

DESOTO HOMES, ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
(Charles Hight Homes)
717 North Fifth Avenue
Rome
Floyd County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2403-A

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, ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
(Charles Hight Homes)

HABS No. GA-2403-A

Location: 717 North Fifth Avenue, Rome, Floyd County,
Georgia

USGS Rome South Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16S 667791
3792625
Coordinate corrected to 34.261360,
-85.176756 on 30 September 2013 using Google
Earth, WGS84 datum, by HABS Collections
Manager Anne Mason. 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 Use: Vacant, Storage Space
To be redeveloped

Significance: Built in 1939-1940, as part of the DeSoto
Homes public housing project in Rome,
Georgia, the Administration Building is
significant for having served as the offices
for the Housing Authority of the City of Rome
from the early 1940s through the late 1960s.
It has also functioned as a community center
and meeting space for residents of DeSoto
Homes.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1939-1940.
2. Architects: The associated architectural firms of Cooper and Cooper and Odus Clay Poundstone.
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: Offices for the Housing Authority of the City of Rome; Community center for DeSoto Homes residents
5. Contractor, Suppliers:

Contractor: Griffin Construction Company, Inc.,
Atlanta, Georgia
Landscape Architect: William C. Pauley, 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 as-built plan for the building was located as well as historic views showing the building after construction.
7. Alterations and additions: Although the exterior appearance of the Administration Building has remained relatively unchanged, the interior plan and materials have been considerably altered over time.

B. Historical Context

The Housing Authority of the City of Rome developed DeSoto Homes as a segregated, federally subsidized, low-rent housing project for white residents. DeSoto Homes, along with Altoview Terrace, which was built for African-American tenants, were two of the earliest housing projects built in Georgia following the passage of the federal United States Housing Act in 1937 and enactment of state enabling legislation for the creation of local public housing authorities in 1938. Located in the Fourth Ward section of Rome, the project was designed in a Spanish Colonial Revival style by the associated Atlanta firms of Cooper and Cooper and

DESOTO HOMES, ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
(Charles Hight Homes)
HABS No. GA-2403-A (Page 3)

Odis Clay Poundstone. The Griffin Construction Company, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia was awarded the construction contract for the project with a low bid of \$427,759. Site clearance and development began in September 1939 and was completed by October 1940. Tenants began moving into the new units by November 11th of that year.

The twenty-eight building Desoto Homes project is located within an urban setting and contains 148 residential units and a public Administrative Building. The one- and two-story buildings are symmetrically arranged to create multiple vistas. The landscaped site plan, designed by landscape architect William C. Pauley, is laced with concrete walkways, small lawns of green space, and a central open playground area.

Located on North Fifth Avenue, the Administration Building was built as part of the original development between 1939 and 1940. The upper level of the building originally served as the rent collection and administrative offices for all of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome prior to the completion of the Wilson M. Hardy Apartments in 1967. During the 1940s and 1950s, the building's basement level served as a community space for resident gatherings and church services. By the late 1960s, the building was primarily used for storage. Renovation work during the 1970s and 1980s greatly altered much of the main level floor plan and replacement of the building's original steel casement windows with anodized aluminum systems.

Between 1940 and the 1980s, lower working class families and individuals comprised most of the residents in DeSoto Homes. By the 1990s, however, the majority of tenants were elderly. In 1986, the project was renamed 'Charles A. Hight Homes' in honor of the businessman and longstanding commission chairman of the Housing Authority of the City of Rome. By 2006, Charles Hight Homes was determined to be functionally obsolete and was designated for potential redevelopment by the Northwest Georgia Housing Authority (formerly the Housing Authority of the City of Rome). The complex currently stands vacant.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is the sole community building that was constructed as part of the housing. Fronting on Fifth Avenue, it is a focal point of the housing.

2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent structural condition, yet much of the interior plan has been altered.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is one story in height with a basement level. The symmetrical façade on North Fifth Avenue has a 25' 6" x 8' raised, four-columned portico entrance. The length of the building is 54'. The overall depth, including the front portico, is 34' 4". Refer to plans for detailed measurements.
2. Foundation: The concrete block walls are predominantly 8" thick; however, a section of the west elevation wall flanking the doors and windows is 1' thick. Most of the basement floor has a clay tile base with a cement finish. Two metal pipe columns on concrete bases support a concrete central beam that runs the width of the basement ceiling.
3. Walls: The building's concrete block exterior walls, roof parapet ends, and portico foundation and pediment are covered with a painted stucco finish.
4. Structural Systems, framing: The building has been constructed with reinforced concrete block. The roof structure is framed using a double truss system with concrete block forming the wall ends.
5. Stoops, porticoes: The raised front portico is accessed by two flanking curved cement stairways with wrought iron railings. Two corner end masonry posts and four fluted wood columns with metal bases support the shallow pitched gable roof. There are three wrought iron railings and the portico floor is quarry tile arranged in a herringbone pattern.
6. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are central double doors at the portico entrance on the front, or east, elevation, central double doors located at the ground floor on the west elevation, and a single door at the ground level on the north elevation that provide access to the building. Original drawings show a single door at the ground floor on the south elevation, however this was later enclosed.

b. Windows and shutters: Aside from the original two, steel frame octagonal fixed windows flanking the double door entrance on the front elevation, all other windows are one-over-one or two-over-two aluminum-framed replacements.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The building is covered with a low-pitched, parapet on side-gabled roof. The front portico and shallow projection at the rear of the building have low-pitched, front-gabled roofs. A centrally placed, octagonal wood louvered vent is located at each parapet gable end. The entire roof surface is covered in replacement, clay-colored asphalt shingle.

b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has a slight eave overhang boxed with continuous brick dentil molding along the cornice. Wood dentils line the frieze of the entrance portico gable roof and the rear gable projection.

c. Cupolas: The building has a central, octagonal-sided cupola on the ridge of the roof. Rectangular, wooden louver vents measuring 1'4" high and 1'9" wide occupy each face of the structure. The cupola is built of 2" x 4" stud post and 2" x 6" joist and rafter framing. Exterior walls are 2 ½" wood sheathing coated with a stucco finish. The roof cap is clad with a sheet metal covering.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The original floor plans are attached; the interior of the building has been completely remodeled, which has resulted in the removal of the original rental office and counter and installation of an interior stairway on the north end of the building. The Administration Building has a massed plan with a main level and lower basement level.

The floor plan of the main level has a large central room with doorways that lead the remaining four office areas. A women's and men's bathroom flanks the entry doors. The former manager's office and general office are located on the south end of the building and are joined by a short pass through area containing the building vault and a closet. On the north end of the

building, the original pass through hall and third bathroom located between the former treatment office and waiting room has been replaced with an interior stairway on the north wall of the building that leads to an exterior door on the lower level. The former waiting room has been converted into a kitchenette.

Architectural drawings of the basement level show a large central recreation room flanked by a carpenter shop to the south, and a mechanical shop on the north end of the building, and an attached kitchen area under the portico foundation. The existing basement level plan is a large open area with a smaller attached room under the portico. A small closet set in the northeast corner of the main room encloses the stairway that was added in the 1980s.

2. Stairways: An interior concrete stairway from the lower level exterior doorway leads to the former treatment room at the northwest corner of the building. This stairway is believed to have been added during renovation work on the building in the early 1980s.
3. Flooring: Replacement asphalt tile is present in the open central area but has been covered with wall-to-wall carpeting in each of the office rooms. The two bathrooms retain the original square pattern black and white ceramic tile. The floor on the ground level has a bare cement finish.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior walls and ceilings are a combination of original plaster and replacement sheetrock and blown ceiling coating with a painted finish.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are solid core wood doors with no panel relief and appear to be replacements.
 - b. Windows: Interior window surrounds are present. Window stools and aprons are capped with sheet metal and have a painted finish.
6. Decorative features and trim: Due to interior renovations, the original wood casement trim is present on some door openings but not throughout. Where present, the original wood baseboards are painted black. The 1939 dedicatory bronze plaque for the

DeSoto Homes housing project is set into the wall near the North Fifth Avenue entrance doors.

7. Hardware: Save for the two bathroom doors, it appears that all original door hardware and locksets have been replaced. The walk-in vault is original to the building.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The building has an updated central HVAC and heating system that was installed in the mid-1990s.
 - b. Lighting: All original lighting fixtures in the offices and common room have been replaced with florescent tube lighting. The original incandescent lighting fixtures are still present in the building's two bathrooms.
 - c. Plumbing: The plumbing systems in the two bathrooms were installed as part of the original development. With the addition of the interior stairway, the plumbing system that once served the original third bathroom appears to have been relocated into the kitchenette. There are no water heaters present in the building.
9. Original furnishings: The main level was most recently used as a community space and the basement level for storage. Both areas have been emptied.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The former Administration Building is centrally located within the Desoto Homes block facing North Fifth Avenue. It has about a 15'-20' setback and sits on a slight embankment that slopes down to the rear of the building from east to west. A dark, wrought iron sign with 'Charles A Hight Homes' spelled out in white, raised lettering is located in front of the building. Installed in 1986, the sign stands approximately 4 ½' in height and is held up by two squared wrought iron supports with woven vine detailing and pyramidal caps. Foundation plantings are located at each end of the portico and both corners of the front elevation.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Existing architectural and engineering drawings, historic views, documents and records, and interviews were used to compile this information. Much of the material was located at the Authority's Archives or within the Maintenance Department's files. For a full bibliography, please refer to Part III Sources of Information for DeSoto Homes, HABS No. GA-2403.

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.