

TECHWOOD HOMES, BUILDING 16
TECHWOOD/CLARK HOWELL HOMES REDEVELOPMENT AREA
488-514 Techwood Drive
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2257-S

HABS
GA
61-ATLA
605-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HABS
GA
61-ATLA
605-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TECHWOOD HOMES,
BUILDING 16

HABS No. GA-2257-S

Location: 488-514 Techwood Drive, NW
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

U.S.G.S. Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
Northing 3739/560, Easting 741/600

Present Owner: Atlanta Housing Authority
739 West Peachtree
Atlanta, Georgia 30365

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Public Housing
Techwood/Clark Howell Homes HOPE VI - Urban Revitalization
Demonstration (URD) Project
To be demolished

Significance: Techwood Homes, Building 16 is a contributing building in the Techwood Homes Historic District, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Techwood Homes is associated with events, agencies, and individuals significant to the history and design of public housing, both nationally and locally.

Techwood Homes was the first federally funded public housing project in the United States to reach the construction stage. As the first of 51 "demonstration projects" developed nationwide by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA), Techwood Homes served as an experimental model for interpretation and implementation of design standards established by the Housing Division. The project drew immediate praise for its sturdy construction, fireproof materials, natural lighting and cross-ventilation, ample open space and recreational areas, and community-oriented amenities.

Development of this landmark project in Atlanta reflected the planning and lobbying efforts of prominent local citizens. Its development provided many benefits locally, including clearance of one of the city's worst slums, employment of many workers and professionals, creation of new housing for over 600 limited-income families, construction of a much-needed dormitory for Georgia Tech, and establishment of local support for the subsequent creation of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1934-1936. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on September 29, 1934, with Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes initiating the dynamiting of wooden shacks at the site. Actual construction began in February of 1935¹ and was nearing completion when President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated the project on November 29, 1935. Housing units were opened for occupancy in mid-August of 1936, and the official opening ceremony was held on September 1, 1936. Specific dates of construction for Building 16 are not known.
2. Architect: Burge and Stevens (now Stevens and Wilkinson) of Atlanta was awarded the design contract for Techwood Homes on May 17, 1934. Flip Burge, one of the firm's principals, was an original member of the Board of Trustees that secured federal approval for the project. Burge and Stevens received \$84,000 for its design services, an enormous job that sustained the firm through the Depression and helped to secure the firm's place in Atlanta history.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Techwood Homes was originally owned by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA). When the U. S. Housing Act of 1937 created the U. S. Housing Authority, that agency assumed control of Techwood Homes. The Atlanta Housing Authority was created in June of 1938 and, in March of 1940, took over operation of Techwood Homes through a lease agreement with the U. S. Housing Authority.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: J. A. Jones Construction Company of Charlotte, N. C. was awarded a general construction contract of \$2,108,337 in February of 1935. The Techwood Homes project received a PWA allotment of over \$2,700,000. Specific construction costs and suppliers for Building S are not known.
5. Original plans and construction: The building remains a primarily two-story L-shaped concrete structure. The building stair-steps up grade to the west, from Techwood Drive. Original plans are housed in the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority.
6. Alterations and additions: The buildings has undergone one significant period of alteration. In the 1980's, the Atlanta Housing Authority obtained a \$17.2 million grant

¹As reported in Engineering News-Record (4 July 1935) and the Atlanta Journal (28 July 1935); other sources, including the National Register nomination, state that work began in late 1934, probably in reference to site clearance.

from HUD through the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program. This grant, shared with Clark Howell Homes, was used to upgrade bathroom and kitchen facilities. All kitchen cabinets were restained and painted inside; they were replaced where needed. Bathroom accessories were replaced as needed as were ceilings and ceramic tile areas over tubs. Marble thresholds replaced as needed as were ceilings and ceramic tile areas over tubs. Marble thresholds replaced the wooden ones in all bathrooms. Grab bars and handheld showers were installed in all HDC units.

The grant was also used to install vinyl flooring, new windows, and roofing, to modify closets, add bookshelves, and washer alcoves, and to insulate vent stacks. It provided electrical work, exterior door replacements, and interior painting. Also the steam boiler/electric baseboard heating system was replaced with an energy efficient, gas-fired hot water circulation system (Atlanta Housing Authority 1986,12). Allain and Associates and James Patterson Associates were the architectural firms who drew the plans for the 1981 comprehensive modernization of Techwood Homes. Newcomb and Boyd Engineers of Atlanta did the plumbing, electrical, and mechanical renovations. Ray Gustafson and Associates were responsible for the civil engineering, and Harry Baldwin, landscape architect, also from Atlanta, relandscaped the property.

B. Historical Context

The first hundred days of President Franklin Roosevelt's administration brought sweeping social and economic legislation to revitalize a nation ravaged by the Depression. Landmark legislation included the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933, which empowered the President to establish the Federal Administration of Public Works (later called the Public Works Administration, or PWA) and spend over \$3 billion on construction projects. The PWA's Housing Division, which provided jobs as well as much-needed housing, established guidelines to ensure that federally funded public housing would be well-planned, economical, durable, and comfortable. For more information about the Housing Division's humane and innovative design guidelines, see "Sample Plans" and "Standards for Low-Rent Housing" excerpted in Architectural Record (March 1935).

NIRA's provisions for slum clearance and low-income housing drew the attention of Charles F. Palmer, a leading Atlanta real estate developer who had long been troubled by deplorable living conditions in one Atlanta's worst slums, Techwood Flats, located between Georgia Tech and the downtown business district. Palmer had studied slum clearance programs in Europe and realized that the NIRA could provide for similar projects in Atlanta. To pursue this undertaking, Palmer won the support and participation of other prominent Atlanta citizens, including Mayor James L. Key, architect Flip Burge, and Atlanta Constitution publisher Clark Howell, Sr. For more information about Palmer, see Adventures of a Slum Fighter (1955).

Palmer and his associates lobbied the PWA for funding for Techwood Homes, to house more than 600 white families, and also University Homes, to house about 800 black families. In October of 1933, the two federally funded housing projects became the first in the nation to be approved, bringing national attention to Atlanta. In February of 1935, Techwood became the first such project to reach the construction phase. Designed by the local architectural firm of Burge and Stevens, Techwood Homes served as an experimental model for interpretation and implementation of the PWA Housing Division's standards for public housing construction. A total of 50 additional projects were developed under the Housing Division during its tenure, which ended in 1937 when the PWA turned its housing program over to the United States Housing Authority. For more information about the objectives, accomplishments, and limitations of the PWA Housing Division, see Chapter 16 in America Builds: The Record of the PWA (1939).

The entire Techwood project, which included a much-needed dormitory for Georgia Tech, was dedicated in November of 1935 by President Roosevelt. In August of 1936, the first of 604 limited-income white families moved into their comfortable, all-modern housing units, amid criticism that the project's subsidized rents were too high to accommodate the city's neediest citizens. In its early days Techwood Homes provided a high quality of life that was later described fondly by many of its early residents, including Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A restaurants. For more information about the community-oriented atmosphere enjoyed by Techwood residents, see copies of the project's monthly newsletter, The Techwood News, archived at the Atlanta Housing Authority.

Shortly after completion of Techwood Homes, public housing underwent several changes at the national as well as local level. The United States Housing Act of 1937 established the U. S. Housing Authority, which took over control of all PWA housing projects, including Techwood Homes. The 1937 act increased budget allocations for housing project subsidies and also decentralized the federal housing program. Under the new program, the federal government would make loans and pay subsidies to local housing authorities that would build and operate public housing projects designed to accommodate lower income tenants. In June of 1938 the Atlanta Housing Authority was created (with Charles Palmer as its director) and undertook the planning and construction of six new projects, beginning with Clark Howell Homes in 1939. In March of 1940, AHA took over management of Atlanta's two PWA public housing projects, Techwood Homes and University Homes, under a lease agreement with the U. S. Housing Authority. For more information about the role of AHA as developer and manager of subsequent public housing efforts in Atlanta, see copies of annual reports archived at AHA.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Architectural Record (March 1935) and Engineering News-Record (4 July 1935) described the architecture of Techwood Homes as Modified Georgian, characterized by red brick veneer exteriors, cast stone trim, and flat roofs. The significance of the project, however, lies more with its construction, floor plan design, and site layout than its architectural style. The PWA Housing Division established comprehensive standards to ensure that federally funded public housing would provide well-lighted, well-ventilated living quarters in durable, fireproof buildings, surrounded by ample open spaces and other site amenities that would create a community-oriented setting. Burge and Stevens met these standards through the development of two-story rowhouses and three-story garden-style apartments of brick and concrete construction, all featuring a narrow transverse dimension to maximize exposure to sunlight and breezes. The buildings covered only about 25 percent of the total project area and were carefully configured to create open spaces for landscaping, children's play areas, and recreational facilities.
2. Condition of fabric: Building 16 appears to be in good structural condition but is in need of maintenance and cosmetic attention.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Building 16 is a two-story building with a L-shaped footprint divided into two wings by the central cupola. The L-shaped layout forms a eastward-facing lawn along Techwood Drive. The overall dimensions of the north wing are 138'-7" x 28'-2", the overall dimensions of the south wing are 118'-10" x 28'-2". The cupola, located at the center of the building between the two wings, provides open-air access through the building.
2. Foundations: The building features poured concrete footings. Basement walls are poured concrete 12 inches thick.²
3. Walls: Exterior walls are faced with four inches of selected common brick, bonded every fifth course and trimmed with cast stone.
4. Structural systems, framing: The floors and roof are of solid concrete slab construction and are supported by 12-inch exterior walls consisting of eight-inch load-bearing tile blocks and a row of interior concrete columns connected by longitudinal concrete beams, as described in the National Register nomination.

² As reported in Engineering News-Record (4 July 1935)

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are twelve doorways paired and equally spaced along the east and north elevations that serve as the front entrances for the units. Along the west and south elevations there are fourteen doorways that serve as rear unit entrances. Two of the units have primary entrances that open into the cupola. Door surrounds are of stone, and doors are metal. The front entrances have metal canopies with supporting metal screens on both sides of the paired doorways. The rear doorways have wooden porch canopies with wooden bracket supports on both sides of the doorway. The cupola has a open-arched entryway on the ground level with single-course brickwork detailing and keystone.

b. Windows: Regularly-spaced windows are located on all sides of the building. On both sides of the secondary or rear doors of the units are small rectangular windows that accent the doorway. Windows are of metal, double-hung sash construction and are defined by snap-in mullions. Brick detailing includes single-course brickwork on the bottom of each window. On the second floor of the cupola there is a window opening with vertical brickwork detailing at the top of the window. Above and on center with the second floor cupola window opening is a small octagon-shaped opening.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is a solid concrete slab 5 1/2" thick. The roofing system involves a flat roof built-up membrane system with a brick parapet capped by a stone molding.

b. Eaves: There are no eaves on the two major wings of the building. However, the cupola has a standing seam copper roof with a lead capping piece.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The footprint of Building 16 is L-shaped. The floor plan consists of two-story, two and three-bedroom townhouse units of floor plan type B. The present configuration and composition date from the 1981 renovation.

2. Stairways: Stairways ascend up one floor from each of the unit's living room spaces to bedrooms on the second floor. The stairs are of concrete construction; the railings are of metal.

3. Flooring: Floors are of solid concrete slab construction.

4. Walls and ceilings: Walls and ceilings are of solid concrete construction.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Detailed information on interior doors is not available.
- b. Windows: Refer to Section II.B, Description of Exterior.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The original steam-generated boiler/ electric baseboard heating system was replaced with a gas-fired hot water circulation system in the 1980s. Steam was originally piped by Georgia Power Company.
 - b. Plumbing: All pipes were originally copper. Each unit in the building has a full bathroom and kitchen.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Building 16 fronts on Techwood Drive. The L-shaped footprint opens to Techwood Drive defining a front lawn along the street. Existing landscape elements include a line of water oak trees along Techwood Drive and in the front lawn of the building. Included in the front lawn are two flowering dogwood trees. At the southwest corner of the building are three green ash trees.
2. Historic landscape design: The original landscape plan included concrete paths connecting the entryways of the units to Techwood Drive and Pine Street. A central path runs from Techwood Drive, cutting diagonally across the front lawn up grade, through the open cupola that connects the two wings of the building. On both sides of this central path were a row of five equally-spaced white crepe myrtle trees. Along the building bordering the front lawn were four (two along the east facade and two along the north facade) American elm trees. Along Techwood Drive were planned water oak trees spaced from 42 feet to 47 feet apart. Along Pine Street, equally-spaced Chinese elm trees were proposed. Each of the units included private yards off the rear entrances, these yards were to be enclosed and have a sandy loam surface. To accent the corners and entrances of the building, a variety of shrubs and ground covers were placed along the building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Several sets of drawings are available, including:

- original drawings

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- drawings dated February 15, 1936
- Atlanta Housing Authority site plan, 1962
- comprehensive modernization drawings by Allain and Patterson, 1981
- measured drawings, 1995

Photographs of selected examples of original drawings are included in this package as follows: HABS # GA-2257-S-24 (Site Plan), and HABS # GA-2257-S-25 (Elevations). Original drawings are housed at the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority. Measured drawings are included in this package.

B. Historic views:

Reproductions of historic views of Techwood Homes accompany the Addendum to Techwood Homes (Public Housing), HABS No. GA-2257. Original historic photographs are archived at the Atlanta History Center, the Special Collections Department of Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University, and the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA). Photographs appear in many of the AHA annual reports and historic newspaper articles listed in the bibliography below.

C. Interviews:

The Atlanta History Center has transcripts of interviews of Atlanta citizens (Manuscript Collection #637) conducted in 1977 and 1978 by Clifford Kuhn and later excerpted and compiled into a book, Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948. For first-hand accounts of project construction and subsequent living conditions in Techwood Homes, interview transcripts were reviewed for three individuals: architect Preston Stevens, Sr., whose firm designed Techwood Homes; landscape architect Edith Henderson, who designed the landscape plan for Clark Howell Homes and Techwood Homes; and Waldo Roescher, Techwood Homes resident from 1936 to 1949.

D. Bibliography:

The Atlanta Housing Authority has an extensive collection of newspaper clippings, annual reports, and pamphlets pertaining to the AHA and its properties. The Special Collections Department of the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University holds the complete manuscript collection of Charles F. Palmer (Manuscript Collection #9), containing pamphlets, newspaper clippings, personal correspondence, student dissertations, transcripts of speeches, photographs, documentary films, and audio tapes, all pertaining to the subject of public housing in Atlanta and elsewhere. Many of the articles and other documents described below were obtained from these two sources. Other research was conducted at the Atlanta History Center, the archives of the Georgia Tech library, the archives of the Coca-Cola Company, and the files of the State Historic Preservation Office.

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Grable, Stephen W. "From Private Realtor to Public Slum Fighter: Charles F. Palmer." Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1984.

National Register of Historic Places: Techwood Homes Historic District. Form prepared on October 26, 1975 and certified by the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer on January 6, 1976.

Pollard, Howard Weaver. "The Effect of Techwood Homes on Urban Development in the United States." M. A. thesis, Georgia Institute of Technology, 1968.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Arnold, Peter E. "Public Housing in Atlanta: A National First." Atlanta Historical Bulletin 13 (September 1968): 9-18.

Atlanta Housing Authority. First Annual Report: Rebuilding Atlanta. Atlanta: Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, 1939.

_____. Second Annual Report: Rebuilding Atlanta. Atlanta: Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, 1940.

_____. Third Annual Report: Homes, Health and Happiness. Atlanta: Atlanta Housing Authority, 1941.

_____. Techwood Homes: 50. Atlanta: Atlanta Housing Authority, 1986.

"Big Dormitory is Nearing Completion in Housing Project at Techwood." Atlanta Constitution, 28 July 1935.

Corley, Florence Fleming. "Atlanta's Techwood and University Homes Projects: The Nation's Laboratory for Public Housing." Atlanta History 31 (Winter 1987-88): 17-36.

"Dream Vs. Reality? Techwood Turns 50." Atlanta (November 1986): 42-44, 110-114.

"FDR's Georgia Ties Paved Way for First Housing Project." Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 17 March 1991.

"First Federal Housing is Fireproof Construction." Engineering News-Record 115 (4 July 1935): 7-11.

"How the PWA Housing Division Functions." Architectural Record 77 (March 1935): 148-152.

Kuhn, Clifford M.; Joye, Harlon E.; and West, E. Bernard. Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1945. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Palmer, Charles F. Adventures of a Slum Fighter. Atlanta: Tupper and Love, Inc., 1955.

Public Works Administration. America Builds: The Record of PWA. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Office, 1939.

"Sample Plans Prepared by the Housing Division Public Works Administration for Low-Rent Housing Projects." Architectural Record 77 (March 1935): 154-167.

"Secretary Ickes to Launch PWA Housing Projects Today." Atlanta Constitution, 29 September 1934.

"Standards for Low-Rent Housing." Architectural Record 77 (March 1935): 182-187.

Stevens, Preston Standish. Building A Firm: The Story of Stevens & Wilkinson, Architects, Engineers, Planners, Incorporated. Atlanta: 1979.

"Techwood Homes, Atlanta, Is a Working Reality." American City 51 (October 1936): 58-59.

"Techwood Housing Project." Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 300-301.

"A Trip Through Atlanta's New \$2,875,000 Techwood Apartments." Atlanta Journal Magazine, 5 July 1936.

"Uncle Sam Uses Atlanta as His Housing Laboratory." Atlanta Constitution, 28 August, 1938.

"U. S. Gets First Permanent Housing Authority." Architectural Record 82 (October 1937): 38.

"Who Wants Techwood?" Atlanta Weekly [Atlanta Journal and Constitution], 15 March 1981.

Works Progress Administration. Georgia: The WPA Guide to Its Towns and Countryside. Athens: University of Georgia, 1940; reprint ed., Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1990.

- D. Supplemental material: Following this outline format text are two 8 1/2" x 11" sketch drawings, as follows:
- historic site plan of Techwood Homes with Building 16 indicated
 - site plan of existing historic district with Building 16 indicated

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This HABS documentation packet is being prepared in compliance with a stipulation of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that addresses the impact of the Techwood/Clark Howell Homes HOPE VI Urban Revitalization Demonstration (URD) Project on the Techwood Homes Historic District, the Clark Howell Homes Historic District, the Georgia Institute of Technology Historic District, and the Anne Wallace Branch Carnegie Library. The MOA is dated March 19, 1993. Parties to the MOA are: the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, and the Techwood/Clark Howell Resident Association.

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HISTORIC SITE PLAN OF TECHWOOD HOMES



