

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

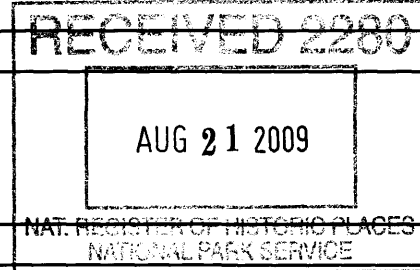
This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested 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 Thomas, Alma, House

other names/site number N/A

09000240



2. Location

street & number 411 21st Street

city, town Columbus () vicinity of

county Muscogee code GA 215

state Georgia code GA zip code 31906

() not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

Category of Property:

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

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

buildings	1	1
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	1	1

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of previous listing: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Richard Clowers
Signature of certifying official

8.11.09
Date

W. Ray Luce
Historic Preservation Division Director
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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 or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

[Signature] 10/28/09

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other, explain:

see continuation sheet

Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions:

COMMERCE/TRADE: professional

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne Style

Materials:

foundation	Brick
walls	Wood: Weatherboard
roof	Asphalt
other	N/A

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Alma Thomas House is located at 411 21st Street in the Rose Hill neighborhood of the city of Columbus in Muscogee County, Georgia. The house sits on the north side of 21st Street near the end of the street where the road has been truncated by the construction of the modern six-lane Veteran's Parkway. The residential suburb of Rose Hill developed north of downtown Columbus during the late 19th century and includes substantial houses, commercial businesses, and community landmark buildings such as the Rose Hill School and a Methodist church located to the east of the Alma Thomas House (Attachment 1). A vacant lot and historic houses are situated immediately east of the house, and across the street to the south are a number of other historic houses.

The house is a one-story, wood-framed, Queen Anne-style house constructed c.1889 (Photographs 1-3). The house has a large, hipped roof with small, front-facing gables and sits on an open brick-pier foundation. The main hipped section contains four rooms and a central hallway. Two gable-roofed wings extend from the back of the main body of the house. An enclosed shed porch is located along the rear of the gabled wings. The house's exterior walls are covered with weatherboard siding. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. One brick chimney is on the hipped roof, and two smaller brick flues remain on the rear gabled wings.

The influence of the Queen Anne style can be seen in the house's irregular form, steeply pitched hipped roof with front-facing gables, asymmetrical front façade with recessed porch and projecting three-sided bay, slender turned porch posts, and decorative jigsaw ornamentation along the porch's roof line and in the three front-facing gables (Photographs 1-8). The jigsaw porch balustrade has been removed (Attachment 2). Two-over-two, double-hung windows are found throughout most of the remainder of the house. The elaborately detailed front door with single arched glass pane and overhead transom also remains intact (Photograph 12).

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

The rear of the house has an enclosed porch, a large wooden deck, and a wheelchair-accessible ramp. The non-historic enclosed porch has three six-over-six sash windows and a non-historic rear entry door. There is a small parking lot located behind the house (Photographs 9-11). There is a driveway located along the west side of the house. A non-historic wood privacy fence surrounds the entire property.

The house's floor plan has a wide central hallway with rooms asymmetrically placed on either side. The west front room projects forward from the front façade and contains a three-sided bay. The east front room looks out onto the front porch through two floor-length windows. The rooms in the rear wings were used as kitchen space, and the rear porch was enclosed.

Non-historic plaster walls are located throughout the house's interior. Ceilings have been lowered slightly with sheetrock covering the original plaster ceilings. The east front room and other rooms on the east side of the house retain their original 11-foot high plaster ceilings. Wood floors remain intact throughout the house, although they may have been covered with linoleum and asphalt tile in a few places. The majority of the floors are 1x4-inch tongue-and-groove boards, but rooms in the rear wings have 1x6-inch board floors, suggesting that these parts of the house may have been constructed at a different time or may have been originally built in a more utilitarian manner. There are historic wood mantels in the front parlor and front bedroom (Photographs 16, 25). These wood mantels have side pilasters topped with scrolls decoratively incised and supporting a simple wood shelf. Wood door and window moldings, picture moldings, and baseboards are simple in design and remain largely intact. Four- and six-panel doors are located throughout the house, although some doors have been replaced, removed, and/or added (Photographs 16-27).

The Alma Thomas House is located on an intown lot in the city of Columbus. There is a noncontributing shed building located behind the house (Photograph 28). The house's backyard has been transformed into parking. No landscape features remain from the house's period of significance. During Alma Thomas' childhood the property contained an ornamental rock garden, playhouse, fruit trees, assorted species of wildflowers, and a stable.

The rehabilitation of the Alma Thomas House was approved by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for the state preferential property tax assessment program on September 10, 2002. The rehabilitation of the Alma Thomas House received final certification from Technical Preservation Services of the National Park Service on August 15, 2003.

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): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

ART
ARCHITECTURE
WOMEN'S HISTORY
ETHNIC HERITAGE—BLACK

Period of Significance:

c.1889-1907

Significant Dates:

c.1889—Date of construction
1891—Alma Thomas born
1907—Thomas family moves to Washington D.C.

Significant Person(s):

Thomas, Alma (1891-1978)

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Statement of significance (areas of significance)

The Alma Thomas House is a late 19th-century, Queen Anne-style house located in Columbus, Georgia, in the Rose Hill neighborhood. The house was built c.1889 by Amelia Cantey and John Harris Thomas. They were a locally prominent, upper-middle class, African-American couple. The house was built in an exclusively white neighborhood. Prominent African-American artist Alma Thomas was born in this house in 1891 and lived here until 1907 when her family permanently relocated to Washington D.C. The home of Alma Thomas is associated importantly with the life of a woman nationally significant in the history of American art. There she spent her formative years, absorbing the area's colorful environment and enduring the period's racist public policies. In her childhood in Columbus can be found the roots of her lifelong study of light and color that foreshadowed her later artistic career. Alma Thomas the artist was a product of the influences that became a part of her when she lived in Columbus. The Alma Thomas House meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion "B" at the national level of significance in terms of Art, Ethnic Heritage-Black, and Women's History because of its direct association with female African-American artist Alma Thomas. The house also meets National Register Criterion "C" at the local level in the area of Architecture because it is a good example of Queen Anne-style architecture. The period of significance begins c.1889 with the construction of the house and ends in 1907 when the Thomas family moved.

The Alma Thomas House is significant nationally under National Register Criterion "B" in the areas of art, ethnic heritage-black, and women's history because it was the childhood home of the nationally significant female African-American artist Alma Thomas. The house is associated with the life of a woman nationally significant in the history of American art. Thomas lived in this house in Columbus between 1891 and 1907. There she spent her formative years, absorbing the area's colorful environment, enduring the region's racist public policies, and observing the bright colors and patterns of simple everyday items in her childhood environment such as the flowers in her father's garden and her mother's brightly colored and patterned dresses.

After leaving her childhood home in 1907 to move with her parents to Washington, D.C., Thomas earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts at Howard University in 1924. She was the first Howard University student and perhaps the first African-American woman anywhere to hold that degree. She taught art at Shaw Junior High School in Washington D.C. for more than 30 years. In 1960 she retired and focused her energies entirely on her own art. She developed a close relationship with artists Gene Davis, Jacob Kainen, and Morris Louis of the Washington Color School whose works emphasized abstract color shapes; this assured her acceptance in this circle. She is best known for her large canvases filled with dense, irregular patterns made by brushes heavily laden with bright colors. Her work has been compared with Byzantine mosaics, the pointillist technique of Georges Seurat, and the paintings of the Washington Color School painters, yet her work is quite distinctive, even idiosyncratic.

Art in America critic Charles North referred to Thomas as "a leading figure in abstract color painting," and the highly influential Harold Rosenberg claimed that she had "brought new life to abstract painting in the nineteen-seventies." A reviewer writing for the *Woman's Art Journal* referred to Alma

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Thomas as “an exceptional artist . . . [who gained] National recognition . . . she was given a small one-person show at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1972.” The reviewer added that Thomas “has been included in all the major exhibitions and books surveying American black and women artists, and was received in 1977 at the White House.”¹ Thomas also received praise from art critics such as Barbara Rose, David Bourbon, and Pamela Simpson in reviews of her work published in the *New York Times*, *Woman's Art Journal*, *Baltimore Sun*, *New York* magazine, and *Art International*.² Thomas, a prominent abstract painter of the 1960s and 1970s, was the first African-American woman to have a solo art exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, in 1972. Thomas's art has been featured in numerous galleries nationwide including Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Museum of Modern Art (New York), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Martha Jackson Gallery (New York), Howard University Gallery of Art (Washington D.C.), Smithsonian National Museum of American Art (Washington D.C.), Columbus Museum (Columbus, Georgia), High Museum of Art (Atlanta, Georgia), Fort Wayne Museum of Art (Fort Wayne, Indiana), Franz Bader Gallery (Washington D.C.), Whyte Gallery (Washington D.C.), Women's Museum (Dallas, Texas), and Dupont Theater Art Gallery (Washington D.C.). Her work was included in the influential show *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, held in 1971 at the Whitney Museum in New York. Thomas's influence extended beyond her lifetime. Following her death in 1978, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art held a retrospective exhibition to recognize her national significance as an American artist. Today her work can be found in many museums including the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington D.C.), High Museum of Art (Atlanta, Georgia), Fort Wayne Museum of Art (Fort Wayne, Indiana), and Columbus Museum (Columbus, Georgia).

While during her childhood Alma Thomas did not exhibit any special aptitude for the art that would later make her nationally, renown, her memories and experiences living in Columbus, Georgia, had a significant influence upon her subsequent art career. Indeed, while Alma Thomas lived in Washington, D.C., during the productive years of her art career, her formative years spent in Columbus, Georgia, had a lasting impression upon her art. Alma Thomas's art, according to art historian Ann Gibson, was highly personal and strongly influenced by memory. Thomas held both positive and negative memories about her childhood in Columbus. She fondly remembered the colorful dress designs created by her mother, Amelia Cantey Thomas, and the rock-and-flower garden maintained by Alma Thomas's father also evoked positive memories of her youth. These memories are believed to have directly influenced the colorful imagery of Thomas's abstract paintings.³ Thomas's career as an artist consisted of two principal phases. During the first and less-well-known phase of her art career, Thomas created a number of impressionistic pieces. Thomas's impressionist period was strongly influenced by her personal childhood memories, as evidenced by her charcoal sketch of her grandfather's home in Fort Mitchell, Alabama. Thomas's impressionistic

¹ “Review of ‘A Life in Art: Alma Thomas, 1891-1978,’ *Woman's Art Journal* vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring- Summer, 1983), 59-60.

² Jonathan P. Binstock, “Apolitical Art in a Political World: Alma Thomas in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s,” in *Alma W. Thomas, a Retrospective of the Paintings*, edited by Jacob Kainen, Ann Gibson, and Jonathan P. Binstock (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 59.

³ Ann Gibson, “Putting Alma Thomas in Place: Modernist Painting, Color Theory, and Civil Rights,” in *Alma W. Thomas, a Retrospective of the Paintings*, edited by Jacob Kainen, Ann Gibson, and Jonathan P. Binstock (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 38.

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pieces also included a number of sketches of gardens and people that were associated with her childhood. It was during the second phase of Thomas's career that she achieved critical acclaim. During the early 1960s Thomas's art became more modern and developed into her trademark colorful brand of abstract expressionism. Thomas developed into a major figure within the Washington Color Field painters—a group of artists whose work emphasized abstract color shapes. While Thomas's art became increasingly abstract, personal memories of the everyday sights of her childhood spent in Columbus, Georgia, continued to influence her work.

The Alma Thomas House meets National Register Criterion "C" at the local level of significance in the area of architecture. The house is a good example of Queen Anne-style architecture in Columbus, Georgia, because of its representative form, massing, and ornamentation. As documented in *Georgia's Living Places: Historic Houses in their Landscaped Settings*, the Queen Anne was Georgia's most popular 19th-century style. The style was extremely popular across Georgia and widely used in many variations all over the state from the 1880s to about 1910.⁴ In Columbus, the Queen Anne style was common during that same period. The Alma Thomas House compares favorably with several excellent examples of Queen Anne-style architecture that are located within the Columbus Historic District (listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 with an National Park Service-approved boundary increase in 1988). The Columbus Historic District is located in downtown Columbus approximately one mile south of the Alma Thomas House. Like the Alma Thomas House, most of the Queen Anne-style houses in the Columbus Historic District are one-story, wood-framed buildings. The Queen Anne-style houses in the Columbus Historic District located at 633 First Avenue Street, 701 First Avenue Street, 627 First Avenue Street, 521 Broadway Street, and 930 Fifth Street share a common architectural style, ornamentation, construction materials, form, and massing with the Alma Thomas House. Only a handful of the Queen Anne-style houses in the Columbus Historic District are two-story buildings such as the examples found at 737 First Avenue and 744 Second Avenue. Like the Alma Thomas Houses, other examples of Queen Anne-style architecture in Columbus have a cross-gabled roof and a partial width front porch with a spindlework frieze and decorative brackets. An ornamented gable is also present in most examples in Columbus. The Alma Thomas House is a representative example of Queen Anne-style architecture in Columbus. The Queen Anne-style houses located in the Columbus Historic District were owned and occupied by members of the local white elite throughout the district's period of significance. The Alma Thomas House, however, was built by and owned and occupied by an African-American family during the house's period of significance. Therefore, on a local scale, the Alma Thomas House's direct association with a prominent African-American family is unique, if not exceptional, among similar examples of Queen Anne-style architecture located in the Columbus Historic District.⁵

⁴ Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, *Georgia's Living Places: Historic Houses in Their Landscaped Settings* (Atlanta, 1991), 9-10.

⁵ *Historic Preservation in Columbus, Georgia* (Columbus, GA: Columbus Area Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

National Register Criteria

The Alma Thomas House meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion "B" at the national level of significance in the areas of Art, Ethnic Heritage—Black and Women's History because of its direct association with African-American artist Alma Thomas.

The Alma Thomas House meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion "C" at the local level of significance in the area of Architecture because it is a good example of Queen Anne-style architecture.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

N/A

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins c.1889 and ends in 1907. The Thomas family purchased the house around 1889 shortly after its construction and remained in the house until 1907 when the family moved to Washington, D. C., to escape mounting racial tensions that threatened the safety of Columbus' African-American population.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

Alma Thomas House—contributing building
Shed—noncontributing building

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

The following historic context was written by Debbie Curtis Toole, architectural historian and consultant. The Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, edited portions of the original text.

While the Alma Thomas House has never been moved, it was originally numbered 419 21st Street and later changed to 411 21st Street. The house was constructed in the area outside of Columbus known as Rose Hill, in a neighborhood described at that time as the "Philips Subdivision of the Sorsby Place." Thomas family members recall that John Harris Thomas and Amelia Cantey were married on June 21, 1888, and the house "was built about a year or two" afterwards. There is no mention of a house on the lot when it was purchased by Sallie Markham in 1889; however, the deeds contain the usual blanket clause, "the said bargained premises . . . together with all and singular the rights, members and appurtenances thereof," which may or may not have included a domicile. While

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the parcel may have contained a structure (outbuilding), it is likely that the house was constructed between May and October of 1889 based on the deed data and the information that the carpenter was a relative of Sallie Markham, who did not own the property until this time.⁶

According to family legend, the house was built by T. Woodson Markham, who was John Harris Thomas' half-brother. Several issues of city directories contain listings for T. Woodson Markham and probably represent this individual. Interestingly, none of the directories list his occupation as a carpenter. Woodson was a sewing machine salesman in 1873; sold general merchandise, perhaps in his own store, in 1888; and was a traveling salesman in 1898. John Harris Thomas paid \$85.00 more for the lot than Sallie Markham paid only six months earlier. That \$85.00 may have gone toward the cost of construction.

During an interview, J. Maurice Thomas, John Harris Thomas' daughter, described the appearance of the house:

There were three rooms on each side, across the back of the house was a . . . porch. There was a big center hall. On each side, the rooms opened out onto the hall. On the right of the center was a large bedroom. Next to that was the dining room, then the kitchen, and then the pantry. On the left was the parlor, a bedroom, another bedroom, and a little bath. In the parlor was a beautiful fireplace with beautiful yellow, red, and green tile around it. A mirror was over the top of the mantel. The floors were plank. All of the rooms had fireplaces. . . .

Also in the parlor was a Knabe piano. A bay window with a seat. I remember beautiful pillows being on the bench. Dark floors with pretty scattered rugs and a rocking chair on the side of the fireplace. Mamma had very good china The next room was the bedroom. It had a very pretty cherry red bedroom suite The last room was sort of a dormitory; we all stayed in there. There were duplicate paintings in the house. I remember *The Man with the Hoe* by Millet; *Caught in the Storm* and a painting called *The Last Hope*.

In the front hall was a library with bookcases all around the wall At that time, we didn't have electricity where we lived although Columbus was lit by electricity. We had oil lights The back hall we used as a rumpus room that opened to the dining room. In the summer we used that part of the hall for dining. In the back hall there was a telephone on the wall. We had a well on the back porch and a pump out in the yard for water. We had a bathroom, but no running water.

On the back porch was a long ice box, like a chest. In there Papa kept it filled with everything because he liked to eat. . . . 500 pounds of ice at a time was needed to keep the food cold. We had a pantry which opened on the back porch. The front yard, on

⁶ *Columbus City Directory: 1894*, (R.L. Polk and Company: Detroit, Michigan, 1894); Muscogee County Superior Court, Deed Book CC: 23; Charles Robertons, "Oral History of J. Maurice Thomas" (On-file at the Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia).

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one side was a rock garden. In that rock garden we had violets, sweet alyssum, pansies, and different colored Sweet Williams. On the other side we had different colored flowers, also the four o'clocks that we used to string in the afternoon, which we put on long pieces of grass which made little garland to go around our necks.

In the back, on one side, there was a gate that led into the yard. On the other side was a yard with pear trees, apple trees, and peach trees. Under one side of the house, I had my little playhouse, with my sister Fannie. Alma and Kathryn had outgrown the playhouse. In the back of this yard was a fence which separated the backyard from what was our garden. Also there was a fence separating the backyard from where Papa had his stable. He had a horse and carriage at one time. We still kept the stable there for grandpa to put his horse when visiting us. The house ran from one street back to the next. That is the reason we had all the land in the back.

Over on this side of the backyard, was a pit Papa had built for bar-b-queing. A little picket fence divided the backyard from the garden. There was a little grape arbor which you passed through to go into the garden. Under the grape arbor was a seat where we used to sit and play. On the fence of our yard, we had little bell-shaped orange colored flowers. I was told that it was a wild honeysuckle. We had a fig tree in the garden near the fence that led into the garden from the back porch. . . . A purple fig tree was in the back of the garden. Papa would have the garden planted in the spring with vegetables. The garden would be planted by a man who kept the garden and yards clean. Mother had helpers to help with the cleaning of the house.⁷

Sallie May Markham of Muscogee County, purchased the lot prior to the Thomas' ownership for \$475.00 from Carrie E. Philips on May 3, 1889. The parcel was described as follows:

Known as lot number twenty four in Philips subdivision of the Sorsby Place Rose Hill in the City of Columbus County and State aforesaid . . . beginning at S. West corner of J. Welborn's lot on 21st at thence running west along said Street sixty-five feet to Welborn's lot Thence South along said line One hundred and sixty feet to beginning point.

The lot extended from 21st Street north to what was called an "alley" in 1889 which became 22nd Street by 1907.⁸

Sallie Markham's sale of the same parcel to John Harris Thomas soon thereafter suggests that she made the original purchase solely with the intent of reselling the lot to John. Sallie made the transaction five months later by selling the lot, and also the house that apparently had been constructed there during that time, in Spalding County. It is speculated that she carried out the real estate transaction in Spalding County in the hope that the sale of the

⁷ Charles Robertons, "Oral History of J. Maurice Thomas" (On-file at the Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia).

⁸ Muscogee County Superior Court, Deed Book CC: 23; Deed Book ZZ: 99.

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

property to an African-American would go unnoticed. John purchased Lot 24 from Sallie on October 25, 1889, for the sum of \$560.00.⁹

The Thomas family grew with the birth of their first child Alma in 1891, followed by Kathryn May's birth. The likelihood of the arrival of more children in the household, and the presence of Amelia's sister, Elizabeth Cantey, led John and Amelia to take out a mortgage on the property for \$300.00 on January 10, 1895. This may have been done to pay for the construction of much needed additions to the house. The mortgage with the City and Suburban Development Company (later the Columbus Savings and Loan Association) had a seven percent interest rate. The mortgage was renewed in 1904 and by 1907 the Thomas' owed the remainder of the loan totaling \$423.00.¹⁰

Additions to the house would have proved fortuitous with the birth of Frances (Fanny) in 1896 followed by the arrival of the last Thomas daughter, John Maurice. (John Maurice's name suggests that perhaps Amelia and John Thomas hoped for at least one son, but managed to carry on John's first name in spite of the lack of sons.) Thus, the household would have included John and Amelia; their children Alma, Kathryn, Fanny, and John Maurice; and Amelia's sister, Elizabeth Cantey. Elizabeth, or "Aunt Lizzy," was a favorite aunt who lived at the Thomas residence from at least 1896 to 1907.¹¹

Lynchings, racial tensions, personal incidents, and the lack of educational opportunities in Columbus led Amelia and John Thomas to move to Washington D.C. in 1907. Amelia Thomas sold the house at 411 21st Street on July 27, 1907 to Elbert Wilson for \$1,577.00 along with the agreement that Wilson pay off the remaining \$423.00 due on the loan. John remained in Columbus for six months after Amelia and the children moved. Elizabeth Cantey relocated when the Thomas family decided to move, and by 1908 she and her sister Mamie were boarders on 18th Street. Although John was recorded as residing at 21st Street during part of 1908, it is likely that Elizabeth chose not to continue living there without the rest of the Thomas family, probably to avoid any suggestion of impropriety.

The following biographical sketch of Alma Thomas was written by Charles T. Butler of the Columbus (Georgia) Museum. The article was published by the New Georgia Encyclopedia in 2004.

A prominent abstract painter of the 1960s and 1970s, Alma Thomas was the first African American woman to have a solo art exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, in 1971.

Born in Columbus on September 22, 1891, Alma Woodsey Thomas was the eldest daughter of John Harris Thomas, a successful businessman, and Amelia Cantey, a dress designer.

⁹ Muscogee County Superior Court, Deed Book CC: 23-24.

¹⁰ Muscogee County Superior Court, Deed Book ZZ: 99.

¹¹ William H. Walsh, *Walsh's Directory of the City of Columbus, Georgia: 1896-97* (Southern Directory and Publishing Co.: Columbus, Georgia, 1896).

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

Alma Thomas showed artistic tendencies as a child when she used local clays to make homemade puppets and sculptures. Her home life was a constant changing environment of cultural activities, as her parents arranged for various lecturers and speakers to make presentations there.

Despite this rich atmosphere of culture, the prevalent social ills of racism and a poor education system for African Americans caused the Thomas family to worry about the future of their family in Georgia. In 1907 the Thomas family moved to Washington, D.C., where they settled in a house that Alma would occupy for the next seventy-one years and that remains in the Thomas family to this day.

In high school Thomas excelled at math and architectural drawing. After graduation she enrolled at Miner Normal School, where she studied kindergarten education and received a teaching certificate. After teaching art for several years, she enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C., to study costume design. She graduated in 1924 with a bachelor's degree in fine arts, becoming the first Howard University student and perhaps the first African American woman anywhere to hold that degree.

After a long and distinguished career as a teacher, Thomas retired in 1960 to focus her energies entirely on her own art. During her professional career she had remained active and visible in Washington's growing art community, and in the late 1950s she developed the confidence and knowledge to pursue the highly colored abstract style for which she is known. Her close relationships with fellow artists Gene Davis, Jacob Kainen, and Morris Louis of the Washington Color Painters [Washington Color School], whose works emphasized abstract color shapes, assured her acceptance in this circle. Thomas's work was included in the important show *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, held in 1971 at the Whitney Museum in New York.

Thomas died in Washington, D.C., in 1978 at the age of eighty-six. Three years later a posthumous retrospective exhibition was held at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art. In 1998 the Fort Wayne Museum of Art in Indiana organized a retrospective exhibition of her paintings that traveled to Columbus. Today her work can be found in many major museums.

The Columbus Museum holds an important collection of Thomas's paintings, watercolors, sculptures, and marionettes, as well as a significant archive of her papers. The Smithsonian American Art Museum also has an archive of her paintings and family papers.¹²

The Alma Thomas House remained a residence throughout the 20th century. The Rose Hill neighborhood in Columbus was predominately white until the mid-20th century when African Americans began moving into the area. Today, due to white flight, the neighborhood is comprised mostly of African-American households. In 2001, the house suffered a devastating

¹² Charles T. Butler, "Alma Thomas," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1040&hl=y> (Article accessed on July 13, 2009).

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

fire. The current property owner used the National Park Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources' tax incentives program to restore the building to its c.1889 appearance. Today the house is used as rental office space.

9. Major Bibliographic References

- Butler, Charles T. "Alma Thomas." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1040&hl=y> (Article accessed on July 13, 2009).
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- R.L. Polk Company's Columbus, Georgia City Directory, 1908*. Detroit: R.L. Polk and Co., 1908.
- Robertons, Charles. "Oral History of J. Maurice Thomas," On file at the Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia.
- Walsh's Directory of the City of Columbus, Georgia: 1896-97*. Columbus, GA.: Southern Directory and Publishing, 1896.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 9—Major Bibliographic References

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

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested**
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued**
date issued: August 15, 2003
- 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:**

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre.

UTM References

A) Zone 16 Easting 689151 Northing 3595718

Verbal Boundary Description

The less than one-acre town lot is bounded to the south by 21st Street and to the north by 22nd Street. The house is located on town lot number 24.

Boundary Justification

The nomination includes the property historically associated with the Alma Thomas House. The house is located on a less than one-acre town lot in the Rose Hill neighborhood in the city of Columbus, Georgia.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Keith S. Hébert and Richard Cloues
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
mailing address 34 Peachtree Street, N.W.
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 651-5983 **date** August 6, 2009
e-mail richard.cloues@dnr.state.ga.us

Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title Debbie Curtis Toole
organization The Jaeger Company
mailing address 119 Washington Street
city or town Gainesville **state** GA **zip code** 30501
telephone 770-534-0506
e-mail N/A

- () **property owner**
- (X) **consultant**
- () **regional development center preservation planner**
- () **other:**

Property Owner or Contact Information

name (property owner or contact person) Terry and Shannon Wilson
organization (if applicable) N/A
mailing address 1101 Belaire Drive
city or town Granite Shoals **state** TX **zip code** 78654
e-mail (optional) N/A

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

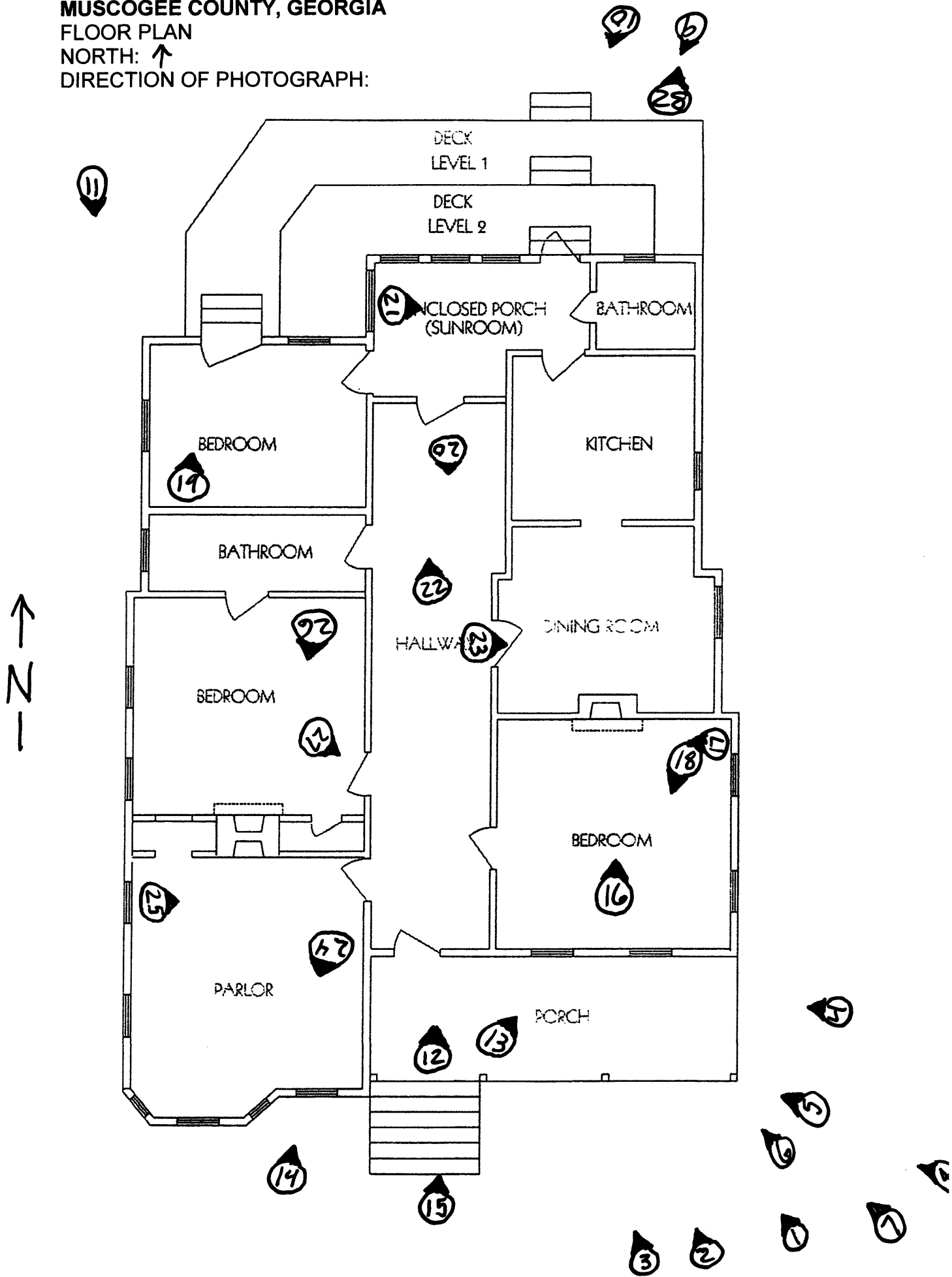
Name of Property: Alma Thomas House
City or Vicinity: Columbus
County: Muscogee
State: Georgia
Photographer: James R. Lockhart
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: 8-10-2008

Description of Photograph(s):

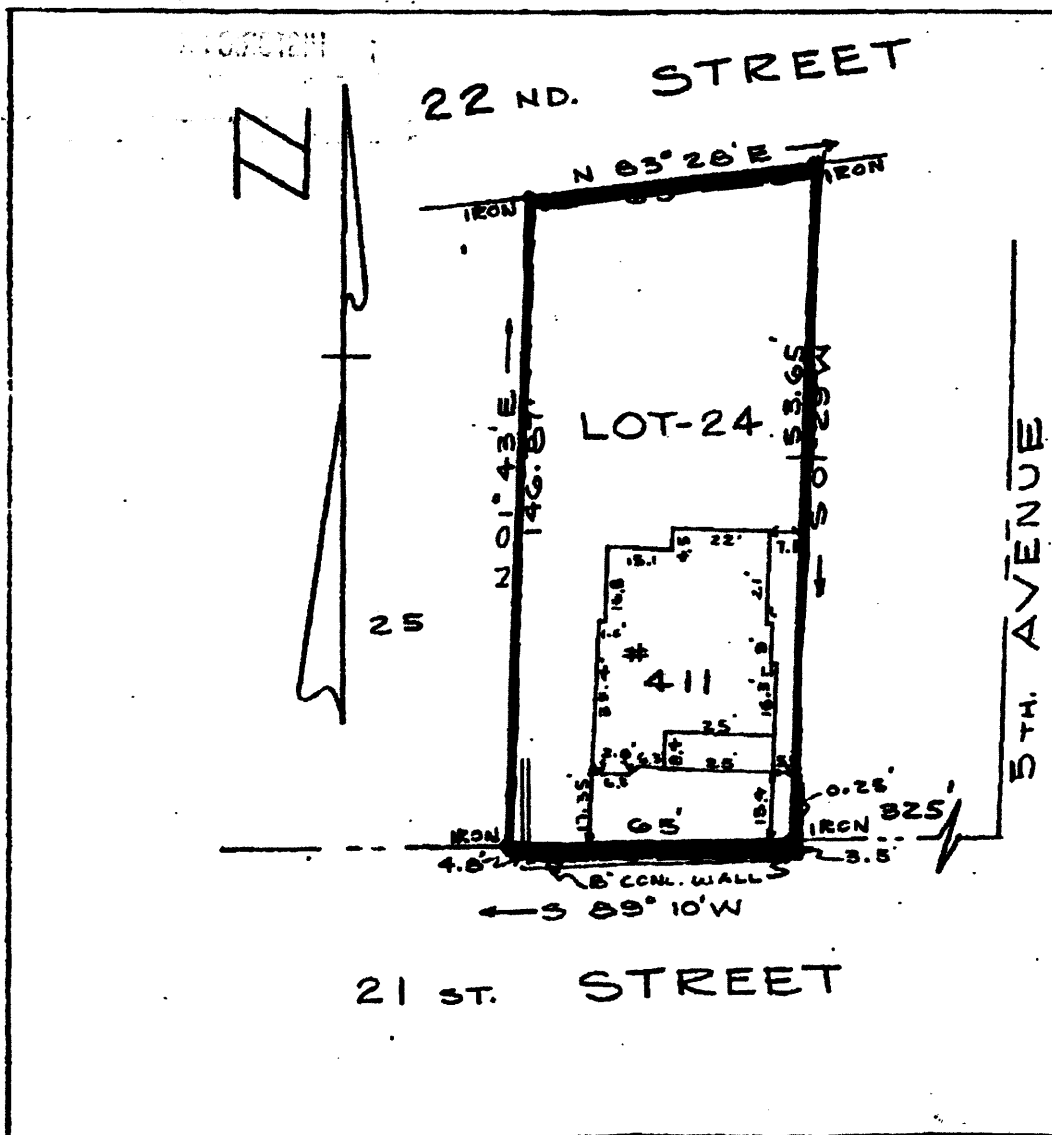
Number of photographs: 28

1. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing northwest.
2. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing north.
3. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing north.
4. Exterior, east side of house; Photographer facing west.
5. Exterior, east side of house; Photographer facing west.
6. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing northwest.
7. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing northwest.
8. Exterior, east side of house; Photographer facing west.
9. Exterior, rear of house; Photographer facing south.
10. Exterior, rear of house; Photographer facing south.
11. Exterior, west side of house; Photographer facing south.
12. Exterior, front door; Photographer facing north.
13. Exterior, front porch; Photographer facing northeast.
14. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing north.
15. Exterior, front of house; Photographer facing north.
16. Interior, front bedroom; Photographer facing north.
17. Interior, front bedroom; Photographer facing west.
18. Interior, front bedroom; Photographer facing southwest.
19. Interior, rear bedroom; Photographer facing north.
20. Interior, central hallway; Photographer facing south.
21. Interior, enclosed rear porch; Photographer facing east.
22. Interior, central hallway; Photographer facing north.
23. Interior, dining room; Photographer facing east.
24. Interior, parlor; Photographer facing southwest.
25. Interior, parlor; Photographer facing east.
26. Interior, bedroom; Photographer facing south.
27. Interior, bedroom; Photographer facing southeast.
28. Exterior, Shed; Photographer facing northeast.

ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
FLOOR PLAN
NORTH: ↑
DIRECTION OF PHOTOGRAPH:



ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
 MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
 TAX MAP
 SCALE: 1"=45'
 NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY: ■



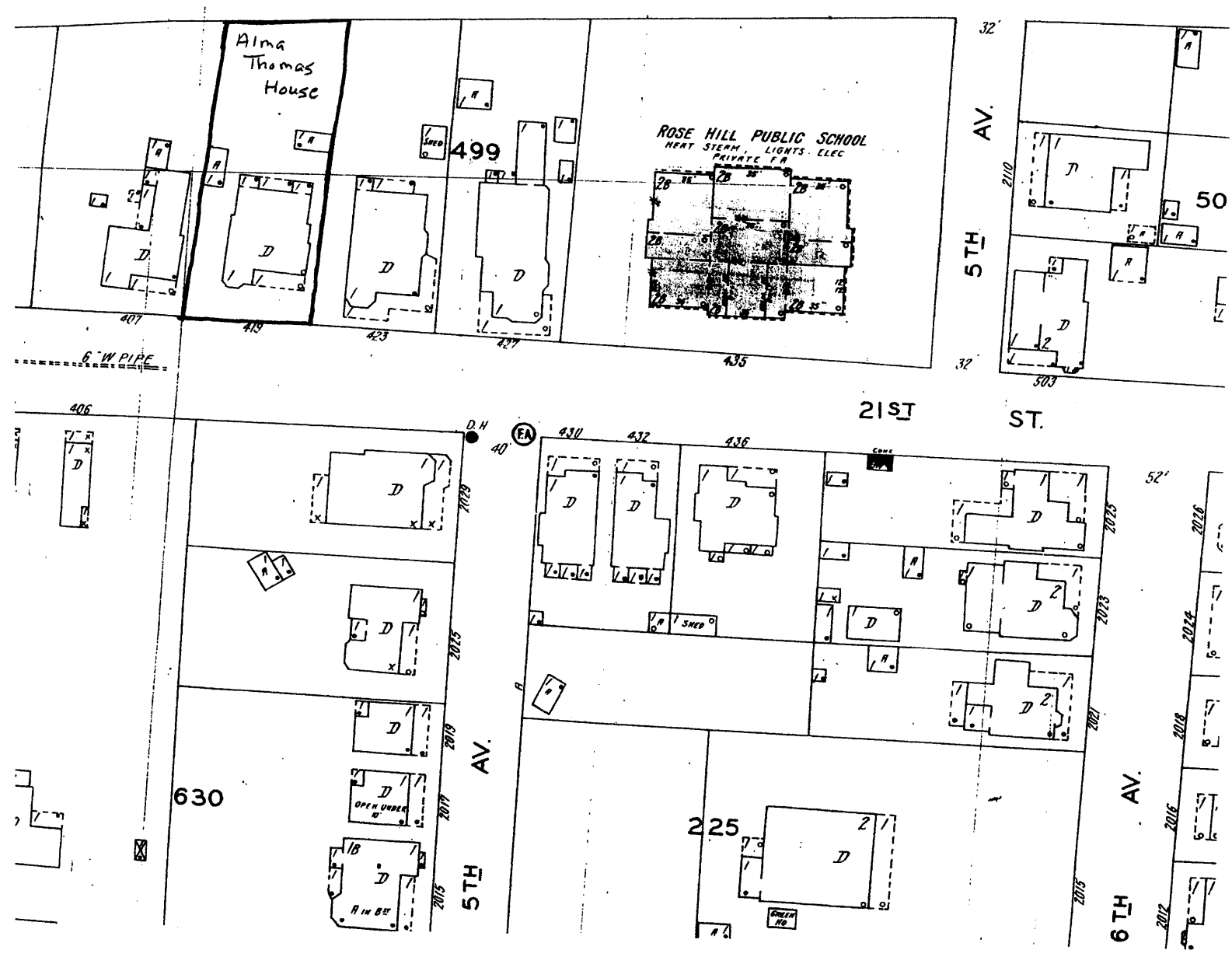
TO ALL PARTIES INTERESTED IN PREMISES SURVEYED

This is to certify that this is a correct plat of Lot 24 of Philips Subdivision of Eorsby Place, said Lot lying in Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia. There are no encroachments except as shown.

This 5th Day of August 1952

Abraham Siegel
 ABRAHAM SIEGEL C. E.
 Professional Land Surveyor Ga. No. 557

**ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
ATTACHMENT ONE: ROSE HILL NEIGHBORHOOD, 1900**



**ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
ATTACHMENT TWO: ALMA THOMAS HOUSE, HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH, C.1895**



**ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
ATTACHMENT THREE: WINTER CANTEY, ALMA THOMAS' GRANDFATHER, C.1895**



**ALMA THOMAS HOUSE
MUSCOGEE COUNTY, GEORGIA
ATTACHMENT FOUR: JAMES CANTEY, ALMA THOMAS' GREAT-UNCLE,
C.1860.**

