

## Raddison Read House (Crutchfield House)

Broad Street and M.L. King Boulevard. This corner has been the location of famous Chattanooga hotels since the 1850's when the Crutchfield House was constructed on this site. Its history has long been associated with the history of the railroad industry in Chattanooga. The site was selected because the railroad industry promised to construct a station across the street once a hotel was built. Thus in 1857, the Western and Atlantic Union Station was constructed on the site now occupied by the Krystal Building. Even though Union Station was believed to be the oldest structure in the downtown area and was listed in the National Register of Historic places, it was demolished in 1973.

Prior to the Civil War, the Crutchfield House was the political, social and economic heart of Chattanooga. Here, Jefferson Davis and William Crutchfield almost fought a duel over state's rights in 1861.



During the Civil War, the Crutchfield House was used as headquarters and as a hospital. The building later burned and was replaced by the first Read House which opened in 1872. The present building was constructed in 1926 in a Georgian Revival style and features many elaborate and ornate interior spaces. In its more than 100 years of continued service, the Read House has played host to numerous famous people, including Winston Churchill, William McKinley, Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Truman.

### **Renovating a Chattanooga Landmark**

Proudly anchoring the corner of Broad Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard, the Sheraton Read House is often the first sight greeting visitors to the city as they enter downtown Chattanooga. But while the downtown area has undergone an extensive revitalization over the past decade, years had passed since the Read House had any significant remodeling.

"Although it's sad to admit, the Read House was 10 years past its prime," says Dean Gerstein, general manager of the historic hotel. "Our owners (the Atlanta hotel investment firm Hodges Ward Elliott) decided it was time to do something about it, and we began remodeling late last year."

#### **The Remodeling Process**

Renovations started in December of 2003 with the installation of a sprinkler system to bring the hotel up to code. Then, one floor at a time, the hotel's 243 rooms and suites were updated.

The worn carpet was replaced, and the walls of each room were painted. New traditional furniture, linens, and bedding were added, including the famous Sheraton Sweet Sleeper mattresses. Each guestroom also features amenities like complimentary high-speed, wireless Internet access, down comforters, and feather pillows. The older outdoor swimming pool at the historic hotel was replaced by a courtyard with a fountain. An indoor zero-edge pool and a new hot tub—one of the largest in Chattanooga—were also added.

"Any hotel can provide a comfortable bed and a nice room," says Lori Jenkins, sales and catering manager for the Sheraton Read House. "Our difference is in the extras. Amenities that are considered perks in other hotels are standard here."

### A POPULAR STOP FOR THE RICH AND FAMOUS



Beautiful décor and outstanding service, as well as a prominent location, have always made the Read House a popular stop for dignitaries and celebrities visiting our city. The following are just some of the many famous people who have stayed at the Read House over the years:

- Jefferson Davis
- Winston Churchill
- William McKinley
- Eleanor Roosevelt
- Margaret Truman
- Richard Nixon
- Al Capone
- Bob Hope
- Ronald Reagan

#### Retaining the Hotel's Elegance

Except for minor improvements, the exterior of the main Read House building has remained virtually the same. Black and tan awnings were added over the windows of Porter's, the hotel's luxurious new 100-seat steakhouse that serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily. The sidewalks around the perimeter of the building were replaced and expanded by the city. The exterior of the hotel's 1960s addition was painted a more contemporary cream and gray.

While remodeling projects continued for the hotel's guest rooms, the Read House's common areas—including the lobby's walnut paneling and the marble floors—were refurbished as well.

The hotel's largest banquet room—the Silver Ballroom—was repainted and recarpeted, while features like the intricate woodwork, mirrors, and the Waterford crystal chandelier,

were all cleaned and polished. The adjoining Continental Room was revamped and renamed "The Terrace Room," and the putting green- like turf that covered the terrace was replaced with slate tile. Wedding ceremonies can now be performed on the curved terrace and receptions can take place in the Terrace Room.

Several of the smaller meeting rooms, like the McAdoo Room and the Davenport Room, were transformed into formal boardrooms for meetings. Retail space on the first floor of the Read House was converted into more meeting rooms, with the exception of the area now occupied by the Starbucks coffee shop. The new Starbucks—which features a funky décor, Internet access, and of course, great coffee, has already become a popular meeting place.

"The people of Chattanooga have an emotional attachment to the Read House, and they have been so supportive of the hotel over the years," Jenkins says. "We wanted to give them a hotel they could be proud of again."

### Read House History

Over the past 157 years, the property at the corners of Broad Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard has consistently been the site of a prominent Chattanooga hostelry.

Upon learning in 1847 that Chattanooga was to be linked to the railway, Thomas Crutchfield built the Crutchfield House on the property now currently occupied by the Read House. Three years later, the Western and Atlantic railways opened a station directly across the street from the already successful Crutchfield House, just as the railroad business was beginning to boom in the city.

But by 1863, the Crutchfield House had changed hands and became the first building in the city occupied by Union soldiers during the Civil War. It later served as a hospital, where as many as 500 patients were treated in a single day.

The hotel withstood the Civil War, but burned to the ground in 1867. In 1871, Dr. John T. Read and his son, Samuel, built a new three-story hotel on the Crutchfield House property. That hotel—named the Read House— continued to prosper but was replaced in 1927 by the current 10-story brick Georgian-style building. In 1976, the Read House was included on the National Register of Historic Places.

Down through the years, the Read House has withstood significant flooding, outbreaks of influenza and yellow fever, and ice and snow storms, but has never closed its doors for any significant period of time.

Shadows of the past linger at the Read House. Winston Churchill, Charles Laughton, Tallulah Bankhead, Gary Cooper, Eddie Rickenbacker, and Al Capone are just some of the luminaries who have visited this elegant and historic hotel. The Read House is the first choice of discerning travelers to Chattanooga.

The hotel opened as the Crutchfield House in 1847. The proprietors, the Thomas Crutchfield family, entered the innkeeping business just as the Western and Atlantic rail lines prepared to link Chattanooga with Atlanta and other commercial centers in the Deep South. The Crutchfields built their Inn directly across from the rail terminal, establishing a lively business from the start. The trains arrived in 1850 and brought boom time to Chattanooga.

By January 1861, times were changing and taking on an ominous tone. On his way home to Mississippi after resigning from the U.S. Senate, Jefferson Davis stopped here and at the urging of two local lawyers spoke to the crowd gathered in the hotel lobby. By all accounts, his remarks on the red-hot issue of secession were brief and temperate. However when Davis finished, William Crutchfield, brother of the owner, jumped up on the counter. From his improvised podium, Crutchfield reviled Davis as a traitor and military despot. Audience loyalties were divided and passions flared. Men drew pistols, women screamed and Davis stood by to demand satisfaction. Bloodshed was barely averted when Thomas Crutchfield, Jr., a southern sympathizer, hustled his brother away in the nick of time.

Not long after this incident, Thomas Crutchfield sold the hotel. The new owners soon had cause to regret their purchase. By 1863 the Civil War engulfed Chattanooga, snuffing out civilian commerce. The hotel was the first building occupied by the Union forces, and it was converted into their hospital in 1863. The hotel withstood the ravages of the entire war only to burn to the ground in 1867.

The story might have ended there, except for a doctor named John T. Read. In 1871, as the city's economic pulse began to beat again, Dr. Read and his son, Samuel, built a new hotel on the site of the Crutchfield House. Opening for business on New Year's Day, 1872, they gave their establishment the name by which it is still known — Read House.

The Read's persevered through Reconstruction and after 1879 with son Samuel at the helm the hotel's reputation grew. Decade after decade, Samuel Read increased the hotel's standing among travelers. The Read House became the address of distinction for out of town visitors.

In the process the Read family gave the city an architectural landmark in 1927, when the original structure was replaced by the present 10-story brick and terra cotta building. Designed in the Georgian style by Holabird and Roche, it was built with lavish appointments now too costly to duplicate: terrazzo floors inlaid with marble; paneling of quarter-sawed walnut, carved and gilded woodwork, mirrors recessed in massive arches, Waterford chandeliers glittering from the 25-foot ceiling of the Silver Ballroom and a lobby beautifully defined by its soaring columns. In 1977, the Read House was included in the National Register of Historic Places as a prime example of period architecture and decorative art.

Since Samuel Read's death in 1942, the hotel has changed hands. To everyone who has known and loved the Read House, this celebrated hotel still honors its cherished past,

while offering the finest modern day comforts and the warmth of its traditional southern hospitality. The Read House is a unique experience inviting you to add to our history!

### **Haunting Activity:**

Those reporting the most encounters with the ghost appear to be male smokers. The prevailing legend is that the ghost in room 311 is that of a prostitute. She was taken to the room by a Confederate soldier and subsequently murdered. However, while the original hotel was built in 1847, it was destroyed by fire and replaced with the current structure in 1874, some say this story isn't very plausible because the hotel had been completely burned down and rebuilt. However, often times spirits or ghosts are attached to the property and not necessarily the building on the property.

Another likely person to be the ghost is Analise Netterly. She was brought to the Read House in the '30s by a gentleman friend under the belief they were to be married. However, it soon became clear that the "gentleman" had another lady friend and was only toying with Miss Netterly. She extended her stay at the hotel, and this is where the story divides. One tale is that in her grief and embarrassment she took her life. The other story says that she pined there for many years before eventually succumbing to her broken heart.

Whichever may be the case, the truth behind the bars on the window is quite interesting -- Al Capone was housed in room 311 during his federal trial in Chattanooga. We know the paranormal activity is much more common with male smokers, which Al Capone was, there is no evidence that he had experienced any paranormal activity during his stay. So either there was no "haunting" at that time or it was.. but just didn't present activity when he was there. So we still don't know if the spirit is that of the prostitute from 1863 or that of the woman in the 1930's. I would like to research more thoroughly and see if there was an obituary or write up of the 1863 murder to possibly get the woman's name as we know the name of the woman from the 1930's incident.

### **Activity Reported By: Guests and staff**

History: The hotel opened as the Crutchfield House in 1847 and operated until 1863, when the hotel became the first building occupied by the Union forces. It was converted into their hospital in 1863 and survived the war only to burn to the ground in 1867.

In 1871, Dr. Read James T. Read and his son, Samuel, built a new hotel on the site of the Crutchfield House, and they opened for business on New Year's Day, 1872, giving their establishment the name of the Read House. The original structure was replaced by the present 10-story brick and terra cotta building in 1927, and the Read House was included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

Among those who have stayed at the Read House are Winston Churchill, Charles Laughton, Tallulah Bankhead, Gary Cooper, Eddie Rickenbacker and Al Capone.