

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

Name: Kiah Museum

Location: 505 West 36th Street, Savannah, Chatham County

Description: The Kiah Museum is a two-story side hall house originally constructed in 1913. The house does not follow a single academic style but features asymmetrical massing, overhanging eaves with a flat soffit hipped roof, centralized attic dormer, a bay window, and sidelights and a transom at the primary entrance. The house was significantly altered in 1959 when it was converted from a home into a combination home and museum and is missing its original porch and windows at the east end of the primary elevation.

Acreage & Boundary Explanation: Less than one acre following the legal boundary for the property

Period of Significance: 1959-1974

NR Criterion & Area of Significance: Criterion A, Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History; Criterion B, Art for association with Virginia Jackson Kiah (1911-2001)

Statement of Significance: The Kiah Museum is significant under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the first Black-owned and operated museum in Savannah. Located within the historically Black West Savannah neighborhood of Cuyler-Brownville, the building was the first museum dedicated to serving the Black community in Savannah. The museum gave Black youth the opportunity to visit a public and admission-free museum during a significant period of racial segregation and discrimination in the United States, while also welcoming visitors of any race or age. The building is also significant under Criterion B in the area of Art for its association with its founder, Virginia Jackson Kiah. A skilled, nationally recognized portrait painter, Kiah was inspired to open a “museum for the masses” based upon her own experience of being excluded from visiting museums as a child during the era of Jim Crow in Baltimore, Maryland.

Suggested Level of Significance: Local

Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by the Historic Savannah Foundation and nomination materials were prepared by Ward Architecture + Preservation

