

PALMER HOUSE APARTMENTS  
430 Centennial Olympic Park Drive, Northwest (Originally Techwood  
Drive)  
Atlanta  
Fulton County  
Georgia

HABS GA-2402  
HABS GA-2402

HABS  
GA-2402

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
100 Alabama St. NW  
Atlanta, GA 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PALMER HOUSE APARTMENTS

HABS No. GA-2402

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GA-2402  
(Page 1)

Location: 430 Centennial Olympic Park Drive, NW (originally Techwood Drive)  
Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia.

USGS Atlanta, Georgia Quadrangle  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
Easting 741395  
Northing 3739604  
Zone 16

Present Owner: Atlanta Housing Authority

Present Use: Mixed low-income senior and handicapped apartment housing

Significance: The Palmer House is a three tower, seventeen-story apartment building, consisting of 250 units designed for elderly tenants. Commissioned by the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA), it was completed in 1966. The building was named for Charles F. Palmer, a pioneer in public housing and the first Chairman of the Atlanta Housing Authority. Its significance lies in its "massing, fenestration, architectural details, and...overall stripped-down appearance" that mark it as an early example of the modern architectural movements that emerged in the 1960s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction: An application for a building permit was submitted by the AHA on June 11, 1964, and the building was completed on June 15, 1966. It was designed as housing for the elderly, one of three complexes that were built by the AHA in the 1960s.
2. Architects: The Palmer House building was designed by an Atlanta architectural firm, FABRAP, an acronym for the first letter in the names of each of the partners – Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothschild, and Paschal. FABRAP was formed in 1958 and was one of Atlanta's most progressive design firms. The firm built its reputation in the design of industrial buildings and laboratories, schools and sporting venues, health care facilities and corporate headquarters. The design of a senior citizen apartment house seems uncharacteristic in their body of work.

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James Harrison Finch and Miller Barnes, both graduates of Georgia Tech, formed Finch and Barnes in 1948. Caraker Paschal, also a Georgia Tech graduate, joined the company in 1948, and became a partner in 1957 when the firm changed its name to Finch, Barnes and Paschal. All three had been under the tutelage of Paul Heffernan, the head of the Georgia Tech Architecture Department and a fierce promoter of efficient and functional design.

Cecil Alexander, a graduate of both Yale University and Harvard University, and Bernard Rothschild, from the University of Pennsylvania, formed Alexander and Rothschild in 1948 and practiced together for nine years.

In 1958 Alexander and Rothschild joined with Finch, Barnes and Paschal to form FABRAP. This firm embraced the functionalist outlook of the modern movement in architecture, and contributed to the post World War II transition of architectural design to the International Style, also known as Bauhaus Modern.

FABRAP designed the Georgia Tech Bunger-Henry Building (1964) and the Fred B. Wenn Student Center (1970). Among company headquarters designed by the firm were those of the First National Bank (mid-1960's with Emory Roth & Sons of New York), the Coca-Cola Company (1970, 1979, 1981) and Southern Bell (1981-82 with Skidmore Owings and Merrill of New York). Another FABRAP project, the Richard B. Russell Federal Building in Atlanta was built in 1979-80. Other projects designed by FABRAP were the Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, MARTA Five Points Station, the Georgia Power Company Office Building, and the Phipps Plaza Shopping Center. Projects at Georgia Tech included the Chemistry Building and the Chemical Engineering Building as well as the aforementioned Bunger-Henry Building and Fred B. Wenn Student Center. The firm also designed the Urban Life Center at Georgia State University.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The original owner, AHA, still owns the building. Constructed as senior citizen housing, residents now include handicapped persons of all ages.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: General contractor for the Palmer House was H. A. Lott, Inc. of Houston, Texas.
5. Original plans and construction: AHA owns a partial set of the original plans for the Palmer House apartments, prepared by FABRAP and dated February 14, 1964. A photographic copy of Sheet 3, the Site Plan, is included as GA-2402-30, and xerographic copies of Sheets 1-2, 4-9, 12 and 13 are included as pages 10-19.

6. Alterations and additions: No major alterations or additions have taken place.

B. Historical Context:

1. Charles F. Palmer: Palmer came to Atlanta in 1919, in large measure because his wife was from Georgia. He was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, attended Dartmouth College and was involved in the real estate business in Pasadena, Santa Barbara, San Diego and Chicago prior to coming to Atlanta. Once in Atlanta, he founded a realty firm, Palmer Company, and became involved in major real estate transactions in downtown Atlanta.

He gained his reputation for involvement in community improvement when he organized the Techwood Homes Project, the nation's first slum clearance project in 1933. In a brochure entitled "You and Your City" he described his commute to work through the Techwood slums and the dismal conditions of those crime-ridden neighborhoods. High rents, absentee ownership, and buildings in horrible disrepair were some of the conditions he described. Palmer figured the only way to alleviate those conditions was to demolish and rebuild. He used federal funds, made available by President Roosevelt for this purpose, to initiate the Techwood Homes Project.

Following the Techwood Homes Project, Palmer continued his involvement in the public housing arena. He served as Chairman of the AHA from 1938 until 1940, when he was drafted by the newly organized National Defense Advisory Commission as their Housing Coordinator. During his travels around the country and abroad, he met President Roosevelt, who named him Special Assistant. After Roosevelt's death, Palmer continued his travels around the world in an advisory capacity. In 1955 he published a book, *Adventures of a Slum Fighter*, in which he documented his slum clearing activities.

When the Palmer House, a senior residential apartment building commissioned by the AHA, was officially dedicated in downtown Atlanta in 1967, it was the first time such a building had been named after a living individual – a remarkable honor in recognition of his contributions to the city. Palmer stayed involved in affordable housing and the downtown real-estate business in Atlanta for the remainder of his life. Charles Palmer died in June 1973 at the age of 80 years after more than fifty years of living and working in Atlanta.

2. History of public housing in Atlanta: Charles F. Palmer's background and business associations in the real estate market made him a strong proponent of the philosophy that by clearing slums, the value of surrounding properties would improve dramatically and therefore help stimulate the economy. He was proven

correct when, after completion of the Techwood Homes in 1936, surrounding land values rose by 150 –300 per cent.

During the same time period, in September 1937, the federal government passed the Wagner-Steagall Bill, a milestone in public housing. The bill established the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA), which would fund local projects through local housing authorities. Federal funding could only be received after a local housing authority had been established. The first attempt to establish a local housing authority in Atlanta passed the City Council in 1937, but was vetoed by Mayor Hartsfield. Shortly after, a major fire near Grady Hospital wiped out large areas of slum housing, resulting in increased demand for new public housing. On May 19, 1938, the Atlanta Housing Authority was created, and Charles F. Palmer was appointed its first Chairman of the Board.

One month later, the AHA received nine million dollars from the federal government. The first “twin” project of slum clearing and building replacement with low-cost housing was Clark-Howell Homes.

By the 1940s, the AHA had become a firmly established organization responsible for planning public housing programs, requesting funds from the federal government and expending the allocated funds. Eight projects comprising 4,815 units had been completed by 1942. At this time Georgia led the Southeast, which led the entire nation, spending one-third of all funds appropriated for slum clearance and construction of public housing by the government.

After World War II, the economy boomed, and the need for public housing slowed down. By the early sixties however, the situation changed again. By this time, public housing was seen as only part of a total effort to help individuals. Other programs such as food stamps, the Head Start program and school integration became equally important in the push for improvement for minorities.

In May 1969, some twenty-seven years after the boom in the early 1940s, only five additional projects for families, with a total of 5,826 units, plus three facilities for the elderly comprising 977 units, had been added. The three facilities for the elderly were:

Antoine Graves	1 white	219 non-whites
John O. Chiles Home	247 whites	11 non-whites
Palmer House	269 whites	0 non-whites

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Palmer House Apartments building is an early example of the modern architectural movements that emerged in the 1960s. The building is a three tower, thirteen- to seventeen-story complex consisting of 250 units designed for elderly tenants. The building has forty-nine efficiency units, 199 one-bedroom units, and one each two-bedroom and three-bedroom units. The original cost of the building was \$2,483,070 and the cost of the land was \$22,717.
2. Condition of fabric: According to a 2007 Obsolescence Report prepared by Praxis<sup>3</sup> Architects, "the facility appears to have been very well maintained." However, they determined that the cost of renovating the existing building to current standards would amount to \$20,038,268, or more than a new facility.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building has an irregular footprint. It consists of three towers, which radiate from a central core that houses a staircase, and the elevators and mechanical rooms. The overall dimensions of Towers A, B and C are 46' 8" x 75'. Dimensions of the core area are 46' 3" from west to east on the north side, 28' 4" from north to south on the east side, 40' 1" from east to west on the south side, and 28' 4" from south to north on the west side with a 6' 2" jog to the west about halfway. Overall dimensions of the building are approximately 210' x 210'. Tower A is seventeen stories high, Tower B is fifteen stories high, and Tower C is thirteen stories high. An external, open concrete staircase, located at the end of each tower, gives them a strong vertical thrust. These stair towers are 10' 3" deep on all towers; they are 17' 6" wide on Towers B and C and 15' 6" wide on Tower A.
2. Foundations: The foundations are concrete piles with caps.
3. Walls: The exterior combines red brick with white concrete. Exterior walls are a combination of exposed concrete and brick cladding. Each tower has a band of concrete, two floors high, breaking the monotony or simplicity of each shaft.
4. Structural system, framing: The structural frame is cast-in-place concrete.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrances to the building are on the first floor and are accessed from the terrace between Towers A and C. Doors and

adjoining window systems are aluminum storefronts, probably replacements. A smaller entrance into Tower A is located on Parker Street.

- b. Windows: The fenestration in the building is regular; the windows are placed in checkerboard fashion. Exterior window air-conditioning units protrude from the facade below the windows. The windows are aluminum framed casement style. Windows vary from 3' 4" to 5' 2" in height and are either single or triple.

6. Roof: The roof is a concrete slab, clad with bitumen roofing.

### C. Description of Interior

#### 1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: On the interior, the first floor houses the lobby, offices, day and meeting rooms. A central elevator and stair core connects all floors. Each tower has a central corridor on each floor connecting the elevators to the external staircase. The lobby is located on the first floor of Tower A. The driveway to an interior parking area bisects the first floor of Tower B.
- b. Second floor: Apartments occupy the second floor of Towers A and C. The second floor of Tower B is bisected by the upper portion of the driveway and houses more mechanical equipment.
- c. Upper floors: The upper floors of all three towers are devoted to apartments. The apartments are located on either side of the corridor. The living spaces, kitchens and bathrooms in the apartments are extremely small.

2. Stairways and elevators: In addition to the two side-by-side elevators there is an enclosed fire stair in the central core. Each tower has an external open concrete stair, which is a major decorative feature of the building.

3. Flooring: Floors are covered with linoleum tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls throughout the building are of concrete masonry unit construction. Walls are painted concrete block. Ceilings are suspended ceiling tiles on the ground floor and painted concrete on the upper floors.

#### 5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors are extremely simple. Doors to apartments are flush with the corridor walls. All doors are solid; doors inside the apartments are painted.
- b. Windows: Aluminum casement windows are furnished with venetian blinds.

#### 6. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Each apartment is served by a wall-mounted heater, which is connected to the domestic hot water system.

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Central air-conditioning does not exist; air-conditioning is provided by units inserted in the wall under the windows. Casement windows are operable and provide ventilation.

- b. Lighting: Lighting in the corridors, stairs and apartments is provided by ceiling fixtures. On the ground floor, where dropped ceilings have been installed, lighting is recessed. Conduit runs exposed.
- c. Plumbing: Some galvanized metal piping exists, and bathroom fixtures are out-of-date.

D. Site

- 1. General setting and orientation: The site of the Palmer House Apartments is located just north of downtown Atlanta. The building occupies an entire block and is bounded by Centennial Olympic Park Drive on the east, Hunnicut Street on the north, Lovejoy Street on the west and Parker Street on the south. A ground-level terrace is located where Towers A and C intersect, and provides outdoor seating space. A service court provides a facility for delivery and housekeeping needs between Towers B and C. Limited parking is accessible via a drive-through under Tower B. as well as controlled access from Hunnicut Street.
- 2. Historic landscape design: A xerographic copy of the original planting plan is attached as Page 14. It shows relatively easy-care plants such as Hollies, Mahonia and Ivy in beds around the buildings and bordering the terrace. Small trees such as Dogwood and Japanese Maple were also included in the initial plantings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: A partial set of the original blueprint plans for the Palmer House is owned by the Atlanta Housing Authority. Dated February 14, 1964, they consist of Sheets 1-9, 12 and 13. Sheet 3, the Site Plan, is reproduced as GA-2402-30.
- B. Building permit: The original building permit for the building is on microfilm at the Atlanta History Center archives.
- C. Early views: The Program for the Dedication of the Palmer House on January 25, 1967 contains a photograph of the building. Copies are in the possession of AHA and the Atlanta History Center.
- D. Bibliography:
  - 1. Primary and unpublished sources

*Arnold, Peter Edward.* "Public Housing in Atlanta." 1970 dissertation, on file at Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. Call Number: Dissertation HD7304.A7 A76.

Atlanta Housing Authority. "Rebuilding Atlanta." Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, Georgia. First Annual Report, June 30, 1939.

Fulton County Building Permits. On microfilm at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Palmer House Subject File. Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Praxis<sup>3</sup> Architects, "Obsolescence Report for: Atlanta Housing Authority. Property: Palmer House." 10 page report, November 8, 2007.

Shirk, Elizabeth. Environmental Review Coordinator, Georgia State Historic Preservation Office. Description of the significance of the building. Email dated March 13, 2008.

2. Secondary and published sources

*Atlanta Constitution.* "WPA Offers 3 Million for 'Odd Jobs' in City." July 2, 1938, pp. 1-2.

*Atlanta Constitution.* "C. F. Palmer named U. S. Co-coordinator of Defense Housing." July 21, 1940, pp. 1 and 8.

*Atlanta Constitution.* "A Proud South Boasts of Palmer's Citizenship." October 15, 1950, p. 17-B.

*Atlanta Constitution.* "Charles F. Palmer Dies Here; Was Public Housing Pioneer." June 19, 1973, pp. 2 and 4-A.

"Bernard Rothschild, Architect." [Cheltenhamalumni.org/halloffame/biographies/rothchild.htm](http://Cheltenhamalumni.org/halloffame/biographies/rothchild.htm). Accessed January 9, 2008.

Craig, Robert M. *The New Georgia Encyclopedia.* "FABRAP: Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothchild, and Pascal." [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org). Accessed April 8, 2008.

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Palmer, Charles F. *The Battle for Housing: Adventures of a Slum Fighter*.  
Atlanta: Tupper & Love, 1955.

Roth, Leland M. *A Concise History of American Architecture*. New York: Harper  
& Row Publishers, 1980.

Walker, Tom. "FABRAP, Rosser White merge." *Atlanta Journal Constitution*,  
July 16, 1984, p. 2-B.

[wikipedia.org/wiki/FABRAP](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/FABRAP). Accessed April 8, 2008.

E. Supplemental Material

Xerographic copies of Drawings, Sheets 1-2, 4-9, 12 and 13, ten pages.

Xerographic copy of "Application for Building Permit," dated June 11, 1964. On  
microfilm at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

Xerographic copy of the Dedication Program, Palmer House, Atlanta, Georgia,  
January 25, 1967, 2:00 p.m. Two pages. Located in the Palmer House  
Subject File at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia and at AHA.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording of the Palmer House Apartments is a mitigative recording as stipulated in a  
Memorandum of Agreement dated September 19, 2008. Signatories were W. Ray Luce,  
Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and J. Ron Larkin, U.S. Department  
of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Renee Glover, Housing Authority of the  
City of Atlanta, Georgia (AHA), owner of the building, concurred.

Bamby Ray, Principal of Ray & Associates, was in charge of the project and prepared the  
paperwork. Marion Ellis of Ray & Associates wrote the initial Historic Structure Report.

Photographs of the building were prepared by Burke Walker, Burke Walker Historic  
Preservation Photography, Athens, Georgia.

Photograph of the Site Plan was prepared by David Russell, Russell Image Processing,  
Acworth, Georgia, who also printed the photographs.

Ray & Associates  
328 7th Street NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30308-1602  
March - September 2009





*dedication*

*Palmer House  
atlanta, georgia*

*january 25, 1967  
2:00 p.m.*

THE BUILDING: A 3-tower 17 story complex of 250 units .....  
consisting of 49 efficiencies, 199 1-bedroom units, 1 2-bedroom unit,  
1 3-bedroom unit. Located at intersection of Techwood Drive and  
Parker Street, N.W.

THE TENANTS: Population — 269  
Average age — 70  
Average Annual Income — \$1,504.00  
Average Monthly Rental — \$31.00  
Welfare Recipients — 23  
Social Security Pensioners — 204  
Other types of retirement income — 88

ARCHITECT: Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothchild & Paschal  
General Contractor: H. A. Lott, Inc., Houston, Texas

FACTS AND FIGURES: Cost of building and equipment — \$2,483,070 .....  
Cost of land — \$22,717 ..... All utilities furnished, consisting of  
electricity for lighting, cooking and refrigeration; hot water; hot water  
space heating ..... Coin laundry and drying facilities on alternate  
floors ..... Group meeting areas on other alternate floors.

PUBLIC FACILITIES: Management Office — Maintenance Shop.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES: Arts and Crafts room ..... Reading room .....  
Health Clinic ..... Golden Age Room ..... Program Director's Office .....  
Auditorium and Community Kitchen ..... Garden Terrace with sitting  
areas, game space.

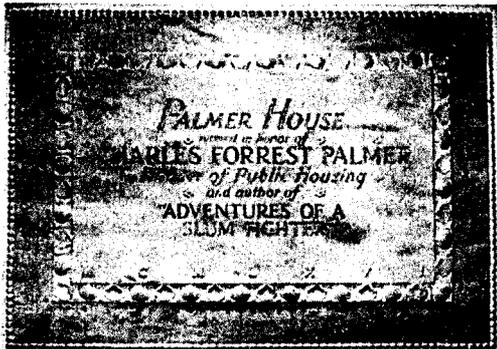
A low rent Public Housing Project erected and owned by

ATLANTA HOUSING AUTHORITY

with the cooperation of Housing Assistance Administration

Outside fold of the Dedication Program. The Dedication program is in the possession of AHA and the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

*program*



Eric Gugler, Designer - James Walt, Sculptor

Invocation ..... *Reverend Fred R. Stair, Jr.*  
Minister  
Central Presbyterian Church

Welcome ..... *Edwin L. Sterne*  
Chairman  
Atlanta Housing Authority

Introduction of Speaker ..... *Honorable Ivan Allen, Jr.*  
Mayor of Atlanta

Dedicatory Address and  
Plaque Unveiling ..... *Anna Roosevelt Halsted*  
*(Mrs. James A.)*

Music ..... Third Army Band  
*CWO Jerome J. Gillis,*  
Director  
*SP.5 James Helms, Soloist*

Benediction ..... *Reverend Fred R. Stair, Jr.*

— OPEN HOUSE —

Tour of the building conducted by Senior Citizens Services, Inc.  
under the direction of Mrs. Carolyn French, Program Director

Third US Army Band will present 30-minute program of patriotic  
music prior to dedication.

Inside fold of the Dedication Program. The Dedication Program is in the possession of AHA and the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia.