



- Points of Interest**
- A** Marker honoring Ralph Peer and his contributions to the Music Industry and Bristol.
  - B** Marker honoring the Carter Family and their contributions to Country Music.
  - C** Marker honoring the Stoneman Family and their contributions to Country Music.
  - D** Marker recognizing historic building formerly known as the H.P. King Building.
  - E** Location of the 1928 Bristol Sessions.
  - F** Believe in Bristol office.
  - G** Marker for the former First National Bank of Bristol established 1866.
  - H** Marker honoring Jimmie Rodgers and his contributions to Country Music and Rock and Roll.
  - I** Marker noting the site of the 1927 Bristol Sessions which later became known as the Big Bang of Country Music.
  - J** Historic Marker noting this location as the place of many "firsts" in Bristol.
  - K** Marker noting the Bristol Sign as a Virginia Historic Landmark.
  - L** Col. John S. Mosby Marker - Col. Mosby was a resident of Bristol at the time of the Civil War and was famously known as the "Gray Ghost of the Confederacy".
  - M** Marker honoring the 100th Anniversary of when Goodson, VA became Bristol, VA.
  - N** Memorial in remembrance of the Veterans for the area. Marker honoring the brave men from this area during the American Revolutionary War known as the Overtmountain Men.
  - O** Solar Hill Historic District - Bristol, Virginia neighborhood listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.
  - P** Bristol Public Library - Children, Teen and Adult reading programs, art gallery and community events.

Complete Historic Downtown Walking Tour is also available at [BristolChamber.com](http://BristolChamber.com)

# VA BRISTOL TENN

SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

- 1 - Bristol Chamber of Commerce Guitar
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Learn more about Bristol by visiting [BristolChamber.com](http://BristolChamber.com) or stop by the Bristol Chamber of Commerce located at 20 Volunteer Parkway, Bristol, TN 37620.

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Historic information provided by the Bristol Historical Association



**Bristol Chamber of Commerce**  
 20 Volunteer Parkway, Bristol, TN 37620  
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This tour is the property of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce

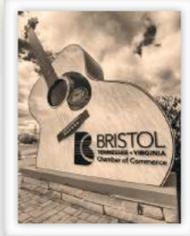
# VA BRISTOL TENN

SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR



## Tour Stop 1 – Bristol Chamber of Commerce Guitar

Erected in 2009 to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, the 20-foot guitar serves as a gateway to tourism in the region and has become a landmark and popular photo spot for tourists and locals.



## Tour Stop 2 – Downtown Center

This impressive music mural was painted by local artist and musician Tim White in 1987. Commemorating the historic 1927 Bristol Sessions, it features Ralph Peer (who organized the recording sessions) as well as the most famous artists to emerge from them - namely The Carter Family, The Stoneman Family and Jimmie Rodgers, the latter giving his trademark double thumbs-up salute.



Situated in front of the mural, you will notice a stage where local pickers, bands and artists gather to play free concerts. The area also provides one of the main stages during the annual Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion music festival, held

in September, featuring a variety of local, regional and nationally known artists. Wednesday and Saturdays (May through October) there is a popular farmer's market held here.

## Tour Stop 3 – H.P. King Building, 620 State Street

The arrival of the railroad in 1856 led to the creation of Bristol. By the late 1800s Bristol had become the largest center for commerce and industry between Roanoke, VA and Knoxville, TN, a 100 mile radius from where you are now.

In 1899, H.P. King built the region's first complete department store. The store offered home furnishings and decoration services with free delivery throughout the area, as well as elegant and moderately priced apparel including locally made beaver hats.

Today, the H.P. King Building houses a restaurant, retail shops and offices.

After a brief decline in the 1970's and 80's, the historic downtown district experienced a rebirth and renaissance. In keeping with the original, more functional design of these buildings, many feature stunning, restored hardwood and ceramic tile floors, high ceilings and exposed brick walls.

Here are all manner of offices, banks, antique stores, restaurants, art galleries, cafes and specialty shops. Plus there is the individual charm of the Tennessee / Virginia state line running down the middle of the street. The area is listed as a National Main Street Community.

## Tour Stop 4 – Paramount Bristol

Coinciding with the golden age of Hollywood, this majestic movie palace was built in 1931 - a masterpiece of art deco craft, blessed with an opulent, richly embellished interior, plush seats and a stunning array of Venetian style murals.

Over the coming decades, the Paramount existed at the heart of Bristol society, and indeed, continued to prosper right through until the 1960s. By the early 1970's, however, the twin impact of TV and a nationwide drift toward suburban movie theaters, threatened its future.

So, it was cause for huge celebration when it was lovingly restored to its full, original splendor in 1991. It reopened with a gala celebration featuring a poignant hometown performance from Bristol native and international singing star Tennessee Ernie Ford, just a few months before he passed away.

The Paramount continues to be a gem of Bristol with community performances, movie showing, theater and hundreds of artist performances.

## Tour Stop 5 – Lost State Distilling

Built in 1909 by brothers, James and Riley Stone, this building was known as the Interstate Hardware and Supply Co. The rooftop is where the most historic landmark in downtown Bristol began. The original "Bristol Sign" was erected here in 1910 as a donation from the Bristol Gas and Electric Company to the community. The sign read "PUSH! THAT'S BRISTOL." In 1915, the sign was

moved to its current location on State Street spanning the state line.

This building is now home to Lost State Distilling. The distillery was voted America's Best New Craft Distillery in 2020 by USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice.

## Tour Stop 6 – Bristol Sign

Originally erected in 1910 atop the Interstate Hardware and Supply Company (Tour Stop 5) as a community gift from the Bristol Gas and Electric Company, the sign was moved to its current location in 1915 due to the weight load on the building. Back then, the sign read "PUSH! THAT'S BRISTOL" instead of a "A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE".

Although the landmark electric sign is viewed fondly by locals, it often illuminated a tainted message in its history. From time to time some of the lights would go out and the sign would spell "PU\_\_! THAT'S BRISTOL" or "\_\_\_SH! THAT'S BRISTOL" In 1921, the Bristol Advertising Club offered a contest for the best new slogan for the sign. The winning slogan was "A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE". The second most popular suggestion was "THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE". The club chose the first because they felt it was "modest in claim, and truthful in statement."

Today the sign is maintained by both the cities of Bristol, TN and Bristol, VA with the help of the utility companies, Bristol Tennessee Essential Services and Bristol Virginia Utilities. It is also on the National Register of Historic Places. The impact of the sign during the day is as nothing compared to the grand spectacle of it lit up at night.

## Tour Stop 7 – Bristol Train Station

Bristol was founded because of the railroad. When surveyors picked this spot for the railway, an enterprising man by the name Joseph R. Anderson began to develop the area. The first train station on this spot was opened in 1856, but was burned down during the Civil War by Union forces. It was hastily rebuilt in 1867, before a new, but small station replaced it in 1881. This current structure was built in 1902.



At one time, more than 20 passenger trains would pull in and out of this station daily. During the early years there was a break in the tracks at the state line due to different size track gauges. This required passengers, livestock and freight to detrain and reboard another train on the adjacent track on the other side of the state line.

Although the last passenger train departed this station in May 1971, the building was lovingly restored for the town's sesquicentennial in 2006. Like the nearby Bristol Sign, the station is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Bristol Train Station now serves as an event and wedding venue.

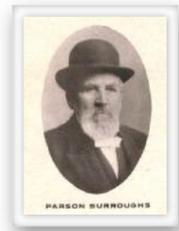
## – The Civil War in Bristol J -Point of Interest

During the Civil War, Bristol was a Confederate city. It had industry producing Confederate goods, and four Confederate hospitals. Many of the injured soldiers were brought into Bristol by train.

Further up East State Street, at the top of the hill, is East Hill Cemetery where the graves of soldiers from both sides of the civil war now rest. Open to the public, the cemetery is recommended for anyone with a further interest in the heroism and tragedies. Dating back to 1857, the cemetery has a special Civil War section. Most are unmarked, have faded or been made illegible by the passage of time. But some do survive for posterity, serving as moving reminders of those troubled years in Bristol.

## – The "Marrying Parson"

Reverend Alfred H. Burroughs, a local Baptist minister who, in the 1870s, fell on hard times, came up with a novel answer to his woes. Back then, Tennessee (unlike Virginia) had no laws requiring parental consent for a marriage. So, after performing a wedding for a young couple who had eloped on foot across the mountains in order to marry in Bristol, TN, he got the novel idea for what was to become a surprisingly popular service.



Burroughs became known as the 'Marrying Parson'. It is said that through the years 1879 to 1914 he could be seen on the train station platform to meet almost every passenger train that steamed into Bristol station, on the look out for likely eloping couples. Throughout the South, word spread and his fame grew.

By 1890 his business was doing so well, he leased the Nickels House Hotel, where he performed wedding ceremonies in

a plush new bridal suite. His income, which was from the weddings themselves and the renting of rooms to the newly married couples, was further supplemented by the selling of engraved marriage certificates.

Burroughs continued to perform weddings right up until his death in 1916. Esteemed local historian Bud Phillips estimated that in his lifetime Parson Burroughs married in excess of five thousand couples.

## Tour Stop 8 – The State Line & Prohibition

Look within the double yellow lines on State Street for brass markers showcasing the official state line between Tennessee and Virginia. A popular photo boasts one foot in Tennessee and the other in Virginia. Who says you can't be in two places at once?

The controversy of liquor & prohibition in the early 1900's was especially turbulent in Bristol because of the location of state line. In the 1907 city elections, the sale of liquor was banned. In the spring of 1909, petitions were circulated to end the prohibition.

At the time, the prohibition movement was making huge successes throughout the United States. By July 1, 1909 every saloon and mail-order house in several large Tennessee cities would close its doors, which would make Tennessee dry from Bristol to the Mississippi River. The Bristol, Virginia election was essential to prohibition, which would help restrict the flow of liquor across the street into Tennessee and keep the rising tide in balance favoring prohibition.

On Election Day in July 1909, representatives from the liquor industry were in Bristol. Now displaced in most Tennessee cities, they were sizing up the territory in the event the measure would pass. When the announcement came, Bristol, Virginia voted to lift the ban by a majority of only 32 votes. The Bristol, Virginia election assured that Bristol, Tennessee prohibition would fall in November 1909.

## Tour Stop 9 – WCYB



Located in Bristol were WCYB's radio program and later television programming, with coverage in five states - Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky.

Along with an impressive roll-call of famous musicians, artists and dignitaries who have featured here in Bristol is a fondly remembered local radio personality named Eddie Cowell.

Broadcasting on WCYB radio back in the 1940s and 50s, Cowell was something of a prankster. Broadcasting on the night of January 23, 1954, Cowell reported live on air that an enormous monster was on the loose, reaping havoc throughout downtown Bristol. He reported that the creature was over 80 feet tall and 40 feet wide, and was smashing into buildings and swishing down trees with its powerful 100 foot tail. Redolent of the time in 1938 when Orson Wells terrified the nation with his famous 'War of the Worlds' broadcast, Cowell kept updating listeners with new - spoof - information that was supposedly arriving at the station all the time. Such as the 'fact' that a warplane had been deployed from Washington DC to bomb the beast in an attempt to save the city. The radio station and local law enforcement offices were inundated with more than a thousand frantic phone calls from all over the East Tennessee and southwest Virginia area. Cowell was subsequently compelled to stop his outlandish antics by the FCC.

## Tour Stop 10 – Cumberland Square Park

Located on the site of the old Bristol, Virginia Court house, this is a peaceful and respectful setting in which to honor all of the nation's war veterans. The five life-size bronze sculptures paying tribute to our servicemen and women are the main focus, but there is also a Cobra AH-1F combat helicopter on display, as well as an eternal flame symbolizing the fight for freedom.

Plans for a community park on this site date back more than a hundred and fifty years. In the summer concerts are held on the purpose built stage and well a stage area for Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion festival stage.

## Tour Stop 11 – The Bristol Hotel

Constructed in 1925 by Hardin Reynolds (son of Civil War veteran and nephew of Bristol's tobacco mogul R.J. Reynolds), the Reynolds Arcade was initially built as a hotel, but became a professional office space known as the Executive Plaza. As the city's most prominent office building of the early 20th century, the Executive Plaza held offices for physicians, attorneys, accountants, and government officials. Classical Revival style elements such as the Roman arched entryway, stucco exterior, and display windows still remain from the original structure. Today the building serves

as The Bristol Hotel, an award winning 65-room boutique hotel. Visitors and locals alike enjoy the incredible 360-degree views from the rooftop restaurant and bar.

## Tour Stop 12 – Birthplace of Country Music Museum

Constructed between 1919-1920 for automobile sales and service as the Goodpasture Motor Co., the building was renovated and opened August 1, 2014 to showcase the Birthplace of Country Music Museum. The Smithsonian Institution affiliate state of the art museum celebrates the influence of the 1927 Bristol Sessions to today's music.

This museum features exhibition space including traveling exhibits from the Smithsonian, a performance auditorium, radio station and an interactive multimedia experience charged with making history come alive.



Working as a talent scout for the Victor Talking Machine Company, Ralph Peer invited local singers to attend a series of auditions and recording sessions at the makeshift studio

in the Taylor-Christian Hat Company warehouse (Point of Interest 1). The initial response was slow. Shortly after, however, the newspaper ran a story mentioning not only that participants could be paid up to \$100 a day, but also detailing how local musician Ernest 'Pop' Stoneman had earned \$3600 in royalties the previous year. It should be noted, the average farmers income at that time was in the region of \$650 a year.

The Bristol Sessions were not the first country music recordings, but they were the first country music recordings to be mass produced and distributed. Because of the influence these recordings had on the music industry, the Bristol Sessions is also known as the 'Big Bang' of country music.

The sessions helped to launch the careers of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. Rodgers is considered the "Father of Country Music" and was the first artist to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Carter Family has been recognized as country music's "First Family" due to the influence of their works on succeeding generations of country music artists.

In 1998, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution designating Bristol as the official Birthplace of Country Music. Music legend Johnny Cash referred to the Bristol Sessions as "the single most important event in the history of country music."

## Tour Stop 13 – Burger Bar - Hank Williams

Hank Williams is widely acknowledged as one of country music's greatest songwriters. His number one hits include "Cold, Cold Heart," "Your Cheatin' Heart," "Hey Good Lookin'," and "Lost Highway".

Although his professional career in the early 1950's was doing well, his personal life was deteriorating. Dealing with back pain, Williams was reportedly abusing alcohol and drugs. The night Williams died, he was forced to take his car to his next show, unable to fly due to bad weather. He spent the ride from Knoxville lying under a blanket on the back seat of his Cadillac.

Allegedly his car stopped in Bristol, right where you're standing, the location of the Burger Bar. According to some, Hank got out and went inside. Others maintain he must have been dead already. Carr, Hank's driver, attests that he was very much still alive at this point. "I remember Hank got out to stretch his legs," he recalls. "I asked him if he wanted a sandwich or something. 'No,' replied Hank. "I just want to get some sleep." By the time the car stopped again in West Virginia, Hank had passed. He was 29 years old.

Incidentally, Hank's single that was riding high in the charts at the time of his death was a peppy little number called, 'I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive'.

## Tour Stop 14 – The Sessions Hotel

The Sessions Hotel (named for the 1927 Bristol Sessions) complex represents the creative bringing together of the 1915 Bristol Grocery Building, the 1920 Jobbers Candy Factory and a 1922 Simply Grand Granary Mill to create a dynamic and engaging experience for the community and guests. The Creative Boutique Hotels development group carefully protected the historic elements of the buildings leaving guests the opportunity to visualize how the buildings functioned in their original uses. High beams, historic wheels and pulleys, large windows and historic sliding doors all add to the guest room and dining experience.

