

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
— PREHISTORIC	— ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	— COMMUNITY PLANNING	— LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	— RELIGION
— 1400-1499	— ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	— CONSERVATION	— LAW	— SCIENCE
— 1500-1599	— AGRICULTURE	— ECONOMICS	— LITERATURE	— SCULPTURE
— 1600-1699	— ARCHITECTURE	— EDUCATION	— MILITARY	— SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
— 1700-1799	— ART	— ENGINEERING	— MUSIC	— THEATER
X 1800-1899	— COMMERCE	— EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	— PHILOSOPHY	— TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	— COMMUNICATIONS	— INDUSTRY	— POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	— OTHER (SPECIFY)
		— INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1880

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Robert Tecumseh Burt was born in Attola County, Mississippi, in a one-room, dirt floor cabin, on November 25, 1873. His ex-slave parents Robert and Sylvia Saunders Burt owned a small farm near Kosciusko. Burt attended school in Kosciusko and completed the normal course at Jackson College. He taught school in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas before returning to take courses at Central Mississippi College. He received his A. B. degree from Walden University in Nashville. In 1897 Burt completed the four-year course with honors at Meharry Medical College in the first such class to graduate from that institution. He opened his first office in McMinnville, Tennessee, and to augment his earnings and pay his education debts, he also taught at and held the principalship of the Bernard School in that city. About 1902 Dr. Burt relocated to Clarksville and set up practice.

In 1904 he purchased the Current House on Front Street and converted it into an infirmary for Negro patients in the Clarksville area. During the early years of this century, Rebecca Carter, a registered nurse from Brooklyn, New York, operated a mission school in the building, but when her financial resources vanished, she was forced to close it. On March 6, 1906 the Home Infirmary, the first, and until 1916, the only hospital in Clarksville began accepting patients. Before 1906 the nearest hospital for either white or black patients was in Nashville, approximately fifty miles away. Dr. Burt operated his hospital for forty-eight years, until the Clarksville Memorial Hospital, which had facilities for patients of all races, opened its doors in August 1954.

Dr. Burt had a reputation as an outstanding surgeon. He did post-graduate at Harvard and the E. A. Printy School of Surgical Technique and observed new surgical procedures at the leading hospitals in Boston and New York and at the Mayo Clinic. He worked at his infirmary with a staff of five doctors and eight nurses, and the equipment in the building, while primitive by modern standards, was comparable to that found in all but the largest Southern hospitals. During his career he served the Negro community in north central Tennessee and the adjacent Kentucky border region. He contracted with the Black Diamond Mining Company to care for its Negro employees and treated the obstetric patients at Fort Campbell before a hospital was constructed at the installation. The Home Infirmary charges were always inexpensive: during most of its history the patient paid between \$15 and \$125 per week for surgery and hospitalization. In 1947 Dr. Burt fractured both of his hips and was confined to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. He died on August 16, 1955, at the age of eighty-one.

The infirmary remains in the hands of Dr. Burt's family and although it is no longer regularly occupied, they continue to maintain the building and reside there one month each year. The family intends to retain the building until a nonprofit organization expresses an interest in restoring the hospital for use as a museum of Negro history or for some other appropriate use.