

## WHAT IS THE OLD KENTUCKY HOME?

Can you imagine what it would be like to grow up in a house shared with strangers? That's exactly how Thomas Wolfe spent most of his boy hood. In 1906, when Tom was six years old, his mother, Julia, bought a house called the "Old Kentucky Home" which she ran as a boardinghouse. A boardinghouse was similar to a hotel. Mrs. Wolfe served three meals each day and gave the boarders who stayed with her a place to sleep, all for \$1.00 a day.

Living in the boardinghouse changed young Tom's life. As the youngest of eight children, he was the only one to go to the boardinghouse to live with his mother. His brothers and sisters lived a few blocks away with their father in the house where Tom was born. This caused a split in the family, making childhood very hard Tom. He felt that the boarders received more of his mother's attention than he did and that they occupied much of her time.

The "Old Kentucky Home" has twenty-nine rooms. In the summertime, Mrs. Wolfe often had as many as thirty boarders living in the house. Tom never had his own bedroom and he never knew from one night to the next where he would sleep. He slept wherever there was extra space. Mrs. Wolfe relied on her children and some hired helpers to assist her with the chores. She was a difficult person to work for and her hired help often quit on her in order to seek work elsewhere.

Visitors came to Asheville in the early 1900s for the cool mountain air. Although there were several hotels in the area, these were often very expensive. Thus, many middle class people chose to stay at the several boarding houses in town instead. There were over one hundred boardinghouses in the Asheville area at that time. Many came to

Asheville for vacation while others came for their health. The mountain air was thought to be good for people with lung illnesses like tuberculosis.

Thomas Wolfe's mother ran the "Old Kentucky Home" until her death in 1945. By this time she was eighty-five years old and had outlived half of her eight children. All of Tom's family members are buried beside Tom in Riverside Cemetery in Asheville except for one of his sisters. She is buried with her family in South Carolina.

A few years after Mrs. Wolfe died, the boardinghouse was opened to the public as a memorial to Thomas Wolfe. Today it is preserved with the same furniture and family possessions that were there when Tom was growing up. Visitors to the memorial can see all of the rooms that Tom described in such detail in his book *Look Homeward, Angel*. The boardinghouse is now operated as a State Historic Site and is called the Thomas Wolfe Memorial.

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**  
**THE "OLD KENTUCKY HOME"**

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

1. Thomas Wolfe was almost \_\_\_\_ years old when his mother bought a boardinghouse.  

A. 10	C. 16
B. 6	D. 29
  
2. Mrs. Wolfe's boardinghouse was called the \_\_\_\_\_.  

A. Altamont	C. Old Kentucky Home
B. Land of the Sky	D. Grove Park Inn
  
3. Mrs. Wolfe charged \_\_\_\_\_ per day for three meals and a place to sleep.  

A. \$1.00	C. \$3.50
B. \$10.00	D. \$0.25
  
4. The "Old Kentucky Home" had \_\_\_\_\_ rooms to accommodate as many as thirty boarders.  

A. 50	C. 10
B. 150	D. 29
  
5. Mrs. Wolfe relied on \_\_\_\_\_ to help her with the chores around the boardinghouse.  

A. hired help and her children	C. her cousins
B. the boarders	D. her husband
  
6. Many visitors were coming to Asheville in the early 1900s for the \_\_\_\_\_.  

A. cheap land	C. Biltmore Estate
B. mountain air	D. gold
  
7. There were over \_\_\_\_\_ boardinghouses in Asheville during the early 1900s.  

A. 20	C. 75
B. 50	D. 100

8. Mrs. Wolfe was \_\_\_\_\_ years old at the time of her death in 1945.

- A. 85
- B. 50

- C. 100
- D. 70

9. Thomas Wolfe described many of the rooms in the boarding house in his novel \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. *The Old Kentucky Home*
- B. *The Land of the Sky*

- C. *Look Homeward, Angel*
- D. *Of Time and the River*

10. Today the boarding house is preserved as a State Historic Site called the \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. Thomas Wolfe Memorial
- B. Vance Birthplace

- C. Old Kentucky Home
- D. Wolfe Monument

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**  
**THE "OLD KENTUCKY HOME"**

**ANSWER KEY**

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