**Title:** President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership (1931 : Washington, D.C.) Records

**Date (inclusive):** 1931-1932

**Collection Number:** XX396

**Contributing Institution:** Hoover Institution Archives

**Language of Material:** English

**Physical Description:** 51 manuscript boxes, 2 oversize boxes, 1 oversize photograph (22.8 linear feet)

**Abstract:** Memoranda, reports, correspondence, pamphlets, clippings, press releases, and expense statements, relating to housing conditions in the United States, and to proposals for improving them, and especially for promoting home ownership through home loan banks.

**Physical Location:** Hoover Institution Archives

**Creator:** President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership (1931 : Washington, D.C.)

**Access**

Microfilm use only.

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**Alternative Form Available**

Also available on microfilm (49 reels).

**Historical Note.**

The Conference on Home Building and Home ownership was announced by President Hoover on August 30, 1930. It followed the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection as the second in the series of social studies to be undertaken by the administration. Its primary purpose was to bring together facts concerning housing throughout the United States; to determine the factors that influence housing, favorably or unfavorably, and how they are inter-related in cities, in smaller communities, and in rural areas; to focus attention upon the problems of home ownership and to suggest means of meeting them.

The President named Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont and Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur as co-chairmen of the Conference. Dr. John M. Gries, who had organized and for several years headed the Division of Building and Housing in the Department of Commerce, was appointed Executive Secretary. A planning Committee was set up to advise and help with the organization.

The President and his advisers believed that the best way to get at the facts was to organize into study committees outstanding individuals engaged in one way or another in activities affecting housing. Thirty-one committees were formed and set to work in the course of 1931; of the 31, twenty-five were fact-finding committees, and six were correlating committees assigned the task of drawing from the 25 main committee reports recommendations related to: Technological Development; Legislation and Administration; Standards and Objectives; Research; Organizations Programs; Education and Service.

More than 540 individuals served as volunteers on the study committees. Funds for research in preparation for the Conference and for publication of final reports were privately provided. The data collected by each committee and checked against the combined experience of committee members and the recommendations drawn from the reports by the
correlating committees were incorporated in tentative reports which were presented to a general Conference held on December 2-5, 1931.

Some 3600 people from every state in the Union as well as Hawaii and Puerto Rico were invited to Washington by the President to consider the reports and recommendations of the committees. These delegates included a wide range of individuals whose activities affected housing. In addition to the land and construction interests -realtors, sub-dividers, architects, and builders, there were manufacturers and dealers in lumber, brick, stone, concrete, tile, and what-not in the materials field; there were manufacturers of equipment and furnishings; carpenters, masons, plasterers, plumbers, and other trades; there were also the financing interests, including bankers, building and loan executives, and insurance officials; there were landscape architects, home economists, and decorators; city planners, utilities men, traffic authorities, tax experts, building inspectors, and other Government officials -State and municipal; there were, in addition, sociologists, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, educators, and editors; and there were a few -because only a few had the wide experience to be designated -housing experts. The pooling of so much experience to discuss and evaluate fact and opinion is without precedent in the history of housing. It revealed for the first time the immense scope of the subject as well as its organic unity.

To ease the serious conditions throughout the country affecting home mortgages, the President had asked the Committee on Finance and Taxation for advice on his proposal for the creation of a system of home loan discount banks. In his talk to the Conference at its first general session he explained that the proposal had been "brought forward partially to meet the situation presented by the present emergency, to alleviate the hardships that exist among home owners today, and to revitalize the building of homes as a factor of economic recovery,...in its long distance view it was put forward in the confidence that through the creation of an institution of this character we could gradually work out the problem of systematically promoted home ownership on such terms of sound finance as people who have the home-owning aspiration deserve in our country."

The Conference by unanimous resolution expressed its support of the legislation proposed by the President to create a Home Loan Bank System and to establish regional Home Loan Banks under a Federal Home Loan Bank Board. The Home Loan Bank Act (H.R. 12280) was passed by the 72nd Congress and signed by the President on July 22, 1932. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board was named on August 5. On August 9 came formal organization of the Board which promptly went to work to put the new system of banks into operations. Its major purpose was to do for institutions which lend on mortgage what the Federal Reserve system does for commercial banks. The plan was not the result of the depression but it was hurried into action by the emergencies of the depression.

The Conference provided much practical information for the whole field of housing, and Committee reports, combining the various studies, were published promptly in eleven volumes.

In addition to its specific recommendation for favorable action on the Home Loan Bank System, the Conference urged that the work of the Conference be carried on by a Constitution Committee. To some extent this follow through was handled by Better Homes in America, the staff of which could be pressed into service to handle publication of the reports. The nation-wide volunteer organization of Better Homes in America could and did make considerable effort to stimulate the utilization of the findings of the Conference.

**Scope and Content**

The records in this collection span the years 1926-1947, although the majority falls within the years 1931-1932, and are arranged in five series.

Most of the collection consists of COMMITTEE files, which deal with the work of the twenty-five fact-finding committees and of the six correlating committees (assigned to draw recommendations for the main committee reports).

Also important is the OFFICE FILE, related to the organization of the Conference. The areas of particular interest are the speeches of Herbert Hoover at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Conference, and his statements.

It is important to note that the REPORTS series does not include the reports themselves, but rather correspondence and memoranda related to them, as well as typescripts, galleys, forewords, lists of possible titles, and reviews of the eleven volumes put out by the Conference.

The PUBLICITY FILE covers the most extensive time-period of 1922-1947. Of special interest are the press releases which reflect the work of the Conference on a daily basis.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Afro-Americans--Housing.

Federal home loan banks.

Home ownership--United States.

Housing, Rural--United States.
Office File, 1930-1934

Scope and Contents note
Correspondence, legal documents, letters, lists, memoranda, minutes of meetings, press releases, publications, statements, summaries and other records related to the organization of the conference, arranged alphabetically by physical form

Box 1, Folder 1-3
Folder 4
General

Folder 5
Announcement of the President's Conference
Biographies. See Lists

Correspondence
General

Folder 6-8
Board of Directors
Ford, James (Executive Director)
Gries, John (Executive Secretary)
Lamont, Robert (Co-chairman)
Wilbur, Ray Lyman (President)

Box 2, Folder 1
Governors

Folder 2
Mayors
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Bremer, Pond W.

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Richardson, Inez G.

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Saginaw, Michigan

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Taylor, James S.

Box 3, Folder 1
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Folder 2
Bids

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Folder 5-7
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Unsigned checks and statements

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Subject file
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Committees File, 1927-1933.

Scope and Contents note
Correspondence, charts, invoices, letters, lists, memoranda, messages, mimeographed material, minutes of meetings, notes, press releases, programs, questionnaires, reports, research projects, reviews, statements, arranged by type of committee and therein alphabetically by name of committee

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Planning Committee. Correspondence, letters, lists of committee members, memoranda, press release, minutes of meetings

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  General. Includes material relating to states sub-committees
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  Fund raising file
  Letters
    Appreciation
      Gries, John M., to all committee members, 1931 December 26
      Lamont, R. P., to all committee chairmen
Folder 8
  Replies to form letter of April 29, 1933, to all who attended the conference
Folder 9
  Resolution presented by the Puerto Rico Delegation
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Folder 23
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Farm and Village Housing Committee
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Housing of Mexicans and Indians

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Folder 36
Organization of an agricultural service corporation

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Publicity file

Folder 38
Radio interview with Bruce L. Melvin, Research Secretary of the committee

Reports

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Stenographer's report, 1931 December 2-5

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Work of the committee

Folder 41
Scale for rating living room equipment

Folder 42
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Folder 43
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Finance Committee
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Folder 45
Address made by Frederick Ecker, Vice-President, 1919 December 4-5

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Correspondence. Mostly of Frederick H. Ecker

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Division mortgage structure

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Reports, 1931

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November 14 (related to foreclosure laws and foreclosure provisions)

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1931 December 4 (tentative report)
Folder 11  Statement by Herbert Hoover, 1931 November 13
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Folder 15  Agenda of meeting, 1931 July 17
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Folder 21  Committee members
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Folder 24  Statement by Dr. James Ford regarding the scope of work, 1931
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**Home Furnishing and Decoration Committee**

Folder 26  Endorsement of report, 1931 November
Folder 27  Invoices
Folder 28  Stenographer’s report of meetings, 1931 December 2-5

**Home Information Centers Committee**

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Folder 2  Brief summary of procedure
Folder 3  Correspondence
Folder 4  Chase, Pearl. Includes excerpts of a letter from Henry Wright, Research Secretary, Committee on Design, to Pearl Chase
Folder 5  Ford, James
Folder 6  Frampton, Merle E.
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Folder 9  Kelley, Roy H.
Folder 10  Merrill, Julia Wright
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Folder 12  Editorial file
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Folder 5  Agencies (commercial, educational, and social) to receive Miss Atwater’s questionnaire
Folder 6  Committee’s findings as to the how, why, who, and what of the Home Information Services
Folder 7  Existing agencies in Boston involved in homemaking
Folder 8  Members of the committee. Includes correspondence
Folder 9  Officers in departments of education in charge of adult education
Folder 10  Plan service organizations
Folder 11  Memoranda. Includes regulations and by-laws of American Home Information Service
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Folder 2  Mimeographed material
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Folder 5  Parker, Mr.
Folder 6  Plans re possible organization
Folder 7  Program
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Committees File, 1927-1933.

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- Agencies giving public information
- Home building clinic
- Local organizations

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- Of the committee

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Folder 8
- On Home Information Centers directed by or affiliated with American Homemakers, Inc.
Folder 9
- On publicity program
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- Building material exhibits, 1931 September
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- Providence, RI, by Ida S. Harrington, 1931 September
Folder 13
- Twenty-four selected cities

Subject file
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- Exhibits
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Suggestions
Folder 18
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Folder 19
- For a National Institute of Housing and Civic Affairs, 1931 September 23
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Folder 22
- Correspondence
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- Gries, John M.
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- List of committee members
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- Preliminary draft of a report of the Committee, 1931 October 12
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- Brief (on the Alabama study)
- Main. Includes endorsements
- Stenographer’s, 1931 December 2-5
- Tentative

*Sub-committees on city housing and family development*

*General*

- 1931 September 29
- 1931 December 5

*Preliminary on special problems of city living*

*Research*

*Supplementary, 1931 December 5*

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**Correspondence**

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- Gries, John
- Raitt, Effie I.

**Miscellaneous**

**Folder 6**

**List of committee members**

**Folder 7**

**Memoranda**

**Folder 8**

**Preliminary notes on meeting, 1931 July 1**

**Folder 9**

**Stenographer’s report, 1931 December 2-5**

**Folder 10**

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**Correspondence**

- Cabot, Richard Clarke
- Ford, James
- Gries, John
- Pratt, Joseph H.

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**Memoranda**

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**Minutes of meetings, 1931**

- October 3
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**Folder 20**

**Regional survey of New York and its environs**

**Reports**

- On effect of housing conditions upon the efficiency of industrial workers, 1931 November 16

**Folder 22**

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**Correspondence**

- Cramer, Stuart W.
- Gries, John M.
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- Members
Committees File, 1927-1933.

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Folder 33  Memoranda
Folder 34  Minutes of meeting, 1931 August 24-25
Folder 35  Questionnaire
Folder 36  Statement on industrial decentralization in appointment of Rural Aid Board, 1931 August 20
Folder 37  Stenographer's report, 1931 December 4
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Folder 2  Checklist to assist in determining need for reconstructioning or modernizing
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Folder 6  Stanley, Louise
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Folder 13  Agenda for the first meeting, 1931 June 5-6. Includes list of committee members
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Folder 18  Subcommittees
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Folder 20-21  Mimeographed material
Box 30, Folder 1  Regional planning notes (County of Los Angeles)
Folder 2  Restrictions by subcommittee on streets, parkways, highways, and byways
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Folder 7  Correspondence. Mostly of Alfred K. Stern, Chairman
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Folder 11  Undated. Includes general correspondence
Folder 12  1931 September 23 (Chicago)
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Folder 20  Suggestions for committee agenda

Negro Housing Committee
Committees File, 1927-1933.

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Folder 12 Sent by President Herbert Hoover to the Committee, 1931 April 24
Folder 13 Suggested by Dr. James Ford to the National Negro Insurance Association,
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Folder 10 Comparative study of houses occupied by whites and Negroes in parallel
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Folder 12 Short study of housing and ownership in Boley Community
Folder 13 Reconditioning, Remodeling, Modernizing Committee
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Folder 16 Editorial file. Includes letters, memoranda, printed report
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**Relationship of Income and the Home Committee**

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    - 1931 December 3 (tentative)
    - 1931 December 4
  - **Stenographic, 1931 December 2-5**

- **Studies**
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    - **General**
      - Ten home purchasing families
    - **Relationship of income and home**
    - Two hundred families of small wage earners, Newark, NJ, 1931
    - **Tentative outline of subject-matter of committee on relationship of income and home**

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- **General**
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  - First draft of report for the committee (by Richard Ely), 1931
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  - Draft of the final report, 1931. Includes endorsement of report

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  Preliminary draft of a discussion on housing in unincorporated areas
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Reports, 1930-1934.
Scope and Contents note
Correspondence, memoranda, typescripts of introductions, galleys, lists, and reviews, related to the eleven volumes put out by the Conference, arranged alphabetically by physical form

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| Map case | Photograph, 1931 December 2 |
| **Scope and Contents note** |
| One photograph depicting the opening session of the Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership (m*A) |