

Alma Thomas House Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

ATLANTA (October 27, 2009) – The Alma Thomas House, located on 21st Street in Columbus, Muscogee County, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 20, 2009. The nomination was sponsored by the property owner.

African-American artist, Alma Thomas, was born in this house in 1891. The Thomas family was a locally prominent, upper-middle-class, African-American family. The family built the house in an exclusively white neighborhood. After the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot sparked a wave of racially motivated violence statewide, the Thomas family moved to Washington, D.C. the following year. While Alma Thomas lived the remainder of her life in the nation's capitol, her childhood experiences in Georgia had an influence upon her subsequent artistic career. When Thomas began painting in 1950, several of her pieces depicted scenes from her childhood spent with her extended family in the Columbus area. She was particularly fond of depicting colorful scenes of her father's garden, which included an ornamental rock garden, fruit trees, and assorted species of wildflowers.

The Alma Thomas House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places at both the national and local levels for its association with Alma Thomas, an African-American woman artist whose work was inspired by her childhood home in Columbus. Categorized by art historians as highly personal and strongly influenced by memory, her abstract paintings are thought to have been directly influenced by her childhood. In the second phase of her artistic career, she received critical acclaim and was a major figure within the Washington Color Field of painters, artists whose work emphasized abstract color shapes. She was the first African-American woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Thomas achieved national recognition for her works of art, which today hang in the White House and museums throughout the country.

The house was also listed as significant locally as a good example of the Queen Anne-style of architecture in Georgia due to its representative form, massing, and ornamentation. The house was built circa 1889 and is located on a small, narrow rectangular lot in the Rose Hill neighborhood in the city of Columbus. The one-story, wood-framed house suffered a fire in 2001 and was rehabilitated in 2002. The house received state and federal tax incentives after its rehabilitation.

The National Register of Historic Places is our country's official list of historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts worthy of preservation. The National Register provides formal recognition of a property's architectural, historical or archaeological significance. It also identifies historic properties for planning purposes and insures that these properties will be considered in the

planning of state or federally assisted projects. National Register listing encourages preservation of historic properties through public awareness, federal and state tax incentives, and grants. Listing in the National Register does not place obligations or restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property.

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources serves as Georgia's state historic preservation office. Their mission is to promote the preservation and use of historic places for a better Georgia. HPD's programs include archaeology protection and education, environmental review, grants, historic resource surveys, tax incentives, the National Register of Historic Places, community planning and technical assistance.

The mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to sustain, enhance, protect and conserve Georgia's natural, historic and cultural resources for present and future generations, while recognizing the importance of promoting the development of commerce and industry that utilize sound environmental practices.

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