



Wood frame cuts building costs

The following excerpts from a speech by John W. Poole, President of Dawson Developments Ltd. of Vancouver, are of widespread interest to all Canadians concerned about housing.

"The building industry is accused of being behind the times, of using antiquated, obsolete methods. We don't apply modern management concepts, we're told. We should introduce assembly-line building systems. Some sources would have us believe that factory-built housing is going to sweep the country.

If you believe any of the foregoing, you're headed for frustration and disappointment. They are just not true. Industrialization of housing has been tried again and again in different forms and no cost miracles have resulted. Certain conclusions can be supported. Industrialized housing is not a faster way, is not a cheaper way, is not a better way, it's just another way.

I expect to open the paper tomorrow and read about a revolutionary scheme to build walls out of some new, non-wood material. This new wall system will supposedly reduce the cost of a house by 30 per cent.

Now this would have to be some hell of a material because the cost of a stick-built wall, that is 2x4's, plywood, siding and gypsum board represents less than 10 per cent of the total price of the dwelling. If we replace the conventional outside wall with nothing, which is hardly a practical idea, the most we can save is 10 per cent. The fact is that no system ever designed to replace the versatile 2x4 costs less. It costs more.

Wall panel systems with hard-board facings, aluminum facings, foam plastic cores, spacer cores, etc., all proved to be much more expensive than conventional stud and skin construc-

tion. The result is that not one of them is on the market today. It is a well documented fact that all efforts to date to industrialize the shell of a house have been unsuccessful.

The most spectacular result of this endeavour to industrialize wall panels is the growth in the production and sale of mobile homes. A mobile home is a truly industrialized unit. Carpets are laid, even the furniture is installed in the plant and it costs less than a conventional house of the same size. This could perhaps be called a successful example of cost control by industrialization except for one thing.

By any existing yardstick for housing the mobile home is sub-standard. The significant point is that a conventional home will truly last a lifetime. If we look, not for the life of the unit, but just fifteen years down the road, chances are a conventional dwelling unit will be worth double its original cost. A mobile home in the same time period is virtually worthless.

A lot of people buy mobile homes and will continue to buy them because they are shelter, and there isn't anything else at the price, but the mobile home industry is not intended to be, and cannot be, the answer to housing needs in this country.

A number of people, convinced by the wide acceptance of mobile homes, believe that conventional housing units could be built on the same assembly lines as the mobiles. To some extent this has been done. Manufactured 'sections', as they are called, have been available for some time. But there is one major drawback to their use.

In order to qualify for government guaranteed mortgage financing, sectionals must be built to conventional specifications. The result is that they are considerably more expensive than similar homes produced on site by volume builders.

The cold, hard fact is simply this. An efficient builder who knows what he is doing, given a chance to mass produce housing using conventional materials, by organizing his job, developing an efficient system for moving his material, can still produce housing substantially lower in cost than any industrialized technique known to date."

When working with plywood, apply filler to exposed edges,

sand smooth and paint in the colour of your choice.