

Toole's will: Home to be museum

By **SUSAN FEENEY**
Staff writer

Thelma Ducoing Toole, mother of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning author John Kennedy Toole, requested in her will that her home on Elysian Fields Avenue become a museum to honor her son and that his manuscript "The Neon Bible" never be published.

Mrs. Toole's will, signed April 1 and filed in Civil District Court Thursday, stipulates that half of her estate, which has not been valued, go to Tulane University "to be used exclusively for scholarships for brilliant and needy authors and playwrights."

The other half is to be divided equally among Jesuit High School instructor Douglas Craw-

ford; Peter Jaeger, dean of doctoral studies at Southeastern University, a private college in Algiers that once gave Mrs. Toole an honorary doctorate; W. Kenneth Holditch, a University of New Orleans English professor; John Geiser of the Louisiana Landmarks Society and Robert Kirn. The will names Geiser as executor.

Mrs. Toole died Aug. 17 at St. Charles General Hospital. She was 82. Her son won a Pulitzer Prize for his novel "A Confederacy of Dunces" in 1981, 12 years after he killed himself because he was despondent that the book had been rejected by several publishers.

John Hantel, Mrs. Toole's attorney, said the size of the estate will be determined within

a few months. "She didn't die penniless," he said.

Mrs. Toole left no part of her estate to Arthur Ducoing, the brother with whom she lived and her only living relative. Hantel said Mrs. Toole and Ducoing, who signed as a witness to the will, had "a mutual understanding . . . He is older than Thelma and he fully anticipated that he would die before she did."

Last month, Maple Street Bookstore owner Rhoda Faust sued Mrs. Toole to force her to honor what Faust said was a 1979 promise to let Faust publish "The Neon Bible." The rights to the manuscript, written by Toole when he was 16, are shared by Mrs. Toole and five relatives on her late husband's side of the family.

Faust's attorney, Brian Begue, said the suit will be amended to name Mrs. Toole's heirs. "I don't think she has the right to say" the book cannot be published, Begue said.

Hantel said he doesn't know who holds the deed to the house at 1016 Elysian Fields. He said Ducoing, who may be named on the deed, has agreed with Mrs. Toole's plan to create a museum.

The will says Crawford, Geiser, and Joel Fletcher III of Lafayette are to maintain and supervise the museum. But it does not specify how it will be paid for.

The will does not say who will get the Pulitzer Prize certificate. "It's not something you can easily divide," Hantel said. He said it will likely be placed in the museum or given to Tulane.