

PH0501352

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUL 21 1977
DATE ENTERED SEP 14 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
 AND/OR COMMON
The Hotel Peabody

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 149 Union Avenue
CITY, TOWN: Memphis
STATE: Tennessee
VICINITY OF: Eighth
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Eighth
COUNTY: Shelby
CODE: 47, 157

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME: Belz Investment Company
STREET & NUMBER: 5118 Park Avenue
CITY, TOWN: Memphis
STATE: Tennessee

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Shelby County Register
STREET & NUMBER: Shelby County Office Building, 160 No. Main Street
CITY, TOWN: Memphis
STATE: Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE: Historical and Architectural Survey
DATE: April 1977
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Tennessee Historical Commission
CITY, TOWN: Nashville
STATE: Tennessee

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Hotel Peabody, completed in 1925, occupies the entire block bounded by Union Avenue, Second and Third Streets and an un-named alley in downtown Memphis. Designed by the architectural firm of Walter W. Ahlschlager, Inc., it was the largest and most elegant hotel in the South and for fifty years was the symbolic center of the social, cultural, and commercial life of the Mid-South region.

Architecturally, the Peabody represents the finest example in the region of the opulence, grandeur, and complexity which characterized the era of the grand hotel. Rising 12 stories on its 320' x 190' site, the building contains 625 guest rooms, has a total volume of 5,750,000 cubic feet, and was constructed at a cost of \$5 million.

The overall building style may be best described as Italian Renaissance Revival. Wrapping around the northeast, southeast, and northwest sides is a two-story base faced with grey terra cotta block and crowned with a buff terra cotta balustrade and decorative urns. Five metal entrance marquees, two on Union Avenue and one on each of the other sides, mark the entrances into the main lobby. Opening onto Union, Second, and Third Streets, as well as into the main lobby, are forty shops and leased office spaces. Above the street level, large plate glass windows open into the various shops, private clubs, and dining rooms on the mezzanine floor.

Rising ten stories above this base and set back from the street to afford additional air and light, is the large brown masonry mass containing the guest rooms. U-shaped in plan so as to offer each room natural light, ventilation, and a view, the masonry mass is interrupted at the tenth floor by two shallow terra cotta cornices and capped by a similar cornice, balustrade, and ornamental urns at the twelfth floor roof-line. At the corners of the building, the special guest suites occupying the eleventh and twelfth floors are expressed by elaborate arched buff terra cotta window frames, balustrades and pilasters. In 1939 the east end of the Peabody's open-air roof garden was enclosed by a new dining room known as the Skyway, although the outdoor Plantation Roof on the west end with its "southern mansion" false-front and tile floor continued to be used.

The five entrance foyers, each finished in Italian travertine, open into the great two-story 85' x 125' main lobby where, it has been said, begins the Mississippi Delta. Sixteen square columns, faced with rose St. Genevieve marble, support the mezzanine balcony and ornate polychrome wood beamed ceiling. The two original colored glass skylights have been removed. The walls of the lobby are of marble although the original terrazzo floor was replaced with white marble in a major renovation during the late 1960s. Dominating the center of the lobby is the fountain, made famous by the "Peabody ducks" who inhabited it for decades. Carved from a single block of white travertine marble imported from Italy, the fountain consists of a bowl supported by four cupids sitting astride dolphins, surrounded by a low octagonal curb of black and gold marble. Opening off the lobby, in addition to the shops and offices, are the front desk with the hotel's administrative offices to the rear and, originally, the two-story Tea Room with its adjacent soda fountain and kitchen.

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On the mezzanine level, overlooking the lobby, is located the Continental Ballroom (originally known as the Louis XVI Ballroom). Seriously damaged by fire in 1957, the ballroom has since been renovated to approximate the mirror-lined elegance of the original, although the large chandeliers and acoustic tile ceiling are a recent addition. Also located on this floor are the two large dining rooms known as the Venetian and Georgian rooms, the main kitchen, and numerous shops, meeting rooms and private club rooms.

Floors three through twelve consist of 625 private rooms with an equal number of baths. The third floor was set aside for use by traveling sales representatives for the display of merchandise. Forty-nine exhibit and meetings rooms totaling 38,000 square feet of display space were allocated for this purpose. The private guest rooms on the upper floors range in size from single rooms to multi-room suites. Four two-story studio apartments, known as the "Romeo and Juliet" suites because of their interior balconies, extend between floors eleven and twelve.

The Skyway, the Peabody's roof-top night club, is a glass-enclosed, semi-circular restaurant with its own kitchen and 2,000-square-foot sunken dance floor. From the Skyway access is afforded to the open-air Plantation Roof with its view of downtown Memphis and the Mississippi River.

In the Peabody's basement are located the laundry, which handled 10,000 pieces of linen per day, and the mechanical equipment rooms which contained the hotel's three bailers, three generators, and own artesian well.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
___PREHISTORIC	___ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	___COMMUNITY PLANNING	___LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	___RELIGION
___1400-1499	___ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	___CONSERVATION	___LAW	___SCIENCE
___1500-1599	___AGRICULTURE	___ECONOMICS	___LITERATURE	___SCULPTURE
___1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	___EDUCATION	___MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
___1700-1799	___ART	___ENGINEERING	___MUSIC	___THEATER
___1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	___EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	___PHILOSOPHY	___TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	___COMMUNICATIONS	___INDUSTRY	___POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	___OTHER (SPECIFY)
		___INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1925

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Walter W. Ahlschlager, Inc.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Hotel Peabody, located in downtown Memphis and known to generations of travelers and local residents as "the South's Finest-One of America's Best," was for over fifty years the symbolic center of the social, cultural, and commercial life of the Mid-South region. Completed in 1925, it was the largest and most elegant hotel in the south and represents the area's finest example of the opulence, grandeur, and complexity which characterized the era of the grand hotel.

In 1923 ground was broken for the new twelve-story, 625 rooms, \$5 million structure which was to occupy the entire block between Union Avenue, Second and Third Streets and an un-named alley between Union and Gayoso Streets. Built to replace the old Peabody which had stood at Main and Monroe Streets since 1869, both hotels were named for financier George Peabody, who had been a close friend of founder Robert Campbell Brinkley.

With its grand opening ball in 1925, the new hotel quickly established a reputation as the center of social life for the entire region. The Peabody's Night-Cap Club, Venetian Dining Room, and open-air Marine Roof (later partially enclosed and known as the Skyway) soon became institutions among the socially elite of both Memphis and the rich Mississippi River delta areas of West Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, and northern Mississippi. The later 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s saw a steady stream of the wealthy and prominent flock to the Peabody to dine and dance to the music of such entertainers as George Hamilton, Les Brown, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Dorothy Lamour, and the Andrews Sisters. Beginning in 1937 the music of the Peabody's bands was broadcast nationwide on CBS radio.

As David Cohn wrote in 1935, "The Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg. The Peabody is the Paris Ritz, the Cairo Sheppard's, the London Savoy of this section. If you stand near its fountain in the middle of the lobby, where ducks waddle and turtles drowse, ultimately you will see everybody who is anybody in the Delta..."

In addition to its significance in the social life of the region, the Peabody performed important commercial and civic functions. From the mid-1930s until the 1960s it was the city's prime convention hotel. The hotel's lower two floors contained forty retail shops and offices, as well as the headquarters of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Civitan clubs. The entire third floor consisted of suites reserved for the commercial displays of visiting sales representatives.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ahlschlager, Walter W., Inc., Architects, "Hotel Peabody" (architectural plans),
November 10, 1923.

Ahrens, Louise Nolan, "Here Housekeeping is Done in the Grand Manner and Sugar Spooned
by the Ton," The Press-Scimitar, September 15, 1951.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.4

UTM REFERENCES

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7	6	8	6	1	0
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3	8	9	2	5	8	0
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B

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

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D

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property nominated is a 320' x 190' rectangular lot, bounded on the northeast by Union Avenue, on the southeast by Third Street, on the southwest by an un-named alley, and on the northwest by Second Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James F. Williamson, Jr., Architect

ORGANIZATION

Keith Kays and Associates

DATE

June 1977

STREET & NUMBER

Upper 83 Madison Avenue

TELEPHONE

(901) 525-3040

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Herbert L. Hays

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

7/18/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

William M. Smith

DATE

9/14/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Charles A. ...

DATE

7.13.77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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The three decades following World War II saw the slow but steady decline of the Peabody. Plagued by a series of major fires, several changes in ownership, and threatened by the increasing popularity of the new motels, the Peabody's traditional stature as a Mid-South landmark gradually became more memory than reality. Despite its acquisition and restoration by the Sheraton Hotel Corporation in the late 1960s, the pressures of a declining downtown Memphis eventually proved insurmountable and the Peabody was forced to close. Acquired by its present owners in 1975, studies are underway to determine the feasibility of re-opening the hotel.

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- "Another Change for the Peabody," The Commercial Appeal, August 23, 1975.
- Cohn, David Lewis, God Shakes Creation, Harper and Bros., New York, 1935, p. 17.
- Connell, Mary Ann Strong, "The Peabody Hotel," Unpublished thesis, University of Mississippi, 1971 (Memphis Public Library and Information Center).
- "Great Day for Peabody; Great Day for Memphis," The Commercial Appeal, September 2, 1925.
- "Hotel Peabody - Facilities for Sales Meetings, Conventions, Trade Shows," Hotel Peabody, 1965.
- Johnson, Robert. "The Peabody Ducks," The Press-Scimitar, December 1, 1967.
- "The New Hotel Peabody," Through the Ages, Fall and Winter, 1926.
- "New \$125,000 Play Spot Opens at Peabody Tonight," The Press-Scimitar, January 30, 1939.
- "Peabody Will Rush Ballroom's Repairs," The Commercial Appeal, August 28, 1957.