

(Oct. 1990)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**



**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

**HISTORIC NAME:** Katherine Anne Porter House  
**OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER:** N/A


**2. LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER:** 508 West Center Street  
**CITY OR TOWN:** Kyle  
**STATE:** Texas **CODE:** TX **COUNTY:** Hays

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION:** N/A  
**VICINITY:** N/A  
**CODE:** 209 **ZIP CODE:** 78640

**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.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

6/28/04  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission  
State or 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 commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

**4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this 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

8/20/04

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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	2 <b>BUILDINGS</b>
	0	0 <b>SITES</b>
	0	0 <b>STRUCTURES</b>
	1	0 <b>OBJECTS</b>
	2	2 <b>TOTAL</b>

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** Rural Properties of Hays County

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** DOMESTIC=single dwelling

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** DOMESTIC=single dwelling, SOCIAL=meeting hall

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Other: L-plan

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION WOOD  
WALLS WOOD  
ROOF ASPHALT  
OTHER

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).



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### Physical Description

#### *Introduction*

The Katherine Anne Porter Childhood Home is a one-story L-plan house with a partial façade front porch located at the west end of a main street in the traditional agricultural hub of Kyle, Hays County, Texas. The house sits on two city lots (5 and 6) in block 37 of the original townsite which was platted in 1880 when the International and Great Northern (I & GN) Railroad made its way between the Texas capital of Austin, to the north, and San Antonio, to the south. The city's commercial strip aligned with the railroad, and later, around the town square, both of which lay to the east of block 37. The surrounding blocks, including block 37, were largely residential. Development was never dense in the residential blocks, even in the wake of the construction spawned by the railroad. Roads remained unpaved throughout the city until the mid-twentieth century and the town could be characterized as a quiet rural trading town with a cotton gin, a handful of general and dry goods stores and various services, several churches, a single high school and the families who supported them. At its core, Kyle continues to be a quiet country town, even as modern subdivisions appear on the once-rural landscape throughout Hays County.

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#### *Setting*

The small town of Kyle lies largely west of I-H 35 in eastern Hays County, Central Texas. Kyle was created in 1880 with the arrival of the International and Great Northern Railroad (I. & G.N.) which connected the Texas capital of Austin with the city of San Antonio, about 70 miles to the south. The railroad spawned new communities like Buda and Kyle along its route through previously unsettled land in eastern Hays County. Hopeful entrepreneurs platted an 18-block townsite on the west side of the railroad line with two blocks set back from the tracks dedicated for public use. Block 11 was reserved for "School Purposes" and Block 9 was designated as a "Public Square" (Map 3 – Townsite Plat). Although a school was built almost immediately, the public square remained essentially vacant, except for a tiny frame structure, for more than 30 years after the town's founding. Narrow commercial lots fronted onto the railroad tracks along Main Street and the remaining blocks were open to residential use. Block 37 was not part of the original plat and, when it was added, it lay at the northern limits of the townsite fronting on Center Street.

When it was platted, Center Street was intended to be one of the main thoroughfares through Kyle and the Porter House would have been located on prime real estate in the newly formed railroad town. The house occupies a corner site at the northeast corner of Groos and Center streets and is set back only about fifteen feet from the present right-of-way which is still only a two-lane road at that juncture. The two city lots are large enough to support a substantial side yard to the east and a modern seminar building at the rear of the house on the north side. Although the house had fallen into disrepair and misuse, it has undergone extensive repair and restoration in the past few years. It is well-maintained and appropriately reflects its original appearance and condition shortly before author Katherine Anne Porter came to live there as a child. The house was built between 1886 and 1890 so it would have been fairly new and in good condition when Katherine and her family



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came to live with grandmother Catherine Anne Skaggs Porter in 1892. Porter lived in the house until 1902 (Williams et. al. 1994: B-6).

### *Katherine Anne Porter House Site*

Lots 5 and 6 of Block 37 are two adjoining lots whose narrow sides front onto Center Street, a main street leading from downtown Kyle west toward Driftwood and Wimberley. The long side of Lot 6 lies along Groos Street which intersects with Center Street on the south. The Katherine Anne Porter House lies almost entirely – if not entirely – on Lot 6, fronting onto Center Street. A concrete sidewalk leads from the street sidewalk to the front steps. Walkways of crushed granite extend in front of the house with one side wrapping around the east side yard to the seminar room at the rear. A large doll house stands in the rear yard along the east fence line. A grassy lawn covers the yard and a variety of low plantings shield the foundation along the front (south) elevation. A limestone mounting stone is a significant landscape feature. An approximately three and a half foot free-standing wooden informational sign with a spotlight stands in front of the house.

The east side of the site is occupied by a large yard in the front and a modern seminar building at the rear. The front (south) side of the yard is covered with grass and a curved path of crushed granite leading to an unpainted gated fence at the rear. The fence is approximately four feet in height with straight-cut pickets and a curved-top gate. The yard to the east probably held a large vegetable garden and possibly chickens and a cow in the past. The rear yard is shielded from Center Street and the lot to the east by tall hedges and other plantings which create a sheltered haven for the yard. Two park benches lie next to the pathway facing a small, circular planted bed. Behind the fence on the north side of the yard lies the seminar room.

A four foot picket fence starting mid-way back on the west side of the house shields the air conditioner and rear of the house from the Groos Street side. Grass and several trees are planted in the exposed portion of the yard. There are no formal plantings on the street side. A double gate in the fence leads to a driveway and the seminar building at the rear of the house. Grass and decomposed granite pathways comprise the rear yard. A wooden privacy fence marks the northern boundary of the property.

### *Katherine Anne Porter House: Contributing*

The Katherine Anne Porter House is one of 17 L-plan houses identified in the 1994 survey of architectural resources in Kyle conducted by consultants Hardy Heck Moore. Like most L-plan houses, it has a projecting front wing that extends from a side-gabled main wing. The Katherine Anne Porter House is distinguished from other L-plan houses in Kyle – and from most in Hays County – by its intersecting hipped roofs. Again, unlike most L-plan houses, the main building mass of the Katherine Anne Porter House consists of two rooms instead of one. The front projecting wing of the house is two rooms deep as is common to most L-plan houses. An attached shed roof porch with tongue and groove flooring is inset from the wing across the remainder of the



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front façade. It is supported by chamfered porch posts and pilasters. An attached, shed-roof screened porch wraps around the rear (north) and east side of the house.

Weatherboard siding sheaths the frame house and asphalt shingles cover what was once undoubtedly a wood shingled roof. Two 2/2 light double-hung windows are spaced equidistant on the face of the projecting wing and three identical windows punctuate the plane of the main wing. Two doors with transoms are also positioned on the main wing and a third "front" door provides access to the projecting wing from the porch. Historic screen doors cover the glazed and paneled front doors. One matching 2/2 window is on the east façade and two others are spaced on the west side of the house. The house has minimal ornamentation; it features corner boards and fascia boards, chamfered porch posts and pilasters, simple window and door trim and decorative screen doors. It is a simple, yet excellent, example of an early Kyle dwelling in very good condition. The house retains outstanding integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association.

### *Mounting Stone: contributing*

A limestone pedestal for mounting horses or buggies lies beside the house on the east in the front side yard. It dates to the earliest period of construction and is considered a rare surviving example of this type of historic object in Kyle. The mounting stone undoubtedly was on the premises when Katherine Anne Porter and her family lived in the house. It is therefore noted as a Contributing feature of the site.

### *Seminar Room: Noncontributing*

The seminar room is accessed by a concrete driveway that enters from Groos, a side street that intersects with Center Street, and lies behind a tall privacy fence so it is not highly visible from the street. It is a cross gable wood frame building with sliding glass windows along most of the front and side (west) elevations, and extended eaves and rafter ends. The building is covered with a standing seam metal roof. It is intended primarily for literary seminars held by Southwest Texas State University but is also used as a community meeting space. It lies behind the Katherine Anne Porter House to the northeast. Accessible to the house via a gravel pathway, the building is visually separate from the main house by its design and orientation. Fences and plantings shield the building from all sides so that it does not detract from the historic feeling of the Katherine Anne Porter House.

### *Doll House: Noncontributing*

A full-height doll house lies behind the Katherine Anne Porter House, in the yard before the seminar room at the northeast corner of the lot. It is a tiny hipped roof building constructed of wood with asphalt shingles. It faces west onto the rear yard and is hidden from the street on all sides by plantings and fences. A new building, it is a Noncontributing feature of the site.



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### *Summary*

Although two of the four resources on the Katherine Anne Porter site are noncontributing elements, they are obscured by bushes, trees and fencing and the Katherine Anne Porter House visually dominates the lot. In excellent condition and little changed since Katherine Anne Porter lived in it as a girl, the house retains outstanding integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. The mounting stone is a rare surviving artifact that contributes to the historic character of the setting. Overall, the site conveys a strong sense of Kyle's early architectural history.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- 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 VALUE, 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:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Literature, Architecture

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1890-1902

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1890, 1892, 1902

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** Porter, Katherine Anne

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** unknown

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-16).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-17 through 9-18).

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- 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 (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:



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## Statement of Significance

The Katherine Anne Porter Childhood Home is an excellent example of a late-19th century vernacular L-plan house in the rural agricultural town of Kyle, Hays County, Texas, but it is best known as the childhood home of Katherine Anne Porter, one of the most distinguished writers of 20th century American literature. Built about 1890 on Center Street at the western edge of Kyle, a newly platted railroad town between Austin and San Antonio in Central Texas, the house was originally distinguished primarily by its spacious yard, corner lot and near-full façade front porch. With the passage of time and the loss of many of the town's earliest homes, the house is now a rare example of the original housing stock of the early era. It has never suffered major alteration and has recently been repaired and restored. In excellent condition, the house is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for Architecture. The house is also nominated under Criterion B for its association with author Katherine Anne Porter, a Guggenheim fellow and the only author to win both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award which she received for her *Collected Short Stories* in 1966. Although Ms. Porter is well-remembered for her only novel, *Ship of Fools*, her true genius is found in her short fiction for which she has received her broadest acclaim. Home to the writer during her formative years, the Katherine Anne Porter House appears frequently in her work, either as a composite or as it was in her memory. The town of Kyle and her girlhood home provided a backdrop for her literature. In fact, the years spent in Kyle were unhappy ones for the young girl – her mother's death precipitated the family's move to her grandmother's house and her grandmother's death, in turn, led to their leaving. At least three of her stories – *The Fig Tree*, *Old Mortality*, and *Old Order*, are recognizably set in Kyle with her grandmother's house – where she lived with her father and siblings – featured prominently. Because the house is closely associated with one of America's greatest authors at an impressionable time in her life and because it figures in her work as the setting in some of our nation's most important literature, the Katherine Anne Porter House is nominated to the National Register under Criterion B at the national level of significance.

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## Historic Associations with Katherine Anne Porter

Katherine Anne Porter is universally regarded as one of America's greatest 20th century authors but the rural Central Texas of her childhood was an unlikely training ground for her sophisticated talents. A native of Texas, she was born in Indian Creek in 1890 but moved with her father, brother and two sisters to Kyle in 1892 when she was only two years old. Her mother had died only a few months after giving birth to a younger sister Mary Alice and the remaining family members moved in with Porter's grandmother Catherine Ann Skaggs Porter, "Aunt Cat", in the newly platted railroad town of Kyle. There she spent the next ten years – the longest period of time she would live anyplace in her life. Although Katherine Anne Porter only lived in the house during the earliest part of her life, she used personal experiences from that period in her later stories. Several of her short stories are almost auto-biographical, taking place in Kyle and the surrounding area (Williams 1994: B-6). Among those set in the Kyle region are *The Fig Tree*, *The Old Order*, *Old Mortality* and *The Source*, which are considered to be some of her best short fiction.

The Porter family legacy in Texas and Hays County dates to the early 1850s when Aunt Cat and her husband Asbury D. Porter moved to Hays County where they bought a 365-acre farm in 1853 (Stovall 1990).



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Katherine's father, Harrison Boone Porter, was born to the couple in Hays County before they moved to Louisiana for the duration of the Civil War. After the war, the family returned to Hays County and Harrison attended military school in San Antonio. Asbury Porter began buying farmland throughout the Mountain City area, the center of population in the region before the arrival of the railroad. Although Porter owned a great deal of farmland in Hays County, he left his widow in poverty and his property was divided among so many heirs and other recipients that no single parcel had significant value (Stovall 1990).

Katherine Anne's mother also came from an old Central Texas family. Mary Alice Jones was born in Luling, a small agricultural center in Caldwell County, just east of Hays County, in 1857. A Methodist, she enjoyed a good education at the Coronal Institute in San Marcos, the Hays County seat. Later, the Jones family moved to Indian Creek, near Brownwood, where Harrison Porter and Mary Alice were married in her parents' home in 1883 (Stovall 1990). The couple moved briefly to Hays County where daughter Gay was born but they returned to Indian Creek in 1885 where they lived on land given to them by Alice's father. Two sons were born to the couple; Harrison Paul in 1887 and Johnnie who died in 1890. That year, on May 15, Katherine was born (Stovall 1990). She was christened Callie Russell after a friend of her mother's. Happiness for the Porters was short-lived. Alice was weakened and two years later, following the birth of her daughter Mary Alice on January 25, 1892, she died on March 20 at the age of thirty-three, only two months before Callie's (Katherine Anne's) second birthday. Harrison Porter packed up the four children and took them to his mother's house in Kyle (Givner 1982: 39).

It is thought that Aunt Cat Porter was already living in the house when Harrison brought the family to Kyle but the deed records show that it was owned by Flora Storts and Ezekial Nance until 1893. The property had originally been sold to Flora L. Storts by an agent of the Texas Land Company on behalf of John S. Barnes and Jacob S. Wetmore in 1884. Subsequently, Ms. Storts married Ezekial E. Nance. It is not known if the Nance's built the house in the 1880s or simply held the property for speculation. The house was probably built during the 1880s and perhaps the Nance's rented the house to Mrs. Porter or had some other arrangement with her. Author Joan Givner stated that Aunt Cat purchased the 110' x 115' lot (lots 5 and 6 combined) when they were sold at auction at the town's inception (Givner 1982: 42). In any event, the Nance's transferred the title to Harrison Porter on January 2, 1893 (Stovall 1990).

By the time the Harrison Porter family arrived in Kyle, the town population had grown to more than 500 citizens including four doctors, two dentists, two blacksmiths, two painters, and a lawyer. Twenty-five businesses lined the International & Great Northern (I & G N) Railroad tracks that ran north and south along the eastern edge of the town. Among them were three general stores, a furniture store and a livery stable. The little town even had a hotel (Givner 1982: 42).

If Kyle was thriving, however, the Porters were not. Porter's biographer, Joan Givens has stated that with the family's move to Kyle their lives became "pinched, disorderly, and unharmonious". Much of the unpleasantness had to do with money, or the lack of it. Porter herself remarked about that period, "How do I know what happened to the money, except that the land was gone?" (Givner 1982: 45). Neither the Harrison Porters nor Aunt Cat had enough money and they sold what land they had to pay the bills and make ends meet. Then, on November 9, 1896, while Harrison, Aunt Cat and the children were still living in the house, the Nances sold the house to Asbury Manlove Porter, Harrison's youngest brother, of Presidio County. Harrison



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Porter was known to mismanage his finances and it is possible that his brother was forced to purchase the house for him (Stovall 1990).

Katherine was keenly aware of the family's circumstances and knew that her friends were better off economically and enjoyed a more stable homelife than she (Stovall 1990). According to one historian, Porter's grandmother kept alive the privileges she had enjoyed growing up in an affluent Southern family. Katherine Anne Porter's dearest childhood friend continued throughout her life – Erna Schlemmer whose father N.C. Schlemmer came to Kyle in 1889. He was proprietor of a successful mercantile company and also served as a postmaster. Katherine Anne observed their genteel life and endured the void in hers when the Schlemmer family traveled every other summer to visit relatives in Germany. She later said of Erna and her son, that they were her only childhood friends "the oldest friends, the only people who have known me from the cradle (that is the mother has) and with luck will see me to the grave" (Stovall 1990).

According to biographer Givner, the cramped little house was most unbearable for the family of six. It had a "combination living and dining room, two bedrooms and a small box room, each opening off the other with no connecting corridor" (Givner 1982: 46). While the description of the house is accurate, it was not unlike many other modest homes in and around Kyle and was certainly more commodious than the two-room cabin at Indian Creek where Katherine was born.

Aunt Cat died in 1901. Asbury Manlove Porter and his wife sold the property to M.A. Johnson (Stovall 1990). The following year the family left Kyle and moved to San Antonio where Callie attended the Thomas School for Girls. There she was exposed to the arts and literature but within a short time the family moved again, first to Victoria and then to Lufkin, Texas. Between 1902 and 1906 when Callie impetuously got married at the age of sixteen, the girl had lived in four different cities. Thus, Katherine Anne Porter's ten-year sojourn at her grandmother's house in Kyle constituted the only stable homelife she had known in her childhood. She would go on to travel and live all over the world, marry and divorce four times, but she would return again and again in her literature to the only home she had ever known as a child.

Porter left her first husband to become an actress and she certainly did have a theatrical bent but she contracted tuberculosis and decided to become a writer during her convalescence. After being released from the sanitarium, she worked as a journalist in Chicago, Denver and Illinois. Between 1918 and 1921, Porter lived in Mexico where she became involved in Mexican revolutionary politics. She worked as a journalist and a teacher and wrote several stories set in Mexico including *Xochimilco* and *the Fiesta of Guadalupe*. In 1922 she published a study entitled *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts*. She later stated that Mexico gave her back her Texas past. In the late 1920s, Porter traveled in Europe and settled in Paris in the early 1930s where she contributed to leftist journals such as *The New Republic* and *The Nation* (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/kaporter.htm> 12/1/2003).

Katherine Anne Porter's first published story was "Maria Concepcion" in *Century* magazine in 1922. In 1927, "He" appeared in *New Masses* in 1927, followed by "Magic" in *transition* and "Rope" in the *Second American Caravan*, both in 1928. "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" appeared in *transition* in 1929 and "Flowering Judas" in *Hound and Horn* in 1930. Her first collection of short stories was a limited edition of *Flowering Judas* – only 600 copies – in 1930, with an enlarged publication in 1935. When Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* was published in 1939, it received widespread acclaim. The work consisted of three short novels:



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"Old Mortality" a loosely autobiographical piece about a motherless family that comes to live with their grandmother in Kyle, Texas; "Noon Wine", set on a Texas farm at the turn of the 20th century, and the title piece; and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider", about a love affair between a soldier and a young newspaper woman during the influenza epidemic of World War I. The central character, Miranda, has a family and background that is roughly based on Porter's. In her 1944 collection of six related stories, *The Leaning Tower*, Miranda's (Porter's) family life is further examined (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/kaporter.htm> 12/1/2003).

In the 1950s, Porter published two volumes of essays, *The Days Before* (1952) and *Defense of Circe* (1954) and concentrated on her only novel, the 1962 *Ship of Fools*, which was published when she was 72. In 1965, Porter published her *Collected Stories* (Morris, September 6, 1997: B3). Her best-known works, among them *Flowering Judas*, originally published in 1930 and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider and Noon Wine*, first published in 1939, were included in the collection. Porter's *Collected Stories* was met with overwhelming acclaim and won both the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award for excellence in fiction for 1966 (Morris, September 6, 1997: B3). The Pulitzer Prizes are the country's most prestigious awards and the most sought-after accolades in journalism, letters and music. They were first awarded in 1917 by a foundation established by publisher Joseph Pulitzer. Pulitzer stipulated that four awards be given for journalism, four for literature and drama, one in education, and four for traveling scholarships. They were established as incentives to excellence (Brennan 1999). Because the collected stories were written primarily in the 1930s and 1940s, the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award may have been more a recognition of Katherine Anne Porter's lifetime contribution to American fiction than for a single work – much less one conceived in the year 1965. Ms. Porter was certainly in good contemporary literary company, however. Previous winners were John Updike for *The Centaur* (1964) and Saul Bellow for *Herzog* (1965) and those following were Bernard Malamud for *The Fixer* (1967) and Thornton Wilder for *The Eighth Day* (1968) (Brennan 1999). Katherine Anne Porter was undeniably among the country's finest writers of fiction.

Katherine Anne Porter received other awards and recognition for her work. In 1966, her only novel, *Ship of Fools*, was made into an Oscar winning film directed by Stanley Kramer and starring Vivien Leigh. It is an allegorical tale of good and evil set aboard a German passenger ship in 1931. Ms. Porter continued to write into the 1970s and published *Collected Essays and Occasional Writings* (1970) and *The Never-Ending Wrong* (1977), an account of the infamous trial and execution of anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. She was the first woman to be named a visiting professor at Washington and Lee University. Katherine Anne Porter died in Silver Spring, Maryland on September 18, 1980. The following is a selected list of Ms. Porter's most influential work over the course of her career:

- Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts, 1922*
- Flowering Judas, 1930 – enlarged Flowering Judas and Other Stories, 1935*
- Hacienda, 1934*
- Noon Wine, 1937*
- Pale Horse, Pale Rider, 1939*
- The Leaning Tower and Other Stories, 1944*
- The Old Order, 1944*
- The Days Before, 1952*



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*A Defense of Circe, 1955*  
*Holiday, 1962*  
*The Ship of Fools, 1962*  
*Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, 1965*  
*Collected Essays and Occasional Writings, 1970*  
*The Never-Ending Wrong, 1977*

Ms. Porter's long life spanned nine decades and, as her biographer, Joan Givner has said, she somehow managed to be present when the history of her time was being made. Ms. Porter was born in a log cabin at Indian Creek, Texas and grew up steeped in such vivid lore of the Civil War that she claimed she was "the grandchild of a lost war". She lived through two world wars – nearly dying in the great flu epidemic of World War I – as well as the Korean Conflict and Vietnam. She lived in New York's Greenwich Village during Prohibition and the Roaring Twenties and participated in the Obregon Revolution in Mexico City. A Communist sympathizer, she lived in Berlin during Hitler's rise to power. From Germany, she traveled to Paris where she lived for four years preceding World War II. She roamed the world for much of her life, finally settling in Washington D. C. in her later years. However, the bulk of her fiction was written during her restless decades as she moved from one exotic place to another. Perhaps not surprisingly, the setting of much of her fiction is based on the only stable home she ever knew – her childhood house in Kyle.

### *Criterion C: Architecture, Katherine Anne Porter's Childhood Home*

Although Katherine Anne Porter led an adventurous life that took her to Chicago, Denver, Mexico, New York, Paris, Berlin and finally to the Washington, D.C. area, her impressions of her childhood years in Kyle remained with her always. Many of the characters in Katherine Anne Porter's writings were drawn from the citizens of Kyle and the surrounding Hill Country. Some of the scenes are rather exotic with parrots in cages, orange and lemon trees, strawberries and fig trees were common in the town's gardens (Stovall 1990). There is still a fig tree in the garden of the Katherine Anne Porter House. Other scenes depict a troubled family life. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Porter appears to be describing her own childhood in the house in a passage recalling a dream:

" . . . How I have loved this house in the morning before we are all awake and tangled together like badly cast fishing lines. Too many people have been born here, and have wept too much here, and have laughed too much, and have been too angry and outrageous with each other here. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantel-pieces, there have been too damned many antimacassars in this house, she said loudly, and oh, what accumulation of storied dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment" (Porter 1965: 269).

The Katherine Anne Porter House is also an excellent example of a modest, small town L-Plan house in late nineteenth century Kyle. Although exaggerated or disguised, the little house on Center Street appears over



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 14

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

and over in Katherine Anne Porter's work. Eleanor Hanover Nance, a native of Kyle, described the house as follows:

It sits on a city block of land, large enough for out-buildings, flower and vegetable gardens, a small orchard, many 'climbing trees' and probably a milk cow and chickens. The front porch was a perfect place to sit in a swing or chair in the late summer evenings after the supper dishes were done, and to listen to the telling of the family tales and or the latest small town gossip, and for the children to play hide and seek, or to catch fireflies (Stovall 1990).

In her story *The Old Order*, Katherine Anne Porter describes a similar scene from "Grandmother's house" where she grew up:

In the summer the women sat under the mingled trees of the side garden, which commanded a view of the east wing, the front and back porches, a good part of the front garden and a corner of the small fig grove. Their choice of this location was a part of their domestic strategy. Very little escaped them: a glance now and then would serve to keep them fairly well informed as to what was going on in the whole place (Porter 1965: 326)

The Katherine Anne Porter House is one of 17 L-plan houses identified in the 1994 survey of architectural resources in Kyle (Hardy Heck Moore, 1994). Easily recognized by its L-shaped footprint, it is Texas' most common 19th century house form. Typically, L-plan houses have front-projecting wings that extend from a side-gabled main building. Most L-plan houses in Texas are of wood-frame construction with weatherboard siding. Although most are relatively modest houses, many display a few of the elaborate late Victorian-era details such as turned porch posts, decorative brackets and window surrounds, spindle friezes and similar ornamentation that is more typical of grand Queen Anne and Eastlake homes. The entrance to an L-plan house often leads directly into a room of the house with several rooms front-to-back on one side and a single room on the opposite side. The front projecting wing usually consists of one or two rooms in tandem with the rear room serving as a rudimentary kitchen and dining area.

Of the 17 L-plan houses documented in the 1994 Kyle survey, the Katherine Anne Porter House is one of the oldest and the only one with an intersecting hipped roof. Most L-plan houses consist of two intersecting gabled roofs and hipped roof variants are much less common. The Katherine Anne Porter House is a particularly good and well-maintained example of the type. Again unlike typical L-plan houses, the main building mass of the Katherine Anne Porter House consists of two rooms instead of one. It is possible that the second room was added at an early date. The front projecting wing of the house is two rooms deep as is common to most L-plan houses. An attached shed roof porch with tongue-and-groove flooring is inset from the wing across the remainder of the front façade. It is supported by chamfered porch posts and pilasters. An attached, shed-roof screened porch wraps around most of the rear façade of the house.

Although some alterations were made over the near century since Katherine Anne Porter lived in the house, it suffered few irreversible changes. Those made during the historic period, including the screening of the rear porch remained intact in the restoration of the building to reflect the evolution of the building through the historic period. The following list indicates ownership of the Katherine Anne Porter House property – and



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Katherine Anne Porter House  
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the occupancy of her immediate family – from the period pre-dating the probable construction of the house to the present:

### Chain of Ownership

- 1884 Texas Land Company to Flora L. Storts (soon afterward, Flora Storts married Ezekial Nance)  
\*1890 Catherine Ann Skaggs Porter is occupant of the house  
\*1892 Harrison Porter and children are occupants of the house  
1893 Flora Storts and Ezekial Nance sold to Harrison Porter  
1896 Flora and Ezekial Nance sold to Asbury Manlove Porter (Harrison's younger brother)  
-Ashbury Porter may have been compelled to assume ownership of his mother's house due to his brother's notorious irresponsibility. The direct deed from Flora and Ezekial Nance appears to be a formal transfer of title to Ashbury Porter.  
1901 Asbury Manlove Porter sold to M.A. Johnson (a cousin of Porters)  
\*1901 Aunt Cat died  
\*1902 Harrison Porter moved his family to San Antonio  
1943 – Johnson heirs sold to Bertie Maude and Joseph Strawn  
1995 – Bertie Maude Strawn sold to Yana and David Bland  
2000 – Yana and David Bland to Friends of Hays County Historical Commission Preservation

Associates

### Present Status

In 1995, David and Yana Bland bought the house and began its restoration. They opened the house as a museum but the restoration and maintenance efforts proved daunting for a private party (Fowler 1998: 24). Two years later, Tom Grimes, head of the creative writing program at Southwest Texas State University, learned that the Katherine Anne Porter house would be offered for sale. He believed the house was an "important legacy to preserve" and thought it might be acquired for a writer-in-residence program (Hill News, Fall 2002). A group of Kyle-area residents led by Bob Barton, a local publisher, established the Katherine Anne Porter Preservation Project to purchase and renovate the house (Fowler 1998: 25). The primary exterior change that had to be rectified was the replacement of the original wooden porch floor and chamfered porch posts. At some time in the past a concrete floor and turned porch posts had replaced the original's (Morris, September 6, 1997: B-3). However, to prepare the site for public use and literary seminars, substantial funds were needed. Bill Johnson, representing the Burdine Johnson, gifted approximately \$300,000 to add extensive landscaping and ensure a historically accurate restoration and Kurt Englehorn, a nephew of Erna Schlemmer, Katherine Anne Porter's childhood friend, donated \$600,000 to fund the writer-in-residence program (Knight files, 2000). Today, Preservation Associates of Kyle owns the house and leases it to Southwest Texas State which operates it as a museum and home for writers-in-residence at the university (Hill News, Fall 2002: 10).

In June 2002, First Lady Laura Bush helped dedicate the childhood home of Katherine Anne Porter as a National Literary Landmark. The designation was made by the Friends of Libraries USA and Library of Congress. The only other National Literary Landmark in Texas is the O. Henry House in Austin. Others across



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Katherine Anne Porter House  
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the nation include the Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings homes (Hill News, Fall 2002: 11).

### *Summary*

Although hers was not a happy or carefree childhood, Katherine Anne Porter's life at her grandmother's house in Kyle formed the foundation for her future literary greatness. Thus, though the house was associated with the author for only ten years, they were of significant consequence. That she was a woman of great talent is undeniable. Porter won the O. Henry Award in 1962 for "Holiday" published in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine. In 1966, she won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, an achievement no other author has yet attained. In 1984, her novella *Noon Wine* was adapted for American Playhouse. The film version, starring Jason Robards and Per Oscarsson, was directed by Sam Peckinpah. Her only novel, *Ship of Fools*, was made into a major motion picture directed by Stanley Kramer and starring Vivien Leigh. Because the house in Kyle is the home most closely associated with Katherine Anne Porter, one of America's greatest twentieth century authors, it is nominated to the National Register under Criterion B at the national level of significance.

The Katherine Anne Porter House maintains its architectural fabric to an outstanding degree and excellently reflects the type of modest dwelling that was most typical of small rural towns of Central Texas in the late nineteenth century. It possesses integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling, materials and association to a remarkable extent and is therefore nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance, as well.



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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### References

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- Fowler, Gene. "Katherine Anne Porter" in *Texas Highways, Vol. 45, No. 1*. Austin: Texas Department of Transportation, 1998.
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- Stovall, Frances, Dorothy Wimberley Kerbow, Maxine Storm, Louise Simon, Dorothy Woods Schwartz and Gene Johnson. *Clear Springs and Limestone Ledges: A History of San Marcos and Hays County*. Austin: Nortex Press, 1986.
- Strom, Ann Miller. *Kyle: The Prairie City*. Burnet, Texas: Nortex Press, 1981.



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 18

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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Texas Historical Commission. *Katherine Anne Porter Subject Marker File*. Hays County, Texas. Articles, ephemera, various dates.



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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

---

**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre

<b>UTM REFERENCES</b>	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
1.	14	608080	3317940

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** Lots 4 and 5, Block 37 in the City of Kyle, Texas

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** This nomination includes all lots historically associated with the property

---

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

---

**NAME/TITLE:** Terri Myers, Historian

**ORGANIZATION:** Preservation Central, Inc.

**DATE:** November 14, 2003

**STREET & NUMBER:** 823 Harris Ave

**TELEPHONE:** 512-478-0898

**CITY OR TOWN:** Austin

**STATE:** TX

**ZIP CODE:** 78705

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see continuation sheet Map-19 through 20)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-21 through 26)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** (see continuation sheet Photo Log-28)

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

---

**NAME:** Preservation Associates, Inc.

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 31

**TELEPHONE:** 512-268-0729

**CITY OR TOWN:** Buda

**STATE:** TX

**ZIP CODE:** 78610

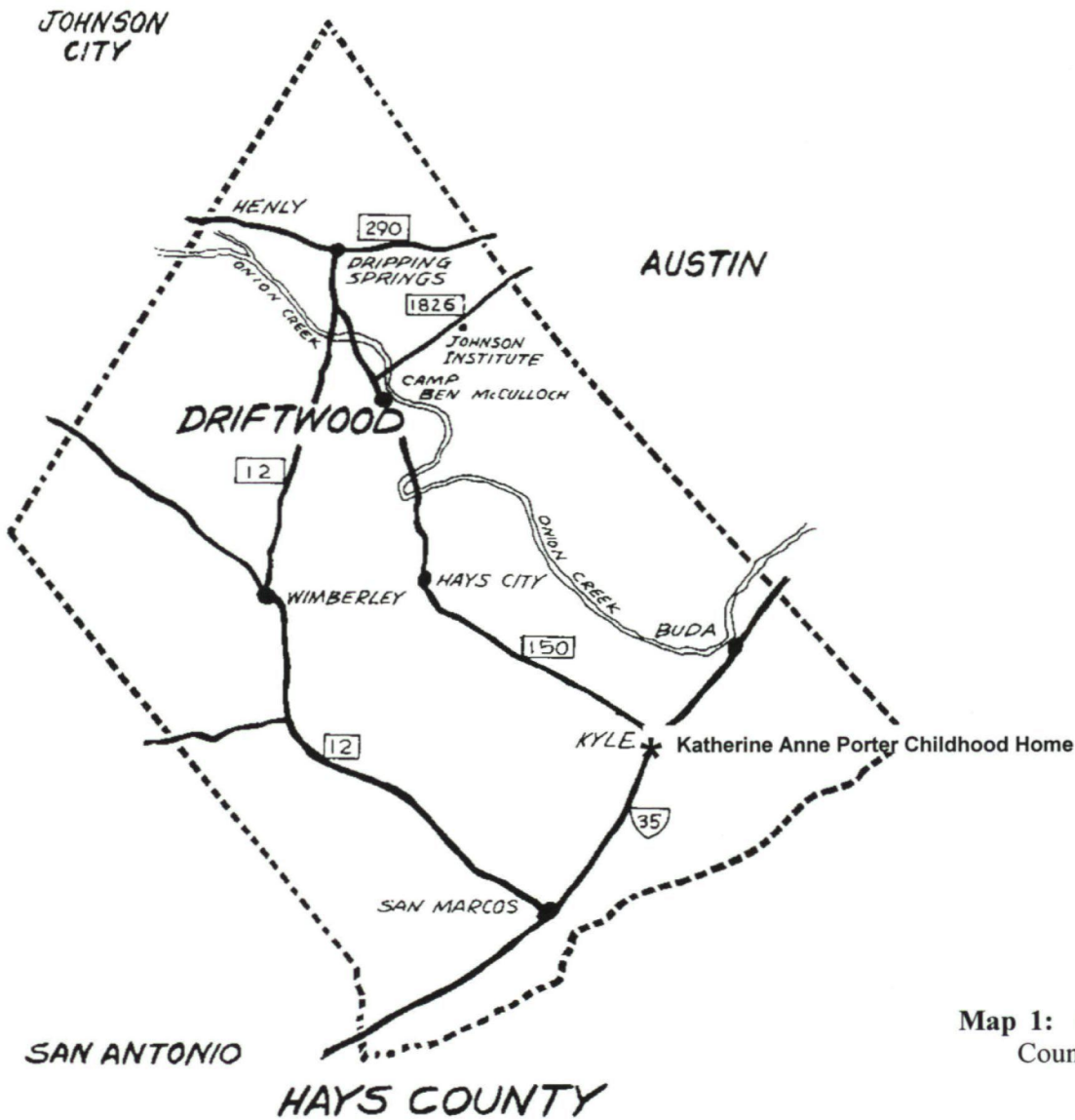


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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAPS Page 19

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas



Map 1: Location of Kyle in Hays County

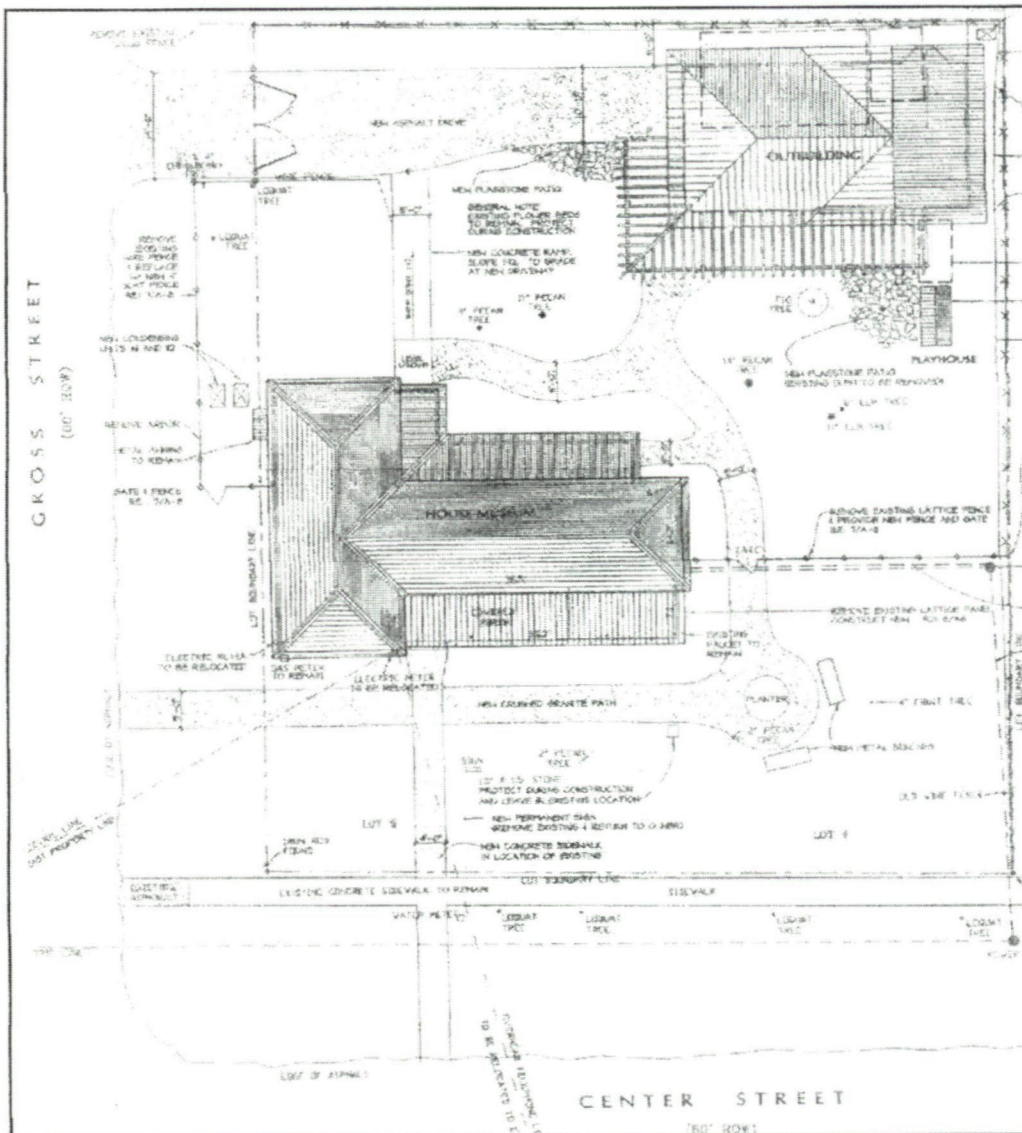


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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section MAPS Page 20

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas



Map 2: Site plan

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 21

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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**Photo 1:** Childhood Home

(South elevation, camera facing North)



**Photo 2:** Childhood Home

(SE oblique, camera facing NE)



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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 22

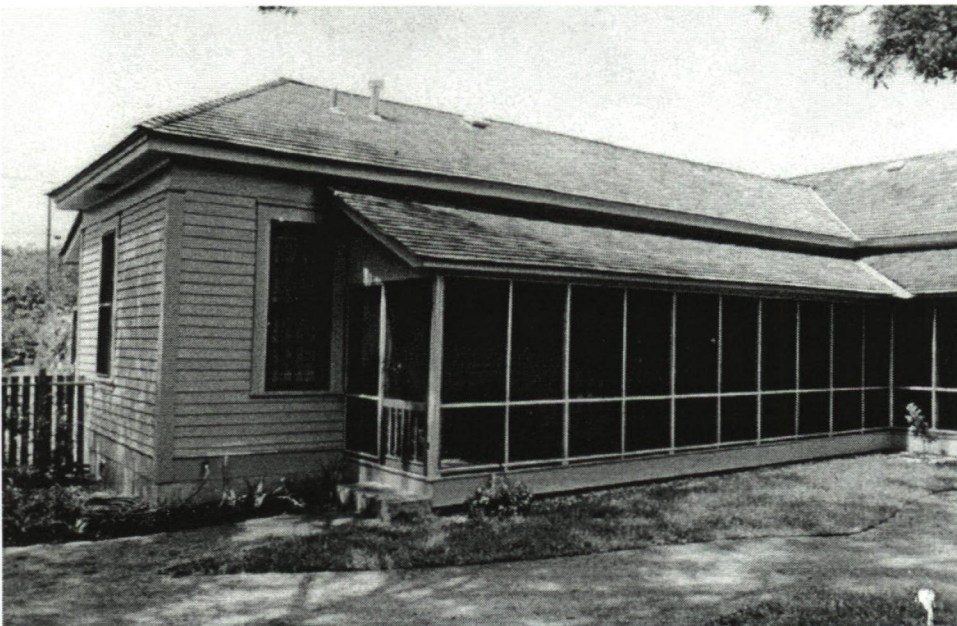
Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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**Photo 3:** Office

(South elevation, camera facing north)



**Photo 4:** Childhood Home

(NE oblique, camera facing SW)

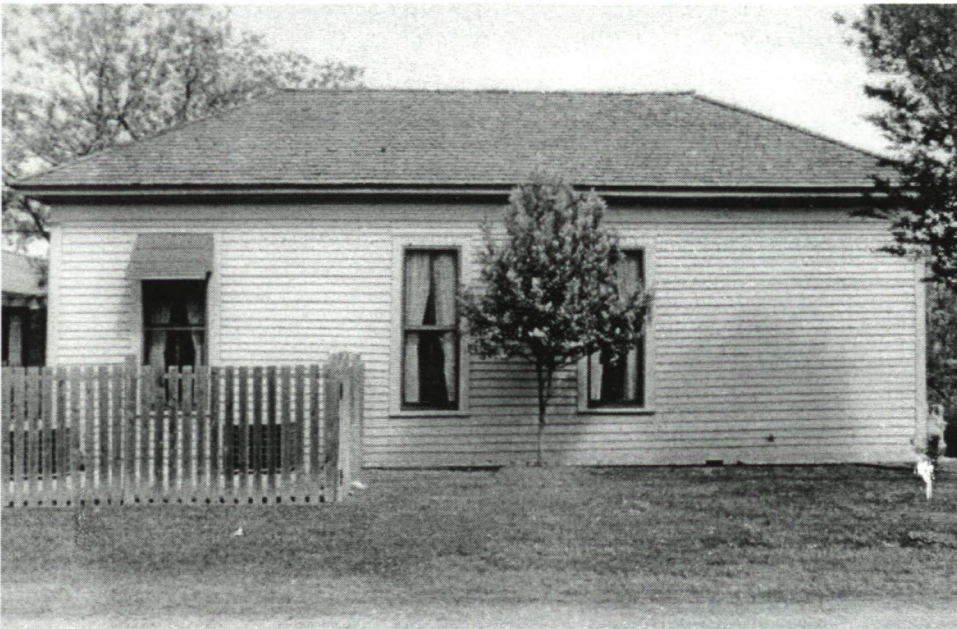
United States Department of the Interior  
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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 23

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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**Photo 5:** Childhood Home

(West elevation, camera facing east)



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 24

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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A

**Photo 6:** Katherine Anne (Callie Russell) about 4 years old (left), her sister Mary Alice and grandmother Catherine Anne Porter.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 25

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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**Photo 7:** Katherine Anne Porter in  
Mexico ca. 1930



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National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Photos Page 26

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas



Photo 8: House interior 1997



Photo 9: First Lady Laura Bush receives plaque dedicating the Katherine Anne Porter House as a Literary Landmark from Bill Johnson (right) in 2002.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photo Log Page 27

Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays County, Texas

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### Photo Log

Katherine Anne Porter House  
508 W. Center Street  
Kyle, TX 78640  
Terri Myers, Photographer  
May 2003  
Negatives on file with Preservation Central, Inc.

Photo 1 of 3  
South elevation, camera facing north

Photo 2 of 3  
Southeast oblique, camera facing northwest

Photo 3 of 3  
Upping stone, camera facing southwest



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Porter, Katherine Anne, House

MULTIPLE NAME: Rural Properties of Hays County, Texas MPS

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Hays

DATE RECEIVED: 7/08/04      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/27/04  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/11/04      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/21/04  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 04000893

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: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

     ACCEPT         RETURN         REJECT                         DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Childhood home of Katherine Anne Porter,  
accomplished and nationally recognized  
author of short fiction genre. Her life in  
Kyle and <sup>ten</sup> years as a youth living in  
her grandmother's house were formative  
in her career and figured in a  
number of her stories. She*

RECOM./CRITERIA BTC  
REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE History  
TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE 8/20/04

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.

*National significance is OK based on her wide acclaim.  
Documentation, however, lacks critical essays  
etc. to support her stature as one of the most  
distinguished writers of 20th century am. literature. To make this  
acceptable for NH & consideration.*

*sign. examples  
of late 19th  
Century  
2-plan houses  
in rural com-  
munity of Kyle.*



THE KATHERINE ANNE PORTER  
LITERARY CENTER

The childhood home (1892-1903) of  
Pulitzer Prize and National  
Book Award Winner Katherine Anne Porter  
is dedicated to preserving the legacy of  
a great American writer



SWT

www.English.swt.edu/KAP  
Preservation Association, Inc.  
Southwest Texas State University



Katherine Anne Porter House  
Kyle, Hays co., TX  
1 of 3





Katherine Anne Porter House

Kyle, Hays Co., Tx

3 of 3

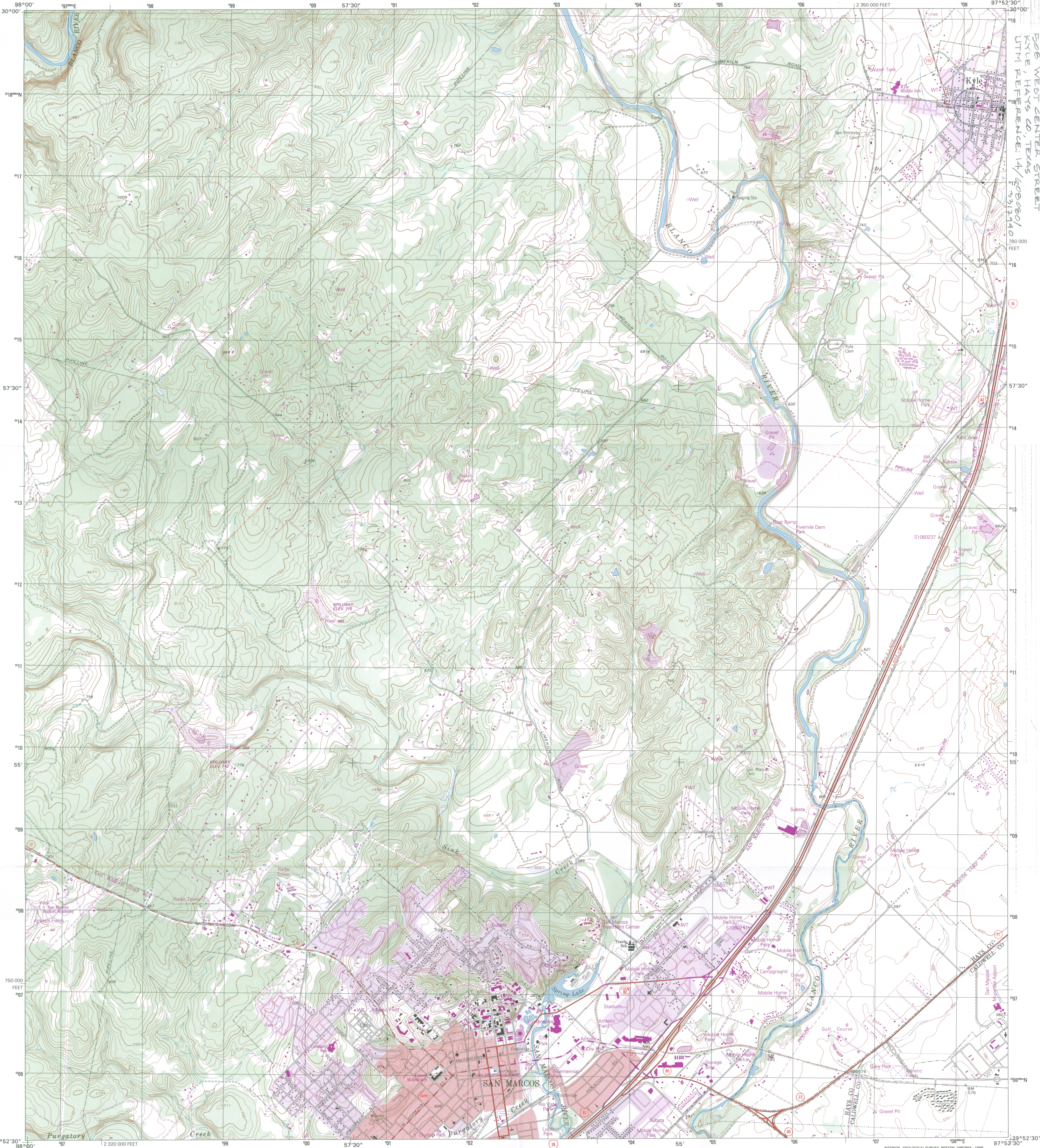
## Missing Core Documentation

<b>Property Name County, State</b>	<b>Multiple Property Name</b>	<b>Reference Number</b>
Porter, Katherine Anne, House	Rural Properties of Hays County, Texas MPS	04000893

The following Core Documentation is missing from this entry:

- Nomination Form
- Photographs (missing #2)
- USGS Map





KATHERINE ANNE PORTER HOUSE  
 606 WEST CENTER STREET  
 KYLE, HAYS CO., TEXAS  
 UTM REFERENCE: 14/4090901  
 7313940  
 780000  
 FEET

Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
 Topography compiled 1958. Planimetry derived from imagery dated 1986 and other sources. Photomapped using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1986. Boundaries, other than corporate, verified 1998.

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 14 10 000-foot ticks: Texas Coordinate System of 1927 (south central zone).

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.

Areas covered by dashed light-blue pattern are subject to controlled inundation.

UTM GRID AND 1988 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24 000

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
 TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION 2997-333

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	

1 Driftwood  
 2 Mountain City  
 3 Boda  
 4 Wheelerley  
 5 Umland  
 6 Hunter  
 7 San Marcos South  
 8 Martindale

ADJOINING 7.5 QUADRANGLE NAMES

**SAN MARCOS NORTH, TX**  
 1995  
 NIMA 6443 IV NW-SERIES V882

THIS MAP COMPLES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

TEXAS

ISBN 0-1607-64283-7  
 29388-409091-6





**TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION**

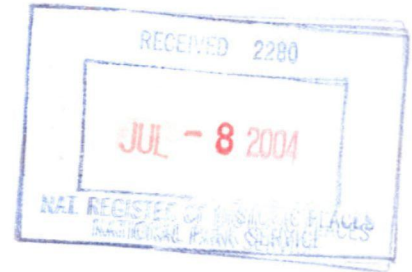
Rick Perry • *Governor*  
 John L. Nau, III • *Chairman*  
 F. Lawrence Oaks • *Executive Director*  
*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

TO: Carol Shull, Keeper  
 National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Hannah Vaughan, Historian  
 Texas Historical Commission

RE: Katherine Anne Porter House, Kyle, Hays County, Texas

DATE: April 5, 2004



The following materials are submitted regarding: Katherine Anne Porter House

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resubmitted nomination
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple Property nomination form
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USGS map
<input type="checkbox"/>	Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

COMMENTS:

SHPO requests substantive review

The enclosed owner objections (do ) (do not ) constitute a majority of property owners

Other \_\_\_\_\_