



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property:	Azurest South
City, State:	Petersburg, Virginia
Period of Significance:	1939-1984
NHL Criteria:	1 and 4; Exception 8
NHL Theme:	III. Expressing Cultural Values 1. educational and intellectual currents 5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design 6. popular and traditional culture
Previous Recognition:	National Register of Historic Places (NRIS 93001464)
National Historic Context:	Springate, Megan E., ed. <i>LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History</i> . Washington, DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016.

NHL Significance:

- Exceptional example of International Style architecture designed by Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984), a Black queer woman in the Jim Crow South, and a symbol of protest against dominant thinking about race, gender, and sexuality.
- First example of architecture designed by a Black queer feminist considered for nomination as an NHL.



- Criterion 1: Azurest South represents important patterns in American history for African American and LGBTQ experience. Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Meade Colson (1888-1985), built a Black queer refuge where they could live safely. Their experience reflects a broader theme in LGBTQ history to secure and maintain privacy. Azurest South is an important example of the fight for self-determination by African Americans, women, and sexual minorities during the twentieth century.
- Criterion 4: Amaza Lee Meredith was a self-trained architect. Azurest South is an architecturally distinctive house intended to communicate the designer's multifaceted identity as a Black queer artist in the Jim Crow South, representing a rare property. It reflects important intersections between the International Style and sexuality, specifically sapphic modernism. Through design, Meredith created a homeplace for herself and her life partner.
- Exception 8: The period of significance extends to Meredith's death in 1984. Because the property is significant under Criterion 1 for LGBTQ and African American history and the couple's self-determination, they spent their entire lives resisting multiple forms of oppression. Azurest South also served as Meredith's "laboratory" throughout her entire life. 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.

Integrity:

- Azurest South remains surrounded by a verdant setting as envisioned by Meredith, and retains a high degree of integrity for location, setting, feeling, and association.
- The exterior reflects Meredith's original design, and has a high degree of integrity for design, materials, and workmanship. It retains important elements, such as the original glass block and casement windows, roof-top terrace railing, and dramatic white stucco with turquoise trim.
- The interior retains the original plan, along with most other features, including the Art Moderne mantel and Art Deco lights. Additionally, the bathroom, an important space for Meredith to experiment with colors and reflective finishes, appears nearly as it did when constructed.
- The original studio has diminished integrity: an accessible bathroom was installed in the studio, partially obstructing an original metal inset bas relief, likely a reversible change.
- The kitchen has lost all historic integrity due to a recent remodeling.

Owner of Property: Virginia State University Alumni Association

Acreage of Property: 1.62 acres

Origins of Nomination: In 2018, National Park Service, Northeast Region (NPS, IR-1-NAA), concluded a region-wide NHL site identification study for potential LGBTQ-related properties for potential nomination. NPS partnered with the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to complete this study. Azurest South was identified as part of this study and evaluated as a high priority for nomination. Azurest South is also featured in the *LGBTQ America* NHL theme study.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: Azurest South is receiving considerable attention, particularly since the publication of a book on Amaza Lee Meredith in 2023 by Jacqueline Taylor, PhD, and the recent partnership between the Getty and National Trust for Historic Preservation on "Conserving Black Modernism," which featured Azurest South as a key property. Public response is likely to be very positive.



Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 20, 2024):

- Maristella Casciato, Senior Curator, Head Architecture Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA
- Brent Leggs, Executive Director, African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC
- Michael L. Rainey, National President, Virginia State University Alumni Association
- Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, President, Virginia State University

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Review for consistent use of terminology related to race.
- Review use of classification International Style.
- Under Modernism as Protest sub-heading, add reference to Ruth Little’s “Getting the American Dream for Themselves,” published in *Buildings and Landscapes*.
- Strengthen reference to queerness and the Harlem Renaissance.
- Add a sentence contextualizing how unusual it was for Colson to achieve her Doctorate in the 1930s.
- Address what could be construed as an ahistorical characterization conflating modern-day LGBTQ+ pride with contemporary acts of resistance.
- Suggest revising language related to Pauli Murray’s exploration of gender.
- Add a sentence or two regarding other Black architects working in modernist idiom.
- Suggest adding a sentence regarding Meredith’s commission for Anne Crittendon Preston, who was also a Petersburg native, VSU alumni, and later professor at Prairie View.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Azurest South in Petersburg, Virginia, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of Azurest South in Petersburg, Virginia, as a National Historic Landmark.