

# Reflections from the Past

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## Enchanted Painting

In 2015 local artist Bill Kidwell asked his wife Lizabeth to arrange for The Hermitage Hotel to purchase one of his favorite watercolor paintings, “Hermitage at Night.” He wished for the proceeds to help their close friend Gina Pittman pursue her dream of starting a music career. Gina has worked hard at it. Three years later, in October 2018, she debuted her own CD at Puckett’s Leiper’s Fork, pictured here. Gina’s beautiful and strong voice is a wonderful addition to Music City, and is yet another uncanny way in which the hotel has touched people’s lives. To learn more of Gina and her music visit her website: [www.ginamevispittmanmusic.com](http://www.ginamevispittmanmusic.com)



The Hermitage Hotel has the echoes of many friendly notes in its past and many more continue to be played today. When the hotel first opened in 1910, hand-picked musicians from the Waldorf Astoria’s string orchestra performed during dinner. The Grille Room (today’s Capitol Grille) engaged many an opera singer while in town performing shows. The top floor of the hotel was originally an exhibit hall and it opened with musical performances. In the 20s the first live radio broadcast to reach Nashville from Europe was broadcast on the mezzanine level, bringing hundreds of listeners in. Meanwhile, orchestra leader Francis Craig, who played lunch and dinner music in the dining room from 1925–1947 helped launch the careers of many musicians. A young lady named Dinah Shore was one of them. The orchestra broadcast live from the Hermitage Hotel on the opening night of WSM in 1925. In ’47, Mr. Craig’s “Near You” became Nashville’s first hit record. Its lyrics were composed in the hotel restaurant on the back of a menu. During the formative years of the Nashville Symphony their office was located in the hotel. Many musical greats who came to perform in Nashville stayed – where else? CMA was formed during meetings in the Hermitage Hotel in the late 1950s when a newcomer called Rock n’Roll was changing the music industry. Meanwhile, celebrity songwriter Cindy Walker took a room here with her mother from time to time. Established musicians were invited in to hear songs she thought might be a good fit. One song, "Dream Baby (How Long Must I Dream)" was recorded by Roy Orbison. Royalties from the estate of Ms. Walker now help fund the Country Music Hall of Fame.

## He'll be back in December !

Local artist Kathleen Deerie Rowan Carlton's painting "Miracle on Sixth Avenue" is an oil on canvas created in 2016 and is now included in her original selection of holiday cards available in Rachel's Boutique. Kathleen has felt a special enchantment with the Hermitage Hotel all her life and has included the hotel in several of her paintings.



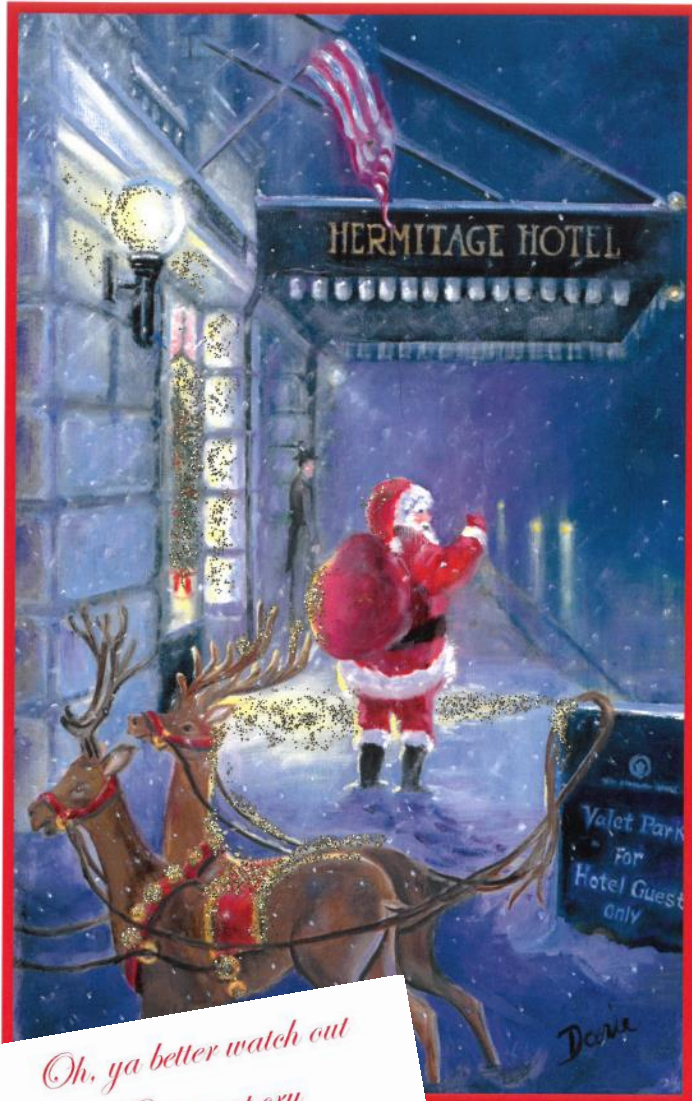
As a schoolgirl Kathleen and several friends met John F. Kennedy in person at the Hermitage Hotel. She remembers it this way. "It was the fall of 1960 when JFK came to Nashville, as the Democratic candidate running for President of the United States. School had just started back and besides the election, nothing else was as important around our house. We were Irish Catholic and I attended an all-girl Catholic school, so it goes without saying we were for JFK.

The big day of his visit finally arrived. He gave a speech at the War Memorial Plaza. "After he spoke, Kennedy stepped down from the podium and turned in my direction. He was headed my way! He came straight towards me. I froze... he was right in front of me! I will never forget those steel grey eyes. He looked straight into my eyes. I have never seen eyes that color before or since. I reached out and touched his arm. His sandy blond hair was blowing in the wind. His skin was a golden tan and he was absolutely "movie star" good looking. I was speechless. Finally, I got the words out "I'm voting for you!" To this day I can still see the expression on his face: blank. I don't know whatever he was thinking. I felt he was looking straight through me with those piercing grey eyes.

Trying to think of the appropriate thing to say, I asked him, "Where was Jackie?" He answered, in his Bostonian accent "She caan't travel, my sister Eunice is here."

Remarkably, Kathleen and other schoolgirls managed to make their way towards Kennedy's room in the Hermitage Hotel after he entered through the Union Street door. He had been provided a suite to relax, shower and have lunch after his speech. Governor Ellington and a large entourage including bodyguards were there.

After a wait in the hallway, the girls managed to gain an audience, with the stated mission of asking some questions for a school paper. Kennedy asked, "What schools do you attend?" Kathleen recalls, "After we answered he repeated it back. It was funny to my friend Peggy and me to hear him say *St. Bernarrrrds* and *Catheedraal* in his Bostonian accent. After Kennedy and Eunice departed, our then Governor, Buford Ellington, was so nice. He invited me and the 5 or six girls left to come in and join them. We gladly accepted and entered the beautiful room filled with other important men that were his staff, I guess. They asked if we would like something to drink, as they had plenty of refreshments, cokes and ginger ale. We gladly accepted while the other girls sat down on the sofas. While they were deciding on who gets to keep the candy and flowers, I asked if I could go in the room where Kennedy had rested. The Governor gave me permission and then I asked, "Is that the shower that Kennedy used?" He said, "absolutely." "May I go in?" All the girls laughed and I proceeded to the bathroom where a dripping wash cloth was hanging. I wasted no time and wrung the cloth out completely, then ran back into the living room holding up Kennedy's wash cloth. The girls wanted a piece of the authentic cloth so I promised them all a square. I left the Hermitage Hotel with the John F. Kennedy holy wash cloth."

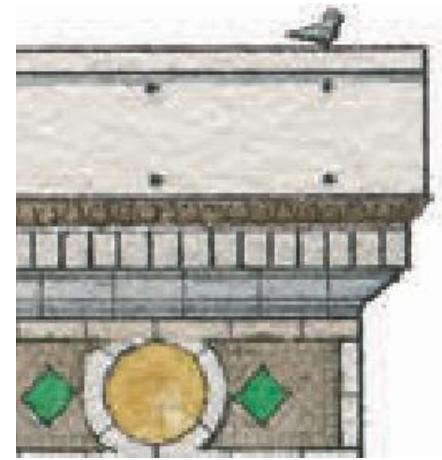


*Oh, ya better watch out  
Better not cry  
Better not pout  
We're telling you why...  
Santa is already here and  
Staying at the Hermitage!*

## And up on the rooftop ...a bird named “Happy”

Local artist Phil Ponder has become well known for his pen and ink watercolors of Nashville’s most recognized buildings. Last year alone he has created 4 small skylines and 41 originals of various restaurants, other buildings, and trees.

The Hermitage Hotel creation was completed in 2007. It can be seen full-sized along the grand staircase to the hotel lobby. The painting was based on a number of camera pictures the artist took, and then he went to work. He recalls that the original was so large that he finished the top floors by turning the painting upside down on his worktable. His remarkable eye for detail seems to capture every single brick and all of the splendid architectural features, including the terra cotta designs of the hotel’s original architect JER Carpenter.



One of Phil Ponder’s trademarks is to place a bird alighted on the building. There is a bird painted inside the hotel as well. Here’s a trivia question: Can you find that bird? Hint: It’s in the Veranda sky ceiling and was painted by the restoration team in 2002.

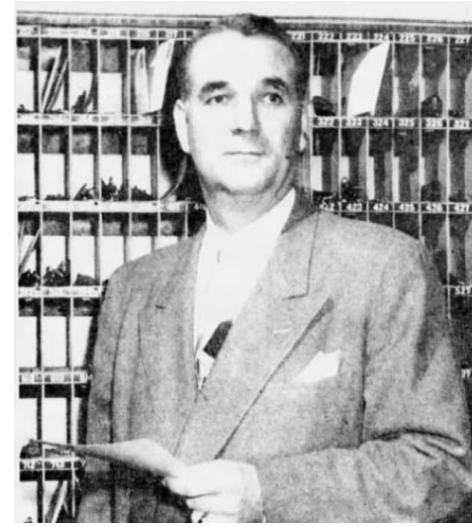
The beauty of the outside of the hotel, like a Faberge Egg, entices one to take a peek inside, where designs of intricate and awe-inspiring beauty await. For many people the aesthetic qualities of the Hermitage Hotel seem to elevate lofty thinking to higher ideals, as when listening to a symphony orchestra. And it’s been that way for more than a century. “Meet me at the Hermitage” has been a favorite phrase of Nashvillians, whether for out of town guests or local friends and family. It’s the blend of the architecture, service, the fine food, the comfortable beds, and that something extra



special – a magic in the air. But all that is not quite it. It’s you, as guest - your own individual experience. At the Hermitage Hotel every day and every guest is a special occasion. The stage is set for you to be in today’s opening act.

# Time Traveler

It was in 1951 when, at the age of 12 years old, Donna Smith Sepull was thrilled to participate in a fashion show in the ballroom of the Hermitage Hotel. Cain-Sloan Company, who was one of the premier downtown department stores, was the sponsor. “We strolled across the stage in the big ballroom. It was at night and there were lots of people and lots of lights. I felt so grown up with my long lime green dress with pink bows.”



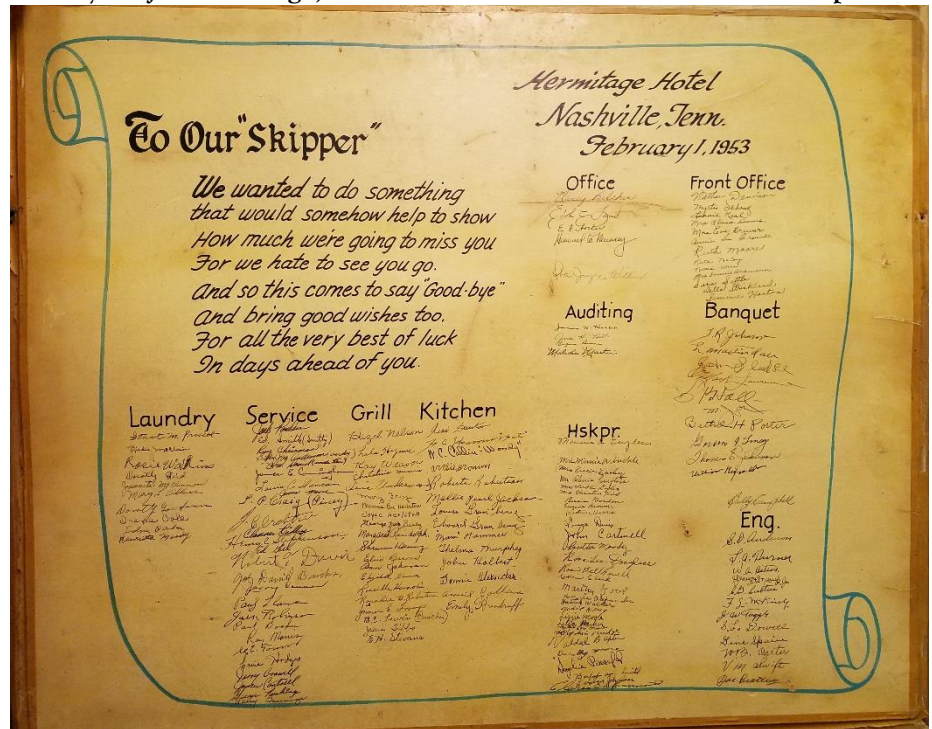
Meanwhile behind the front desk the hotel displayed a painting of Andrew Jackson’s home, the Hermitage, for which the hotel is named.

The hotel general manager at the time was Edward T. Doty, (1949 – 1953, pictured above). When he departed the staff showed him their appreciation by giving him a replica painting of the Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage. The back was inscribed with a farewell message and the signatures of each and every employee of the hotel, organized by department.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century as Donna Sepull tells her story. “Several years ago I was browsing in an antique mall near Williamsburg, Virginia. I noticed a picture of the Hermitage tucked in the back of one of the stalls. Being from Shelbyville, Tennessee and a history major in college, I was curious about the item. When I picked up the picture I noticed the extensive writing on the back and was truly thrilled to discover a wonderful part of the Hermitage Hotel’s history! I purchased this treasure with the hope the hotel would like to have it and am so pleased it has returned to its proper home.”

It’s a remarkable coincidence these employees were working at the hotel at the time she enjoyed her childhood fashion show!

Donna has other special memories of visiting Nashville in the late 40s and early 50s for downtown shopping trips with her mother. “Our first stop was usually Cain-Sloan. Many trips included visits to Gus Mayer, Steif, Chayburke, Harveys (my first pair of “heels” were from the Harveys shoe department, circa 1952!), Rich Schwartz and Grace’s. My mother and



grandmother often had matching hats made to match their Davidow suits they had purchased at Gus Mayer. Lunch was most often at Satsuma and at the Hermitage’s Grill Room. We also went to the Ryman once. It was a performance with Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Trigger! I was amazed that a horse could be on a stage!”



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