

## Visiting Ms. Welty

By Larry Ridley

A recent stranger to Jackson on business, I jumped at the opportunity to visit an old and dear friend of mine, though my time was short before I had to fly back home. Late spring had already become early summer in southern Mississippi, the beautiful sunny day heating above 80 degrees, with a light breeze still wafting through the trees around the city.

After a light lunch, my friend decided to provide the whirlwind tour of her town, driving me around in the car for glimpses of the neighborhoods, landmarks, and colleges, and I was fascinated by the wealth of history that Jackson boasts. At the edge of Belhaven University, we paused and parked on Pinehurst Street across from Eudora Welty's home, a handsome Tudor-style structure that her parents originally built and where she wrote all of her major works of literature. Wishing for more time to tour the house and gardens, we waited for the light afternoon traffic to clear and pulled back into our own personal tour agenda.

Circling the city, my friend drove past the Mississippi State Capitol, still referred to as the new capitol building by some, the gilded eagle perched atop the dome facing staunchly away from the Federal capitol in Washington, D.C. By this time, my brain was filled with so much, I felt like we needed a break, and we conferred to see what I might have time left to do.

Satisfied we had a little leeway still left in my schedule, my friend asked, "Would you like to visit Eudora?"

Now, both of us share a love of the author, and I became slightly confused since her house was back across town. "I thought we didn't have time for that."

"Not her house. Her." She pointed over her left shoulder.

"Sure," I stammered in confusion, and she whipped a quick left onto N. President Street and then another left onto George Street until we saw what looked like a large park ahead of us, revealing itself to be a cemetery once she turned left and a right into the entrance at the corner across from the west side of the State Law Library. The contrasting white letters on the open wrought iron gate spelled out GREENWOOD.

Driving up the paved cemetery road, she drove the car beneath two huge arbors entwined with snaking wisteria vines, but far past blooming. Passing a small building on the left, she continued past the stone headstones until we reached an elongated loop surrounding a large monument dedicated to Reverend Amos Cleaver. Past the paved circle, a graveled two-track continued, and my friend followed its rectangular path until we parked in the shade of a large tree directly west of the monument.

Out of the car and into a thicker copse of aged trees, my friend led me to one of the benches next to Eudora Welty's grave, a smaller headstone of her one-year-old brother, Christian, just next to her. Sitting together in her presence, my friend and I talked of her books, caught up with each other as the lemony scent of magnolia blooms carried to us on the warm breeze. A few small stones marked earlier visitations and respect, and I touched them to add my own.



*Christian and Eudora Welty's Monument*

Not remembering, I asked if Welty had ever married. My friend told me no, but that there was speculation that she had been in love with another writer, Ross MacDonald, from California. Up to his passing in 1983, Mr. MacDonald and Ms. Welty exchanged almost 350 letters. With that amount of correspondence, I shrugged and speculated myself, but leaving the idea to rest in this appropriate place. Ms. Welty herself has rested in Greenwood since her death in July of 2001.

Fascinated by the life and history that cemeteries represent, Greenwood Cemetery captured my fancy, and I was happy that my last spare minutes in Jackson were spent with my extraordinary friend in such an exceptional place. As we drove back towards the gate, we stopped at the little house to pick up an informational brochure before driving on. I discovered that I must someday return to visit other famous figures, including seven Mississippi governors.

A few days later and many miles away, I reached out to Mrs. Cecile Wardlaw, the Executive Director of the Greenwood Cemetery Association, a volunteer organization dedicated to keeping Greenwood cared for and respected. More than happy to impart her passion for the cemetery and its value to Jackson and Mississippi, she told me that the area's almost 20 acres is the largest green spot in the city. And although the Park Maintenance Division does its utmost to maintain Greenwood, there is still so much that can be done by volunteers working in conjunction to preserve this state landmark, where so many historically-important Mississippians rest.

If you have never visited Greenwood Cemetery, when the stress of your week is too much, stop and take a quiet walk, experience the past, enjoy the open green space. If it speaks to you as it did to me, perhaps consider being a part of keeping Greenwood Cemetery green and clean, and visit the Greenwood Cemetery Association webpage at <http://www.greenwoodcemeteryjackson.org/> for more information.

### Wildlife in the Cemetery

Greenwood Cemetery has been chosen by Mississippi State Extension Service as a location to monitor wildlife in the urban area. A motion activated camera has been mounted in the cemetery to record animals at ground level. The project is part of the Urban Wildlife Information Network based out of Chicago and Lincoln Park Zoo. The UWIN is a national effort and the Jackson metro area is the first location in the mid-south. Learn more at <https://urbanwildlifeinfo.org/> )

In addition to the research, the Extension Service plans to develop projects to engage with the local neighborhoods and schools in learning about wildlife in their own neighborhoods. Greenwood Cemetery Association is pleased to participate in the study and looks forward to assisting with the community projects.

### Planning for the Future

A generous grant from the Community Foundation for MS has underwritten the production of two important plans for the future of Greenwood Cemetery Association. **Infrastructure Preservation Plan for Greenwood Cemetery, Jackson, Mississippi** provides details for addressing the immediate need for repairs to drainage and roads, and the possibility of introducing electricity to the area. The report includes engineering plans, permit requirements and costs involved. **Fundraising and Marketing Plan for Greenwood Cemetery, Jackson, Mississippi** offers possible fundraising strategies for current and future projects. The comprehensive plans were recently completed and distributed to board members who will meet in the coming weeks to discuss them and set a course of action. Look for more details in the November newsletter.

### Two Options for Donations

Contributions in any amount to **Greenwood Cemetery Association** are always gratefully received. Donations directly to the Association are used for monument repair and cleaning, landscape improvements and maintenance, research and interpretation, and marketing and publicity, such as the publication of this newsletter. The Association strives to fill the gaps in the City's maintenance and we depend on our faithful supporters to provide the necessary funds. To donate to the association, please use the enclosed envelope or PayPal on the website [www.greenwoodcemeteryjackson.org](http://www.greenwoodcemeteryjackson.org).

An endowment fund for Greenwood Cemetery has been established at the **Community Foundation for Mississippi** with a goal of \$100,000 by the end of this year. As the Endowment Fund grows, so will the income generated by it, thus insuring the future stability of the Association. **Donations to the Endowment Fund must be made directly to the Community Foundation for Mississippi at 119 South President Street, Jackson, MS 39201.** Options for giving include cash gifts as well as stock and other non-cash gifts. For more information, contact the Community Foundation at 601-974-6044 or visit their website [www.formississippi.org](http://www.formississippi.org).



*High summer in Greenwood*

# Grave Gardeners

Are you a dedicated gardener, fascinated with flowers and always looking for more space in which to plant, or an apartment dweller frustrated by your lack of a patch of ground? Either way, you are needed at Greenwood! *Grave Gardeners* will kick off in the fall.

A recent visit to Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, to view the mini garden beds in cradles throughout the cemetery, has provided the inspiration for a similar program at Greenwood. Cradles are individual graves that have a coping (edging) around the grave. A cradle for an adult is thus six feet long and about two feet wide. Children's cradles are usually much smaller. Grave Gardeners are volunteers who adopt a particular cradle (or several in proximity to one another) and create a beautiful garden in each.

The Grave Gardeners program will kick off in the fall with the planting of daffodils, and continue in the spring with the addition of perennials and annuals to provide color throughout the summer and fall. The association will provide the bulbs in the fall and an assortment of plants in the spring, but gardeners will be encouraged to bring other plants to provide a diversity of color and style. The Elmwood gardeners were enthusiastic in their support of their program and the results are stunning.

Gardening isn't a "one and done" activity and ongoing care including weeding and watering will be required. We will announce "Gardening Days" for those who wish to work with a group, but gardeners can work on their own schedules. A survey of cradles in Greenwood has found more than 100. There are likely others that have fallen and are in need of repairs which will be undertaken in the early fall.

Interested gardeners are urged to email [greenwoodcemeteryjackson@gmail.com](mailto:greenwoodcemeteryjackson@gmail.com) to register or for more information, or call Cecile at 601-540-6558. Please help us spread the word among friends and gardening groups! This program will add to the natural beauty of Greenwood, provide needed food for our bees and enhance the experience of visitors, while providing gardeners with a great sense of accomplishment. Join us!



*Cradle garden in Elmwood Cemetery*

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**Thank you for your support!**