

DESOTO HOMES, BUILDING NOS. B-1 - B-4  
(Charles Hight Homes)  
709-725 North Fifth Avenue  
Rome  
Floyd County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2403-C

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, PLAN BUILDING NOS. B-1 - B-4  
(Charles Hight Homes)

HABS No. GA-2403-C

Location: 709-725 North Fifth Avenue, Rome, Floyd  
County, Georgia

Building Numbers B-1, B-2, B-3, and B-4 are  
located along North Fifth Avenue on the  
eastern perimeter of the DeSoto Homes complex.

USGS Rome South Quadrangle, Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16S 667791  
3792625  
Corrected on 21 October 2013 using Google  
Earth, WGS84 datum by HABS Collections  
Technician Angela Sloan. The coordinates  
represent the approximate center of the roof  
of each building. There are no restrictions on  
its release to the public.

Building No. B-1: 34.260909, -85.176730  
Building No. B-2: 34.261138, -85.176772  
Building No. B-3: 34.261508, -85.176832  
Building No. B-4: 34.261735, -85.176865

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

Present Occupants: Vacant

Present Use: Public housing to be redeveloped

Significance: Built in 1940 under the United States Housing  
Authority, DeSoto Homes is significant as the  
first federally funded public housing project  
in Rome, Georgia. Building Numbers B-1, B-2,  
B-3, and B-4 are the four examples of the Type  
B Plan Building in the DeSoto Homes housing  
project. The Type B Plan Building is a one-  
story, duplex with one-bedroom units.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1939-1940.
2. Architects: The associated firms of Cooper and Cooper and Odie 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: Public housing units for the Housing Authority of the City of Rome and Northwest Georgia Housing Authority.
5. Builder, 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 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. Aside from the replacement of the original doors and windows, all four Type B Plan Buildings generally retain their original appearance and interior plans.
7. Alterations and additions: The exterior stucco finish on all Type B Plan Buildings were repaired and repainted in 1960 and again in 1995-96. As part of Phase I of the Rome Housing Authority's building modernization plans during the early 1970s, aluminum

screen doors were replaced and rear canopies and gutters were also changed. During the larger CIAP modernization program in the early 1980s, new bathroom fixtures, tile floors, and sheetrock were installed, as were new kitchen cabinets. The original steel casement windows in each building were replaced with double and tripartite anodized aluminum sash windows. Original gas heaters were replaced with the existing wall furnaces and water heaters were upgraded and relocated to utility closets within the kitchens. Subsequent renovation work completed during the 1990s included interior improvements (painting, new bathroom tiling) and additional gutter and appliance replacements.

## 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 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

The four Type B Plan Buildings in DeSoto Homes were constructed as part of the original project between 1939 and 1940. Sited along North Fifth Avenue on the east side of the project, the one-story Type B Plan Buildings are the smallest building type in DeSoto Homes. Each building contains only two, one-bedroom apartments and these units were historically reserved for single, elderly residents. In 1955, lower access doors and a basement level were added in Building Numbers B-2 and B-3 for use as equipment storage. Each building was later renovated as part of the modernization plans of the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in

the replacement of much of the interior fabric in all units, removal of the original steel casement fenestration, and installation of metal front doors, screen doors, and rear canopies.

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:

There are four Type B Plan Buildings located with the DeSoto Homes project. All were built in 1939-1940 as single story, duplex unit dwellings with Spanish Colonial Revival style architectural detailing. Each apartment has a three-and-a-half room standardized floor plan featuring a kitchen with a utility closet, a living room, one bedroom, and a full bathroom.

#### 2. Condition of fabric:

The buildings are in good structural condition. Despite the replacement of the historic windows and doors and renovation of much of the interior fabric, the original appearances and floor plans of the buildings are intact.

### B. Description of Exterior:

#### 1. Overall dimensions:

A Type B Plan Building is one story in height with a symmetrical facade. It measures 41'8" in length and has an overall depth of 26'4". Refer to plans for detailed measurements.

#### 2. Foundations:

The foundations of Type B Plan Buildings are composed of 8'' thick concrete block wall footings supporting a reinforced 8'' concrete slab.

Building Numbers B-1 and B-4 have 2' high crawl spaces accessed through openings at the rear foundations covered with a metal grate. Building Numbers B-2 and B-3 each have a full height basement with concrete slab flooring used for storage space that is accessed through a covered concrete ramp located in the center of the rear elevation.

3. Walls:

Walls are 8'' thick structural terra cotta block, also known as hollow tile block, and covered with a grayish-blue painted stucco finish.

4. Structural Systems, framing:

The Type B Plan Building is constructed of structural terra cotta block masonry with a 2'' x 6'' trussed frame roof.

5. Porches, stoops:

The front elevation of a Type B Plan Building has one shared, flat canopy porch supported by two 4'' metal pipe columns and a concrete slab foundation. Arched concrete steps with cantilevered metal canopies and wrought iron railings are located at each back doorway on the north and south ends of the rear elevation.

6. Chimneys:

Each Type B Plan Building has two interior end chimneys. All are transversely placed double flue vent chimneys coated with a stucco finish.

7. Openings

a. Doorways and doors:

Each building has two doors accessing each apartment unit on the front elevation. The two back doors are located on each end of all four buildings. The basement access doors on Building Numbers B-2 and B-3 are located in the center of the rear elevation. All existing

exterior doors are flat metal replacements with aluminum screen doors.

b. Windows and shutters:

The façade of each building has a centrally placed double window and corner windows located at each end of the elevation. The rear of the building features two small windows and a larger central double window. Both building ends also have one window opening in addition to the corner unit. Although the four Type B Plan Buildings retain the sizes and locations of the original fenestration, all current windows are non-historic two-over-two, anodized aluminum sash replacements of the historic steel casement multi-light windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

Each Type B Plan Building is covered with a low-pitched gable-on-hip roof with wood louvered vents separated by the chimneys at the gable ends. All roofs are covered with original red slate tile shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The Type B Plan Building roof has a slight eave overhang that is boxed with continuous brick dentil molding of alternating stretcher and header courses along the cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Type B Plan Buildings have a rectangular massed plan that is two units wide and two units deep. Each building contains two, three-and-a-half room residential units. The apartment of each standardized interlocking floor plan has a linear kitchen with an enclosed utility closet, living room, a hallway and coat closet, one bedroom with a closet, and one bathroom. Adjacent apartment plans are reversed; therefore, the bedrooms in the south unit is located at the rear of the building off of the hallway, while bedroom in the north unit is

placed at the front of the building and is accessed through the living room.

2. Stairways:

The buildings are single story and have no stairway.

3. Flooring:

All four Type B Plan Buildings have asphalt tile flooring applied over concrete slab throughout, save for bathrooms, which have replacement square ceramic tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

All remaining original walls retain a plaster finish; however, due to the extensive renovations made to the DeSoto Homes housing project during the mid 1980s, many of the Type B Plan Buildings' walls and ceilings are sheetrock with a painted finish.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

All Type B Plan Buildings appear to retain their original interior two-panel wood doors. Interior closet doors were added as part of the modernization work in the 1970s. Doorways have 3 1/2" wide, plain wood casing with a painted finish.

b. Windows:

Interior window surrounds are generally devoid of casing and detailing save for unadorned, blocked stools and aprons with sheet metal capping and a painted finish.

6. Decorative features and trim:

Developed as low-income housing units, the apartment interiors of Type B Plan Buildings are minimally ornamented. All interior partitions and doors are painted a uniform off-white. One of the few distinctive features is painted black clay tile base molding found in each room, save for the bathroom.

7. Hardware:

Most interior doors retain their original brass doorknob and mortis lockset hardware although examples of cylindrical lock metal door sets on closet doors installed in the 1970s are also present.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:

Apartment units in each building have been updated to include modern central HVAC and wall furnace heating systems. The original water heaters have been replaced and relocated within utility closets next to the kitchen.

b. Lighting:

Apartment units in each building have been updated to include adequate electrical wiring systems with modern breaker panels, wall outlets, and overhead lighting fixtures in the kitchen, living room, and hallway areas.

c. Plumbing:

All Type B Plan Buildings have plumbing systems installed as part of the original development. Kitchen sinks and bathroom fixtures have been updated over time during the 1970s and 1980s. The original water heaters have been replaced and relocated within utility closets next to the kitchen.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design:

The four Type B Plan Buildings are oriented to the east and staggered along North Fifth Avenue, flanking the Administration Building. Building Numbers B-1 and B-2 are located to the north and B-3 and B-4 are to the south. Single concrete walks run from each building porch entrance to the North Fifth Avenue sidewalk. Angled automobile parking areas for the residents are located at north and south ends of North Fourth Avenue and Keelway Drive. A semi-circular lot is also located in the area of the former spray pool behind the Administration Building.

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 yet to be assigned.