



## Country Music in Knoxville

**Grade Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Standards/Unit:**

Unit 5: Post World War II Era

Local I.D. #5.08: Identify changes in the music industry brought about by Tennessee's influence (i.e. Grand Ole Opry, WSM, Nashville music publishing, Sun Records in Memphis, Elvis Presley).

**Lesson Time:** One class period

**Objective/Purpose:** Students will understand the local history of the evolution of the radio in Knoxville and how it impacted the music industry in Tennessee. Students will also be able to locate historic structures and places that were associated with the music/radio industry Knoxville.

**Materials:** PowerPoint

**Strategies/Procedures:** Teachers will present the PowerPoint and then engage the students in a discussion using the following question(s). If time allows you may use one question or all.

1. Suppose you could produce a live radio show today. You as the producer will need to select the location, host, station, and music genre. Why did you pick these?
2. With Knoxville as the birthplace of radio in Tennessee why do you think it was Nashville who became so influential in country music and not Knoxville?
3. Why did the NYC recording label Brunswick/Vocalion set up a temporary recording studio at the St. James Hotel?

**Activities:** if time permits teachers can assign in-class enrichment projects for extra credit.

1. Select a recent crime (local or national) and write your own folk ballad. If you are not shy about singing – sing it for the class!

2. Stop by the East Tennessee History Center (601 S. Gay Street – downtown Knoxville) and pick up a brochure for the “Cradle of Country Music” walking tour. Take the tour and then write about your experiences on the tour. What did you like? What didn’t you like? Maybe investigate further and visit the McClung Collection (East Tennessee History Center – 601 S. Gay Street 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor) and research your favorite part of the tour!

**Assessment/Evaluation:** The teacher will evaluate the student’s discussion and level of interest and participation.

# Country Music in Knoxville Teacher Resource Guide

## Country Music – General Information

Country Music is a blend of popular music originally found in the Southern United States and the Appalachian Mountains. It has roots in traditional folk music, Celtic music, gospel music and old-time music and it evolved rapidly in the 1920's.

### Early history

Immigrants to the Southern Appalachian Mountains of North America brought the music and instruments of the Old World along with them for nearly 300 years. They brought some of their most important valuables with them, and to most of them this was an instrument.

The interactions among musicians from different ethnic groups produced music unique to this region of North America. Appalachian string bands of the early twentieth century primarily consisted of the fiddle, guitar, and banjo. This early country music along with early recorded country music is often referred to as old-time music.

According to Bill Malone in *Country Music U.S.A.*, country music was “introduced to the world as a southern phenomenon.” In the South, folk music was a combination of cultural strains, combining musical traditions of a variety of ethnic groups in the region. For example, some instrumental pieces from Anglo-Celtic immigrants were the basis of folk songs and ballads that form what is now known as old time music, from which country music descended. It is commonly thought that British folk music influenced the development of old time music. British arrivals to the Southern U.S. included immigrants from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England.

Often, when many people think or hear country music, they think of it as a creation of European-Americans. However, a great deal of style--and of course, the banjo, a major instrument in most early American folk songs--came from African Americans. One of the reasons country music was created by African-Americans, as well as European-Americans, is because blacks and whites in rural communities in the south often worked and played together.

History taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music)

### Early days of Country Music in Knoxville

The Banjo (Corner of Main and Gay Street) – It is said that near this spot in 1798 (7 years after the founding of Knoxville in 1791 and just 2 years after Tennessee admission into the Union in 1796), that a traveler named Thomas Weir witnessed and documented African slaves playing the banjo (an African musical instrument) for a mixed race audience of dancing African Americans, white settlers and Cherokee Indians. Weir's written description is believed to mark the first evidence of white people listening to banjo music in the East Tennessee region.

History taken from: Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour

Folk Ballads and The Knoxville Girl – in 1774 in Berkshire, England, a miller named John Mague was hanged for the murder of his fiancée. This murder and Mague's capture and

execution were adapted into the oral tradition of English folk ballads. Folk ballads were an important part of the cultural traditions imported to North America by European immigrants. These ballads would often be Americanized by changing the names and locations of events in the song to match the new surroundings of the settlers. It is thought this process that the story of murder and justice in faraway England came to be known in America as The Knoxville Girl. The Knoxville Girl and other adaptations of folk ballads were among the earliest popular recordings in country music.

History taken from: Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour & [http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/folk-song-lyrics/Knoxville\\_Girl.htm](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/folk-song-lyrics/Knoxville_Girl.htm)

Fiddlin' Bob and the Custom House - The Custom House was built in 1874 and was Knoxville's first federal Post Office and Court House. The Custom House was a popular Knoxville gathering place for local musicians, storytellers, gossips and other assorted individuals. In the mid to late 1870's a man by the name Robert L. Taylor – a pension agent employed in the Custom House often would entertain visitors with a number of tall tales, jokes and fiddle tunes - regulars called him "Fiddlin' Bob and he was also a popular performer at fiddling contests and exhibitions on the nearby Market Square. Robert L. Taylor (Fiddlin' Bob) later in his life would become one of Tennessee's most popular politicians (U.S. Representative from Tennessee 1879 until 1881) and became governor of Tennessee in 1887 and again in 1897. Taylor would also serve as a United States senator from 1907 until his death in 1912. While serving as Governor in the 1890's, Taylor mentored the beginning career of "Fiddlin' John Carson – one of country music's first recording star.

History taken from: Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour & [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Love\\_Taylor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Love_Taylor)

### **U.S. Custom House and Post Office – 314 W. Clinch Avenue**

The Customs House was built between 1871 and 1874 and became the city of Knoxville's first federal building. It housed the Post office on the first floor and federal courtrooms and offices on the upper floors until 1933 when the new art deco post office and federal building opened on Main Street. It is built of East Tennessee marble, and was created from designs by the U.S. Treasury Department Supervising Architect Alfred Bult Mullett, who is remembered primarily for his ornate French Second Empire style buildings in Washington, D.C., such as the former State, War and Navy Building.

The north wing of the structure was added in 1910.

Starting in 1934 the building was used as offices for Tennessee Valley Authority and in 1976 TVA transferred the ownership of the building to the City of Knoxville and it has been the home to the East Tennessee Historical Society, Knox County Archives, and the McClung Collection.

### **Market Square**

Market Square in the center of downtown Knoxville, is the location of the city's original central market, established in 1854. Land for the market place was given to the city by William G. Swan and Joseph A. Mabry. Farmers from the surrounding area would bring their wagons into a market house that once stood in the center of the square, where they sold their wares.

## Country Music and radio in Knoxville, Tennessee

### **WNOX - The Birthplace of Radio in Tennessee**

One of the ten oldest radio stations in the United States, WNOX in Knoxville played a significant role in showcasing major talents in the burgeoning hillbilly--or country--music field from the 1920s through the 1950s. Personal interviews confirm that a man named Stuart Adcock built a primitive radio station for the company People's Telephone and Telegraph Company where he was employed as an engineer in 1921. The location was probably but not confirmed in the basement of their Vine Avenue and Market Street building. By November 2, 1921 Adcock's WNAV was on the air – part time and only during the day but all 50 watts were enough to earn Knoxville the coveted position in the “top ten” stations in early radio in the United States. Adcock operated WNAV for the company for four years before the station received an official radio license in April 1925. Eventually, Adcock would purchase the station from People's Telephone and Telegraph Company for \$3,000 and he applied to the Department of Commerce to change the call letters to “KNOX”. At the time, the prefix “K” was reserved exclusively for western states, and Adcock was granted the call letters “WNOX”. The “W” was the demarcation for states east of the Mississippi River. Long before WNAV evolved into WNOX, the station began to outgrow its basement station, so Adcock moved the station into the St. James Hotel on Wall Avenue.

In 1927, Adcock sold the station to Sterchi Brothers, one of the leading furniture dealers of the South. Sometime after Adcock sold the station to Sterchi Brothers, the station had two studios locations – one in the basement of the Sterchi furniture building located at 114-118 S. Gay Street and one on the mezzanine floor of the St. James Hotel on Wall Avenue.

By August 1928 the small basement studio was still being used for playing records and making station breaks and the St. James Hotel station was used for live broadcasts and occasionally for recordings. In May 1930, Adcock went to work for another radio station called WROL a station for the Lonsdale Baptist Church and Sterchi Brothers leased WNOX to a man named Virgil Evans who owned a radio station in Spartanburg, SC. During this time Evens moved the WNOX station from the St. James Hotel to the spacious 17<sup>th</sup> floor of the Andrew Johnson Hotel. Evans leased the station from Sterchi Brothers until June 1932 and by early 1924 he was living in Greenville, SC. At the same time as Evan's move to South Carolina, Sterchi Brothers sold WNOX to Frank Hipp, who made the purchase for Liberty Life Insurance Company in May 1932. On December 15, 1935, Liberty sold WNOX to Scripps-Howard.

The programmers at the station made an early commitment to live radio performances and utilized such local talent as Mac and Bob, Hugh Cross, Otis Elder, and the Smoky Mountain Ramblers. Sterchi Brothers Furniture, located on Gay Street, was an important sponsor of these early country music programs. In 1929-30 the station hosted the town's first commercial recording sessions, featuring the diverse, lively music that had characterized the Knoxville club scene of the 1920s. Some of the legendary artists who regularly performed on WNOX's programming include Roy Acuff, Chet Atkins, Archie Campbell, Red Rector, Homer & Jethro, Bill Carlisle, Don Gibson, Kitty Wells, Pee Wee King and Bill and Charlie Monroe.

Emerging media chain Scripps-Howard purchased the station in 1935; the following year, in 1936, the station launched its most popular program, the influential *Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round*, a live noontime performance show which highlighted hillbilly music artists. Beginning at the WNOX Studios located in the Andrew Johnson Hotel on Gay Street, *Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round* later moved to its own six-hundred-seat auditorium, also on Gay Street. After the station

boosted its signal in 1937, allowing it to dominate the airwaves through the region, *Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round* became a noontime institution for a generation of East Tennesseans. Hosted by Lowell Blanchard, the program proved to be a launching pad for the careers of Roy Acuff, Archie Campbell, Kitty Wells, Chet Atkins, Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters, Pee Wee King, Martha Carson, Don Gibson, and the Louvin Brothers. Blanchard also hosted a Saturday night program of country music titled *The Tennessee Barn Dance*, which was broadcast from the city's Lyric Theater. Both live radio programs remained on the air until the early 1960s.

In 1937 WNOX would move to a new station at 110-112 S. Gay Street due to being evicted from the space on the top floor of the Andrew Johnson Building. On May 12, 1955 WNOX left Gay Street forever for a new state-of-the-art studio near the old Whittle Springs Hotel located at 4400 Whittle Springs Road in North Knoxville.

WNOX remains a Knoxville institution, but not for live music. It now features a news/talk/sports format. In 1999 the station won the prestigious Edward R. Murrow for Overall Excellence Award as the best medium market radio news department in the United States.

Tennessee's first radio station and, by some accounts, one of American's first ten radio stations broadcast from a building on the corner of Vine and Market in 1921. Later known by the call letters WNOX, its stock in trade was live music and became one of country music's most influential stations.

Taken from: The Cradle of County Music Walking Tour &  
<http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=Wo79>

### WROL

From the early 1930's to the early 1940's, WROL, the main competitor to Knoxville's oldest radio station, WNOX, broadcast from the building located at 524 S. Gay Street. Among the station's regular shows was the *Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour*. In the WROL studios, Roy Acuff commenced what would become one of the most successful radio careers of all time. Despite an 8-month stint with WNOX in 1936, Acuff spent many early radio years with WROL before moving on to Nashville in 1938 and WSM's *Grand Ole Opry*.

Taken from: The Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour

WROL was started around 1931 on Cumberland Avenue. WROL moved to 524 S. Gay Street in 1932 and stayed there until 1942 when they moved to the top floor of the Hamilton National Bank Building. While hosting the WROL studios in the late 1940s and 1950s, this building served as a center of a new movement on county music – bluegrass. The legendary duo Flatt and Scruggs used WROL in Knoxville as their home base for radio performances and touring. The Osborne Brothers, Bailey Brothers, Brewster Brothers, Cope Brothers and other bluegrass pioneers performed regularly at these studios. One December 7, 1941, a disc jockey from Bristol, Tennessee, working here at the studios of WROL, was among the first to bring the news of the Pearl Harbor bombing to East Tennessee. The disc jockey, Ernest Jennings Ford would become one of the most successful country and pop music stars of all time, while performing under the name “Tennessee” Ernie Ford. In the mid-1960s WROL moved to 5041 Broadway.

## **WIVK**

The founder of WIVK was a native of Paris, Tennessee - James Allen "Jim" Dick. In 1952 at the age of 32 Jim Dick applied to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a permit to take over a daytime, 1,000 –watt broadcast signal at AM 860 that had been vacated by another station. Jim Dick used the call letters WIVK that met "We're the Independent Voice of Knoxville". WIVK's first broadcast studio was located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Green's Hardware store at 319 N. Gay Street. WIVK's second home was located on Bearden Hill at 6711 Kingston Pike. WIVK moved in 1967 to Powell on Emory Road and finally WIVK moved west Knoxville at 4711 Old Kingston Pike. WIVK signed on for the first time on March 20, 1953! WIVK, one of the most popular and successful county music radio stations in the country, opened its first studios here in 1953. In 1953, at the age of 7, Dolly Parton had her first broadcast debut at this location, performing on *Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour* with her uncle Bill Owen. By the time she was 10; Parton was a regular on the show and made her Grand Ole Opry debut in 1959, at the age of 13. Parton also made her first non-commercial recordings at the WIVK studios.

## **Evolution of the Radio Show**

### **WNOX, *The Midday Merry-Go-Round* & The Andrew Johnson Hotel**

The Andrew Johnson Hotel's top floor was the original site for WNOX's live country music variety show *The Midday Merry-Go-Round*. *The Midday Merry-Go-Round* broadcasted at 10,000 watts, enough power to reach homes all over East Tennessee. From 1936 until 1955, Chicago born Lowell Blanchard hosted the show. Blanchard would also host the Saturday night live show the *Tennessee Barn Dance*. An early star of the show was a little known fiddler named Roy Acuff. The rowdy fans and musicians who crowded the hotel's elevator and lobby brought complaints and WNOX was forced to hold its live show elsewhere. In the late 1930's until the 1950's WNOX's the remains of this building (located on the 100 block of S. Gay Street – besides the Emporium and Sterchi) served as the studio and "radiothorium". *The Midday Merry-Go-Round* was broadcasted six days a week at lunchtime and was the most influential of the station's many county music programs. The popular show proved to be an important stepping stone to stardom on Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*.

Taken from: Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour

### **WNOX, *The Tennessee Barn Dance* & Staub's Opera House**

Known for its beauty and acoustics, the Staub's Opera House was operating under the name of The Lyric Theater when it was the host in the 1940's to WNOX's legendary live weekend show, *The Tennessee Barn Dance*, which featured such local performers as famed comedian Archie Campbell.

In October 1872, Knoxville's first opera house opened at the corner of Gay Street and Cumberland Avenue. Under Peter Staub's management the theater became the centerpiece of Knoxville's cultural development. The building featured lacy wrought iron exterior balconies and old aerial photographs suggest a very large stage and stage house 1/3 the size of the auditorium. In 1885, Peter had assumed the consulship in Switzerland and named his son, Fritz to succeed him as manager of the theatre. Also during the time the theater was called Staub Theatre. In 1890 and 1900 the building was remodeling creating more seating. When the enlarged theatre opened October 14, 1901, Knoxvilleians were treated to a gala event. During the next twenty years the Staub Theatre hosted some of America's outstanding plays and players. In February 1920 the theatre opened under a new management and under the name Loew's Theatre, one of a chain of 300 playhouses. Two years later in 1922 the name was changed to the Lyric and the theatre was used for some time. By the time the 1940's rolled around the theatre has become host to many events, to include wrestling matches and WNOX's live weekend show, *The Tennessee Barn Dance*.

Peter Staub, a prominent figure in late nineteenth-century Knoxville business, culture, and politics, was born in Switzerland on February 22, 1827. Orphaned at eight years old, Staub immigrated to the United States when he was twenty-seven. He finally settled in Knoxville in 1856, where he became a leading figure in the city's postwar development. The first of Staub's many Knoxville business enterprises was a tailor shop. In October 1872 the city's first opera house, Staub's Opera House, opened on the corner of Gay Street and Cumberland Avenue. Under his management, the theater became the centerpiece of Knoxville's cultural development, bringing prominent actors and theatrical companies to East Tennessee.

Staub also played a crucial role in Knoxville city government from 1874 until his death in 1904. He was twice elected mayor, in 1874 and 1881. Under Staub's leadership, Knoxville founded a city fire department and established the city's public school district. President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Staub to represent the United States and Tennessee as a commissioner to the Paris exposition. In 1885 President Grover Cleveland named him U.S. consul to Switzerland.

He married Rosina Blum in 1847, and they had nine children, including Fritz, who followed his father in the management of Staub's Theater. On May 8, 1904, a runaway horse accident claimed Staub's life.

### **WIVK, Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour and the discovery of Dolly Parton**

#### **Orton Caswell Walker (Cas Walker)**

Cas Walker was a prominent Knoxville businessman, politician and TV and radio personality. Born in 1902 to a working class Sevier County family, Cas left school at the age of 14 and spend several years working various jobs outside of the East Tennessee region; to include a stint at Champion Fibre Company in North Carolina and later worked at a number of coal mines in Kentucky.



In 1924 Cas moved to Knoxville, Tennessee where he started his business – Cas Walker Cash Store. The Cas Walker Cash Store was popular with the working class and African Americans because of the simple rural atmosphere the store provided. He used his radio show and other innovative marketing methods, for example scattering coupons from airplanes to advertise his store's weekly specials. By the mid-1950s Walker's chain reached 27 stores with estimated revenue of \$60 million.

In 1929, Walker created a variety show known as the *The Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour* to help promote his chain of stores, Cas Walker Cash Stores. The show initially aired as a radio program on WROL-AM and later on WIVK-AM. In 1953, the show adopted a television format for WROL-TV, now WATE-TV and aired on various local channels until 1983. The show featured many established and up-in-coming musical artists also helping launch the career of Sevierville native Dolly Parton at the age of 7. The Every Brothers were regulars on the show in the mid-1950s.

### **Dolly Parton**

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born in Sevierville, Tennessee on January 19, 1946. Born into a very poor family, Dolly was the 4<sup>th</sup> of 12 children. Parton began singing and performing as a young child, singing on local radio and TV stations in East Tennessee. At the age of 7 she started appearing on the *Cas Walker Farm and Home Hour* in Knoxville, Tennessee and by age 13 she was recording on a small Louisiana record label – Goldband Records and appearing on the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. Immediately after her high school graduation in 1964, Parton moved to Nashville and found immediate success as a songwriter. Parton was signed with Monument Records in 1965 with her first single, "Dumb Blonde" reaching number 24 on the county music charts in 1967. Over the past 45 years Parton has become a very popular celebrity.

### **St. James Hotel & the Brunswick-Belke-Collender Company**

Touted as Knoxville's first "fireproof" building, the St. James Hotel was built not long after the ruinous Gay Street fire of 1897. The St. James wasn't the biggest hotel in town, or the swankiest, but it was the closest to Market Square, the one place in town visited occasionally by nearly everyone, rich or poor, black or white.

There were no real recording studios in Tennessee at the time—in the 1920s, Nashville had no reputation as a recording center, and most country-music recordings were still made in New York. So when one of the nation's most famous record companies, the Brunswick/Vocalion label set up a temporary studio in the St. James Hotel in downtown Knoxville, hundreds of musicians came, from miles around, to take a turn behind the microphone. It made some sense for Brunswick to come to Knoxville. The city had been home to several of the earliest country-music recording artists, musicians like Charlie Oaks and George Reneau, who had travelled to New York in the early '20s to make records.

Some who showed up at the St. James were backwoods groups who were obscure and remained so. A few were already well-known, like Nashvillian Uncle Dave Macon, who was already famous

on a relatively new radio show on WSM called the *Grand Ole Opry*, came to Knoxville this one time to record, making a trip that would have seemed backwards a decade later. Some were country groups who went on to bigger and better things, like Mac and Bob, who would be stars of the WLS Barn Dance in Chicago, and the original Tennessee Ramblers, featuring Willie Sievers, one of country music's first female guitarists. Ballard Cross, a member of the famous Georgia band the Skillet Lickers, played his original version of "Wabash Cannonball," a song Acuff would make a national standard.

The St. James sessions of 1929-30 are a rare window onto a fertile time and place in the history of American popular music. The 1920s saw the dawn of music on the radio, and improvements to recording technology that saw the introduction of mass-market recordings of popular music. And the Roaring '20s was accompanied by a surprisingly worldly stew of folk music, blues, show tunes, jazz, Hawaiian, and vaudeville novelties that all played a part in the evolution of what we now know as popular music.

It's not surprising that the St. James sessions were a remarkable collection of country musicians of the period. These sessions differ from the earlier ones in Bristol and Johnson City, though, in that they include a much wider variety of music than what we now know as country.

Taken from: [http://www.lynnpoint.com/st\\_james/history.htm](http://www.lynnpoint.com/st_james/history.htm)

### **Sam Morrison/Bell Sales Company and Elvis Presley**

In a small store on Market Square (14 Market Square) a Knoxville record merchant helped launch the most famous career in music history. In July 1954 in a recording session Sun Studios in Memphis, Elvis Presley started singing Arthur Cradup's 1946 song "That's All Right". A recording was made and distributed. Sam Morrison of Bell Sales Company chose to promote Elvis Presley's *That's All Right, Mama* by playing it on loudspeakers to the public on Market Square. He was pleasantly surprised when he would sell hundreds of copies to people of all ages, to include two copies to an RCA talent scout in the area looking for local country music talent. The scout sent a copy of the record to his boss in New York and several months later, RCA bought Elvis' contract from Sun Studios in Memphis.

History taken from: Market Square: A History of the Most Democratic Place on Earth –Jack Neely

### **Hank Williams & The Andrew Johnson Hotel**

On New Year's Eve, 1952, Hank Williams checked into the Andrew Johnson Hotel for what would be the final hours of his life. Through he was pronounced dead in West Virginia, Many believe that Williams was dead before his teenage chauffeur carried him out of the hotel.

On January 1, 1953, Williams was due to play at a concert in Canton, Ohio, but he was unable to fly due to weather problems with snow and ice. He hired a college student, Charles Carr, to drive him to the concerts he was to perform at over the few final days of 1952 and early 1953. Upon leaving the Andrew Johnson Hotel, Williams apparently had been injected with some painkillers. Also found in the Cadillac convertible were some cans of beer and the handwritten lyrics to a song yet to be recorded. According to some, Williams was carried semiconscious to his automobile by Carr and a hotel employee, who wondered about Williams' condition, and later believed Williams, might have been dead at that point.

In a slightly different version, Carr suspected Williams was lifeless at some earlier point, but realized the great singer was dead several miles before entering the town of Oak Hill, West Virginia.

Upon closer examination, it was discovered that Williams was dead. He was 29. The official cause of death was heart failure, but there is still some mystery about the circumstances. Controversy has since surrounded Williams' death, with some claiming that Williams was dead before leaving Knoxville. Other sources, speculating from the forensic evidence, claim that Williams died in his sleep while the Cadillac was being driven through Kentucky about an hour before his body was discovered in the back seat. Oak Hill is still widely known as the little town where Hank Williams "died." There is a monument dedicated to his memory across the street from the little gas station where Carr anxiously sought help for Williams. The people of Oak Hill were apparently concerned with Carr and his near-panicky condition, as they calmed him and welcomed into their homes. The Cadillac is now preserved at the Hank Williams Museum in Montgomery, Alabama.

### **Hiram King ("Hank") Williams**

Born, September 17, 1923, Williams was an American country music performer who many believe to be the greatest of all time. He was not able to read or write music to any significant degree. He fathered a son who later became a country star in his own right. Williams died at age 29 after writing some of the greatest country songs of all time. His death is widely believed to have resulted from a mixture of alcohol and drugs.

History taken from: Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour & [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank\\_Williams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hank_Williams)

### **Andrew Johnson Hotel – 913 South Gay Street**

Planning for the hotel began in 1918 by the Adair Corporation of Atlanta, and it was to be called the Tennessee Terrace Hotel. The hotel was designed by Knoxville architects Baumann & Baumann. Eight historic homes were razed so that construction could begin on the hotel project. "The promoters of the undertaking," The Sunday Sentinel reported, "promise Knoxville that Tennessee Terrace will be open in full operation by Christmas of 1926."

By 1927, only seven stories of the Tennessee Terrace were completed, and work was suspended because of financial difficulties. The structure was finally completed in 1928 after a successful financing campaign spearheaded by J. Basil Ramsey, president of the Holston Union Bank. Its name was changed to the Andrew Johnson Hotel, and it was an immediate success, ultimately becoming a home to more than 100 permanent residents. The spectacular view from the penthouse patios was especially noteworthy.

From 1928 to 1978, the Andrew Johnson Hotel was the city's tallest structure and was the cornerstone of the downtown skyline. It hosted such noteworthy personalities as Amelia Earhart (stayed in the hotel in 1936 – the year before her disappearance), jazz legend Duke Ellington, and Great Russian composer and pianist Sergi Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff stayed in the hotel after a performance at the University of Tennessee Alumni Hall in 1943. The performance was intended to be just one stop in his American tour but it turned out to be his final performance – in pain from undiagnosed cancer he canceled the rest of the tour and died

three months later. One of the hotel's most esteemed guests, country music legend Hank Williams, spent his last few hours at the hotel in 1952.

In 1940, the hotel was purchased by R.J. Reynolds, who held the building until 1964, when he sold it. Reynolds later repurchased the Andrew Johnson Hotel just before his death, and his wife inherited the building and kept it until 1973. In 1979, it was purchased by San Urman for renovations as an office building. Today is the headquarters of the Knox County School System.

**For more information or potential field trips**

Permanent Exhibit – Voices of the Land: The People of East Tennessee

Museum of East Tennessee History

601 S. Gay Street

Knoxville, TN 37902

Phone: (865) 215-8824

<http://easttnhistory.org/content.aspx?article=1284&parent=1200>

Cradle of Country Music Walking Tour – downtown Knoxville

Pick up a brochure the East Tennessee History Center -601 S. Gay Street

**Have any concerns or a suggestion on how to make better? Please contact...**

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