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APPENDIX F

Sources and Methods for Estimates of Rent Levels

THE sources and methods for computing average rent levels from newspaper data have been described in the text. This appendix will describe by years the budget studies and housing surveys used to make the rent-level comparisons shown in Table 36.

1918

The BLS budget study of 1918 has already been discussed in connection with the clothing and furniture indexes. The figures shown in Table 36 are obtained from the data on average annual expenditure on rent per year by cities in *Cost of Living in the United States*, BLS Bulletin 357, pp. 276-333. The data are given by income groups. We have used the data for income groups below \$1,500 (for an explanation of this restriction, see notes 4 and 13 in Chapter 4). Annual rents for each of the three income groups were weighted by the number of families in the group, and the weighted average was converted to a monthly figure. Data for flats and apartments only were used in New York, Chicago, and Boston, and for both houses and flats and apartments in Cincinnati and St. Louis. The data on number of families by size and type of dwelling unit, from the same study and for the same income groups, provide the weights for the newspaper data. Therefore, the two sets of figures for average rent per month for 1918 shown in Table 36 apply to the same size distribution of dwelling units.

1909

The survey data for February 1909 are from Great Britain, Board of Trade, *Cost of Living in American Towns* (1911). Agents of the Board of Trade visited twenty-eight cities and, in each, visited a considerable number of working-class dwellings in various parts of the city. The number of dwelling units visited is not stated. For New York, rents and living conditions in more than forty buildings are described in

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detail as examples; in most of these buildings several units are described.

The rents for each city are summarized in a table giving ranges of "predominant weekly rents of working-class dwellings," by rooms per unit. These ranges are stated in units of British currency per week; thus for New York, the range for three-room units is 9s. 7d. to 13s. 6d. When the ranges are converted to American currency at the rate of 2 cents to the penny¹ and multiplied by 4 $\frac{1}{3}$, they are seen to be ranges in dollars per month to the nearest dollar—thus, the range in the example given above becomes \$10.00 to \$14.00. We have used data for the sizes of units that our data and the Board of Trade data have in common. For these sizes, we have taken the midpoint of the range of dollars per month and divided by the number of rooms. These average rents per room were weighted by our weights for the various sizes as shown in Table 33. The weights for houses and apartments of the same size were combined, since the Board of Trade tables do not distinguish type of unit.

1907

The New York data for 1907 are from Robert Coit Chapin, *Standard of Living Among Working Men's Families in New York City* (1909), pp. 85 and 96. The study covered 391 families (291 in Manhattan and 100 in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens). Enumerators tried to find families "with both parents living and 2 to 4 children under 16 years of age." Dependent families were excluded (*ibid.*, p. 28).

We have used the data on average annual rent per family by income class (*ibid.*, p. 85), which were restricted to 318 families with incomes between \$600 and \$1,099. The average annual rent for each class was weighted by the number of families in the class and the weighted average was converted to a monthly figure. Then, from the data given on page 96, we constructed a weighted average number of rooms per family for the same income classes. To get the figure shown in Table 36, the average monthly rent per family was divided by the average number of rooms per family.

1902

The New York data for 1902 are from New York City Tenement House Department, *First Report*, Vol. II (1904). This gives the results

¹ That is \$4.80 to the pound, a convenient approximation to the par of \$4.87 to the pound. For example, the study gives New York subway fares (then 5 cents) as 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

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of a complete census of rented dwelling units in Manhattan and Brooklyn made in November and December 1902.²

Pages 12-23 give frequency distributions of tenement houses by average monthly rent per room, for the most part by 5 cent intervals, for the two boroughs separately. The distributions cover 38,732 tenement houses (buildings) having 380,618 tenements in Manhattan, and 32,894 tenement houses having 143,131 tenements in Brooklyn. We have computed the means of these two distributions and combined them, using the number of tenements (dwelling units) as weights. The mean rents per room for the two boroughs separately are \$3.79 for Manhattan and \$2.56 for Brooklyn.

1900

The Chicago data of 1900 are from City Homes Association, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* (1901), p. 185. This work is the report of an investigation by a committee that included Jane Addams and Anita McCormick Blaine; the work of the enumerators was directed by Frank A. Fetter. Because the principal concern of the study was crowding and sanitary conditions, it was confined to three small districts representative of bad housing.

The table on rents (*ibid.*, p. 185) gives average rent per room for 420 apartments, divided into five classes by districts and predominant national or religious group (Italian, Jewish, mixed Italian and Jewish, Polish, and Bohemian). The number of apartments in each class is not given; we have shown, therefore, the simple average of the figures for the five classes. Because of the way in which the areas studied were selected, it is not surprising that the average rent is very low.

1893

The data for 1893 are from the *Seventh Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor, The Slums* (1894). This study was prepared by Commissioner Carroll D. Wright in compliance with a Congressional joint resolution of July 1892. It covers selected areas of the slums of Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. The field work was done in April 1893. The population in 1893 of the areas covered

² This report and several earlier reports use the word "tenement" to refer to a rented dwelling unit and "tenement house" to a building containing one or more such units. The present association of the word "tenement" with slums was absent, as shown by the inclusion in the tables of units renting for more than \$50 a month.

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(for our cities) was Chicago, 19,748; New York, 28,996; and Philadelphia, 17,060. The Chicago data are for part of the near West Side, and the New York data are for parts of lower Manhattan.

The tables on pages 595–600 of the *Seventh Special Report* give frequency distributions of tenements (dwelling units) by average weekly rent and number of rooms, to the nearest 5 cents. We have computed the means of the distributions for the room sizes used in our index and expressed them as monthly rents per room. These mean monthly rents per room for units of each size were weighted by the weights of Table 33.

The average rents per room shown by the *Seventh Special Report* are surprisingly high for slum areas. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that the areas selected are close to the central business districts. The New York data are confined to Manhattan, and we know that Brooklyn rents in 1902 were much lower than Manhattan rents. Another possible explanation of the high average rent per room is the large number of persons to a room. (The New York data show more sleeping rooms with three or four occupants than with one or two. One room had thirty-one occupants and only one outside window; one room had ninety-two occupants!) The New York data are largely for units with only two or three rooms; however, four-room units were common in Philadelphia and Chicago.

1891

The Boston data of 1891 are from the *Twenty-second Annual Report* of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics (1892). This report gives the results of a complete census of rented dwelling units (tenements) in the city of Boston taken during 1891. The census covers 71,665 occupied tenements. The use of the term “tenement” is again very broad; the tables include a unit of thirteen rooms renting for \$333.33 a month. Page 512 of the *Report* gives the average monthly rent per unit by number of rooms. We have selected the sizes used in our index, converted the averages to rents per room, and weighted these by the weights for the various room sizes used in our index.