

Peabody Creatures Great and Small

CHECKING IN TO “THE SOUTH’S GRAND HOTEL”

- **Two decades or so ago, a prize bull was checked-in and stabled in the hotel’s lobby for the Cattlemen’s Convention. The bull sold for \$8,000**
- **Three or four decades ago, a donkey was corralled in the lobby. Its owner fed it beer, brought it up to his room, and you can guess what the room looked and smelled like next morning**
- **Many years ago, two baby alligators were placed in the lobby fountain – long before the Peabody Ducks came to town. Two little girls picked them up and brought them over to their mother and grandmother who were enjoying Afternoon Tea. Gramma promptly fainted!**

HISTORY IN THE MAKING - NAME DROPPING

Through the checkered history of The Peabody Memphis, many, many famous people stayed at the hotel. From presidents to European royalty, statesmen and women, stars of stage and screen, literati and glitterati, they all loved the hotel. Here are just a few of the historical figures who slept, wine and dined at the famous Peabody:

- **General Robert E. Lee**
- **Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest**
- **The Grand Duke Alexis, son of Czar Alexandra II of Russia came to The Peabody at the invitation of then president Ulysses S. Grant. The royal dinner was considered to be the social and gastronomic event of the century**
- **The Romanovs continued to stay at the Peabody Memphis for three generations**
- **The current Duchess of Devonshire came in 2004 and was enchanted by the hotel and The Peabody Ducks**

THE FIRST DUCKMASTER

- **Edward Pembroke, a former a circus animal trainer, came to the Peabody as a bellman in the early 1930s. He was given the daily task of taking the ducks to the lobby fountain from their hutch on the roof and returning them every evening. Pembroke quickly decided to elevate this task into something truly unique. He created The March of the The Peabody Ducks. He laid out**

the red carpet, got himself a Duck Master uniform and a brass duck-head cane. He added the music of John Philip Sousa's *King Cotton March*, and the rest is history.

THE BIG BAND ERA

The Skyway at the top of The Peabody Memphis was THE place during WWII and the Big Band era. Band leaders such as Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, and Clyde McCoy broadcast live on CBS radio from 1937. The sound controller was Sam Philips who later founded Sun Studios and recorded Elvis Presley's first demo and many of his later hits.

FALL & RISE

After years of economic decline, the City of Memphis eventually sank into a wretched ghost town on the banks of the mighty Mississippi River. Long-established businesses closed and buildings were boarded up. Downtown Memphis was hardest hit and the air of doom and gloom was palpable. Here is a brief run-down of the misfortunes and fortunes of this great Southern Belle.

- In 1965, The Peabody was sold to Sheraton and was re-named the Sheraton Peabody. It was not a good match. In December 1973, ITT-Sheraton abruptly closed down the hotel with little or no warning. The people of Memphis were in shock...they mourned the loss of their downtown front room. To this day, that civic pride of ownership is one of the most important elements of The Peabody Memphis. Memphians really do feel a sense of "ownership" of their downtown showplace.
- Fast-forward a few years... to 1986, when The Peabody Orlando was ready to open as the International Plaza Hotel. Meeting planners were not responding to this no-name hotel, way out in the wilderness of Orlando's I-Drive. However, in a smart branding move, the name was changed to....The Peabody Orlando! Then, the meeting planners got it!!!
- Memphians resented the fact that the Orlando property was going to fly their Peabody flag - not to even mention taking their Peabody Ducks, too! It was, just too much!!!
- Now back to 1975. When ITT Sheraton abandoned the hotel, it was to be bought at auction - or demolished immediately. There wasn't a lot of interest in acquiring the property. It was horribly run-down, seedy and unattractive. Then riding into town came father and son, Philip and Jack Belz, who ran a family contracting business in the area.

- **At auction, they bought the hotel without consulting anyone...When they came home that evening to their respective wives and told them they now owned The Peabody...the ladies said, “you did what??????”**

We can all imagine what the dinner table conversation would have been like! But, thank goodness for Jack and Philip Belz. Their vision revitalized Downtown Memphis and re-established The Peabody Memphis as “The South’s Grand Hotel.”

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