



CENTER CITY

VOLUME II, NUMBER 10

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

MARCH 13, 1975

MATRIARCH

She stands solemnly at the corner of Third and Madison, staring her matronly disapproval of the young upstarts around her.

The story of our grand old lady began around the turn of the century. A. B. Pickett, editor of the MEMPHIS EVENING SCIMITAR, began nurturing a dream of a new building to house his newspaper. Mr. Pickett found in Napoleon Hill a receptive backer for his project.

When the Scimitar Building was completed in 1902, she was a marvel of "modern" architecture. The SCIMITAR described their new building in a supplement to a May, 1903 edition.

"This building is indicative of the persistent and all-conquering growth of the city of Memphis. Moreover it marks a new era in the architectural advancement of the South and typifies the graduation of Memphis from the nondescript class of ordinary interior towns to a position among American cities of the first rank.

"The Scimitar Building is recognized superior to any office building in the city.

"Rising five stories above its commodious half-basement floor, the solid stone edifice stands as a thing of beauty and joy forever. It is calmly impressive and uniformly harmonious in design and construction.

"It embraces the principal forms of architecture. At the first sweeping glance one is impressed with the idea of solidity and endurance. Then one is struck with the reminiscent suggestion of the French Renaissance mode of architecture. The Renaissance scheme

Courtesy of Memphis Light Gas and Water, the following is a portion of an article by the same title which appeared in the March 1970

issue of the MLG&W publication CONNECTION.

OF

MADISON



is materially qualified by many other types. The columns pedestalled at the Madison Street entrance are Corinthian and the cornices are distinctly Italian.

"The Third Street entrance is Romanesque in tone and make-up. Hand-some carvings and toned fancy work enclosing and surmounting windows and doors relieve it from the barest suggestion of sameness. Almost all of the classical forms of architecture are embodied into a pleasing and eminently artistic whole."

Napoleon Hill, who built and owned the Scimitar Building as it was originally called, was a prominent banker and property-owner in the city. His holdings were scattered throughout the city, including buildings on the four corners of Madison and Third.

Mr. Hill's residence with its French Renaissance window arches and cupolas occupied the corner where the Sterick Building stands, a boarding house was situated on another corner,

the Cordova Hotel and the new Scimitar Building on the others.

The architects were A. A. Chighizola and William J. Hanker . . . "whose skill has given them an enviable place among the architects of Memphis," to quote the SCIMITAR.

Excavating work began for the building on April 1, 1902, with the firm of C. J. Wagner as the contractor in charge of general construction work. Mr. Hill's son Frank supervised construction for his father and on September 6, 1918 bought the building from his widowed mother. On November 25, 1925, Frank Hill sold the Scimitar Building to the Memphis Power and Light Company.

With the advent of a publicly owned utility in Memphis, the building was sold to the Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division in 1939 for \$539,922.79. The 148.5 feet X 46 feet lot on which the building stood cost \$140,044.68 of the total.

The original Madison entrance had red granite steps — like the present Third Street entrance — and heavy swinging oak doors. Tennessee marble — pink and green — was used in the lobby to complement the golden oak furniture. Floors were black and white mosaic with Trojan borders. Ceilings in the lobby, which was the SCIMITAR counting room or business office, had heavy paneled beams and plaster cornices supported by Corinthian columns.

During the latter 50's the brass revolving doors that had replaced her original doors were removed and replaced with aluminum framed swinging ones. At the same time the lobby ceiling was lowered approximately six feet and a false ceiling put up. Lowering the ceiling did not do away with the space, however. To this day anyone climbing the stairs from one to two finds an extra flight of stairs . . . the illusion created by the lobby's false ceiling.

Does Money Talk?

CENTER CITY has been allocated \$10 a week for paying writers whose articles are selected for publication. The ten dollars will be divided up according to the quality, interest and magnitude of accepted works. This means that persons who are unable to donate their time and material, and who submit acceptable articles, poems or fictional material (unrelated to their regular employment) will be awarded for their work.

In addition, each week CENTER CITY will give TWO FREE LUNCHES in the Community Culinary Club at First Presbyterian Church (paid for by CENTER CITY) for the best humorous story submitted for publication.

CENTER CITY does not have unlimited resources, but it understands that for continuously good and diverse material many persons need an extra incentive. Hopefully, this experimental policy will help in stimulating contributors to become involved in their downtown community.

If you are interested call or write: CENTER CITY, 166 Poplar, 38103; 525-5619. All articles for-pay-only must be designated as "Free Lance" or they will be considered donated material. "Free Lance" material which cannot be paid for will not be printed, and will be returned, provided a stamped, self-addressed envelope is sent with the entry.

"TO DRAW AN ANGEL DOWN"

by Vincent C. Astor, Organist
St. Michael's Catholic Church & the Malco Theatre

Memphis is proud of its new Convention Center, and rightly so. It has the finest facilities of its kind in the Mid-South.

There is one great asset, however, which is slumbering high in the ceiling of the Auditorium North Hall. Many I'm sure, remember a large black object on one side of the North Hall which, when operated, could produce some of the loudest and most impressive music they had ever heard. This is the "slumbering giant" of the Auditorium, the Kimball pipe organ. There is an organ console in the South Hall which "plays" on occasion, but its better half is located in the North Hall. The explanation is fascinating.

The Memphis Auditorium Kimball Pipe Organ is the largest organ in Memphis. It was installed in 1928 at a cost in excess of \$100,000.00. It has 110 ranks of pipes in the ceiling of the Auditorium and two consoles below. This means that the instrument is capable of producing 110 types of sound, singly or in endless combinations, and it can be played as two separate instruments or as a single, huge instrument.

When the Auditorium first opened it ~~could~~ be converted into an arena by lowering the stage to floor level, thus making both halls one vast en-

floor by floor the plaster and metal ceilings have been chopped away and replaced with acoustical ceiling tiles, until half of the fifth floor ceiling is the only original ceiling in the building.

And the ceramic flooring was replaced with black and white linoleum squares sometime after Memphis Power and Light Company bought the building.

Our Grand Lady has willingly indulged her owners through the numerous "face liftings" and held her head high through the insults flung at her squatness by the Sterick Building completed in 1929 and the First National Bank Building completed in 1964.

It is sad . . . the type thing you would never have happen to a lady.

mall fotobook

Photograph by Alan Copeland



closure. When it was decided to install a pipe organ, the organ had to be just as versatile as the building. The contract was given to W. W. Kimball Company of Chicago; the organ was designed by Charles M. Courboin, a nationally famous designer and organist. After taking months to build, it was shipped to Memphis in early fall of 1928. Six months later huge wind chests, gigantic blowers, miles of wire, thousands of electrical relays and 8000 pipes were ready for the finishing touches. The parts were so large that they had to be lowered into their chambers through the roof. In the ceiling lie two bass ranks, the longest pipes reaching 32 feet in length, while sizes descend through every length and breadth imaginable to the smallest at 1/4 inch. Mr. Courboin premiered the organ on April 9, 1929, using the huge 5-manual console on the North Hall side of the stage.

The possibilities of the 5-manual console capable of controlling both the five divisions of the organ in the North Hall and the four in the South Hall are staggering: graduations, symphonies, operas, concerts, and intermissions played on the largest concert pipe organ in the entire South. Why is this masterpiece silent for the most part? It is one of the three largest organs made by a remembered organ company, and should be a source of pride. But something happened.

During the last remodeling of the North Hall someone made a colossal mistake. The large con-

sole was situated so it could be stored in a room below stage when not in use. It was raised on the pit elevator when needed. After it was used for the last time it was put away as usual, however, when the new orchestra pit elevator was installed a concrete block wall was erected around it leaving only a walk space in front of the console storeroom. The console was, for all practical purposes, bricked up. It can still be reached, but not moved.

The organ is a very good piece of workmanship. The South Hall organ can still be played, but the entire instrument has gone virtually without maintenance for its entire 46 years. The large console needs only to be moved out to be playable again, but both consoles need frequent exercise: the many leather parts and electrical contacts need to be used to keep them in good condition.

Why import any organ when there is one there already which even in its present state can outshine them all? The expense incurred in having the console unearthed would be negligible when it is compared to the value of the investment now being grossly wasted. It is to be stressed, though, that a professional should be selected to do the moving.

The fact remains that the organ should be made available. With all the money being poured into new improvements there should be some used to maintain existing valuables.

earthly delights

FILM

Peabody Library

March 14 – “The Ultimate Trip” and
“The Occult: An Echo From Darkness”

Brooks Art Gallery

March 16 – “A Raisin in the Sun”

MSU

March 21 – “Duck Soup”

Southwestern

March 21 – “Straw Dogs”

MUSIC

Harris Music Auditorium (MSU)

March 10–15 – “The Rooster & the Fox”
and “Little Red Riding Hood”
– Southern Opera Theatre

Brooks Art Gallery

March 15 – Classical Guitar Recital –
George Sakellariou

Harris Music Auditorium

March 17–22 – New Music Festival

POETRY

Peabody Library

March 15 – Poetry Workshop –
Poetry Society of Tennessee

THEATRE

Circuit Playhouse

Thursday thru Sunday (Mar. 13–Apr. 13)
“Taming of the Shrew”

Announcements

FOSTER HOMES NEEDED

A lot of teenagers under the Tennessee Department of Correction are not bad, they just need a stable home and someone to care. You can help by opening your home and your heart to a child with nowhere to go. For details call 534-6866 and ask for the Foster Home Counselor.

CENTER CITY TREATS EXPLORERS

The winners of the second “Exploring Downtown” contest were: Martha Jane Peeples Avery (five lunches); Mrs. George Hoogasian (three lunches); and four members of the Transportation Section of Wm. S. Pollard Const., Inc.: David Hutchison, Gary Dumas, William L. Wills and Mark M. Boggs (one lunch each). Our explorers correctly identified the two renderings in the February 20th issue as (1) 121 Union Ave. and (2) 123 S. Main St.

CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

Serving from 11:30 to 1:00

First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

PRICE: \$1.50 per serving, including drink

MENU FOR MARCH 13 – MARCH 21

THURSDAY, MARCH 13

Pork Steak, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

FRIDAY, MARCH 14

Beef Stew, Tossed Salad, Corn Bread

MONDAY, MARCH 17

Steak w/onion gravy, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

Macaroni & Cheese, Turnip Greens, Corn on the cob, Beets & onion, Corn Bread

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19

Turkey & Dressing, English Peas, Cranberry Sauce, Rolls

THURSDAY, MARCH 20

Ham, Sweet Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

FRIDAY, MARCH 21

Spaghetti, Cole Slaw, French Bread

Center City

First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

Second-class
postage paid at
Memphis, Tennessee