

WANT TO BUILD A MIRACLE CITY?

War Housing in Wichita

by Julie Courtwright

“**N**ow behold the day of the war industries,” wrote famed Kansas editor William Allen White in 1942. “Towns like Wichita, Pittsburg, Parsons are being transformed.” And transformed they were. Wichita, seemingly overnight, changed forever from what one citizen called a “sleepy little cow town” to a booming city that “shook off the doldrums of the Great Depression to become one of the nation’s busiest military production centers” in the wake of World War II.¹

An important facet of Wichita’s explosive war metamorphosis was defense housing for the thousands of workers who migrated to the city. Lack of adequate wartime housing was a serious consideration. If workers did not have a place for rest, relaxation, and recreation while not on the job they would suffer from the effects of stress and sleep deprivation. A decrease in productivity would result, hindering the war effort. This was a situation to be avoided at all costs. Production was essential to military success; many maintained that although housing would not win the war, it could lose it.²

Because Wichita was unable to provide housing for the vast number of in-migrating workers, President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated the city as one of 146 defense areas. This distinction allowed homes to be financed through the Federal Housing Administration with no down payment, thus encouraging private building. Also, the federal government announced that it would build new homes in Wichita beginning in 1941. The first of these additions was Hilltop Manor, soon to be followed by Planeview and Beechwood. Although the *Wichita Evening Eagle* proclaimed the city’s housing as “more or less the ‘bell wether’ of the gigantic [United States] war housing program,” the projects were not the largest, nor the smallest, nor the most problematic, nor the most controversial of the national scene.³ In fact, despite its

Julie Courtwright is a Ph.D. student in American history at the University of Arkansas. She received her master’s degree from Wichita State University, and her research interests include regional and western history.

1. “Wartime Wichita,” *Wichita Eagle*, August 12, 1995; *ibid.*, November 14, 1944; White’s comment in “Kansas—Jekyll or Hyde?” *Kansas City Times*, January 23, 1942.

2. Charles Abrams, “Housing the War Workers,” *New Republic* 105 (December 29, 1941): 886.

3. “Pick Wichita As Model on War Housing,” *Wichita Evening Eagle*, October 10, 1945; Craig Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City* (Wichita: Wichita–Sedgwick County Historical Museum Assn., 1988), 189; *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943.

Announcing

**THE FORMAL DEDICATION
OF THE
FEDERAL PUBLIC
HOUSING AUTHORITY
PROJECTS IN WICHITA**

★ HILLTOP MANOR
★ PLANEVIEW ★ BEECHWOOD
★ TRAILER PARK

Formal dedication ceremonies for all war housing projects in Wichita will be held today, opening with a sunrise Easter service, and continuing throughout most of the day with speeches, tours of inspection, band music, and more such.

Activity has been planned from early in the morning until late in the evening as the grounds from Rockwood, Hilltop Manor, Trailer Park and Mineview join with all the folks of Wichita who are interested in attending the public occasions. **Wichitans are cordially invited to be on hand for the full day of activities.**

A large parking area will be provided and a natural sloping hillside with lawn and shade will serve as a stadium for the services. The platform will be decorated with Easter lilies, palms, and a beautiful white lighted cross. A public address system will be used for the occasion, and for the talks which will be heard later in the day.

★ **THE PROGRAM** ★

WILL BEGIN AT 2:30 P. M.

1. Horing, Korch, and Crane	8. Community Singing: "God Bless America."
2. Easter Music.	7. Praying, officiated, Mr. Stan- nor Mykleski, Director of Region VII, Federal Public Housing Authority.
3. Invocation: Father Clynen.	9. Visiting guest speakers.
4. Flag Raising Ceremony, by The Army.	
5. Dedication Program.	

THE LOCATION
In the Mineview Area East of Hillside and
South of Franklin Road

Wichita Sunday Eagle, April 25, 1943,

problems, Wichita experienced a smoother transition from pre-war sleepy city to industrial defense center than did many others across the country. Nevertheless, even these comparatively “easy” modifications changed both the human and physical makeup of the city almost overnight, an accomplishment that could not be achieved without major ramifications—the results of which are still being felt in Wichita today. The most heated arguments concerning war housing in the Kansas “air capital” began not in the frantic confusion of the early war years, but when V-J day was clearly in sight. Planeview, Beechwood, and Hilltop Manor were, for Wichita and for Kansas, not only an example of increased government involvement in private industry, but, and perhaps more important, an unintentional experiment in social reorganization and an ongoing and far-reaching lesson in community identity. As White observed in 1942, Kansas and Wichita would “feel the change that comes with this great defense program We are standing on the threshold of a new day.”⁴

While Kansas agriculture was vital for victory, so too were Kansas war industries a significant part of the war on production. High quality quick aviation manufacturing, in particular, was what the battle of Kansas was all about, and, contrary to its cowtown image, Wichita was already established as an aviation center prior to Roosevelt’s demand for airplane manufacturing in the early years of the war. “On the great, flat plains of Kansas,” 1940s journalist Raymond Moley observed, “pioneers in aircraft-flying and manufacturing . . . [were] at work for more than thirty years” prior to the war and had managed to stay at work during the difficult depression decade. Future airplane moguls Walter Beech, Clyde Cessna, and Lloyd Stearman worked for pioneering aviationist Jake Moellendick before they started the companies that became the foundation of the air capital city.⁵

“What Wichita means to the nation at war,” wrote a *Fortune* journalist, “is expressed in four words: Boeing, Beech, Culver, and Cessna.”⁶ The midwestern city, in addition to its established aviation industry, was transformed into a major defense production center because of its central location in the country, making it less susceptible to German or Japanese attack. Other factors were the Wichita image as a loyal “heartland” town, useful for war effort propaganda, and its extremely low alien population. Therefore, the city was primed for serious expansion and serious money. “Had it been known just how many dollars were on the way,” noted Wichita historian Craig Miner, “isolationist sentiment in town might have all but disappeared.”⁷

That money came in the form of war industry contracts and orders. The Stearman Company, renamed Boeing–Wichita in 1942, built a biplane that was used as a primary trainer. Delivery began as early as 1936 on the first of ten thousand P-13s built in Wichita. As war loomed closer, demand escalated. In September 1940, when total business pending was estimated at twenty-one million dollars, thirty million dollars in additional local contracts were signed in one week. In July 1941 the *Wichita Eagle* reported more rumors of impending contracts for all aircraft companies. The big news, however, was the new addition to Stearman. Reports to the city commission noted that Plant II, built under emergency legislation to produce bombers, would increase employment from thirty-five hundred to more than twenty thousand within three years. This translated to fifty new employees per day hired to work on the famous B-17 and B-29 “flying fortresses.” Employment increases such as these were astounding to plants that were, in 1939, working at only one-quarter capacity. By the end of the war Boeing–Wichita was producing 4.2 Superfortresses per working day, or 100 per month. Of the total 3,888 Superfortresses made, 1,644 were built in Wichita.⁸

4. “Kansas—Jekyll or Hyde?”

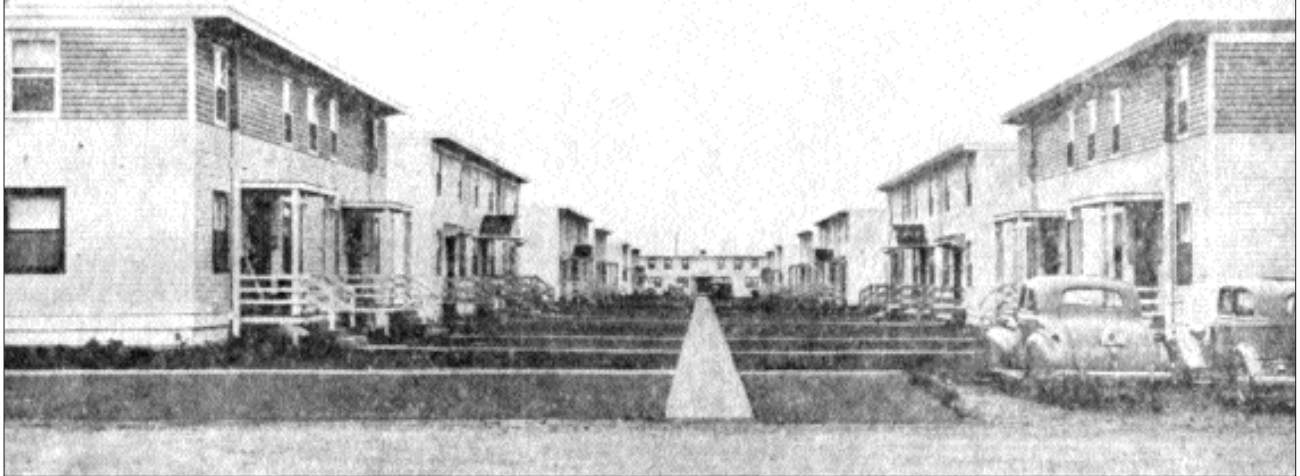
5. Raymond Moley, “Kansas in the War,” *Newsweek* 20 (October 12, 1942): 96.

6. “Housing For War,” *Fortune* 26 (October 1942): 193.

7. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 183–85.

8. “Housing For War,” 193; Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 184–86; “The Battle of Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 13 (November 1945): 483; “Wichita Aircraft Factories in Line for Big Contracts,” *Wichita Eagle*, July 6, 1941.

PLANEVIEW



NEW TENANTS SIGNING UP LEASES



Known as "the miracle city," Planeview became Kansas's seventh largest city as thousands of defense housing units seemed to "spring up as if by magic." Beginning in 1943 a steady stream of Wichita's war workers moved into the new homes.

As a result of increased activity, Wichita's population escalated from 114,966 in 1940 to approximately 200,000 in 1943, and, for many months, made the city one of the fastest growing in the country. From April 1940 to October 1941 the highest growth rates were in San Diego, California, at 27 percent, and Wichita, Kansas, at 20 percent. The 1,598 vacant dwellings for sale or rent in 1940 Wichita were hardly adequate for required defense housing.⁹

The Kansas city was not alone in this inadequacy. Debate over defense housing was a nationwide phenomenon. Four million war workers plus their families migrated to various parts of the country to assist in wartime production. Nationwide "share your home" campaigns found dwellings for two million workers. The others, however, had to be provided through government assistance. Under the Lanham Act, the federal government built approximately one million temporary housing structures. Between Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, for example, rose Vanport, the largest war housing project in the nation. Built on the floodplain of the Columbia River, work began in September 1942, and war workers settled into the first of nine thousand apartments on December 12. By the end of the war over forty thousand people, more than twice the population of Wichita's largest defense community, called Vanport's "dull gray" buildings home.¹⁰

Dependence on the federal government for housing was a controversial idea. But the new policy was facilitated by the precedents of government involvement set

by the New Deal and by the frantic atmosphere of the war emergency.¹¹ In Kansas, arguably the most consistently Republican state in the union, antigovernment cries were surprisingly not pervasive, although they were heard. Senator Arthur Capper received correspondence, for example, from prominent Topeka businessman and noted Republican Henry A. Bubb, that, under normal conditions, might have been the typical Kansas response to the "Public Housers."

It is almost impossible for me to believe, that anyone from the great state of freedom loving Kansas would be rendering comfort to this group of Socialists who want the government to eventually house most of the people When you take away the will of an independent American citizen to buy and pay for his own home, you take away a great part of what our boys are fighting for.¹²

Despite such objections, overall Kansas reaction, or the lack of it, indicates that initial acceptance of government involvement in construction of war housing was not as great a problem as might have been expected.

As construction began, however, the government's zeal to build houses as quickly as possibly led to haphazard planning. Mistakes, inefficiencies, and bureaucracy did not endear war housing programs to the hearts of city authorities. According to Gerald D. Nash, author of *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War*, the sheer number of federal agencies involved in war housing resulted in chaos and inefficiency.¹³ The confusion partially cleared, however,

9. Jeanne Brooks and Julia Emery, eds., *Planning for Wichita's Future: A Summary of the Wichita Comprehensive Plan: 1946* (Wichita: City Planning Commission, 1946): 7; Carl Abbot, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1987), 103; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Sixteenth Census, Housing: First Series Data for Small Areas, Kansas 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), 9.

10. National Housing Agency, *War Housing in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, April 1945): 4-23; National Housing Agency, *Public Housing: The Work of the Federal Public Housing Authority* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 1946), 12; Carl Abbot, *Urban America in the Modern Age: 1920 to the Present* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harland Davidson, 1987): 61.

11. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 164; see also Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Wichita was no stranger to federal aid for construction projects. The city received funding for thirty-four such projects between 1933 and 1942. See Jeffrey L. Tully, "New Deal Construction Relief Projects: Wichita, Kansas, A Decade of Change" (master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1994).

12. Henry A. Bubb to Arthur Capper, February 25, 1944, "Federal Housing 1940-1945," box 8, Arthur Capper Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. The senator received other letters concerning government intervention from people all over the state.

13. Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 46, 76.

when President Roosevelt established the National Housing Agency (NHA) in 1942. The new department, in addition to supervising the massive organizational problem of defense housing, also embarked on an educational campaign to conjure positive public support for war housing. This was not easy among city officials, who feared that poor government planning and practices were simply creating tomorrow's slums in their cities through today's supposedly temporary federal war housing.¹⁴

Although the air capital city experienced many of the problems typical of war housing, the local projects were praised in national news. The Associated Press composed this "recipe":

Want to build a "miracle" city? Here's the recipe: Take 1635 railroad cars of lumber, 280 of brick and flue tile, 100 of roofing, 60 of plumbing, 70 of furnaces, 40 of bathtubs, 17 of hot water heaters, 42 of water and gas mains, 800 of road materials, 14 of shower stalls, 16 of nails, 17 of paint, 77 of insulation, 50 of refrigerators, 75 of stoves and four of electrical wiring and fixtures. Load aboard a train 100 miles long and transport to site. Add 4500 truck loads of ready-mixed cement. Then go to work. That's how Uncle Sam built Planeview—Kansas' seventh largest city.¹⁵

Wichita housing concerns began in 1940 when employment at the aircraft plants started to drastically increase. The *Wichita Beacon* reported that an estimated thirty thousand people would need housing in 1941 alone. The Chamber of Commerce members hoped that the housing boom could be handled through private financing, but this proved impossible. The overwhelming situation and the seemingly never ending supply of new workers made acceptance of government interference in housing easier for some

and welcome for others. By January 1, 1941, an average of twenty-two new families were moving to Wichita per week.¹⁶

That year the Federal Public Housing Authority announced that it would build four hundred homes near Harry and Oliver Streets in Wichita. Applications for the proposed housing units began to pour in at a rate of twenty to twenty-five per day, and eventually totaled eleven hundred, an indicator of the great need for the service.¹⁷ Although a shortage of materials slowed the project at Hilltop Manor, the houses eventually were completed down to the last detail. Noted the *Eagle*: "The last shipment of gas ranges, one of the items which was holding up completion . . . was received. Ice cube trays for the refrigerators have also been received." Ice cube trays in hand, workers soon began to build an additional six hundred demountable homes adjacent to the original site. The demountables were prefabricated structures manufactured by the Southern Mill Company in Tulsa. One-unit houses were twenty-four by thirty feet square, while two-units measured twenty-four by fifty-six feet square. All houses were designed to fit together easily and quickly and to be moved after the emergency had ended.¹⁸ The goal for this phase of the project was to complete all six hundred homes in one hundred days. Local construction crews worked in boots and raincoats for much of the time. The construction site became a sea of mud for which special "mud boat" sleds were constructed and powered by a Caterpillar tractor to haul supplies around "bottomless quagmire" roads. Tents were set up to keep materials dry.¹⁹ The working condi-

14. "Gothic Gazebo," *Time* 39 (January 5, 1942): 29; National Housing Agency, *Housing for War and the Job Ahead* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, April 1944), 24.

15. "Planeview, 'Miracle City' of 18,599 Persons, 7th in State," *Wichita Eagle*, November 14, 1944.

16. "Wichita Faces Acute Problem in Housing," *Wichita Beacon*, October 18, 1940; "Population Hiked 21,870 For Wichita in 14-Month Period," *Wichita Eagle*, July 6, 1941.

17. Frank Rowe and Craig Miner, *Borne on the South Wind: A Century of Aviation in Kansas* (Wichita: Wichita Eagle and Beacon Publishing Co., 1994), 145; "Defense Housing Units at Wichita in Great Demand," *Wichita Eagle*, July 6, 1941; "Government to Build 600 Demountable Homes Here," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, September 18, 1941.

18. "Work on 600 Demountable Homes Begins," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, September 17, 1941; Rowe and Miner, *Borne on the South Wind*, 145.

19. "Fighting Mud to Erect 600 Defense Units," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, October 20, 1941.

tions under which the crews operated demonstrated the importance of raising housing quickly for the war effort.

The next housing project in Wichita, and the largest, was Planeview, which was built in conjunction with the smaller five-hundred-dwelling Beechwood development. Planeview opened February 9, 1943, and was fully occupied by January 16, 1944. The "miracle city" consisted of 4,382 units that seemed to "spring up as if by magic."²⁰ The "magic," however, really consisted of a great amount of work and organization of the voluminous details involved in construction of a twenty-thousand-person community all at one time. Residents of Wichita were urged to visit the area "before gasoline rationing starts" and view the "largest active defense housing project in the United States at the present time."²¹ The huge Planeview project was located on 592 acres north of the Boeing Aircraft Company, a tract originally designated for a large city park. Beechwood was built on forty acres southwest of the Beech Aircraft Corporation. Both projects were situated so that workers walked to work, saving rubber and gasoline.²²

C. H. Samson, project manager, explained to the *Eagle* the two types of houses built at Planeview and Beechwood. One type, of which 2,182 units were built, was a one-story prefabricated structure while the remaining 2,200 units were two-story site fabricated houses. All houses, which had an average rent of thirty-two dollars per month, had fairly uniform kitchens, living rooms, bathrooms, and utility rooms, with the number of bedrooms varying for different families. Houses came equipped with gas for cooking and hot water heaters, electricity, showers, kitchen cabinets, and ice refrigerators. Coal furnaces were installed with accompanying storage bins on each house. Water was obtained

through a reservoir, but sewage could be disposed of through a connection with Wichita. Planeview houses were linked with a twelve-mile system of roads, interspersed with cul-de-sacs and lined by many sidewalks.

The "instant" city was built by twenty different contractors who employed more than two thousand workers. Materials, stated Samson, were very difficult to obtain and, as in the Hilltop Manor project, often caused delays. "But contrary to general opinion, neither the Federal Public Housing Authority nor the contractors on the job is in a preferred position in regard to obtaining building materials."²³

The physical construction of Planeview and the other war housing units was only the first challenge, however, in establishing real defense *communities*. More complicated than boards, nails, and concrete were the social changes and problems that developed as a result of the need for defense production. Therefore, Wichita's war housing population, like others around the country, became an unintentional experiment in social reorganization, resulting in significant and long-lasting changes for its host city.

Houses alone do not make a city, and Planeview, even though it was constructed hurriedly, had no shortage of facilities and activities, organized by a regimented system of community leadership. A resident manager, whose job was to oversee the operation of the entire community, directed each war housing project while maintenance groups supervised housing and landscape upkeep in each zone of the city. Responsibility for planning and promotion of community activities fell to an executive council composed of chairmen from each of four zone councils. The councils attended to any problems that arose and backed civic functions.²⁴ Residents participated in a variety of activi-

20. Unidentified clipping, War Housing file, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum, Wichita; "Homes for War Workers: Planeview (in Sedgwick County, Kansas)," Planeview file, Local History Division, Wichita Public Library, Wichita, 5; "Planeview, 'Miracle City' of 18,599 Persons, 7th in State"; "Homes for 5000 Families is Huge Project," *Wichita Eagle*, November 29, 1942.

21. "Wichita Housing Area is One of Largest in United States," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943; "Homes for 5000 Families is Huge Project."

22. "Huge Organization Rushes Housing Project to Completion," *ibid.*, April 25, 1943; City Planning Commission, *A Comprehensive City Plan for Wichita, Kansas* (N.p.: n.p., 1923), 74.

23. "Homes for 5000 Families is Huge Project"; Rowe and Miner, *Borne on the South Wind*, 146; "Homes for War Workers: Planeview," 1; "Streets, Utilities, and Community Facilities in a Large War Housing Project: 'Planeview,' Wichita, Kansas, Has 4382 Dwelling Units," *American City* 59 (August 1944): 73; "Two Distinct Types of Houses Constructed on Planeview Site," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943.

24. "30,000 Wichitans Affected by War Housing Area Projects," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943; "Planeview: The Miracle City, A Souvenir Map," War Housing file, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum.



Aerial map of Planeview, ca. 1943.

ties, including library services, kindergarten, Red Cross nutrition classes, air raid warden meetings, fire protection, and nurse care. Religious opportunities were available through Sunday schools, Bible classes, choirs, and special lectures. Recreation activities included band, game rooms, women's rhythmic exercise classes, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Brownies, Cub Scouts, holiday parties, concerts, and family evenings.²⁵

Eighteen acres of organized play areas for children were distributed throughout the development. Children also helped in the upkeep of "Planeview Victory Gardens," located near the housing area and proudly designated as such by a large sign. Families rented plots of land for the gardens, paying \$1.75 for a twenty-five-by-twenty-five-foot plot and \$3.00 for a fifty-by-fifty section. Teenage boys who joined the "Clipper Club" used Planeview's 240 community mowers to solicit lawn mowing work, charging pre-set prices for each task.²⁶

On Sundays parents took their children to Protestant and Catholic services held at community centers. During the week, youth attended school within the Planeview community. The population explosion in the Wichita area put a tremendous strain on the school system already in place. In 1941 the *Wichita Evening Eagle* reported that the 128 children of Hilltop Manor were assigned to thirteen schools in Wichita. The board of education agreed to "take the children into the local schools in spite of technicalities in order that they would not miss out on their education."²⁷ Wichita soon, however, received federal notification that \$172,000 was en route to assist overcrowded Sedgwick County schools. A new building was constructed at Orme and Pershing Streets to relieve overcrowding. School officials hired more than one hundred teachers to instruct children of avia-

tion war workers. Beechwood children attended one school in their neighborhood, and at Planeview four large elementary schools and a high school were constructed separate from Wichita's facilities.²⁸

Planeview residents were very proud of their school system and were careful to portray it in several magazine articles as a community, not a government, operation. Only the "physical features" of the schools were the Federal Housing Authority's, stated a 1950 article in *Kansas Teacher*. The programs, operation, and success belonged to Planeview.²⁹ "Don't think it was easy to get this school system into gear," warned the author of "The Planeview Story," a booklet about Planeview schools.

Small beginnings, barrack buildings for classrooms, muddy streets (therefore muddy floors), home made furniture, a great new crop of pupils every Monday morning and finally four well-equipped elementary schools and high school for the some four thousand students who came. Even then classes operated in shifts in those hectic days.³⁰

In fact, school buildings were rarely not in use in Planeview, as they served more purposes than simply a place to learn history, reading, and math. Services that are commonplace today were new and much more unusual in 1940s Wichita. In response to an increased need for child care for working parents, for example, Planeview schools operated year round, providing traditional as well as recreational summer school classes for students who needed some place to go while their parents were on the job. More than 25 percent of Planeview children took advantage of classes such as archery, softball, band, dramatics, and crafts. Also pro-

25. "Big Responsibility Rests With FPHA Project Services Section," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943.

26. "Streets, Utilities, and Community Facilities in a Large War Housing Project," 74; "To Erect Several Permanent Schools," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943; "Planeview Victory Gardeners," *ibid.*; *Welfare News*, February 15, 1945; "Homes for War Workers: Planeview," 12.

27. "Defense City Pupils Enter Schools Here," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, September 12, 1941; "30,000 Wichitans Affected by War Housing Area Projects."

28. "U.S. Inquires About School Enrollment," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, September 26, 1941; "Board Takes School Offer of Uncle Sam," *ibid.*, October 8, 1941; "Provide Modern School Systems," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943; "Permanent Schools," *ibid.*; Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 191.

29. "Elementary School, Planeview," *Kansas Teacher* 58 (May 1950): 33.

30. "The Planeview Story," (N.p.: n.d.), 4, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

gressive was the establishment of all-night child care for fathers and mothers who worked irregular hours. Elementary schools housed the nursery school facilities and also were connected to a community building with an auditorium, kitchen, and several club rooms, all of which were used for various purposes throughout the week. In an effort to control incidents of juvenile delinquency, officials opened school gyms three nights a week for recreation and social purposes. At first, to limit the size of the crowds, one hundred tickets were handed out for one boys night, one girls night, and one co-ed night per week. Girls night was sparsely attended, however, and the co-ed night proved highly popular, so that policy changed to allow two co-ed nights and one boys night each week.³¹

Businesses were located at the intersection of Roosevelt Drive and Ross Parkway. A Planeview souvenir map boasted advertisements from the Planeview Cafeteria, Planeview Barber Shop (complete with eight barbers), and Planeview Shoe Store. War workers were reminded of the importance of “proper relaxation” and were urged to attend the movies, such as *In Old Oklahoma* starring John Wayne, at the Planeview Theater, or to take advantage of the “Bowling for Health” center. A trip to Wichita was not necessary to visit the post office, bank, doctor, dentist, or supermarket, as all were available in Planeview. The Beechwood Grocery advertised in the *Welfare News*: “This is the Store for War Workers,” while Kroger opened a “Super Store,” which, in name and advertisement, pointed toward the future. Many stores, for the first time, were open on Sundays for war worker convenience.³² Changes in business and child care practices, although seemingly of little significance at the time, were in actuality a part of the myriad of social adjustments that had a lasting effect after the war. They were part of what made World War II a benchmark for Wichita, as well as for the rest of the country. Not only was the physical environment of Wichita changed

forever as a result of war housing, so too were many customs, attitudes, and daily procedures altered by the experience.

Although many social adjustments, both large and small, were made by defense housing residents and Wichitans during the war production frenzy, some problems were more difficult to solve than the need for all-night child care. Racial discrimination was present not only in Planeview but in war housing communities across the nation. In the Bay Area, for example, the California housing authority practiced integration in defense areas, a policy upsetting to many who believed that black and Filipino workers should not live in the same areas as whites. At Willow Run, near Detroit, more serious actions such as riots, strikes, and shut-outs erupted over racial tensions.³³

In contrast, discrimination at Planeview, Beechwood, and Hilltop Manor was quiet and relatively invisible to most Wichitans, but it was nevertheless present. The *Welfare News*, a 1930s labor-interest newspaper that in the 1940s became Wichita’s war housing sheet, reported that thirty families of American Indians were “one of the most interesting groups” living in the “cosmopolitan city” of Planeview. For African Americans, however, segregation was more overt. A section of the city was reserved for blacks, and the “Souvenir Map” displayed a photograph of a bingo game at a “colored” recreational center. The “finest supervision,” the pamphlet reassured prospective tenants, was available for “both colored and white children” at area facilities. While nurseries were segregated, all school-age children of the war housing communities attended together, leading to outbreaks of racial intolerance. Teachers reported such incidents as rock throwing and name calling.³⁴

31. Strong Hinman, “Something New in Education!” *Recreation* 38 (February 1945): 575–78, 612; Rowe and Miner, *Borne on the South Wind*, 145.

32. *Welfare News*, November 18, 1943, February 15, 1945, April 6, 1944; “Planeview: The Miracle City, A Souvenir Map.”

33. Nash, *The American West Transformed*, 98; National Housing Agency, *War Housing in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, April 1945), 19.

34. “American Indians Hold Meetings,” *Welfare News*, February 15, 1945; Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 191; “Planeview: The Miracle City, A Souvenir Map”; Victor Brewer, “Wichita: The War Years: 1940–1947,” private collection of Judith R. Johnson, History Department, Wichita State University, Wichita.

Besides racial prejudices, the influx of a new population to Kansas and Wichita also sparked fear in many pre-war citizens, who, despite the beneficial economic gains of war production, were concerned that the new activity would somehow change their home, and not for the better. Planeview residents hailed from forty-two states and had 225 different professions. This eclectic population, noted one author, made Planeview a "typical MIDDLETOWN" and represented a cross-section of America.³⁵ A cross-section was specifically what Emporia editor William Allen White, and other like-minded Kansans, did not want. "How the old individualists of the [eighteen] sixties, seventies, and eighties would stand aghast at this new Kansas," White editorialized. Public housing, he wrote, provides luxury unheard of to old pioneers. Migratory labor will result in changes of leadership in politics and business. Kansas will no longer be able to boast of its homogeneous, static population.

The new migrants of the forties . . . are coming from all over the country. We shall have to build new school buildings for their children and strangely unpronounceable names will appear on the school roll. . . . Those men and women with strange names will go to the Legislature, will appear on Commercial street and Main street. . . . Kansas will no longer be unique. It will be like Illinois, or West Virginia, or Massachusetts.

As the title of the editorial indicated, this xenophobic attitude is a response to a fear that Dr. Jekyll would turn into Mr. Hyde.³⁶ Instead of focusing on positive and useful social and economic changes that were a result of the new war population, many citizens and members of the Wichita city government viewed war housing as a symptom of a situation that threatened their city's future identity. Although Wichita planners encouraged growth, the fast-track war housing complete with a "foreign" population was not the kind of expansion envisioned for the city.

In addition to the belief that war housing would become the slums of the future, incidents of "loose morals" attracted the attention of local ministers and the city commission, reinforcing their fears about the population increase. "Victory Girls" working the streets and an increase in venereal disease were topics discussed in 1943 commission meetings. Incidents of "juvenile delinquency" concerned Planeview High staff and parents. The school held fourteen hundred students, crowded into a building built for eight hundred. Teenage committees organized to help find remedies for the trouble but did little good. Ministers, especially concerned about the seeming change in the moral climate of Wichita, tried to convince officials to outlaw wearing shorts in public, but to no avail. Social changes, good and bad, were inevitable during the war and were present in war communities.³⁷

Despite the undercurrent of negative feelings about war housing, the majority of press given to the developments was positive. This was necessary to maintain war effort morale and war worker respectability in the eyes of the general public. Newspaper propaganda bolstered the public's image of Planeview and also served as a useful business tactic. For example, advertisements for goods such as furniture read:

Welcome War Workers! The coming of thousands of you to Wichita means that new cities have been placed within the city of Wichita. Your coming to Wichita means much more than just numbers. It means a greater and happier family . . . a family united in the purpose of making Wichita the finest city in . . . which to live. . . Dress up your home with attractive new furniture.³⁸

The *Welfare News* more sarcastically observed: "Fifty thousand newcomers are settling in Wichita. From far and near these good people are coming . . . With outstretched hands and beaming faces, the Chamber of

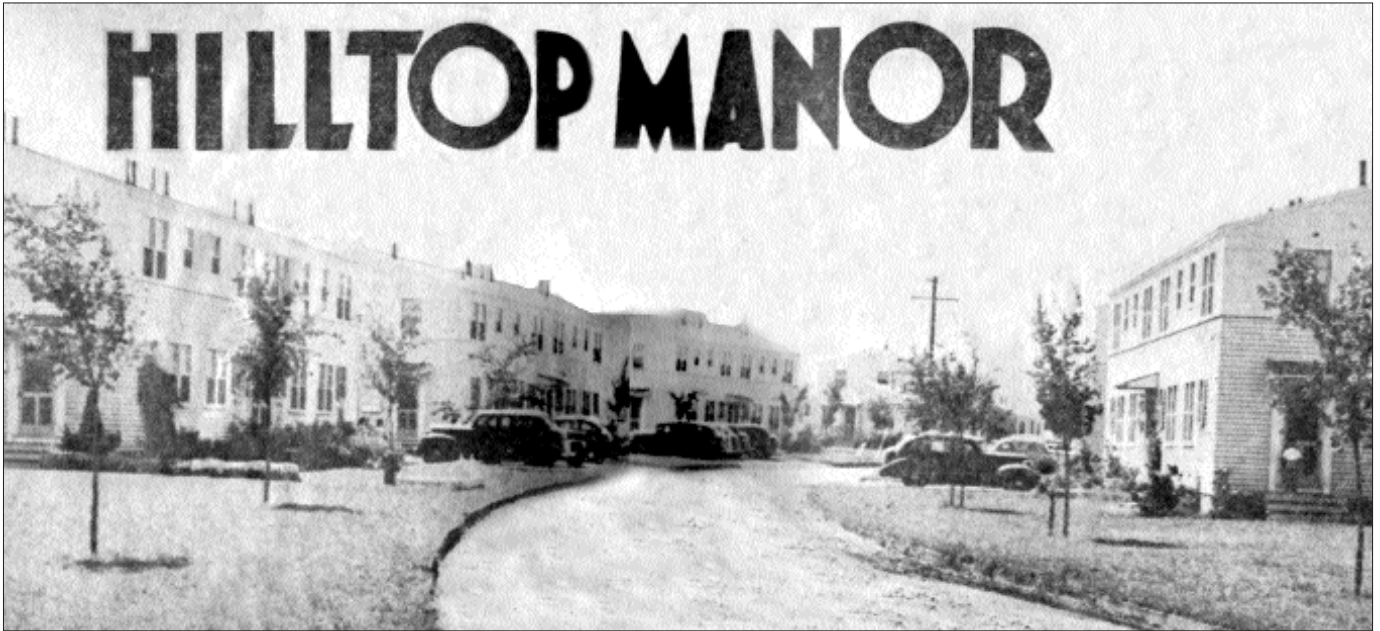
35. "Planeview, 'Miracle City' of 18,599 Persons, 7th in State"; Hinman, "Something New in Education!" 574.

36. "Kansas—Jekyll or Hyde?"

37. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 191.

38. *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943.

HILLTOP MANOR



Built during 1941 Hilltop Manor (above) was the first of three war housing projects in Wichita. Shortage of supplies and rain slowed construction as applications for the units poured in at a rate of twenty to twenty-four per day.

Constructed in 1943 in conjunction with Planeview, Beechwood (below) was the smallest of the housing projects, containing five hundred dwellings.



Commerce, the realtors, the profiteers, the racketeers, the money-lenders, et al, are checking them in."³⁹

Another attempt to show war workers as vital citizens of Wichita was included in the September 24, 1941, issue of the *Wichita Evening Eagle*. The article, entitled "Defense Wives Like Homes," profiled Mrs. Earl Moberly happily going about her day's business in her new Hilltop Manor house. The typical productive life of a war worker couple is described for the reader, including the fact that "families of defense workers who occupy government homes in Hilltop Manor are a friendly and cooperative group of men and women who like their homes and are more neighborly than families in other parts of the city." In short, defense wives shouldered their share of the work to "keep their husbands healthy and happy in defense work." The children also did their part for the war effort, noted the *Evening Eagle*, by keeping a "vital interest" in airplanes. The airplane, maintained the reporter, was the favorite toy of Hilltop Manor boys.⁴⁰

To ward off images of future Wichita slums, the *Eagle* and *Beacon* frequently ran articles describing the pastel colored houses as clean, new, homey, and comfortable. Pictures of the Planeview "village" displayed the "cheery" bedrooms and "attractive" breakfast nooks.⁴¹ Impressive aerial photographs described houses with "red, blue, and green roofs," and under the headline "Lights Blaze at Hilltop Manor at Night," another picture caption read:

A few months ago Wichitans driving south on Oliver, near Lincoln, at night looked to the west at one of the few dark and lonely spots near the city. Then came the influx of defense workers as the plane plants swung into work at furious tempo. Now cheerful lights shine from scores of windows

where once dark prairie reigned. People are at home just as if their houses had stood there for dozens of years. Friendships have been formed, joys and tragedies appear, children shout at play and life goes on as it does in all parts of Wichita.⁴²

Statements such as these clearly were attempts to make Wichitans forget the traffic problems, overcrowded schools, hectic shopping experiences, and other inconveniences of rapid population growth that accompanied the war patriotism and economic boost provided by the war workers.

A further activity tinged with war effort propaganda was the 1943 "formal dedication of the federal public housing authority projects in Wichita." Held on Easter Sunday, the ceremony showed visitors "the miracle that has been accomplished in such a short time." Citizens were urged to come early and stay late for the many patriotic activities, including performances by the Beechcraft Band, Beechcraft All-girl Guardettes, and sing-alongs to the "Star Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America." The day was designed to reemphasize the importance of the war worker to success in both the European and Pacific theaters. Guest lists for the event included several national and state dignitaries who were involved in the war effort. Gunner Mykland, director of region seven of the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA), encouraged Wichita's work to continue: "Our work is not complete. It scarcely is begun; but we are taking this moment to dedicate what we have done. . . . Our project stands as a model of cooperation between federal and local governments and shows what we Americans can do." Lee Johnson, assistant commissioner of the FPHA, enlightened the crowd with words on "What War Housing Means to the Federal Public Housing Authority and the War Effort." He attributed Wichita's war success to the Kansas environment and its history of thriving amidst challenges:

39. *Welfare News*, January 1942.

40. "Defense Wives Like Homes," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, September 24, 1941; "Hilltop Manor Children Like Airplanes," *ibid.*, October 6, 1941.

41. "Planeview: The Miracle City, A Souvenir Map"; "War Housing," *Wichita Beacon*, July 29, 1945.

42. "A Look at America," unidentified clipping, War Housing file, Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum; "Lights Blaze at Hilltop Manor at Night," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, October 17, 1941.

The very nature of life in these western plains makes man know what it is to fight disappointment after disappointment, only to lick the weather, the wind, the drouth and the dust in the end. That spirit certainly could have nothing but contempt for a Nazi or a Jap. That spirit knows no fear. That spirit has made Wichita a great airplane center for victory.

The day of celebration concluded with an Easter egg hunt at Hilltop Manor for which the prizes were "defense stamps in keeping with the April Bond Drive."⁴³

A national magazine praised Wichitans for their "hospitable" attitude toward the influx of new inhabitants and the lack of complaining about government ineptitude.⁴⁴ On the surface, and compared with other communities around the country, this probably was true. Positive propaganda and patriotism were not, however, a cure-all. They could not mask or change the opinions of leading Wichita citizens concerned about the city's future real estate values. Even some of the general public, the *Welfare News* reported, became disgruntled with the "strangers" in town. "I know that many [war workers]," the editor maintained, "feel that the 'native sons of Wichita' are cold and straight-necked, that they are making unfair remarks about defense workers in general. . . . We know it to be a fact that some merchants complain that the defense workers are the hardest customers to satisfy."⁴⁵ This view was entirely different from the pro-war worker articles in the *Eagle* and *Beacon*.

As early as July 1941 the *Wichita Evening Eagle*, amidst all the war housing propaganda, printed an article titled "Think Homes to be Moved From Wichita." The author addressed the concerns of local real estate owners that when the nation returned to normalcy, the quickly built houses would sit vacant, thereby seriously damaging the real estate market. Temporary housing should be used, the citizens maintained, so that the

structures can be moved where they are needed. The future of Wichita, and not solely the present, should be thought of in regard to war housing.⁴⁶

As the war neared completion, city leaders and businessmen became increasingly proactive in the fight to remove the housing communities. In April 1944 they met with FPHA officials to discuss bringing Planeview into the city limits of Wichita. The city commission opposed this plan because services provided by the government, such as fire, police, and education, would, if Planeview were a part of the larger city, have to be provided by Wichita.⁴⁷ Therefore, in November 1945 sixty-three of Planeview's buildings were sold, with a plan, per federal guidelines, to completely remove Planeview within two years. The government took sealed proposals for the properties, giving priority to state or local governments, "quasi-public" institutions, and veterans. Nonpriority parties could place bids on a competitive basis. Purchasers of the buildings agreed to tear them down and remove them from Planeview. In the first sale, buildings went to Enid, Oklahoma, to relieve the housing shortage there, and to ex-servicemen.⁴⁸

The beginning of removal was just what Wichita leaders wanted. The January 8, 1946, *Kansas City Times* described the dwindling Planeview:

So today Planeview sits waiting on its rolling, treeless site, with 1720 of its 4051 family units vacant. . . . The truth is, Plainview [*sic*] was not built for permanence or beauty. . . . Now the curving roadways are lined with the blank windows and "no trespassing" signs of empty houses. Rusting screens and coal bunkers and garbage cans along the streets contribute to the appearance of disuse.

43. "Wichita's Mammoth Housing Areas to be Dedicated Today," *Wichita Eagle*, April 25, 1943; "Many Notables At Dedication of Big Housing Projects," *ibid.*, April 26, 1943; "Hilltop Manor to Hold Easter Egg Hunt," *ibid.*, April 25, 1943.

44. "Housing For War," 193.

45. *Welfare News*, June 17, 1943.

46. "Think Homes to be Moved From Wichita," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, July 29, 1941; "Fear Permanent Housing Units to be Erected Here," *Wichita Eagle*, March 23, 1941.

47. "Wichita Historic Preservation Board Item No. 8A: Staff Report," February, 1996, Planeview file, Local History Division, Wichita Public Library.

48. "Notice," Federal Housing 1940-1945, box 8, Capper Collection; *Wichita Evening Eagle*, October 10, 1945.

Downtown Planeview . . . shows little of the life that once hurried through it Packed into less than a square mile of Kansas prairie, Planeview could become a rural slum if it remained. So it will be torn down.⁴⁹

This view of Planeview and the need to demolish its buildings was continually challenged, however, by residents and the war housing newspaper over a period of more than five years. In contrast to the bleak view of the defense city, the *Welfare News* reported in 1945 that, in reality, hardly anyone had left. Residents were staying in Planeview because they did not yet have another job or a better place to go. Threatened elimination of Planeview, still a front-page item in 1950, was, according to the editor, the doings of “the big wheels in Wichita in the real estate business.” This was despite the fact that low-income housing was needed for many residents who did not want to leave Wichita. The people, he urged, had to “counteract this propaganda of poison by the antidote of truth.”⁵⁰

The truth about the condition of Planeview probably lay somewhere between the two extreme positions. Real estate businessmen and other Wichita leaders did try to push Planeview out, despite a lower vacancy rate in 1947 Wichita than before the war and a clear need for low-income housing.⁵¹ Before the war ended, a firm was hired to revise a city plan. The final recommendation, published in 1946, was that the housing developments should be torn down to achieve long-range stability and value for the city. City commissioners agreed that leaving Planeview, Beechwood, or Hilltop Manor intact would cause “unjust competition to the housing units within the city.” Residents were therefore left with little to stand on, although much of the war housing did get a reprieve from the original two-year removal time plan.

According to Craig Miner, city officials were afraid of the “justified criticism” they would face if any more housing was torn down during the well-publicized post-war housing crunch. Nevertheless, pressure on the war communities continued. The United States Treasury, in 1947, decided not to authorize the Planeview Fourth National branch bank, striking yet another blow to the community. Because the state of Kansas had a law prohibiting branch banking, the institution had to close. By 1949, while the remainder of Planeview got television, business owners had to bid on their locations, regardless of the fact that some had been there for many years.⁵²

Yet, war housing was always meant to be temporary. Even temporary housing, however, was sometimes difficult to dismiss. The problem was that the temporary housing was occupied by people who had learned to love their homes, did not consider them “slum and blight,” and did not want them razed, especially when housing was still difficult to find. Leah Claney, whose family moved to Kansas during the war, found a home at Hilltop Manor in 1947. When the family was forced to vacate its wartime house, Claney’s husband, who worked for the Coleman Company, told his supervisor that the family would have to leave Wichita because he could not find a new place to live amidst the post-war housing shortage. Claney’s boss subsequently found them a defense house at Hilltop Manor, where the Claney’s had been told they could not live because they were no longer “defense workers.”⁵³

The Claney’s enjoyed their home at Hilltop. Leah remembered that twenty-one children, including three of her own, played on Hilltop’s playground equipment in the late 1940s. The community was a place for families where everybody watched over each other’s children. “It was a family affair,” she remembered. “Everybody cared about one another.” This positive atmosphere was not one that the residents of Hilltop were anxious to

49. “Planeview, War Plant Town, Offers Opportunity for Housing Veterans,” *Kansas City Times*, January 8, 1946.

50. “Planeview vacancies 842, Hilltop Full, Beechwood Filling Up,” *Welfare News*, August 30, 1945; “Planeview is Stunned,” *ibid.*, January 27, 1950.

51. “Wichita Makes Community-Wide Housing Survey in One Day,” *Public Management* 30 (March 1948): 77–78.

52. Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 196–97; “Bank Will Close,” *Welfare News*, June 12, 1947; “Planeview Sandbagged,” *ibid.*, October 27, 1949.

53. Leah Claney, telephone interview by author, July 1, 2000.



Planeview residents participated in a variety of activities including educational, religious, and recreational opportunities. (Above) Adults and children work together to establish and maintain the Planeview Victory Garden.

The "miracle city" also developed its own business district, which included this Safeway supermarket (left).

lose. The temporary community, placed on the fringes of the city alongside sprawling wheat fields, had become a valued home to many people. "The razing of the war houses will be a waste," the *Welfare News* lamented, "and waste is a sin."⁵⁴

To stop the waste, the war housing newspaper tried various tactics. One was simply to portray the communities in a positive way, printing an article detailing the defense cities' beautification program, for example, and another stressing that the vacant housing was quickly filling up with veterans. A second persuasion method was economic reasoning. Under the headline "Whose Baby is This?" the editor expressed his views. "Unless Wichita immediately launches plans to build at least 10,000 low rental units . . . the city is cutting its own throat by forcing workmen to go to other points of industry, starving Wichita's pay roll and discouraging new factories."⁵⁵ The most dramatic tone the *Welfare News* adopted in an attempt to save the dying communities was, however, shame and guilt. Crying out his disappointment in Wichita for its treatment of war residents, editor Karl Parkhurst admonished:

Can it be possible that these domiciles are like a bastard child of shame, conceived in the womb of so-called New Deal inefficiency and wastefulness, and all signs of Planeview and Beechwood are to be erased from the rolling farm land[?] Can it be possible that the Republican Administration of Kansas and reactionary Democrats . . . be afraid to take over these well arranged war cities and OPERATE THEM IN AN EFFICIENT MANNER until their 26,500 human souls can adjust themselves to a changed economy[?]⁵⁶

Although economics and politics, instead of fear, was the rationalization, the State of Kansas did refuse to take over responsibility for Wichita's "bastards of

shame." Similar to Wichita's leaders, Governor Andrew Schoepfel told two federal housing representatives, in February 1945, that the state was "not ready to make the financial commitment" necessary to maintain the areas. Some citizens, such as A. R. Brasted, executive vice president and secretary of the Mid Kansas Federal Savings and Loan Association in Wichita, were pleased with how the governor handled the "do-gooders and slum enthusiasts."⁵⁷ The governor's concerns about the economic problems associated with war housing might not have been his sole motivation for rejecting the government's proposal, however. The *Welfare News* quoted Schoepfel, a Republican, as saying that "Kansas wanted nothing to do with Roosevelt's white elephants."⁵⁸ There is little doubt that the defense communities were considered by Kansas officials to be a federal, not a state, problem.

Left to survive or expire on their own, residents of Hilltop Manor commenced on a two-year fight with the city. They formed the Hilltop Manor Mutual Housing Corporation and hired prominent attorney and former Kansas governor Payne Ratner to fight for the right to purchase 1,118 housing units. "A government man came down with a loudspeaker," resident Leah Claney remembered. "The men went to meetings about buying the houses."⁵⁹

Hilltop's location within the city limits of Wichita and the fact that it was already using Wichita schools and utilities were factors in its favor that Planeview did not possess. The city, nevertheless, did not want the houses left standing. Questions were raised about the intended permanency of the structures and the failure to meet current building codes.⁶⁰ The FPHA, however,

54. Ibid.; Miner, *Wichita: The Magic City*, 196; "Planeview and Beechwood to be Torn Down," *Welfare News*, March 16, 1944.

55. *Welfare News*, July 12, 1945; "Towns are Booming," *ibid.*, March 7, 1946; *ibid.*, May 24, 1945.

56. *Ibid.*, February 15, 1945.

57. Andrew Schoepfel to Marshal W. Amis, March 5, 1945, War Effort—Public Works Project, 1943–1945, Correspondence, Andrew F. Schoepfel Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Schoepfel to A. R. Brasted, February 27, 1945, *ibid.*; Brasted to Schoepfel, February 23, 1945, *ibid.*

58. *Welfare News*, February 7, 1946.

59. Claney interview.

60. *Wichita Evening Eagle*, October 27, 1945; "Planeview, War Plant Town, Offers Opportunity for Housing for Veterans."

offered to sell Hilltop for \$3,238,000, based on appraisals by Thomas Burtch of Denver. Burtch placed an economic life of thirty-five years on Hilltop Manor and the vacancy and collection loss at 8 percent. The residents' corporation, however, found the assessment unreasonable. Thirty-five years was optimistic without extensive repairs and maintenance. Furthermore, in houses without basements, garages, or in some cases foundations, the vacancy and collection loss undoubtedly would be more, especially when four hundred houses per month with these amenities added were going up in Wichita. Therefore, the Hilltop Manor Corporation countered with an offer of 2.5 million dollars, which, conveniently, was the amount the insurance companies were willing to loan the group. The FPHA should not, the residents maintained, make a profit from selling to World War II veterans at a price that "makes unrealizable the ambition of these veterans to become home owners."⁶¹

Eventually, the opposing sides agreed on a compromise and the Hilltop residents won the right to buy four hundred permanent two-story units from the federal government for an average price of \$2,900 per unit, or \$1,160,000.⁶² Assisting in the compromise was a series of letters written to the congressional subcommittee in charge of disposition of the Hilltop project. In a letter to Representative Walter Ploeser, Governor Frank Carlson of Kansas confidentially expressed his support of the Hilltop residents:

Personally, I do not want to get involved in this matter, as I understand the Chamber of Commerce and some other groups are opposing it. On the other hand, it does seem to me that these people who are now living there should have a prior right of purchase. I am sure your splendid committee will give the problem your usual honest appraisal and decision.⁶³

61. "Hilltop Manor War Housing Project, Wichita, Kansas," file 17, Frank Carlson Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Carlson, Governor's Records).

62. *Wichita Eagle*, November 2, 1949; "Hilltop Manor War Housing Project, Wichita, Kansas"; Clancy interview.

63. Frank Carlson to Walter Ploeser, February 3, 1947, Carlson, Governor's Records.

Ratner, the residents' attorney, reasoned to the various committee members that because their job was to reduce federal maintenance appropriations totaling almost nine hundred thousand dollars in Wichita, the logical thing would be to sell. "The only way to eliminate the Hilltop Manor portion of the appropriation," Ratner wrote, "is to sell Hilltop Manor."⁶⁴ Another way that Ratner did not mention, of course, was to remove Hilltop, but that prospect seemed unlikely given the housing shortage in Wichita, the political ramifications of such an action, and the even greater desire on the part of city officials for the removal of Planeview.

But as the 1950s progressed even the acutely undesirable Planeview was never completely razed. In part, this was because of an increased need for housing when the Boeing Company was reactivated for jet production. Some buildings nevertheless were dismantled in Planeview as late as 1956. The *Eagle* headline proclaimed in February that 234 Planeview units were "doomed." Nineteen demolition permits had been issued in the first weeks of the year allowing some two-story as well as several "four or six-plexes" in the former boom town to be destroyed.⁶⁵

The smaller Beechwood development demolition was completed without the controversy that surrounded its larger counterparts. In March 1955 the Public Housing Authority announced the names of thirty-five successful bidders on fifty-eight temporary buildings at Beechwood. The bidders had 120 days to remove their buildings from the defense housing project's thirty-nine acres, after which the land was deeded to the city of Wichita.⁶⁶

The still nervous members of the Hilltop Manor Mutual Housing Corporation, which is still in existence in the year 2001, more than fifty years after its formation, continued to hold meetings through the decade following their purchase of the war housing. Legal representation at the monthly meetings was provided by

64. Payne Ratner to Ben. F. Jensen, February 14, 1947, *ibid.*

65. "234 Planeview Units Doomed," *Wichita Eagle*, February 14, 1956.

66. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1955.

Payne “Darb” Ratner Jr., who joined his father’s practice in the 1950s. The younger Ratner even lived for a time in Hilltop Manor while finishing law school.⁶⁷ Even though the Hilltop residents had won their case against the city, the “temporary” stigma and constant threat of further dismantlement was disconcerting and warranted their continued attention.

Hilltop Manor had always been a part of Wichita. But it was not until November 1955 that Planeview formally became a part of the city under new annexation procedures passed by the city commission. Federal control ended and public services were then provided by Wichita for the five thousand remaining Planeview residents.⁶⁸

Ten years later the Wichita City Commission “resurrected” what was still called the “pesky *Planeview* [not *Wichita*] problem.” The slums predicted in 1945 had become a reality. Commissioner Clarence Vollmer advocated bulldozing the substandard homes and starting again. In fact, that idea had been attempted in 1961 when Planeview was designated an urban renewal study area. Residents protested, however, and the commission tabled the plan, although, according to Robert C. DesMarteau, director of the Wichita Urban Renewal Agency, many believed a bill should be put before Congress to facilitate the removal of Planeview and similar projects. “The government should be willing to right its own wrong,” he said.⁶⁹

With the onset of a renewed attack, nearly four hundred citizens of Planeview met with Payne Ratner in October 1965. Their purpose was to unite, organize their concerns, and take them to city hall. The final statement, written by Ratner, began: “We are tired of being kicked around. We are tired of being treated like stepchildren. . . . We are tired of being threatened and harassed and we are going to take whatever measures are necessary—litigation, if we are forced to it—to pre-

serve the existence and integrity of our section of Wichita.” One woman at the meeting summed up the problem well when she suggested: “Why don’t we do away with the name of Planeview. . . . We’re not Planeview any more. We’re part of Wichita.”⁷⁰

But were they? In the legal sense Planeview was annexed in 1955, but dispensation of public services did not affect community identity. To Wichitans, and perhaps to themselves, Planeview residents were still a part of a temporary and substandard community. Even twenty years later, the slum stepchildren image, acquired after war housing was no longer “vital for victory,” remained.

The 1965 threat to litigate worked, however, as the city decided to rehabilitate Planeview instead of tearing it down. This met with little success. Two years later a housing report listed the development as the worst of three areas in Wichita with substandard living conditions. “The only all-encompassing characteristic that can be attributed to Planeview,” the report bluntly stated, “is that the inhabitants are apparently doomed to an existence that most of us would not consider subjecting our household pets to.”⁷¹

Nevertheless, Planeview continued to exist and to serve a purpose. Similar to the influx of non-Kansas natives during World War II, the 1980s brought to Wichita Southeast Asian refugees who largely settled in Planeview’s low-income housing. Indochinese residents opened stores very different from Planeview’s shops forty years earlier and sold items such as fifty-pound bags of rice to accommodate the newest citizens. The Ross Parkway apartments, once a home to Wichita’s war workers, now housed Asian families who, because of language and pronounced culture differences, felt even more transplanted than had the new Kansans of the war years.⁷² Once again, Planeview was home to Wichita’s most controversial population. A transformation

67. Payne “Darb” Ratner Jr., telephone interview by author, June 15, 2000.

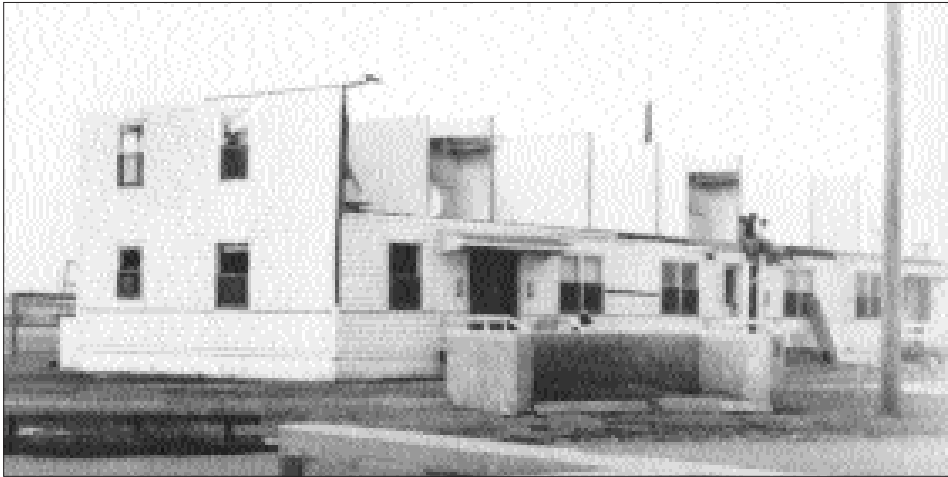
68. “Wichita [sic] Takes Over Planeview War-Born Suburb, Next Week,” *Kansas City Times*, October 28, 1955.

69. “Fed-Up Planeview Citizens Will Take Fight to City Hall,” *Wichita Beacon*, October 13, 1965.

70. *Ibid.*

71. “City Hints Planeview Will Be Rehabilitated,” *Wichita Beacon*, November 16, 1965; “Wichita Releases a Housing Report,” *Kansas City Star*, September 28, 1967.

72. *Wichita Eagle*, May 1, 1988; “Refugees’ Depression Clouds Hopes For Freedom, Success,” *ibid.*, May 2, 1988.



The war's end ignited a fight among Wichita's residents over the removal of war housing. Beechwood (left), showing damage from a 1948 tornado, was completely demolished in 1955.

After a two-year battle, the residents of Hilltop Manor (right) finally won the right to buy some of the permanent housing units, thereby saving the community from removal or demolition.



Not until November 1955 was Planeview annexed as part of Wichita. Against much opposition, it was not razed and today continues to exist. This photo of the Planeview school library (left) was taken in post-war years, ca.1954.

of the city, with a drastic increase of Asian citizens and businesses, was made possible by Planeview's continued existence and its service to residents needing low-income housing.

Rehabilitation efforts, both city and resident initiated, continued into the 1990s on houses, parks, streets, and drainage systems. The Wichita-Sedgwick County Comprehensive Plan of 1993 categorized Planeview as a "Re-establishment" area. The city "recognizes the area as severely deteriorated . . . [which] may require a large scale overhaul to create vitality." In 1996 an effort was made to include Planeview on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the development was acknowledged as historically significant, the requirement of integrity for National Register inclusion was more difficult. "The Planeview of 1996 is not the Planeview of 1943," the report concluded.

The historic context of the housing stock and support structures has been severely compromised. More than half of the original dwelling units have been removed, and the commercial section of the community has been either destroyed or modified beyond recognition . . . The Historic Preservation Board finds that the area in southeast Wichita commonly known as Planeview is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.⁷³

Little was recognizable of the "miracle city" that was once a symbol for Wichita's war on production.

The legacy of Wichita's war housing is an ongoing issue of community identity and acceptance. In the new millennium Hilltop Manor continues to be an area of proposed rejuvenation. Jill Owens of Development Concepts, Inc., an Indianapolis company that Wichita hired to do a neighborhood study of Hilltop in 1999, said of the community: "Hilltop is really a fascinating neighborhood. It shouldn't be around. It was never intended to be around as we approached the turn

of the century, but here you have it." Leah Claney is proud of the Hilltop community and what the members of the Mutual Housing Corporation accomplished in the late 1940s. There are still a few "original" residents left from the war days, she noted. Claney has had the same neighbor for the last forty-nine years. Nevertheless, supporters of the Neighborhood Revitalization Project are still fighting to remove the lingering "temporary" stigma from Hilltop Manor. They are determining areas where new housing can be developed, crusading for aggressive enforcement of housing codes, especially in the remaining areas of the housing development that are not controlled by the very strict board of the Mutual Housing Corporation, and getting officials to set rigid punishments for landlords who violate city codes. "Optimism may be Hilltop's Lifeline," the *Eagle* predicted. This and the opportunity to "rejuvenate and regenerate" hopefully will establish Hilltop Manor, a once temporary community, permanently in the new century.⁷⁴

The long lasting effects of World War II on Wichita, Kansas, were remarkable. The aircraft industry, destined to become responsible for the nickname Air Capital of the World, was, during the Great Depression, struggling to survive in Wichita. The onset of war, however, almost overnight transformed aviation into high-dollar industry and its host into a boomtown. The war housing developments of Planeview, Hilltop Manor, and Beechwood were simultaneously a result and cause of that boom. Facilitated by the legacy of the New Deal, defense communities were an acknowledged necessity of the war but were also a vehicle for tremendous social and community change, the effects of which still reverberate in Wichita today. The obvious change was to the physical construction of the city. Just as significant, however, was the human transformation that war housing brought to Wichita.

The economic boost the war workers created in 1941 helped Wichitans accept the initial transformation of

73. "Wichita Historic Preservation Board, Item No. 8A, Staff Report," February 1996.

74. "Special Report: Communities in Transition, Optimism may be Hilltop's Lifeline," *Wichita Eagle*, September 2, 1999; "Hilltop Looks for Solutions," *ibid.*, October 7, 1999; Claney interview.

their town. Many, however, had mixed feelings about the transplanted citizens. As the war ended and it became evident that Wichita would never again be the same pre-war “sleepy little cow town,” nostalgia for what once was, in all probability, influenced Wichita’s leaders. This feeling undoubtedly was a contributing factor to the incessant and impractical drive to erase all traces of war housing from Wichita’s landscape. The war on production and war housing improved Wichita economically, but the change came so fast and was so encompassing that other aspects of the smaller, pre-war city were lost. Wichitans liked their city before the war just as William Allen White liked Kansas and feared the “sea of change” brought by the emergency. It is only natural that losing that other Wichita, or witnessing such a rapid transformation of it, would have some effect on longtime residents. Therefore, Wichitans put forth a futile effort to regain some semblance of the old. Fears about future real estate values were a major factor in the attempted removal, of course, and city leaders certainly wanted growth and progress. But the explosion of people and housing was not on the original plan for Wichita’s expansion. The push for removal of Planeview was, in some limited form, an attempt to return to this plan, to the more familiar community identity. It was an attempt by the city to rid itself of at least the physical reminder of unsatisfactory changes. Such an action would, of course, prove impossible. “We are about to see a social, economic and political miracle,” predicted William Allen White in 1942. “And let us pray to all the gods at once that it will come gently and not with revolution, catastrophe, and debacle.”⁷⁵

75. “Kansas—Jekyll or Hyde?”

There was no “catastrophe,” but the “miracle” was not unalloyed joy either. Predictions about future “slums” did come true, just as city leaders feared. And the new mix of population surely remained. But it was easier and more appropriate to regret the one than the other. In the midst of their xenophobia, Wichitans did not see that the war housing communities brought people who were necessary to make the modern city thrive. Perhaps Wichita was not accustomed to labor unions, members of the Democratic Party, or racial and ethnic minorities any more than it was to low-cost housing. But those came with the boom of which it boasted. The city’s new industrial strength required a cadre of wage workers, and the low-cost labor that gave Wichita and the Midwest an advantage continued to require the type of living area represented by Planeview and Hilltop Manor, whether they were part of the most idealistic city plans or not. The “accident” of World War II forced the creation of a new community identity. As the city’s newest residents, defense workers wanted to be accepted as Wichitans. Their influence was far more important to Wichita than was suggested by the “re-establishment” designations of Planeview’s dilapidated buildings. The people who lived and worked in the war housing communities not only won the war on production, they helped make Wichita a successful modern industrial city. 