

## THOMAS WOLFE'S ASHEVILLE, 1900-1920

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe wrote about things he had known as a child. He had grown up in Asheville, North Carolina in the early years of the twentieth century. In the story he calls Asheville Altamont and he describes the city and its inhabitants.

Asheville was a growing city in the early twentieth century. Around 15,000 people lived in the mountain city during this time. Asheville was becoming known around the world as a tourist resort. People were coming from everywhere to enjoy the scenic mountain beauty and cool, clean mountain air. It was during this time that Asheville was popularly known as “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. Now people could easily ride the train to Asheville and arrive in comfort, ease and 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 named the Battery Park Hotel and was visible from all points in town. Ten years later a man named George Vanderbilt came to Asheville. He would build his home there. He called it Biltmore. By the turn of the twentieth century Asheville had several hotels, restaurants, theaters, parks and even a trolley system. Asheville had grown from a tiny mountain village into a city, almost overnight.

Asheville was also known as a health resort. Many people believed that Asheville's clean, cool mountain air was healthful. Tuberculosis was a very dreadful disease at this time. People who were sick with this 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 these sick people. They were afraid of becoming sick themselves. Thomas Wolfe's mother did not allow sick people to board at the Old Kentucky Home.

This was Thomas Wolfe's Asheville. He would live here until he was sixteen years old. He left Asheville in 1916 to begin attending classes at the University of North Carolina. Tom never returned there 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 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. scenery  
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 1800's 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. 16

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