

Reflections from the Past

The Hermitage Hotel – Historical Quarterly

2018 Volume 2

A Continuing Legacy

Chef Alfred S. Vogliazzo and musician Francis J. Craig relax for a moment once preparations are complete for a dinner dance in the hotel grand ballroom as of 1938. These two greats gave much to the people of Nashville and untold thousands of guests at The Hermitage Hotel.

Chef Vogliazzo was in charge of the kitchen and its production from 1932 – 1946. Meanwhile, Mr. Craig led the Francis Craig Orchestra at the hotel 6 days a week during lunch and dinner from 1924 – 1946. Both professionals led teams of more than 10 talented specialists.



Bon Appetit!

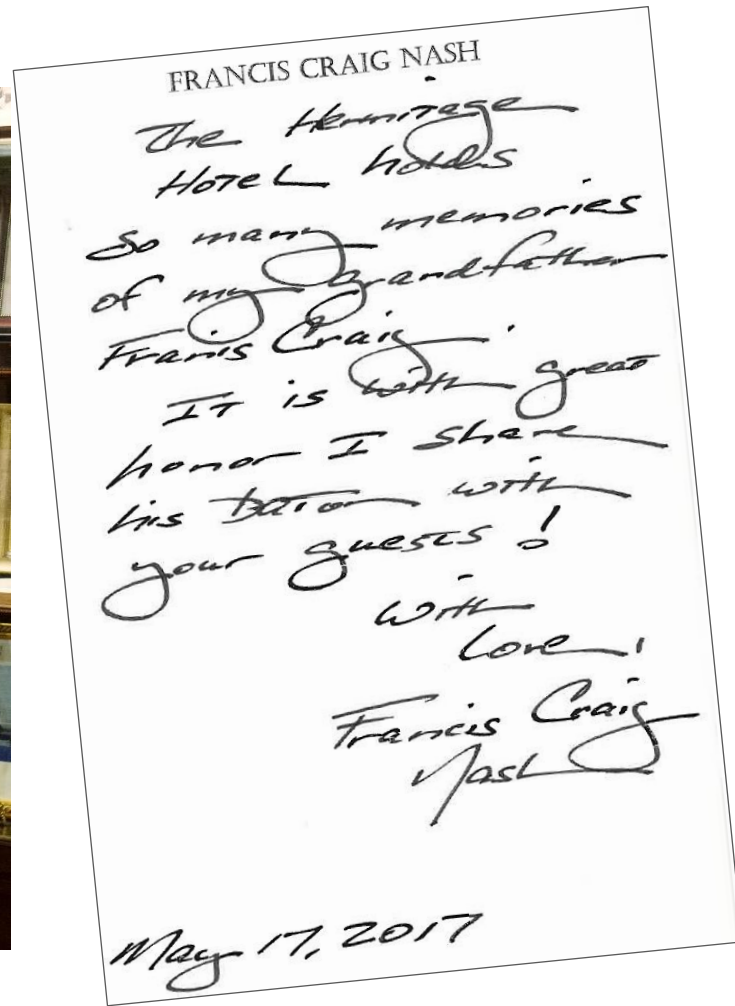


In recent times Chef's grandchildren enjoyed a visit to the hotel.
From left: Whit Rhodes, Stacey & Taylor Rhodes, Jane & Scott Smith.



The family enjoyed a dish credited to the chef, "Chicken a la Vogliazzo." They also brought some family photos and stories of the chef. He was a very hard worker and enjoyed his craft to the extent he was known as the smiling chef. How many meals were produced on his watch? Surely in the hundreds of thousands or more.

The grandchildren of Francis Craig also continue a special association with the hotel. Grand-daughter Francis Craig Nash recently donated Mr. Craig's conductor baton. It is now in the lobby historical display case. Ms. Nash holds a 1943 photo of the orchestra taken in the Capitol Grille "on location." Great-grandson Lane Abernathy, who is a professional musician, felt the energy for a few fine moments while holding the baton here.



The story of Francis Craig's phenomenal hit "Near You" must be mentioned. In 1947, on the cusp of retirement, Mr. Craig recorded his theme song "Red Rose" at the WSM recording Studio C. On the "B" side of the record they agreed to include a new tune "Near You" that he'd composed. The lyrics had been written on the back of a Grill menu. "Near You" caught on like wildfire across the country's radio stations. It sold 2.3 million records and 350,000 copies of sheet music in 20 languages and stayed on the Hit Parade for 16 weeks. It was Nashville's first hit record.

History sometimes does repeat itself. In this 1981 newspaper photo, the two daughters of the great musician, Donia Craig Dickerson and Elizabeth Craig Lancaster and his wife Elizabeth (center), donated memorabilia to hotel, accepted by manager Schoenwaldt. Today it is the descendants of these ladies, left & right in photo, who are again showing their generosity and friendship. The beat goes on.



Timeless Memories

Daughter Mary Ann Skillman relates her mother Wauneta Batey Skillman's views from the World War 2 era, "My mother was a quiet pioneer in women's rights and she did so with great dignity. She was a role model to women,



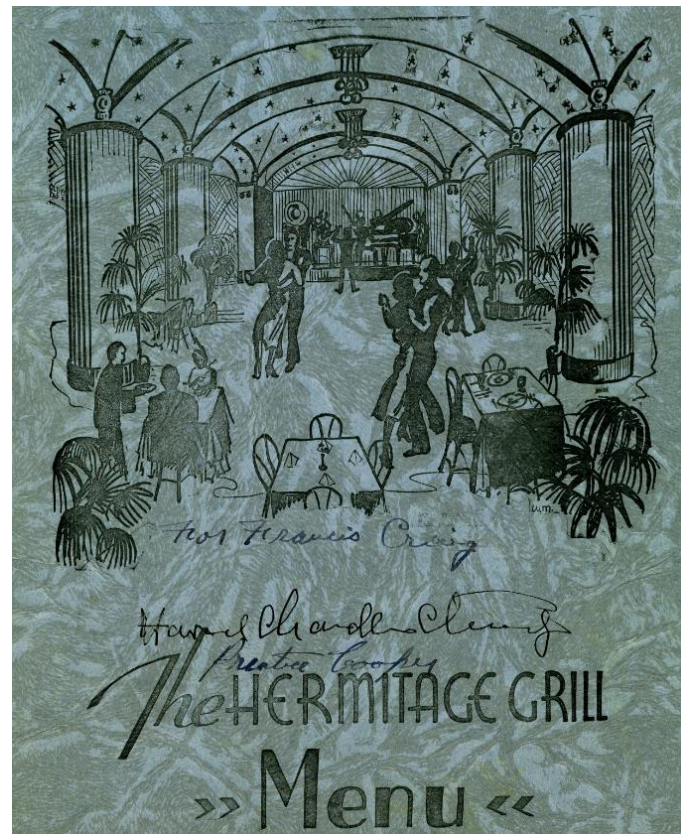
giving example of how to, in an integrated and gracious manner, take one's place in banking, society and family while still looking absolutely beautiful. My mother felt that music combined with beauty provided an atmosphere for socialization so of course the Hermitage Hotel was where she loved to come with her young lady friends to find enjoyment from the troubles of the war." In recent times, mother and daughter enjoyed a luncheon in the hotel Veranda while reliving a happy moment.

Another collection of fond memories is offered by Margaret Shea, excerpts reprinted by permission of Metro Nashville Archives. "My parents loved to dance and Nashville had an abundance of supper clubs, but their fondest memory was always dancing to the orchestra of Francis Craig at the Hermitage

Hotel. Mr. Craig had an added plus besides his musical talent: he was a gentleman. To my mother, Mr. Craig represented fine character, intelligence and the gentle-hearted lifestyle that she aspired to.

As a child, I remember we often went to the Hermitage Hotel for lunch as a special treat for a birthday or some other occasion. If we went through the lobby we could hear the music from the orchestra as we walked down the stairs. When we were seated, Mr. Craig usually came over to speak to my aunt. It was really exciting for Mr. Craig to come to our table. He was always so kind and welcomed us as like VIPs. We always loved his music. I remember watching everything going on at the bandstand from the time I arrived until we left. We usually were seated where we could see everything. The waiters were very attentive. My favorite lunch, as a child, was chopped sirloin steak and baked bananas. Even though I usually ordered this, one day I ordered a lamb chop, and it was served with little green peas. When I tried to cut the lamb chop my knife slipped and the little green peas went all over the table. I was old enough to be very embarrassed even though the waiter immediately took care of it and my aunt acted as if nothing had happened. However, I never ordered little green peas at the Hermitage again, or anywhere else. Now that I think about it, I'm sure I was paying more attention to Francis Craig and the orchestra than of cutting my lamb chop. Since my aunt, Louise Crouch, was bookkeeper at the hotel we would sometimes go into the kitchen to see the chef as well. One Easter

he gave me a chocolate rabbit he had made himself. I was so proud of that rabbit.



Please enjoy the personalized service and special touches that we wish to offer to you today, as our grand tradition continues in our second hundred years!

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

~ The Hermitage Hotel 231 Sixth Avenue North Nashville, Tennessee 37219 ~

www.thehermitagehotel.com ~