

This Is Not The Oldest Profession In America, But It's Close Part II

By George Porter

In last month's article we discussed the history of manufactured housing from 1694 to the end of the 1930's. It was pointed out to me by a good and faithful reader named Phil Bergelt in Fla. that I had neglected to mention in the article that the covered wagon was responsible for the opening of the American west. I apologize for this gross oversight and will state now that without this type of "mobile home" we might very well not have a Los Angeles as we know it today. There are some of us in the industry who do not wish to take credit for this, all things considered, and would just as soon leave that part out Phil, but thanks anyway.

In the early 1940's the increased defense production demands necessitate workers living as close as possible to their production plants. Government purchases of mobile homes were so large during 1940 to 1943 that public sales of mobile homes were forbidden by executive decree. Some of the homes were especially designed as mobile units for the Red Cross.

In the late 1940's the trailer length increased to over 30 feet, allowing the installation of very compact bathrooms. There was a small toilet and a shower with the bathroom floor serving as the shower pan. Trailers in 1947 and 1948 were also equipped with electric refrigerators, bottled gas ranges, circulation air furnaces and hot and cold running water.

It was around this time that what was a common trailer industry begun to separate into two distinct types to meet two different consumer needs. As a matter of fact, it was only in 1947 that separate statistics began to be assembled for mobile homes designed as full time residences, as contrasted to travel trailers used for temporary vacation living.

The 1950's saw a greater mobile home expansion. The length increase up to fifty feet and rounded ends were boxed off, creating even more interior space. In 1954 the ten-foot wide mobile home was introduced. Prospective owners were pleased with the larger living space but there were also some problems. The special width necessitated new permit, so in the beginning, manufacturers had a lot of trouble delivering the homes to dealers and new homeowners. Consumer demand and higher production of the ten foot wide mobile home convinced legislators to adopt regulations allowing their movement on state highways.

By 1962 the twelve-foot wide mobile home was in mass production affording owners even greater living space. During the mid 1960's the popularity of the two section mobile home gained in popularity because states were beginning to limit the width of home that were allowed to travel on the highway.

Several mobile home manufacturers established the "Mobile Home Craftsmen Guild" in the early 1960's. The guild members with the aid of the American Standards Association and the National Fire Protection Association, developed a mobile home construction code. Manufacturers' products that met that code specifications were designated by a gold seal. This promotion of standards is credited with a four-fold increase in production of homes by the end of the decade. This was the

beginning of the kind of numbers we are seeing today. During the 70's one mobile home was built for every three site-built homes.

In July of '76 the H.U.D. Code was established and that is about where we are today. We have been building to that standard with only small changes ever since then. Currently it is receiving lots of attention from many groups, both within the industry and from outside. This is probably a good thing even though it is a little unsettling. It is requiring us to think about ourself and our methods, it also means that other people are recognizing that we are becoming a very major player in the housing markets of this country.