

Reflections from the Past

The Hermitage Hotel – Historical Quarterly

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A Lasting Legacy

John E. Meyer, who worked as an Assistant Manager at the Hermitage Hotel in 1945, is pictured below with his first wife and daughter in 1958 while giving charitable funding to the Kettering-Meyer Laboratory in Birmingham, Alabama. Meyer came back to the states a decorated war hero after 99 combat missions with the Air Force. During one of those missions his P-51 Mustang took an anti-aircraft burst of shrapnel that left Meyer wounded and nearly unable to see. His wingman heroically guided him safely back to base. The story



was featured in Look Magazine. After a time in the hotel business, Meyer, would joke that he worked in “hotel sales” as he gradually sold off his late father’s chain of Robert R. Meyer Hotels. The Hermitage was a shining star in that small southern chain from 1912 - 1956. Properties ranged from Jacksonville to Atlanta, Knoxville, Raleigh, Roanoke, Baltimore, and more.

To honor the memory of his older brother whose life was lost during a combat mission in the Pacific, John established the Robert Randolph Meyer, Jr. Memorial Scholarship in 1953. It gives scholarships to Princeton University students. Their father, the self-made hotel chain magnate, left a large charitable foundation in his home town of Birmingham, Alabama that still thrives today. Over \$65 million has been granted to hundreds of organizations over the years.

John (known as Jason by his friends) eventually retired early and acquired property in coastal South Carolina because he loved hunting and fishing. That land, Botany Bay on Edisto Island, is now a 4,687 acre wildlife preserve. Its location is about 45 miles south of Charleston. Botany Bay includes nearly 2 miles of pristine, wild Atlantic Ocean coastline, marshes and woodlands. The access road to Botany Bay is pictured at right. Yet another lasting legacy of the Meyers!



Historic Preservation

The Land Trust for Tennessee is the leading non-government organization in Tennessee for preserving our land and its important heritage across the state. The work of the Land Trust involves the donation of conservation easements, which allow people to continue to own their land while placing limits on its development. It also purchases or accepts donations of land to be protected. They work with communities and partner organizations to develop strategic conservation plans and to raise funds for land protection. Furthermore, they serve as stewards of protected lands, ensuring that conservation agreements are respected.

The following important reasons for preservation are posted on the website www.landtrusttn.org :



Historic Land– 58% of adult travelers include an historic activity on their trip. Conserving historic lands protects the context of historic structures and sites while safeguarding our rich history for future generations.



Working Farms– 41% of Tennessee’s acreage is farmland. Conserving farms promotes a major industry in Tennessee and preserves landscapes that distinguish our state.



Recreational/Scenic Landscapes– Conserving our natural resources and open spaces is essential for protecting our clean water, air and places to hunt, fish and play. Outdoor recreation and open natural space are vital to the physical and emotional health of the community.



Water Protection – Land bordering our rivers, lakes and streams filters pollution before it reaches our drinking water. If we do not remove the pollutants that our society puts into the air and water, we consume them ourselves.



Urban Open Space – 50% of homebuyers would be willing to pay more than 10% extra for a house near a park or protected open space. Protecting and creating green space in urban areas enhances the quality of life, public health and fosters a sense of place.



Wildlife Habitat – Protecting habitats is especially critical for Tennessee, one of the most biodiverse states in the country.

The Hermitage Hotel, through a voluntary contribution program with its guests, donates \$3.00 per night stayed at the hotel. The proceeds are paid to the Land Trust for Tennessee monthly. The program has been in effect since July, 2008 and has resulted in more than \$700,000 in contributions to date. Since the partnership began, The Land Trust for Tennessee has helped to conserved more than 85,000 acres of land. Since its founding in 1999, The Land Trust for Tennessee and its partners have worked to protect 119,000 acres.

A portion of the contributions from the hotel are applied by the Land Trust to maintain one of the crown jewels, the Glen Leven Farm and also supports the educational programming held at that property. Glen Leven is a 65-acre site located just 3 miles from downtown Nashville. Glen Leven Farm is not regularly open to the public, but scheduled workshops, field trips, open days, group tours, volunteer days, pasture walks, arboretum walks, cultural events and lectures are offered. The farming operation is a dynamic working landscape that includes:

- ❖ An heirloom garden planted and maintained by the team at Capitol Grille for Double H Farms, The Hermitage Hotel’s Sustainable Farming Project
- ❖ A honeybee sanctuary maintained by volunteers
- ❖ An education garden planted and maintained by The Land Trust for Tennessee
- ❖ A rotational cattle grazing system managed by GL Shorthorns
- ❖ Hops grown by Jackalope Brewery



Image courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives

Preserving an Icon

This picture gives a sense of the many wonderful and historic events that have taken place at The Hermitage Hotel. This particular occasion occurred on September 18, 1941 when the patriotic movie “Sergeant York” premiered at Nashville’s Knickerbocker Theater on 6th Avenue North. The street was renamed York Avenue for the day. This event was just a couple of months before Pearl Harbor. The movie contract itself had been finalized in the hotel the year before. Mr. York was no stranger to the Hermitage, having been an overnight guest during his honeymoon more than twenty years earlier.

Hard to believe, but the hotel once faced the possibility of demolition or conversion into an office building. That was in the 1970s. Concerned citizens launched a “Save the Hermitage” campaign, complete with slide show. In 1975 the Metropolitan Historical Commission successfully nominated the hotel to the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic Nashville Inc. has played an important role in the preservation of the hotel. They championed saving the Ryman Auditorium, Union Station (closed at the time), the lower Broadway district and more.

When new ownership acquired the hotel and it reopened as a Park Suite hotel in 1981 after a full renovation, a preservation easement on the front façade of the hotel was granted to Historic Nashville, Inc. The distinctive façade with its Beaux Arts style and terra cotta ornamentation is therefore assured to be maintained intact into the future, and without alteration.

If you know of important old buildings in Nashville that deserve to be protected, you are encouraged to talk with Historic Nashville, Inc. president Jenn Harman and to visit their website: <http://historicnashvilleinc.org/what-we-do/preservation-easement-program/>

Lobby Marble – From the Source

When Monica Gawet stopped by during a visit to Nashville a few years ago, we had the pleasant fortune to become acquainted with a marble quarry owner-operator whose stone product matched those on our lobby floor. Those beautiful pieces are commonly called Tennessee Quaker Gray, Tennessee Pink, and Tennessee Chocolate. Monica was introduced to us by Susan W. Knowles, Ph.D., who is the leading marble expert in the state, based at the Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro.

Monica proceeded to help us replace some cracked lobby tiles. During a century of footsteps by untold thousands of people, a few tiles had begun to break up. Monica carefully searched through her massive inventory to match some sample pieces we provided. The success was chronicled in a piece aired by Tennessee Crossroads and can be found on YouTube.

The Tennessee Marble Company was formed in 1993, and is a family owned 3rd generation stone company. The company utilizes 2 factories with over 125,000 square feet of production capacity on over 200 acres of marble deposits. Tennessee marble(s) are dense, durable, distinctive, water-resistant materials available in earth tone colors of pink, brown, gray and beige.

The Tennessee marble industry was established in 1838 when this distinctive stone was shipped to the nation's capitol for the construction of the United States Capitol. Tennessee Marble has been used so extensively throughout Washington D.C., it is simpler to list those buildings without this timeless stone than

the many buildings that utilize it on exteriors, floors, counters, elevators, and walls. Among those buildings that reflect the warm tones of the unique American marble are the National Gallery of Art, The Smithsonian, the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the National Cathedral, and most recently, the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center. If you've walked through Grand Central Station in New York, you've walked across Tennessee marble. Tennessee Marble can be found in virtually every significant historic public building in the United States. To see more of Monica's company visit: www.tnmarble.com



Do you have some special memories of The Hermitage Hotel ?
To share your own "news" please drop by and see Tom Vickstrom, telephone 615-345-7123 or e-mail archives@thehermitagehotel.com

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