

Ramsey Homes

In 1941, the United States Housing Authority (USHA), under the Federal Works Agency (FWA), began to plan for the construction of permanent housing for Black defense workers in the Uptown neighborhood. Then known as the Lanham Act Alexandria Defense Housing Project, the Ramsey Homes would be located here along North Patrick Street, between Wythe and Pendleton Streets. The Ramsey Homes housed 15 defense workers and their families during World War II and the Korean War. This was part of a large Federal plan to provide 26,206 units of wartime housing in the Washington metropolitan area.

Delos H. Smith, an Alexandria architect, proposed a Modernist design for the homes, consisting of three square homes and a one L-shaped building, all constructed of economical materials. These materials included the innovative “Fabcrete,” a pre-cast unit of cementitious material that did not require interior framework for support. The final plan included landscaping and a simple paved play area within the L of the triplex.

African American defense workers first occupied the homes in 1942, prior to their completion. However, their identities were kept classified as a matter of national security. The 1945 Alexandria City Directory did not list the residents because of this policy, but this only continued for a short time. By 1947, the City Directory listed residents including two defense workers but also a barber, auto mechanic and a janitor. All the residents were noted to be African American. As the homes were originally restricted to defense workers, the 1947 directories and the civilian



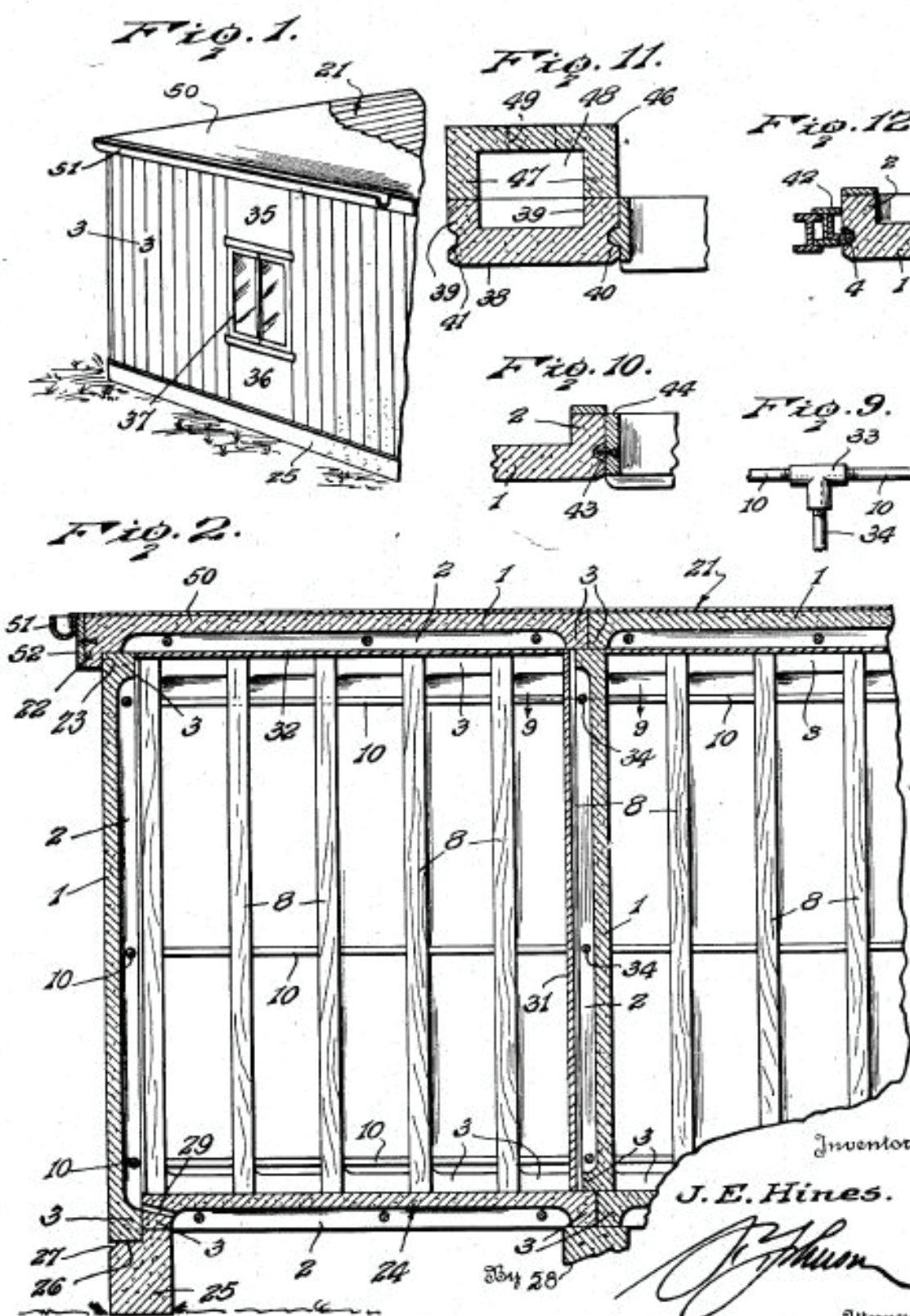
All four Ramsey Homes along North Patrick Street, View Southwest. (Thunderbird Archeology 2018)



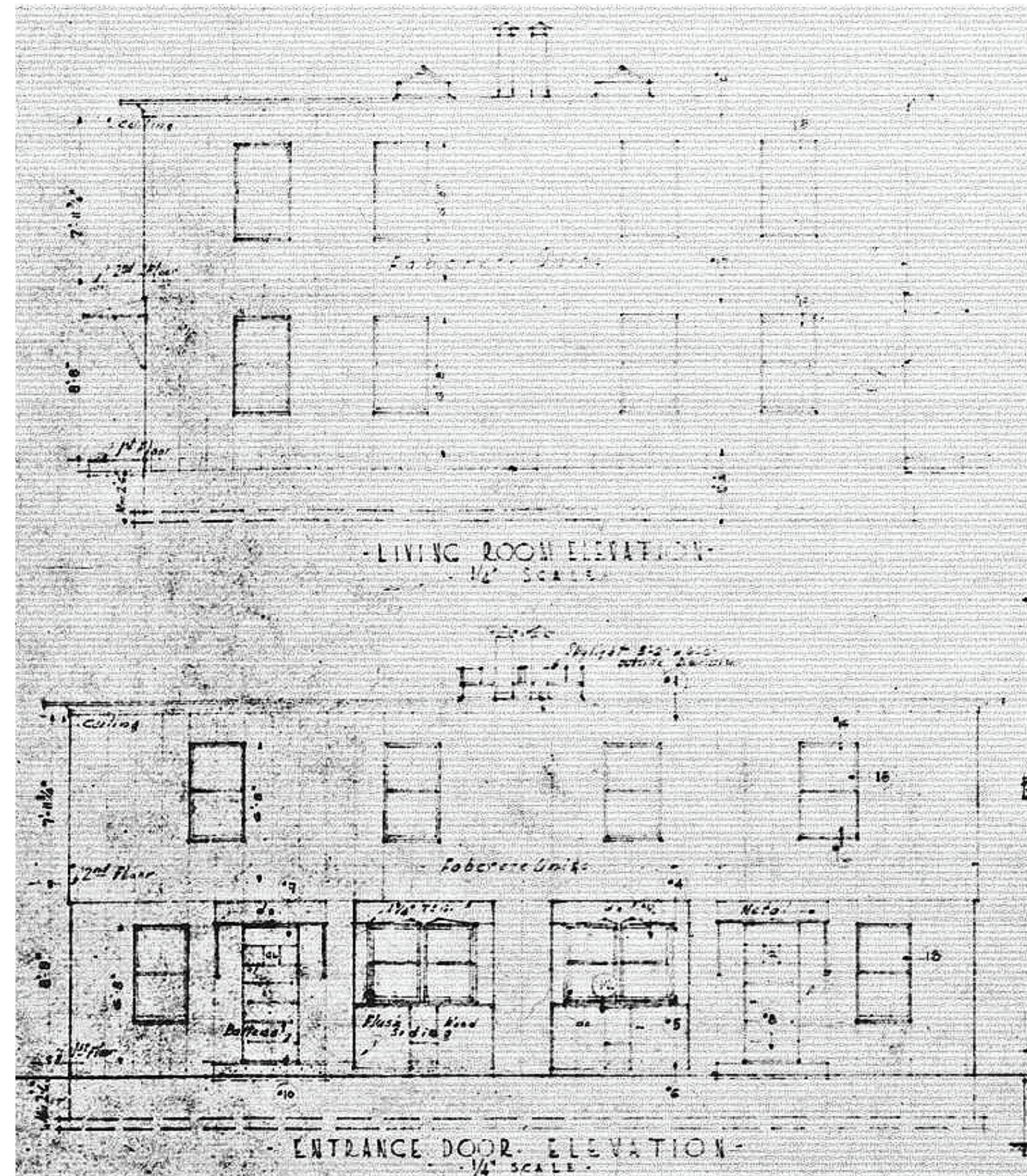
Ramsey Building III, 609-611 North Patrick Street. View Northwest. (Thunderbird Archeology 2018)



Ramsey Building II, 619-623 North Patrick Street. View Northeast. (Thunderbird Archeology 2018)



“The present invention is directed to improvements in building constructions, and more particularly to buildings that are formed from pre-cast units of cementitious material. The primary object of the invention is to produce a building employing units so constructed that they may be easily and quickly assembled and held in rigid relationship to provide walls, partitions, floors and roofs. Another object of the invention is to provide a building unit which is light in weight, water and fire proof and so fashioned that the units when united can be used to produce a building of any desired size and shape, and at a minimum cost.” (Fabcrete 1939 Patent US227,846A. ARHA)



Elevations with Fabcrete. Entrance door side and living room side (constructed). Revised Plans by Delos Smith of Smith, Werner and Billings, Oct. 10, 1941. (ARHA)

residents listed indicate an end of the policy of secrecy that likely caused their omission from the war-time city directories, and the listed occupations of the residents show that the housing was no longer restricted to defense workers.

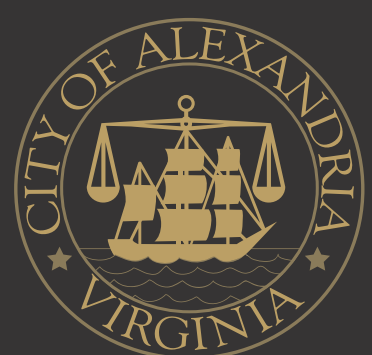
After World War II, the Federal Public Housing Authority sought to sell the Ramsey Homes; the City of Alexandria contemplated the purchase of the site, and the *Washington Post* reported that the Mayor of Alexandria claimed the war-time housing did not meet city building codes and was substandard. The property did not leave federal hands until 1953, when the Federal Housing Authority transferred ownership of Ramsey Homes to the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) and they served as affordable housing units. The homes were demolished in 2018, and ARHA redeveloped the Ramsey Homes site to allow for high density mixed low-income and market-rate housing units.



1957 Aerial, showing Ramsey Homes (USGS)

Parker-Gray Historic District
The Ramsey Homes were located within the bounds of the historically Black community known as Uptown. Free Black Alexandrians established the neighborhood in the antebellum period. Uptown was the first Black neighborhood settled north of King Street and, along with the Berg (the second Black neighborhood to form north of King Street), expanded significantly during and after the Civil War as newly emancipated African Americans migrated to Alexandria. Uptown eventually grew into the largest Black neighborhood in the city, encompassing 24 city blocks. The Uptown neighborhood is now the Parker-Gray Historic District, named for John Parker and Sarah Gray who were principals of Alexandria's first Black public schools.

Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority; Alexandria Archaeology; Thunderbird Archeology, a division of Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc.



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