Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

VLR Listed: 9/21/1976
NRHP Listed: 11/16/1978

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED OCT 13 1976
DATE ENTERED NOV 16 1978

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Rachel E. Boak House

AND/OR COMMON
Willa Cather Birthplace (Preferred)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
N. Side of U.S. Route 50, .5 mile NE of the intersection of U.S. Route 50 and State Route 704.

NW of Gore on U.S. 50

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Gore

X VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Seventh (J. Kenneth Robinson)

STATE
Virginia

CODE
51

COUNTY
Frederick

CODE
069

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	X PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Charles T. Brill

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Gore

__ VICINITY OF

STATE
Virginia

22637

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Frederick County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Winchester

STATE
Virginia

22601

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE
1975

__FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

CITY, TOWN
Richmond

STATE
Virginia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
X FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Willa Cather Birthplace is a simple, two-story log house probably erected around the second decade of the nineteenth century. It was enlarged by the addition of a two-story frame extension on its western end approximately twenty years after the initial construction date. A later, probably post-Civil War, two-story frame ell extends from the center of the rear wall. With the enlargement the house now has a continuous facade of five bays with entrances in each of the outside bays. A simple nineteenth-century porch shelters the western entrance. The original portion includes the three eastern bays. This section was built with an exterior end chimney on its west end, but because of the extension, the chimney is now incorporated in the addition and only the upper portion of the stack is visible above the roof ridge.

The main portion of the house is covered by a continuous gable roof sheathed in standing-seam sheet metal with simple box cornices at the eaves. The rear ell has a gable roof as well. Weatherboards cover all but a section of the rear wall and the rear ell where modern asbestos shingles are employed. The underpinnings of the main section are fieldstone with the break between the original portion and the extension clearly evident on the facade. The windows originally had small-pane sashes, but all now have one-over-one sash. All of the facade windows are hung with louvred blinds.

The first-floor plan of the main section consists of two large rooms. The original portion formerly had a board partition separating its main room from the stair which ascends against the east wall. The second-floor plan of the original portion includes two rooms separated by a board partition from a narrow passage along the rear wall. This passage leads to the single large room in the extension. The partition between the two bedrooms in the original section may have been shifted as it runs into a window, which is now made into a blind window on the facade. Much of the early fabric is intact in the original portion including flooring, batten doors, board partitions, and simple stair. The stair has square balusters, a square newel, and a simple handrail. Most of the woodwork on the first floor of the original section is painted with a very stylized comb graining executed by an Italian in the 1940s. The woodwork in the first-floor room of the extension is plain; the only notable feature is a simple mid-nineteenth-century mantel. The rooms in the rear ell have no particularly distinguishing features. The ell's first floor now contains the kitchen. A two-story kitchen and servants' house, in dilapidated condition, stands in the yard, just east of the ell. The construction date of the building is uncertain but its proportions and details suggest a date in the third or fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

The general setting of the Willa Cather birthplace is pastoral; both pastures and cultivated fields are in the vicinity. The quality of the house's immediate setting has been significantly marred by the widening of U.S. Route 50 which has taken all but a small portion of the front yard. However, the large maple trees dotting the lawn help maintain a homey atmosphere. Immediately in front of the house is a state highway historical marker commemorating the fact that the house is the birthplace of Willa Cather.

The house at present is in only fair condition but receives essential maintenance. The owner makes his residence in a nearby dwelling and uses the Cather birthplace during the day as an office and retreat.

CL

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	X LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Famed American novelist and short-story writer Willa Cather (1873-1947) was born in an unprepossessing log and frame house in the Back Creek Valley north of Winchester, Virginia. The house hitherto has received little of the recognition it merits as a literary shrine; most of the attention has been focused on Miss Cather's later home in Red Cloud, Nebraska. A typical example of Shenandoah Valley vernacular architecture, the birthplace was originally owned by Miss Cather's great-grandfather, Jacob Seibert. Its construction date is not known, however, it would seem likely that the earlier log section was erected around the second decade of the nineteenth century and that later modifications and extensions were made around 1850. In 1869 Seibert's heirs conveyed the house and four-and-a-half acres of land to his daughter, Rachel E. Boak, Miss Cather's grandmother. Mrs. Boak's daughter, Virginia, and Charles Cather were married in the house in December 1872. There, one year later, on December 7, 1873, their daughter, Willa, was born.

Willa Cather's grandfather, William Cather, had been a Unionist during the War Between the States. After the war Federal authorities appointed him sheriff of Frederick County; his two sons, George and Charles, were made his deputies. In an area of strong Southern sympathies, the Cathers hardly endeared themselves to the majority of the population. Probably as a result of local resentment, George Cather moved to Webster County, Nebraska in 1873. His father followed in 1877. The Cather family home, Willow Shade, a substantial brick farmhouse just up the road from the Boak house, was left in the care of Charles Cather, who brought his wife and young daughter there to live that same year. In 1883, Charles Cather, along with his wife, daughter, and Mrs. Boak, joined his family in Nebraska. After operating a ranch for a year he settled in the village of Red Cloud.

Despite its seeming lack of attachment to Virginia, Miss Cather's family was relatively distinguished in the area. Her grandfather, William L. Boak, represented Berkeley County in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1845-46. Her great-grandfather, Charles Cather, had represented Frederick County at the same time. The Cathers were capable farmers, and three of Willa Cather's Boak uncles had served in the Confederate Army.

Because Miss Cather spent what she called her formative years (ages 8 to 15) in Nebraska it is not surprising that little of her Virginia youth is reflected in her writings. She is mainly remembered for her celebration of the pioneer traditions of the Nebraska prairies and the deserts of the Southwest. Her fiction centers on the frontier traits and themes of courage and struggle, respect for the land, family ties, and the sense of place. As one biographer noted: "She became a champion of these elements of an older society against the modern, industrial, materialistic world."

* See Continuation Sheet #1

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bennett, Mildred R. The World of Willa Cather. Lincoln, Nebraska: 1961.

Encyclopedia Americana, 1976.

Lewis, Edith. Willa Cather Living. New York: 1953.

Quarles, Garland R. Some Old Homes in Frederick County, Virginia. Winchester, Virginia: 1971.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 6 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	17	730850	4349680	B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE
July 1976

STREET & NUMBER
221 Governor Street

TELEPHONE
(804) 786-3143

CITY OR TOWN
Richmond

STATE
Virginia 23219

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X 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

TITLE Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Executive Director
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE SEP 21 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 11/16/78

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE Nov 16, 1978

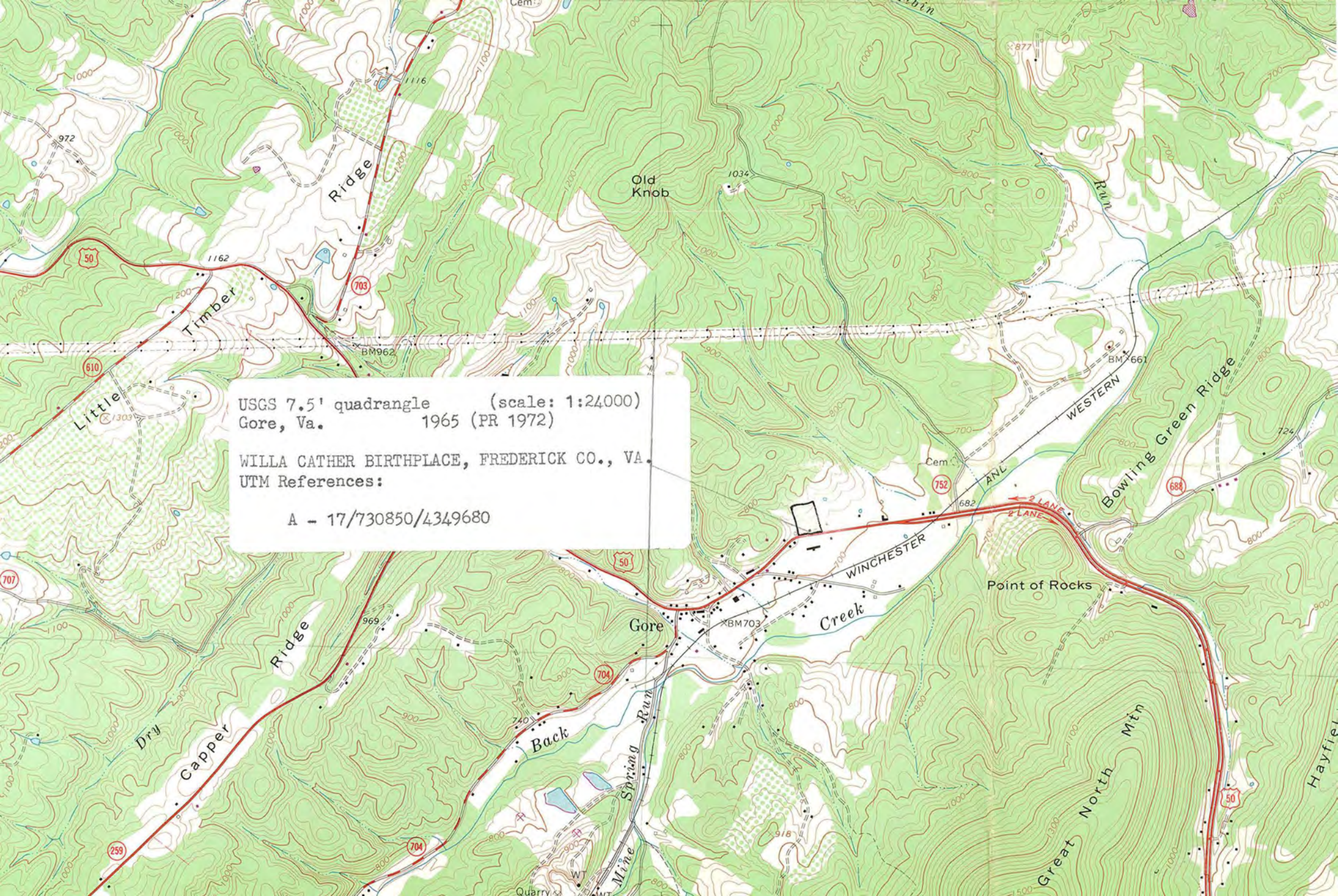
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

8. SIGNIFICANCE

However, her interest in the quest for ancestors and the sense of a historical past may have had their roots in her Virginia background.

Following the family's removal to Nebraska, Mrs. Boak conveyed her granddaughter's birthplace to Mrs. S. S. Gore. It changed ownership four more times prior to 1950 when it was bought by Charles T. Brill, the present owner.

CL



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale: 1:24000)
Gore, Va. 1965 (PR 1972)

WILLA CATHER BIRTHPLACE, FREDERICK CO., VA.
UTM References:

A - 17/730850/4349680