

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: 94000372

Date Listed: 5/2/94


Lee, Lt. George W., House
Property Name

Shelby
County

TENNESSEE
State

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

5/2/94
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

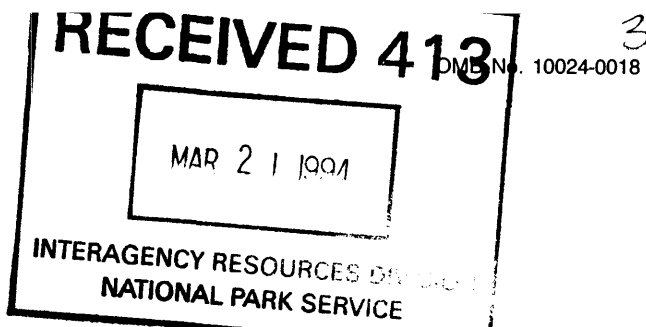
Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to add Ethnic Heritage--Black as an area of significance, to reflect Lt. Lee's importance in the African American community in Memphis discussed in the text.

This change was confirmed by phone with the Tennessee SHPO (5/2/94)

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lee, Lt. George W., House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 563 Stephens Place not for publication

city or town Memphis vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Shelby code 157 zip code 38126

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Robert L. Huger 3/15/94
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 the Keeper Ma J. M. [Signature] Date of Action 5/2/94

Lee, Lt. George W., House

Shelby Co., TN

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: bungalow influence

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls vinyl

roof asphalt

other metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: **N/A**

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Commerce
- Literature
- Politics/Government
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1921-1941

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Lee, Lieutenant George Washington

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): **N/A**

- 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

Name of repository:

Lee, Lt. George W., House
Name of Property

Shelby Co., TN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

Southwest Memphis, TN-ARK
404SE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	6	7	6	9	4	6	0	3	8	9	0	2	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

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

Zone Easting Northing

2

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

4

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

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kim Isbell, Judith Johnson & Lydia Henegar

organization Memphis Heritage, Inc. date November 1993

street & number P.O. Box 3143 telephone (901) 529-9828

city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38173

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Anthony Stewart

street & number 563 Stephens Pl. telephone (901) 948-0394

city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38126

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

MAR 2 1994

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Narrative Description

The Lt. George Washington Lee House, constructed in 1911, is a one and one-half-story, hip roof, double pile form cottage with bungalow stylistic detailing. The building is of frame construction on a raised foundation with pyramid shingle roof and a front gable roof that extends over the front porch. At the rear of the house is a half-story extension. The original half-story is setback from the first floor and extends only over the rear portion of the house. A small one-story addition has been added on the rear wall of the house. The house is situated in an urban neighborhood of south Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee (population 986,068).

The house's site is a low gradual terrace facing north above the street grade of Stephens Place. It contains a concrete drive and walkway with embanked steps at the edge of the sidewalk. No public or private landscaping appears in front of the Lt. Lee House, as is common with most of the houses fronting Stephens Place. Two large hardwoods are situated to the front and rear of the dwelling on the shared property line with 569 Stephens Place.

Development on Stephens Place began in 1911 and continued through 1920. The houses maintain an average setback of twenty feet. Each house has a driveway and many have walkways from the sidewalk to the dwelling. Other walkways begin at the edge of the driveway close to the dwelling.

The facade, or north elevation, is three bays wide with an off-center entry flanked on the west by a rectangular bay window containing a pair of windows and on the east by a single window. The facade entryway features a single 3/4 light door and small transom. The windows, changed circa 1963, are one-over-one wooden sash with aluminum frame storm windows and burglar bars in a plain flat surround. The roof has an asphalt shingle covering and a gable roofed dormer on the west side. The cornice is boxed. A one-story porch covers half of the facade and has a gable roof supported by replacement wrought iron posts on concrete pedestal bases. The porch entrance has closed concrete risers. The wall covering of the house is a narrow-faced vinyl siding whose appearance is similar to the original weatherboard. The house's original window and door surrounds were covered in the installation of the vinyl siding circa 1980.

The west elevation has two window openings and a gable-roofed dormer containing a pair of windows. The eastern elevation features three window openings. The first and last bays on the eastern elevation have one-over-one sash windows. The center bay has a small single light window. Appended to the rear are two additions: a one-story wing that appears to have been built circa 1950 and a small shed-roofed addition built circa 1990. The wing has a gable roof and a three-part picture window and entry on its rear elevation and sliding sash windows on the sides.

An original hip-roofed half-story, visible from the sides and rear, has paired one-over-one sash windows on the ends. On the rear of the upper story there are two pairs of one-over-one sash windows flanking a central doorway. The doorway was created in 1992 from what was originally a single-light window. In 1992 a second-

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

story shed-roofed porch and exterior stair with open railings were built of wooden two-by-fours (Stewart, 1993). Both the stair and the second-story porch are completely reversible changes.

The interior contains four original, unaltered rooms connected by a center hall. The west front room, the living room, retains the original wood stained and varnished floor (covered by carpet in 1993), original base molding, window and door surrounds, panel strips, fireplace mantel and built-in bookcase. The window and door surrounds have a molded lintel and panel strips appear at regular intervals along the walls. The fireplace features the original coal grates and a stained and varnished mantel having a mantel shelf with column supports and a mirror above flanked by columns. To the right of the fireplace is a built-in bookcase with glass doors. An arched opening between this room and the adjoining room to the east (originally the dining room) was closed circa 1990 but the outline of the arch is visible in both rooms.

The east front room was originally used as a dining room and serves as a bedroom in 1993. Similar to the living room, the dining room retains all of its original moldings, panel strips, wood floors and mantel. In addition, the panel strips are topped by a bracketed plate rail. The fireplace features the original coal grates, mantel shelf with sawn bracket supports and a mirror above. All trim in the front two rooms retains the original stain and varnish finish.

The rear west room continues to serve as a bedroom. The room retains its original woodwork though it has been painted. The fireplace has a simple mantel with shelf with sawn bracket supports. The fireplace opening is bricked up.

The southeast corner of the house is divided into the bathroom and kitchen. Each room retains its original doors and trim though they have modern floor coverings, commode, tub and cabinets. Appended to the rear of the kitchen is a wing that appears to have been constructed circa 1950 by Lt. Lee. The wing houses a family room or den with panelled walls and a tiled ceiling. Also appended to the rear of the kitchen and to the east side of the circa 1950 wing is a shed-roofed utility room addition, built in 1990 (Stewart, 1993).

All rooms were historically accessed through a central hall which contains a narrow staircase for access to the upper floor. The house has been divided into an up-and-down duplex in 1993. The top landing of the staircase has been extended across the stairwell to create a floor surface for what is now the entryway for an upstairs apartment. The original interior stair is still in place, and this alteration is completely reversible.

Access to the half-story is now gained via the new rear exterior stair. The half-story contains two plain unaltered finished rooms in the rear on either side of the former stair landing. The half-story also has a bathroom with original fixtures. The attic space in the front half of the house has been finished for living room use for what is now the upstairs apartment.

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

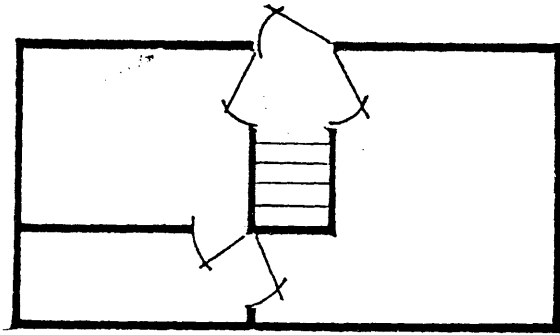
The interior of the house has few changes and retains much of its original woodwork including the five-panel interior doors. The walls and ceilings of the downstairs rooms retain their original plaster finishes. Changes to the interior of the house, including the closing of the arch opening between the living room and dining room, are reversible.

Though exterior alterations, including the installation of vinyl siding, the rear shed roof addition, and the second story rear porch and staircase occurred after Lee's death, the texture, feeling and integrity of the original character of this place are unimpaired from that largely known by George W. Lee in his life. The majority of these changes are reversible.

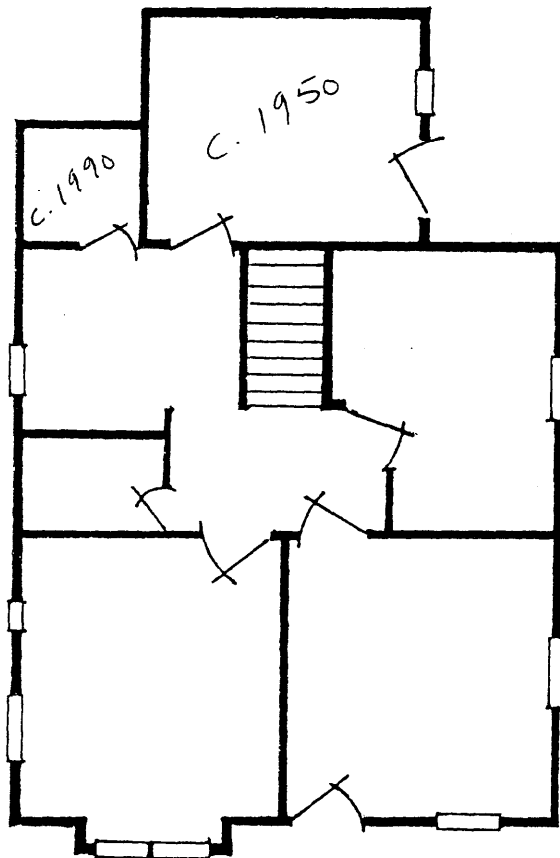
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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN



Monitor



Lee House - Stevens Pl. 563

Not to Scale

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Lt. George Washington Lee House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under criterion B as a locally significant site for its long-time association with Lieutenant George Washington Lee (1894-1976), whose participation, leadership and contributions in the areas of politics, commerce and literature provide an important perspective on the social history of Memphis and Shelby County's African-American middle class. Lt. Lee purchased the property and house at 563 Stephens Place on April 9, 1921, for \$10,000. He lived there for the remaining 55 years of his life. Although Lee continued to be active in public life until he died in 1976, for purposes of this nomination the chosen period of significance ends in 1941. While Lt. Lee continued to be active in politics, 1941 marks the end of his published books and a shift in his political career brought about by Robert R. Church, Jr.'s move from Memphis.

At the Fourth Atlanta University Conference held in 1898, African-Americans identified the merits of capitalism as a means of racial advancement and the race's main hope for progress. After World War I, this African-American capitalist philosophy became identified with the Harlem "New Negro" intellectual movement which promoted the spiritual emancipation of the African-American race by praising all things African-American: art, music and even middle-class business successes (Tucker, 53-4). Lt. George W. Lee exemplified locally the first generation of African-American capitalists and "New Negroes" with his successes as an insurance executive, civic leader, orator, politician and author.

The grandchild of slaves, George Washington Lee was born in Indianola, Mississippi, on January 4, 1894, to the Reverend George and Hattie Stringfellow Lee, at a time when racial division and prejudice dominated everyday life. Despite these conditions Lee rose from his humble beginnings to become one of the most successful African-American business and political leaders in the South.

During his college years (1912 -1918) at Alcorn Agriculture & Mechanical College in Okolona, Mississippi, Lee worked summers in Memphis as a bellhop at the Gayoso Hotel (Gayoso-Peabody Historic District, NR 5/7/1980) to pay for his education. Working as a bellhop was considered to be a prestigious and lucrative job for African-Americans. A bellhop was able to earn \$50.00 to \$200.00 a summer and the position also provided an opportunity to interact with white people during a time when white connections were valuable (Tucker, p. 22).

When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, African-American volunteers were initially called on to be laborers in the Army and servants in the Navy. The Army refused to commission African-American officers. In an effort to end racial discrimination, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pressed the United States War Department into establishing a separate but equal officers training school for African-Americans. George Lee was one of only twenty-seven Tennesseans accepted into the newly-created officers school in World War I.

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
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Lee distinguished himself in the military. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant from officers training camp at Camp Dodge in Des Moines, Iowa, and he served in the 92nd Division, the "Buffalo Division," of the War Department, in the 368th Regiment, Company C, which sailed for France in June 1918. On September 25, 1918, Lee won promotion to First Lieutenant and was later awarded the French "Croix de Guerre" for bravery at the Battle of Argonne Forest. On March 27, 1919, Lee was discharged from service (MPS 6-27-41). His military accomplishments gave Lee some prestige, so he kept the title "Lieutenant" for the rest of his life.

Alcorn A & M College granted Lee college credit for his service in the Army and he received a Bachelor of Science degree in June 1918 (Alcorn A&M Catalogue, 1918-1919; Tucker, p. 35).

After Lee's return to civilian life in 1919, he chose to become a businessman at a time when successful African-American businessmen considered themselves the leaders of the race. African-American capitalism was burgeoning when Lee returned to Memphis and he quickly landed a position with Mississippi Life Insurance Company as an insurance sales person (GWL Collection, Box 1 Folder 23). Other local new African-American businesses included Bert M. Roddy's chain-store grocery business, the Citizen's Cooperative Stores; the Citizen's Mercantile Company, Beale Street's first modern department store; and the Tri-State Casket and Coffin Company (Tucker, 45).

The Mississippi Life Insurance Company had been founded in 1909 by Wayne Cox, an African-American entrepreneur in Indianola, Mississippi, Lee's hometown. Cox organized Mississippi Life with \$25,000.00 in capital. A year later the company's assets had increased to approximately \$100,000.00, which enabled it to become the "first Negro Corporation to be chartered as a legal reserve company" qualified to write every variety of insurance from the industrial to an endowment policy (Harvard Business History, p. 437).

When Lee joined Mississippi Life, its home office had been moved from Indianola to 390 Beale Street, Memphis. Dr. Joseph E. Walker (1880-1956) was its president. Walker had been a charter member of the company. He was also from the Indianola, Mississippi, area and was a graduate of Alcorn A & M. Within a short period of time, Lee was promoted to Sales Manager at Mississippi Life. In 1920 he was promoted to Vice President and he remained in that position until 1923 (Harvard Business History, 437-439).

In 1921 Lee was invited to speak at the National Negro Business League conference. There he found that the conference offered little for the for-profit insurance industry. Recognizing a need for a national forum on insurance issues, Lee became the principal organizer of the National Negro Insurance Association in Durham, North Carolina. The National Insurance Association, as the organization is known today, maintains operations in Durham, North Carolina, and has twenty-three member, African-American companies (National Insurance Association, The Pilot, August 1970).

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Lee left Mississippi Life in March of 1923 when the company came into white ownership after financial difficulty. Walker resigned just prior to the buy-out to establish a new insurance company (Harvard Business History, p. 442). Walker's new company, Universal Life Insurance Company, was founded in 1923 in Memphis as a stock corporation. In 1993, Universal maintains its home office in Memphis and has branch offices in ten states and the District of Columbia. Lee was an original stock holder in this company and later served on its Board of Directors. He was not employed by Universal Life but instead went to work for Atlanta Life Insurance (Hassell, 1993).

Lee contacted A. F. Herndon (1858-1927), founder of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company in Atlanta, one of the largest African-American owned businesses in the United States, and convinced him to open a Memphis branch. Atlanta Life was founded in 1905 by Herndon as a benevolent association and in 1916 it was incorporated as Atlanta Mutual. Lee opened the Memphis branch of Atlanta Life Insurance in 1924 at 390 1/2 Beale Street. From 1924 until 1976 Lee served as the Sales Manager of the Memphis office. During his 52-year association with Atlanta Life, Lee also served on the Board of Directors, and as the company's Third Vice President and as Senior Vice President. In 1993 Atlanta Life Insurance Company maintains operations in thirteen states, including a branch office in Memphis at 526 Beale.

George Lee devoted much of his time to the self-imposed role of race leader who worked for the betterment of the social and economic conditions of African-Americans using the ballot box as his primary vehicle. In Memphis, the African-American businessmen challenged the accommodating attitudes of the African-American ministers, provided aggressive leadership and provided a militant philosophy of African-American pride. In 1920, Lee joined Robert R. Church Jr.'s Lincoln Republican League, organized by Church in 1916 as a national African-American political organization in Memphis. The League continues to exist today as a Republican organization whose purpose is to foster the education of African-Americans about political issues and candidates and to increase voter registration (Melton, 39-40).

It was largely through Lee's involvement with the Lincoln Republican League and Robert Church Jr. that he was so quickly able to obtain national recognition as a Party speaker. Lee attended a Republican National Convention for the first time in 1920 when Warren G. Harding was nominated. For his efforts as a Party speaker, Lee received a thank-you letter from Will H. Hays, chairman of the Republican National Committee (Melton, 100-102). From 1920 to 1952, Lee attended twelve GOP (Republican) National Conventions, six as a delegate. During the 1928 Hoover campaign and under Hoover's administration, Lee served as the National Director of Veterans. He held a similar title in Alf Landon's unsuccessful 1936 campaign.

Lee worked with the Lincoln Republican League in the 1923 and 1927 campaigns to ensure the elections of Rowlett Paine and Watkins Overton as Mayor of Memphis (Melton, 135). During the Depression years, Lee served as the Colored Division Director of Mayor Paine's Relief Committee, (Melton, p. 131; GWL Collection Box

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
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IX Folder 13). Lee was also a long-time member of Tennessee's State Republican Executive Committee and chairman of the steering committee of Volunteer Ticket, the African-American ticket in Memphis city elections.

In addition to Lee's life-long commitment to the Republican party as a vehicle to improve the socio-economic conditions of African-Americans, Lee was dedicated to the Beale Street Elks Club Lodge No. 95 of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World. The Elks Club is a fraternal organization that united African-American leaders in a brotherhood for the advancement of the race. Locally the lodge served as the social club for African-American Memphis business and political leaders (Harvard Business History, p. 444). Lee served as the Beale Street lodge's first Exalted Ruler and was crowned the Elks "King of all Exalted Rulers" in 1939 for his work with the local lodge, which was the largest in the nation with 800 members (CA 10-28-38; 1-1-40). The national fraternal order supported a Department of Education and a Department of Civil Rights which informed the African-American masses by having school children declaim their constitutional rights in annual oratorical contests (Tucker, 55).

Lee was devoted to his professional life, almost to the exclusion of his personal life. He lived with his mother in the house at 563 Stephens Place until she died in 1939. In 1946, at the age of 52, Lee married Estell Buell, who was Miss Bronze America 1943. Their marriage was short-lived, apparently because Lee continued to devote most of his time and energy to his public life. A daughter, Gilda, was born in 1947. The Lees divorced in 1948 (CA 2-15-90).

Since writing offered a medium for promoting the racial pride upon which African-American business thrived, as a businessman George Lee took up the pen. His first published articles called for the race to unite against the evils of poverty and discrimination. After the Great Depression delivered a devastating blow to the African-American economy of Beale Street, Lee felt compelled to write a book that would revive faith in African-American business. In Beale Street: Where the Blues Began (1934), Lee wrote of the history of Beale Street; he painted a picture of the district's businessmen and women, of the moral and intellectual qualities of its inhabitants and, following the trend of the Negro literary renaissance writers, he also sought a sympathetic portrayal of the street's gangsters, pimps and prostitutes. Beale Street was a best-seller and became the first book by a African-American author offered by the Book-of-the-Month Club (Tucker, 112; PS 3-26-37; PS 10-17-41).

Lee's second book, a novel about a roustabout, was River George. It was published in 1937 and also became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. A book of short stories, Beale Street Sundown, was published in 1941. His success as a writer brought Lee the nickname "the Boswell of Beale Street" (Tucker, 119).

The 1930s marked the end of Lee's protest leadership. Just as his writing had shifted from the assertion of racial pride to the entertainment of whites, so did his politics shift from protest to accommodation. Robert R. Church Jr., Lee's mentor, left Memphis in 1940 because of his political differences with E. H. Crump and

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Shelby County, TN

financial problems brought about by the Depression. With Church removed, Lee became primary speaker for the Republican Party in Memphis (Melton, p. 195).

Lee was an orator of great natural ability. His father and four uncles were preachers. His positions with Atlanta Life, the Elks, and the Republican Party brought frequent occasions for speeches. Many of these were published by Atlanta Life in its monthly magazine and Lee's own copies are preserved in his collected papers at the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library. To encourage young people to develop their talents for speaking, Lee and the Elks sponsored annual oratory contests.

Lee's speech included vivid imagery. He used his talent as a speaker to encourage patriotism and African-American pride. In the early 1940s he referred to Adolf Hitler as "a madman of blood and iron." And later he urged African-Americans to support the U.S. and buy war bonds by reminding them: "In what other country could a Booker T. Washington rise out of the womb of slavery and dip his pen in the blood and sweat of slaves and write into the curriculum of time the greatest system of industrial education the world has ever known?" (Thomas, Suggested, 263).

About Barry Goldwater, who Lee was afraid was a harbinger of white exclusivity in the Republican Party, Lee said in 1964: "His is the battle to hold back the clock, the battle to remain in the past, the battle of ultra-conservatism. And ultra-conservatism is like a spinster--with noble ancestry, but no offspring," (Thomas, Suggested, p. 264).

Perhaps the culmination of Lee's speaking career was in 1952, when he made the seconding speech on behalf of the nomination of Robert Taft at the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Lee was the first African-American offered such an opportunity since Reconstruction. Although Dwight Eisenhower, not Taft, was selected as the nominee, Lee's speech was much-praised. In 1954, Lee visited and was photographed with President Eisenhower at the White House, accompanied by his daughter Gilda and young Huey Sheppard of Long Beach, California, the winner of the 1954 Elks oratorical contest (Lee collection index, p. ii).

As the State GOP leader, Lee was credited with President Eisenhower's 1956 win in Tennessee as African-American voters carried the state. Under Eisenhower, Lee served as a member of the National Board of Field Advisors of the Small Business Administration and as a Federal Communications Commissioner. Under President Lyndon Johnson, Lee was a member of the Regional Export Expansion Council.

Lee, one of Memphis's last African-American patronage bosses, was again in the national spotlight when he lost a bitter struggle to be seated as a delegate at the GOP convention that nominated Barry Goldwater in 1964. Although he lost the struggle, Lee gained even more respect as a symbol of African-Americans' search for a place in the Republican Party.

The George W. Lee U. S. Post Office at 826 Mississippi Blvd. in Memphis, built in 1956, was the first named for an African-American and one of few ever named for a living person. During his lifetime, Lee provided for the maintenance of the facility

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
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and his will listed the property at 826 Mississippi Boulevard as part of his estate (Probate Court Record 105644).

Lt. Lee Avenue, one street south of Beale Street in Memphis, was named after Lee also. In 1973, Lee's portrait was hung in the Tennessee State Capitol by Governor Winfield Dunn. At the time, W.C. Handy's was the only other portrait of an African-American in the Capitol (CA 9-20-73).

Lee died in an automobile accident after apparently suffering a heart attack, on August 1, 1976. He was 82. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis. His daughter, Gilda Lee Robinson, later donated Lee's papers to the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center (PS 8-2-76).

Lt. George W. Lee exemplified locally the first generation of African-American capitalists and "New Negroes" with his successes as an insurance executive, civic leader, politician, orator and author. Lee's participation, leadership and contributions in the areas of politics, literature and commerce provide an important local perspective on the social history of the African-American middle class in the decades between World Wars I and II.

Lee's home at 563 Stephens Pl. occupies Lot 14 of the Divine Hill Subdivision and was apparently built on speculation by the Divine Hill Land Company of Covington, Kentucky. On February 17, 1911, the land company sold the land and improvements to R. C. Clinton and wife. The deed stipulated that "the purchaser maintain, make repairs and pay taxes for the length of the mortgage" which implies a structure existed on the property. Prior to Lee's purchase of 563 Stephens Place the title transferred four times. The resident listing in the Memphis City Directory indicates that the house was used as rental property during the period 1916-1921. Lee purchased the property on April 9, 1921, for \$10,000.00.

The Lt. George Washington Lee House is the one remaining building with which Lee was closely and continuously associated during his productive life. Lee's Elks lodge and the original Atlanta Life Insurance building on Beale Street were demolished during Urban Renewal. Though alterations including the application of vinyl siding, the addition of burglar bars, and the closing of an interior door opening have occurred since the house was occupied by Lee, it still retains the texture, feeling and integrity of the original character of the property known by him.

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
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Shelby County, TN

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

Verbal Boundary Description

563 Stephens Place is lot 4 of block 21 in ward 25 of census tract 49 in the City of Memphis as shown by the Shelby County Tax Assessor Map I-7.

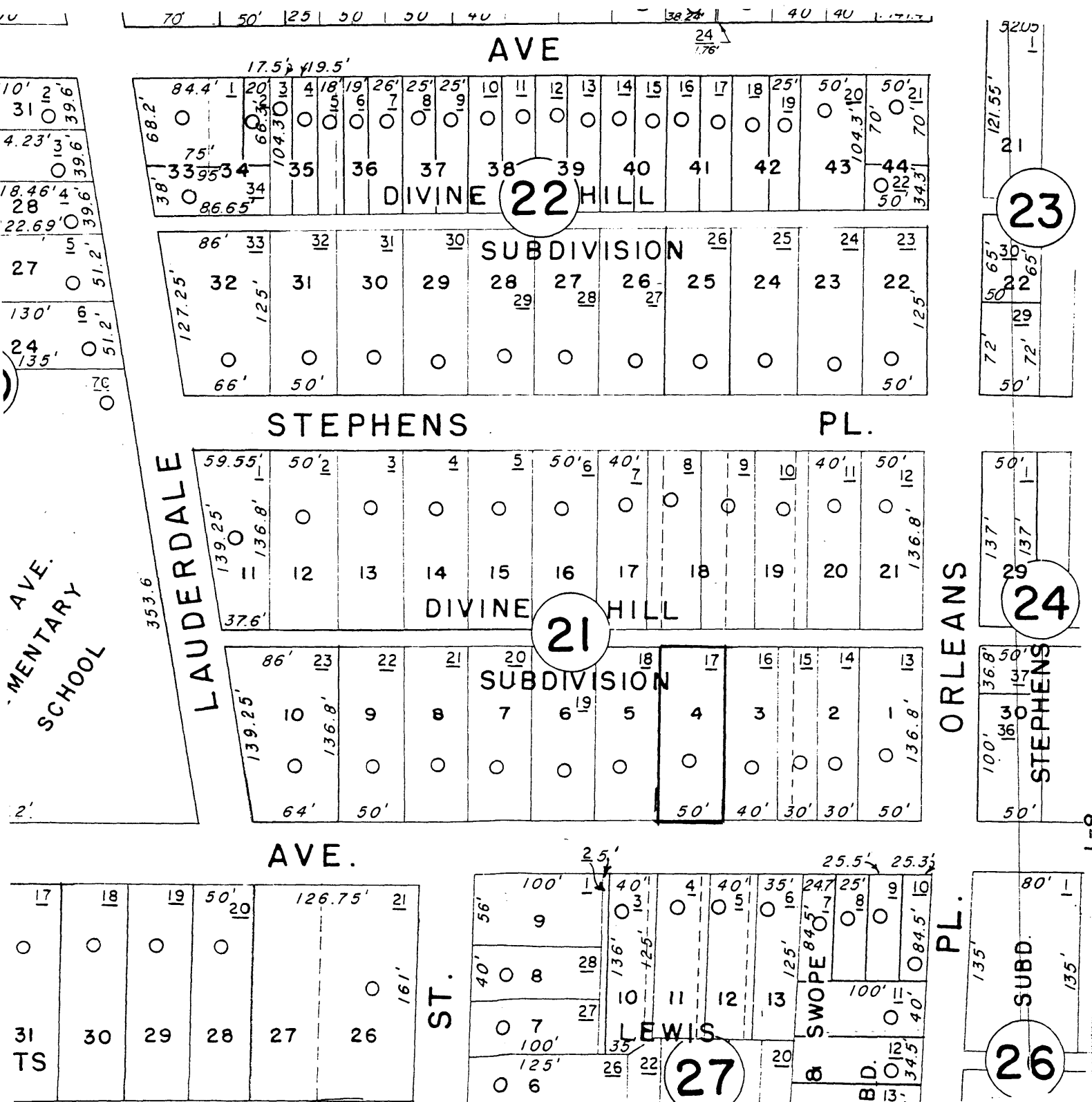
Boundary Justification

The above described parcel is the only remaining property associated with Lt. George Washington Lee from 1921 - 1941.

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Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN



AVE.
MENTARY
SCHOOL

LAUDERDALE

STEPHENS PL.

DIVINE HILL

SUBDIVISION

ORLEANS

STEPHENS

AVE.

ST.

LEWIS

SWOPE B.D.

PL.

SUBD.

N
Scale 1" = 100'

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Photos Page 16 Lee, Lt. George W., House
Shelby County, TN

Photographs

Lee, Lt. George W., House
563 Stephens Place
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee
Photos By: Judith Johnson
Date: November 1993
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, Tennessee

- 1 of 16 North facade and west side elevation, looking southeast (Outbuilding visible at far right of photo is associated with the house behind the Lt. Lee House)
- 2 of 16 North facade and east side elevation, looking southwest
- 3 of 16 South elevation, looking north
- 4 of 16 Detail, rear elevation
- 5 of 16 Interior, living room showing front door and window
- 6 of 16 Interior, living room showing fireplace with original mantel, the kitchen beyond it, and the original stair to the half-story are visible
- 7 of 16 Interior, living room showing fireplace
- 8 of 16 Interior, living room, southwest corner showing fireplace and built-in bookcase and panel strips on walls
- 9 of 16 Interior, dining room (now used as a bedroom) showing the bracketed plate rail atop the panel strips
- 10 of 16 Interior, dining room showing original fireplace and mantel
- 11 of 16 Interior, dining room, west wall showing ghost of arched opening that led to the living room
- 12 of 16 Interior, bedroom, southwest corner, showing fireplace
- 13 of 16 Interior, bedroom, west wall
- 14 of 16 Interior of c. 1950 den
- 15 of 16 Interior of c. 1950 den
- 16 of 16 Interior, looking from the living room into the hallway



Circa 1962

Lee, Lt. George W., House

Shelby Co., TN