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HISTORY OF THE POSITION OF HOUSING ADVISOR FOR THE
NORTH CENTRAL AREA

By

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Relocation Officer

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The position of Housing Advisor for the North Central Area was in effect from June 1, 1945, to November 18, 1945. The job specifications of this position were: "To assist the area staff and the district Relocation Officers in planning and carrying out the program designed to make housing available to resettlers in the various communities in the area; make necessary contacts with regional staffs of Federal Housing and other agencies; spend considerable time in visiting district offices for conferences with staff and local groups; survey of housing situation in general, and related activities."

At the time this position was instituted housing through the Area was generally tight for all groups and was particularly tight for the resettler group under War Relocation Authority auspices. This resettler group followed the heavy influx of war workers who had already overcrowded most of the cities, and in many cases this group did not qualify for the federal and local emergency housing created for war workers.⁽¹⁾ This group also met in all cities to a varying degree a certain amount of race prejudice. All districts in the North Central Area had, however, in operation at this time programs designed to locate available housing and to overcome landlord and public prejudice.

These programs had in general been successful in meeting current

(1) Exhibit H

housing needs up to June of 1945. There was uncertainty, however, on the part of all districts as to the adequacy of their own program to continue to meet housing demands if the current rate of resettlement continued. There was, moreover, a general feeling that they could not meet successfully with their existing programs the peak loads of resettlement expected at the time the relocation centers began to close.

The problem was therefore twofold: to condition existing programs to meet the current, although already increasing flow of resettlement, and to set up emergency programs for each district for use if and when the expected peak loads occurred. It should be noted that certain advantageous conditions had already been built up in all districts which materially lessened the severity of the subsequent housing problems. The race prejudice problem as affecting housing had been greatly improved both by the efforts of the several relocation officers and by the fact that landlords had found the resettlers usually made good tenants. Moreover in many cases one or more members of a given family were already relocated and when family reunion did occur these advance representatives smoothed the way for the rest of the family. Finally, as more and more resettlers arrived in a given local there was an ever increasing working out of the newcomers' housing problems by friends who had already relocated.

The overall area housing program as instituted with the establishment of the position of an Area Housing Advisor was divided into the following functions: First, the interchange between districts of ideas already proven productive of housing. Second, the interpretation and

clearance of federal regulations for all government controlled housing.(1) Third, the setting up of effective housing committees and the interpretation of the general housing problems to these committees and to all local agencies, both public and private.(2) Fourth, the recognition and acceptance on both area and district levels of the fact that available housing vacancies irrespective of quality must be used and that this recognition and acceptance must be passed on to the resettlers themselves. Fifth and last, the setting up of individual programs for each district designed to meet local conditions and problems.

During the first visit of the Area Housing Adviser to a given district there was a definite concentration on the first point mentioned above. That was the exchange between the districts of ideas and methods already proven productive of housing vacancies. There was also an insistence that an idea or method that had proven successful for one or more districts was well worth a try. The housing program as set up by the Chicago District proved a fertile source of such workable ideas and methods.

In regard to the second point, the interpretation on clearance of federal and local housing regulations,(3) there was a continual need for such assistance by all the districts. It was found in most cases the actual, local regulation for housing projects had proven so inconsistent with the interpretation given out by Washington through general releases that the local relocation offices had decided it was futile to try to obtain resettler housing from these sources. There was also a vast dis-

(1) Exhibit H
(2) Exhibit B & I

(3) Exhibit H

crepancy in the interpretation of the federal rules for war conversion properties by local officials and operating real estate companies. Subsequent to V-J day there was a steady stream of changes in housing project and conversion property regulations that needed continual interpretation not only to the relocation officers but also to the operating agencies. It was found that by direct calls to the operating agencies by the Area Housing Adviser and by the local relocation office, many of these problems were cleaned up. On some cases it was found necessary to ask the Chicago offices of Federal Project Housing Authority, National Housing Authority or Federal Housing Administration to clear additional interpretation on certain regulations to their several operating agencies. Cooperation in these matters was excellent on the part of the above-mentioned agencies.

In carrying out the third point, establishment of housing committees and interpretation of resettlement program to local agencies, considerable organizational work was attempted with gratifying results.(1) It was found many of the Resettlement Committees which were already functioning locally in working out the general resettlement problems could be re-aligned to concentrate on the specific problems of housing. This move was made with the approval of the Area office as housing was considered at that time the most pressing problem facing all districts. It should be noted that these housing committees also acted as Hostel Committees in those cities or towns where no hostel existed and there

(1) Exhibits B & I

was need for such services. In a few cases Housing Committees had to be organized from scratch. Where possible, all agencies interested in the resettlement problems were pulled in these Housing Committees as active members. Where agency contacts did not develop through Housing Committee meetings, direct contact was made to such agencies by the Area Housing Adviser.

In some respects the fourth point, acceptance of local housing conditions and then working on the problem from that point, was the most important and difficult job the Area Housing Adviser faced. There had been a degree of identity of all district staffs with the resettlers and their problems. There was as a result, an honest desire by all members of these staffs to obtain the very best housing possible for the resettlers. In other words to turn down for listing all poor quality housing. The quality housing available in most districts was never in the quantity to meet the housing demands of these new settlers. There was, also, no chance that new buildings or even conversions would be completed in the near future. Against this was also the problem that there was no strategically located temporary housing to fall back on such as was being used in California for resettlers during the fall of 1945. The housing problem of the resettlers had to be met locally with what housing was available, good or bad as the case might be and the acceptance of this fact had to be passed on to the resettlers themselves. As a result of this policy, the Area office knows of no case in any of the districts where resettlers were left on the street with no shelter provided. It should be noted that the district staffs were encouraged

to get for the resettlers the best quality housing available and as long as it was available. Many resettlers who accepted the less desirable housing were able, through their own and friend's efforts, to shortly improve their conditions, either by rehabilitating their existing lodging or by finding better housing.

The fifth and last point, the local housing programs of the several districts, will occupy the remainder of this report. These programs were formulated by the individual Relocation Officers with the assistance of the Area Housing Adviser unless otherwise indicated. A system of self-audit of the individual district's housing program was instituted. In noting the program of the several districts the name of the city in which the district office is located will be used for the sake of brevity to designate the entire district.

The Minneapolis District

The Minneapolis District covering the entire State of Minnesota, the ~~E~~ast half of North Dakota and the westernmost counties of Wisconsin had a relatively heavy resettlement estimated at 2,183 persons as of June 1, 1945. The large percentage of these people settled in Minneapolis with lesser concentration in Rochester and Duluth. The main problems, housing, etc., were concentrated in the two cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The Area Housing Adviser visited this district three times and the following housing program was put into effect with the cooperation

of the District Relocation Officer, Mr. James Hiner, Jr.

1. Contact realtors by letter regarding listings⁽¹⁾ of "For Sale" and "For Rent" properties.
2. Determine proper agency to follow up possible housing vacancies noted over stores, garages, and carriage houses.⁽²⁾ ⁽³⁾
3. A Nisei Housing Committee to be set up to obtain listings of vacant properties.
4. Proper machinery to be set up to protect purchasers of homes and businesses.
5. State-wide contact with all agencies to be maintained. Emphasis to be placed on job-housing combinations in institutions, estates, farms, etc.⁽⁴⁾
6. Employees to be encouraged to find housing for their new employees.
7. One or more resettlers in each town to be encouraged to establish boarding houses or light housekeeping apartments.
8. A St. Paul Hostel should be pushed.
9. Contacts with Summer Terraces, Minneapolis Federal Housing, should be maintained.⁽⁵⁾
10. The use of trailers should be considered.⁽⁶⁾
11. The use of Camp Savage for resettlement housing to be considered.
12. Questionnaires to be sent to all Centers and to advance family agents to determine future housing needs.⁽⁷⁾
13. The District Relocation Offices to maintain close contact with the Minneapolis Hostel and to aid the healthy flow of resettlers from the hostel into their own homes.
14. Record newspaper listings of "For Rent" properties.
15. Resettlers to place ads in newspaper for rental properties.

(1) Exhibit F

(2) Exhibit B

(3) Exhibit D

(4) Exhibit G

(5) Exhibit H

(6) Exhibit A

(7) Exhibit C

16. At least three days per week to be given by Mr. Wesley Harkness, District Housing Specialist, in canvassing for housing vacancies.
17. A housing registry to be maintained by War Relocation Authority District staff.
18. The several resettlement committees in outlying cities and towns (Rochester, Duluth, etc.) to be contacted at once to determine their ability to meet the expected peak of resettlement. (The Area Housing Adviser visited Duluth in this capacity June 29, 1945.)

In carrying out the above program, the Minneapolis District maintained an excellent relationship with all public and private agencies.(1) Attention should be called to the fact that the Mayor's Housing Committee of Minneapolis was formed largely through the efforts of the War Relocation Authority office and that Mr. Wesley Harkness of W.R.A. employee is the president of this Committee.

The War Housing Center has given consistent cooperation to the relocation program. Limited cooperation was received from the local public housing unit, Summer Terraces.

The proposed city-wide housing survey by the Minneapolis Boy Scouts was never carried out as the expected peak load of resettlement never developed. This survey was held in obedience as an emergency measure. A spot survey of housing vacancies over stores, garages, and carriage houses was carried out successfully by the Victory Aids as a unit of the Mayor's Housing Committee.(2)

There was a higher percentage of home purchasing by resettlers in Milwaukee and St. Paul than was found in any other district in the North Central Area.

- (1) Exhibit B
- (2) Exhibit D

The quality of housing located for resettlers ranged from poor to very good.

The Milwaukee District

The Milwaukee District covering the entire state of Wisconsin with the exception of the northwestern counties bordering Minnesota and covering Northern Michigan had an estimated resettlement of 747 persons as of June 1, 1945, with the great bulk of these living in Milwaukee proper. There was a limited settlement in Madison, Kenosha, etc.

The Area Housing Adviser visited Milwaukee four times and the following program was put into effect with the cooperation of the District Relocation Officers, Mr. Joe Hansen and Mr. John Bailey:

1. Listings of available housing "For Rent" and "For Sale" to be obtained by personal surveys on the part of District War Relocation Authority staff.
2. Immediate vacancy listing irrespective of quality to be set up at once. Quality of listings to be improved as rapidly as possible.
3. Letter to be sent to all local realtors requesting listings of vacancies.(1)
4. Support for a Milwaukee Hostel to be sought
5. Housing Committee to be set up to plan for handling of expected peak load of resettlement.(2)
6. Now employers of resettlers to be encouraged to help their employees to locate housing.
7. Job-housing combination to be investigated.(3)
8. A housing registry to be maintained by W.R.A. staff.

(1) Exhibit F

(2) Exhibit B & I

(3) Exhibit G

The housing situation was without doubt the tightest in Milwaukee proper of any of the cities in the North Central Area. To compensate for this fact were the following alleviating conditions: The existing resettlement committee was extremely active and was representative of both the welfare and business interests.⁽¹⁾ The interests of this Committee shifted readily and effectively to a general responsibility for a housing program. The resettlers themselves had an active organization that cooperated with the housing program. And lastly, early contacts with many real estate operators gave a limited but steady flow of listed vacancies for resettler groups.⁽²⁾

The public housing units and operators of conversion properties were cooperative with the resettlement program.

The quality of housing ranged from fair to very good.

The Des Moines District

The Des Moines District covering the entire State of Iowa had an estimable resettlement of 527 persons as of June 1, 1945. Again a disproportionate number of these persons located in the city of the district office, Des Moines.

The Area Housing Adviser visited Des Moines three times and the following program was set in operation with the cooperation of the District Relocation Officer, Mr. Arthur Downing:

1. Realtors to be contacted at once by letter.⁽³⁾
2. Listing of vacancies to be obtained through local agency

(1) Exhibit B & I

(2) Exhibit E

(3) Exhibit F

or agencies as determined by Housing Committee. (Use of milkmen to make a house-by-house survey considered, but never acted upon.)(1)

3. Check to be made with Chamber of Commerce to see if listings could be obtained from their registry. No cooperation from this source.
4. A Nisei Housing Committee to be set up.
5. Proper channels for appraisals, etc., to be established.
6. State-wide contacts with all agencies to be maintained with emphasis on job-housing combinations (institutions, estates, farms, etc.)(2)
7. Employers of resettlers to be encouraged to help find housing for new employees.
8. A housing registry to be set up by W.R.A. to insure the best use of the above proposals.
9. A determined effort should be made to obtain a "C" gas card for use of hostel station wagon.

The Friends Resettlement and Hostel Committee were extremely active on all problems and quickly adjusted themselves to a Housing Program.(3) The Director of the Hostel, Mr. Ross Wilbur, the members of the Committee and Niseis who had already established themselves, all cooperated in a week-by-week canvass of vacancies.

The Hostel maintained a small deposit of used furniture which was available for resettlers use. The hostel director and the Nisei helped move the resettlers from the hostel to their new homes and the Nisei also helped clean up these new homes. The hostel was in operation through October, 1945.

There was no public housing or an extensive conversion program in Des Moines.

The quality of housing obtained for the resettlers was generally good.

The Omaha District

The Omaha District covering both the eastern halves of South Dakota and of Nebraska had an estimated resettlement of 439 persons as of June 1, 1945.

The Area Housing Advisor visited Omaha twice and the following program was proposed. The District Relocation Officers were Mr. Claude Cornwall and Mr. Francis O'Malley:

1. A Housing Committee to be set up as main resettlement committee. (No active committee operating)
2. A registry of vacancies to be set up and maintained by W.R.A. staff.
3. All realtors to be contacted by letter. (1)
4. Contacts with local housing authority to be maintained to obtain vacancies both in project and vacancies outside projects.
5. Clearance to be maintained with Federal Housing Administration conversion units. (2)
6. Determine satisfactory hotel for emergency use and check Salvation Army set up for same.
7. Check possibility of resettlers buying and renting rooming houses or light housekeeping apartments.
8. Establish proper channels to protect resettlers who buy property.
9. Check institutions and private estates for job-housing combinations. (3)
10. Determine proper agency to clear farm jobs.

Very little of the above program was ever put into effect with the exception of listings obtained from Federal Housing Administration (con-

version properties.)⁽¹⁾

With the exception of this Federal Housing Administration help all housing problems were handled on an emergency case basis.

No cooperation was received from the local housing authority as their low-income program excluded all resettlers.⁽²⁾

The quality of housing obtained for the resettlers ranged from very poor to good.

The Kansas City District

The Kansas City District covering the State of Kansas and the west half of Missouri had an estimated resettlement of 472 persons as of June 1, 1945. The majority of these persons were located in Kansas City, Missouri, proper.

The Area Housing Adviser visited Kansas City three times and the following program was put into effect with the cooperation of the District Relocation Officer, Mr. Francis P. O'Malley:

1. Recontact realtors by letter for listings of vacancies.⁽³⁾
2. Arrange house-to-house survey of vacancies to be made by the Boy Scouts.⁽⁴⁾
3. Establish a Hostel.
4. Arrange machinery to protect resettlers purchasing property.

A more elaborate program was unnecessary due to excellent cooperation of the War Housing Center and the excellent acceptance of resettlers by realtors.⁽⁵⁾ This acceptance by realtors probably stemmed from the attitude of the War Housing Center.

(1) Exhibit E
(2) Exhibit H

(3) Exhibit F
(4) Exhibit D

(5) Exhibit E

The principal housing problem in Kansas City was therefore to provide an emergency program to meet the expected peak load of resettlement. An agreement was made with Mr. Roy Bartle, Director of the Kansas City Boy Scouts, for the scouts to make a city-wide housing survey if and when the need arose. This survey was never needed.

Excellent cooperation existed between the District Relocation Officer and the Resettlement Committee.

A Hostel was opened in Kansas City, Missouri, the latter part of June, 1945.

The public housing projects were all assigned to specific war industries. It was found extremely difficult to qualify resettlers for jobs in these industries. (1) Therefore no resettlers were placed in any of the public housing projects.

The quality of housing obtained for resettlers was good to very good.

The St. Louis District

The St. Louis District covering the eastern half of Missouri and the Illinois counties immediately adjacent to St. Louis, had an estimated resettlement of 430 persons as of June 1, 1945. The majority of these people were located in St. Louis, Missouri, or in its satellite towns.

The Area Housing Adviser made one visit to St. Louis with nominal results. The District Relocation Officer was Miss Mary Elizabeth Brooks.

(1) Exhibit H

The following housing program was proposed by the Area Housing Adviser:

1. A hostel to be established as soon as possible.
2. A letter requesting listings of vacancies to be sent to all realtors.⁽¹⁾
3. Arrange for a housing survey to be made by either the mailmen or the Boy Scouts. (No agreement)⁽²⁾
4. Institutions to be canvassed for job-housing combinations (limited results).⁽³⁾
5. A Citizens Housing Committee to be set up.

Excellent support existed between all agencies and Miss Brooks. This support, however, was maintained on a very personal basis and tended to work out in such a fashion that each and every resettler's problem was handled on a individualistic basis.

There was no assumption of the general housing problem by any agency or group of agencies.⁽⁴⁾ An attempt was made without success to set up a Citizens Housing Committee for St. Louis. Mr. C. S. Coil of the Chicago Office of National Housing Administration attended meetings at the time this Committee was being contemplated at the Area Housing Adviser's request.

It should be noted that although housing was extremely tight in St. Louis there was no War Housing Center or any similar local agency to turn to for a like function.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to enlist either the Postmen or the Boy Scouts to make a city-wide housing survey.⁽⁵⁾

Limited cooperation was received from the local Housing Authority.

(1) Exhibit F
(2) Exhibit D

(3) Exhibit G
(4) Exhibit B & I

(5) Exhibit F

Placement of resettlers in farm and estate job-housing combinations by the District Relocation Authority was excellent. Placement in institutions with job-housing opening was limited.(1)

A Hostel was opened for operation August, 1945.

The quality of housing opened up for resettlers was fair to good.

The Indianapolis District

The Indianapolis District covering the State of Indiana, had an estimated resettlement of 203 persons largely concentrated in Indianapolis proper.

The Area Housing Adviser made one visit to Indianapolis. The following program was put into effect with the cooperation of the District Relocation Officer:

1. Obtain assumption by the general Relocation Committee of responsibility of a housing program.
2. Explore possibility of a resettler going into the boarding house or apartment business.

As will be noted the proposed housing program for Indianapolis was extremely limited in scope. At the time of the Area Housing Adviser's visit family reunion was to all extents and purposes complete for the resettlers of the entire state. There was also but little indication of any general influx to come. The problems were, therefore to provide an emergency housing program for an unexpected influx and to form some focal point for all resettlers. The Resettlers Committee made up largely of influential business men agreed to assume both functions. They proposed that they would obtain housing for any new resettler families on a personal case basis and would even go so far as to buy the

needed housing if no other solution offered itself. They were also ready to finance a resettler in a boarding house or apartment business if the right party was located. Neither of these proposals materialized.

The only public housing project was earmarked for Negro occupancy. No resettlers were admitted.⁽¹⁾

The quality of housing obtained by resettlers in Indianapolis was generally good.

The Greater Illinois District

The Greater Illinois District covering the State of Illinois with the exception of the neighboring counties of both Chicago and St. Louis had an estimated resettlement of 493 persons as of June 1, 1945, with the bulk of these persons living in Peoria and Rockford.

The Area Housing Adviser made three trips to these and nearby towns and the following program was put into effect with the cooperation of the District Relocation Officers, Mr. William Kir-Stimon and John Brenton:

1. Enlarge the institution contacts which could offer job-housing combinations.⁽²⁾
2. Set up some agency in each town to act as a housing registry.
3. Revitalize the Resettlement Committees to operate as Housing Committee.⁽³⁾
4. Maintain contact with cooperative realtors.⁽⁴⁾

Excellent cooperation with the Bishop of Peoria and the Bishop of Rockford was obtained in placing resettlers in institutional jobs where there was family housing. Many of the Catholic institutions

(1) Exhibit H
(2) Exhibit G

(3) Exhibit B & I
(4) Exhibit F

bought such housing on the open market.

The Young Women's Christian Associations of both Peoria and Rockford assumed the responsibility of maintaining a housing registry for their local towns.

A housing committee was set up in Peoria to function if and when a peak load of resettlement occurred.

The Housing Authorities of both Peoria and Winnebago County (Rockford) welcomed resettlers in their projects.

Through agreements with Peoria realtors, considerable conversion housing was earmarked for resettlers' use.⁽¹⁾

The quality of housing obtained for resettlers in both Peoria and Rockford ranged from fair to good.

The Chicago District

The Chicago District covering the city of Chicago and the adjacent counties, had an estimated resettlement of 9,398 persons as of June 1, 1945.

The Area Housing Advisor was not called upon to assist in formalizing a housing program for this district as a workable program had already been put into effect by the District Housing Specialist, Mr. John Setecka. The Area Housing Adviser was requested from time to time to evaluate the existing program and the following suggestions were made to supplement this program.

1. The interviews to get listings of apartments about to be vacated by West Coast returnees.
2. Clearance with landlords to be made as to acceptance of resettler tenants when apartments of three or more bedrooms

(1) Exhibit E

are located during survey.

The following housing program was in operation under Mr. Setecka's direction:

1. A day by day survey of housing vacancies was made by Mr. Setecka. These surveys were restricted to areas with a relatively high rate of vacancies. It should be noted that the quality of housing in these areas was generally poor.
2. Realtors were contacted by letter, telephone and personal calls in regard to vacancy listings. (1)
3. Contact was maintained with the Chicago Housing Authority to gain acceptance and admittance of resettler families into the War Housing Projects operated by that agency. (2)
4. A listing of all resettler operating boarding houses and apartment buildings was compiled. (3)

The above program produced housing vacancies to the amounts needed to take care of the heavy influx of resettlers into Chicago although the quality of homes listed was poor. The resettlers were required in most cases to front for themselves in the actual renting of their homes, ~~as it was found~~. Acceptance of the individual was generally better than attempts by War Relocation Authority personnel to gain prior acceptance.

Cooperation was received from the local Housing Authority in placing resettlers in war housing projects. No resettlers were qualified for low-income housing projects due to the very low rate set for income admission ceiling (\$1200 a year family income) and requirement of one-year residence.

Little or no cooperation was received from the Chicago War Housing Center as this agency, although federally sponsored, was enforcing the

(1) Exhibit F
(2) Exhibit H

(3) Exhibit J

the local restrictive covenants.

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The position of Area Housing Adviser was terminated as of
November 18, 1945.