

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



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1. Name of Property

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Historic Name: Thornton House

Other Name/Site Number: PU9824

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2. Location

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Street & Number: 1420 West 15th Street

Not for Publication: N/A

City/Town: Little Rock

Vicinity: N/A

State: AR

County: Pulaski

Code: 119

Zip Code: 72202

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Historically Black Properties in Little Rock's Dunbar School Neighborhood

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

Carthyn A. Slatu
Signature of certifying official

3-30-99
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. ____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

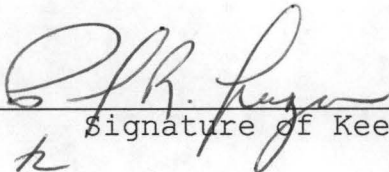
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5. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ 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 Keeper

5/23/99
Date
of Action

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Historic:	<u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub:	<u>Single Dwelling</u>
	<u> </u>		<u> </u>
	<u> </u>		<u> </u>
Current :	<u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub:	<u>Single Dwelling</u>
	<u> </u>		<u> </u>
	<u> </u>		<u> </u>

Architectural Classification:
Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials: foundation Brick roof Other/Composition Shingle
walls Wood/Weatherboard other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY

Originally a one-story cottage, the frame residence of Dr. and Mrs. John G. Thornton underwent two significant remodelings before reaching its current two-story, predominantly American Foursquare configuration. The initial circa 1896 cottage had a gable-front and wing plan with an ell extending to the rear at right angles off the wing; a small front porch was confined within the "L" formed by the gable and wing. During the early 20th century, front and rear additions squared off the plan of the house, and a full-width front porch was constructed. Around 1920, another extensive remodeling added a second story, giving the house its present American Foursquare appearance.

ELABORATION

The 1897 Sanborn Insurance Map of Little Rock reveals the modest frame cottage that originally was built at 1420 West 15th Street. A gable faced the street at the east end of the main (south) facade with a wing extending

to the west. In the rear, an ell projected at right angles to the wing. A small front porch was located in the "L" formed by the gable and wing, and a back porch ran along the west side of the ell. At about the middle of the east side of the cottage, a bay containing two windows projected slightly beyond the plane of the rest of the east wall.

The house originally did not have a continuous foundation. It sat on brick piers, which sometime subsequently were stuccoed. Eventually, the spaces between the piers were filled in with rubble stone.

Around 1906, the plan of the house was squared off by additions that infilled both the space occupied by the front porch and most of the "L" at the back of the house formed by the wing and rear ell. The projecting bay on the east side of the house, however, was left intact, as was the rearmost section of the ell. Also during this remodeling, the existing Colonial Revival-style full-width front porch was added. Beneath the flat roof of this porch is a simple entablature supported by five square, fluted columns that form four bays across the front of the house. In addition to the columns and entablature, the porch's balustrade identifies it as Colonial Revival in style.

The front door of the Thornton House is off center in the main facade, in the second bay from the west end of the porch, its location since the early-20th century remodeling. Immediately west of the door is a bay window that projects only slightly beyond the wall surface; east of the door, and directly behind a porch column, is a picture window that probably also was added during the early 20th century remodeling.

Around 1920, the house grew again, this time with the addition of a second story that extends over all of the first floor except the section of the rear ell that survived the earlier remodeling. This one surviving piece of the original 1890s cottage is easy to spot at the back of the house because its steeply-pitched gabled roof is at odds with the "squareness" of the front section of the house, which received a hipped roof when the second floor was added.

Both the main roofline and a hipped-roofed dormer have exposed rafter ends, reflecting the influence of the Craftsman style. Exposed rafter ends also decorate the shed roof added to the original bay that survives on the east side of the house. The *circa* 1920 remodeling created a projecting, second-story bay on the west side of the house which contains a landing for the staircase that was part of the interior remodeling work.

The remodeling also is evident in the windows of the Thornton House. Most windows in the house have double-hung sashes, but on the first floor of the main section of the house, the original, 1890s-vintage windows are one light-over-one light while those in the second-story addition are three-over-one, a common early 20th century configuration. Also part of the

circa 1920 remodeling was a second-story sunroom, located at the southwest corner of the house and wrapped with casement windows. These casements prevent the second story of the main facade from being symmetrical. One large double-hung window is centered in the facade of the second story, directly below the roof dormer, but it is flanked on the east by a band of three double-hung windows and on the west by four casement windows.

Added at some more recent date is a side door located at the south end of the west facade. Concrete steps lead to a small porch which has a shed roof supported by two square posts. Another more recent addition to the Thornton House is a room attached to the rear, where it spans the west half of the north (rear) facade, adjacent to—and wrapping a few feet around—the section of the 1890s ell that survives.

Inside the Thornton House, the various periods of construction and remodeling are readily visible in the doors and woodwork. Downstairs, four-panel, 1890s-vintage doors are the rule, as is woodwork that includes plinth and corner blocks that also are typical of the 1890s. The Craftsman style of the circa 1920 remodeling becomes evident on the staircase, which has a very plain balustrade with square balusters, as well as a built-in window seat on the landing between floors. The influence of the Craftsman style prevails throughout the second floor in clean-lined door and window trim and doors with five horizontal panels. Aside from the room added at the back of the house, no significant alterations appear to have been made since the circa 1920 remodeling.

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8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: B and C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage/Black
Health/Medicine
Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1906-1957

Significant Dates: 1906

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Significant Person(s): Thornton, Dr. John G.
Thornton, Bessie Stephens

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

SUMMARY

Originally built about 1896 but expanded twice during the first two decades of the 20th century, the Thornton House is significant as the home for fifty years of Dr. John G. Thornton, a noted black physician, and his wife, Bessie Stephens Thornton, member of a black family that had been prominent in Little Rock since before the Civil War. The house also briefly served as the residence of Mrs. Thornton's mother, Charlotte E. Stephens, Little Rock's first black public school teacher. Through its alterations, the house illustrates the manner in which African Americans who grew more prosperous often remodeled and expanded their homes rather than moving to new locations. This practice, explained in part by limits imposed by segregation, influenced development in the Dunbar School neighborhood.

ELABORATION

Built about 1896 for Charles E. Taylor, a white "traveling agent" for a local hardware company, the house at 1420 West 15th Street in Little Rock's Centennial Addition became the residence of Dr. and Mrs. John G. Thornton about 1906. Dr. Thornton, who has been described as one of the "deans of black physicians" in Little Rock, was born in St. Louis in 1873 but grew up in Mississippi, graduating in 1893 from the State Normal College at Holly Springs. He then taught for several years, using his teaching income to put himself through Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. After graduating in 1902, he first practiced in Greenville, Mississippi, then moved to Little Rock, where he married Miss Bessie Stephens in 1904. Bessie Stephens Thornton, a graduate of Walden University in Nashville, was a teacher and the daughter of Charlotte E. Stephens, who is remembered as Little Rock's first black public school teacher. Mrs. Thornton's maternal grandfather was a leader in Little Rock's antebellum black community and served as butler for the family of one of the city's founding fathers, Chester Ashley.

During his long career, Dr. Thornton devoted his energies not only to caring for his own patients but also to ensuring that all African Americans had access to good medical care and facilities. In 1905, he and another African-American physician in Little Rock, Dr. John M. Robinson, co-founded the Arkansas Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, an organization for black medical professionals that remains in existence today. One of the Association's first projects was opening a hospital to address the need for better medical facilities for African Americans at a time when Little Rock had no integrated hospitals. Although the Association's hospital was short-lived, it helped pave the way for subsequent, more successful efforts to provide quality medical care for black patients.

Dr. Thornton's practice initially was located at 701 West 9th Street in the black business district, but he eventually moved his office into the Mosaic Templars Building at 9th and Broadway, where he served as "National Grand Medical Examiner." Through the Mosaic Templars, he continued his efforts to ensure that African Americans had access to good medical care by laying the groundwork for the Mosaic Templars to operate hospitals that would serve its members.

As a leader in the black community, Dr. Thornton held numerous positions and received many honors, including serving as physician to Shorter College, a historically black school in North Little Rock, and as vice-president of the National Medical Association, a professional association for black physicians that eventually merged with the American Medical Association. Dr. Thornton also was active in efforts to re-establish African Americans as a force in the Republican Party, taking part in a bold attempt to force "Lily White" Republicans to recognize black delegates to the 1920 Pulaski County Republican Convention.

Dr. Thornton's success enabled him to enlarge and update his home twice, first around 1906, when the floorplan was expanded and stylish Colonial Revival decorative details were added, and again around 1920, when a second story was built to create a then-popular American Foursquare with Craftsman-style details. By that time, Little Rock real estate developers were openly excluding African Americans from new residential areas. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Thorntons had the option of building a larger house in a newer neighborhood—certainly not in one of the suburban neighborhoods then under development. The twice-remodeled Thornton House illustrates the fact that even successful African Americans had to accommodate themselves to segregation and is one of several extensively remodeled homes in the Dunbar neighborhood that demonstrate how segregation influenced the neighborhood's development.

Dr. Thornton lived for more than fifty years at 1420 West 15th Street, dying at the age of eighty-four in 1957.

A footnote to the significance of the Thornton House is the brief period during the 1920s when Charlotte E. Stephens lived with her daughter and son-in-law. Mrs. Stephens, who was between permanent residences at the time, lived at 1420 West 15th Street from about 1923 to 1925. She is an important figure in Little Rock's history not only because she became the city's first black public school teacher but also because she taught longer in Little Rock than anyone else ever will. Her teaching career began in 1869, when she was fifteen; she retired in 1939 at the age of eighty-five. A public elementary school in Little Rock is named for her.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock). 3 April 1955.

Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock). 6 November 1957.

Bush, A. E. and P. L. Dornan, eds. *History of the Mosaic Templars of America, Its Founders and Officials*. Little Rock: Central Printing Company, 1924.

Dillard, Tom W. "Perseverance: Black History in Pulaski County—An Excerpt." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 31 (Winter 1983): 62-73.

Gordon, Fon Louise. "Black Women in Arkansas." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 35 (Spring 1987): 26-37.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, Arkansas. Vol. II. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1939.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, including Argenta and Pulaski Heights, Arkansas. Vol. 1. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1913.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Baring Cross, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1897.

Little Rock City Directories: 1895-96 through 1958.

Terry, Adolphine Fletcher. *Charlotte Stephens: Little Rock's First Black Teacher*. Little Rock: Academic Press of Arkansas, 1973.

Walls, Edwina. "Some Extinct Black Hospitals of Little Rock and Pulaski County." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 34 (Spring 1986): 2-13.

Woods, E. M. *Blue Book of Little Rock and Argenta, Arkansas*. Little Rock: Central Printing Co., 1907.

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

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:

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>565100</u>	<u>3843860</u>	B
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lot 8, Block 14, Centennial Addition to the City of Little Rock

Boundary Justification:

The legal description of the Thornton House property has remained unchanged since the house was built; this boundary contains all of the property historically associated with the resource.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Name/Title: Cheryl Griffith Nichols/Consultant

Organization: N/A Date: March 24, 1999

Street & Number: 1721 S. Gaines St. Telephone: 501-375-2686

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72206

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 99000543

Date Listed: 5/28/99

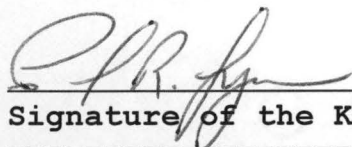
Thornton House
Property Name

Pulaski
County

AR
State

Historically Black Properties in Little Rock's Dunbar School
Neighborhood MPS
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

5/28/99
Date of Action

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Amended Items in Nomination:

Significance:

The current documentation fails to establish the individual NR significance of Ms. Bessie Stephens Thornton. Her connections to one of Little Rock's prominent African American families is insufficient by itself to justify her listing under NR Criterion B.

[Bessie Stephens Thornton is deleted from the *Significant Person(s)* box.]

Criteria Consideration G must be checked for resources that continue to achieve significance into a period less than fifty years before the nomination. In the case of the Thornton House, the property meets the criteria consideration based on its continuing association with an important local citizen over a period of 51 years, ending logically with Dr. Thornton's death in 1957.

This information was confirmed with the Arkansas SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Thornton House

MULTIPLE NAME: Historically Black Properties in Little Rock's Dunbar School
Neighborhood MPS

STATE & COUNTY: ARKANSAS, Pulaski

DATE RECEIVED: 4/15/99 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/26/99
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/12/99 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/30/99
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 99000543

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT _____DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Thornton House is significant under National Register Criteria B and C in the areas of Ethnic History-Black, Health/Medicine, and Architecture. The house is associated with important Little Rock physician John G. Thornton, whose contributions promoted quality medical care for local African American residents. Architecturally, the house reflects the common evolutionary patterns often witnessed by residential designs in the Dunbar School neighborhood.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criteria B+C

REVIEWER Paul Lusignan DISCIPLINE HISTORIAN

TELEPHONE _____ DATE 5/28/99

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



- 1) Thornton House
1420 W. 15th St., Little Rock
- 2) Pulaski County, Arkansas
- 3) Cheryl Nichols
- 4) 7/1/98
- 5) AHPP
- 6) View from south, looking north



- 1) Thornton House
1420 W. 15th St, Little Rock
- 2) Pulaski County, Arkansas
- 3) Cheryl Nichols
- 4) 7/1/98
- 5) AHPP
- 6) View from south, looking NW



- 1) Thornton House
1420 W. 15th St, Little Rock
- 2) Pulaski County, Arkansas
- 3) Cheryl Nichols
- 4) 7/1/98
- 5) A#PP
- 6) View from north, looking south

Please refer to the map in the
Multiple Property Cover Sheet
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64500023