

DESOTO HOMES
(Charles Hight Homes)
Bounded by Turner McCall Boulevard
North Fifth Avenue, West Ninth Street,
Keelway Drive
Rome
Floyd County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2403

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Building Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DESOTO HOMES
(Charles Hight Homes)

HABS No. GA-2403

Location: Bounded by Turner McCall Boulevard, North Fifth Avenue, West Ninth Street, and Keelway Drive, Rome, Floyd County, Georgia

USGS Rome South Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16S 667791 3792625
Corrected to 34.261368, -85.177779 on 30 September 2013 using Google Earth, WGS84 datum by HABS Collections Manager Anne Mason. The coordinate represents the approximate center of the district. There is no restriction on its release to the public.

Present Owner: Northwest Georgia Housing Authority
800 North Fifth Avenue
Rome, Georgia 30162-1428

Present Occupants: Vacant

Present Use: Public housing project area to be redeveloped

Significance: Built in 1939-1940, DeSoto Homes is significant as the first federally funded public housing project built in Rome, Georgia under the auspices of the United States Housing Authority. As one of the earliest public housing programs in the state, it is considered historically significant for its role in Georgia's twentieth-century history. It also speaks to the history of segregation. DeSoto Homes was originally limited to white residents as a result of housing laws enforced during the Jim Crow Era. The smaller development of Altoview Terrace, located in East Rome, was built at the same time for African-American residents (See HABS No. GA-2419 - documentation not submitted to HABS as of 30 September 2013) as part of the project. The name of the DeSoto Homes community and its Spanish Colonial Revival style design reflect Rome's association with explorer Hernando de Soto's expedition through Georgia in 1540 and the 400th anniversary of that event.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1939-1940. The Commission of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome approved the working drawings submitted for DeSoto Homes on June 12, 1939. The United States Housing Authority gave a Notice to Proceed with construction on August 28, 1939. Site clearance and construction began on September 5, 1939. In mid-August, the Housing Authority of the City of Rome began accepting tenant applications for DeSoto Homes and the buildings were occupied in November of that year.
2. Architects: The firm of Cooper and Cooper and Odis Clay Poundstone; the landscape architect was William C. Pauley.

Brothers Samuel Inman Cooper (1894-1973) and Joseph Walter Cooper, Jr. (1899-1972) founded the architectural firm of Cooper and Cooper in Atlanta, Georgia in 1925. Originally, the firm primarily focused on residential and school commissions, most notably with the design of several buildings and the campus master plan at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. Prior to World War II, Cooper and Cooper entered into large-scale housing and defense-related projects such as Lawson General Hospital in Chamblee, Georgia. The partnership was dissolved during the war and reorganized in 1945 as Cooper, Bond, & Cooper.

A native of Montgomery, Alabama, Odis Clay Poundstone (1889-1974) based his practice in Atlanta, Georgia. Along with his initial business partner Frank Lockwood (1865-1936), he became a registered architect in Georgia in 1920 and joined the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1923. The firm of Lockwood and Poundstone lasted from 1920 until shortly before Lockwood's death in 1936. Poundstone later formed the firm of Poundstone, Ayers and Goodwin, which concentrated on school and church commissions throughout the southeastern United States from the 1930s through the 1950s. Among Poundstone's principal works from this time period are a number of buildings on the Pfeiffer University and Bennett College campuses in North Carolina, the Woman's Building in Cedartown, Georgia, and the John Graham Homes (GA 5-3) and Park Homes (GA 5-4) housing projects, and Rodeph Sholom Synagogue located in Rome, Georgia.

William C. Pauley (1893-1985) was the landscape architect for both the DeSoto Homes and Altoview Terrace housing project developments. A native of Lafayette, Indiana, Pauley obtained his Master's of Landscape Architecture degree from the Massachusetts Agricultural College. In 1919 he moved to Atlanta where he worked for local firms E. Burton Cooke, the C.A. Dahl Company, and Lakewood Nursery before starting his own practice in 1923. Pauley's notable projects include the Atlanta Botanical Garden, a master plan for Piedmont Park, Hurt Park near the Georgia State University campus, and the landscape design of University Homes in Atlanta. From 1930 to 1950, he primarily focused on landscape planning for government commissions, including a number of public housing projects throughout the state.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Housing Authority of the City of Rome, 1939 to 2004; Northwest Georgia Housing Authority, 2004 to present.
4. Original and subsequent uses: Public housing and administration offices for the Housing Authority of the City of Rome.
5. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Contractor: Griffin Construction Company, Inc.,
Atlanta, Georgia
Structural Engineer: W.H. Armstrong
Mechanical Engineer: A.L. Lindstrom
Electrical Engineer: L.R. Bush
Civil Engineer: Jere Dodd
6. Original Plans and construction: The Commission of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome approved the working drawings submitted for DeSoto Homes on June 12, 1939. The project contractors, Griffin Construction Company, Inc., won the base bid contract of \$427,759. Site clearance and construction of DeSoto Homes began in early September 1939 and was completed in October 1940.
7. Alterations and additions: There have been no additions to individual buildings within the DeSoto Homes housing project or to the site plan of the development as a whole. As part of the Phase I Modernization Plan of the early 1970s more thorough renovations conducted through funding from the

Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program (CIAP) occurred in the 1980s, including: metal exterior doors were added, ceramic tile bathrooms were installed, and insulated sheetrock walls were placed in all buildings, the original steel casement windows were replaced with anodized aluminum sash windows, and the interior floor plan of the Administration Building was significantly altered. It is also believed that the original recreational spray pool, once located behind the Administrative Building, was paved over for parking.

B. Historical Context:

Built as racially segregated low-income housing for white occupancy in 1939-1940, DeSoto Homes was the first United States Housing Authority funded project completed in the city of Rome, Georgia. Along with the smaller Altoview Terrace project, which was concurrently built for African-American residents in East Rome, DeSoto Homes was loosely based on the European social housing estates and planning principles of the Garden City Movement. The twenty-eight building complex contains 148 residential units and a public Administrative Building within an urban context. One- and two-story buildings are symmetrically arranged to create multiple vistas and the landscaped site plan is laced with concrete walkways, small lawns of green space, and a central open playground area.

Early Advocates for Housing Reform in the United States

As immigrants and rural residents flooded into American cities searching for employment during the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, development of low-income housing was primarily left to the real estate entrepreneurs from the private sector. Although religious-based institutions and local philanthropic organizations, such as Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, sought to alleviate the overcrowded slum conditions of the urban poor, politicians and social reformers alike remained largely deferential to private interests. Aside from the minimum standard housing codes passed by the City of New York in 1867, 1879, and 1901, government efforts at the state or federal levels to address problems with substandard housing were largely absent.¹

By the 1920s, a waning of private investment in low-income residential construction, coupled with the limited success of an emergency housing program at the end of World War I had prompted a new generation of American housing activists to call for a

¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 219.

larger role for the federal government.² One of the most prominent early reformers was Edith Elmer Wood, who gained international recognition with her thesis *The Housing of The Unskilled Wage Earner*, published in 1919. Wood was one of the first to argue against restrictive housing codes that had a correlation with higher rental rates for poor tenants. She also declared that the country's reliance on private enterprise, as a sole provider of low-cost housing, was inadequate and appealed for a government subsidized housing program to be instituted as a permanent policy goal in the United States.³

The Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), founded in 1923 by New York architect Clarence Stein, joined Wood in her petition for a public housing program. Although loosely organized and small in number, the RPAA proved to be a highly influential voice in planning and housing matters. The group counted among critic and journalist Lewis Mumford, planner Catherine Bauer, architect Henry Wright, conservationist Benton McKaye, and Edith Wood herself, as some of its more well known members.⁴

Wood and those in the RPAA looked to Europe as a guide for developing a comprehensive, low-cost housing plan in the United States. The Social Housing Act of 1901 in the Netherlands was one of the first initiatives on the continent that provided for subsidized housing to be built by municipal governments and non-profit organizations in cities with populations exceeding 10,000 residents.⁵ The British Parliament passed the 1919 Housing Act as part of an effort to address a crippling post-war housing shortage and lack of affordable housing for returning veterans after World War I. Along with the subsequent 1923 Housing Act, the two programs accounted for construction of approximately 760,000 rent subsidized units in the United Kingdom prior to 1927.⁶

Even more influential were the large-scale German housing settlements (or, "Siedlung"), built on public land at the

² Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, p. 220.

³ Edith Elmer Wood, The Housing of The Unskilled Wage Earner (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), pp. 257-260.

⁴ Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s" The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 37, No. 4 (December, 1987), p. 236.

⁵ Anthony M. Tung, Preserving the World's Great Cities (New York: Three Rivers Press, 200), p. 225.

⁶ A.E. Holmans, Housing Policy in Britain (London: Wolfeboro, N.H., 1987), p. 83.

outskirts of cities during the Weimar Republic in the mid to late 1920s. Seeking to fulfill both a functional and social need, German architects and planners forged a synthesis of the modernist emphasis on prefabrication and standardized residential plans (coined "Existenzminimum") with the utopian tenets of the English planner Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement, which espoused the creation of decentralized and self-sufficient, suburban edge cities. In her travels to Germany and Europe in the early 1930s and subsequent 1934 book *Modern Housing*, Catherine Bauer chronicled such developments as Ernst May's Römerstadt estates (1925-1930) in Frankfurt, the Dammerstock project (1928) in Karlsruhe by Walter Gropius and Otto Haesler, and Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut's Horseshoe housing development (1925) in Berlin. These German housing projects were generally characterized by uniform rows of apartment houses and community buildings reaching no more than four or five stories in height. The buildings were oriented toward the sun, interspersed with landscaped areas, and surrounded by large greenbelt tracts of publicly owned land.⁷

The New Deal and Public Works Administration Housing Division

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and collapse of the real estate market, a greater sense of urgency was felt among housing reformers and the public at large about the need for a federal housing program. The change came with the presidential election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 and the implementation of his New Deal program. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was passed in June 1933 as part of Roosevelt's First One Hundred Days in office. Designed to create jobs and provide low-income housing, the legislation authorized the Public Works Administration (PWA) Housing Division under Interior Secretary Harold Ickes to lend money to private limited-dividend corporations for slum clearance and housing development or, if need be, to buy, condemn, and build subsidized housing itself. Some limited-dividend projects were built between 1933 and 1935 before the program was abandoned in February 1934.⁸ The PWA then began directly building federal housing with slum clearance as a parallel objective. On November 29, 1935, Techwood Homes, a segregated whites-only complex located in

⁷H. Peter Oberlander and Eva Newbrun, Houser: The Life and Work of Catherine Bauer (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), pp. 64-66.

⁸ Paul R. Lusignan, "Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949," Cultural Resource Management, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Washington D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), p. 36.

Atlanta, Georgia had the distinction of being the first PWA housing project in the country to be dedicated by President Roosevelt (however the complex was not ready for occupancy until January 1936).⁹

After only two years since the start of the program, Harold Ickes and the Housing Division of the PWA were subjected to criticism from both sides of the federally subsidized housing debate. Advocates were unhappy with Ickes' centralization of power within the PWA, the glacial pace of the administration's funding and construction schedules, and high minimum rent rates charged to tenants. Opponents such as the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) and the Chamber of Commerce viewed subsidized housing as socialistic and feared the Public Works Administration's power of eminent domain and role as a direct builder, which had become the primary vehicle for creating low income housing development and slum clearance following the collapse of the limited-dividend project plan.¹⁰

Creation of the United States Housing Authority

In January 1935, the Federal Sixth Circuit Court handed down a decision in the case *United States v. Certain Lands in the City of Louisville* that effectively restricted the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration by declaring its condemnation powers for the construction of public housing to be unconstitutional.¹¹ Housing advocates, many of whom had anticipated potential legal problems with the hastily written legislation authorizing the PWA, had tried and failed to craft a permanent public housing policy bill as early as 1934. Following Franklin Roosevelt's landslide re-election in the fall of 1936, proponents redoubled their efforts. The result was the 1937 United States Housing Act (also popularly known as the Wagner-Steagall Act after the bill's two sponsors Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York and Representative Henry B. Steagall of Alabama), which led to the creation of the United States Housing Authority (USHA).¹²

The new legislation was greatly influenced by the input of housing reformer and urban planner Catherine Bauer and sought to

⁹ Florence Fleming Corley, "Atlanta's Techwood and University Homes Projects," Atlanta History, Vol. XXXI, No. 4 (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, Winter 1987-88), p. 26.

¹⁰ John H. Mollenkopf, The Contested City (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 69.

¹¹ Gail Radford, Modern Housing for America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 103.

¹² Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, pp. 223.

rectify many of the shortcomings that critics felt had hampered the work of the PWA. The USHA was created as an independent agency outside the authority of Harold Ickes and the Interior Department with Nathan Straus, former head of the New York City Housing Authority, appointed as the first administrator.¹³ The 1937 Housing Act also offered a more decentralized approach to federal housing than its predecessor. Under the USHA, the federal government provided financial, technical, and design assistance to local housing authorities, which were charged with the responsibility of initiating, building, and operating their own projects. Between 1937 and 1940, the USHA was responsible for the development of over 370 housing projects at a cost of about \$540 million.¹⁴

By 1938, thirty-three states had passed enabling legislation that allowed for the establishment of local authorities.¹⁵ The Georgia General Assembly passed the Housing Authorities Law during the 1937 session and Governor Eurith D. Rivers signed it into law on March 30 of that year. The law provided for the creation of the State Housing Authority Board, which was composed of the State Treasurer, the State School Superintendent, the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the State Planning Board and the Governor. The State Housing Authority Board was responsible for allocating federal funds and holding final approval over local housing authorities. Shortly after the passage of the Georgia Housing Authorities Law in 1937, local authorities were established in Atlanta, Athens, Augusta, and Savannah. The cities of Columbus, Macon, and Rome followed suit in 1938.¹⁶

The Housing Authority of the City of Rome

Located at the confluence of the Etowah, Oostanuala and Coosa rivers in the northwest corner of the state, the city of Rome, Georgia experienced significant population growth during the early twentieth century as the city emerged as an industrial center in the region based cotton textile, furniture, and brick manufacturing among others. In 1900, the city had a population of 7,291. By 1910, that number had risen to 12,099 as a result of the city's annexation of surrounding areas and an influx of rural residents in search of work. Rome, like other developing industrial municipalities in Georgia and throughout the South,

¹³ Oberlander and Newbrun, Houser: The Life and Work of Catherine Bauer, pp. 155-156.

¹⁴ Lusignan, "Public Housing in the United States, 1933-1949," CRM, p. 37.

¹⁵ Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, pp. 224.

¹⁶ Coleman Woodbury, ed., Housing Yearbook 1938 (Chicago: National Association of Housing Officials, 1938), pp. 54-55.

was ill-prepared to accommodate such rapid population growth and much of the city's rental housing at that time for poor and working class families tended to be either older, poorly maintained residences or crowded together and shoddily constructed dwellings that often lacked heat or running water. The economic hardships of the Great Depression only exacerbated these conditions and, following the Housing Act of 1937, city leaders moved to address the issue with federally subsidized slum clearance and low-income housing for the African-American and white residents of Rome that needed assistance.

The City Commission of the City of Rome created the Housing Authority of the City of Rome on May 25, 1938 and it was granted approval by the State Housing Authority Board and Governor E.D. Rivers on April 1, 1938. At the first organizational meeting on April 4, Alfred Lee Barron was unanimously elected Secretary-Treasurer, or Executive Director, of the Authority. H.H. Keel, Chairman of the City Commission, designated Stewart A. Marshall, Ulysses N. Howell, and Wilson M. Hardy as Authority Commissioners with Osgood P. Willingham (1892-1966) acting as Chairman.¹⁷ The first Central Office of the Rome Housing Authority was located at 426 ½ Broad Street.

The Authority's first motion was the appointment of a Committee to negotiate with architects and recommend possible courses of action to be taken for future housing projects in the city. Two days later, on April 6, 1938, the committee submitted their recommendations and the Housing Authority of the City of Rome selected the associated firms of Odis Clay Poundstone and Cooper and Cooper for their "Architectural and Engineering Services in connection with the Slum Clearance Project that is soon to come up in the City of Rome, Georgia."¹⁸ Each firm focused on neo-classical style building design, and although based in Atlanta, both were well known in Rome having worked on commissions in the city itself and throughout Northwest Georgia. Poundstone was the architect for Cave Spring High School (1922) and the Rodeph Shalom Synagogue (1938) in Rome and the Woman's Building (1936) in nearby Cedartown.¹⁹ Cooper and Cooper had strong ties to Berry College in Rome, and built a number of properties on the campus

¹⁷ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of the First or Organization Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome, GA, " Rome, April 3, 1938.

¹⁸ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome, Georgia, April 6, 1938.

¹⁹ Kenneth Thomas, "Biographical Sketch of Odis Clay Poundstone," (Atlanta: Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, 1998).

throughout the 1920s and early 1930s in addition to completing the school's master plan in 1937.²⁰

Poundstone and Cooper and Cooper were to act as the liaisons between Rome Housing Authority and the USHA offices in Washington with regard to the design and construction of the projects. The firms' primary duties included site planning (i.e., the design of entrance walks, drives, fences, retaining walls, and sub-grading), landscaping, and building construction that included housing units, stores, garages, and community facilities. Furthermore, the architects' contract called for the firms to conduct site recommendations within the city of Rome, construction cost estimates, income surveys of current residents in the selected areas of development, and a total of the number of units to be demolished as part of the slum clearance component of the development.

Construction of Desoto Homes and Altoview Terrace

On July 2, 1938, the Authority received a \$540,000 loan from the USHA to facilitate site selection surveys and planning by the architectural firms.²¹ In early December 1938, a meeting was held which approved a decision to send preliminary building plans to Washington with the suggestion that USHA officials would make necessary amendments.²² Later that month, A.I. Brady of the USHA met with all members of the Rome Housing Authority to discuss necessary general changes to the submitted plans, what the City of Rome's obligations would be with regard to utility improvements for the projects, and how the Authority was to proceed with an application for a USHA advance loan. It was also indicated within the meeting minutes that site selections had been finalized for two projects.²³ Further changes to the plans and the first mention of the decision to build racially segregated projects were issued in mid-January of 1939 when the USHA recommended that the number of living units in the white project be increased from eighty-four to 120 as a method of reducing average construction costs.²⁴

²⁰ Jennifer Dickey, personal communication, 2009.

²¹ Augusta Herald, "\$14,660,000 for Georgia Housing," July 2, 1938.

²² Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of December 6, 1938"

²³ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome," December 23, 1938.

²⁴ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome," January 18, 1939.

What appears to be an illustration of the GA 5-1 project in the early stages of the design process is found in the bulletin "Housing and Recreation," which was published by the United States Housing Authority in 1939. Identified only as "A Housing Project in a Small Southern City," the site plan of the GA 5-1 development is used as case study on how to raise the density per acre of a site without sacrificing recreational space. The illustration of the first study shows an open-ended plan of thirty-eight, single-story residential buildings and a large community building facing to the east and west along four interior access drives. A large courtyard occupies the center of the site with four smaller open areas placed in each corner of the complex.²⁵

In February 1939, a total of \$829,000 in USHA-aided loan contracts was approved for the Housing of Authority of the City of Rome to build two housing projects within the city. \$531,000 was allocated for the development of GA 5-1, the low-income project for white occupants; \$298,000 was to go towards GA 5-2, for African-American residents. The loans were to cover approximately 90 percent of construction costs for each development. The Authority approved and signed the contracts on March 8, 1939.²⁶ Total development costs for both GA 5-1 and GA 5-2 were not to exceed \$1,014,000.²⁷

By mid-April 1939, a second draft of drawings had been developed and the site was chosen for the GA 5-1 project.²⁸ In May, the planned location of GA 5-1 was made available to the public. The slum clearance and new housing development was to be located on North Fifth Avenue between West Seventh (now Turner-McCall Boulevard) and West Ninth streets. Authority members praised the site "because of the large space available so close to the heart of the city, along with transportation, school facilities, and other desirable features...the location is a prominent one and desirable from every standpoint, close enough to industry and commerce to be in easy walking distance, yet so located as to afford quiet and comfort for tenants."²⁹

²⁵ United States Housing Authority, Housing and Recreation (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939).

²⁶ Annual Report of the United States Housing Authority (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 19.

²⁷ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome," April 4, 1939.

²⁸ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome," April 13, 1939.

²⁹ Rome News-Tribune, "N. Fifth Avenue Options Taken By Authority, " 11 May, 1939, p. 1,3.

At the time of the announcement, approximately forty single story rental houses occupied the site, primarily along North Fifth Avenue and Jackson Street, and an unpaved alley, which ran between West Seventh and West Ninth streets. Most of the deteriorating wood frame dwellings dated from the early twentieth century and lacked interior plumbing. The block on which the dwellings were located was in a white middle and working class area in the Fourth Ward section of Rome. Developed during the 1870s as one of the city's earliest suburbs, the Fourth Ward was originally known as the DeSoto neighborhood after the infamous expedition of Spanish Conquistador Hernando DeSoto (1539-1541), which was believed to have passed through the area. The neighborhood was later annexed by the City of Rome in 1885.³⁰

In a meeting on May 15, 1939, the Authority Commission officially adopted the name "DeSoto Homes" for GA 5-1, as a recollection of the historic name of the neighborhood in which the project was to be located. It may have also reflected the growing national interest in the 400th anniversary of the DeSoto Expedition and the accompanying Congressional report issued by anthropologist John R. Swanton in 1939 that traced the route of the journey. GA 5-2 was to be built on a sloped site bounded by Spring Creek Drive, East 14th Street, and East 13th Street in East Rome. It was given the name "Altoview Homes" (changed to Altoview Terrace a month later) because of the project's vista of nearby Mount Alto, located to the southwest of the city.³¹

On June 8, the architects submitted the final working drawings for both DeSoto Homes and Altoview Terrace. Preparations were also made for advertisements of construction bids starting on June 12.³² Chairman Wilson M. Hardy approved both sets of architectural plans on June 12 and June 16, respectively.

The DeSoto Homes plans showed twenty-eight buildings containing 148 residential units, a one-story administrative building, and a large, rectangular central playground area on a level, landscaped 8.7-acre site. All buildings were arranged on a north-south and east-west axis. One-story buildings lined the perimeter of the development along West Ninth Street, North Fifth Avenue, and West Seventh Street. The larger, two-story row houses were placed on the interior of the complex and along a new access drive (later

³⁰ Upper Avenue A Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form

³¹ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome, Georgia," May 15, 1939.

³² Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome, Georgia," June 8, 1939.

named North Fourth Avenue) that connected West Ninth and West Seventh Streets and split the project into two blocks. In addition to the playground space, smaller recreation areas were interspersed between the one-story apartments and an oval children's spray pool was located behind the Administration Building. A gridded network of concrete walks delineated the common landscaped areas and provided access to each of the other buildings and surrounding city sidewalks.

Altoview Terrace was designed as a much smaller development with only nineteen buildings housing ninety-four dwelling units, a one-story community center, and playground on 5.5 acres. The two communities shared similar architectural details in the designs of the one- and two-story residential buildings, including a Spanish Colonial Revival style aesthetic and a variety of one, two, or three bedroom plans. The buildings of both projects were to be constructed of structural terra cotta masonry block walls on concrete slabs with stucco exteriors and slate roofs.

Opposition to the housing project developments, which had been brewing among some citizens since the organization of the City of Rome Housing Authority, came to the fore with a legal injunction to halt work that was issued in Floyd County Superior Court on July 3, 1939. Petitioners argued that the contract between the city and housing authority was illegal and that the city did not have the funds available to proceed with construction.³³ The Authority denied the allegations of contract illegality, claiming that it was created in accordance with state law.³⁴ The court ruled in favor of the Authority in a hearing on July 22, 1939.³⁵

Despite the lawsuit, the Authority initiated land purchases and condemnation proceedings in early July on property in the Fourth Ward and East Rome sections of the city.³⁶ On July 18, construction bids for site clearance and development of both housing projects were opened. The Griffin Construction Company of Atlanta, Georgia was the lowest bidder for DeSoto Homes with a base bid of \$427,759. A.J. Honeycutt Company, Inc., of Birmingham, Alabama came in with the lowest bid for the Altoview

³³ Rome News-Tribune, "4 Citizens Seek an Injunction Upon Housing," 3 July 1939.

³⁴ Rome News-Tribune, "Rome Housing Authority Answers Injunction Suit: Denies any Illegalities," 16 July 1939, p. 1-2.

³⁵ Rome-News Tribune, "Authority Wins First In Series of Legal Fights," 23 July 1939.

³⁶ Rome News-Tribune, "Housing Project Land Purchases Begun in Rome," 2 July 1939, p.1.

Terrace project at \$274,335. United States Housing Administrator Nathan Straus approved the low base bids on July 31, 1939.³⁷

The notice to proceed with clearance and construction of the DeSoto Homes and Altoview Terrace projects was given by the USHA officials on April 28, 1939.³⁸ Demolition began of the forty buildings, thirty-eight of them residences, in the Forth Ward area on September 5, 1939. Clearance of nineteen houses, one store, and one shed on the Altoview Terrace property began shortly thereafter.³⁹ By late October, crews totaling between seventy-five and 100 workers had installed concrete footings on all but three buildings on the DeSoto Homes site and finished erecting foundation walls on three other buildings. At Altoview Terrace, forty-five workers had completed the footings for eight buildings and finished erecting the foundation walls for two buildings.⁴⁰

As work progressed throughout the fall and winter, housing authority commissioners dedicated themselves to resolving minor alterations to the building plans and other construction-related issues. As a means of developing support for the two projects, the Rome Housing Authority sponsored a screening of the documentary "Housing In Our Time" at the DeSoto Theater in downtown Rome on January 26, 1940.⁴¹ By the end of May, the Authority had begun to turn its attention to contract bid requests for interior appliances for the both projects. In a display of the racial inequality of the era, commissioners decided that the white tenants of DeSoto Homes would receive electric refrigerators, while African-American residents would be provided with iceboxes.⁴²

The Authority also began to give consideration to issues relating to tenant selection. Acceptance of resident applications began in July for both Altoview and DeSoto Homes.⁴³ A brochure with a

³⁷ Rome News-Tribune, "Bids Upon Rome Housing Approved At Washington," 31 July 1939.

³⁸ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of Commissioners of Housing Authority of the City of Rome," August 31, 1939.

³⁹ Rome News-Tribune, "Work is Begun Upon Housing Projects Here, 5 September 1939, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Rome News-Tribune, "Rapid Progress Being Made ON Housing Projects Here," 30 October 1939, p. 7.

⁴¹ Rome News-Tribune, "Housing Movie Scheduled Here," 21 January 1940, p. 1.

⁴² Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome," May 23, 1940.

⁴³ Rome News-Tribune, "Housing Authority Ready For Tenant Applications", 21 July 1940.

question and answer format was published by the Rome Housing Authority at this time and distributed to city residents and prospective tenants. Entitled "Questions and Answers About the Housing Projects in Rome," it sought to address topics related to income qualifications, rental applications, and community rules and regulations for the new developments.

In August 1940, citizens of Rome were invited to an open house at the project site and a newspaper report hailed the new low-income housing project as "right up-to-date, modern in every respect and thoroughly convenient."⁴⁴ Construction of DeSoto Homes began to wrap up by mid October and the last recorded contract bid was awarded to the Westinghouse Electric Supply Company in Atlanta for the furnishing of 149 electric meters for DeSoto Homes and ninety-five meters for Altoview Terrace at a cost of \$2,230.16.⁴⁵ Residents started to move into units at the project later that fall. It is believed that the City Of Rome Housing Authority moved its offices into the DeSoto Homes Administration Building on North Fifth Avenue by February 1941.

Management and Modernization of DeSoto Homes, 1940-1980

From 1940 until the early 1970s, it appears that the DeSoto Homes housing project and its residents were subjected to very few changes. At a July 1941 meeting of the Rome Housing Authority, a motion was carried to establish a Children's Clinic in the "two North Rooms on the First Floor of the Administration Building" at DeSoto Homes, but no further mention of this endeavor is made in later minute entries.⁴⁶ The basements of Building Numbers B-2 and B-3 were excavated and converted into needed storage space in 1955.⁴⁷ And, although cracking and failure of stucco was noted as early as 1947 on some building exteriors at both DeSoto Homes and Altoview Terrace, efforts were not made to correct the problems until 1960-1961 when the units were sandblasted and recoated.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Rome News-Tribune, "Man Romans Pay Visits to DeSoto Homes Project," August 1940.

⁴⁵ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome," October 10, 1940.

⁴⁶ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome, Georgia," July 10, 1941.

⁴⁷ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of Housing Authority of the City of Rome," January 20, 1955.

⁴⁸ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Minutes of Regular Meeting of the Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome, Georgia," March 20, 1947.

In 1965, the Housing Authority of the City of Rome adopted the Civil Rights Bill, which legally barred residential discrimination based on race in the various low-income housing communities in the city. Nevertheless, de facto segregation remained at DeSoto Homes. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the project remained predominantly white and did not fully integrate until the late 1980s.

Small projects made to refurbish or upgrade materials at the DeSoto Homes community during this time were generally limited to the replacement of fixtures and appliances. The Authority maintained its headquarters in the DeSoto Homes Administration Building until about 1967 when they moved across the street on North Fifth Avenue into the ground floor office spaces of the Wilson Hardy Apartments high rise building. After that time, the former Administration Building was used exclusively for maintenance and equipment storage.⁴⁹

The first renovation of the DeSoto Homes community was issued in Phase I of the Rome Housing Authority Modernization Program in 1973. This provided for the installation of aluminum screen doors, back door canopies, and interior closet doors, gutter and downspout replacements, and painting of exterior building walls. Rush Engineers of Anniston, Alabama performed the work at a total cost of \$68,217.⁵⁰ The proposed Phase III of the Modernization Program was intended to bring even greater changes in 1974. Plans called for the construction of a new maintenance shop and storage building and renovation of the old Administration Building in order to provide DeSoto Homes residents with community space. However, full funding was not forthcoming due to federal budgetary constraints and the bulk of the project was put on hold.

CIAP Modernization Project

In 1981, the Rome Housing Authority was awarded over \$2 million in federal funding by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as part of the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program (CIAP) to cover modernization costs for the DeSoto Homes and Altoview projects.⁵¹ Building permits were

⁴⁹ Rome News-Tribune, "High Rise Apartment Planned...Bids Due Thursday on Six Story Housing Unit," 25 August 1965, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Housing Authority of the City of Rome, "Phase I Modernization Program, Rome Housing Authority," March 7, 1972.

⁵¹ United States Department of Housing And Urban Development Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program, Comprehensive Assessment/Program Budget Part I-Summary, 1981.

secured in early 1983 and local contractors and laborers were employed by the Rome Housing Authority as a means of providing an economic stimulus in a depressed housing market. Residents had to be relocated as the renovation work carried on through most of the year. Workers replaced the original plaster walls of all buildings with insulated sheetrock and installed new plumbing fixtures, bathroom ceramic tile, kitchen cabinets, windows, exterior doors, and water heaters.⁵²

Renaming of DeSoto Homes and CGP Funded Improvements

Three years later on September 26, 1986, DeSoto Homes was officially renamed Charles A. Hight Homes with the dedication of a wrought iron sign in his honor.⁵³ A businessman by trade who owned his own insurance firm, Mr. Hight was a native of Rome, a World War II veteran, and an active member of the Rome Boys Club. Prior to his death in 1990 at age seventy-six, Charles A. Hight, Sr. served for twenty-three years on the Rome Housing Authority Commission with twelve of those years as Chairman.⁵⁴

In the 1990s a number of small improvements were made to the DeSoto Homes housing project through funding by HUD's Comprehensive Grant Program (CGP). Most notable were the painting and stucco repair of all building exteriors and replacement of all stoves and refrigerators in 1995, the purchase of playground equipment in 1997, and installations of a new playground fence and asphalt shingle roof on the former Administration Building in 1998. Landscape improvements include the repair of concrete walks and re-pavement of the parking lot behind the Administration Building, which were also completed in 1998.⁵⁵

The DeSoto Homes remained occupied until recently. They are currently vacant as the planning process for redevelopment moves forward.

⁵² Wayne Anderson, "Sharp Upturn in Building...Construction permits up \$5 million at mid-year," Rome News-Tribune, 20 July 1983, p. 3A, 5A.

⁵³ Rome News-Tribune, "DeSoto Homes unit retitled for Roman," 24 September 1986, p. 2A.

⁵⁴ Ted Ross, "Charles A. Hight, Sr. dies at 76," Rome News-Tribune 21 October 1990, p. 3A, 5A.

⁵⁵ Northwest Georgia Housing Authority, CGP Program Modernization Work Completed, 1992-2004 for Hight Homes GA 5-01.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. General Site Description:

The DeSoto Homes housing project occupies 8.76 acres of land on a level, parallelogram-shaped lot in the urban, Fourth Ward section of Rome, Georgia. The complex is bounded by West Ninth Street on the north, Turner McCall Boulevard on the south, North Fifth Avenue on the east, and Keelway Drive on the west. North Fourth Avenue intersects the site, running between Turner McCall Boulevard and West Ninth Street.

Surrounding development is a combination of commercial and residential properties. The Northwest Georgia Housing Authority-managed senior citizen high-rise apartments and central offices are located directly to the east of DeSoto Homes, across North Fifth Avenue. A one-story pharmacy building and convenience store at the northeast corner of North Fifth Avenue and Turner McCall Boulevard are also present. The Floyd Medical Center occupies the entire city block to the south and a large, five-story parking garage overlooks DeSoto Homes on the west side of Keelway Drive. Surface parking lots, a small office park, and other individual businesses face the housing project along West Ninth Street. There are three shotgun house type residences located on the northwest corner of West Ninth Street and North Fifth Avenue.

2. Historic Landscape Design

With its emphasis on open areas, courtyard green spaces, and patterned variations of building locations and vistas, the DeSoto Homes historic site design was strongly influenced by United States Housing Authority-recommended planning concepts. In turn, these ideals were largely modeled after Garden City Movement theories and the block plans of modernist social housing estates in Europe. USHA Administrator Nathan Straus was a champion of the idealized New England community design oriented around the village green and felt that integrated open spaces in public housing projects could fulfill a social need for residents by providing recreation areas for children and gardens

that "foster a sense of responsibility."⁵⁶ He also extolled the health benefits of open areas as a method to "assure each dwelling air circulation, sunlight, and a pleasant outlook."⁵⁷

The asymmetrical site plan for the DeSoto Homes project focuses on a large one-acre playground enclosed by seven, two-story buildings on the western edge of the complex. One-story buildings, separated by small open courts of green space, line the northern, eastern, and southern perimeters of the development. Grids of simple paved pathways, some with soldiered red brick curbing, allow for easy pedestrian access throughout the project and connect to the surrounding sidewalks. Former garbage site pads are still present along walkways next to the North Fourth Street access drive.

All of the individual brick-paved, pre-school play areas, sandboxes, and the single oval spray pool shown on the original architectural drawings have been removed. The remnants of William C. Pauley's landscape designs are also no longer discernable. The slide and jungle gym equipment located in the main playground area is now enclosed with a metal fence, which was installed in the mid-1990s. Today, most green space areas simply consist of a grass lawn with tree cover and scattered vegetation. Mature oak, hickory, hackberry, and maple trees are found throughout the development, along with the occasional foundation plantings. Identified plants and shrubbery include crepe myrtle, boxwood, rose bushes, nandina, and burning bush.

3. Buildings and Structures

The DeSoto Homes low-income housing project consists of twenty-seven original residential buildings containing 148 dwelling units and an administration building. The one- and two-story row houses, and one-story semi-detached duplex houses were all built in 1939-1940. The buildings are constructed of structural terra cotta block masonry and designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style with stucco-coated exteriors and terra cotta roof tiles.

⁵⁶ Lawrence J. Vale, From the Puritans to the Projects (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 217.

⁵⁷ United States Housing Authority, Housing and Recreation

Each residential building in the complex is categorized according to one of seven plan types. All units feature a kitchen, living room, bathroom, and one, two, or three bedrooms. Each dwelling has an attached clothesline and pole located in the piece of property at the rear of the unit. The various residential plan type buildings are listed below along with the number of buildings found within the DeSoto Homes community:

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Type A Plan Building | 13 |
| Type B Plan Building | 4 |
| Type C Plan Building | 2 |
| Type D Plan Building | 1 |
| Type E Plan Building | 1 |
| Type F Plan Building | 5 |
| Type G Plan Building | 2 |

Other remaining structures within the DeSoto Homes complex include two non-historic covered mailbox stations located on the west side of North Fourth Avenue at the north and south ends of the street. The wrought iron Charles A. Hight Homes sign located in front of the old Administration Building on North Fifth Avenue was installed as part of a dedication ceremony that renamed the DeSoto Homes housing project after the former Rome Housing Authority commission chairman Charles A. Hight, Sr., in September 1986.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings:
The Northwest Georgia Housing Authority's Maintenance Division has a complete set of architectural and engineering drawings of the DeSoto Homes. They are on file at the Maintenance Division Warehouse, Rome, Georgia.
- B. Early Views:
The Authority houses a collection of early views. These are Site Survey photographs from 1938 and project completion photographs from 1940. The collection is housed at the Authority's Archives, 800 North Fifth Avenue, Rome, Georgia.
- C. Interviews:
The research was informed by conversations with Authority representatives both in Maintenance and Management Departments.
- D. Bibliography:

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United States Housing Authority. Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1940. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941.

- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:
The Record Groups of the Federal Housing Administration at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland and the Southeast Regional Archives in Morrow, Georgia were

investigated; however records for the Atlanta Field Office were only partially located. These records may be useful in further research.

Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was prepared to assist the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Northwest Georgia Housing Authority in meeting their Section 106 responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act as amended. After consultation with the Georgia Historic Preservation Division (HPD), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers the housing to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places based on Criterion A, namely, events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The Authority, as administrator of federal funds allocated for this purpose, wishes to redevelop the site and its plans will have an adverse effect on the eligible property. Thus HUD, the Authority, and HPD entered into a Memorandum of Agreement in 2007 to complete a HABS Level II documentation of the DeSoto Homes. In addition, the Authority has elected to complete a second recordation project that documents the historically associated Altoview Terrace. DeSoto Homes is documented in HABS No. GA-2403, while Altoview Terrace's number is HABS GA-2419, but the documentation has not been submitted to HABS as of 30 September 2013.