

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to our web site, and thanks for your interest in our Landmarks of American History and Culture Workshop.



To me, the Landmarks of American History and Culture Workshops are jewels in the crown of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The concept of using historical or cultural sites as an avenue for understanding writers, events, or statesmen is an incredibly valuable one. In fact, I can offer personal testimony to the power of a “landmarks” experience. In 1983, when I was an English professor at the State University of New York in Oswego, I drove to Jackson, Mississippi, in the hopes that I might meet Eudora Welty, see some of the settings she had drawn upon, and be able to read the Welty manuscripts and correspondence housed at Mississippi’s Department of Archives and History. My hopes became reality—I had two wonderful interviews with Welty, I visited the sites she had translated into fiction, and I discovered that the Welty archives illuminated my understanding of her published work. That summer led me to join the faculty of Millsaps College in Jackson, to write critical works and a biography of Welty, to teach class after class about her fiction, and to call Eudora Welty my friend. My landmark experience was transforming.

Although Eudora Welty died in 2001, her legacy is ongoing. If you participate in our workshop, you will come to know her. Visiting the Eudora Welty House is like having a conversation with Welty. You’ll see the diverse nature of the books she loved, everything from a collection of comic pieces by S. J. Perelman, to the tightly-plotted murder mysteries of Agatha Christie and Elizabeth Daly, to novels by Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce, to poetry by William Butler Yeats, to the copy of Moby-Dick Eudora read on a voyage to Italy, and to a philosophical treatise by Sir Arthur Eddington, a treatise discussing the ways in which relativity theory had unsettled old certainties. You’ll see pictures of her friends, many of whom were also fine writers—Katherine Ann Porter, V. S. Pritchett, Reynolds Price, Ross Macdonald, among them. You’ll see the paintings she hung on her walls and take note of the mementoes she brought back from her trips to New York, San Francisco, England, and Italy. You’ll see the views from her windows. You will read her fiction and what critics have said about it. You will come to know her.

You’ll also come to know the world in which Welty lived. We’ll spend time in her garden, at a museum which recreates a Depression-era Mississippi village, at a museum devoted to the African American experience in the Deep South, and at the home of Civil

Rights leader Medgar Evers. These visits will bring alive the times and places about which Welty wrote and will reveal the profound insights her fiction can bring to historical studies.

If my experience proves to be your own, knowing Welty and her world is the gateway to becoming a more effective reader and teacher of her fiction, and it is a fiction every student should know. I hope to see you in Jackson this coming summer.

Best wishes,

Suzanne Marrs