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LAWSON PURDY, 90, IS STILL A BUSY MAN

Pioneer in Tax and Housing Reforms Proud of Record in Long City Career

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Sept. 12—Lawson Purdy, one of the grand torch-bearers in the historic New York City crusades for tax reforms, zoning regulations and improvement of tenement buildings, will be a vigorous 90 years old tomorrow.

"The best thirteen years of my life," he said at his home here, have been those since 1940—his marriage to the former Mrs. Helene Wexelsen, a widow.

They have traveled around South American and out to the South Seas. Twice they visited Europe. Mr. Purdy learned to drive a car at the age of 77, and they made trips down South, although he gave up driving at 85 because of sight problems.

Back in 1937, Mr. Purdy retired from his last "gainful employment"—controller of Trinity Church. But even now, he said, his "days are too short" for all the things he wants to do. He serves as trustee of Trinity College in Connecticut and the Provident Loan Society, and is a board member of the Russell Sage Foundation. He is active president of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, named for a printer who left \$300,000 to spread the tax reform, free trade and political economy ideas of Henry George.

Led in Tax Reform

It was Mr. George's book, "Progress and Poverty," that enticed Mr. Purdy out of a banknote company, and in 1896 led to the "great joy" of becoming secretary of the New York Tax Reform Association—at a cut in salary. Now terminated, the association fought successfully to abolish ad valorem taxes on personal property in the city and to improve real estate assessing.

Nowadays, Mr. Purdy also writes. Not memoirs. He is analyzing factors that increase land val-

ue. He believes it is accessibility, rather than the aggregate amount of land, that determines price. Commuters rarely used to live more than one mile from a railroad station; now the automobile has stretched their radius to as much as five miles comfortably.

The study may never be printed, but that won't grieve Mr. Purdy. "If I've got something in me, I want to get it out," he said. It's "the joy of working."

Mr. Purdy was president of the New York City Department of Taxes and Assessments under three Mayors from 1906 to 1917. He was vice chairman of the commission that drew up the city's first zoning law in 1916. He was secretary of the commission that led to the 1929 Multiple Dwelling Law. He was general director of the Charity Organization Society from 1918 to 1933, and chairman of the city's Emergency Work and Relief Administration in 1932 and 1933.

He is proudest of the bills he pushed through in 1902 and 1906 to require that real estate assessments be separated to show land and total value, and to compel publication of assessment rolls so that citizens could better study them.

Helped to Protect Gains

He recalls how Robert W. De Forest, president of the Charity Organization Society, held that "no social law is good for much of it doesn't have people to safeguard it" after enactment. Mr. Purdy thus served on a civic group that upheld the 1901 Tenement House Law. He was vice chairman of the similar New York zoning Committee, laboring from 1916 to 1942, and chairman of the Multiple Dwelling Law Committee, working from 1929 to 1933.

The zoning law fight, he recalled, was coupled with a successful effort to promote zoning laws over the nation. "People said that the Supreme Court of the United States wouldn't allow a man's property to be taken away from him," he recalled. "So we wanted a lot of other people to put in laws as soon as we could so that the court would be slow to change them."