

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>California</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Contra Costa</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
**Eugene O'Neill House**

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Tao House**

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**end of Kuss Road off Bradford Place**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Danville Vicinity**

STATE: **California** CODE: **06** COUNTY: **Contra Costa** CODE: **013**

3. CLASSIFICATION

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

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Corduroy Hills Joint Venture (c/o Towle and Associates, Realtors)**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**2979 Ygnacio Valley Road**

CITY OR TOWN: **Concord** STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**County Recorder-Contra Costa County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**822 Main Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Martinez** STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Department of Parks and Recreation (History Section)**

DATE OF SURVEY: **4/1/70**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Department of Parks and Recreation**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1416 19th Street (Resources Building)**

CITY OR TOWN: **Sacramento** STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: COUNTY: ENTRY NUMBER: DATE: FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Overlooking the San Ramon Valley and distant Mount Diablo, Tao House nestles on a small plateau high up the slopes of Las Trampas Ridge. A pair of stone pillars marks the entrance to the private drive which approaches the residence. This road was once guarded by electrically-operated gates that opened with the push of a button from the house.

Mrs. O'Neill designed the new home for her and her husband in conjunction with architect Frederick Confer, and described it as "a sort of pseudo-Chinese house" expressing the O'Neills' concept of a serene Oriental existence. In front of the long, L-shaped dwelling is a walled courtyard entered through a heavy wooden gate. A one-story service wing at right angles to the main part of the house encloses the northern side of the courtyard, while in the southwestern corner stands a small chauffeur's cottage. Later owners of Tao House created new gardens within this entrance court, but some of the O'Neill plantings still survive. These include weeping willow trees and the wisteria which droops from the upper veranda of the house.

Built of rough-faced concrete blocks resembling stone, Tao House is covered by a low-pitched black tile roof which extends over the verandas to the front and rear. Continuing the Chinese motif, the solid wooden shutters flanking the windows are painted a muted Chinese red. The facade has been somewhat altered since the O'Neills' time by the addition of a wood-and-stucco, two-story projecting wing. Other exterior changes post-dating the O'Neill occupancy include a second chimney added to the front of the house, and the replacement of the original wooden railing on the upper west porch by the present one of wrought-iron. The rear or eastern elevation of Tao House, however, presents virtually its original appearance. 2

The simple interior arrangement of Tao House has also survived, despite various modifications. The large living room, which is now re-oriented around the later fireplace, lies to the right of the entrance hall. Off the living room, at the southern end of the house, is a guest chamber and bath, with a private sunroom. On the left side of the entrance hall is the dining room, and beyond, a butler's pantry, kitchen, servants' quarters, and garage.

Upstairs are the bedroom suites of Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill, as well as the playwright's study--perhaps the least-altered room in the house. The study is separated from the principal bedrooms by a short corridor, with doors at each end to insure the privacy which O'Neill required during periods of creativity. Windows on both sides of the room command views of the gardens and the California countryside. A small fireplace faces a pair of French windows which open into a sun deck now glassed in, while rough wooden beams support a deep red ceiling.

The first-floor rooms of Tao House are paved with red Chinese tile, and throughout the interior are found wall recesses built to accommodate the shelves for O'Neill's vast library. Mrs. O'Neill left the interior walls of Tao House unpainted, to serve as a backdrop for the Chinese furnishings which she secured through Gump's in San Francisco. Pastel greens and blues now predominate, but three pieces of furniture still at Tao House are believed to have been part of the original Chinese decor: a pair of andirons in the

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**II. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1937-1944

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Eugene O'Neill is held by many critics to be the central figure in the coming of age of American drama.<sup>1</sup> O'Neill alone, among that generation of writers which included Broadway and Lewis, succeeded in making of the American stage a vehicle of mature artistic expression. His was the achievement which ultimately proved the outstanding contribution toward a new dimension of realism and the attainment of great tragedy within the American theater. As one writer has observed: "Before O'Neill, the U.S. had theater; after O'Neill it had drama."<sup>2</sup>

During his peripatetic career, O'Neill inhabited a succession of houses. Tao House, however, has singular importance. Here the playwright did his final and some of his best work; and the seven years passed in this place constituted perhaps the longest period of relative happiness that O'Neill's stormy life knew. He and his wife, Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, chose the wooded mountainside near San Francisco for what they hoped would be "a final home and harbor," as O'Neill confided to a friend.<sup>3</sup> The O'Neills occupied their new residence in October 1937, and promptly named it Tao House--meaning roughly "the right way of life" of the Taoist faith.

At Tao House, O'Neill wrote The Iceman Cometh (1939), A Moon for the Misbegotten (1943), and completed several plays--including A Touch of the Poet and More Stately Mansions--through which he hoped to portray the saga of an American family. Finally, O'Neill here wrote the autobiographical masterpiece, Long Day's Journey Into Night--"a tale of old sorrow, written in tears and blood," and possibly his greatest work.<sup>4</sup>

The hardships imposed by World War II, and the playwright's growing need of medical attention, forced the O'Neills to give up Tao House late in 1943. Minor alterations were made both inside and out by the subsequent

<sup>1</sup> Spiller, p. 1237; Gould, p. 77.  
<sup>2</sup> Time, quoted in Sheaffer, p. 481.  
<sup>4</sup> Gelb, pp. 3, 944.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian
- 15th Century
- 16th Century
- 17th Century
- 18th Century
- 19th Century
- 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1937-1944

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

*[Faint, illegible text in the statement of significance section]*

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Bowen, Crosswell, The Curse of the Misbegotten. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1959 (~~pp. 52, 231, 299, 60~~) (pp. 255-296).  
 Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site Association, Papers (Mrs. Thalia Brewer, spokesman, Danville California).  
 Gelb, Arthur and Barbara, O'Neill. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960 (pp. 822-858)  
 Gould, Jean, Modern American Drama Since 1918. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1957 (pp. 50-77).  
 Sheaffer, Louis, O'Neill, Son and Playwright. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968 (p. 481).

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	37 ° 49 ' 42 "	122 ° 02 ' 00 "		0 ' ' "	0 ' ' "	
NE	37 ° 49 ' 42 "	122 ° 01 ' 24 "				
SE	37 ° 49 ' 16 "	122 ° 01 ' 24 "				
SW	37 ° 49 ' 16 "	122 ° 02 ' 00 "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 158.61

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

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

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Robert S. Gamble ; Historian**

ORGANIZATION: **Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service**      DATE: **3/23/71**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**801-19th Street, N. W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington**      STATE: **D. C.**      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

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

National       State       Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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STATE California	
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ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

Tao House

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (1) Continued Eugene O'Neill House

owners of Tao House, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Carlson, who expanded the acreage of the estate and turned it into a sheep ranch. These changes did not, however, affect the essential character or setting of Tao House.

Biography

Eugene O'Neill was born in New York City in 1888. His father, James, was a successful actor, and as a child Eugene toured with his family in the winter, while summering in New London, Connecticut. The O'Neill's family life was filled with grief and antagonism which sprang from many sources but centered around the drug addiction of his mother. As he approached manhood, O'Neill rebelled against this situation, directing his revolt intellectually against his Catholic upbringing and personally against his father. After a wasted year at Princeton, a brief marriage, and a stint of clerical employment, he entered a period in which he shipped as a sailor and frequented various waterfront dives, notably "Jimmy the Priest's" in New York. O'Neill then worked for some months as a reporter for the New London Telegraph, but discovered that he had contracted tuberculosis. In December 1912, he entered a sanitarium, where he made his decision to become a playwright. Upon his release in the spring, he returned to New London and wrote several plays, including most of Bound East for Cardiff. During the school year 1913-1914, he attended George Pierce Baker's playwriting course at Harvard. His visit to Provincetown, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1916 coincided with the formation of an important experimental group, the Provincetown Players. Their production of Bound East... launched O'Neill's career as a performed playwright.

Until 1924, O'Neill continued to live at least part of each year at Provincetown, although the Players transferred their main efforts to Greenwich Village, where they produced several of his plays. The Emperor Jones, which opened in November 1920, made both O'Neill and the Players nationally famous. The same year, O'Neill's full length drama, Beyond the Horizon, was performed on Broadway. It became a great critical and popular success, and introduced a new vein of tragic realism to the American stage,<sup>5</sup> a vein which O'Neill later exploited in such plays as Desire under the Elms.

But realism was only one aspect of these works and of O'Neill's talent. The Hairy Ape (1922) showed a tendency toward expressionism, involving an attempt to depict events as they appear to a participant rather than to a detached observer. The Great God Brown (1925) was innovative in its complex symbolism and use of masks to represent the characters' external selves.

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(Continuation Sheet)

Tao House

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(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (2) continuedEugene O'Neill House

His next major work, Strange Interlude, showed O'Neill's tendency toward unusual length, but abandoned non-realistic devices, except for long soliloquies in which the characters of this psychological drama reveal their unspoken attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

Mourning Becomes Electra, which recasts the events of AEschylus' trilogy in terms of the period of the American Civil War, has been called "the best tragedy in English which the present century has produced."<sup>7</sup>

O'Neill had married Agnes Boulton in 1918, but in 1929 he left for Europe with the actress Carlotta Monterey, whom he married the following year. While abroad he wrote most of Mourning Becomes Electra. On his return in 1931, he lived in or near New York until his departure in the spring of the next year for Sea Island, Georgia, where he built a house called "Casa Genotta." Here he wrote Days Without End and Ah, Wilderness! By 1936, the O'Neills were disillusioned with their Georgia retreat, and moved to the West Coast. They were staying in Seattle in November when O'Neill received word that he had won the Nobel Prize. The following year, he built Tao House. After the end of the Second World War, the O'Neills returned to the East, settling first in New York and later in Massachusetts. In 1945, The Iceman Cometh opened on Broadway, the first O'Neill play to be seen there since 1934. During these last years O'Neill was prevented from writing by a deterioration of his physical condition, particularly by an uncontrollable shaking of his hands. He died in Boston in November 1953.

The decade of the fifties saw the New York openings of three important O'Neill plays, Long Day's Journey..., A Moon for the Misbegotten, and A Touch of the Poet. The first of these, based on the playwright's tortured family life in New London, was published in 1956 and "immediately recognized as a masterpiece in the United States and abroad."<sup>8</sup> Although O'Neill's reputation had suffered a decline in the thirties and forties, his posthumous plays returned him to the high esteem which he now enjoys. In the twenties he had associated himself with the birth of the modern stage in this country and had given the movement a stature without which it might have failed. When the playwright's whole contribution had been evaluated, it became clear that he had been alone among his contemporaries in his sustained pursuit of the goal of great tragedy and in his uncompromising artistry. These qualities made him the man most often considered to be America's outstanding dramatist.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Spiller, pp. 1241, 1245.

<sup>7</sup> Krutch, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Krutch, p. 120; Gould, p. 77; Spiller, p. 1249.

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

*(Continuation Sheet)*

STATE	
California	
COUNTY	
Contra Costa	
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*(Number all entries)*

9. Major Bibliographical References      Con't.

Spiller, Robert E., et al., Literary History of the United States, New York:  
The Macmillan Company, 1960 (pp. 1237-1250).