

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: Rutherford and Martha Ellis House.

2. Location: 543 West Wesley Road, NW, Atlanta, Fulton County, Georgia.
USGS Quadrangle: Northwest Atlanta, GA.

3a. Description: Located in a residential area of Buckhead in northwest Atlanta, the Rutherford and Martha Ellis House is a one-story, frame, Georgian-plan cottage with a rear ell and an enclosed side porch. The house was constructed in 1939 based on designs by the prominent Atlanta firm of Hentz, Adler, & Shutze, and remains remarkably intact. Sitting on a hill far back from West Wesley Road, it is reached by a curving asphalt drive through a wooded landscape. The appearance from the front (south) façade is deceptively small and simple due to the understated Colonial Revival features, but much of the massing is to the rear. The main section of the front (excluding the porch) is symmetrical with five bays and a central door with five-light transom and decorative pilasters. It has wood clapboard siding, a brick foundation, and twelve-over-twelve double-hung windows with exterior wooden shutters. The central chimney is on the ridgeline of the steeply pitched side-gabled roof. The front-gabled porch extends forward from a side hyphen (a garage and kitchen) on the right (east) side. The porch's screening was replaced with glass in the late 1970s. The rear wing of the L-shaped house extends from behind the left (west) side, forming a cross-gabled section with another hyphen in the rear. The interior has a central hall with a stairway that leads to a bedroom under the roofline. The front rooms are a library and dining room on the east and a living room on the west. The rear ell has three bedrooms. The interior retains significant original features such as plaster walls, mahogany shelves and panels, paneled wainscoting and doors, beamed ceilings, and wooden mantels and trim. Mechanical systems are in the basement. The only outbuilding is a small rear studio constructed in 1983. The large rolling city lot has informal landscaping with mature ornamental trees and shrubs, obscuring the house from the roadway.

3b. Period of Significance: 1939.

3c. Acreage: 3.6 acres.

3d. Boundary Explanation: The boundary is the current legal boundary and the remaining acreage historically associated with the house.

4a. National Register Criteria: A and C.

4b. National Register Areas of Significance: Architecture and Social History.

4c. Statement of Significance: Rutherford and Martha (Hodgson) Ellis acquired the lot, which was then a larger tract of land several miles outside Atlanta city limits, in 1938. They referred to the surrounding pine forest as "Loblolly Hill." Rutherford Ellis was a successful businessman and philanthropist who worked in insurance, real estate, property management, and mortgage loans. Ellis engaged noted Atlanta architect Philip Trammel Shutze to design a house based on a Colonial cottage built in 1770 in Wiscasset, Maine. The unpretentious home design was a departure for Shutze who was famous for larger neoclassical estates. Ellis was active in the details of the house, such as providing Philippine mahogany for the library and erecting a greenhouse (no longer extant). The Ellis House is significant in the area of architecture as an excellent and intact example of the work of Hentz, Adler, & Shutze based on a renewed public enthusiasm for colonial precedents coinciding with the recent restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. It represents the work of a master melded with the desires of a client who wanted an adaptation of a house from an earlier period. Shutze was an expert at derivative detailing while also creating his own signature. The property is significant in the area of social history for the contributions of Rutherford Ellis to Atlanta's commercial and social life through his activities as president of Lipscomb-Ellis Company, founder of Southern General Insurance, chairman of the American Cancer Society, member of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, and trustee of Trebor Foundation and Egleston Hospital, among others.

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: The house is being nominated at the statewide level of significance as a highly-intact good example of a Colonial Revival house designed by the well-known architectural firm of Hentz, Adler, & Shutze.

4e. National Register Status: The property received final certification from the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources for the state property tax abatement program on July 19, 2007.

5. Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by the property owner. Nomination materials were prepared by a consultant.