

1847

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 22 1992

NATIONAL
REGISTER

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Murphy, Will, House

other name/site number: Murphy/Collins House (preferred)

2. Location

street & number: 2601 Paul Bryant Drive

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Tuscaloosa

vicinity: N/A

state: AL county: Tuscaloosa

code: 125

zip code: 35401

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

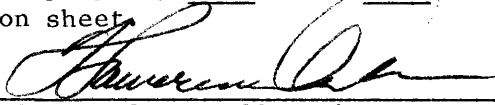
Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

=====
4. State/Federal Agency Certification
=====

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.



Signature of certifying official

12-14-92
Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====
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): _____

 1/28/93

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current : RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: museum

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification:

Bungalow/Craftsman

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation brick roof asbestos
walls brick other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ETHNIC-BLACK HERITAGE

Period(s) of Significance: c.1923 - 1942

Significant Dates: c.1923 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: George Clopton/builder

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

X See continuation sheet.

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

See continuation sheet.

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 -- Specify Repository: _____

=====

10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreeage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>16</u>	<u>446940</u>	<u>3673860</u>	B	_____	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ____ See continuation sheet.

For the point beginning start at the Northeast corner of said Lot 394; run thence West along the North boundary of said Lot 394 a distance of 60 feet to a point; run thence South and parallel to the East boundary of said Lot 394 a distance of 84 feet to a point which is Southwest corner of the property hereby conveyed; run thence East and parallel with the South boundary of said Lot 394 a distance of 60 feet to the East boundary of said Lot 394; run thence North along the East boundary of said Lot 394 a distance of 84 feet, more or less, to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: ____ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries were determined by the legal description of the proprty, as described above.

=====

11. Form Prepared By

=====

(Melanie Betz, AHC NR Reviewer)

Name/Title: Jennifer Bryant/National Register Intern; Phadra Carson/Black Heritage Intern

Organization: Alabama Historical Commission Date: July 1992

Street & Number: 725 Monroe Street Telephone: 205/242-3184

City or Town: Montgomery State: AL ZIP: 36130

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Description Murphy/Collins House Page #1
=====

The Murphy/Collins House, located on the corner of Paul Bryant Drive and 26th Street in the city of Tuscaloosa, is a two-story, stuccoed brick bungalow built c.1923. It faces north on a residential street and is one block away from Greenwood Cemetery and First African Baptist Church (NRHP, 9/28/88).

The main facade contains a central door with ten panes and sidelights and is flanked by double windows. All of the windows in the house except for those on the rear addition have stone lintels and four vertical lights in the upper sash and a single pane of glass in the lower sash. The low-pitched, side oriented gable roof is clad with asbestos shingles. A cross gable on the main facade contains a row of four windows and overhanging eaves which are supported by decorative brackets.

The wraparound, attached porch on the main facade has large stuccoed posts, a wide cornice, exposed rafters in the ceiling, and a flat roof. The floor and steps are cement.

The entire structure except for the rear addition is clad with stuccoed brick. The stucco is made of special sand, gravel, and cement to maintain an earthen hue that would not require painting. Made by freedmen and slave craftsmen, the bricks were originally part of the Alabama State Capitol building (Tuscaloosa 1826-1846). The old capitol building, a women's college at the time, was destroyed by fire in 1923.

The rear of the house has a one-story, enclosed, shed roof porch clad with weatherboards. The second floor also has a shed roof, but it has retained its original windows and overhanging eaves.

There are two interior stuccoed chimneys. One is located at the rear, or south side of the house, and the other is on the east side.

The first floor interior contains a living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast nook, an enclosed porch, bathroom, and an office. The living room has a patterned brick fireplace surround and a cross beam, waffle design ceiling like that in the First African Baptist Church. The reversed, open stringer staircase has pine paneling from the floor to the treads. The second floor consists of a large, open hallway, four bedrooms and a bathroom.

The lot is landscaped with shrubs, flowering plants and trees. A cement driveway runs along the west side of the house.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Significance Murphy/Collins House Page #2
=====

Criterion A (Ethnic-Black Heritage)

The Murphy House is significant for its associations with the development of a black middle class in the early decades of the 20th century and with the system of racial segregation maintained for most aspects of life during the South until the 1960s. Constructed for Will and Laura Murphy in 1923, it reflects the middle-class aspirations and attainment of this prosperous couple, whose income and high status in the local black community derived from providing services to that community.

Undertakers and ministers were the more independent figures in the black community because they did not rely on whites for their income.¹ Will Murphy was an undertaker by profession. He served as the first black licensed embalmer in West Alabama. Until he began practicing in Tuscaloosa, in 1906,² the black community used white undertakers. Laura Murphy, his wife, worked as a teacher and served as the third principal at 20th Street Elementary School--a black school which was located approximately two blocks from the house.³

The Murphy House is one of the few houses that remains from a large downtown residential neighborhood that reflected the residential segregation prevalent at that time. Located on a street that marked the separation of white from black residents, it faced a row of substantial white owned and occupied structures. Neighbors on the same side of the street as Murphy were primarily doctors and represented the upper echelons of black society in Tuscaloosa. The house itself was one of only two brick houses in the area and the only brick house owned by blacks. It was built for the Murphys by local black contractor, George Clopton. Most of the other houses in the community were destroyed in the early 1980s to create Lurleen Wallace Boulevard. With the exception of the house next door, most of the houses immediately surrounding the house have been moved there from elsewhere. The neighborhood is now zoned for business.⁴

Period of Significance:

The period of significance for the Murphy/Collins House extends from 1923 (-date of construction-) to the arbitrary date of 1942, which reflects the NPS 50-year rule for nominating properties to the National Register. The building is one of the last surviving houses in a once prominent black neighborhood in Tuscaloosa.

¹ Black, Earl and Merle Black. Politics and Society in the South. Harvard, Massachusetts, 1987. p.121-2.

² Tuscaloosa News and Time Gazett, P.7, Monday, May 29, 1916.

³ Harper, Marvin. Nomination information sheet. 1991.

⁴ Pickens, Lela. Will Murphy's great-niece, Interview with Phadra Carson and Ruthie Pitts, April 1992.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Significance Murphy/Collins House Page #3
=====

Historical Summary

The house was built for Will and Laura Murphy around 1923. It is an excellent and intact example of a house built by a black contractor for upper-middle class blacks during the first decades of the 20th century. The two-story Craftsman influenced bungalow was constructed by George Clopton. It was constructed with bricks from the former State Capitol at Tuscaloosa and a previous home owned by Will Murphy located on 18th Street.

Clopton built the First African Baptist Church (NRHP 9/28/88), which is located two-blocks northwest of the house. His firm built the Van Hoose Building located on 24th Street between 7th and 8th which housed black-owned businesses, as well as other homes in the area which are no longer standing. He committed suicide because of business debts incurred when he underbid on a contract for St. John Baptist Church. He was able to construct the basement before his demise.⁶

Members of Will Murphy's family rose from slavery to become farmers and landholders. Will Murphy's father lived in the community of Liberty located just outside of Tuscaloosa. His father lived with one of Will's sisters and worked as a farmer on property owned by one of his nephews. According to family members, his nephew traveled to Alabama as a baby in the arms of his mother who was a slave.

Mr. Murphy was born February 17, 1874. He became an undertaker, and served as the first black licensed embalmer for west Alabama. According to the Alabama Board of Funeral Services, embalming was not a regular practice at this time. Most bodies were washed, dressed and laid on a cooling board. Some people embalmed bodies at home and buried the waste from the embalming fluid with the body or in a field. Some persons provided funerary services in conjunction with another business such as a furniture store or barber shop. Will Murphy was licensed as an embalmer on April 16, 1928.⁸ His business moved three times: originally located on 6th Street, later on 7th Street, and then finally on 8th Street. According to neighbors, one of these sites was destroyed by racist arsonists.

Laura, Will Murphy's wife, was born August 17, 1889. She received her education at Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical Normal School in Normal, Alabama.¹⁰ She worked as a teacher and served as the third principal at 20th Street Elementary School. After her husband's death,

⁵ Barnett, Jasper. Will Murpy's nephew. Interview with Ruthie Pitts, Summer 1986.

⁶ Howard, Ida Mae. Church Clerk, St. John Baptist Church. Interview with Ruthie Pitts, June 1992

⁷ Pickens.

⁸ Alabama State Board of Embalming Certificate #149.

⁹ Randolph, Hattie. Interview with Phadra Carson and Ruthie Pitts, May 1992.

¹⁰ Diploma. Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College. May 25, 1897.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number <u>8</u>	Significance	Murphy/Collins House	Page #4
=====			

June 17, 1943, Laura Murpy began to take in boarders.¹¹ She died October 12, 1956, and willed the house to her nephew, Jasper Barnett. The home was purchased by Sylvia P. Collins and Goldye P. Nelson in December of 1957.¹² Mrs. Collins lived in the house until Phoenix House began using it as a halfway house for substance abusers.¹³

Most of the Murphy's closest neighbors were black doctors--Dr. Weaver, Dr. McKenzie, Dr. Mitchell, and Dr. Gilmore. Some of them worked in offices located in the VanHoose building owned by another prosperous black mortician in Tuscaloosa who later moved to the neighborhood. Other neighbors included the Wright brothers whose downtown barber shop served white patrons only, and Robbie Mae Evans who taught at Central School. Her husband was a plumber who also catered to whites only. William Gilchrest lived in the neighborhood and worked as one of two black fireman for the Georgia, Missouri, and Ohio Railroad. Other neighbors worked as teachers,¹⁴ in various postions at Bryce Hospital, or owned their own business.

The city gained ownership of the house and turned it into a house museum for Revealing a Heritage (RAH). RAH is a branch of the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society dedicated to the preservation of properties related to Black Heritage in Tuscaloosa County. The Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society is currently using part of the space for offices.¹⁵

¹¹ Barnett.

¹² Property Deed, Tuscaloosa County. Bk. 404 p. 424.

¹³ Pitts, Ruthie. Founder of Revealing a Heritage. Interview with Phadra Carson, February-July 1992

¹⁴ Miller.

¹⁵ Pitts.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9 Bibliographical Information Murphy/Collins House Page #5
=====

Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College. May 25, 1897.

Alabama State Board of Embalming Certificate #149.

Alabama Board of Funeral Services. 1992.

Barnett, Jasper. Will Murphy's Nephew. Interview with Ruthie Pitts, Summer 1986.

Black, Earle and Merle. Politics and Society in the South. Harvard University Press:
Massachusetts. 1987.

Harper, Marvin. Nomination Information Sheet 1991.

Howard, Ida May. Church Clerk, St. John Baptist Church. Tuscaloosa. Interview with Ruthie Pitts,
June 1992.

Miller, Lula. Neighbor Interview with Phadra Carson and Ruthie Pitts, April 1992.

Pitts, Ruthie. Interviews with Phadra Carson, February-July 1992.

Pickens, Lela. Will Murphy's great-niece. Interview with Phadra Carson and Ruthie Pitts, April
1992.

Property Deed, Tuscaloosa County, Bk.404, p. 424.

Randolph, Hattie. Neighbor Interview with Phadra Carson and Ruthie Pitts, May 1992.

Tuscaloosa News and Time Gazette, p.7, Monday, May 29, 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number PHOTOGRAPHS Murphy/Collins House Page #6
=====

Murphy/Collins House
2601 Paul Bryant Drive
Tuscaloosa, Alabama (Tuscaloosa County)
Phadra Carson, Photographer, 1991
Negatives: Alabama Historical Commission

- PHOTO #1: Front and side facades, looking south
- PHOTO #2: Front and side facades, looking southeast
- PHOTO #3: Side facade, looking west
- PHOTO #4: Rear facade, looking northwest
- PHOTO #5: Front entrance, looking southeast
- PHOTO #6: Interior, stairs
- PHOTO #7: Interior, fireplace in parlor
- PHOTO #8: Interior, ceiling in dining room
- PHOTO #9: Interior, French doors
- PHOTO #10: Interior, windows

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: 92001824

Date Listed: 1/28/93

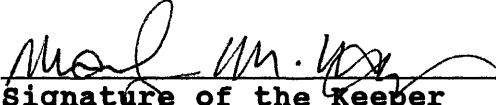
Murphy-Collins House
Property Name

Tuscaloosa
County

ALABAMA
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

2/4/93
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 7

This nomination is amended to show the wall and foundation material as stucco, since that is what is visible on the exterior.

This change was confirmed by phone with the Alabama SHPO (2/3/93).

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)