

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Evans-Tibbs House
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1910 Vermont Avenue, N.W. not for publication N/A
city, town Washington, D.C. vicinity N/A
state District of Columbia code DC county N/A code 001 zip code 20001

3. Classification

Ownership of Property private public-local public-State public-Federal
Category of Property building(s) district site structure object
Number of Resources within Property
Contributing 1 Noncontributing _____ buildings _____ sites _____ structures _____ objects _____ Total
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Carol B. Thompson 7/28/87
Signature of certifying official State Historic Preservation Officer Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

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:)

Patrick Ward Andrews 9/8/87

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian/ Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brickwalls Brick

roof Otherother _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Evans-Tibbs house is located at 1910 Vermont Avenue, N.W. near the northeast corner of the intersection of Vermont Avenue and Tenth Street, N.W. The house was constructed in 1894-1895 by Richard E. Crump. The structure's simplified Victorian styling is similar to that of residential row structures built in the nation's capital at the close of the 19th Century. The house is a two-story, pressed brick, flat-roofed structure. The property is enclosed by a three foot (3') high wrought iron fence with hairpin railings intersected by arrowhead rods.

The house's facade is dominated by a projecting bay of double windows which stands at the building's south end. The main entrance to the house is located within a third bay which is recessed some three feet from the frontage of the main bay. String courses and horizontal brick banding articulate the facade and cornice area. Access to the house is gained through an open archway faced with a wrought iron gate. Multi-paned double doors lead to the house's interior. This arrangement is not original to the house and probably dates to a 1932 remodeling.

Another element dating from this remodeling effort is the wrought iron ornamentation of the entrance bay. An elaborate hood has been placed over the main entrance way. Railing fronts the window above the entrance, giving the appearance of a balcony. The two decorative elements share a common motif of stylized harps or lyres. The iron work was custom designed according to the directions of Madame Evanti.

Within the foyer, a staircase ascends to the second floor. To the left of the vestibule is an entrance to the living room topped by a fanlight. Wall sconces, plaster panels, cornices and a centrally positioned chandelier were added during the 1930s' remodeling. The ceiling medallions are the only remaining original decorative elements of the living room and library. The Palladian motif entranceway from the living room to the library is formed by composite order columns.

The library, like the living room, is accentuated by plaster panels, classical decorative elements and a ceiling medallion with chandelier. The fireplace and mantle, together with the base molding, provide additional visual detailing to the room. A final distinctive feature of the library room is the two recessed wall bookshelves which are crowned by cast iron sea shells. A simply paneled sliding wood door separates the library room from the dining room.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage/ Black

Performing Arts

Social History

Period of Significance

1920 - 1937

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Tibbs, Lillian Evans

a.k.a. Madame Evanti

Architect/Builder

Crump, Richard E.

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

The Evans-Tibbs House is significant for its long association with Lillian Evans-Tibbs (Madame Evanti), a pioneering black opera diva. The house served as her primary residence from early childhood (1904) until her death (1967). Although the house has served as a frequent meeting place for Washington's black intelligentsia since it was first purchased by the Evans family (1904), it gained its primary significance during the years of Madame Evanti's professional development as an opera singer in America and abroad (1920-1937).

Evanti lived in the house throughout her early school years, when her interest in music and opera was first expressed. Upon completion of her successful European tour (1925) she returned to her Washington home. During the 1930's while Evanti concentrated on her career in America, the house continued to serve as the primary residence for herself, her husband and children. It was during those years between her European tour and early domestic career that Evanti established herself as one of America's premiere black divas through a number of concerts and stage performances.

Lillian Evans was born into a prominent black family in Washington, D.C., on August 12, 1890. Evanti's great, great uncle was Hiram Revels, the first Afro-American to serve in the United States Senate. Her grandfather, Henry Evans, and great uncle, Wilson Evans, took part in the infamous Oberlein-Wellington rescue of fugitive slave John Price. Evanti's father was Dr. Wilson Bruce Evans, a leading national advocate of the technical-vocational education system of Booker T. Washington. In 1902, Dr. Evans was selected as the first principal of Armstrong High School, the District of Columbia's first high school devoted to the vocational training of black students. Two years later, in 1904, Wilson B. Evans purchased the house at 1910 Vermont Avenue, N.W.

The family's prominence placed Lillian in the center of a world guided by politics, education and culture. The Vermont Avenue house was a common meeting place for the artists, politicians, and scholars who comprised Washington's black intelligentsia. In this environment, Lillian Evans's natural talents were nurtured and encouraged to flourish. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Howard University in 1913 and in 1918 married her music teacher, Roy W. Tibbs. In the early 1920's, she left her teaching position in the District of Columbia to pursue a career in opera.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Estill, Ann H.M., The Contributions of Selected Afro-American Women Classical Singers: 1850-1955, Thesis, New York University 1982

Goldberg, Issac, George Gershwin, A Study in American Music, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., New York 1958

Greene, Robert Ewell, The Leary-Evans, Ohio's Free People of Color, Keitt Printing Company, Washington, D.C. 1979

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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: N/A

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	8
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3	2	4	3	2	0
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4	3	0	9	1	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Square 333, Lot 21, Eliza Clement Subdivision at 1910 Vermont Avenue, N.W., in the city of Washington, D.C.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title _____
organization Ronald Lewis & Associates date April 27, 1987
street & number 1200 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. telephone (202) 371-2133
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20005

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The dining room, like the library and living room, is accented with plaster panels, base molding, and a central medallion with a chandelier. An unusual plaster detailing of two mythological Griffins flanks a large fruit urn.

The remainder of the first floor is devoted to the kitchen and a bathroom added in 1963. On the side rear wall are multi-paned windows, reportedly representing the eighty-eight keys of the piano. The second floor is devoted entirely to bedrooms that were altered in the 1930s' remodeling.

The interior and exterior alterations all date from 1932. Under Madame Evanti's direction, the house was adorned with decorative elements similar to those found in the concert halls and stately homes of her travels. The remodeling distinguished the house as the home of a musician.

Today, the house is utilized as a gallery. The gallery exhibits the works of black artists and serves as a library and research center. Evanti's grandson, Thurlow Evans-Tibbs, serves as curator.

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Before the first World War, blacks in America were largely accepted as singers of only "natural" music--spirituals, minstrel tunes and the blues. However, the pioneering efforts of a small cadre of black classical performers eventually opened the world of opera to Marian Anderson, Leontyne Price and those who have followed them. Lillian Evans-Tibbs (Evanti) was an important member of that pioneering group.

Historically, the world of opera presented a conflict of artistic and social status for Afro-American performers. The rigorous discipline and technical skill required for the performance of opera was entirely inconsistent with the historical stereotype of the character of blacks. The study of opera was thought to be beyond their intellectual perspicacity and linguistic dexterity. Further, the status traditionally awarded to performers of opera required their welcome into the "high" society of wealth and culture. In sum, the artistic realm of opera was totally incongruent with the then social realm of black Americans. The artistic trials and triumphs of Madame Evanti and other pioneering black vocalists bridged the artistic and social differences for the first time.

The dearth of operatic opportunities (for whites, as well as blacks) in the United States prompted Lillian Tibbs to travel to Europe. While in Paris, she studied with Madame Reiter-Campi and enjoyed the sponsorship of Mme. Salmon Tan-Harbe. It was at this time that she took the stage name of Madame Evanti; Evanti being a contraction of her maiden and married surnames. In 1925, Evanti made her professional debut in Nice, France as the lead singer in Delibes' opera "Lakme". Evanti earned a contract for three seasons of performance with the Paris Opera Company and went on to perform in principal cities throughout France, Italy and Germany. As a result of her work with the Paris Opera, Evanti became the first Afro-American to perform with an organized European company.

Up until that time, black classical vocalists were limited to the concert stages and salons. Evanti's predecessors, such as Siseretta Jones and Black Patti, enjoyed success only as concert performers. Evanti's successful company performances established a positive precedent and allowed others, such as Catarina Jabaro, to follow soon afterward.

Upon her return to the United States, Evanti performed wherever possible throughout the country. Although she auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera in 1932, Evanti was not invited to join any American opera company. Instead, like other black performers of classical music at that time, she gave performances at local theatres and churches. Still, without benefit of association with a major company, Evanti's career flourished. In 1934, she was invited to the White House to perform for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Other White House concerts were given for Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. She was also invited to give USO performances for black troops during World War II.

Evanti was determined that other black performers benefit from her experience of working with an established company. She was also concerned with working opportunities for her fellow performers here in America. Although Gershwin's Porgy & Bess (1935) provided an unprecedented number of roles for black vocalists and met with wide commercial and critical acclaim, the folk opera did not garner the level of respect of classic opera. Most Porgy & Bess performers were pulled from the ranks of the New York theatre. Despite the growing number of aspiring black performers, opera's establishment remained averse to hiring them for traditional classical roles.

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In order to address this lack of opportunity, and nurture the growth of black talent, Evanti became a principal in the establishment of the Negro National Opera Company in 1942 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While Mary Caldwell Dawson was responsible for the formation and management of the company, Evanti was, at times, responsible for its artistic direction. While with the company, Evanti rewrote the libretto and sang the lead role of Videtta. Evanti's work with the Negro National Opera Company allowed other performers to share in her knowledge and experience of Europe's operatic culture.

During the 1940's and 50's, Evanti expanded her interest to politics and spearheaded efforts in Pan-Americanism. During the Roosevelt Administration, Madame Evanti was made a Goodwill Ambassador. As part of the Goodwill Ambassador program, Evanti travelled extensively throughout South America with Toscanini's Orchestra. During a visit officially endorsed by the State Department, she travelled to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. In addition to her official activities, Evanti lent her personal efforts to the Pan-American movement. As Chairman of the Council of Inter-American Relations, she led programs to promote knowledge of Afro-American culture in Latin America. Evanti was responsible for a campaign which led to the donation of libraries to Latin American governments. The book collections concerned the social and cultural lives of blacks and their contributions to American life.

Evanti's international activities extended beyond Pan-Americanism. Her composition "Salute to Ghana" was commissioned by the Voice of America for that nation's independence celebration. In addition, her efforts resulted in commendations from the governments of Liberia and Haiti. In Haiti, she was honored with the "Chevalier de L'Honier et Mercie," the country's highest award in the area of culture.

At home, she composed Thomas E. Dewey's campaign song, "There's a Better Day A' Coming." She was also called to testify before Congress on the need to establish a national cultural center, a movement which established the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. Throughout the 1950's Madame Evanti continued to encourage the efforts of aspiring black opera performers by giving voice lessons. Lillian Evans-Tibbs died in 1967 at the age of seventy-seven.

Madame Evanti, as a performer, made inroads into the world of opera that established black artists as company performers. She was among the first black opera singers to earn international recognition.

In America, her career established early standards for black operatic performers. Evanti used her voice and musical talents to further the cause of Pan-Americanism and promoted American democracy through her activities as Goodwill Ambassador. Her accomplishments are significant to America's musical history and to Black American culture. These later accomplishments, taking place after 1937, will prove to be significant as time passes and a historic context is more fully developed.

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May 23, 1941

Washington Post, "Lillian Evanti Back from Tour of South America"
December 29, 1940

The Washington Tribune, "Washington Woman Made Outstanding Success in Opera"
March 29, 1934

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