

What's in the safe?

This is the second in a series of articles about the hidden jewels found in the safe at the Metro Archives. A new item will be featured each week.
This week:

The last flag of the City of Nashville

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Associate Editor

While red, white and blue have always been the colors we salute to, citizens of Nashville have looked upon more than the stars and stripes throughout the city's history.

The Metropolitan flag that now flies over the courthouses and administrative buildings was not the first flag to represent Nashville. Prior to the merger of Nashville and Davidson County governments, the City of Nashville had its own flag. Today, that retired flag can be found neatly folded in an over-sized shoebox in the Metro Archives' safe where it has been preserved since 2003.

Although it's been in the safe

for eight years, the wind stopped flying through the symbolic fabric in the spring of 1963 when Assistant Executive Sec. of the Nashville Fire Department the late Fred G. Davis took note of the flag's piece in history.

"This City of Nashville flag was the only "City of Nashville Flag" in stock at the Nashville Fire Department Headquarters on the date of the merger of the City of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee government into the Metropolitan Government concepts April 6, 1963," Betty Davis states in the flag's accompanying letter.

According to the letter, Fred Davis took the flag to his home where it remained until his



The design of the last City of Nashville flag was selected through a competition open to area high school students. The winner received a \$50 savings bond.

Photo by Autumn Boaz

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wife donated it to the Archives after her husband's death in 2002.

Although the last flag's glory days were short lived, then-Mayor Ben West had high hopes for the city symbol when he initiated a contest to find the flag's designer.

The 1961 contest was open to area high school students who hoped to display their creativity, literally, all over the city. The contest garnered 122 applicants from students attending 20 different schools, who were told that "both color and design of the flag should bear a relationship to Nashville's origin, tradition and history."

The contest's second- and third-place winners each received a \$25 savings bond, while winner and Hume Fogg senior Harville Duncan was awarded a \$50 savings bond.

Judged by architectural, educational and historical professionals and adopted by the city council that spring, the flag's aspects represented various pieces of the city including a central blue star to signify the state capitol, a red background with a blue border to represent the city's position within the state, a gold "N" surrounded by a wreath to represent the city's reputation as the "Athens of the South," and white rays beaming from the center star.

"Great white rays emanating from the star are symbolic of Nashville's reputation as a city of enlightenment, a center of



In 1961, Hume Fogg Senior Harville Duncan designed the last city flag before Nashville merged into a Metropolitan form of government in 1963.

education, culture, medicine and religion backed by a diversified economy," West wrote in a letter.

While the flag now must be unfolded for viewing, Betty Davis is proud to have made this contribution to preserving a piece of Nashville's history - even if it is hidden in a shoe box.

"My husband was very history minded and he loved his home city of Nashville," Davis said. "When we were moving from Nashville to Hendersonville we came across a lot of items, and I asked him

what he wanted to do with (the flag.) ... The Archives was a logical place for it because it didn't belong in the state museum and the fire department didn't have a museum."

This 81-year-old former Metro Archives clerk and a proud contributor to history can be assured that the flag will be available for generations to come.

"That's what history is all about," Davis said. "It's about maintaining your records so other interested citizens can come look at them."