Follow the Music.

THE SOUNDTRACK OF AMERICA

The Genres of Music

TENNESSEE PATHWAYS

www.tnmusicpathways.com

Historic Hickman County: A Driving Tour
One of the oldest and largest counties in Middle Tennessee, Hickman County features stunning landscapes, evocative river valleys, and a rich history filled with fascinating stories. Founded in 1807, its early settlement and growth depended upon agriculture and the iron furnace industry, both shaped by the labor of enslaved workers. The county seat of Centerville was and is home to the county’s largest educational, commercial, civic, and religious institutions.

In 1864, the Civil War reached Hickman County with a vengeance. C.S. Col. Jacob B. “Jake” Biffle pursued U.S. Col. John Murphy’s 2nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry for two days from Buffalo, about 40 miles west. When Union troops reached Centerville, they occupied the courthouse, temporarily holding off Biffle’s men before retreating to Nashville. After C.S. Capt. Albert H. Cross ordered the courthouse burned to prevent its re-use as a fort, U.S. Capt. John W. Taylor retaliated by burning the square’s commercial buildings and several homes.

After the war, newly emancipated African Americans settled farming communities and villages across the county, centered around the phosphate mining and iron furnace industries in places like Fort Cooper, Shipps Bend, Wrigley, Cedar Hebrew, and Nunnelly. Despite the painful restraints of segregation, they established churches, schools, and businesses, creating opportunities to learn and succeed amid hardship and challenge.

Victorian-era tourists flocked to the natural sulphur springs resorts at Bon Aqua Springs, Primm Springs, and Beaverdam Springs, although only glimpses of these once-thriving places remain. Pinewood, a self-sufficient industrial and mill village now abandoned, was once the country’s largest single employer. The 20th century brought significant changes, as the iron furnaces and phosphate mines closed, and population growth slowed. Despite those challenges, a strong sense of community remains, and has sustained the county through both thriving and difficult times.

This driving tour highlights many of the unique places where Hickman County’s citizens built their communities and made history. (Please note that some sites are publicly accessible; however, others are privately owned and should be viewed only from public thoroughfares.)
1. Hickman County Courthouse and Square
Tennessee Highway 100, Downtown Centerville

Anchoring the public square, this classically styled courthouse (ca. 1925) served as the center of public life for countless community events, from election night gatherings to annual festivals. Now privately owned, the courthouse property is home to a Tennessee Civil War Trails marker and a bronze statue of Hickman County’s most famous citizen, Cousin Minnie Pearl (Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon), the beloved comedian who starred on the Grand Ole Opry for several decades.

During the Civil War, Union troops occupied the town square due to Centerville’s strategic crossroads location. The county experienced years of fighting between Union troops and Confederate regiments and partisans. The violence did not end with the surrender in April 1865. Three months later, U.S. commanders sent a force to Centerville with orders “to hunt down and put out of the way all bushwhackers and guerrillas, and that you leave sufficient force there to secure the re-establishment of civil law.”
2. Hickman County Historical Society
201 E. Public Square, Centerville • Open to the public

The all-volunteer Hickman County Historical Society houses research collections, historical publications for sale, and rotating exhibits about people, themes, and communities in local history. For more information about hours and availability, please call 931-729-3279.

3. Hickman County Chamber of Commerce
405 W. Public Square, Centerville • Open to the public

Located in the historic Sam Davis Lodge of the Knights of Pythias, the Chamber of Commerce has information on the county’s most popular attractions. It is home to Grinder’s Switch Center, with special exhibits on Grand Ole Opry and country music stars Minnie Pearl, Del Reeves, and Blake Shelton, as well as songwriter Beth Slater Whitson. The chamber also hosts the popular Grinder's Switch hour, a live music/variety show where talented local and regional musicians take the stage every Saturday morning. To learn more, visit www.hickmancountychamber.org.
4. Bates-Burchard Building
406 W. Public Square, Centerville • Private

Erected by John C. Burchard in 1906, this Victorian-style, two-story building housed different businesses on the first floor, with the second floor serving as the town's recreation center. It has been the Olympic Opera House, the Olympic Roller Rink, a basketball court for local teams, and a movie theater.

5. Breece’s Café
111 S. Public Square, Centerville

Founded in 1939 as a pie wagon on the town square, Breece’s Café was renowned throughout Centerville and the surrounding areas for its home-style meals and fresh pies. Founded by John and Bessie Breece, the restaurant was family operated for four generations.

6. Historic Methodist Church/Masonic Lodge
114 Church Street, Centerville • Private

Built ca. 1850, with impressive Flemish bond brick patterning, the church/loge is the last remaining pre-Civil War downtown building, having survived the burning of many commercial buildings in 1864. Polk Lodge 183 of the Grand Masons and the Sons of Temperance used the building for their meetings. Later, it became Shipp Studio, operated by Ronnie and Joe Hardy Shipp. This father-son studio compiled a rich collection of historic images from the 1930s to early 2000s.
Centerville Cemetery is the final resting place for many of the county’s founding families, and also contains early segregated sections for African American burials. Several Confederate veterans are buried here. Grave markers range from the hand-carved to ornate Victorian headstones, and include markers dedicated to the county’s fraternal lodge members and many military veterans.

8. Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church and Church of God
186 Columbia Avenue, Centerville • Private

These two historic black churches on adjoining lots served as the center of African American religious, social, and cultural life in downtown Centerville. Mt. Zion’s congregation was established ca. 1887. The present 1916 building replaced an earlier sanctuary destroyed by a tornado. The Church of God congregation dates to 1908, and its original building was replaced with the current sanctuary in 1958.
9. Bernard Community Center
113 Bernard Avenue, Centerville (continue past the churches on Columbia Avenue, which will turn into Bernard Avenue)

• Open for special events

The O.H. Bernard School, named for a prominent Rosenwald schools advocate, replaced the original Ali Vista School and later 1928 Rosenwald school at this same location. Rosenwald schools came out of a partnership between Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington to advance African American education and were built across the South. Originally serving K–12, this school became one of the county’s only African American high schools in the 1940s. The current building was built in 1956 after the 1928 building burned, reportedly due to a heater problem. The final high school class graduated in 1969, and the school now serves as a vibrant community center.

10. Centerville United Methodist Church
103 College Avenue, Centerville • Private

Built in 1922, the Centerville United Methodist Church is one of the largest churches in Centerville. This Classical Revival building reflects
the downtown square’s architectural transformation. Historically important members of this congregation include James Buchanan Walker, a local banker and education leader, and many other county and community leaders.

11. James Buchanan Walker House
115 West End Avenue, Centerville • Private

An example of early 20th century Classical Revival architecture, the James Buchanan Walker House (1903) represents one of the few houses in Hickman County listed on the National Register of Historic Places. James Buchanan Walker (1857–1940) served in several important community roles. The house’s architect, Clarence K. Colley, who later designed the original campus of Middle Tennessee State Normal School (now Middle Tennessee State University).

Continue down West End Avenue and bear right to West Swan Street, which will head back to Tennessee Highway 100. This part of town is known as Colleytown because Minnie Pearl’s father, Thomas Colley, owned much of the land near the Duck River.
Beacon Light Tearoom
6276 Highway 100

Annie and Lon Loveless, who later founded Nashville's famed Loveless Café, opened this popular roadside landmark in the 1930s.

Pink Cadillac Drive-In Theater
2506 Highway 100, Centerville

Originally known as the Bel Air Drive-In, the Pink Cadillac Drive-In Theater opened in 1960. This beloved roadside landmark, especially its brightly lit pink sign, remains one of the few historic Tennessee drive-in theaters still in operation. Call 931-729-2386 for information on schedules and ticket prices.
John Gordon House
Natchez Trace Parkway Milepost 407.7

Built in 1818 by Captain John Gordon, a veteran of the War of 1812 who served with Andrew Jackson, the Federal-style dwelling is one of only two homes from this era remaining on the Trace. This house was built at the location where John Gordon and his wife, Dolly, operated a ferry across the Duck River. Following John’s death in 1819, Dolly continued to run the site until her death in 1859. The ferry operated until 1896.

Sheboss Place Trail Head
Natchez Trace Parkway Milepost 400.2

The Trail of Tears represents a series of forced migrations of most of the Native American tribes in the southeastern United States to lands west of the Mississippi River. The Sheboss Place Trailhead, named for a homestead that once stood in this vicinity, marks the point where the route of John Benge’s detachment of approximately 1,200 Cherokee crossed into Hickman County. Benge’s detachment began its journey to present-day Oklahoma from a point about 8 miles south of Fort Payne, Alabama, in September 1838.
Music icon Johnny Cash once owned this property in Bon Aqua, near the location of the old Bon Aqua Springs resort. Originally it was a general store for guests staying at the resort. Cash later bought and renovated the building into a stage and venue for young musicians until the mid-1980s. In 2016, the Storytellers Hideaway Farm purchased the property and restored it as a local museum and music venue.

The Storytellers Hideaway Farm property, originally deeded in 1806 to Revolutionary War veteran Andrew Jefferson Ponder, was once part of Bon Aqua Springs. The Weems family owned the springs and farm until the 1970s, when Johnny Cash purchased the property. Today, the farm-house contains exhibits related to Johnny Cash and his career, including the famous “One Piece at a Time” car.

More information, hours, and directions to both the Museum and Hideaway Farm are posted on the Storytellers Hideaway Farm and Museum website: www.storytellershideawayfarm.com or by calling 931-996-4336. Admission charged.
Nunnelly

Nunnelly Community Center
1400 Highway 230, Nunnelly, TN 37137 • Open by Appointment Only

This double-gabled “community plan” school is an excellent example of rural school architecture and improved educational opportunities in 1920s Tennessee. The school operated until 1978 and has had a second life as a community center, which is also home to the Nunnelly Family Memorial Garden.

Bucksnort

Lee and Gould Furnace
(Also known as Sugar Creek)
Private, but visible off of I-40 at the Bucksnort exit on TN Highway 230

Built in 1833 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Lee and Gould Furnace is a significant reminder of Hickman County’s industrial history. Its location along Benge’s Trail of Tears route means 1,200 Cherokee in that detachment walked near this furnace in 1838.
Shady Grove/Duck River

Shady Grove Community Center
2013 Leatherwood Road, Duck River, TN 38454
(Located just off Leatherwood Road on Highway 50 across from the Duck River Country Store) • Open for special events

The Shady Grove School, built in the 1920s, replaced a building that served as one of the earliest high schools in Hickman County. Repurposed as the Shady Grove Community Center in the late 1970s, the building now hosts local meetings and events. Due to the extraordinary efforts of the Shady Grove community, both the school and the gym are in excellent condition, with efforts to restore both buildings continuing today.

Duck River Country Store
4230 Highway 50 E., Duck River, TN 38454

Established in 1930, the Duck River Country Store serves the area as a general store, restaurant, and popular live music venue. Located just 1 mile west of the Natchez Trace Parkway, this traditional country market, with its decades-old wooden floor and rustic charm, sells gasoline, snacks, beverages, and groceries, with a variety of lunch offerings and pizza.

There is a parking lot across the street just past the furnace, on the left going toward I-40, that can be used to turn around.
During the 19th century, a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints community lived on the outskirts of Hickman County. In 1881, Shady Grove United Methodist Church members decided to share their building, allowing Latter-day Saints members to also hold services in the Methodist Church. Other residents did not share such generosity. Tensions between various denominations culminated in what is known as the 1884 Cane Creek Massacre, a short distance away in Lewis County, when local residents killed four Latter-day Saints members, including two missionaries.

The Stand Cemetery

The Stand Cemetery is renowned for its stunning views and historic headstones. In the older portion of the cemetery (the back-right section when driving in), there are also two memorials to enslaved persons, as well as an unknown number of unmarked graves and depressions. According to local lore, in the 1830s the Stand was the site of several religious revival services and fiery debates between different local denominations. Several Civil War veterans are buried here.
In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several sulphur water springs in Hickman County were developed into fashionable resorts. This historical marker (on private property but visible from the road) notes the location of the Bon Aqua Springs, located along Old Highway 46 near the Storytellers Hideaway Farm.

This tour was developed as a Professional Services project of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (a partnership unit of the National Park Service administered by Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation) with the Hickman County Historical Society. Tour text and images prepared by Catie Latham and Laura Holder. Printed in 2022.

The Shady Grove United Methodist Church photo is courtesy of the Hickman County Historical Society. All other photos courtesy of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area.