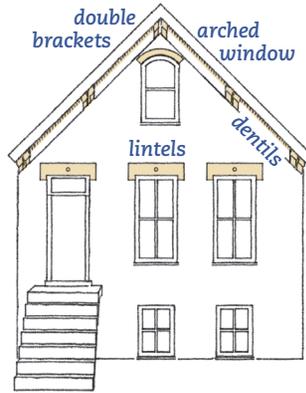


## Decorative Charm

Modern siding covering the exterior may make it hard to recognize the historic character of Chicago's workers cottages. Older cottages are contemporaries of grand Victorian houses, though on a smaller scale. Indeed, many workers cottages feature a bit of Queen Anne, Italianate, or later Arts & Crafts style ornamentation such as decorative stone



lintels or wooden gingerbread details under the eaves or around the windows.

Any fragile decorative woodwork on the exterior or interior which has survived for over a century is rare and worth the effort to repair and preserve. These details are part of what creates the charm and character of Chicago's workers cottages.

## Take Part In Chicago's Story

For more information about the features unique to workers cottages, download the *Field Guide to Identifying Chicago Workers Cottages* from the Chicago Workers Cottage Initiative's website below. Please join us in our effort to preserve Chicago's unique workers cottage housing at [workerscottage.org](http://workerscottage.org)!



[www.workerscottage.org](http://www.workerscottage.org)  
[contact@workerscottage.org](mailto:contact@workerscottage.org)



Working to protect, elevate, and restore  
 Chicago workers cottages

# The Chicago Workers Cottage

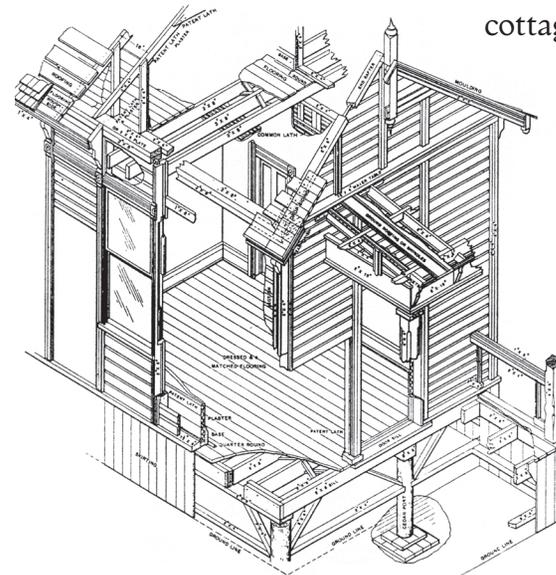


## A Neighborhood Classic

THE "workers cottage" is a historic house type built in many cities around the Great Lakes from the 1880s to 1910s. Tens of thousands of these houses were built in Chicago and on its outskirts as the city grew dramatically in the decades after the Great Fire of 1871. Cottages were built of wood or brick, ranging from simple working-class dwellings to more-elaborate middle-class residences.



Workers cottages were a popular house style in their heyday because they were affordable. New technologies of balloon-frame building techniques and standardized lumber sizes which were developed in Chicago made construction faster and cheaper for builders as well as buyers. There may be as many as 57,000 workers cottages in Chicago today.



Balloon frame construction in 1889

Many cottages were built by small family-owned construction companies one at a time. Others were produced in great numbers as spec houses by larger developers. The simple house designs may have been copied from a pattern book rather than designed by an architect or from detailed architectural plans.

## The American Dream

Many of the first cottage buyers were newly-arrived immigrants. Owning a home provided laborers stability during economic ups and downs. The affordable workers cottage gave access to the American Dream for each generation of immigrants arriving in Chicago. Together the stories of the families who lived here are the stories of Chicago's neighborhoods and the city's promise of opportunity.

To live in a workers cottage is to be connected to the continuous legacy of all the workers and families who shared these spaces and built the city we know today.

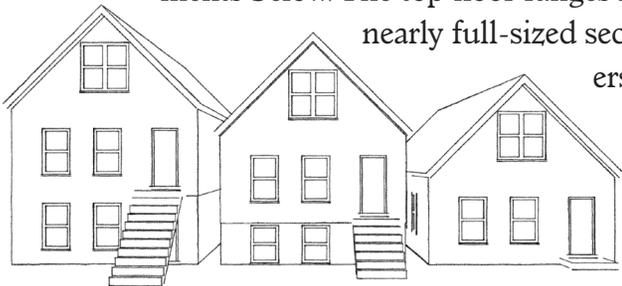


*Remodelled open floor plan*

*Cottage-lined street circa 1910, courtesy Logan Square Preservation*

## An Iconic Form

Workers cottages are often easily recognizable from the peaked gable roof facing the street. Their height varies from houses with only a crawlspace foundation to taller buildings with garden-level apartments below. The top floor ranges in size from tiny attics to nearly full-sized second floors. Some workers cottages have separate apartments on the upper or lower levels, while many are single-family homes.



*Cottage with historic interior*

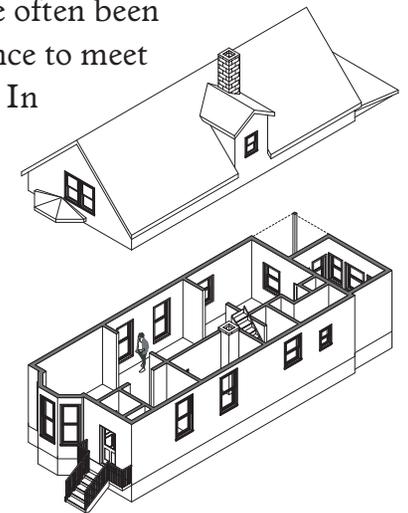


## Houses for Modern Living

The typical workers cottage is about twenty feet wide, sized to fit a standard Chicago city lot. The length varies by the number of bedrooms. Original floor plans typically featured a row of living and dining rooms along one side of the house and smaller bedrooms along the other.

Many cottage floor plans have been modified over the years to create larger rooms or add extra living space upstairs or downstairs. Wood-frame cottages, in particular, have often been remodelled from their original appearance to meet the needs of the families living in them. In the late nineteenth century it was not uncommon to lift the entire house to add an extra floor underneath, while nowadays it is easier to add space by building a rooftop dormer.

No matter the size of the workers cottage, there is usually room in the back for a patio or garden, which can be a treasured bit of private green space for residents in the midst of a crowded city.



*Cutaway view of a cottage built in 1886*