

**Narrative History
Tindall Heights
Macon, Bibb County,
Georgia**



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Prepared for

The Macon Housing Authority

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Cover - Front & Back: Circa 1961 Photograph of Tindall Heights, Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority.

Table of Contents

List of Figures..... iii

Introduction 1

Narrative History 2

Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century 2

1930s 2

1940s 3

1950s 9

1960s 11

1970s 11

1980 to Present 12

Bibliography 17

List of Figures

Figure 1: Henry Bascom Steagall	2
Figure 2: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.....	3
Figure 3: Original Floor Plans	4
Figure 4: Architectural Rendering of Tindall Heights.....	5
Figure 5: The members of the Advisory Board for Black Housing.....	6
Figure 6 Robert Cummings of 115 Tindall Avenue was the first applicant for a home in Tindall Heights	6
Figure 7: Mr. and Mrs. J.L. Wilson’s family moves into apartment 37-H.....	7
Figure 8: Conditions that black families were moving from.....	7
Figure 9: Low-rent housing complexes in Macon (1940).....	8
Figure 10: Location of the playground	8
Figure 11: Snapshots from July 1941	8
Figure 12: Otis Redding receiving keys to a new convertible from Phil Walden outside Tindall Heights	9
Figure 13: Relationship of Tindall Heights to Felton Homes	10
Figure 14: Visitors and housing authority members visit Tindall Heights during the circa 1961 renovations.....	11
Figure 15: Grow Beautiful campaign flag.....	11
Figure 16: Mrs. Mamie Curtis, 67-E in her yard.....	12
Figure 17: Concrete steps installed by MHA in March 1970 at Building 73.....	12
Figure 18: Extant versus demolished buildings	13
Figure 19: 2009 Aerial of Tindall Heights	13
Figure 20: Diagram of road alignment changes to the Tindall Height	14
Figure 21: Building being moved from the Tindall Heights Extension along Elizabeth St.....	14
Figure 22: Location of the park	14
Figure 23: Tony Oxford, Macon Police Department, Macon Housing Authority Unit.....	15
Figure 24: Opening of the Macon Police Department Office at Tindall Heights.....	15
Figure 25: Lena Billingslea walking through Tindall Heights.....	16

Introduction

The Macon Housing Authority (MHA) in 2011 requested \$22 million of HOPE VI¹ grant funding for the revitalization of Tindall Heights. In the application, MHA proposed to demolish all the existing units with on-site replacement of 299 units, off-site construction of 136 new units and acquisition and rehabilitation of five additional units. The first off-site phase, Phase I-Bartlett Crossing, received a Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) award in 2009 for 9 percent tax credits in the construction of 75 family rental units. The second off-site phase, Phase II, will provide 75 additional single-family rental housing units in scattered locations in the immediate vicinity of the Tindall Heights neighborhood. Nine of which will be on the former Tindall Heights site. Phases I, and Phase II units would be used as relocation housing when demolition begins on Tindall Heights. The overall project would replace the 412 public housing units with 417 low-income units and 26 market-rate units, totaling 443 new units.

In anticipation of this funding MHA enlisted the services of The Jaeger Company in 2011, a preservation planning and landscape architectural firm from Gainesville, Georgia to prepare archival documentation of the Tindall Heights housing complex. This included 142 digital archival photographs documenting the landscape; 567 digital archival photographs documenting the 56 buildings (55 apartment buildings and 1 administration building); and 43 photographs documenting the interiors of the three types of apartments. In conjunction with this work, The Jaeger Company also compiled research on Tindall Heights and prepared a narrative history.

On May 23, 2011 MHA was informed that they did not receive the HOPE VI grant, so the revitalization of Tindall Heights was put on hold. Now, as of January 2015, MHA has determined that the revitalization of Tindall Heights is to be a priority. To fund the demolition, the MHA is utilizing on-hand funding. Wishing to continue in the good faith effort begun in 2011, MHA engaged the services of LaBrie Consulting, a preservation planning

firm from Gainesville, Georgia to revise the 2011 archival documentation, and narrative history of the Tindall Heights Complex for acceptance by SHPO.

The MHA's current plan is to demolish the 412 units currently located on the 28-acre Tindall Heights site and remove the old, failing infrastructure. In its place, the plan calls for new infrastructure and a mixed-used use development consisting of five segments. Approximately 8.5 acres will become a planned neighborhood-oriented commercial center. The remaining 19.5 acres will be developed in four phases of new affordable housing consisting of 270 units: Phase I - 76 Senior Units (mid-rise); Phase II - 64 Family Units (townhouses); Phase III - 65 Family Units (townhouses); and Phase IV - 65 Family Units (townhouses).

Tindall Heights is located southwest of downtown Macon and is bounded by Plant Street, Nussbaum Avenue, Little Richard Penniman Boulevard and College Drive (some maps refer to this as Elizabeth Street). The property is situated immediately west of the Tindall Heights National Register Historic District, listed in 1993. This public housing complex was originally constructed in 1940 with expansions in 1942 and 1963. It was the first public housing complex for African-Americans in Macon, Bibb County, Georgia.

¹ HOPE VI is a major HUD program that began in 1992. This program was intended to revitalize the worst public housing projects into mixed-income developments. As of 2005, the program had distributed \$5.8 billion through 446 federal block grants to cities for these developments.

Historical Narrative

Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century

The events in the United States leading to the establishment of public housing laws in Georgia began with casual interest in the later 19th century with investigations into large urban slum areas. This interest was believed to be sparked by an 1853 epidemic in Naples, Italy that stemmed from insanitary housing, as related by Jack Cutler, the first Executive Director of the Macon Housing Authority to students at Georgia Baptist College in February 1940.² The first government efforts to alleviate the conditions of low income housing were directed at developers, by the enactment of the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932. This Act made loans to private corporations for the construction of low-income housing. The National Housing Act of 1934 was passed by the U.S. Legislature to help relieve unemployment and to stimulate release of private credit to individual home owners for repairs and construction. This act led to the creation of the Federal Housing Administration with its two basic mortgage insurance programs: Section 203 (single family) and Section 207 (multi-family). The government soon realized that this major effort to stimulate housing construction did not provide housing for lower income families. This led to the United States Housing Act of 1937 (also referred to as the Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, see *Figure 1*) that formally established the federal public housing program. The United States Public Housing Authority was created by this act, which provided loans to local public housing authorities to construct low-income rental housing. A similar act, the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act was passed to provide low-income housing to rural farm workers.³

1930s

The Macon Housing Authority was chartered in 1938, after the State of Georgia adopted laws allowing the State to take advantage of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937.⁴ The Georgia Legislature

² "Low-Rent Housing is Explained to Group," *Macon Broadcast*, 10 February 1940.

³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD Historical Background: The 1930s," available from <http://www.hud.gov>; Internet; accessed 25 August 2010.

⁴ Macon Housing Authority, "About MHA," available from <http://www.maconhousing.com>; Internet; accessed 25 August 2010.



Figure 1: Henry Bascom Steagall (May 19, 1873 - November 22, 1943) was a United States Representative from Alabama. He was chairman of the Committee on Banking and Currency and in 1933 co-sponsored the Glass-Steagall Act with Carter Glass, an act that introduced banking reforms and established the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). Alongside Senator Robert F. Wagner he co-sponsored the Wagner-Steagall National Housing Act of September 1937 which created the United States Housing Authority. Courtesy of Wikipedia.

approved on March 30, 1937 the "Housing Authority Law," which stated:

It is hereby declared: (a) that there exist in the State insanitary or unsafe dwelling accommodations and that persons of low income are forced to reside in such insanitary or unsafe accommodations; that within the State there is a shortage of safe or sanitary dwelling accommodations available at rents which persons of low income can afford and that such persons are forced to occupy overcrowded and congested dwelling accommodations; that the aforesaid conditions cause an increase in and spread of disease and crime and constitute a menace to the health, safety, morals and welfare of the residents of the State and impair economic values... that the clearance, replanning and reconstruction of the areas in which insanitary or unsafe housing conditions exist and the providing of safe and sanitary

dwelling accommodations for persons of low income are public uses and purposes for which public money may be spent and private property acquired; that is in the public interest that work on such projects be commenced as soon as possible.⁵

Statistics from this time period illuminate the substandard housing that was found in Macon. For example, of the approximately 6,691 black families in Macon, only 91 were deemed to be adequately housed. Adequate housing appears to have been defined as having running water for use in a toilet, sink and bath tub inside a house. Further research showed that approximately 6,600 black and 4,500 white families lived in substandard housing in Macon.⁶ The 1940 Census shows that 83,783 people lived in Bibb County with approximately 26 percent (21,778 people) living in substandard housing.⁷

Prior to construction in 1940, the area that is known today as the Tindall Heights housing complex was called Tindall Field. It consisted of nine urban blocks bounded by Plant Street, Nussbaum Avenue, Elizabeth Street and Division Street (today's Alabama Street), see *Figure 2*.⁸ At this time "the neighborhood... consisted mostly of one-family homes. It was a considered a nice black neighborhood with a high proportion of railroad employees."⁹ The neighborhood was pedestrian orientated with the majority of its residents walking to and from work, as well as to downtown Macon. The neighborhood is reputed to have had typical black neighborhood businesses along Alabama and Elizabeth Streets which were demolished for the housing project.¹⁰

The first property purchased for the Tindall Heights housing complex was 1637 Nussbaum Avenue from Charlie and Georgia Richardson in November 1939. All land acquisition for the complex was



Figure 2: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Courtesy of the University of Georgia Map Room.

handled by Jones, Sparks, Benton and Cork, a local law firm. Sellers were allowed to stay in their homes after the sale, until all of the sites for the complex were acquired, paying a small rental fee to the Macon Housing Authority. These "tenants" would be given a 30-day notice to vacate prior to the demolition of their homes for the complex.¹¹ The nine blocks that would become Tindall Heights originally had 115 families living in substandard houses. In their place would be 318 new apartments not only providing for those 115 families, but also for 203 more black families.¹² It was believed that by drawing families from other substandard living conditions that those vacated properties would have to be repaired to current standards by the owners to continue to attract renters.

1940s

With the establishment of the Macon Housing Authority in 1938 funds were acquired for two housing complexes - Oglethorpe Homes for white families and Tindall Heights for black families. These two complexes would be designed as equal despite the racial divide, although it was generally acknowledged that the site for Tindall Heights was poor due to drainage issues. Floor plan options for

⁵ Housing Authorities Law, *Georgia Code*, vol. 1, page 210 (1937).

⁶ "Macon's Negroes Need New Homes," *Macon Telegraph and News*, 11 February 1940.

⁷ "Pipes Frozen? Many in Macon Can't have Trouble Like That," *Macon Telegraph and News*, 31 January 1940.

⁸ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company, 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 101, 1908, Map Collection, University of Georgia.

⁹ "Glory Days," Dan Maley, *Macon Telegraph and News*, 17 April 1989.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "First Property Purchased For Tindall Hgts. Project," *Macon Telegraph and News*, November 1939.

¹² "Housing Project Tenants Sought," *Macon Telegraph and News*, 18 February 1940.

the units at Tindall Heights included one, two and three bedroom layouts see *Figure 3*.

The two projects were described in detail in the Macon Telegraph and News on September 24, 1939:

“Tindall Heights will consist of 318 housing units, covering nine city blocks. Each project will include an administration building, with the largest administration unit to be built at Oglethorpe Homes. Each administration building, shown in the pictures, will have an adjoining wading pool for children, a large community hall with small kitchen adjoining for entertainments and cooking demonstrations. Both projects will be administered from the building at Oglethorpe Homes, but the Tindall Heights building will have a small office for an assistant administrator.

There will be no through driveway at Tindall Heights and the drive through Oglethorpe Homes will enter from Oglethorpe street [sic] and go out Calhoun street [sic]. Each drive will be properly spaced and built with dips in it to prevent speeding.

Adequate parking space will be provided at each project. Plans also call for adequate supervision of houses and tenants, who will be carefully chosen. Tenants will be selected on this basis: A couple with two children will be admitted if their earnings are not in excess of five times the total rent, including utilities... Between 50 and 100 applications for units have been made, according to Jack Cutler, executive director.

As the pictures show [see *Figure 4*], buildings will be erected so that the back

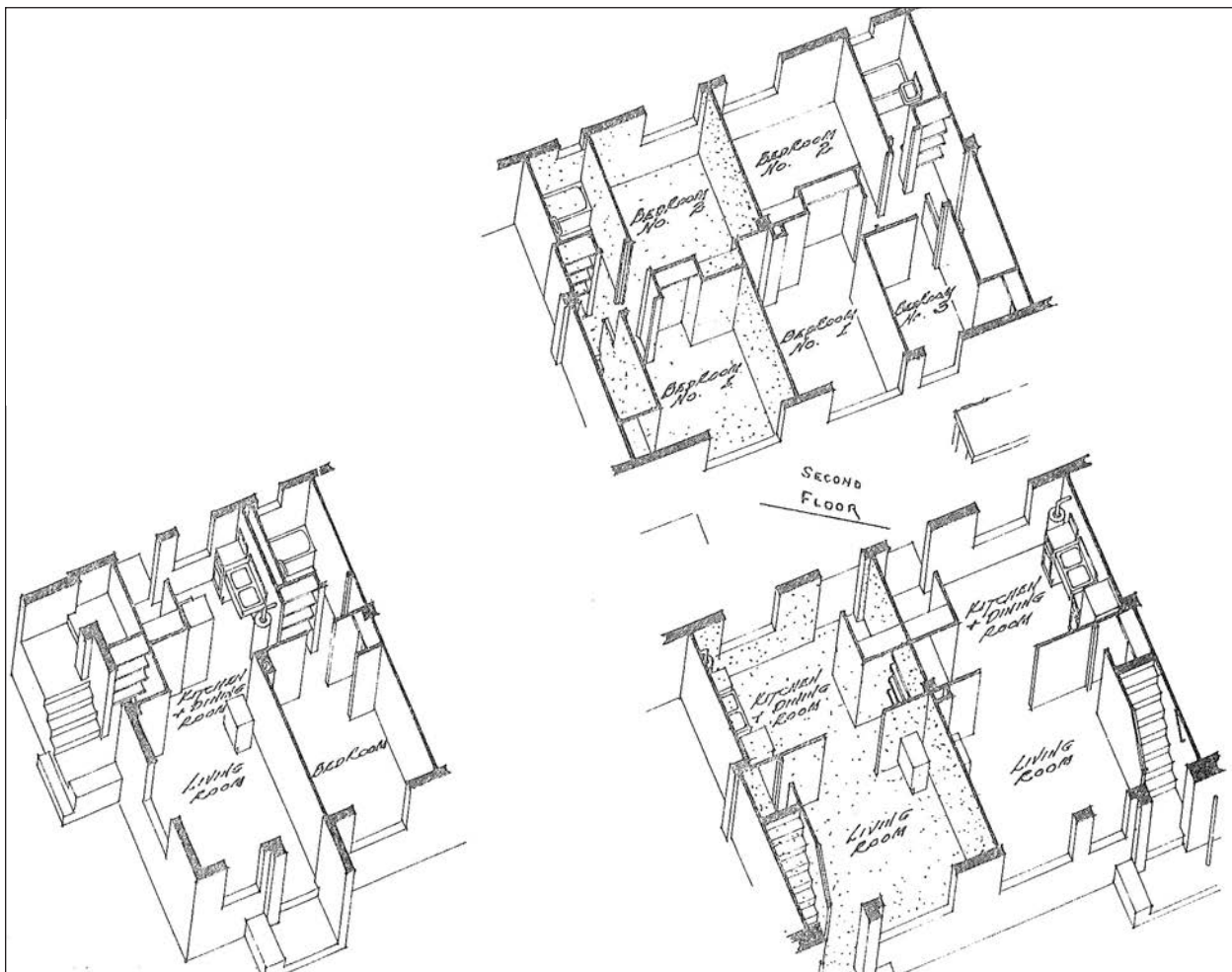


Figure 3: These original floor plan sketches show the plan for the three types of apartments. On the lower left is the one bedroom unit, located on a single floor. On the right are plans of the first and second floors of the larger apartments. The apartment shaded with dots is the two bedroom unit and the other is the three bedroom unit. Courtesy of Macon Housing Authority Archives.

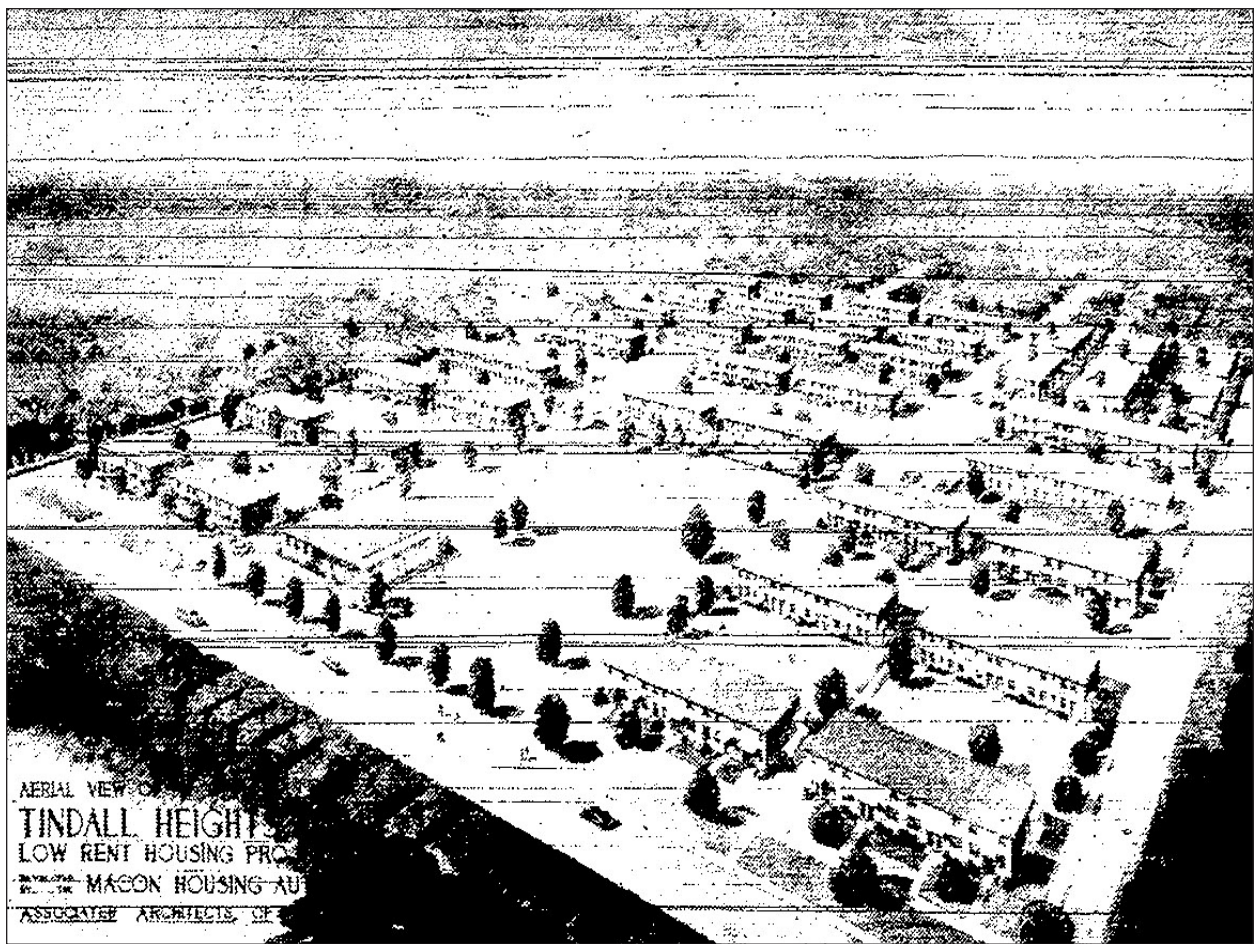


Figure 4: Architectural Rendering of Tindall Heights from Macon Telegraph and News, Sept 24, 1939. Courtesy of the Middle Georgia Archives, Macon, Georgia.

of no building faces the front of another. Construction must be completed by Sept. 4, 1940, and all grading, planting, etc. must be completed by Jan. 15, 1941. Demolition of sub-standard homes and clearance of sites will be completed [illegible] buildings have been numbered in accord with post office regulations. Unlike other housing projects, the Macon buildings will have ample terrace space for each unit, so residents will have some place to sit outdoors.”¹³

The interiors of these housing complexes would be up-to-date with modern conveniences, typically not found in the substandard housing where many of these families previously lived. Such conveniences included a double sink for washing in the kitchen, with a clothesline for drying immediately outside the rear door of the apartment. Bathrooms would include a wall cabinet, running hot and cold water

in the bathtub and sink, and a toilet. The living room and bedroom(s) of the apartments were equipped with picture moldings allowing tenants to hang pictures on the plastered, masonry walls.¹⁴

It appears from articles in the Macon Telegraph and News in 1940 that finding tenants for Tindall Heights was proving difficult. It is unclear exactly the reason, but may be a result of mistrust by the African American community on efforts by the white community to “better” their living conditions. To combat this problem the Macon Housing Authority published a leaflet that was distributed to the various leaders of the African American community, including ministers and businessmen. This leaflet explained “what the low-rent homes and slum clearance will mean to colored people.” The leaflet goes on to state that “the public housing program has meant much more to the Negro than a means of obtaining a decent, safe and sanitary

¹³ “Architects Show How Completed Housing Projects Will Look,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 24 September 1939, sec. B, p. 9.

¹⁴ “Figures Show Our Dire Need of Housing,” *Macon Broadcast*, 13 April 1940.



Figure 5: The members of the Advisory Board for Black Housing (from top, left clockwise) – Dr. C.W. Dyer, D.L.T. Robinson, Mrs. Minnie D. Singleton, and Frank J. Hutchings from the the Macon Telegraph and News, February 23, 1940. Courtesy of Macon Housing Authority Archives.

home. It has recognized him as an integral part of the American people. It has included him in the development of its policies. It has opened the door of employment to the Negro in a variety of occupations - professional, technical, skilled and clerical.”¹⁵

These efforts to include the African American community in decisions affecting their “low-rent” housing even included the establishment of an advisory board to the Macon Housing Authority, called the Advisory Board for Black Housing, to assist with “problems relating to housing of tenants at the Negro project.” “The chairman of the board was Dr. C.W. Dyer, one of Macon’s leading colored citizens. Other African American citizens on the board included: Reverend D.L.T. Robinson (vice chairman), F.J. Hutchings, R.E. Harley and Mrs. Minnie D. Singleton (secretary),” see *Figure 5*.¹⁶ The board visited the construction site of Tindall Heights and reported back to the African American community on the progress and good will put into the complex.

¹⁵ “Negro’s Part In Housing Program Told In Booklet,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 11 February 1940.

¹⁶ “Dr. C.W. Dyer Heads Committee To Aid Low-Rent Project Here,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, Colored Section, 23 February 1940.



Figure 6: Robert Cummings of 115 Tindall Avenue was the first applicant for a home in Tindall Heights on January 15, 1940 from the Macon Telegraph and News, January 16, 1940. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

The application process for the two housing complexes began on Monday, January 15, 1940. The main office for applications was located at 1116 Oglethorpe Street and a secondary location at Douglass Theater, primarily for African Americans, and likely added due to their reluctance to apply at the main office. This was a result of racial tensions with the white community.¹⁷ The first applicant for the Tindall Heights housing complex was Robert Cummings of 115 Tindall Avenue; see *Figure 6*.¹⁸ The first families moved into Tindall Heights on, or around September 10, 1940, and were: Sallie Adkins, 67D; Willie Benjamin, Jr., 61E; Willie Lee Berry, 64C; Fred Blango, 64D; Mary Brown, 66C; Sadie Bryant, 67E; Nathaniel Burnett, 67G [see *Figure 7*]; Marshall Carswell, 65E; Ed Felton, 64E; H.R. Harris, 66F; M.M. McTier, 67F; Mary Mitchell, 66E; Leroy Moore, 66B; Bishop Nelson, 62C; Willie Ross, 67B; Emmie Rozier, 62D; Clifton Smith, 64B; James Stovall, 61H; Joe Shavers, 61B; Furman Tasker, 61C; J.W. Waters, 64G; Lucius Hall, 66B; Arthur Riley, 66G; John White, 61D.¹⁹ These families were often moving from substandard living conditions, such as those pictured in *Figure 8*.

When the United States joined World War II (1939 – 1945) in 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor²⁰

¹⁷ “Low Rent Housing,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 14 January 1940.

¹⁸ “Low-Rent Homes Sought Here,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 16 January 1940.

¹⁹ “First Families Move Into Macon Housing Projects,” *Macon Housing News*, October 1940, p. 4.

²⁰ The attack on Pearl Harbor was a surprise military strike by the



Figure 7: Mr. and Mrs. J.L. Wilson's family moves into apartment 37-H at Tindall Heights from *Macon Housing News*, October 1940. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

the only housing projects approved were known as defense projects or war housing. These were constructed in cities and areas where war-related industries were established or where civilians needed to be housed to aid with other war efforts. That meant housing projects constructed during the war had been previously approved prior to the U.S. joining World War II and did not have to be constructed in conjunction with the war effort. War housing projects were built under the auspices of the Mutual Ownership Defense Housing Division of the Federal Works Agency.²¹ This agency was put in charge of the United States Public Housing Authority in 1939.²² These projects were often administrated by the housing authorities established by the U.S. Housing Act of 1937.

A survey done at this time noted that of the approximately 17,100 dwellings in Macon only 389 were vacant.²³ This led to concerns over housing shortages with the advent of World War II and the expansion of Camp Wheeler, Herbert Smart Airport for use by the military and Robins Air Force Base, as well as the location of a fuse plant and a flight training school (Cochran Field) in Macon-Bibb County. Due to this development, the \$900,000 received by the MHA soon after the initial

Imperial Japanese Navy against the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on the morning of December 7, 1941. The next day the United States declared war on Japan resulting in their entry into World War II.

²¹ Wikipedia, "Public Housing in the United States" available from <http://www.en.wikipedia.org>; Internet; accessed 26 August 2010.

²² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD Historical Background: The 1930s;" available from <http://www.hud.gov>; Internet; accessed 25 August 2010.

²³ "Georgia Dwelling Space is Scarce," *Macon Housing News*, November 1940, p. 3.

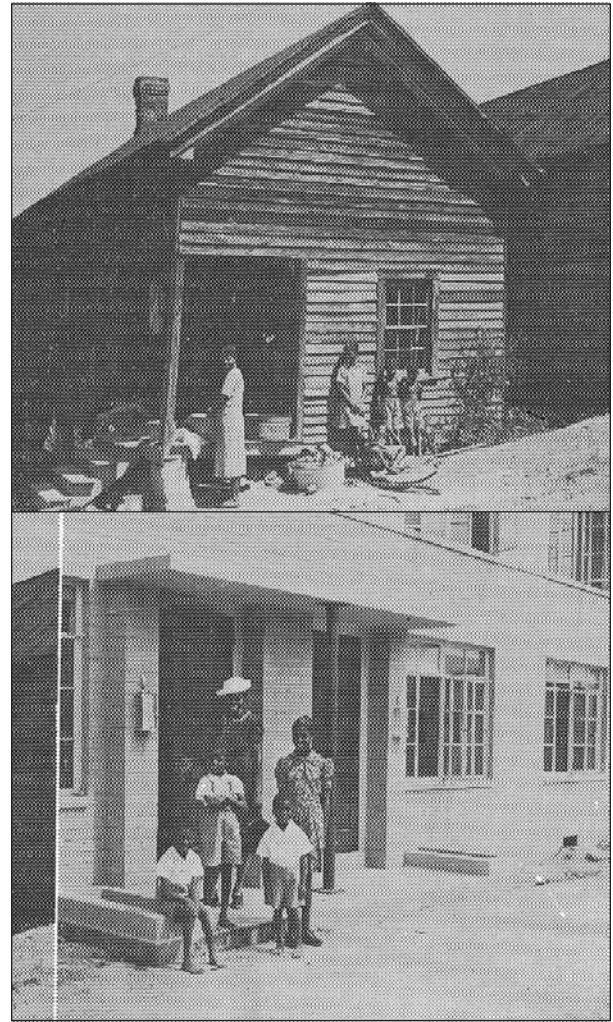


Figure 8: This clipping from the *Southeastern Housing News* (September - October 1955 Issue) shows the conditions that black families were moving from (top) versus those found at Tindall Heights (bottom). Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

construction of Tindall Heights was used to fund an extension for war housing. This extension added 126 more units northwest of the existing complex along a large tract of land fronting on Division Street (currently Alabama Street). The remainder of this grant funded the construction of Bowden Homes (completed in 1942 for white families) south of the complex near the intersection of Houston Avenue and Ell Street, see *Figure 9*.²⁴ Reputedly Bowden Homes was not needed for war housing and was open to all low-income families. It is believed that during World War II priority was given to those applying for housing if they worked for a company or agency involved in the war effort.²⁵

²⁴ "Clearing of Sites Begins," *Macon Housing News*, April 1941, p. 4.

²⁵ Tracy Barlow, Interview by Brian LaBrie, 19 August 2010, Interview, The Jaeger Company, Gainesville, Georgia.

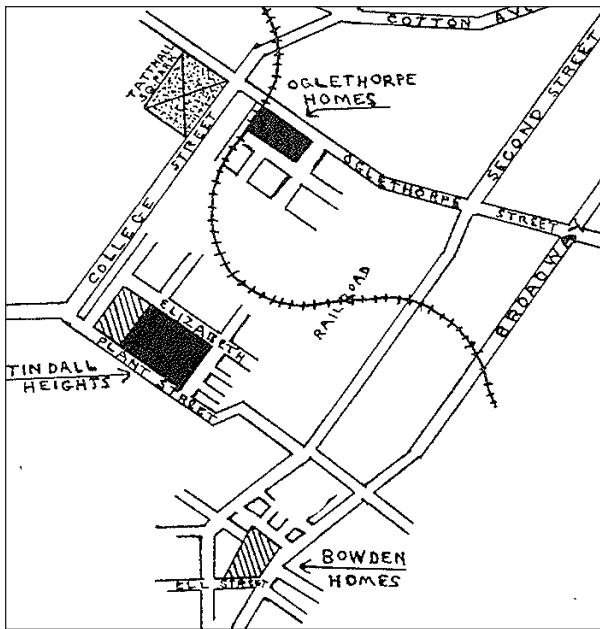


Figure 9: This map shows the low-rent housing complexes in Macon from the Macon Housing News, November 1940. Dark shaded properties were built and hatched properties were under construction in 1940. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

By 1942 the playground (still extant, see *Figure 10*) had opened with hours Monday through Friday, and included organized activities such as soft ball, volley ball, paddle tennis, horse shoes and a “seven hole golf course.” A luxurious feature of this playground was the “spray pool” that was in operation from 5 pm to 6 pm each day helping the children cool down during the hottest part of the day. The playground and its activities were supervised by C.R. Woodward (also in charge of the Charles E. Young Center at Clinton Road and Cotton Avenue) with the assistance of James E. Brown and Mrs. Clifford Jordan. A nursery, supervised by Mrs. Ethel Hill and Miss Ethel Clayton was run concurrently with the playground for children 3 - 6 years of age from 3 pm to 6 pm.²⁶ The spray pool and the golf course are no longer extant. It is assumed that these features were located in the large playground area behind the Administration Building at Tindall Heights. The nursery was likely located in the Administration Building adjacent to the playground.

To foster a sense of community many programs were held in the “community room” of the Tindall Heights Administration Building. These included holiday parties and educational forums for “homemaking.” Various Men’s Groups included

²⁶ “Tindall Playground Schedule Is Set,” *Macon Housing News*, July 1942, p. 4.



Figure 10: Modern aerial showing location of the playground (dashed outline). Courtesy of Bing Aerials, 2009.

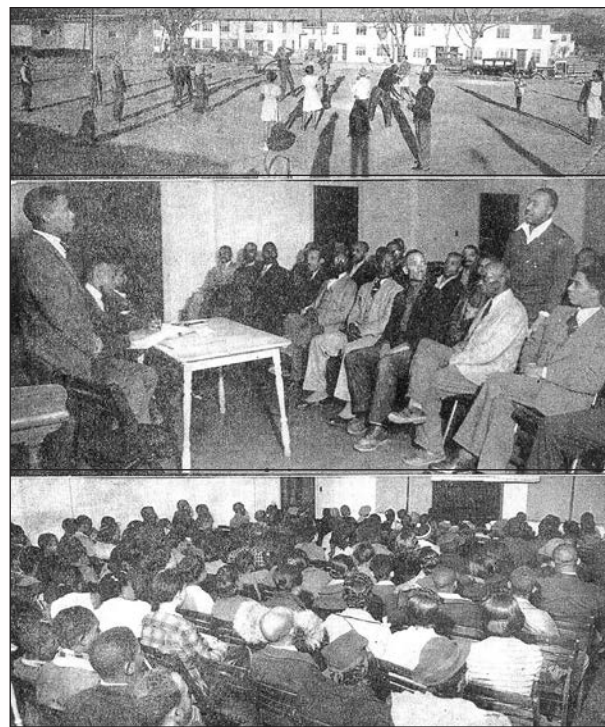


Figure 11: Snapshots from July 1941 Macon Housing News of activities at Tindall Heights - children play in the park to the rear of the administration building (top) and educational forum/conferences in the community hall (middle and bottom). Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

the “Renters Saving club” [sic] and the Boy Scouts. “Young people’s groups” were established to study arts and crafts as well as sports activities.²⁷ Regular weekly vesper services were held at 5 pm each Sunday and often included “appropriate” music, as well as prominent speakers such as: the Rev. Stennett of Washington Avenue Presbyterian Church; Hewitt Toney, professor of mathematics at Ballard; Mrs. Clara Reid, registered nurse; Dr.

²⁷ “Tindall Heights Clubs Are Formed,” *Macon Housing News*, November 1940, p. 3.

Whitehead; Mr. C.H. Shelton, Pilgrim Insurance Company; and the Rev. D.L.T. Robinson, pastor of Stewart Chapel A.M.E. Church.”²⁸ From this line up of prominent business leaders to ministers it is clear that all programs at the complex were geared towards creating a moral and uplifting atmosphere for its residents, see *Figure 11*.

An interesting aside in the story of Tindall Heights is that singer/songwriter Otis Redding (1941-1967) (see *Figure 12*) lived in apartment 97-B for a brief time around 1944. Redding’s father moved the family into the Tindall Heights housing complex when he took a job at Robins Air Force Base. Soon after the family moved into a rental house in an adjacent neighborhood, but had to move back into the public housing complex when their home burned down.²⁹ His biographer, Scott Freeman notes that “Tindall Heights must have seemed exotic and luxurious beyond description” due to the modern conveniences of indoor plumbing for both a bathroom and a kitchen with hot/cold running water, as well as gas heat and electricity. Redding, even after he left Tindall Heights, considered Tindall Heights his neighborhood and would spend time there with his friends. These friends, like other residents banded together to keep troublemakers out. This sense of community and the need to protect it was noted by others who reminisce of time spent in Tindall Heights into the 1970s.³⁰ Redding achieved success as a rhythm-and-blues and soul musician during the early 1960s.

1950s

It is unknown for how long the advisory board led by Dr. C.W. Dyer was maintained. Letters in the archives of the Macon Housing Authority allude to racial tensions between African American and whites, but no mention of the advisory board was found. Some of the correspondence received by MHA from private realty companies suggests that private real estate entities in Macon did not want MHA involved in low-rent housing for African Americans. This is evident in a letter between Thad E. Murphey, Murphey, Taylor & Ellis, Inc. (legal counsel of the Macon Housing Authority) to



Figure 12: This photograph shows singer/songwriter Otis Redding receiving keys to a new convertible from Phil Walden outside Tindall Heights. Courtesy of Historic Macon by James Barfield.

Walter G. Ashmore, Dessau Realty and Insurance Company dated February 6, 1957. In this letter the realty company urged the housing authority not to construct 350 units of black housing, because they felt that there was adequate housing in private hands in Macon. This notion by the realty company is refuted by the following statement:

From our survey and from our investigation in the Macon Housing Authority, it is felt that the 350 units asked for in the existing program is not unreasonable. However, if in the meantime the evidence shows that Macon does not need 350 units of colored units, I am sure you will find the Macon Housing Authority receptive to a re-examination of the project. The approval granted by the City Council about two weeks ago was for the preliminary contract and nothing definite has been signed by the Macon Housing Authority.

In some cases over the country the national level of income has risen to such an extent in the last seven or eight years that it makes it possible for the average worker to secure housing built by private financing. I wish that this was true in the city of Macon, but it is not so and no private enterprise can erect suitable housing for certain segments of the colored population.³¹

²⁸ “Tindall Heights News,” *Macon Housing News*, November 1941, p. 4.

²⁹ “Otis Redding” available from <http://www.history-of-rock.com>, internet, accessed 19 July 2011.

³⁰ Scott Freeman, *Otis: The Otis Redding Story* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), pp. 5 - 6.

³¹ Thad E. Murphy of Murphy, Taylor & Ellis, Inc. to Walter G. Ashmore of Dessau Realty & Insurance Company, 6 February 1957, Letter, The Macon Housing Authority, Macon, GA.



Figure 13: This 1958 aerial shows the relationship of Tindall Heights (dashed outline) to Felton Homes (diamond outline). Aerial courtesy of the University of Georgia Map Room.

Despite the efforts of MHA no new housing complexes were constructed in the 1950s in Macon. In 1955 two war housing projects (Pendleton and Felton Homes, see *Figure 13*) were transferred into the ownership of the Macon Housing Authority. The third war housing project, Lanier Heights³² as never transferred into their ownership, but maintained by Robins Air Force Base.³³

³² Lanier Heights was primarily for white families located at Camp Wheeler and for other civilian personnel utilized at the Herbert Smart Airport which was jointly used by the public and the United States Army Air Forces Air Technical Service Command, 5th Air Depot Group from Robins Field as a sub depot beginning on 9 November 1941 until 7 October 1944. The wartime military facility at the airport was known as Macon Army Air Base.

³³ Bibb County, Georgia, Superior Court, *Deed Book 703*, Page 323.

Attitudes and laws did begin to change in the 1950s, starting in 1954 with *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* In this case the United States Supreme Court declared that state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students and denying black children equal educational opportunities were unconstitutional. Originally segregation of all aspects of life was government-sanctioned, but in 1954 it was determined for educational purposes that segregation was unconstitutional. With this later decision the Civil Rights Movement in the United States began to pick up momentum pushing for the court system to expand on the ruling from 1954. This was followed in 1955 by Prince



Figure 14: Visitors and housing authority members visit Tindall Heights during the circa 1961 renovations. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

Heyward, et al vs. Housing Administration, et al in the Southern District Court of Georgia (Savannah Division). The decision by F.M. Scarlett, District Judge, and dated October 15, 1955 upheld that as long as the separate accommodations for blacks were equal to the white accommodations that the Savannah Housing Authority was in compliance with all State and Federal laws.³⁴

1960s

In the 1960s MHA undertook modernization of Tindall Heights that included reglazing of windows as well as general repair to apartments, see *Figure 14*. In 1961 work began on another expansion to the complex which included the buildings located along the north side of Elizabeth Street between Tindall and Nussbaum Avenues. These buildings (Buildings 101 - 104) were designed and supervised by Dennis, Dunwoody & League Associated Architects of Macon.

In 1962 the African American community in Macon refused to ride the public bus system due to four black ministers being jailed for refusing to move to the rear of the bus.³⁵ This loss was keenly felt by the bus company as the majority of passengers were African American. It was soon decided that segregation of the bus system and preference for white passengers to have preferential seating was no longer going to be part of the company's policy.³⁶

³⁴ "Judge Scarlett Dismisses Cases Against Public Housing Administration And Savannah Authority," *Southeastern Housing News*, September - October 1955.

³⁵ Nancy Briska Anderson, *Macon: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company / Publishers), 177.

³⁶ James Barfield, *Historic Macon: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio, Texas: Historical Publishing Network), 55.



Figure 15: September 1970 photograph of "Grow Beautiful" campaign flag. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

This boycott of the bus system and change in the bus company's policy may have been what led to the construction of Murphy Homes (206 units) in 1963 and Mounts Homes (86 units) in 1964, which were constructed for African American occupancy by The Macon Housing Authority.³⁷ No records of protests or any civil disobedience like the community expressed towards the bus company was recorded in MHA's archives.

1970s

The majority of work undertaken by MHA in 1969 and 1970 was focused on the exteriors of Tindall Heights. This work included concrete sidewalks, stairs and retaining walls, as well as seeding of lawn areas that had eroded due to the poor drainage of the site. Concurrent with this was the "Grow Beautiful" campaign undertaken by residents of Tindall Heights with the support of MHA. This campaign encouraged residents to install planting beds around their patios and entries.³⁸ See *Figures 15, 16 and 17*.

The Macon Housing Authority had 920 units for African American occupancy in the 1970s, or 64 percent of their 1,435 housing units. Of these 920 units almost half of them were at Tindall Heights. As experienced across the United States there was also momentum in Macon-Bibb County for further integration of all public facilities. This began in 1970 with Macon's high schools being reorganized

³⁷ "Housing Matrix," The Macon Housing Authority, Technical Services File, Unknown.

³⁸ "Grow Beautiful Campaign Scrapbook," The Macon Housing Authority, Tindall Heights File, 1970.



Figure 16: Photograph of “Mrs. Mamie Curtis, 67-E” in her yard showing the plantings used to beautify her front stoop. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.



Figure 17: Photograph of concrete steps installed by MHA in March 1970 at Building 73 to combat erosion and facilitate pedestrian movement through the site. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

as three complexes with neither identified as for white or African American students.³⁹ It was not until the later 1970s that public facilities were fully desegregated, including The Macon Housing Authority which was integrated by 1980.⁴⁰

1980 to the Present

Extensive renovation projects were undertaken in the 1980s for both the site and the mechanical systems at Tindall Heights. Approximately \$9,000,000 was spent to revitalize Tindall Heights alone by 1987.⁴¹ Site work followed recommendations from

³⁹ Barfield, *Historic Macon*, 56.

⁴⁰ Tracy Barlow, The Macon Housing Authority, to Bruce Gerwig, The Macon Housing Authority, 12 August 2010, Electronic Mail, The Macon Housing Authority, Macon, Georgia.

⁴¹ “Neighborhoods Celebrate Completion of Modernization,” *The*

Tribble & Richardson Inc., civil engineers who in 1983 recommended that “drainage structures be added or corrected, retaining walls be constructed, and swales be installed to direct water” off site to combat erosion and pooling of water.⁴² Besides drainage, additional site work requested by the Residents Association included handicap accessibility, lighting for safety, improvements to the playground, and reorganization of trash storage and pick up.⁴³ The residents, led by tenants of the section of the complex constructed in 1942, participated in the improvements to the site by beautification programs and establishing a “tool bank” that had eight hoses with sprinklers, two planters, two shovels, two hoes and one metal rake for “lending”. With these tools residents worked on keeping their patio and entrance areas tidy with maintained lawns and flower beds.⁴⁴

Other work by MHA during this period included “demolition for the purpose of reducing the density to open up additional space that can be used for recreation purposes.”⁴⁵ Upon review of historic aerials (see *Figures 18 and 19*) for Tindall Heights it is clear that 11 buildings were demolished. Nine were from the extension completed in 1942 allowing for a recreational field, open space and realignment of the intersection of College and Elizabeth Streets into the curve (circa 1989) that is found today, see *Figure 20*. In 1989 two of the nine buildings (Buildings 75 & 77) were moved to the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Elizabeth and Tindall Streets, see *Figure 21*. The two remaining demolished buildings, from the original section completed by 1940, created the park found between Alabama and Tindall Streets today, see *Figure 22*. Although the resident’s association was in favor of improved recreational space, they were not in favor of demolition of buildings as they felt the loss of apartments would be felt by their community. Also the Residents Association felt that at least one of the buildings to be demolished would make a

MHA Insider, Fall 1987.

⁴² William F. Hodges, Tribble & Richardson Inc. to John Hiscox, Executive Director, Macon Housing Authority, 16 March 1983, Archives, Macon Housing Authority, Georgia.

⁴³ Tindall Heights Resident Association, Modernization Committee to John Hiscox, Executive Director, Macon Housing Authority, 26 March 1984, Archives, Macon Housing Authority, Georgia.

⁴⁴ Memorandum for the files, dated April 25, 1986 for Tindall heights Section 7-2A (Plant, College, Elizabeth & Alabama Streets).

⁴⁵ “Macon gets \$2.5 million grant,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 6 November 1981, p. 1.

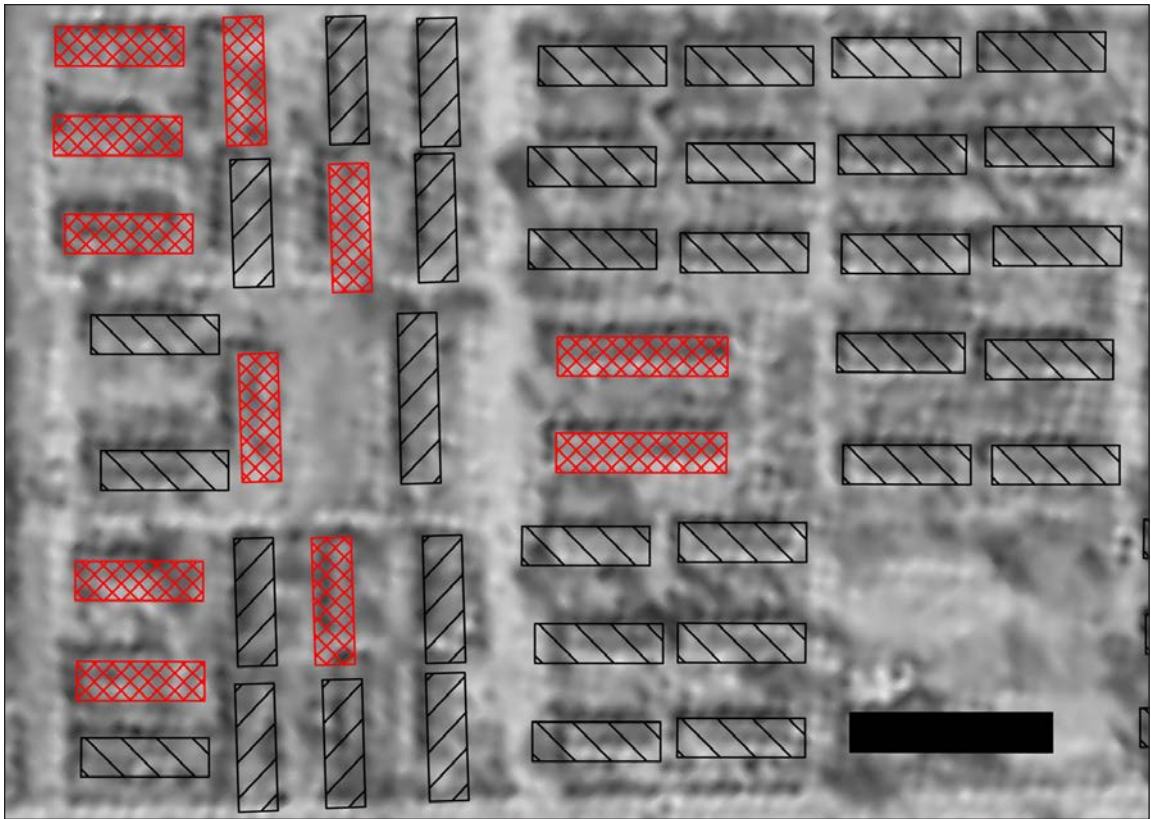


Figure 18: 1966 Aerial of Tindall Heights (extant buildings outlined in black hatch, demolished buildings hatched in red, administration building in solid black. Aerial courtesy of the University of Georgia Map Room.



Figure 19: 2009 Aerial of Tindall Heights. Courtesy of Bing Aerials.

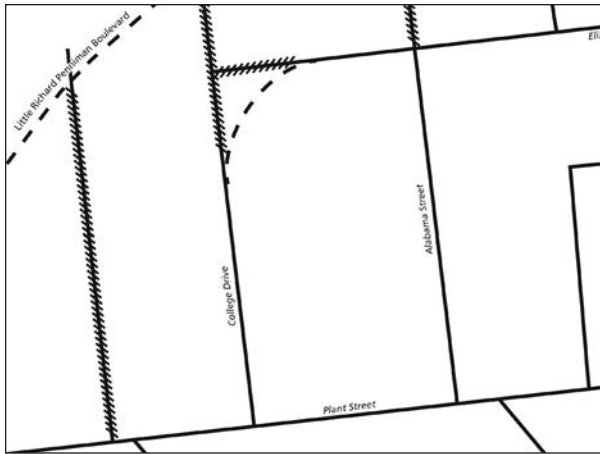


Figure 20: Diagram of road alignment changes to the Tindall Heights Extension circa 1989. Hashmarked roads were removed and dashed roads were constructed.

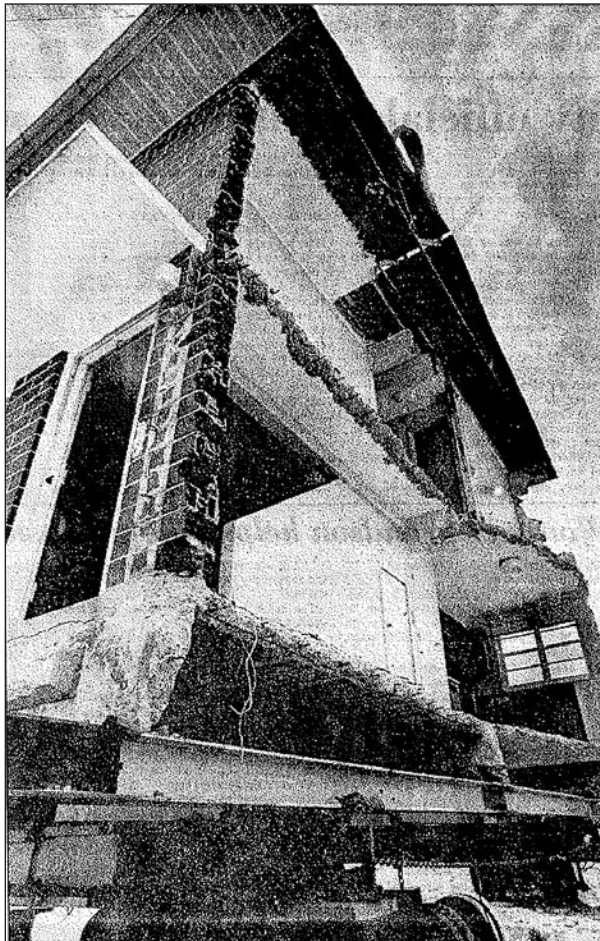


Figure 21: Photograph from the Macon Telegraph and News, March 30, 1989 of building being moved from the Tindall Heights Extension along Elizabeth Street to its final location near intersection of Elizabeth and Tindall Streets. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

community center that could be staffed by residents

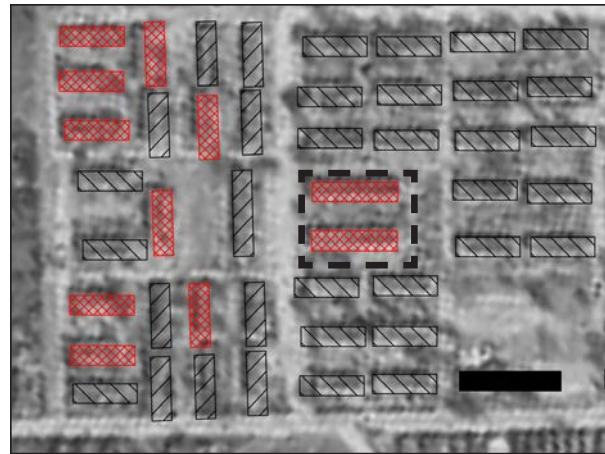


Figure 22: The diagram shows the location of the park (dashed outline) between Tindall Street and Campbell Avenue in relation to demolished buildings (red crosshatch). Aerial courtesy of the University of Georgia Map Room.

to provide daycare, adult education and additional recreational space.⁴⁶

One of the main catalysts for work at Tindall Heights was that the buildings were virtually unchanged since the 1960s or earlier. For example, the wiring could not handle air conditioning units. This became fatal for residents in July 1980 when extreme temperatures caused the heat-related death of four residents at Tindall Heights. Air conditioning units that would fit in the original windows from the 1940s, which were expensive for most of the tenants at Tindall Heights, were hard to find. Cheaper air conditioning models were too wide to fit within the narrow window openings in the complex. This led many residents to cut through the metal mullions of the windows to accommodate the less-expensive air conditioning units. This was originally considered a lease violation by MHA, but due to public opinion and the well-being of their residents policies were changed allowing the windows to be altered by MHA if a tenant requested the change to accommodate a window air conditioning unit the tenant would install. The Macon Housing Authority also aggressively “counseled” tenants on the need to properly ventilate their apartments, and instituted a program where 12 volunteers were assigned to four to five elderly residents that they were to check on morning, noon and night to insure that they did not suffer from a heat-related ailment.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Association Tindall Heights Resident Association, Modernization Committee to John Hiscox, Executive Director, Macon Housing Authority, 26 March 1984, Archives, Macon Housing Authority, Georgia.

⁴⁷ “Beating the heat,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, July 1981.

According to the newspapers many residents feared burglary if they left windows or doors open to properly ventilate their apartments. “The relatively high population density of the public housing neighborhoods contributes to the crime there, but it also makes it easier for officers to get out and familiarize themselves with the residents.”⁴⁸ With this in mind the Macon Housing Authority Unit was created at the Macon Police Department in 1982, see *Figure 23*. In this unit police officers ride in pairs, and they “get out and walk more to get to know the neighborhoods better.” The officers in this unit “all work the same shifts so their teamwork is enhanced, but their shifts are never regular, to make it harder for the bad guys to predict when they’re coming.”⁴⁹ MHA policy predicated that tenants found to be involved in selling drugs, or other illegal activities were to be evicted. A list was maintained of those residents, and if visitors to residents were found to be involved in such activities they were also added to that list. The Macon Housing Authority Unit also helped compile this list, which along with background checks was used by the MHA to insure that residents of their housing complexes had good quality neighbors. Furthermore, many residents wanted nothing to do with “drug sales, reckless driving and other disturbances that destroy the peace and tranquility of their neighborhood.”⁵⁰ As another precaution, the Macon Police Department decided to locate a police office at 101 Nussbaum Avenue on June 13, 1987, see *Figure 24*. This office allowed for a better relationship between the police department and the residents, building trust between the two.⁵¹ All of this hard work on behalf of the Macon Police Department resulted in a 30% increase in self reporting by the residents to the police regarding illegal activity that was observed at Tindall Heights.⁵²

As noted by John Hiscox, the bad reputations held for decades by public housing neighborhoods were undeserved. He has on many occasions noted that national studies have shown that crime rates in public housing neighborhoods are actually slightly lower than those of adjacent neighborhoods, which

⁴⁸ “Neighborhood officers beating crime,” Dan Maley, *Macon Telegraph and News*, 13 March 1989.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Neighborhood Police Office Opens in Tindall Heights,” Mark Thomas, *The MHA Insider*, Summer 1987, p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Maley, “Neighborhood officers beating crime.”

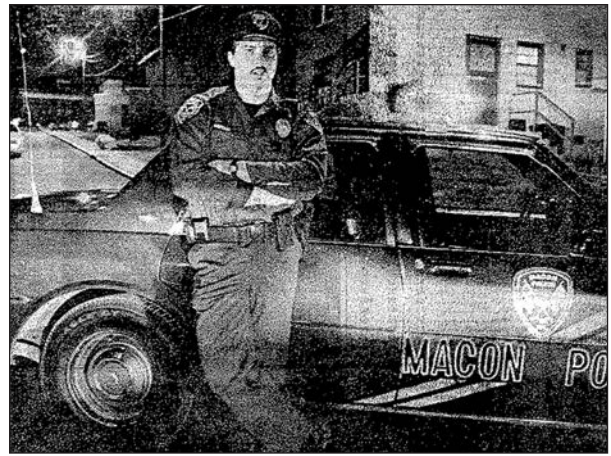


Figure 23: Photograph from Macon Telegraph and News, March 13, 1989 of Tony Oxford, one of the police officers that patrolled the Macon Housing Authority housing complexes. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.



Figure 24: Photograph of the opening of the Macon Police Department Office at Tindall Heights from the Macon Telegraph and News, June 13, 1987. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

also tend to be low-income.⁵³ Continuing from the 1980s into present times MHA has continued to struggle with perceptions of Tindall Heights having a high crime rate, despite best efforts by the police department and MHA providing facts that show that Tindall Heights “is no more or less dangerous than many other downtown neighborhoods.” Unfortunately, on May 17, 2003, Kelvin “P-Wee” Jones was killed outside of Building 103 on Elizabeth Street.⁵⁴ Newspapers used this killing to further the notion that the neighborhood was not a safe one to live in or visit.

However, this killing did inspire residents of Tindall Heights to unite in common causes to improve the neighborhood. As many residents

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tindall Heights wrestles with latest killing,” *Macon Telegraph and News*, 29 May 2003, p. 1.

over the years had moved from Tindall Heights, many times following marriage and often times, to locations close to Tindall Heights, these former residents offered assistance. Reunions were held to provide a support network for families in the complex, as well as provide community-centered guidance. As an example former resident, Lena Billingslea (see *Figure 25*) began strolling through the neighborhood where she was raised, making herself available to young men and women to form mentoring relationships.⁵⁵

Through all of this Tindall Heights has grown into a thriving community where neighborhood children play in the recreational fields with their parents and neighbors closely watching them from their adjacent patios. It has become a place where high school football players practice their sport and encourage other children in the complex to join them. Many residents feel that the design of the buildings has become outdated, and due to their sturdy masonry construction, very difficult to update.⁵⁶

In 2011 the Macon Housing Authority applied for, but did not receive, a HOPE VI grant in the amount of \$22,000,000. The Macon Housing Authority's application was one of 44 made through the federal HOPE VI grant program with only six receiving funding. If approved, these funds would have resulted in the demolition of Tindall Heights and replacement with apartments and houses, similar to those found at Oglethorpe Homes and Tattnall Place. The application and its proposed plans had the support of its residents, along with funding commitments from Mercer University, the City of Macon and the Macon Water Authority. As many as 40 organizations pledged in-kind donations to help make the project a success.⁵⁷

In January 2015, MHA determined that the revitalization of Tindall Heights is a priority. To fund the demolition, the MHA is utilizing on-hand funding. The MHA's current plan is to demolish the 412 units currently located on the 28-acre Tindall Heights site and remove the old, failing infrastructure. In its place, the plan calls for new infrastructure and a mixed-used use development



Figure 25: Photograph from the Macon Telegraph and News, May 29, 2003 of Lena Billingslea walking through Tindall Heights. Courtesy of the Macon Housing Authority Archives.

consisting of five segments. Approximately 8.5 acres will become a planned neighborhood-oriented commercial center. The remaining 19.5 acres will be developed in four phases of new affordable housing consisting of 270 units: Phase I - 76 Senior Units (mid-rise); Phase II - 64 Family Units (townhouses); Phase III - 65 Family Units (townhouses); and Phase IV - 65 Family Units (townhouses).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Brian W. LaBrie, The Jaeger Company, Observations, May 18, 2011.

⁵⁷ "Macon fails to get \$22M HUD grant for Tindall Heights upgrades," *Macon Telegraph and News*, 5 June 2010.

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