

PROGRAM TO ENHANCE RESEARCH & SCHOLARSHIP (PERS) PROPOSAL
Atlanta Housing Interplay: Plotting Atlanta on the Interwar/New Deal Housing Map (Phases I, II)

Christina E. Crawford (Principal Investigator)
Assistant Professor, Architectural History
Emory University Art History Department

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Atlanta was the site of both the first so-called “slum clearance” project in the United States, in 1934, and of America's first completed—though segregated—federally-funded public housing: Techwood Homes (for white families), and University Homes (for black families). These projects, composed of low-slung brick apartment buildings set in footpath-crossed open spaces, became models for New Deal housing projects built throughout the U.S. in the years following enactment of the National Housing Acts of 1934 and 1937. These foundational sites played a significant role in setting the aesthetic language and planning logic for American public housing of the mid-20th century, yet they have been overshadowed by later projects in cities like New York and Chicago, where architectural scholarship is already abundant. Through a detailed investigation of Techwood and University Homes, this research project seeks to plot Atlanta on the interwar architectural map, establishing the city’s role as a clearinghouse for European social housing ideas in the U.S., and as the earliest home-grown precedent for New Deal public housing.

Phase I, currently underway with support from the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship (ECDS), charts a geography of architectural influence for Techwood and University through archival research, digitization, and mapping of foreign precedents brought back to Atlanta by real-estate mogul turned housing crusader, Charles Palmer, the driving force behind Techwood’s development. I am culling evidence from Palmer’s personal papers that reside at Emory’s Rose Library. Specifically, my research targets materials related to Palmer’s three European fact-finding missions in the early 1930s to visit housing sites he deemed worthy of study and possible replication. A series of questions drive the initial research. Which countries, cities, and housing projects did Palmer elect to visit? Who did he meet at those sites? What graphic and textual materials did he bring back to Atlanta? Ultimately, and most importantly, how did information collected in those travels influence the designs of Techwood and University Homes? With a student assistant, I am cataloging correspondence, maps, architectural plans, photographs, booklets, and ephemera for digitization and georeferencing by the Emory University Library digitization team and ECDS collaborators. Palmer’s motion picture films of his European trips—used to convince local and federal constituencies of the need for a comprehensive U.S. public housing program—will also be included in the project. The end result of Phase I will be a website—a simple online platform that serves as a cartographic and chronological entry point to the digitized material.

Phase II, for which I am requesting PERS funding, will entail hiring a research assistant to oversee the website launch in Summer 2017, begin outreach with local archives, and prepare materials for the graduate research seminar I will teach on Techwood/University in Spring 2018. Each student in this seminar will be assigned a research repository to mine for materials on the two housing projects. These repositories will include the archives and libraries of the Atlanta Housing Authority, Atlanta University (Woodruff Library), Georgia State, Georgia Tech, and University of Georgia as well as the Atlanta History Center, and the National Archives (where many related materials have already been digitized). In addition to gathering more material on the projects, the Phase II will engage in deep architectural analysis of the materials, to determine how and in what ways European precedents made their way into Atlanta’s public housing architecture, and what elements emerged from Techwood and University to influence other sites in North America.

PROJECT BUDGET

| Personnel Expenses | rate | hrs / wk | weeks | subtotal |
|---|-------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Student Research Assistant (Summer 2017) | \$12.00 | 20 | 12 | \$2,880.00 |
| Student Research Assistant (Fall 2017) | \$12.00 | 6 | 16 | \$1,152.00 |
| 3D modeling for Techwood and University sites | | | | \$2,000.00 |
| Supplies | | | | |
| Archival digitization funds for seminar students <i>Funding for digitization of archival materials</i> | | | | \$1,000.00 |
| Travel Expenses | | | | |
| Archival transportation funds for seminar students <i>MARTA, zipcar, Lyft for archival visits throughout Atlanta</i> | | | | \$1,000.00 |
| | | | Phase II total | \$8,032.00 |