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Federal Housing Administration  
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*Housing, Wartime*

# WAR HOMES A DAY

A Story of

## WAR HOUSING

Five homes a day for war workers -- 300 to be completed by 1943--reads the schedule of the Chicago Housing Authority's housing program for Chicago.

To meet this program, the Housing Authority is rushing the completion of these new war homes in less than a year's construction time, an average of more than one a day. This is the beginning of the answer to the demand for shelter from intransigent war workers and their families.

The attack on Chicago's housing problem is a race against time to prevent housing shortages here from impeding our production, a disaster already experienced by many communities in both the present conflict and in the last war. In short, it is a race to insure that Chicago will be able to do its part to help attain the nation's production goals.

Chicago is just beginning to feel the impact of the war production program.

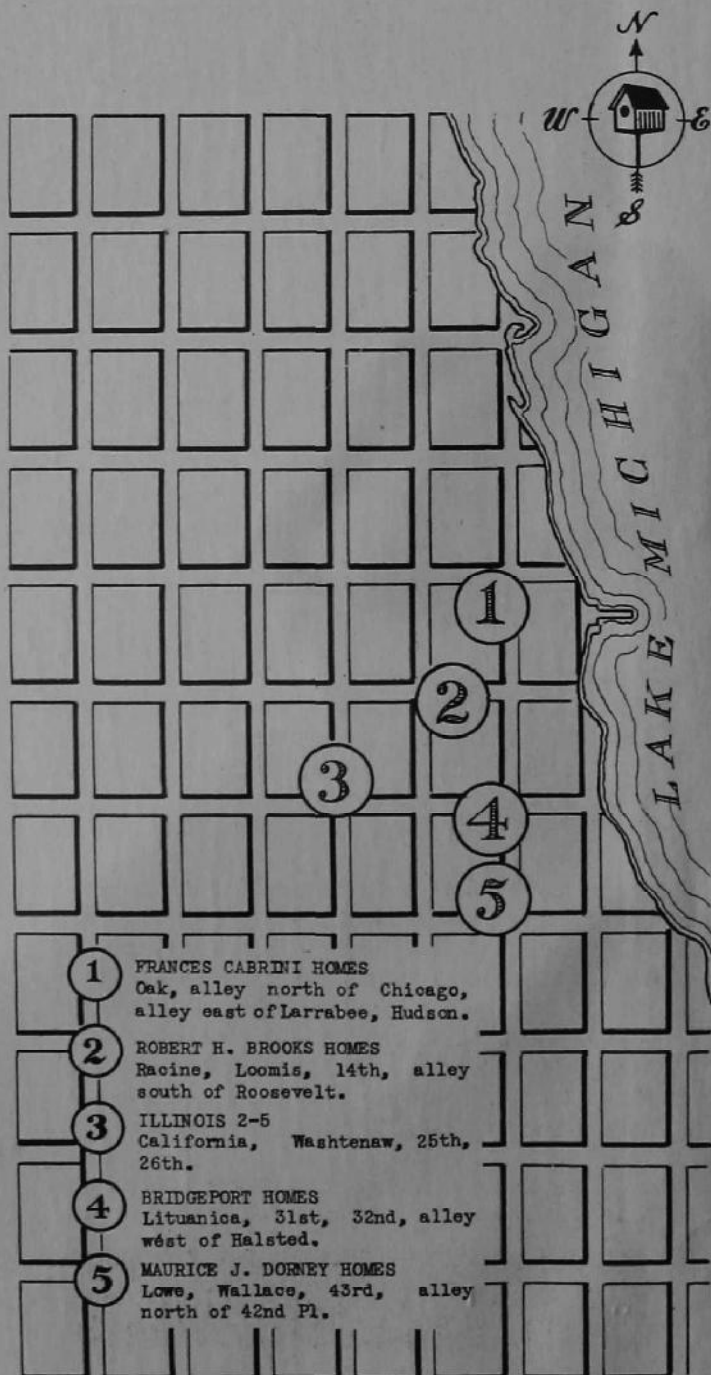
CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

208 South La Salle Street, Chicago

July 1, 1942

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# WAR HOUSING



Our plants and industries have received millions of dollars worth of war orders to make vital equipment and parts for our military machine, its planes, tanks, and guns. Billions of dollars of additional contracts are on the way.

As a result, Chicago's industries are expanding and shifting from normal peacetime civilian production to war production, and the new job is much larger than the old. Thousands of additional workers already have been employed. Moreover, based on the present volume of war contracts in the Chicago area, it is estimated that a minimum of 110,000 additional war jobs will be created by January 1943.<sup>1)</sup> In addition, several federal government agencies were recently transferred to Chicago, and more will be on the way if adequate housing facilities can be secured.

In Chicago, war jobs are now being created faster than workers can be found to fill them. At present there are several thousand openings in war industries that the plants are having great difficulty in filling. This is apparently due to the lack of trained workers and the large number of physically incapacitated unemployed workers that make up the present pool of available labor in Chicago.

A survey of this pool reveals that to fill new war jobs a minimum of 22,000 new workers are expected to be brought into Chicago during the next year.<sup>2)</sup> If more war plants are constructed and if the volume of war contracts is increased in accordance with the present plans, many more than 22,000 workers may move into Chicago.

But where will they live?

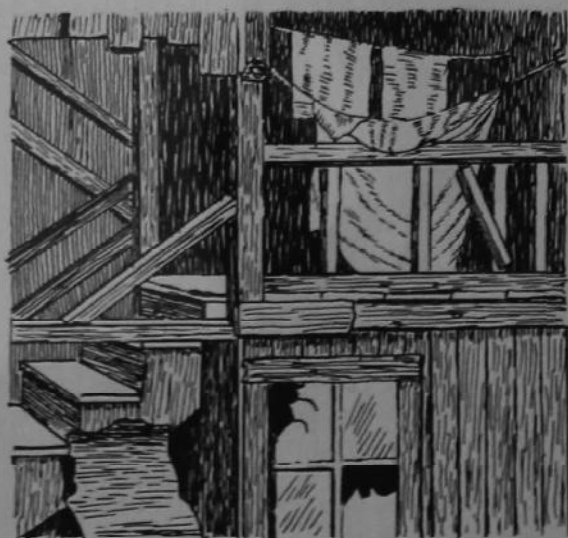
The difference between the number of families and the number of homes has always caused housing problems. In Chicago, the number of families increased by 117,000 in the ten year period from 1930 to 1940.<sup>3)</sup> According to the Office of Price Administration, the consumer registration for



sugar on May 4-7, 1942 revealed that the city's population has further increased by 80,264 in two years since the federal census in 1940. This rapid growth has been partly due to the flow of war industry toward Chicago and the transfer of government agencies.

Our builders and planners have been slow to take up the challenge of the rapid increase in the number of families during the last decade. From 1930 to 1940 more dwelling units were actually destroyed by fire, vandalism, and demolition than were constructed.<sup>4)</sup> Were it not for a number of conversions of large apartments into smaller ones during this period, by 1940 we would have had over 75,000 more families in Chicago than dwelling units.

At the same time, obsolescence and decay have spread throughout much of our existing supply of housing, increasing the number of substandard homes and blighted areas. Today, over 225,000 Chicago dwelling units are substandard - one fourth of all housing in the city. Most families forced to live in these quarters have low incomes and cannot afford decent homes. But income is no longer the only test of a family's ability to find an adequate home. Today, there are practically no decent homes available in the medium and low rental groups.



Chicago's vacancy rate has been dropping steadily for the past three years. In 1939, there were 42,337 vacancies of all kinds -- slightly over four per cent of all the dwelling units in the city.<sup>5)</sup> But by January 1941, only 17,700 dwellings were vacant -- only two per cent,<sup>6)</sup> and by January 1942, the vacancy rate had dropped to below 0.9 per cent--less than 8,000 dwelling units.<sup>7)</sup>

In addition, the Chicago Defense Housing Committee indicated, after investigation last March, that only 2,000 homes were found to be of the type, location, and price required by the average war worker.<sup>8)</sup>

To offset a housing emergency, a large number of rental accommodations to meet the needs of the in-migrant war worker will have to be obtained.

The typical war worker is not a \$200 a week employee, as is sometimes pictured, but a skilled or semi-skilled worker earning approximately \$40 a week. Though his wage may be the best he's received in ten or more years, he can not be sure of decent shelter for himself and his family despite the importance of the job he is doing for his country.

Some war workers earn as little as \$25 a week while a few earn as high as \$60 to \$75 a week. However, including overtime pay, sixty per cent of the war workers in this city earn less than \$45 a week -- ninety-six per cent less than \$50 a week.<sup>9)</sup>

In the second place, the war worker who moves to Chicago has a job only for the duration of the war. He can not risk the purchase of a home which, even if he could afford now, he might have to give up after the war. Therefore, most war workers will need homes of the type renting from \$25 to \$50 a month, with a majority renting for between \$30 and \$40 a month.

Because of the importance of decent housing to war production, the Chicago



Housing Authority, in October 1941, resolved to rush construction of 1,800 rental homes for war workers in the lower earning bracket below \$2,100 a year, who required homes renting for between \$25 and \$40 a month. To meet the developing housing emergency, in-migrant workers are to be housed first.

The Chicago Housing Authority, a municipal corporation engaged in slum clearance and low rent public housing, had already rehoused over four thousand low income families from Chicago's slums in four large housing developments. Before the war, funds had been obtained for the construction of five additional slum clearance projects in Chicago from earmarkings made by the United States Hous-

ing Authority (now the Federal Public Housing Authority).

The growing housing emergency, greatly accelerated after Pearl Harbor, caused an immediate change in plans for the use of these projects. War workers in need of homes must be housed, and therefore the rehousing of slum families would have to be deferred until the end of the war.

Two slum sections in the midst of Chicago's worst blighted areas had already been purchased as sites for housing redevelopment when this decision was made. One—a six block area on the near North Side between Chicago Avenue, Oak Street, Hudson Avenue, and Larrabee Street—formerly known as "Smokey Hollow," or "Little Hell," had been under consideration by the Authority since 1940. By December 1941, the site had been cleared and \$3,740,000 had been set aside for the construction of 586 dwelling units, named the Frances Cabrini Homes.

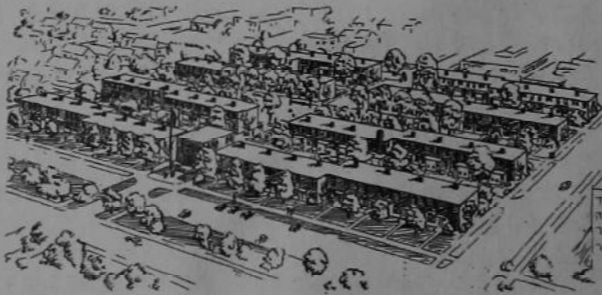
The other, an even larger area on the West Side between Roosevelt Road, 14th Street, Racine Avenue, and Loomis Street, had been purchased by the Authority for a proposed \$4,840,000 development of 834 dwelling units. This neighborhood, which had been for years one of the worst slums in Chicago, was largely occupied by Negro families of very low incomes.

With the decision to convert all housing to war purposes, it was immediately determined to rush construction on these two sites to provide homes for our production soldiers. Centrally located in the city, these sites lie within a half hour's street car or elevated ride to three quarters of Chicago's industries with war contracts. To meet this vital need now was to help insure that after the war hundreds of low income families for whom the projects had originally been intended might enjoy a decent American home, a home preserved for them by the efforts of their predecessors.

In accordance with its policy of preserving the same racial character in the redeveloped neighborhood, the Authority decided to make the West Side housing project available insofar as possible to Negro war workers. Recently, this project was named the Robert H. Brooks Homes. Robert H. Brooks, a Negro soldier of the United States Army Armored Force, gave his life for his country on December 8, 1941 in the Philippines, becoming the Armored Force's first casualty of the war.

In accordance with the War Production Board's appeal for speed, the Chicago Housing Authority promptly cut construction schedules. On December 10, the S. N. Nielsen Company broke ground for the Frances Cabrini Homes. Here, the first dwelling units will be ready for war workers and their families in July, 1942.

On February 2, 1942 construction began on the Robert H. Brooks Homes. The Patrick Warren Construction Company is now



pressing to complete the first 100 units on this project by the end of August. Both the Frances Cabrini Homes and the Robert H. Brooks Homes were designed by the Associated Housing Architects of Chicago.

In the meantime, the Housing Authority located sites for three smaller war housing developments that were favorably situated with regard to the central war industries and easy to acquire. Two of the three additional war projects are already under construction and will be finished in only a few months' time.

On a vacant site between 31st Street, 32nd Street, and Lituanica Avenue, the Goodwin Construction Company is building 141 dwelling units at a total estimated cost of \$796,000. This project, located on the Southwest Side in Bridgeport, has just been named the Bridgeport Homes. The architectural firm of Burnham and Hammond, Inc. designed these homes.

On another vacant tract between 25th Street, 26th Street, Washtenaw Avenue, and California Boulevard on the West Side, 128 units are under construction by the Helge Construction Company at a total estimated cost of \$691,000. Eric Hall, architect, designed this project, which, known as Illinois 2-5, is yet to be named.

The fifth war housing development proposed by the Chicago Housing Authority will be built in the vicinity of 43rd Street and Lowe Avenue on the South Side. Here, 108 dwellings are to be constructed, to be officially named the Maurice J. Dorney Homes after the famous religious and civic head of that neighborhood.

To maintain construction of these new projects according to the schedules originally set by the Authority has been a super-human job. To locate building materials and parts in a nation at war so as not to conflict with the constantly increasing demands for the same materials for ships, planes, and tanks has taxed the vigilance of the contractors to the utmost. Their ingenuity in solving these problems is making building history.

Despite these difficulties, which have caused some delays, construction has progressed rapidly on the two large projects - the Frances Cabrini Homes and the Robert H. Brooks Homes - although it has yet to be started on the Maurice J. Dorney Homes.

Today steam shovels, bulldozers, and mixers are being operated on the sites at full speed by hundreds of skilled workmen. A visit to the location of the new war





homes gives a thrilling view of how American workmen can skillfully and speedily tackle any job, no matter how large or difficult, to win this war. As you watch, long lines of bricklayers erect a building's entire wall in only a few hours. Doors, windows, plumbing, and the interior walls seem to fall into position almost as rapidly as space is created for them. Speed, and more speed, in order that our production soldiers need not lose a single minute at their jobs for lack of a place to live.

Most of the new war homes will be of permanent type, fire-proof construction similar to the other Chicago public housing projects. After the war, they will be available to rehouse low income families from Chicago's blighted areas.

The individual homes will range in size from 2 to 6½ rooms, the larger number being either 4½- or 5½-room units. Most of the dwellings will be of the two-story (duplex) row house type -- living room and kitchen-dinette on the first floor, and bedrooms and bath upstairs.

Each dwelling will have its own bathroom and a complete modern kitchen, with a gas range, electric refrigerator, cupboards, and sink. There are to be ample windows in every room, and the amount of light and air in each home will be enhanced by double exposure. Modern heating facilities will assure comfort during the winter months.



Rents, which have as yet been determined for only one project, are being scheduled so as to approximate one week's wages of the tenant. Including the cost of heat, gas, and electricity, they are being graded at several different levels, between \$20 and \$40 a month, in order to meet the needs of war workers earning from \$25 to \$40 a week.

Even though the Chicago Housing Authority is building new homes at the rate of over five a day in 1942, and other agencies are doing everything possible to meet the situation, the war housing problem is daily growing in magnitude. Unless additional rental homes are constructed for war workers, we face a disastrous housing shortage.

The solution of the housing problem for war workers is the major job of the moment. The Chicago Housing Authority is cognizant of the fact that construction for victory in war will leave a useful implement of peace afterwards. After victory will come the tremendous task of reconstruction and the elimination of the evils of the slum.

Not only must we win the battle of war-time housing, but we must be prepared to attack these peace-time problems when the conflict ends.

## LIST OF FOOTNOTES

- 1 Studies of Probable Defense Housing Requirements in the Chicago Area, as prepared by the Chicago Housing Commission, March and April 1942. Collaborated on these studies were the Chicago Housing Authority, the Federal Housing Administration, the Metropolitan Housing Council, the National Housing Agency, and other federal, state, and municipal agencies.
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Comparison of U.S. Census, Data for the City of Chicago, for the years 1930 and 1940.
- 4 Metropolitan Housing Council Release, November 1941, data for year 1930 through first ten months of 1941.
- 5 The Chicago Land Use Survey, the Chicago Planning Commission, 1941.
- 6 The Illinois Bell Telephone Company, January 1942.
- 7 Ibid, January 1942.
- 8 Report of Defense Housing Committee on Factors Governing the Housing Needs and Existing Facilities in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, the Chicago Defense Housing Committee, March 1942.
- 9 A Survey of Wages in Chicago Defense Industries, Chicago Housing Authority, April 1942.

Illustrations by the Illinois Work Projects Administration, War Services Program. Sketches of the new war homes were originally made by Eric Hall, architect.

### *Chicago Housing Authority*

Appointed by the Mayor of Chicago,  
THE HONORABLE EDWARD J. KELLY

Approved by the Illinois State Housing Board  
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