

Study Charts Century of Progress to 'the Good Life'

BOSTON, Nov. 24 (AP) — Americans are now leading a "good life" that their ancestors of a century ago never dreamed of, according to a study by the United States Department of Labor.

The study examined the spending habits of people living in the Boston area in the 1970's, the 1960's, the 1950's and on back to 1875, when the textile, leather and metal industries were booming and New England was the prosperous machine shop of the nation.

A century ago, when a few pennies bought a loaf of bread or a streetcar ride, the average wage earner brought home \$763 a year and spent 94 percent

of it on necessities: food, clothing and housing.

But the study found that in 1972 and 1973, the latest years surveyed, the average wage earner in the Boston area brought home about \$9,500 a year and could afford to spend 38 percent of it on nonessentials.

'Sign of Material Improvement'

"This increase in the amount available for miscellaneous expenditures is regarded as a sign of material improvement," the study said.

The average "wage earner" family in 1875 had 5.1 members, the study found, while the comparable family of

today has 3.2 persons. One family in 100 in 1875 owned its home, while 48 percent now do.

A century ago, families spent about half their income on food, the study said, while the proportion today is only one-quarter.

In the post-Civil War years, fewer than one family in 100 spent anything at all on recreation or education. Today, the report found, the average family spends 17 percent of its income in these categories.

The study surveyed about 400 families, according to Dennis McSweeney of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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