. Jones, “Your Home—1902 to 1952,” Popular Mechanics Magazine, May 1952, 98; Richard F. Dempewolff, “More House for Less Money,” Popular Mechanics Magazine, October 1953, 296.

<sup>188</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 256-257.

<sup>189</sup> Joan Kron, Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc./Publishers, 1983), 19. Many studies focus on the relationship between home and self-identity. See Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 113; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-20.

similarity, real or imagined, becomes the norm. This results in a propensity to “exclude” individuals who have not achieved the appropriate level of ownership or class.<sup>190</sup>

This approach explains much of the suspicion and discrimination against manufactured housing. For many traditional homeowners, homes that arrive on site with axles and wheels contradict their sense of stability. Those who have invested in homes literally cemented to the land often cannot understand that the initial inclusion of axles and wheels does not necessarily mean future mobility.

The possibility of mobility offers one of the most perplexing dilemmas facing manufactured homes. Initially, travel trailers and the later house trailers were praised for their ability to mobilize the comforts of home and accommodate the changing vacation or work scene. However, as mobile homes and manufactured homes grew in size and their owners evolved from adventure seekers and construction workers to settled middle and lower income families, their mobility became improbable. The very phrase “mobile home” became an oxymoron. Beginning in the early seventies, manufactured home owners grew to be one of the most stable populations in the United States. At that time, the average American homeowner was slightly more likely to move than a mobile home owner was.<sup>191</sup> Since then, the average rate of mobility for U.S. citizens has remained the same for traditional and nontraditional homeowners, an average of 20 percent of Americans move each year.<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, Foremost Insurance Company’s 2002 national survey of manufactured home owners reported that only six percent moved their

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<sup>190</sup> Joan Kron, Home-Psych: The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. /Publishers, 1983, 19.

<sup>191</sup> Elaine Kendall, “The Invisible Suburbs,” Horizon, Winter 1971, 106.

<sup>192</sup> Tobey, Wetherell, and Brigham, 1399.

homes during the previous three years.<sup>193</sup> Moving a manufactured home is a costly endeavor, one very few owners choose to undertake. Yet opponents consistently use this bias as a means of denigrating manufactured homes and their residents.

This persistent prejudice against mobile housing is especially perplexing considering that migration is a central theme in U.S. history. Not only did Western Native American tribes sustain themselves by following natural resources, but also the ancestors of most of the remainder of the population traveled thousands of miles to establish residence in this country. Frederick Jackson Turner, countless pioneers' memoirs, and families' historical memory have romanticized migration and mobility. Robert Weaver eloquently explained this paradox in his examination of suburban growth, urban renewal and the U.S. mainstream's resistance to innovative housing. Weaver asserted that,

As a people, who are, for the most part, socially and economically mobile, we have a tendency to accept the established, to question the novel, and to resist the unknown. For mobility creates insecurity, and insecurity breeds conservatism. Nowhere is this more apparent than in shelter. A home is the most costly possession of most Americans and one of their basic symbols of status.<sup>194</sup>

To owners of the traditional "status symbol" homes, manufactured houses represent a novel form. For a myriad of reasons, manufacture homeowners chose a housing alternative constructed off site, and then delivered to location. This sets their home apart from traditional homes and homeowners. Their choices make them the subject of suspicion and ongoing prejudice to many mainstream property owners. In the

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<sup>193</sup> "Opinions, Trends, and Characteristics of Manufactured Home Owners," Manufactured Homes, The Market Facts 2002 Report, Foremost Insurance Group, 2003.

<sup>194</sup> Robert C. Weaver, Dilemmas of Urban America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 9.

words of essayist Allan Berube trailer parks are viewed as being on the “social edge . . . a borderland where respectable and ‘trashy’ (get) confused.”<sup>195</sup>

In reaction to the reality of the U. S. love of status symbol homes, television has created a “cult of home.” The “home” has its own network: Home and Garden TV. The network’s programming features a multitude of home décor and care shows. None features manufactured housing. Other networks produce and air episode after episode of “Trading Spaces” and “Extreme Makeovers, Home Edition.” During these programs, homeowners, often families, are treated to new and improved homes. Designers and supportive friends create rooms around the dreams and hopes of the owners. They add components to a house that already complies with the proper middle-class concept of home – the houses are predominantly single, detached structures. On the other hand, the last time a mobile home was featured on television it probably appeared on “Cops.”

The manufactured home has enjoyed a colorful and dynamic history. With its roots embedded in America’s affair with the automobile, it began as a camping accessory, but a job hungry population soon enlisted camp trailers as emergency housing. It provided homes for returning GI’s and construction workers. By mid-century, mobile homes were well on their way to becoming a viable form of permanent housing for millions of Americans. Since the 1950s, the demographics of residents have evolved to embrace a diverse patronage. Even as a proven housing alternative, mainstream society refuses to relinquish stereotypes whose origins can be traced back to the 1930s and often supported by the industry’s own advertising and popular media. As a response to the long held misperceptions, local governments continue to marginalize manufactured

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<sup>195</sup> Allan Berube with Florence Berube, “Sunset Trailer Park” in White Trash, Race and Class in American, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York, New York: Routledge, 1996), 17.

homes through restrictive zoning. After decades of increasing popularity and millions of comfortable homes, manufactured home owners and the industry continue the battle for social acceptance and legal recognition.

The history of manufactured homes' evolution and battles over its place in society are particularly apparent in western states, which report the highest percentages of manufactured homes. Montana, in particular, has witnessed a dynamic history as its residents utilized travel trailers, house trailers and mobile homes. Historically, the peoples of Montana required mobile shelter in their quests for natural resources. More recently, the need for affordable, convenient, and available shelter became an issue. Although Montana's manufactured housing meets the needs for an increasingly diverse population, county planners and city councils across the state restrict and in some cases prohibit manufactured home usage. Montana's story does not begin in private workshops and camper trailers; rather, the story begins in its natives' search for natural resources and employment.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Montana's Booming Need for Transportable Housing**

During the winter of 1966-1967, the residents of Libby, Montana, witnessed the establishment of a new subdivision on top of Bowen Hill above town. New subdivisions were common at the time, as the logging and mining economy was booming, and arriving workers needed places to live. However, the Bowen Hill settlement was different from other Lincoln County subdivisions. Forty-two top of the line *Columbia* mobile homes, not site built homes, lined the neighborhood's streets. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had purchased the mobile homes to accommodate the influx of workers for Libby Dam construction. Contractors had placed the 12- foot by 60-foot homes, each with three bedrooms and "expando" living rooms, along the two streets of the Reese Mobile Home Court. These homes marked just the beginning of the preparations to accommodate the hundreds of workers expected for the massive construction project.<sup>196</sup>

The rows of mobile homes above Libby and the additional courts established by the Corps north of Libby Dam in Eureka and Trego solved the housing needs for the rush of government employees who descended upon Libby. In addition to the government employee housing, numerous other courts later sprang up around Lincoln County to accommodate the hundreds of mobile homes shipped in by employees of private contractors working on Libby Dam. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stated that with the purchase of the *Columbia* homes and establishment of other parks they had "accomplished [their] mission by providing living facilities" for its personnel in this isolated location with limited housing options. Indeed the mission was successful. At the

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<sup>196</sup> Libby Dam Archives, Progress Photos, Libby Dam -- 1507-1509, 8 December 1966; Paul Verdon, "Libby Townspeople Working to Handle Influx of Dam Workers," *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 June 1967, 10; Libby Dam Archives, Project History , Section 6 - Ancillary Construction, Part 10 - Government Employee Housing, 6.10-1 to 6.10-2; Libby Dam Archives, Project History, Section 1- Introduction.

peak of construction, Libby Dam Project employed more than 2,100 people, many of whom lived in mobile homes.<sup>197</sup>

Following the Dam's dedication in 1975, the privately owned homes were sold to locals or were moved to new job sites. The government dispersed its homes to other agencies throughout the country, including projects in Maine and Alaska.<sup>198</sup> The mobile homes brought to Libby provided the most practical shelter for hundreds of families taking advantage of the financial opportunities offered by a massive, but temporary, federal project. When the workers moved on, so did many of their houses.

The extensive use of transportable housing during construction booms was not exclusive to Libby. Trailer houses, and later mobile homes, were well suited for the state's boom and bust economy during the 1960s and 1970s. They provided instant housing during the booms and transportability during the busts. The federal government, private businesses, and workers all utilized this alternative housing to meet housing demands brought about by natural resource extraction and construction booms. Many communities welcomed the workers and their transportable homes, seeing them as signals of economic vitality. Some communities, however, rejected manufactured homes and the changes they signified. These contrasting reactions had much to do with how the manufactured homes were introduced and whether enhancements to existing infrastructure accompanied the introduction of mobile home developments. In areas where manufactured homes were thoughtfully installed, they often represented a new prosperity; in these instances communities welcomed both the house form and the residents who occupied them.

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<sup>197</sup> "Employment Outlook Explained At Libby," Missoulian, 2 March 1971.

<sup>198</sup> Libby Dam Archives, Project History, Section 6 - Ancillary Construction, Part 10 - Government Employee Housing, 6.10-2.

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Transportable housing has a long history in the Western United States. Native peoples of the Rocky Mountain region and the Great Plains took advantage of various types of innovative mobile shelters to survive on land that demanded continuous migrations to access resources. Dogs, and later horses, pulled tipi components from one location to another as Native American tribes traveled on seasonal rounds to hunt and gather food and other resources.<sup>199</sup> Early European pioneers transported their belongings and families in covered wagons.<sup>200</sup> Efficiently designed sheep wagons have sheltered generations of shepherders.<sup>201</sup> In the 1930s, workers taking advantage of Montana's

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<sup>199</sup> For discussions and observations on tipi use, see Gilbert L. Wilson, "The Horse and Dog in the Hidatsa Culture," Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 15 (1924), 127-224; also see Norman Henderson, "Replicating Dog Travois Travel on the Northern Plains," Plains Anthropologist 39, no. 148, (1994), 145-159. Henderson discusses the prehistoric and historical sources pertaining to dog and travois use on the Northern Plains. His essay includes extensive reports regarding on-site experiments conducted with dogs, travois, and packs. He specifically tested dogs for performance and endurance, with the intent of testing the accuracy of primary accounts. ; Don Juan de Onate, "Letter Written by Don Juan de Onate, 1599," Original Narratives of Early American History: Spanish Exploration in the Southwest: 1542-1706, edited by Herbert Eugene Bolton, ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916). Juan de Onate reported on the experiences of one of his Sergeants, Vicente de Saldivar Mendoca, who, while traveling witnessed widespread use of dogs and travois. See page 201, 223-230. George Catlin, Catlin's Indians, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Hubbard's Brothers, 1891), 81-84. Robert H. Lowie, The Crow Indians, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1935), 86-89. For discussions on Plains Indians and horses see: James Willard Schultz, Blackfeet and Buffalo: Memories of Life Among the Indians, edited by Keith C. Seele, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962); Frank Gilbert Roe, The Indian and the Horse, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955); Harry Turney-High, "The Diffusion of the Horse to the Flatheads," Man 35 (December 1935). Harry Holbert Turney-High, "Ethnography of the Kutenai," Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association 43, no. 2 (1941), 9-12, 53-54, 61,63-64, and 69.

<sup>200</sup> For thorough discussions regarding wagons, see Richard M. Davis, "Where Have All the Wagons Gone? Gone, Gone, Long Ago, or Very Nearly So (Part 1)," Overland Journal 15, no. 3; George R. Stewart, "The Prairie Schooner Got Them There," American Heritage 13, no. 2 (1962); Merrill J. Mattes, The Great Platte River Road: The Covered Wagon Mainline Via Fort Kearney to Fort Laramie (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, (1987); George R. Stewart, "The Prairie Schooner Got Them There," American Heritage 13, no. 2 (1962), 12; Goldie Ellis Marble, quoted in Dwight Harriman, "A Wagon Full of Memories," The Livingston Enterprise, 23 April 2002, 1; Margaret A. Frink, "The Journal of Margaret A. Frink," Covered Wagon Women Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1840-1890, Vol. II, edited by Kenneth L. Holmes (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1985), 59, quoted in Sharon Brown, Ph.D., "What the Covered Wagon Covered," Overland Journal 4, no. 3, (1986), 35. Harriet P.F. Sanders, "Harriet P.F. Sanders Reminiscence," Montana Historical Society Collection, MC 53, 79.

<sup>201</sup> For historical discussion regarding Sheep Wagon origins and construction, see Nancy Weidel, "The Wyoming Sheep Wagon," Wyoming History Journal 67, no 1, (1995): 4-6, 12; Agnes Wright Spring, "Sheep Wagon On Wheels Originated in Wyoming," Wyoming Stockman-Farmer, (December 1940): 1-3.



construction and resource extraction boomtowns also depended on mobile homes as a means of shelter.

This persistent use of mobile shelters—across centuries and cultural groups—reflects the region’s distinct geographical realities. The area now known as Montana was not originally farming country, which would have encouraged site-built homes. Instead, the aridity of the region, both the dry plains and timbered mountains, created “concentrations” of vegetation and animal life, which made hunting and gathering the best way to make a living from the land for Native Americans.<sup>202</sup> As the flora and fauna responded to seasonal dynamics, including precipitation and warmer weather, Native Americans survived by traveling to disparate resource pockets to gather food, timber, and minerals. Their need to travel led to innovative adaptations in transportable shelter. The primary type of shelter they adopted (the tipi) was well-suited to meet the demands of the region’s the diverse topography - from prairies to snowy peaks, from brittle basins to verdant valleys.

The region’s pockets of rich resources later attracted Euro-Americans eager to extract those resources before moving on. Just as the first inhabitants traveled to resource pockets to gather bitterroot, timber, obsidian, and buffalo, these later Euro-American migrants also established migratory patterns as they looked to profit from concentrations of timber, minerals, and other lucrative resources. In an attempt to explain these dynamics, Thomas Alexander, history professor at Brigham Young University, observed

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The Montana Historical Society Museum has a sheep wagon on permanent display. The wagon is believed to have been built in Miles City, 1910. The wagon was used on the Bair Family lease lands in the southeastern Montana for over fifty years before donated by the family.

James E. Larcombe, “Alone in the Hills,” Great Falls Tribune, Parade, 16 September 1990, E1; Marie Hoeffner, “High Country Solitude,” Independent Record, 22 September 1991, C1.

<sup>202</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, “Toward a Synthetic Interpretation of the Mountain West: Diversity, Isolation, and Cooperation,” Utah Historical Quarterly 39, no. 3 (Summer 1971), 202.

that in the West “the resources necessary for most . . . activities [were] isolated from one another.”<sup>203</sup> These resource “oases,” in turn, dictated the creation of distinct and distant settlement areas and often demanded a high degree of mobility. The need for mobility encouraged the use of mobile homes to supply necessary shelter—whether covered wagons to cross the Plains, sheep wagons to follow grazing flocks, or more recently, manufactured homes. In short, the geographic, economic, and lifestyle dynamics of Montana created an environment perfectly suited to the widespread acceptance and use of manufactured housing.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Montanans joined the rest of the country by embracing the automobile and the resulting accessory, the auto trailer.<sup>204</sup> Due to the prevalence of tourism and auto trailers in the state, Montana became one of the first to initiate legislation regulating campgrounds. Before the end of the 1920s, Montana lawmakers had begun to establish standards for travel trailer use and camps. These standards included licensing and inspections for camps, requirements for highway safety, and sanitation and health regulations. They also provided guidelines for city and county commissions to assist in the enforcement of these standards as well as defining local planning and zoning.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Alexander, 203.

<sup>204</sup>For information on the popularity of the Automobile in Montana and the Rocky Mountain West, see “Many Autos in Billings,” Montana Daily Record, 1 April 1906; “Charms of Automobile in Missoula,” The Anaconda Standard: Holiday Edition, 15 December 1907, 3; “Thousands of Autos in State,” Medicine Lake Wave, 9 December 1915, 1; Montana Historical Society Vertical Files, “Automobiles:” Ernest McGaffey, “What Federal Aid Means to the West,” Sunset Magazine, March 1926, 37, 94-95; “The West’s Portion of Interstate Roads,” Sunset Magazine, March 1926, 36; Allan D. Wallis, Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of the Mobile Home, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 68.

<sup>205</sup> The House Trailer, It’s Effect on State and Local Government, prepared by the American Municipal Association, The American Society of Planning Officials, and the National Association of Housing Officials: Report No. 114, February 1937, 5.

During the 1930s, trailers became an integral part of Montanan's search for employment. In particular, the transportable shelter proved invaluable for laborers who worked on large public works projects. During the first of these projects, Fort Peck Dam, the federal government constructed barracks and other accommodations for workers. It failed to plan for the hundreds of families who accompanied the laborers.<sup>206</sup> In response to the lack of family housing, "shanty towns" quickly grew around the construction zone. One of these towns, Wheeler, housed 3,500 people at the peak of construction.<sup>207</sup> Wheeler was made famous in the 1936 Life magazine photo essay on Fort Peck Dam construction. A double-page photo featured a bird's eye view of Wheeler. Every conceivable form of shelter was visible, including a sheep wagon, trailer houses, and frame homes.<sup>208</sup> Contemporary reports and later memoirs mentioned the converted "trucks" and "auto trailers," which housed people along the banks of the Missouri from 1933 until construction ceased.<sup>209</sup> After the dam's completion, Wheeler's population fell to 1,500, with many workers "taking their homes with them."<sup>210</sup>

During the Dam's construction, social critics berated government officials for their "poor social planning" by not incorporating family living space into their system of barracks and dormitories.<sup>211</sup> In response, the federal government looked for inexpensive means to house workers' families in future projects. Their choice was obvious and

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<sup>206</sup> Documents from State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Vertical File, "Fort Peck Dam (3)," 5-8.

<sup>207</sup> Life, 17 October 1938, 23, Vertical Files, Montana Historical Society, "Fort Peck Dam, 1."

<sup>208</sup> Life, 23 November 1936, p. 10-11.

<sup>209</sup> Connie Poten, "Fifty Years Ago, The Construction of the Fort Peck Dam Gave Montanans Something to Shout About, 'Dead Broke and Dam Happy,'" Northwest Orient, August 1983, 24; C.C. Lull, M.D., "Wheeler's Medic Kept Records for Prosperity," as quoted in Fort Peck – A Half a Century and Holding, District News, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Publication, Summer 1987, 18.

<sup>210</sup> Life, 17 October 1938, 23, Vertical Files, Montana Historical Society, "Fort Peck Dam, 1."

<sup>211</sup> Documents from State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Vertical File, "Fort Peck Dam (3)," 8.

introduced the modern era of manufactured home use in Montana boomtowns. Within a decade of Fort Peck Dam's completion, house trailers, and later mobile homes, became vital shelter components for federal construction projects.

When mobile homes were introduced in an orderly and organized fashion, they tended to gain widespread acceptance. House trailers, for example, were among the various housing options used during the Tiber Dam Project on Montana's Marias River. Because of its distance from any established community, federal planners and private contractors constructed a camp a short distance downstream from the dam site between 1952 and 1954. The federal component of the camp consisted of 39 conventionally built homes and 18 house trailers. The primary contractor constructed 175 trailer sites in addition to building a dormitory for single personnel. More than 1,100 people lived in the camp during the peak years of construction. Structures included a post office, elementary school, gas station and restaurant.<sup>212</sup> Photos of the town indicate a well-planned and orderly community. The town in no way resembled the shantytowns depicted in photos and memoirs from the Fort Peck construction. Although barracks and dirt roads separated the government employees' housing from the almost two hundred privately owned house trailers, both "sides" of town appeared well maintained.

The reports describing Tiber Dam Camp contained no derogative references to mobile housing. Rather, newspaper reports referred to the house trailers and the courts that accommodated them in the same tone as they referred to the mainstream housing.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> "\$20 Million Tiber Dam Construction Chronology," Liberty County Times, 23 February 1956, section 4, 1. The newspaper article came from the Golden Anniversary Issue of the Chester, Montana paper. Montana Historical Society Vertical files, "Tiber Dam."

<sup>213</sup> See articles in Montana Historical Society Vertical files, folder "Tiber Dam." "Construction of Tiber Dam Moving Ahead of Schedule," Great Falls Tribune, 10 May 1953, 8-9; "Lower Marias Project Seen as Boon to Prosperity of State, Triangle Area," Great Falls Tribune, 29 November 1953, 10; "317 Men on Tiber Dam Payrolls, More Arriving as Work Gains Momentum," Liberty County Times, date unknown:

Residents, community planners, and social critics recognized the benefits of transportable housing during construction projects. When brought in as part of a planned community, mobile homes clearly contributed to the order and stability of these temporary communities.

Mobile home use for governmental projects in Montana reached a peak in the 1960s during the Yellowtail Dam project. The project, designed for hydroelectric power and flood control, would eventually back up the Big Horn River into the second deepest canyon system in the United States. The nearest town of any size to the proposed Yellowtail Dam site was Hardin, Montana, an hour's drive. Because of the site's isolation, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed construction of a permanent town in 1960, on the original site of old Fort Smith. During the town's construction, which began some months before work started on the dam, the usefulness of mobile housing to the project's success became obvious. The Reclamation Bureau and private entrepreneurs created a town with four trailer parks and additional structures, both mobile and traditional. In contrast to Tiber Dam housing, where federally constructed homes out-numbered house trailers, the bureau built fewer than two dozen site-built homes in Fort Smith. The conventional buildings housed administrative staff and their families during the project, and served as permanent residences in the decades following the dam's completion. Several "relocatable buildings" were added to the town site, including dormitories and a dining hall.<sup>214</sup> However, the majority of governmental employees and construction

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"\$20 Million Tiber Dam Construction Chronology," Liberty County Times, 23 February 1956, section 4, 1. None of the articles imply anything unusual about house trailer usage. Rather, both text and photos of the camp portray them as simply alternative residences.

<sup>214</sup> "Damsite, Ft. Smith Townsite Progress Rapidly," Hardin Tribune Herald, 27 July 1961, 1; "Living Space for Workers Furnished by Private Enterprise Near Ft. Smith," Hardin Tribune Herald, 12 October 1961, Special Section, 6; "First Year at Yellowtail Sees Much Work Begun, Several Installations Completed," Hardin Tribune Herald, 12 October 1961, Special Section, 1.

workers, which reached its peak in 1964 at 1,085 men and women, lived in the hundreds of mobile homes situated in and around Fort Smith.<sup>215</sup>

In addition to the many trailers located in the same neighborhood as the administration's site-built homes, other areas accommodated only mobile homes. The Ballensky development, in the northern section of town, contained 270 mobile homes and no site built homes. Across the road, the Stanton development planned for 400 mobile homes. A couple of miles from town, on the road to Hardin, the Lyndale and Lee courts offered spaces for a few dozen more homes. All of the developments included peripheral buildings and services, including grocery stores, laundry facilities, and gas stations.<sup>216</sup> They were complete communities created for mobile homes.

Having learned valuable lessons from the Fort Peck and Tiber Dam projects, the federal government and private contractors made mobile housing integral to Fort Smith's community plan. In fact, not only was temporary housing included in Fort Smith's community plan, but entrepreneurs and the federal government also constructed multiple trailer courts to accommodate hundreds of workers and their families.

By the time of the Yellowtail Dam project, manufactured housing filled a critical need for transportable housing and become an acceptable housing choice during the federal construction projects throughout Montana. Very few towns or cities could provide shelter for the number of workers necessary for federal dam projects. Mobile homes' transportability and affordability made them ideal components in the federal

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<sup>215</sup> "Yellowtail Work Force Reaches Peak of 1,085," Great Falls Tribune, 8 September 1964, Vertical Files, folder "Yellowtail Dam." Montana Historical Society.

<sup>216</sup> "Living Space for Workers Furnished by Private Enterprise Near Ft. Smith," Hardin Tribune Herald, 12 October 1961, Special Section, 6.

construction projects, which brought thousands of jobs and millions of dollars to rural Montana.

In the 1960s, Montana did not stigmatize families that lived in mobile homes as poor and undesirable neighbors but typically welcomed the new residents. In Hardin, for example, a half page ad in the Hardin Tribune Herald run by the Fox Oil Company, welcomed “all newcomers who have a hand in the construction of the Yellowtail Dam.”<sup>217</sup> The Fox family, owners of the Texaco station and the Blue Flame Propane Company, expressed the feelings of many in town. Yellowtail Dam’s construction brought an economic boom to the small communities that lay on the northern border of the Crow Indian Reservation. The fact that most of the imported workers lived in mobile homes meant little to the merchants of Big Horn County or to the families earning high wages from the dam’s construction. Rather, the mobile homes provided a means of shelter for workers, offered opportunities for the local entrepreneurs who financed construction of multiple mobile home courts, and brought hundreds of consumers into Big Horn County.

The trend of welcoming mobile homes and their residents continued into the 1970s, as evidenced by the Libby Dam project. The last major federal river project in Montana, Libby Dam employed thousands of workers and brought millions of dollars into Lincoln County between 1966 and 1975. Unlike the Yellowtail Project, which was fifty miles from Hardin, the Libby Dam project lay only seventeen miles from the town of Libby. Yet housing remained a problem. Despite the town’s proximity, Libby was too small to provide enough existing housing for all the workers coming into the area. As a result, developers created several mobile home facilities to house the town’s new

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<sup>217</sup> Advertisement, Hardin Tribune Herald, 12 October 1961, Special Section, 6.

residents. The Reese Court, Riverside Court, Orchard Vale, and Green Acres Trailer Court, and multiple smaller courts sprang up on the outskirts of town.

Once again, mobile homes won acceptance. The workers who took advantage of Lincoln County's boom embraced the convenience of manufactured homes. The 1960 Census reported Lincoln County, of which Libby served as county seat, had 203 "Trailers."<sup>218</sup> In 1970, the U.S. Census enumerated 1,328 "Mobile Homes or Trailers" for the same area.<sup>219</sup> This constituted a 650 percent increase in mobile homes in just a decade for Lincoln County.

The prevalence of mobile homes in Lincoln County altered the way developers and private investors approached land ownership and housing. Rather than focusing ads for unimproved property on those planning on building new homes, land developers used the convenience of mobile homes as a selling point. Advertisements attempted to convince prospective customers of the wisdom of parking their homes on their own land in the hope of building equity, as opposed to paying to park their homes in a mobile home community. One landowner, in his advertisement for a subdivision south of town, enticed prospective customers by advertising, "pay no more for lot than renting in trailer court."<sup>220</sup>

From real estate developers to Main Street business owners, the people of Libby did not associate mobile homes with transience or poverty in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rather, the eight years of dam construction represented a time of unprecedented wealth

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<sup>218</sup> 1960 Census of Housing, Volume I, States and Small Areas, Part 5, Michigan – New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Table 28 – Tenure, Vacancy Status, Condition and Plumbing Facilities, and Structural Characteristics, For Counties Outside SMSA's: 1960 – Con." 28-32.

<sup>219</sup> 1970 Census of Housing, Volume I, Housing Characteristics for States, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Issued July 1972, "Table 62, Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Characteristics for Counties: 1970," 28 – 104 Montana.

<sup>220</sup> Western News, 21 August 1975, Classified Ads, 140 For Sale: Real Estate.



for the community and surrounding area. Increased tax revenue generated by thousands of newcomers helped pay for improvements in Lincoln County's public services and infrastructure. Libby's high school and elementary schools not only benefited from new students but also from the new wings built to accommodate larger class sizes, and from a new middle school that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed below Skidale Hill.<sup>221</sup> During the boom, Libby workers also benefited. Between 1967 and 1971, Lincoln County workers enjoyed the highest wages in the state.<sup>222</sup> To the locals, business owners, Libby Dam workers, and multiple entrepreneurs, mobile homes went hand in hand with jobs and prosperity.

Federal projects were not the only economic and construction ventures to take advantage of the convenience and transportability of mobile homes. Resource extraction boom and bust cycles also created demand for quick and transportable housing. The energy crisis and resulting oil, gas, and coal booms generated an increase in manufactured housing in many central and eastern Montana counties from the late 1960s through the 1980s. One of the first such ventures, the late 1960s Tiger Ridge gas field development, brought in dozens of workers and their families. As a result, the number of mobile homes in Blaine County quadrupled, from 62 in 1960 to 222 homes in 1980.<sup>223</sup> Also late in the same decade, the discovery of the Powder River County Bell Creek oil field created a boom economy near Broadus. The area's manufactured home count

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<sup>221</sup> Paul Verdon, "Libby Townspeople Working to Handle Influx of Dam Workers," Great Falls Tribune, 11 June 1967, 10. Montana Historical Society Vertical Files, folder "Libby Dam."

<sup>222</sup> "Worker's Income Here Tops State," Western News, 13 May 1971, page unknown. Montana Historical Society Vertical Files, folder "Libby Dam."

<sup>223</sup> 1960 Census of Housing, Volume I, States and Small Areas, Part 5, Michigan – New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Table 28 – Tenure, Vacancy Status, Condition and Plumbing Facilities, and Structural Characteristics, For Counties Outside SMSA's: 1960 – Con." 28-32. 1980 Census of Housing, Volume 1, Characteristics of Housing Units, Chapter A, General Housing Characteristics, Part 28, Montanan, HC80-1-A28, Issued May 1982, "Table 46, Occupancy, Plumbing, and Structural Characteristics, for Counties: 1980, 28 – 64 Montana.

increased from 32 in 1960 to 228 just ten years later.<sup>224</sup> Coal discoveries also created boom areas. In the mid-1970s, the Sarpy Creek Mine thirty miles east of Hardin created an increased demand for manufactured housing. Big Horn County's manufactured home count doubled from 221 in 1970 to 475 in 1980.<sup>225</sup> The prevalence of mobile and manufactured homes in boomtowns was so common during these decades that sociologists and economists out of the University of Wyoming believed that a noticeable increase of mobile homes in a localized area was the "most visible sign of the energy boom."<sup>226</sup> Although this phenomenon was not exclusive to Montana, the economic and housing impact to southern and eastern areas of the state was particularly noticeable because of the sparse population.

Due to the nature of resource extraction employment, many workers favored manufactured homes.<sup>227</sup> As with federal projects, towns in close proximity to the oil, coal, and gas fields were ill prepared to house a sudden influx of dozens of new workers and their families. Small towns and rural areas lacked the population to support large numbers of carpenters, electricians, and other contractors necessary for home construction. In addition to the lack of skilled workers, building supplies were sparse and had to be ordered in advance for building projects. The shipping costs added to the expense of site built homes. Manufactured homes, both efficient and quickly installed, became the preferred form of housing.

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<sup>224</sup> Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, Montana, A History of Two Centuries, (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1991), 336-337.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>226</sup> Judith A. Davenport and Joseph Davenport, III, ed. Boom Towns and Human Services, (Laramie, Wyoming: University of Wyoming Department of Social Work, 1979), 73.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Sociologists Judith A. Davenport and Joseph Davenport from the University of Wyoming studied the boomtown phenomenon and ensuing community dynamics. They found that the majority of workers living in manufactured homes under these circumstances were predominantly young and married. These same workers not only earned more than previously established community members living in site built homes but were also better educated.<sup>228</sup> Contrary to widespread assumptions, workers who chose manufactured homes did not do so out of financial desperation. Rather, they were part of a skilled middle class whose choice of housing was simply the means to well paying jobs. In areas with few housing options, manufactured housing provided the most viable housing choice.

Despite these facts, the reception manufactured homes and their occupants received in energy boom towns was not always positive. Many energy boomtowns were not as orderly and well planned as the manufactured home communities of Fort Smith or Libby. At these federal construction sites, the federal government actively participated in the planning of the manufactured home communities and assisted established towns in adjusting to the infrastructure and public service demands of increased population. In contrast, private energy companies often did not concern themselves with community planning nor with the impact the sudden increase in population had on schools and municipal resources. Rather, the manufactured home communities that cropped up around some energy boomtowns suffered from a lack of planning and initial investment. Workers and their families, lured by the promise of high paying jobs, found few housing choices other than these quickly constructed manufactured home courts.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

Thus, despite their middle-class incomes, the new residents of energy boomtowns found themselves on the fringes of established communities, both literally and figuratively. Without the federal government offering leadership, locals who hoped to maintain the integrity of their communities resorted to restrictive zoning, segregating manufactured homes to the outskirts of populated areas. These locations were often the least desirable plots of land near flood plains and industrial areas. This physical separation exacerbated conflict between the newcomers and older residents. Taxes became another area of conflict. Because manufactured homes on rented lots were taxed as personal property, the same tax system as automobiles, they generated less tax revenues than traditionally built homes. The disproportionately low taxes paid by mobile home owners often irritated locals as they attempted to cope with the new demands increased populations placed on schools and other public facilities and services.

Lack of planning, infrastructure overload, and differentiated tax rates resulted in negative perceptions of mobile homes and their residents in energy boomtowns. In response, some corporations recognized the need to become involved in the communities affected by their employees and began to take active roles in community planning. In this they followed the same trajectory of the federal government, which, after experiencing negative publicity due to the chaotic boomtowns that surrounded Fort Peck Dam, engaged in community planning on subsequent dam projects.

Montana Power Company and its many contractors in Colstrip offered an example of the benefits of corporate planning and involvement. In 1971, Montana Power Company announced plans to develop coal deposits and construct generating plants in the

area around Colstrip, about 103 miles east of Billings.<sup>229</sup> As with earlier federal projects, housing was a local concern. In the late 1960s, Colstrip had fewer than a hundred houses and only 400 residents. During construction of the generators, from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, the population grew to more than 8,000 people. To accommodate this population explosion, private parties and investors built 680 traditional homes and townhouses and numerous apartment buildings and duplexes. In addition to these conventional forms of housing, investors installed permanent spaces for 264 mobile homes and temporary pads for 800 additional mobile homes.<sup>230</sup> In the ten years between the 1970 and 1980 censuses, Rosebud County's manufactured housing count increased tenfold, from 217 to 1206.<sup>231</sup> During the generator construction, manufactured housing made up almost a third, 32 percent, of Rosebud County's housing. The conscientious planning, described above, integrated hundreds of mobile home sites into the new additions. The many temporary mobile home pads and barracks allowed for future reclamation of properties. Inevitably, Colstrip's workforce declined and those mobile homes on temporary pads moved onto the next job site. Most significantly, the corporate planning enjoyed by Colstrip preempted many of the conflicts characterized by earlier, less organized energy boomtowns.

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<sup>229</sup> Charles E. Johnson, "Chronology: From Its Earliest Days, Colstrip Faced Battles of Politics, Philosophy," Great Falls Tribune, 23 October 1983, E1.

<sup>230</sup> "Colstrip: The Metamorphosis of a Town In the Face of Massive Development," Great Falls Tribune, 23 October 1982, G4; "Colstrip: A Tribute to the Efforts for More Energy," Great Falls Tribune, 23 October 1983, G1.

<sup>231</sup> 1970 Census of Housing, Volume I, Housing Characteristics for States, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Issued July 1972, "Table 62, Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Characteristics for Counties: 1970," 28 – 108 Montana; 1980 Census of Housing, Volume 1, Characteristics of Housing Units, Chapter A, General Housing Characteristics, Part 28, Montanan, HC80-1-A28, Issued May 1982, "Table 46, Occupancy, Plumbing, and Structural Characteristics, for Counties: 1980, 28 – 64 Montana.

Manufactured housing's boomtown history is only one facet of Montana's manufactured home story. The second, and more prevalent story, is about the thousands of Montanans who live in manufactured homes as permanent residences. In rural areas the homes have won favorable reception. In urban areas, however, manufactured homes and their inhabitants have met with prejudice. Although a richly diverse population has chosen manufactured homes for numerous and compelling reasons, urban Montanans continue to marginalize both the house form and its owners. Home to 14 percent of the state's population, Montana's manufactured housing still struggles for social and legal acceptance. Chapter Three details this history.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Permanent Side of Manufactured Housing**

In Montana, as in the rest of the nation, mobile homes originated as car campers. With the construction of Fort Peck Dam, they became a useful source of temporary housing. In later years, they continued to play an important role in providing temporary homes at large public works projects and for resource-extraction workers in the mining, oil, and gas industries. Both their origin as vacation housing and their mutation into temporary worker housing mirrored national trends. What distinguished Montana from other parts of the country was the popularity that trailers gained as permanent housing. Whereas, in 2000, manufactured homes made up 7.0 percent of the national housing stock, in Montana, they made up more than twice the national average at 14.3 percent.<sup>232</sup>

The popularity of manufactured homes in Montana is partly explained by the importance of resource extraction to Montana's economy and the resultant boom-and-bust economy in those resource extraction communities. However, that is only one reason for their popularity. Mobile homes have also been prevalent in Montana because of the state's limited housing stock, and lack of local carpenters, a problem for building homes in isolated areas. Montanans have also appreciated the affordability of mobile homes. Finally, mobile homes were eventually accepted as mainstream housing in many rural communities.

Despite their popularity, manufactured homes have been stigmatized in Montana's cities. Manufactured homes' nontraditional appearance and the negative stereotypes associated with trailer parks have led towns like Billings, Butte, Bozeman,

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<sup>232</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, DP-4 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics:2000 Geographic Area, United States <<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet>> (2/2/2004).

and Missoula to pass zoning ordinances prohibiting or limiting their installation. Discriminatory zoning has affected manufactured home owners in all of these communities as well as the manufactured home industry (including dealers and site developers).

With their economic interests at stake, dealers and developers responded to the discriminating policies and negative stereotypes in various ways. Responses have included lawsuits, attempts to cooperate with county commissioners to address the commissioners' concerns, imposing their own strict community regulations on trailer court tenants to counter negative stereotypes, and public relation campaigns. Today, discrimination continues to exist, but the state has made progress, with legislation passed in the 1990s forbidding some discriminatory zoning practices and protecting tenant rights in their disputes with landlords.

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Montanans have utilized manufactured homes at rates more than double those elsewhere in the nation. Limited housing stock was one of the main reasons Montanans turned to manufactured homes, and housing shortages were not limited to resource extraction boom towns. Other small communities also experienced housing shortages—and trailers often became the housing type of choice. For example, by 1960, mobile homes made up almost 14 percent of the housing in Jefferson County, four times higher than the state average. Most of these homes were located in the Boulder city area, home to the State Hospital. During the 1950s, the State Hospital hired a growing number of employees. The influx of these professionals, as well as the resulting increase in school



district personnel, caused a housing shortage. The low wages paid by both the State and school district disqualified many employees from home loans, forcing them to look for alternative housing.<sup>233</sup> Mobile homes provided the best option and served as permanent housing for many families. In Jefferson County, the percentage of housing made up by mobile homes continued to run well above the state average for decades, at 15 percent and 18.5 percent in 1970 and 1980 respectively.<sup>234</sup>

Glasgow and surrounding Valley County provide another illustration of an ongoing economic boom creating a demand for manufactured homes. Construction of the Glasgow Air Force Base brought a large number of construction and military personnel to the area. The project began in 1955 and the base activated in 1957. Between 1950 and 1960, Valley County's mobile home count increased from 23 homes to 736.<sup>235</sup> By 1960, mobile homes made up almost 14 percent of Valley County's housing. Even after the Glasgow Air Force Base closed in 1968, mobile homes continued to serve the area.<sup>236</sup> In 2000, there were 331 Valley County mobile home residences.<sup>237</sup> This was a ten-fold increase from the 23 mobile homes reported fifty years earlier. Those mobile homes

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<sup>233</sup> Correspondence from Roy Millegan, Secretary and Treasurer of Jefferson Valley Museum Board, [jvmuseum@in-tch.com](mailto:jvmuseum@in-tch.com) (10 May 2005).

<sup>234</sup> Mobile homes made up 6.3 percent of Total Housing Units in the State in 1970, and 11.3 percent in 1980. See U.S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Housing, Volume 1 Housing Characteristics for States, Cities, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, "Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Characteristics for Counties, 1970," Montana 28 – 111 and U. S. Department of Commerce, 1980 Census of Housing, Volume 1 Characteristics of Housing, Volume 1, Chapter B, Detailed Housing Characteristics Part 28 Montana, 28-19.

<sup>235</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960 Census of Housing, Volume I, States and Small Areas, Part 5, Michigan – New Hampshire, "Table 28.—Tenure, Vacancy Status, Condition and Plumbing, Facilities, and Structural Characteristics, for Counties Outside SMSA's: 1960," 28-35.

<sup>236</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Housing, Volume 1 Housing Characteristics for States, Cities, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, "Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Characteristics for Counties, 1970," Montana 28 – 111. For information regarding the construction, operation, and deployment of Glasgow Air Force Base see Paul Freeman, "Abandoned and Little Known Airfields: Montana," 2004, <[http://www.airfields-freeman.com/MT/Airfields\\_MT.htm](http://www.airfields-freeman.com/MT/Airfields_MT.htm)> (27April 2005).

<sup>237</sup> Table H30. Units in Structure [11], Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3), Valley County, U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder; < <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTTable> >(2/20/2004)

servicing construction and military personnel were relocated, but a significant number remained in the county to provide housing for permanent residents.

The owners of these mobile homes did not fit common stereotypes. In Jefferson County, many mobile home owners were educated professionals. Specifically, they were white-collar employees of the state hospital. In Glasgow and the surrounding Valley County, the average income of mobile home owners remained higher than the state average. For these middle-class families, mobile homes provided convenient, affordable housing in the sparsely populated rural areas.

The trend held true in other sparsely populated Montana counties, which also reported high manufactured home use, even when they did not experience population growth. For example, the 2000 Census reported that only 1,279 people lived in Garfield County, a 28 percent decrease from the 1,796 people reported in 1970.<sup>238</sup> In 1970, manufactured housing made up 14 percent of the county's homes, more than twice the state's percentage at that time, of 6.3 percent.<sup>239</sup> By 2000, the county seat, Jordan, reported that manufactured homes made up 21.6 percent of the small city's housing stock, while they made up 27 percent of the entire county's homes.<sup>240</sup> Despite three

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<sup>238</sup> Population of Counties in Montana, 1890-2000, U. S. Bureau of the Census, Decennial Censuses of Population, Census and Economic Information Center, Montana Department of Commerce, November 2002.

<sup>239</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Housing, Volume 1 Housing Characteristics for States, Cities, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, "Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Char U.S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Housing, Volume 1 Housing Characteristics for States, Cities, and Counties, Part 28 Montana, "Structural, Plumbing, Equipment, and Financial Characteristics for Counties, 1970," Montana 28 – 111 Characteristics for Counties, 1970," Montana 28 – 102; Occupancy, Plumbing, and Structural Characteristics for the State: 1970, 28-12.

<sup>240</sup> Table H30. Units in Structure [11], Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3), Garfield County, U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?>> (2/20/2004): Table H30. Units in Structure [11]-Universe: Housing Units, Data Set: Census 2000 Summary File (SF3), "Jordan City, Montana," U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?>> (7/5/2005).

decades of declining population, residents regularly chose to live in manufactured homes rather than move into more expensive and work intensive site built homes.

Garfield County residents' choice of manufactured housing over conventional housing exemplified the outlook of thousands of Montana manufactured-home owners. One reason for this surprising trend was that the county's small population supported only two or three carpenters and contractors, all based around Jordan. Thus, families planning for new homes had two options. One was to import housing contractors from Billings, but this option escalated the expense of a home, since in addition to the time commitment, construction and labor costs, hopeful homeowners had to pay for out-of-town crews' room and board. The second option was to purchase a manufactured home, and this was the option many Garfield County residents chose.

For Garfield County residents, a manufactured home purchase demanded less time and money than site-built housing. According to Jack Shawver, Garfield County Assessor and manufactured home owner, the decision to purchase a manufactured home was "not income prompted." Rather, locals accepted manufactured homes because they made both economic sense and were convenient. They cost less, often as much as half the cost of site built homes, and could be assembled more quickly. The latter reason appealed to farming and ranching families in need of additional housing for family and hired help. The purchase of a manufactured home required a few trips to Billings (174 miles) to "shop around" for an appropriate home. Once new owners chose and ordered a home, the dealer from Billings arranged for crews who poured permanent foundations for the new home and assisted in its set up after its arrival. Delivery for a new home often occurred as little as three months after the finalization of contracts. All the homeowner needed to do

was supply land and arrange for power and water.<sup>241</sup> By contrast, a site built home could take up to a year to construct.

Garfield County manufactured home owners made up a cross section of county citizenry. According to Eric Miller, the County Extension Officer, the homes appealed to the small number of professionals in the area as well as to retirees, farmers, and ranchers.<sup>242</sup> From 2000 through 2002, the Montana Building Codes Bureau granted construction and electrical permits for 40 single family dwellings in Garfield County. Almost half were manufactured homes.<sup>243</sup> Although the median cost of a site-built home in Garfield County was \$80,000, well below the state average, manufactured homes were nonetheless quite popular.<sup>244</sup> Even people who could afford a site built home often chose manufactured homes for reasons of convenience and affordability.

Just as Garfield County residents embraced manufactured homes for economic and logistical reasons, so too have residents of Lincoln County, 550 miles to the northwest. For some, the primary appeal was the relative ease and speed of construction; for others, the low cost of a manufactured home enabled them to purchase more acreage; for still others it was the type of home they could afford.

In Lincoln County, the use of manufactured homes began during a local economic boom but continued even as the county's economic health declined. In the decades before

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<sup>241</sup> Jack Shawver, Garfield County Assessor and chief assessor for Montana's ten eastern counties, Jordan, Montana, see notes from phone interview, 25 April 2005.

<sup>242</sup> Eric Miller, Garfield County Extension Officer, Jordan Montana, see notes from phone interview, 25 April 2005.

<sup>243</sup> Single Family Dwellings, Construction and Electrical Permits Issued in Montana, Building Codes Bureau, Montana Department of Labor and Industry, U.S. Bureau of the Census, October 2003; Mobile Homes and Recreational Vehicles, Construction and Electrical Permits Issued in Montana, Building Codes Bureau, Montana Department of Labor and Industry, U.S. Bureau of the Census, October 2003. Files from Helena Census Office, Dave Martin, (26 February 2004).

<sup>244</sup> The Price of Housing in Montana: 2001, The Center for Applied Economic Research, Montana State University—Billings, 29 April 2002, 4.

1980, the county enjoyed unprecedented prosperity as logging, mining, and Libby Dam construction brought both the highest incomes in the state and one of the highest mobile home counts.<sup>245</sup> The next twenty years, however, witnessed the closing of Libby's lumber mill, the cessation of all but a small mine in Troy, and the completion of construction on Libby Dam. Libby, and most of Lincoln County, now suffers from some of the highest unemployment rates in the state.

With the boom years behind them, many of the area's residents continued to choose manufactured homes. By 2000, twenty years after the boom times ended, the percentage of manufactured home ownership had actually increased to 22.5 percent of the county's total housing stock.<sup>246</sup> The valley's proximity to the Flathead and Cabinet Wilderness attracted retirees and upper-income families, who valued the area's relative isolation and scenic beauty. The majority of these families purchased lots and acreage outside the city area with plans for retirement or vacation homes. This influx of new residents created a demand for local contractors. In the spring of 2005, Libby's half a dozen or so contractors were booked up through the summer of 2007.<sup>247</sup> While it had become standard practice for families with enough income to import construction crews, many chose not to wait for an available carpenter; instead, they ordered new manufactured homes. In addition to this clientele, many families spent the bulk of their housing budget on land, with the intent of installing a more affordable manufactured

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<sup>245</sup> "Worker's Income Here Tops State," Western News, 13 May 1971, Montana Historical Society Vertical Files, folder "Libby Dam."

<sup>246</sup> In 1980, the percentage of manufactured homes in Lincoln County was 16.9. 1980 Census of Housing, Volume I Characteristics of Housing Units, Chapter A, General Housing Characteristics, Part 28, Montana. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary. May 1983, 28-53. For 2000 Census figures see Table H30. Units in Structure [11], Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3), Lincoln County, U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder; <<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTable>> (2/20/20)

<sup>247</sup> Tom Wood, Libby, Montana, City Councilman, see notes from interview, 1, May 2005.

home on their acreage. These two groups, those without the patience to wait for a contractor and those without the financial resources for a site-built home, purchased 286 new manufactured homes in the three years from 2000 and 2002. This was 33.7 percent of the 425 homes built in Lincoln County during that time.<sup>248</sup>

Not all of Lincoln County's manufactured home owners settle on their own private land. Lincoln County is home to forty mobile home communities. The largest, in Eureka, has lots for sixty homes; the smallest have spaces for as few as four homes. Yet only a quarter of the county's mobile homes rest in manufactured home communities. The remainder are permanently settled on private lots or acreage.<sup>249</sup> As with Garfield and Valley counties, manufactured housing has become an alternative to traditional housing in Lincoln County.

Manufactured homes' affordability made them popular in Montana's urban areas as well. As in the rest of the nation, residents in and around urban areas and their fringe depended on manufactured housing as a growing population, increased housing demands, and escalating property prices left few choices for many families. Between 1982 and 1992, manufactured homes made up 79 percent of new housing units in Missoula County.<sup>250</sup> By 2000, manufactured homes made up 13.4 percent of the county's housing stock.<sup>251</sup> Neighboring counties boasted even higher percentages of manufactured homes,

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<sup>248</sup> Montana Construction Permit Data, Building Codes Bureau and Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Montana Census and Economic Information Center, Construction and Electrical Permits Issued in Montana, 1992-2002 revised June 2003.

<sup>249</sup> Joan Clough, County Assessor's Office, Libby, MT; see notes from conversation, 7 July 2005.

<sup>250</sup> 1993 State of Montana Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), Montana Department of Commerce, December 1992, p. 102.

<sup>251</sup> Montana Construction Permit Data, Building Codes Bureau and Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Montana Census and Economic Information Center, Construction and Electrical Permits Issued in Montana, 1992-2002. revised June 2003; Economic and Demographic Analysis of Montana, Volume II, Housing Characteristics, Final Report, Montana Department of Commerce, November 2002, Table C.1 "Units in Structure for Montana and Counties, 2000 Census," pg. 12.

with 15.9 percent of Ravalli County's total housing stock and 30.2 percent of that in Mineral County.<sup>252</sup>

Just as in the Missoula area, manufactured homes became popular around Bozeman in the 1980s and 1990s. Manufactured homes supplied the Bozeman area and Gallatin County with 12.7 percent of their housing units and 15.8 percent of the housing units in neighboring Park County. Due to population increases, these two growing western cities had some of the highest real estate values in the state as well as the least number of vacant housing units.<sup>253</sup> Manufactured homes offered housing options in a market in which low and moderate-income families could not otherwise afford homes.

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In contrast to their acceptance in Montana's rural communities, manufactured homes have met with considerable resistance in the state's more heavily populated areas. One barrier to acceptance was their nontraditional appearance. Historically boxlike and unadorned, manufactured homes did not meet urban communities' expectations of what houses should look like. More significant were the lingering negative stereotypes associated with trailer parks that arose from their residents' mobility and their seeming lack of commitment to the community.

These negative stereotypes have contributed to restrictive zoning. Some counties have restricted manufactured home use on private land; others have isolated trailer courts in the most undesirable locations. In response, home owners, dealers, and site developers

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<sup>252</sup> Economic and Demographic Analysis of Montana, Volume II, Housing Characteristics, Final Report, Montana Department of Commerce, November 2002, Table C.1 "Units in Structure for Montana and Counties, 2000 Census," pg. 12.

<sup>253</sup> The Price of Housing in Montana, 2001, April 29, 2002, For the Board of Housing, Department of Commerce State of Montana, Compiled by The Center for Applied Economic Research, Montana State University, Billings, MT, Cheryl Heath Project Manager, Fig. 1, page 3.

have responded with lawsuits and other actions intended to end discriminatory policies and combat stereotypes. This next section will look at three case studies—from Billings, Butte, and Bozeman—that illuminate these zoning disputes and illustrate the problems developers faced in incorporating this housing form into urban plans. In each case, opponents of manufactured homes revealed, according to one commentator, unreasoned “prejudice against mobile homes and the people who live in them.”<sup>254</sup>

The first case study comes from Billings. In 1976, there was growing demand for manufactured home sites in the Billings area and repeated requests for new mobile home developments. These requests were met with refusals on the part of Yellowstone County Commissioners, who consistently relegated manufactured homes to the least desirable lands in the county. Despite their unwillingness to permit manufactured homes in most areas, the commissioners claimed that their zoning policies did not discriminate. When mobile home advocates cried foul, the commissioners responded that there was plenty of land available for manufactured homes. They pointed to tracts of land in Lockwood, Shiloh, the old Hardin Road, and Mallowney Lane, all of which were on the far outskirts of the city. The commissioners insisted that although many of these sites had not seen development, the “potential” lay in these areas. There was, according to the Commissioners “plenty of space” for the growing number of manufactured homes in the Yellowstone Valley.<sup>255</sup>

Frustrated dealers and manufactured home advocates were not satisfied with the commission’s stance, and they challenged the County Commissioners’ assessment of manufactured home development opportunities. Bill Novak and Dale Longfellow, both

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<sup>254</sup> Christine C. Meyers, “County Called Shortsighted,” Billings Gazette, 11 June 1976, 1B

<sup>255</sup> Christine C. Meyers, “1,271 Mobile Home Sites Here,” The Billings Gazette, 10 June 1976, 1A.



Billings manufacture home dealers, charged the Commissioners with overstating the potential of manufactured-home zoned areas. Novak described many of the areas listed as “undevelopable,” including sites in “gravel pits and swamps – or away from water and sewer connections and schools.” Novak called for a more open-minded board. He also reminded the officials that recent legislation and subdivision regulations would prevent manufactured home communities from becoming “junkyards.” Novak insisted that manufactured-home-community planners and developers intended the new communities to be “positive additions to any neighborhood.”<sup>256</sup>

The truth lay on Novak's side. Despite demand, Yellowstone County had little space allotted for manufactured housing. By 1976, manufactured housing filled 40 percent of the housing market for the county's low and mid-income families. It made up the vast majority, 90 percent, of all homes less than \$20,000 in Yellowstone County.<sup>257</sup> Yet, the County Commissioners repeatedly denied that zone changes were necessary for more manufactured homes to be installed. Even more blatantly, they refused to approve proposals to develop areas previously zoned for manufactured homes.<sup>258</sup> In their defense, county officials claimed that the existing neighborhoods' opposition to manufactured homes was often a determining factor in rejecting proposals for new developments. Established residents consistently worried about undue stress on existing water and sewage systems and overcrowding of local schools. However, the commissioners admitted that the largest hurdle in accommodating the growing number of manufactured

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<sup>256</sup> Christine C. Meyers, “County Called Shortsighted,” Billings Gazette, 11 June 1976, 1B.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 1B.

<sup>258</sup> See Christine C. Meyers, “Zoning Board Overruled; Trailer Court Rejected,” Billings Gazette, 9 June 1976, 1A. Meyers reported that Commissioners had overruled lower county officials and for the third time in just a few months rejected plans for a mobile home court development. One of these plans, Duck Creek, located 10 miles west of Billings, had already been approved by the State Board of Health, and was under construction. Other denials included a development near the Ramada Inn and a community proposal for a development off St. Mary's Street in Billings Heights.

homes in the Billings areas was “a prejudice against mobile homes and the people who live in them. Nobody will come right out and say they don’t like them. But they don’t want them in their neighborhood.”<sup>259</sup>

This statement summarized the problem. Middle-class, established neighborhoods simply did not want manufactured homes nearby. At every public hearing, outspoken citizens protested proposed rezoning for manufactured homes. To placate these concerned citizens, commissioners consistently denied applications for manufactured home developments. The few exceptions were for areas well beyond the existing Billings city limits, many of which were located near ground that held little, if any, aesthetic appeal. For example, the city commissioners approved developments for the Lockwood and Old Hardin Road areas, both of which lay just beyond oil refinery sites. The commission also approved areas on Mallowney Road near gravel pits created during Interstate construction a decade earlier and near or on the Yellowstone River flood plain. Of all the sites approved for development, the Shiloh Road area was the only one that provided some appealing options, as it enjoyed an agricultural setting, and had not yet been a focus for development.<sup>260</sup>

While Yellowstone County planners battled manufactured home proponents, Silver Bow County Planners and the Montana Manufactured Housing Association were also battling over zoning. Although manufactured homes were already restricted from the residential areas nearest Butte city center, officials were attempting to enforce similar ordinances in a four and a half mile radius around Butte as well as in other sections of the

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<sup>259</sup> Christine C. Meyers, “County Called Shortsighted,” Billings Gazette, 11 June 1976, 1B

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 1B; Christine C. Meyers, “1,271 Mobile Home Sites Here,” The Billings Gazette, 10 June 1976, 1A; Christine C. Meyers, “Zoning Board Overruled; Trailer Court Rejected,” Billings Gazette, 9 June 1976, 1A.

county well beyond the city limits. While most statewide zoning codes specified architectural components or building codes, the Silver Bow County planners proposed ordinances that would specifically restrict “mobile homes” from most of the county regardless of age or size.<sup>261</sup> In March 1977, after seeking legal aid from the Montana Manufactured Housing Association (MMHA), dealers from the Butte area filed suit against Silver Bow County to battle what they claimed was the county’s attempt at a “blanket prohibition against mobile homes.” District Court Judge James Freebourn ruled that the proposed zoning was “unconstitutional because it discriminate[d] against mobile home owners and dealers.” The ruling upset county officials who dreaded an increase in manufactured homes in the Butte area.<sup>262</sup>

Although Silver Bow County planners took preliminary steps to comply with the court’s ruling by initiating a zoning commission to study previous plans and to make recommendations, they also began a public relations campaign to persuade citizens that the county already adequately accommodated manufactured homes.<sup>263</sup> Planners claimed that manufactured homes made up 10 percent of the Butte area’s housing units, and that most of these were located in the “newer” residential sections of the area. However, the commissioners failed to report that the sections zoned for manufactured homes remained as far from the city limits as possible.<sup>264</sup> Manufactured homes and their owners were secluded on the outskirts.

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<sup>261</sup> James A. Edgecomb, “Zoning For Manufactured Housing: A Case Study in Missoula, Montana,” Master of Science Thesis, University of Montana, 1988, 39.; Richard Kaudy, “Mobile Homes Make Up 10% of Mining City Dwelling Units,” Montana Standard, 28 December 1977, 1A.

<sup>262</sup> “Mobile Home Zone Ruling Brings Proliferation Fears,” Billings Gazette, 2 March 1977, 2D.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Kaudy, “Butte Council Expects Zoning Law by April 1,” Montana Standard, 5 January 1978, 1A.

<sup>264</sup> Richard Kaudy, “Mobile Homes Make Up 10% of Mining City Dwelling Units,” Montana Standard, 28 December 1977, 1A.

For the first time in Montana history, the District Court held local community planners legally accountable for their longstanding discriminatory policies. Although the District Court found them guilty, Butte-Silver Bow officials continued to insist through press releases and community meetings that Silver Bow County offered plenty of spots for families hoping to live in manufactured homes. Through their public relations campaign, they not only attempted to absolve themselves but also hoped to gain the support of established homeowners, who traditionally feared the growing number of manufactured homes.

As the commissioners listed the neighborhoods open to manufactured homes they failed to report just how little area was actually available for improvement. Only 6.7 percent of Butte's residential areas were zoned for homes other than single-family structures or apartments. Approximately half of these areas, less than 3.4 percent of Silver Bow County, allowed both manufactured home communities and individual manufactured homes. Many of the areas permitting manufactured homes were strictly regulated, with minimum lot sizes set at one acre or more. Close study of areas open to manufactured homes revealed that only small portions were actually open to improvement, with much of the land already occupied or undevelopable.<sup>265</sup> With such limited areas available, Silver Bow County had effectively restricted the prospective number of new manufactured homes that could move into the area.

In the face of this de facto limit and foot-dragging over changing their zoning policies despite Judge Freebourn's ruling, the Silver Bow County Commissioners encountered additional charges of discrimination. Within two years of the initial court

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<sup>265</sup> Martz vs. Butte-Silver Bow Government, No. 81-237, In the Supreme Court of the State of Montana, 26 January 1982, 3. Mr. Justice Fred Weber delivered the Opinion of the court.

case, the Martz family attempted to acquire a building permit to place a new manufactured home on a lot they had purchased in an area zoned for single-family dwellings, and that specifically excluded manufactured homes. After the County refused them a building permit on April 23, 1979, the Martz family filed suit against Silver Bow County. The District Court ruled in favor of the family. The court concluded that Butte's zoning was "unconstitutional" and emphasized that the negligible percentage of land zoned for manufactured homes and the large lot minimum was "tantamount to an exclusionary ban" on mobile homes.<sup>266</sup> The expense added by the large lot restriction effectively limited the number of middle and low-income families who could afford to live in these areas. Ultimately, the court ruled that Butte had failed in its responsibility to provide an equitable share of housing for a diverse income population.<sup>267</sup>

The District Court also ruled on another key aspect of the case. Manufactured homes were built to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) codes, rather than United Building Codes (UBC), and in their arguments before the courts, Silver Bow County officials maintained that structures failing to meet UBC codes "pose[d] a real and substantial threat to health and welfare."<sup>268</sup> The District Court examined both construction standards and how they related to manufactured housing.<sup>269</sup> After hearing expert opinions presented by plaintiffs and defense, the court decreed that manufactured homes did not pose a threat to the community. Rather, HUD codes were "comparable and equal" to the standards of site-built homes.<sup>270</sup> Because community planners had often

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 4 & 8.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. 8-9.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

<sup>270</sup> James A. Edgcomb, "Zoning For Manufactured Housing: A Case Study in Missoula, Montana," Master of Science Thesis, University of Montana, 1988, 41.

cited public welfare and safety concerns as reasons for excluding manufactured homes, this ruling added particular relevance to the court's decision.

The county appealed the ruling, but the Montana Supreme Court upheld the District Court's ruling that Silver Bow County was guilty of "unconstitutional exclusion."<sup>271</sup> The Supreme Court also agreed that the county had failed to offer a plan for a diverse, balanced community of which mobile homes were an important part. In their zest to discourage non-traditional housing in and around Butte, community planners not only restricted manufactured housing. Their exclusionary tactics also created an unwelcoming atmosphere for families of varying incomes, differing needs and lifestyles.

Despite the legal recognition enjoyed in the courts, manufactured housing continued to battle old stereotypes and established misconceptions for the next two decades, and zoning battles continued in virtually every city in Montana.

A conflict in Bozeman typified the tension between the growing popularity of manufactured housing and the continual opposition to its inclusion in communities.

Nancy Stephenson, Executive Director of the statewide nonprofit collaborative Montana Neighborhood Housing Service, attempted to explain the complex housing dynamics found in many Montana areas.<sup>272</sup> She reported that beginning in the 1970s, movie stars, entrepreneurs, and sports heroes discovered Montana. Retirees from the west coast followed them. Within a decade, people hoping to escape "crime, overcrowding, pollution, earthquakes, hurricanes and other problems not prevalent in Montana" began

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<sup>271</sup> Martz v. Butte Silver-Bow Government, No. 81-237, In the Supreme Court of the State of Montana, 26 January 1982, 9.

<sup>272</sup> The Montana Neighborhood Housing Service, based out of Great Falls, is a "lead partner in the Montana Home Ownership Network, a statewide collaborative that provides housing counseling, education, and lending services to low- and moderate-income homebuyers throughout the state." See their website at: <<http://www.nw2.org/WinningStrategies/display.asp?strategy=1108&offset=5>> (12 October 2009).

migrating to many of the smaller cities along the Rocky Mountain Front.<sup>273</sup> Older Gallatin Valley residents suffered from the surging home prices as did residents in Missoula, Kalispell, and other smaller urban areas in Western Montana. Traditional housing could not keep up with demands, nor could the average income. By 1990, the average cost of an existing home in the Bozeman area was \$81,000. New home construction averaged \$150,000. With 75 percent of Bozeman's families making less than \$35,000 annually in 1990, the more affordable \$28,000 for a manufactured home was one of the few home-owning options. Due to the valley's "limited and expensive housing," not only were college students and young families buying manufactured homes, but also a growing number of professionals chose them as well.<sup>274</sup>

In reaction to the growing need for affordable housing and a looming housing shortage, the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* published articles, editorials, and letters promoting diverse housing, particularly manufactured homes. The articles provided housing and income statistics, refuting critics of manufactured homes who complained about their "tacky appearance" and who worried that their residents would engage in "undesirable social behavior that threaten to drag down the value of neighboring real estate." The editor challenged the Bozeman community and policy makers to "abandon their prejudice against" manufactured housing, arguing that relinquishing old stereotypes was the first step in a progressive strategy for a balanced and diverse community. As the editor explained, if old prejudices could not be overcome and affordable housing

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<sup>273</sup> Nancy Stephenson, "Montana's Housing Crisis: What Is and Isn't Working," *Fedgazette*, July 1993, <<http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/93-07/edi937b.cfm>> (24 June 2004).

<sup>274</sup> Joe Kolman, "From Trailer House to Mobile Home to Manufactured Home," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 20 June 1993, 33 & 48.

alternatives accepted, the community was destined to become an “exclusive enclave for the well-to-do.”<sup>275</sup>

The demand for affordable and diverse housing became such a matter of public concern that prospective legislators made manufactured housing a campaign issue during the fall of 1994. During a forum in Gallatin County, both Democrats and Republicans agreed on the local need for areas with less restrictive zoning in regards to manufactured homes and more reasonably priced housing. Republican House Candidate Steve Vick stated that the best approach to solving the housing problem was to “increase the supply” of locations. Democratic Candidate Bob Hawks agreed that the “time appear[ed] ripe for development” of moderate priced housing. Republican State Senate candidate Casey Emerson demanded that local governments “get off the back” of local developers and allow them the opportunity to create moderate priced neighborhoods.<sup>276</sup> Without exception, the eleven candidates spoke in favor of manufactured housing.

During this seemingly receptive climate, Gene Cook, long-time Gallatin County realtor and developer, applied and received approval for Bozeman’s first new manufactured home community in more than ten years. In October 1995, the city planning board unanimously approved the zoning change for twenty acres behind the Main Mall on West Babcock Street. After “applaud[ing]” Cook’s plan, they recommended that the city commission also approve the zone changes. Within days, the Commission agreed with the Board and approved the zoning change.

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<sup>275</sup> Editorial, “An American Dream Clashes With Reality In Manufactured Homes Policy and Attitudes,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 22 June 1993, 4. Also see “Tenants Didn’t Gain Much: New Legislation Isn’t Too Much Regulation of Mobile Home Parks,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 15 November 1993, 4; Joe Kolman, “From Trailer House to Mobile Home to Manufactured Home,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 20 June 1993, 33 & 48; Janice Worden, Letters to the Editor, “Give City’s Mobile Home Owners a Chance,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 16 April 1994, 4.

<sup>276</sup> Joe Kolman, “More Mobile Homes? Candidates Agree on Need for Fewer Restrictions and Greater Supply,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 28 September 1994, 1.



Nearby property owners immediately objected. The most emphatic was Anson Crutcher, a developer in the process of building and selling conventional homes on neighboring streets. Crutcher insisted that nearby manufactured housing would devalue his properties. The Board explained their belief that Cook's plan for fewer than a hundred homes would make less of an impact on the neighborhood than an apartment complex, allowable under the previous zoning, which could number as many as 300 units. The manufactured home community would also serve as a "transition" between the existing homes and two small, older manufactured home communities just blocks from the proposed site. In addition, Cook assured the planners and local property owners of his commitment to maintaining an aesthetically pleasing and safe environment. This included construction of a "buffer" between the existing conventional and the proposed manufactured home sites.<sup>277</sup>

Over time, opposition to manufactured home development in Bozeman spread. During the next two years, Mr. Cook's plan met with constant criticism and challenges. Eventually, 400 neighboring property owners signed petitions to halt its approval. Most stated their concern that manufactured homes would lower their property values, increase traffic, and introduce a transient element into the neighborhood. In addition to the opposition by local homeowners, developer Anson Crutcher attempted to sue both the city of Bozeman and Cook, not once, but twice. Crutcher claimed the city planners' decision to allow rezoning for the manufactured home community was responsible for lowering his property values and their income potential. Following the filing of the initial

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<sup>277</sup> Gail Schontzler, "Planning Board Approves Mobile Home Park: Proposal Would Allow For Affordable Housing," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 4 October 1995, 9.

suit by Crutcher in November 1995, the City-County Planning Board backed out of their agreement to support Cook's proposal.<sup>278</sup>

Throughout the controversy, prospective manufactured home owners and advocacy groups spoke in favor of Cook's project. A representative for Montana People's Action, an advocate group for low and moderate-income families, voiced concern that neighbors' objections proved that the general population "look[ed] down" on manufactured home owners. The group also submitted a petition with 400 signatures in support of the rezoning. Janet Ruleaux, public school teacher and manufactured home owner, asked the assembly at one hearing, "Am I good enough to teach your kids but not good enough to live near you?" Another proponent, Carolyn Maples, social worker for the State Department of Health and Human Services and manufactured home owner, explained that her salary was too high for her to qualify for low-income housing. Manufactured housing was her only opportunity to own her own home. Both women argued for the creation of diverse housing opportunities.<sup>279</sup>

Despite multiple setbacks, Cook diligently reworked and resubmitted his proposal. In April 1996, the city-county Board rejected this second proposal. However,

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<sup>278</sup> The controversy over the proposed "Babcock Vista" community made news from the fall of 1995 through summer of 1997. See Gail Schontzler, "Neighbors Oppose Proposed Mobile Home Park," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 17 October 1995, 12; Gail Schontzler, "City Approves Mobile Home Park," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 24 October 1995, 1; Editorial, "One Tough Decision," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 25 October 1995, 4; Gail Schontzler, "California Developer Sues City Over Mobile Homes," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 17 November 1995, 1; Gail Schontzler, "Protests Won't Stop Mobile Home Park," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 20 December 1995, 6; Editorial, "A Move On Housing," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 19 June 1996, 4; Gail Schontzler, "Mobile Home Park Project Rejected Again, Rough Road Ahead: Developer Finds Few Planning Board Members in Favor of Park Behind Main Mall," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 18 April 1996, 9; Gail Schontzler, "Mobile Home Park Is a Go," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 7 May 1996, 1; Staff, "City OKs Two Mobile Home Plans of W. Babcock Street," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 19 June 1996, 6; Tom Lutey, "City Sued Again Over Mobile Home Project," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 19 July 1996, 3; Gail Schontzler, "City Starts Review of Controversial Development," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 May 1997, 3. See also notes from telephone interview with Gene E. Cook, Bozeman, MT, June 22, 2005.

<sup>279</sup> Gail Schontzler, "Mobile Home Park Is a Go," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 7 May 1996, 1 & 12.

just a month later he won approval from Bozeman city commissioners who chose to ignore the county board. In defense of their decision, the commissioners emphasized the need for affordable housing, but assured neighbors that the project would include “proper buffering,” a system of landscaping that would separate the manufactured home community from its conventionally built neighbors.<sup>280</sup> Meant to address concerns about unsightliness and to physically separate the manufactured homes from surrounding site-built homes, the buffer was a means of placating the concerns of antagonistic neighbors. Only after agreeing to a plan that would assure neighbors that there would be a barrier between them and the manufactured home residents did Cook win approval in June 1996.<sup>281</sup>

For a short time, city commissioners enjoyed praise from affordable housing advocates for their support of this project against the “objections of neighbors.” According to a *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* editorial, the commissioners accepted a “wider responsibility” by taking steps to create affordable housing. In support of the plan, the editorial argued that the commissioners and Cook offered an opportunity “to prove affordable housing and more traditional residential neighborhoods [could] co-exist.”<sup>282</sup>

In spite of the praise from housing advocates and city commission approval, the project suffered from setbacks for at least another year. In July 1996, Anson Crutcher again filed suit against the Bozeman city commission. Once again, Crutcher claimed the rezoning was responsible for driving down the value of properties he had in the area and

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<sup>280</sup> Gail Schontzler, “Mobile Home Park Is a Go,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 7 May 1996, 1.& 12.

<sup>281</sup> Chronicle Staff, “City OKs Two Mobile Home Plans on W. Babcock Street,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 19 June 1996, 6.

<sup>282</sup> Editorial, “A Move On Housing,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 19 June 1996, 4.

negatively influencing their development potential.<sup>283</sup> However, Crutcher failed to prove that the proximity of a manufactured home community had any adverse effect on his property and lost the suit.<sup>284</sup>

In May 1997, two years after initially winning approval for his rezoning request, Mr. Cook finally submitted initial plans for review by city engineers and public works representatives. The plans allowed for full streets, a clubhouse, and a centrally located play area, all components of a well-planned, welcoming community. The plans also incorporated the previously promised buffers, including landscaping “to screen residents from Babcock Street” and an eight-foot cedar fence. Both the fence and landscaping were intended to “screen” the development from the view of nearby “residents.”<sup>285</sup> The barriers physically and visually separated the new community from the surrounding site built homes.

Following his long battle for affordable housing, Cook successfully improved the property for manufactured homes, and the Babcock development now houses dozens of families. During a 2005 interview, when asked what strategies he used in finally obtaining support from Bozeman city planners, Mr. Cook’s response was simply, “I dug in my heels and refused to accept defeat.”<sup>286</sup> To satisfy city planners, Cook met many special conditions, including installation of additional water and sewer systems. This installation, as well as other special requirements, created an additional seven to eight thousand dollar investment for each residence. Each accommodation and its expense

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<sup>283</sup> Tom Lutey, “City Sued Again Over Mobile Home Project,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 19 July 1996, 3.

<sup>284</sup> See notes from telephone interview with Gene E. Cook, Bozeman, MT, June 22, 2005.

<sup>285</sup> Gail Schontzler, “City Starts Review of Controversial Development,” Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 May 1997, 3; See also notes from telephone interview with Gene E. Cook, Bozeman, MT, June 22, 2005. Mr. Cook and I discussed the specifics regarding the buffer.

<sup>286</sup> See notes from telephone interview with Gene E. Cook, Bozeman, MT, June 22, 2005

added to the final cost of the project. Cook stated that he believed the county and city planners were under both public and legal pressure to approve his application for rezoning. However, he argued that so many conditions were attached to its acceptance that the council undermined its success. If he were to finance another manufactured home community in the Gallatin Valley, reported Mr. Cook, it would be well beyond the jurisdiction of the Bozeman city council.<sup>287</sup>

Notably, the man who did most to oppose Cook's Babcock community, neighboring real estate developer Anton Crutcher, also ultimately finished his development, selling his properties at full value.<sup>288</sup> Although his fears that the neighboring mobile home community would decrease his property values were unfounded, the prejudice against manufactured housing continued to dominate zoning debates in urban communities.

The Bozeman battle over whether to allow manufactured housing within the city limits exemplified similar clashes throughout the state. Developers approached planning boards with plans for a new community, while politicians and developers discussed the need for affordable housing. Neighboring property owners organized to battle against the mythological evils of manufactured housing: transience, depreciating property values, unkempt yards and homes. Often, the sheer vehemence of neighboring property owners dissuaded elected officials from permitting manufactured home developments.

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<sup>287</sup> See notes from telephone interview with Gene E. Cook, Bozeman, MT, June 22, 2005

<sup>288</sup> Gail Schontzler, "City Starts Review of Controversial Development," Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5 May 1997, 3; Telephone Interview with Gene E. Cook, 22 June 2005, 2.

Community opposition to manufactured home developments have led planners and investors to attempt to counter stereotypes by imposing strict community regulations, including standards about home maintenance, pets, and visitors. While some residents welcomed strict standards, many tenants have found such restrictions constraining and patronizing, and organized in opposition. Conflict within manufactured home communities between court owners and those who rent lots have led to angry meetings, lawsuits, and, in at least one case, a compromise that improved community life. They also exposed the class biases and social prejudices that inform discussions of manufactured homes.

One conflict in Missoula epitomized the issues that could lead to tension between property owners and tenants. In January 1991, Jim Moore of Mission Viejo, California, purchased the Travois Village after its previous owner experienced financial problems.<sup>289</sup> Following the purchase, he enforced an eleven-page list of new rules and regulations governing the court, its appearance, and inhabitants. The revised rules covered all areas of manufactured community living, from garbage disposal to home and personal appearance. Many of the latter rules insulted residents. For example, they prohibited vegetable gardens. This proved especially divisive to the six Hmong families who considered their gardens a means of maintaining their heritage.<sup>290</sup> The new rules also raised the cost of living in the Travois, as water and sewage, previously included in monthly rent, were now metered and residents charged for personal water use. New regulations restricted the size of dogs that could be kept in the Travois. All mobile homes were to be skirted with metal that matched each home's color. The new rules went so far

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<sup>289</sup> Ginny Merriam and Gary Jahrig, "Owner Stands by Rules," Missoulian, 30 July 1991, 1B.

<sup>290</sup> Gary Jahrig, "Garden Ban Worries Refugees," Missoulian, 7 August 1991, 1A-2A.

as to prohibit “vile language” and required residents to attain permission for visitors to park in the court for more than an hour. As a *Missoulian* editorial stated, the rules appeared to “treat the residents as slothful, irresponsible imbeciles.”<sup>291</sup>

In reaction to numerous tenant complaints, Derie Kain, community manager, told a *Missoulian* reporter that although the list of rules had grown from two pages to eleven, Village regulations had not been “substantially changed.” Rather, she explained, the revisions addressed preexisting rules in more detail.<sup>292</sup> Mr. Moore and his representatives insisted that the intent of the revisions was to “raise the standard of living for park residents.”<sup>293</sup> In other words, the revisions were designed to counter any possibility of the community inadvertently displaying any trailer house stereotypes.

Mr. Moore reacted defensively to growing community reactions and proceeded to antagonize his tenants even further. In response to tenant frustration, he stated that although he believed most residents were “rule abiding and responsible,” the Village also had its share of “redneck people.”<sup>294</sup> Residents, in turn, organized and enlisted the aid of Montana People's Action to fight the new owner and his regulations.<sup>295</sup> Eventually, two hundred of Travois’ two hundred-eighty households formed the Travois Residents Association.<sup>296</sup>

As the controversy escalated, Moore Enterprises’ General Manager Gary Lenhart traveled to Missoula. He agreed to meet with residents, review the new Travois

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<sup>291</sup> “Missoulian Editorial, Tenant’s Right’s Ruled Out,” *Missoulian*, 31 July 1991, 4A.

<sup>292</sup> Ginny Merriam, “Tough New Rules Bring Travails to Travois Park,” *Missoulian*, 27 July 1991, 1B-2B.

<sup>293</sup> Ginny Merriam and Gary Jahrig, “Owner Stands by Rules,” *Missoulian*, 30 July 1991, 1B

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 1B.

<sup>295</sup> Ginny Merriam, “Tough New Rules Bring Travails to Travois Park,” *Missoulian*, 27 July 1991, 1B-2B. The Peoples’ Action is a citizen’s advocacy group that often assists low-income and middle-income groups.

<sup>296</sup> Initially, only 85 families joined, see Gary Jahrig, “Upheaval At Travois Draws Owner to Town,” *Missoulian*, 31 July 1991, 1B. However, by the spring of 1993, attorney Jim O’Brian testified that 200 families belonged to the Travois Resident’s Association. See Senate Business and Industry Committee, Proponents Packet, HB 422, 24 March 1993, Exhibit 2.

covenants, and promised that if he found the rules in need of change, the corporation would willingly “revise some or delete some [rules].”<sup>297</sup> During the public meeting, Lenhart apologized for his employer’s remark concerning “rednecks,” before listening to residents’ concerns. While a few residents agreed that the court would benefit from stricter rules, most complained about rules they considered “petty,” including the form a clothesline could take and the one-hour visitor restriction. Upon concluding the public meeting, Lenhart explained that the corporation had found similar rules useful in “avoiding liability and in maintaining an orderly, attractive and healthy environment” for other properties it owned. However, he promised to meet with corporation attorneys in hopes of addressing specific concerns.<sup>298</sup>

Within four months, Moore Enterprises issued a revised set of rules. They incorporated changes to rules about gardening, visitation, and many of the other rules tenants found objectionable. The compromise also included grandfather clauses. For example, families who already had dogs larger than the new maximum size were not in violation of the new regulations.<sup>299</sup> A perusal of current “Community Rules and Regulations” indicates that Lenhart and residents succeeded in compromising.<sup>300</sup> A

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<sup>297</sup> John Stromnes, “Lessor Agent Here to Calm Rules Uproar,” Missoulian, 9 August 1991, 2B.

<sup>298</sup> John Stromnes, “Hot Seat: Travois Village Residents Grill Management’s Spokesman,” Missoulian, 10 August 1991, 1A.

<sup>299</sup> John Stromnes, “Travois Village Restrictions; Revised Rules Don’t Appease Residents,” Missoulian, 24 December 1991, 2B; Also see Linda Wolfe interviewed by Zoe Ann Stoltz, 17 April 2003, 4-5. Mrs. Wolfe discussed these provisions during her interview. However, Mrs. Wolfe also addressed her concern that the stricter rules controlling the age of prospective manufactured homes and the tendency of Moore Enterprises to install their own brand of homes on empty lots, was creating an environment that would eventually reflect Mr. Moore’s definition of community. She described the shift to Moore Enterprise’s rules as the “hardest transition” since she and her family took up residence in 1975. Because the rules initiated by Moore enforce many specifics, such as size of decks, age of homes, a prohibition on fences, and skirting, Mrs. Wolfe regretted the growing tendency of “sameness.” However, she admitted to an appreciation for the consistently maintained environment, a result of the rules.

<sup>300</sup> The current “Community Rules and Regulations” consists of seven and a half pages. The rules include topics addressing standard of housing, garbage disposal, rental payments, mobile home accessories and lot improvements, motor vehicles, utilities and others.



minority of residents, however, chose not to compromise and filed suit against Moore Enterprises, claiming that the rules were “unconscionable, illegal, and improperly promulgated.”<sup>301</sup> The court eventually ruled in Mr. Moore’s favor.<sup>302</sup>

The discontent at the Travois Village made headlines for six months. Eventually, most Travois residents and Gary Lenhart took the advice found in a *Missoulian* editorial,

Moore Enterprises and the Travois Village residents have a common interest in making the neighborhood a nice, well-kept place to live. By sitting down together to agree on the best way to serve their common interests, the owner and residents . . . will probably accomplish far more than is possible with the current set of rules.<sup>303</sup>

Although seemingly at odds, Moore Enterprises and Travois residents wished for the same outcome. Both Moore and the residents desired a community that allowed for a high quality of life and provided a pleasing appearance to the remainder of Missoula, an appearance that would not perpetuate the stereotypical views that “trailer parks” were disorderly and unkempt

The conflict at the Travois, as well as similar clashes throughout Montana, reveal the tension between manufactured home owners and community property owners. Renters own their own homes, but the landowner controls the property on which it rests. Due to the expense involved in moving a manufactured home, relocation is often impossible. This is especially true for owners of older homes, as many manufactured home communities refuse to accommodate homes not meeting HUD codes or specific aesthetic criteria such as pitched roofs or non-metal siding. When property owners attempt to improve living standards in communities and perceived image problems through strict community rules, tenants often react with suspicion and defensiveness.

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<sup>301</sup> Don Baty, “Residents Sue to Dump Rules,” *Missoulian*, 1 January 1992, 3B.

<sup>302</sup> Derie Kain interview by Zoe Ann Stoltz, 14 April 2003 7.

<sup>303</sup> “Missoulian Editorial: Tenant’s Rights Ruled Out,” *Missoulian*, 31 July 1991, 4A.

Many reported feeling that they were being treated as “rednecks,” “trailer trash” or “children.”<sup>304</sup>

Those who favor the strict community codes that are now the norm in manufactured communities have a different perspective. They see the need to protect their trailer parks against the unfortunate fact that some residents confirm the negative stereotypes. Situated between the Yellowstone River flood plain and the Billings’s city dump, the Blaine Trailer Court in Billings was one example of a trailer court gone bad. Blaine hosted dozens of manufactured homes along its unpaved streets, and if any covenants existed that addressed yard care or refuse disposal, they were not enforced. A drive through the community in April 2004 provided many examples of yards containing a winter’s worth of garbage, junk cars, and tall weeds. In addition, quick perusal of the *Billings Gazette* revealed the fact that the community suffered from numerous drug raids, spousal abuse calls, and a persistent peeping tom.<sup>305</sup>

As the divergent realities of the Blaine and Travois Trailer Courts suggest, the conflict between court owners and trailer owners is complicated—and there are no easy answers. Nevertheless, trailer park tenants and owners do share a common interest in combating negative stereotypes associated with trailer homes. In this quest, they have a valuable ally in manufactured home retailers, who have led the fight to improve the sector’s image and to lobby for better zoning legislation.

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<sup>304</sup> For examples of tenant-owner conflicts and tenant responses see: Vestal, Shawn, “Fighting Mad; Trailer Court Residents and Owners Still at Odds,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 31 October 1993; Kolman, Joe, “Trailer Park Resident Files Complaint Against Owner of Court,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 18 November 1994, p. 3; Kanauber, Al, “Tenants Objecting to 105 Rules in Lease,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 25 February 1996, p. 23;

<sup>305</sup> For negative reports regarding Blaine’s Mobile Home Court see: Tom Tollefson, “Prowler Goes ‘Bump’ in the Night at Trailer Court,” *Billings Gazette*, (1 August 1982), 1 & 8A; Tom Tollefson, “Winter Stills Midnight Din of Prowler,” *Billings Gazette*, (19 December 1982), 4C;

For decades, the Montana Manufactured Home Association has sponsored programs and legislation designed to counter negative stereotypes. Their more recent efforts to educate the public and combat discriminatory zoning have made a lasting impact on Montana's manufactured housing. As early as 1969, George Pierce, one of the founding members, spoke with savings and loan groups with the hopes of "selling" the concept of mobile homes. The next year, the MMHA produced and circulated a pamphlet, "Mobile Home Living in Montana," which extolled the virtues of mobile home life and construction standards. The Association also distributed a film on mobile homes to Montana television stations, and an education pamphlet titled "A Look at the National Housing Picture" on how mobile homes could help address the lack of affordable housing. Within the next decade, their educational programs included seminars for county assessors and county planners, campaigns on the increased quality of manufactured homes, radio public service announcements addressing winterizing tips, management and distribution of a study of state and local zoning laws, and continuous attempts to counter negative stereotypes during zoning disputes.<sup>306</sup>

In addition to the multiple educational and public relations programs initiated by the MMHA, the association also became directly involved in the evolving legislation addressing manufactured home issues. During the 1970s, their efforts reflected the concerns of their dealer membership, as they grappled with highway regulations, set up procedures, and licensing. The association also took on local and state lawmakers in attempts to battle restrictive zoning. In 1973, the association lobbied for both Senate Bills

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<sup>306</sup> "Why Join the Montana Manufactured Housing Association," handout created by Montana Manufactured Housing Association, (1976); Copy of handwritten address given by Stuart Doggett at MMHA 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention, Helena, MT, 1999. These papers acquired during an interview with Stuart Doggett, Helena, MT, 26 & 27 February 2004.

267 and 268. The first would have obliged exclusionary zoning ordinances to justify their actions in “terms of public health, welfare, and safety.” The second was intended to support the first with the creation of a State Board of Land Review to monitor zoning legislation throughout the state, particularly those marginalizing manufactured homes.<sup>307</sup> The MMHA specifically proposed this legislation in an effort to counter discriminatory zoning practices caused, in part, by stereotypes. Both of these attempts failed. The lack of consistent industry building standards and an unfortunate history of poorly enforced sanitary records undermined their passage. The Montana state legislature had a long way to go before it could recognize that mobile homes did not threaten community health and welfare.

While these attempts to make treatment of Montana’s mobile homes less discriminatory failed, other legislation proved successful. In 1973, the MMHA sponsored and successfully passed Senate Bill 269, “authorizing inclusion of studies of mobile homes and mobile home parks in comprehensive master plans prepared as basis for zoning.”<sup>308</sup> In other words, planners were encouraged to consider manufactured homes as suitable mainstream housing.

Slowly, as legislators and community leaders began to recognize Montanans’ need for affordable housing, they acknowledged manufactured home’s success in filling this need. The 1993 Legislative session addressed several pressing manufactured home issues. Montana Manufactured Housing and RV Association sponsored House Bill

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<sup>307</sup> “Why Join the Montana Manufactured Housing Association,” handout created by Montana Manufactured Housing Association, (1976); Copy of handwritten address given by Stuart Doggett at MMHA 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention, Helena, MT, 1999. These papers acquired during an interview with Stuart Doggett, Lobbyist for MMH A, Helena, MT, 26 & 27 February 2004.

<sup>308</sup> “Why Join the Montana Manufactured Housing Association,” handout created by Montana Manufactured Housing Association, (1976), 3.

375.<sup>309</sup> Signed into law on April 24, after surviving opposition in the Senate, the bill specifically stated its intent to “discourage discrimination within zoning districts between manufactured and site-built housing.”<sup>310</sup> The bill prohibited communities from restricting manufactured homes on the outdated assumption that the housing form forced down neighboring property values. Rather, communities had to allow a manufactured home similar in appearance and size to neighboring homes, settled on a permanent foundation, built after 1990, and meeting local building regulations.<sup>311</sup> With the passing of House Bill 375, Montana became one of twenty states with laws forbidding discriminatory zoning against manufactured housing.<sup>312</sup> The Bill updated Montana law by designating the housing form as “manufactured homes,” deleting from law the antiquated term “mobile homes.” It also rejected the most insidious myths surrounding manufactured housing: the belief that inclusion of manufactured homes in a neighborhood necessarily lowered surrounding property values.

While the Montana Manufactured Housing and RV Association worked with lawmakers to overcome discriminatory zoning issues, other proposed legislation has addressed the growing number of conflicts between manufactured home community property owners and tenants. Two 1993 bills amended and expanded existing tenant-landlord laws to encompass mobile home owners who rented space in mobile home communities. House Bill 245, solicited by the Montana People’s Action advocacy group, protected tenants from random evictions and required landlords and managers to have

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<sup>309</sup> Montana Manufactured Housing and RV Association, “Legislative Bulletin,” 30 April 1993, 1. From MMHRV Files, papers acquired during an interview with Stuart Doggett, Helena, MT, 26 & 27 February 2004.

<sup>310</sup> 53<sup>rd</sup> Legislature, House Bill No. 375, 1. From MMHRVA Files, papers acquired during an interview with Stuart Doggett, Helena, MT, 26 & 27 February 2004.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

legitimate reasons, good-cause, for evictions.<sup>313</sup> House Bill 422 required property owners to put community rules and ordinances in writing if “they are to be enforced or used as grounds for eviction.”<sup>314</sup>

The Montana Landlords Association and Income Property Managers Association feared the bills undermined their authority and opposed the legislation. These groups protested that the bills would prevent landlords from managing successful communities and protecting “good tenants” from the “bad tenants.” On the other hand, bill proponents argued that mobile home community residents lived under a “constant threat of eviction” and were “vulnerable to arbitrary” actions of the landlord.<sup>315</sup> Many tenant advocates believed that by ignoring the tenant rights of mobile home communities, the state relegated manufactured home owners to “second-class citizenship.”<sup>316</sup> Once Governor Racicot signed both bills, an editorial published in the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* put them in perspective. After reviewing the arguments from both sides, the editor explained, “Landlords are selling a place to park – and most in Bozeman are selling that at a dear price – and that ought to come with some measure of security.”<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> House Bill 245 received a considerable amount of press coverage. See Bob Anez, “Mobile Home Park Laws Sought,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 18 December 1992, 6D; “Group Seeks Mobile Home Park Legislation Support,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 10 December 1992, 5; “Mobile Home Owners Ask Eviction Protection,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 6 February 1993, 6D; “House OKs Mobile Home Owner Protection,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 19 February 1993, 7D; Gail Schontzler, “Trailer Park Residents Seek Bill Protecting Them,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 25 March 1993, 3; Gail Schontzler, “Mobile Home Bill Gains Teeth,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 29 March 1993, 3; “Mobile Home Tenants,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 23 April 1993, 7D;

<sup>314</sup> Quoted from “Mobile Home Bills Advance in Senate,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 30 March 1993, 4C; for other articles discussing HG 422 see: Gail Schontzler, “Trailer Park Residents Seek Bill Protecting Them,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 25 March 1993, 3; Gail Schontzler, “Mobile Home Bill Gains Teeth,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 29 March 1993, 3;

<sup>315</sup> Letter by Attorney Jim O’Brian, found in Senate Business and Industry Committee, Proponents Packet, HB 422, 24 March 1993, Exhibit 2. Montana Historical Society Archives.

<sup>316</sup> Gail Schontzler, “Mobile Home Bill Gains Teeth,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 29 March 1993, 3.

<sup>317</sup> Editorial, “Tenants Didn’t Gain Much: New Legislator Isn’t Too Much Regulation of Mobile Home Parks,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 15 November 1993, 4.

With the passage of House Bills 375, 422, and 245 Montana lawmakers recognized the growing number of Montana residents who chose to live in manufactured housing and their distinctive needs. Bill 375 was the first legislative step to encourage progressive, diverse zoning. Bills 422 and 245 recognized the unique relationship between landowners and mobile home community residents, some 110,000 Montanans. With their passage, manufactured home owner' rights were no longer seen as separate from the rights of renters of traditional homes and apartments. Rather, lawmakers recognized their need for similar legal and ethical protection as tenants.

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As important as these legislative gains have been, they can only do so much to change public perception. Unfortunately, the history of trailer homes, so rooted in mobility and the automobile, makes it difficult for much of the American public and community planners to see manufactured homes as proper mainstream housing. Part of the problem in Montana is related to manufactured housing's historical success in providing temporary homes for workers in boomtowns—at dam sites and oil and gas fields, for example. This practice reinforced the ongoing stereotype that the structures and their inhabitants were transient. These perceptions return repeatedly to haunt the permanent side of mobile home use.

However, manufactured housing's boomtown success is only one facet of Montana's manufactured home history. The second, and more prevalent story, is about the thousands of Montana's manufactured homes used as permanent residences. A richly diverse population has chosen manufactured homes for numerous and compelling

reasons. In all corners of the state, from Lincoln County in the northwest to Valley County in the northeast and from Garfield County on the eastern plains to Jefferson County along the Rocky Mountain Front, Montanans, particularly in rural areas, have accepted manufactured homes as a viable alternative to site-built houses. The story of manufactured homes has been less straightforward in Montana's urban communities. Although many people see the advantages of manufactured homes, prejudice continues to influence their acceptance and to marginalize both the house form and its owners. Montana's manufactured housing, home to more than 14 percent of the state's population, continues to struggle for social and legal acceptance.



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