

**Georgia Historical Society (GHS) Marker Program Application**  
**Historical Research Paper for**  
**University Homes, Atlanta, Georgia**

Submitted: June 30, 2021

Marker approved by GHS: August 27, 2021

The University Homes housing project, adjoining the newly established Atlanta University Center<sup>1</sup> and the historic Friendship Baptist Church, admitted its first residents on April 17, 1937. It was the first federally funded New Deal housing project built specifically for Black families.<sup>2</sup> Constructed alongside partner project Techwood Homes (1936) for white families, the University Homes grand opening took place nearly eight months after the opening of Techwood, and a little over a year after the death of its founder and champion, former Atlanta University president and civil rights leader, Dr. John Hope.

Initially intended to house nearly 800 Black families, the project's final construction tallied at 675 units.<sup>3</sup> The project as built was more austere in its decoration and embellishments than it had first appeared in architectural renderings published in the *Atlanta Constitution* just a couple of years earlier, and many of University Homes' flat-roofed structures topped out at two-stories as opposed to the rendered three.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, simple projecting balconies on the second floors allowed residents access to fresh air and provided a covering for each unit's private entrance, an access strategy that eliminated shared hallways and allowed each resident to feel a sense of "ownership" and control over their domicile.<sup>5</sup> The eight storefronts in the University Homes Commercial and Administration Building (later Roosevelt Hall) on Fair Street were filled with establishments deemed essential to promote health and hygiene: barbers, pharmacies, groceries, and a dairy shop. Communal laundry facilities and a drying room were also available to all tenants.<sup>6</sup> Such shared programs, deliberately built into the project's design to positively shape the lived experience of residents, clearly demonstrated some of the goals first envisioned by Dr. Hope and his one-time project partner, Atlanta businessman, Charles F. Palmer.

Following their completion, both University and Techwood Homes quickly became national models for slum-clearance projects in other US cities following enactment of the National Housing Acts of 1934 and 1937. Having been constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA) on land formerly occupied by two of Atlanta's most ill-regarded slums—the Beaver Slide neighborhood in the case of University Homes, and the Tech Flats neighborhood for Techwood—the housing projects became prime examples used to support and justify racially segregated slum clearance and

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<sup>1</sup> A physical union of four of Atlanta's premier historically black colleges and universities on the city's southwest side.

<sup>2</sup> Christina E. Crawford, "Expanding the Interwar Housing Map," Atlanta Housing Interplay, published 2020, <https://www.atlhousing.org/introduction>; Carol A. Flores, "US Public Housing in the 1930s: The First Projects in Atlanta, Georgia," *Planning Perspectives* 9 (1994): 422.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence J. Vale, *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 54; "Housing Project Here Start in 60 Days: Atlanta Sponsors of Development Ready for Work," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 October 1933, A1; Katie Marages Schank, "Producing the Projects: Atlanta and the Cultural Creation of Public Housing, 1933-2011" (PhD Diss., Washington, D.C., The George Washington University, 2016), 110.

<sup>4</sup> Flores, 420; Schank, 109-112.

<sup>5</sup> Flores, 420; Schank, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Flores, 416-418; Schank, 117.

development.<sup>7</sup> However, while Techwood Homes has predominantly been framed as the culmination of Palmer's dreams of what public housing should look like—garnered from housing Grand Tours of Europe and Palmer's personal research into the subject on America's home front—University Homes can and should be differentiated as the autonomous brainchild of Dr. Hope that he envisioned long before Palmer became involved.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Hope foresaw the University Homes project as a critical element of a larger experimental space around the Atlanta University Center, and he asserted that the inner excellence of Black Atlantans would be cultivated and brought to the exterior surface at University Homes.<sup>9</sup> The project would be a type of laboratory for social change, a “university settlement”<sup>10</sup> drawing power from its physical contiguity with the consortium of higher education institutions at the Atlanta University Center that Hope had *also* helped to forge (and that is recognized as a National Historic District). Hope's desire to uplift the tenants at University Homes was enacted through the implementation of community-oriented and cooperative programming at Roosevelt Hall, the project's administrative center that today stands as the project's only remaining building.<sup>11</sup> Together with civil engineer O. I. Freeman and renowned local architect W. J. Sayward, Dr. Hope secured Palmer's involvement in the University Homes project in the summer of 1933, with the site already selected and plans underway.<sup>12</sup> Federal authorities in Washington D.C. approved both University Homes and Techwood Homes projects on October 13<sup>th</sup> of 1933, under the proviso that the two housing developments be constructed simultaneously.<sup>13</sup>

While both the University Homes and Techwood Homes projects were met with considerable animosity by white Atlantans who worried about the long-term effects of government intervention in free-market housing, such fears were mitigated in a positive media campaign spearheaded by Hope and Palmer with the help of Clark Howell, Jr., publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and then-mayor of Atlanta, James L. Key.<sup>14</sup> The first artistic renderings of both projects appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* on October 15, 1933 and were presented to the public as opportunities for much-needed public work in a context where local unemployment rates had remained high since the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>15</sup> It was not until 1934 that the Beaver Slide slum was at last demolished to make way for the University Homes building project, the long-awaited plunge of dynamite delivered by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes on September 29. Dedication of the low-rent housing construction project was proudly presided over by the increasingly frail Dr. Hope, whom many feared would not live to see the project's completion.<sup>16</sup> Hope did die in February 1936, over a year before the first tenants moved into University Homes.

Federal funding for public housing projects shifted delivery methods after the National Housing Act of 1937, which required establishment of local housing authorities to build and administer low-rent

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<sup>7</sup> Flores, 411.

<sup>8</sup> Charles F. Palmer, *Adventures of a Slum Fighter* (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1955), 16; John Sugg, *How Hope Came to Atlanta*, (Atlanta: The Alisias Group, Inc.), 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Sugg, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Christina E. Crawford, “Black Social Condenser,” *JSAH* (Forth.), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, (Forth.), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Flores, 411; Palmer, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Flores, 414.

<sup>14</sup> Palmer, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Flores, 415.

<sup>16</sup> Palmer, 237; Sugg, 15.

projects. Both University Homes and Techwood Homes were expanded under the direction of the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA). Charles Palmer was the first Chairman of the AHA, and in that role, he sought to both raze additional slum neighborhoods and to raise Atlanta's profile as a public housing leader. John Hopes Homes, bearing Hope's name in tribute to Palmer's one-time colleague and friend, added an additional 600 units adjacent to University Homes in 1938.<sup>17</sup>

Both University Homes and John Hopes Homes were allowed to fall into disrepair in the second half of the 20th century, and despite AHA's efforts to rehabilitate the two projects in the 1990s, both were demolished as part of the US Housing and Urban Development HOPE VI program.<sup>18</sup> University Homes' housing buildings were completely gone by 2009, and only the original Administration Building, Roosevelt Hall, remains on the site today.

As contemporary attempts are made to strengthen the pillars of Black excellence constructed by Dr. Hope early in the 20th century through continued expansion of Atlanta's historically black colleges and universities and the recruitment of tech companies to Atlanta's West Side,<sup>19</sup> a new mixed-income housing project is being built on the land formerly occupied by University Homes. Billed by the AHA as a "revitalized master planned community," the Scholar's Landing housing project will maintain the intellectual aura of University Homes in name while hopefully serving to bring the vision of Dr. Hope into the present era.

Residents of Atlanta and visitors alike would greatly benefit from awareness of University Homes' historical significance as the first federally funded public housing project for Black Americans, the brainchild of AUC President and influential Black intellectual, Dr. John Hope, and as a shining example of housing and landscape design excellence from the New Deal era that was built on Atlanta's West Side. Because of the project's almost complete physical erasure through demolition, University Homes deserves recognition through a Georgia Historical Marker.

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<sup>17</sup> Palmer, 244-45.

<sup>18</sup> Sugg, 29. For information on HOPE VI see [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/ph/hope6](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/hope6).

<sup>19</sup> For information on Apple's new technology center at Atlanta University, see <https://www.ajc.com/education/apple-southern-company-to-fund-new-tech-hub-at-atlanta-university-center/WNADIY5NVZFN3GHAWFJ5ATLHIU/>.

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**Georgia Historical Marker Program Application**  
**Documentation Worksheet for**  
**University Homes, Atlanta, Georgia**

Fact One
The University Homes housing project admitted its first residents on April 17, 1937. It was the first federally-funded New Deal housing project built specifically for Black families.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Christina E. Crawford, "Expanding the Interwar Housing Map," Atlanta Housing Interplay, 2020; Carol A. Flores, "US Public Housing in the 1930s: The First Projects in Atlanta, Georgia," <i>Planning Perspectives</i> 9 (1994): 420.	Digitally; <a href="https://www.atlhousing.org/introduction">https://www.atlhousing.org/introduction</a> <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20</a>

Fact Two
Initially intended to house nearly 800 Black families, the University Homes project's final construction tallied at 675 units.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Lawrence J. Vale, <i>Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities</i> (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 54.	Digitally; scan of physical book

Fact Three
Together with civil engineer O. I. Freeman and renowned local architect W. J. Sayward, University Homes' founder and champion Dr. John Hope secured local businessman Charles F. Palmer's involvement in the University Homes project in the summer of 1933, with the site already selected and plans underway.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Charles F. Palmer, <i>Adventures of a Slum Fighter</i> (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1955), 5; Flores, 411.	Digitally; scan of physical book <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20</a>

Fact Four
The federal government in Washington D.C. approved both the University Homes and Techwood Homes housing projects on October 13 <sup>th</sup> of 1933, under the proviso that the two housing developments be constructed simultaneously.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Carol A. Flores, "US Public Housing in the 1930s: The First Projects in Atlanta, Georgia," <i>Planning Perspectives</i> 9 (1994): 414	Digitally; <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20</a>

Fact Five
The first artistic renderings of University Homes appeared in the <i>Atlanta Constitution</i> on October 15, 1933, where they appeared as opportunities for much-needed public work in a context where local unemployment rates had remained high since the onset of the Great Depression.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Carol A. Flores, "US Public Housing in the 1930s: The First Projects in Atlanta, Georgia," <i>Planning Perspectives</i> 9 (1994): 415.	Digitally; <a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02665439408725805?journalCode=rppe20</a>

Fact Six
The former Beaver Slide slum was demolished on September 29 <sup>th</sup> , 1934 to make way for the University Homes building project. The long-awaited plunge of dynamite was delivered by US Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, and the dedication of the low-rent housing construction project was proudly presided over by the increasingly frail Dr. John Hope.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Charles F. Palmer, <i>Adventures of a Slum Fighter</i> (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1955), 237.	Digitally; scan of physical book

Fact Seven
Dr. John Hope died in February 1936, over a year before the first tenants moved into University Homes.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
John Sugg, "How Hope Came to Atlanta," (Atlanta: The Alisias Group, Inc.), 6.	Digitally; scan of physical book

Fact Eight
Both University and Techwood Homes expanded under the direction of the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) in the late 1930s. John Hope Homes, bearing Hope's name in tribute to Palmer's one-time colleague and friend, added an additional 600 units adjacent to University Homes in 1938.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Charles F. Palmer, <i>Adventures of a Slum Fighter</i> (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1955), 244-5.	Digitally; scan of physical book

Fact Nine
All University Homes' housing buildings were demolished as part of the US Housing and Urban Development HOPE VI program in 2009, and only the original Administration Building, Roosevelt Hall, remains on the site today.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
John Sugg, "How Hope Came to Atlanta," (Atlanta: The Alisias Group, Inc.), 29.	Digitally; scan of physical book For more information on HOPE VI see <a href="https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/hope6">https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/hope6</a> .

Fact Ten
In 2010, Atlanta Housing Authority was awarded a Choice Neighborhoods (CN) Planning Grant by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to begin a revitalization project at the former site of University Homes.

Source	How and Where was the Source Accessed?
Atlanta Housing Authority website	Digitally; <a href="https://cnatlanta.org/placemaking/housing/">https://cnatlanta.org/placemaking/housing/</a>

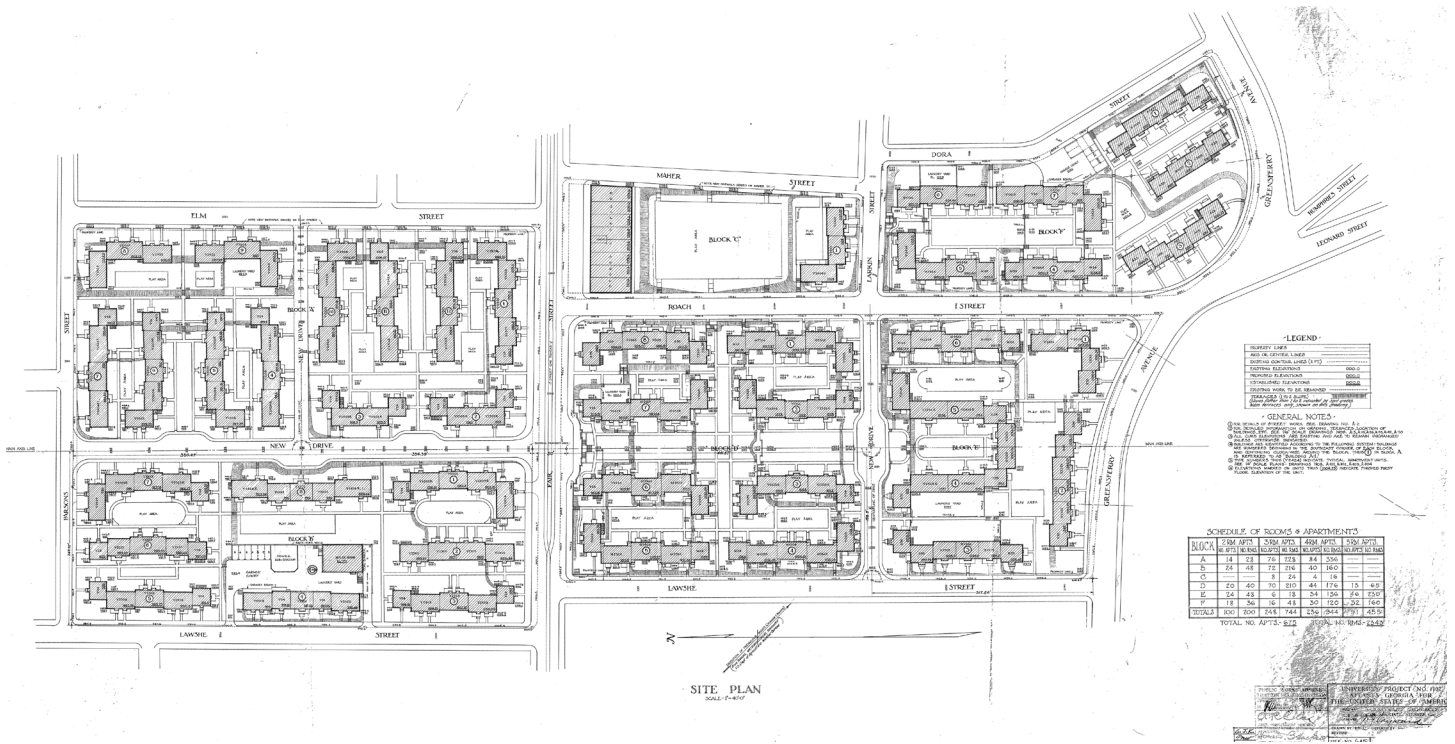




**Wood frame houses in the Beaver Slide neighborhood, with Spelman College in the background, Atlanta, GA, 1934.** "Houses in slum area," Neighborhood Union Collection, auc.050.b14f15.18930000.pho0001. (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library).



**Construction of University Homes, with Spelman College in the background, Atlanta, GA, c. 1936.** PWA Housing Division photograph, Charles F. Palmer papers, Box 167, Folder 10 (Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library).



**University Housing Project site plan, Atlanta, GA, 1935.** Architects: Edwards & Sayward, drawn by Robert Logan with O.I. Freeman, Engineer; oversight by PWA Housing Division. "University Project No. 1102, Site Plan," 8 January 1935, University Homes Records, UNIV005-003 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**University Housing Project birdseye view, Atlanta, GA, late 1934.** Architects: Edwards & Sayward, Landscape Architect: William C. Pauley, Engineer: O.I. Freeman. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs, National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives Identifier (NAID) 195307.



**Construction of University Homes, Black residential enclave, Atlanta, GA, c. 1936.** Charles F. Palmer papers, Box 167, Folder 10 (Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library).



**Dedication of University Homes held in the Horse Shoe Court on Larkin Street, May 1, 1937.** University Homes Records, 2015.0058.5.10, photograph UNIV 2019.0008b (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**Figure 20: University Homes two-story apartment type, Atlanta, GA, 1936.** University Homes Records, 2015.0058.5.23 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**Administration Building at University Homes (later Roosevelt Hall), 1936.** “University Homes construction progress photograph #190,” 17 October 1936, University Homes Records, 2015.0058.5.2 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**University Homes two-story apartment type under construction, Atlanta, GA, 1936.** University Homes Records, photograph UNIV2013\_img\_01665 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**University Homes street view under construction, Atlanta, GA, 1936.** University Homes Records, photograph UNIV2013\_img\_01666 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**University Homes two-story apartment type under construction, Atlanta, GA, 1936.** University Homes Records, photograph UNIV2013\_img\_01711 (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



**University Homes, official inspection, circa 1937.** University Homes Records, Photograph UNIV 2013.00412, Public Works Administration, (Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta Housing Archives, The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta).



University Homes  
1937-2009