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# MEETING HOUSING NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE *in rural areas*



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I N 1950 nearly 310,000 Wisconsin residents were 65 years old or more. And nearly 55,000 of these folks were living on farms. Since then, some of these "senior citizens" have moved -- gone to live with a son or daughter, or moved to villages or cities. But for the most part, older people expect to spend the rest of their lives after retirement in the houses they have made their homes over the years.

*University of Wisconsin* — EXTENSION SERVICE  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, MADISON



Many of these houses in which older folks live are well arranged to meet their needs. Others are not. Often, however, we can make fairly small changes in a house which add to the comfort and safety of older persons living in it. Failing eyesight or hearing, and the danger of a fall causing serious injury, mark "safety first" as the rule to apply in planning housing. Aging and certain diseases leave

older people with less energy. This also calls for safety measures, especially in regard to stairs.

And of course changes in family personnel may mean the house is too big and its facilities are no longer appropriate for the smaller household with its altered needs.

Following are three big questions to ask in planning housing suited to older people. Under each question is a suggested answer. Many of these suggestions came from Wisconsin farm people who were visited from 1953 to 1955 as part of a study by the School of Home Economics at the University of Wisconsin.

## With Whom Do Older People Want to Live?

- Older people want to live independently as long as possible.
- They prefer not to live with married children or grandchildren, but would like to be near them.
- They like to be where they can help with familiar tasks about the farm and home.

## Where Do They Want to Live?

- Older people like to live in familiar surroundings where their friends and associations are.
- Very old people like to watch persons of all ages go about their work or play, not other aged only.
- Most older farm people like rural surroundings with open spaces, a place for animals, a chance to watch things grow.
- But they don't want to be isolated. They want to be able to walk or drive to:
  - 1 Go shopping.
  - 2 Go to church and other meetings.
  - 3 See friends and relatives; have help if needed.
  - 4 Just be out-of-doors when weather permits.

## What Kind of House Do Older People Want?

### IT MUST BE SAFE

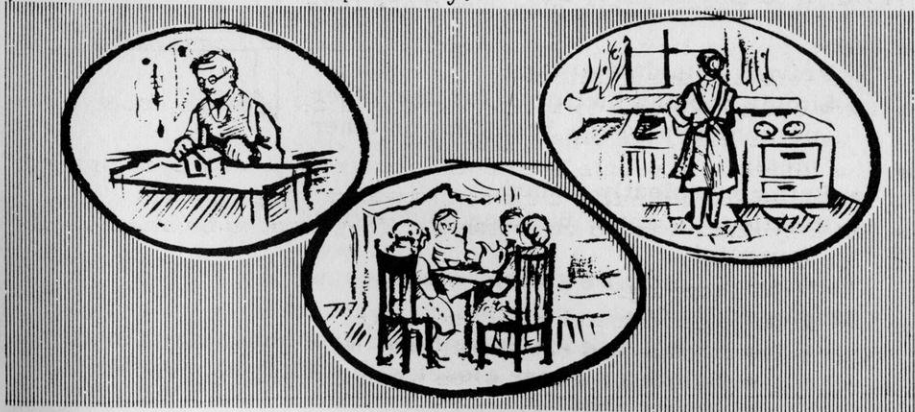
- 1 The first floor is the best location -- with no stairs except perhaps one or two to the outside.
- 2 If stairways are present, they should be well-lighted, with hand rails, and free from obstructions. Treads should be wide, even, and in good condition; risers should be low.
- 3 The house must be free from undue fire hazard.
- 4 Cooking facilities should use electricity, not gas.
- 5 No slippery floors; no loose or sliding rugs.
- 6 Bath tubs or showers with convenient handholds -- shower faucets easily reached and adjusted -- rubber mats to reduce slipperiness.

### IT SHOULD BE CONVENIENT AND COMFORTABLE, WITH:

- 1 Plenty of heat in winter, automatically regulated.
- 2 Electric light adequate for reading or for crafts, without glare.
- 3 An indoor toilet on same floor as sleeping and living area.
- 4 Windows easily opened or shut.
- 5 A comfortable bed, a chair with headrest, a place for daytime rest.
- 6 Cleanliness of rooms, clothes and person made easy. Opportunity to do personal laundry.

### AND HAVE PLENTY OF SPACE, YET PRIVACY

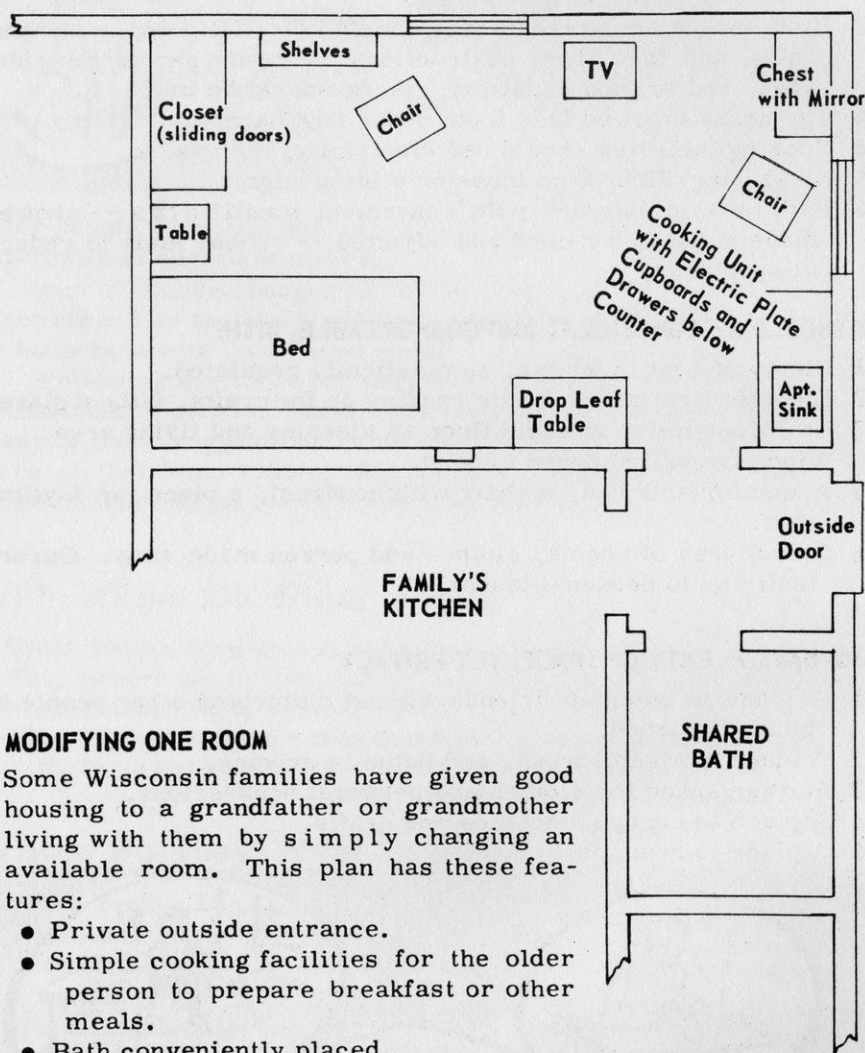
- 1 A place to entertain friends without disturbing other people or being disturbed.
- 2 A place to sleep, dress, and bathe in privacy.
- 3 Storage space for clothes and personal possessions.
- 4 A place to carry on hobbies and crafts.
- 5 A place to read mail privately.





## Four Living Arrangements for Older People

**T**HERE ARE MANY ways to provide housing for older people. The plan to use depends on the individual situation. Four possible arrangements are presented on the following pages. They are actual cases of how farm people in Wisconsin have met housing needs of older people.



### MODIFYING ONE ROOM

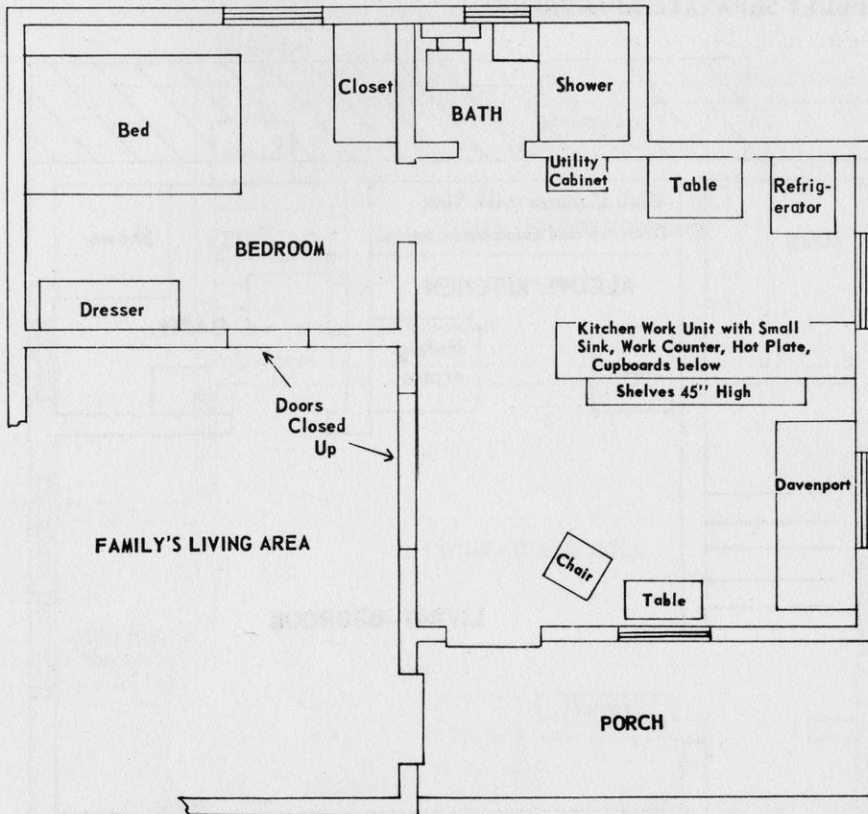
Some Wisconsin families have given good housing to a grandfather or grandmother living with them by simply changing an available room. This plan has these features:

- Private outside entrance.
- Simple cooking facilities for the older person to prepare breakfast or other meals.
- Bath conveniently placed.
- Relatives in same building, but living separately.

These were the three main expenses in changing the room.

- Installing cooking unit with apartment size sink.
- Building storage closet with sliding doors.
- Adding shelves.

## DEVELOPING AN APARTMENT ON SAME FLOOR AS FAMILY



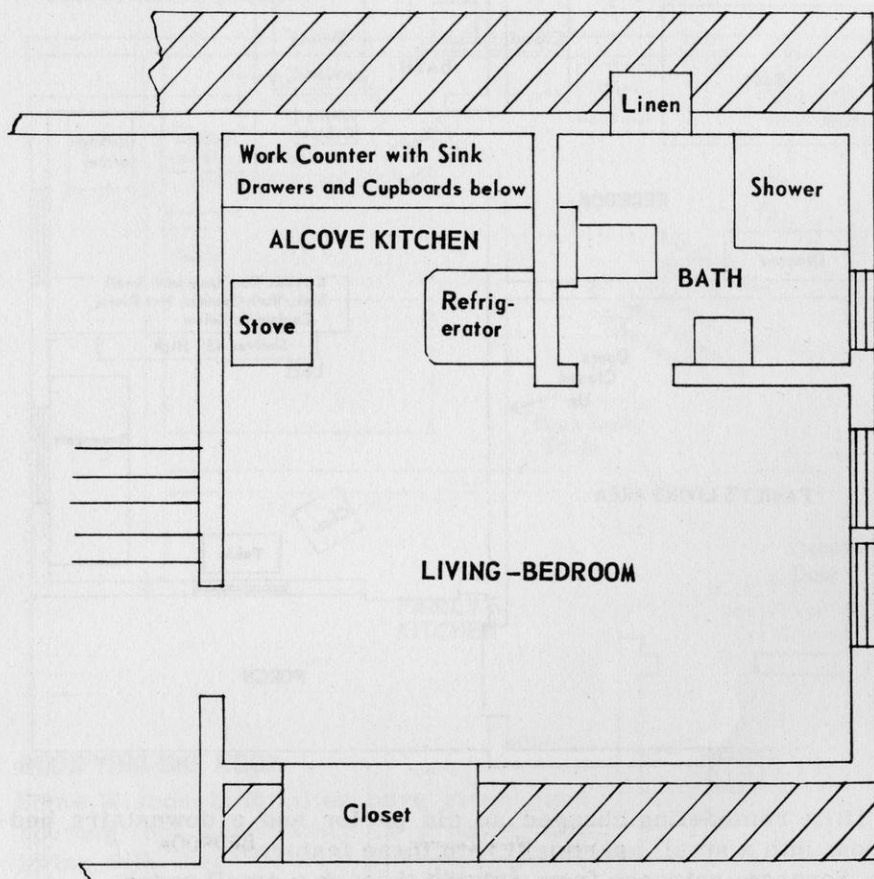
A little remodeling changed an old parlor and a downstairs bedroom into a small apartment with these features:

- Separate entrance from outside through a small porch.
- Living space large enough to entertain a friend or two, to rest comfortably while watching TV or listening to the radio.
- A small but complete kitchen -- with a work unit of the "bar" type.
- Shelves for books or keepsakes separating the kitchen from the living room.
- Small bath conveniently located.

These were the main expenses:

- The kitchen work-unit materials (work done by son-in-law).
- Shower and bowl in bathroom (the toilet was already in the house, although not conveniently placed for this new apartment).

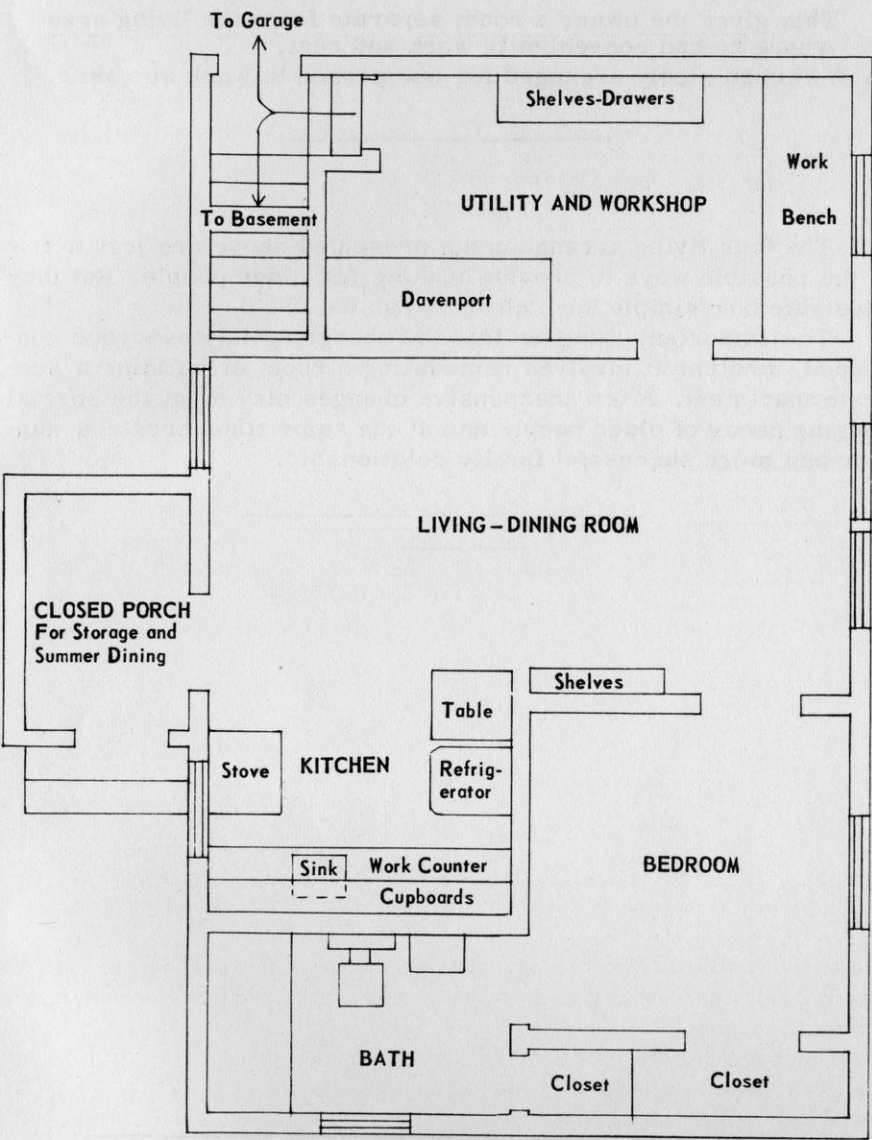
## A FULLY SEPARATE APARTMENT



Here is a small livable apartment for one or two people. It was made by transforming attic space above a one-story house. Features include:

- Enough space for one or two people.
- Apartment separate from the family living below.
- Kitchen has small refrigerator and apartment size range.
- Storage space obtained by using low area under the roof slant.

LIVING IN A SEPARATE BUILDING



This home started as a garage. Partitions, fixtures, and a partial basement were added to make a very complete house. A retired couple live here. The husband has a bad heart and can only work



a couple of hours at a time, with frequent rests. In spite of this, he did much of the work himself. Features include:

- A utility-work shop with work bench, shelves, and davenport. This gives the owner a room separate from the living area where he can conveniently work and rest.
  - A kitchen nicely arranged for one person to work at a time.
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The four living arrangements presented above are just a few of the possible ways to provide housing for older people. But they illustrate how simple such changes can be.

The important thing is that the change satisfy everyone concerned, whether it involves remodeling a room or building a separate apartment. A few inexpensive changes may meet the special housing needs of older people and at the same time create a happier and more successful family relationship.

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