

America's First Biracial Lesbian Architect: Amaza Lee Meredith

by Sierra Earle



Amazee Lee Meredith courtesy of the New York State Historic Preservation Office

On the campus of Virginia State University, [the state of Virginia's first land grant college for African Americans](#), stands a modular stucco building with curved edges, glass block windows, and cyan trim. Its doors face away from campus and its bedroom windows were once obscured by mature cedar trees. This building, named "Azurest South," is one of the only examples of [International Style](#) and is unlike anything in the surrounding area. [In the 1993 induction of "Azurest South"](#) into the National Register of Historic Places, a second bedroom is listed as belonging to the architect's "companion," Dr. Edna Meade Colson.

This architect, Amaza Lee Meredith, was prohibited from receiving formal training or registering as an architect because of "[both her sex and race](#)." Obscured and without formal recognition, this is the narrative of our Queer ancestors, especially our BIPOC Queer ancestors; yet Amaza Lee Meredith's refusal to accept the prescribed hierarchy has left behind

physical artifacts of a well-lived life despite the systemic oppression that writes such a narrative.

“[Azurest South](#)” was not the only building that Amaza Lee Meredith designed; she designed homes for friends and family, a luxury resort in Long Island, and was a real estate developer for [a neighborhood of summer vacation homes for Black families in Sag Harbor, New York](#) (with the help of her sister Maude Terry). Some of these buildings still stand today.

Amaza Lee’s dream of becoming an architect was cultivated by her father, a white carpenter, who taught her how to mock up blueprints and build models. After her father’s suicide, her mother would continue to work to provide for Amaza Lee and her siblings to ensure they would receive an education, as she thought education was what would reverse the racist opinions held by the majority.

Though Amaza Lee initially went to university to for a teaching certificate, she would later move to New York City in 1926 to attend and teach at Columbia University. There she furthered her education in a variety of topics including studies on modern interior design and continued to nurture her architectural ambitions. She also became more familiar with The New Negro Movement and identified as a member of [The Talented Tenth](#).

Her partner (as she is now identified) was equally engaged; Dr. Edna Meade Colson was the Dean of Virginia State University and publicly fought for access to graduate education for Black Americans and for suffrage. Amaza Lee met Edna while she was pursuing her teaching certificate at Virginia State University. Amaza Lee Meredith would also later become a professor at Virginia State University and [founded the University’s Fine Arts Department](#). The two would move into “Azurest South” upon its completion in 1939.

As a part of the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#)’s “[Where Woman Made History](#)” campaign, “Azurest South” [got a fresh coat of paint](#) to preserve and resurface the history behind the home. Watch the panel discussing the project (Maria Chabot and the homes of other infamous lesbians were also included in this), “[Preserving the Places Where Women Made Art](#).”

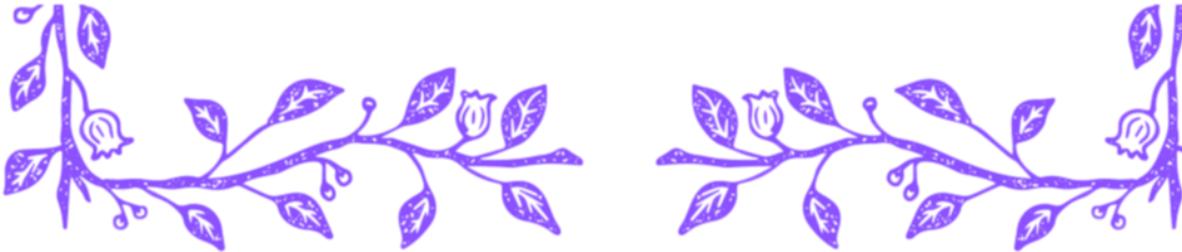
The story of Amaza Lee continues the conversation of what Lesbian art is, and how Lesbianism affects art. In the case of “Azurest South,” it is that Queerness of design that seems to reflect the Queerness of Amaza Lee’s lifestyle as a biracial woman.

There were far too many interesting facets of this woman’s life to list in this featurette, I hope you click some of the links and keep exploring for yourself!

Read about [more Black Queer Historic Places](#). Also, read “[Amaza Lee Meredith and the Art of Leisure](#)” by Jasmine Weber.



Azurest South, taken by Calder Loth



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Curated with community, history, and an understanding that every present moment is a nexus of many pasts. May these stories of Queer culture inspire, enthuse, and rouse you to Lesbian actions. We hope you've enjoyed this installment of Sinister Snapshot! Have a lovely weekend.

