

WALKING WITH WRIGHT MORRIS

Note: As in many “railroad” towns, the streets and avenues are sometimes confusing. The old part of town was set out “straight with the railroad” and the newer part “straight with the world.” You will find in the old part, the streets and avenues are alphabetically named, and in the newer part of town they are numerically named. Please be mindful of the “street” or “avenue” designation as well as the odd corners when walking from “old town” to “new town.”

1. Start from the east door of the Boyhood Home at 304 D Street.
2. Turn right on B Avenue for one block. At the end of the block, on your right, is the Riddlemosher House and on your left is the house with the “run-around porch.”

From WILL’S BOY: “Mr. and Mrs. Riddlemosher live in the house on the corner, facing the railroad tracks. It sits flat on the ground. In the barrel under the rain spout bugs skitter on the water and polliwogs cast shadows on the slimy bottom.”

From GOD’S COUNTRY AND MY PEOPLE: “What made the house a home was the run-around porch, a screen that stuck or slammed, a wire basket of dead ferns, a swing that scuffed the paint off the clapboards, a rail to lean on when you threw up, a stoop to sit on when you watered the grass.”

3. Turn left on E Street to the Merrick County Museum. (Inside is a display of the barbershop fixtures which figure prominently in many of Morris’ writings.) Again, if someone is around and the museum open, feel free to stop for a visit –no charge.

From THE HOME PLACE: “Nearly fifty years ago Cahow’s shop was a bank, with a lobby at the front where he put his barber chairs, and in the back, behind the grillwork, there was a safety vault.”

4. Continue on E Street to 17th Avenue (Highway 14). CROSS HIGHWAY 14 HERE. Turn right (south) and follow 17th Avenue.

*The Hord elevator stood just south of the tracks. From CEREMONY IN LONE TREE— “Beyond the grain elevator is the railroad station, the iron wheels of the baggage truck sunk in the gravel, an OUT OF ORDER sign pasted on the face of the penny scales in the lobby.”

5. Cross Highway 30 with care and continue along 17th Avenue to 18th Street. Turn left to the north side of the courthouse.

At the Merrick County Courthouse is a Veterans’ Memorial.

The Courthouse is also where Dr. H.E. Glatfelter's work resulted in "the first meeting held in the United States to ratify the proclamation of the Lincoln Highway...on October 13, 1913."

The Patterson Law Office on the north side of the street is on the National Register of Historic Places and holds the archives of the Lone Tree Literary Society—the Wright Morris preservationists.

6. Turn left (north) on 15th Avenue for two blocks to 16th Street. (Restrooms available at Library.) Cross 16th Street (Highway 30/Lincoln Highway) with care, then turn left (west).

The house on the right just after turning left is the Heber Hord house. T.B. Hord's house stood across the street east. "At the turn of the century Hord was the world's largest livestock feeder with feedlots of cattle, sheep, and hogs. The Hord name was found on many businesses including the largest grain company in the state, lumberyards, banks, and various other enterprises."

The clock in front of the house is dedicated to Monte Hord, a grandson to Heber, who died in the North Tower of the World Trade Center on 9-11.

At the west end of the block is the Lincoln Manor Hotel (now a restaurant). It was renamed when the Lincoln Highway came through town.

From CEREMONY IN LONE TREE: "The door at the front, set in slantwise on the corner, with a floral design in the frosted glass, opens on the prospect of the town."

From WILL'S BOY: "Once it had entered town from the east, the Lincoln Highway made a dogleg turn at the "square," an open space where five streets converged, in order that the main street would exit parallel to the Union Pacific Railroad as it followed the curve of the Platte Valley."

Note: At this point the streets and avenues become alphabetical and are no longer N-S-E-W; the directions will be in left and right turns only.

7. Continue on 16th Street (which becomes G Street) and follow Highway 30 for five blocks through downtown. (At the "square" or "triangle" look back over your right shoulder for a view of how the depot and Hord elevator looked when Wright Morris lived here. Morris' father was the depot agent.

From WILL'S BOY: "In Central City we had our meals in the café on Main Street with tables for ladies. People seated in the buggies parked at the front could peer over the half curtain at the front and watch us eat.

8. Turn right at F Avenue and cross the Union Pacific tracks. Continue on F Avenue to B Street. Turn right at B Street and walk to the sidewalk, turn left and walk through the park.

From THE WORLD IN THE ATTIC: "This is Hibbard Park' ...and looked through the trees, the idle chains on the swings, to where a Civil War cannon, with a seat-polished breech, sparked in the sun." (The cannon was sacrificed to the WWII efforts.)

From THE WORLD IN THE ATTIC: "Is that the school?... That worn building of unfaced red brick, with the paper-flower cutouts in the tall, dark windows...."

Note--the school which was north of the park has been razed. This is a testament to Wright Morris' mission to save on paper that which is passing out of existence.

9. Turn right at A Street for one block, and then right again on D Avenue for three blocks.

10. Turn left on D Street for two blocks and you are back to the Wright Morris Boyhood home.

From WILL'S BOY: "...the panels of colored glass in the window make a bright pattern on the bedclothes."

From WILL'S BOY: "In this same house, in my sleepers with the 'feet,' I hurry to stand on the hot-air floor radiator while I am dressed. In the kitchen my eyes are below the level of the table where raw sugar cookies are being rolled for baking. I reach and clutch some of the dough: I love its sweet, raw taste."

Thank you for walking with Wright Morris and the Lone Tree Literary Society.