

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and the United States Department of Agriculture
Cooperating: Extension Service, L. B. Dietrick, Director, Blacksburg, Virginia

Printed and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914

FARM HOME PLANNING

PLANNING A NEW HOUSE AND REMODELING AN OLD ONE

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FOREWORD

Our purpose is to show you the importance of careful and complete planning of the farm home *before* construction or remodeling begins. Too many farm houses are just built — with little or no planning — which results in ill-adapted rooms, inconveniences, waste space, lack of comfort, loss of delight and satisfaction, and many other faults. The farm home should be planned as carefully as any city home. Even if it must be a low-cost house you can have most of the desirable features if you plan sufficiently and intelligently.

Thorough planning on paper before construction begins is the best way to avoid mistakes which are seldom corrected afterward. It is costly to change plans during construction. Hundreds of dollars can be saved in the first and later costs of a house by careful planning. The cost of "planning on paper" is practically nothing. Help may be needed to reach your final plan. This circular will not make you into a competent house designer, but we hope that it will cause you to give more time and thought to your planning and aid you in making a plan for a house that more nearly meets the needs of your family. As this is being written, the building situation is much confused and it is not likely that you can readily build a house for two or three years. Make use of this time to do plenty of planning.

Procedure in House Planning

You probably have acquired some ideas of what you want in a house. These will come from your present house, from plans seen in books and

magazines, from homes you have visited, and from your own desires. Probably the easiest and best start is made by using a plan that comes close to meeting your ideas. You will want to check such a plan to see what changes or additions you need to make it meet the requirements of your family and your budget. The whole family should take part in the planning. Soon, the plan will have to be drawn on paper and desired changes made. It may be necessary to draw three, six, or ten plans before you are satisfied. Keep the best drawings to study later, and don't be discouraged, for that is how to plan. Perhaps no one in the family can do the drawing and that is where an architect comes in, but it is also likely that no architect can be had. The next best thing is to select a plan that comes close to being what you want from a source that can furnish rather complete drawings. Study some of the farm and home magazines, lumber dealers' plan books, U. S. D. A. Farmers' Bulletins, publications of other Government agencies, and books of plans from agricultural colleges which you usually can see at your county agent's office. Blueprint plans from these sources can usually be changed slightly when you see your builder. *But have a plan before you begin construction.*

In addition to your planned arrangement of rooms, you will need to give thought to the type of house you want, the construction materials to be used, just how it will look on your building site, how much it will cost, and what changes you must make in order to keep the cost within your means. Building a home is a major

project on the farm, which cannot be slighted if desired goals are to be reached. Certainly, you will not accept the old way of guessing about how big the house should be and then dividing it into four or more big rooms to which you must adapt the family needs forever after. Rather, you will suit the rooms and plans to the needs. If family needs will grow, plan for the house to grow, too.

Some Aspects of Remodeling

In remodeling an old house the same need for advance planning exists and the problem may be harder because a house once built is not easy to change. Before thinking of remodeling be sure the old house is worth it. A careful study should be made, possibly with expert help, to determine soundness of construction, strength of framing, amount of reconditioning needed, and adaptability to a good plan and to good appearance. Location and setting may be strong elements in favor of remodeling. These things must be carefully considered. Remember that the cost of remodeling is difficult to estimate and that it usually runs higher than you may think.

The replanning of an old house will be limited by existing walls and partitions which support floors and ceilings. While these cannot readily be removed they can have openings cut into them. When erecting new partitions the floor under them must often be strengthened, although lightweight walls around closets can be set up without trouble. Sagging floors in old houses indicate weakness in original framing and are difficult to straighten. Stairways are often too steep for safety and easy travel and

should be rebuilt. You should not hesitate to move doors and windows. A change in window size and style may add to outside appearance and to better lighting. If rooms are to be added on, plan to avoid a patchwork effect. Big rooms are often improved in size by using a strip off the inner wall for a pair of closets or a hallway. Undesirable high ceilings may be lowered by suspending a new light-weight ceiling at proper height. If old plastering must be replaced, it may be wise to remove it all and put insulation in the outside walls. All necessary pipes and wiring should be installed before plastering anew. New floors are readily laid over old ones, using strips and shims for leveling.

It is obvious that if you do many of these things the job will approach that of a new building, and probably with less satisfactory results. To be worth remodeling, an old house must be sound and strong, with basic good lines and proportions for appearance; must have a reworkable plan to secure convenience; and must require little work on inside and outside surfaces. It is possible that, with high cost for materials, an old house now has more value for remodeling. This is certainly true if its site and setting are very good or have a sentimental value for the family.

The Building Site

One phase of your planning which must not be overlooked is choosing a building site and fitting the house to it. If possible the house should be built on a spot of ground that rises two or three feet above the surrounding land. This adds to its appearance, provides proper drainage away from it, and makes it easier to put in a septic tank. Avoid setting the house on a high foundation; rather, it should "cling to the ground." A steep slope to the front is difficult to build on, while one to the back may permit of a grade entrance into the basement. Place the house to ensure plenty of sunshine in the living and working parts of the house. On the farm the kitchen window should overlook the farmstead and farm activities, if possible. Trees add to the setting of a house but avoid hiding it in a grove of trees. Other considerations are the water supply and the highway. Generally it is best to have the house back about 200 feet from the highway. Unless the site of an old house is so fine in all its appointments that the house is really worth remodeling, tear it down to make way for a new house.

Type of House

Whether you build a one-story, a two-story, or a one and one-half-story bungalow type of house will depend

upon the number of rooms you want, the price you can pay, and what you want. Whether you build of stone, brick, or wood, or combinations of these, will depend again on what you want, but probably a lot upon what materials you can buy. To some extent your house will depend on what your builder can do for you, his skill and experience.

The one-story house is suitable to four- or five-room homes. When used for more rooms than that, the house may lose its compactness and require more expense for foundation and roof. The square two-story house of cubical proportions is economical in cost for the space obtained but is often plain and uninteresting. A one-and-one-half-story house has the advantages of the one-story and may provide two or more serviceable rooms under the roof at low cost. It is probable that this is the most economical type of house.

We want you to be proud of your new home and you will be if it is useful and attractive. Proper proportions, simple lines and angles, use of color and appropriate materials, and eliminating useless parts and ornamental gadgets will make it attractive. At little or no extra cost a roof, for instance, can have simple cornices, pleasing slopes, and shingles of interesting texture and color. Many of these qualities are the product of experienced architects, and we have many examples of beautiful small homes to follow in developing our own particular house.

The Living Room

Your family needs a center for social life. The living room serves that purpose and its size will depend on the number in the family and how much entertaining you do. An average living room requires 200 square feet of floor area; an oblong room allows more convenient furniture arrangement; thus a room about 13 x 16 feet might be suitable while one 14 x 20 feet would serve for greater needs. If joined by a dining alcove or a large front hall it seems larger. Generally the living room belongs at the front of the house near the most used entrance, and if possible it should receive sunshine most of the day from two directions at least.

A fireplace is the usual center of attraction. It is best located on an inner long wall, although the end of the room away from traffic is suitable. It is important to plan the correct placing of furniture in this room and to locate doors and windows accordingly. Traffic across one end of the room disturbs activities less than diagonal or length-wise routes. If entrance is made direct into the room without an entry hall, a clothes closet

near the front door is highly desirable. When used for sleeping, then a closet is a necessity. To be most useful, the living room should have space for books, magazines, games, and sometimes, fuel. In the small home the living room must be cleverly planned to serve all these functions.

The Dining Room

You may want a dining room although it is often the least used room in the house. If attempting to cut down the size and cost of your house, consider carefully the need for a dining room. The dining room may be used for other purposes, such as a study room for school children or as an overflow to the living room when large groups are entertained. If you want to use it in this way, connect with the living room through an archway or large opening with double French doors. You must have dining space. If the kitchen is not large enough to provide it, then plan a good sized breakfast nook or a large alcove off the living room.

The dining room should be between kitchen and living room. If possible it should be on the sunny side of the house with a pleasing view of the yard to create a cheerful and delightful atmosphere. Its minimum size will be about 11 x 13 feet. A 12 x 14 size is better. Again you will find an oblong room more fitting to the long table and to furniture arrangement. One long wall space for the buffet is essential. Put the door into the kitchen near a corner to avoid an undesirable view into the kitchen by those at the dining table. You may prefer a swinging door between dining room and kitchen. The dining room should be well-lighted from windows on two sides and should be heated. Built-in cupboards for china add to the room's usefulness.

Kitchens

Your kitchen is your household workshop in which you spend many hours. This room, with all its built-in features and installed equipment, becomes the most important room in the house. Therefore, it must be carefully planned to attain the efficiency and convenience so necessary to get your tasks done on time. Unless you can do your work efficiently you will spend too many hours in the kitchen and lose much enjoyment of other parts of the house. We find plenty of kitchen illustrations in the magazines, but these are mostly "deluxe models." The farm kitchen does not need so much streamlining and frills, but it must be arranged for efficient work.

The L-shape and the U-shape are the most desired kitchen arrange-

ments. The U-shape arrangement puts all work areas and equipment into one end of the room with doors at the opposite end. This permits traffic to cross the inner end without bothering the worker in the other portion. This arrangement is efficient. Traffic should not pass between working areas. In the U-shape kitchen, work surfaces and equipment extend around the three sides of the "U," the sink being placed at the base. The range belongs near the dining room door, and the refrigerator, on the opposite leg of the "U." A wide, high-up casement window may be put over the sink. The L-shape kitchen, which has the equipment and work surfaces on two adjacent sides of the room, is about as convenient. A long, narrow kitchen may have all these along the outside wall.

In size, a kitchen may be as small as 9 x 12 feet, but this is generally too small for the extra jobs that a farm kitchen must care for. Here a size of 11 x 14 feet would be better. The size of a farm kitchen depends upon the family size and the extra jobs such as laundering, canning, meat preparation at slaughtering time, freezing of food, etc. If you can afford an adjoining workroom to take care of such jobs, then the kitchen should be kept as compact as possible. Make it no larger than necessary for food and equipment storage, food preparation and serving, and dishwashing. If the kitchen occupies a big room in an old-time house, it can often be remodeled for efficiency by dividing it into two parts: one for food preparation and serving, the other for laundering and other workroom jobs. The division may be no more than a set of cabinets or a counter which does not go to the ceiling.

One window above the sink and work surfaces will be enough for small kitchens, but in large ones it is well to have cross ventilation through a second window in an adjacent wall. The number of doors should be kept to two, if possible. Remember that doors and windows occupy lots of wall space which could be used for cabinets. An existing chimney for the wood range may not be well placed for best arrangements. It is worth while to relocate it. Other items concern a smooth linoleum floor and washable walls for easy cleaning. Attractiveness is obtained with a simple and appropriate color scheme.

Pantry

In our recent survey, about 24 percent of the farm women voted for a pantry off the kitchen, while 62 percent said they prefer the basement for storage of food supplies, canned fruit, and vegetables. If a pantry is

used, it must be well insulated and ventilated. In winter it will have to be well closed to outside weather and be heated some from the kitchen. In summer it can be cooled by opening a small window at night and by keeping it closed during the warm part of the day. Such controls are inadequate and the temperature will vary from day to day and season to season. You may find that a special room in the basement will provide more uniform storage conditions, although it may not be as convenient as a pantry.

Workroom

More and more attention is being given to the usefulness of a workroom which takes most of the extra jobs out of the kitchen. The workroom makes possible a more compact and efficient kitchen which may be used at any moment for its regular work without having to clear out the disorder of the extra jobs. Ideas for workrooms may not be complete at present, but the usefulness of a workroom is definite. Such a room would provide a laundry, men's wash room, closet storage for work clothes, food preparation center for canning, meat curing, and food freezing, as well as a place for a home freezer. To be convenient, the workroom should be on the main floor adjoining the kitchen and back porch. Like the kitchen it must have work surfaces, sink, hot and cold water, storage cabinets for equipment used there, and probably a cook stove. Light and air are essential. To be usable the year 'round the room must be well built, with some source of heat.

The workroom could be in the basement or in a separate building but would be less convenient. For part-year service it could be on a screened porch. If the screens can be replaced with storm sash in winter, the porch can be used more months of the year. The size of a workroom will be about that of a kitchen. If well arranged it need not be large since you will seldom do more than one job at a time. The workroom will provide many advantages although you may hesitate to build another room similar to the kitchen.

Bedrooms

Bedrooms are a necessary part of the house. They merit very careful planning for comfort, privacy, and satisfying sleep. Most farm families should have at least three bedrooms: one for the parents, one for the girls, and one for the boys. A bedroom for one person may be as small as 9 x 10 feet, but 11 x 13 feet is better, and 13 x 15 feet would be large. Each bedroom should have two windows for cross ventilation and at least

one large 'net. Large bedrooms, used by two persons, can well have two closets. Doors and windows should be placed to allow good locations for the furniture. A choice of two locations for bed and dresser is desirable. For privacy, only one door is necessary and this should open into a small hallway leading to the bathroom and to both front and rear parts of the house. Even if the second floor is given over to bedroom space, at least one bedroom should be on the first floor not far from the kitchen, to make it easy to care for children and sick persons. To be comfortable and usable the year 'round, all bedrooms should be heated. If you use stoves, more floor space will be necessary. Bedrooms are often planned in pairs with closets or a bathroom between them. They may then occupy a wing placed across the end or on the rear of the house. Because of the large amount of time they are occupied, bedrooms are important and should be given the best of planning.

Closets

The home without adequate storage space for *everything* is not convenient or efficient. Each bedroom should have at least one good-sized clothes closet, and one for each person occupying the room is more desirable. Near the front door of the house a clothes closet is almost a necessity. At the rear of the house a closet for work clothes, overshoes and raincoats, is a great convenience. A linen closet with shelves and deep drawers should always be found near the bathroom. Even the living room needs a closet for extra magazines, toys, etc.

The minimum clothes closet will be 2 feet deep and 3 feet long. A much better size will be 30 inches deep and 5 feet long. You may have a closet as small as 18 inches square for brooms and cleaning materials. Each clothes closet should have a shelf 6 feet high along its entire length. Under this should be a 1-inch pipe rod for clothes hangers, while around the wall under the shelf can be a 4-inch board supporting hooks 12 inches apart. Near the floor on the baseboard can be other shelves for shoes. Closets should be planned along with the rooms and not left to take up any odd space that may or may not be found.

Bathrooms

For health and cleanliness there is no more important room in the house than the bathroom. Your plan must include a bathroom even though it may not be possible at present to put in running water and the fixtures. While there are many arrangements for a bathroom a good size is 5 x 7

feet with the tub across the side and the lavatory and stool at the other. This leaves plenty of space. Do not put the tub under the window. Locate the bathroom near the bedrooms, preferably between two bedrooms so that only one wall is on the outside. A small hallway should connect it with other parts of the house, but the bathroom door should be out of sight of public parts of the house. A bathroom on the first floor is very convenient and it is cheaper to place it near the kitchen and laundry plumbing. Don't put the bathroom on a porch where it will be cold and the pipes may freeze. Like the kitchen, it should have linoleum floor and washable walls for easy cleaning. Small storage for medical supplies, soap, towels, etc. must be included.

Many farm homes also need a wash-room for men to use when coming in from dirty work. This room should have a lavatory or sink and a simple shower bath, together with a nearby closet for work clothes. The wash-room might well be in the basement if a convenient rear entrance is provided.

Basements

Many new homes are being designed without basements to reduce cost and eliminate running down stairs. On the other hand, basement space, which serves many purposes, is the cheapest space in the house. In our survey 48 percent of the women would put the laundry in the basement while 62 percent said they would use the basement for canned fruit storage. Considering all things, it is likely that you should have a basement under your farm house.

To be completely useful, the basement should be well lighted, and ventilated and dry. This means that you must give attention to ample windows and to drainage of the surrounding

soil. Adequate entrances, both inside and outside, are essential. A smooth 3-inch concrete floor sloping to a floor drain is most desirable. Areas best suited to each activity should be planned and equipped. The basement may be divided or the whole space may be left open by supporting the floor above on beams and posts. When the house is small, the basement can be full size. Larger houses may need only a half-basement. The plan of a basement naturally takes the shape of the house above, but its arrangement should be as carefully planned as any part of the house.

Hallways

The large house can usually afford a front entrance hall which leads to the living room, upstairs, and to rear parts of the house. But a small, low-cost house can hardly justify a front hall. A small hall connecting the bedrooms and the bathroom is necessary. If cleverly planned it may also connect the living room with the rear of the house. You should remember that halls are non-living spaces which should be kept to a small floor area. This is often a test for good planning.

Stairways are also hallways and they should be designed for safety and ease of travel as well as for convenience. Many are too steep and dangerous. The width of halls and stairs can be as little as 30 inches, but this is not enough for usual traffic or for moving furniture. A better width is 42 inches, which is obtained by placing hall partitions 4 feet on centers.

Porches

The old-time porch extending clear across the front of a house is not very useful or economical. Certainly our low-cost houses cannot afford large porches which give only partial shel-

ter. But we are interested in a room-size, screened-in porch which can be used for summer living and for working. For privacy the walls of this porch should be tight 3 feet up, with screens the rest of the way to the top. It should open onto the driveway and be on the breezy and pleasant side of the house. If you are going to use it for both living and working, some kind of a partial division wall may be desirable, and the work area should be near the kitchen door. The living area can become comfortable sleeping space on hot nights. It can also be used as a child's playroom on rainy days. You may want a multiple-duty porch like this instead of a straight workroom. No other porches may be needed except that each outside door should have a shelter even if it is nothing more than a stoop.

Utility Installations

Your planning is not complete until you provide for electric service, heating, and plumbing. It is cheaper to install them as the house is built, although the fixtures may be omitted until later. Some heating systems, like hot water, can be successfully installed after the house is built. The complete plan should always show where these things are to go.

Quality Construction

It is not our purpose to discuss construction and materials, but there is one thought in regard to them which should be repeated as often as possible: Avoid cheapness in building your house. Spend a little more time and money to secure lasting quality. This may be hard when the cost must be kept low, but over the years the trouble you save, the slower depreciation, and less expense for repair from quality construction will give you a house of low yearly cost.