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MAY 20 1999

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

AHPP

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

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1. Name of Property

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Historic Name: Thornton House

Other Name/Site Number: PU9824

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2. Location

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Street & Number: 1420 West 15th Street

Not for Publication: N/A

City/Town: Little Rock

Vicinity: N/A

State: AR

County: Pulaski

Code: 119

Zip Code: 72202

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Number of Resources within Property:

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

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

Name of related multiple property listing: Historically Black Properties in Little Rock's Dunbar School Neighborhood

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation _____ standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification

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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
 ___ See continuation sheet.
- ___ determined eligible for the
 National Register
 ___ See continuation sheet.
- ___ determined not eligible for the
 National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date
of Action

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

Current : DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials: foundation Brick roof Other/Composition Shingle
walls Wood/Weatherboard other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY

Originally a one-story cottage, the frame residence of Dr. and Mrs. John G. Thornton underwent two significant remodelings before reaching its current two-story, predominantly American Foursquare configuration. The initial circa 1896 cottage had a gable-front and wing plan with an ell extending to the rear at right angles off the wing; a small front porch was confined within the "L" formed by the gable and wing. During the early 20th century, front and rear additions squared off the plan of the house, and a full-width front porch was constructed. Around 1920, another extensive remodeling added a second story, giving the house its present American Foursquare appearance.

ELABORATION

The 1897 Sanborn Insurance Map of Little Rock reveals the modest frame cottage that originally was built at 1420 West 15th Street. A gable faced the street at the east end of the main (south) facade with a wing extending

to the west. In the rear, an ell projected at right angles to the wing. A small front porch was located in the "L" formed by the gable and wing, and a back porch ran along the west side of the ell. At about the middle of the east side of the cottage, a bay containing two windows projected slightly beyond the plane of the rest of the east wall.

The house originally did not have a continuous foundation. It sat on brick piers, which sometime subsequently were stuccoed. Eventually, the spaces between the piers were filled in with rubble stone.

Around 1906, the plan of the house was squared off by additions that infilled both the space occupied by the front porch and most of the "L" at the back of the house formed by the wing and rear ell. The projecting bay on the east side of the house, however, was left intact, as was the rearmost section of the ell. Also during this remodeling, the existing Colonial Revival-style full-width front porch was added. Beneath the flat roof of this porch is a simple entablature supported by five square, fluted columns that form four bays across the front of the house. In addition to the columns and entablature, the porch's balustrade identifies it as Colonial Revival in style.

The front door of the Thornton House is off center in the main facade, in the second bay from the west end of the porch, its location since the early-20th century remodeling. Immediately west of the door is a bay window that projects only slightly beyond the wall surface; east of the door, and directly behind a porch column, is a picture window that probably also was added during the early 20th century remodeling.

Around 1920, the house grew again, this time with the addition of a second story that extends over all of the first floor except the section of the rear ell that survived the earlier remodeling. This one surviving piece of the original 1890s cottage is easy to spot at the back of the house because its steeply-pitched gabled roof is at odds with the "squareness" of the front section of the house, which received a hipped roof when the second floor was added.

Both the main roofline and a hipped-roofed dormer have exposed rafter ends, reflecting the influence of the Craftsman style. Exposed rafter ends also decorate the shed roof added to the original bay that survives on the east side of the house. The circa 1920 remodeling created a projecting, second-story bay on the west side of the house which contains a landing for the staircase that was part of the interior remodeling work.

The remodeling also is evident in the windows of the Thornton House. Most windows in the house have double-hung sashes, but on the first floor of the main section of the house, the original, 1890s-vintage windows are one light-over-one light while those in the second-story addition are three-over-one, a common early 20th century configuration. Also part of the

circa 1920 remodeling was a second-story sunroom, located at the southwest corner of the house and wrapped with casement windows. These casements prevent the second story of the main facade from being symmetrical. One large double-hung window is centered in the facade of the second story, directly below the roof dormer, but it is flanked on the east by a band of three double-hung windows and on the west by four casement windows.

Added at some more recent date is a side door located at the south end of the west facade. Concrete steps lead to a small porch which has a shed roof supported by two square posts. Another more recent addition to the Thornton House is a room attached to the rear, where it spans the west half of the north (rear) facade, adjacent to—and wrapping a few feet around—the section of the 1890s ell that survives.

Inside the Thornton House, the various periods of construction and remodeling are readily visible in the doors and woodwork. Downstairs, four-panel, 1890s-vintage doors are the rule, as is woodwork that includes plinth and corner blocks that also are typical of the 1890s. The Craftsman style of the circa 1920 remodeling becomes evident on the staircase, which has a very plain balustrade with square balusters, as well as a built-in window seat on the landing between floors. The influence of the Craftsman style prevails throughout the second floor in clean-lined door and window trim and doors with five horizontal panels. Aside from the room added at the back of the house, no significant alterations appear to have been made since the circa 1920 remodeling.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: _____.

Applicable National Register Criteria: B

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage/Black
 Health/Medicine

Period(s) of Significance: 1906-1957

Significant Dates: 1906

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Significant Person(s): Dr. John G. Thornton
Bessie Stephens Thornton

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

SUMMARY

Originally built about 1896 but expanded twice during the first two decades of the 20th century, the Thornton House is significant as the home for fifty years of Dr. John G. Thornton, a noted black physician, and his wife, Bessie Stephens Thornton, member of a black family that had been prominent in Little Rock since before the Civil War. The house also briefly served as the residence of Mrs. Thornton's mother, Charlotte E. Stephens, Little Rock's first black public school teacher. Through its alterations, the house illustrates the manner in which African Americans who grew more prosperous often remodeled and expanded their homes rather than moving to new locations. This practice, explained in part by limits imposed by segregation, influenced development in the Dunbar School neighborhood.

ELABORATION

Built about 1896 for Charles E. Taylor, a white "traveling agent" for a local hardware company, the house at 1420 West 15th Street in Little Rock's Centennial Addition became the residence of Dr. and Mrs. John G. Thornton about 1906. Dr. Thornton, who has been described as one of the "deans of black physicians" in Little Rock, was born in St. Louis in 1873 but grew up in Mississippi, graduating in 1893 from the State Normal College at Holly Springs. He then taught for several years, using his teaching income to put himself through Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. After graduating in 1902, he first practiced in Greenville, Mississippi, then moved to Little Rock, where he married Miss Bessie Stephens in 1904. Bessie Stephens Thornton, a graduate of Walden University in Nashville, was a teacher and the daughter of Charlotte E. Stephens, who is remembered as Little Rock's first black public school teacher. Mrs. Thornton's grandfather (her mother's father) was a leader in Little Rock's antebellum black community and served as butler for the family of one of the city's founding fathers, Chester Ashley.

The year after the Thorntons were married, Dr. Thornton co-founded with Dr. John M. Robinson the Arkansas Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, an organization for black medical professionals that remains in existence today. One of the Association's first projects was opening a hospital to address the need for better medical facilities for African Americans at a time when Little Rock had no integrated hospitals. Although the Association's hospital was short-lived, it helped pave the way for subsequent, more successful efforts to provide quality medical care for black patients.

Soon after moving to 1420 West 15th Street, Dr. and Mrs. Thornton undertook the first remodeling of the house, which expanded its floorplan and added some stylish Colonial Revival decorative details. At this time, Dr. Thornton's practice—the success of which was described in 1907 as "gratifying"—was located at 701 West 9th Street in the black business district, but he eventually moved his office into the Mosaic Templars Building at 9th and Broadway. Like most black men of any stature in Little Rock during the early 20th century, Dr. Thornton was a member of the Mosaic Templars. Over the course of his very long career, he also held numerous positions and received many honors, including serving as physician to Shorter College, a historically black school in North Little Rock, and as vice-president of the National Medical Association, a professional association for black physicians that eventually merged with the American Medical Association. Dr. Thornton also was active in efforts to re-establish African Americans as a force in the Republican Party, taking part in a bold attempt to force "Lily White" Republicans to recognize black delegates to the 1920 Pulaski County Republican Convention.

Dr. Thornton's success enabled him to remodel and expand his home again around 1920, when a second story was added to create a then-popular American Foursquare with Craftsman-style details. By that time, Little Rock real estate developers were openly excluding African Americans from new residential areas. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Thorntons had the option of building a larger house in a newer neighborhood—certainly not in one of the suburban neighborhoods then under development. The twice-remodeled Thornton House illustrates the fact that even successful African Americans had to accommodate themselves to segregation and is one of several extensively remodeled homes in the Dunbar neighborhood that demonstrate how segregation influenced the neighborhood's development.

Dr. Thornton lived for more than fifty years at 1420 West 15th Street, dying at the age of eighty-four in 1957.

A footnote to the significance of the Thornton House is the brief period during the 1920s when Charlotte E. Stephens lived with her daughter and son-in-law. Mrs. Stephens, who was between permanent residences at the time, lived at 1420 West 15th Street from about 1923 to 1925. She is an important figure in Little Rock's history not only because she became the

city's first black public school teacher but also because she taught longer in Little Rock than anyone else ever will. Her teaching career began in 1869, when she was fifteen; she retired in 1939 at the age of eighty-five. A public elementary school in Little Rock is named for her.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock). 3 April 1955.

Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock). 6 November 1957.

Dillard, Tom W. "Perseverance: Black History in Pulaski County—An Excerpt." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 31 (Winter 1983): 62-73.

Gordon, Fon Louise. "Black Women in Arkansas." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 35 (Spring 1987): 26-37.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, Arkansas. Vol. II. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1939.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, including Argenta and Pulaski Heights, Arkansas. Vol. 1. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1913.

Insurance Maps of Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Baring Cross, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1897.

Little Rock City Directories: 1895-96 through 1958.

Terry, Adolphine Fletcher. *Charlotte Stephens: Little Rock's First Black Teacher*. Little Rock: Academic Press of Arkansas, 1973.

Walls, Edwina. "Some Extinct Black Hospitals of Little Rock and Pulaski County." *Pulaski County Historical Review* 34 (Spring 1986): 2-13.

Woods, E. M. *Blue Book of Little Rock and Argenta, Arkansas*. Little Rock: Central Printing Co., 1907.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

— preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	—	—	—	B
C	—	—	—	D

Verbal Boundary Description:

Lot 8, Block 14, Centennial Addition to the City of Little Rock

Boundary Justification:

The legal description of the Thornton House property has remained unchanged since the house was built, making these boundaries appropriate for use in this nomination.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Cheryl Griffith Nichols/Consultant

Thornton House
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas
County and State

Organization: N/A

Date: August 4, 1998

Street & Number: 1721 S. Gaines St.

Telephone: 501-375-2686

City or Town: Little Rock

State: AR ZIP: 72206