

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-934 (Rev. 03-2023)

OMB Control No. 1024-0276

Azurest South

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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1. NAME AND LOCATION OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Azurest South

Other Name/Site Number: Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Meade Colson House

Street and Number (if applicable): 2900 Boisseau Street¹

City/Town: Petersburg

County: Chesterfield

State: VA

Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior December 13, 2024.

2. SIGNIFICANCE DATA

NHL Criteria: 1 and 4

NHL Criteria Exceptions: 8

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values

1. educational and intellectual currents
5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
6. popular and traditional culture

Period(s) of Significance: 1939-1984

Significant Person(s) (only Criterion 2): N/A

Cultural Affiliation (only Criterion 6): N/A

Designer/Creator/Architect/Builder: Amaza Lee Meredith (architect/designer)
Russell B. Holmes (builder)

Historic Contexts: Megan E. Springate, ed. *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service and National Park Foundation, 2016.

¹ In her scrapbook, Amaza Lee Meredith indicated the property address as “89 Boisseau St., Ettrick, VA.” This is no longer the correct address. This nomination uses the current address provided by Chesterfield County.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement. We are collecting this information under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 461-467) and 36 CFR part 65. Your response is required to obtain or retain a benefit. We will use the information you provide to evaluate properties nominated as National Historic Landmarks. We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. OMB has approved this collection of information and assigned Control No. 1024-0276.

Estimated Burden Statement. Public reporting burden is 2 hours for an initial inquiry letter and 344 hours for NPS Form 10-934 (per response), including the time it takes to read, gather and maintain data, review instructions and complete the letter/form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate, or any aspects of this form, to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, Mail Stop 242, Reston, VA 20192. Please do not send your form to this address.

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3. WITHHOLDING SENSITIVE INFORMATION

Does this nomination contain sensitive information that should be withheld under Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act?

☐ Yes

☒ No

4. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

1. Acreage of Property: 1.62 acres

2. Use either Latitude/Longitude Coordinates or the UTM system:

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (enter coordinates to 6 decimal places):

Datum if other than WGS84:

Latitude:

Longitude:

OR

UTM References:

Zone 18

Easting 285594

Northing 4124286

3. **Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundary of the nominated property uses Chesterfield County Tax Map and Parcel Number: 182-10 (1) 1. This boundary description and justification is the same as the National Register form. The UTM references have been updated to correct an error in the National Register form.²

4. **Boundary Justification:** The nominated boundary corresponds to the entire 1.62-acre parcel of land historically associated with Azurest South, as described in present-day Chesterfield County Tax Map and Parcel information.

² Calder Loth, Mary Harding Sadler, and James Hill, "Azurest South," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993), Section 10.

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5. SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION: SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Azurest South, in Petersburg, Virginia, is nationally significant as an exceptional example of subversive and innovative modern architecture by Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984), a Black (biracial), queer, woman in the Jim Crow South (1877-1964).³ Embodying her ideas about art and design theory and her identity as a New Negro woman, yet surrounded by Colonial Revival architecture of the historically Black Virginia State University (VSU), Azurest South demonstrates the ways that architecture expresses, sustains, and protects culture and identity.

Azurest South is significant under Criterion 1 for its associations with African American/Black, women, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) history. Azurest South—where Meredith lived with her life partner, Edna Meade Colson (1888-1985), for forty-five years—exemplifies the struggle for safety and self-determination by Black Americans, women, and sexual minorities throughout the twentieth century. The period of significance is 1939-1984, representing the years when Meredith and Colson resided in the house, from its construction until Meredith's death. The property was identified in the *LGBTQ America* National Historic Landmark (NHL) theme study as an African American LGBTQ site.⁴ Azurest South is also significant under Criterion 4 as an unusual example of modern architecture combining vocabularies of Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, and the International Style in the American South, designed in 1938 by Amaza Lee Meredith. By designing her own home in this modern architectural style, Amaza Lee Meredith created and sustained a symbol of protest to the dominant thinking on race, gender, and sexuality throughout her partnership with Colson.

Azurest South is being considered under NHL Exception 8 as a property that has achieved significance within the past fifty years, to include the last nine years of Meredith's life. Because the property is significant under Criterion 1 for LGBTQ and Black history and the couple's self-determination, it is safe to assume that they spent their entire lives resisting multiple forms of oppression. This follows the precedent of the Gerber House and Ida. B. Wells, which extend their occupations until their deaths. Furthermore, Azurest South served as Meredith's "laboratory" throughout her entire life.⁵ Azurest South was designed in 1938 and constructed in 1939, but Meredith modified it over the years with minimal documentation. Because of this, the period of significance is extended to the year of Meredith's death to incorporate the changes she made over her lifetime.

³ Regarding the use of "LGBTQ" and "queer," Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Colson did not write about their sexualities, but scholars widely agree that they lived outside of heteronormative structures, maintaining a long-term relationship. Cookie Woolner explains that women like Meredith were described by contemporaries as "women loving women" and uses "queer" broadly to discuss the LGBTQ community during this time. For reflections on the use of queer see Susan Ferentinos, "Ways of Interpreting Queer Pasts," *The Public Historian* 41, 2 (2019): 21; Cookie Woolner, *The Famous Lady Lovers: Black Women and Queer Desire before Stonewall* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 20. Additionally, Meredith was proud of her African and Anglo ancestries and her experience as a biracial child was formative (discussed elsewhere in the nomination). While acknowledging her experience as a biracial person, she lived and identified within the Black community. Therefore, as a style choice this nomination will refer to Amaza Lee Meredith as "Black." Relatedly, discussion of African-descended people or communities, the style choice is "Black." Similarly, this nomination will use the style choice of "White" when referring to European-descended people. Where specifically required by pre-determined style choices in other documents, this nomination will adapt "African American." This adopts the Chicago Manual of Style recommendations made in 2020 in University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, "Black and White: A Matter of Capitalization" CMOS Shop Talk from the Chicago Manual of Style, June 22, 2020. <https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/black-and-white-a-matter-of-capitalization>.

⁴ Jeffrey A. Harris, "'Where We Could Be Ourselves': African American LGBTQ Historic Places and Why They Matter," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service and National Park Foundation, 2016), 13.3-13.5.

⁵ Jacqueline Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern: Architecture and the Black American Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023), 207.

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According to scholar Jacqueline Taylor, whose work strongly informs this nomination, the design was “constantly in flux” as Meredith responded to changing needs.⁶ This extends beyond the National Register period of significance of 1938-1943, which focused on construction of the house.

PROVIDE RELEVANT PROPERTY-SPECIFIC HISTORY, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND THEMES. JUSTIFY CRITERIA, EXCEPTIONS, AND PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE LISTED IN SECTION 2.

Criterion 1: Black Queer Women of the New Negro Movement

Azurest South holds historic significance in the areas of Black history, women’s history, and LGBTQ history, particularly during the Interwar Period (1918-1939). It reflects broader patterns of the Black experience in the US South, specifically the significance of education, the arts, and art education within the New Negro movement. Additionally, Azurest South was a Black queer refuge and represents the broad national pattern of LGBTQ history and same-sex relationships before World War II.

Amaza Lee Meredith: Early Life

Amaza Lee Meredith was born on August 14, 1895, in Lynchburg, Virginia, the youngest of four children. Her father, Samuel Peter Meredith (1862-1915), was Anglo American from Lynchburg, and her mother, Emma Pink Kenney (1871-1941), was African American from Staunton. Although interracial marriage was illegal in Virginia during Samuel and Emma’s lifetimes, they nonetheless pursued a long-term intimate relationship, eventually marrying legally in Washington, DC, in 1902. Emma Kenney first appears in Lynchburg city directories in 1887, and that same year she gave birth to their first child, Maude (1887–1968). Scholar Jacqueline Taylor demonstrates the delicate balance the couple needed to strike as they navigated the legality of their relationship. For instance, although recorded as living with his mother, Meredith and Kenney purchased adjoining city lots and eventually joined their properties.⁷

At times, Emma Kenney is recorded as a seamstress, like Samuel Meredith’s mother and sisters. Samuel Meredith was a carpenter whose father and brothers also worked in the building trades (sometimes described instead as a stair builder).⁸ In 1902, when Amaza Lee Meredith was seven years old, Samuel Meredith and Emma Kenney traveled to Washington, DC, to legally marry. From that point forward, Meredith lived with the family, all relocating to a four-bedroom home purchased by Meredith in a more respectable part of town at 701 Monroe Street. However, within a few years, Meredith experienced financial trouble, and conveyed the house to Emma Kenney for \$1400. Samuel Meredith died by suicide in 1915, nine days before Amaza Lee’s twentieth birthday. Emma Kenney died in 1941 in New York City.⁹

⁶ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 28.

⁷ Summarized from Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 55-67. Heart motif described on page 65.

⁸ 1880 census listed as carpenter’s apprentice; 1897 listed as stair builder in: Lynchburg, Virginia, City Directory, 1897, 269 available at: *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995*, Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

⁹ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” in *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945*, ed. Dreck Spurlock Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2004), 393–94; Jacqueline Taylor, “Amaza’s Azurest: Modern Architecture and the ‘New Negro’ Woman,” in *Suffragette City: Women, Politics and the Built Environment*, eds. Elizabeth Darling and Nathaniel Robert Walker (New York: Routledge, 2020), 36; Loth, Sadler, and Hill, “Azurest South.” Note that Loth et al. list Emma’s maiden name as “Kennedy.”

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Black Education

Emma Kenney secured a complete education for her four children, despite the difficulties and disparities they encountered in the Jim Crow South.¹⁰ Racial segregation proliferated throughout the South after the post-Civil War Reconstruction era (1865-1877). Campaigns of violence and oppression endangered Black communities throughout the region, as White Americans sought to reassert their racial dominance. At the same time, the federal government—eager to reunite the country and privileging cohesion among northern and southern Whites over the safety and civil rights of Black Americans—permitted southern state governments to enact laws that suppressed Black freedom and self-determination, known collectively as Jim Crow.¹¹ Jim Crow segregation extended to the educational system. In the words of the NHL Theme Study on desegregation in public schools, “It was education to subordinate and control Blacks, education to perpetuate a separate and unequal social order grounded in white fear and greed.”¹² In 1890, five years before Amaza Lee Meredith’s birth, less than one percent of Black children attended high school, and Black school enrollment declined in the first decade of the twentieth century. In that period, only about a third of Black children between the ages of five and fourteen attended school.¹³

Amaza Lee Meredith graduated in 1912 at the top of her class from Jackson Street High School, the segregated Black high school in Lynchburg.¹⁴ In 1915, Meredith enrolled in the teacher training certificate program at the historically Black college Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute (VNII) in Petersburg, Virginia. It was during her summer program that Meredith met Edna Meade Colson, a leader in the Black educational community, one of her teachers in the training program, and later director of Virginia State College Education Department. The two were mutually attracted and Meredith passionately pursued the relationship after she completed the program and moved home to Lynchburg.¹⁵

Meredith returned to Lynchburg in 1916 and then left for a rural teaching assignment at Indian Rock, a standard step in teacher training. The one-room schoolhouse served 110 registered Black students of the mountain hamlet in Botetourt County, close to present-day I-81 midway between Lexington and Roanoke. Her sister, Cora, was stationed three miles away at another rural school. Jacqueline Taylor observes that the pressures of poor attendance and inadequate facilities “infuriated Meredith.”¹⁶ While there, she coordinated with the Black community to establish a Parent Teacher Organization and raised enough money for a match from the Rosenwald Fund to construct a new school. Like many of the Rosenwald schools, the Indian Rock community, not Rosenwald, subsidized most of the costs: of the \$3200 Meredith helped raise, \$400 was from the Black

¹⁰ Jacqueline Taylor notes this as one of the “survival patterns” used by Emma Kenney, Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 67-70.

¹¹ Glenn D. Lowry, “Foreword,” in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, ed. Sean Anderson and Mabel Wilson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 9.

¹² Susan Cianci Salvatore et al., *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Education in the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2000), 28.

¹³ Salvatore et al., 34, 38.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 68-69; Amaza Lee Meredith, “Memo to Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin, Centennial Historian, RE: Additional Notes” (November 1983), folder 1, box 1, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, 1912, 1930-1930, Accession #1982-20, Special Collections Dept., Johnson Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Va (collection hereafter cited as Amaza Lee Meredith Papers); “Black Schools and Colleges in Lynchburg,” Lynchburg Museum System, accessed February 26, 2024, <https://www.lyncburgmuseum.org/digital-exhibit-black-schools-and-colleges>; “Jackson Street United Methodist Church Historical Marker,” Historical Marker Database, August 19, 2021, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=179842>.

¹⁵ Taylor cites the numerous veiled references to an intrigue the two experienced that summer in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 78-79 and 89-91.

¹⁶ Meredith teaching experience at Indian Rock summarized from Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 84-89.

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community, \$100 was from the White community and public businesses, the local board of education added \$2400, and the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$300.¹⁷ Four Rosenwald Schools were built in Botetourt County, although none of them are still standing. As Jacqueline Taylor notes, by securing better school facilities for the Indian Rock community, Meredith set a life-long precedent of “combining education with architecture as a means to improving conditions and forging African American progress.”¹⁸

In 1919, Meredith returned to her hometown of Lynchburg, this time teaching in the city’s segregated Payne Elementary. Meredith also pursued the Normal Professional Certificate from VNII, which allowed her to teach at the high school level. She subsequently taught at her alma mater Jackson Street High School, as well as Dunbar High School when it replaced the Jackson Street school in 1923.¹⁹ Along with continued correspondence with Colson, it was at Dunbar High School that Meredith worked with mentor and relative through marriage Anne Spencer (1882-1975), her sister’s sister-in-law, life-long Lynchburg resident, well-known Harlem Renaissance poet, and educational advocate. Spencer helped found the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), regularly hosting leaders and nationally acclaimed artists and authors, including W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, at her home, which served as a salon bringing cultural and political ideas to Meredith’s circle (Spencer’s home contributes to the National Register-listed Pierce Street Historic District, NRIS 76002224).²⁰ Surely motivated by the strong women advocating for education around her—her mother, Edna Colson, and Anne Spencer among them—Meredith decided to continue her education and training. After seven years teaching in her hometown, Meredith left for New York City and to greater educational opportunity.

Art, Education, and the New Negro Movement

In 1926, Meredith relocated to New York City to pursue a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Columbia University Teacher’s College.²¹ Upon arriving in New York, Meredith lived at 416 West 146th Street, the home of her oldest sister Maude Meredith Terry and her family. She returned to Petersburg in 1930 but went back to New York to pursue a master’s degree in art education from Columbia University Teacher’s College, which she completed in 1935.²²

Her time in Harlem put Meredith in the heart of the New Negro Renaissance cultural movement focused on racial pride, cultural self-expression, economic independence, and progressive politics.²³ This movement reflected larger cultural changes taking place after World War I. Many people placed an increased emphasis on personal fulfillment, autonomy, pleasure, and consumer goods. Within Black intellectual circles, ideas about modernity influenced the existing theories of racial advancement of the New Negro movement. Although

¹⁷ Discussion of Rosenwald school from Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 86-89. Amounts are referenced in Taylor, citing Bryan Clark Green, “Rosenwald Schools in Virginia,” National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2005), Appendix One, 14. Green cites a report from Fisk University. The amounts quoted here are from Green.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 89.

¹⁹ Meredith, “Memo to Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin, Centennial Historian, RE: Additional Notes” folder 1, box 1, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers; “Black Schools and Colleges in Lynchburg,” Lynchburg Museum; Loth, Sadler, and Hill, “Azurest South,” Section 8.5; Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 394; Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 89.

²⁰ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 91-92, 131, and 261 fn.107.

²¹ Jacqueline Taylor, “Designing Progress: Race, Gender, and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century America” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2014), chapter 3, 15.

²² Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 140.

²³ Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

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sometimes described as primarily an artistic movement of the 1920s and 1930s, it also reflects efforts to exert agency and self-determination.²⁴ Although Meredith was primarily in New York to develop her teaching credentials, she undoubtedly engaged with the ideas and aesthetics evolving around her within the pan-African community of Harlem.

More broadly, New York City in the 1920s and 1930s was the center of modernist design in the United States, showcasing both modern architecture in its skyline and modernist interior design in its major department stores.²⁵ In the words of architect Robert A. M. Stern and his co-authors:

Through exhibitions and symposia, New York became the nation's premier forum for the exchange of architectural ideas in the interwar years. Just as the streets of Manhattan were an art gallery of architectural styles, its museums, department stores, and leading professional organizations brought the latest in American and foreign thought to the professional and lay public.²⁶

As noted by Jacqueline Taylor, while in New York, Meredith “absorbed the lessons of modern art and aesthetic theories of the new age in which she found herself.”²⁷ In February 1930 she attended the “Painting in Paris” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art and purchased the catalogue, which she read alongside other books about French modern painters, including Cezanne.²⁸ As a student, she had access to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and likely visited the 1934 “Exhibition of Contemporary American Industrial Art.” Meredith also visited the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibit “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” which brought the modern European architecture described as the International Style to the American public.²⁹ She even returned to New York in 1936 and visited the modernist “House of the Modern Age,” constructed as an experimental demonstration at Park Avenue and East 39th Street.³⁰ While in New York, she learned about a wide intellectual and artistic community, which shaped her later teaching and ultimately the application of these theories at Azurest South.

Meredith's Design Theory³¹

A significant component of Meredith's master's training at Columbia University Teacher's College focused on art and art education. Her thesis demonstrates the way she wove information about art theory and African art, history, and culture with her life-long passion about education equality, particularly art education. Her thesis, titled “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation For College Students” included two parts: a survey of art programs offered across Virginia at the time in Black schools and a proposed model art education curriculum. She eventually used both sections in her professional work back in Virginia. Her survey was designed to gauge

²⁴ Context adapted from Susan Ferentinos, “Lucy Diggs Slowe and Mary Burrill House [draft],” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2024), 18. Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 17–19.

²⁵ Taylor, “Amaza's Azurest: Modern Architecture and the ‘New Negro’ Woman,” 42–45.

²⁶ Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 239.

²⁷ Meredith's experience in New York from Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 158–163; quote p. 163.

²⁸ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 163.

²⁹ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 222.

³⁰ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 216–217.

³¹ Context section contributed by Casper. Meredith's thesis and design theory covered in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 140–141 and in more depth 147–201.

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art education across the state in Black schools; she sent a questionnaire to Superintendents inquiring whether art was taught, what kinds of art (Fine or Industrial), and the teacher qualifications. Amongst the Black schools of Virginia, she found that there was only one fully qualified art teacher. Meredith presented her findings to the Virginia Research Society, a state-wide organization founded by Edna Colson and other VSC faculty.³²

The other part of Meredith's thesis presented a model art education curriculum with a justification for how students would benefit. Her model curriculum included a nuanced discussion of African arts as well as a reading of W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Negro*, meant to orient students to the diverse cultural context of the African diaspora and dispel the myth of a homogenous culture. The syllabus included popular, fine, and decorative arts, and included detailed study of African ceremonial masks, household utensils, weapons, and textiles. The assigned reading list included exhibition catalogues from the Brooklyn Museum 1923 exhibit "Modern Negro Art" and the Schomburg Collections from the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library (NHL designated 2016, NRIS 78001881).³³

As discussed extensively by Taylor, Meredith was a strong advocate for art education. She was concerned about art theory and art's role in society at large, and interrogated problems of the machine age. Reflecting the theories of her teacher, Belle Boas, and art theorist Arthur Wesley Dow, Meredith wrote in her thesis:

Art education today must meet the growing realization that, intellectual training and the acquisition of facts are not Sufficient to produce an individual of strength and of ability to meet adequately the problems which confront him in the modern world... art is an integral part of the life of the average individual, not only in school but in adult life.³⁴

Art was not just a luxury (and thus, optional at Black schools, colleges and universities), but instead, Meredith advocated that art was essential, "in all phases of the student's life, both in and out of college," allowing them to be more sophisticated producers and consumers of art.³⁵ In her thesis, Meredith explained that art could make a "more worthy citizenship" who undertook productive activities to fill their leisure time because the "machine age with its attendant social problems of higher wages and fewer hours [was] presenting as a challenge."³⁶

Meredith's comment about a "more worthy citizenship" directly and explicitly connected her work in art education to broader goals of the New Negro movement espoused by leaders such as Du Bois and Alain Locke. The section of her thesis titled "The Negro and Art" engages with prominent New Negro activists and intellectuals, drawing connections between racial uplift and engagement with the arts. For example, she opens a section with an excerpt from John Louis Hill's "Negro: National Asset or Liability?"³⁷ She joined many other intellectuals and reformers who used African art and cultural expression to demonstrate that Black Americans made contributions to American society. Charles S. Johnson, the first Black president of Fisk University,

³² Amaza Lee Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students," (Master's thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935), as discussed in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 140-141; Virginia Research Society quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 141.

³³ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 184-185.

³⁴ Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students," 11, as quoted in Taylor, "Designing Progress," chapter 4, 37.

³⁵ Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students," 13-14, as quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 195.

³⁶ Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students," 14, as quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 196.

³⁷ As discussed and quoted in Taylor, "Designing Progress," chapter 4, 32.

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sociologist, and civil rights activist promoted the concept that through cultural recognition, Black people could transform their racial identity while also boosting their cultural pride and confidence. The March 1925 issue of the *Survey Graphic* covered the ideas and currents of the Harlem Renaissance underway in an issue titled *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*, a collection of essays, poems, and illustrations later expanded into *The New Negro* anthology edited by Alain Locke. Authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Arturo Schomburg, James Weldon Johnson, and Robert Moton explored the intersections between ideas around racial uplift, cultural pride, and the arts.³⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Anne Spencer contributed literary pieces. Meredith could have encountered this collection, or certainly these ideas, either through the national periodical or anthology publication, or perhaps more intimately through Anne Spencer and her network. Serving as an artist and designer, cultivating artistic expression, and teaching art appreciation were her ways of connecting with these broader themes.

Amaza Lee Meredith as Designer and Educator

Upon receiving her bachelor's degree in 1930, Meredith was appointed to the faculty of Virginia State College (VSC) for Negroes (formerly VNII and now VSU), to teach art studio and art appreciation, serving in this role while also completing her master's degree. In 1935, the year she earned her degree, she founded and served as chair of the art department at VSC. She convinced then-president John Gandy that the college should train for art professions, not just domestic science, believing it would provide more professional opportunities for the students.³⁹

Meredith encouraged all students to take up art appreciation. She believed art—whether through appreciation or production—could have a positive impact on everyday life and otherwise enrich students.⁴⁰ Meredith spent the rest of her career at VSU teaching art and architecture, creating professional opportunities for students in fine arts, and fostering a community at the institution. In 1935, as one of her earliest programs, Meredith brought the traveling exhibit “Photographs of African Negro Art,” a portfolio of photographs by Walker Evans (1903-1975) from the Museum of Modern Art “African Negro Art” exhibit.⁴¹ She retired in 1958.

Meredith was also an accomplished artist in her own right. Two of her paintings were included in the 1939 “Art Exhibition by Art Teachers in Virginia Colleges” displayed at Sweet Briar College, a White liberal arts school north of Lynchburg. The VSC newspaper noted Meredith was the only included Black teacher and she did not attend “due to an illness.”⁴² The following year her work was shown at the Lynchburg Art Gallery in an exhibition sponsored by the Interracial Relations Commission, which featured works by Black Virginians, Works Progress Administration artists, and Lynchburg public school students.⁴³ Additionally, as early as 1958 in her retirement announcement, she is credited as exhibiting at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts as well as “galleries in New York and North Carolina.”⁴⁴ Other works were put on permanent display at Petersburg General Hospital and Petersburg's Gillfield Baptist Church. A collection of art pieces survive at relative Anne Spencer's house in Lynchburg, including a painting, a tile mosaic, and a stencil-on-contact paper of Spencer's

³⁸ Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

³⁹ Early career discussed in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 30, 140-143.

⁴⁰ Meredith's teaching career covered in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 139-143, 185-201.

⁴¹ Virginia-Lee Web, *Perfect Documents: Walker Evans and African Art, 1935* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

⁴² “Local Instructor Displays Art Work,” *The Virginia Statesman* 11, 7 (February 18, 1939), 1.

⁴³ G.G., “Local Instructor Displays Art Work,” *The Virginia Statesman* 12, 6 (February 10, 1940), 1.

⁴⁴ “Four Faculty Members Retire,” *The Virginia Statesman* 30, 1 (October 6, 1958), 1. These additional exhibitions have been repeated consistently as part of Meredith's biography, including in a biography shared marking the dedication of a building in her honor, see “New Names Reflect VSC Heritage,” *The Virginia Statesman* 44, 10 (March 29, 1972), 1.

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poems, “A Lover Muses.”⁴⁵ In 1955, she was awarded a patent for a golf bag accessory she designed.⁴⁶ However, it is perhaps her design of Azurest South adjacent to the VSC campus for which she is most well-known (discussed below). Additionally, after World War II, Meredith and her sister Maude Meredith Terry founded a Black vacation resort town in Sag Harbor, New York (discussed below).

Meredith was active in the VSC (later VSU) Alumni Association beginning in the 1930s. In 1949, she created an architectural design for an Alumni Association house, and for the next ten years, she tried to secure resources to build it. However, it was never built. Meredith remained active in the Alumni Association until about 1969, more than a decade after her retirement, and upon her death in 1984, she bequeathed her half of Azurest South to the group. After Meredith died, Edna Colson, who was then ninety-five years old, moved to a nursing home in nearby Colonial Heights, Virginia, but retained half-ownership of Azurest South. When she died the following year, the Alumni Association purchased Colson’s half of the property from her estate.⁴⁷

The Partnership of Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Mead Colson

Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Colson began a romantic relationship after meeting in 1915, which was sustained from a distance through letters and visits until they eventually lived together in 1939 at Azurest South, an arrangement that continued until Meredith’s death in 1984.

Edna Colson Biography

Edna Meade Colson was born on October 7, 1888, in Petersburg, Virginia, the oldest child of educators James Major Colson Jr. (1855-1909) and Kate Hill Colson (1861-1928). Edna Colson’s paternal lineage were free Black people who resided in Petersburg since the eighteenth century. Her great-great-grandfather, James Colson (1768-1824), was an enslaved laborer in York County, Virginia, but achieved his freedom through emancipation around 1791 and moved to Petersburg. Edna Colson’s maternal grandfather, John Henry Hill, born in 1828, was an enslaved carpenter in Petersburg. He married a freewoman, Rose McCray, and in 1853 liberated himself by escaping to Canada, where his wife later joined him and where their daughter Kate was born. After the Civil War, the Hill family returned to Petersburg, and Kate Hill married James Major Colson Jr.⁴⁸ Hill and Colson, Jr., were among the first to graduate from Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (later VSC and now VSU) and were both respected educators. Together, they created a highly respected, established family in Petersburg, “steeped in tradition, [a] desire for position, education, and social standing.”⁴⁹

Edna Colson graduated in 1904 from Peabody High School, in Petersburg. She attended the Normal Training Program at Fisk University, a historically Black university in Nashville, Tennessee. She completed courses in 1908 and joined the faculty of VNII in 1909. She spent her entire career at this institution, while at the same time advancing her own education. In 1915, Colson earned a Bachelor of Education degree from Fisk. In later

⁴⁵ Meredith art at Anne Spencer house described in, Anna Katherine Clemmons, “An Ode to Home: Historic House and Garden Museum Honors Poet Anne Spencer,” *Preservation Magazine* (Summer 2023) Available at: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/historic-house-and-garden-museum-poet-anne-spencer>.

⁴⁶ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 396; Stebbins and Edwards Jr., *Finding Aid: Amaza Lee Meredith*; “African American Trailblazers: Amaza Lee Meredith,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, February 5, 2009.

⁴⁷ Stebbins and Edwards Jr., *Finding Aid: Amaza Lee Meredith*, 4; Loth, Sadler, and Hill, “Azurest South,” 8.8; L. Lee Luranett, “Edna Meade Colson (7 October 1888-17 January 1985),” in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, 2006, https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Colson_Edna_Meade.

⁴⁸ “A Guide to the Papers of the Colson-Hill Family,” 2002, Colson-Hill Family Papers. See also, J. J. Roberts and Sarah H. Colson, “The Colson Family,” *Negro History Bulletin* 10, 1 (1946): 3–21.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 74.

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decades she earned multiple degrees from Columbia University Teacher's College: Bachelor of Science in 1923, Master of Arts in 1924, and a PhD in 1940.⁵⁰ Colson's educational accomplishments are noteworthy in their own right: three Black women became the first in the United States to earn their PhDs only nineteen years prior in 1921; In 1929, the first Black woman, Jane Ellen McAllister, earned a PhD from Columbia University Teacher's College; It is estimated that only sixty Black women earned PhDs before the 1954 ruling of *Brown v Board of Education*.⁵¹ Over the course of her career at VNII (later VSC), Colson served as a classroom teacher, Supervisor of Student Teaching, Director of the Normal School, Director of the Division of Education, and then Director of the School of Education. Within the field of education, her specialties were curriculum development and teaching what today would be called African American or African Diaspora Studies.⁵² Edna Colson retired in 1953.

Partnership

In 1915, while teaching at VNII, Colson met Amaza Lee Meredith, who was a student in the teacher training program (known at the time as normal school). The two became close friends and, over time, fell in love. Their feelings are evident in the few letters that survive. In June 1917, while teaching at Indian Rock, Meredith wrote Colson:

What will you think when I tell you that last night, for exactly two hours, by the clocks, I lay and thought of you. I wonder if any girl has thought or rather felt towards another as I feel towards you. Perhaps you do like me some; do you like me? I have often wondered, I have often "wondered" for something definite. You have never definitely said, directly. Was it for fear of appearing silly? That is what you said in your last letter? But is that the true reason? It wouldn't be silly to say so. Even in a letter, I can't be with you to hear you say it or to judge by your actions. It would mean a bit to me. Our friendship has been a strange one, and it may sound strange to you if I were to write and tell you how I feel; but I shall not do that. But Edna, have you the least idea how much you mean to me? No! I know you could not. I suppose those words have been used hundreds of times before but I have not used them. I would give anything for the opportunity to make you "feel" how much I care for you. Little Lady, could I do it?⁵³

By March 1918, Meredith was enthusiastically declaring her love for Colson, but seemed unsure that the feeling was reciprocated. She wrote:

Do you know I love you? Do you realize it? Can you believe it? Does it mean anything to you? Do you think that I can be mistaken? I know that I am not. Not after this. And yet I never loved you more than I do this minute. I love you with my whole heart, mind, body, and soul. But it is a hopeless love. I don't expect any return and yet I love you.⁵⁴

Meredith's doubt seems to have pertained more to the degree of Colson's love rather than its presence. A few months later Meredith wrote:

⁵⁰ "A Guide to the Papers of the Colson-Hill Family," 2002, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵¹ Margaret Smith Crocco and Cally L. Waite, "Education and Marginality: Race and Gender in Higher Education, 1940-1955," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2007): 69-91; Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 120-138.

⁵² "A Guide to the Papers of the Colson-Hill Family," 2002, Colson-Hill Family Papers

⁵³ Meredith to Colson, June 21, 1917, folder 1, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵⁴ Meredith to Colson, March 1, 1918, page 3, folder 2, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

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It is 10:30 PM now, you are dead asleep – I hope you are. Could I wake you? Not that I wish to; only wish to know if I could do so. Do you recall that two little bodies used once upon a time, a long time ago, to wake each other by looking into the other's face. I shall not get to bed until about one. Until then, and while you sleep far away, I shall be thinking of you then and always.⁵⁵

Meredith's letters to Colson are surprisingly unrestrained regarding her feelings. Yet, they also contain references to topics she did not feel comfortable committing to writing. "I'll just say your last letter was alright. You understand don't you? I won't write it. Do you know I have more to tell you? There are so many things that are 'unwriteable.'"⁵⁶ And, twelve years later, while in New York, the references continued. "It's now 1:15 AM. Sleep is no nearer than it was two hours ago [when she began writing the letter], but you are. Guess you are tired trying to read this too. Good night, Edna dear; Forget all else that I've written except what's between the lines. Always, love, Fraulein."⁵⁷

Far fewer of Colson's letters to Meredith survive, but what letters do exist indicate that Meredith's feelings were reciprocated. In 1939, for instance, as the pair prepared to move in together, Colson wrote, "So long, Dear; do take a good pass this weekend. Be well and strong. We have so many things to plan."⁵⁸ And in another letter a few days later, "I love you so – I'd give a great deal to be with you tonight. All my love to you, E."⁵⁹

Homemaking⁶⁰

In 1939, the couple began the construction of Azurest South, designed by Meredith. That year, after Colson finalized her dissertation and earned her PhD (officially awarded in 1940), Colson agreed that the time was right to build the house and (in the words of Taylor) that "she was ready to settle down."⁶¹ Taylor notes, "the construction of Azurest signified in many ways the resolution of any doubts the couple may have had over the years of their mutual feelings of admiration and passion, cementing (literally in concrete blocks) a commitment to one another...."⁶²

Meredith and Colson celebrated this public expression of their life. In the social column of the university newspaper, often containing content placed by the subjects themselves (so likely from Colson or Meredith), the near completion of their house was heralded: "Misses Edna Colson and Amaza Meredith are almost ready to move into their new home...."⁶³ Writing to her sister, Colson recounted: "Mazie and I are happy. The ground has been broken for our house; enough timber for concrete frames, some sand, cinder block, brush has been cleared away from our woods; the prospects for a comfortable attractive home are very pleasing, I hope you will like it I'm sure you will."⁶⁴ In response to the news of their new home, Meredith's sister, educator Maude Meredith Terry, wrote to the "Girls" (addressing Meredith and Colson together), "We are happy that at last you

⁵⁵ Meredith to Colson, July 3, 1918, folder 2, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵⁶ Meredith to Colson, May 5, 1918, folder 3, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵⁷ Meredith to Colson, January 20, 1930, folder 6, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵⁸ Colson to Meredith, April 15, 1939, folder 8, box 29 Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁵⁹ Colson to Meredith, April 21, 1939, folder 8, box 29, Colson-Hill Family Papers.

⁶⁰ Context section contributed by Casper.

⁶¹ Colson's exact words are not cited. Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 40 and 207.

⁶² Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 40.

⁶³ *Virginia Statesmen* 12, 4 (November 4, 1939): 4.

⁶⁴ Edna Colson to Myra Colson, May 13, 1939, Myra Callis Papers Collection 193-1 to 193-53 (193-folder 1939), Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC, quoted in Jacqueline Taylor, "Amaza Lee Meredith," *Pioneering Women of American Architecture*, 2024, <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/amaza-lee-meredith>.

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are ‘safe,’ happy and really beginning to live.... We are rejoicing in your success and aims....I know you are having a wonderful experience with your homemaking. May you get many wonderful thrills from it all!”⁶⁵

Maude Terry’s use of “safe” in quotation marks likely hinted at deeper concerns. Taylor suggests it referred to the risks that Black women took as they navigated across geographies traveling to attend school in the North or the otherwise prevalent violence, prejudice, and discrimination that they surely experienced; homeownership provided safety and security..⁶⁶ The emphatic punctuation may have hinted at an additional layer of safety the house provided for the two women; Azurest South can be understood as a Black queer refuge—a place to be themselves and to “really begin to live.”⁶⁷ Using the framework of feminist intellectual bell hooks, Azurest South served as a “homeplace,” which is, “the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.”⁶⁸ Many scholars use the framework of homeplace to explain how Azurest South served as an important expression of Meredith’s and Colson’s identity, or a place where they could be themselves.⁶⁹

*Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Interwar Years*⁷⁰

Azurest South represents the complicated intersections of race, sex, and sexuality navigated by Meredith, Colson, and many other women like them (notwithstanding the complications of geography). In *LGBTQ America*, Megan Springate explains, “intersectionality is the recognition that categories of difference (sometimes also referred to as axes of identity) including—but not limited to—race, ethnicity, gender, religion/creed, generation, geographic location, sexuality, age, ability/disability, and class intersect to shape the experiences of individuals....”⁷¹ The intersectional histories of race, gender, and sexuality provide the framework to understand Azurest South as a modernist, Black feminist statement against and refuge from societal norms.

New Negro Womanhood⁷²

Meredith and Colson provide important insights into Black women’s history of the twentieth century. Both women were born in the last decades of the nineteenth century, after the Supreme Court ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional (ruling in 1883) and the 1896 decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* emboldened white supremacists and brought forth so-called Jim Crow segregation by law with “separate, but equal” They followed the generation of Black leaders like Du Bois and Booker T. Washington who debated how best to

⁶⁵ Maude Terry to “Girls,” May 19, 1939, box 1, folder 2, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 41.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 41.

⁶⁷ The identification of Azurest South as a “Black queer refuge” provided by Taylor Brookins, National Park Service.

⁶⁸ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 41.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 41-42. In the introductory essay for *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson point to hook’s concept to understand the establishment of Black communities and towns as “building ‘homeplaces’—for safety, affirmation, refuge, and resistance.” Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson, “Introduction,” *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, eds. Sean Anderson and Mabel Wilson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 16. See also Kofi Boone, “Notes Toward a History of Black Landscape Architecture,” *Places Journal* (October 2020), <https://placesjournal.org/article/notes-toward-a-history-of-black-landscape-architecture>.

⁷⁰ Context section provided by Casper.

⁷¹ Springate, “A Note about Intersectionality,” *LGBTQ America*, ed. Springate, 7.1.

⁷² Context section contributed by Casper.

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accomplish racial uplift and community self-determination, and early Black feminists like Ida B. Wells and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper who called for the advancement of race and gender. The National Association of Colored Women (later National Association of Colored Women's Clubs) was founded in 1896 with the motto “lifting as we climb.”

In the 1920s and 1930s when Meredith and Colson became respected educators and community leaders, they inherited the complicated work of race and gender advancement taken on by earlier women and carried it forward. They worked within notions described by historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham as the “politics of respectability”—a set of social norms that celebrated “industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.”⁷³ The politics of respectability emerged out of the National Baptist Convention (NBC), founded in 1896, which was the largest Black religious organization in the country. As Higginbotham documents, the NBC had 2.2 million members in 1906 compared to the African Methodist Episcopal church membership of 494,000.⁷⁴ As race leaders and educators, Meredith and Colson were part of an “educated female elite, frequently consisting of teachers or wives of ministers associated with educational institutions, [who] promoted middle class ideals among the masses of blacks in the belief that such ideas ensured the dual goals of racial self-help and respect from white America.”⁷⁵ Additionally, respectability was meant to counteract negative images of Black women perpetuated by racist stereotypes.⁷⁶ The politics of respectability were a set of societal and personal pressures that Meredith and Colson surely operated within and against, particularly earlier in their careers.

As the Harlem Renaissance brought in a new wave of feminist authors and activists, Black women began to articulate the frustration of working for the betterment of race and gender, or what educator Elise Johnson McDougald (1885-1971) called the “double task” of Black women.⁷⁷ Along with many educational organizations, Meredith and Colson participated in the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and the suffrage movement. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Edna Colson and a group of women from VNII (later VSC and VSU) commemorated the moment of their voter registration with a celebratory photograph.⁷⁸ Colson was a leader throughout her life. Both Meredith and Colson were members of NAACP, Colson being Virginia’s first Black woman to become a lifetime member. Praising their work, particularly their educational activism, Meredith’s sister, Maude, noted they were, “doing with dignity and efficiency [their] burdensome duties.”⁷⁹ Meredith and Colson reflect a class and social status that was on the one hand constrained by race and gender, but on the other hand bolstered by professional security, financial independence, and established respectability. Publicly, they operated safely within the politics of respectability.

Black women writers and activists also articulated the stress of being Black, women, and Americans, or a “triple consciousness.”⁸⁰ Anne Spencer, relative through marriage and contemporary of Meredith, reflected on being a Black woman in her autobiography statement in Countee Cullen’s 1927 *Caroling Dusk*, writing: “I proudly love

⁷³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

⁷⁴ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 6.

⁷⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 14.

⁷⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 196-202.

⁷⁷ Elise Johnson McDougald, “The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation,” *The Survey Graphic* 53, no. 11 (March 1, 1925): 689-691; Laila Haidarali, *Brown Beauty: Color, Sex, and Race from the Harlem Renaissance to World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 31-61.

⁷⁸ From VSU archives and reprinted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 77.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 284 fn. 52.

⁸⁰ Nahum Welang, “Triple Consciousness: The Reimagination of Black Female Identities in Contemporary American Culture” *Open Cultural Studies* 2, 1 (2018): 296-306.

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being a Negro woman—its [sic] so involved and interesting. We are the PROBLEM—the great national game of TABOO.”⁸¹ Spencer’s biographer Noelle Morrisette clarifies that the “taboo” was being both a Black American and a woman.⁸² Spencer’s statement reflects a play on the contemporary notion of “double consciousness,” first used by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1897 and published in his 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, described as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁸³ Echoing the feelings of Du Bois and mirroring the sentiments of Spencer, educator Elise Johnson McDougald lamented that Black women are, “figuratively, struck in the face daily by contempt from the world around her.”⁸⁴ Yet, like Spencer, McDougald also celebrated the enduring strength and resilience of Black women closing her essay reflecting, “She is maintaining her natural beauty and charm and improving her mind and opportunity. She is measuring up to the needs and demands of her family, community, and race... The wind of the race’s destiny stirs more briskly because of her striving.”⁸⁵

Backlash

Working to advance both their sex and race (and living a private queer life) had a great deal of danger, when there was violent backlash against both the advances made by early feminists and civil rights activists. The early years of Meredith and Colson’s relationship were also the crescendo and immediate aftermath of the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. The Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, guaranteed women the right to vote, although, voter restriction laws in much of the country continued to prevent African American women and men from voting. Nevertheless, women’s suffrage was just one of many societal changes taking place around 1920. Americans expressed a wave of backlash through racial violence, anti-immigrant legislation, and anti-communism, amongst other things.⁸⁶ In the realm of gender, working women were blamed for the breakdown of the American family, and women’s desires for careers, independent opinions, and remaining unmarried and childless were all cast as signs of abnormality. Similarly, African American sexuality—both male and female—was repeatedly described in popular and medical literature as voracious and predatory. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins termed this “controlling images,” the negative stereotypes that Black women constantly experienced and worked to contradict.⁸⁷ Sexuality was also a feature in the backlash against women; women who were considered too independent were tainted with the label of lesbianism, understood at the time to be a mental illness and a shameful sexual perversion.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Anne Spencer, “Anne Spencer,” *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets*, ed. Countee Cullen (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1927), 42. The all-caps “problem,” was likely a reference to W.E.B. Dubois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, which posits in the introduction, “How does it feel to be a problem?” W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 1.

⁸² Noelle Morrisette, *Anne Spencer between Worlds* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2023), 27.

⁸³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

⁸⁴ McDougald, “The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation,” 691.

⁸⁵ McDougald, “The Double Task,” 691.

⁸⁶ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 202–21.

⁸⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 61–88.

⁸⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870–1936,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1985), 245–96; Patricia Raub, “A New Woman or an Old-Fashioned Girl? The Portrayal of the Heroine in Popular Women’s Novels of the Twenties,” *American Studies* 35, 1 (1994): 109–

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Black Queer Experience

Azurest South is nationally significant as the home of a Black female couple whose relationship spanned nearly seventy years. Decades before the beginning of a sustained political movement for LGBTQ acceptance and protection, Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Meade Colson built a home together in a one-of-a-kind dwelling guaranteed to be noticed. Amaza Lee Meredith's decision to create a modernist monument to her life in the hostile circumstances of Jim Crow-era Virginia, and to live there openly with her same-sex partner, represented a significant challenge to the social patterns of her era. It served as a celebration of creativity and self-determination, which qualifies these women as significant LGBTQ icons and classifies their actions as significant to LGBTQ, and thus American history. This assertion is supported by the inclusion of Azurest South in the National Park Service's LGBTQ theme study. There, author Jeffrey Harris explores the house as a case study of properties listed in the National Register whose significance to LGBTQ history was overlooked in the designation process.⁸⁹ As Jeffrey Harris notes in *LGBTQ America*, euphemisms for their relationship were used in the National Register nomination ("companion") and elsewhere throughout their lives ("former student" and "friend").⁹⁰ Azurest South was listed at the state level of significance in the area of architecture alone, reevaluated here for its national significance under Criteria 1 and 4.

The liberating experience of their time in Harlem seemed to have an influence on both women, particularly Meredith.⁹¹ Harlem served as an intellectual and cultural center for the New Negro Movement and a significant community for Black queer people. As distinguished scholar of African American history Henry Louis Gates Jr., observes, Harlem was "surely as gay as it was black...."⁹² Scholars have demonstrated the queerness of the Harlem Renaissance, uncovering the encoded language of literature, the clubs and social venues that welcomed queer patrons, and musical performers who redefined gender norms.⁹³ As described by Taylor, Meredith seemed to enjoy the "freedom of living in New York" and "sharing with friends the subversive meanings of the lines in work by bisexual poet Edna St. Vincent Millay."⁹⁴ While in New York, she experimented with wearing pants, as she did later in life.⁹⁵ In evocative photographs from a Canadian camping trip taken around this time with friends and family, Meredith stands (or crouches) amidst a tent and automobile, in bold striped tie and plus fours, with hair short, parted on the side in the androgenous bobbed hairstyle typical of 1920s "flapper" women. In contrast, her sister, Cora, sits with legs crossed wearing a dress and stockings, her hair in a casual, yet feminine, style.⁹⁶ At this time Meredith operated outside the fashionable limits of respectability, embracing a new personal expression.

30; Heather Lee Miller, "Sexologists Examine Lesbians and Prostitutes in the United States, 1840-1940," *NWSA Journal* 12, 3 (Fall 2000): 67-91; Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Harris, "Where We Could Be Ourselves," in *LGBTQ America*, ed. Springate, 13.3-13.5.

⁹⁰ Harris, "Where We Could Be Ourselves," in *LGBTQ America*, ed. Springate, 13.4.

⁹¹ Context in this section hereafter provided by Casper.

⁹² Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Black Man's Burden" in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 233.

⁹³ A.B. Christa Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); James F. Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

⁹⁴ Based on a reading of Meredith's letters during her time in New York City, Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 153.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 270 fn. 20.

⁹⁶ Photograph from scrapbook at Virginia State University Special Collections and Archives, undated, reproduced in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 157.

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As Meredith returned home to Virginia, the ways she and Colson navigated life as queer women within the politics of respectability provides important insights into the history of LGBTQ experience in America.⁹⁷ Heteronormative behavior was central to respectability, and sexuality was a critical means that the Black middle class differentiated themselves from those below.⁹⁸ Literary and African American Studies scholar Tara Green suggests that respectability served as a cover for “a woman’s vulnerability, her true nature, and her pleasurable desires.”⁹⁹ Contemporary Nella Larson expressed a similar dilemma through her main character in the Harlem Renaissance novel *Passing*, who was depicted outwardly as sexually repressed, and thus respectable, but at the same time explored through Larson’s coded subtext her sexuality towards other women.¹⁰⁰ In this way, Meredith and Colson surely used their public-facing image as Black race leaders to maintain a life safely, even as they pursued a private relationship together in a house that itself served as an affront to such pressures (see discussion in *Modernism as Protest*). It was likely their social standing, financial security, and respectability that allowed them to navigate, without noteworthy incident, a life together in life-long partnership as women loving women.¹⁰¹

The experience of Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Colson also reflects the ongoing theme in broader LGBTQ history to secure and maintain privacy, “where they could be themselves.”¹⁰² Additionally, it is possible that Meredith and Colson were amongst a queer community there. Harris suggests that Meredith and Colson “likely did not live in a LGBTQ vacuum, meaning that there likely was a LGBTQ community at Virginia State [College], no matter how clandestine it may have been, to which they belonged.”¹⁰³ Women and gender studies scholar Cookie Woolner uncovered such a community at Howard University.¹⁰⁴ It was within this community, surrounded by other Black intellectuals and protected within a wider network of church membership and supportive family, that they lived as women loving women. Azurest South not only enabled the freedom to be themselves, but also the safety to do so.

Of course, not all experiences for Black queer women were the same during this time. The life of equal rights activist Pauli Murray (1910-1985), who struggled personally with her gender and sexuality all her life and is the only other Black queer woman recognized through NHL designation, provides important insights for understanding Meredith and Colson’s lives.¹⁰⁵ Raised in Durham, NC, (family house, NHL designated 2016, NRIS 100000866), Murray left for New York in 1926 and enrolled at Hunter College in 1928 (Meredith moved to New York in 1926). While there, both Murray and Meredith seem to have experienced a transformation in

⁹⁷ For how queer Black women navigated the politics of respectability, see Woolner, *The Famous Lady Lovers*, 105-134; For how Black women navigated the sexuality repressive nature of respectability, see Tara T. Green, *See Me Naked: Black Women Defining Pleasure in the Interwar Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022). For the intersections of the twentieth-century civil rights struggle with politics of homosexuality, see Glenda Elizabeth Sherouse “The Politics of Homosexuality in the Twentieth Century Black Freedom Struggle” (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2013). Their relationship is a throughline in *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, but for explicit discussion, and reflection on how expands LGBTQ history, see Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 75-80 and 89-91.

⁹⁸ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ Green, *See Me Naked*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Nella Larson, *Quicksand and Passing*, Deborah E. McDowell, ed (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1986), xxiii-xxv.

¹⁰¹ For impressions from people, and one potential incident, see Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 283 fn. 47.

¹⁰² Phrase from title of Jeffrey A. Harris, ““Where We Could Be Ourselves”” Harris, ““Where We Could Be Ourselves,”” in *LGBTQ America*, ed. Springate, 13.1-13.36.

¹⁰³ Harris, ““Where We Could Be Ourselves,”” *LGBTQ America*, ed., Springate, 13.4.

¹⁰⁴ Woolner, *The Famous Lady Lovers*, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Pauli Murray identified as “Negro” and later “Euro-African-American.” Her family descended from African, European, and Cherokee ancestors. Rosalind Rosenberg, *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xvii-3.

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their sexual identities, but Meredith returned home. Murray stayed in New York, changing her name from “Anna Pauline” to “Pauli,” sought medical explanations for her sexuality, and unsuccessfully pursued testosterone treatments; privately she shared feelings that would today be regarded as gender dysphoria, wondering if she was “a girl who should have been a boy.”¹⁰⁶ Murray suffered emotional and physical breakdowns because love relationships with women “failed or were impossible.”¹⁰⁷ By sheer coincidence, while resisting segregation on an interstate bus going home in 1940, Murray was arrested and held in a Petersburg jail; a few miles away, Meredith and Colson lived together in Azurest South, completed the year prior.

Murray went on to pursue a law degree at Howard University in the early 1940s, after she reached a level of acceptance about her gender identity, where she encountered sexism and pressures to conform to the image of a female race leader. It was here she developed the term, “Jane Crow,” to articulate the discrimination she experienced because she was Black and because she was a woman, later used in her influential 1965 legal article, “Jane Crow and the Law.”¹⁰⁸ Scholars have also understood her work, particularly as it relates to race, gender, and identity, as efforts to confront binaries so often used by society, and although she claimed female gender after her time at Howard University, she did not fully embrace gender conformity. As women and gender studies scholar Brittany Cooper argues, Murray’s “refusal to classify herself in terms of a binary Black-White racial classification system...reflected her desire to expand the universe of racial leadership possibilities for queer-identified Black women.”¹⁰⁹

Despite their divergent paths, the experience of Murray and Meredith were framed by significant barriers, especially regarding their sexualities and the ability to be themselves publicly. Throughout most of the twentieth century, being openly queer was illegal and dangerous. State laws criminalized behavior outside of heterosexual norms, including “laws against nature.” Additionally, the cultural openness of the 1920s and 1930s faded, giving way in the 1950s to the “lavender scare” and a rise in homophobia, which the nascent homophile movement tried to combat.¹¹⁰ Problematically, at the time homosexuality was considered a psychiatric illness that required treatment, which is why Murray sought medical diagnosis of “biological maleness” to distance herself from the categorization of “homosexual” as she pursued treatment.¹¹¹ These wider contexts shaped the choices of Meredith, Colson, Murray, and many other Black queer women.

These women navigated gender expression and sexuality differently. Murray privately explored her gender and sexuality as a same gender loving person but feared being diagnosed publicly as homosexual or being associated with mental weakness. Murray’s anxieties were informed by her tragic formative experience, including a series of familial struggles with mental illness (her father was murdered while in a psychiatric facility); the perceived burden of motherhood (her mother struggled and died at thirty-five, leaving six children); the fear of racial violence held by her grandmother; and the family legacy of sexual violence experienced by Murray’s great-grandmother.¹¹² In stark contrast, Meredith and Colson were able to explore

¹⁰⁶ Heather Fearnbach and Sarah Azaransky “Pauli Murray Family Home,” National Historic Landmark Form (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016). For more on her struggles with gender and sexuality, see Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 87-114; Doreen M. Drury, “Boy-Girl, Imp, Priest: Pauli Murray and the Limits of Identity,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29.1 (Spring 2013): 142-47.

¹⁰⁷ Drury, “Boy-Girl, Imp, Priest: Pauli Murray and the Limits of Identity,” 143.

¹⁰⁸ Murray, *Pauli Murray*, 356, 362; Pauli Murray and Mary O. Eastwood, “Jane Crow and the Law: Sex Discrimination and Title VII,” *George Washington Law Review* 34.2 (1965): 232-56.

¹⁰⁹ Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*, 87-88.

¹¹⁰ For a collection exploring homophobia in the Black community, see Delroy Constantine-Simms, ed., *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2001).

¹¹¹ Drury, “Boy-Girl, Imp, Priest: Pauli Murray and the Limits of Identity,” 143.

¹¹² This is briefly summarized in Drury, “Boy-Girl, Imp, Priest: Pauli Murray and the Limits of Identity,” 144-146.

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their sexuality privately at Azurest South, although publicly they still retained gender normative identities of Black middle-class respectability. The ability of the women to skillfully navigate an illegal and socially unacceptable relationship privately was surely the result of Meredith's own formative experience watching her parents navigate an interracial relationship, which was also illegal and dangerous at that time. Meredith and Colson maintained their lives in Petersburg, where Colson's family lived for generations, and where they likely felt a sense of safety and belonging living as respected educators on the Black campus, despite ongoing segregation and Jim Crow violence.

Criterion 4: Modernist Domestic Architecture

Azurest South, in Petersburg, Virginia, is an unusual example of modern domestic architecture in the American South. Two conditions contribute to its architectural distinctiveness. One is its embrace of modern architectural modes, including Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, and International Style. The home is also architecturally noteworthy for its designer, Amaza Lee Meredith, a Black queer woman raised in the Jim Crow South, who, as a self-trained architect, created a place of "refuge" and a "homeplace" for herself and her life partner. Her choice of design mode reflects important themes in the intersections of race, sex, sexuality, and design, and an act of protest against social and architectural conventions.

Scholars have generally described Azurest South as an example of the International Style.¹¹³ The property is identified as an example of the International Style on the 1993 National Register form.¹¹⁴ While seeming to embrace the principles of the International Style, the property is a nuanced expression of the mode with significant departing characteristics of Streamline Moderne or Art Deco, including structural masonry block walls (the surface is structural, not merely a skin enclosing a volume), distinct rounded features, noteworthy use of glass block ~~corners~~, smooth white plastered surfaces, and bold turquoise trim. Azurest South might be understood using architectural historian William Jordy's conceptualization of "buildings within the [International] Style which nonetheless reveal modifications of the canons enunciated by Hitchcock and Johnson," because they adapted to "normative human needs and desires...."¹¹⁵ Therefore, while acknowledging that many scholars have interpreted Azurest South as an important example of the International Style, this nomination will identify the property more broadly as an example of modern architecture.¹¹⁶

International Style Architecture

International Style is a subset of modern architecture that spanned the middle of the twentieth century, from roughly the 1920s to the 1960s. It began in Europe in the 1920s and had roots in the German Bauhaus and post-World War I European social movements. The trauma of the Great War in Europe led to a rejection of the past, including traditional architectural forms. Young Europeans turned to new political systems such as communism, socialism, and fascism, each of which sought to overthrow

¹¹³ For recognition as an example of the International Style, see Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M. S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson, eds., *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond and Charlottesville: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1992), 105; Melina Bezirdjian and Lena Sweeten McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia, Architectural Style Guide* (Richmond: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2014), 33; Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 17. In contrast, Dell Upton describes the property as "Moderne" in: Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 273.

¹¹⁴ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South."

¹¹⁵ William H. Jordy, "The International Style in the 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 24, no. 1 (March 1965): 12; Taylor advances this interpretation in Taylor, "Designing Progress," Conclusion, 5.

¹¹⁶ This approach was strongly advised by the Landmarks Committee.

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traditional distributions of power. Those new modes called for new styles of architecture—one means by which power is communicated.¹¹⁷ Modern architects like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright rejected historicized elements and instead advocated for “a synthetic relationship between materials, form, and function.”¹¹⁸

International Style was not widely known in the United States until 1932. That year, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson published the seminal work *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* and curated an exhibit at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) entitled *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* with an accompanying exhibit catalogue.¹¹⁹ Quite likely, Amaza Lee Meredith attended the 1932 MOMA exhibition; she was living in New York City at the time and doing graduate work at Columbia University Teacher’s College. She owned a copy of the exhibit catalogue.

Notably, although International Style had clear connections to the European social movements of the 1920s and 1930s, Hitchcock and Johnson downplayed this characteristic in their descriptions of the style, choosing instead to deal exclusively with its aesthetic features. Architectural historian Lawrence Wodehouse suggests that this choice may have been made in deference to MOMA’s wealthy benefactors or to Johnson’s own family wealth.¹²⁰ The anti-communist Red Scare that swept the United States in the early 1920s may also have been a factor in Hitchcock and Johnson’s decision.¹²¹

Hitchcock and Johnson identified three characteristics that defined the International Style. These were volume (as opposed to mass); balance (as opposed to symmetry); and the functional organization of building parts (as opposed to an emphasis on ornamentation).¹²² International Style is marked by simplicity. According to Wodehouse, “Adjectives such as *pure, clean, logical, straight-forward, and articulated* typify the descriptions of International Style architecture.”¹²³ Its efficient use of space and its emphasis on functionality provided a commentary on the perceived excesses of previous eras. In the words of Swiss architect Le Corbusier, one of the visionaries of the International Style, a building should be “a machine for living.”¹²⁴ *A Field Guide to American Houses* lists the following characteristics as distinguishing features of International Style: “Flat roof, usually without ledge (coping) at roof line; windows set flush with outer walls; smooth, unornamented surfaces with no decorative detailing at doors or windows; composition commonly includes large window groupings, often linear, and expanses of windowless wall surface; unified wall cladding, generally white stucco; commonly asymmetrical.”¹²⁵ The *New Dominion Style Guide* echoes a similar explanation and features Azurest South as

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1991), xiii–xviii.

¹¹⁸ Lydia Mattice Brandt, “An Introduction to Making Modern Architecture Matter,” *Public Historian* 42.4 (October 23, 2020): 143.

¹¹⁹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1932).

¹²⁰ Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture*, xv.

¹²¹ Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

¹²² Barr, Hitchcock, Johnson, and Mumford, *Modern Architecture*; Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture*, xiv; McAlester et al., *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 617.

¹²³ Wodehouse, xiii.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Loth, Sadler, and Hill, “Azurest South,” Section 7, 1; see also McAlester et al., *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 621.

¹²⁵ McAlester et al., *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 617.

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an example of the International Style.¹²⁶ Azurest South serves as a representative example of how the principles of the International Style manifested alongside other modes in everyday architecture.

Beyond simply representing the aesthetics of a new age, International Style designs also made use of new technology and materials.¹²⁷ More commonly, this mode is associated with the use of a structural frame (often metal) rather than load-bearing walls to support a building, such as the exhibited “House of the Modern Age.”¹²⁸ Azurest South used load-bearing concrete block, an economical use of a modern material, particularly for residential purposes.¹²⁹ This construction technique enabled the flat roofs and large expanses of windows characteristic of this style, and these features in turn enabled a blending of functional space with the natural world. Flat roofs at times served as recreational space (as they did at Azurest South), allowing city dwellers to relax in the outdoors, and large banks of windows allowed those inside International Style buildings to feel connected to their outside surroundings.¹³⁰

Race, Gender, and Modern Architecture

Modern architecture was fundamentally a vision for the twentieth century that broke with the past. However, while the social commentary of the International Style was de-emphasized in its introduction to the United States, it is highly likely that Amaza Lee Meredith was aware of these European undercurrents and understood the implications for social change embedded in the genre.¹³¹ Therefore, Meredith’s choice of architectural style may have served as a critique of the US social, political, and racial climate of the 1930s or even an act of protest.¹³² Conversely, it was also a strategic act of self-fashioning, expressing identity using the vocabulary of the International Style, and an exceptional example of sapphic modernism in the United States. Architect Mario Gooden calls Azurest South an example of a modernist house where “race and sex intersected with spatial praxes and architectural theory.”¹³³

African Diaspora and Modernism

The intersections of the International Style, and modernism more generally, with the African diaspora provides an important context for Azurest South. On the one hand, African American culture, particularly the dance and music of the New Negro (Harlem) Renaissance, was lauded as inherently modern—a conscious rejection of tradition like the International Style. Writing of Harlem jazz music, Le Corbusier proclaimed, “it is the melody of the soul joined with the rhyme of the machine.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, negative images portrayed African culture and people of the African diaspora as the antithesis of modernity. Primitivism, an artistic trend in which

¹²⁶ Melina Bezirdjian and Lena Sweeten McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia, Architectural Style Guide* (Richmond: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2014), 33.

¹²⁷ Thomas C. Jester, *Twentieth-Century Building Materials: History and Conservation* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2014).

¹²⁸ McAlester et al., 617–18.

¹²⁹ Pamela H. Simpson, *Cheap, Quick and Easy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 9-29.

¹³⁰ Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture*, xiii; Bruce Clouette and Hoang Tinh, “Philip Johnson’s Glass House,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1997), 12.

¹³¹ Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture*, 3–5; Hasan-Uddin Khan, *International Style: Modernist Architecture from 1925 to 1965* (London: Taschen, 2009), 11–27.

¹³² Taylor, “Amaza’s Azurest: Modern Architecture and the ‘New Negro’ Woman,” 45.

¹³³ Azurest South was one of two examples Gooden highlighted; the other example is the Josephine Baker house designed by Adolf Loos in Paris in 1928. Mario Gooden, *Dark Space: Architecture, Representation, Black Identity* (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2016), 127-128.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 176.

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designers coopted African, Indigenous, and folk art in search of “new” aesthetics, occurred alongside modernism, and yet, problematically, also served to reinforce the supremacy of European culture.¹³⁵ Mario Gooden interrogates this further in his analysis of Austrian architect Adolf Loos’s “Ornament and Crime,” published in 1913, which portrayed these cultures as backwards and inferior.¹³⁶

The New Negro movement sought to contradict these negative images, promoting awareness of African contributions and the new Afrocentric, modern aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance. The contributions of Africa to the arts were overlooked in contemporary literature, which is why Meredith assigned readings on the history of Africa and focused her lessons on African arts and material culture. “As an instructor in the history of African art,” Taylor observes, “Meredith took up [Alain] Locke’s ‘mission of rehabilitating the race’ and deliberately created for her students a tangible connection to Africa through the arts.”¹³⁷ Artists like Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) combined African and modern aesthetics to create a new form of expression.¹³⁸ For artists and cultural leaders, it was important to connect modernism with the African Diaspora.

Sex, Sexuality, and Modernism

Azurest South can also be understood as an expression of what scholars now call “sapphic modernity.”¹³⁹ The term generally refers to the idea, embraced by some women artists of the 1920s and 1930s, that modernity involved “‘the strict rejection of received ideas about what it meant to be a woman,’ which included a refusal to be governed by the norms of heterosexuality.”¹⁴⁰ Media studies scholar Jasmine Rault uses the term as a means of understanding the work of modern designers Elizabeth Eyre de Laux and Evelyn Wyld, who were collaborators and lovers. Rejecting the (male) modern architects’ “drive towards a purified identity,” Rault argues, de Laux and Wyld mixed “the aesthetic signifiers of ‘degeneration’ and modernism in their interior designs,” thus creating “spaces that signaled the possibility of accommodating those mixed, unclean, hybridized bodies that were being carefully purged from architectural modernity at the time.”¹⁴¹ Eileen Gray is a significant example of sapphic modernism, and her design of E.1027 exhibits parallels with Azurest South. These women also opted to design their homes incorporating vocabularies of the International Style and modernist architecture.

Meredith’s design for the studio, captioned in her scrapbook as “My Lady’s” boudoir” (interior features largely lost now), illustrates how she blended design and sexuality to enact sapphic modernity.¹⁴² This room was originally designed as Meredith’s studio, but later became Colson’s studio and Meredith shifted to the garage, which she converted into a studio and darkroom. A scrapbook photo provides a glimpse into this space of intimacy where Colson could “carry out the activities that defined her both publicly and privately.”¹⁴³ The space

¹³⁵ James Knapp summarizes the complicated history of “Primitivism” and the critical response to the 1985 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern,” in James F. Knapp, “Primitivism and the Modern,” *Boundary 2* 15.1/2 (Autumn, 1986 - Winter, 1987): 365–379. Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

¹³⁶ Mario Gooden, *Dark Space*, 129–130.

¹³⁷ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 184.

¹³⁸ Starting February 2024, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will present the exhibition *The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism*.

¹³⁹ Laura Doan, ed., *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

¹⁴⁰ Rault, “Losing Feelings,” 60; Jasmine Rault, *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity: Staying In* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

¹⁴¹ Rault, “Losing Feelings,” 62. Quotation marks around “degeneration” added.

¹⁴² Context in this section hereafter by Casper.

¹⁴³ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 223.

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included a built-in bunk with drawers adjacent to a smoking stand, and in the foreground a telephone and ashtray; on the wall is a metal inset of women in various acts of artistic and literary pursuits. Taylor attributes inspiration for this room to Eileen Grey's "Boudoir de Monte Carlo."¹⁴⁴ Mario Gooden draws connections to the "withdrawn and inwardly facing" *Damenzimmer* (lady's room/ boudoir) of Loos's Villa Müller in Prague, and calls Meredith's design a "recoding of male authorship and authority." Villa Müller has garnered significant scholarly attention for the intersection of the International Style and sexuality, and architectural historian Beatriz Colomina has analyzed Villa Müller as an example of "domestic voyeurism."¹⁴⁵ So too, through the scrapbook image, we may be peering into Meredith's own version of domestic voyeurism and her admiration of Colson, particularly when considered with the metal bas-relief (extant), which displays a woman in modest contemporary dress with an updo hairstyle strikingly similar to the way that Colson frequently fashioned herself publicly and in photographs. The unnamed woman pursues various forms of literary and artistic pursuits—reading, writing, painting—but in one, the woman is fluidly reclined in a rolled-arm sedan, eyes closed with arm behind her head, perhaps as only Meredith and other close intimates would see such an active woman.

Modernism at Azurest South

The tastes, experiences, and ambitions of Meredith and Colson ultimately shaped their interpretation of the International Style at Azurest South. Unfortunately, Meredith never wrote about her architecture. Instead, her choices in design, materials, form, and composition provide information, set against broader design trends, her intersecting identities, and her philosophies around art, particular African art. Like many contemporary architects and designers of her day, she focused on the house and interior decoration. Azurest South presented a complete artistic expression. It was also her design "laboratory," where she experimented with new techniques and materials, realized designs, patterns, and compositions, and applied theoretic concepts about modern design and color.¹⁴⁶

Building Azurest South

Meredith began designing her International Style home in 1938 and engaged local African American contractor and carpenter Bryant Russell Holmes (1896-1961) to construct the house, completed in 1939.¹⁴⁷ By twenty-one years old, Holmes was identified as a carpenter.¹⁴⁸ In a city directory from 1929, he was one of ten listed contractors, and one of two notated as African American.¹⁴⁹ He lived across the river from Meredith near downtown Petersburg, in the rear of the affluent Poplar Lawn neighborhood (Poplar Lawn Historic District, NRIS 06000030).

In 1939, Meredith and Colson moved into the residence, which they christened Azurest. Later, it would become known as Azurest South, to distinguish it from another building project of Meredith's on Long Island, New York, known as Azurest North (discussed below). The origins of the name Azurest are not entirely clear. One letter from a friend refers to the house as "Az-u-Rest," and Meredith herself sometimes wrote the name as

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 223.

¹⁴⁵ Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in Beatriz Colomina, ed, *Sexuality & Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 73-130.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 207.

¹⁴⁷ Sometimes recorded in documents as Russell B. or B. Russell.

¹⁴⁸ WWI Draft Registration Card, 1917-1918, Registration State: Virginia; Registration County: Dinwiddie County, Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005.

¹⁴⁹ Petersburg, Virginia, City Directory, 1927 U.S., *City Directories, 1822-1995* (database on-line), Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, 643.

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“AzuRest.”¹⁵⁰ The phrase was attributed to Meredith’s sister, Maude, and at first referred to the summer community in Sag Harbor, New York. As retold by Meredith, her sister thought of that community as “Heavenly Peace, Blue Rest, Blue Haven, Azure Rest.”¹⁵¹ That poetic phrase was used for both Azurest North and Azurest South. The names embodied the significant role that safety held when Meredith and her sisters constructed places of belonging, places of refuge, places to relax and find comfort—their homeplaces.

As her experimental design space, Meredith changed Azurest frequently, although always maintaining the exterior from the original design.¹⁵² Taylor notes Azurest South was “constantly in flux,” and reflects a philosophy of buildings as “un organisme vivant,” a living organism, as articulated by bisexual Irish designer Eileen Gray for her modernist villa E.1027. As Taylor, notes, this was a contrast from modernist architect Le Corbusier’s conceptualization of the house as a “machine for living.”¹⁵³ This departure is also reflective of sapphic modernism. In fact, even in her master’s thesis, Meredith joins Alain Locke and Grey in a rejection of this aspect of modernism and the “machine age.” Meredith advocated for personal expression, art in the everyday, and leisure; she arguably lived more fluidly, and her house was an expression of that. Because of this, the period of significance covers her occupation of the house until her death in 1984.

From the outside, Azurest South serves as a textbook example of a modest-scale International Style residence. Meredith may have drawn inspiration for the design from *The 1938 Book of Small Houses: A New and Authoritative Guide Book for Prospective Home Builders*, which she owned. Azurest South bears a striking resemblance to design 13 “House in Alexandria, VA,” by Adolf K. Waterval, a one-story, white stucco house with casements and corner windows; it is also one of the few houses constructed using cinder block.¹⁵⁴

Azurest South exhibits an exceptional combination of the International Style with a more dramatic, arguably Art Deco inspired, interior design. Given its close adherence to International Style elements on its exterior, the home’s bold use of decorative elements in the interior is surprising. In the words of architectural historian Dreck Spurlock Wilson, “The limited palette of exterior materials explodes on the interior with an unexpected mix of colors and finishes.”¹⁵⁵ Meredith adorned her kitchen and bathroom with unique tilework in yellows, greens, blacks, and pinks. Both the strong color combinations and the specific designs could also be read as a reference to her African heritage, or “Africanisms,” which, in the words of scholar Joseph E. Holloway are “elements of culture found in the New World traceable to an African origin.”¹⁵⁶ The subtle inclusion of Africanisms might reflect Meredith and Colson’s academic interest in the arts, history, and culture of the African diaspora. Meredith also incorporated Art Deco and Art Moderne elements, including the mantel, which served as a centerpiece in her living room.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Meredith, “Memo to Dr. Edgar Allen Toppin, Centennial Historian, RE: Additional Notes” folder 1, box 1, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers.

¹⁵¹ From Amaza Lee Meredith’s obituary for Maude Kenney Meredith Terry, as quoted in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 228.

¹⁵² Context section provided by Amanda Casper.

¹⁵³ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 225.

¹⁵⁴ *The 1938 Book of Small Houses: A New and Authoritative Guide Book for Prospective Home Builders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1937), 18; Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 394.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Brian D. Joyner, ed., *African Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Africanisms* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Center for Cultural Resources, Office of Diversity and Special Projects, 2003), 2.

¹⁵⁷ Meredith directed her contractor to replicate a design featured in *American Home* from August 1936. Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 215.

Modernism as Protest

If the International Style was a European rejection of traditional society, then Azurest South can be seen as Amaza Lee Meredith's individual act of critique against the traditions of oppression encoded in the architecture around her. Even the historically African American college campus, which Azurest South abuts, predominantly features Colonial Revival-style buildings. "Designing her home in the modern idiom," Taylor observes, "...made a bold statement that was remarkable in the way it broke from tradition and refused to adopt the national historic narratives of the colonial past..."¹⁵⁸ Historians now interpret the popularity of Colonial Revival in the 1920s and 1930s as an effort to reassert native-born White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant values amid an era of rapid urbanization, immigration, and labor activism.¹⁵⁹ However, in Virginia, this style was embraced as early as the 1880s.¹⁶⁰ At the time Meredith constructed Azurest South, the university was undergoing its first major expansion and the eleven new campus buildings were Colonial Revival in style.¹⁶¹

Thus, amidst this wider setting of a design vocabulary steeped in Virginia colonial history, Azurest South seems even more out of place, making the subtext more dramatic.¹⁶² Mario Gooden argues that Azurest South is "simultaneously a bold statement of belief in the doctrines of Modern architecture and a re-scripting its masculinist codes."¹⁶³ While being modern and unique, surely standing out on the campus, Azurest South at the same time "subverts representation and patriarchal power structures" that would have informed the Colonial Revival.¹⁶⁴ By building their home, Meredith and Colson, "affirmed resistance to racial oppression."¹⁶⁵ Meredith created a visible rejection of a dominant social structure that classified her as inferior because of her race, gender, and choice of a life partner.

Within this historic context, a white stucco modernist home designed by a Black woman was an act of defiance. Taylor describes Azurest South as "an architectural intervention in a landscape dominated by a provincial, conservative, segregated society's values and constraints."¹⁶⁶ Writer Jessica Lynne states that it is "an act of radical self-fashioning."¹⁶⁷ Historian Grace Lynis Dubinson makes a similar argument, although her focus is more on Meredith's visual art. Dubinson states: "...Meredith actively created, maintained and secured her own ideas about identity in everything that she conceived... Interpreted as a statement of the self, these artifacts demonstrate personal agency in determining one's own representation."¹⁶⁸ Although Meredith and Colson operated within the politics of respectability—serving as educators and community leaders—Azurest South served as a radical form of self-imaging when set amidst the campus. Within this framework, Azurest South

¹⁵⁸ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 18.

¹⁵⁹ J. Samaine Lockwood, *Archives of Desire: The Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1–6; Hilary Iris Lowe, *Mark Twain's Homes & Literary Tourism* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 116–17; Seth C. Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), 28–32.

¹⁶⁰ Chris Novelli, Melina Bezirdjian, Calder Loth, and Lena Sweeten McDonald, *Classic Commonwealth: Virginia Architecture from the Colonial Era to 1940* (Richmond: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2015).

¹⁶¹ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," Section 8, 7-8; Wilson, "Amaza L. Meredith," 395.

¹⁶² Remainder of context section by Casper.

¹⁶³ Gooden, *Dark Space*, 128.

¹⁶⁴ Gooden, *Dark Space*, 134.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, "Amaza's Azurest: Modern Architecture and the 'New Negro' Woman," 53.

¹⁶⁷ Jessica Lynne, "'That Which We Are Still Learning to Name': Two Photographs of Black Queer Intimacy," *Southern Cultures* 26.2 (Summer 2020): 156.

¹⁶⁸ Grace Lynis Dubinson, "Slowly, Surely, One Plat, One Binder at a Time: Choking Out Jim Crow and the Development of the Azurest Syndicate Incorporated" (master's thesis, Georgia State University-Atlanta, 2012), 12.

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serves as a significant act of defiance and a monument to autonomy, created by a Black woman-loving woman in the US South.

While Meredith's Azurest South might be one of the earliest examples of a Black architect's use of modernist idioms, there are other examples that suggest this is an important pattern of Black design choice in the history of architecture in America. A contemporary example is the Langston Terrace Dwellings (NRIS 87001851) in Washington, DC, a federally funded housing project constructed between 1935 and 1938 for Black residents co-designed by Black architects Hilyard Robinson and Paul Revere Williams in the International Style. Architectural historian Margaret Ruth Little observed a similar rejection of the Colonial Revival amongst post-war Black suburban residents in Raleigh, whose residents preferred modern architecture.¹⁶⁹ Modernism provided an important means of expression for Black architects.

Azurest South, with its dramatic stylistic contrast, also serves as a nationally significant example for how Black queer women could use architecture in self-definition. Mario Gooden observes, Azurest South "works to confound the hierarchal male gaze and its subject and object relationships....The house subverts these relationships through the masculine guises of Modernism while never yielding the agency of the Black female bodies of its inhabitants—Ms. Meredith and Dr. Edna Meade Colson."¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, by choosing modern architecture—devoid of ornament or historical references—Meredith selected a mode that lacked "identifiable markers of domesticity associated with race or sex."¹⁷¹ By deploying modernist architecture, Azurest South perhaps served as a "mask" as described in 1895 by poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who wrote of having a public-facing appearance that masked the deeper emotional and intellectual experiences of Black people.¹⁷² Patricia Hill Collins reflects on the use of masking, within self-definition, which allowed Black women to resist controlling images and maintain dignity, writing, "Behind the mask of behavior conformity imposed on African-American women, acts of resistance, both organized and anonymous, have long existed."¹⁷³ Meredith's modern house was a means for eschewing the limits and biases experienced because of her race, sex, and sexuality.

More confounding, Azurest South can also be read as an act of protest against the politics of respectability, including acceptable housing, meant to combat negative images and stereotypes. As educators, they were held to high social standards, and the two women were clearly adept at maintaining a respected presence within the community. Yet, its bold design also served as an affront to the expectations for how Black people should live as stewards of racial uplift. Architectural historian Barbara Mooney observes that many Black people in the United States "appropriated white built forms and social values..." to "combat prejudice and as a strategy for gaining social acceptance within a dominant European culture."¹⁷⁴ Azurest South serves as a radical departure from the "comfortable, tasty framed cottage" promoted by Booker T. Washington. It also was a departure from

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Ruth Little, "Getting the American Dream for Themselves: Postwar Modern Subdivisions for African Americans in Raleigh, North Carolina," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 19, no. 1 (2012): 73–86, <https://doi.org/10.5749/buildland.19.1.0073>.

¹⁷⁰ Gooden, *Dark Space*, 133.

¹⁷¹ Gooden, *Dark Space*, 134.

¹⁷² Willie J. Harrell, Jr., *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010).

¹⁷³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 91.

¹⁷⁴ Barbara Burlison Mooney, "The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, 1 (March 2002): 49.

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the respectable Queen Anne and brick homes of Black families and religious leaders presented by W.E.B. Du Bois at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris.¹⁷⁵

Meredith built her home nearly forty years after Spencer, reflecting a generational shift as well as a fuller expression of the avant-garde, Afrocentric aesthetic inclinations of the Harlem Renaissance, which sought to reinvent the image of Black people. Taylor argues that Amaza Lee Meredith offers an alternative view to the leaders of the New Negro movement who promoted the politics of respectability and who were, “male, predominately conservative, and typically promoted the patriarchal values of respectability, family, and the home.”¹⁷⁶ As a protest enacted through modern design, and with allusions to Africanisms in the interior, Azurest South is a unique architectural realization of the values of the Harlem Renaissance.

Amaza Meredith, Self-Taught Architect

Yet another significant aspect of Azurest South is its creator, Amaza Lee Meredith. Meredith has been recognized by the US chapter of DoCoMoMo (International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites, and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) as a “trailblazing” “African American architect, educator, and artist.”¹⁷⁷ Meredith's father was a carpenter, and Meredith stated that she learned the principles of construction from watching him work. However, the elder Meredith discouraged his daughter from pursuing architecture as a career. She received no formal architectural training, and there is no record of her serving as an architectural apprentice.¹⁷⁸ Instead, she gained training through manual and industrial arts coursework.

At the time Meredith designed Azurest South, the professional architectural field (which would have omitted self-trained architects such as Meredith) contained few Black people, and no Black women. Indeed, the 1940 Compendium of the United States Occupational Census lists only sixty-eight Black architects, all male, in the entire country, compared to 15,347 White architects.¹⁷⁹ In 1942, three years after the completion of Azurest South, the first Black woman (Beverly Loraine Greene, 1915-1957) obtained an architectural license in the United States.¹⁸⁰

This paucity was likely due to a combination of factors. Architectural historian Dell Upton notes that many women and Black people who were interested in architecture were “diverted to allied occupations as a way of evading restrictions,” and points to Amaza Lee Meredith as an example.¹⁸¹ Given widespread discrimination, Black architects were largely excluded from most commissions, such as municipal buildings, corporate buildings, or the majority of residential, educational, and religious structures. Overwhelmingly, their potential customers were other Black individuals or organizations.¹⁸² As such, architecture was not a very lucrative occupation and thus an unpopular choice for the small numbers of Black people who had access to a college education. In addition, while numerous Black institutes offered courses in architectural drawing in the early

¹⁷⁵ This contrast discussed in Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 153.

¹⁷⁷ “Amaza Lee Meredith, Architect,” Do.co.mo.mo_us, Docomomo US, 2022, <http://www.docomomo-us.org/designer/amaza-lee-meredith>

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 71.

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, ed., *African American Architects*, xii–xiii. Wilson does note that this source was “notoriously unreliable;” nevertheless the statistic captures a sense of the challenges facing Black people in this profession, even if the specific number is slightly off.

¹⁸⁰ “From the Ground Up: Black Architects and Designers” (Exhibit, Seattle Museum of History and Industry, April 2023), <https://ftgu.mohai.yourcultureconnect.com/e/digital-labels/our-city-and-beyond>.

¹⁸¹ Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 273.

¹⁸² Harrison Mosley Ethridge, “The Black Architects of Washington, D.C., 1900-Present” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1979), iii–vi.

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twentieth century, according to architectural historian Harrison Mosley Ethridge, before the end of World War II, Howard University was the only Black educational institution “offering quality architectural training in a university setting.”¹⁸³ Given such circumstances, the majority of Black people who were designing and building houses before the mid-twentieth century were unlicensed and lacking in formal training, operating instead in an unofficial capacity. In this, Meredith was not unusual. However, for her to have the vision and confidence to design such a distinctive house in an architectural style that had so recently been articulated is remarkable.

Comparable Properties

Azurest South outstandingly represents a remarkable extant example of what is likely a rare property type – an architecturally distinctive house intended to communicate the designer’s multifaceted identity as a Black queer artist in the Jim Crow South. As such, it is difficult to identify properties that are directly comparable for all aspects of national significance identified in this nomination. Consideration of properties designated as NHLs for several related themes and topics under Criteria 1 or 4 is below.

Criterion 1¹⁸⁴

Comparative analysis for Azurest South under Criterion 1 would best include NHL properties associated with the New Negro movement as related to art education. There are no such properties, however, a related property is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (NHL designated 2016, NRIS 78001881), which housed bibliophile Arturo Schomburg’s collection of literary and artistic works and encouraged the study of Black history and culture across the African diaspora. It also served as an important space to host art exhibitions and performances during the Harlem Renaissance, when Black artists were excluded from other spaces. Additionally, there are many Black artists and authors from the Harlem Renaissance with associated designations, but they are not known to have worked in education activism. Several designated properties are associated with Black female education activism more broadly.¹⁸⁵

Additionally, Azurest South might be understood in comparison to other properties associated with acts of protest by Black women against “dominant thinking on race, gender, and sexuality,” as well as discrimination based on the intersection of gender and race. A useful example is the family home of activist Pauli Murray, who popularized the notion of “Jane Crow” in 1965. Her home represents her formative years from 1914 to 1948 (NHL designated 2016, NRIS 100000866). Properties associated with New Negro womanhood or first wave Black feminism might also be relevant. The pending nomination for the Lucy Diggs Slowe and Mary Burrill House (to be presented in May 2024) is closely related.¹⁸⁶ More tangentially, other early Black feminists provide useful comparables, including the home of journalist, feminist, and activist Ida B. Wells (NHL designated 1974, NRIS 74000757).

At present, only two NHL designations recognize significant LGBTQ individuals (as opposed to event or organizations). The first is the home of LGBTQ activist Henry Gerber (NHL designated 2015, NRIS

¹⁸³ Ethridge, 41; “From the Ground Up.”

¹⁸⁴ Comparative analysis for Criterion 1 contributed by Casper.

¹⁸⁵ For relevant theme studies, see: National Park Service, *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002, rev. 2008); Susan Cianci Salvatore et al., *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Education in the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2000).

¹⁸⁶ As presented, the draft nomination reads: “while the significance of the Slowe-Burrill house lies in part in the couple’s success at fitting into a middle-class ideal of respectability, the significance of Azurest South lies in Meredith and Colson’s challenge to those ideals.” See Ferentinos, “Lucy Diggs Slowe and Mary Burrill House [draft],” 33.

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15000584). The second is the home of LGBTQ poet James Merrill (NHL designated, NRIS 13000618). Along with the pending Slowe-Burrill House designation, Azurest South will be an important expansion of NHL representation for intersectional queer women's history. Additionally, the *LGBTQ America* theme study identified the residence of writer Claude McKay in Harlem, New York at the Harlem YMCA (NHL designated 1976, NRIS 76002143) as a property associated with a queer individual, but the designation does not mention his sexuality or association with LGBTQ history. Finally, the *LGBTQ America* theme study identified additional properties associated with Black LGBTQ people listed in the National Register, including poet Langston Hughes (NRIS 82001198), the writer Countee Cullen (NRIS 79001601), civil and LGBTQ rights activist Bayard Rustin (16000062), and blues performer Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (NRIS 92001530).

Criterion 4¹⁸⁷

Azurest South serves as the first example of architecture designed by a Black queer feminist as a symbol of protest to be considered for nomination as a NHL. More generally, this property is nominated for important intersections between modern architecture and sexuality, specifically sapphic modernity. Other designated International Style properties designed by members of the LGBTQ community may benefit from additional historic context and updated documentation. One example is the nomination for Philip Johnson's Glass House, designated under Criteria 2 and 4 as well as Exception 8, which made no mention of his sexuality (NHL designated 1997, NRIS 97000341).

More generally, Azurest South is an example of architecture designed by a Black woman, one of many that exist and are worthy of their own nuanced frameworks. One contemporary is Ethel B. Furman (1893-1976), considered the "earliest known African American female architect in Virginia."¹⁸⁸ The only known associated extant property is an addition to the Fourth Baptist Church, a contributing resource in the Church Hill North Historic District (NRIS 00000887). The lack of known properties associated with Furman is largely due to discriminatory practices, an experience that surely impacted the careers of many Black female architects. According to a brief biography, when Furman began practicing in Richmond, "city administrators, and the architecture community, 'refused to accept her as the architect of record' on any projects she designed. This discrimination forced Furman to ask male contractors to sign her proposed designs and submit them for approval."¹⁸⁹ This discrimination has made it difficult to identify properties associated with Furman and others. However, at present there are no other known comparable modernist houses designed by a Black female architect.

Finally, Azurest South complicates our understanding of modernist architecture in the United States.¹⁹⁰ More well-known examples of modern and International Style architecture include the Gropius House in Lincoln, Massachusetts, designed by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer in 1938 (NHL designated 2000, NRIS 00000709). The Ludwig Mies van der Rohe-designed Edith Farnsworth House constructed in 1951 near Plano, Illinois was a one-room weekend retreat and serves as an exceptional International Style property and an interesting example of a commission by a female client (NHL designated 2006, NRIS 04000867). The Miller House, located in Columbus, Indiana is a mid-century modern home designed by Eero Saarinen and completed in 1957 (NHL designated 2000, NRIS 00000706). The Neutra Studio and Residences in Los Angeles, California

¹⁸⁷ Comparative analysis for Criterion 4 contributed by Casper.

¹⁸⁸ "Ethel B. Furman," Do.co.mo.mo_us, Docomomo US, 2022, <https://docomomo-us.org/designer/ethel-furman>.

¹⁸⁹ "Ethel B. Furman," Do.co.mo.mo_us, Docomomo US, 2022, <https://docomomo-us.org/designer/ethel-furman>.

¹⁹⁰ For more on recognition of modernist architecture within the National Historic Landmarks Program see Sarah Allaback, *Essays on Modern Architecture for the National Historic Landmarks Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003).

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was designated under Criterion 2 for association with the productive life of Richard Joseph Neutra (1892-1970), a nationally significant twentieth-century architect, and it also reflects his efforts to navigate the residential design challenges of limited funds and footprint (NHL designated 2016, NRIS 03000774). These and many other properties highlight the manifestation of modernism in the United States, of which Azurest South serves as an important example.

Other Amaza Lee Meredith Designs

Although Amaza Lee Meredith never had an official architectural business, she did design a few properties for friends and family in addition to Azurest South. She designed at least three buildings or renovations that were never built: a renovation for someone named “Reed” (no date) in Ettrick, Virginia; a home (1975) for Evelyn L. Parker for Azurest North; and a VSU Alumni House (1949). Meredith also designed a home (1954) for Dr. James H. Johnston, built on Third Avenue in Ettrick, Virginia, and a home called “Anndot” (1956) for Anne Crittendon Preston in Prairie View, Texas. Johnston was a dean at VSU, married to Bessie A. Johnston, and Preston was a widowed teacher trainer at Prairie View College (now Prairie View A & M University) born in Petersburg who may have attended VSU and Columbia at the same time as Meredith. In 1964, Meredith designed an education annex for her church, Gillfield Baptist, at 209 Perry Street in Petersburg, Virginia.¹⁹¹ Because the addresses of the Johnston house and Anndot are not known, it is unclear whether they remain extant. However, because these buildings have garnered little attention in the scholarly literature, they are unlikely to match Azurest South’s distinctive style. As of 2023, the Gillfield Baptist Church annex still stands; however, it too lacks the distinctiveness of Azurest South.

Azurest North, a real estate development in Sag Harbor, New York, is another architectural venture associated with Amaza Lee Meredith and includes properties she designed. In 1947, Meredith and her sister Maude Terry envisioned a resort community for Black people in eastern Sag Harbor, New York, where middle class Black people could relax away from the critical gaze of White people. In consultation with White realtor Elsie B. Gale, Meredith and Terry platted 120 acres and offered plots of land for sale to Black buyers.¹⁹² Other real estate developments soon followed, and a series of resort subdivisions for Black people were established in this part of Long Island. In 2019, three of these subdivisions—Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest [North], and Ninevah Beach, collectively also known as SANS—were listed in the National Register as a historic district (NRIS 100004217) for significance in the areas of community planning and development, social history, and ethnic heritage.¹⁹³ In 2023, the district was included in the *African American Outdoor Recreation* NHL theme study, recommending:

Sag Harbor SANS Subdivisions have a high potential to be considered as a National Historic Landmark. Further study will be needed to determine the integrity of SANS to determine if a district designation should consider parts of one, two or all three of the subdivisions. As with other resort communities of this type, the assessment of feeling and setting will be particularly critical in order to determine which

¹⁹¹ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 397; biographical materials for Ann C. Preston and James Hugo Johnston, Jr., Ancestry.com Library Edition. Although Wilson refers to Dr. James H. Johnson, there is no record of anyone by that name living in Ettrick in this era; thus, this author assumes there is a typographical error in Wilson and the correct name is Dr. James H. Johnston, who was a professor at VSU, referenced in Jeffreys, “History of Virginia State,” 193.

¹⁹² Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 395–96.

¹⁹³ Allison McGovern, “Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah Beach,” National Register of Historic Places District Nomination Form (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2019).

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resources within this NHL Study List most outstandingly represent African American resort communities.¹⁹⁴

Meredith was deeply involved with the creation of Azurest North. In addition to being part of its initial conception, she formed Azurest Syndicate in 1953 with her sister; Dorothy C. Spaulding, an attorney; and James P. Smith, a civil engineer, to administer legal matters and infrastructure issues related to the village, and after her retirement from VSU in 1958, she became recording secretary for the organization, a position she held until 1974.¹⁹⁵ She spent summers at Azurest North from its inception until her death in 1984, and she designed at least two houses in the subdivision.¹⁹⁶

Meredith designed the first house built in Azurest North. Known as Terry Cottage, the extant International Style building occupies a waterfront lot (3 Terry Drive) and was co-owned by Terry and Meredith.¹⁹⁷ On the lot adjacent to Terry Cottage, Dorothy and Edward Spaulding built their vacation home, designed by Meredith in 1951. Called “Edendot” (pronounced “Ed-n-Dot,” for the property’s owners), the house was a concrete block structure.¹⁹⁸ This house has either been razed to make way for new construction on site or has been incorporated into this new building, built in 2000.¹⁹⁹ Meredith also designed a house known as “HIHIL” in 1946 (never built) for her niece, Dr. Iris Terry Richards, and her husband Dr. Frederick Richards. Since its design predates the establishment of Azurest North by one year, it appears the family’s plans changed, and Terry Cottage became the summer outpost for the extended Meredith-Terry family.²⁰⁰

Although Amaza Lee Meredith is associated with the development of the subdivision, this association is less expressive of her architectural work and personal expression. Thus, Azurest South, is the property best associated with her life and architectural vision.

¹⁹⁴ Andrew W. Kahrl, Malcolm Cammeron, and Brian Katen, *African American Outdoor Recreation Theme Study: Historic Context and National Historic Landmark Survey* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2022), 193.

¹⁹⁵ Dubinson, “Slowly, Surely, One Plat, One Binder at a Time,” 9–10, 54–55.

¹⁹⁶ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 396–97; Taylor, “Designing Progress,” chapter 5, 34–35.

¹⁹⁷ McGovern, “Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah Beach,” Section 9, 46–47; Dubinson, “Slowly, Surely, One Plat, One Binder at a Time,” 52; Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 397; McGovern, “Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah Beach,” Section 8, 30.

¹⁹⁸ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 396–97; Dubinson, “Slowly, Surely, One Plat, One Binder at a Time,” 53.

¹⁹⁹ Dubinson, “Slowly, Surely, One Plat, One Binder at a Time,” 52–53; McGovern, “Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah Beach,” Section 8, 29.

²⁰⁰ Wilson, “Amaza L. Meredith,” 397; McGovern, “Sag Harbor Hills, Azurest, and Ninevah Beach,” Section 8, 20.

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6. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local:

Public-State:

Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District:

Site:

Structure:

Object:

Number of Resources within Boundary of Property:

Contributing

Buildings: 1

Sites: 0

Structures: 0

Objects: 0

Total: 1

Noncontributing

Buildings: 0

Sites: 0

Structures: 0

Objects: 0

Total: 0

PROVIDE PRESENT AND PAST PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF PROPERTY

(Please see specific guidance for type of resource[s] being nominated.)

Azurest South is a compact, one-story residential dwelling completed in 1939 in Petersburg, Virginia. It was designed in the contemporary mode of American modernism by Amaza Lee Meredith, a Black woman with no formal architectural training. The building bears the unadorned form, rounded corners, metal windows, and flat roof that are characteristic of this architecture.²⁰¹ In the words of Richard Guy Wilson, “Volume rather than mass, regularity rather than symmetry, and the avoidance of applied decoration—the principles of the International style—define the exterior of her house.”²⁰²

Meredith and her life partner, Edna Meade Colson, lived at Azurest South from 1939 until Meredith’s death in 1984. This property reflected Meredith’s curated design aesthetic, cultivated through years of study, serving as an exhibition of her design and art ambition. The house, while widely discussed by architectural historians as International Style, possesses elements of Art Deco and Art Moderne as well, adding a distinctive interpretation to the architectural form. Meredith’s scrapbook documenting the construction and design of the property serves as a unique interpretive device—a sort of exhibition catalog—in which we can glean her design philosophy through her own words. It is an additional testimony to her artistic sensibility and approach to composition.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Calder Loth, ed., *Virginia Landmarks of Black History: Sites on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 18.

²⁰² Richard Guy Wilson, “Building on the Foundations: The Historic Present in Virginia Architecture, 1870-1990,” *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, eds. Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M. S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson (Richmond and Charlottesville: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1992), 104–5.

²⁰³ Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers. For more on the intersection between curation and composition as expressed in the scrapbook photographs, see Taylor, “Designing Progress,” chapter 5, 1-8.

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Setting

Azurest South sits on 1.62 acres originally on the edge of Virginia State College (now Virginia State University), where both Meredith and Colson taught on faculty. Today, it is surrounded by institutional buildings of the campus, but the original lot remains preserved. Azurest South is the only building on this small stretch of road, and this part of Boisseau Street now serves as an extended driveway leading to the house. When originally purchased, their lot was the terminus of the road before ending at Fleets Branch, which flows to the Appomattox River. It would have been secluded, with only a few neighboring houses. This section of Boisseau Street is accessed from Carter G. Woodson Avenue, on the eastern edge of Virginia State University. Boisseau Street is paved where it intersects Woodson Avenue, but as it enters the Azurest South property, it turns into two paved tracks of poured concrete. The road ends at the rear of the house, in what is now a small, paved parking lot leading to a single-car metal carport. Running parallel to the carport is a concrete walkway (originally flagstone) leading to the secondary kitchen entrance. The main entrance to the dwelling is out of view of Boisseau Street, on the southeastern corner of the house, and the path to this door is no longer apparent. As such, many contemporary images of Azurest South actually depict the west side of the house and the secondary kitchen entrance.

The house sits on a northeast-southwest axis and was originally oriented to Boisseau Street (site south for this description). Azurest South is surrounded by wooded land on three sides, as it was when Meredith and Colson lived in the house. Meredith called these trees a “verdant backdrop” for Azurest South, and took care to record the juxtaposition of modern architectural lines against the organic green backdrop.²⁰⁴ Fleets Branch is to the east of the house, which today is largely obstructed by trees and undergrowth, but would have been visible and accessible when Meredith lived there—she included images of it in her scrapbook and it would have been visible out of the large living room picture window. Today, the west side of the property along Carter G. Woodson Avenue has a thin line of trees blocking the view of campus, providing the impression that the property is secluded; it originally was open, providing unobstructed views to a rural, agricultural setting. To the south along Boisseau Street Meredith planted a row of cedars, which today provide a dramatic screening of the house, a composition she called “the house behind the cedars.”²⁰⁵ Additionally, historic photographs indicate that Meredith planted small evergreen trees and shrubbery against the house, most of which have been removed. To the north, the property contains a knoll leading to the tree line, and this feature is visible from the home’s sunroom and original studio. This knoll can be accessed by brick stairs from the carport.

Exterior

The one-story house has a concrete foundation and is made of concrete block, excepting curved corners made of brick. The exterior of the building is covered in white stucco with distinctive turquoise casement window trim, carport canopy, and roof line coping. The turquoise color was a distinctive choice for a building in Virginia and reflects her incorporation of Art Moderne. According to the property’s National Register documentation, this color is referred to locally as “Azurest blue.”²⁰⁶ On the isometric drawings, Meredith noted the trim color as “blue ocean.”²⁰⁷ The roof is flat and the bulk of it is railed off with steel pipe to form a rooftop terrace. The

²⁰⁴ Azurest Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers.

²⁰⁵ Azurest Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers. Meredith seemed to frequently use allusions in her scrapbook, and this is likely alluding to the 1900 novel *House Behind the Cedars* by Charles W. Chesnutt, a literary treatment of miscegenation and passing, which was also turned into a film for Black audiences in 1927. Considering Meredith’s background and the experience of her mother and father, this work surely resonated with her, and it is reasonable to assume she was aware of it considering its popularity.

²⁰⁶ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, “Azurest South,” 7.1.

²⁰⁷ Blueprints, box 18, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers.

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terrace is accessible via a metal pool ladder. The structure has rounded corners accentuated by glass-block windows, but aside from these it has virtually no ornamentation, as is characteristic of modernist buildings.²⁰⁸

The south elevation of the house, which is the exterior wall to the building's two bedrooms, features the dwelling's distinctive rounded corners accentuated by horizontal glass-block windows. In her scrapbook, Meredith documented the construction of this feature, surely proud of this design accomplishment. The main ("front") entrance to the house is on the southeast corner, recessed past the southeastern bedroom, so that it is nearly flush with the living room. The single door is slightly elevated, accessible via three external steps, and has a vertical glass block sidelight (ten blocks high and two blocks wide) running next to it on the east side of the entrance.

The east elevation of the building, which is the exterior wall of the living room and sunroom, is dominated by windows. On the living room portion, the east elevation features a center window of square plate glass, flanked on both sides by two smaller sidelights filled with glass block (each eight blocks high and three blocks wide).

The northeast corner of the property is an enclosed porch, positioned to take the greatest advantage of the scenic knoll and creek, it was originally screened and later enclosed by Meredith. The porch openings appear to have originally extended to the floor but were likely infilled when enclosed. The eastern elevation of the sunroom still retains the original wood framing that was later filled with a mixture of windows. The upper four frames retain their original dimensions and are filled with glass panes. The lower four frames were modified to accommodate an aluminum awning casement window with crank, leaving two very narrow openings that were fit with glass and a wood divider. The National Register form, completed in 1993, described these sunroom windows as jalousie, but the extant wood and aluminum framing suggests otherwise.²⁰⁹ The north elevation of the sunroom includes a door with floor-to-ceiling windows on both sides and a window above the doorway. Like the eastern elevation, the windows are divided, likely reflecting the original framing. Each row of windows includes six sections, with aluminum casement awning windows in the center. The door is accessed by red cast concrete steps.

The remainder of the north elevation features a grouping of steel casement windows and glass-block strips of varying sizes, providing light into the room that was originally Meredith's studio and the kitchen.²¹⁰ Further west along the north elevation, the garage-turned-studio has an exterior door, painted red, and signs of another exterior door that has been walled off. The west elevation includes the carport, which attaches to the garage-turned studio. A concrete path with flagstones approaches the secondary kitchen entrance, which was enclosed with fiberglass siding when the garage was converted to a studio. To the right is a small window for the utility room, followed by windows for the bathroom and a bedroom.

Interior

Azurest South is a five-room dwelling with attached garage and enclosed sunroom. The primary living space of the dwelling has a square footprint, except for the building's rounded corners and a recessed main entrance on the southeast corner of the building. The main entrance to the house, located on the southeast corner, opens into

²⁰⁸ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South"; Brownell et al., *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, 104; Taylor, "Amaza's Azurest: Modern Architecture and the 'New Negro' Woman," 33.

²⁰⁹ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," 7.2.

²¹⁰ Quotation from Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," 7.2.

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a compact entryway with a coat closet, which is illuminated by a glass block sidelight, and then opens to the living room, the largest room in the house.

From the entryway, one enters the living room at its southeast corner. To one's right, the eastern wall of the room is dominated by an assemblage of windows, comprised of a large picture window flanked by glass-block sidelights (each eight blocks high and three blocks wide). These windows provide a view of the trees that surround the property. In her scrapbook, Meredith described this view as "in side out," an intentional design element echoing the International Style characteristic of blending the indoors with the outside by way of large windows.²¹¹ The wall underneath the windows contains window seats under the two glass-block windows and a covered radiator under the center plate-glass window. Perpendicular to this wall, opposite the entryway, there is a casement window opening into the sunroom, located on the northeast side of the house. Underneath this window is another wood window seat. Next to this interior window, on the north wall of the living room, is a fireplace with Art Moderne motifs and a built-in curved concrete mantelpiece and matching side pedestals that are also curved. It is the centerpiece of the interior living space. It originally had applied metal strips, now lost. Meredith based the mantel on a design featured in *American Home* from August 1936, which she gave to her contractor to replicate.²¹² The west wall of the living room has two amber half-moon Art Deco sconces that echo the curves of the fireplace. The floor features inlaid oak squares. However, the National Register form mentions "A curtain slot in the ceiling across the west end of the room [that] allowed the west end to be treated as a separate dining area," but this has been removed.²¹³ The northwest corner of the living room has two perpendicular doorways, one leading into the kitchen and one leading into a narrow room that runs along the center of the building's north side. In the southwest corner of the living room, there is a door leading to a small, square hall. This hall provides access to the building's two bedrooms and its one (original) bathroom.

Meredith designed Azurest South with two, nearly symmetrical bedrooms on the south side of the house that included dramatic rounded corners filled with glass block, which she referred to as the "Blue" and "Rose" rooms.²¹⁴ The curved corners included a metal supporting post and deep plastered windowsills that Meredith and Colson used to display items, including vases and framed photos. Each rounded corner was flanked on both sides by steel casement windows.

The bathroom is an exceptional demonstration of Meredith's original choices for finishes and fixtures and reflects her design focus on reflective surfaces and bright colors. She featured it in numerous pages of her scrapbook and highlighted the color scheme ("walls: green, black, yellow") and "reflections" of black Carrara glass and the "double reflections" of this into the medicine cabinet mirror.²¹⁵ The bathroom includes a central steel casement window with textured privacy glass flanked by two glass-block sidelights with convex ribbed pattern. The shower walls are primarily finished in apple green glass tile. The sink wall is finished in black Carrara tile with apple green trim. The opposite wall includes a wainscoting of black glass tile with apple green trim. The remaining wall surfaces were once covered by tileboard, but this has since been removed and the wall is painted canary yellow. The bathroom also includes a built-in, three-part cabinet with tiled upper and lower cabinet doors in canary yellow and black trim, and a middle glass-faced cabinet. The original yellow tub, toilet, and sink remain, as does the medicine cabinet, which is flanked by geometric white glass Art Deco sconces. The floor is finished with buff, yellow, and black tile in a geometric pattern.

²¹¹ "In side out," Azurest Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers.

²¹² Taylor, *Amaza Lee Meredith Imagines Herself Modern*, 215.

²¹³ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," 7.3.

²¹⁴ Taylor, "Designing Progress," chapter 5, 22.

²¹⁵ Azurest Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers

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The remaining rooms are on the opposite side of the house, accessed through the northwest corner of the living room. The sunroom is on the far northeast corner of the house. It was originally a screened-in porch but was enclosed with windows during the period that Meredith and Colson lived in the house. This room has windows on all four of its walls. The wall it shares with the central room (studio) has an interior casement window between the two rooms, in addition to the door. The wall it shares with the living room also contains an interior casement window.

The central northern room was designed as Meredith's studio, but later became Colson's studio. This room, along with the kitchen, has changed since the building's period of significance and after the property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1993. The Virginia State University Alumni Association, which owns the building, has added a wheelchair-accessible bathroom on the northwest side of this room; this is likely reversible.

A metal bas-relief inset embellishes the west wall of this room. According to notes in Meredith's scrapbook for the room, labeled, "My Lady's Boudoir," she described it as a metal inset and attributed it to artist Cecilia C. Scott, who was a student of Meredith's and possibly a faculty member at VSC.²¹⁶ It depicts a woman in various artistic and intellectual pursuits, including reading, writing, and painting.²¹⁷ While this feature remains, it is now obscured by the southern wall of the new bathroom, which bisects the inlay. Removal of this new wall would reverse the obstruction.

West of the studio and accessible from the living room lies the kitchen and adjoining utility room. Like the bathroom, Meredith embellished the kitchen with a complex palette of materials applied to nearly every surface, now lost. According to the property's National Register description from 1993:

The kitchen has original, white-enameled metal cabinets and an original gas range. The kitchen counters are decorated with brightly colored mosaic tiles set in Miss Meredith's patterns. The geometric designs of green, black, pink, and red tiles suggest an African aesthetic. The countertop pattern in the northwest corner spells out "Azurest So" in stylized pink letters. Colored tile also decorates the windowsill and the wall surface above the stove. Forming an important part of the kitchen's color scheme is the patterned pink, green, and gray vinyl tile floor. The kitchen walls are faced with blue and pink tileboard, and the ceiling is faced with pink tileboard fixed in place with orange wooden battens.²¹⁸

The kitchen's distinctive tilework was added sometime during the period of significance (date unknown). Meredith's scrapbook detailing the construction and early years of the house contain a photograph of the kitchen before this tilework was added. Most likely, Meredith added color to the kitchen in the 1950s. It appeared to be installed directly on top of the original black countertops. One of the tiled counters depicts the words "Azurest So" in stylized script, indicating that it was created after the founding of Azurest North in 1947. The kitchen exterior wall has a large casement window. Meredith also designed a row of glass blocks at counter height for additional light in each corner (extant).

²¹⁶ No other information about Scott is available. She appears in the college newspaper periodically in the late 1920s and early 1930s, perhaps the same Cecelia Scott noted from the class of 1932 that published "On Being Sheep," *Virginia Statesman* 4, 10 (February 27, 1932), 3. From at least 1936 to 1939, Cecelia Scott is reported in the *New York Age* accompanying Colson and Meredith (and for two years Ella Mundon, another faculty member) to the White Caps, presumably a hotel or resort, in Gloucester, Virginia, near the Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School. No records or other reference to the White Caps have been found.

²¹⁷ Untitled scrapbook (n.d.), Box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers.

²¹⁸ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," 7.3.

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These finishes and the original kitchen assembly were removed since documented in the 1993 National Register form. The kitchen now contains wood laminate cabinets, along with nondescript counters, backsplash, and floors. Only the windows and glass block remain. On the western edge of the south wall, the kitchen has a door leading into a narrow utility room, a few steps down from the kitchen.

Perpendicular to the utility room door, on the southern edge of the kitchen's west wall, is a small entryway leading to the exterior door on the carport side of the building, which served as the secondary kitchen entrance. The door is flanked by a glass block sidelight (ten blocks high and two blocks wide) that combines convex ribbed patterned glass block on the lower half and more decorative wave patterned glass block on the upper half. This entrance to the building was added during the period of significance. It was originally accessed by an exterior step; this has been removed and a small ramp has replaced the step, so that the home is relatively wheelchair accessible. A concrete walkway runs from the building entrance to the street, running parallel to the building's carport.

The garage sits at the farthest northwest corner of the house. In the 1950s, the garage was renovated to become Meredith's studio.²¹⁹ According to the property's National Register form, "The garage doors were removed and aluminum windows were installed on the south and the west elevations."²²⁰ This space remains intact but is in need of repair due to water damage.

Statement of Integrity

Azurest South survives as an exceptional example of compact residential modern architecture. For forty-five years the property served as a laboratory in which Meredith applied her art and design theories through architectural vocabulary and materials. Over the years she transformed and modified the space. From the exterior, the house remains as it was when first designed. Besides the renovation of the kitchen, all other elements of her design remain intact, or interventions are reversible.

Location

Azurest South retains integrity of location—it remains in the same location where it was built. It is adjacent to the VSU campus, but visually separated from it by a row of mature trees.

Design

The exterior of the building retains its integrity from its original design, which remained consistent throughout the period of significance, 1939-1984. Meredith made three exterior modifications to the fenestrations and entrances, which include: the conversion of the single-car garage on the west side of the house into a studio space (ca. 1950s); the conversion of the screened-in porch on the northeast corner of the house into an enclosed sunroom; and the addition of a small, enclosed entrance off the kitchen, enabling interior access to the garage/studio. On the interior of the house, Meredith's floorplan remains intact. However, a wheelchair-accessible bathroom has been added, creating a room-within-a room in the middle north room that originally served as Meredith's studio, which is likely reversible. Otherwise, Azurest South retains a high degree of integrity for representing her design.

²¹⁹ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, 7.2.

²²⁰ Loth, Sadler, and Hill, "Azurest South," 7.2; Taylor, "Amaza's Azurest: Modern Architecture and the 'New Negro' Woman," 47-48.

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Setting

The serene, natural setting of Azurest South has been preserved and retains a high degree of integrity. The perimeter of the property is bordered by a stand of mature trees, and the north side of the building overlooks a knoll and Fleets Branch. Significant features, such as the row of cedars along the southern border, remain.

Materials

The house retains the distinctive materials characteristic of modern architecture—concrete blocks, white stucco exterior, glass block, steel casement windows, and plaster interiors. Significantly, the bathroom, including its distinctive Carrara tile color patterns and yellow fixtures, remains nearly unchanged from when Meredith completed it. Additionally, many of the original light fixtures she selected also remain. The metal bas-relief inset in the middle north room is also retained, however, the recently installed accessible bathroom does obscure a full view. The kitchen, which had distinctive tile countertop and backsplash, has been removed.

Workmanship

The beauty of this property is its unique combination of modern styles and materials, which required an eye for design and skill in application. Dramatic architectural statements, such as the curved corners of glass block, required careful planning and execution—it is possible that neither Meredith nor the builder, Russell B. Holmes, had experience using these new materials in this way. Small details, such as countertop glass blocks for illumination and varied reflective surfaces in the bathroom, illustrate the careful attention paid to realizing Meredith's design.

Feeling

The sense of secluded setting, the dramatic composition of the bright white house against trees, and the unexpected shift from the strong geometric lines of the exterior to the warm, more intimate scaling of the interior evokes a sense of surprise. Once inside, the glass block dampened light and green scenery outside feels soothing, likely a feeling that Meredith sought in her design. Thus, Azurest South retains a high degree of integrity for feeling. The property continues to convey the feeling invoked by the name “Az-u-Rest.”

Association

Azurest South retains a high degree of integrity for association to its designer Amaza Lee Meredith. It would certainly be recognizable to Amaza Lee Meredith and her contemporaries as her home.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☒ Previously listed in the National Register (fill in 1 through 6 below)

☐ Not previously listed in the National Register (fill in **only** 4, 5, and 6 below)

1. NR #: 93001464

2. Date of listing: 12/30/1993

3. Level of significance: State

4. Applicable National Register Criteria:

A ☐ B ☐ C ☒ D ☐

5. Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G ☐

6. Areas of Significance: Architecture

☐ Previously Determined Eligible for the National Register:

Date of determination:

☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark:

Date of designation:

☐ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey:

HABS No.

☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record:

HAER No.

☐ Recorded by Historic American Landscapes Survey:

HALS No.

Location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office:

Other State Agency:

Federal Agency:

Local Government:

University: Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, 1912, 1930-1930, Accession #1982-20, Special Collections Dept., Johnson Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Va.

Other (Specify Repository):

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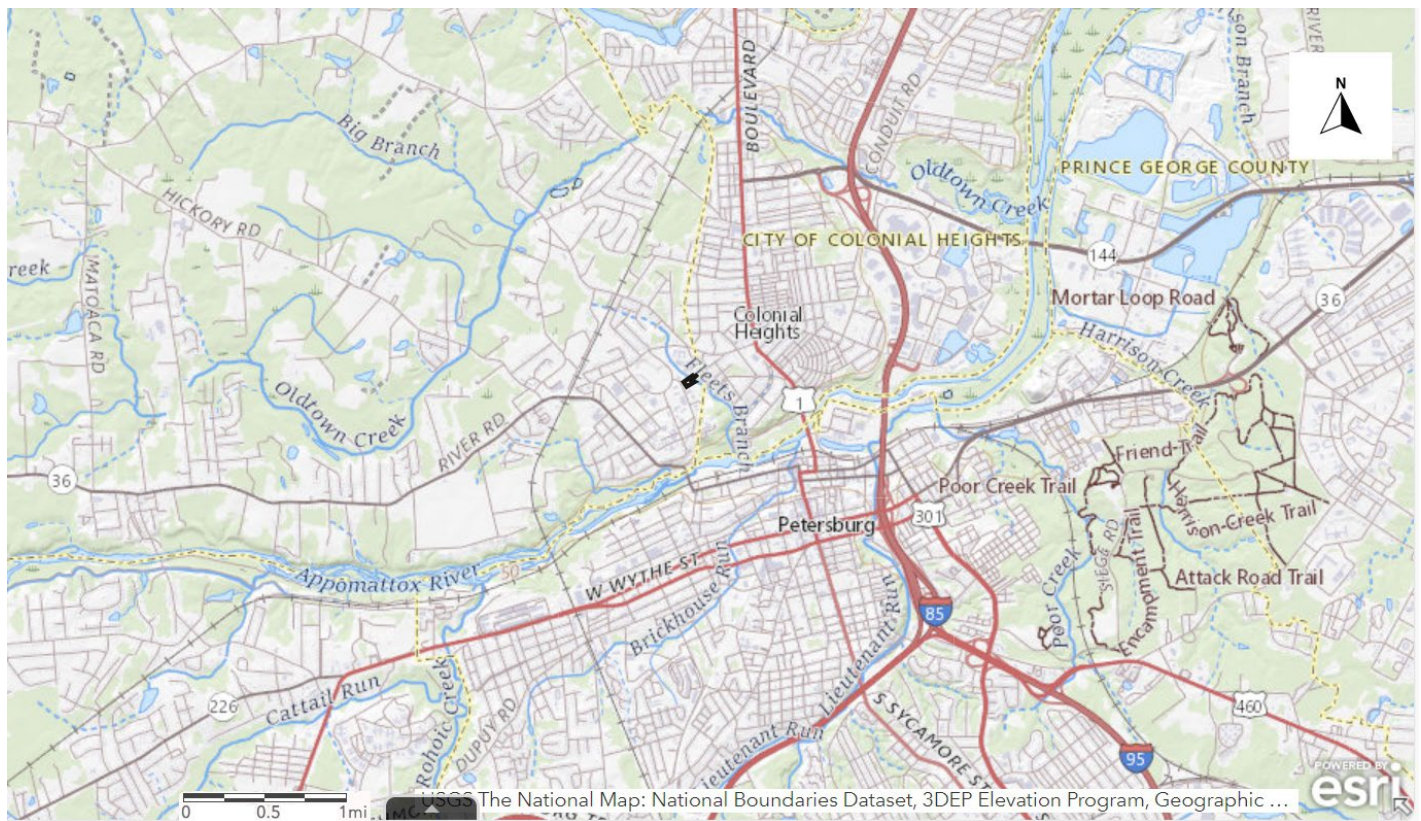
Additional review provided by two anonymous external peer reviewers.

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Maps

Map 1.

USGS map showing Azurest South in relation to Virginia State University campus and broader Petersburg context. Azurest in center. USGS National Map, ESRI.

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Map 2.

Satellite map showing Azurest South in relation to Virginia State University campus, delineated by its parcel boundary as provided by Chesterfield County. Virginia Geographic Information Network, ESRI.

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Map 3.

Satellite map showing Azurest South boundary, delineated by its parcel as provided by Chesterfield County. Google Earth.

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Photograph Log

Name of Property: Azurest South
Address: 2900 Boisseau Street
City or Vicinity: Petersburg
County: Chesterfield
State: Virginia
Photographer: NPS/Amanda Casper, unless otherwise noted.
Date: February 12, 2024, unless otherwise noted.

TIFFs on file with the National Park Service. All elevations described using northwest as site north. Azurest South is oriented on a northeast-southwest axis.

Photo 1. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0001)

South elevation of garage (at left) and west and south elevation of house (at right) showing carport and garage (enclosed and altered into a studio by Meredith), kitchen entrance and windows of utility room and bathroom at center, and bedrooms with block glass curved corners to right. Photographed facing true north.
Susan Ferentinos, July 13, 2021.

Photo 2. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0002)

Azurest South, as viewed through the screen of cedars planted by Meredith, offering a framed view and contrast between the modern form of the house against the organic tree shapes. Photographed facing true north from driveway.

Photo 3. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0003)

South (left) and east (right) elevations, showing main entrance and roof terrace. To the left are the windows of both bedrooms. To the right are the living room and sunroom windows. Photographed facing true west.

Photo 4. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0004)

North elevation, showing side of the garage (at right), kitchen with countertop block lights, north middle room (originally Meredith's studio), and sunroom windows and entrance (at left). This photograph indicates that one of the original doors to the garage has been walled over. Most likely, the garage entrance was changed during the period of significance when the space was converted to Meredith's studio. Photographed facing true southeast.

Photo 5. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0005)

Row of cedars planted along the south border of yard, serving as a screening. Photographed facing true southwest.

Photo 6. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0006)

Detail of bedroom rounded corner glass block windows.

Photo 7. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0007)

Main entryway, showing the entrance to the coat closet (left side of entryway) and view through the hall out the front door. Note that the vertical strip of glass block (visible from the exterior) is located inside the closet, providing natural light to the space. Photographed facing southeast.

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Photo 8. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0008)

Living room, showing the blending of indoor and outdoor through the large picture window and glass block. Side profile of Art Moderne mantel on left. Photographed facing northeast. Susan Ferentinos. July 13, 2021.

Photo 9. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0009)

Detail of living room picture window and exterior wall concrete block construction. Evidence of plaster failure undergoing stabilization. Photographed facing northeast.

Photo 10. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0010)

North wall of the living room, showing Art Moderne fireplace.

Photo 11. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0011)

Detail. Living room metal sconce.

Photo 12. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0012)

One of the two original bedrooms, showing curved corner concrete block windows. Photographed facing south.

Photo 13. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0013)

West wall of the original bathroom, showing part of the window grouping and the Carrara glass tile. Original yellow tub and sink, black and green wall tile, and patterned floor tile. Photographed facing true southwest.

Photo 14. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0014)

Northwest corner of the bathroom showing original built-in tiled cabinets. Photographed facing true west.

Photo 15. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0015)

South wall of original bathroom, showing tilework, mirror, and lighting. Photographed facing true southwest.

Photo 16. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0016)

Detail of bathroom window grouping from interior, showing interplay of different textures and depth of light through use of mixed materials. Photographed facing southwest.

Photo 17. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0017)

Detail of bathroom window grouping from exterior. Photographed facing northeast.

Photo 18. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0018)

Northeast corner of the remodeled kitchen, showing windows, including original counter-level glass blocks for task lighting. Photographed facing true northwest. Susan Ferentinos. July 13, 2021.

Photo 19. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0019)

Interior view of the rear (west) entrance off the kitchen, showing original vertical glass block. When Meredith converted the original garage to her studio, she also added the small entryway shown here, so that the studio could be accessed without going outside. The studio entrance is perpendicular to the outer and kitchen doors, on the right of the entryway.

Photo 20. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0020)

The north middle room (originally a studio) was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom subsequent to Meredith and Colson's time at the house. Looking towards sunroom door. Photographed facing true north. Susan Ferentinos, July 13, 2021.

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Photo 21. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0021)

Detail of glass blocks originally installed on north wall over bunk and built-in drawers of north middle room, which originally served as a studio. The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom.

Photographed facing true northwest.

Photo 22. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0022)

Detail of metal inset attributed by Amaza Lee Meredith in her scrapbook to Cecelia C. Scott installed over bunk of original studio, described by Meredith in 1940 as "My Lady's Boudoir." The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom and in the process a doorway was installed over it, bisecting the piece.

Photographed facing true southwest.

Photo 23. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0023)

Detail of metal inset attributed by Amaza Lee Meredith in her scrapbook to Cecelia C. Scott, showing women in states of artistic and intellectual pursuits, including reading and painting.

Photo 24. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0024)

Detail of metal casement windows in northeast corner of middle room, which originally served as a studio. The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom. Photographed facing true north.

Photo 25. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0025)

Sunroom on north side of the house. Photographed facing true north.

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Photo 1. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0001)

South elevation of garage (at left) and west and south elevation of house (at right) showing carport and garage (enclosed and altered into a studio by Meredith), kitchen entrance and windows of utility room and bathroom at center, and bedrooms with block glass curved corners to right. Photographed facing true north.

Susan Ferentinos, July 13, 2021.

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Photo 2. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0002)

Azurest South, as viewed through the screen of cedars planted by Meredith, offering a framed view and contrast between the modern form of the house against the organic tree shapes. Photographed facing true north from driveway.

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Photo 3. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0003)

South (left) and east (right) elevations, showing main entrance and roof terrace. To the left are the windows of both bedrooms. To the right are the living room and sunroom windows. Photographed facing true west.

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Photo 4. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0004)

North elevation, showing side of the garage (at right), kitchen with countertop block lights, north middle room (originally Meredith's studio), and sunroom windows and entrance (at left). This photograph indicates that one of the original doors to the garage has been walled over. Most likely, the garage entrance was changed during the period of significance when the space was converted to Meredith's studio. Photographed facing true southeast.

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Photo 5. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0005)

Row of cedars planted along the south border of yard, serving as a screening.
Photographed facing true southwest.

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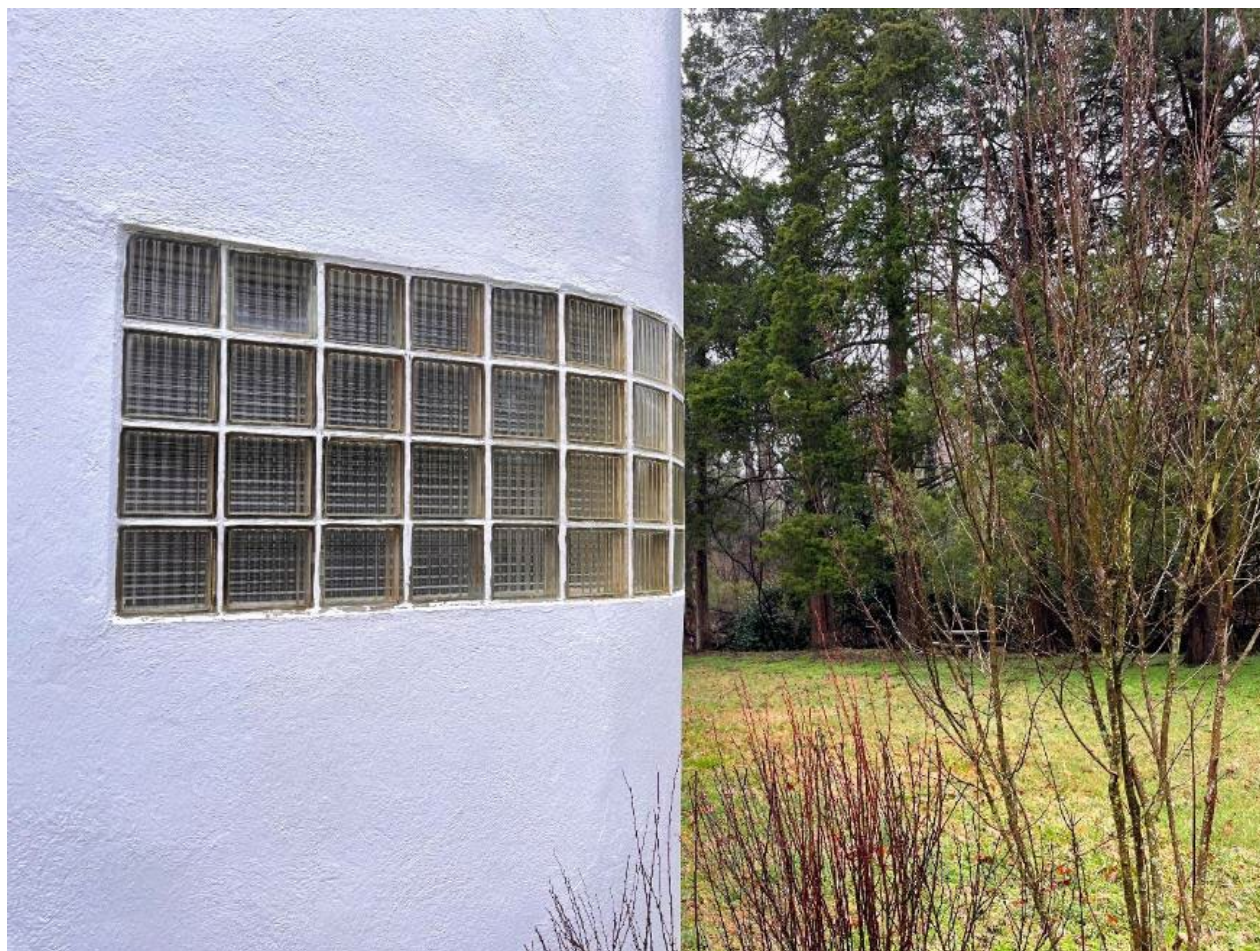


Photo 6. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0006)

Detail of bedroom rounded corner glass block windows.

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Photo 7. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0007)

Main entryway, showing the entrance to the coat closet (left side of entryway) and view through the hall out the front door. Note that the vertical strip of glass block (visible from the exterior) is located inside the closet, providing natural light to the space. Photographed facing southeast.



Photo 8. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0008)

Living room, showing the blending of indoor and outdoor through the large picture window and glass block. Side profile of Art Moderne mantel on left. Photographed facing northeast. Susan Ferentinos. July 13, 2021.



Photo 9. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0009)

Detail of living room picture window and exterior wall concrete block construction. Evidence of plaster failure undergoing stabilization. Photographed facing northeast.

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Photo 10. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0010)

North wall of the living room, showing Art Moderne fireplace.



Photo 11. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0011)

Detail. Living room metal sconce.

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Photo 12. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0012)

One of the two original bedrooms, showing curved corner concrete block windows. Photographed facing south.

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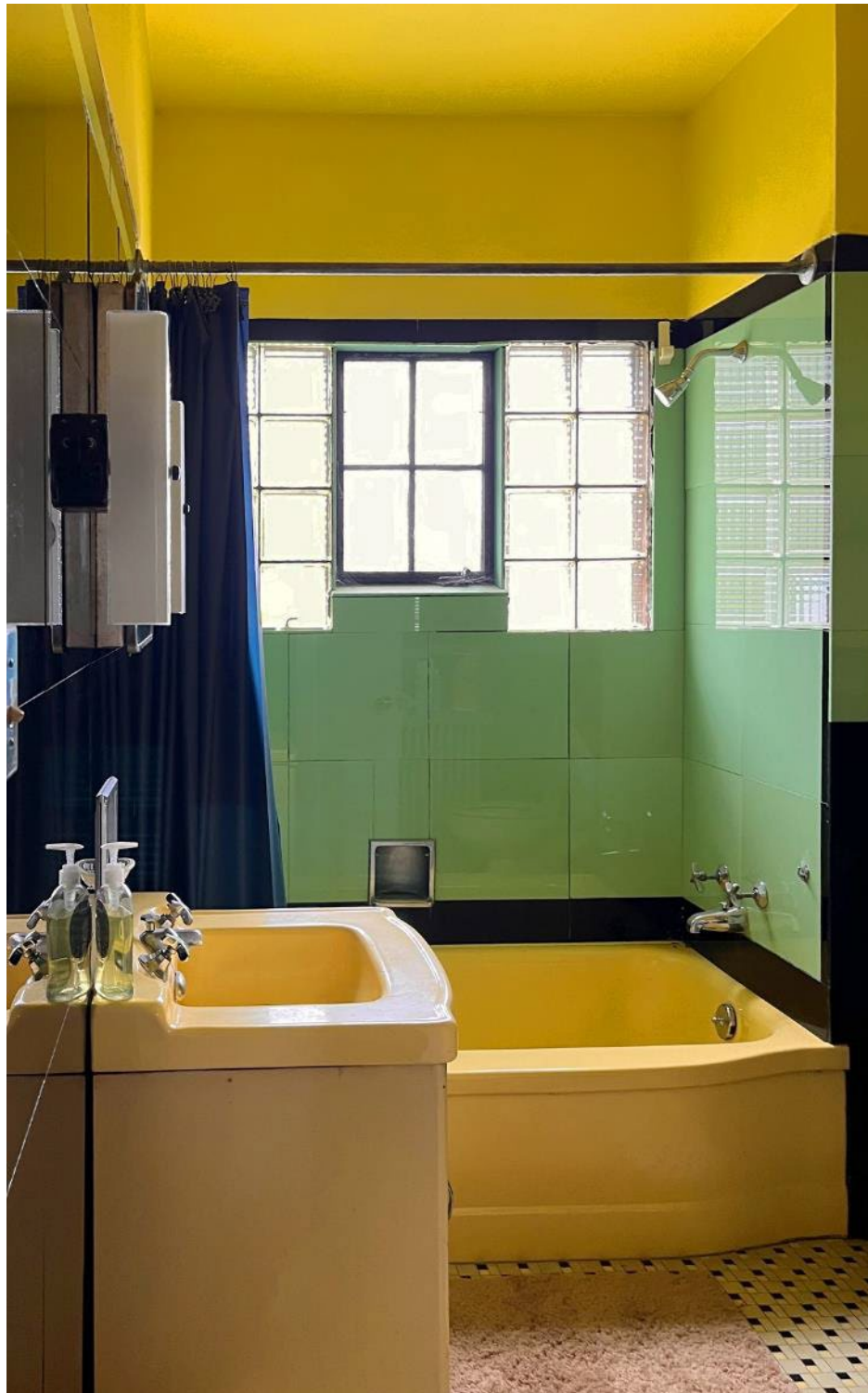


Photo 13. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0013)

West wall of the original bathroom, showing part of the window grouping and the Carrara glass tile. Original yellow tub and sink, black and green wall tile, and patterned floor tile. Photographed facing true southwest.

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Photo 14. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0014)

Northwest corner of the bathroom showing original built-in tiled cabinets. Photographed facing true west.

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Photo 15. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0015)

South wall of original bathroom, showing tilework, mirror, and lighting. Photographed facing true southwest.

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Photo 16. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0016)

Detail of bathroom window grouping from interior, showing interplay of different textures and depth of light through use of mixed materials. Photographed facing southwest.



Photo 17. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0017)

Detail of bathroom window grouping from exterior. Photographed facing northeast.

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Photo 18. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0018)

Northeast corner of the remodeled kitchen, showing windows, including original counter-level glass blocks for task lighting. Photographed facing true northwest. Susan Ferentinos. July 13, 2021.



Photo 19. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0019)

Interior view of the rear (west) entrance off the kitchen, showing original vertical glass block. When Meredith converted the original garage to her studio, she also added the small entryway shown here, so that the studio could be accessed without going outside. The studio entrance is perpendicular to the outer and kitchen doors, on the right of the entryway.

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Photo 20. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0020)

The north middle room (originally a studio) was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom subsequent to Meredith and Colson's time at the house. Looking towards sunroom door.

Photographed facing true north. Susan Ferentinos, July 13, 2021.



Photo 21. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0021)

Detail of glass blocks originally installed on north wall over bunk and built-in drawers of north middle room, which originally served as a studio. The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom. Photographed facing true northwest.



Photo 22. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0022)

Detail of metal inset attributed by Amaza Lee Meredith in her scrapbook to Cecelia C. Scott installed over bunk of original studio, described by Meredith in 1940 as “My Lady’s Boudoir.” The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom and in the process a doorway was installed over it, bisecting the piece.

Photographed facing true southwest.



Photo 23. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0023)

Detail of metal inset attributed by Amaza Lee Meredith in her scrapbook to Cecelia C. Scott, showing women in states of artistic and intellectual pursuits, including reading and painting.

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Photo 24. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0024)

Detail of metal casement windows in northeast corner of middle room, which originally served as a studio. The room was divided for the installation of an accessible bathroom.

Photographed facing true north.

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Photo 25. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0025)

Sunroom on north side of the house. Photographed facing true north.

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Figures Log**Figure 1. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0026)**

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, south (left) and east (right) elevations, showing main entrance and roof terrace. To the left are the windows of both bedrooms. To the right are the living room and sunroom windows. Photographed facing true west.

Photograph by Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 2. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0027)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination showing south elevation of garage (left) and west and south elevation of house (right) showing carport and garage (enclosed and altered into studio by Meredith) to the left, kitchen entrance and windows of utility room and bathroom in center, and bedrooms with block glass curved corners to right. Photographed facing true north.

Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 3. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0028)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination showing living room, including Art Moderne mantel and built-in window seats. Photographed facing true north.

Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 4. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0029)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing northeast corner of the kitchen before it was remodeled. Note the distinctive tilework on the counters and behind the stove.

Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 5. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0030)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing detail of original kitchen tile backsplash over stove (removed). Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 6. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0031)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing detail of original kitchen counter tilework spelling out "Azurest So" (removed). Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 7. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0032)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing the north middle room before the addition of accessible bathroom. Metal inset now bisected by doorway, built in drawers removed.

Calder C. Loth, 1993.

Figure 8. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0033)

Portrait of Amaza Lee Meredith, 1922. Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 9. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0034)

Portrait of Edna Meade Colson, 1915. Colson-Hill Family Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 10. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0035)

Scrapbook page of Azurest South during construction, showing the main entrance in center, to the left is the bedroom and the right is the sunroom, at that time a "screened terrace." Facing true north. Photograph by

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Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1939. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 11. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0036)

Scrapbook page of Azurest South after completion, showing main entrance, living room windows, and screened-in porch. Example of Meredith's poetic labeling. Facing true north. Photograph by Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1939. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 12. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0037)

Scrapbook page of Azurest South living room showing Meredith's distinct decorative arts style. It features the window seat and Art Moderne curved mantel, meant to evoke the serene refuge of their home. Art Deco Djanger dancer (Bali) figurine on mantel and radio on the floor comprising a tableau of modernism, exoticism, and comfort. Photograph by Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1945. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 13. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0038)

Photograph from scrapbook of Azurest South showing dining table against wall adjoining living room showing Meredith's distinct decorative arts style. Surrealist painting is over the table. Photograph by Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1945. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 14. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0039)

Scrapbook pages of Azurest South north bedroom, captioned "My Lady's Boudoir," highlighting the metal bas relief inset attributed to Cecelia C. Scott, and showing the telephone and desk, built-in "bunk drawers" and smoking stand. Photograph by Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1940. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 15. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0040)

Archival photograph of the northeast corner of the kitchen before distinctive tilework was added. Camera facing northeast. Photograph by Amaza Lee Meredith, c. 1940. Scrapbook, box 15, Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

Figure 16. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0041)

Plan of Azurest South based on original Amaza Lee Meredith 1939 plan, including changes she made over time (enclosure of garage and sunroom, addition of entry). Not to scale. Does not include recent modifications to north bedroom.

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Calder C. Loth, 1993.

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Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination showing living room, including Art Moderne mantel and built-in window seats. Photographed facing true north.
Calder C. Loth, 1993.

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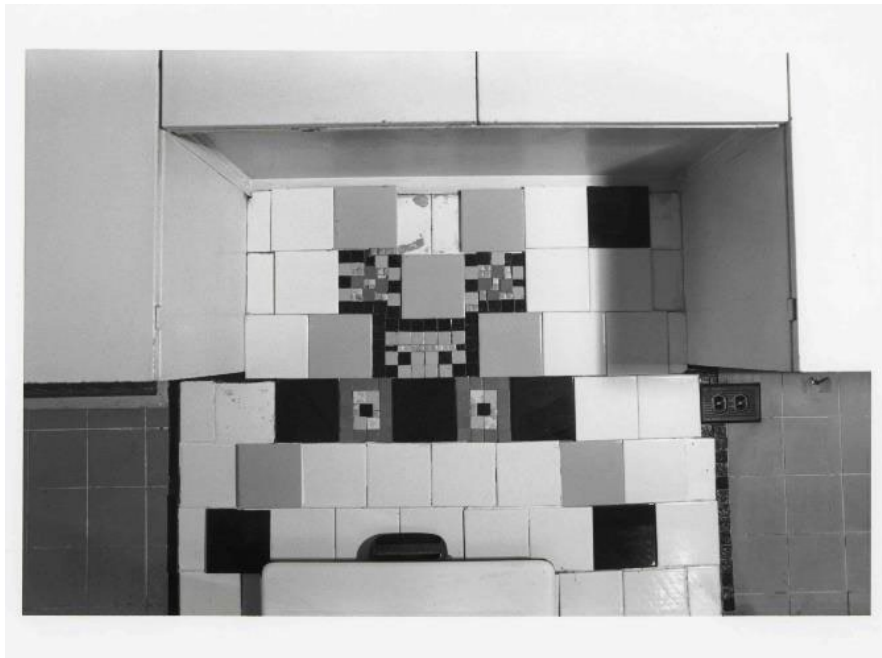


Figure 5. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0030)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing detail of original kitchen counter tilework spelling out “Azurest So” (removed). Calder C. Loth, 1993.



Figure 6. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0031)

Photograph from the 1993 National Register of Historic Places nomination, showing detail of original kitchen counter tilework spelling out “Azurest So” (removed). Calder C. Loth, 1993.

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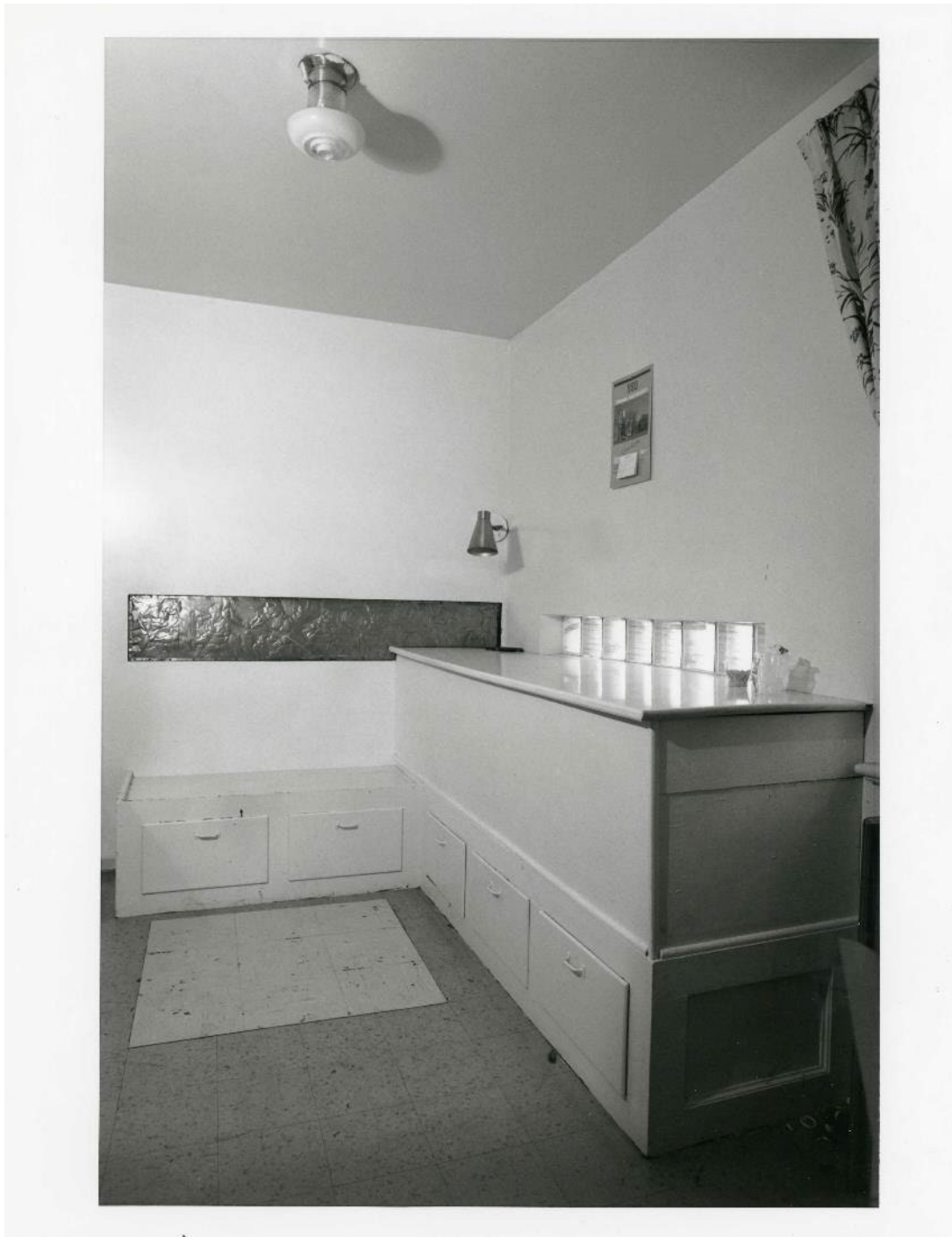


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Calder C. Loth, 1993.



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Portrait of Amaza Lee Meredith, 1922. Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

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Figure 9. (VA_Chesterfield_Azurest South_0034)

Portrait of Edna Meade Colson, 1915. Colson-Hill Family Papers, Virginia State University Special Collections, Petersburg, VA.

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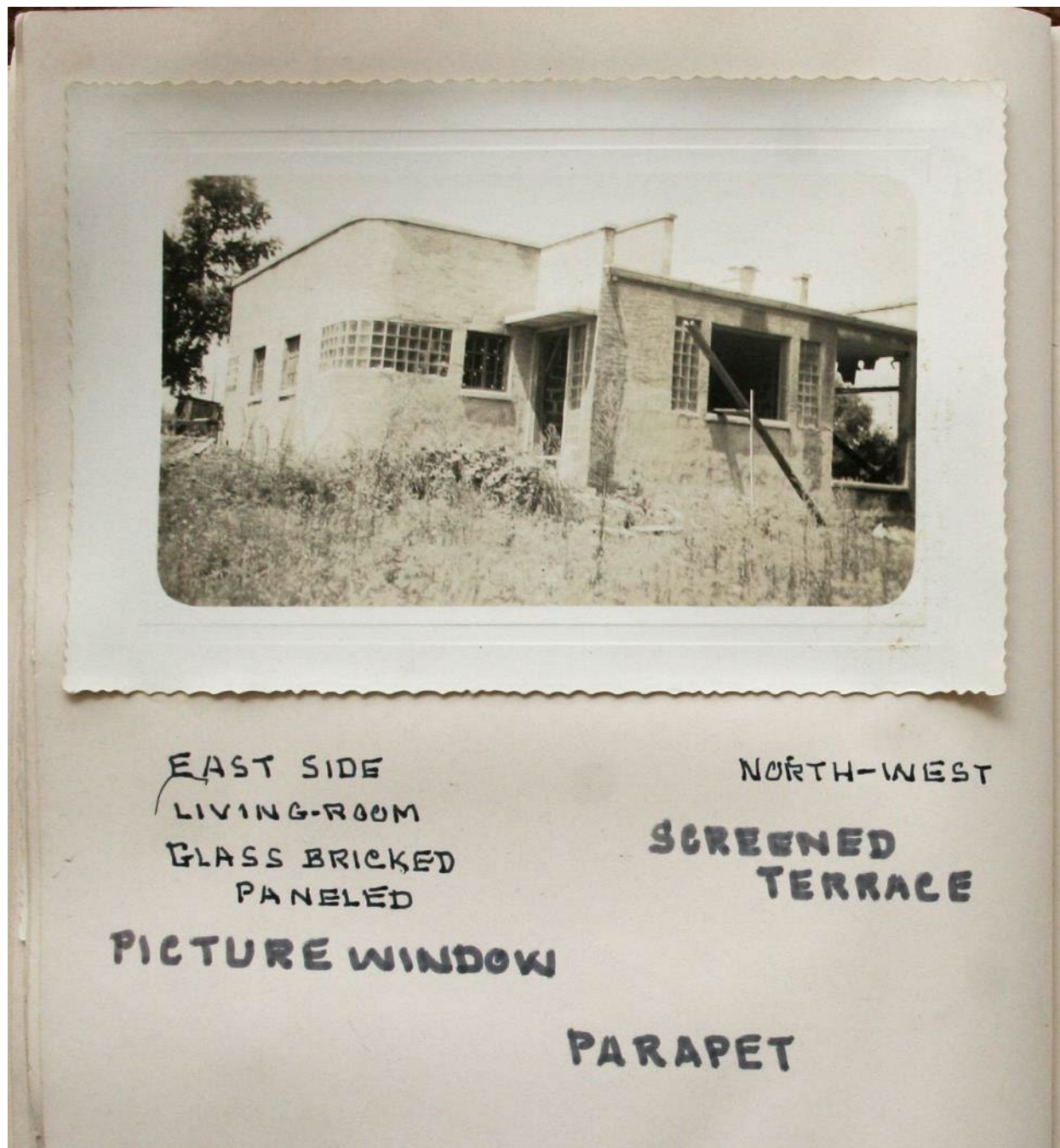


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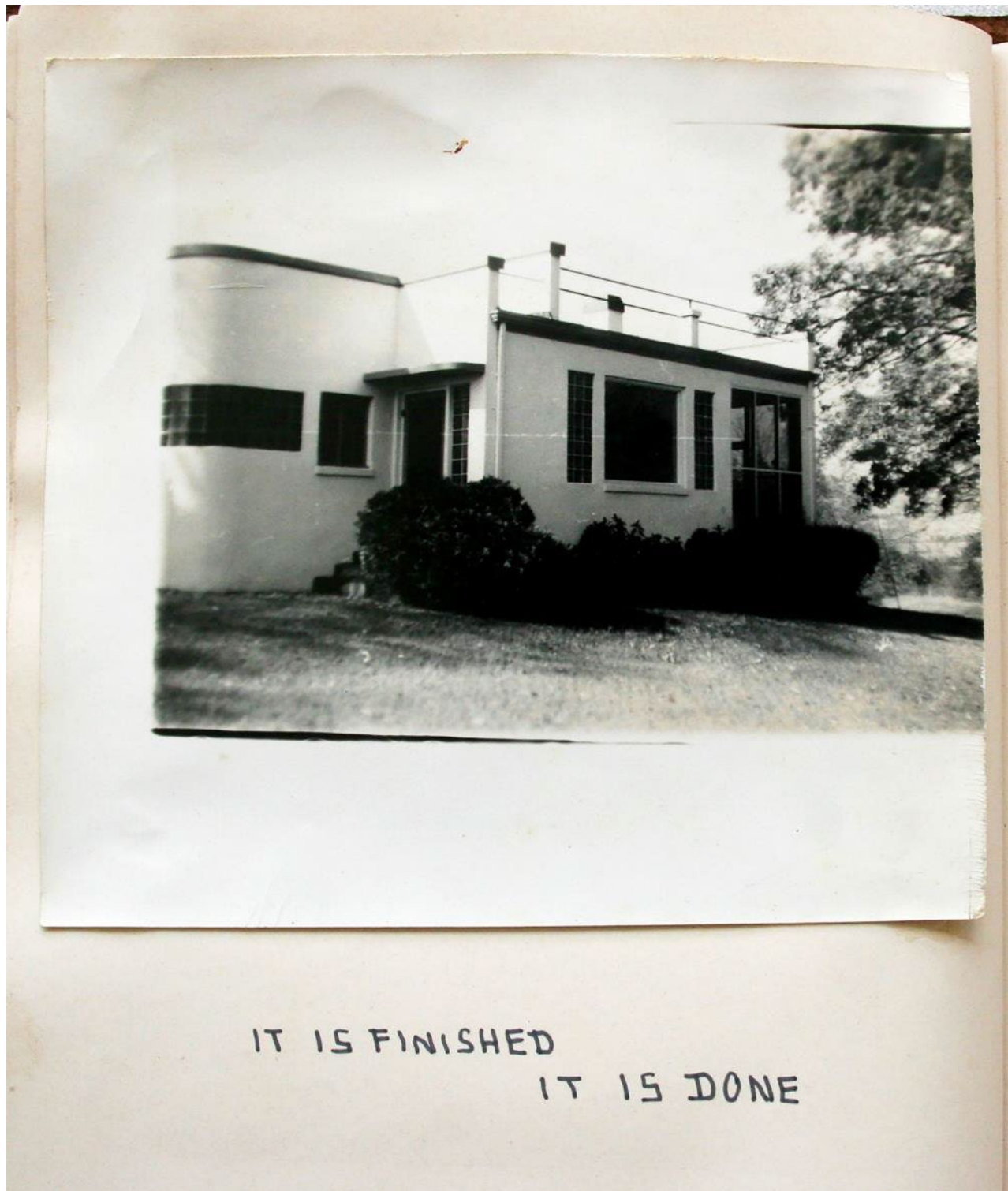


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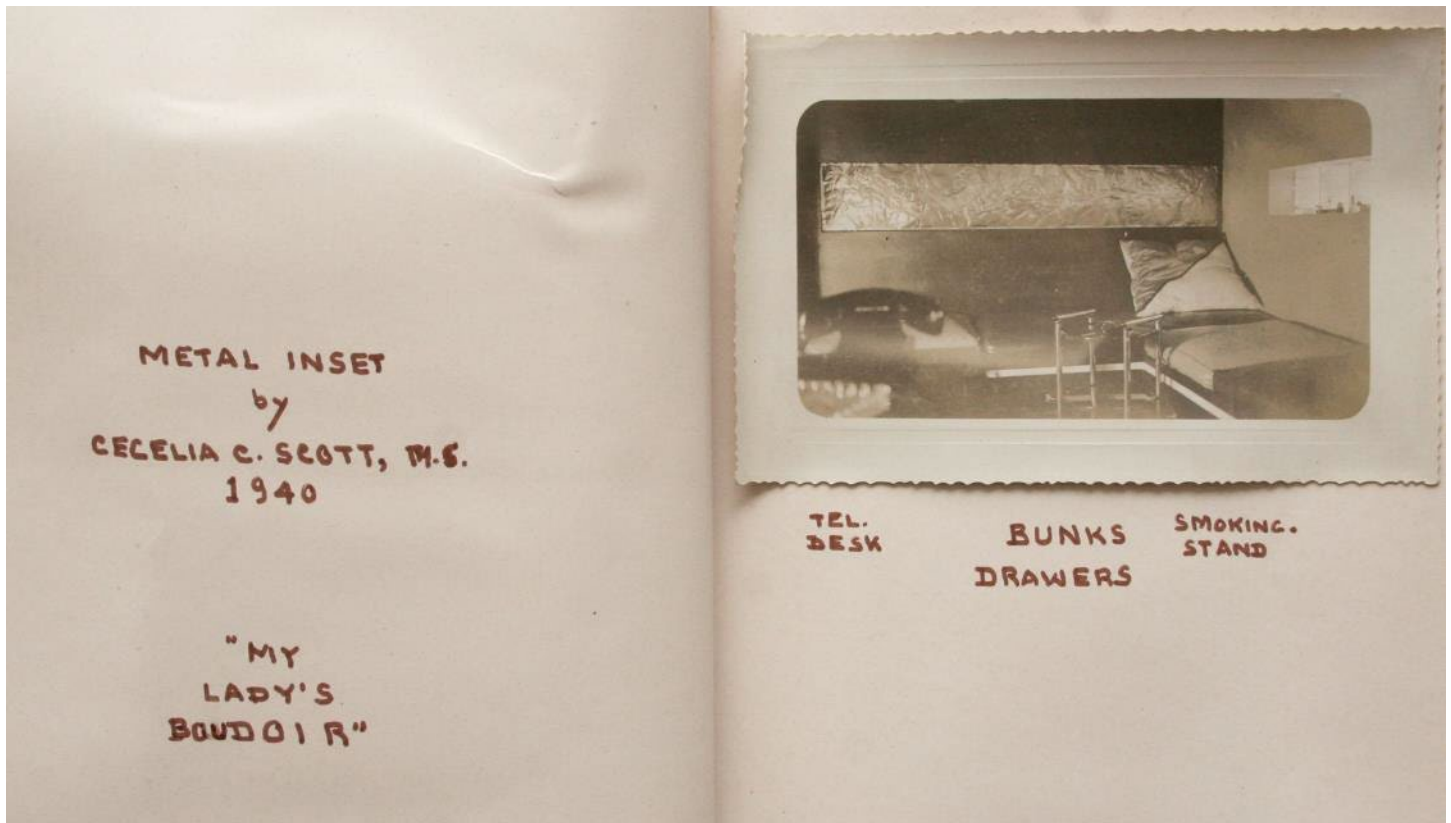


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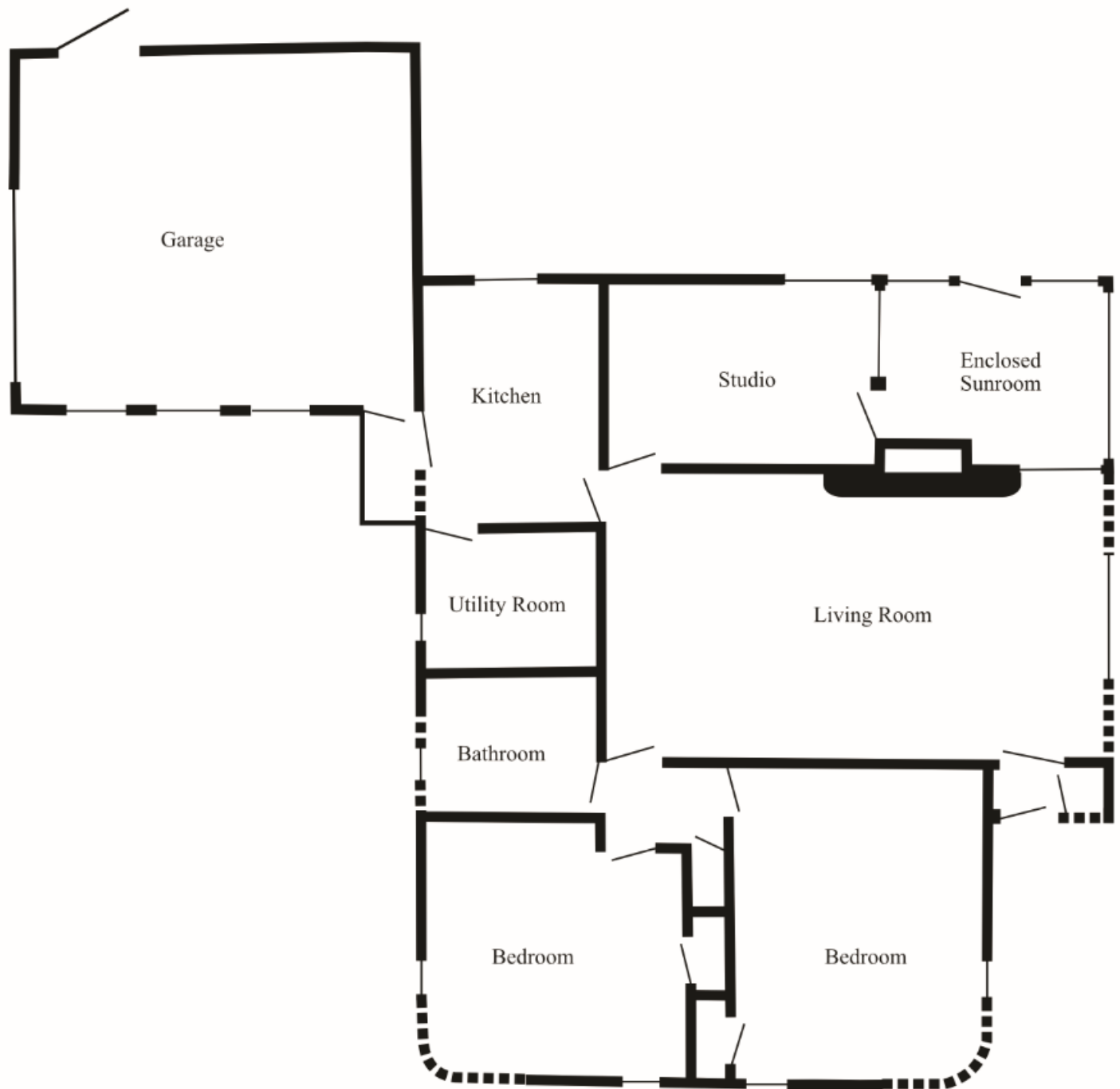


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