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## Where It All Began (Volume 6)

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# THE ROBERT PENN WARREN BIRTHPLACE

## *Where It All Began*

Guthrie, Todd County, Kentucky is a small town located in the western part of south-central Kentucky. It is about 50 miles northwest of Nashville, Tennessee and the northern Tennessee border runs through it. As late as 1844 it had been a stopping place called Pondy Woods. With the coming of the railroad, growth began and in 1867, Pondy Woods was renamed for James Guthrie, then president of the L&N Railroad (now CSX Railroad). Guthrie received its charter in June 1879 and by the early 1900's had grown to a population of about 1200 people. The north-south and east-west lines of the L&N Railroad crossed in Guthrie. At its peak passenger train traffic through Guthrie reached thirty-seven trains a day. In 1869 a large hotel opened across the tracks from the new Guthrie Depot with accommodations for three hundred guests and was known as one of the most valuable hotel properties in the state. At the edge of town there was a mile-long racetrack with stables, bleachers, water, and breeding farms. By the early 1900's Guthrie, now thriving, was described as a "banking town" with about 40 businesses including two publishers and an electric plant. The surrounding area was agricultural and remains so today.

The birthplace of Robert Penn Warren is located at the corner of Third and Cherry Streets. The house is a small red brick structure and is now owned and maintained by the Committee for the Preservation of the Robert Penn Warren Birthplace in Todd County, Inc. The Committee purchased it in 1988 from the city of Guthrie. The city of Guthrie had, in 1987, purchased it to ensure that it would remain on its original site. The house was built around 1902 or 1903 to be used as a rental house and the original builder was an enterprising lady named Ms. Billy Rose. By 1905 the Warren family had rented this house and on April 24, 1905 Robert Penn Warren was born there.

Upon purchase in 1988 by the present owner, a complete renovation was begun and is now complete. The birthplace opened officially in early June 1989 and houses an extensive collection of Warren's works and offers numerous books for in-hand reading and study. On April 21, 1990 the Robert Penn Warren Birthplace was formally dedicated to the appreciation of the life and work of Robert Penn Warren. Through the use of period furniture and displays, photographs, and memorabilia, the birthplace reflects the life and work of Robert Penn Warren while telling the story of Guthrie at the turn of the twentieth century. Special tours and programs can be arranged by contacting Mrs. Jeane Moore at 270-483-2683. The home is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:30 AM-3:30 PM CST and on Sunday, 2 PM-4 PM CST. The home is closed on Monday. Admission to the home, special tours, and programs is free. Donations are gratefully accepted.