

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name McCullers, Carson, House

other name/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & town 131 South Broadway  not for publication

city or town South Nyack  vicinity

state New York code NY county Rockland code 087 zip code 10969

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

M. McCullers, SA/Commissioner  
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/16/05  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

[Signature]

7/14/06

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as apply)

- public-local
- private
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(check only one box)

- district
- building(s)
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
	1	sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC; single dwelling

**Current Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC; multiple dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Second Empire, Queen Anne  
LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE  
walls WOOD, BRICK  
roof SLATE, ASPHALT  
other GLASS

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**See Continuation Sheets-**

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 7 Page 1

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## **7. Narrative Description**

### *Location and Setting*

The Carson McCullers House is located on the east side of Broadway in the Village of South Nyack, Rockland County, New York. The wood frame building is partially screened from Broadway by natural cover, consisting of both deciduous and coniferous trees and ornamental shrubbery, and was built into the sloping grade of the site, which drops somewhat steeply from street level east towards the Hudson River. The house was built with its façade in relatively close proximity to Broadway, leaving it with very little in the way of a front lawn, and is separated from the road by a sidewalk. There is, however, an expanse of lawn on the building's east side, and on the south elevation a small landscaped garden of fairly recent date which was built to accommodate visitors wishing to pay their respects to McCullers. Across the street is the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Nyacks (NR-listed 1991); the remainder of the immediate area around the nominated property displays a mixed-use character, with residential properties interspersed with commercial properties.

### *Overview*

The Carson McCullers House is a Second Empire-style residence constructed in 1880, and modified with subsequent interior and exterior alterations largely in the Colonial Revival spirit c. 1910. Built as the parsonage to the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Nyacks, the original building phase consisted of the construction of a roughly square-shaped, mansard-roofed dwelling of the type popularized in period pattern books in the post-Civil War period. The building was constructed with a light wood "balloon" frame and was three bays wide by four bays deep, with raised basement walls of brick built above stone footings. The building was subsequently expanded on the north side and at that time received minor embellishments in keeping with contemporary architectural fashion just after the turn of the century.

### *Exterior*

Fenestration on the west-facing façade elevation consists of original double-hung windows with two-over-two wood sash, and later windows set within projecting bays, tall and narrow and double-hung with one-over-one wood sash. These later windows are paired with a broad mullion separating the two units, and, like the others, fitted with shutters. The offset and recessed primary entrance [originally a side-hall entrance prior to the expansion of the house northward] is double-leaved, each door consisting of a glazed arch over a single wood panel, both the panel and arch embellished with heavy raised moldings, in typical Late Victorian-period fashion. A rectangular-shaped two-light glazed transom spans the doors, separated from them by a molded architrave. A second pair of outward-opening glazed doors with six pairs of lights over two horizontal recessed wood panels flanks the two inner doors described above. The second story windows are terminated by prominent molded crowns, as are those on the first story, the window bay above the entrance by a cornice that is carried north to encircle the remainder of the c. 1910 addition. Above these is the boldly projecting cornice of the mansard roof, which is embellished with Neoclassically-inspired festoon

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 7 Page 2

---

motifs on the fascia board, which receives the bottom portion of the wood brackets that adorn the eaves.

A one-story verandah spans the façade elevation and is carried around a portion of the south elevation. The current porch posts, with their chamfered corners, molded caps and brackets, appear to be retained from the 1880 building campaign.

Above the cornice rises the mansard roof, which is clad in diamond-pattern gray octagonal slate. A prominent square-headed dormer interrupts the mansard at mid-point, though altered from its original 1880 configuration. There is a single dormer on each elevation of the mansard, the east one modified like that on the facade. On the south elevation two original dormers, smaller in scale and spanned by a segmental cornice, indicate the appearance of the original treatment. Evident is the disposition of elements, i.e. the windows and dormers, which appears to be more random than would be expected given the preoccupation of the style for organization and formality.

The east elevation reveals the discrepancy in elevation from the front to the rear of the house, which leaves the basement level fully exposed at-grade. A two-tier porch abuts the southeast corner of this elevation, providing cover for the entrance to the basement on this side and likewise providing a covered area opening from the rear parlor above. There is likewise a similar though smaller porch at the northeast corner, including a stair that accesses an entrance to the primary level.

The north elevation includes a small one-story garage addition dating to c. 1958, largely unobtrusive in character, and at the second story level an interesting multi-story tower projection crowned by a bell-cast roof.

*Interior*

The interior continues to largely reflect the plan and finishes of the c. 1880 building campaign, augmented with the addition made to the north elevation c. 1910. The primary entrance leads into a stair hall that accesses double-parlors aligning the south elevation, which can be segregated from one another by pocket doors, as well as a kitchen and pantry-service area behind the stair in the northeast corner. The addition on this floor consisted of a new room along the original north exterior wall of the 1880 building, which is carried most of the depth of the original footprint. The stair is largely original to 1880, with its period turned balusters and handrail, though the newel post and paneled treatment of the wall are Colonial Revival in spirit and date to the c. 1910 updating. The entrance to the front parlor from the hall does, however, reflect its original configuration, with a pair of four-paneled doors of the typical type set within a casing, all with distinctive heavy moldings. Walls and ceilings are plaster on sawn lath throughout; floors are thin-width oak and date to the twentieth century. Hardware remains intact in many areas.

The front and rear parlor retain a majority of their original 1880 finishes with some modifications. In the front parlor the original mantel was replaced with one of Colonial Revival vintage, consisting of a neo-Federal treatment surmounted by an over mantel mirror. The mantel displays a

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 7 Page 3

---

characteristic five-part entablature and is embellished with foliate chains, garrotes colonettes, and ellipses; it is set within a projecting chimney breast and has a glazed tile skirt. The fireplace for the rear parlor was removed but appears to have been on the inside wall as evidenced by the location of a chimney breast. Baseboards, ceiling medallions and struck plaster cornices likewise survive in this part of the house from the first construction phase.

The chamber floor retains a plan suggesting the original building campaign, and the addition of three rooms along the north side during the c. 1910 work. The original consisted of two large master bed chambers, a smaller chamber, the stair hall, and built-in closet space between the two larger chambers; the addition included two larger rooms and a smaller room. The 1880 work retains period finishes in the form of plaster on sawn lath ceilings and walls, period doors, door casings and baseboards, and a faux marble fireplace mantel in the front bed chamber of a typical period type, with a round arched opening accented by a keystone and further embellished with incised detailing and chamfered edges.

The attic floor, that area within the mansard, included a single large open room lighted by the dormers. The basement area may have originally included the kitchen, servicing the primary floor via a dumbwaiter, and also included a coal storage area.

**8. Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

LITERATURE

**Period of Significance**

1880- 1954

**Significant Dates**

1880, c. 1910, 1945

**Significant Persons**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

McCullers, Carson

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 1

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## **8. Narrative Statement of Significance**

### *Overview*

The Carson McCullers House is historically significant for its association with author Carson McCullers (1917-1967), a prominent member of the American literary community during the middle decades of the twentieth century. McCullers achieved considerable attention with the publication of her 1940 book *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, which she followed the next year with *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. Her literary achievements were somewhat remarkable given her decades-long battle with multiple and serious health issues, among them debilitating strokes which all-but crippled the author in later years. During her time in the South Nyack house she completed *The Member of the Wedding Party*, 1946, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, 1951, and *Clock Without Hands*, 1961, not to mention numerous short stories, essays, and poetry. Given the prominence of McCullers in the mid-twentieth century literature of the United States, and her productive association with the South Nyack house -- she authored three major works there-- the building is being nominated for designation at the national significance level.

The house is likewise significant architecturally as a largely intact example of Second Empire-style residential design with subsequent Late Victorian era modifications. Constructed in 1880 by an unknown builder as the parsonage for the nearby Methodist Episcopal Church, the building was modified in the early twentieth century with typically Colonial Revival and to a lesser extent Queen Anne-style modifications.

### *Carson McCullers: Biographical Overview*

Lula Carson Smith was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1917, the daughter of a well-to-do watchmaker and jeweler of French Huguenot extraction. Beginning at the age of five she took piano lessons, and at the age of 15 she received a typewriter from her father. Two years later she moved to New York to study piano at Juilliard School of Music, but never attended the school - she managed to lose the money set aside for her tuition. McCullers worked in menial jobs and devoted herself to writing. She studied creative writing at Columbia and New York universities and published in 1936 an autobiographical piece, 'Wunderkind', in *Story* magazine. It depicted a musical prodigy's failure and adolescent insecurity. In 1937 she married Reeves McCullers, a failed author; they moved to North Carolina, living there for two years. During this time she wrote *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, a novel in the Southern Gothic tradition. McCullers's marriage turned out to be unlucky, as both she and her husband had homosexual relationships and separated in 1940. She moved to New York to live with George Davis, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. In 1945 McCullers remarried Reeves; three years later she attempted suicide under depression. McCullers suffered throughout her life from several illnesses, and a series of strokes left her a virtual invalid in her early 30s. She died in New York in September 1967, after a stroke and a resultant brain hemorrhage.

In a life eventually beset by crippling sets of illnesses and infirmities, Carson McCullers emerged at the age of nineteen as the "Wunderkind" of her own life. From a middle class family life in

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 2

Columbus, Georgia, on the banks of the Chattahoochee River, the shy, sensitive and introverted daughter, earmarked before birth by her mother for greatness, lost herself in her piano playing, a refuge from the pangs of gangly, self-conscious adolescence.<sup>1</sup>

Struck by a debilitating illness at the age of fifteen, Carson McCullers was to suffer almost annual periods of long illness during her twenties. The first in 1941, “of radically impaired vision and stabbing head pains,”<sup>2</sup> were followed by two strokes in 1947, which destroyed her right lateral vision and paralyzed her left side. The cause was later diagnosed as rheumatic fever. Despite this and other assaults on her person, she continued to write until the end, supported by a wealth of colleagues and friends, and especially by her friend and psychiatrist, Dr. Mary Mercer. In the winter of 1932 she came down with rheumatic fever (incorrectly diagnosed), an illness that pursued her for the rest of her life. Graduating from high school in 1933 with indifferent grades and in the middle of the Great Depression, the prospects of her attending college were not great, but Carson had other plans. Her cousin, Vivian Johnson, the local librarian, supplied a reading list of the “greatest literature in the world” which Carson devoured in the next year and a half.<sup>3</sup> Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and all the great Russians; D.H. Lawrence, Flaubert, Joyce, the Brontes, Katharine Mansfield, Hawthorne, Melville, Proust, Hemingway, Faulkner, Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, O’Neill and Nietzsche; Greek dramatists and philosophers, and later, Isak Dinesen—all this consumed while still continuing her rigorous piano practice schedule. Additionally she had begun to write with the same boundless energy; first a play inspired by O’Neill: “By autumn I am writing a three-acter about revenge and incest – the curtain rose on a graveyard and, after scenes of assorted misery fell on a catafalque.”<sup>4</sup>

In September 1937 Carson married Reeves McCullers, a handsome young Southerner she had known for several years who likewise shared aspirations of becoming a writer. He had recently purchased his discharge from the army, and had found work with the Retail Credit Corporation, first in Charlotte, North Carolina, and then Fayetteville, South Carolina. Sadly he was already on the path to alcoholism, spending the majority of his weekly pay on alcohol.

Despite a rather stressful married life, McCullers managed to complete six chapters and a detailed outline of her novel, *The Mute*, for which she received a contract and a \$500 advance; it was later to be known as *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. In the following two months she completed her second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. With the publishing of *Lonely Hunter*, McCullers and Reeves, their marriage deteriorating, moved back to New York City. By September they had separated and she had moved into rooms in a brownstone in Brooklyn Heights at 7 Middagh Street, rented by George Davis, editor-in-chief of *Harper’s Bazaar*, and later *Mademoiselle*, a building which for several years became a center for writers, poets, musicians and actors living a “Bohemian” lifestyle.<sup>5</sup> This ménage, which included W.H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Richard Wright and his

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 571.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 33; quotation from McCullers, *How I Began to Write*.

<sup>5</sup> Josyanne Savigneau, *Carson McCullers: A Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 75.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 3

wife, Lotte Lenya (who after Kurt Weill's death married Davis), Gypsy Rose Lee (a favorite of McCullers), Aaron Copland, Salvador Dali, Virgil Thompson, Leonard Bernstein, Oliver Smith, and Klaus and Erica Mann, whose father was Thomas Mann. They ate at a common table lorded over by Davis and Auden, in an atmosphere "where the doors were left ajar" and "the residents shared a great sense of love and respect. . . and camaraderie."<sup>6</sup> Combined with her two week participation in the Bread Loaf Writers at Middlebury College in Vermont (where she met Eudora Welty and Louis Untermeyer), this experience broadened Carson's capacity to make deep and lasting friendships and helped form one observers description of her as "young, gifted, odd, fey, bizarre, likeable, winsome, gregarious, bemused, withdrawn and taken to wearing boy's shirts."<sup>7</sup>

Adding to Carson's tumultuous and complicated year was the stunningly beautiful Swiss girl, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, "the eccentric scion of a patrician family," thirty-two years old, and a novelist, journalist, photographer, travel writer, anti-Fascist, and friend of Erica Mann. McCullers response was to fall in love with both Annemarie and Erica, enthralled as she was by their tales of daring exploits.<sup>8</sup> But things did not work out to Carson's wishes. "I'm deeply fond of her and wish the world to be different, easier for her to face," Clarac-Schwarzenbach confided to a friend. For several years they corresponded with letters arriving from Morocco, the Belgian Congo, and Angola. "Thank you forever. . . Carson, remember our moments of understanding and how much I loved you" wrote Clarac-Schwarzenbach shortly before she died, after her bicycle plunged into a ravine in Sils, Switzerland. She was thirty-four, McCullers twenty-five.<sup>9</sup> McCullers dedicated *Reflections in a Golden Eye* to her friend's memory.

Carson's bisexual ambivalence continued throughout her life as with David Diamond, to whom Reeves was similarly attracted, causing her to fear she was being excluded -- "the we of me" -- a recurring theme of exclusion most completely expressed in *The Member of the Wedding*. Overcome with shyness, McCullers almost missed her interview with Elizabeth Ames for an invitation to attend Yaddo, the famous art colony in Saratoga Springs, New York, founded by the Trask family in 1900. But the interview was a success and she stayed the entire summer of 1941, working on *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and the much-belabored *Bride of My Brother*, as well as two short stories sold to the *New Yorker*, "The Jockey" and "Correspondence."

Instead of just depositing the checks from the trusting McCullers, Reeves also forged her signature and overdrew the account, a betrayal that, combined with his unfaithfulness, led to her painful divorce. Reeves, without a future, reenlisted in the military. Wounded in the Normandy invasion in June 1944, he returned to America the following year as a lieutenant, and unwisely the two remarried, that event later termed by McCullers as "vulgar."<sup>10</sup> After the death of her father in 1944, McCullers's mother sold the family house in Columbus, Georgia, and she and her sister moved north to an apartment in South Nyack, and then to the house at 131 South Broadway, found by them

<sup>6</sup> Ibid; Carlos Dewes, *Illuminations and Night Glare* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 110-13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 100-01.

<sup>9</sup> Savigneau, *A Life*, 97-98.

<sup>10</sup> Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 140, 145.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 4

in 1945 by McCullers's friend, painter Henry Varnum Poor, of New City; Poor and McCullers had been friends since 1935. This house, now being nominated for National Register of Historic Places designation, was her home for the remaining twenty-two years of her life.

In 1951 she purchased the house from her mother, though not without some associated financial stress. A friend of McCullers, Tennessee Williams, lent assistance to her during this period. As McCullers worried about finances, Williams suggested she "turn [the house] into apartments darling, at least you'll eat." He then gave her the funds to provide the necessary bathrooms and kitchen. Williams and McCullers first became associated in 1935, when the former invited her for a two week vacation on Nantucket; prior to that the two had only known one another by reputation. This began a friendship considered perhaps the most lasting and deepest of her life. Restored by her presence from his own poor health the two "work[ed] together at the same table, he at one end me at the other."<sup>11</sup> "He was working on *Summer and Smoke*, following his triumph with *The Glass Menagerie*," McCullers wrote of this experience, "and I was beginning *The Member of the Wedding*, as a play, with his encouragement."

Describing her arrival on the ferry, Williams and his companion provided their first impressions of McCullers upon her arrival:

My god, what am I going to do with a perfect stranger for a week? They both had second thoughts. . . a tall imperial-looking woman in tweeds or a sophisticated glamorous type – perhaps even mannish. . . after all the passengers had apparently alighted. . . just then a tall slim figure wearing faded blue dungarees, white moccasins, a white shirt and a wide-brimmed straw hat approached them. "Are you Tennessee Williams and Pancho?" she whispered. . . Here before us stood the Genius, sparkling voice, the softest Southern voice I had ever heard, shy and almost trembling. She couldn't talk. . . she was so plain and unassuming, yet warmth and affection oozed out of her as if from an inexhaustible fountain.<sup>12</sup>

But her persona had its detractors, as well. Some years earlier at Middagh Street in Brooklyn, with her natural competitiveness and unease in the group she "began to take up too much space," observed Richard Wright. He continued: "She drank too much and she talked too much, she constantly complained and she spoke of no one but herself. . . and destroyed the harmonious atmosphere which had previously reigned in that house."<sup>13</sup>

With the publication of *The Member of the Wedding*, dedicated to Elizabeth Ames, director of Yaddo, and the award of a second Guggenheim, McCullers and Reeves sailed for France, where she was enthusiastically received, as she was in Italy, as one of America's brightest literary talents. But tragedy was soon to follow—twice, first in August in Paris, and again in November—in the form of severe and frightening strokes, the latter leaving her paralyzed on her left side. She and Reeves, the later now suffering from delirium tremens, were flown back to New York on stretchers. After a month in the Neurological Hospital of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, she returned home to her

<sup>11</sup>Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 291.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 272.

<sup>13</sup>Savigneau, *A Life*, 97.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 5

mother's care, an invalid at the age of 30. McCullers now required physical assistance with almost every act of her daily life, her illness keeping her in bed until early spring.<sup>14</sup>

Despite her illness, McCullers continued to write with continued success, including the publication of three short works in *Mademoiselle* and *New Directions*, an impressive feat given the circumstances. Also, a revised adaptation of *The Member of the Wedding*, which she had started that summer while in Nantucket with Williams, was being prepared for Broadway, starring Julie Harris and a reluctant Ethel Waters, the singer, who agreed to take the part after "one or two lines of religious inspiration were added to the role," and seven-year old Brandon De Wilde, "a sensation."<sup>15</sup> Immediately after the Philadelphia opening-night tryout, McCullers went home to Nyack, saying she felt ill. A visit from the doctor determined she was pregnant, and after an ensuing dispute with a psychiatrist, she suffered a sudden and painful miscarriage.

Brooke Atkinson wrote the following in the *New York Times* "in view of the rare quality of the writing and acting, the fact that *The Member of the Wedding* has practically no dramatic movement does not seem very important. . . It may not be a play, but it is art." Critic William Hawkins of *The New York World Telegram* wrote "never before heard what happened last night at the curtain calls. . . when hundreds cried out as if of one voice for Ethel Waters and Julie Harris. . . two actresses. . . beyond compare in this curious play about the tragedy of loneliness." That same day McCullers was released from the hospital. *The Member of the Wedding* ran for 501 performances, astonishing for a dramatic, non-musical play, and likewise a great financial success.

Despite the dramatic contrast of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, adapted by the playwright Edward Albee, the production encountered difficulties from the beginning and was not the success of *Member*, having run "for only 123 performances, a relative failure at a time when every play was expected to run a full season."<sup>16</sup> Certainly, a love story about a dwarf-hunchback and an amazonian woman set in a Southern mills town in 1950 was not popular fare for Broadway in the mid-twentieth century.

Among McCullers's literary heroes was Isak Dinesen (1885-1962), the Baroness Kaven Blixen, whose *Out of Africa* McCullers had read "every year since 1937" and which she admired for its "simplicity and unequalled mobility." Of *Out of Africa* McCullers further stated that she "realized that this was one of the most radiant books of my life" in an article in *The New Republic*, 1943, sixteen years before the two authors were to meet. The occasion was a dinner in honor of Dinesen, given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. As Dinesen's biographer later wrote, "it was something of an epiphany for both women as Dinesen has read and reread *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* many times..." When McCullers learned that Dinesen longed to meet Marilyn Monroe, she eagerly volunteered to arrange it. Arthur Miller, an old friend, was sitting at the next table, and the party was set for a "luncheon in Nyack." The luncheon featured the frail Dinesen's menu of grapes, oysters and champagne, while the others had a soufflé. Dinesen explained her choice of menu by

<sup>14</sup>Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 574.

<sup>15</sup>Savigneau, *A Life*, 193-94.

<sup>16</sup>Savigneau, *A Life*, 290, 307.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 6

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saying "oh, the doctors are horrified... but since they agree with me there's no problem." Monroe, having recently completed *Some Like It Hot*, told an amusing story of her culinary adventures (pasta), and Dinesen's talk of her life apparently enthralled the other guests.

After suffering through serious illness for many years, like McCullers, and the completion of her final work, *Shadows in the Grass*, Dinesen died, in 1962, at the age of 77. She was a twenty-five years older than McCullers. Another guest of the Nyack luncheon, Marilyn Monroe, also died that year, her death ruled a suicide. Arthur Miller later wrote "however, at that luncheon there was certainly a natural sympathy between the two women, Marilyn and Carson, who lived close to death."<sup>17</sup>

Depressed by the failure on Broadway of *The Square Root of Wonderful* in 1958, and with the advice of Tennessee Williams, Carson agreed to seek further psychiatric help despite previous failures. Fortunately, help lived nearby in the person of Dr. Mary Mercer, and in desperation, she finally made the phone call. "I have lost my soul," she told Dr. Mercer; the latter responded by telling her "I don't believe you have lost your soul, Mrs. McCullers. I believe you have mislaid it and I'll help you find it... as long as you are not afraid of the truth."<sup>18</sup> Overcoming writers block, illness and multiple handicaps with the assistance of Dr. Mercer, McCullers managed to continue as a creative person and to finish *Clock Without Hands*, and to continue with her other writings.

More out of friendship than out of professional responsibility, Dr. Mercer became her medical advisor and oversaw McCullers's precarious health. By this time the author was in and out of the hospital; health issues included an operation to free her paralyzed left arm, repairs to the tendons in her left hand, the removal of a cancerous breast, and a broken hip, among other problems. Despite this litany of suffering she continued to write, to lecture, and to plan exhausting trips, some of which she actually took, like the one to London for Dame Edith Sitwell's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration.

But in 1967, it was the invitation of John Houston, who had just completed filming *Reflection in a Golden Eye*, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando, to come for a visit to his palatial estate in Galway, Ireland. By ambulance and stretcher, and attended by her devoted housekeeper, cook and caregiver Ida Reeder, McCullers, by then a frail but indomitable invalid, made her last great odyssey to see her great friend and admirer.

When the final stroke came in August 1967, it spared her the amputation of her painful left leg. In a coma for forty-seven days, McCullers died in Nyack at the age of fifty. Her grave remains perhaps the most visited of any in Nyack's Oak Hill cemetery.

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<sup>17</sup>Carr, *Lonely Hunter*, 481.

<sup>18</sup>Personal recollections of Dr. Mary Mercer, current owner of the nominated property.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 7

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*Architectural Overview*

The McCullers House was constructed in 1880 in association with the Methodist Episcopal Church, as a parsonage for their house of worship which was subsequently replaced by the current church, located across South Broadway from the nominated resource. In its physical characteristics the house typifies post-Civil War residential construction trends in the United States, with its light-wood balloon frame and employment of Second Empire-style design motives, as this style was one of the dominant modes for domestic architecture in this era. Typical characteristics of this mode include the mansard roof punctuated by dormers, bay windows, verandahs, and prominent bracketed cornice; the interior, with its side-hall plan, trim formed with heavy raised moldings, plaster medallions, and stair with complexly-profiled balusters, is likewise characteristic. Both masonry and frame interpretations were common.

The Second Empire style, as distilled from French sources, may well have made its first appearance in America with Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux's Culbert House, built on Grand Street in Newburgh in the early 1850s. Vaux subsequently offered this mansard-roofed house as a plate in his 1857 book *Villas & Cottages*. In the post-Civil War era the books of George Woodward helped carry the style into the mainstream currents of American house building and proved an important source disseminating both the Second Empire and Italianate styles. The popularity of Second Empire architecture peaked in the United States in the period from 1865 to 1875 immediately following the time when the Italianate style was at its height. The style is distinguished from other Victorian architectural styles by the presence of the mansard roof, a very steeply sloped roof that can be concave, convex, straight, or even S-shaped. The style originated in France and is attributed to architect Francois Mansart. Buildings of Second Empire design are decorated with prominent brackets under the eaves, and often utilize corner quoins and ironwork cresting. These features are also common to buildings of Italianate character, and eclectic mixtures of the two styles are not uncommon.

Sometime in the early twentieth century alterations and modifications were made to the original scheme, including the expansion of the house northward. Aesthetically the changes were representative of the Colonial Revival style, a mode of design which highlighted the rediscovery and celebration of early American architectural forms beginning in the later nineteenth century. In this instance, interior changes included modifications to portions of the original stair treatment and changes to the front parlor; on the exterior, festoons were added to the fascia on which the brackets rest.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 8

*Appendix 1: Chronology of Carson McCullers's major work*

Year	Novel	Stage	Screen
1936-9	<i>The Heart is a Lonely Hunter</i> Dedicated to her husband and her parents; originally <i>The Mute</i>		Filming begins 1967; Thomas Ryan
1939	<i>Reflections in a Golden Eye</i> Published 1940; dedicated to Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach		Film 1967; John Houston
1941	<i>The Ballad of the Sad Café</i> , published in <i>Harpers Bazaar</i> 1945, <i>Look</i> 1951	Drama, 123 Broadway performances	
1945-46	<i>The Member of the Wedding</i>	Drama, 1950; 503 Broadway performances	1951 Screen rights to Stanley Kramer
1954	<i>Square Root of Wonderful</i>	Drama, 1954-57; Anne Baxter, 45 Broadway performances	
1951-60	<i>Clock Without Hands</i> , published 1961, dedicated to Dr. Mary Mercer	Drama 1963; Edward Albee	
1951-60	<i>Illuminations and Night Shade</i> , autobiography		

According to Virginia Spencer Carr, McCullers's body of work included "five novels, two plays, some two dozen non-fiction pieces, a book of children's verse, and a handful of distinguished poems. During the years 1920-67, McCullers authored about 20 short stories and essays, published in *Story*, *The New Yorker*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, *Vogue*, *Saturday Review*, *This Week Magazine*, *New Directions*, and a number of foreign publications. In addition to having her work so

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 9

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widely published and performed, Carson McCullers received wide recognition for her literary accomplishments including the following:

- Invitation to Bread Loaf Writers Conference
- Invitation to Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York, 1941-47
- Guggenheim Fellowship, 1942, 1946
- Grant from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters
- Best American Short Stories Award, 1944, for *The Ballad of the Sad Café*
- One of the Best Post-War Writers in America, Quick 1947
- One of 10 Most Deserving Women in America, 1947, *Mademoiselle*
- New York Drama Critics Circle Award: Best Play of the Season, 1949-50
- Donaldson Award: Best Play of the Season, 1949
- Gold Medal by Theatre Club, Inc: Best Playwright of the Year
- Lectures at Goucher College; Philadelphia Fine Arts Center; NYC Poetry Center; Columbia, 1954, 1958
- Symposium, Chelton Festival of Literature, England, 1962
- Prize Younger Generation: Die Welt, Germany, 1964
- Henry Bellaman Award Winner, 1966

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Page 1

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Cole, David. *History of Rockland County*. New York: Beers, 1884.

*Columbia Encyclopedia*. Fifth Edition. Columbia University Press, 1995.

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Fletcher, Sir Banister. *The History of Architecture*. Seventeenth Edition, 1963.

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Gross, Jane. "Traditional Lives in the McCullers House," *New-York Times*, Metro Section, 14 May 2000.

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McCullers, Carson, House  
Name of Property

Rockland County, New York  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .18 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 590740 4548640  
Zone Easting Northing

2  
Zone Easting Northing

3  
Zone Easting Northing

4  
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Danforth W. Toan, FAIA [edited by William E. Krattinger, FSB, NYS OPRHP]

organization Rockland County Board for Historic Preservation date June and November 2004

street & number 18 Hickory Hill Lane telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Tappan state NY zip code 10983

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Mary E. Mercer, M.D.

street & number 5 Tweed Boulevard telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Nyack state NY zip code 10960

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Property Name *McCullers, Carson, House*  
Location *South Nyack, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Photographs

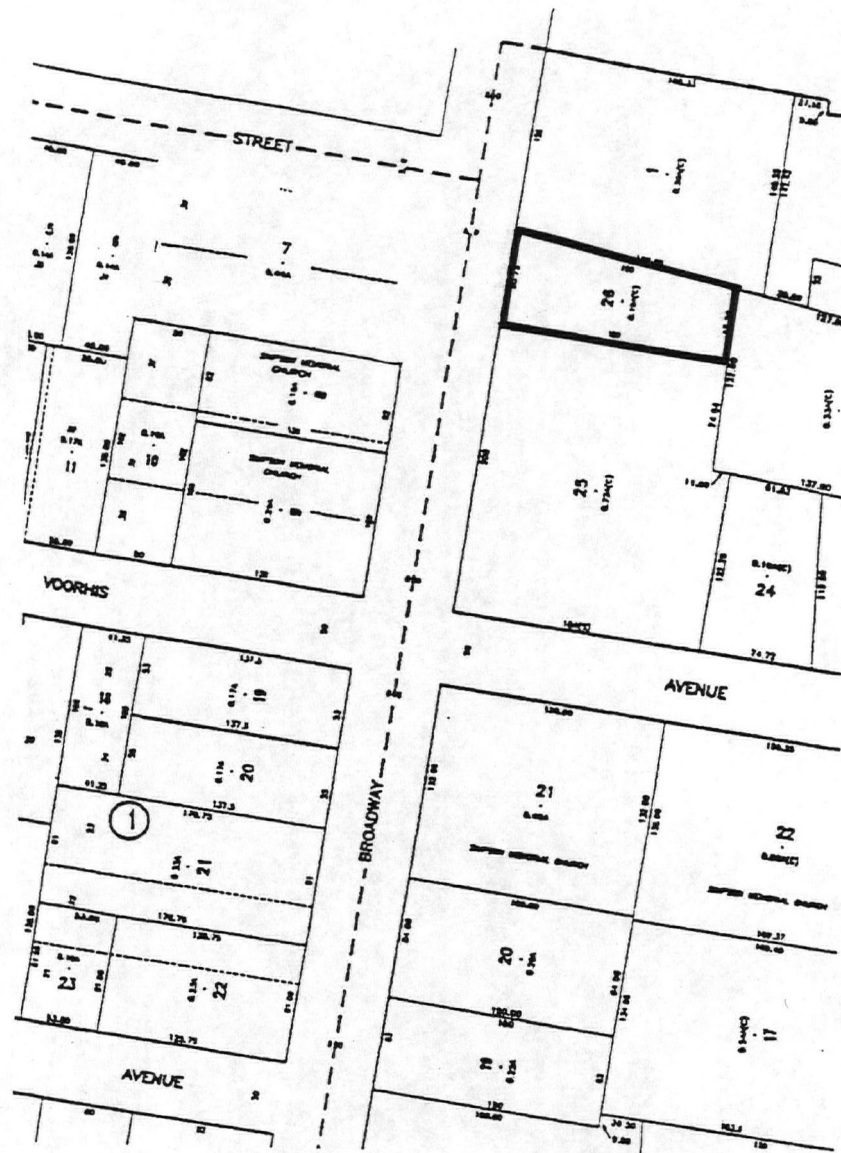
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**Photograph Key**

Photographs taken by Danforth Toan, Fall 2005 and Winter 2006

Negatives at NYS OPRHP, Peebles Island State Park

1. Exterior view, façade and south elevation, view looking roughly northwest
2. Exterior view, façade entrance detail
3. Exterior view, south elevation
4. Interior view, main staircase
5. Interior view, first floor double parlor treatment
6. Interior view, second floor landing newel post and balusters
7. Interior view, second floor chamber fireplace mantel
8. Interior view, first floor parlor ceiling medallion



NORTH



scale: 1 inch equals 133 feet  
boundary

Carson McCullers House  
131 South Broadway  
South Nyack, Rockland County, New York

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 06000562

Date Listed:

7/14/06

McCullers, Carson, House  
Property Name

Rockland  
County

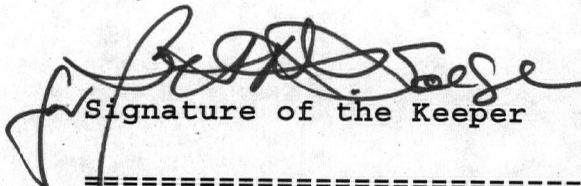
NY

State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

7-14-06

Date of Action

-----  
Amended Items in Nomination:

Level of Significance

The level of significance "national" applies to McCullers' importance in the area of Literature under criterion B; the appropriate level of significance under criterion C for architecture is "local."

This information was confirmed with NYSHPO staff by telephone.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without attachment)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: McCullers, Carson, House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Rockland

DATE RECEIVED: 5/31/06 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/20/06  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 7/05/06 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 7/14/06  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 06000562

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

\_\_\_ ACCEPT \_\_\_ RETURN \_\_\_ REJECT \_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Residence of acclaimed author  
Carson McCullers for the last 22 years  
of her life, which was cut short  
by debilitating illness.*

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept B+C

REVIEWER Savage DISCIPLINE Architectural History

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE 7/14/06

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



MC CULLERS HOUSE

SOUTH WALK, ROCKLAND CO. NY

#1



McCULLERS HOUSE  
SOUTH WALK, ROCKLAND CO. NY  
#2



Mc CULLERS HOUSE  
SOUTH WYACK, ROCKLAND CO. NY  
#13



Mc CULLERS HOUSE

SOUTH WACK, ROCKLAND CO. NY

#4



McCULLERS HOUSE

SOUTH WACK, ROCKLAND CO. NY

#5



McCULLERS HOUSE  
SOUTH WYACK, ROCKLAND CO NY  
#6



MR. CULLERS HOUSE

SOUTH WALK, ROCKLAND CO. NY

#1

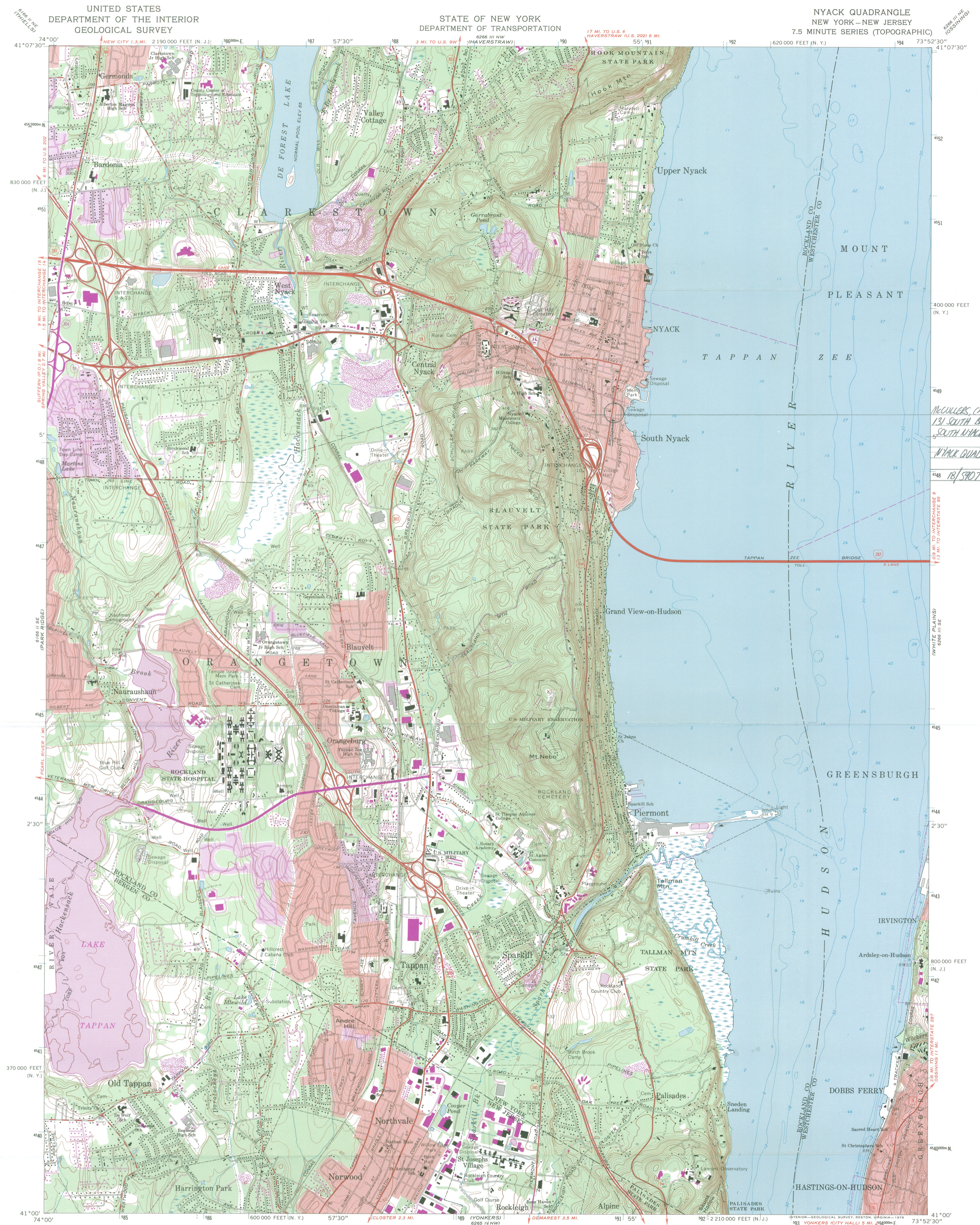


061187

MC CULBERTS HOUSE

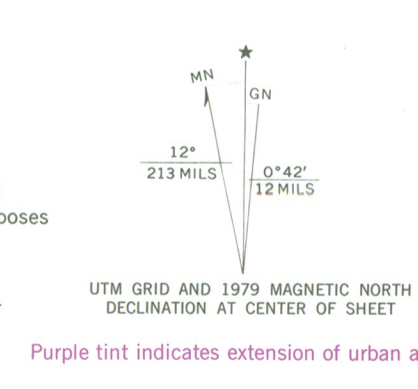
SOUTH WALK, ROCKLAND CO. NY

#8



McGILLERS, CARSON, HOUSE  
131 SOUTH BROADWAY  
SOUTH N.Y.A.K., N.Y., ROCKLAND CO  
NYACK QUAD 1:24000  
18/590740/4548640

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and New Jersey Geodetic Survey  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1964 and 1965. Field checked 1967  
Supersedes map dated 1957  
Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Charts 282 (1965)  
and 748 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grids based on New York coordinate system,  
east zone, and New Jersey coordinate system  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18,  
shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines  
where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE  
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 3.2 FEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———  
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———  
Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of  
the National or State reservations shown on this map  
Boundary lines shown in purple compiled from latest  
information available from the controlling authority  
Revisions shown in purple and woodland compiled  
from aerial photographs taken 1977. This information  
not field checked. Map edited 1979

NYACK, N. Y. - N. J.  
N4100-W7352.5/7.5  
1967  
PHOTOREVISED 1979  
AMS 6266 III SW-SERIES V821



STATEMENT OF OWNER SUPPORT

Before an individual nomination proposal will be reviewed or nominated, the owner(s) of record must sign and date the following statement:

I, Mary E. Mercer, M.D., am the owner of the property at  
(print or type owner name)

131 South Broadway, South Nyack, New York 10960  
(street number and name, city, village or town, state of nominated property)

I support its consideration and inclusion in the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Mary E. Mercer, M.D. 7/7/04  
(signature and date)

5 Tweed Boulevard, Nyack, New York 10960

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(mailing address)

7/9

## AFTERWORD

The estate of Carson McCullers sold 131 South Broadway to Dr. Mary Mercer in 1967, who originally thought to make the house into a museum in honor of Carson McCullers, similar to the Edward Hopper House up the street. That idea was soon abandoned, and the four apartments remained rented.

The apartments had been made after the death of Carson's mother, thanks to the generosity of Tennessee Williams, who said: "Writers don't make much money, darling, but with tenants you will never starve."

The tenants gradually became people interested in the arts as was Dr. Mercer herself. Mel Gussow wrote in the New York Times (April 15, 2000) :  
"The fact that the house has become a kind of informal artist colony would have pleased McCullers" Dr. Mercer said. She added, "Every house outlives its owners."

Eventually, Carson's Nyack house will be given to the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, her hometown.

Cathy Fussell, C.S.U. faculty member and Director of the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians said: "Establishing a tribute to McCullers is extremely exciting, but the plans reach past being a museum.

7/10

AFTERWORD

We want to offer these houses as havens for other writers, musicians and scholars. It is our purpose to offer fellowships for emerging or mid-career, American writers or composers where they will have large blocks of time to give themselves to their discipline. (CSU publication, "A NATIONAL TREASURE From Georgia to New York. CSU Is Preserving A Literary Heritage.)

Mary S. Mercer, M.D. 7/7/04