

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

RECEIVED AUG 3 1990

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Buttram, Frank and Merle, House and Grounds other names/site number Oklahoma City Museum of Art

2. Location

street & number 7316 Nichols Road N/A not for publication city, town Nichols Hills N/A vicinity state Oklahoma code OK county Oklahoma code 109 zip code 73116

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes sub-rows for Contributing and Noncontributing resources.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO Date: July 27, 1990

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: [X] entered in the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined eligible for the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined not eligible for the National Register. [] removed from the National Register. [] other, (explain:). Signature of the Keeper: Beth Boland Date of Action: 9/11/90

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Beaux-Arts

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls CONCRETE

STONE/Limestone

roof CERAMIC TILE

other CERAMIC TILE: accent panels

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY:

The Buttram mansion, completed in 1938, is a two-story structure with a full basement and attached five-car garage. It remains unaltered with the exception of minor interior changes, made to accommodate its current use as a fine arts museum. The grounds include formal gardens, vistas, alleys, manicured lawns, statues, and fountains. The mansion and grounds are located in the city of Nichols Hills. Originally, the house and grounds were on 89 acres. Today, only 5.727 acres remain unaltered. The nominated property is located in a residential neighborhood. The property retains a high degree of integrity.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The structure utilizes steel re-enforced concrete for the foundation as well as the interior and exterior structural walls, where applicable for strength. The house stands today with no structural failure. It is a two-storied structure based loosely on an "H" configuration with a full basement. The 5-car garage and servants' quarters are connected by an arched walkway and drive for covered access.

The roof material is red ceramic barrel tile supported over wood framing, except the garage and stair hall are covered with built up gravel and tar. The roof terminates over a generous cornice with modillions. (See Photo #8). The cornice conceals a complete guttering system. There are five chimneys which penetrate the roof line.

The north lawn has an elongated U-shaped drive running north and south which passes under a porte-cochere serving the front door (See Photo #9). An extension from this drive to the west enters the service areas by way of the covered archway previously mentioned (See Photos #10 and #11). The driveway is 21' wide and can accommodate automobiles parked along its edge and still allow other vehicles to pass unobstructed. This U-shaped portion abuts the remainder of the driveway which has an east-west axis. Originally, the driveway was accessible by two gates: One on the east, no longer existing due to later residential development, and one on the west, currently used as the entrance to the property. The garage lies to the northwest of the house. To accommodate visitors, the garage area has a parking lot which can hold up to 15 cars. This paved area is shrouded from view with four-foot high shrubs on the west and south sides. As a result of the landscaping, and the similarity in design and materials of the garage and servant's quarters, they do not distract from the main house.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1938

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Ayers, Robert M., and Company
Landscape Architect: Fry, Homer L.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Frank and Merle Buttram House and Grounds is significant to Nichols Hills as an excellent example of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. Situated immediately adjacent to Oklahoma City, Nichols Hills was developed by the noted builder G. A. Nichols and was incorporated in 1929. The Buttrams planned their estate over a period of thirty years. They retained the services of the noted San Antonio, Texas, architectural firm of Ayers and Ayers to implement their ideas on an eighty-nine acre tract of land at the highest point in the area. Additionally, landscape architect Homer L. Fry, also of San Antonio, began landscaping the property in 1929 to the Buttram's specifications. Landscaping began first. Then construction of the house began with completion in 1938.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Frank Buttram was a native Oklahoman, successful oilman, civic leader, and philanthropist. His greatest contribution was to the oil industry. In 1912 he wrote a pamphlet predicting oil deposits based on geological analysis. Subsequent development confirmed Buttram's findings. Within a year the oil industry was revolutionized as virtually every company hired a geologist. Buttram, with two associates, capitalized on his success to form the Fortune Oil Company. When he sold it in 1918, he was a millionaire. On his own, he created the Buttram Petroleum Corporation, which became one of the nation's largest independent oil operations, with wells in Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. Buttram used his fortune and his business acumen to benefit his native state. He donated a good portion of his time and money to his alma mater, the University of Oklahoma. In 1924, he was instrumental in the adoption of the city manager form of government in Oklahoma City. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Buttram chairman of the state recovery council, which coordinated all federal depression recovering programs in Oklahoma.

Merle Buttram was a graduate of, and professor of violin at the University of Oklahoma. She played a leading role in establishing a string music program in Oklahoma City high schools. She was also instrumental in founding the Oklahoma City Symphony.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Boren, Lyle H., and Dale Boren. Who Is Who in Oklahoma: A Biographical History of Men and Women in Oklahoma Life Today. Guthrie, OK: The Co-operative Publishing Company, 1935.

Buttram, Merle, with J. Landis Fleming. One Man's Footprints: The Story of Frank Buttram. Muskogee, OK: Western Heritage Books, 1985.

The Daily Oklahoman, October 9, 1938, April 20, 1944, February 13, 1973, September 30, 1974, October 9, 1974, October 20, 1974, March 16, 1975, March 29, 1975, September 12, 1976, December 19, 1966.

Glasscock, C.B. Then Came Oil: The Story of the Last Frontier. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938.

Harlow, Rex. Successful Oklahomans: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches. Oklahoma

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 5.727 acres

UTM References

A

1	4
---	---

6	3	2	9	6	9
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	9	3	5	6	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

 Zone Easting Northing

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

 Zone Easting Northing

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is a part of block 84, Nichols Hills, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, and more particularly described as follows: Beginning at the Northwest corner of said block 84; Thence from said point of beginning South 89°59'39" East along the North line of said Block 84 a distance of 460.73 feet to a point; Thence South 0°1'58"

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the mansion and grounds. The nominated property is all of the original Buttram estate that retains it's historical integrity. The remainder of the estate grounds have been subdivided and developed as a residential neighborhood.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robynne Silvester, Scot Sidwell
 organization Buttram Mansion Advocacy Coalition date October 25, 1989
 street & number 4300 N. Sewell telephone 528-8571
 city or town Oklahoma City, Oklahoma state Oklahoma zip code 73118

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The Buttram Mansion is architecturally significant within the context on Nichols Hills. It is an excellent example of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. It is a two-story building constructed in an "H"-shaped configuration. The South or Garden facade is symmetrical with paired Corinthian Columns in the Beaux Arts tradition. The east elevation has a balustraded terrace which overlooks a formal garden and pool beyond. The decorative smooth, light-colored stone is typical of the style as well. The house has a low-pitched hipped roof covered with red ceramic barrel tiles representative of some Beaux Arts houses.

Great attention to detail was given in the design and construction of the Buttram Mansion. This fact is evidenced, for example, in the interior finishes. Italian and German artisans were employed to apply color to the plaster ceilings by hand. The elaborate dining room ceiling is also an example of this dedication to quality design and construction.

Yet another magnificent interior feature is the elliptical entry hall with double-rise, double-return stairway. Three arched, leaded glass windows at the intermediate landing flood the room with light.

An unusual aspect of the estate's design is the fact that the grounds were landscaped about eight years prior to the Buttram's occupation of the house in the spring of 1938. This was done so that the grounds would already exhibit a mature appearance when the family took residence. Though only 5.72 acres of the original 89 acres remain today, the grounds still provide a pleasing setting for the mansion.

CONCLUSION:

Today the Frank and Merle Buttram Mansion houses the Oklahoma City Art Museum. Thousands of visitors a year come to the estate to enjoy exhibits of fine art and to enjoy the mansion and grounds. Possessing a high degree of integrity, the Buttram Mansion is significant for its architectural style.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1

City, OK: Harlow Publishing Company, 1927.

Melton, Howard and Merle. Interview. Melton Art Reference Library, Oklahoma City,
OK: Spring 1987.

Mesta, Pearl. "My Oklahoma." Town and Country, October 1964.

Myers, Debs. "Oklahoma." Holiday, May 1953.

Simpich, Frederick. "So Oklahoma Grew Up." National Geographic, March, 1941.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

East a distance of 219.33 feet to a point; Thence South $14^{\circ}39'51''$ West a distance of 364.32 feet to a point on the rear line of Lot 42, as shown on the recorded plat of Section 2 Buttram Estates Section to Nichols Hills, Oklahoma, said point being 50 feet North $89^{\circ}28'35''$ West of the Northeast corner of said Lot 42; Thence North $89^{\circ}28'35''$ West along the rear line of said Lot 42 a distance of 204.61 feet to the Northwest corner of said Lot 42; Thence North $63^{\circ}48'06''$ West along the North line of Lot 43 in said Section 2 Buttram Estates Section to Nichols Hills, Oklahoma, a distance of 124.14 feet; Thence North $78^{\circ}38'51''$ West along the North line of said Lot 43 a distance of 105 feet to the Northwest corner of said Lot 43; Thence Northeasterly along a curve to the left whose tangent bears North $11^{\circ}25'09''$ East and whose central angle is $11^{\circ}04'58.6''$ and whose radius is 2,541.19 feet, for a distance of 7.48 feet to the point of place of beginning; containing 5.727 acres more or less.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

The east elevation has a balustraded terrace, (6 risers above grade), which overlooks the formal garden and pool beyond. It is accessible by steps located at the north and south ends with additional steps leading down to the men's and women's dressing rooms located in the basement. There is a walkway to the south terrace, and two doors leading into the house from the terrace.

The south elevation has a terrace, (2 risers above grade), running on an east-west axis the full length of the house (See Photo #6). Access to this terrace is by two doors from the house, stairways to the south and west leading to grade level, and from the east terrace walkway.

MANSION, EXTERIOR GROUNDS:

The Buttrams commenced construction of the estate in 1929 with the purchase of 89 acres in the Nichols Hills subdivision of Oklahoma County.

The home was sited at the highest point on the property to give the viewer a commanding view of the formal gardens, parks, pools, lakes, grottos, fountains, statuary, and allees.

The Northern portion of the grounds contain the drive and outlying parks. These are unchanged today. The fountain of youth (See Photo #1 and #2) is centered in a clearing with a backdrop of evergreens for contrast.

The Eastern portion of the grounds is an allee of evergreens (see photo #3) with two concrete walks running parallel with the axis on the outer edges of the trees. At the eastern terminus are seven risers (see photo #5) the width of the allee, leading to the swimming pool. Originally, two fountains at either end overflowed into the pool, these are now removed. The swimming pool's depth has been decreased to about 2 feet.

The South area of the property maintains the open park feeling as it was designed, despite the decrease in total acreage (see photos #6 and #7).

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The interior of the house consists of a basement, ground floor, and a second floor.

The basement was the informal entertaining area of the house. The basement is a full basement containing about 7500 square feet, less space for the equipment room. Besides the utility rooms, this area had a shooting gallery, a clubroom decorated as a medieval hall, a bar, bowling alley, cardrooms, and fully equipped showers and locker rooms for men and women. Currently, the clubroom remains unchanged. The remainder of the basement has been partitioned into classrooms for art instruction.

The ground floor consists of the library, art room, dining room, kitchen, servants' quarters and pantries, breakfast room, living room, and the 'Palm Room'.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 2

The library is three risers below the base elevation of the first floor. The ceiling utilizes an arcade on all perimeter walls and is supported by small capitals in the Venetian style (see photo #22). This arcading flattens progressively, blending with the ceiling and becoming flush with it. Historically, a hand-stippled tan color, the ceiling is now painted a flat white. On the west wall is a balcony (see photo #22). It is supported from the ceiling by decorative ironwork and is connected to an upstairs bedroom by a concealed stairwell and connected to the library by a circular stairway. The trim is mahogany raised panel and casework with concealed compartments in the panelling. On the north wall is a fireplace of Verde Antique marble with a plain oak mantle. On the east wall is a large plate glass window (see photo #12). This window is not in keeping with the other divided-lite windows, but met the owner's wish to have an unobstructed view of the formal gardens. Located underneath the library balcony, is a restroom and wash area. Another restroom is located down the hall from the library. It consists of a toilet area and a generous powder room with decorative plaster work, vaulted ceiling, etched mirrors, and an elaborate vanity with marble-top.

The art room measures 36' X 58' with a 14' ceiling and is two risers below the elevation of the ground floor. The ceiling is a flat white color with unadorned plaster stepwork (see photo #23). This room can be entered from all four sides. The south wall entrances are from outside. They are two, double, eight-lite doors with fan light overdoors. The east and west wall entrances are archways and the north entrance is a columned passage (see photos #23 and #24). The north, east, and west entrances all have wood railing and iron balustrades, matching those in the stairhall. On the east and west walls, on both sides of the archways, are highly decorative niches with mirrored and lighted interiors to display art pieces (see photo #23). Centered on the south wall, between the arched exterior doors, is an imported Carrara marble chimney piece in high relief (see photo #25). There is no overmantle, as this space was reserved for the largest painting in the house; a Thomas Moran Venetian scene.

The dining room is located adjacent to the service pantry and food preparation areas of the kitchen. The ceiling in this room is the most decorative in the house (see photo #26). Barrel vault in design, this ceiling was plaster cast and painted by artisans with robust colors and with attention to quality. The frieze is about 11" in width and uses the same colors as the ceiling. Leading from the dining room into the kitchen is a butler's pantry, finished in natural wood with tubular lights above the counter tops, glassed closets for china and glassware and every gadget that modern minds could invent.

The kitchen, servants' quarters, and the pantries represent a great deal of planning with attention given to the details of preparing and serving the hundreds of guests who enjoyed this home. They are utilitarian and without decoration. However, these service areas were equipped with the most modern commercial equipment available at the time. The servants' quarters contain private baths and living areas for three individuals.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 3

The remainder of the ground floor consists of a breakfast room, living room, the 'Palm Room,' the vestibule, stair hall, assorted butler's pantries, passageways, and closets. The breakfast room has imported tiles from Holland and a vaulted ceiling. The living room includes an Italian marble chimney piece. The 'Palm Room' has a tile floor, ironwork, and a fountain with a goldfish pool. The vestibule has marble flooring and two panelled doors. One leads to a closet. The other leads to a passage connected to the breakfast room so servants could answer the door without entering the main living area (see photo #27). The ceiling is flat with a stairstep plaster detail and small cornice.

The stair hall is elliptical in shape and is approximately 28' X 34' with a ceiling height of 28'. The stairway is double rise, double return, with the secondary landing being above the vestibule (see photo #29). The wood railing and ornate iron balustrade with applied 'patina' coordinate with the iron gates of the vestibule and other metal-work in the house (see photo #30). This room has a faux-stone wall treatment with white painted finish on the window surrounds, stair stringers, columns, architraves, and niches (see photos #31 and #33). The ceiling is a hyperbolic-suppressed dome with substantial cornice (see photo #28). The dome uses applied color to accentuate its shape. A darker color is used next to the cornice and gradually becomes lighter as it reaches the center. The center is decorated with an elliptical ceiling medallion, also hand colored. The cornice is proportionate to the size of the room, and consists of a crown with modillions, and a frieze with turquoise background and raised floral relief painted the same tan color as the ceiling (see photo #33). Three large leaded glass windows on the north allow light to flood into the room (see photo #29). Translucent glass in these windows prevent the viewing of the porte-cochere roof. The flooring is 3" X 7" hardwood.

The second floor contains seven bedrooms, all with private bathrooms. As with the breakfast room, the upstairs bathrooms are decorated with imported tiles. The master bedroom suite is made up of his and hers dressing rooms, bedroom, and sitting room. Opening to the east of the sitting room is a large roof terrace located over the 'Palm Room' which gives a panoramic view of the grounds. The bathroom is equipped with heated towel racks, sitz bath, large bath tub, shower, sauna, toilet, sinks, storage, and vanity area. The ceiling is a suppressed dome, hand colored a turquoise and using the same shading technique as the stair hall dome. There are several fireplaces with hand-carved chimney pieces throughout various public areas on this floor. There are three balconies on the south.

CONCLUSION:

The Buttram Mansion is an excellent example of the Beaux Arts style. The mansion's local significance and lack of alteration help maintain the completeness of the structure. Because of this, the mansion possesses a very high degree of architectural integrity.