

## THOMAS WOLFE'S ASHEVILLE, 1900-1920

In most of his writings, Thomas Wolfe wrote about things he had known as a child in Asheville, North Carolina. In his stories he called Asheville "Altamont" and he described the city and its inhabitants, often using their actual names or names similar to their own. Through his writings, Thomas Wolfe raised interest in the city that became known as "The Land of the Sky".

Asheville was a growing city during the early twentieth century, boasting around 15,000 inhabitants. It became known around the world as a tourist resort. People were coming from everywhere to enjoy the scenic mountain beauty and cool, clean mountain air. During that time, Asheville acquired the label "The Land of the Sky." But it had not always known such fame.

In the years before Thomas Wolfe's birth in 1900, Asheville was just a small mountain village. About 2,000 people lived there. The streets were unpaved and the buildings were simple frame houses. The land around the Public Square was mostly farmland and pasture. But in 1880 the railroad came to town. After the train's arrival, people could easily ride the train to Asheville and arrive in comfort, ease and at speed. Hotels and boarding houses began to spring up in town. Theaters were built and the roads were paved with cobblestones. A beautiful hotel was completed in 1886 atop a hill near the center of the city. It was called the Battery Park Hotel and was visible from all points in town. Ten years later a man named George Vanderbilt came to Asheville and loved the city. Thereafter, he built his monumental home there. He called it Biltmore. By the turn of the twentieth century, Asheville had several hotels, restaurants, theaters,

parks and even an electric trolley system. Asheville grew from a tiny mountain village into a city, almost overnight.

Asheville was also advertised as a health resort. Many people believed that Asheville's clean, cool mountain air was healthful. Tuberculosis was a dreadful disease at the time and people who were sick with the disease often came to Asheville to recuperate. Places to house the sick began to appear in the city in the years before the turn of the twentieth century. They were called sanitariums. Most of Asheville's citizens and tourists were afraid of the sick people because they knew the patients could spread their contagious diseases. Thomas Wolfe's mother did not advertise for sick people to board at the Old Kentucky Home.

This was Thomas Wolfe's Asheville. He lived there until he was sixteen years old. He left Asheville in 1916 at age 15 to attend classes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Tom never returned to his home city to live, but he carried memories of his childhood home with him throughout his life. When he finally came home to visit Asheville again in 1937, he found that the city had continued to grow and change. He realized that he could never return to Asheville to live. One of the last novels he wrote was entitled *You Can't Go Home Again*.

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**  
**THOMAS WOLFE'S ASHEVILLE**

**Choose the best answer to the following questions.**

1. At the turn of the twentieth century Asheville's population was around \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. 2,000  
B. 5,000  
C. 15,000  
D. 100,000
2. People were beginning to come to Asheville to enjoy the mountain \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. hikes  
B. air  
C. water  
D. people
3. During this time Asheville came to be known as the \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. Old Kentucky Home  
B. Queen City  
C. Mountain City  
D. Land of the Sky
4. The railroads had come to Asheville in \_\_\_\_\_ bringing tourists and growth.  
A. 1900  
B. 1880  
C. 1770  
D. 1910
5. \_\_\_\_\_ was a grand hotel built upon a hill in Asheville in 1886.  
A. Battery Park Hotel  
B. Grove Park Inn  
C. Biltmore Estate  
D. Haywood Park Hotel
6. George Vanderbilt came to Asheville in the late 1800s and built his home which he called \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. Belvedere  
B. Grove Park Inn  
C. The Manor  
D. Biltmore
7. Many sick people also came to Asheville in those days suffering mainly from \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. cancer  
B. tuberculosis  
C. stress  
D. heat exhaustion

8. Asheville's cool mountain \_\_\_\_\_ altitude and climate was thought to offer health benefits.

A. air

C. scenery

B. water

D. forests

9. Thomas Wolfe left Asheville when he was \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

A. 10

C. 13

B. 20

D. 15

10. One of Thomas Wolfe's last novels was entitled \_\_\_\_\_.

A. *Look Homeward, Angel*

C. *You Can't Go Home Again*

B. *The Lost Boy*

D. *The Hills Beyond*

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**  
**THOMAS WOLFE'S ASHEVILLE**

**ANSWER KEY**

1. C
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. A
6. D
7. B
8. A
9. D
10. C