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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service	
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM	
mpiete each item by marking 'x' in the appropriate box or by entering the publication requested. If any	inactions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Buil vittem does not apply to the property reing documented, enter IN AC for not applicable." For functions, ar Place additional entries and parentive items on continuation speets (NPS Form (0-900a). Use a typewriter, word
1. Name of Property	
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#### Azurest South

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) 
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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register $\0$

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) \_\_\_\_\_N/A\_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Function or Use

	ctions (Enter categories from instructions) DOMESTICSub:Single dwelling	
	tions (Enter categories from instructions) SOCIAL Sub:Clubhouse	
7. Descriptio	on Classification (Enter categories from instructions) ENTERN MOVEMENT: International Style	
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Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

# Chesterfield County, Virginia

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3. Statement of Significance	
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Architect/BuilderMeredith, Amaza Le Holmes, Russell (c	
Narrative Statement of Significance (Expl one or more continuation sheets.)	lain the significance of the property on
9. Major Bibliographical References	
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Previous documentation on file (NPS) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. 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 Name of repository:Virginia State University

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See continuation sheet.
Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuatior sneet.)
name/titleCalder Loth, Mary Harding Sadler, James Hill
organization_Virginia Department of Historic Resources_date15 Sept 1993
street & number 221 Governor Streettelephone 804-786-3143
city or townRichmond state VA zip code 23219

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location. A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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<pre>?roperty Owner</pre>	:
Somplete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)	
nameYirginia State University Alumni Association, Incorporated	_
street & number_P. O. Box 71 telephone	
city or townPetersburg state _VA_ zip code _23803	-

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET	
Section 7 Page 1	Azurest South Chesterfield County, Virginia

CMB No. 1024-0018

# SUMMARY ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

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0-041

The dwelling called Azurest South is a compact but articulate example of the International Style, located adjacent to the campus of Virginia State University. It was designed in 1938 by Amaza Lee Meredith as her own residence and completed in 1939. Built of concrete block rendered in white-painted stucco, the flat-rooted, one-story structure exhibits the smooth, clean lines associated with its style. Its crisp, geometric forms are set off by a lush landscaped setting--a sloping grassy dell surrounded by mature trees. The structure is connected to the surrounding garden through a series of curving pipe rails and by the extending, corrugated roof of the open carport. The distinguishing features of the house are the asymmetrical massing, the curved corners accentuated by narrow bands of glass-block, and the complete lack of applied ornament. The house has been unoccupied for nearly a decade but remains in good condition without significant alteration. Details and finishes designed by Miss Meredith survive intact, though some are obscured by a recent coat of white paint. Miss Meredith's interior design is characterized by dramatic use of color, vivid patterning of walls, floors and ceilings, and the use of inventive lighting fixtures. The house functioned in part as a design laboratory and studio for Miss Meredith, so its appearance evolved subtly over the years, reflecting Miss Meredith's studies of color and material. The most significant changes to the house occurred in the 1950s when the garage was converted to a studio, the carport added, and the kitchen entry infilled with corrugated fiberglass walls.

## DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Azurest South is located on the eastern edge of the campus of Virginia State University in the town of Ettrick, Chesterfield County. A narrow drive, two parallel tracks of poured concrete, leads the visitor into the property, which is screened from the campus by tall trees and shrubbery forming a hedgerow. The drive is further delineated by a row of cedars, and by short, low sections of steel pipe rail. The open carport frames views into the grassy dell, inviting the visitor down a short flight of stairs into the landscape. The house is approached by flagstone paths to the kitchen entry, which is next to the carport, and to the formal entry which is blocked from immediate view. Originally cedar trees were planted at the perimeter of the house to mark entry and to provide privacy to the bedroom wing. Indigenous shrubs still soften the eastern side of the house. The west facade presents a strict geometry uncompromised by foundation plantings.

This house, a five-room, single-story dwelling, can be classified with other residences designed in the International Style: a "machine for living"<sup>1</sup>, devoid of applied ornament or historic references. Characteristic of the style, Azurest South has clean lines and a strong geometry emphasizing regularity rather than symmetry. The walls are concrete block finished in white stucco. The flat roof, designed as a terrace, is highlighted by plain metal coping and by steel pipe rails, all painted a bright turquoise blue. The same blue, referred to locally as-"Azurest blue," is used on the carport canopy, the entrance canopy, and the steel casement windows. The parapet is penetrated regularly with small circular vents.

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A dominant feature of the exterior is the bedroom wing whose curved corners are articulated with horizontal ribbon windows of glass block. A glass-block sidelight at the front door illuminates the coat closet. Glass-block sidelights in the living room window are echoed in the window centered in the shower wall. A single band of glass-block was positioned above the day bed in the first studio. A glass-block sidelight for the kitchen door is now enclosed by a curved, corrugated fiberglass vestibule of terra cotta red that shelters the kitchen entrance. The vestibule was added by Miss Meredith in the 1950s to provide an airlock between the kitchen and her new studio space in what had formerly been the garage.

Projecting from the west side of the house, adjacent to the kitchen entry is the former garage, enclosed in the 1950s by Miss Meredith to create a studio and dark room. The garage doors were removed and aluminum windows were installed on the south and west elevations. The open carport, roofed with corrugated fiberglass, is supported on slender pipe columns.

The main entrance to the house is positioned at a re-entrant angle near the southeast corner and is approached by cast concrete steps ascending to a quarry tile stoop. The front doorway retains evidence of the three shades of red paint used to enliven the entry, originally painted "Azurest blue".

The east elevation, overlooking the creek, is dominated by a large, single-pane, square window lighting the living room. The roof terrace above, defined by its blue pipe railing, provides outdoor living space. Beyond the railing is the brick stack of the house's single chimney.

The northeast corner of the house is marked by a enclosed porch. The porch, originally screened, was later glazed by Miss Meredith with jalousie windows. The whimsical north elevation features irregularly spaced openings of different sizes and materials. Two steel casement windows and a long slit of glass block light the earlier studio and two small sections of glass block bring natural light to the kitchen counter.

Whereas the exterior of the house is relatively severe in its architecture, the interior of the house is enlivened by the vivid colors of walls, floors, and ceilings. Though some of the original colors have been whitewashed in recent years, evidence of the original paint remains in closets and behind radiators. The judicious placement of windows and mirrors enlarges the apparent size of this modest space. Oak floors in the living areas and pine doors partly stained and partly painted warm the palette of materials. Miss Meredith used an original combination of traditional and contemporary materials resulting in a blend of cultural motifs that defy categorization. The panelled doors, picture molding, and trim are standard millwork elements. The colorful vinyl tile, carrara glass, acoustical tile, and tileboard represent the most currently available, contemporary finishes at the time of construction.

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Through the door of the formal entry to Azurest one enters a small vestibule with coat closet. The naturally lit closet with its mirrored door has shelves painted in contrasting blue and green. Original door chimes are set in a painted reveal on the opposite wall.

The spacious living room is dominated by the Art Deco fireplace composed of a thick, curving mantel shelf which echoes the massive curves of the pedestals. The wall behind the mantel has been recently mirrored to the ceiling. An ell-shaped, panelled, enclosure provides a seat next to the mantel, contains the firebox, and forms a cover for the radiator. The living room floors are narrow oak boards set in large squares. A curtain slot in the ceiling across the west end of the room allowed the west end to be treated as a separate dining area. Original, quarter-round, metal sconces painted to resemble alabaster further distinguish the dining area. Indirect lighting was concealed by the curtain valances.

The kitchen, one of the most interesting rooms in the house, remains essentially unaltered since Miss Meredith's occupancy. 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 window sill 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. Three steps down, to the south of the kitchen, the utility room retains such early features as an original sink, storage cabinets, fold-down ironing board, and oil-fired furnace. The hot-water tank is suspended from the ceiling.

The adjacent studio, which still contains Miss Meredith's books and materials, was created in the 1950s using the original garage space. Lined with cabinets and book shelves, this space retains its original paint scheme of reds, taupe, blue, green, and gray. The adjacent dark room is painted dark green.

North of the living room is the original studio. Set into the west wall is a metal basrelief frieze of stylized African-American figures (referred to in Miss Meredith's scrapbook<sup>2</sup> as "My Ladies Boudoir", executed in 1940 by Cecilia C. Scott, thought to be one of Miss Meredith's students). The large wooden storage box along the north wall was added after Miss Meredith's occupancy. Its wooden base with built-in drawers, however, is an original feature and formerly served as the base for a couch or "bunk."<sup>3</sup> The base continues along a portion of the west wall. A steel casement window and a long single course of glass block light the room. The studio floor is finished with turquoise vinyl tile accented with metallic gold flecks. The door at the east end of the studio opens onto the enclosed porch which features a quarry tile floor and a panel beneath the window opening into the living room that permits the placing wood into the living room firebox.

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South of the living room is a small vestibule which opens into the two bedrooms and the bathroom. Like the kitchen, the bathroom displays Miss Meredith's skill at achieving decorative effects with an unusual palette of materials. The walls are a striking combination of black and celery green carrara glass panels and green ceramic tileboard. Black carrara glass dominates the south wall and celery carrara glass is used on the walls above the bathtub. The bathtub, vanity, and toilet are yellow. The ceramic tile floor is patterned in squares of buff, yellow, and black. The bathroom also has built-in cabinets with cararra glass doors and built-in mirrors. Also preserved are original stainless-steel accessories.

The two bedrooms are defined by the matching curves of their glass block windows. Miss Meredith's room preserves the massive Victorian bed in which she was born, as well as a matching bureau and an Art Deco dresser. Dr. Colson's room in the western half of the bedroom projection is nearly identical to the master bedroom. A book shelf featuring indirect lighting is set into one wall. Rectangular, recessed light fixtures illuminate the curved corners in both rooms.

Azurest South is a unique architectural creation of a well-educated woman who studied current trends in design and materials. From the exterior, Miss Meredith's house and its landscape embody the tenets of the International Style, rarely expressed in Virginia's residential architecture. The interior of the residence reveals a richer blend of cultural precedents, evoking both Miss Meredith's individual creativity and the rich material culture of African-Americans.

#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1.</sup> Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, 1927

<sup>2.</sup> Miss Meredith's scrapbook is in the manuscript collection of Virginia State University.

<sup>3.</sup> Meredith Scrapbook.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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Azurest South is one of the Commonwealth's few mature examples of the International Style, a style that espoused a complete break with architectural traditions. Designed by Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984), one of the nation's few black female architects, the house is a significant landmark of African-American material culture and design. Following completion of the dwelling in 1939 by prominent Petersburg contractor Russell Holmes, Miss Meredith lived there with her companion Dr. Edna Meade Colson, Dean of Virginia State University's School of Education, until her death. Trained at Columbia Teacher's College as an artist and teacher, Miss Meredith founded the Fine Arts Department at Virginia State University in 1930. Although principally employed as a teacher, Miss Meredith also enjoyed a limited architectural career, designing houses and interiors for herself, family and friends in Virginia, Texas, and New York. Azurest South, the home she built adjacent to VSU's campus, demonstrates her fascination with avant-garde design, her familiarity with modern materials and construction details, and her courage in expressing non-traditional ideas in the public eye of the state's first land grant college for African Americans. At Azurest Miss Meredith blended the forms of the International Style with colorful, highly personalized interior decoration. Architectural historian Richard Wilson judged Azurest South to be "one of the most advanced residential designs in the state in its day." Azurest provided a rich and ever-evolving setting for the lives of two remarkable women during nearly half a century.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amaza Lee Meredith was born in Lynchburg, Virginia on August 14, 1895. She was the eldest child of Samuel Meredith, a respected carpenter, and Emma Kennedy. Because her father was white and her mother black, the two could not be legally married in Virginia. Meredith was determined to legalize his relationship with Emma Kennedy so the two journeyed to Washington, D. C. in racially segregated railroad cars, to be married. Subsequently Meredith lost much of his business, apparently as a result of the marriage. He took his own life in 1915.

Following graduation from high school in 1915 at the top of her class, Amaza Meredith enrolled at the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute near Petersburg where she received the "Summer School Professional Certificate" for teachers. In her first summer at what was to become Virginia State University Miss Meredith met Dr. Edna Meade Colson, daughter of James Major Colson III, one of the Institute's founding faculty members. Dr. Colson, Miss Meredith's senior by 7 years, had degrees from Fisk College and from Columbia University. She belonged to a well-educated, upper-middle-class family, descended from free blacks. Miss Meredith and Dr. Colson were each to become highly respected members of Virginia State's faculty as well as lifelong companions.

Having received her teaching certificate, Miss Meredith began her professional career \_ in Botetourt County schools, where she "found a local black community dispossessed, disenfranchised, and complacent."<sup>2</sup> She returned to Virginia State University, acquiring her

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degree in teaching in 1922. After teaching for several more years, Miss Meredith moved with her sister to Brooklyn where she enrolled in 1926 in Teachers' College, Columbia University and majored in fine arts. There she received a bachelor's degree with honors in 1930 and a master's degree in 1934.

Miss Meredith was hired by John Gandy, third president of what had become Virginia State College for Negroes, to teach art. She struggled to provide small, primitive facilities with the minimum equipment necessary to establish a fine arts department. In 1930 she wrote to the campus business manager: "The sink is most urgently needed as all water used in room 8 has to be brought and carried to and from the third floor, the center of the building. The nearest heat is in the hospital, therefore the gas stove is badly needed." In 1935 Miss Meredith became chair of the art department. Miss Meredith was dedicated to the notion that fine arts be included in the public school curriculum. She successfully sought funding for two art scholarships at Virginia State. Photographs she took of Azurest in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s show a home decorated with students' paintings and sculptures.

Miss Meredith began the design of Azurest South in the late 1930s. Though the plan and axonometric are not drawn by an experienced hand, they indicate an understanding of construction details and materials that Miss Meredith likely gained from her father. The drawings carefully delineate treatments such as the smooth, curved walls, accentuated with ribbons of glass block. Paths of slate flagstone are deliberately illustrated as merging with straight-edged stoops of poured concrete. Steel pipe railings define the edge of a roof terrace reached by way of a steel ship's ladder, very much in the manner of the French International Style master Le Corbusier. Miss Meredith notes both materials and construction details with equal care. Though not facile in her use of architectural vocabulary, Miss Meredith clearly gave both the esthetics and the material functions of this project balanced consideration. Her scrapbook of photographs<sup>3</sup> provides fascinating glimpses of Azurest under construction, in its landscaped setting, and with an interior filled with eclectic furnishings and artwork. Outdoor photographs hint at frequent gatherings of faculty, students, and friends in the lush, shaded dell on the grounds.

When Miss Meredith created Azurest South, she was a middle-aged woman who had established a small architectural practice, designing houses and interiors for family and friends<sup>4</sup>. Little of her work is documented; her drawings are not those of a practiced architect, but rather those of a person who was familiar with both traditional and current trends in architectural design. She designed a house in Lynchburg for one sister and a residence in Sag Harbor for another sister. It is likely that the largest assemblage of her architectural projects can be found at Sag Harbor on Long Island. At Sag Harbor, a resort for wealthy whites, including the Roosevelt family, Miss Meredith and her family and friends created Azurest North, an enclave of vacation homes for middle-class blacks. Miss Meredith worked on design commissions at Sag Harbor into the 1970s when she was an elderly woman. She is also known to have designed "Andot", a home near Prairie View College in Texas; a home for James Hugo Johnson on 3rd Avenue in Ettrick; and the Education Building for Gilfield Baptist Church near Petersburg.

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To understand Miss Meredith's architectural oeuvre in its context it must be remembered that she was one of only a handful of black architects with an active practice. Architectural historians John Wells and Robert Dalton make the following observation:

Architecture has been, and to a large extent still is, a white man's profession. The place of any black architect in the region's history cannot be evaluated without understanding the limited options available to black practitioners of the period and region. In 1910, according to Mather, of 7,317,922 Negroes over the age of 10 and enumerated in the 13th national census, 59 were active as architects, and 47 as draftsmen.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of blacks who sought a formal education in architecture in the early twentieth century received degrees from northern schools. Hampton University, the private school founded in 1868 to train freed slaves, established its architecture program in 1940, the year after Azurest was completed. It appears that the first black architect to be registered in Virginia was Richmonder Charles Russell in 1931<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps the best known black architects working in Virginia in the 1920s and 30s were William Henry Moses (1901-1991), who founded Hampton University's architecture department, and Hillyard Robinson (1899-1986), who headed the Department of Architecture at Howard University<sup>7</sup>. Both Moses and Robinson designed in a modern idiom. In 1938 Moses won the open competition to design the Virginia Room for the 1939 New York World's Fair. His winning design with its curved walls and streamlined elements, though later rejected because of his race, was "initially given extensive publicity"<sup>8</sup>. It is likely that Miss Meredith was aware of these architectural currents. Indeed, she attended Columbia University at the same time as Robinson.

Amaza Meredith attended Columbia Teacher's College at a time of tremendous vitality and change in the American architectural scene. In the late 1930s there was a wave of immigration from the Germany design community, including Walter Gropius who had been head of the Bauhaus school of design, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, all proponents of the International Style. Their arrival heralded a new period in American architecture. "In the creation of new house types, no previous decade and a half in American architectural history can compare in inventiveness with that from roughly 1935-50. These house types were immediately and extensively influential in current building."<sup>o</sup> Azurest is a salient example of this trend in residential design.

It must be noted that Virginia State University's first major expansion was simultaneous with the design and construction of Azurest. Eleven of the principal buildings for the campus, were designed by Charles Robinson, during the 1930s, in accordance with his master plan for the campus<sup>10</sup>. Virginia State University was the state's first state supported institution of higher learning for blacks. Consistent with the architectural vocabulary favored in the Commonwealth, Robinson designed Virginia State University's buildings in the Colonial Revival style he also employed at William and Mary, Madison, Radford, and Mary Washington colleges. In light of

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the overwhelming dominance of traditional architecture in Virginia Miss Meredith's achievement at Azurest is all the more remarkable.

Miss Meredith resided at Azurest South, summering in Sag Harbor at Azurest North, from 1939 until her death in 1984. Her will left one half of the property to the Virginia State University National Alumni Association. The Association purchased the remaining interest in the property from Dr. Colson's estate following her death in 1986. The property is now used for meetings and social functions held by the Alumni Association.

#### **ENDNOTES**

1. Charles Browneil, Calder Loth, William Rasmussen, Richard Wilson, The Makine of Virginia Architecture (Richmond) The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), p. 105.

2. Lucious Edwards, Jr., Unpublished lecture on Amaza Lee Meredith delivered at the Fifth Annual Symposium on Architectural History. University of Virginia, November 13, 1992. Mr. Edwards generously allowed full access to the information he has gathered concerning Miss Meredith and her work.

3. Miss Meredith's Scrappook is in the manuscript collection of Virginia State University.

4. Information concerning Miss Meredith's architectural commissions was provided by Lucious Edwards. Archivist, Virginia State University.

5. John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, Unpublished manuscript, September 27, 1993.

6. Ibid.

7. The Making of Virginia Architecture, pp. 94 and 408.

8. Ibid. The commission was subsequently awarded to Leslie Cheek.

9. William H. Jordy, American Buildings and Their Architects (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), p. 168.

10. Land and Community Associates, Survey of State-Owned Properties: Institutions of Higher Education, unpublished manuscript, 1991, p. 82.

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# BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

- Brownell, Charles, Calder Loth, William Rasmussen, Richard Wilson. *The Making of Virginia* Architecture (Richmond: The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992.
- Edwards, Lucious, Jr., Unpublished lecture on Amaza Lee Meredith delivered at the Fifth Annual Symposium on Architectural History, University of Virginia, November 13, 1992.
- Land and Community Associates, Survey of State-Owned Properties: Institutions of Higher Education, unpublished manuscript, 1991.
- Meredith, Amaza Lee, Scrapbook, Manuscript Collection of Virginia State University, Ettrick, Virginia.

Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton, Unpublished manuscript, September 27, 1993.

# VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property may be described using Chesterfield County Tax Map and Parcel Number 182-10 (1) 1.

# BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated boundary corresponds to the entire 1.6 parcel of land historically associated with Azurest South.

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Azurest South Chesterfield County, Virginia

All photographs are of **AZUREST SOUTH** Chesterfield County, Virginia VDHR File Number: 333-62-36 Calder C. Loth, photographer Negative no. 13133, 23 August 1993 Negatives filed in the Virginia State Library & Archives

VIEW OF: front entrance, camera facing northwest PHOTO 1 of 11

VIEW OF: kitchen entrance, camera facing northeast PHOTO 2 of 11

VIEW OF: front entrance, showing rounded corners, camera facing northeast PHOTO 3 of 11

VIEW OF: fireplace in living room, camera facing northwest PHOTO 4 of 11

VIEW OF: fireplace in living room, camera facing northeast PHOTO 5 of 11

VIEW OF: chest, originally a cot, in the early studio, camera facing west PHOTO 6 of 11

VIEW OF: Miss Meredith's (front) bedroom, camera facing southeast PHOTO 7 of 11

VIEW OF: kitchen, camera facing north PHOTO 8 of 11

VIEW OF: kitchen, counter tile detail, camera facing west PHOTO 9 of 11

VIEW OF: kitchen, wall tile detail above stove, camera facing northeast PHOTO 10 of 11

VIEW OF: bathroom, camera facing northwest PHOTO 11 of 11

