

**IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK, IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK,
MARRIED MEN WOULD HAVE TO TAKE THEIR BEDS AND WALK,
EXCEPT ONE OR TWO WHO NEVER DRINK BOOZE,
AND THE BLIND MAN ON THE CORNER SINGING
BEALE STREET BLUES!**

BEALE STREET BLUES BY W.C. HANDY

BEALE STREET OVERVIEW

Prior to being annexed into the City of Memphis in 1850, Beale Street was the “main street” of the town called South Memphis, founded by Robertson Topp. The name Beale originates from a war hero of the Battle of New Orleans, **Thomas Beale**. Following the Civil War, Beale Street became the melting pot for African-Americans to freely work, play, shop and socialize. A great in-migration from the outlying Delta brought numerous share-croppers looking for opportunities in urban centers such as Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago and Detroit.

Highway 61 (Third Street) is known as **The Blues Highway**, which so many blues musicians from the Mississippi delta traversed to get to Beale Street and Handy Park – The “Crossroads Of America’s Music”. In 1909, W.C. Handy wrote “Mr. Crump’s Blues” at P.Wee’s Saloon (now Hard Rock Cafe is located at this address – 315 Beale), which he later published as “**Memphis Blues**” in 1912, the first blues song published in America. Handy Park opened in 1938 and quickly became ground zero for all blues musicians and performers. Through the first half of the 20th century, Beale Street was very vibrant with shops operated by immigrant (Italians, German, Jewish) merchants. The Beale Street Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the last march of his life down Beale Street on March 28, 1968, and the march was interrupted by malcontents anathema to his peaceful means of raising awareness of the civil rights issues of the time.

Urban renewal of the 1970s became “urban removal” as over four hundred buildings in the Beale Street area were leveled by this program. From 1977-1983, Beale Street between Second and Fourth Streets was completely fenced off with no pedestrian or vehicular access, and only one business open (A. Schwab’s), which had to be accessed from a rear alley. In 1983 the Beale Street Entertainment District opened with the mission to return commerce to the street, to make it a place where blacks and whites could work and play together, and to be the center of Memphis Music again. There are over 82 commemorative **Brass Notes** laid in the sidewalks of Beale Street to honor and recognize people from all walks of life that have contributed to the history and success of Beale Street. A complete list of Brass Note honorees is at the end of this self-guided walking tour. **Today, Beale Street is the most visited attraction in the State of Tennessee.**
To Start The Walking Tour:





[200] **Handy Park** (1938) – **A** Begin at the statue of **W.C. Handy**. In 1960 the statue was dedicated in the honor of the “Father of the Blues”. Just to the west of the Handy statue is a monument recognizing **Rufus Thomas**, the “World’s Oldest Teenager”, legendary disk jockey, performer and recording artist at both Sun Studio and Stax Recording Company. On the north side is a large stage for performances of all kinds, and in the shadow of the statue is a small stage that blues musicians perform free shows daily and long into the evenings.

This land was the former site of the South Market House, one of two major market houses in the city from 1859-1898. It was replaced with a new building in 1898 that lasted until Handy Park was created in 1938. Exit Handy Park onto the north sidewalk of Beale Street and turn left (east). Cross Rufus Thomas Boulevard (formerly Hernando Street).

[308] Former site of Greener’s Department Store and Harris Department Store (1928-1960s) with black-owned businesses (insurance companies) with offices on the second and third floors. More recently, it was the site of Pat O’Brien’s, world famous establishment from New Orleans. State of Tennessee historical markers **B** on the sidewalk honors **Rufus Thomas** and **Nat D. Williams** (see narrative on markers).

[324] Former site of The Palace Theater **C**, during the middle of the 20th century, which was the only local

member of the Theatre Owners and Bookers Association (TOBA), a circuit of theaters which catered to black audiences – vaudeville skits, blues singers, chorus girls, films and talent contests were among the attractions. **Amateur Night**, hosted by Nat D. Williams, was where many future notable musicians and performers got their start.

[330] The **New Daisy Theater** opened in 1941 and showed movies aimed at the black audience, such as *The Black Cat* and *St. Louis Blues*, and also listing “Colored Cast” on the marquee that year. The New Daisy is a 900-seat venue for all genres of current entertainment.

[340] Former site of the Monarch Saloon, the “Castle of Missing Men” for its reputation for fights and murders, as this spot was the center of the underworld during the rough and tumble days.

[352] **W.C. Handy Home & Museum** **D**. This cottage was relocated in 1985 from the Soulsville neighborhood to be closer to the Beale Street traffic. W.C. Handy lived in this house in the early 1900s and wrote many songs while raising six children in this house. The W.C. Handy Home & Museum is operated by Heritage Tours (901-527-327).

[356] Before crossing over Beale Street to the south sidewalk, view eastward down Beale to Church Park, First Baptist Church Beale Street (south side) and Solvent Savings Bank, then The Plush Club, a structure built in 1974 as the Muhammad Ali Town II Cinema. Now, head west down Beale.

[333] **Eel Etc.**, opened in 1883 and operated by James Clark, is currently the longest running African-American-owned business in the district – “The Eel on Beale Where the Deal is Real”. **E** **Dr. Ernest Withers**, the preeminent African-American photographer of modern times, captured the social, commercial, musical, sporting life and civil rights movement of black Memphis for more than fifty years. Dr. Withers’ authored numerous books and his “Pictures Tell The Story” photography exhibition has traveled to many museums and art galleries around the country. Dr. Withers’ office and studio was located in the rear of this building (now named in his honor), and soon to be the permanent location of a new Withers Museum.

[329] **The Daisy** opened in 1917 as a movie theater and in 1929 premiered the movie short “St. Louis Blues” starring Bessie Smith. Today it is operated by the Beale Street Development Corporation as the Historic Daisy/ Interpretive Center on Beale (www.bealestreetdev.com).

[323] **People’s Billiard Club** has been an established “pool hall” in Downtown for almost a century and on Beale Street for nearly twenty years. People’s boasts the “Home of the Hundred Year Old Brunswicks” (pool cues).

[317] Now the Hard Rock Café, opened in 1997, this was the former site of **P.Wee’s Saloon** **F** where W.C. Handy worked the city’s only pay phone in the early 1900s booking musicians for gigs throughout the city. In 1909 W.C. Handy wrote the song “Mr. Crump’s Blues” while sitting at the cigar counter, and later made it the first blues song published in America in 1912 as “**Memphis Blues**”. A historical marker commemorates P.Wee’s Saloon at this site. Now, cross over Rufus Thomas Blvd.



Photo: Amie Vanderford/www.amie.org

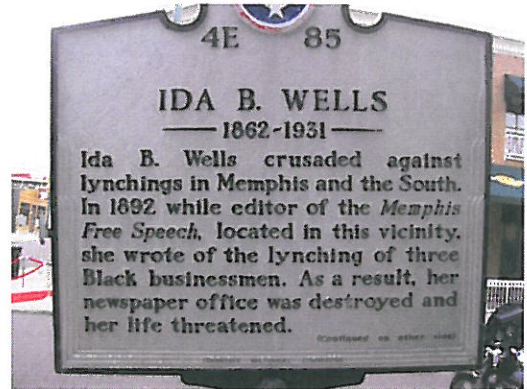
[211] On the east side of this address (195 Hernando) was the entry for Mitchell’s Hotel (3rd Floor) and **Club Handy** (2nd Floor), formerly Domino Lounge, both operated by Andrew “Sunbeam”

Mitchell. Many jazz and blues performers, such as Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Boy Williamson and B.B. King played here. **G** The historical marker for **Ida B. Wells** is positioned at this corner. Ms. Wells, an African-American journalist and newspaper editor, was early leader in the civil rights movement, documenting lynching in the United States. She was very active in the women's rights and women's suffrage movements

[207] From 1896 to the 1960s, this corner location was the site of a 24-hour drug store and pharmacy under two names (Battier's and Pantaze Drug Store No.2). Abe Plough became the proprietor around 1914 and marketed his St. Joseph's Aspirin brand here, later blossoming into the Plough and Schering-Plough empires.

[203] *The Tri-State Defender* weekly newspaper, founded in 1951, relocated its offices to Beale Street in 2007 and has served the African-American community for almost sixty years.

Now cross Third Street, also known as U.S. Highway 61 and The Blues Highway. This intersection with Beale Street is known as "**The Crossroads of America's Music**" as numerous blues musicians in-migrated from the Mississippi delta northward up this highway in search of opportunity on Beale Street, music in Handy Park and employment in the urban center of the Mid-south, Memphis. Looking south from this intersection, there is FedExForum, the Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum, Gibson Guitar Factory and Westin Hotel.



[177] Gallina Exchange was built in 1891 to house a saloon, restaurant and 21-room hotel. The building façade was preserved during the 1970s urban renewal, but a new building has never been built to replace the old structure, thus the odd supports that hover over the sidewalk here. Looking closer inside the courtyard, a pair of goats can be seen in and around the little castle.

[163] **A. Schwab's General Store** **H**, established in 1876, has been at this location since 1911, the oldest such permanent business at the same location in Downtown. The motto is "If You Can't Find It At A. Schwab's, You Are Better Off Without It!" Go on in and browse around.

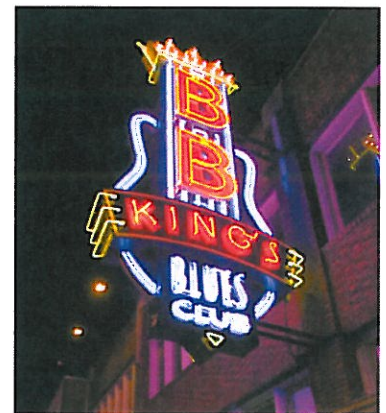
[149] **Memphis Music**, an African-American-owned gift shop carries a blues, jazz and soul music selection that is second-to-none. Throughout the century, this circa 1880s building housed A. Schwab's, Hutkins' Hardware, loan shops and professional offices.

[138] **B.B. King's Blues Club** **I** opened on Beale Street in 1991 and been the modern "Home of the Blues" ever since. B.B. King migrated from Itta Bena, Mississippi to Memphis in the late 1940s to compete in Handy Park and Palace Theater talent shows, to be a disk jockey at WDIA, and to become the most famous, internationally known blues artist ever. View the **Benjamin Franklin Booth** historical marker. Benjamin Booth was one of Memphis' earliest and most distinguished African-American lawyers, and practiced law for more than 54 years.

Cross over Second Street and walk to **Elvis Presley Plaza** **J** to view the bronze statue of the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Elvis often walked Beale Street to listen to the raw musical sounds that streamed from the clubs and in Handy Park. Home Of The Blues Record Shop was located in a building here during the middle of the 20th century. *Please note that this block of Beale Street between Main and Second Streets is open to vehicular traffic. Be careful and always look both ways.*

Continue to Main Street to view The Orpheum Theatre "**Where Broadway**

Meets Beale". Cross over Main and the Trolley Line to view The Orpheum Theatre Stars **K** which is 63 brass stars laid in the sidewalk noting celebrities and actors that have performed on The Orpheum stage over





the past 100 years. Built in 1928 after a fire destroyed The Grand Opera House at this location, The Orpheum Theatre hosts a variety of entertainment, including 100 days of Broadway shows during each year. Cross over Beale to the north and then over Main (and the Trolley tracks) to the east to resume to walk down the north side of Beale Street.

The Tri-State Bank (180 S. Main) opened in 1946 and was the third African-American bank to open in Memphis. **L** **The Schools For Freedman** historical marker on this corner represents the destruction of African-American homes, business and schools in this area during

post-Civil War race riots in Memphis in the late 1860s.

November 6th Street is an odd name for an alley, but it was selected to commemorate the date in 1934 that Memphis voted to join the Tennessee Valley Association (TVA) for utilities services.

[126] This is the former site of **Lansky Brothers Clothing Store** **M** now located in the lobby of **The Peabody Hotel**. Many performers such as Elvis Presley and B.B. King purchased clothes here selected by Bernard Lansky, who is known as "The Clothier To The King". Cross over Second Street back to the pedestrian-only portions of Beale Street.

[138] Numerous business over the years have operated at this corner including a Piggly Wiggly (which was the first self-service grocery store in America, founded by Memphian Clarence Saunders in 1916), loan shops, pawnbrokers, real estate offices and now **Blues City Café**.

[142] **Hotel Clark** **N**, on the second floor from 1925-1960s, was a popular stopover for visiting jazz musicians such Count Basie, who wrote the song "Sophisticated Lady" while staying here.

[158] Upstairs is the former site of the offices of **Dr. Arthur Martin**, who with his three brothers in 1929, gained control of the **Memphis Red Sox**, a black professional baseball team and built Martin Stadium in South Memphis. While here at **King's Palace Café**, enjoy the company of the premier doorman of Beale Street, trumpeter **Rudy Williams**.

[162-168] View the **Hooks Brothers** historical marker **O**, one of the oldest African-American-owned businesses in Memphis, a company which chronicled and documented through photography, the history and lives of black Memphians. From the 1910s on, many noteworthy African-American dentists, and lawyers had offices on the second floor. Hooks Brothers Photography and The Memphis World, an African-American-oriented weekly newspaper, were also located here.

[170-172] **Strange Cargo** is an African-American-owned retail business featuring t-shirts and novelties of all kinds.

[182] **Rum Boogie Café** was one of the first businesses to open in the 1980s when Beale Street was re-opened after the urban renewal closure of the 1970s, and has been providing the best in rhythm & blues for almost three decades. Step inside to view the vast array of celebrity guitars hanging throughout each room.

Now, being back at "The Crossroads Of America's Music", cross over Third Street and re-enter Handy Park **A** for some real, down home, live blues . . .

For more information about Beale Street, please contact www.bealestreet.com or the **Beale Street Merchants Association** (901-529-0999) or **Performa Entertainment Real Estate Company** (901-526-0110).

BEALE STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

BRASS NOTES

As of February 1, 2010

North Side of Beale

Beale Street Main to Second Street

126 Sam Phillips
Johnny Cash

Beale Street Second to Third Street

138 Booker T. Laury
Dr. Herman Green
Jerry Lee Lewis
James Cotton
Cato & Polly Walker & Family
156 Robert Johnson
162 Rudy Williams
The Newborn Family
168 The Bar Keys
Corey Osborn
172 Bobby "Blue" Bland
Albert King
174 Walter "Furry" Lewis
Don McMinn
James Govan

Beale Street Third to Fourth Street

194 Lucie E. Campbell
Dewey Phillips
Will Shade & Memphis Jug Band
Lamar Alexander
The Blues Brothers
Ardent Studios
Cordell Jackson
Onzie Horne, Sr.
320 Hank Crawford
Mudboy & The Neutrons
Carla Thomas
326 Hi Rythm Section
Mose Vinson
330 Bob Kelley
Three 6 Mafia
340 Otis Redding
344 W.C. Handy
348 Harry Godwin
356 Reverend W. Herbert Brewster

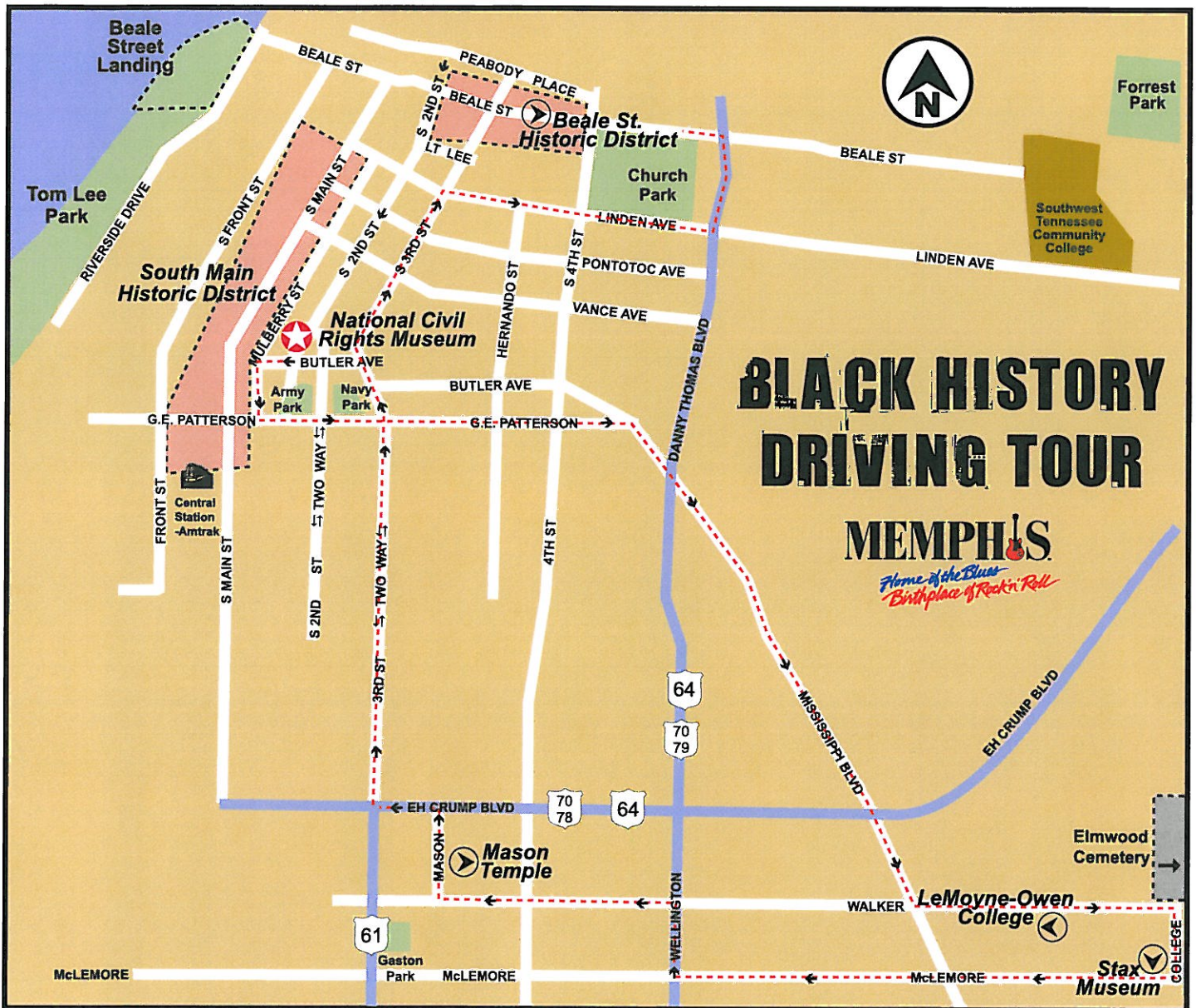
South Side of Beale

Beale Street Second to Third Street

143 Jerry Wexler
Ruby Wilson
Justin Timberlake
B.B. King
Pete Pederson
149 Charlie Musselwhite
Little Jimmy King
Clyde Hopkins
Stax
153 Steve Cropper
David Porter
Bukka White
The Memphis Horns
Frank Stokes
The Staple Singers
Preston Shannon
159 The Tigaretts'
Rarecas Bonds & The World
183 Thomas "Silky" Sullivan
Jeremiah Buckley

Beale Street Third to Fourth Street

203 Lillie Mae Glover
John Robertson
Kevin Paige
Elvis Presley
George Klein
Jerry Schilling
Memphis Minnie
209 Isaac Hayes
Dwight "Gatemouth" Moore
Joyce Cobb
315 Memphis Slim
O'Lander Draper & The Associates
Sam & Dave
"Little Milton" Campbell
Al Green
Rufus Thomas
Willie Mitchell
323 Rev. James E. Smith
Nat B. Williams
333 Ernest Withers
Peter Guralnick
Ray Glover
Jimmie Lunceford
Alberta Hunter



(Approximately One & 1/2 Hours & 6.2 Miles)

★ Begins at the National Civil Rights Museum, south parking lot at 450 Mulberry Street.

- [0.0] Turn right (north) onto Mulberry Street
- [0.05] Turn left (west) onto Butler Avenue to South Main Street
- [0.1] Turn left (south) onto South Main Street
- [0.2] Turn left (east) onto G.E. Patterson Avenue
- [0.4] Now crossing Third Street (U.S. Highway 61) and what is historically called "The Blues Highway"
- [0.7] Turn right (southeast) onto Mississippi Boulevard and cross over Danny Thomas Boulevard
- [1.0] Now at the intersection of Mississippi Boulevard and Georgia Avenue
- [1.4] Now crossing E.H. Crump Boulevard
- [1.8] Turn left (east) onto Walker Avenue
- [2.0] LeMoyné-Owen College
- [2.3] Turn right (south) onto College Street
- [2.6] Turn right (west) onto E. McLemore Avenue - STAX Recording Company
- [3.3] Willie Mitchell Boulevard
- [3.5] Turn right (north) on Wellington Street
- [3.7] Turn left (west) onto Walker Avenue and continue to Mason Street
- [3.8] Turn right (north) onto Mason Street
- [3.9] Mason Temple

- [4.1] Turn left (west) onto E.H. Crump Boulevard
- [4.5] Turn right (north) onto Third Street. Head north on Third across G.E. Patterson.
- [5.3] Turn right (east) onto Pontotoc Avenue
- [5.4] Turn left (north) onto Hernando Street - Clayborn Temple
- [5.5] Turn right (east) onto Linden Avenue - FedExForum.
- [5.7] Turn left (north) onto Danny Thomas Boulevard
- [5.9] Turn left (west) onto Beale Street
- [6.0] Church Park
- [6.1] Turn right (north) onto Fourth Street - Beale Street Entertainment District
- [6.2] Turn left (west) onto Peabody Place

Beale Street is now blocked to vehicles on a daily basis between Fourth and Second Streets. Proceed to a parking lot on the south side of the Peabody Place or a parking garage on the north side, if you would like to park the car and take the Walking Tour of Beale Street or to enjoy on the many restaurants and clubs of Beale Street. Visit our mobile site (m.memphistravel.com) for other helpful information.