**THEME:** LITERATURE, DRAMA, MUSIC

**STATE:** North Carolina

**COUNTY:** Buncombe

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

*(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)*

1. **NAME**

   **COMMON:** The Thomas Wolfe Memorial (Thomas Wolfe House)

   **AND/OR HISTORIC:** "The Old Kentucky Home"

2. **LOCATION**

   **STREET AND NUMBER:** 48 Spruce Street

   **CITY OR TOWN:** Asheville

   **STATE:** North Carolina

3. **CLASSIFICATION**

   **CATEGORY** *(Check One)*
   - [ ] District
   - [ ] Site
   - [x] Building
   - [ ] Structure
   - [ ] Object

   **OWNERSHIP**
   - [x] Public
   - [ ] Private
   - [ ] Both

   **STATUS** *(Check One)*
   - [x] Occupied
   - [ ] Unoccupied
   - [ ] In Process
   - [ ] Being Considered
   - [ ] Preservation work in progress
   - [ ] Unrestricted
   - [ ] Restricted
   - [ ] No

   **PRESENT USE** *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*
   - [ ] Agricultural
   - [ ] Commercial
   - [x] Educational
   - [ ] Medical
   - [ ] Military
   - [ ] Museum
   - [x] Religious
   - [ ] Transport
   - [ ] Other (Specify)

4. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**

   **OWNER'S NAME:** Wayne S. Montgomery, Mayor of Asheville

   **STREET AND NUMBER:** City Building

   **CITY OR TOWN:** Asheville

   **STATE:** North Carolina

5. **LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

   **COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:** Buncombe County Courthouse

   **STREET AND NUMBER:**

   **CITY OR TOWN:** Asheville

   **STATE:** North Carolina

6. **REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

   **TITLE OF SURVEY:** None

   **DATE OF SURVEY:**
   - [ ] Federal
   - [ ] State
   - [ ] County
   - [ ] Local

   **DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:**

   **STREET AND NUMBER:**

   **CITY OR TOWN:**

   **STATE:** North Carolina

   **CODE:**
The Thomas Wolfe Memorial is a large, two-story frame house with a gabled roof, clapboard siding, and a two-story porch on two sides. The principle facade has three bays, including a bay window to the right of the front door. When Thomas Wolfe's mother, Mrs. Julia Wolfe, bought the house in 1906, there were seventeen rooms. She soon opened it as a boarding house, naming it "The Old Kentucky Home." In 1917, she enlarged the house by adding two rooms on the south side (widening the porch in the process) and three rooms to the northwest corner. No structural changes have been made to the building since that time.

Thomas Wolfe lived in "The Old Kentucky Home" until his entry into the University of North Carolina in 1916. The house later provided part of the setting for his two first and most successful novels. Following the death of their mother, the remaining Wolf children set aside the house and its furnishings as a memorial. In 1949, the City of Asheville agreed to accept the house and administer it as a museum. The furnishings in the house are all Wolfe family items, with the exception of a few objects added by the city to fill in gaps. One room contains furnishings from one of Thomas Wolfe's apartments in New York, including his writing table and typewriter. South of the house stands the Wolfe children's playhouse, a small, one-story building with a gabled roof, which stood originally in the rear of the (now destroyed) Wolfe family residence at 92 Woodfin Street.

The Thomas Wolfe Memorial is maintained in excellent condition. It is open to visitors from May 1 to October 1.
Thomas Wolfe's short period of productivity included both the late 1920's and the 1930's, and he is remembered as one of the major writers of both of these dissimilar decades. While he was highly individual, the shift of his artistic outlook from romantic individualism to social awareness typified the intellectual progression of his time.\(^1\) He became "perhaps the central spokesman for the artistic beliefs of the 1930's."\(^2\) But the real value of Wolfe's writing lies in its more intrinsic qualities, particularly its great scope and energy, its lyricism, and its full-bodied characterization. These assets have gained for his books a wide and continuous readership. Wolfe is sometimes compared with Whitman as an interpreter of our national spirit and promise.\(^3\) As Herbert J. Muller has remarked, "his life work was perhaps as close as we can expect to come to an American epic.\(^4\)

Of all this country's major novelists, Wolfe was probably the most overtly autobiographical, and his own family and boyhood provided the material for many of his memorable passages and characters. As the scene of this boyhood, "The Old Kentucky Home" bears an intimate relationship to his career. Preserved as a memorial since the death of the writer's mother, the house retains its integrity to an unusual degree. It stands as a striking monument to Thomas Wolfe and to the environment in which his character was formed.

**Biography**

Thomas Wolfe was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1900. He was the youngest of eight children, and the unusually close attention which his mother gave him affected his later life and character. The Wolfe home began to disintegrate in 1906, when Mrs. Wolfe bought the large house at 48 Spruce Street, which she ran as a boarding house. Her husband refused to have any part of this enterprise, and remained at their former residence.

---

2. Ibid.
8. Significance: (1) The Thomas Wolfe Memorial, "The Old Kentucky Home"

This conflict between the two parents remained irreconcilable, and kept the family in a constant state of turmoil.

In 1916, Thomas Wolfe entered the University of North Carolina, where he began to write plays. After graduation in 1920, he determined to become a dramatist and enrolled in Professor George P. Baker's famous playwriting course at Harvard. While there he wrote several plays, including Welcome to Our City. (1923)

In 1923, Wolfe moved to New York City, which became his permanent home, except for his frequent travels, until his death. Unable to have his plays produced, he turned to teaching. While returning from Europe in 1925, Wolfe met Aline Bernstein, who became for a time a dominant influence upon him. With her financial help and encouragement, he left teaching in 1927 to concentrate on completing his first novel, which was eventually titled Look Homeward, Angel. This work appeared in 1929, after considerable editing by Maxwell Perkins, who became the author's close friend. The book was well received, despite the jeers of a few critics, and was hailed as the voice of a new and different talent.

In 1930, Wolfe went abroad for a year on a Guggenheim fellowship. On his return he lived in Brooklyn for four years. In 1935, he published a second novel, Of Time and the River. Wolfe left the country shortly before this work appeared. It was not until his arrival in Berlin in May that he learned that he had received great critical acclaim, and was in fact a famous man.

Wolfe had come to have a deep admiration for Germany, but gradually became concerned about the evils of Naziism. This awareness, combined with his observation of the effects of the depression in America, led to a leftward shift in his thinking and to a heightened political enthusiasm. The conservative Perkins saw this tendency as a threat to Wolfe's creativity, and it became a major cause of the break which occurred between the two men.

In May 1938, after completing The Web and the Rock (1939), he left for a tour through the Western national parks. At the close of the trip he was stricken with pneumonia. He contracted tuberculosis, and died in Baltimore on September 15, 1938. His fourth long novel, You Can't Go Home Again, was published in 1940, and together with many shorter pieces, completed the body of his work. Despite his early death, Wolfe's achievements had become a landmark in American literature.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Austin, Neal F., A Biography of Thomas Wolfe, Austin, Texas: R. Beacham, 1968.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LAND AND SURVEY

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/3

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: John D. McDermott, Historian

ORGANIZATION: National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, History Division, OAHP, National Park Service

DATE: April 15, 1970

STREET AND NUMBER: 801 - 19th Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington, D.C.

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date
The Old Kentucky Home about 1937.