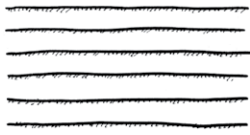
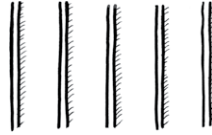


## Layers of History

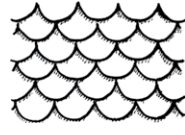
Frame workers cottages were originally finished on the exterior with wood clapboard, or occasionally vertical board-and-batten siding. Some houses featured decorative fish scale siding at the top or in panels on the front facade.



Clapboard

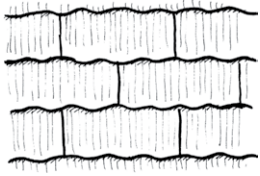


Board and Batten

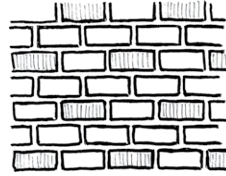


Fish Scale

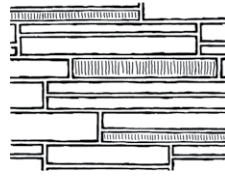
In the 1930s-50s, many homeowners covered the clapboard with asbestos shingles or asphalt sheets to protect the wood houses against fire or to cover deteriorated wood.



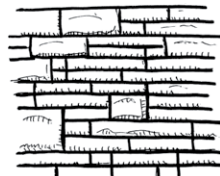
Asbestos-Cement Shingles



Asphalt Sheet Patterns



Perma-Stone and other brand names of artificial stone date from the same time period. A thin layer of concrete mixed with binders and colorants was applied over a layer of lath and wire mesh attached to the brick or wood wall, then pressed in metal molds to create a wide variety of realistic or unrealistic simulated stone patterns. PermaStone was used to weatherize the building, repair crumbling masonry, cover alterations, or simply change the look of the house.



PermaStone / artificial stone



Vinyl / Aluminum Siding

In the 1960s-90s vinyl and aluminum siding became popular. The thin panels snap together and could be easily applied over other siding.

The siding on many Chicago workers cottages conceals a legacy of earlier cladding materials. The outer layer of recent siding may make it difficult to recognize the age and historic character of the building underneath.

Have you identified an exceptional workers cottage in your neighborhood? Stumped by an unusual building? Please share with the Chicago Workers Cottage Initiative at [contact@workerscottage.org](mailto:contact@workerscottage.org)!



CHICAGO  
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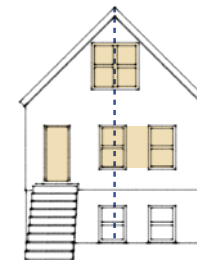
## FIELD GUIDE FOR IDENTIFYING CHICAGO WORKERS COTTAGES



### What is a Workers Cottage?

The workers cottage is a small-sized house type built of wood or brick by the tens of thousands from the 1880s to 1910s to provide affordable working-class and middle-class housing in the growing industrial cities of the Midwest.

Workers cottages are typically built with a narrow rectangular footprint to fit a 25- by 125-foot Chicago city lot. With a gap for a walkway alongside the building, a workers cottage on a standard lot most often measures about 20 feet wide by 30-60 feet long.



Most workers cottages feature a simple gable (peaked) roof oriented toward the street. The entry door is typically located to one side of the front facade balanced by a set of windows or a projecting bay. The upper level usually features a window or set of windows in the center.

A workers cottage is usually 1½ stories with a smaller attic or ½ floor on the upper level. The angle or pitch of the roof and height of the eaves above the upper floor may create a large or small space on the upper level.

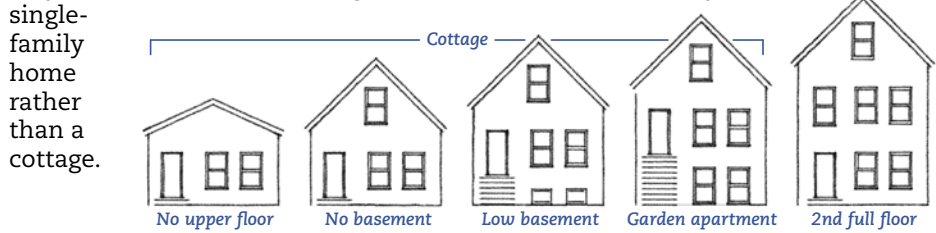


Many workers cottages have been modified over the years, which can make them challenging to recognize and interpret. In the 1890s homeowners often added space by raising the entire building to add an extra floor underneath. Due to the sturdy balloon-frame construction of wood workers cottages, this was not as difficult as it may seem. When looking at the house now, you may see a clue to these alterations in different construction materials used on the first and second floors, or a tall staircase to the main entry.

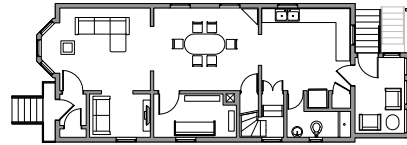


More recent changes may include extra apartments in the basement or attic, roof dormers and pop-tops. If the roofline has been altered, it may be challenging to recognize as a workers cottage.

Workers cottages were originally built in a full spectrum of sizes according to the needs of the owner and builder. They were originally built as single-family homes, but many now include an extra apartment in the basement or attic. Most are 1½ stories, but can appear smaller or larger depending on the height of the upstairs and basement levels. An external staircase may indicate which floor is the main floor. A building with a second full-height floor may be better described as a gable-front two-flat or 2½-story



The original floor plan of most workers cottages was partitioned into a row of larger common rooms with smaller bedrooms lined up along the opposite wall.

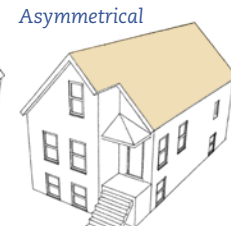


### Workers Cottage Features

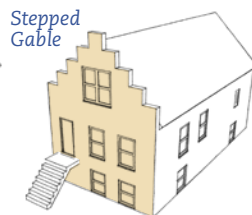
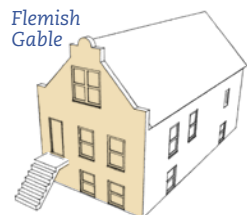


The strong diagonal lines of the gable roof provide much of the character of the workers cottage style. The steep roof and low eaves give the house a snug feel.

The gable is the most common roof style, though there are several other roof forms. Some cottage roofs may have been modified over the years and no longer easily fit into one of these categories.



Rooftop dormers are a relatively-recent modification to enlarge the upper floor. Ideally, dormers should be set back from the front to preserve the diagonal rooflines and the “cottage” look of the house.

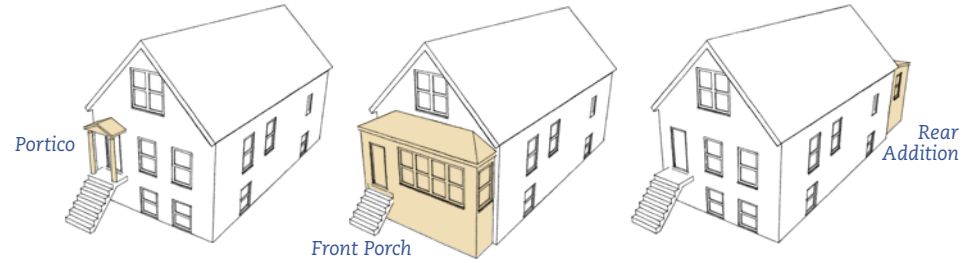


Localized variations can be found in some Chicago neighborhoods, with different roof pitches or facade ornamentation.

A rectangular or octagonal bay window to the side of the front entry is an original feature of many workers cottages. A roof extending over the entry and/or a landing may be attached to the projecting bay.

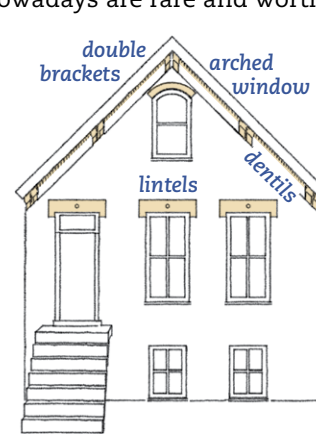


Some workers cottages originally included a portico over the front entry, or porch and landing. Enclosed porches and rear extensions are most likely later additions to the building.

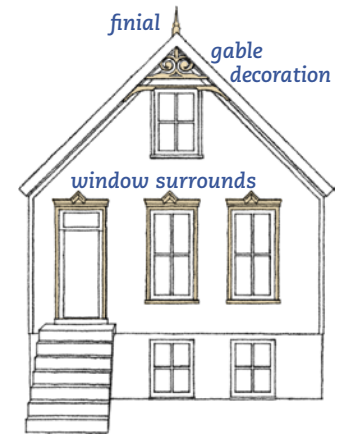


### Historical Details

Though workers cottages were originally built as simple housing, many featured mass-produced wooden or stone ornamentation in the Victorian or Craftsman styles popular when they were built. Fragile details which survive nowadays are rare and worth preserving.



Brick workers cottages built in the 1880s-1890s often feature ornamental carved limestone lintels above tall Italianate windows, elaborate wood brackets and rows of small blocks called dentils under the roofline. Craftsman-style brick cottages built after 1900 often featured arched window openings and decorative brickwork panels above or below the windows.



Some frame cottages originally featured wood filigrees under the gables, rooftop finials, ornate window surrounds, fish scale siding, dentils and other machine-made wooden flourishes. Lost details may have deteriorated or may be hidden behind layers of later siding. Traces of wood pieces, construction records, and historic photographs may be the only evidence nowadays of whether a frame cottage was elaborately or plainly decorated when it was new.