

KEYS TO THE CITY **OF ASHEVILLE** HISTORY

BY NANCY OAKLEY

Meet Asheville's Literary Lions

“**T**his town of Altamont had been settled soon after the Revolutionary War. It had been a convenient stopping-off place for cattledrovers and farmers in their swing eastward from Tennessee into South Carolina.” So begins the description of a thinly disguised Asheville in Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*. Published in 1929, the novel captured in detail the city’s neighborhoods, the bustle of its square, and Wolfe’s mother’s boardinghouse on Spruce Street that is today the site of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial. But Wolfe’s unapologetic characterizations based on real people so offended the citizenry that *Look Homeward, Angel* was banned from the public library for seven years.

It would take another literary heavyweight, F. Scott Fitzgerald, to restore the novel to its rightful place on the library shelves. A frequent visitor to Asheville, the author of *The Great Gatsby* was known as much for his escapades at the Grove Park Inn as for his writing. But as the story goes, when Fitzgerald searched in vain for Wolfe’s book, only to be told it was banned, he ventured into nearby communities and found two copies of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Presenting them to the



Thomas Wolfe at his parents' home in Asheville, 1939.

Asheville librarian, he said, “Now you do carry Tom Wolfe’s books.”

Both men would write other works. Both would die young. (Wolfe is buried in Riverside Cem-

etry near another literary great, William Sydney Porter, a.k.a. O. Henry.) And both would leave Asheville with an enduring literary legacy.

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