
E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

Worker Housing in Racine 1860 - 1914

Introduction

This city-wide, multiple property nomination for Racine Workers' Cottages includes those vernacular houses, of sufficient architectural integrity, which were constructed in the City of Racine between 1860 and 1914 for the laborers who worked in the manufactories of Racine, as well as for the small shopkeepers and craftsmen who provided goods and services in the working class neighborhoods where these cottages were built. The houses are considered significant in the areas of Architecture and Social History. In architecture, because they exhibit vernacular styles, methods of construction, and materials which were characteristic of housing for ordinary working people in Racine during the last third of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. In social history, because these cottages are good examples of the soundly built and respectable housing for working people to be found in smaller cities like Racine, which contrasts sharply with the tenements and slums that were developing in larger cities like Chicago during the years of America's industrialization and urbanization between the Civil War years and the onset of World War I.

- - - - -

After 1860, and especially after the Civil War, American cities accelerated their transformation from mercantile centers which had served a local, essentially agricultural economy to manufacturing centers which produced a variety of products for an industrial economy that became increasingly regional, national, and international. Fed with raw materials shipped by water or rail, powered by water, steam, or later by electricity, and manned by the skilled or unskilled hands of rural and foreign migrants, the factory became the economic heart of the American city and the impetus for its growth during the period from 1860 to 1914. (1)

Racine's industrial history closely followed the American pattern. The city was founded in 1834 by Gilbert Knapp. Several years earlier, when he was the captain of a Coast Guard cutter operating on the Great Lakes out of Detroit, Knapp had dropped anchor off the mouth of the Root River while he was cruising the western shores of Lake Michigan, and he explored the area around the river which was to become Racine. Knapp was convinced that the site was the finest potential harbor on Lake Michigan, and even before the area was opened for settlement, he returned there in November of 1834 to establish and hold a claim to 140 acres, which were almost evenly divided on both sides of the Root River where it flows into Lake Michigan. (2)

The harbor was expected to be the source of Racine's growth and prosperity. Knapp envisioned Racine as the principal port on the western shore of Lake Michigan, and the early settlers in the village shared his vision. As early as 1836, the citizens of Racine paid for a survey of the harbor. Later, bonds were issued and heavy assessments were made for the building of piers and for dredging the river. In those early years, Racine competed closely with Chicago and Milwaukee as a port. In 1842, when the population of the village was only 800, some 3500 immigrants landed in Racine during the year. They headed for the rich farmlands to the west of the city, and by 1843 wheat exports from the Port of Racine frequently reached 1500 bushels a day—second only to Chicago. (3)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number E Page 1 Worker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Historic Context (continued)

Racine continued to compete with Milwaukee and Chicago until the coming of the railroads in the 1850s. A rail line linking it to the Mississippi River was considered a necessity for the success of any port on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Racine started late in the railway race; both Chicago and Milwaukee completed their lines to the Mississippi before Racine and they dominated the transport routes to the west. Railroads quickly replaced ships in the moving of people and goods over long distances, and the activity in Racine's harbor diminished. In its heyday more than 300 ships had called the Port of Racine their home, but by World War I, the last of them had been sold and departed. (4)

While Racine never fulfilled its promise as a port or as a center of trade and transportation, it did establish a firm economic base as a center of manufacturing. In 1842 Jerome Increase Case began to make threshing machines west of Racine in the Village of Rochester. Two years later, when he was denied rights to the water power he needed for a factory along the Fox River in Rochester, he moved his shop to a site along the north side of the Root River in Racine. That was the beginning of an agricultural implement industry which remains to this day one of the most important industries in the city. That same year, Lucius Blake began manufacturing fanning mills. His was the first of nine firms to produce hand cranked grain winnowers in Racine. In 1855 Henry Mitchell moved his wagon factory from Kenosha to Racine, and during the following years, three other firms were established to manufacture every variety of farm or freight wagon, as well as carriages, buggies, sleighs, and cutters. (5)

By 1860 Racine was second only to Milwaukee as a manufacturing center in the state of Wisconsin. There were shops producing boots and shoes, clothing, furniture, iron castings, hardware, and millwork—as well as mills for grinding flour and plants for packing meat or tanning leather. By that time the city's manufacture of agricultural implements and wagons had expanded to supply county, statewide, and sometimes regional markets. Racine had become, as one historian put it, "a sort of microcosm in which industrial activity was present in its various evolutionary forms, ranging from the household to the craft shop, the mill, the manufactory, and even the factory." (6)

During the Civil War and after, Racine's industries grew and diversified. New firms were established which manufactured more and more products for national and international markets. Some of their names became household words, as "Case" already had. Johnson Wax was founded in 1886, and Horlick's Malted Milk was first offered for sale from Racine in 1887. Hartmann Trunks and Gold Medal Furniture appeared in the 1890s. Western Publishing Company was established in 1907 (and began printing Whitman Books in Racine before 1916). The Hamilton Beach Company was formed in the city in 1910, to manufacture electrical appliances (as Oster, Dremel, and In-Sink-Erator were in the years soon after World War I). In 1913 the Commercial Club of Racine made a survey of the city to determine every article made there. It published a pamphlet containing the names of 179 manufacturers with a list of the products they made. It became a local

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number E Page 2 Worker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Historic Context (continued)

boast that a greater variety of things were made in Racine than in any comparable city in the country—perhaps in the world! With a population then of only 43,000 people, Racine may well have been (per capita) the most industrialized city in the country, if not in the world. (7)

By the beginning of World War I, then, the modern industrialization of the United States had been accomplished, and it was apparent in Racine. With industry, however, came the problems of providing urban amenities like paved streets and local transportation; urban necessities like running water and sewerage; or urban facilities like natural gas and electricity; but the most pressing problem was providing housing for the flood of workers who swelled the census of American cities and changed America's population from primarily rural to metropolitan. (8)

The problem of housing industrial workers had, often enough, been solved before the Civil War with developments built, owned, or arranged by the employing companies themselves—like those provided for workers in the textile towns of Massachusetts. Such solutions were occasionally tried later, while American industry was coming of age, in "model" communities like Pullman, Illinois, or Kohler, Wisconsin; but they proved unsuccessful. Workers did not regard the company houses as "real homes" because they could not own them. In larger cities, tenements built by absentee landlords replaced the workingmen's cottages of an earlier generation and working families were jammed into them. Some New York tenements rose to five or six stories. In Chicago the older cottages housing workers were often hemmed-in: with the original dwelling along the street at the front of a lot, an added one in the rear at an alley, and sometimes another in between. (9)

In a smaller town like Racine, tenements never rose, nor did they cluster on the lots where houses for working people were built. There was from the beginning plenty of room to expand—north and south from the Root River and westerly from Lake Michigan—for manufacturing or housing. Neither was there much experimenting with company housing in Racine. Early in this century the Horlick Malted Milk Company did erect about a dozen cottages or so for some of its workers on the eastern border of its parklike factory site. These were sold by the company to their tenants in 1941 and 1942. In a more ambitious project, the Racine Rubber Company platted a subdivision within walking distance from its factory on Taylor Avenue, and shortly after World War I, it built nearly sixty side-by-side duplexes which it rented to its workers. The enclave was nicknamed "Rubberville." But the company failed in the Great Depression just ten years later and the houses were foreclosed upon and sold publicly. (10)

Because of the diversity of its manufacturing, Racine never became a company town. The workers in its industries found housing for themselves, for the most part, in modest cottages which dotted the grids of newly platted subdivisions as the city expanded. The houses were small but soundly built either in frame or brick, and since Racine did

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetWorker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, WisconsinSection number E Page 3

Historic Context (continued)

not grow into a metropolis, most of those cottages were not torn down and replaced by multistoried slums; neither were they turned into tenements by crowding them on the same lots with additional dwellings. Many of them still line the streets of older sections of Racine, but the greatest concentration of them is to be found on the north side, along the streets from Lake Michigan west to Memorial Drive and from the Root River north to Gould Street.

Originally, that area must have looked much like the nineteenth century working class sections of Chicago which are pictured by Edith Abbott in The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935. By the time her photographs were taken (about 1933), those sections had degenerated into slums, but still there to be seen were the essential form, elevation, and detail of similar cottages built in Racine. The basements of the Chicago cottages are higher, the lots are narrower, and the density of dwellings is greater; but the saw-toothed streetscape of gabled roofs is the same as it was in Racine, and so is the mix of one, one-and-a-half, and two-story structures with their faintly Italianate "style." Many of Abbott's "small tenements" were by then dilapidated, but two examples of those Chicago cottages in their prime are pictured in David Lowe's Lost Chicago (page 44). Multiply them, in frame and brick, and spread them out along the nineteenth century or early twentieth century streets of Racine and you have a prospect of workers' cottages in the city as they were once to be seen. (11)

Some of Racine's worker cottages were built of a local material which is historic in itself—cream brick. The unusual chemical composition of the clay found along the shores of Lake Michigan in Southeastern Wisconsin produced brick of a pale yellow color. The first of its kind is said to have been made in Milwaukee about 1835, and Milwaukee soon became known as "the cream city" because so many of its buildings were constructed of this indigenous masonry product. But cream colored brick was just as indigenous to Racine, and it was manufactured in brickyards around the city from 1839 to 1914. It was used in the construction of almost every important building in the early history of Racine, and it was also used in building several hundred workers' cottages in almost every section of the city. (12)

Racine workers' cottages were not "bare little one-story oblong wooden boxes with a roof and with partitions inside making two to four small rooms," like the workers' houses found by Robert and Helen Lynd in "Middletown" and described by them in their first sociological study of a Midwestern town during the 1920s. Racine workers' cottages were better planned and more soundly built. They were more like the simple cottages suggested by Samuel B. Reed in his books of house plans "for everybody" during the 1870s and 1880s, or like some of the basic houses built for working people in and around Chicago by the real estate developer, Samuel Eberly Gross, during the 1880s and 1890s. Also, like the most economical of Reed's plans, Racine workers' cottages were intended to be enlarged. Many were started "with a room or two" as Reed had advised his readers, but almost all of them were added onto later. (13)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetWorker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, WisconsinSection number E Page 4

Historic Context (continued)

Just as soon as a Racine working family could afford to, they enlarged their "room or two" by expanding into the attic, where the sloping roofline was sometimes pushed outward by dormers; or they added to their basic house with an extension to the rear or an addition on one side or the other. And if their budget would allow, they embellished their house with a decorative bay window or, more often, with a porch (or even two or more) in the architectural fashion of the moment. "After all, a new porch or dormer is reasonably permanent, a gift to one's family and to the ages," John R. Stilgoe observed, in his survey of an earlier American landscape and of its enduring values. "American men," he wrote, and increasingly women too, of every economic class enjoy hobbies that involve reshaping domestic structure." Reshaping domestic structure is an American tradition, at least, if it is not an American value. The plan and form of Racine workers' cottages was not static; the cottages evolved and grew throughout the historic period of their construction and development. (14)

Most of them were owned by the families who lived in them. Some of them have housed several generations of the same family, and a few are still owned by the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren of their original residents. For Racine's working families, these simple houses were the fulfillment of an American dream—a home of their own. "A house to live in," as Walt Whitman asserted when writing about workers' housing in New York in 1856, "is the third greatest necessity; food and clothing only being before it. And furthermore, it is in some sense true that a man is not a whole and complete man unless he owns a house and the ground it stands on." And Edith Abbott wrote, in her study of workers' housing in Chicago, that "the familiar picture . . . of the pleasant cottage home and garden of a sturdy artisan or mechanic who is on the thrifty road to independence and comfortable living"—through home ownership—"has been an American tradition, and from early days has been regarded as one of the characteristic features of American life." It was a dream that did not often come true in larger industrial cities, but in Racine it was not without possibility during the period of the city's industrialization, from 1860-1914. (15)

Notes to Section E:

- (1) Edward C. Kirkland, Industry Comes of Age: Business, Labor, and Public Policy, 1860-1897 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), pp. 163-180; Allan R. Pred, The Spatial Dynamics of U. S. Urban-Industrial Growth, 1800-1914 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966), pp. 16-19.
- (2) The History of Racine and Kenosha Counties (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1879), pp. 355 & 365 (hereafter referred to as 1879 History); Fanny S. Stone, ed. Racine: Belle City of the Lakes (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1916), 1:67-68.
- (3) Stone, 1:273-278; 1879 History, pp. 368, 454-455.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetWorker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, WisconsinSection number E Page 5

Notes to Section E (continued)

- (4) 1879 History, 459-460, 466-467; Stone, 1:241-250; Richard H. Keehn, "Industry and Business," Racine: Growth and Change in a Wisconsin County, ed. Nicholas C. Burckel (Racine: County Board of Supervisors, 1977), pp. 282-286.
- (5) Stewart H. Holbrook, Machines of Plenty: Pioneering in American Agriculture (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), pp. 31-32; Keehn, p. 286.
- (6) Margaret Walsh, The Manufacturing Frontier: Pioneer Industry in Antebellum Wisconsin, 1830-1860 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1972), pp. 141-170 (the quotation is on p. 170).
- (7) Keehn, pp. 284-295; Don Rintz, "The Great Exposition of 1913," Preservation-Racine Newsletter (Summer 1988), pp. 1-3ff.
- (8) Fred, p. 19; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 70, 76-77; Kirkland, pp. 237-261.
- (9) On the textile towns, see John Coolidge, Mill and Mansion: A Study of Architecture and Society in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1820-1865 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1942) or Constance McLaughlin Green, Holyoke Massachusetts: A Case History of the Industrial Revolution in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939); Stanley Buder, Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 81-84; Edith Abbott, The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), pp. 190-193.
- (10) Racine County land records.
- (11) Particularly the photographs in Abbott facing pp. 154, 178, 184, & 198; Lowe's book was originally published in Boston by Houghton Mifflin in 1975; the edition cited, however, is published by American Legacy Press (a 1985 reprint).
- (12) "Milwaukee's Cream City Brick," in H. Russell Zimmermann, The Heritage Guidebook: Landmarks and Historical Sites in Southeastern Wisconsin (Milwaukee: Heritage Banks, 1976), pp. 14-22; Don Rintz, "Workingman's Marble," Preservation-Racine Newsletter (Summer 1989), pp. 1-3.
- (13) Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1929), p. 95; Samuel B. Reed, House Plans for Everybody (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1878), pp. 9-12; Samuel B. Reed, Cottage Houses for Village and Country Homes (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1883), pp. 9-12; for information on Samuel Gross's houses and career, see Gwendolyn Wright, Moralism and the Model Home (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 40-45; and Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., The American Family Home, 1800-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 97-98.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 6

Worker Housing in Racine 1860-1914
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Notes to Section E (continued)

(14) Common Landscapes of America, 1580 to 1845 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 344.

(15) The Whitman quote is from New York Dissected, eds. Emory Holloway and Ralph Adimari (New York: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Inc., 1936), p.92; Abbott, p. 363.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 1Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

II. Description

Summary

Most of the workers' cottages built during the historic period of Racine's industrial development were originally rectangular in plan and front-gabled in form. Only a few were side-gabled or hip-roofed. Almost all of them, however, were expanded or added onto during the historic period of their construction, and other forms and plans evolved, such as gabled-ell forms or "L" and "T" plans. The original stylistic influence on the cottages was Italianate, and that influence continued throughout the period of their construction and development; but a few cottages, especially some that were built after the turn of the century, were influenced by the Queen Anne or Colonial Revival Styles. Alterations and additions to the traditionally Italianate cottages, which were made during the historic period, frequently show the influence of those and other domestic architectural styles which were popular in Racine from 1860 through 1914. Most of these cottages have provided serviceable (and sometimes even stylish) housing for Racine's working families over the past hundred years or more. Subsequent alterations have continually been influenced by later American domestic architectural styles, yet the configurations of Racine workers' cottages from their historic period are still readily identifiable.

One-and-a-Half-Story Cottages

Racine workers' cottages were built in one, one-and-a-half, and two-story varieties, but the one-and-a-half-story type was by far the most common. It is also the most easily identifiable configuration of this locally historic architectural resource and can serve as a pattern with which other variations can be compared and explicated. A typical one-and-a-half-story cottage was originally a rectangular box with a full basement below it and an attic above it, under the sloping rafters of a front-gabled roof. Living spaces were ordinarily finished only on the first floor, with the exception that kitchens were occasionally relegated to the basement to begin with. Bathrooms were almost never included in the original construction, even during the early years of the twentieth century. Interiors were arranged to provide as much space as possible for usable living area. Rooms opened directly onto one another, rather than into passageways. Exterior doors opened directly into parlors or kitchens; only occasionally was there a front or a rear entry hall. The conventional floor plan was two rooms wide and two rooms deep: two common rooms (used, perhaps, as a parlor and a kitchen), in line one behind the other, and two bedrooms (often separated by a closet), running alongside them on the left or right. It was the basic plan—usually the beginning plan—for almost every worker's cottage built during the historic period from 1860 to 1914.

The shorter sides of this rectangular plan were normally oriented parallel with the street. The foundation was low, inset with narrow awning windows to the basement. Two

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetRacine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, WisconsinSection number F Page 2

II. Description (continued)

long, double-hung windows (usually 2/2) and a doorway (very often with a transom and sometimes with sidelights) were spaced evenly along the first floor front. The doorway could be at the center, left, or right. Simple wooden steps and a stoop often led up to it; occasionally a little gabled canopy supported by brackets protected it, or a small entry porch surrounded it. A single, double-hung window (or sometimes a slender pair of them) was centered under the peak of a moderately steep, gabled roof. The window provided light and air to the attic. Door and window placement on the sides and at the rear of the cottage was not nearly so formulaized, but fenestration was still regularly spaced and balanced. In silhouette, the basic one-and-a-half-story Racine worker's cottage was originally very much like the archetypal symbol for "home"—a narrow rectangle with a tall triangle atop it.

One-Story Cottages

The simplest one-story version had merely one common room with an outside doorway opening directly onto it both at the front and the rear. To one side or the other of the common room was a single bedroom with a closet in line behind it. (The kitchen was in the basement.) Most one-story cottages, however, were two rooms wide and two rooms deep like the one-and-a-half-story types. But the one-story version was more likely to have a hipped roof; and it often had a small window or louvered vent in a central gablet at the front, which provided some light and air to a minimal attic area. Otherwise, in form, plan, elevation and fenestration, the one-story Racine worker's cottage was very much like the one-and-a-half-story type.

Expanded One-and-a-Half-Story Cottages

As already noted, Racine workers' cottages were intended to be enlarged; and the first expansions were often made, literally, under the same roof—within the attic spaces. Even a one-story cottage generally had enough headroom beneath its ridge board for at least one attic room in the center with a small window at one end or the other. A steep stairway was usually run up—at the sacrifice of a front or rear closet downstairs—for access to the finished attic bedroom or dormitory. The more common, one-and-a-half-story cottage had space for two long and narrow rooms, side-by-side, parallel with the ridge board and within the sloping rafters. But more often attic expansion in either case was accomplished by raising the roof for increased headroom with separate gabled dormers or continuous shed dormers on one side of the gabled roof or on both sides. On occasion a cottage was expanded by adding an entirely new second story.

The cottages were almost always added onto as a working family grew or prospered. A frame lean-to was often the first addition—extending to the rear and housing a first floor kitchen. More permanent additions (those with a full basement below them) were also extended to the rear, but they usually jutted beyond the original house to one side or the other, creating an "L" plan. Further additions were occasionally made straight

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 3Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

II. Description (continued)

back, turning an "L" into a "T" plan. Before the turn of the century, many Racine workers' cottages and their inevitable additions had evolved into either an "L" or a "T" plan with a gabled main section facing the street and a gabled wing to one side or the other.

When an addition was built, another exterior doorway to the house was usually provided on the street side of the newly projecting ell. An entry porch was almost invariably added—along the side of the original section and within the crook of the ell—giving access to the new doorway. Some cottages then had (and still have) two porches and two doorways facing the street. This was most often the case when the addition contained only a kitchen and perhaps a pantry. The original doorway led to the parlor and the new one led to the kitchen. A third door at the rear led to the yard behind the house. If an addition (or series of them) contained, for example, both a dining room and a kitchen, the formal entrance to the house was sometimes moved from the front door in the original section (which had led directly into the parlor) to the door in the ell (which usually led directly into the dining room). Often the old front doorway was then converted into a window and the original stoop or porch was removed. In many "T" plan cottages, a front and rear porch flanked either side of the central wing and a doorway from each porch led into the house.

By the 1890s a complete "L" or "T" plan, often enough, was built at the time of original construction if the working family could afford it; and some variations in the fenestration of the street front developed. Rather than the traditional tripart placement of two windows and a doorway on the first floor, the doorway was sometimes recessed at the left or the right corner. Also, rather than the traditional arrangement, only two windows or even one wide window were set at the first floor of the front-gabled wing and the formal entryway was located in the side wing, with access from a porch along the side of the main section. These variant types were generally built later in the period and are not as numerous as the traditional types.

Two-Story Cottages

Two principal variations of two-story cottages were built, each meant to house two families. They had nearly identical flats on each floor—arranged two rooms wide and two rooms deep like the original cottages or in an "L" or a "T" configuration like the expanded ones. Their elevations differed with their rooflines. The gable-roofed type had an attic area like the one-and-a-half-story cottage, usually with a central attic window or two under the peak of the gable. The hip-roofed type had a minimal attic area like a one-story cottage, often with the same sort of central gablet and small window or vent. Later variations in fenestration appeared on two-story cottages just as they did on the one- and the one-and-a-half-story types.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 4Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

II. Description (continued)

Materials

Almost all of these cottages were constructed with exteriors entirely of frame or brick, although a few built during the early years of the twentieth century were constructed of brick on the first floor with a frame story above. Foundations were usually rubble stone, randomly coursed ashlar, or brick. Originally most of the roofs were shake shingled; here and there a more "exotic" material like tin or tile was used, but almost all of the original roofs have been replaced by composition shingles or roll roofing. Doors, window sashes, door and window frames were wood, as were the original stoops, steps, posts, and porches. Interiors were finished with wood lath and plaster, as well as with paneled doors and decoratively milled casings and moldings in stock patterns.

Siting

The cottages were usually built on narrow--twenty-five to fifty foot--city lots, which normally had a depth of a hundred feet or more. The lots were often in newly platted subdivisions, just within or contiguous to what were then the city limits of Racine. They were residential land developments for working people, laid out in the grid pattern which was then conventional in the Middle West. The houses were fairly close together; only rarely was there room for a driveway between them. Some blocks had alleys, and garages were often built much later, at the rear of the lots with access to them from the alley. All the cottages in any block were normally set back the same distance from the street, resulting in an orderly but rather regimented prospect. The city has since expanded considerably, and most of these cottages are now located in what is considered the central area of the City of Racine.

Style

Racine workers' cottages are merely folk houses, but probably because they began to be built in the 1860s, their architectural ornament was heavily influenced by the Italianate Style. That influence became traditional and it continued throughout the historic period of their construction and development. Some of the older cottages have retained decorative brackets at the eaves. A number have bay windows in the Italianate manner on one side or the other of their main sections. On some of the one-story or two-story types, the small attic window or louvered vent is circular or semi-circular. These ocular openings often have trefoil, quatrefoil, or multifoiled wooden tracery (and are sometimes called "rose windows" locally). Later cottages were built with simpler architectural detail, and a few which were built around the turn of the century show the influence of later architectural styles like Queen Anne or Colonial Revival. But the great majority show their indebtedness to the Italianate, especially in the treatment of windows and doorways.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 5Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

II. Description (continued)

Doors and windows were usually set within segmental arches surmounted by ornamental hood moldings, on the front and on either side of the house as well. (However, round arches, straight arches, or rectangular openings were also used.) Brick cottages often had door and window hood moldings which were executed in decorative brick relief and occasionally in cast concrete or stone. Frame cottages were commonly trimmed with bracketed or pedimented crowns above their door and window openings. But the most elaborate embellishments of Racine workers' cottages during their historic period were on their porches, which were usually added after original construction, although most of them were built during their period of historical significance. The earliest porches were in the Italianate Style, but later ones displayed Queen Anne spindlework, Colonial Revival porticos, Neoclassical columns, or the brick piers and battered posts of the Craftsman Style.

Since these cottages have been lived in continuously by Racine working families—some of them for a century or more—they also display modifications and additions in domestic architectural styles which became fashionable much later. A few of them have been transformed into something else entirely (a small Swiss chalet, for example), or they have been altered almost beyond identification by being brought "up to date." But a great many more still retain the essential architectural fabric (at least on the outside) from the significant period of their construction and development in the years between 1860 and 1914.

III. Significance

Summary

Racine workers' cottages are architecturally significant under Criterion C as embodying the distinctive characteristics of a particular type of historic vernacular building which was constructed locally during a specific period in the industrial growth and development of the City of Racine. Within districts, some of these cottages may be shown to be significant and distinguishable entities from that historic period although their components may lack individual distinction. Those Racine workers' cottages which were built of cream brick are also significant under Criterion C because the principal material of which they were constructed is also locally historic. Within districts, Racine workers' cottages may be shown to be significant as well under Criterion A, in the area of Social History, as surviving examples of the decent and durable housing available for working people in Racine compared to the shanties and tenements which housed workers in other heavily industrialized areas of the country during the period of America's industrial development, from 1860 to 1914. In addition, such groups of cottages are significant as reminders of the workers themselves and of their skills, which served Racine's diverse industries during that period.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 6Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

III. Significance (continued)

Racine workers' cottages are significant on the local level under Criterion C because they embody the distinctive characteristics of the type and style of houses built by and for working class families in Racine during the years between 1860 and 1914, when Racine was growing and developing as an urban industrial area. They are historic examples of Racine's solution to the problem of housing the rapidly increasing work force which flowed into the city seeking jobs in its flourishing factories. Company housing never developed in Racine to any great extent, nor did the closely built small tenements of Chicago or the even more congested, multistoried warrens of New York. Small, one or two family cottages were the rule in Racine, most of them owned by the working people who lived in them.

Their configuration became conventional: a rectangular plan and elevation with a moderately steep, gabled roof oriented towards the street or a hipped roof with a central gablet (or a few other variations). Their fenestration became formulaic: two long windows and a doorway spaced evenly along the front on the first floor and a small window or two centered within the gable above. The cottages were modest and vernacular, but they were not without style. Probably because Italianate was the popular domestic style in Racine when these cottages were first being built, Italianate treatment and ornament became characteristic of them. Doors and windows were usually set within arched apertures and beneath decorative hood moldings, or within rectangular openings crowned by brackets and pediments. Paired windows or ocular openings were common in attic stories; brackets were frequently found at the eaves, and bracketed bay windows were sometimes to be seen at the sides. Even though later cottages were often simpler, their essentially Italianate character was apparent. And even though a few of these workers' cottages built around the turn of the century adopted characteristics of the Queen Anne or the Colonial Revival Styles, they were clearly just variants of the traditional Italianate Style cottage, which was built throughout the period of Racine's industrial development.

The cottages became a vernacular convention which was reproduced again and again in working class residential sections of Racine between 1860 and 1914. In districts, this local building pattern is particularly distinguishable, and although their components may lack individual distinction, groups of these cottages are precisely evocative of the period when they were built.

Some Racine workers' cottages are also significant under Criterion C because they were built of an historic local building material: the cream colored brick which is indigenous to Southeastern Wisconsin and was manufactured in Racine for 75 years between 1839 and 1914. The brick was used to build almost every important building in the early history of Racine, but it was also used extensively to construct distinctive brick workers' cottages, which are found almost exclusively in the city of Racine.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 7Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

III. Significance (continued)

Within districts, Racine workers' cottages are also significant under Criterion A, in the area of Social History, as seen in the context of laborers and their housing in America during the period of its industrialization, from 1860 to 1914. In the working class areas of large cities like Chicago, absentee ownership and overcrowded conditions were commonplace; in suburban communities planned for laborers, like Pullman, Illinois, company ownership and regulation were the rule. But in Racine, residential neighborhoods for working people spread out from and around the city's industrial core, where these modest but well constructed cottages lined the streets. The houses were lived in and owned, for the most part, by a diverse population of workers in Racine's equally diverse industries. The workers may not have been historically significant individually, but they possessed skills or performed jobs, many of which are now only a part of American history. Their industrial skills are worthy of being memorialized as the earlier skills of handcrafters have been commemorated and even reconstructed in colonial and pioneer locales. A district comprised of the houses of these laborers in industry is just as significant in recalling them, their skills, and their society.

IV. Registration Requirements

An example of the property type will be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C as embodying the distinctive characteristics of a particular type of historic vernacular building. Within districts, groups of this property type will be eligible as well under Criterion A, in the area of Social History. Specific evidence for these findings will be documented in the individual nominations for buildings or districts.

Historic Racine workers' cottages, as already indicated, were usually built with exteriors executed wholly of clapboards or brick (above their masonry foundations). Only a relatively few of the later ones were constructed with brick on the first floor and with a frame second story or attic. Although many more frame than brick cottages were built, the brick ones have retained more of their architectural fabric—at least on the outside—because their masonry construction made it difficult and rather expensive to alter their form and fenestration or to obliterate those architectural details which were fashioned in brick.

Because frame workers' cottages were so much easier to alter over the years since the period of their historic significance, many have been remodeled so drastically that they have been transmuted almost beyond the identification of their origins. Only their siting in obvious "workingmen's rows" of cottages and the barest outlines of their original forms betray their beginnings. Decorative architectural detail was often stripped from eaves, lintels, or porches, in order to make their original exteriors look

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 8Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

IV. Registration Requirements (continued)

more "modern" or else to make them easier to cover with the simulated brick or slate siding of the 1940s and 1950s, the wide aluminum "clapboarding" of the 1960s and 1970s, or the narrower—but still inappropriate—molded vinyl of the present day.

As a consequence, there are a larger number of historic brick workers' cottages than frame ones which are readily identifiable today. Brick workers' cottages, therefore, can be held to a higher standard of historical integrity than frame ones, when they are considered individually for nomination to the National Register. Non-historic alterations to frame workers' cottages may occasionally be excused, if such cottages are otherwise important examples of their kind. However, the case for any worker's cottage—brick or frame—must be individually established and made.

To be nominated individually to the National Register, an historic Racine worker's cottage must stand today at its original location and, whenever possible, within a residential setting—just as it usually did during the period of its historic significance (1860-1914). A setting, however, can change over time. While it is desirable that each nominated cottage still stand within a row of modest, working class dwellings that provide a suitable streetscape for it, the urban blocks or neighborhoods where some of the best of these cottages are now to be found have often evolved, since the period of significance, from residential to commercial or industrial. Particularly fine examples of these historic resources should not be disqualified because they now stand among commercial or industrial buildings, or because they may, here or there, stand alone in areas where whole blocks of houses have been razed. Even isolated examples of these cottages, while not strictly in context, are unexpected capsules of history which fleetingly evoke their era despite their contemporary urban environment.

To be nominated individually to the National Register, an historic Racine worker's cottage must also retain the original elements of its design, materials, and workmanship on the outside. Interior integrity is desirable—especially in the preservation of original millwork or decorative plasterwork—but it need not be mandatory. Even during their historic period, the floor plans of these cottages were often altered, and their interior decoration varied widely, from frugally plain to surprisingly ornate. Exteriors, however, ought to display characteristic forms, fenestration, and facades. Original materials must have been preserved or restored, and decorative architectural details should be original or appropriate reproductions. These cottages were frequently remodeled during their historic period. As already pointed out, they were actually meant to be altered and enlarged. Change was (and still is) a part of their architectural and historical character. Additions and alterations made during the historic period are not only acceptable, they are desirable, since they are the material records of each cottage's historical evolution. Therefore historic alterations such as shed or gabled dormers are acceptable, as are the brick or frame additions which produced the characteristic "L" or "T" plans. Porches which were added in one or another of the architectural styles popular during the historic period are particularly

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Section number F Page 9

IV. Registration Requirements (continued)

desirable. They must, of course, accurately display and preserve the appropriate architectural characteristics of their styles.

Historic Racine workers' cottages which fulfill the requirements stated above for location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship will, as a result, have an historic appearance sufficient to evoke the feeling of their period. They will also display tangible elements of form, fenestration, and facade which will associate them immediately with the period between 1860 and 1914, when Racine was developing its manufacturing industry and the workers in its factories built these cottages with the earnings of their labor.

The standards of historical and architectural integrity required for individual nomination to the National Register can be applied less strictly when such cottages are grouped in districts. In such districts siting, silhouette, and streetscape are of particular importance in evoking the feeling of the historic period. Non-historic alterations which do not materially affect a cottage's contribution to the feeling of the district and its association with the period of significance may be acceptable. They will, however, have to be evaluated in the nomination of any particular district.

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

When the architectural survey of the city of Racine was undertaken in the late 1970s, notes on more than a hundred brick and frame workers' cottages were filed in the conservation office of the city. When this survey was undertaken, those notes became the basis for a more extensive search of the city for examples of the type. A "wind-shield" survey of every street in the city was conducted, and lists of cottages which were apparently from the period were compiled. A closer visual survey was then made of those cottages which seemed to have retained a high degree of architectural integrity. From those, several cottages were selected and visited. Detailed notes were taken on them, and in some cases floor plans of the houses as they are today were drawn, along with conjectural floor plans of their original configurations, based on an examination of the houses and the alterations to them. Beyond that, for some of the cottages more intensively studied, the original ownership was researched in the county's land records and searches of city directories were made, listing the residents of these cottages from the year of their construction to 1940.

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency

- Local government
 University
 Other

Specify repository: _____

I. Form Prepared By

name/title Don Rintz, Consulting Historian
organization for Racine Landmarks Preservation Commission date September 14, 1992
street & number 1730 College Avenue telephone (414) 637-2413
city or town Racine state Wisconsin zip code 53403

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 1

Racine Workers' Cottages
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Major Bibliographical References

- Abbott, Edith. The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936.
- Burckel, Nicholas C., ed. Racine: Growth and Change in a Wisconsin County. Racine, WI: County Board of Supervisors, 1977.
- The History of Racine and Kenosha Counties. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879.
- Karr, Susan E. Architectural and Historical Survey of the City of Racine. Racine, WI: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1979.
- Kirkland, Edward C. Industry Comes of Age: Business, Labor, and Public Policy, 1860-1897. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.
- Long, Robert D. Racine: A Guide to Architectural Styles, 1840-1940. Racine, WI: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1982.
- Lynd, Robert S. and Helen Merrell. Middletown: A Study in American Culture. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1929.
- Fred, Allan R. The Spatial Dynamics of U. S. Urban-Industrial Growth, 1800-1914. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966.
- Preservation Racine Newsletter. Various issues.
- Racine City Directories, 1850 through 1941.
- Racine County land records.
- Reed, Samuel B. Cottage Houses for Village and Country Homes. New York: Orange Judd Company, 1883.
- . House Plans for Everybody. New York: Orange Judd Company, 1878.
- Stone, Fanny S., ed. Racine: Belle City of the Lakes and Racine County, Wisconsin. 2 volumes. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1916.
- Walsh, Margaret. The Manufacturing Frontier: Pioneer Industry in Antebellum Wisconsin, 1830-1860. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1972.
- Warner, Sam Bass Jr. The Urban Wilderness. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- Wright, Gwendolyn. Moralism and the Model Home. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Zimmermann, H. Russell. The Heritage Guidebook. Milwaukee, WI: Heritage Banks, 1976.