

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, he moved with his mother, Julia to a house called "Old Kentucky Home" which she operated as a boardinghouse. A boardinghouse was similar to a hotel. Mrs. Wolfe served two 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 for 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" had eighteen rooms in 1906 with nineteen boarders inside. By 1916 eleven more rooms had been added. In the summertime, Mrs. Wolfe often had as many as thirty to forty 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 to help with boardinghouse chores. She also hired helpers to work in the house. Tom wrote that his mother was a difficult person to work under.

Although there were several hotels in the area, these were very expensive for many travelers. Thus, many people chose to stay at the numerous boarding houses in town. There were over one eighty boardinghouses in the Asheville area at that time.

Visitors came to Asheville for the cool mountain air. Some came to Asheville for a 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.

Four years after Mrs. Wolfe death, the boardinghouse was opened to the public as a memorial to Thomas Wolfe. Today it is preserved with many of the same furniture and family possessions that were there when Tom was growing up. Visitors to the memorial can see the rooms that Tom described in in his book *Look Homeward, Angel*. The boardinghouse is now operated by the State of North Carolina as part of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site.

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
B. 6
C. 16
D. 29
2. Mrs. Wolfe's boardinghouse was called the _____.
A. Altamont
B. Land of the Sky
C. Old Kentucky Home
D. Grove Park Inn
3. Mrs. Wolfe charged _____ per day for three meals and a place to sleep.
A. \$1.00
B. \$10.00
C. \$3.50
D. \$0.25
4. The "Old Kentucky Home" had _____ rooms to accommodate as many as thirty to forty boarders.
A. 50
B. 150
C. 10
D. 29
5. Mrs. Wolfe relied on _____ to help her with the chores around the boardinghouse.
A. hired help and her children
B. the boarders
C. her cousins
D. her husband
6. Many visitors were coming to Asheville in the early 1900s for the _____.
A. cheap land
B. mountain air
C. Biltmore Estate
D. gold
7. There were over _____ boardinghouses in Asheville during the early 1900s.
A. 20
B. 50
C. 75
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