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BOARDING HOUSE

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Boarding houses were places where unrelated individuals could live, they had separate rooms and public spaces to gather and socialize. They accommodated travelers but also became permanent residence for others. Some received room and board in exchange of for labor. A significant characteristic of boarding houses was that as domestic work was outsourced, chores change from being done out of love to being done in exchange for money. The boarding house said to have been the type against which the American single-family house idea of domesticity evolved against to conceptualize itself. It was the same developments that increased the demand for “American institutions” – the expansion of urban manufacturers and commerce, the dramatic increase in the number of city residents in need of shelter, the emergence of economies based less on custom and more on cash – helped give rise to the domestic ideal that the nineteenth century Americans came to call home. As employers – no longer bound by craft traditions – increasingly declined to house their employees, homes became the private abodes of loving families. As artisan workshops gave way to factories and retail stores, “home” became distinct from “work”.” (4)

There were larger scale boarding houses that operated as a large residence, and at the other end of the spectrum, there were families that would take a boarder in one of their spare rooms to help them pay the bills. There were boarding houses for every degree of social status. Boarders took their meals with the family on a common table while lodgers slept in the house but took their meals elsewhere. 1/3 to ½ of all urban Americans either boarded or took boarders at some time in their life. Most families took in one or two boarders at a time. When income was needed, a private boarding house could have 6 to 10 tenants. Keeping a low profile helped the family avoid technically required hotel licenses and annual taxes.”

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