

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAY 4 1977
DATE ENTERED DEC 14 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

W. E. Palmer House

AND/OR COMMON

(Alex Haley House)

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Off U. S. 57

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Henning

VICINITY OF

Seventh

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

47

COUNTY

Lauderdale

CODE

97

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The William Reid Estate

*By conversation w/owner:
Mrs. Mollie S. Young LBF
P.O. Box 385
Henning, Tennessee 38041
9/29/78*

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Henning

VICINITY OF

STATE

Tennessee

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Lauderdale County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Court Square

CITY, TOWN

Ripley

STATE

Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Tennessee Historical and Architectural Survey

DATE

April 1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Tennessee Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Palmer House is located in the quiet suburbs of Henning, a small incorporated town with a population of approximately 600, in southeastern Lauderdale County. W. E. Palmer, a prominent Negro businessman and community leader, had the ten-room eclectic Bungalow-style house built in 1918 or 1919.

Although the story-and-a-half, frame house has several structural projections, the overall floor plan is rectangular and symmetrical. Divided into three major units, the main section, the veranda and porte cochère, and the rear wing, all of these were included in the original construction plan of the house. It rests on a brick foundation, and roof surfaces are covered with composition shingles.

The square main section has a low hipped gable roof. The main elevation which faces southeast, is divided into three bays; paired windows flank the main entrance which consists of a single-leaf door and side and head lights. Most of the windows in the Palmer House have an eight-over-one light pattern comprised of four small lights and similar number of elongated lights in the upper sash or variation of this configuration; the window surrounds are wooden and unadorned. Above the entrance, a large hipped gable dormer--with paired windows, scroll-cut verge boards, and unusual brackets, which are repeated in other parts of this section--dominates the southeastern face of the roof. Two brick chimney stacks are also located on this side of the roof. Except for fenestration variations, the northeast and southwest elevations are identical. The distinctive features of these walls are the slightly projecting, gable-roofed elements located in the northwest end of the walls.

The assertive columned veranda and porte cochère project southeast and northeast of the main section. Four massive, square, truncated columns with brick bases support the porch, and the porte cochère has two similar units. The columns have rectangular recessed panels, and these are joined with shallow, v-shaped arched lintels, surmounted with exposed rafters, and brick base infill. A centered, wide, straight staircase provides access to the veranda, and a second set of stairs joins this area to the porte cochère.

Attached to the northwest wall of the main section is a single-story wing with a hipped gable roof and a recessed porch, supported by three square columns, in its northwestern end. A square, vertical projection with a very low pyramidal roof, exposed rafters, and eight windows, provides for a bright, airy, second-floor room which may have been a studio or music room.

Surprisingly spacious best describes the interior of the Palmer House. There are seven rooms in the first story and two rooms above the main section and the studio in the upper level of the house. The second-floor rooms are reached by a narrow staircase in the center of the northwestern end of the house. The parlor, located in the south corner of the main section, has a fireplace and two sets of French doors.

Except for the shingles, the present and original appearance of the Palmer House remain the same. It is in good repair and the present owners, who reside there, insure that its condition does not deteriorate.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1918-19

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

It was on the porch of the Palmer House that the young Alex Haley listened to Cynthia Palmer, his grandmother, and Aunts Liz, Plus, Viney, and Till, and Cousin George share reminiscences and tell the history of his and their ancestors. He heard them speak of the "African," the Mandingo youth Kunta Kinte, who was captured by slave catchers near his village of Juffure on the Kamby Balongo in West Africa and who was transported over the Middle Passage aboard the Lord Ligonier to Annapolis, Maryland, and sold into slavery. The elderly ladies traced the genealogy of the young man, called "Toby" by his owner John Waller, to his daughter Kizzy, who was sold to Tom Lea of North Carolina; to "Chicken George," her son, a gamecock trainer and an extraordinary man who won his freedom before the Emancipation Proclamation, and who led his family and friends overland to Henning, Tennessee; to his son Tom Murray, the industrious and enterprising blacksmith; to Cynthia, Murray's daughter who married Will Palmer; to Bertha George, the daughter of Will and Cynthia Palmer, who married Simon Alexander Haley; and finally to Alex Haley. The seed planted in Haley's mind during those quiet summer evenings in the 1920s and '30s germinated in 1964 when he began to further investigate his ancestry. Twelve years later Roots, which will probably become one of the most influential books of the twentieth century, was published. On April 1977, Haley received the Pulitzer Prize for Roots.

Alex Haley was born in Ithaca, New York, in 1921; six weeks later his parents took him to Henning, where he and his mother lived with Will and Cynthia Palmer while Simon Haley completed his graduate studies and later operated the Palmer family business. About 1929 the elder Haley began his teaching career, and the family again relocated; Alex and his brothers spent every summer with Cynthia Palmer in Henning. Haley taught himself to write while serving a twenty-year hitch in the U. S. Coast Guard; he had published a few adventure stories before his retirement in 1959. After writing biographical articles for Readers Digest and the first "Playboy interview", he collaborated with Malcolm X to write the autobiography of that ill-fated Black Muslim leader.

Roots, Haley's major work, is significant for several reasons. It relates the American Negro experience from its origins in Africa to the present, employing a framework of documented historical persons and events. The book records the history of a single family while also epitomizing the collective experience of all black Americans in a way that is personally meaningful and deeply moving to readers of all races and ethnic origins. The eight-part television series, based on Roots, reached millions of Americans who had not or would not have read the book. Haley has accomplished what was considered a difficult, if not impossible, feat: he traced the history of his family back over seven generations, more than two hundred years, to a small West African hamlet. He proved that it could be done. Roots has inspired thousands of Americans to begin the laborious but rewarding task of tracing their own ancestry. Finally, while Haley

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Alex Haley, Roots, New York: Doubleday, 1976.
 Deed, D. M. Henning to Thomas Murray, January 23, 1886, Lauderdale County Deed Records.
 Memorandum, Herbert L. Harper to Robert E. Dalton, April 14, 1977, relative to
 interview with Alex Haley

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .5

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 6	2, 5, 6, 8, 1, 0	3, 9, 5, 0, 5, 6, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property nominated is a rectangular lot 100 feet by 200 feet, bounded on the northeast and southeast by un-named Henning city streets.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Robert E. Dalton, Director of Field Services

ORGANIZATION

Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

April 1977

STREET & NUMBER

170 Second Avenue North

TELEPHONE

(615) 741-2371

CITY OR TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X STATE LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Herbert L. Harper

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

April 29, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Approved out by laborouch 11/9/78

no other 3 other names not verified

DIRECTOR OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *William laborouch* DATE: *11/7/78*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE: *Nov 7, 1978*

all names verified when signed 12/14/78

William laborouch 12/14/78

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was not the first to write of the sophisticated and highly developed cultural heritage of Black Africa, or to reveal that the triangular slave trade was an ugly and dehumanizing business, or that Negro slavery demeaned both master and bondsman and retarded the development of black Americans for centuries, he did disclose this information to a vast segment of the American public in a dramatic and comprehensible format.

The final chapter of Roots describes the exodus of twenty-nine families in "Rockaways," led by Haley's great-great grandfather "Chicken George," from Alamance County, North Carolina, to the "Promised Land" in Lauderdale County. Fifteen wagons reached Henning in the late 1860s or early 1870s and the settlers began clearing their thirty-acre farms and planting cotton and corn. Tom Murray circumvented a local prohibition against Negro-owned businesses by mounting his blacksmith shop on wheels; in 1886 he set up a shop in Henning. By 1874 the freedmen had built the New Hope Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, replete with a \$250 Sears and Roebuck stained glass window. Tom and Irene Murray's daughter Cynthia and Will Palmer were married in this church in 1893.

Palmer, a capable, ambitious young man, had for several years conducted the business affairs of the local lumber mill owner, an alcoholic incompetent who finally declared bankruptcy in 1893. A group of ten white businessmen cosigned a note to reactivate the mill under Palmer's ownership. He proposed and became a respected member of the business community and a leader in the Negro society in the town. In 1918-19 he had a ten-room house built which contained such unusual features as a library and music room. This house was very likely the largest and most impressive residence owned by a Negro in Henning in the 1920s and a tribute to Palmer's business acumen and recognition of his status in this West Tennessee town. Bertha George Palmer and Simon Haley were married in 1920 at New Hope CME Church and the reception was held in her parent's new house. There was an abundance of food for the guests, but the high point of the reception was a recital by the entire Lane College Choir, which Palmer had brought to the house by chartered bus from Jackson, Tennessee. Although Palmer died in 1926, the house remained in the family until the present owners purchased it in 1959.

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The Palmer House meets the criteria for the National Register as the home of a prominent Black businessman in the period of the early twentieth century.