The History Behind the Sites and Sounds

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Here’s a quick lesson before you go out on the town.
“MUSIC City,” “Buckle of the Bible Belt,” and “Athens of the South” are but a few of the nicknames associated with Nashville, Tennessee, the host city of NAESP’s 87th Annual Convention and Exposition. Before you start planning your sightseeing agenda—which you’ll hopefully squeeze in between General Sessions, Distinguished Lecturer presentations, concurrent sessions, and trips to the exhibit hall—take a few moments to learn the rich history of the city and the reason why Nashville is an ideal city to explore during your free time.

Musical Roots

Perhaps most well-known as Music City, Nashville has a reputation beyond country music. The city has attracted or produced musicians from all genres, including Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, James Brown, Bob Dylan, Jimmy Buffett, The Beach Boys, Paul McCartney, BeBe and CeCe Winans, Jon Bon Jovi, and Nelly, among many others. Nashville’s musical roots date back to the days of Davy Crockett, who became a noted fiddler and buck dancer. WSM radio announcer David Cobb is credited for...
penning Nashville’s musical nickname in 1950. While ad-libbing on the air, he referred to Nashville as “Music City USA” and the name has stuck ever since.

Another WSM radio announcer, George D. Hay, is recognized for coining “Grand Ole Opry,” the name of America’s longest-running radio show. Known previously as the WSM Barn Dance, the show got its new name after Hay announced to listeners at the beginning of his broadcast—which followed a broadcast of the New York Opera—“Folks, for the last hour you’ve been listening to music taken largely from the grand opera … from now on you’re gonna hear the Grand Ole Opry!”

Higher Education

As Nashville looked toward the future after the Civil War, the education of the city’s youths was at the top of the list. In a span of 25 years following the war, four colleges were founded: Vanderbilt University and Montgomery Bell Academy, as well as Fisk University and Meharry Medical College—colleges established for the higher education of black students. With the opening of these learning facilities, Nashville became known as the Athens of the South.

The Parthenon was constructed to honor Nashville’s commitment to embodying the moniker, Athens of the South. The building and the 42-foot Athena statue are both full-scale replicas of the Athenian originals.

Political Ties

Two of the three U.S. presidents from Tennessee called Nashville their home at some point during their lives. James K. Polk’s final residence was a mansion in downtown Nashville that has since been torn down. However, Andrew Jackson’s plantation, The Hermitage, still remains today. It is one of the few presidential homes with a majority of the original furnishings on display. While Jackson is buried on his estate, Polk is buried on the grounds of the State Capitol in Nashville.

Printers Alley

Printers Alley takes its name from its early connection with Nashville’s printing and publishing industry, then located in the immediate area. At the
height of the publishing boom in the city, Nashville was home to more than 35 printing companies and associated businesses.

Printers Alley also became the center of the city’s nightlife after the newspapers and other print shops relocated during the 1930s. The alley gradually became Nashville’s premier destination for nighttime “wine, women, and song.” Nightclubs opened here in the 1940s, and the alley became a showcase for the talents of performers such as Boots Randolph, Chet Atkins, and Dottie West. This historic district’s architecture includes elegant late Victorian styles, Nashville’s first automobile parking garage, and the city’s first skyscraper.

Today, Printers Alley has tamed down, but nightclubs and bars are still the main businesses along this strip.

Rich in history beyond its musical roots, Nashville has plenty to offer convention attendees during their stay in the city.

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SOURCES:
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