



Fortunes, Fiddles and Fried Chicken : A Business History of Nashville

Bill Carey

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Did Teddy Roosevelt really say that Maxwell House Coffee was “good to the last drop”? When did Nashville become Music City U.S.A.? What led to the federal investigation of Columbia/HCA?

Providing rare facts in reviewing Nashville’s past and present businesses, *Fortunes, Fiddles, & Fried Chicken*, written by journalist Bill Carey, is a comprehensive account of the city’s history.

Carey includes the beginnings of Maxwell House Coffee and its marketing campaigns. He chronicles the National Life & Accident Insurance Co., a business that helped Nashville become the home of country music and a major tourist destination. Carey also reveals the series of events resulting in a federal investigation of Columbia/HCA and the subsequent firing of the company’s CEO.

Other anecdotes and bottom-line analyses that Carey includes are the rise and fall of Caldwell & Co., the bond-trading house led by Rogers Caldwell that almost single-handedly gave Nashville the nickname “Wall Street of the South”; a complete history of Genesco, an apparel giant led by Maxey Jarman that fell on hard times in the 1970s; and the bizarre saga of Minnie Pearl’s Fried Chicken, a company founded by brothers John Jay and Henry Hooker that went from a stock-market darling to a legendary failure in only a few months.

J.C. (Jimmy) Bradford Jr. is one of many people who remembers Minnie Pearl’s Fried Chicken, according to Carey. “People just went hog wild,” said Bradford. “I remember going to a cocktail party where John Jay walked in and there were about 10 people wanting to grab him because they wanted to get in.”

Fortunes, Fiddles, & Fried Chicken also shares the life stories of people who founded and led Nashville companies, from Kentucky Fried Chicken and HCA cofounder Jack Massey to Third National Bank president Sam Fleming to H.G. Hill Sr., founder of H.G. Hill Food Stores.

In the words of H.G. Hill Stores Co. president, Wentworth Caldwell Jr., his grandfather H.G. Hill Sr. was the “kind of person who would get off a streetcar, turn to his employee and say, ‘We are going to build a store here! Get everybody out here! We are going to have that thing opened by Monday and by God that is what we are going to do.’”

John Egerton, author of *Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries*, said of Carey’s book, “For a town that takes great pride in the quality of its business enterprises, Nashville has been surprisingly negligent about recording the stories of its biggest deals and dealmakers—the triumphs as well as the disasters. Bill Carey’s book dramatically changes all that.”

Carey said he hopes the book adds to Nashville’s sense of community and sense of identity.

“I hope that as people read the stories of entities such as DuPont, the United Methodist Publishing House, and the Nashville Bridge Co. they will become more proud of their hometown. But most importantly, I hope that this book helps the entrepreneurs and executives of the twenty-first century to avoid the mistakes of the past,” Carey said.

Carey is a native of Huntsville, Ala., and a former naval flight officer. A graduate of Vanderbilt University, he has worked as a reporter for many publications since he moved to Tennessee in 1992. Carey lives in East Nashville with his wife and step-daughter. This is his first book.

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