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## Backgrounder

### **NASHVILLE'S UNION STATION HOTEL:**

#### **A LOT OF HISTORY AND AN \$11 MILLION DOSE OF MODERN TOUCHES**

*Classic railroad station transformed into appealing boutique hotel*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – As visionary as the executives of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad were when they opened their grand Union Station in Nashville in 1900, they couldn't have foreseen the station's use more than a century later.

Their dreams were big, but they couldn't have imagined jet travel, Interstate highways, air-conditioning, high-definition LCD televisions and foodstuffs from around the world. Nor would they have imagined their Union Station would have a different role in Nashville's economic life—no longer a railroad station, but rather a 125-room boutique hotel sought out by executives from Music Row, fans of country music, lovers of history and simply lovers.

Grand, indeed, was Union Station when it opened after speeches, a parade and great pomp and circumstance on October 9, 1900. It was 247 feet tall from track level to the top of its impressive tower, where a statue of Mercury (messenger of the gods and god of roads and travelers) perched.

The lobby made visitors gasp as they looked overhead to inspect the barrel-vaulted ceiling adorned with 128 panels of multi-colored stained glass. Massive clocks were at either end of the lobby. Under one was a bas-relief sculpture of an Egyptian pharaoh in a chariot, and beside it were angels representing Time and Progress. Under the other clock was another bas-relief sculpture, this one of more modern transportation—a powerful steam locomotive—and beside it were two female figures representing Miss Louisville and Miss Nashville, the railroad's namesake cities.

Two levels above the lobby floor were 10 great arches, and above them were 20 "angels of commerce" (in surprisingly revealing gowns for such conservative times) showing off Tennessee products such as corn, wheat, books and, yes, whiskey.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the decline of passenger rail traffic led to the decline of Union Station. Mercury even fell from the top of the tower in 1952.

The decline was reversed in the 1980s, however. Union Station came back to life as the Union Station Hotel in 1986. Mercury, the stained glass ceiling, the angels, the bas-relief sculptures were back in all their glory. In 2006 and 2007, an \$11 million renovation added even more luster and appeal to the classic structure built of Kentucky limestone in the Romanesque style of architect H.H. Richardson.

Richardson certainly would be proud today to see Union Station Hotel. It offers travelers 125 guest rooms—no two of which are exactly alike—12,000 square feet of flexible meeting space in six meeting rooms, a business center, a fitness center and fine dining. In-room amenities include high-speed wireless Internet service, Herman Miller Aeron work chairs, plasma flat-screen televisions and CD players (this *is* Music City USA, after all).

Its location at 1001 Broadway is strategic. Just a few blocks away in one direction are Nashville's central business district, the historic Ryman Auditorium (a long-time home to the world-famous Grand Ole Opry and now one of America's most respected performance venues), the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, numerous restaurants and a honky-tonk district that includes the endearingly named Tootsie's Orchid Lounge.

Just a few blocks in the other direction are Nashville's famed Music Row, Vanderbilt University, Belmont University, Centennial Park with its full-size replica of the Athenian Parthenon and an emerging entertainment and restaurant area simply called the Gulch.

Union Station, a Wyndham Historic Hotel, is a member of Historic Hotels of America, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that recognizes properties that have maintained their historic integrity, architecture and ambiance.

It is owned by Turnberry Associates in Aventura, Fla., and the Nashville-based Corner Partnership. Complete hotel information is online at [unionstationhotelnashville.com](http://unionstationhotelnashville.com).