

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

WELTY, EUDORA, HOUSE

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Welty, Eudora, House

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 1119 Pinehurst Street

Not for publication: __

City/Town: Jackson

Vicinity: __

State: Mississippi

County: Hinds

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: __

Public-Local: __

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: __

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: __

Site: __

Structure: __

Object: __

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

1

__

__

3

Noncontributing

__ buildings

__ sites

__ structures

__ objects

__ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 3

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single dwelling

Current: Work in progress Sub:



7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Tudor Revival

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: brick, stucco

Roof: asphalt

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.¹

The Eudora Welty House is a two-story Tudor Revival-style residence located at 1119 Pinehurst Street in Jackson, Mississippi. It occupies a tree-shaded lot directly adjacent to the campus of Belhaven College, in the neighborhood that bears the same name on the north side of the city. Erected in 1924-25, the house is built of wood-frame construction with brick veneer on the lower story and stucco and false half-timbering above. It was designed by Wyatt C. Hedrick of the firm of Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick in Fort Worth, Texas.

The house faces north and is set back from the street about 80 feet. The topography of the lot rises at a gentle slope to the house and then drops off in the rear. The lot is 140 feet wide and extends further east of the house than west. A gravel driveway along the west side leads southward from the street to a small, gable-roofed garage that stands just beyond the southwest corner of the house. The garage is contemporaneous to the house and is finished with matching stucco and false half-timbering. On the east side of the house is a side yard with lush border plantings. Due to an offset in the property lines, the back yard is only half the width of the front yard (70 feet wide for most of the yard but then narrowing 50 feet at the rear). The back yard consists of a small lawn surrounded by an extensive garden planted by Eudora's mother, Chestina Welty, an avid horticulturist. The garden has been carefully documented and is currently being restored to its appearance during the period 1925 through 1945.

The façade of the house is roughly symmetrical except for an off-center front-facing gable on the eastern half. The roofline of the gable extends down to the first story, where it forms the roof of the side porch and is supported by brick piers linked by shallow segmental brick arches. The first story of the house is clad in variegated dark brown brick laid in running bond with a rosy brown mortar. The front entrance is a centrally placed Tudor-arched doorway, set into a slightly projecting gable-roofed vestibule. Set into the main wall on both sides of the projecting vestibule at the first and second-story levels are triple sets of six-over-six, double-hung, wooden-sash windows. The upper-story windows are directly above and aligned precisely with the windows on the lower story. Above the peak of the vestibule roof is a small rectangular window. The eaves of the roof are open and have exposed rafter-tails. The three main gable ends—on the façade, the corresponding gable on the rear elevation, and the side gable on the west elevation—are clipped. Chimneys occupy both sides of the house. The chimney on the west end projects from the wall plane and rises alongside the clipped gable end. The chimney on the eastern side is contained within the side porch and the low, overhanging porch roof. It emerges from the roof at a point toward the center of the roof plane.

The crossed gables create a complex roofline and enhance the massing of the façade. Despite its intricate exterior appearance, the house is built on a simple, essentially square plan with two projections: a side porch on the east and a kitchen on the south. The central entrance on the façade opens to a small foyer, or vestibule, with an adjacent coat closet. Beyond the foyer is a central stair hall and a short cross-hall that affords access to a breakfast room, the first-floor bathroom, and a small bedroom (11'11" by 11'9") at the southwest corner of the house.

Opening off the stair hall to the west is the front parlor (16' by 17'), which in Eudora Welty's later years served as a study. Set into the north wall is a triple set of windows that provide a view of the front yard. The west wall features a fireplace with Craftsman-style brick facing and a wooden mantel shelf flanked by two six-over-six windows overlooking the driveway. On the south wall is a closet and a door leading into the first-floor bathroom.

¹ The information in this section is drawn largely from an unpublished Historic Structure Report for the Eudora Welty House prepared by architect Robert Parker Adams in 2002 (on file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History).

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On the eastern side of the stair hall is a set of French doors that lead to the living room (21'9" by 14'10"), which features a Craftsman-style fireplace with patterned brick facing and a wooden mantel shelf. Flanking the fireplace are two sets of French doors that provide access to the side porch. Set into the north wall is a triple set of windows overlooking the front yard. At the south end of the room is a broad opening (formerly hung with French doors) that leads to the dining room. The dining room is square (14' 9" by 14'10") and features a triple set of double-hung windows that overlook the side yard. A door on the west side of the dining room opens to the breakfast room, which has an elaborate Arts and Crafts-style built-in china cabinet. This room was originally square but took on an L-shaped form when a closet was added to the southwest corner room of the house to convert it into a guest bedroom. Beyond the breakfast room to the south is the kitchen, which occupies a portion of the wing in the rear of the house. It has changed little since 1925 and retains an original sink and built-in cabinet. Adjacent to the kitchen in the eastern corner of the rear wing is a small utility room with a stair that descends to a partial basement.

Located on the upper story of the house are two bedrooms, one on either side of the stair hall with a bathroom in between. A sleeping porch that was variously used as a bedroom and for other purposes is located off the west bedroom.

On the west side of the stair hall is the smaller of the two upstairs bedrooms, which is almost square (17'6" by 15'4") and has a triple set of windows on the north and two single windows on the west. A door in the northeast corner provides access to a small closet. A door at the east end of the south wall leads to a sleeping porch, which has a pair of windows on the west wall and triple set of windows overlooking the garden.

To the east of the stair hall is the larger of the two bedrooms (22' by 15'7"). This was Welty's room for most of her lifetime and served as her writing room as well as her bedroom. Her writing desk stands at the north end of the room, in front of the triple windows that look out upon the front yard. Her bed is at the south end, where another set of triple windows overlooks the garden. At the center of the east wall is a fireplace faced with blonde bricks. To the north of the fireplace is a door leading to a large closet, and to the south is a door that leads to an attic storage room. The closet and the attic room are tucked under the slope of the roof over the side porch.

The upstairs bathroom is located between the two bedrooms at the north end of the stair hall. It retains all of its original surfaces and fixtures, including white rectangular tile wainscoting and a hexagonal tile floor.

Overall, the house retains an exceptionally high degree of integrity for its entire historic period. Few changes have been made since its construction. Those alterations that have been made were carried out by Welty and therefore reflect her residency.

In 1986 Welty deeded the house, subject to a life estate, to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to ensure its preservation. Plans are currently underway to make necessary physical repairs so that the house can serve as a house museum to interpret Welty's life, work, and literary significance.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A B X C D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G X

NHL Criteria: 2

NHL Criteria Exceptions: 8

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values
3. Literature

Areas of Significance: Literature

Period(s) of Significance: 1925-2001

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): Welty, Eudora

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Hedrick, Wyatt C.

Historic Contexts: XIX. Literature
B. Fiction

1. Novel
2. Short Story

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.¹

The Eudora Welty House is nationally significant under Criterion 2 in the area of literature as the home of Eudora Welty, one of the most influential American writers of the twentieth century. Welty lived in the house from 1925 until her death in 2001. It was here that she wrote all of her major works, including the short stories that initially brought her critical acclaim and such award-winning novels as *Delta Wedding*, *The Optimist's Daughter*, and *Losing Battles*. The property includes the 1925 Tudor Revival-style house, a garage, and the surrounding grounds and garden. The garden was created by Eudora's mother, Chestina Welty, an avid amateur horticulturist who passed her love of flowers and ornamental plants onto her daughter. The property is of extraordinary national importance for its association with Welty's literary career and meets Criterion Exception 8.

EUDORA WELTY: LIFE AND LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

In a career that began in the mid-1930s and lasted for five decades, Eudora Welty left an indelible mark on American literature. She received the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, the French Legion of Honor, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the William Dean Howells Gold Medal for Fiction, the National Medal of Freedom, the National Medal of Arts, and membership in the National Institute and American Academy of Arts and Letters. Two of Welty's books, *The Ponder Heart* and *The Robber Bridegroom*, were made into Broadway plays. In 1998 Welty became the first living author to have a commemoration of works published by the prestigious Library of America Series, which includes editions of major works by such literary giants as Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Henry James, and William Faulkner.² Today Welty is recognized by scholars as a major figure in twentieth-century American literature.

Eudora Welty was born on April 13, 1909, the daughter of Christian Webb Welty and his wife Chestina Andrews Welty. Christian Welty was a career officer of the Lamar Life Insurance Company and eventually served as president of the company from January 1931 until his death in September 1931. At the time of Eudora's birth, the Weltys were residing at a house at 741 North Congress Street in Jackson. In 1925, when Eudora was a teenager, the family moved into the house at 1119 Pinehurst Street, where she would make her home for the rest of her life.

As a child, Eudora was influenced by her parents' love for books and learning. She graduated from Jackson's Central High School in 1925 and spent two years at Mississippi State College for Women, in Columbus, Mississippi, where she was an active contributor to the literary magazine. She then continued her undergraduate studies at the University of Wisconsin and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1929. Her father, concerned that she would never be able to earn a living as a writer, encouraged her to pursue a career in advertising. In 1930 Welty began graduate studies at the Columbia University School of Business in New York City but quickly lost interest, finding advertising to be "too much like sticking pins into people to make them buy things

¹ This section is based on the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Eudora Welty House prepared by Richard J. Cawthon of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi. The Welty House was listed in the National Register on November 21, 2002. Suzanne Marrs, a Welty scholar and professor of English at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, provided information for the National Register nomination. Daniel J. Vivian, a historian with the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., prepared this section by incorporating information from additional research and making editorial revisions to the statement of significance from the National Register nomination. The final draft of the NHL nomination benefited significantly from comments provided by Marrs, Cawthon, Lucy Allen, and Mary Alice White, the director of the Eudora Welty House for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

² Eudora Welty, *Stories, Essays, and Memoir* (New York: The Library of America, 1998).

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they didn't need." She also found the work creatively limiting. "Advertising is so filled with taboos—you are scared to say this thing and that thing; scared to use this page and that kind of type, and so on. What's the use of learning fears?" said Welty.³ Although she quickly lost interest in a business career, the time she spent in New York was personally enriching. She enjoyed an active social life, visited the city's great museums, and went dancing and to the theatre often. Harlem nightclubs were a regular destination for Welty and her friends. She would later recall, "For somebody who had never, in a sustained manner, been to the theatre or to the Metropolitan Museum, where I went every Sunday, it was just a cornucopia."⁴

In 1931, with America in the midst of the Great Depression, Welty returned to Jackson.⁵ She initially put her training in advertising to use by working for a local radio station, WJDX, and writing society stories for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. In 1936 she became a Junior Publicity Agent for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a job that stimulated her interest in writing fiction. Her varied duties with the WPA included writing newspaper articles and conducting interviews. Captivated by what she saw in small towns and rural communities across her native state, Welty soon began traveling with a camera and taking photographs of the people she met and the places they lived and worked. "Traveling over the whole of Mississippi . . . I saw my home state at close hand, really for the first time," she later recalled.⁶ "And it was a real eye-opener for me because I'd never been in those places before, and it just hit me with a great impact, to see everything firsthand like that."⁷

Inspired by her firsthand exposure to everyday life in the Depression-era South, Welty turned her energies to writing fiction. In 1936 she published her first short story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," in the literary magazine *Manuscript*. John Rood, the magazine's editor, recognized Welty's tremendous talent and her potential as a writer. "Death of a Traveling Salesman," Rood wrote, "is one of the best stories that has come to our attention—and one of the best stories we have ever read."⁸ The tale is of a salesman who wrecks his car near a young married couple's shotgun shack and is overcome by a longing for the relationships he has never experienced. The story revealed Welty's deft skill at capturing raw emotion and the essence of human experience.

The next five years marked the formative period in Welty's development as a writer. Six of her stories were accepted by the *Southern Review* between 1937 and 1939, and her first book, a collection of stories entitled *A Curtain of Green*, was published in 1941. It received critical acclaim. The stories in the book demonstrated Welty's talent for earnest expressions of emotion, subtle recreations of regional speech and thought patterns, tragic portraits of blighted lives, and droll descriptions of eccentric behavior. In choosing subjects, Welty let her imagination run with the scenes she witnessed in her work with the WPA. "Clytie" and "Why I Live at the P.O." depict solitary, eccentric young women in small-town settings. "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "A Piece of News," and "Petrified Man" all explore the dangers and fascination of illicit sexuality. Evident throughout the book are Welty's keen powers of observation and ability to capture the authentic sounds of dialogue and dialect, her precise turn of phrase, and her freedom from sentimentality. *A Curtain of Green* established Welty's engaging style and the distinguishing marks of her fiction: a penchant for humor, often dark

³ Robert Van Gelder, "An Interview with Eudora Welty," in *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, ed. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), p. 5.

⁴ Jan Norby Gretlund, "An Interview with Eudora Welty," in *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, p. 218.

⁵ Welty's decision to leave New York was influenced more by financial circumstances than a longing for home. "There was no more advertising being done; there were no more jobs," she said of New York in the early days of the Depression. Jean Todd Freeman, "An Interview with Eudora Welty," in *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, p. 178.

⁶ Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 84.

⁷ Bill Ferris, "A Visit with Eudora Welty," in *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, p. 15.

⁸ John Rood to Eudora Welty, March 19, 1936, Eudora Welty Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Miss.

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in implication; the theme of love and separateness; the impulse to celebrate life; the exploration of human mystery; and the importance of place, especially life in the small-town South.⁹

With the success enjoyed by *A Curtain of Green*, Welty began a decade-long period of extraordinary productivity that established her as a major figure in American literature. In 1942 she published *The Robber Bridegroom*, a daring and innovative novella about a wealthy planter's daughter who is courted by a bandit.¹⁰ The story combines Welty's childhood memories of a Grimm's fairy tale and her reading of Robert Coates's *The Outlaw Years* with her own vision of nineteenth-century Natchez Trace. It explores tall tales of the old Southwest, the nature of love and betrayal, the passing of the frontier, and the destruction of Native American political autonomy, while at the same time challenging the fairy tale's reassuring "and they all lived happily ever after" formula. Author and critic Marianne Hauser called it "an American fairy tale" and hailed it as evidence of Welty's emerging talent.¹¹ In 1943 Welty published *The Wide Net, and Other Stories*, a second collection of short stories that saw her return to the terrain she had first explored in *A Curtain of Green* by probing the intricacies of the human heart amid simple settings. Characterized by mystical passages that capture episodes of human brutality and moments of union with nature, the stories in the volume revealed Welty's concern for the unknown and the unknowable.¹² The book originally puzzled some critics but has since come to be highly regarded by scholars.

In 1943, Eudora Welty began working on a short story called "The Delta Cousins." Her agent, however, saw it as a chapter in a novel, and Welty soon realized he was correct. The novel that ensued was *Delta Wedding*, a work that again broke from established fictional patterns. Refusing to follow the conventional love story format, she avoided describing a simple courtship or wedding but instead crafted a novel that depicts family members and servants in orbit around the bride and groom. The stars in *Delta Wedding's* constellation of characters include a mother concerned for her daughter's happiness, an orphaned cousin longing to feel part of the family, an uncle and aunt whose marital difficulties seem portentous, and black servants and field hands whom the plantation family sees only in relation to itself.¹³ Despite the multiple story lines, the novel is as tightly structured as a poem. "The interplay of family life, with a dozen different people saying and doing a dozen different things all at the same time, is wonderfully handled by Miss Welty so that no detail is lost, every detail had its place in the pattern of the whole," wrote Charles Poore in his review of the novel.¹⁴

In the midst of writing *Delta Wedding*, Welty worked briefly on the staff of the *New York Times Book Review* at the invitation of editor Robert Van Gelder. She was praised by colleagues for her incisive reviews of World War II battlefield reports from North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific. On one occasion she used the pseudonym Michael Ravenna, which was also used twice by her friend Nash Burger for wartime reviews.

Following her brief stint in New York, Welty returned to story writing while working at home and in San Francisco, where she would spend several months in 1946 and 1947. She wrote about a marriage on the rocks, a piano recital in a small town on the edge of the Delta, and a San Francisco encounter between an ineffectual man and a Spanish guitarist. She continued to explore the complex emotional lives of ordinary people. And then she had a revelation—although names would have to be changed and made consistent, she had been writing about a common set of characters in each of these stories, depicting them over the course of many years, sometimes making one character a protagonist, sometimes letting that character recede into a story's

⁹ Eudora Welty, *A Curtain of Green* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1941).

¹⁰ Eudora Welty, *The Robber Bridegroom* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1942).

¹¹ Marianne Hauser, "Miss Welty's Fairy Tale," *New York Times Review of Books*, 1 November 1942.

¹² Eudora Welty, *The Wide Net, and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943).

¹³ Eudora Welty, *Delta Wedding* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946).

¹⁴ Charles Poore, "A Fine Novel of the Deep South," *New York Times Review of Books*, 14 April 1946.

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background. Was this another novel in the making? Welty decided not. She cherished the sort of development possible in a set of closely related stories but resisted the novel's need for a unifying plot. She wanted the openness, the lack of resolution that typifies human experience. The result was *The Golden Apples*, an experimental work that is regarded by many as Eudora Welty's most profound achievement.¹⁵ The book is a closely related group of stories that function almost, but not quite, as a novel and depict several families in the small town of Morgana, Mississippi, between the turn of the century and the 1940s. Extraordinary for its wisdom and technical virtuosity, mingling of tragedy and comedy, and pervasive sense of time and mutability, *The Golden Apples* drew praise from critics and is today recognized by literary scholars as one of Welty's most important works.

Following the publication of *The Golden Apples* in 1949, Welty left for a year in Europe financed by a Guggenheim Fellowship. Inspired by her travels abroad, she began to pursue new directions in her writing. She wrote several short stories: "Circe," a tale about Odysseus told by the sorceress Circe; "The Bride of the Innisfallen," which finds a woman slipping away unannounced from her husband in London to travel anonymously; and "Going to Naples," the story of a young woman of Italian descent who "makes her animal spirits heard and felt from stem to stern of the little ship Pomona."¹⁶ In 1955, these and others were published in *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories*.¹⁷ In addition to stories that feature European settings, the collection also includes several set in the world most familiar to readers of Welty's fiction: the American South. "No Place for You, My Love" is the tale of two strangers on a Sunday drive in the bayou country of Louisiana. "The Burning" is a chilling story about the Civil War. In "Kin," two young women discover that their family past has been more mysterious than they had dreamed.¹⁸ During the same period, Welty also wrote *The Ponder Heart*, a comic tour de force that chronicles the life of Daniel Ponder, a generous, foolish, eccentric southern gentleman. The story is told by his spinster niece Edna Earle Ponder, a small-town hotel manager. In a narrative that mixes sympathy and outrage, Edna describes her uncle's marriage to a lower-class girl. After literally tickling his wife to death, Uncle Daniel is charged with murder but turns the trial into a farce by throwing his money away in the courtroom. The novel won the William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy for the most distinguished work of American fiction published between 1950 and 1955.¹⁹

In the mid-1950s, just as she seemed to be reaching the peak of her career, family obligations compelled Welty to set her writing aside. Both of her brothers suffered from a crippling form of arthritis that would eventually claim their lives; a stroke left her mother bedridden. Welty would ultimately spend ten years caring for her family. The assistance required by her ailing brothers and mother left Welty with little time to write. She capitalized on her growing fame by using fees earned from speaking engagements to help support herself and provide for the needs of her family. During the long period of family crisis, Welty managed to complete and publish two short stories that dealt sensitively and insightfully with the Civil Rights Movement, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators." She also worked on a novel, writing individual scenes and character descriptions for later compilation.

In 1959 Welty's brother Walter died, and in 1966 her mother and her brother Edward died within days of each other. Suddenly freed from the obligations that had occupied her for more than a decade, Welty returned to her writing with renewed vigor. Although she might have been expected to begin by pulling together the fragments she had drafted while caring for her brothers and mother, she instead wrote a new and powerful story about a

¹⁵ Eudora Welty, *The Golden Apples* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

¹⁶ Frances Gaither, "Of the South and Beyond," *New York Times Review of Books*, 10 April 1955.

¹⁷ Eudora Welty, *The Bride of the Innisfallen, and other stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

¹⁸ Eudora Welty, *The Bride of the Innisfallen, and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

¹⁹ Eudora Welty, *The Ponder Heart* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954).

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young woman facing the imminent death of her father and coming to terms with the loss of her mother many years earlier. Although the plot diverges from the facts of Eudora Welty's life, *The Optimist's Daughter* is a deeply personal work of fiction that deals with the continuity of love in the face of loss. It was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1969; Welty revised and expanded the story for publication as a book in 1972. It received unbridled praise from critics. Reynolds Price declared *The Optimist's Daughter* to be her "strongest, richest work" and wrote that reading it led him to think "of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekov . . . and not as masters or originals but as [Welty's] peers for breadth and depth."²⁰ The noted poet and critic Howard Moss offered a similar assessment in calling it the "best book Eudora Welty has ever written." Recognizing that it might one day be regarded as the crowning achievement of Welty's long career, Moss praised it as "a miracle of compression, the kind of book, small in scope but profound in its implications, that rewards a lifetime of work." The story, Moss noted, "Has all those qualities peculiar to the finest short novels: a theme that vibrates with overtones, suspense and classical inevitability."²¹ The critical acclaim for *The Optimist's Daughter* was confirmed when it won the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1973.

The other novel Welty published during the era, *Losing Battles*, also won favor from critics and the public and received a prestigious award. The hilarious account of a 1930s family reunion in north Mississippi that celebrates the strength of close-knit family ties while acknowledging the difficulties inherent in committed relationships, *Losing Battles* was published in 1970, shortly after *The Optimist's Daughter* appeared in the *New Yorker* but before its release as a book.²² Welty incorporated many of the short scenes she had drafted while caring for her ailing mother and brothers into the book. Reynolds Price called *Losing Battles* "a frightening gift—because it hands us after so long a wait, an offering of such plentitude and serene mastery as to reveal with panicking suddenness how thin a diet we survive on. . . . Reading it, one is reminded that liberated prisoners of war in 1945 often succumbed to shock on receiving full rations."²³ Writing in the *New York Times Review of Books*, James Boatwright declared it "a major work of the imagination" and said that "Eudora Welty possesses the surest comic sense of any American writer alive." He praised her ability to present characters "without fake compassion or amused condescension." *Losing Battles*, wrote Boatwright, is "a comedy that releases, illuminates, renews our own seeing . . . [and] moves in full knowledge of loss, bondage, panic and death."²⁴ The book earned Welty the National Book Award for fiction in 1971.

Although *Losing Battles* and *The Optimist's Daughter* were Welty's last major works of fiction, her long and distinguished career did not end without another major achievement. In 1983 she delivered the first annual William E. Massey, Sr., Lectures in the History of American Civilization at Harvard University, in which she recalled childhood experiences that set her on the road to becoming a writer and explored the origins of her creativity. The following year the lectures were published as *One Writer's Beginnings* by Harvard University Press. In this slim volume, Welty managed to convey the spirit of an era and provide a deeply introspective account of her development as a writer. She told of the hours she spent as a child watching and listening to the people around her, absorbing their stories and the way they told them. "I am a writer who came from a sheltered life," she wrote. "A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within."²⁵ *One Writer's Beginnings* was hugely popular and became the first best seller in the history of Harvard University Press.

The success of *One Writer's Beginnings* symbolized Welty's changing role as a literary figure. No longer an

²⁰ Reynolds Price, *A Common Room: Essays, 1954-1987* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), p. 54.

²¹ Howard Moss, "Eudora Welty's New Novel About Death and Class," *New York Times Review of Books*, 21 May 1972.

²² Eudora Welty, *Losing Battles* (New York: Random House, 1970).

²³ Reynolds Price, *Things Themselves: Essays and Scenes* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 139.

²⁴ James Boatwright, "I call this a reunion to remember, all!," *New York Times Review of Books*, 12 April 1970.

²⁵ Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*, p. 104.

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active writer, she was increasingly regarded as the grand dame of southern authors amid a groundswell of interest in the southern literary renaissance. Her importance as one of the most prolific southern writers of her generation was well established; now, many observers looked to her as one of the only living authors with a direct connection to the early stages of the southern renaissance. Her profound contributions to the literary output of the region and personal remembrances of authors who were no longer living made her insights especially valuable. Welty was among only a handful of living figures who was able to speak directly and authoritatively to the question that intrigued scholars and the public alike: How did the South, the poorest, least educated, most racially troubled region in the nation, produce so many first-rate writers? Welty consequently received a steady stream of requests for conference appearances, speaking engagements, and interviews, yet she remained as protective of her privacy as ever and limited her commitments.²⁶

Although Welty was known mainly for her literary works, she was also an accomplished photographer. She first discovered her talent with the camera while working for the WPA in the early 1930s. Confident in the quality of her work, she took her photographs to New York and tried to interest a publisher, but she could only arrange for a solo exhibition at Lugene's, a small gallery on Madison Avenue. Nearly four decades later, in 1971, Welty published a book of her Depression-era photographs, *One Time, One Place*.²⁷ Only a few images in the book are of inanimate subjects such as country churches, dilapidated houses, and the rural countryside; the majority are of people, black and white, engaged in the activities of everyday life. She recorded, for example, a beggar playing his fiddle at a county fair, men slaughtering a hog in the fall, two elderly black women standing on a street corner, a young African American girl working in a field, and tomato packers taking a break from their work. The faces captured in her images revealed, in the words of novelist Madison Jones, "sadness . . . and more often, joy and serenity and appetite for life."²⁸ After Welty ceased to be an active writer and neared the end of her life, two other books of her photographs were published: *Photographs* (1989) and *Country Churchyards* (2000).²⁹ Her photography earned widespread acclaim. In 1990 Museum of Modern Art Director John Szarkowski said Welty's photographs "show us only the rarest and most evanescent truths."³⁰

Welty is today considered one of the most important authors of the twentieth century. In the early decades of her career she was often identified as a "southern writer," and some critics used the label to dismiss her as a regionalist. Indeed, the majority of her stories are set in the South and reflect its language and culture; the sense of place evident in her work has close parallels in the writings of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Katherine Anne Porter. Yet Welty's treatment of universal themes, use of humanity as the common denominator, and concern for the complexities present in common lives clearly transcend regional boundaries. Her body of work represents an original and innovative contribution to the American literary canon that has been described by Michael Kreyling as "not primarily regional writing, or even excellent regional writing, but . . . the vision of a certain artist who must be considered with her peers—[Virginia] Woolf, [Elizabeth] Bowen, and [E.M.] Forester. . . ."³¹ *New York Times* writer Albin Krebs also emphasized the transcendental quality of Welty's fiction. "She is a Southerner as Chekov was a Russian, because place provides them with a reality . . .

²⁶ The publication of *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* in 1980 focused attention on Welty's place in American literature. In an essay that offered a retrospective assessment of her career, literary scholar and writer Reynolds Price wrote that a "slow perusal . . . [of *Collected Stories*] will not fail to confirm a granite core in every tale: as complete and unassailable an image of human relations as any in our art, tragic of necessity but also comic. . . . As real a gift in our legacy as any broad river or all our lost battles." See Reynolds Price, "Answerable Calls," in *A Common Room: Essays 1954-1987* (New York: Atheneum, 1987), p. 78.

²⁷ Eudora Welty, *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression, A Snapshot Album* (New York: Random House, 1978).

²⁸ Madison Jones, "One Time, One Place," *New York Times Review of Books*, 21 November 1971.

²⁹ Eudora Welty, *Photographs* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984) and *Country Churchyards* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

³⁰ 1992 Eudora Welty Photograph Portfolio (N.p.: Diogenes Editions and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1992).

³¹ Michael Kreyling, *Eudora Welty's Achievement of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. xx.

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as difficult, mysterious, and impermanent as life.”³² In recent years, scholars have praised Welty’s fiction for its unique contribution to modernist literature. “Unlike most modernist writing,” argues Ted Ownby, a historian at the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture, “which tries so hard to get inside the head of one person, Welty emphasized that we’re part of a group. She brought that to life. She showed that we only exist as we relate to other people.”³³

The success of *One Writer’s Beginnings* seems to have heightened Welty’s awareness of her enduring significance. She donated her literary papers, personal correspondence, and approximately 1,100 photographic prints and negatives to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, making them accessible to scholars and the public. In 1986 she deeded her house, subject to a life estate, to the Department of Archives and History to ensure its preservation. The agency is currently working to turn the house into a museum that will interpret Welty’s life, work, and literary significance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUSE AT 1119 PINEHURST STREET

The Eudora Welty House at 1119 Pinehurst Street in Jackson, Mississippi, is significant as the home of internationally known author Eudora Welty. During Eudora’s childhood, her family resided in a two-story wood-frame house at 741 North Congress Street. This house was listed in the National Register in 1980 but was removed in 1986 after inappropriate alterations destroyed its integrity. In 1925, Christian W. Welty, his wife Chestina, and their three children moved to a new Tudor Revival-style house at 1119 Pinehurst Street in the prestigious Belhaven neighborhood. Eudora Welty lived in the house until her death on July 23, 2001, at the age of 92. It was here that all of her major literary works were written.

The Welty House was designed by Wyatt C. Hedrick, a partner in the architectural firm of Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick in Fort Worth, Texas. The firm also designed the Lamar Life Building, which was then under construction in downtown Jackson. After working with Hedrick to develop guidelines for the design of the Lamar Life Building, Christian Welty, a senior officer with the company, hired the firm to design a new residence for his family. Jackson architect Noah Webster Overstreet, one of Mississippi’s most prominent and prolific architects during the first half of the twentieth century, apparently oversaw construction of the house. Overstreet was associate architect for the Lamar Life Building and evidently served as the local supervisor of construction for the firm; although his involvement with the Welty House is not clearly documented, evidence suggests he played a similar role in its construction.

The grounds surrounding the house are an important part of the property. The most notable feature is the garden that occupies much of the back and side yards. Welty’s mother, Chestina, was a respected amateur horticulturist and a founding member of the Jackson Garden Club. She drew careful plans for her garden and spent endless hours working in it, often accompanied by her daughter. Eudora Welty eventually assumed the responsibility of caring for the garden and showed nearly as much passion for the task as her mother. Because of Chestina Welty’s careful planning and record-keeping, the garden is well-documented. Efforts are currently underway to restore the garden to its ca. 1925-1940 appearance, when it was in its prime.

INTEGRITY AND JUSTIFICATION OF PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITERIA EXCEPTION 8

The Welty House retains an exceptionally high degree of integrity for its entire historic period. Few changes have been made since its construction, none of which detract from the historic character and appearance of the property. The handful of minor alterations made to the house were carried out by Welty and therefore reflect

³² Albin Krebs quoted in “Eudora Welty,” *Newsmakers 3* (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group, 2002).

³³ Ted Ownby quoted in “Eudora Welty,” *Newsmakers 3* (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group, 2002).

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her residency. Overall, the interior and exterior of the house retain their original appearance.

The period of significance reflects Eudora Welty's long period of residency in the house and her literary career. Welty's family moved into the house when she was sixteen. Except for a few brief sojourns, Welty spent the remainder of her life and wrote all of her major literary works in the house. The property meets Criteria Consideration 8 because she achieved significance as an author in the 1940s and continued to produce influential works of fiction through the early 1970s. Her short stories and early novels received international acclaim in the 1940s; after family obligations resulted in a long hiatus from writing in the 1950s and early 1960s, Welty produced several of her most important works. She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 and published a best-selling memoir in the 1980s. Consequently, Welty achieved significance long before her death on July 23, 2001, and the critical study her work has received from scholars provides sufficient historical perspective to evaluate her contributions to American literature under the NHL criteria. Her house possesses exceptional significance for its association with her life and literary career.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**Major Works by Eudora Welty (in chronological order)**

- A Curtain of Green*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1941.
The Robber Bridegroom. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1942.
The Wide Net, and Other Stories. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943.
Delta Wedding. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946.
The Golden Apples. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949.
The Ponder Heart. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953.
Selected Stories. New York: Modern Library, 1953.
The Bride of the Innisfallen, and Other Stories. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.
Losing Battles. New York: Random House, 1970.
One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression, A Snapshot Album. New York: Random House, 1971.
The Optimist's Daughter. New York: Random House, 1972.
The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews. New York: Random House, 1978.
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- Waldron, Ann. *Eudora: A Writer's Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

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Interviews

Jones, John Griffin, ed. *Mississippi Writers Talking*. Vol. 1. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982.

Prenshaw, Peggy W., ed. *Conversations with Eudora Welty*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984.

_____, ed. *More Conversations with Eudora Welty*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other (Specify Repository): Mississippi Department of Archives and History

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	15	766400	3579110

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property is described as follows: Lots Two (2), Three (3), and Eight (8), less 20 feet off the east side of the south half of said Lot Eight (8) and fifty feet off the south end of the remainder of Lot Eight (8), all being in Block 7, Magruder Second Subdivision of Block "P" of the north Park Addition to the City of Jackson according to Surveyor's Record Book "B" at page 69 thereof in the office of the Chancery Clerk at Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi.

Boundary Justification: The property described above is the parcel historically associated with the Eudora Welty House and includes the house, garage, and garden.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
August 18, 2004