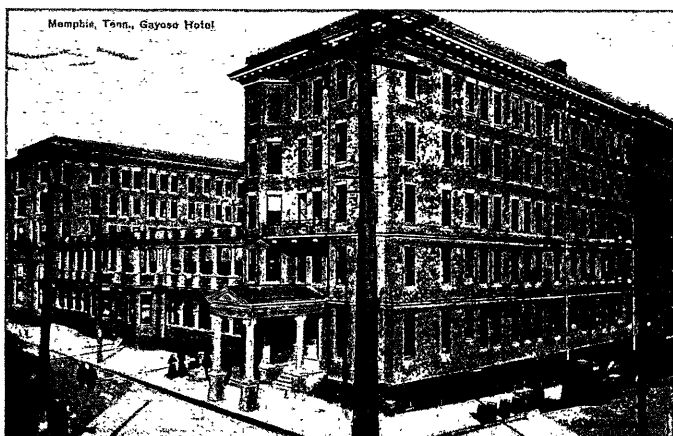


HOSTELRY IN MEMPHIS, 1541-1991  
A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY IN POST CARDS FROM THE  
COLLECTION OF PAT McCARVER

By John E. Harkins and Pat McCarver

The earliest accounts of the Memphis area chronicle its hospitality. The first European visitors to the site of Memphis were doubtlessly accommodated in Indian lodges not very different from the present reconstructions at Chucalissa. No one knows precisely where in the Memphis area the Indian village of Quiz was, but Chisca and his tribe made De Soto and his soldiers welcome and supplied them with food.





The first known hostelry on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff antedates Memphis. Patrick Meagher kept an "ordinary house" on the bluff before the city was founded. In the early 1820s he became the genial host of the legendary Bell Tavern. The structure on North Front Street is gone, but a historical marker designates its site and importance to early Memphis.

The Bluff community's earliest great hotel was Robertson Topp's Gayoso House, at the corner of Front and Gayoso. The original burned at the turn of the century and was replaced with the Gayoso Hotel, which faced on Main Street rather than toward the river. The Front Street side was still rather grand, however, with its covered promenade.

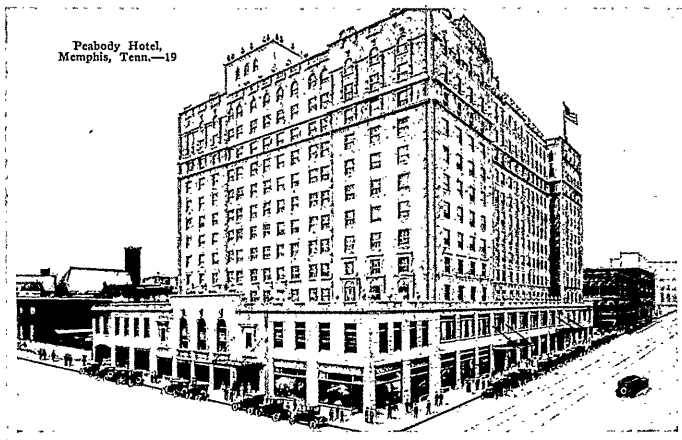
Just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, the Overton Hotel was constructed. It was used as a hospital during the war and became the City Hall and County Courthouse thereafter. It stood where Ellis Auditorium is now, on Poplar between Main and Front.

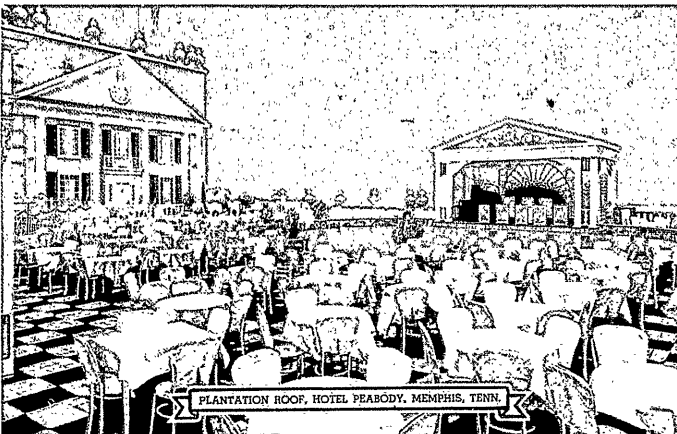
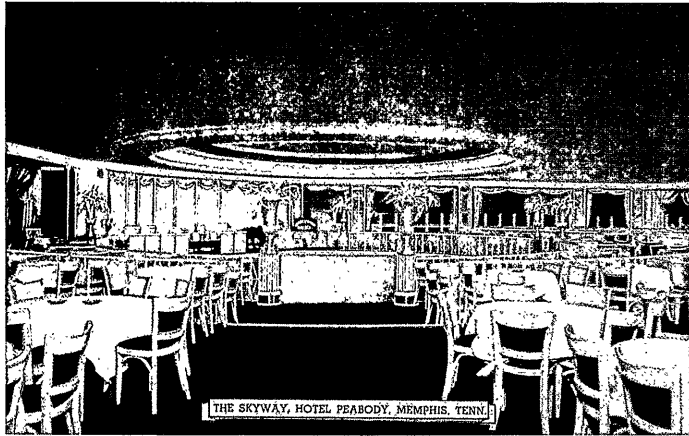


PEABODY HOTEL, MEMPHIS.  
In the Heart of the Business, Shopping and Skyscraper District of the City.

Another fine 19th century Memphis hotel was the first Peabody Hotel. It stood where Brinkley Plaza (the old Lowenstein's Department Store) Building is now, facing Main at the corner of Monroe. It burned in the mid-1920s.

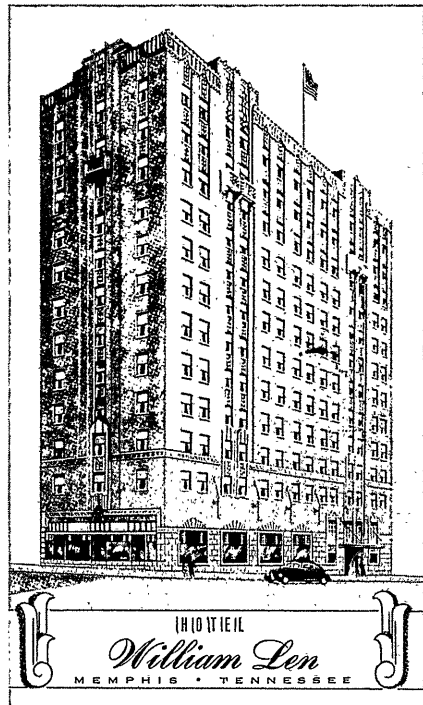
Memphis' grand hotel for the 20th century, of course, has been the "new" Peabody. Completed in 1925, it too is the stuff of legends. The ornate lobby, the Skyway dance floor, and the Plantation Roof are all justly famous in fiction, as well as in fact.

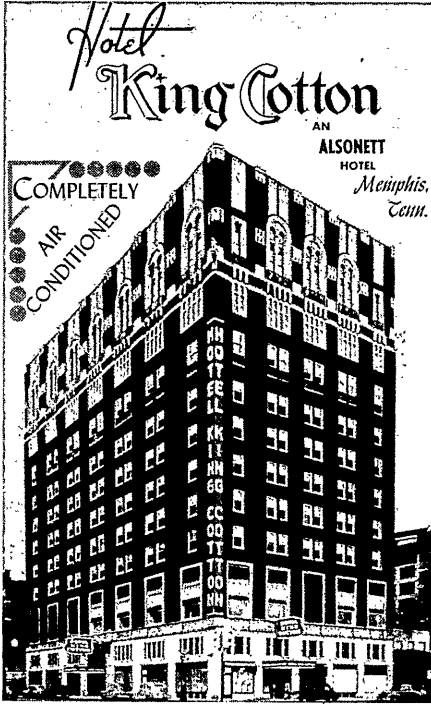






Prior to the Great Depression, Memphis erected a number of other fine hotels in the downtown area. The Chisca (after the Indian chief), the Claridge, the William Len, and the King Cotton (earlier the Elks, then the DeVoy) all added to the city's justifiable reputation as a warmly hospitable place. "Out east," at Overton Park, the Parkview Hotel gave visitors who wanted to be close to nature an alternative. For those of modest means, the downtown Y. M. C. A. (and YWCA) offered reasonable lodgings.





Y. M. C. A., MEMPHIS, TENN.

56



Parkview Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee.



The proliferation of automobiles beginning in the 1920s meant congested city streets and a desire for lodgings that would be reasonable in price and convenient for touring cars. Roadside cottages or tourist courts like Harbin's, Leahy's, and the Crescent Lake filled the bill for a time. Chains of such courts or motels, like the Alamo Plaza, brought economies of scale and standardization to this service industry.

Here, though, is where a Memphian and Memphis made history. Kemmons Wilson started the Holiday Inn chain on Summer Avenue in Memphis in 1952. It became the nation's, then the world's inn-keeper. After it became a corporate giant, Wilson lost control. Then, in 1990 Holiday Corp was sold to the British based Bass Company, which is moving its headquarters to Atlanta in 1991. An era of the hospitality industry in Memphis' history is ended.



