
(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION FORM

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: Ivy Green

other name/site number: Keller, Helen Birthplace

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: 300 W. North Commons

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Tuscumbia

vicinity: N/A

state: AL

county: Colbert

code: 033

zip code: 35674

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: Public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	2	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	2	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 3

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Significant Person(s): Keller, Helen
Macy, Anne Sullivan

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Keller, David
Moore, Mary Fairfax

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

X 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:

X State historic preservation office

Other state agency

X Federal agency

X Local government

University

Other -- Specify Repository: _____

=====

10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property: 10 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 16 435340 3844140 B _____

C _____ D _____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

The East 1/2 of the last 1/2 of the South East 1/4 of the North East 1/4 of Section 5, Township 4, South, Range 11, West, containing ten (10) acres, more or less. Situated and being in the city of Tuscumbia, Colbert County, Alabama.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries include setting appropriate for the historical environment of Ivy Green.

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director

Organization: National Coordinating Committee
for the Promotion of History

Date: June 7, 1991

Street & Number: 400 A Street, SE

Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington

State: DC

ZIP: 20003

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Ivy Green

Page # 1

=====

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:¹

The main house of the three-structure Ivy Green complex is a one-and-half story frame structure facing south and fronted by a small porch. Built by David and Mary Fairfax Moore Keller in 1820, it is of Southern Virginian cottage construction with four rooms on the first floor and three rooms on the second floor. The wide doorway, with rectangular transom and sidelights starting one-fourth of the way up, leads into the hall which bisects the first floor, having a rear door opening onto a back porch. The living and dining rooms are on the west side of the hall with a bedroom and a museum room (formally a bedroom) on the east side. Stairs from the front of the hall lead upstairs where a large bedroom flanks each side of a small hall. Twin chimneys are on both the west and the east sides of the house as each room has a fireplace.

The birthplace cottage, also of frame construction, is adjacent to the main house and was originally used as an office for the plantation, until it was occupied by Captain Arthur Henley Keller's sons. At this point a dressing room and a porch was added to the building. The cottage was later refurnished as a bridal suite for Keller's second wife, Kate Adams Keller. Helen Keller was born here on June 27, 1880. This structure also faces south and has a large bedroom with a bay window, and a playroom on the north side of the cottage. There is a chimney on the east side of the house.

Both the main house and the birthplace cottage have brick foundations and cedar shingles on the roof. Both buildings are surrounded by English boxwood, magnolia, mimosa, ivy, roses, honeysuckle and smilax.

The well and pump is situated between the main house and the birthplace cottage and is covered by a four-square open structure made of cedar posts with a cedar shingle roof. Also located on the property are two non-contributing buildings, a kitchen with cook's bedroom, and a carriage house.

The only alteration to any of the original buildings was the removal of a small porch and pantry enclosure on the west side of the main house. In 1954, Ivy Green was acquired by the City of Tuscumbia, and made into a museum. In 1972, a fire on the west side of the main house caused minor damage to the building. The house suffered smoke damage and some repairs were required. The roof was replaced, as were some of the second story windows and the second story floors. Damage on the first story was minimal; the first story floors were undamaged. All repairs were conducted according to architectural drawings of the entire (interior and exterior) house, conducted before the fire. In a June 5, 1991 telephone conversation, Lolane Cook, property manager of Ivy Green at the time of the fire, said that the local newspaper articles published the day after the fire and before a thorough inspection of the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Ivy Green

Page # 2

=====

property were misleading; the house was not gutted and only minor damaged occurred. Following the fire, the family of Helen Keller donated additional furniture to the Helen Keller Museum and the second floor was opened to the public.

¹Building description derived from National Register Nomination Form, prepared by W. Warner Floyd, Alabama Historical Commission, and D.K. Wilson, Helen Keller Property Board, 17 June 1970. Sue Filcaton, current manager of Ivy Green, confirmed this architectural description, and provided information on the 1972 fire. The Alabama State Historic Preservation Office had no information regarding the fire at Ivy Green.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Ivy Green

Page # 1

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The three contributing structures that comprise the ten acre Ivy Green-- the cottage, the main house, and water pump-- served as the birthplace, early childhood home, and site of communication breakthrough for Helen Adams Keller. The homestead was the site of the pivotal experiences which led up to Keller's emergence in the forefront of the effort to provide better methods and facilities to educate the handicapped. With the aid of her teacher and constant companion, Anne Sullivan (Macy), the blind and deaf Keller learned to communicate with the world outside of Ivy Green. Through the use of a finger language created by Samuel Gridley Howe of the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, various self-developed techniques and much patience and dedication, Sullivan taught Keller to read, write and speak at Ivy Green. In addition, the setting of Ivy Green and its inhabitants provided Keller with her sole memories of sight and sound.¹ Within the context of the National Historic Landmarks Program thematic framework, Ivy Green has national significance under the theme: XXVII. Education, D. Specialized Education (5) Physically Handicapped; XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements, F. Aiding the Handicapped and Mental Health Care.

Although Keller and Sullivan eventually left the homestead and resided in various locations throughout their lives together, they continued to return to Ivy Green.² Thus Ivy Green was not only the place of the "miracle" but was also their home base over the years. A little over a year after Sullivan's arrival at Ivy Green in 1887, Helen and Anne traveled to Boston to spend the summer at the Perkins Institute for the Blind. They stayed at the home of Michael Anagnos, the director of the school. They spent a few months on Cape Cod, then returned home in early November. They corresponded with Anagnos until September of 1889 when they returned to Boston so Helen could attend Perkins on a permanent basis. There they resided at the school dormitories. Their stay at Perkins ended in 1894 after a troubling dispute over the possible plagiarism of a short story Helen had written a few years earlier. In the autumn of 1894, Keller and Sullivan moved to New York City so Helen could attend the Wright Humanism School founded to teach oral language to deaf children. They once again resided in the school dormitories until 1896 when Helen enrolled in the Gilman School for Young Ladies in Cambridge Massachusetts to prepare for Radcliffe College. They stayed at the Howell's House, another school dormitory, for approximately nine months. In 1897, Keller and Sullivan moved to a friend's farm in Wrentham, Massachusetts where Helen received private tutoring to prepare for her college entrance examinations. In 1888, the two moved to a boarding house on Newbury Street in Boston to be closer to Helen's tutor. Helen entered Radcliffe in September of 1900 and lived with Anne first in a house on Coolidge Avenue and, later, on the outskirts of Cambridge. In 1904, after Helen's graduation from Radcliffe, she and Sullivan purchased a farm and seven acres in Wrentham and lived there together until

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Ivy Green

Page # 2

1916 when Sullivan went to Puerto Rico for health reasons and Keller back to Alabama. In 1917, they sold the house in Wrentham and purchased another in Forest Hills, Long Island. In 1919, Keller and Sullivan began to travel extensively. Starting with the Vaudeville circuit, and then numerous lectures at universities and schools for the handicapped, their excursions led them abroad to such countries as England, Scotland, France and Yugoslavia. They based themselves in Forest Hills, but returned to Ivy Green as often as their busy schedule allowed. Although grieving the death of Anne Sullivan in October of 1936, Helen soon left for Japan and shortly afterwards sold the house on Long Island. Helen then moved to "Arcan Ridge" in Westport, Connecticut and lived there between numerous trips abroad. She died at Arcan Ridge in 1968 of arteriosclerotic heart disease. In her eighty-eight years, Helen Keller had lived in over ten different sites and had traveled to more than twenty different countries.³ Yet, none of the experiences and events that made up her fascinating life had as profound an effect on her as the one breakthrough event that occurred by the water pump at her parents home on a warm April day in 1887. Therefore, Ivy Green, the arena of Helen Keller's introduction to the world of communication, substantiates the most appropriate site for designation.

Helen Keller was born a seeing and hearing child at Ivy Green on June 27, 1880 in the small cottage in the yard near the main house. Originally an office, the cottage also functioned as a bridal suite for her parents Arthur H. and Kate (Adams) Keller and, later, as a tool with which Anne Sullivan isolated Helen from her over-indulgent family. At the age of nineteen months, Helen suffered acute congestion of the stomach and brain which left her deaf, blind and mute.⁴ Her inability to communicate beyond her most primary needs frustrated her and produced increasingly violent temper tantrums. Although relatives tried to discourage her parents from believing Helen could ever function like other children, the Kellers refused advice to have Helen committed to an asylum. When Helen was six years old, her mother read about Samuel Gridley Howe's success at the Perkins Institution in Boston with the deaf-blind Laura Bridgeman. On the advice of Alexander Graham Bell, the Kellers contacted Michael Anagnos, Howe's successor in Boston. Anagnos recommended a recent Perkins graduate, the formerly blind Anne Sullivan as a teacher for Helen. Sullivan arrived at Ivy Green on March 3, 1887, a day that Helen would later refer to as her "soul's birthday".⁵

Anne Sullivan was born in Massachusetts in April of 1866. Her parents, Thomas and Alice Sullivan, had migrated from Ireland a few years before her birth. When Anne was eight years old her mother died, and two years later her father deserted her and her brother and sister. Relatives sent Anne, nearly blind from a childhood fever, and her crippled brother to the state almshouse at Tewksbury. Within a few months her brother also died, an event that would haunt Anne Sullivan for the rest of her life. She lived at the almshouse until she enrolled at Perkins Institute for the Blind in 1880 at the age of fourteen. The next year, she underwent surgery at the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Ivy Green

Page # 3

=====
Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary which gave her limited use of her eyes. She graduated Perkins in 1886 as valedictorian of her class.⁶

Knowing little of the South, the Keller family or her future pupil before her departure from Boston, Sullivan felt unprepared and unqualified to handle the situation that confronted her at Ivy Green. Barely seven years old, Helen Keller had perfected the definition of a "spoiled, willful and inarticulate child".⁷ Within her first few days at the homestead, all of Sullivan's attempts at physical contact towards the child had been rejected. Instead, Sullivan found herself locked in her room and witness to Helen's frequent temper tantrums. Sullivan knew her first task must be to discipline Helen and control the child's temper.

Much to the Keller family's disapproval, Sullivan employed the tactic of isolating Helen from her parents who gave in to her every whim. The cottage in the yard of the main house soon became the home of Anne and Helen. Arthur Keller rearranged the objects inside and led Helen there by a confusing path so the girl would not know where she had been taken.⁸ Anne and Helen remained there for nearly a month, with no contact from the Kellers, until the girl's parents felt the separation from their child had lasted long enough. Although the removal of Helen from the immediate surroundings of her family had caused anxiety for both the girl and her family, Sullivan used this opportunity to foster a sense of dependency in Helen she felt necessary to commence a successful education. In addition, despite Helen's incorrigible behavior, Sullivan detected in her new student a keen sense of intelligence and passion to learn.⁹

Sullivan proceeded tirelessly in her task to bring this young girl into the world of communication. Although Helen had not yet made the connection between her teacher's fingers endlessly tapping on the palm of her own hand and the path to the outside world, she sensed Sullivan's patience and love.¹⁰ They spent almost all their waking hours together, Sullivan developing new and different techniques to reach the young girl and Helen grateful for the constant companionship and attention. The lifelong relationship between the two found its roots in those early days at Ivy Green.

One day in early April of 1887, only one month after Sullivan's arrival at Ivy Green, Helen Keller finally made the connection that would change her life forever. Sullivan had been painstakingly spelling the word "w-a-t-e-r" while pumping water over Helen's hand. Helen grasped for the first time that everything had a name. From then on, they spent their days naming every object that Helen could possibly lay her hands on at Ivy Green. In the two weeks following, Helen had learned over three-hundred words.¹¹ One of which, "Teacher", would become the most important word in her life.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Ivy Green

Page # 4

Except for a brief period after the 1888 summer in Boston when Sullivan underwent another eye operation, she and Helen never spent more than a few days apart from each other for the next eighteen years.¹² Sullivan not only accompanied Keller to every school she attended, but in addition, became her eyes and ears. While Sullivan served primarily as Keller's teacher, she functioned in other spheres as well. She played the roles of mother, best friend and, most importantly, Helen's constant companion. Anne Sullivan's love and patience only made Helen Keller's handicaps less difficult to overcome.

Among Helen Keller's many accomplishments, her writing stands out as her most encouraging message to the handicapped world wide. Through the publication of her seven books, ranging from her autobiography to a collection of socialist writings and the life story of her teacher, Keller let the handicapped of the world know that dedication to education can be equated with victory. Her writing won her national and international acclaim and paved the way for other outstanding achievements.

A year after the publication of The Story of my Life in 1903 (which she wrote and published with the help of Sullivan's husband John Macy), Keller received an appointment to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. By 1919, Keller had become a socialist and a suffragist, toured in the Vaudeville circuit and had a film based on her life story produced in Hollywood. In 1924, Keller began her work for the American Foundation for the Blind and by 1933, she had published 5 books, traveled abroad several times and, along with Sullivan, received an honorary degree from Temple University.¹³

On October 20, 1936, Helen Keller lost her beloved "Teacher". Anne Sullivan died at the age of seventy from heart disease at Forest Hills. Although Keller had not been without Anne Sullivan since before she was seven years old, she decided to continue the work started by her teacher over fifty years before. Keller spent the next twenty-five years dedicating her life to furthering the cause of improving education and general conditions for the handicapped around the world.

During the second world war, Keller went to Europe to visit the sick and wounded in military hospitals. In 1946 she made tours to Greece, Italy, France and England for the American Foundation for the Overseas Blind. She continued to tour the world, giving lectures on what might be done to help the handicapped. In 1955, just after the publication of Teacher, Harvard University awarded her an honorary degree. In 1960, on her eightieth birthday, she told an interviewer about her plans for the future: "I will always-- as long as I have breath-- work for the handicapped."¹⁴ In 1961, only four years after the first production of William Gibson's The Miracle Worker, Keller suffered her first stroke and retired from public life. Although she lived for seven more years, she no longer actively communicated with the outside

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Ivy Green

Page # 5

world.¹⁵ In 1964, she sent her niece and nephew to Washington to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom conferred upon her by President Lyndon B. Johnson. She died in 1968, at home in "Arcan Ridge," Westport, Connecticut, of heart disease. Yet, Helen Keller left behind a lifetime of astounding accomplishments. She made her mark on the world as a writer, feminist, advocate for the handicapped and, most importantly, a symbol to anyone who has ever doubted their ability to persevere and achieve.

¹Joseph P. Lash, Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980).

²Helen Adams Keller, The Story of My Life (New York: Doubleday, 1954).

³Lash, Helen and Teacher, passim.

⁴Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, eds., Notable American Women, The Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980), 389.

⁵Lash, Helen and Teacher, 47-80.

⁶Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James, eds., Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary vol. II, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 481-482.

⁷Ibid., 481.

⁸Lash, Helen and Teacher, 48.

⁹James and James, Notable American Women, 481.

¹⁰Keller, The Story of My Life, passim.

¹¹Sicherman and Green, Notable American Women, 389.

¹²Lash, Helen and Teacher, passim.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Sicherman and Green, Notable American Women, 392.

¹⁵Ibid., 393.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9

Ivy Green

Page # 1

=====

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Gibson, William. Monday After the Miracle: A Play in Three Acts. Canada: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1980.

James, Edward T., and Janet Wilson James, eds. Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary vol. II. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971.

Keller, Helen. Midstream: My Later Life. United States: Crowell Publishing Company, 1929.

Keller, Helen Adams. The Story of My Life. New York: Doubleday, 1954.

Keller, Helen Adams. Teacher: Anne Sullivan Macy. New York: Doubleday, 1955.

Lash, Joseph P. Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1980.

Sicherman, Barbara and Carol Hurd Green, eds. Notable American Women, The Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number PHOTOGRAPHS

Ivy Green

Page # 1

PHOTOGRAPH NUMBER 1

- 1) Name of Property: Ivy Green, Main House
- 2) City and State: Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 3) Photographer: Doug Letson
- 4) Date of Photograph: February, 1990
- 5) Location of Original Negative: Doug Letson Photography, Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 6) Description of view indicating direction of camera: Front view facing north

PHOTOGRAPH NUMBER 2

- 1) Name of Property: Ivy Green, Main House
- 2) City and State: Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 3) Photographer: Doug Letson
- 4) Date of Photograph: February, 1990
- 5) Location of Original Negative: Doug Letson Photography, Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 6) Description of view indicating direction of camera: Front view facing northeast

PHOTOGRAPH NUMBER 3

- 1) Name of Property: Ivy Green, Cottage
- 2) City and State: Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 3) Photographer: Doug Letson
- 4) Date of Photograph: February, 1990
- 5) Location of Original Negative: Doug Letson Photography, Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 6) Description of view indicating direction of camera: Side and front view facing northeast

PHOTOGRAPH NUMBER 4

- 1) Name of Property: Ivy Green, Pump
- 2) City and State: Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 3) Photographer: Doug Letson
- 4) Date of Photograph: June 1991
- 5) Location of Original Negative: Photograph Memory, Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 6) Description of view indicating direction of camera: view of pump