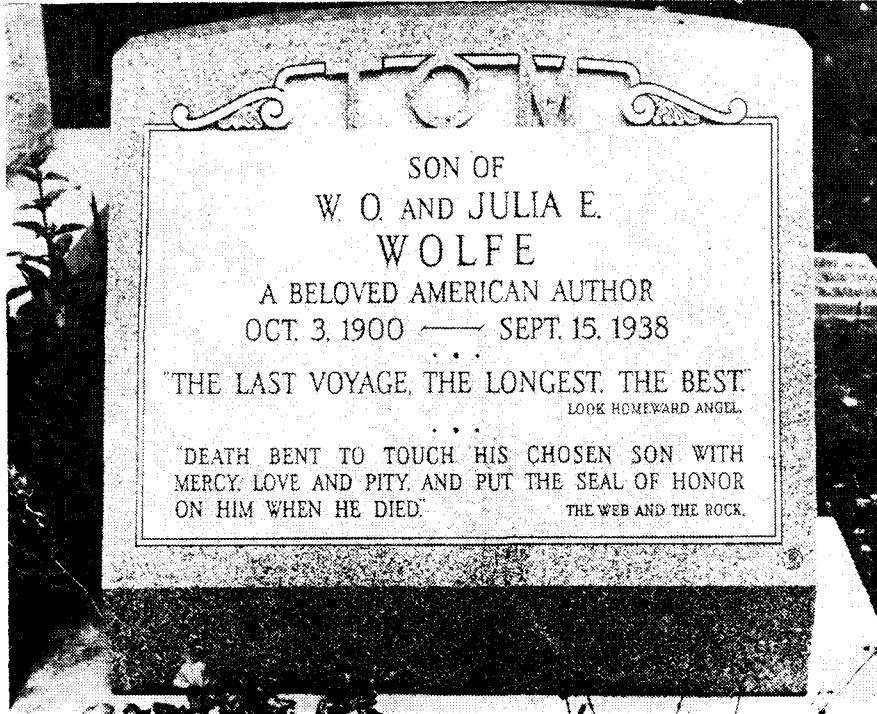




## Look Homeward, Asheville



Thomas Wolfe's grave in Riverside Cemetery, Asheville, near O. Henry's grave.

### ASHEVILLE.

SITTING on the open terrace of the Sky Club the other night with some of the local hillwilliams (it can be very formal here), I watched the sun drop behind the mountains and shine like hidden footlights against the determined blue curtain of the evening sky. The Pisgah range made a black deckled edge of the Carolina horizon, Venus glowed uncountable karats above the peaks, and in the valley Asheville pulsed with neon around its dozen-story skyscrapers—the city hall, the county building, and that gingerbread pile where Tom Wolfe's father had his marble-cutting offices.

It was perfectly plain why this perch I sat on was named Beaucatcher Mountain, for I suspect that beaux brought there by hill girls had hardly a chance. Asheville has a way of beguiling wayfarers of the most varied assortment—old W. O. Wolfe, and twenty-three retired generals whose home was the Army, and Demeree and Dorothy Bess of *The Saturday Evening Post*, whose home was China and Moscow and Paris, and old George Vanderbilt, who could have bought any home he wanted and indeed he did.

Old George looked out at the view

one night from the top of the Battery Park Hotel and stated that he would possess all that he saw. Now, that is not a fatuous statement coming from a man with George's collection of banknotes, and he soon held the deed to a parcel of 100,000 acres including Mount Pisgah itself, a hillcock that measures 5,721 feet above sea level. On this plot he built himself a modest French Renaissance chateau of 183 rooms, patterned after the extravaganzas of Blois and Chambord in the Loire Valley.

Track was laid from the present railroad line at Biltmore, and it took artisans and drones five years to put the whole thing together. The result is far more appealing and certainly better maintained than either Blois or Chambord. The thirty-five acres of gardens and lawns, after all, were laid out by Frederick Olmstead, who had designed the grounds for the Capitol at Washington and also Manhattan's Central Park.

The Great Banquet Hall measures seventy-two feet long, has a ceiling seventy-five feet high, and in case anybody ever has a chill there are three cavernous fireplaces side by side any of which could take a sizable bite of a California redwood without yawning. Napoleon's chess-set deco-

rates the Print Room, a forest of greenery decorates the Court of Palms, and the library could service Chicago.

Although the preserve has been trimmed in recent years to 12,000 acres, and gas stations are scattered before the entrance, there is enough property on hand to require a three-mile drive from gate to front door. Seventeen miles of paved road wind through the grounds and there are 120 miles of equestrian path. Six maids keep house for Lord Cecil, who was once married to Cornelia Vanderbilt and stays there with his son as a condition of the divorce. Tourists can visit there now as a condition of the times.

When Mrs. George Vanderbilt was alive she organized Biltmore Industries, a wool-weaving enterprise designed to help the mountain people make use of the trade that had been hand-propelled across oaken looms. Fine homespun is still being woven at Biltmore Industries by mountain people who still use dogwood shuttles, handpropelled across oaken looms. Wool comes in from England, Australia, and Scotland, and visitors can see whole fleece from Scottish black-face sheep being unpacked. The Scottish wool is easily recognizable, the mountain people say, since a piece of ear is frequently found in the fleece and only a Scotsman would clip that close. At any rate, the crystal waters of the springs running from Mount Mitchell are used in the dyes, the fabric is pre-shrunk and dried in the Carolina sun, all of which is said to impart a special brilliance of color, not to mention durability.

Not long ago John D. Rockefeller stopped by with the unworn pair of trousers to a two-pants suit he had bought from Biltmore thirty years ago. The coat and one pair of trousers had worn out, and Rockefeller wanted Biltmore to make him a new coat to match the unworn trousers. They did, too.

ASHEVILLE's other famous house is rather more modest than the Vanderbilt chateau. It is the white frame building on Spruce Street, behind the Asheville Biltmore Hotel, where Tom Wolfe's family lived and which Wolfe used as a setting for his first novel, "Look Homeward, Angel." The fictional Gant family of fictional Altamont were the actual Wolfes of actual Asheville, and so many characters were so thinly disguised in the book that Asheville hasn't quite gotten over the shock yet.

When I stopped by the Spruce St. place the other day Mrs. Mabel Wheaton, Tom's sister, was sitting on the porch under a sign which identi-

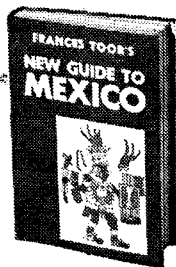


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**LOOK BACKWARD:** SR reviewed "Look Homeward, Angel" on December 21, 1929. Written by Basil Davenport, now on the editorial staff of the Book-of-the-Month Club, the review said:

... Mr. Wolfe, like Rabelais, though plainly odors and colors and all stimuli affect him more intensely than most people, is happily able to devour sensations with an enormous vigor; his perceptions have a rare combination of fineness and largeness.

In manner, Mr. Wolfe is most akin to James Joyce, somewhere between the ascetic beauty of the "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and the unpruned fecundity of "Ulysses." ... Rabelais fed on all the fulness of the French Renaissance, a dawn in which it was bliss to be alive; what would he have been like if he had been a poor boy in a small Southern town with a drunken father, a shrewish mother, and a family of quarreling brothers and sisters? Mr. Wolfe's answer seems to be that, in his childhood at least, he would have done unexpectedly well. ... "Look Homeward, Angel," though it has the faults of the luxurious, has the great virtue that it always has the vision of something half comprehensible behind the humdrum life, and that in the reading it carries conviction with it.

fied the place as "The Old Kentucky Home." Here Tom's mother (Eliza Gant in the book) ran the house for her family and her boarders.

Mrs. Wheaton is tall and imposing and on the day we met she wore a suit of lavender loose-knit wool that might have been homespun. A felt hat was pulled down sharply over one eye. Lace curtains hung at the living-room window and photographs in frames ran across the top of the upright piano. A book of music was opened to "O See the Swift Swallow Flying." "These are the pictures that Mama had spread when this was a boarding-house," she said. "That's our old piano that we took music on. It still plays pretty well." She sat down at the stool and ran her hands over a few classical bars, then cut into a brisk rendition of "Alexander's Rag-time Band." "This is more what the family liked," she said.

Tom Wolfe about to board a tram in Berlin looked down from the top of the piano, and so did Julia Wolfe and old W.O. in pictures taken just before their deaths. There was another of Tom at six and one of Mabel at nine months. "That's how pretty I looked at nine months," Mrs. Wheaton said. "I always had that dark,





dirty look. Papa was a wanderer, but he married mother and had all of us and couldn't get away. He carried a daguerrotype of his first wife in his pocket and looked at it all the time. It's a wonder Mama didn't shoot him. Tom was named Clayton after Professor Clayton Bowman, who had to do with theosophy or something. Mama was always very conscious of those new isms."

She showed us the dining room. "Each table seated ten. Sometimes we didn't have so many boarders and they could spread out some. There was soup always. We had soup 365 days of the year. Mama got the magnificent price of fifty cents a meal. Board was \$8 to \$10 a week and glad to get 'em at that." We walked back into the pantry and Mrs. Wheaton looked fondly at a marble-topped kitchen table. "I pulled many a batch of taffy on that," she said. "We ground coffee on it, usually Arbuckles, that was the famous brand then. Steak was cut on it, too. You can still see the notches.

In the kitchen was Mama's ironing board, all set up and ready to use. "I bought her an electric iron, but she always preferred these." She picked up the flatirons that stood on the stove. On a table across the room were atlas jars of peaches and others that held grapes and currants. They looked strangely discolored. "Mama is

#### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Poet, Shelley. 2. Realtor, Lewis. 3. Slave, Stowe. 4. Country, Butler. 5. Dog, Woolf. 6. Horsewoman, Tennyson. 7. Philologist, Borrow. 8. Student, Milton. 9. Dentist, Norris. 10. Town, Eliot. 11. Boy, Tarkington. 12. Halfbreed, Jackson. 13. King, Byron. 14. Horse, James. 15. Model, Du Maurier. 16. Tribe, Melville. 17. Sylph, Fouqué. 18. Caliph, Beckford. 19. City, Brontë. 20. Pond, Thoreau.



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dead nine years on the seventh of December and that is some of her fruit." Mrs. Wheaton said. "It must have made its own alcohol by now. We haven't tried it yet."

We walked upstairs together to see the dress Tom wore at three, carefully pleated and trimmed in lace, hanging on a wall. There was a child's desk and a sign on it which said, "The Chautauqua Industrial Art Desk—a plan to promote the culture of work and play among children in the home." In another room was Tom's furniture from New York, his studio couch, the old Remington Standard

FOR MY MOTHER, with all the love and respect I have for her, and with the hope that she will find this book worthy of what she hopes I may do and be.

From her son,

Tom

—From Thomas Wolfe's personal dedication to his mother in the fly-leaf of "Of Time and the River," March 1, 1935.

he worked on, and the portable he took to Europe.

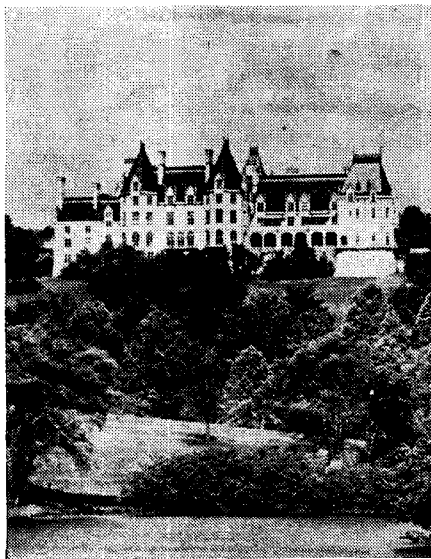
There was the copy of "Look Homeward, Angel" which Tom gave his mother. Inside he had written:

To my mother, Julia E. Wolfe, I present this copy of my first book, with love and with hope for her happiness and long life.

Thomas Wolfe  
October 15, 1929.

If she was not always happy, Julia Wolfe was bestowed with a long life; she died at eighty-six in 1945, and she rented rooms right to the end. Tom's notoriety changed things for the strange family of Spruce St. As Mabel recalls, she wrote Tom, "You certainly shocked the world into recognizing us. We're not nonentities any more!" October 18, 1929 was release date for that first book. I got my telegram that day. It said, "Thanks for your wonderful letter. Asheville in time will know we have written a book about great people." I began showing that telegram to people all over Asheville, to people who were shaking their fist in my face.

"We still get royalties from the books. And they're still talking about doing a picture. It's not a great deal, but I can't let Tom down, it's been a great help." —HORACE SUTTON.



George Vanderbilt's "Biltmore."

## Americana

Continued from page 37

verse material. This material goes beyond the customary area of civil liberties and reaches out to include as many as possible of those broad points of contact of liberty and life.

THE book opens appropriately with July 4. Each day thereafter has one page only and a single topic. The first week of January illustrates the plan. January 1. "Emancipation Proclamation" (1863); 2. The FBI raids of January 2, 1920 at the time of the Bolshevik scare; 3. Anti-Peonage Act of 1867 (to protect Indians of the Southwest); 4. The Right Peaceably to Assemble (a Supreme Court decision of 1937 arising out of a Communist case originating in Oregon); 5. Freedom from Want (a discussion of the third of Franklin D. Roosevelt's four freedoms); 6. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (a discussion of Associate Justice Stone's dissent from the majority opinion in which he said the Court should limit its decision to the matter of power and avoid the question of the wisdom of the act); 7. The Impeachment of Scroggs (concerning a tyrannical Chief Justice of the King's Bench in the late seventeenth century whose tyrannies provide a background for some of the provisions of the American Bill of Rights). Each week of the fifty-two contains an equally varied assortment of matter—historical episodes, court cases, acts of Congress or state legislatures, and opinions of past leaders.

Justice Douglas does not hesitate to set down his own convictions. These, when put beside his printed opinions from the bench, add up to perhaps the most impressive philosophy of liberty to be proposed in our time. Concerning wiretapping: "The free state offers what police state denies—the privacy of the home, the dignity and peace of mind of the individual. That precious right to be let alone is violated once the police enters our conversations." Concerning the Nuremberg trials: "An *ex post facto* law is one which punishes a person today for an act which, when he did it, was not a crime. The Nuremberg trials, in my view, applied to the defendants such a law. . . . Goering, *et al.*, deserved severe punishment. But their guilt did not justify us in substituting power for principle." Concerning the Fifth Amendment: "The Fifth Amendment is an old friend and a good friend. It is one of the great landmarks in man's struggle to be free of tyranny, to be decent and civil-

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ized. It is our way to escape from the use of torture."

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## Bookmarks

**G**ERALD CARSON's "The Old Country Store," as pleasant a packet of socio-economic Americana as you are likely to meet, takes due account of the once ubiquitous county history—a "mass-produced tome filled with slapdash accounts of local Indian artifacts dug up, and the first fulling mill, with a section of woodcut portraits of the county's worthies, published at so much per 'cut,' and flattering biographies of the 'prominent farmer' or 'leading merchant'—that is, the subscribers." Mr. Carson does not employ the descriptive tag by which these histories were, and still are, known in the trade. The tag is "mug-book." Many mug-books, despite their palpable shortcomings, have acquired prestige over the years. Often the mug-book, frail reed though it is, represents the only early historical documentation a community can offer, and librarians and antiquarians accord it a respect that would astonish the cynical originator who was only out to make a fast buck by playing up to universal human vanity.

\* \* \*

Add Anglicisms: From E. C. R. Lorac's "Shepherd's Crook," a pleasant regional English mystery, we learn that when a Briton says "translating a Latin unseen" he means "making a sight translation" (*unseen* being a noun, for the lady who uses the term later notes that her husband is "good at unseens").

\* \* \*

"Varsity" seems to be coming back, and "collegiate" appears to be on the way out. We have no statistics on this.

\* \* \*

One classification of personnel of which we are never in short supply is our private-spirited citizens.

\* \* \*

Ever meet anyone who was in sorts?

—J. T. W.

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By **William Frank Zornow**. \$4.

**The Authentic Life of Billy, The Kid**  
By **Pat F. Garrett** (the man who "got" Billy). \$2.

# In Brains We Trust

Continued from page 23

if not taken over, by an army of his "Happy Hot Dogs," as they were sneeringly labeled.

By the common consent of his quicker-witted students, Frankfurter was a great teacher. Unorthodox in his means, impatient with the dull, at his best "as a small club man, not a big club man" with his handpicked advance course, he was superbly stimulating to those who could keep up with him and his dartings down the byways of the points he discussed. Holmes once described him and Roscoe Pound as the "soul" of the Law School. A few of his colleagues complained that, though he gave courses in Public Utilities, Administrative Law, and Federal Jurisprudence, what he taught was Felix Frankfurter, not law. To most of those who studied with him, however, Frankfurter was the kind of law they liked. He returned their liking and their loyalty, going to great pains to place them. He liked teaching, too, and the stimulation and delight that "only the young can give to a teacher." He also liked Cambridge. Indeed he liked it so much that after his return in 1919 he remained there, at least officially, for the next twenty years (some say the happiest of his life) until Roosevelt appointed him to the Supreme Court.

**T**O pretend that he was chained to Harvard by his duties would be to ignore the truth and misread Frankfurter. During those years at the Law School he was all over the place physically as well as mentally. This was bound to be because, intense as his now more disciplined interests re-

main, he was then a man who could not find enough pies to have his fingers in. Laski playfully touched on this side of his nature when, after a visit to Washington in 1917, he wrote Holmes, "Mr. Wilson has charge of foreign policy and Felix seems to sponsor the rest of the Government. To my certain knowledge he directs the War Department; Mr. Baker is the pale wraith that Felix casts before him in his progress. I saw that he had almost annexed the Shipping Board; there are similar rumors from the Department of Justice."

Though written by an imaginative friend in a smiling mood, this sketch (so close to what Frankfurter's detractors would like to believe true) suggests the characteristic wholeheartedness with which he continued to hurl himself at life after his return to Cambridge. He was writing pieces, signed and unsigned, for the *New Republic* and the *World*; exposing what he held to be the injustice of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial in an article which catapulted him to national fame; lecturing widely at other universities and culling from his lectures and his journalism an impressive number of distinguished books on the law, government, and the Supreme Court; making trips to Albany to give advice to Franklin Roosevelt, by then his warm friend; and later spending more and more time in Washington and Hyde Park, so trusted by FDR that he was recognized as a major factor in the New Deal.

According to Ickes, in 1933 when ranking members of the Administration met at the White House with leading operators and union officials

to discuss the coal code Frankfurter was seated "a little to the rear, as an interested auditor." Two years later Ickes reported that Frankfurter "has been spending the better part of every week at the White House for some time recently and he sees the President on occasions when the President can talk freely." Even before then, when Frankfurter stayed with a friend in Washington, his host was amazed to find people queued up all day long outside his house, hoping to see Frankfurter about jobs. No wonder John Gunther said he "served as a kind of recruiting officer for the whole Administration," especially in finding young lawyers for the ever-multiplying Government agencies. No wonder James A. Farley grumbled, "I don't see why I am here as Postmaster General since Frankfurter seems to hand out all the patronage." Or that General Hugh Johnson, in words already quoted, resentfully described him as "the most influential single individual in the United States."

**O**NE reason for Frankfurter's influence was his uncommon talent as an emissary, a trouble-shooter, a go-between, a Mr. Fixit, call it what you will. Since his elevation to the bench he has, of course, exercised this talent rarely. To be sure, he did help persuade Roosevelt to send Harry Hopkins to confer with Churchill in London at the beginning of 1941. To be sure, Stimson's presence as Secretary of War in Roosevelt's Cabinet may have been in part due, as Stimson believed, to Frankfurter's intimate relationship with the President. But once on the Court his relations with the White House changed and were bound to change because, with his fastidious regard for the Court's dignity and his own role as a Justice, he was thereafter (as he later described himself) "out of party politics and party attachments."

In the preceding decade the reverse was true. He was so involved in politics that at times his confreres in Cambridge must have wondered if he were not a visiting rather than a resident professor. With Frankfurter's formidable knowledge of the law, it was not surprising that Roosevelt, before and after his election, turned to him as an increasingly trusted advisor or that members of the Cabinet, such as Miss Perkins and Ickes, sought him out when they needed an expert legal opinion. Though invaluable in the counselor's role, Frankfurter was no less valuable, because of his way with men, working behind the scenes like a stage manager. Again and again he demonstrated that, as an emissary or go-between, he could placate, coax, persuade, or reconcile persons who

## Epilogue

By Walter de la Mare

**"P**INING to live, I was constrained to die,  
Here, then, am I.  
Love was my maker, fountain of all bliss.  
Now, only this.

The maze of thought and feeling that I was!  
Of all earth's marvels the blest looking-glass!  
The all desired—the little brought to pass  
Alas!"

"Poor soul; he suffered. But, at end, no child  
Ever more gently fell asleep.  
As if all contraries were reconciled;  
He smiled."