

HOW THE PEABODY GOT ITS NAME

What's in a name? Why is our hotel company known as "Peabody Hotel Group?" Why are North American Mallards the symbol of the three Peabody-flagged hotels in Orlando, Memphis and Little Rock? Why are the ducks named the "Peabody" ducks? Is there a specific "Peabody" duck species? Was there a Mr., Ms., or Mrs. Peabody? If so, where and when?

Once upon a time, long ago, back in 1865 to be precise, a very wealthy man named Robert Brinkley decided to build a beautiful, new hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. He wanted it to be the finest, grandest hotel in the South, an oasis of elegance and good taste, where the local gentry, wheelers and dealers could congregate in comfort to wine and dine on the finest foods and rarest wines; where their ladies could meet and greet for genteel afternoon tea, in opulent, exquisite surroundings, then change into gorgeous evening gowns for dining and dancing in the mirrored halls, beneath twinkling chandeliers. The hotel was to be named The Brinkley House Hotel.

No expense was spared. Craftsmen, artisans, carpenters, bricklayers, mosaic designers, interior designers and decorators of the highest order worked on the building. They designed impressive public areas and opulent, comfortable guest rooms which reflected state-of-the-art hotel facilities of the day. The finest bone china, silverware and crystal glassware were purchased from Europe. Rich brocades and silks adorned windows, and the softest, finest linens graced the beds. The best of chefs and hotel management and staff were hired.

Just before the official opening of the hotel in 1865, Mr. Brinkley's dearest friend, American George Peabody, an international financier and philanthropist, died suddenly in London, England. Brinkley was devastated by the sudden loss of his dear friend. Without hesitation, Brinkley decided to honor the name of his cherished friend, and immediately changed The Brinkley House Hotel, to The Peabody Hotel in his honor.

Today, the three properties of Peabody Hotels, (a division of Peabody Hotel Group), The Peabody Memphis, The Peabody Orlando, and The Peabody Little Rock, proudly bear the name of George Peabody, an extraordinary American, whose generous, enlightened spirit mirrors those of our existing owners and management. But, who was Mr. Peabody?

Mr. Peabody was a successful owner-operator of a dry goods warehouse business with branches in Georgetown, Washington, DC., Philadelphia, PA., and New York City. His business took him on frequent visits to London, where Her Royal Majesty, Queen Victoria, ruled the then-vast British Empire - on which the sun never set!

On one of these trips, Mr. Peabody negotiated an \$8-million loan for the near-bankrupt State of Maryland, accepting no commission on the transaction. Eventually, he moved to London permanently and established a merchant banking business specializing in foreign exchange.

He amassed a huge fortune, which at his death he bequeathed to philanthropic works benefiting the poor and disenfranchised on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, he especially assisted universities through foundations to provide higher education for Southern children of all races. He was dedicated to the elevation of the performing and visual arts, founding libraries, museums, art galleries and music academies.

George Peabody's kind and generous spirit, and his goodwill towards all peoples, earned him the attention and admiration of Queen Victoria, who offered him the most coveted honor which can be bestowed on a native Englishman, let alone an expatriate American: the rank of Baron and the Order of the Bath. A proud and loyal American, Mr. Peabody declined the honors, but remained very much in the good graces and affections of Her Royal Majesty, Her court and government.

Unexpectedly, on November 4, 1865, George Peabody drew his last breath. His sudden demise sent shock waves through the corridors of royal palaces, the Houses of Lords, the front and back benches of Parliament, the London Stock Exchange, the powerful British banking and vast insurance institutions such as Lloyds of London. Back home across the Atlantic, Washington, DC., and Memphis, Tennessee were plunged into mourning for the loss of such a fine native son who had so nobly represented his native land at the Court of Saint James.

His hometown, South Danvers, Essex County, MA., was renamed "Peabody" in his memory; and, today, George Peabody's name lives on through the George Peabody College for teachers, a private, non-sectarian, co-education college in Nashville, Tennessee, founded in 1875. It was the first such institution in the South, and one of the first in the nation to offer advanced degrees in education. By 1867, he had founded the Peabody Education Fund.

Both Mr. Peabody and Mr. Brinkley would be proud, indeed, of the way in which Peabody Hotel Group has brought worldwide recognition to the Peabody name through multi award-winning, quality hospitality management and good corporate citizenship wherever the Peabody flag flies.

While there's no official "Peabody" duck species, The Peabody Ducks, those VIPs, Very Important Poultry, are named for George Peabody. The March of The Peabody Ducks takes place twice daily at the three Peabody-flagged hotels to the delight of all who come to see them, 365 days a year. But, that's a subject for another Peabody story.

Three of the newest organizations to bear the Peabody name are the award-winning Peabody Alliances for the Arts & Culture, "cultural chambers" which spearhead the promotion of the performing and visual arts, history and heritage in the city destinations where the Peabody flag flies. They are known as: Orlando/Peabody Alliance for the Arts & Culture, (OPAAC), Memphis/Peabody Alliance for the Arts & Culture (Mem/PAAC), and Little Rock/Peabody Alliance for the Arts & Culture (LPAAC).