

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina	
COUNTY: Buncombe	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

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      CODE:      COUNTY: Buncombe      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

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      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

STREET AND NUMBER:      STATE:      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

CITY OR TOWN: Asheville      STATE: North Carolina      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: None

DATE OF SURVEY:       Federal       State       County       Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:      STATE:      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

STREET AND NUMBER:      STATE:      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE:      CODE:      DATE:      DATE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:      COUNTY:      ENTRY NUMBER      FOR NPS USE ONLY      DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins
	(Check One)			(Check One)	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1920-1923

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature  | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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 those 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.<sup>1</sup> He became "perhaps the central spokesman for the artistic beliefs of the 1930's."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> As Herbert J. Muller has remarked, "his life work was perhaps as close as we can expect to come to an American epic."<sup>4</sup>

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.

- 
1. Spiller, Robert E., et al, Literary History of the United States, N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1960, p. 1309.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Walser, Richard, Thomas Wolfe, An Introduction and Interpretation, N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961, p. 1-2.
  4. Op. Cit., p. 138.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	North Carolina	
COUNTY	Buncombe	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE

(Number all entries)

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.  
 McElderry, Bruce Robert, Thomas Wolfe, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.  
 Nowell, Elizabeth, Thomas Wolfe, A Biography, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960.  
 Turnbull, Andrew, Thomas Wolfe, New York: Scribners, 1968.  
 Walser, Richard G., The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953; Thomas Wolfe, An Introduction and Interpretation, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961.  
 Spiller, Robert E., et al, Literary History of the United States, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		35	35	51.5
SE	° ' "	° ' "		82	32	43.5
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/3

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**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, STATE D.C. CODE

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation*

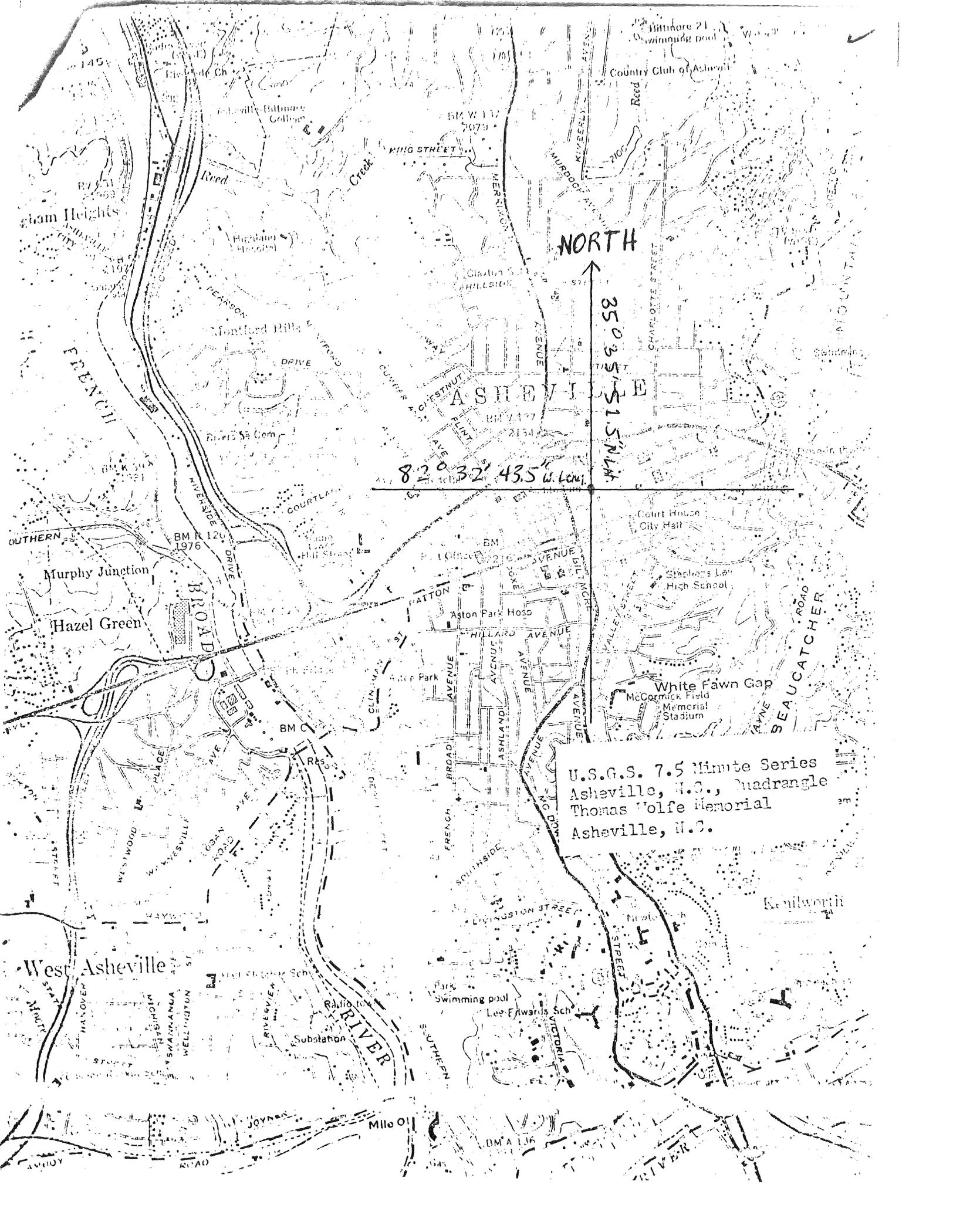
Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Keeper of The National Register*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



NORTH

3503 S. 1 S. N. W.

820 32 435 W. Long.

U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute Series  
Asheville, N.C., Quadrangle  
Thomas Wolfe Memorial  
Asheville, N.C.

The Old Kentucky Home about 1937.



Photograph: Elliot Lyman Fisher