

# Three Old Vacant Houses Joined To Provide 40 Modernized Suites

## Buildings on East Second Street Promptly Filled, Giving Return to Owner— Other Alteration Projects

By LEE E. COOPER

Modernization of old private homes and tenements which are now empty and represent a burden on the owners, offers a comparatively quick way of helping to fill the unprecedented demand for shelter in Manhattan.

Some of these structures have been gathering dust and tax arrears since boom days. They constitute an eye-sore and a neighborhood drawback at a time when they might be paying a reasonable return after a modest additional outlay for improvements and removal of violations. Hundreds of them, particularly on the lower East and West Sides and in Harlem, could be put back into use in a matter of weeks.

Some of these outmoded structures, of course, are in such a state of disrepair that it would be economically unsound to send good money after bad in trying to modernize them. But many could provide satisfactory living quarters in short order for families desperately in need of some place to live.

In view of the present shortage, there even has been some sentiment for municipal commandeering of idle buildings for renovation and rental at levels which would pay back the city's investment in improvements and then return something to the owners. But housing experts generally suggest that the owners themselves embark upon a widespread alteration program. Some owners already have started the ball rolling.

### Owned by Samuel Fassler

One of the latest examples of a successful renovation job of this kind is to be found at 157-61 East Second Street, where Samuel Fassler, former Commissioner of Housing and Buildings, has combined three old five-story tenements, formerly boarded-up and unsightly, into a single modernized structure with forty suites for which tenants already have been found at a satisfactory rent level.

J. M. Berlinger, the architect, drew the plans and supervised the work of bridging the courts between these houses with a central public hall containing the elevator, stairs and incinerator, and providing eight comfortable apartments, of three and four rooms, on each floor.

"This virtually new apartment house offers an idea of how sound planning applied to countless similar structures throughout the city

could produce at one-half the cost and one-half the time, and with use of considerably less materials, the same number of apartments as could be obtained in new buildings, few of which may be expected in the immediate future," Mr. Berlinger commented.

"This kind of low-cost permanent housing is not delayed by the necessity for relocation of families and demolition necessary for other proposed large-scale housing jobs and new slum-clearance projects. It can be carried out at once.

### Get New Tax Benefits

"Furthermore, under a bill signed by Governor Dewey a few days ago, municipalities may grant limited tax exemption and tax abatements as a further inducement to owners who may be considering making vacant buildings habitable."

Just before the war, The East Side Chamber of Commerce awarded to Mr. Berlinger its certificate of merit for altering the properties at 302 and 304 East Third Street into new apartments, and for planning the garden which separates them from another structure on East Second Street. Both of these projects also were sponsored by Mr. Fassler.

During the past decade, this architect has planned modernization work involving about 10,000 housing units. One of the largest of these was the Roosevelt Gardens apartments on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

Following the completion of the East Second Street alteration, he is engaged in similar operations at 952 Fifth Avenue; at the Spencer Arms Hotel at Broadway and Sixty-ninth Street; at 52 West Ninth Street and at 815 Park Avenue. He is now drawing plans also for remodeling the building at the south corner of Central Park West and Eighty-third Street, 523 East Eighty-first Street, and 349 West Eighty-sixth Street.