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WOMEN WORKERS IN POWER LAUNDRIES

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
WOMEN'S BUREAU BULLETIN NO. 215

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

L. B. SCHWELLENBACH, Secretary

WOMEN'S BUREAU

FRIEDA S. MILLER, Director



WOMEN WORKERS IN POWER
LAUNDRIES



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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
WOMEN'S BUREAU,
Washington, April 22, 1947.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit a report on women workers in power laundries. The report is based on a survey made in 1945 by the Women's Bureau, whose agents visited 258 power laundries in 38 selected cities or towns located in the Midwest or in the Southeast.

In selecting the power-laundry industry for survey, the Women's Bureau, fulfilling its statutory function "to promote the welfare of wage-earning women," was guided by the anticipated return to the industry of displaced women war workers. Information was obtained on all conditions affecting the employment of women production workers. Presenting what was found in 1945, this report must be read in the light of general conditions then prevailing.

The survey was planned by Caroline Manning and by Isadore Spring who also directed the statistical work with the assistance of Leo Robison. Margaret K. Anderson directed the field work. The report was written by Sylvia R. Weissbrodt who was assisted by Grace E. Ostrander in the analysis of the data.

Grateful acknowledgment is given to the American Institute of Laundering, to the labor organizations in the industry, and to the individual employers whose cooperation made this survey possible.

Respectfully submitted.

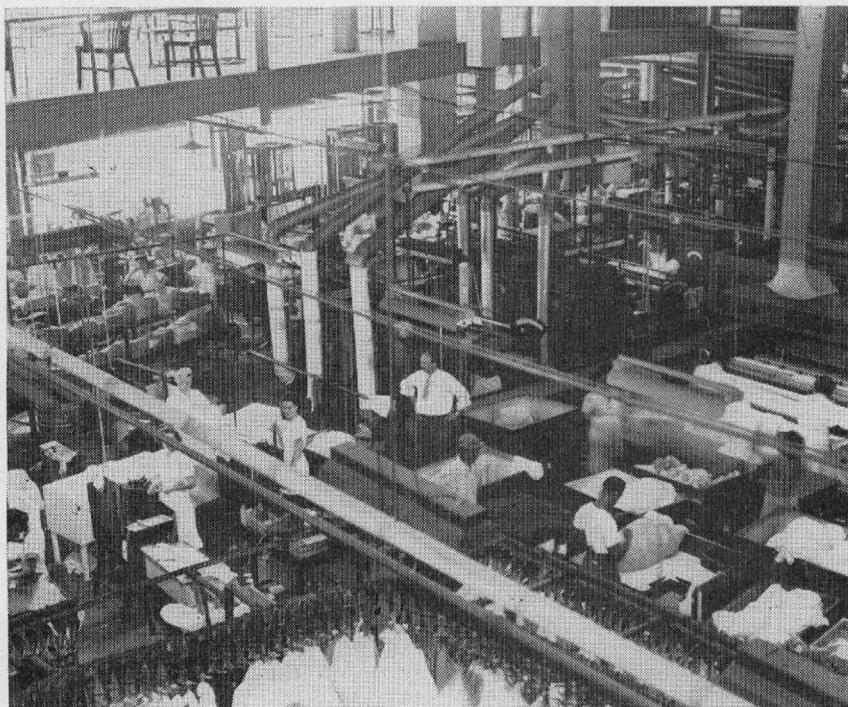
FRIEDA S. MILLER,
Director.

Hon. L. B. SCHWELLENBACH,
Secretary of Labor.

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FOREWORD

What conditions confront women laundry workers in the postwar period? To obtain factual information of help to employers in developing good employment conditions for women was the purpose of this survey. By pointing to the striking differences in standards from laundry to laundry within the same city, and by contrasting a relatively high-standard region of the country with one of low standards, this survey shows that progressive managements in the industry itself have proved the practicability of adequate wage and employment standards, pointing the way to those all too numerous establishments still clinging to depressed standards.



BALCONY VIEW OF MOST OF THE FINISHING
DEPARTMENTS IN A LAUNDRY

WOMEN WORKERS IN POWER LAUNDRIES

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

THE INDUSTRY

A laundry owner of Tampa, Fla., in discussing differences in the rate of turn-over among the jobs in his laundry, expressed understanding of the high turn-over among his "flatwork ironers"—they were the new workers and those lowest paid, he said. But the high turn-over among his "sorters" perplexed him—they were the highest paid women workers in his plant, he added. In this southern laundry, the low-paid flatwork ironers received \$16 for a 54-hour week, while the "high-paid" sorters received all of \$18 for a 54-hour week. Moreover, it was only under the stress of war conditions, in 1943, that hours had been reduced from 58 a week. These twin evils—low wages and long hours—are still found in many laundries in many cities. On the other hand, progressive managements, in city after city, have demonstrated by their own practices that laundry employment need not be synonymous with depressed wage and employment standards.

GROWTH OF THE INDUSTRY

The power-laundry industry, grown in the past 30 years from a shirt and collar business to one of the major service industries in the country, had a sales volume in 1945 of approximately 650 million dollars. Laundry service, officially declared essential to the health and welfare of the people during the recent war, has come to be accepted among large parts of the population as one of the necessities and comforts of modern living. About 275,000 people depend on its almost 6,800 establishments for a livelihood.

Like other services performed in the home exclusively not too many years ago, laundering with the use of power-driven machines is now a well-entrenched industry. It is estimated that commercial laundries now get slightly less than 10 percent of the total potential laundry business. Much of the same sort of work, obviously, is still done in homes. But urbanization, smaller apartments, an increasing number of women in the labor force, the shortage of household help, and the virtual disappearance of the unpaid family household worker, as well as the trend toward relieving the housewife of the more onerous household tasks are among the forces contributing toward the demand for commercial service. Measured by its total receipts, there is no doubt that the industry is growing. In 1942, a new high in dollar volume was attained, and each succeeding year, 1943, 1944, and 1945, has brought record-breaking receipts to the industry.

TYPES OF ESTABLISHMENTS

The power-laundry industry is composed of three basic types of establishments—family laundries, institutional laundries, and commercial wholesale and linen supply establishments. Family laundries, selling their services primarily to the individual consumer at retail, constitute by far the dominant group. Less than 7 percent of the establishments, in 1939, did linen supply work either exclusively or predominantly.

Although characteristically an industry composed of small units, it has shown a tendency toward larger establishments and expanded services. The "average" family laundry receives from its customers about \$100,000 a year. Such an average, however, obscures the marked contrasts between the small and large units. In 1939, just a little over half the establishments accounted for over 90 percent of the industry's dollar volume and provided employment for almost 90 percent of the industry's employees. Together, therefore, with many small plants (almost half of the total), generally employing 1 to 3 persons, are the relatively few large establishments doing a substantial share of the business. In 1939, only 314 establishments, less than 5 percent of the total, each with annual receipts of a quarter of a million dollars or more, together were responsible for 30 percent of the industry's total receipts. These large laundries, in addition to the regular family-laundry service, generally offer a variety of other services, such as dry cleaning, rug cleaning and storage, fur cleaning and storage, and hat cleaning.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Commercial laundry service shares with other service industries the characteristics of time and place limitations. Customers want their laundry processed and returned at a particular time. The industry, unlike manufacturing industries, cannot store inventories for future sale. At the same time, because the processing is of short-lived utility in that the garments soon become soiled and again require laundering, the establishments generally serve localized markets, insulated from competition from other communities. These factors determine the distribution of establishments. Laundries are operating throughout the country, in all large cities, and in hundreds of smaller cities; in short, in almost every community large enough to support at least one establishment.

Several other special characteristics of the industry have particular bearing on an understanding of the industry itself and more specifically on the wage and employment standards practiced in the individual plants. It is, significantly, a woman-employing industry, a fact which has had far-reaching effects on its wage standards. Women, almost 200,000 in number, constitute almost two-thirds of the work force.

More than in other service industries, total pay-roll costs consume a high percentage of receipts. Approximately 52 cents of every revenue dollar is paid out in pay roll.¹ Most of the plant operations require individual handling. Aside from washing and drying, processes in which several garments can be handled in a machine at one time, all

¹ This figure, based on 1939 census, includes salaries of paid executives of corporations.

other plant processes require individual handling of the garments, despite the use of power-driven machinery. This means that the wage bill represents the largest single item in the employer's costs.

It is difficult, if not invalid, to compare the pay-roll ratio in the laundry industry with that in manufacturing or trade industries. Pay-roll cost percentages, being expressed in relation to revenue, are obviously affected by the component elements of revenue. Laundries do not produce a physical product, and therefore the return on raw material costs is not, as in manufacturing, reflected in total receipts.² Unlike the distributive trade industries, laundries do not have to get a return on merchandise costs.

The two major elements in the laundry employer's pay-roll costs are productive labor, which consumed, in 1944, 35 percent of receipts, and routemen's wages and commissions, 11 percent of receipts. Because laundries sell predominantly the processing performed by their labor force, they should be vitally concerned with modern techniques for using that labor force most effectively. Efficient operating methods, increased productivity, and a realistic concern for the welfare of the employees to enable them to yield maximum quality output should be the benchmarks of the cost-conscious employer.

The industry is profitable, having been consistently "in the black" for over a decade. Total return to management during the three war years, 1942-44, averaged over 7 percent of sales; over 2½ percent represented net operating profit, and 4½ percent was drawn off for executive salaries. Rates of profit, however, varied substantially, not only with the volume of business of the individual plants but also with their locations. The higher the volume of business, the higher was the net profit rate. Laundries having a weekly sales volume of less than \$1,000 showed an average loss of 4.42 percent of sales for the three war years, whereas those in the next higher volume classification (\$1,000-\$2,000 weekly) averaged 0.10 percent profit. This rate of net profit increased consistently in the higher-volume groups, reaching an average net profit rate of 4.24 percent of sales in laundries doing \$8,000 and over a week in business. The rate of profit also differed markedly in different areas of the country. Laundries in the Southern and far Western States³ realized a higher rate of net profit than did those in other areas of the country.

The power-laundry industry is not one of widespread union organization. It is estimated that only 30 to 40 percent of the industry's production workers are working under terms set by collective-bargaining agreements. And it is only within the past decade that this organization was accomplished. As recently as 10 years ago union membership was insignificant. Only 600 paid members belonged to the Laundry Workers' International Union (AFL) in 1936, and some laundry drivers were affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (AFL). Significant organizational strides were made by the AFL laundry workers union in 1938-40 and by the CIO union, Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, which entered the

² Laundries do have productive supply costs which, in 1944, consumed less than 10 percent of revenue.

³ *Southern*—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. *Far Western*—Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, and Arizona. A few laundries in British Columbia, Canada, are also included in this group.

laundry field in 1937 and achieved almost complete organization of the industry in the New York area by 1941. Total membership in the AFL laundry workers union, however, apparently reached a plateau in the war years, having remained unchanged in the past 4 years from its 50,000 membership figure of 1943. Comparable data are not available for the CIO union.

Much of the union membership appears to be centered in certain large cities, such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland on the west coast; New York, Jersey City, and Philadelphia on the east coast; and middle western cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Detroit, and Milwaukee. Some union contracts are also in force in scattered southern cities, among them, Birmingham, Atlanta, and, more recently New Orleans. The provisions of some of the southern-city contracts, however, still leave much to be desired. Both the CIO and AFL unions currently report activity in the South.

The extent of union organization thus far attained in the industry lags behind that in most manufacturing and many nonmanufacturing industries.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF SURVEY

SELECTION OF INDUSTRY

In selecting the power-laundry industry for survey, the Women's Bureau, fulfilling its statutory function "to promote the welfare of wage-earning women," was guided by the anticipated return to the industry of displaced women war workers. Always an employer of large numbers of women, the industry was faced during the war with the wholesale exodus of its regular workers attracted to the higher wages and more desirable plant environment and working conditions in war-manufacturing industries. Cut-backs following the cessation of hostilities forced women workers in all parts of the country to reestablish themselves in industries offering postwar job openings to them. Seeking to reconstitute their work forces disrupted by the labor-market upheaval incident to the war, laundries must also expand to meet that part of consumer demand not heretofore satisfied because of war shortages and restrictions. Again assuming their peacetime importance to women workers as a whole, power laundries loom especially significant as a reemployment field for women war workers, fresh from the rewarding experience of higher wage and employment standards in war factories.

Historically the industry has been among the lowest paying for women workers. A Women's Bureau survey conducted in the war period among women employed in 10 war-production areas showed that take-home earnings of women working in war plants considerably exceeded those of women working in laundries. Take-home pay in war plants averaged over \$35 in half the areas surveyed, but in laundries, with the exception only of west coast laundries, take-home pay averaged \$25 or less, and, in one area, as low as \$16 a week. These earnings, low enough, were nevertheless higher than in many other localities in the country because they were received during the war period in war-congested areas of tight labor markets. Some women in the South are still being paid 18 and 25 cents an hour.

Like those in other intrastate trade and service industries, women working in laundries usually do not enjoy the benefits of the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act⁴ which assures to workers in interstate industries a minimum rate of at least 40 cents an hour and time and one-half the employee's regular rate of pay for hours in excess of 40 per week. Recognizing that many women laundry workers have long been subjected to unconscionably low wages, every State with an active, applicable minimum-wage law of its own has established, either through a specific minimum-wage order or the statute itself, a legal floor to women's wages in laundries. No other industry has such extensive coverage under State minimum-wage programs. Yet low wages still are widespread in many places. Twenty-two States do not have a minimum-wage law. Three States, Kansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, have inactive laws. In a fourth State, Maine, the law cannot be applied to laundries because it is limited, by its terms, to the fish-packing industry only.

Even in those 23⁵ States, however, which have established a minimum wage for laundries, the rates fixed are so low in most as no longer to fulfill the legislative purpose of establishing a living wage. Only 7⁵ States fix a rate for the entire State as high as the 40-cent minimum of the Federal Act. And it was only through recent revision (1943-47) of previously established rates that these 7 States achieved higher minima. In 13 other States, the rate set is 30 cents an hour or less for all or part of the State. In Arkansas a minimum wage of \$1.25 per day for experienced workers has remained unchanged since its establishment as far back as 1915. The Arkansas rate, like others which have never been adjusted to increased living costs since originally issued, is patently no longer adequate to assure decent living standards.

The last report made on women's peacetime earnings in laundries was in October 1940, when a Women's Bureau study showed that the average earnings of about 25,000 women laundry employees in 11 large industrial States were 36 cents an hour—average earnings which bore the doubtful distinction of being the lowest among 24 selected woman-employing industries (22 manufacturing and 2 service).

PURPOSE OF SURVEY

What conditions confront women laundry workers in the postwar period? To obtain factual information on all conditions affecting the employment of women spells out the objective of the survey. To help employers develop good labor standards was the underlying purpose which determined the method used in obtaining the information. By pointing to the striking differences in standards from laundry to laundry within the same city, and by contrasting a relatively high-standard region of the country with one of low standards, this survey will show that progressive managements in the industry itself have proved the practicability of decent wage standards, pointing the way to those all too numerous establishments still clinging to appallingly depressed standards.

⁴ On the basis of recent U. S. Supreme Court decisions, the Act was applied, effective Jan. 15, 1947, to laundry and linen supply firms which receive more than 25 percent of their total gross receipts from services provided to commercial and industrial customers for business purposes.

⁵ Includes District of Columbia, counted as a State. All information on State minimum-wage rates is as of March 15, 1947.

SCOPE OF SURVEY

In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, two regions of the country showing contrasts were selected for survey—the Middle West and the Southeast. Women's Bureau agents in the fall of 1945 visited 258 laundries in 38 places (cities and towns) in 11 States—3 in the Middle West: Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri; 8 in the Southeast: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

*Southeastern States*⁶

The southeast region was selected for more intense survey because it has long been the low-wage, low-income section of the country. Per capita income has for many years been consistently lower in the Southeast than in other regions of the country. Although the gap is being narrowed (substantial gains were made in the war years), per capita income payments in the southeastern region in 1945 were only 67 percent of the national average.

Annual wages of all workers covered by unemployment compensation laws averaged only \$1,706 in 1944 in the Southeast; the \$2,380 average for the rest of the country exceeded the southeastern region by almost 40 percent. In the low-paid service industries the difference was much greater—workers in the Southeast averaged only \$1,222 a year, those in the rest of the country, \$1,806, or almost 50 percent more.

Many of the Southeastern States, aside from being low-wage areas, do not provide their workers with adequate legal safeguards through State laws regulating labor standards. Over half the States in the country have minimum-wage laws but only one of the Southeastern States (Kentucky) has such a law. Two of the five States without a maximum-hour law for women are in the Southeast—Alabama and Florida. In three other Southeastern States, the legal maximum is as high as 60 hours a week (Kentucky, Georgia, and Mississippi). Florida has no laws regulating the payment of wages, and those in North Carolina and Alabama are extremely limited in coverage. Mississippi is the only State in the country without a workmen's compensation law of any kind. Among the eight Southeastern States having such laws, only two, Kentucky and Virginia, have the preferred compulsory type. The unemployment compensation laws are usually of more limited coverage in the Southeast than in many other parts of the country. Only 1 of the 21⁷ States in the country which regulate industrial home work is in the Southeast—Tennessee.

Middle Western States

The three Middle Western States selected for survey contrast with the southeastern region. In Illinois, per capita income payments in 1945 exceeded the national average; in Indiana, they were about the same as the national average; in Missouri, 92 percent of the national average. Wage-earner income in these States in 1944, measured by the \$2,350 average annual wage of all workers covered by unemployment compensation laws, topped slightly the national average of

⁶ This section covers the nine States commonly considered to comprise the southeastern region of the country—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia. Mississippi, however, was not included in the survey.

⁷ Includes District of Columbia, counted as a State.

\$2,302, but exceeded substantially the \$1,706 average of the Southeast. Service-industry workers covered by unemployment compensation laws averaged \$1,725 a year in the three Middle Western States (a close approximation to the national average), compared to only \$1,232 in the Southeast.

City Samples

In selecting the cities to be surveyed in each of the two regions, no effort was made to obtain a scientific sample representative of the region as a whole nor of the individual States within each region. Rather a variety of individual cities differing in size and type were chosen in each region. Within each city, however, a representative cross-section or all of the power laundries of the family service type employing 25 or more employees were visited by Women's Bureau agents. Hand laundries, institutional laundries, and power laundries specializing in linen supply or other commercial trade were omitted. The selection of establishments was made following consultation with employers' associations and union officials. Only a representative group of laundries was visited in the larger cities, whereas in the smaller places, wherever possible, all the laundries of the specified size and type were visited. The group of 258 establishments included in the survey are therefore representative of 38 selected cities—92 laundries were located in 14 midwestern cities, and 166 laundries, in 24 southeastern cities. These laundries employed a total of over 21,000 workers, almost three-fourths of whom, or about 16,000, were women.

Most of the laundries surveyed (about four-fifths of them) offered dry cleaning as well as laundry service. Dry cleaning business usually accounted for about 10 to 20 percent of the receipts of midwestern laundries, but about 25 to 40 percent (and sometimes much more) in southeastern laundries. The survey, however, was confined solely to the laundry operations. Employers were interviewed, pay-roll records were transcribed, and inspections made in the plants to obtain information on such subjects as earnings, productive-labor costs, prices, productivity, hours, and working conditions.

The survey was directed to the conditions affecting women production workers only, who, over 14,000 in number, constituted 84 percent of all laundry production workers and almost two-thirds of the total laundry employment in the 258 establishments. Wage data gathered in the survey were based for the most part on the week ended July 15, 1945. In order to have data comparable from city to city, the same pay-roll week was used in each city, except where that week was not normal. The Bureau of Labor Statistics cooperated with the Women's Bureau in obtaining the wage data.

Although most of the laundries were incorporated, their type of business organization differed materially in each region. The midwestern laundries, on the whole, operated as corporations (about four-fifths of them did), whereas in the southeastern cities, only about half were incorporated, and the others were either partnerships or individual proprietorships. Approximately one-sixth of the laundries were reported to be units of a chain of two or more establishments. Sometimes the separate units of the chain were located in the same

city; some establishments, however, were parts of chains with units in different cities of the same or other States.

Table 1 presents the cities included in the survey and the number of laundries, with their employment, visited in each city.

Table 1.—Number of Power Laundries Visited and Their Employment, by Locality, 1945

Locality	Number of plants visited	All employees ¹			Production and related workers			Route-men—Total	All others—Total
		Total	Women		Total	Women			
			Number	Percent of total		Number	Percent of total production workers		
All localities.....	258	21,422	15,787	73.7	16,796	14,065	83.7	2,076	2,550
Middle West.....	92	7,729	5,138	66.5	5,966	4,648	77.9	971	792
Illinois: Chicago.....	30	2,947	1,593	54.1	2,116	1,430	67.6	521	310
Indiana:									
Indianapolis.....	8	748	491	65.6	539	421	78.1	105	104
Other places.....	14	1,028	693	67.4	820	617	75.2	102	106
Evansville.....	5	507	309	60.9	408	277	67.9	50	49
Lafayette.....	2	114	82	71.9	82	66	80.5	14	18
South Bend.....	3	169	123	72.8	139	112	80.6	13	17
Terre Haute.....	4	238	179	75.2	191	162	84.8	25	22
Missouri:									
Kansas City.....	10	820	633	77.2	667	582	87.3	71	82
St. Louis.....	16	1,407	1,125	80.0	1,183	1,050	88.8	112	112
Other places.....	14	779	603	77.4	641	548	85.5	60	78
Cape Girardeau.....	1	(3)							
Hannibal.....	1	(3)							
Jefferson City.....	1	(3)							
Joplin.....	4	188	151	80.3	153	134	87.6	15	20
Springfield.....	3	189	154	81.5	159	144	90.6	13	17
St. Joseph.....	4	261	196	75.1	212	178	84.0	22	27
Southeast.....	166	13,693	10,649	77.8	10,830	9,417	87.0	1,105	1,758
Alabama: Birmingham.....	15	1,297	1,028	79.3	1,007	891	88.5	93	197
Florida:									
Jacksonville.....	13	1,322	1,049	79.3	1,101	958	87.0	88	133
Tampa.....	8	469	371	79.1	383	332	86.7	32	54
Georgia:									
Atlanta.....	10	979	755	77.1	750	643	85.8	83	146
Savannah.....	8	507	397	78.3	372	332	89.2	35	100
Other places.....	10	831	699	84.1	684	619	90.5	32	115
Brunswick.....	2	147	135	91.8	123	118	95.9	5	19
Columbus.....	3	303	253	83.5	259	231	89.2	8	36
Macon.....	5	381	311	81.6	302	270	89.4	19	60
Kentucky: Louisville.....	8	654	482	73.7	528	438	83.0	62	64
North Carolina:									
Charlotte.....	9	710	528	74.4	555	475	85.6	67	88
Winston-Salem.....	3	180	137	76.1	146	127	87.0	19	15
Other places.....	14	912	712	78.1	732	652	89.1	81	99
Burlington.....	1	(3)							
Raleigh.....	7	440	341	77.5	364	322	88.5	38	38
Wilmington.....	6	433	343	79.2	339	305	90.0	38	56
South Carolina:									
Charleston.....	6	412	334	81.1	334	290	86.8	16	62
Columbia.....	12	726	589	81.1	569	499	87.7	37	120
Other places.....	11	687	518	75.4	566	485	85.7	50	71
Greenville.....	7	477	361	75.7	391	334	85.4	31	55
Spartanburg.....	4	210	157	74.8	175	151	86.3	19	16
Tennessee:									
Memphis.....	9	1,616	1,206	74.6	1,260	1,098	87.1	219	137
Other places.....	14	1,143	872	76.3	856	720	84.1	91	196
Knoxville.....	4	556	433	77.9	424	362	85.4	42	90
Nashville.....	6	587	439	74.8	432	358	82.9	49	106
Virginia: Hampton Roads area.....	16	1,248	972	77.9	987	858	86.9	100	161
Newport News.....	2	189	127	67.2	137	106	77.4	25	27
Norfolk.....	10	780	631	80.9	623	556	89.2	54	103
Portsmouth.....	4	279	214	76.7	227	196	86.3	21	31

¹ Excludes employees engaged in dry-cleaning operations.

² Includes 4 women.

³ Withheld to avoid disclosure.

⁴ Includes 1 plant for which employment data not available.

CHAPTER II. OCCUPATIONS

NATURE OF OCCUPATIONS

The occupations found in a laundry can be grouped into three major divisions. Most important numerically are the production employees—a group comprising all workers engaged in actual laundering operations. About 78 percent of all laundry workers employed in the establishments surveyed were production workers. Women predominate in this group. Constituting not less than two-thirds of the production workers in any city, women formed 80 to 90 percent of the productive work forces in most cities. The second occupational division covers routemen (drivers) who made up 10 percent of the total employees, and the third division (12 percent of the total) covers all other employees, including office, power-plant, and repair-maintenance workers. Normally women are not employed as routemen but a few were found working in this occupation in 1945 in an Atlanta and in a Savannah laundry.

The 258 laundries surveyed employed 14,065 women production workers who worked at almost every production job found in the industry. The relationship of these jobs to one another and the contribution of each to the completed laundry bundle can be seen by tracing a bundle through the various processes in an average laundry.

Let us start with the homemaker who, gathering soiled articles, finds that her bundle contains some flatwork (sheets, pillow cases, towels), wearing apparel (shirts, socks, handkerchiefs, pajamas), and some specialty items such as a wool blanket and curtains. The customer itemizes the articles on the list accompanying her bundle and specifies the desired type of service from a variety offered. She might request that, after washing, all the items be returned damp; or that only the flatwork be ironed and the wearing apparel returned ready for her to iron at home; or that all articles in the bundle should be ironed by the laundry. If this homemaker holds a full-time job, the likelihood is she will have little time or energy to iron her laundry at home and will perhaps request "family-finished service," which means that all articles in the bundle are to be washed and "finished" (ironed) on machine presses. Any necessary "touch-up" will be done by *hand-ironers*, and *menders* will repair torn articles. Upon being returned to the customer, all articles in a family-finished bundle are ready for use.

The bundle is picked up at the customer's home by a *routeman* who delivers it by truck to the laundry plant. If the customer had preferred "cash and carry" service, she herself could have taken the bundle directly to a "call office" at the plant or to a branch office where it would be picked up by a *driver* and brought to the plant.

The marking department starts the bundle through the productive processes. Here, the bundle is weighed by a *weigher* or *marker*, and the marker opens it and lists and identifies (marks) the individual articles so that items following different courses through the laundry may be later reassembled. The distinguishing mark placed on the articles may be visible or "invisible" (visible only in ultra-violet light) inking, or it may be a removable label sewed or stapled to the article. A *classifier* separates the bundle, putting flatwork in one group, shirts

in another, specialty items in a third, and all other articles into separate groups according to fabric and color. Each group is put into an individual net bag, and each bag is marked with a large pin numbered with the "mark" assigned the customer.

The laundry is conveyed in carts to the washroom where a *loader* puts it into washing machines, often called "washwheels." In some



WOMEN OPENING BUNDLES OF SOILED LAUNDRY. NOTE FLUORESCENT LIGHTING AND INDIVIDUAL AIR VENTS WHICH BRING FRESH AIR INTO EACH BOOTH.

plants the markers and classifiers, working on a mezzanine floor, drop the laundry down chutes into the washing machines. A *washman*, in charge of washing operations, admits the washing solution into the machines which wash and rinse the laundry. A *puller* removes the wet laundry from the washers and dumps it into a chain basket or perforated cage, in turn lowered into an extractor—a centrifugal drying machine which expels water from the washed articles. After this operation, the *extractor operator*, lifting the laundry from the extractor, places it into carts which are sent to different sections of the plant. Some articles are then tumbled instead of ironed. Bath towels, for example, are tumbled to remove creases without leveling the nap. The *tumbler operator* loads, operates, and unloads the tumbling machine. Other articles are sent to the finishing departments.

Sheets and pillow cases are sent from the washroom to the *flat-workers*, an ironing crew composed of three groups of workers. Two *shakers* pick up the wet pieces of flatwork, shake them to uncrumple them, and place them on a rack. Two *feeders* place the pieces on the flatwork ironer in position for the ribbons to carry them through the machine. Two *folders* (also called *catchers* or *receivers*) receive the ironed flatwork and fold it.

Handkerchiefs are finished on a small machine, often operated by one person, the *handkerchief ironer*, who shakes out the handkerchiefs,

spreads them on the ironer, removes and folds the ironed pieces.

Shirts are finished on a group of specialized presses—a shirtline. The number of *shirtline operatives* in a unit varies, depending on the type of equipment used and the degree of specialization practiced. The operators perform successive operations on the same shirt. Each member of the shirtline crew operates one or more of the presses—collar-and-cuff press, bosom press, body press, sleever, collar former, and yoker. One operator folds the shirts, and a hand ironer may touch them up.

Other garments such as pajamas and housedresses are finished on garment presses in the wearing-apparel finishing section where the presses are operated by *press operators* who may tend more than one press. Socks are pulled over a heated sock form by a *sock ironer* who removes the socks when they are dry and free of creases and who also sorts them.

The specialty-finishing department handles such items as blankets and curtains. The customer's woolen blanket, possibly hand washed and already extracted, is sent to the finishing department where a *carding-machine operator* feeds the blanket into a carding machine which brushes and raises the nap of the blanket as it passes between the rolls, or where a *carder* brushes the blanket with a hand card. Curtains are dried on a large frame (curtain drier) onto which the *stretcher-drier operators* press the curtains. Fluted edges are shaped with a pair of corrugated irons by the *fluting-machine operator*, and ruffled edges are finished by the *hand ironer*.

As each group of the customer's articles is completed in the various finishing departments, it is sent to the *sorters (assemblers)* who assemble all the items belonging to the customer. A *checker* examines the bundle to ascertain that nothing is missing. The bundle, after being packaged by a *wrapper*, is sent to the delivery department where a *routeman* picks it up and delivers it to the owner.

As can be seen from the foregoing description, much of the plant's floor space is occupied by presses, which, being steam-heated, generate heat and humidity often causing considerable discomfort, especially in hot weather. Workers in the marking department are subjected to the unpleasantness of handling soiled clothing. Employees in the sorting department must adhere to high standards of accuracy so that customers' complaints due to missing items or failure to follow special requests are reduced to a minimum.

OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

The women production workers perform almost all of the jobs in marking, finishing, and sorting departments. At the time of the survey in 1945, about 5 percent of the women also assisted in the washing department where the jobs are normally held by men. In laundries of the southeastern cities it was typical to find Negro women in the finishing departments and white women in the marking and sorting departments.

The degree of job specialization found in individual laundries varied with the size of the establishment; the larger laundries had more specialized job break-downs, whereas the smaller ones often assigned employees to different jobs during the course of a day or

week in response to fluctuations in the work-load of the various units.

The women production workers on the pay rolls of the 258 laundries were grouped in nine occupations; these women were markers, washers' helpers and tumblers, flatworkers, shirtline operators, other machine pressers, hand ironers,¹ sorters, working supervisors, and general or miscellaneous production workers. A laundry employing 50 women production workers usually had about 14 flatworkers, 8 shirtline operatives, 7 other machine pressers, 6 markers, 7 sorters, and 8 other workers (hand ironers, working supervisors, etc.).

Flatworkers generally composed the largest single occupational group. Considerable differences were found, however, from laundry to laundry in the relative importance of this group. Two-fifths of the laundries employed 20 to 30 percent of their women production workers as flatworkers. But in about one-fifth of the establishments, flatworkers constituted less than 20 percent, and in one-sixth of the plants they were substantially more important, constituting 40 percent or more.

Differences from plant to plant in the occupational distribution of their women production workers, though most marked for the flatworkers, were not confined to this occupation. In almost two-thirds of the laundries, shirtline operatives represented 10 to 20 percent of the woman productive force, but in most of the other plants the shirt crew was relatively more important. Other machine pressers, constituting 10 to 20 percent of women workers in almost three-fifths of the laundries, were significantly less important in many.

Markers and sorters, combined, generally accounted for a fourth of the woman productive force. Several laundries, however, primarily in Chicago and Kansas City, were able to handle the marking and sorting operations with substantially smaller proportions of their women.

The differences from plant to plant in the relative importance of each occupation can be traced, in part, to the types of service offered in each and the distribution of the laundry's business among those services offered.

In the war period some laundries had discontinued family-finish service, and these plants would obviously have little need for wearing-apparel pressers. Other laundries, having discontinued hand "touch-up," would not require hand ironers. Two Chicago laundries, for example, both employing about the same number of women workers, showed distinct differences in the occupational distribution of their work forces. One laundry, employing 52 women production workers and offering all the basic services, reported that one-fifth of the women were either machine pressers or hand ironers. The other laundry, employing 57 women and not offering the family-finish service, had neither machine pressers nor hand ironers.

There is no doubt, either, that the operating methods used in the plant affected the relative importance of each occupation. Differences from plant to plant can be caused by differences in marking methods, the extent to which labor-saving devices are used, the degree of specialization, plant efficiency, and flow of work through the plant.

¹ Includes all hand ironers except those working on shirtline crews who are classed with shirtline operators.

CHAPTER III. EARNINGS¹

INTRACITY VARIATIONS

AVERAGE FOR ALL OCCUPATIONS

Average hourly earnings among competing laundries within the same city were vastly different, demonstrating a conspicuous lack of wage standardization. In an overwhelming majority of the cities surveyed, employees working in the city's highest-paying laundry earned 30 to over 50 percent more than those in the lowest-paying laundry.

Four or more establishments were visited in 27 of the 38 cities included in the survey. In these 27 cities, average hourly earnings in the top-wage plant exceeded those in the lowest-wage plant by an average of 12 cents. A 12-cent differential in a typically low-wage industry yields a substantial percent difference—it amounted to an average difference of as high as 39 percent. In some cities the difference was much greater. Birmingham was one of them. Here, employees in the highest-paying plant, averaging 36 cents an hour, came close to earning twice as much as those less fortunately employed in the lowest-paying plant where hourly earnings averaged only 19 cents. Norfolk was another. In this city, employees in one plant averaged 56 cents an hour, those in another only 30 cents.

Midwestern cities, though not having differences as high as 50 percent, such as were found in several southeastern cities, also showed a marked lack of uniformity in earnings within the same city. Chicago topped the list with a difference of 22 cents, or 43 percent, between the lowest- and highest-paying plant. Indianapolis, where the difference was 40 percent, was close behind.

That wage standardization within a city is possible is demonstrated by the earnings found in three of them—Kansas City, Terre Haute, and Raleigh, where average hourly earnings in different plants of each city differed by no more than 3 cents.

The fact that the laundries in a city were operating under a union contract did not necessarily serve to standardize wages. In 4 of the 27 cities under consideration, all or most laundries were organized, and wage scales were set by union agreement. Two of them, Kansas City and Terre Haute, were among the three cities of striking wage uniformity. The other two, however, Chicago and Birmingham, showed marked differences from one establishment to another.

Table 2 shows the variation from one laundry to another within the same city.

¹ Information obtained on earnings was based, for the most part, on the week ended July 15, 1945. This information may no longer represent current conditions. Among other changes which have taken place since July 1945, it is known, for example, that the St. Louis laundries have since been organized and are operating under a union contract calling for a 40-cent minimum rate. Similarly, under a renegotiated union contract in Birmingham, rates are higher than those reported at the time of survey.

Table 2.—Intracity Differences Between Plants in Average Hourly Earnings of Women Production Workers, by City¹

City	Number of plants ² reporting	Average hourly earnings		Difference between lowest- and highest-paying plants	
		All plants ²	Range	Actual	Percent ³
Middle West:					
Illinois: Chicago.....	29	\$0.61	\$0.51-0.73	\$0.22	43
Indiana:					
Evansville.....	5	.46	.40- .53	.13	32
Indianapolis.....	8	.53	.45- .63	.18	40
Terre Haute.....	4	.46	.46- .48	.02	4
Missouri:					
Joplin.....	4	.37	.35- .40	.05	14
Kansas City.....	10	.47	.46- .49	.03	7
St. Joseph.....	4	.39	.35- .42	.07	20
St. Louis.....	16	.43	.38- .50	.12	32
Southeast:					
Alabama: Birmingham.....					
15	.30	.19- .36	.17	89	
Florida:					
Jacksonville.....	12	.38	.33- .46	.13	39
Tampa.....	8	.39	.30- .46	.16	53
Georgia:					
Atlanta.....	10	.34	.29- .38	.09	31
Macon.....	4	.26	.23- .30	.07	30
Savannah.....	7	.32	.27- .38	.11	41
Kentucky: Louisville.....	8	.50	.41- .55	.14	34
North Carolina:					
Charlotte.....	8	.35	.29- .40	.11	38
Raleigh.....	6	.32	.30- .33	.03	10
Wilmington.....	6	.34	.24- .40	.16	67
South Carolina:					
Charleston.....	6	.34	.29- .40	.11	38
Columbia.....	10	.28	.25- .34	.09	36
Greenville.....	7	.25	.21- .31	.10	48
Spartanburg.....	4	.27	.23- .32	.09	39
Tennessee:					
Knoxville.....	6	.35	.32- .39	.07	22
Memphis.....	9	.33	.30- .38	.08	27
Nashville.....	5	.31	.25- .36	.11	44
Virginia:					
Norfolk.....	10	.41	.30- .56	.26	87
Portsmouth.....	4	.42	.29- .53	.24	83

¹ Lists only those cities in which 4 or more laundries were visited.

² City averages take into account the number of plants in each city but not the number of women production workers in each plant.

³ This represents the percent by which earnings in the highest-paying plant exceed those in the lowest-paying plant.

Although the power-laundry industry has long been among the lowest-paying fields of employment for women, wage practices of many employers themselves prove that it need not be a depressed-wage industry. In most cities there was one and often there were a few establishments where women earned substantially more than in other establishments of the same city. Moreover, as will develop in subsequent chapters, these higher wage-standard laundries did not necessarily charge higher prices than others in the city, and often their productive labor-cost ratios were lower than in other low-wage plants. In Louisville, for example, women's hourly earnings in four plants averaged 55 or 54 cents, but in the other four plants earnings lagged behind at averages of 47 cents or less and as low as 41 cents.

Indianapolis showed a similar picture. Two laundries where women averaged 63 and 61 cents an hour stood out as wage leaders, but in all other plants average earnings were 55 cents or less. Even in the unusually low-wage cities in the Southeast, some laundry owners found it possible to pay wages high enough to enable their employees to earn considerably more than employees of other laundries. In Wilmington, for example, where average earnings for all plants was at the conspicuously low level of 34 cents and where women in one establishment averaged only 24 cents, one plant stood above all others in that hourly earnings there averaged 40 cents. In the very low-wage city of Columbia, too, where average earnings in most plants hit lows of 25-28 cents, women in one plant averaged 34 cents—hardly an adequate wage level but nevertheless much higher than in other laundries of the city.

SELECTED OCCUPATIONS

Flatworkers, constituting numerically the most important occupation, were also generally the lowest paid in the five basic women's production occupations. The highest-paid workers were usually the markers and sorters. Earnings of shirtline operatives and of other machine pressers generally fell at some point between those of flatworkers and of markers and sorters. Only a few cities varied from this pattern. Shirtline operatives, rather than markers and sorters, took top place in average earnings in four localities—Chicago, Kansas City, Louisville, and small Missouri cities. Other machine pressers averaged highest earnings in two cities, Indianapolis and Memphis.

Because earnings differed from one occupation to another, plant to plant differences in occupational composition may account for the great variety in average earnings within each city. But such differences are obviously only a partial explanation. The observation on lack of wage standardization within a city, made in the first section, was reinforced by the marked differences found from plant to plant in earnings in the same occupation. This was outstandingly true of shirtline operatives who, in many cities, earned over 70 percent more in the highest-paying plant than those working in the lowest-paying plant. Intracity differences were so great that in two cities shirt operatives in one plant averaged almost twice as much as those in another, and in two other cities the difference was even greater. In Chicago, for example, where the city average for shirt operatives was 69 cents, the average in three plants was as high as 90 cents, compared to a low in three other plants of 55 or 52 cents. Similarly, shirt operatives in one Birmingham plant averaged 45 cents, those in two others only 21 cents. As table 3 shows, the greatest difference was found in Norfolk, the least in Terre Haute. Moreover, as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, differences in productivity were not necessarily reflected in differences in earnings.

Table 3.—Intracity Differences Between Plants in Average Hourly Earnings of Women Shirtline Operatives, by City¹

City	Number of plants reporting	Average hourly earnings		Difference between lowest- and highest-paying plants	
		All plants ²	Range	Actual	Percent ³
Middle West:					
Illinois: Chicago.....	28	\$0.69 ^r	\$0.52-0.90	\$0.38	73
Indiana:					
Evansville.....	5	.51	.40-.57	.17	43
Indianapolis.....	8	.57	.51-.61	.10	20
Terre Haute.....	4	.46	.45-.46	.01	2
Missouri:					
Joplin.....	4	.37	.35-.40	.05	14
Kansas City.....	10	.53	.49-.71	.22	45
St. Joseph.....	4	.41	.35-.46	.11	31
St. Louis.....	16	.47	.36-.66	.30	83
Southeast:					
Alabama: Birmingham.....	15	.31	.21-.45	.24	114
Florida:					
Jacksonville.....	12	.35	.30-.53	.23	77
Tampa.....	8	.44	.30-.52	.22	73
Georgia:					
Atlanta.....	10	.34	.30-.52	.22	73
Macon.....	4	.25	.22-.37	.15	68
Savannah.....	7	.28	.22-.38	.16	73
Kentucky: Louisville.....	8	.58	.44-.70	.26	59
North Carolina:					
Charlotte.....	8	.34	.27-.53	.26	96
Raleigh.....	6	.32	.28-.40	.12	43
Wilmington.....	6	.29	.22-.38	.16	73
South Carolina:					
Charleston.....	6	.41	.32-.55	.23	72
Columbia.....	10	.28	.22-.35	.13	59
Greenville.....	7	.23	.19-.30	.11	58
Spartanburg.....	4	.25	.22-.31	.09	41
Tennessee:					
Knoxville.....	6	.37	.30-.46	.16	53
Memphis.....	9	.33	.27-.39	.12	44
Nashville.....	4	.33	.28-.38	.10	36
Virginia:					
Norfolk.....	10	.44	.31-.72	.41	132
Portsmouth.....	4	.52	.31-.59	.28	90

¹ Lists only those cities in which 4 or more laundries were visited.

² City averages take into account the number of women shirtline operatives in each plant.

³ This represents the percent by which earnings in the highest-paying plant exceed those in the lowest-paying plant.

Earnings of flatworkers, the least skilled workers and probably those whose occupation is most comparable from one plant to another, also showed marked variations within each city, though not as wide as for shirt operatives. In nearly two-thirds of the cities, flatworkers in one plant earned 40 percent or more above those in another plant. Because flatworkers were the lowest-paid workers, differences from plant to plant in several southeastern cities meant the difference between meager earnings of 17-22 cents and those over 30 cents. Table 4 shows the differences between one plant and another within each city.

Comparison of average earnings in each of the other occupations among laundries in the same city also revealed the same lack of wage standardization found among the numerically more important groups of flatworkers and of shirt operatives.

Table 4.—Intracity Differences Between Plants in Average Hourly Earnings of Women Flatworkers, by City ¹

City	Number of plants reporting	Average hourly earnings		Difference between lowest- and highest-paying plants	
		All plants ²	Range	Actual	Percent ³
Middle West:					
Illinois: Chicago.....	29	\$0.56	\$0.48-0.69	\$0.21	44
Indiana:					
Evansville.....	5	.47	.40-.50	.10	25
Indianapolis.....	8	.49	.39-.63	.24	62
Terre Haute.....	4	.45	.44-.45	.01	2
Missouri:					
Joplin.....	4	.36	.33-.46	.13	39
Kansas City.....	10	.46	.45-.49	.04	9
St. Joseph.....	4	.39	.35-.40	.05	14
St. Louis.....	16	.39	.31-.50	.19	61
Southeast:					
Alabama: Birmingham.....	14	.27	.19-.31	.12	63
Florida:					
Jacksonville.....	12	.31	.24-.40	.16	67
Tampa.....	8	.35	.28-.40	.12	43
Georgia:					
Atlanta.....	10	.29	.24-.34	.10	42
Macon.....	4	.21	.20-.25	.05	25
Savannah.....	7	.25	.20-.32	.12	60
Kentucky: Louisville.....	8	.44	.37-.51	.14	38
North Carolina:					
Charlotte.....	8	.29	.25-.36	.11	44
Raleigh.....	6	.26	.22-.30	.08	36
Wilmington.....	6	.28	.21-.33	.12	57
South Carolina:					
Charleston.....	6	.24	.20-.32	.12	60
Columbia.....	10	.24	.18-.39	.21	117
Greenville.....	7	.21	.17-.27	.10	59
Spartanburg.....	4	.22	.19-.34	.15	79
Tennessee:					
Knoxville.....	6	.30	.28-.35	.07	25
Memphis.....	9	.31	.26-.39	.13	50
Nashville.....	5	.25	.22-.29	.07	32
Virginia:					
Norfolk.....	10	.37	.28-.45	.17	61
Portsmouth.....	4	.41	.30-.46	.16	53

¹ Lists only those cities in which 4 or more laundries were visited.

² City averages take into account the number of women flatworkers in each plant.

³ This represents the percent by which earnings in the highest-paying plant exceed those in the lowest-paying plant.

EARNINGS AND SIZE OF ESTABLISHMENT

Women's earnings appeared to be unaffected by the size of the laundry, measured by the total number of laundry production employees (men and women). When the plants were divided into two groups of less than 50 and of 50 and more laundry production employees, and these groups compared, it was found that in the Middle West a somewhat higher proportion of the smaller establishments showed low earnings. But in the Southeast, it was the reverse—a higher proportion of the larger units tended to be in the low-earnings group.

Within each of the cities, the larger establishments sometimes paid more, sometimes less than the smaller units. In a few cities, in each region, the largest establishment showed the highest earnings, but in several communities first place in earnings was taken by the smallest laundry visited. In some places several of the city's larger laundries

reported earnings below the city average, and in several places the lowest earnings were found in the largest establishment. Wage practices of employers therefore show it is feasible for both large and small units to pay adequate wages.

INTERCITY VARIATIONS

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO REGIONS

Laundries where hourly earnings averaged less than 40 cents, the minimum established by the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, were infrequently found in the midwestern region, whereas most laundries in the Southeast had average earnings under 40 cents. In the Middle West, well over four-fifths of the establishments reported average earnings of 40 cents or more. The relatively few plants with average earnings below 40 cents were in Missouri, concentrated in St. Louis and the smaller cities. Sharply contrasted was the southeastern region where the situation was just the reverse. Here, laundries with averages of 40 cents or more were the exception rather than the rule. Less than one-fifth of them achieved average hourly earnings as high as 40 cents, found primarily in Louisville and Hampton Roads, a few in Jacksonville and Tampa, and one each in Charlotte and Wilmington. All other establishments reported average earnings of less than 40 cents.

Average earnings as high as 65 cents and over were found in the Middle West in some Chicago laundries. But in the Southeast the highest average was only 56 cents, found in one Virginia laundry. In not one midwestern laundry did average earnings fall below 35 cents. On the other hand, three-fifths of the southeastern laundries fell below this level, and almost one-fifth of these showed appallingly low averages of 19 to 25 cents.

Average earnings in a city or an establishment do not give the complete picture. A relatively high average may conceal very low earnings received by individual women workers. Unless depressed wages are wiped out entirely, a laundry cannot be classed among those with adequate wage standards. Six of the 14 midwestern cities had eliminated earnings below 40 cents—Chicago, Kansas City, and all cities visited in Indiana except Indianapolis where only 5 percent of the women earned under 40 cents.

Not one of the 24 southeastern cities equalled this standard. Louisville, where only 9 percent of the women earned less than 40 cents, approached the higher wage-standard cities of the Middle West, but in all other southeastern cities large proportions of the women received less than 40 cents an hour. Substandard earnings were so widespread that it was common to find, in city after city, over 80 percent of the women earning less than 40 cents. In contrast with all 14 midwestern cities, where not 1 woman earned less than 30 cents an hour, most southeastern cities showed relatively large proportions of women earning less than this substandard wage. In 2 of these cities, Greenville and Spartanburg, about 3 out of 10 women averaged even less than 20 cents an hour.

The unreasonably low earnings received by women laundry workers in southeastern cities stands in sharp relief against the information on

net profit rates supplied by laundry owners themselves to their employer association. As was stated in the introductory chapter, southern laundries averaged a higher rate of net profit than did laundries in most other regions of the country.

INTERCITY DIFFERENCES WITHIN EACH REGION

In the Middle West, Chicago stood out as a city in which women's earnings were far and away above those in all other cities. Here, women averaged 61 cents an hour. Not one woman earned less than 45 cents, and some earned as much as \$1 an hour. Among the larger cities, Indianapolis ranked second to Chicago. Women in Indianapolis averaged 54 cents an hour, and 13 percent of them received less than 45 cents. Kansas City and St. Louis followed next in line among the larger cities, with averages of 47 and 44 cents, respectively. Among the smaller cities, those in Indiana showed higher earnings than small Missouri cities. Women in each of the four smaller Indiana cities averaged 46 cents or more and, in South Bend, as high as 55 cents. In contrast with Indiana, the six smaller Missouri cities combined showed low average earnings of only 38 cents. The proportions of women earning less than 40 cents ranged from about one-third in St. Joseph to almost 90 percent in Joplin.

Two localities, Louisville and Hampton Roads, grouped with the southeastern cities, differed from the usual for this region. Louisville, where women averaged 50 cents an hour, was the only southeastern city in which no women earned less than 35 cents an hour. Earnings in the Hampton Roads area averaged 42 cents an hour—a relatively low wage standard, but one nevertheless that brought this locality up to above-average for the region. Women laundry workers averaged less than 40 cents an hour in each of the other southeastern cities and in some of them, materially less. In Birmingham, for example, women averaged only 30 cents, and in some cities of South Carolina and Georgia averages fell as low as 24 to 29 cents.

In contrast with the Midwest where not one woman received less than 30 cents, all southeastern localities except Louisville had varying proportions of women earning under this amount. Earnings in many places were so low that sizable proportions of the women received even less than 25 cents an hour.

Below are listed the cities in which one-fifth or more of the women earned less than 25 cents an hour.

<i>City</i>	<i>Percent earning under 25 cents</i>
Macon, Ga.....	65
Greenville, S. C.....	60
Spartanburg, S. C.....	59
Columbus, Ga.....	50
Columbia, S. C.....	37
Charleston, S. C.....	35
Savannah, Ga.....	28
Nashville, Tenn.....	21
Wilmington, N. C.....	21

At the other end of the scale are the higher-paid women employees. But in the Southeast, even these workers rarely received more than 60 cents an hour.

EARNINGS AND SIZE OF CITY

Within each of the two regions, cities of less than 50,000 population showed lower earnings than those of 50,000 and over. Among the larger cities, however, there appeared to be no consistent relation between size of city and earnings.

In 7 States, where 3 or more cities of varying size were visited, it was possible to compare earnings in large and small cities within the State. The 2 large cities in Missouri, St. Louis and Kansas City, showed substantially higher earnings than the 6 smaller communities. In each of the other 6 States, however, the difference between the large and small cities was not so clear cut. Indiana, for example, showed that earnings in Indianapolis, the largest city, were considerably higher than in each of 3 smaller cities, but were nevertheless exceeded by earnings in South Bend, almost a fourth the size of Indianapolis. Earnings in the 5 North Carolina cities, which vary greatly in size, differed by no more than 3 cents. In 2 States, Georgia and Tennessee, the smallest cities visited paid more than each of the larger ones. For example, Brunswick, a city of only 11,000 population, showed average earnings of 37 cents, above the 34-cent average of Atlanta which was over 20 times its size. Similarly, Knoxville, about a third the size of Memphis, showed slightly higher earnings.

EARNINGS AND COST OF LIVING

Although a woman laundry worker living in Birmingham earned about half what an Indianapolis worker earned, it did not mean that her living costs were correspondingly lower. On the contrary, it costs the average wage earner exactly the same thing to maintain the same standard of living in each of these cities. Moreover, food costs, an important item of expense, are higher in Birmingham than in Indianapolis.

Often, persons seeking to justify low wages hit upon the defense that living costs are lower in one city than another, hence workers don't need as much in wages. In evaluating such claims it is always safe "to look at the record." The record on living costs shows that in 1945 a dollar went just as far in Indianapolis as it did in Birmingham or Savannah. The striking fact is that living costs differ only slightly from one city to another, whereas earnings in one city might be half what they are in another. The woman laundry worker in southeastern cities, far from being able to buy more for less, simply has to do without. What may be surprising to some is that 1945 living costs in each of six southeastern cities for which information was available were higher than in Kansas City, but earnings of women laundry workers were far lower. The following table shows the relative differences in living costs from one city to another, in terms of the cost to the average wage earner of maintaining the same standard of living in each of these cities. The cost in Birmingham is shown as 100, which means simply that, on the average, what costs \$1.00 in Birmingham costs no more nor less than \$1.00 in Indianapolis, costs \$1.01 in Memphis, \$1.07 in Chicago, and \$0.99 in Kansas City.

TABLE 5.—Relative Differences in the Cost of Equivalent Goods, Rents, and Services in Selected Cities, March 1945,¹ Compared to Average Hourly Earnings of Women Production Workers in Power Laundries, July 1945

<i>City</i>	<i>Living costs (costs in Birmingham=100)</i>	<i>Average hourly earnings of women production workers in laundries</i>
Chicago.....	107	\$0. 61
St. Louis.....	103	. 44
Atlanta.....	101	. 34
Jacksonville.....	101	. 37
Memphis.....	101	. 32
Norfolk.....	101	. 42
Birmingham.....	100	. 30
Indianapolis.....	100	. 54
Savannah.....	100	. 31
Kansas City.....	99	. 47

¹ The differences show how much more or less is required in one city than another to buy the items in a typical budget for a city family in order to maintain a given level of living, that of the average wage earner. The differences are due primarily to differences in prices and rents and also to the influence of climate on clothing and household requirements.

Table 5 shows the relative differences in living costs from one city to another, but it does not show the actual dollar-and-cents costs. For this important information it is necessary to turn to other sources.

To measure the adequacy of a wage in terms of dollars-and-cents living costs, it is essential to know how much is earned a week or, better yet, how much is earned a year. Although this type of information was not obtained during the survey, the conclusion is inescapable that hourly earnings as low as those found in many places cannot possibly enable these women to maintain a standard of living of adequacy and health. Hourly earnings of 30 cents, for example, yield \$12 for a standard 40-hour week and \$14.40 for a 48-hour week. Even if the woman were to work 54 hours a week, 30 cents an hour provides her with only \$16.20 for this onerously long workweek. Even a 40-cent rate yields only \$16 for 40 hours, \$19.20 for 48 hours, and \$21.60 for 54 hours.

How far short such earnings fall of the amount needed for a decent, American standard of living can be seen from a comparison of these earnings with actual living costs. According to surveys or estimates made in 1945 or 1946 in widely separated States throughout the country, a self-supporting working woman needs anywhere from about \$28 to about \$35 a week, as a minimum, to live at an adequate standard of living. A weekly wage of \$12 a week doesn't foot the bill, nor does \$21.60.

METHOD OF WAGE PAYMENT

The growing use of an incentive method of wage payment was reflected in the establishments visited. Some form of incentive pay had been introduced in almost all the cities visited (32 of 38), but in only 7 cities was a relatively high proportion of the women affected by it. About three-fourths of the more than 13,000 women for whom wage data were secured were paid on a time basis: some by the hour, others by the week or day. Weekly workers, so-called, especially prevalent in many southeastern cities, were considered weekly workers by management, but they did not conform to the usual type of weekly worker found in manufacturing establishments.

INCENTIVE METHOD

Wage-payment methods geared to output rather than hours worked were of many types. Sometimes the workers were paid by the number of pieces or pounds produced, sometimes a piece rate was applicable only for units completed above a specified quota or standard, or a bonus may have been paid for production of a particular standard and under prescribed circumstances. The payment may have fluctuated with the production of an individual worker or of a group (group incentive). Of the varieties of plans encountered, some had been more or less scientifically installed and executed, and others seemed to have been instituted without too much pre-planning.

Extent of Use and Occupations Affected

Detailed information on the type of incentive plan in use was not secured. It is therefore not possible to describe the operation of these plans nor to measure their effectiveness either from the employer's or employee's point of view. In order to make such judgments, it would have been necessary to make a comprehensive survey directed to this particular subject. The information obtained permits only a simple classification of workers according to method of wage payment and some broad comparisons between time and incentive workers' earnings and production.²

Although only about one-fourth of all the women included in the survey were paid on an incentive basis, all but 6 of the 38 cities visited showed the use of incentive pay in one or more laundries. In 9 cities the proportion of women affected was relatively insignificant—less than 10 percent of all in the city. But sizable groups of women in 23 cities were paid on an incentive basis, a practice especially widespread in 7 cities where between 40 and 60 percent of the women were paid on this basis. Three of these cities were in the Middle West: Chicago, St. Louis, and Evansville; and four were in the Southeast: Memphis, Portsmouth, Newport News, and Charleston.

An incentive pay method was in operation in more than half the laundries reporting pay-roll information (129 of 246) and was applied most frequently to the shirtline operatives. Almost 90 percent of the plants using such pay method had placed the shirtline under incentive. Incentive systems were also used often for the other machine pressers. As a matter of fact, incentive pay methods were found in use somewhere in every production occupation held by women. Marking, sorting, flatwork, and hand ironing occupations had some incentive workers in over 20 percent of the laundries where incentive methods were practiced. In about a fourth of laundries using incentive pay, only one occupation was affected, usually the shirtline. Another fourth had such pay methods in operation for two occupations, usually the shirtline and other machine pressing. But about half the plants using incentive pay had devised such systems for three or more women's occupations, and a few laundries paid all or most of the women plant workers by such methods.

² For comparison of production of time and incentive workers, see pp. 47-48

A higher proportion of the larger plants used incentive pay than of the smaller units, but a significant proportion of the small laundries had adopted such pay methods, enough to indicate the practicability of incentive pay in establishments of all sizes. On the shirtline, even in plants where there were no more than a total of 4 or 5 shirt operatives, incentive pay was frequently found in operation.

Effect on Earnings

Women workers paid under an incentive method generally earned substantially more than time workers.³ Table 6 presents the earnings of time and incentive workers in the same occupation in each city where there was a sufficient number of both time and incentive workers and of plants to justify comparison.

It is apparent that incentive workers did not enjoy the same degree of advantage in each city, and in one city they actually earned less than time workers. Among the shirtline operatives the earnings difference in favor of incentive workers ranged from 6 percent in Atlanta to 53 percent in Norfolk. Among other machine pressers, another group to whom incentive pay was often applied, it was also found that the margin favoring the incentive workers differed markedly in different cities. Incentive machine pressers in Savannah and Norfolk averaged 50 and 59 percent, respectively, more than time workers, but in several cities the difference was under 10 percent. Charleston was the only city encountered where incentive workers averaged less than time workers.

The difference in earnings between time and incentive workers would probably have been reduced if it had been possible to limit the comparison to workers of the same degree of skill, experience, and length of service and to job duties more exactly comparable from one plant to another. Payroll evidence shows, for example, that new or inexperienced workers are more apt to be paid on a time rather than an incentive basis, thereby depressing the general average of time workers' earnings.

The establishment of an incentive system, though affording a distinct earnings advantage to the workers affected, did not necessarily eliminate substandard earnings. In several southeastern cities the incentive systems had obviously been built on such low rates that many incentive workers, presumably exerting additional effort to increase their earnings, could not earn as much as 30 cents an hour. There is no doubt that the level of earnings possible under an incentive system has a direct effect on the success of the plan. Workers under an incentive plan who do not stand a chance of earning a living wage are not provided the stimulus essential to the plan's success. That many southeastern incentive plants did not match the productivity of midwestern plants may have been partially caused by inadequate wages.⁴

³ Average hourly earnings for time workers represent straight-time hourly rates. For incentive workers, average hourly earnings were derived by dividing one week's actual straight-time earnings (including all incentive payments and production bonuses) by the actual number of hours worked during that week.

⁴ For discussion of productivity and method of wage payment, see pp. 47-48.

Table 6.—Comparison of Average Hourly Earnings of Time and Incentive Workers in Selected Occupations, by City ¹

City	Time		Incentive		Percent by which incentive earnings exceed time earnings	Time		Incentive		Percent by which incentive earnings exceed time earnings
	Number of women	Average hourly earnings	Number of women	Average hourly earnings		Number of women	Average hourly earnings	Number of women	Average hourly earnings	
	SHIRTLINE OPERATIVES					OTHER MACHINE PRESSERS				
Middle West:										
Chicago, Ill.-----	72	\$0.58	235	\$0.72	24	52	\$0.58	21	\$0.63	9
Evansville, Ind.-----	12	.47	40	.53	13	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Indianapolis, Ind.-----	18	.50	52	.60	20	26	.52	19	.72	39
St. Louis, Mo.-----	47	.39	117	.50	28	61	.40	66	.55	38
Southeast:										
Atlanta, Ga.-----	25	.32	63	.34	6	20	.33	62	.39	18
Birmingham, Ala.-----	119	.29	27	.39	35	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Charleston, S. C.-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	16	.35	58	.27	-23
Charlotte, N. C.-----	31	.30	30	.38	27	16	.31	30	.34	10
Columbia, S. C.-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	44	.25	21	.34	36
Greenville, S. C.-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	17	.23	25	.25	9
Louisville, Ky.-----	16	.49	36	.62	27	21	.45	31	.63	40
Memphis, Tenn.-----	39	.31	141	.33	7	68	.33	92	.36	9
Norfolk, Va.-----	41	.36	32	.55	53	41	.34	38	.54	59
Raleigh, N. C.-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	22	.29	11	.41	41
Savannah, Ga.-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	35	.24	19	.36	50
Tampa, Fla.-----	25	.37	23	.51	38	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	MARKERS					SORTERS				
Middle West:										
Chicago, Ill.-----	60	\$0.62	28	\$0.77	24	81	\$0.57	36	\$0.68	19
Indianapolis, Ind.-----	39	.53	20	.64	21	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
St. Louis, Mo.-----	63	.48	47	.52	8	97	.42	38	.45	7
Southeast:										
Louisville, Ky.-----	18	.47	24	.56	19	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Memphis, Tenn.-----	94	.31	74	.34	10	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Norfolk, Va.-----	32	.41	16	.63	54	55	.40	23	.62	55
	FLATWORKERS					HAND IRONERS				
Middle West:										
Chicago, Ill.-----	348	\$0.53	193	\$0.62	17	16	\$0.61	27	\$0.75	23
Indianapolis, Ind.-----	91	.45	49	.57	27	13	.47	11	.62	32
St. Louis, Mo.-----	179	.36	102	.44	22	45	.39	10	.51	31
Southeast:										
Memphis, Tenn.-----	88	.29	129	.33	14	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Norfolk, Va.-----	110	.35	51	.42	20	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

¹ Lists only cities in which 3 or more laundries show at least 10 time and 10 incentive women workers in the selected occupation.

TIME METHOD

Although incentive pay methods appeared to be of increasing importance in some occupations, time methods continued to affect most of the women workers, three-fourths of whom were paid on this basis. Almost half of all plants surveyed used time methods only, and virtually all of the others paid some of their women workers according to time worked rather than output.

Time workers in manufacturing industries are usually paid by the hour, and the employees themselves have no difficulty in understanding how their gross weekly earnings are calculated—the known

hourly rate is multiplied by the hours actually worked. The relatively few salaried workers in manufacturing, paid by the week, month, or year, have a specified rate of pay, generally received in full regardless of an occasional absence by the worker.

Not equally clear-cut is the classification of many laundry workers in several southeastern cities. Almost all the time workers in the midwestern cities were paid on the basis of an hourly rate, but in several southeastern cities many of the women were designated by their employers as weekly workers, particularly in some cities of the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Absence Deductions for Weekly Workers

On attempting to determine just how these so-called weekly workers in the Southeast are paid, one finds that many are somewhat of an anomaly, and that employers' methods of calculating weekly pay are of the type prohibited in industries covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Despite the fact that their employers consider them weekly workers, many, aside from not being paid for overtime work, are subjected to deductions for absences. Moreover, in several cities, it appeared to be common practice to make a penalty deduction for absence over and above what the employee would have earned had she worked a full week.⁵ Comprehensive information on these peculiar methods of making deductions was not obtained in every laundry visited. However, sufficient evidence was supplied by employers to throw light on the inequities of these practices. Aside from the obvious injustice of these "penalty deductions" in principle, they often affected low-paid workers, further whittling down an already inadequate wage.

Illustrations of some of the practices found in use follow:

Saturday absence (reported in several cities and more frequently than the other practices)—Despite the fact that the workweek called for fewer hours on Saturday than on other days (usually half-day on Saturday), the same amount was deducted for a Saturday absence as for one on any other day; that is, one-sixth of the week's pay. For example, in one South Carolina laundry, typical of several practicing this method, some flatworkers were paid \$9.50 for a 5½-day, 45¼-hour week. Saturday called for 4-hours' work for which the employees actually earned 84 cents (\$9.50 per week ÷ 45¼ hours = \$0.21 per hour; 4 hours x \$0.21 per hour = 84 cents). However, if this flatworker were absent on Saturday, one-sixth of her \$9.50 week's pay was deducted, or \$1.58—a deduction almost twice the amount she would actually have earned (84 cents) had she worked on Saturday.

Full Saturday pay contingent upon other attendance—Although the employer may actually require his employees to work only half a day or not at all on Saturday, pay for Saturday was calculated as if it were a full day, and full payment was contingent upon the

⁵ To calculate hourly earnings of these workers, for the purpose of presenting the wage data in this report, the employee's weekly rate of pay for a full-week's work was divided by the number of hours in the plant's standard workweek. The hourly rates of pay thus derived do not reflect, therefore, the penalty deductions actually in use.

employee's attendance on other specified days of the week. In a North Carolina laundry, for example, where employees usually were not required to work on Saturday at all, an employee absent on Friday lost one-third of her week's pay (presumably for Friday and Saturday) though she had failed to put in only one-fifth of the time required of other workers. In another laundry a penalty deduction was made even if the absence occurred on a day other than Friday.

Flat-rate deduction for absence—Another South Carolina laundry, for example, deducted 40 cents an hour for all absences—an amount which exceeded the workers' 36-cent average hourly earnings.

Weekly rate converted to penalty-hourly rate when absence occurred—A Tennessee laundry with a 50-hour workweek paid its weekly workers a flat weekly rate for 50 hours or more a week. Not only were these employees not paid at all for overtime hours beyond 50 but, when absent, were paid on the basis of a lower hourly rate and only for hours actually worked. In a week in which no overtime was required, flatworkers, for example, were paid \$12.50 for 50 hours, yielding 25 cents an hour. If the worker were absent for any part of the week, she was paid at the rate of only 19 cents an hour for hours actually worked.

RECENT CHANGES IN METHOD OF WAGE PAYMENT

Employers were asked whether they had instituted a change in method of wage payment since January 1942. Relatively few reported a change affecting all or some employees—only 59—about one-fourth of those whose laundries were visited. Among midwestern laundries reporting a change, it was as likely to have been a shift from a time to an incentive method as vice versa. In the southeastern region, on the other hand, shifts from a time to an incentive basis were much more prevalent than those from incentive to time.

When the change was from time to incentive, laundrymen generally said it had been made to increase production. When the reverse change was made, employers reported they had to discontinue incentive pay because during the war years they had been using inexperienced help who could not produce enough to earn a decent wage under an incentive system. One employer also referred to the impracticability of his incentive system under conditions of high turn-over and absenteeism, and another said he had dropped incentive pay because he did not have enough shirt business to keep the shirt operatives busy.

WAGE PROGRESSIONS

Single job rates characterized the practices in most of the laundries visited. Relatively few made provisions for automatic rate increases with length of service. About one-fourth of the establishments had some form of automatic wage progression in effect. The progression was generally limited to an entrance rate followed by an automatic increase to a job rate after a specified length of service of usually about 1 month in the Midwest and 2 or 3 weeks or 1 month in the Southeast.

WAGES AND PRODUCTIVE LABOR COSTS ⁶

Adequate wages for women workers were not necessarily accompanied by high productive labor costs, nor did low wages assure low productive labor costs. The American Institute of Laundering, on the basis of cost information supplied them by 409 member laundries, reported average productive labor costs of 35 percent in 1944; that is, 35 percent of receipts was expended on productive labor costs.

A sufficient number of employers in six cities reported information on productive labor costs for the year ended 1944 so that a comparison could be made of one city with another. Average costs were not identical in these cities, nor did all correspond to the 35-percent national average reported by the American Institute of Laundering. More significant, however, is the relationship of productive labor costs to the average hourly earnings of women productive workers in these cities. Chicago showed the lowest costs. Here, productive labor costs consumed an average of 30 percent of revenue, but average hourly earnings were highest in this city. Comparing Chicago with Memphis, we find that Memphis, where productive labor costs averaged only slightly more than in Chicago, showed average earnings about half those of Chicago. Comparisons of other cities point to the same conclusion. Average productive labor costs in Indianapolis and Kansas City were almost the same, 34 and 35 percent, respectively, but average hourly earnings differed substantially, being almost 15 percent higher in Indianapolis than in Kansas City. The six-city comparison can be seen in table 7 in which the cities are listed in the order of average productive labor costs expressed as a percent of revenue.

Table 7.—Earnings of Women Productive Workers and Productive Labor Costs in Six Cities

City	Number of plants reporting information	Average productive labor costs (percent)	Average hourly earnings ¹
Chicago.....	17	30	\$0.61
Memphis.....	9	32	.33
Indianapolis.....	6	34	.54
Kansas City.....	7	35	.47
Louisville.....	7	39	.49
St. Louis.....	9	39	.44

¹ In plants reporting productive labor costs.

Narrowing the comparison to individual laundries within the same city, one comes upon many illustrations, not only of laundries whose women had low earnings compared to the average for the city yet whose productive labor costs were comparatively high, but also of laundries showing comparatively high earnings and low costs. The following illustrations are typical. Laundries designated as plant "A" reported higher earnings and lower costs than those shown as plant "B."

⁶ Productive labor costs, expressed as a percent of revenue, represent the percent which laundry productive labor costs consumed of total laundry receipts. Dry-cleaning costs and receipts were excluded. This percent does not show actual dollar costs, nor should it be confused with unit labor costs.

City	Plant	Productive labor costs (percent)	Average hourly earnings
Chicago	A	30	\$0.73
	B	39	.55
Indianapolis	A	27	.61
	B	34	.55
Louisville	A	30	.55
	B	43	.41
Macon	A	29	.30
	B	35	.23
Norfolk	A	34	.43
	B	41	.30
St. Louis	A	34	.49
	B	40	.39

From the foregoing comparisons and from table 7 it can be seen that productive labor costs are obviously influenced by factors other than the wage level of productive workers, most of whom are women. A Virginia laundry owner whose 1944 productive labor-costs ratio was lower than in 1941 attributed the reduction directly to the vastly improved production methods and more modern equipment instituted after a study revealed that many production bugs could be ironed out. In 1944 the laundry did a substantially higher volume of business with fewer employees than in 1941. Productivity increased substantially as did employee's earnings.

Laundry owners, expressing themselves through their own trade journals, have similarly declared that good wage standards can stimulate the attainment of efficiencies so necessary in the industry. An editorial in the May 1945 issue of the American Laundry Digest stated that—

“Laundry owners should remember that higher wages do not necessarily mean higher labor costs. In well operated plants higher wages have acted as a spur to management, and lower labor costs have resulted. This has meant that higher wages have not come out of profits but out of increased production.”

LAUNDRY EARNINGS COMPARED WITH EARNINGS IN OTHER INDUSTRIES

The 1945 wage level of women laundry workers in any one city did not evolve in a vacuum. It has been influenced by a variety of forces among which is the prevailing wage level for women in other industries of the same city. Competition in a labor market area for the available labor supply sets up a cross-current of influences affecting the wage level of all industries in the area. Such competition is of more limited effect in the South, however, because of the restricted employment opportunities of Negro women workers, hired readily for many laundry jobs but only for a few jobs or not at all in other industries.

It is significant to see how women's laundry earnings stack up against earnings in other industries. Information on women's earnings is available for one or more other industries in 12 of the cities visited during the laundry survey. As table 8 shows, women's earnings in laundries generally came closer to approximating those in limited-price stores (5 and 10's) than those in any other industry. Women workers in department stores and clothing stores usually earned substantially more than in laundries. Manufacturing earnings in industries important to women in each city were far and away above those in laundries.

Table 8.—Comparison of Average Hourly Earnings of Women Production Workers in Power Laundries With Earnings in Other Industries in the Same City

City	Average hourly earnings of women										
	Power laundries	Retail trade ¹			Manufacturing ¹						
		Limited-price stores	Department stores	Clothing stores	Cotton textile	Seamless hosiery	Wood furniture (not upholstered)	Cotton work pants	Women's and misses' dresses	Men's and boys' dress shirts	Other
		July 1945	April 1945	April 1945	April 1945	April 1946	January 1946	October 1945	April 1945	April 1945	April 1945
Alabama: Birmingham.....	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.63	\$0.57							
Florida:											
Jacksonville.....	.37	.38									
Tampa.....	.39	.34	.47	.50							\$0.82 (cigars)
Georgia: Atlanta.....	.34	.38	.52	.61				\$0.50	\$0.72		
Kentucky: Louisville.....	.50	.41	.50				\$0.69				\$0.68 (cigarettes)
North Carolina:											
Charlotte.....	.34	.34			\$0.72	\$0.57					\$0.79 (full-fashioned hosiery)
Winston-Salem.....	.33				.76	.64	.51				\$0.58 (wood furniture, upholstered)
South Carolina: Greenville.....	.26				.70						\$0.55
Tennessee:											
Knoxville.....	.36	.35	.51	.47		.54					
Memphis.....	.32	.38	.54	.58			.45				
Nashville.....	.32	.32						.53			\$0.55 (tobacco and snuff)
Illinois: Chicago.....	.61	.47	.68	.83			.75		1.06	.65	\$0.81 (radios and equipment)
											\$0.80 (footwear)
											\$0.64 (boxes, set-up)
											\$0.82 (gloves)

¹ Based on information obtained from employers by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor.

² Pay-roll dates as follows: January 1945—Radios and equipment; July 1945—Gloves; August and October 1945—Footwear; October 1945—Wood furniture (upholstered), Boxes (set-up); January 1946—Cigars, Cigarettes, Tobacco and snuff, Full-fashioned hosiery.

EARNINGS

CHAPTER IV. PRICES

LAUNDRY SERVICES

Familiarity with the services offered by laundries is essential to an understanding of their pricing practices. Most family laundries sell several types of services, offered under a variety of names.

PRINCIPAL TYPES OF SERVICE

A *bachelor bundle* is usually composed of shirts and other items that are completely finished and mended. All items are priced individually, by the piece, rather than at pound rates as in most other services. This type of service is also known as "custom work," "piecework," "list price work," or "bundle work."

In a *damp-wash* service (often called "wet wash"), all items are washed, extracted, and returned damp. The customer must iron the laundry.

The several *semi-finish* services are known by various trade names, such as, "fluff dry," "rough dry," and "soft dry." In a semi-finish service the flatwork is ironed, and the wearing apparel, after being washed and dried, is returned to the customer for ironing. Another type of semifinish service, generally known as "thrifty," also calls for ironed flatwork, but the wearing apparel is returned damp instead of dry, as in the other types.

The *family-finish* service offers washing and ironing of all articles in the bundle. In the less expensive type, everything is completely machine-finished and ready for use, while the more expensive type (a deluxe service) also includes hand touch-up (hand ironing) and sometimes mending.

A rate per pound is usually charged for the above services (except bachelor bundle), and a bundle of a specified minimum size is generally required. In each of the pound-price services, except frequently family-finish, shirts are generally finished at an extra charge. Individual laundries may offer one, more, or all the services and may or may not offer delivery service. Some laundries are exclusively of the "pick-up and deliver" type, whereas others are exclusively of the "drive-in" or "walk-in" type offering all their services on a cash-and-carry basis and may or may not have different sets of prices for each.

WARTIME REGULATIONS ON SERVICE AND PRICES

In common with many other industries, power laundries experienced shortages during the war, of labor, materials, and equipment, which necessarily limited the quality and types of service that could be provided the public. Government regulations on prices, transportation, and manpower also affected the services offered. Inasmuch as

information was secured on conditions in effect in July 1945, a month before VJ-day, the services then offered were influenced by wartime controls.

The Office of Price Administration permitted the elimination of many practices, called "frills," without corresponding price decreases. Among them were the discontinuance of hand finishing on machine-pressed articles, the ironing of handkerchiefs in the semifinish services, mending, special starching, and the delivery of list-price bundles priced under \$1. Under OPA regulations, laundry prices were frozen at the March 1942 level. Price relief was granted to individual laundries when management return¹ fell below 8 percent of sales or in other specified circumstances. In Chicago, area-price relief (applicable to all laundries) was granted, but in the other cities visited only individual establishments, upon application and approval, were allowed to increase prices. Price relief, when granted, was generally expressed as a percentage of existing prices. The approved increase was added as a surcharge to each customer's bill, first totaled according to previous prices.

The industry was also affected by regulations of the War Manpower Commission which set up requirements for laundries to meet before they could be declared essential or "locally needed," thereby assuring themselves some measure of stability in retaining workers. Establishments wishing to be classified as "locally needed" were required, among other things, to offer a maximum of three services—wet wash, semifinish or rough dry, and press or family finish; to eliminate hand ironing, retouching of flatwork and wearing apparel, and ironing of articles already dry-tumbled; to do all starching in the wash wheel (rather than as a process separate from washing) and to use only one grade of starch; to discontinue the use of shirt boards and other packaging frills; and to reduce labor requirements for pick-up and delivery service by establishing nonoverlapping delivery zones and a 7-day delivery schedule for semifinish and family finish services, that is, simultaneous pick-ups and deliveries once a week in any zone.

Regulations of the Office of Defense Transportation materially affected the delivery service of laundries which, among other requirements, had to reduce mileage of their motor trucks; were not allowed to make special deliveries, call-backs, or more than one delivery a day at the same point of destination; and were required to eliminate wasteful and duplicating delivery operations.

WARTIME CHANGES IN SERVICE

Among the establishments included in this survey, family finish was the service most frequently eliminated during the war by laundries reporting a change in basic services. Many discontinued it entirely, and a few reported that they limited the amount of family-finish work by discouraging customer requests for this service or by accepting only a certain amount. Laundering of curtains was quite generally eliminated, and a few laundrymen also reported they had discontinued laundering silks, rayons, rugs, blankets, spreads, pillows, and handkerchiefs. Some laundries did not iron bath towels, fancy work, overalls, or socks.

¹ Defined as profit before provisions for executive salaries and Federal income taxes.

Changes reported in processing usually related to the starching process—only one grade of starch, and starching done directly in the “wheel.” A few also said they had increased the wash loads, cut washing time, eliminated bleaching, and discontinued tumbling towels.

Wartime changes in packaging, corresponding to the standards set up by the War Manpower Commission, were chiefly the elimination of the use of shirt boards, boxes, tissue paper, and cellophane wrappings. Some laundries were unable to get collar supports.

Delivery-service changes were reported by practically all the laundries visited. Service was most often limited to once weekly in any one zone, but in some laundries twice weekly was possible. Routes were consolidated, and outlying deliveries were discontinued. Many laundry owners hailed the changes resulting from Government war controls on delivery service as a boon to the industry and, for the most part, would like to continue, in peacetime, the delivery practices adopted during the war. Some owners reported substantial cuts in delivery costs because of the consequent reduction in force and diminished consumption of gasoline and oil; others asserted that the curtailed delivery service and regulated pick-ups had benefited their establishments by stabilizing the flow of work during the course of the week and by increasing operating efficiency.

Concerning the other services curtailed or discontinued during the war, a few owners mentioned that complete services would be restored after the war; others indicated the services would be resumed only in response to community demand or on condition that the labor supply would be adequate. Particular methods of packaging, providing so-called “frills” (mending, special starching, folding, and laundering of curtains), and complete family-finish work were described, in some laundries, as deficit-producing services not to be resumed in peacetime.

SERVICES SELECTED FOR PRICE-ANALYSIS

Information was obtained from laundry owners on prices in effect July 1945, the same date as the pay-roll week used for the wage information. Only three basic prices have been selected for analysis—the list price of men’s shirts, the pound price of damp-wash service, and the pound price of family-finish service, of the “budget” or “economy” type if more than one family-finish service was offered. These prices have been chosen because they represent basic services that are relatively comparable from one laundry or city to another, though undoubtedly some differences exist between one laundry and another in the quality of processing and service. Prices for semi-finished work have been excluded because differences from plant to plant may represent differences in type of service rather than price differences for the same service.

Only prices quoted for service which includes pick-up and delivery have been selected. Cash-and-carry prices have, therefore, been excluded. This exclusion should not be interpreted, however, as an attempt to minimize the noticeable development in the industry of cash-and-carry trade. Some cash-and-carry business was done by almost every laundry included in the survey, and a few laundries operated on this basis exclusively.

Each of the three prices selected may not be equally significant in every laundry. Obviously, a family-finish price is more important

in a laundry specializing in this service than in one catering to damp-wash business. Information was not collected on the distribution of business among the various services in the laundries surveyed. This would be influenced by such factors as the type of city in which the laundry is located and the type of clientele served by the establishment. The prices used, however, are sufficiently basic to be indicative of price practices.

METHODS OF PRICING

There are two types of laundry prices—list prices and pound prices. List prices are those charged for each individual item and applied to articles in a bachelor bundle. A few laundries also use this method of pricing for family-finish work. Most laundries charge pound rates for family bundles, whether they are to be damp-washed, semifinished, or completely finished. A minimum price is usually quoted for each of these services, and the same minimum applies to a bundle of a specified number of pounds or less. For each pound above the minimum size, a flat, pound price is added. Generally the additional pound price is lower than the pound rate in the minimum-size bundle, to induce the customer to send a large bundle.

In the damp-wash service, the pound price of flatwork is the same as that of wearing apparel. In a semifinished bundle, flatwork, which is finished, costs more per pound than does wearing apparel, which is only washed and dried. In a completely finished bundle, the pound price of wearing apparel is generally higher than that of flatwork; and most laundries specify the maximum percentage of wearing apparel that will be accepted in a family-finish bundle.

Methods of pricing shirts are somewhat complex. When shirts are included in a list-price service, they are charged for at the list price. However, when shirts are included in the damp-wash or semifinish services, the true total price of each shirt is composed of two charges. Shirts accompanying several types of family bundles are weighed with the bundle, and the applicable pound price of the requested service is charged for the shirts as well as for all other articles in the bundle. In addition, an extra charge (usually lower than the list price) is made for each shirt. This additional charge may be a fixed price applicable to all but list-price bundles. It is thus evident that the true total price of shirts accompanying family bundles varies according to the type of service requested for other articles in the bundle. For example, pound prices for damp wash are far lower than for semifinish. Shirts included in each of these two services, though processed identically, will nevertheless usually have a higher total price in a semifinish than in a damp-wash bundle. This inconsistency in price setting is further complicated by the fact that the total shirt price in one or more of the family bundles may not be the same as the laundry's list price of shirts. Moreover, laundries in most cities do not make an additional charge for shirts accompanying family-finish bundles. Instead, the applicable pound rate for wearing apparel is often charged for shirts as well as for other items of apparel. This creates another shirt price in the same laundry. Some laundries have as many as four or five different prices for shirts, although all are processed in exactly the same way.

It is evident that laundries offer several types of service with a variety of trade names and price-setting methods likely to be confusing to the public. Aware of this situation, several industry spokesmen are in agreement on the need for greater standardization of services and simplification of pricing methods.

COMPUTATION OF PRICES

Because of the varieties of methods used by laundries in setting prices, it was necessary to translate these prices into a unit which would be comparable from one laundry to another. The prices selected for analysis, as quoted for pick-up and delivery service, were computed as follows:

Shirt price: represents the list price of laundering and finishing one (man's) shirt. The use of the list price has the disadvantage of not being of equal significance in each laundry, because one laundry may do a high volume of shirt business at list price, whereas another may do its volume shirt business at any one of the several types of family-bundle price. The list price has the advantage, however, of being comparable from one laundry to another.

Damp-wash price: represents the price of 1 pound of laundry in a damp-wash (wet-wash) service, computed on the basis of how much the customer would pay per pound if she were to send a 20-pound bundle to the laundry. A 20-pound bundle was used because this was the highest minimum-weight bundle specified among the laundries surveyed.

Family-finish price: represents the price of 1 pound of laundry in a regular family-finish service, computed on the basis of how much the customer would pay per pound if she were to send a 16-pound bundle, consisting of 60 percent flatwork and 40 percent wearing apparel, which represents the average family-finish bundle, according to the American Institute of Laundering. To make allowance for those establishments making an additional charge for shirts, four shirts were included in the average bundle. In laundries offering more than one type of family-finish service, the price of the less expensive service was used.

OPA price relief: the prices used for each of the above items take into account price increases, when granted by OPA, in effect on the date for which pay-roll information was furnished.

Prevailing price: this term is used in this report to designate the price most commonly charged in a city for any of the above services.

ANALYSIS OF PRICE STRUCTURE

Aside from the complexities and inconsistencies in price-setting methods, analysis of the actual prices in effect July 1945, yields some fairly general observations applicable to almost all cities visited. Prices for each service were relatively uniform among laundries in any one city, a tendency only somewhat more pronounced in smaller than in larger cities. The size of a laundry or the size of the city in which a laundry was located, did not appear to affect prices. The

geographic location of the city appeared to have no effect on the list price of shirts, only slight effect on the pound price of damp wash, but a somewhat greater effect on the pound price of family finish.

GENERAL PRICE UNIFORMITY WITHIN CITY

Due either to competition or to trade agreement, prices within a city tended to be identical in all or most laundries. While there might be considerable difference between the prices charged by the lowest charging and the highest charging laundry, usually most establishments within a city charged identical prices or prices only slightly different from one another. This practice was not peculiar to the Southeast or Midwest, nor to cities of any particular size. Rather, it was characteristic of most cities. In Chicago, for example, the list price of shirts varied from 16 to 25 cents, but 20 of 22 laundries all charged the same price—16 cents. Similarly, the pound price of damp wash was identical in all but one laundry, and that of family finish was identical in all offering this service. Price identity was especially marked in 6 cities where not even 1 laundry deviated from the city's prevailing price for each of the three services analyzed.² From this observation of price uniformity within a city, it is obvious that the size of the establishment did not influence prices. In a city as large as Memphis, for example, where establishments differed greatly in size from one with a total of less than 50 to another with almost 500 employees, all charged the same prices. Only a few cities did not conform to this pattern of price standardization.

It would appear that price standardization within a city would have been even more widespread than was found in effect were it not for the fact that price relief, approved on the basis of profit, was granted generally to individual laundries, rather than to groups of laundries. Prices in establishments granted relief, previously perhaps in line with others in the city, consequently varied from the city's prevailing price.

Comparison of price characteristics in 8 cities included among those surveyed by the Women's Bureau in 1934 and in 1945 demonstrates that price standardization, already in evidence in 1934, has since become more pronounced, particularly in Chicago and Memphis.

LIST PRICE OF SHIRTS

The list price of men's shirts appeared to be particularly rigid, not only within a city but also from city to city. The single price most frequently charged was 15 cents—the prevailing price in over half the cities visited. Almost two-thirds of all the laundries charged 15 to 16 cents for finishing a man's shirt at list price. There was a group of southern laundries, however, concentrated in Columbia, Jacksonville, and Macon, which charged only 12 cents, and in some scattered cities 18 cents was the prevailing price.

Shirt prices apparently do not respond readily to changing economic conditions. When the Women's Bureau made its 1934 survey of power laundries located throughout the country, it found that the prevailing price was 15 cents in 13 of the 22 cities covered at that time. A 15-cent price continued to be popular in 1945.³

² The six cities are Evansville, Lafayette, Memphis, Springfield, Tampa, and Wilmington. In the city of Columbia, too, all laundries charged the same price for shirts and for family finish; the pound price of damp wash differed by only 2 mills.

³ It should be remembered that 1945 prices in most laundries represented prices frozen at 1942 levels.

Table 9.—Retail Prices of Selected Laundry Services, by City ¹

City	List price of shirts				Pound price of damp wash ²				Pound price of family finish ³			
	Number of plants reporting	Range of prices (cents)	Prevailing price (cents)	Number of plants charging prevailing price	Number of plants reporting	Range of prices (cents)	Prevailing price (cents)	Number of plants charging prevailing price	Number of plants reporting	Range of prices (cents)	Prevailing price (cents)	Number of plants charging prevailing price
Middle West:												
Illinois: Chicago.....	22	16-25	16	20	27	5.6 & 5.7	5.6	26	13	21	21	13
Indiana:												
Evansville.....	5	15	15	5	5	5	5	5	4	17.4	17.4	4
Indianapolis.....	8	14-15.3	14	6	7	6	6	7	7	14.6-15.9	15.4	5
Lafayette.....	2	15	15	2	2	5	5	2	2	16	16	2
South Bend.....	2	18	18	2	2	5 & 5.7	5	1	(4)			
Terre Haute.....	4	15.9 & 16.2	15.9	3	4	6.4 & 6.5	6.4	3		2	17.2 & 17.3	17.2 & 17.3
Missouri:												
Joplin.....	4	15	15	4	4	4 & 4.1	4	2	}	12.5 & 13.6	12.5	2
Kansas City.....	10	13.4-18.8	14.6-15.5	6	6	5.5-6.2	5.6	3			8	11.5-20.2
St. Joseph.....	4	13.7-18	18	2	3	5 & 5.6	5	2	4	12.5-14.4	14.2-14.4	4
St. Louis.....	14	11.4-20	12.5	8	11	4.5-6.3	4.5-4.8	6	12	14-21.3	12.5 & 13	2
Springfield.....	3	15	15	3	3	5	5	3	2	14.2	(5)	2
Southeast:												
Alabama: Birmingham.....	13	10-16.8	15-15.9	7	8	5-7.8	5-5.3	6	12	12.8-16.6	(5)	
Florida:												
Jacksonville.....	11	12 & 15	12	10	8	5-6	5	6	12	11.6-14.2	12.2	5
Tampa.....	5	15	15	5	4	5	5	4	4	12.8	12.8	4
Georgia:												
Atlanta.....	10	15 & 16.4	15	7	6	4 & 5	5	5	10	14.4-15.7	14.4	4
Brunswick.....	2	15	15	2					(4)		15.4	3
Columbus.....	2	15	15	2								15.7
Macon.....	4	12 & 15	12	3	2	5 & 5.2	5 & 5.2	2	(4)			
Savannah.....	5	15	15	5	4	4 & 5	5	3		5	11.6	11.6
Kentucky: Louisville.....	7	12.2-18.9	15	3	7	4.5-5.8	4.5-4.8	3	7	13-19.1	(5)	
							5.5-5.8	3				

North Carolina:														
Charlotte.....	8	15-16.1	15	6	7	5-5.4	5	5	4	13-15.1	13-7 & 14	2		
Raleigh.....	7	15 & 16.7	15	6	6	5	5	6	6	12.8-14.8	(¹)	-----	6	
Wilmington.....	6	18	18	6	6	6	6	6	6	16	16	6		
Winston-Salem.....	3	15 & 16	16	2	3	5	5	3	2	14 & 14.5	14 & 14.5	2		
South Carolina:														
Charleston.....	6	15	15	6	(⁴)	-----	-----	-----	5	12.2 & 13	12.2	4		
Columbia.....	11	12	12	11	6	4 & 4.2	4.2	4	11	10	10	11		
Greenville.....	7	15	15	7	5	5 & 6	5	4	5	10.8 & 13	13	4		
Spartanburg.....	4	10 & 15	15	3	3	5 & 6	5	2	4	11.6 & 12.2	12.2	3		
Tennessee:														
Knoxville.....	7	15	15	7	5	5 & 6	5	4	4	13-15.7	13 & 13.6	2		
Memphis.....	9	15	15	9	9	4.2	4.2	9	9	14.4	14.4	2		
Nashville.....	6	16-18.4	16-16.6	3	6	5-6	5-5.4	4	6	13.9-16	(²)	-----	9	
Virginia:														
Newport News.....	2	18	18	2	2	5	5	2	2	16 & 16.8	16 & 16.8	2		
Norfolk.....	10	15 & 16	16	8	8	5-6	(³)	-----	10	14	14	10		
Portsmouth.....	4	15	15	4	4	4.8-7	5	2	4	14 & 15.3	14	3		

¹ Based on prices quoted for pick-up and delivery service. City and/or price not shown where only 1 plant reported.

² Based on price per pound of a 20-pound bundle.

³ Based on price per pound of a 16-pound bundle of 60 percent flatwork and 40 percent wearing apparel including 4 shirts.

⁴ Only one plant reported.

⁵ Prices vary too much to report any as prevailing.

N. B. Prevailing price: designates that price most commonly charged in a city, generally by half or more of the plants. In cities in which there is no *single* prevailing price and in which prices in at least half or more of the plants fall within a narrow range (of less than \$0.005 for damp wash and of less than \$0.01 for shirts and for family finish), this range is shown as the prevailing price. In those few cities in which two or three different prices, rather than one price or one narrow range, are almost equally common, these prices are shown.

PRICES

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POUND PRICE OF DAMP WASH

Almost the same degree of uniformity within a city was found in prices of damp-wash bundles as was found in shirt prices. On comparing the price level itself in different cities, one finds that 5 cents a pound is most popular in southeastern laundries, whereas a slightly higher price, 5 to 6 cents, is characteristic of the Middle West.

This service was not offered in over a fifth of the laundries visited, many of which had not offered it even before the war. Possibly the increased use of washing machines in the home may reduce the demand for this type of service from commercial laundries.

POUND PRICE OF FAMILY FINISH

This price, much more than either of the others, appeared to be sensitive not only to the conditions within the establishment itself but also to the characteristics of the city. Ability of the customer to pay appeared to affect price, whereas the influence of this factor was hardly noticeable in the price level of shirts and only slightly evident in damp-wash prices.

In 30 cities where 2 or more laundries offered this service, 16 showed price standardization, but in each of the other 14 cities prices among competing laundries generally differed from one another. Many more cities showed standardization on prices of shirts and of damp wash.

Unlike prices of other services, there was no single family-finish price that was charged by a large proportion of the laundries. Prices in southeastern cities were generally lower than in the Middle West. About three-fourths of the southeastern laundries charged less than 15 cents a pound, but some two-thirds of those in the Middle West quoted 15 cents or more. Prices as low as 10, 11, or 12 cents a pound were quoted in several southern laundries but only rarely, if ever, were found in the Middle West. Relatively popular prices in the Southeast were about 12 or 14 cents, but in the Middle West they were about 14, 15, or 17 cents. The prevailing price in Chicago was 21 cents, higher than in any other city surveyed.

Among the wartime effects on laundry service discussed earlier was the elimination of family-finish service—in about one-sixth of the establishments visited. Apparently the relatively high cost of finishing wearing apparel, coupled with the shortage of labor, induced some laundries to dispense with this service.

PRICE AND SIZE OF CITY

There were no consistent differences between prices charged in larger cities and those in smaller cities of the same State. Prices in the smaller cities were often as high as or higher than those in the larger cities. Sometimes the situation was reversed. In Indiana the prevailing prices of shirts and of family finish were higher in each of the smaller cities than in Indianapolis. Similarly, in South Carolina, prices in the smaller cities were higher than in Columbia. In Georgia, however, Atlanta's prices for shirts and for damp wash were about the same as in the smaller cities, but prices for family finish were substantially higher in Atlanta than elsewhere in the State.

SUMMARY

Table 9 presents the price information supplied by employers which formed the factual basis for the preceding analysis.

PRICES AND EARNINGS

OVER-ALL RELATIONSHIP

In order to determine the exact relationship between prices charged the customer and earnings received by employees, it would be necessary to convert all prices in an establishment, on the basis of business done at each price, into a single price unit comparable to what the average hourly earnings figure represents for employees' wages. To secure this type of information would have required far more intense study of each individual plant than was undertaken in this survey. Some general and rather crucial conclusions can nevertheless be drawn from the available information.

Although, on the whole, there was a slight tendency for higher prices to accompany higher earnings, so many laundries deviated from this tendency as to warrant the conclusion that higher prices were not an inevitable concomitant of higher earnings.

DEVIATIONS FROM OVER-ALL RELATIONSHIP

One has only to compare the lack of wage standardization within a city with the highly developed price standardization to realize that many laundries paying lower wages than others capitalize on the advantage of charging the same prices. In practically every city large enough to support several laundries, some establishments paid higher wages without charging higher prices than competitors in the same city. To allow some employers to undercut wages while adhering to the city's standard prices constitutes unfair competition. Such practices are a constant threat not only to wage standards but also to the industry's stability.

Observations of the earnings and prices actually in existence among competing laundries in the same city demonstrate that good wage standards do not inevitably mean high prices. Efficiencies in management and operating methods and increased productivity can often enable employers to pay adequate wages without proportionate increases in prices. While sometimes higher earnings were reported in laundries quoting higher prices, it was not uncommon to find that *higher earnings* went hand in hand with *lower prices*.

In addition to the wage-price situation within a city, the relationship between one city and another should be considered. Such a city-to-city comparison lends supporting evidence to the observation described previously—that higher earnings do not necessarily cause higher prices. Sometimes they went together, but practices in several cities prove that they need not. For example, prevailing prices for each of the three services studied were identical in two South Carolina cities, but in one of them, Charleston, the 34-cent average earnings of women workers were 7 cents higher than in the other, Spartanburg. Even more conclusive is evidence provided by the cities in which prices were lower but earnings higher than in the others. Prices in both Springfield, Mo., and Portsmouth, Va., were substantially lower than

in Wilmington, N. C., but women's earnings were considerably higher. Similarly, Jacksonville, Fla., charged less and women earned more than in Greenville, S. C.

EARNINGS IN SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS RELATED TO PRICES

Further evidence that prices do not always reflect wages was found in comparing prices for two services with earnings in two occupations—earnings which might be expected to influence price. The list price of shirts was compared with earnings of shirt operatives, and the pound price of family finish was compared with earnings of machine pressers, who finish the wearing apparel in family-finish bundles. It is recognized, of course, that even in plants or industries of relatively well rationalized price structure unit labor costs of a specific item are not necessarily covered by the price of that item but, instead, may be defrayed, for a variety of reasons, by prices of other items. Despite this accepted business practice, it is nonetheless striking to observe the relatively minor influence earnings in these occupations exercise on price.

Within each region earnings tended somewhat to be higher in laundries quoting higher prices. More significant, however, are the marked variations in earnings in laundries charging the same price.

Tables 10 and 11 group those laundries quoting the same price for a service and show the differences in earnings in these same laundries. For example, midwestern laundries charging a 15-cent list price for shirts reported average hourly earnings of shirt operatives ranging from a low of 34½ cents in one laundry to a high of 57½ cents in another. Compare this with the Southeast. Here, laundries charging the same price, 15 cents, showed shirt operatives' earnings which averaged only 19 cents in one plant but climbed all the way up to 68 cents in another. The variations in earnings among laundries charging another popular price, 16 cents, were just as striking, if not more so.

The same observation holds true when earnings of machine pressers are examined in relation to the pound price of a family-finish bundle.

Admittedly, the entire problem of establishing a rational relationship between prices and wages does not yield itself readily to quick solution of a-b-c simplicity. Worthy of mention is the future course suggested by one industry spokesman in a manual written to guide war veterans interested in establishing a laundry. Glancing at the industry's postwar problems, this spokesman looks toward a period of lower prices, a fair profit, and a 60-cent minimum wage for women workers.⁴

⁴ See: Victor Kramer, *Establishing and Operating a Laundry*. U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1946. pp. 189, 190.

Table 10.—Comparison of Average Hourly Earnings of Women Shirtline Operatives With List Price of Shirts, by Region ¹

Average hourly earnings	Middle West											Southeast									
	Number of plants reporting	Number of plants in which list price of shirts was—										Number of plants reporting	Number of plants in which list price of shirts was—								
		11 cents	12½ cents	13 cents	14 cents	15 cents	16 cents	18 cents	19 cents	20 cents	25 cents		10 cents	11 cents	12 cents	13 cents	14 cents	15 cents	16 cents	17 cents	18 cents
All plants.....	78	1	8	2	10	24	23	7	1	1	1	137	2	22	1	1	74	22	4	10	1
Percent distribution.....	100	1	10	3	13	31	30	9	1	1	1	100	1	16	1	1	54	16	3	7	1
Average hourly earnings.....	\$0.53	\$0.45	\$0.51	\$0.48	\$0.51	\$0.44	\$0.64	\$0.53	\$0.49	\$0.55	\$0.80	\$0.36	\$0.23	\$0.33	\$0.32	\$0.21	\$0.36	\$0.40	\$0.31	\$0.33	\$0.50
15, less than 20 cents.....												1					1				
20, less than 25 cents.....												15	2	4		1	7				1
25, less than 30 cents.....												20		5		9	4				1
30, less than 35 cents.....						1						45		6	1	23	8		1		4
35, less than 40 cents.....	1					6						24		4		15	2				3
40, less than 45 cents.....	9		1	1	1	6						9		1		5	2				1
45, less than 50 cents.....	12	1			2	6	1	1				5				4	1				
50, less than 55 cents.....	18		3			8	3	3	1			9				6	1				
55, less than 60 cents.....	7				3	1	2			1		5		1		6	1				1
60, less than 65 cents.....	9		1		3	2	2	1				5				3	2				
65, less than 70 cents.....	10			1	1		6	1				1				1	1				
70, less than 75 cents.....	3		1				1	1				2		1							
75, less than 80 cents.....	1						1					1					1				
80, less than 85 cents.....	4						3				1										
85, less than 90 cents.....	2						2														

¹ Based on prices quoted for pick-up and delivery service.

Table 11.—Comparison of Average Hourly Earnings of Women Machine Pressers With Price per Pound of Family-Finish Service, by Region ¹

Average hourly earnings.	Middle West											Southeast										
	Number of plants reporting	Number of plants in which pound price of family-finish service was—										Number of plants reporting	Number of plants in which pound price of family-finish service was—									
		11, under 12 cents	12, under 13 cents	13, under 14 cents	14, under 15 cents	15, under 16 cents	16, under 17 cents	17, under 18 cents	18 cents	20, under 21 cents	21 cents		10, under 11 cents	11, under 12 cents	12, under 13 cents	13, under 14 cents	14, under 15 cents	15, under 16 cents	16, under 17 cents	17 cents	19, under 20 cents	
All plants.....	52	1	3	2	12	8	5	9	2	1	9	120	9	7	23	17	37	13	12	1	1	
Percent distribution.....	100	2	6	4	23	15	10	17	4	2	17	100	7	6	19	14	31	11	10	1	1	
Average hourly earnings.....	\$0.49	\$0.47	\$0.36	\$0.34	\$0.43	\$0.55	\$0.46	\$0.45	\$0.58	\$0.47	\$0.64	\$0.35	\$0.28	\$0.29	\$0.32	\$0.34	\$0.39	\$0.37	\$0.35	\$0.63	\$0.45	
15, less than 20 cents.....												1			1							
20, less than 25 cents.....												12		3						1		
25, less than 30 cents.....												24	2	3						2		
30, less than 35 cents.....	2			1	1							27	1	2	5	11	8	3	3			
35, less than 40 cents.....	7		3	1		1	1	1				28		2	4	3	4	6	4			
40, less than 45 cents.....	10				5	1	1	3			1	13	1		3	4	2	4	1			
45, less than 50 cents.....	17	1			6	2	4	4		1		6			1	2	2	3				1
50, less than 55 cents.....	3								1			3					1					
55, less than 60 cents.....	3										2	3				1		1				
60, less than 65 cents.....	4					1					3	3		1	1	1				1		
65, less than 70 cents.....	2								1		1	3										
70, less than 75 cents.....	1					1						1				1						
75, less than 80 cents.....	2					1						1				1						
80 cents and over.....	1					1					1											

¹ Based on prices quoted for pick-up and delivery service.

CHAPTER V. SHIRT PRODUCTIVITY

Production achieved on the shirtline often provides one of the basic indexes of over-all plant efficiency. Shirt output also lends itself readily to measurement. Laundry owners are more apt to be familiar with the output of their shirt crews than of other groups of workers, not only because the frequent use of incentive pay on this operation requires that production records be kept, but also because many owners watch shirt output closely to provide them with some means of evaluating productivity. Information was therefore obtained from employers on the number of shirts finished by the shirt operatives. With relatively few exceptions, employers were able to supply this information, most often by reference to actual production records. In a few plants, authoritative estimates were accepted.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PRODUCTIVITY

Type of equipment appeared to be among the most important determinants of productivity. Even skilled, competent operatives, working under good conditions, cannot overcome the mechanical limitations of the equipment itself. They cannot exceed the capacity of the machines. Employers whose shirt operatives had achieved relatively high output frequently attributed it to their modern equipment, in a good state of repair, and of the type not requiring hand finishing. The importance of equipment was corroborated also by employers with low output who ascribed their low output to equipment that was old, or subject to break-downs, or of the type requiring hand ironing. Important too are the steam pressure and air pressure used in the machines. The steam pressure controls the degree of heat in the presses, and the air pressure (on modern equipment) controls the speed with which the head of the press is lowered and raised. Equipment that eliminates the need for hand ironing was often stressed as an essential to good production.

Good equipment, in itself, cannot guarantee good output. There are other basic factors influencing productivity which, like equipment, can be controlled by the employer. The volume and flow of work have an appreciable effect on the output of the operatives. Too many shirts one day and a prolonged lull the next do not assure sustained, high output. Also, extreme fluctuations during the course of a single day have an adverse effect on the work-rhythm of the shirt crew. Employees who have to wait for varying lengths of time for work to be brought to the unit cannot be expected to maintain consistently good production. Another factor is the division of labor in the unit and the definition of each employee's job. Shirt operatives work as a team on specialized presses; each member of the team performs successive operations on the same shirt. An individual shirt unit may consist of 2, 3, often 4, and up to as many as 8 operatives.

A poor division of labor and a failure to determine specifically each individual worker's responsibility are obviously not conducive to high output for the unit as a whole. The timing of the work-flow through the unit should be such that each successive member of the crew is ready to handle the shirt when the preceding operative has finished her part of the processing. This calls for the elimination of wasteful, unproductive, and duplicating motions and a clear-cut understanding on each worker's part of her specific contribution to the work of the unit and to the standard of production she is expected to meet.

Several other elements which affect productivity revolve around the labor force itself—experience, teamwork, stability, regularity of attendance, training, supervision, and employee interest. Employers who expressed themselves on this subject attributed high production to careful selection of workers, expert training, the use of skilled operators, good teamwork, adequate supervision, and low turn-over. On the other side of the picture were the employers with low output caused, they said, by the type of worker available to them, by the use of inexperienced workers, and by high turn-over. There is no doubt that the war years were not propitious for increasing or even maintaining output. Experienced workers left for higher wages in other industries, and employee turn-over increased alarmingly. The employer who said he could not get normal output because a learner was frequently on one or more of his shirt units was not alone in that predicament.

A few employers mentioned they stressed quality or hand finishing (even when the equipment did not require it) rather than quantity and were therefore not too much concerned about their relatively low shirt production. Other employers (primarily in Chicago), desirous of attaining good output, at the same time placed controls on maximum output. In contrast with so many of the southern laundry owners who said their workers were not achieving the desired output, many Chicago employers were confronted with the problem of putting a brake on very high production in order to protect quality. Inasmuch as shirts are dried as well as ironed by the presses, it is necessary that the shirts remain on the heated presses long enough to dry. An operator can, by removing the shirt from the press too soon, reach an unusually high output, but the shirt, not thoroughly dry, will soon look wilted. Employers, in explaining why deliberate top limits were placed on production, generally referred to the need to preserve quality, but it is undoubtedly also true that they wanted to keep their wage bills in hand, because their shirt operatives were often paid according to the number of shirts finished.

Several employers attributed good production on the shirtline to their use of an incentive method of wage payment to the operatives, but, as will be discussed later, incentive pay did not prove to be an indispensable prerequisite to high output.

VARIATIONS IN SHIRT OUTPUT

From the information supplied by employers, shirt output per operator-hour was calculated. For example, in a laundry with 3 shirt units, each composed of 4 operators, and averaging a total of 240

shirts an hour, the hourly output of each unit would average 80 shirts, and of each operator; 20 shirts.

Productivity varied markedly from one laundry to another within each of the cities surveyed. In many cities there were 1 or more laundries with output as low as 10 or fewer shirts per operator-hour. At the same time, most cities had substantially more productive laundries where output reached 20 and sometimes as high as 30 or more per operator-hour. In Chicago, for example, with its relatively high production standing, the plant with the highest output achieved 30 shirts per operator-hour whereas another only 10. In Norfolk, the spread from low to high was little different from Chicago. One Norfolk laundry produced as few as 11 shirts an hour, in sharp contrast with another whose operators were turning out 34. Even in a city like Birmingham, where the vast majority of the plants were able to reach less than 14 shirts an hour, some laundries attained considerably higher production. Extremes in production were common to practically all the cities visited. Undoubtedly the conditions in the war years, when the demand for laundry service exceeded the supply, enabled many inefficient plants to remain in operation.

However, even if one were to remove from consideration the very low-output establishments in each city, there would still be substantial differences in production in the remaining laundries in most cities. Of only a very few cities can it be said that production in the majority of the establishments was similar or only slightly different. Memphis is one of them. Here most laundries reached a production figure of 13 to 16 shirts per operator-hour. Indianapolis is another; about half the laundries produced 17 to 20 an hour. But this relative uniformity was not found in most of the other cities and, like the striking differences in earnings, offers further evidence of the lack of standardization within each city.

Differences in average output from city to city, though found, were not as widespread as the differences within each city. The average output¹ for most localities was 15 to 18 shirts per operator-hour. This average was substantially exceeded in St. Louis, Louisville, and Chicago where average output topped the list at 24 in St. Louis and in Louisville and at 21 in Chicago. At the other end of the scale are Birmingham and three small cities of North Carolina where production lagged behind at an average of 12 and 11, respectively. Therefore, although the localities at the top of the list averaged twice as high a production as those at the bottom, it is possible to refer to a norm, or standard production, of 15 to 18 shirts which most localities averaged.

These locality averages, useful as they are for an over-all view of production, are of limited value because they are based on extremes within each city and obscure significant differences between the mid-western and southeastern regions. Of the 80 midwestern laundries able to supply production data, over half (53 percent) reported output of 20 or more shirts per operator-hour. This is better than twice the achievement in southeastern laundries where only one-fourth reached an output of at least 20. Laundries in southeastern cities

¹ This average is based on a median average—half the laundries produced more; half, less. A median average was used rather than a simple arithmetic average because of the extremes in output found in most cities.

appear prominently at the low-production end of the scale—44 percent of them reported production of less than 15 shirts and 7 percent, less than 10 shirts. On the other hand, only 23 percent of the laundries in midwestern cities produced under 15 shirts per operator-hour, and those with production falling below 10 were very rare. Conspicuous as low-output midwestern cities are Terre Haute, Ind., and three small Missouri cities. Among the southeastern cities, Louisville is outstanding for its high productivity. The Hampton Roads area in Virginia also stands out as above average. But almost all the other localities had relatively high proportions of their laundries with particularly low shirt output.

Some southern laundry owners blamed low output on the supposed low productivity of Negro workers. The fact of the matter is (surprising as it may be to some) that the 3 laundries with the highest rates of shirt production of all those visited—one in Chicago with 30, another in St. Louis with 33, the third in Norfolk with 34—were staffed with Negro women who constituted 99, 95, and 85 percent, respectively, of all their women production workers.

The information on shirt output in each locality is presented in table 12.

Table 12.—Shirt Production per Operator-Hour, by Locality

Locality	Number of plants reporting	Shirt production per operator-hour		Number of plants with average shirt production per operator-hour of—			
		Average ¹	Range in plant averages	Under 15	15, under 20	20, under 25	25, and over
All localities.....	219	17	8-34	79	63	47	30
Middle West.....	80	20	8-33	18	20	22	20
Illinois: Chicago.....	28	21	10-30	4	5	8	11
Indiana:							
Indianapolis.....	8	18	14-22	1	5	2	-----
Other places (4).....	11	16	10-27	3	3	4	1
Missouri:							
Kansas City.....	8	15	9-25	3	3	1	1
St. Louis.....	13	24	14-33	1	1	5	6
Other places (5).....	12	16	8-25	6	3	2	1
Southeast.....	139	16	8-34	61	43	25	10
Alabama: Birmingham.....	14	12	8-28	9	2	1	2
Florida:							
Jacksonville.....	11	15	8-22	5	3	3	-----
Tampa.....	8	16	10-23	3	2	3	-----
Georgia:							
Atlanta.....	10	15	8-24	4	4	2	-----
Savannah and other places (3).....	12	15	8-22	6	3	3	-----
Kentucky: Louisville.....	5	24	17-29	-----	1	2	2
North Carolina:							
Charlotte and Winston-Salem.....	10	16	8-25	4	3	2	1
Other places (3).....	12	11	8-25	9	1	1	1
South Carolina:							
Charleston and Columbia.....	15	16	12-30	6	5	3	1
Greenville and Spartanburg.....	9	15	8-18	4	5	-----	-----
Tennessee:							
Memphis.....	9	15	11-20	5	3	1	-----
Nashville and Knoxville.....	11	18	12-25	4	3	3	1
Virginia: Hampton Roads area.....	13	19	10-34	2	8	1	2

¹ This represents a median; half the plants were above; half, below.

EFFECT ON SHIRT OUTPUT OF HAND FINISHING AND SIZE OF UNIT

Output appeared to be lower in plants doing hand finishing of shirts. Most often the type of equipment required hand finishing, but sometimes the owner preferred to offer this service. Several employers, in attributing low or high production to the use or absence of hand finishing, corroborated this finding. An Indianapolis laundry, for example, had two types of shirt units—one turning out a completely machine-finished shirt and the other doing some hand finishing. The former unit had average production of 25 per operator-hour; the latter, doing hand finishing, averaged only 12.

Seemingly, output was also affected by the size of the shirt unit. For a group of laundries where information was available, it was found that output per operator-hour was as high as 20 or more only when 4 or fewer operatives worked in a unit. A few employers expressed a preference for smaller units, explaining that it is easier to develop good teamwork on a small unit. On the other hand, a few owners said they had deliberately added additional workers to the unit and that though production per operator was lowered, they thereby assured themselves a reserve of workers.

PRODUCTIVITY AND METHOD OF WAGE PAYMENT

Although it was generally true that laundries whose shirt operatives were paid on the basis of an incentive wage achieved higher productivity than laundries paying their operatives on a time method, the existence of an incentive system, per se, did not inevitably assure high output per operator-hour, nor did it provide a cure-all for eliminating extremely low output.

Shirt production per operator-hour was less than 20 in almost two-thirds of the establishments. Only 14 percent attained a production figure of 25 or more. When, from among the total group of laundries, those which paid all members of their shirt crews on a time-method were compared with those which paid all shirt operatives on an incentive basis, sharp contrasts were found between the time and the incentive shirtlines. Over four-fifths of the time plants, compared to less than half the incentive plants, had production falling below 20 shirts per operator-hour. Only 2 percent of the time crews achieved production of 25 or more, compared to 26 percent of the incentive crews reaching this output.

Other significant facts stand out, however, from this analysis. Despite the use of an incentive wage method, almost half the incentive plants could not reach production as high as 20 per operator-hour, and in over a third of these production hit low points of less than 15 an hour. In several localities, including Chicago, St. Louis, and Atlanta, some laundries paying shirt crews on the time method exceeded the operator-hour output of incentive plants. It is evident, therefore, that an incentive system, in itself, did not automatically guarantee high productivity.

Equally significant is the fact that southeastern laundries, even when they used incentive methods of pay, did not equal the production performance of laundries in midwestern cities. Among the southeastern laundries whose shirt operatives were paid exclusively under an incentive system, almost three-fifths had production of under 20, and almost a third of these, under 15. Midwestern laundries using incentive pay did almost twice as well. Here, in almost three-fourths of the incentive plants, production averaged 20 or more, and in the majority of these plants production was substantially higher—25 or more shirts per operator-hour. Obviously, factors other than method of wage payment have influenced productivity in many southeastern laundries.

Table 13 presents the picture.

Table 13.—Comparison of Shirt Production per Operator-Hour and Method of Wage Payment, by Region

Shirt production per operator-hour	Both regions		Middle West		Southeast	
	Number of plants	Percent distribution	Number of plants	Percent distribution	Number of plants	Percent distribution
ALL PLANTS						
All reporting plants.....	219	100.0	80	100.0	139	100.0
Under 20.....	142	64.9	38	47.5	104	74.8
20 and over.....	77	35.1	42	52.5	35	25.2
PLANTS PAYING ALL SHIRTLINE OPERATIVES BY TIME METHOD						
All reporting plants.....	104	100.0	34	100.0	70	100.0
Under 20.....	85	81.8	24	70.6	61	87.1
20 and over.....	19	18.2	10	29.4	9	12.9
PLANTS PAYING ALL SHIRTLINE OPERATIVES BY INCENTIVE METHOD						
All reporting plants.....	81	100.0	31	100.0	50	100.0
Under 20.....	38	46.9	9	29.0	29	58.0
20 and over.....	43	53.1	22	71.0	21	42.0

PRODUCTIVITY AND EARNINGS

Contrary to what might have been expected, differences in productivity did not account for differences in earnings. Shirt operatives have no assurance that their pay will be commensurate with their output. Operatives with identical output, working in different cities, and often in different laundries of the same city, received vastly different wages. For example, in southeastern laundries which reported shirt output of about 20 per operator-hour, average hourly earnings of the shirt operatives varied from a low of 30 cents in one of these plants to a high of 59 cents in another. In midwestern laundries with the same output—20 per operator-hour—shirt operatives in one plant averaged 40 cents an hour, in another 85 cents. That output bears little relationship to earnings is also illustrated by the 10 southeastern laundries whose shirt operatives averaged about 11 shirts an hour and who received, on the average, 32 cents an hour. In another group of

southeastern laundries where the operatives produced more—15 shirts an hour—they earned less, only 28 cents, on the average.

Even within the same city, earnings differed widely in laundries with identical output per operator-hour. In Norfolk, two laundries, both of whose shirt operatives were paid on an incentive basis, reported the same output, 19 shirts per operator-hour, but the shirt operatives averaged only 47 cents an hour in one laundry, compared to 72 cents in the other—a difference of 53 percent. Four Chicago laundries, paying all their shirt operatives under an incentive method, were able to turn out 25 shirts per operator-hour, but earnings varied from 61 cents to 90 cents.

Operatives in one laundry sometimes earned less for a higher output than operatives in another laundry in the same city. In a Tampa laundry, for example, operatives averaged 52 cents an hour and produced an average of 16 shirts per operator-hour. In another Tampa laundry, operatives produced 22 shirts an hour, but averaged only 39 cents an hour. This type of inequity was found in many cities.

As was noted previously, laundries in many of the midwestern cities achieved substantially better production records than did those in southeastern cities. But the differences in earnings of shirt operatives, when compared to their output, was even more striking. Shirt operatives in many southeastern laundries, for output only somewhat lower than in the Midwest, nevertheless earned materially less—an earnings difference substantially greater than could be considered warranted by the difference in output. As table 14 shows, in southeastern laundries which paid all their shirt operatives on an incentive basis, production, on the average, was 14 percent less than in midwestern laundries using incentive pay, but earnings in the Southeast were 36 percent lower than in the Midwest, a difference over two and a half times the difference in output.

Table 14.—Comparison of Average Shirt Production per Operator-Hour and Average Hourly Earnings of Shirtline Operatives, by Region

Region	All reporting plants	Average shirt production per operator-hour	Average hourly earnings of shirtline operatives
ALL PLANTS			
Middle West.....	79	20	\$0.56
Southeast.....	129	16	.36
Percent by which Southeast is less than Middle West.....		20	36
PLANTS PAYING ALL SHIRTLINE OPERATIVES BY TIME METHOD			
Middle West.....	34	16	.48
Southeast.....	70	13	.32
Percent by which Southeast is less than Middle West.....		19	33
PLANTS PAYING ALL SHIRTLINE OPERATIVES BY INCENTIVE METHOD			
Middle West.....	31	22	.64
Southeast.....	50	19	.41
Percent by which Southeast is less than Middle West.....		14	36

CHAPTER VI. HOURS

Low wages and long hours often go hand in hand. Management inefficiencies resulting in low output tend to make the employer think that only by operating under an unduly long workweek can the required work be produced. The effects of unreasonably long hours on productivity per man-hour, on absenteeism, and on turn-over are well recognized in present day principles of industrial efficiency.

During the war period, laundry employers may have either extended the workweek or failed to reduce one already long in order to maximize the use of available labor and existing machinery. On the other hand many employers, in an effort to make laundry employment more attractive, reduced hours of work. Such war conditions probably influenced the hours schedules in effect in 1945.

Industry in normal years has been tending toward a 40-hour week, a development stimulated by the provisions of the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act which require the payment of time and one-half the employee's regular rate of pay for hours beyond 40 per week. Despite the fact that women, often compelled by economic necessity to hold a full-time job and to perform a variety of homemaking tasks in their "leisure" hours, have a particular need for reasonable working hours, many are denied the benefits of the Fair Labor Standards Act because they are concentrated in intrastate trade and service industries. Especially in an industry which leans heavily on women's labor, the hours of work bear directly on the problem of recruiting and retaining a competent workforce. Among retail department stores there is a noticeable trend toward the 5-day, 40-hour week for employees, though the store itself may remain open to customers for longer hours. Relatively few laundries have matched this standard.

Laundries have long been faced with the difficulty, stemming from the traditional Monday washday, of regularizing the workweek. Wartime regulations on delivery service have helped to overcome this problem by regularizing the work load and consequently the workweek. Employers hope to retain this advantage. When, instead of pick-ups on Monday and deliveries on Thursday and Friday, regulated pick-ups and deliveries are made on each day of the week, the volume and flow of work in the plant can be kept at an even keel, making it possible to establish a definite schedule of daily and weekly hours for employees.

Several employers reported that hours of work varied, depending on the work load. In these plants the scheduled workweek generally called for a full day on Saturday, but employees were allowed to leave when the week's work was completed. Sometimes this meant about half a day's work on Saturday and sometimes none at all.

SCHEDULED WEEKLY HOURS

The scheduled hours for women production employees sometimes corresponded with the hours usually worked, but, as described above,

they sometimes represented the maximum hours employees might be called upon to work if the work load required it, exclusive of overtime which might or might not be paid for.

A 40-hour week was virtually unknown except in some Chicago laundries. The workweek in most laundries, about two-thirds of them, called for 45 to 50 hours. Relatively few had less than 45 hours, but one-fifth of the total 258 plants scheduled their women employees to work more than 50 hours a week, sometimes as long as 54, 55, 56, and even 57 hours. Hours were generally longer in the Southeast than in the Middle West, but large proportions of the establishments in both regions had unreasonably long workweeks; more than 48 hours a week were scheduled in 36 percent of the midwestern laundries and 47 percent of those in the southeast.

That laundries can adhere to reasonable schedules is proved by the practices of groups of employers in many cities. Table 15 shows the workweek scheduled for women production workers in the laundries surveyed. Relatively few laundries reported that employees in some departments worked on a schedule different from that of the other workers.

Table 15.—Weekly Hours of Work Scheduled by Plants for Women Production Workers, by Locality

Locality	Total number of plants	Number of plants reporting scheduled weekly hours of—							
		40	Over 40, under 45	45	Over 45, under 48	48	Over 48, through 50	Over 50, under 54	54 and over
All laundries.....	258	13	18	40	33	43	60	31	20
Percent distribution.....	100.0	5.0	7.0	15.5	12.8	16.7	23.2	12.0	7.8
Middle West—All plants.....	92	10	7	18	7	17	15	13	5
Percent distribution.....	100.0	10.9	7.6	19.6	7.6	18.5	16.3	14.1	5.4
Illinois: Chicago.....	30	10	6	3	1	10			
Indiana:									
Indianapolis.....	8			2	1	1	2	2	
Other places (4).....	14			4	1	1	4	2	2
Missouri:									
St. Louis.....	16		1	5	2	1	3	4	
Kansas City.....	10			2	1	2	1	2	2
Other places (6).....	14			2	1	2	5	3	1
Southeast—All plants.....	166	3	11	22	26	26	45	18	15
Percent distribution.....	100.0	1.8	6.6	13.3	15.7	15.7	27.1	10.8	9.0
Alabama: Birmingham.....	15		1	1	3	5	2	1	2
Florida:									
Jacksonville.....	13		3	1	2	1	4	2	
Tampa.....	8			1	1	2	1	2	1
Georgia:									
Atlanta.....	10			1	2		6	1	
Savannah.....	8		1	4	1	1	1		
Other places (3).....	10			2			2	5	1
North Carolina:									
Charlotte.....	9				2		5		
Raleigh.....	7		1	2	1		3		
Other places (3).....	10	2	1	2	1	1		1	2
South Carolina:									
Columbia.....	12		2	2	4	2	2		
Charleston.....	6				2	1	2		1
Other places (2).....	11				2		5	1	3
Tennessee:									
Memphis.....	9			1		1	5	2	
Other places (2).....	14				1	1	5	3	4
Kentucky: Louisville.....	8	1	1	1	2		2		1
Virginia: Hampton Roads area.....	16		1	2	2	11			

States, recognizing that women's hours of work are of vital public concern, have passed legislation to protect women workers. All but five States fix maximum weekly and/or daily hours for women. The existence of a law, however, does not necessarily mean that laundry workers are covered, nor that the law itself, where it does apply to laundries, actually protects women from excessively long hours. The standards set in some laws have long since become outmoded.

The cities included in this survey were located in 11 States, 5 of which do not regulate maximum hours of women laundry workers, and 4 fix a legal maximum as high as 54, 55, 57, or 60 hours a week. A 48-hour maximum is in effect in only 2 of these States—Illinois and Virginia. All the laundries visited in these 2 States were operating, in line with the legal maximum, on no more than a 48-hour week for women, demonstrating the ability of employers to adjust to reasonable hours of work, if required to do so. The following tabulation shows the legal maximum for women laundry workers in States included in the survey.

State ¹	Legal maximum	
	Daily	Weekly
Illinois.....	8	48
Virginia.....	9	48
Missouri.....	9	54
North Carolina.....	11	55
Tennessee.....	10½	57
Kentucky.....	10	60

OTHER WORKING TIME CONDITIONS ²

WORKDAY, LUNCH PERIODS, REST PERIODS

The workday in most laundries was long, burdensome, and unrelieved. A 9-hour day or longer was found in almost two-thirds of the establishments. Excluding Chicago, where the State law prohibits more than 8 hours a day, one finds that the 8-hour day, so popular in other industries, is a rarity indeed to women laundry workers. Here and there, as in Columbia, S. C., and Jacksonville, Fla., some laundries were using the 8-hour day, but by and large the 9-hour day was most common. In several laundries, notably in the Southeast, women were scheduled to work as long as 10 or 10½ hours daily.

These long days were usually interrupted by a 30-minute lunch period. Rest periods, widely accepted by progressive employers as good management, were rarely provided in the Southeast but were substantially more prevalent in the Middle West. Laundries allowing rest periods, all of which were paid for, provided one or two a day, each usually of 10 or 15 minutes' duration. In an industry such as this, in which many employers have been slow to adopt modern labor standards, if at all, significant attention should be focused on those employers who have found it possible to adjust to standards practiced with matter-of-fact acceptance in other industries.

¹ Alabama, Florida, and Indiana have no maximum-hour laws. The laws in Georgia and South Carolina are not applicable to laundries.

² Unfortunately the important problem of overtime and overtime pay is omitted from this discussion because of inadequate information.

HOLIDAYS

Although information on the observance of holidays and on holiday pay was not obtained from every employer, enough detail was supplied by many of them to indicate the types of practices in use.

To laundry workers a holiday often means forfeiting a day's pay. Many establishments did not pay for holidays, though observed by the plant. Others limited pay to weekly workers, thus excluding hourly and incentive workers from benefits allowed other workers in the same plant. Payment for holidays not worked, when made, had strings attached in several southeastern laundries which imposed conditions of payment. Most frequently imposed was the requirement that employees must work all other workdays in the holiday week. In other plants requirements were such that the holiday pay was earned on other days of the week. For example, employees were required to work longer hours or to complete the week's work quota on other workdays.

TREND IN HOURS CHANGES

COMPARISON OF 1945 AND 1927-28

Progress in approaching reasonable hour standards has been made, however slow. Three southern cities covered in the present survey were also included in a Women's Bureau survey of 1927-28—Atlanta, Birmingham, and Jacksonville. At that time almost two-fifths of the hours schedules in laundries of these three cities called for more than 54 hours a week, whereas only one laundry in these cities had a similar schedule in 1945. On the other hand, schedules of 48 hours or less were found in over half the laundries in 1945, whereas in 1927-28 not one laundry in either Birmingham or Jacksonville and only a few in Atlanta had schedules of 48 hours or less.

CHANGES SINCE 1942

That war conditions accelerated this slow progress in reducing hours is borne out by the reports from employers on changes made in hours schedules since 1942. Two-fifths of the establishments had changed the hours of women production workers. The predominant trend was toward a decrease in hours, either by reducing hours on Saturday to provide the women with necessary shopping time, or by cutting the length of each workday by half an hour. Many laundry employers were forced by competition for labor to attempt to bring their labor standards into line with those in other industries.

A few employers, primarily in Chicago, increased hours, for the most part by raising them to 48. Some had instituted a night shift during the war.

CHAPTER VII. PHYSICAL WORKING CONDITIONS¹

Though difficult to measure, good working conditions enhance the attractiveness of a job and augment the value of wages received. But when low wages and long hours are combined with undesirable working conditions, the result is a triple threat to decent standards.

Proper working conditions are important not only in stimulating morale and effective production but also in promoting stability of the work force, a problem of particular importance to laundries today. During the year after the war employment in laundry plants climbed steadily. Hiring was somewhat facilitated by the curtailment of war production and the displacement of women in industrial employment. Turn-over, however, serious during the war, continued to run high. Many of the newly hired women, aside from having had received adequate wages in wartime, had been working in plants where conditions were attractive. They know, from their own experience, that modern improvements can minimize, if not completely eliminate, the unpleasant aspects of a job, and that facilities can be and are provided elsewhere for the employee's comfort. Coming to the laundry industry, they are confronted with a job in its very nature unpleasant and sometimes intolerable. Employee-welfare facilities are often lacking. Many workers complain of excessive heat. High humidity caused by steam and water add to the discomfort. The noise of machines, handling dirty, wet, or hot clothes, and the strenuous nature of some tasks combine to make the jobs, already unattractive because of low wages, far from appealing. Questioned by Women's Bureau agents on employee turn-over, laundry owners often admitted freely that turn-over was highest on those jobs lowest paid, such as flatwork, or on jobs at which excessive heat was generated, such as shirt and garment pressing. Current reports from employment offices throughout the country indicate that recruitment of workers is difficult.

Laundry work need not be undesirable. Progressive employers have made great strides in reducing the severe discomforts of heat and humidity by modern ventilation methods and exhaust systems. Some have provided adequate facilities for the welfare of their employees by furnishing seats, rest rooms, lunchrooms, and acceptable washing and toilet facilities.

Women's Bureau agents, in visiting the laundries included in the present survey, observed work surroundings and recorded their impressions by describing, as poor, fair, good, or very good, each of various conditions, such as ventilation, layout, employee-welfare facilities. Obviously, the subjective element entered the agents' descriptions, but in order to reduce its effect to a minimum a set of standards had been previously agreed upon, based on standards set up by the American Standard Association and by Federal and State govern-

¹ Because information was not obtainable from 1 of the 258 plants surveyed, this chapter is based on conditions in 257 plants.

ment agencies and on suggestions made by the American Institute of Laundering.

Two types of working conditions were evaluated, (1) conditions in the work area itself: ventilation, illumination, layout, equipment, and housekeeping; and (2) employee-welfare facilities: drinking and washing facilities, toilets, seating, and other facilities such as lunchrooms, rest rooms, and dressing rooms.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Conditions in the work area itself were generally satisfactory in the majority of the establishments, except for the fact that housekeeping was often not up to par. Major items, however, such as ventilation, illumination, layout, and equipment were considered adequate more often than not.

Unfortunately adequate facilities for the welfare and personal needs of employees were not common. Sanitary facilities, usually provided, were frequently inadequate. Other employee-welfare improvements such as seats, lunchrooms, dressing, and rest rooms were often conspicuous by their total absence or were grossly unsatisfactory.

That employers were generally mindful of improvements in the work area but neglected employee-welfare facilities can be traced to the easily observable effect of poor work surroundings on production—of vital importance to the employer. On the other hand, not only did some employers fail to see the relationship between poor welfare facilities and worker morale, but others were not even cognizant of the inadequacy of such facilities. Laundry operators of plants with poor facilities sometimes boasted to agents of the superior conditions in their own plants, asserting they were the best in town or as good as could be found anywhere. The unsatisfactory conditions observed in these plants resulted perhaps from a failure to recognize shortcomings rather than an unwillingness to provide decent working conditions.

It is recognized that at the time of this survey, shortly after VJ-day, employers were not yet able to purchase equipment or materials to install or construct improvements, despite an intention to do so. Agents were told of plans to expand and improve working conditions. It is hoped that this summary of conditions in 1945 will aid employers in making these improvements, so necessary in the industry.

CONDITIONS IN WORK AREA

VENTILATION

Ventilation is a particularly serious problem in laundries because the work processes generate heat and humidity. Employers' recognition of this fact is shown by the large number of them (58 percent) who had achieved satisfactory ventilation.

Ventilation was judged on the basis of temperature and humidity readings, taken with a sling psychrometer, and on observations of natural and artificial ventilating systems. Agents noted whether windows or artificial ventilation provided a cross flow and proper movement of air, whether ceilings were sufficiently high, and whether specialized attention had been given to areas requiring it. They

observed, for example, whether fresh air was provided in areas where soiled clothes were being handled, and whether local exhaust systems were in use directly over machines generating steam, such as flatwork ironers and shirt and garment presses.

Types of ventilation varied widely, ranging from a very poor system in an Atlanta laundry where low ceilings, only few windows, and no provision at all for artificial ventilation made the atmosphere almost unbearable, to other plants with large window areas, high ceilings, local exhausts, and extensive systems of general mechanical ventilation.

The problem must be coped with differently in each plant. The size and layout of the workroom as well as the construction of the building itself are important considerations. The following illustrations, offered to familiarize employers with conditions in other plants, may suggest means of improvement to those who have not yet successfully overcome the problem.

A Chicago laundry, faced with the problem of counteracting the heat of the sun's rays which came through the west windows and a skylight, tackled it in the following manner. In the skylight was installed a type of glass which permits light to enter but filters out the heat rays of the sun. The west windows were fitted with copper screens ("cool shades") with tiny curved surfaces that deflect the light. Complete ventilation of the plant was assured by cutting vents beneath the windows and installing exhaust fans in the opposite wall to pull cool air from the outside across the room.

The workroom of an Indiana laundry was equipped with an extensive system of ducts which carried fresh air from the outside. The conducted air was poured down onto the workers, who, it was said, preferred this direct flow of air to less immediate contact.

In a Chicago laundry, through iron grating beneath the windows, fans drew air from the outside. Hoods had been installed over the shirtlines and the flatwork ironers and were equipped with large exhaust fans. The plant superintendent, emphasizing the importance of having the hoods close to the presses, related that the hoods had been lowered recently, on the recommendation of an engineer. Results were gratifying, he reported, in that the summer just passed was the first during which women workers had not fainted or been forced to leave for home due to the heat.

The ventilating system in a Louisville plant included a row of exhaust fans over the finishing department. To determine the effectiveness of the fans, the plant superintendent suggested that temperature and humidity readings be taken at the flatwork ironer while the fans were in motion and again a few minutes later when the fans were turned off. The fans were turned off without the knowledge of the workers who began to perspire and talk among themselves about the suddenly uncomfortable atmosphere; readings showed a difference of 8 degrees in temperature and 6 in humidity.

A well ventilated North Carolina plant had windows and doors on three sides, skylights, five large exhaust fans, two upright fans, and other smaller fans.

High-speed fans in a Virginia plant were placed 15 feet apart at floor level to carry the air upward. The fans, it was said, changed the air every minute. There were fans also over the flatwork ironers. High ceilings and skylights complemented the picture, and tinted window glass was used to cut heat radiation.

Local exhaust systems, either fans or hoods over a specific area, are desirable in that they draw off steam immediately at the source and prevent it from diffusing into the room. While the advantages of an exhaust fan are obvious, there was some disagreement about hoods. Some employers explained that hoods gathered dust and lint and hence

were not practicable. Hoods, used in some midwestern laundries, were seldom found in the Southeast. Much more common were exhausts in the ceiling over processing areas, especially flatwork ironers. Asbestos cement covering on presses was another device sometimes employed to control heat.

The existence of good ventilating systems in the majority of laundries should not obscure the patently inadequate conditions in many—over two-fifths of all those visited. Unsatisfactory conditions, particularly common in Birmingham and in cities of Georgia and South Carolina, were found in every locality.

Good laundry ventilation is aided by such devices as large window areas that provide cross ventilation, high ceilings permitting steam to rise, and intake and exhaust fans to insure a supply of fresh air and removal of steam at the source.

ILLUMINATION

Good lighting promotes accuracy, cleanliness, and orderliness. Laundries require primarily good general illumination and also special local lighting for some operations, such as marking, sorting, and mending. Illumination, to be considered good, should be sufficient, evenly distributed, and without glare. The existence of window areas and the provision of electric lights do not, in themselves, assure adequate illumination. Preferred standards require that the windows be arranged to admit a maximum of light with a minimum of glare. They must be kept clean. Electric light bulbs should be above the normal line of vision, well spaced, correctly shaded, and clean.

Women's Bureau agents did not attempt to measure the quantity of light. Rather they evaluated it on the basis of their observations. They noted whether lighting appeared to be uniformly sufficient throughout the plant, including all work areas, aisles, and stairways, and whether local lighting was provided for jobs involving possible eyestrain. The type of lighting fixtures was observed, as was the existence of any unlighted areas, such as dark stairways.

Illumination was considered adequate in almost two-thirds of the laundries, which unusually had large, clean window areas and fluorescent lighting or well shaded incandescent bulbs. In relatively few plants was the lighting poor, but in some it was only fair.

A large Memphis laundry with unusually good illumination had large casement windows on all sides fitted with heat-resistant glass that reduced glare. Walls were of white tile. Electric light bulbs, none of which was exposed, were covered with white, dome-shaped globes. Fluorescent lights over the shirtline, marking, and sorting units, and adjustable green-shaded lamps for the menders provided the necessary special lighting. Other plants with particularly good lighting had windows on four sides and skylights; white ceilings and walls reflected the light.

In contrast, laundries with unsatisfactory illumination often had dirty windows and light bulbs, unshaded or unreplaced broken bulbs, and no special lighting on particular jobs requiring it. In some, stairways and other places outside the work area, though used by employees, were only dimly lit and hence a safety hazard. On the whole, better maintenance—cleaning windows and light bulbs, shading

bulbs, replacing those worn out or broken—would have improved the illumination in many laundries.

LAY-OUT

The lay-out of a plant directly affects production. Essential to good lay-out is the proper location and spacing of departments and equipment to assure a smooth flow of work from one department to another, with a minimum of criss-crossing or unproductive motions, a minimum of trucking of work and walking by operators, and a maximum use of labor saving devices.

Agents judged lay-out on the basis of floor plan and the extent to which labor saving devices were used, such as conveyor belts, rails, elevators, and chutes. Agents observed whether aisles were sufficiently wide and work areas uncrowded and whether soiled garments were kept entirely separate from clean clothing.

By and large, the lay-out was found adequate, and the flow of work was systematic. This was not always simple to accomplish, especially when laundries were situated in buildings not originally constructed for this purpose.

Some laundries had all departments on one floor except marking which was on a mezzanine above the washroom. Laundry, after being marked and classified, was dropped into chutes which emptied into the wash wheels. In one Florida plant, however, though laundry was marked on the balcony, it was carried up- and down-stairs—an avoidable use of additional labor.

A one-story plant is considered more satisfactory than a multi-story type. Some plants of the multistory type, however, had minimized the amount of labor required to transfer laundry from one floor to another by using such devices as conveyors, rails, chutes, or elevators. Conveyors and rails were used also to move laundry from one department to another on the same floor, although carts were more commonly used for this purpose. The engineer in a North Carolina laundry had designed a three-tiered cart with the advantage of minimizing the crushing or "pounding down" of laundry, a short-coming of the more usual, deep cart.

Other practicable methods and devices found in use are worth mentioning:

Incoming bundles in a Chicago plant were piled at one end of a conveyor belt. Along the conveyor, classifiers and identifiers were stationed at tables on the sides of which were racks designed to hold the nets open so that laundry could be dropped into them easily.

After the bundles were broken and marked in the marking and identifying department of a Missouri plant, the laundry was put into nets, and the nets in turn loaded at waist level into canvas bags. Conveyors carried these bags to the washroom and returned them empty to the marking room.

Handling and routing were facilitated in a Virginia laundry by hanging wearing apparel on racks that were moved along a rail.

In a Louisville plant the classifier worked from a raised platform from which she could, without raising her arms, toss the bags of laundry into their proper carts.

Although, generally speaking, lay-out was satisfactory, the standards in some localities were not equal to those found elsewhere.

Falling short of achievement in other cities were many laundries in Atlanta, Jacksonville, and small North Carolina cities.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment, like lay-out, affects directly the rate of production. Equipment that is outmoded or subject to frequent break-down places the employer at a competitive disadvantage in relation to others operating with modern machinery, and it makes it impossible for the worker to match the production standard achieved in other plants.

Factors used in evaluating equipment were type and condition of equipment and of guarding on machines. Agents also took note of the use of specialized equipment adapted to particular needs. Agents observed, for example, whether washers were of wooden or metal construction; whether presses were of the air-compression or older, foot-treadle type; whether flatwork ironers were guarded; and whether the covers of washers and extractors were equipped with an interlocking device to prevent operation of the machine with the cover open.

On the basis of these criteria, equipment was considered good or very good in three-fifths of the 257 plants. A negligible number of plants were rated poor, and somewhat over a third were judged fair. In four localities, however, equipment did not equal the standards found elsewhere—Atlanta, Birmingham, Tampa, and small North Carolina cities.

Washers.—In laundries with good equipment, washers were frequently of metal construction. Many were automatic to some extent and had interlocking devices on the covers. On the "automatic washman," the most modern washer, the washing cycle, initiated by pressing a button, is automatically completed without further handling. In one laundry pipes connected the washer with a container of washing solution, admitted into the machine by opening a valve. On the other hand, the older type of wooden wheel, still found in some laundries, was frequently operated with open covers so that the water sloshed out of the rapidly revolving cylinders onto the floor.

Extractors.—These machines should be equipped with metal covers and interlocking devices. Lack of such devices, as well as broken covers, or occasionally the complete absence of a cover, constituted the most common faults of equipment observed during the survey.

Flatwork ironers.—Some type of guard was almost invariably found on these machines, affording protection against injury to almost all flatworkers. The guarding usually consisted either of a shield extending across the ironer or of one or more small, light rolls in front of the heavy cylinders.

Ironers in some plants were equipped with special features. Some had conveyors or baskets that could be swung from one end of the ironer to the other to carry damp or imperfectly ironed pieces from the folders to the feeders for re-ironing. A few laundries had cooling devices on the ironers which cooled the pieces as they left the machine. The flatwork emerged warm, and not hot as is general elsewhere, and hence was easier and more comfortable for the folders to handle. An unusual electrical device on the ironer in one plant operated in such a

way that large pieces of flatwork emerged from the ironer completely folded.

Presses.—The majority of presses, of all types, were adequately guarded. Most of the presses were of the air-compression type, operated by pressing two buttons simultaneously, one with each hand. Because both hands are occupied, they cannot be caught as the head of the press is lowered. Sometimes it was possible for the worker, by tampering with the buttons, to use only one hand to operate the press. To prevent this, some plants had set the button controls in close-fitting rings. While the two-button-control, air-compression presses were most common, a number of plants still had some of the old foot-treadle type. For the most part, however, they were being replaced. Time-adjusted shirtline presses were also seen in use. The operator has only to lower the head (the upper of the two pressing surfaces) which is automatically raised when the shirt has been on the press long enough.

Special equipment.—Some laundries had installed specialized equipment to answer particular needs. For example, in one plant finished laundry was sent to a semicircular table, rather than to a more common long type, where bundle wrappers assorted the pieces into bundles. At a semicircular table the workers have only to turn to pick up the pieces, whereas at a long table they must walk from one part to another. This plant was also equipped with a large tumbler which gently tumbled laundry to loosen it after it came out of the extractors tightly wound. This saved the time of finishing operators who did not have to loosen the pieces by hand.

Postwar Plans

That modern equipment was not more widely used was undoubtedly due to employers' inability to buy new equipment during the war. Some laundry owners said they had already ordered or intended to buy new equipment, such as automatic metal wash wheels, modern extractors with conveyor rails, shirtline presses, apparel presses, flat-work ironers, and conveyors.

HOUSEKEEPING

Individuals are more or less sensitive to their surroundings. Clean, orderly surroundings are conducive to clean, orderly work habits.

Agents, in judging housekeeping, noted whether washroom floors were of relatively impervious material, well drained, and without a measurable depth of water; whether floors were in good repair and without obstructions which might cause falls; whether windows, light bulbs, floors, and stairs were clean; and whether aisles were kept open and free of obstruction.

In contrast with each of the other items used in judging work-area conditions, housekeeping was often found to be unsatisfactory. Housekeeping was definitely considered poor in 39 of the 257 laundries, several of which were in Georgia or South Carolina, and it was rated only fair in 97 other laundries. In less than half the establishments was housekeeping considered good or very good. Because of the difficulty in hiring porters during the war, plants were not cleaned so frequently or thoroughly as necessary. At the time of the survey some plants

were getting a postwar housecleaning. Light fixtures, floors, and all areas in the plant were being thoroughly cleaned for the first time in many months.

Laundries where housekeeping was considered good or very good were characterized by wide, uncluttered aisles, by clean floors, windows, and light fixtures, and by well-drained concrete floors in the washroom, which, though often wet, had no measurable depth of water.

While concrete or other relatively impervious material is desirable for the washroom, a more resilient material is preferable in other work areas to relieve the strain caused by standing constantly on a hard surface. To counteract this strain, some laundries which had concrete floors provided their employees with mats. In a clean, spacious Jacksonville laundry employees were given a choice of mats or wooden platforms on which to stand. Other plants had laid special floor surfaces of composition or asphalt which were smooth, even, and less fatiguing than a harder surface.

Agents found that white interiors were used advantageously to achieve a cheerful appearance. A Missouri laundry, where housekeeping was excellent, was described as having spotlessly white painting throughout; clean, smooth, unobstructed floors; and composition-covered work tables. White brick walls, wooden floors (except in the washroom), wide, clear aisles, and spacious work areas were observed in a North Carolina plant.

Many plants, however, were far from satisfactory. In an Indiana laundry were observed crowded, cluttered aisles, dirty light bulbs, floors dirty and rutted, and very wet washroom floors caused by non-functioning drains. A Florida laundry was housed in a very old building once used as a store. The ceiling, made of fiberboard, much of it loose, was covered with dust and cobwebs. In addition to cluttered aisles, unduly wet washroom floors, and a generally dirty appearance, undesirable features observed in some laundries included pipe-obstructed floors; narrow or broken stairs, sometimes without handrails; no provision of mats on hard-surfaced floors; soiled clothing scattered around marking room; and haphazard storage of completed bundles. The call office of a Virginia laundry, for example, was practically littered with bundles—on desks, floors, and chairs. Contrast this with the simple system found in other laundries where rows of shelves had been constructed, each designated with a letter of the alphabet; on these shelves bundles were neatly "filed" according to the first initial of the customer's name.

EMPLOYEE-WELFARE FACILITIES

Although employers would unquestionably be aghast at the very thought of using in their own homes the types of facilities they provided their employees, many showed little concern or awareness of the flagrant inadequacies in plant facilities. Not that luxurious appointments are necessary. But certainly facilities which recognize the simple decencies of living are essential in a place where human beings spend a substantial part of their waking hours.

In contrast with conditions in the work area, satisfactory on the whole, facilities for the health and comfort of employees were often wholly lacking or inadequate.

DRINKING FACILITIES

Adequate, pure drinking water, dispensed by sanitary means, is essential in laundries where the temperature is relatively high, and the work involves almost constant movement. Drinking water facilities were judged on the basis of adequacy (1 facility for every 30 persons was considered adequate), type, location, and state of repair, particularly of guards against contact by mouth and nose. Essentially, the water should be somewhat cooled, but not by direct contact with ice, and so dispensed as not to transmit disease. Any one of several types of dispensers is adequate. Satisfactory types include: (1) Water coolers provided with suitable dispensers for individual paper cups and containers for disposal of used cups; and (2) drinking fountains, of impervious material; equipped with angle-jets, which prevent the water from falling back on the opening, and with guards to prevent the drinker's mouth and nose from coming in contact with the nozzle; the inclined jet of water not touching the guard, to avoid splattering.

Drinking facilities were poor in fully one-fourth of the 257 laundries. Almost every laundry in Memphis was described as poor. Only somewhat over one-third of all laundries were reported to have good or very good facilities, but not even one laundry was so described in several cities—some cities in Georgia and in South Carolina.

Laundries with satisfactory facilities had modern dispensers supplying cool water, often electrically refrigerated. The dispensers were either fountains with a well-guarded, slanting jet or water coolers and disposable cups.

Laundries with unsatisfactory facilities sometimes had one water-filled wooden barrel, from which workers drew water into their own glasses or milk bottles. In other plants the only source of drinking water was a washtub faucet in the washrooms.

WASHING FACILITIES

Washing facilities were evaluated on the basis of adequacy and cleanliness. They were considered adequate when one washbasin was provided for every 10-100 employees and one additional basin for every 15 additional persons; when basins were of vitreous, glazed, enameled-ware, or similar material; and when hot and cold water, soap, towels, and towel-disposal facilities were provided. The facilities should be located in or near the toilet rooms.

In nearly half the laundries washing facilities were highly unsatisfactory; in 4 plants they were not provided at all. Only 16 percent of all laundries visited provided good or very good facilities.

The best of the washing facilities consisted of an adequate number of clean washbasins with hot and cold water, soap (liquid, powder, or bar), and sanitary towels—roller towels, paper towels, or individual cloth towels. Showers were provided in a few laundries.

Laundries described as having poor facilities often provided only cold water and neither soap nor towels. A single faucet, intended to accommodate all employees, might be the only source of water for washing. The only washing facility in a small city, Missouri laundry consisted of a long, cold-water pipe in the laundry washroom to which had been attached a faucet. Water, when drawn, poured directly onto the floor. Neither towels nor soap were provided. In a Kansas

City plant towels were used in common. Negro women in a Jacksonville laundry, comprising 60 percent of all the plants' women production workers, had no place to wash except at a workroom wash-tub. In many plants the washbowls, inadequate in number, were dirty. Soap was frequently lacking. The majority of laundries provided either unsanitary common towels or none at all.

TOILETS

Good toilet facilities, essential in all industrial establishments, safeguard workers' health. Inadequate, unsanitary facilities are likely to spread disease.

Adequate standards require that one toilet be provided for every 15 women employed, that separate rooms, clearly distinguished, be available for men and for women, and that each toilet be enclosed in an individual compartment closed by a door which can be fastened to insure privacy. Toilet facilities should be conveniently located near the workroom. Toilet paper and, in women's facilities, covered receptacles for sanitary napkins are essential. Washing facilities should be available in or near the toilet rooms. The facilities must be kept clean, sanitary, and in a good state of repair.

That laundries did not always meet these standards may be seen from the fact that in 33 percent of them toilet facilities were described as poor; and in 43 percent, only fair. Only one-fourth of the 257 plants were described as good or very good. In the large southern city of Memphis there was not even one laundry where facilities were considered good—the majority were poor. On the other hand, not one Louisville laundry was considered poor.

Toilet facilities judged good or very good were of the type previously described as being adequate, located in rooms satisfactorily lighted and ventilated. In a few laundries clean, modern toilets were enclosed in individual steel booths which could be closed by a door equipped with a fastener.

Eye-witness comments by agents on the poor facilities describe shocking conditions. Laundry owners who accompanied agents in touring the plant sometimes claimed they themselves were seeing the women's personal services facilities for the first time. Agents' observations of poor facilities showed the number of toilets was inadequate. Almost invariably the toilets, as well as the toilet rooms, were dirty, often with heavily accumulated dirt testifying to infrequent and haphazard cleaning. Some of the most serious deficiencies indicated a disregard for simple, basic decency. The following observations were among those made: no toilet paper provided (one plant had supplied a mail-order catalogue (!) as a substitute); two or more toilets, without separating partitions, located in a dressing room and unscreened from the rest of the room; broken seats or none at all; leaking, out-of-order toilets; common toilets for men and women; inadequate lighting and ventilation in toilet room. Among the worst facility encountered were outside toilets. Such a facility in a Virginia laundry consisted of a small, dilapidated shack located in an outside alley. Only a thin wall separated two, filthy toilets, one for each sex. When not in use, the toilet-doors were open.

Additional and/or modern facilities were sometimes needed, but very often necessary improvements could have been made by better

maintenance of existing facilities. Particularly needed were cleanliness and prompt repair. Frequently lacking were such essentials as toilet paper, sanitary-napkin dispensers, covered receptacles, and door-fasteners. Frequently the facilities for Negro women were inferior to those available to white women. Sometimes, though Negro women outnumbered white, fewer toilets were provided for the Negroes.

SEATING

Most laundry production jobs require the worker to stand while working. However, women menders are seated, and occasionally women who operate handkerchief ironers or fold small pieces of flatwork are provided with seats. While it may not be feasible to seat workers at most laundry jobs, seats are essential for use during lunch, rest, or enforced waiting periods. From a North Carolina laundry came the report that shirtline operatives, who had almost daily waiting periods, sometimes had to wait more than an hour at a time for shirts to be brought to them. Although this may be an extreme illustration, it was not unusual to find that workers had several short waiting periods daily. Aside from the fact that such unproductive waiting time is a loss both to the employer and the employee, it would seem only reasonable to expect to have a seat during enforced idle time.

Authoritative experts agree that alternate sitting and standing positions are more healthful and more conducive to efficiency than are either constant standing or constant sitting. Constant standing is fatiguing. Every State in the country except Mississippi and Illinois² now has legislation requiring that seats be provided for women employees. Many of the seating laws, however, cannot be satisfactorily enforced because they do not define what is meant by "adequate seats."

Two types of seating were investigated—seats for use, when possible, at or near work stations, and seats for use during lunch and rest periods. Almost a fourth (59) of all the laundries visited provided no seats whatsoever for plant workers—a deficiency especially prevalent in small cities of Georgia, North and South Carolina. Workers in 100 other laundries, where seating was poor, were not much better off. Frequently, a couple of chairs, without backrests at that, were provided only for the menders. In one laundry, typical of others, women workers had no alternative but to eat their lunch while sitting on window sills or work tables.

In only 35 laundries, most of them in the Middle West, was seating described as good or very good. Here, a sufficient number of seats was provided for use during lunch and rest periods. Sometimes seats were available at work stations. In one plant flatwork folders sat while folding small or medium-sized pieces, alternating jobs every day or half-day with feeders, to give all flatworkers an opportunity to sit part of the time.

² Illinois had a seating law, but it is no longer in effect.

DRESSING, REST, AND LUNCH ROOM FACILITIES

Facilities outside the work area where women could eat lunch, rest when necessary, and change clothing were not too common. In small plants one adequately equipped room may suffice, while larger plants may require three separate rooms—a lunch room, a rest room, and a dressing room.

Dressing Rooms

Almost half the laundries had no such facility, a more common failure in the Southeast than in the Middle West. When provided, the dressing rooms were of various types. Sometimes the facility consisted only of a narrow partitioned aisle where coats were hung, but in a few places large rooms were available, equipped with benches, metal lockers, and possibly showers. By and large the dressing facility, when available, provided hooks or hangers for coats, a bench or two, and perhaps a mirror. Most of the dressing rooms were consid-



NOTE LOCKERS AND SHOWERS IN THIS REST ROOM FOR WOMEN LAUNDRY WORKERS

ered unsatisfactory because crowded, improperly lighted and ventilated, and inadequately equipped.

Two of the best dressing rooms observed were in relatively large laundries. A Chicago laundry provided a large room, equipped with individual metal lockers and benches. Adjacent to it was a first aid room, with cot and equipment. A North Carolina laundry provided dressing rooms for both white and Negro women, both rooms large, adequately furnished, and equipped with showers.

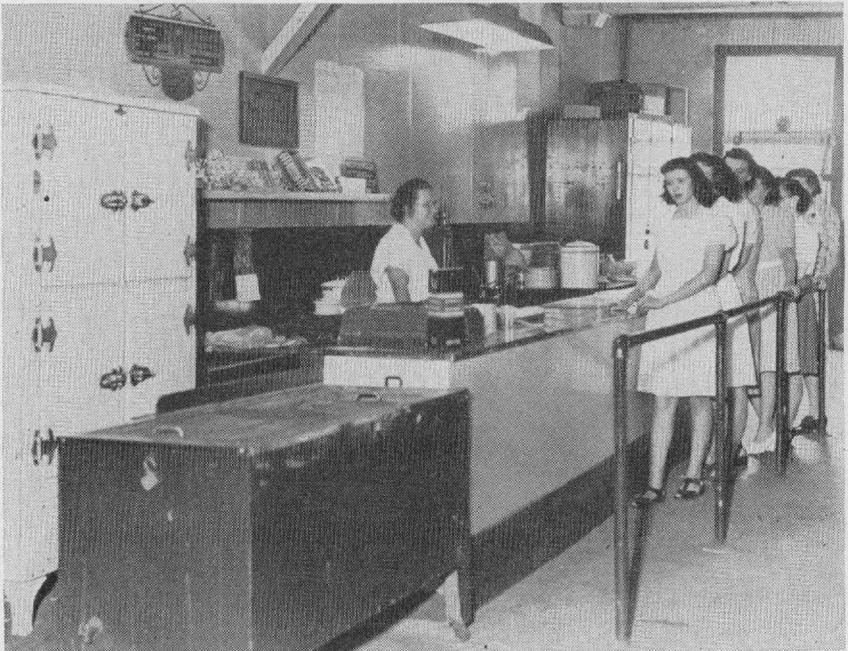
Rest Rooms

These are practically an unknown luxury to laundry workers, even to those employed in large plants. Only 15 of 91 midwestern laundries provided rest rooms, much more scarce in the Southeast where only 7 were found among 166 plants. Many of the few rest rooms observed were unsatisfactory.

Lunch Rooms

Only about 1 of every 10 laundries provided a lunch room, although it would appear that such a facility is necessary in an industry where most employees are allowed only half an hour for lunch, hardly enough time to leave the building, eat at a nearby restaurant, and return. In many laundries women ate their lunch in the work area.

Some of the relatively few lunch rooms were of a desirable type. Most were separate rooms, used only as eating places. Sometimes low-cost, hot food was served, cafeteria style. Others had facilities



A MODEST EMPLOYEE CAFETERIA IN A LAUNDRY. FREE COFFEE IS FEATURED.

for food-preparation or refrigeration. Chairs and tables were provided. In some plants, vending machines dispensed candy, cookies, and soft drinks, or a snack bar might be provided where workers could buy milk, coffee, sandwiches, candy, and the like.

In a few laundries which had no eating facilities on the premises, management had made provision for an adequate noonday meal for the employees. Arrangements had been made to have a neighborhood woman prepare lunch and serve it in her home to workers of a North Carolina laundry. A similar provision had been made in another plant, where a woman prepared lunch and brought it to the laundry.

No Facilities

Almost half the laundries had no dressing, rest, or lunch rooms. Here, coats were usually hung on nails or hooks in the workroom; lunch, if taken at the plant, was eaten in the workroom; and quiet, comfortable rest facilities were not available. Plants entirely lacking in service facilities were substantially more prevalent in the Southeast, where they constituted three-fifths of the 166 southeastern plants. Several were large plants, employing more than 100 women, where the provision of minimum adequate facilities would not be an unreasonable requirement.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE WOMEN'S BUREAU

For complete list of publications, write the Women's Bureau.

Single copies of these publications—or a small supply for special educational purposes—may be secured through the Women's Bureau without charge, as long as the free supply lasts. These bulletins *may be purchased* direct from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington 25, D. C., at prices listed. A discount of 25 percent on orders of 100 or more copies is allowed. Leaflets may be secured from the Women's Bureau.

Bulletins available for distribution, published since 1940

- No. 157. The Legal Status of Women in the United States of America, January 1938, *United States Summary*. 1941. 89 pp. 15¢. No. 157-A. *Cumulative Supplement, 1938-1945*. 31 pp. 1946 10¢. Leaflet—Women's Eligibility for Jury Duty. June 1, 1947.
175. Earnings in the Women's and Children's Apparel Industry in the Spring of 1939. 91 pp. 1940. 15¢.
176. Application of Labor Legislation to the Fruit and Vegetable Canning and Preserving Industries. 162 pp. 1940. 20¢.
177. Earnings and Hours in Hawaii Woman-Employing Industries. 53 pp. 1940. 10¢.
178. Women's Wages and Hours in Nebraska. 51 pp. 1940. 10¢.
180. Employment in Service and Trade Industries in Maine. 30 pp. 1940. 10¢.
182. Employment of Women in the Federal Government, 1923 to 1939. 60 pp. 1941. 10¢.
183. Women Workers in Their Family Environment. (City of Cleveland, State of Utah) 82 pp. 1941. 15¢.
185. The Migratory Labor Problem in Delaware. 24 pp. 1941. 10¢.
186. Earnings and Hours in Pacific Coast Fish Canneries. 30 pp. 1941. 10¢.
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188. Office Work in 5 Cities in 1940:
1, Houston (10¢); 2, Los Angeles (10¢); 3, Kansas City (15¢); 4, Richmond (15¢); 5, Philadelphia (15¢); Chart, Salary Rates in 5 Cities.
189. Part 1. Women's Factory Employment in an Expanding Aircraft Production Program. 12 pp. 1942. 5¢. (See Bull. 192-1.)
Part 4. Employment of and Demand for Women Workers in the Manufacture of Instruments—Aircraft, Optical

- and Fire-Control, and Surgical and Dental. 20 pp. 1942. 5¢.
190. Recreation and Housing for Women War Workers: A Handbook on Standards. 40 pp. 1942. 10¢.
191. State Minimum-Wage Laws and Orders, 1942: An Analysis. 52 pp. and 6 folders. 1942. 20¢. Supplements through 1946. Mimeo. Progress of Minimum-Wage Legislation, 1943-1945.
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195. Women Workers in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. 15 pp. 1942. 5¢.
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