

Early Beginnings to Privatized Housing

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Prior to the Military Housing Privatization Initiative that took place in Fiscal Year 1996, several privatization efforts were undertaken by the DoD – Wherry and Capehart acts in the late 1940s through to the 1950s – to provide family housing for our military members. Following World War II, military service members faced severe family housing shortages with several factors contributing to this shortage: increased number of personnel required to maintain the post-World War II permanent US military establishment; number of families increased due to higher ranks of enlisted personnel allowed to serve accompanied by families; and, personnel serving in the Air Force supported increasingly sophisticated weapon systems. In 1949, the Air Force inventory contained 17,954 family housing units with 6,397 deemed substandard; in comparison, Air Force estimated that 121,000 family housing units were required to house its personnel. But, was there an effort prior to the Wherry Act in August 1949 to supply military housing? Obviously yes if I am asking.



Quonset huts built during the Lanham Act for military housing.

A shorting of housing dated even longer than 1949. Enacted in October 1940, a full 14 months prior to

the Japanese surprise attack upon Pearl Harbor, the Lanham Act, after Representative Frederick Lanham, created “one million emergency housing accommodations for war workers and WWII veterans.” The legislation provided for the construction of housing for employees engaged in national defense activities in geographical areas experiencing housing shortages. For a community to qualify, local housing conditions had to be in such a short supply as to impede national defense efforts, and the private sector had to be unable to provide the necessary units. However, this did not settle living conditions as depicted in a 1949 Life magazine article highlighting the living conditions facing many military families – tar-paper shacks, chicken coops, garages, and plywood pyramidal huts providing shelter for military families stationed around the country with some houses lacking



Workers building Cameron Valley in Alexandria circa early 1940s. Cameron was one of three wartime housing projects completed in Alexandria during World War II.

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running water and electricity. This would lead to the passing of the Wherry Act in August of 1949 that encouraged private sector developers to construct military family housing and the Federal Housing Administration insuring private rental housing on or near permanent military installations.¹

There were two major issues with the Lanham Act – risk and leaseholder agreements – that arose that would impeded future military housing legislation and required subsequent legislative action with the Wherry Act addressing these concerns in 1949. Under the Wherry Act, the issue of project risk within a military context required the Secretary of Defense to certify that the request for housing was needed and with regards to the termination of leases after national emergencies, the Wherry Act provided an exemption to private sponsors.



Housing erected under the Lanham Act for military industry workers in Southern Indiana who worked for the Indiana Army Ammunition Plant; many of these homes are still occupied today.

Following World War II, the Federal government wanted to dispose of the Lanham housing as quickly as possible with Congress adding Title VI to the Lanham Act through the Housing Act of 1950, which included a comprehensive plan for disposition of the units. However, the Korean Conflict halted the disposal of the housing units with resumption in January 1953. After two deadline extensions, an Executive Order authorized the establishment of a timetable for disposal and required a case-by-case authorization for any additional extensions.



Lanham Act family housing on an Air Force installation.

Lanham Act housing still exists today, even here in the Dayton area with Greenmont Village between Woodman and Patterson (10-miles southeast of our location) as one such “Housing Experience” that was constructed under the Act that was built for the Dayton’s defense workers and their families that are still standing today.

Notes: 1. See BBP, “A Look Back at Past Housing Privatization Efforts,” 19 Nov 2019.



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