

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name RCA Victor Studios Building
Other names/site number Studio A; RCA Studio A; RCA Nashville Sound Studio; Music City Music Hall
Name of related multiple property listing N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number: 30 Music Square West
City or town: Nashville State: Tennessee County: Davidson
Not For Publication: ☐ N/A Vicinity: ☐ N/A Zip Code : 37205

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official:

Date

Title:

State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register
- ☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	Buildings
0	0	Sites
0	0	Structures
0	0	Objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: office building,
professional recording studio, organizational
headquarters

Current Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: office building,
professional recording studio

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

BRICK; CONCRETE; STONE; METAL; GLASS

Narrative Description

The RCA (Radio Corporation of America) Victor Studios Building, built 1964-1965 along “Music Row” in Nashville, Tennessee, is a three-story brick, concrete, stone, and metal International Style building that combines recording studios and offices into one building. The building was painted a dark green over the original yellow brick c. 1995. It sits on an approximately one-acre lot at 30 Music Square West; RCA Studio B (NR 7/10/2012) is adjacent on approximately .3 acres.

The RCA Victor Studios Building was envisioned as a complement to, yet a major upgrade for, the existing RCA operations at the Studio B facility, where tiny offices shared space with the recording studio. The RCA Victor Studios Building has two distinct sections: (1) the studio and associated spaces for equipment storage, mastering of recordings, artist lounge, and technician offices; and (2) the office side, along with the elevator and rest rooms for the building.

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RCA dominated the use of the building for its recordings and label management from 1965 to 1990, when it moved its company headquarters to a new building at 1 Music Circle North. From its opening in 1965 to 1977, RCA Victor leased the Studio A area. It also installed Studio C, c. 1972 to 1977. After 1977 the company did not operate the studios but continued to keep its label management offices on all three floors of the building to 1990. From 1965 to the present, other record labels and music industry companies also have leased office space at the building.

As a building for both the recording process and the administration of the music industry in Nashville, the interior spaces have received periodic technology updates since, the latter date marking the end of the period of significance. A c. 2000 fire on the first floor of the office section led to a low-impact remodeling of the first floor, but the building's general plan and arrangement of recording spaces, storage spaces, and offices is largely intact from the period of 1965-1990.

Exterior

In keeping with its International Style-influenced design, the RCA Victor Studios Building is a long rectangular-shaped brick and stone-veneer building, with an asphalt flat roof and poured concrete foundation.

Its west façade contains all of the building's exterior architectural elements. The west façade has two distinct zones on either side of the central entrance to the building: the north half, where Studio A is located, and the south half where offices are located.

The north section of the facade is a solid brick veneer wall, accented by three bands of textured brick, flat brick, and a section of Crab Orchard stone veneer that are divided by vertical metal strips. Closest to the building's entrance is the Crab Orchard stone veneer section; originally the metal lettering RCA Victor Studios Building was installed on this section. Since the north half is the exterior of Studio A there are no windows in order that sound inside the studio is diminished.

The façade's central public entrance is at the first floor. Metal double-glass doors with single-light transom are flanked by single large fixed picture windows that also have transoms. Two projecting narrow concrete pillars extend to the roof, with bands of three fixed windows on each floor to provide light to small lobbies and the elevator on the interior. The office section of the building to the south of the central entrance is defined by two projecting concrete cantilevers, faced in metal, that run the length of the south section. The cantilevers divide and define the first, second, and third floors. The second and third floors each have four symmetrical paired fixed windows. The first floor of the office section has only three sets of windows; where the fourth set of windows "should be" at the southwest corner is a brick veneer wall.

The north elevation is a flat brick veneer wall. At the northwest corner, there is a metal flat-roof walkway, c. 1965, that connects the rear studio entrance of the earlier Studio B building of 1957 to the RCA Victor Studios Building. It ends at a flat wall but providing a concrete sidewalk to the northeast corner entrance of the RCA Victor Studios Building.

The south elevation is a flat brick veneer wall.

The east elevation is the rear of the building. It has three areas, divided by a central projecting rear entrance that accesses the interior's central staircase, which was placed in the building as a secure fire escape. The

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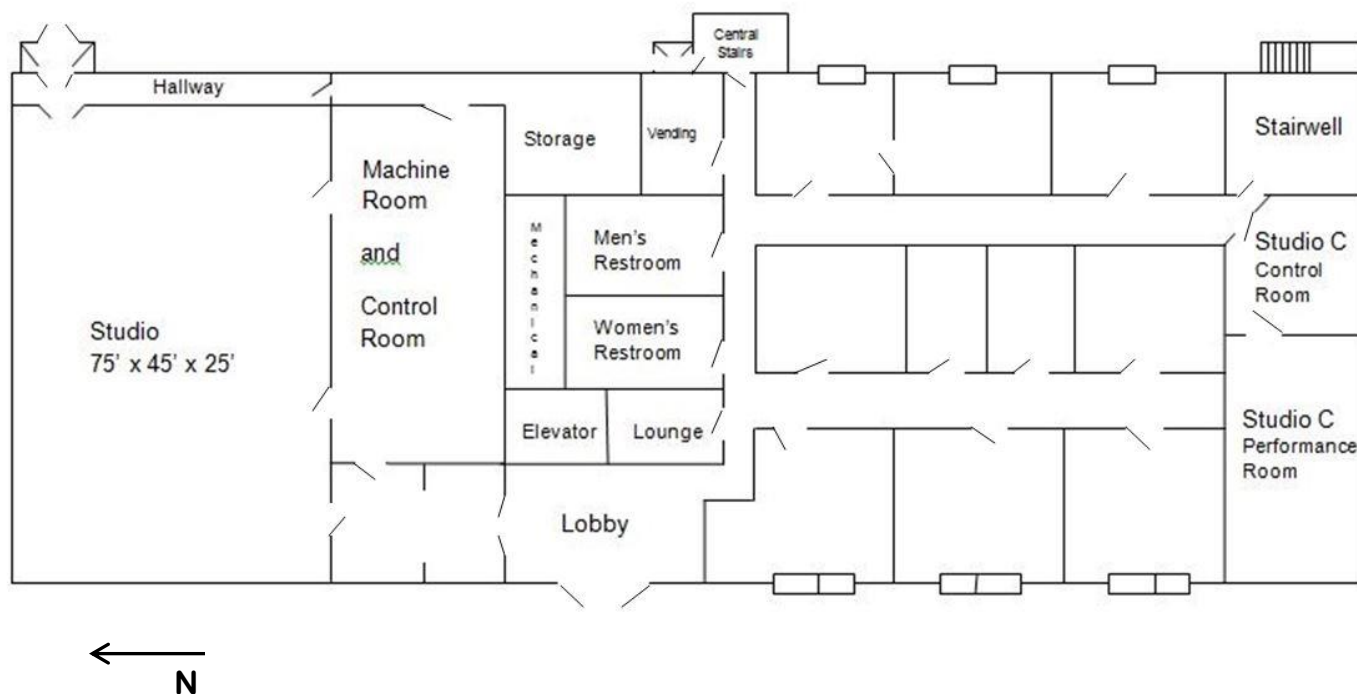
central projecting rear entrance has a brick covered entrance with a metal hipped roof, installed c. 1977. To the south of the central projecting section, at the southeast corner, is a second floor metal door with metal staircase that serves as another fire escape. Also in the south section are three symmetrical single fixed windows providing light to offices on the second and third floors. North of the central projecting rear entrance is the rear of Studio A. It has an irregularly placed door high on the third floor; this door has no staircase but was installed so that equipment could be delivered to the top of Studio A, if necessary. The studio's rear equipment/artist entrance, which has a metal hipped roof covered brick entrance c. 1977, is at the northeast corner. The double metal doors of this northeast entrance date c. 2000.

Interior

First-floor entrance

The public entrance contains a small lobby behind which is an elevator shaft that runs to all three floors and a mechanical room. A dog-leg hallway leads to a narrow east-west hallway. On the north side of the hallway are c. 1965 doors to a women's lounge/restroom and a men's restroom. The restrooms are similar on each floor. They are two-stall facilities, with c. 1965 metal partitions separating the stalls. They each have c. 1965 tile wainscoting and tile flooring. A final north door, date unknown, on the east-west hallway, leads into the vending area and the rear hallway accessing the Studio A area. On the rear wall of the east-west hallway is a c. 1965 metal door that leads to the rear entrance/fire escape.

First Floor – *not to scale*



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Studio A: Reception and Control Room

To the north of the first floor entrance lobby is a double-glass door, c. 1969, and concrete wall extension, c. 1969, that creates a vestibule between the lobby and the original first floor entrance to Studio A. The original doors to Studio A have been removed when this alteration took place, c. 1969. The next spaces north are the studio's reception area and then an open entrance to the east that provides access to the control room. The recording equipment in the control room was remodeled c. 1969, c. 1974, c. 1982, and c. 1990, but the original space itself is largely intact, as a large open irregularly shaped rectangle with fixed double-glass windows into the studio so engineers and producers could watch and communicate to the performers. The primary alterations to the control room occurred c. 1990 when wood framing was placed around the windows, a platform floor was installed so wiring from the recording equipment could be more safely managed, and decorative treatments, like exposed wood beams and a stone veneer section of the rear wall, were installed. A door in the east wall of the control room leads into the studio's machine and equipment storage area, and also provides access to the vending area.

Studio A

The studio is a large long rectangle that is largely intact from its original construction in 1964-1965. It is approximately 75 ft by 50 ft by 25 ft and 3 stories in height. The floor is parquet wood cemented to concrete. The ceiling is composed of acoustical tiles that are replacements, c. 1974, when RCA installed decorative metal chandeliers in the room, to meet artist expectations that the space have some "class" and not seem just like a warehouse. Fred Tudor of J&J Electrical, a Nashville firm, designed and installed the chandeliers. The chandeliers replaced the original in-ceiling fluorescent lighting. The circular metal vents are original.

One of the hallmarks of the new RCA design by engineer John E. Volkmann was the use of tall, long rooms with one long side wall (west wall) and one end wall (north wall) having three convex wood panels disposed horizontally and tilted inward to deflect sound downward and to reduce the effect of sound wave interference with microphones. Between the convex wood panels are acoustic tiles, also extant. The wainscot in the room is extant, having been composed of perforated plywood. On the west wall are three wood platforms to hold speakers; these were installed c. 1990.

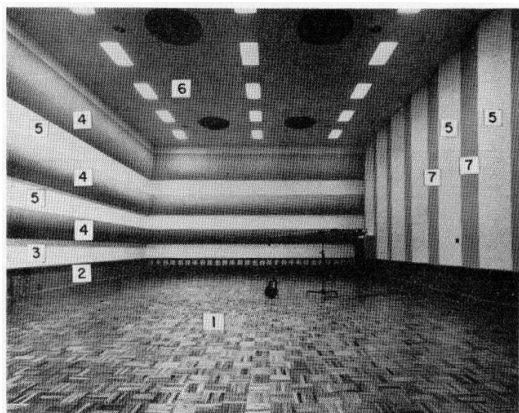


Fig. 1. Photo of Studio A, c. 1966¹

¹ John E. Volkmann, "Acoustic Requirements of Stereo Recording Studios," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 14(October 1966): 325.

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The other long wall (east wall) was altered c. 1990. Originally the wall had serrated vertical absorbing panels that consisted of alternating acoustic tile and perforated plywood. Two wood sound booths and a wood staircase leading to 2nd floor platform and access to 2nd floor rooms were installed along the east wall c. 1990. This new space was created by tacking on to the original walls, where the vertical absorbing panels remain extant. There is a large metal double-door, a replacement installed c. 1990, which allows for exterior access from the studio to the rear parking lot.

The end wall (south wall) abuts the control room. Acoustic tile is extant above the perforated plywood wainscoting. The glass in the control room windows is tilted inward so to better reflect sound downward.

A door on the east wall adjacent to the control room allows access into the rear hallway that runs the length of the studio. This long hallway is mostly for storage but its south end is the original vending machine area of the building.

Office Section, 1st Floor

The first floor of the office section is the most altered space in the building due to repairs made after a fire on this floor c. 2000. The lobby space has been refinished. New drywall was installed as well as acoustic tile dropped ceilings with flourscent lights.

The floor has 10 rectangular-shaped offices, each with dry wall interiors, carpeted floors, and dropped ceilings with flourescent lights. The offices are arranged along two narrow north-south hallways, a plan that differs from the single north-south hallway on the second and third floors. Chet Atkins c. 1969-70 converted part of the southeast corner of the first floor into Studio C, which consists extends along the end (south) wall of the building. There is a southeast corner office for the studio and a doorway that allows access into the two-space studio. One space is the control room, separated from the studio by a drywall with a center tilted window on the west side and a set of three small rectangular titled windows on the south side. This space was remodeled with the addition of a fabric paneled wall in the control room c. 2005. The second space is the performance area of Studio C. There are no exterior windows in Studio C.

Office Section, 2nd Floor

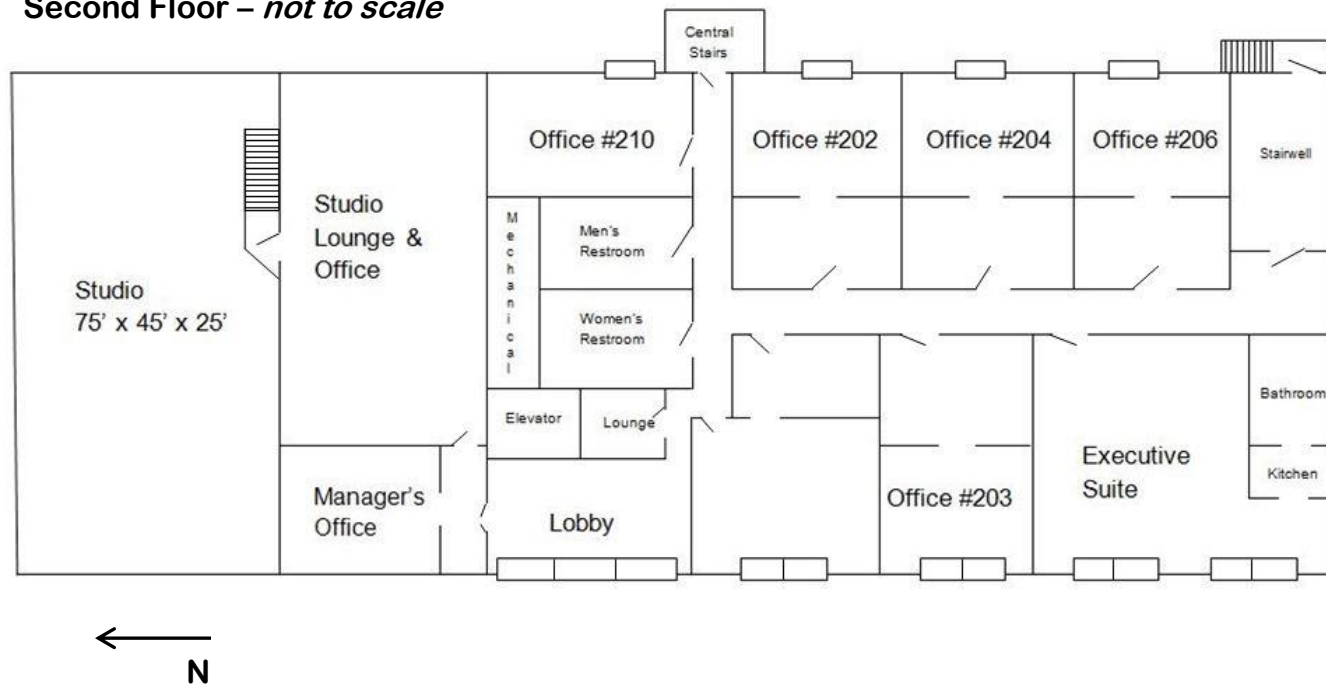
The second floor contains a small lobby behind which is an elevator shaft that runs to all three floors and a mechanical room. The south wall of the 2nd floor lobby is intact to c. 1969, and consists of floor to ceiling thin wood strips, a theme that carries into a dog-leg hallway. This dog-leg hallway leads to a narrow east-west hallway. On the north side of the hallway are c. 1965 doors to a women's lounge/restroom and a men's restroom. The restrooms are two-stall facilities, with c. 1965 metal partitions separating the stalls. They each have c. 1965 tile wainscoting and tile flooring. Between the two bathroom doors is a c. 1965 metal water fountain. A final north door on the east-west hallway, leads into office #210. On the rear wall of the east-west hallway is a c. 1965 metal door that leads to the rear entrance/fire escape.

The offices of the second floor was arranged along a single north-south hallway. An acoustic tile dropped ceiling with flourscent lights and carpet on the floors were installed c. 1990. Otherwise the original walls and floor plan is largely intact from c. 1969 when RCA Victor made changes to create new adminstrative offices. Offices #202, #203, #204, #205, and #206 are two-room office suites, with exterior windows. The southwest corner office is labeled the executive office, which was remodeled with a Colonial Revival theme c. 1974. It has a Colonial Revival-style wood mantel, flanked by built-in bookcases. It also has a separate small kitchen and bath.

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Second Floor – *not to scale*



On the north side of the lobby are offices and rooms associated with Studio A. The north lobby wall has a two-part metal and glass door that leads to an open vestibule and to the manager's office, which is located above the control room and reception area of Studio A. The vestibule has a door on its east wall that opens into a rectangular space of two rooms, one that serves as a lounge for artists and a second office space for the studio.

Office Section, 3rd Floor

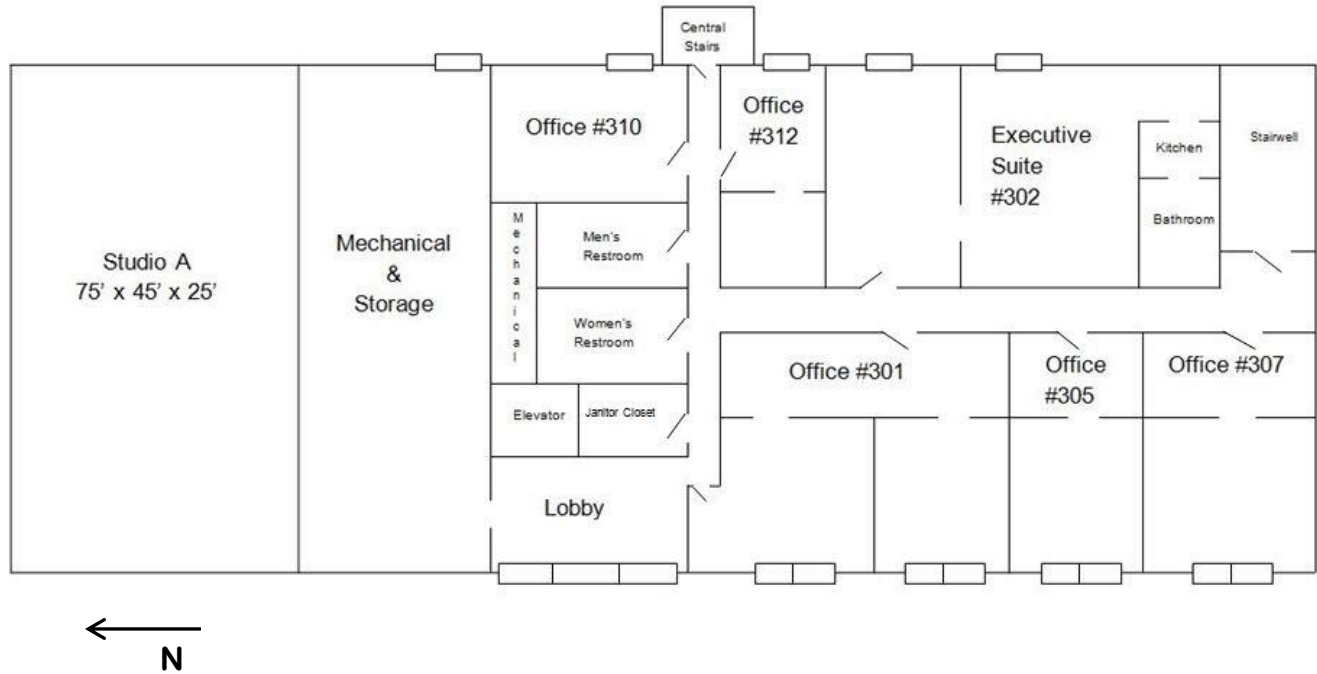
The second floor contains a small lobby behind which is an elevator shaft that runs to all three floors and a mechanical room. The south wall of the 2nd floor lobby is intact to c. 1969, and consists of floor to ceiling thin wood strips, a theme that carries into a dog-leg hallway. This dog-leg hallway leads to a narrow east-west hallway. On the north side of the hallway is a replacement door, date unknown, to a janitor closet, which was converted, date unknown, from the original women's lounge. The women's restroom has a c. 1965 exterior door. Both the women's and men's restrooms are two-stall facilities, with c. 1965 metal partitions separating the stalls. They each have c. 1965 tile wainscoting and tile flooring. Between the two bathroom doors is a c. 1965 metal water fountain. A final north door on the east-west hallway, leads into office #310. A door on the south wall provides access to office #312. On the rear wall of the east-west hallway is a c. 1965 metal door that leads to the rear entrance/fire escape.

The third floor has four offices arranged along its north-south hallway. This hallway has an acoustic tile dropped ceiling with flourescent lights; carpet on the floors were installed c. 1990. The executive suite at #302 has four rooms: a secretary office and an executive office that also contains a small kitchen and bath. Originally constructed for Chet Atkins, the suite was next the offices for Jerry Bradley and then Joe Galente. It is currently the office of musician/songwriter Jamey Johnson. Office #301 has three rooms, with one reserved for secretaries and the other two for executives. Offices #305 and #307 have two rooms each.

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Third Floor – *not to scale*



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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☒ G significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

COMMERCE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1965-1977

Significant Dates

1965

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

W. B. Cambron and Company,
architect/contractor

Stevens, Alan and Volkmann, John E., studio
engineers

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Statement of Significance Summary

The RCA Victor Studios Building, at 30 Music Square West, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its exceptional significance in the city's history of recorded music, music industry administration and popular culture. Built and designed 1964-1965 by the W. B. Cambron firm in Nashville with studio engineering and design by Alan Stevens and John E. Volkmann of RCA Victor, New York City, it was the first "Music Row" building constructed to be both a major international recording studio and to provide offices for a major corporation and associated businesses and organizations of the fledgling Nashville music industry. As such, it was the first recording company corporate landmark on Music Row, soon to be followed by many other key studio buildings such as those for Columbia and Monument records built immediately afterward. Since its opening in 1965, it has since hosted music recording sessions as well as served as offices for recording artists, music publishing firms, and record companies in Nashville. The property's period of significance for this nomination is 1965 to 1977 when RCA shut down the studio and sold it to Owen Bradley and partners to be operated independently as what became known as Music City Music Hall. Its planning, construction and recording and music industry administration during this period of significance coincided with and helped to shape two significant eras in the country music history. First is the flowering of the "Nashville Sound" from 1965 to 1972 under the guidance of Music Row founder and RCA executive Chet Atkins. The second era, 1972-1977, is associated with the administration of Jerry Bradley, the son of legendary producer Owen Bradley and hand-picked by Atkins to maintain RCA's position in country music. Bradley did so through the "Outlaw" movement, including the release of the highly influential album *Wanted! The Outlaws* (1976).

Narrative Statement of Significance

Part I: Creation of the RCA Victor Studios Building and the Expansion of Music Row, 1965-1972

The story of the RCA Victor Studios Building begins in what scholars and critics define as the golden era, the years of the 1950s and 1960s when Nashville emerged as a major center for the recording of country music. Representative of this era are such listed landmarks as the Ryman Auditorium (NHL 6/25/2001), the home of the Grand Ole Opry from 1943-1974; the WSM Transmission Tower Complex (NR 3/15/2011); and RCA's first (1957) stand-alone Nashville studio building, now known as RCA Studio B (NR 6/1/2012). It is an era spoken with reverence for the accomplishments of producers Owen Bradley (an independent, also associated with Columbia and Decca) and Chet Atkins, the legendary guitarist, producer, and RCA studio head in Nashville. Atkins and Steve Sholes of RCA had bigger dreams than what the little one-story concrete block Studio B could capture. Atkins had already established RCA's claim to the "Nashville Sound," and by 1962 all of the records coming out of RCA from Nashville would bear the label "Recorded at RCA's 'Nashville Sound' Studio/s." Atkins wanted the ability to add more sound, more instruments to his sessions. In addition, he believed that the country music industry was being hampered by the general corporate impression that it was a second-rate genre and thus needed only second-rate recording facilities. As a statement of RCA's commitment to both country music and to Nashville, Atkins wanted a studio on par with all of the other major RCA facilities across the world, specifically the new studios planned for Hollywood, California and Rome, Italy. Sholes agreed, and he convinced RCA executives in New York City to support a

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plan that would have Atkins and along with Owen and Harold Bradley to build a new studio and office building that, in turn, RCA would lease as its company headquarters.²

On June 19, 1964, Alan Stevens, chief engineer for RCA, came to Nashville to finalize arrangements for the "three-story combination office building and studio," with an estimated cost of \$300,000, to serve as the new headquarters for RCA Victor in Nashville. "The latest electronic equipment, including RCA Victor's Dynagroove process, will be incorporated in the new operation," *Billboard* reported. RCA plans also called for its administrative offices to occupy the studio section and the first floor of the office section. "The second and third floors of the building will be office space to be leased to related businesses in the music industry. It will be the first general office building in the immediate Music Row area," emphasized *Billboard*. The magazine also noted that "The present RCA Victor studio and offices [Studio B] will be retained by the company to be used for smaller recording sessions and custom work [smaller labels would rent the studio for their sessions]." RCA Victor, in other words, envisioned the new building as its major Nashville studio not only for their recordings but for those of other smaller record companies and its corporate headquarters on Nashville's emerging Music Row.³

Groundbreaking ceremonies came on July 31, 1964, with the mayor of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County (Metro), Beverly Briley, and RCA executives such as Steve Sholes in attendance.⁴ Major RCA recording stars, including Eddy Arnold, George Hamilton IV, Don Gibson, Roni Stoneman, Floyd Cramer, and naturally Chet Atkins also attended. W. B. Cambron and Company, a Nashville-based firm, was the general contractor/architect for the project (the firm later served as the contractor for the 1966 Columbia Records Studio and original Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in 1967).⁵

Mayor Briley was interested in the new project for more than the photo opportunity. Under his leadership, Metro government in 1963-1964 had already considered ambitious new redevelopment plans for the city, with one possibility being the creation of Music City Boulevard as part of what was titled the University Center Urban Renewal project, a project designed to build a direct route from the Demonbreun Street exit of I-40 to the Vanderbilt University and what was then George Peabody College of Teachers and Belmont College (now Peabody College of Vanderbilt University and Belmont University). The possibility of Metro action led to a frenzy of land speculation in 1963-1964 and contributed to the RCA decision to build on 17th Avenue South, which would be on the west side of the planned boulevard. But the Metro government did not implement its Music Row plans until 1970-1972.⁶

² Forthcoming biography of Chet Atkins by Don Cusic; Cusic correspondence to the author, January 3, 2015; Nicholas Davidoff, *In the Country of Country* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 42-50.

³ "RCA Victor Bldg. for Nashville," *Billboard*, July 4, 1964, p. 22.

⁴ "Ground-Breakers," *Billboard*, August 29, 1964, p. 32.

⁵ Photos of the ceremony from the Grand Ole Opry Archives show the stars in attendance as well as a billboard announcing Cambron as the builder.

⁶ "Decca's Bradley Scores Music Row Plan," *Billboard*, July 25, 1970, p. 36; "Wrong Way on 1-Way Street?" *Nashville Tennessean*, Dec. 20, 1970.

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Alan Stevens, the general plant engineer for RCA Victor, is credited with the studio design, in collaboration with John E. Volkmann of RCA Laboratories. Volkmann was the company's resident acoustics expert and had recently designed a large studio for RCA Italiana (in Rome, Italy) and the sound systems at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. At Nashville's RCA Victor Building, Volkmann installed polycylindrical wood diffusers in the studio to give the space a distinctive sound. The Audio Engineering Society (AES) considers the RCA design to be significant trendsetter for 1960s sound studios, and Studio A today appears to be the most intact design from the 1960s still in existence, judging from recent AES assessments.⁷ Volkmann explained that the new studio design was necessary for pop music records, and especially for stereo recording, which was becoming increasing the standard for the field. He added that the Nashville studio was part of the label's "inauguration of the program of 'new sound' improvements which culminated in the introduction of 'Dynagroove.'"⁸

Recording took place in the studio before the building's formal opening. Session logs indicate that Waylon Jennings may have recorded his first two songs for RCA at Studio A in mid-November 1964. In *Variety* magazine, Red O'Donnell of Nashville *Banner* reported in his "Tin Pan Valley" column, dated January 12, 1965: "Word around RCA Victor is that Perry Como's sesh is skedded for early February—and in the new ultra-modern studio which is expected to be completed on or before Feb. 1. [The session took place in mid-February.] Meanwhile, A&R [Artists and Repertoire] chief Chet Atkins (ulcers notwithstanding) is directing LP seshes for Eddy Arnold, Porter Wagoner, Dottie West, Willie Nelson, Carl Belew, Skeeter Davis, George Hamilton IV and Hank Cochran."⁹

O'Donnell did not give any dates for those sessions, outside of the February date for Como. If Como had the new building's first session—his first in Nashville—then Studio A may be credited, in part, with resurrecting his recording career. The former pop music star was becoming better known for his television appearances. But the Nashville-recorded album, *The Scene Changes*, proved to be a hit, creating a Top 40 song for Como in 1965. His biographers conclude that the Nashville alum was "perhaps the only album by a mainstream vocalist to capture the Nashville Sound" and that it "brought Perry Como back to life as a recording artist."¹⁰

Eddy Arnold's family believes that their father was the first to record in the new studio. Arnold had a major release that spring so such a session is a possibility, especially considering the fact that Arnold was one of RCA's biggest Nashville stars. Eddy Arnold's sessions led to his career-rejuvenating album, *My World*. His biographer, Michael Streissguth notes, that sessions took place on January 13, 1965, but does not note if they were in Studio A. The bulk of *My World* was recorded in June 1965. "Make the World Go Away" became one of Arnold's best known hits.¹¹ Streissguth concludes: "Nobody in Chet's stable, nobody, squeezed more

⁷ "Legends In The Round – Studio A Years," A Symposium sponsored by Audio Engineering Society, Nashville Chapter, November 5, 2014.

⁸ John E. Volkmann, "Acoustic Requirements of Stereo Recording Studios," *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 14(October 1966): 324-325.

⁹ Red O'Donnell, "Tin Pan Valley," *Variety*, January 13, 1965.

¹⁰ Malcolm Macfarlane and Ken Crossland, *Perry Como: A Biography & Complete Career Record* (New York, 2012), 129.

¹¹ Michael Streissguth, *Eddy Arnold: Pioneer of the Nashville Sound* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 170.

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from RCA's Nashville setup than Eddy Arnold."¹² He adds: "Few artists in Nashville had stepped forward as boldly as Eddy with a sound that so liberally incorporated symphonic instruments and so willingly rejected traditional country stylings."¹³

A final claim to be the first artist to record in Studio A has come from Maxine Brown, one of the three siblings in the RCA group The Browns (her brother Jim Ed Brown soon left for his own very successful solo career). Her autobiography has a photograph of the Browns singing in the studio with Chet Atkins watching from his sound board.¹⁴

The office section of the new RCA Victor Building also met with immediate success, quickly becoming the preferred address for an expanding Nashville music industry. By late February/March, Jack Clement, an independent producer who gained great fame as "Cowboy Jack" Clement, left Texas to open his office for "Jack Music Co." in the RCA Victor Building.¹⁵ In 1966, Clement would "discover" and then champion the music of Charley Pride, RCA's first major African American country music star.¹⁶ The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), the performing rights organization, also established offices in the RCA Victor Building in 1965 before building its own headquarters on Music Row later in 1968-1969.¹⁷

On March 29, 1965, RCA Victor officials from New York hosted a grand gala to open the building.¹⁸ Al Hirt, a mainstream RCA "jazz music" star, performed for the over 300 people in attendance. George R. Marek, a RCA vice-president and general manager of its Record Division, said: "The structure is *a testament of our faith in the future of the industry* and a vital acknowledgement of the most essential part Nashville—Music City U.S.A.—plays as one of the most creative and profitable centers of the recording phase of the world's entertainment complex." He further stated: "This studio is *equal* in beauty, modernity and technological advance to *any recording facility anywhere in the world*. It matches the magnificence of our Rome and Hollywood studios and, like them, is an exciting example of the growing internationalism of the recording industry and RCA Victor's expansion as the world's most global record company."¹⁹ *Variety* magazine called the festivities an "all-day, dinner-on-the-ground gala" that included WSM-TV broadcasting from the building for two different shows. It was a mega Nashville cultural event.²⁰

There were really no comparisons between the 1957 RCA studio and the new building. The first studio was a company response to the success of Elvis and the money his success had generated. It was an unadorned, functional building, designed for recording, not expanding an industry. The new building was the opposite.

¹² Ibid., 184.

¹³ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴ Maxine Brown, *Looking Back to See: A Country Music Memoir* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 208.

¹⁵ *Billboard*, March 20, 1965; According to a later story, Clement moved in the new building in February. Martin Hawkins, "The Nut with the Midas touch," *Melody Maker* (October 13, 1979): 59.

¹⁶ New scholarship emphasizes Pride's significance in country music. All of his early albums were recorded at the RCA Victor Studios Building. See Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), chapter five, titled "Pride and Prejudice," especially pp. 133-139.

¹⁷ "The Growth of Performing Rights," *Billboard*, April 25, 1970.

¹⁸ "Marek Hails New Nashville Site," *Billboard*, April 10, 1965, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰ "Victor Preps All Day Gala," *Variety*, March 10, 1965, p. 57.

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It possessed a studio that was the “equal” to anything RCA operated across the world. It also contained offices and facilities where RCA could run a large Custom Record sales program (recording disks for smaller companies and artists) as well as managing commercial sales, “tape mastering room, editing room, tape storage room with ‘controlled environment’ and facilities for two lacquer cutting machines.”²¹ The office section quickly established an administrative center for the entire industry as independents, producers, songwriters and smaller labels set up business there.

It took only a year for Atkins and his fellow RCA producers to move most recording sessions to Studio A. Some artists and producers continued to prefer the 1957 studio. RCA engineer Al Pachucki, for one, did not like the new studio’s sound—bass disappeared and drums dominated he thought—but, as Streissguth notes, “Still, the studio could accommodate more musicians, which was critical as Chet and his staff employed strings more often to broaden their singers’ appeal.”²² Thus, from this point on, RCA consistently referred to its two properties (the buildings were actually physically linked by cables and by a covered walkway) as the “Nashville Sound” Studio or Studios. In time, recordings took place in Studio A (often called the big studio), Studio B, and a small Studio C (also in the RCA Victor Studios Building). But mastering and editing took place in the RCA Victor Studios Building, unless it was contracted out to yet another Nashville firm.²³ Atkins’ Nashville Sound started out of Studio B but it reached its fullest form, and greatest influences, with the recordings that came out of Studio A from 1965 to 1972.

The new RCA headquarters represented a step forward that its competitors quickly matched. Columbia’s new studio was already under construction at the time of the RCA gala (as stated previously March 29, 1965) and as the two “big boys” prospered in the next year, many other firms and independents flocked to build a new presence on 16th and 17th avenues south. Buddy Killen, for example, expanded and renovated his Tree Publishing facilities beginning in April 1965.²⁴

W.B. Cambron’s RCA Victor Building also proved to be a 1960s architectural monument for Music Row, following his 1964 expansion of the office building for Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) that the firm had under construction on 16th Avenue South at the same time that the larger RCA building was constructed from 1964-1965.²⁵ William Briggs Cambron (1922-1992) was a Nashville commercial builder from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. Compared to the BMI Building’s quasi-classical overtones in its projecting two-story portico of concrete posts, the RCA Victor Building was much more “International Style” in appearance with its long horizontal façade, its flat roof, its sandstone yellow brick, cantilevered concrete ledges, and the use of bands of glass windows to highlight the front. The RCA Building also has a local flavor by using bands of Tennessee sand stone to the front. This use of native stone, in what was otherwise a modern office composition, highlighted the firm’s other buildings for the Row, including the Columbia Studio (designed by Edwin Keeble, opened later in 1965) and especially the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum building (1967, no longer extant). Indeed, multiple articles in trade magazines show that the

²¹ Ibid., p. 10.

²² Streissguth, *Eddy Arnold*, 184.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Nashville Scene,” *Billboard*, April 24, 1965, pp. 45-46.

²⁵ “Francis Preston, music industry pioneer, dies at 83,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 13, 2012.

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Country Music Association (CMA) chose Cambron at their builder due to the success of the RCA Victor Building. Cambron built the structure with an expansion joint—meaning that the “studio is free from all sounds in the office building” (this separation is clearly apparent on the rear elevation of the building). Capable of “accommodating 100 performers,” the building was “equal to RCA’s largest recording studios in this country.”²⁶

The new building also led to RCA Victor adding new engineers to its Nashville operations, and these engineers contributed significantly to the rise of the Nashville Sound. Jim Malloy, a Grammy Award winner, moved from Los Angeles, California to Nashville. He joined Chuck Seitz, who had arrived in late 1964, and Bill Vandervort and Al Pachucki who worked at the facility before 1965. Seitz was the senior engineer and he foresaw “a definite increase in custom business due to the fact that the RCA Victor Dynagroove process is now available to its custom clients. The RCA Victor Custom Record sales office here handles work for customers throughout the South.”²⁷ Malloy would particularly gain fame at RCA and after 1970 as an independent producer/engineer, often working with Jack Clement. Felton Jarvis, a favorite of Elvis, would also soon relocate to Nashville; one of his first sessions was with Ann-Margret in September 1965.²⁸

Throughout the spring and summer of 1965 the second and third floors of the office section of the RCA Victor Building continued to fill with the arrival of other record labels and music industry operations. For example in April, Kelson Herston, the A&R rep for United Artists in Nashville for a year, moved into offices at the RCA Victor Building.²⁹ Chart Records, an independent label best known for Lynn Anderson, also established offices in the building in the summer. By the end of the summer, Gerald “Jerry” W. Purcell, a concert promoter and artist manager based in Hollywood, established his first Nashville office at the RCA Victor Building. Eddie Cummings was named as the local office manager. Purcell already managed Al Hirt and Eddy Arnold, among several other Nashville artists, and established the office to build his country music profile in television.³⁰

The building in the summer and fall of 1965 also became the new commercial center for the southern gospel music industry. In June, management companies and artists for southern gospel music began a move to the RCA Victor Building, where they soon made the building and the city the commercial heart for that genre of music. In late May/ early June, the gospel music giant the Blackwood Brothers and Billy Graham Revival songleader George Beverly Shea recorded new albums at RCA. It was Shea’s first recording in Nashville. Darol Rice, head of RCA A&R for “religious product” came from Hollywood to Nashville to direct the sessions. These sessions underscore the building’s importance for the modern southern gospel music industry, especially since Pete Emery moved into the RCA building at the same time. In late May/early June Pete Emery Productions, the management firm of Jake Hess and the Imperials, moved from Atlanta and established a Nashville office at suite 203 of the RCA Victor Building. The Imperials were a particular favorite of Elvis Presley. In October, Don Light, formerly Billboard’s Nashville correspondent, left the magazine to create Don Light Talent Inc., a talent agency specializing in gospel music, which signed the Oak

²⁶ “Marek Hails New Nashville Site,” *Billboard*, April 10, 1965, p. 10.

²⁷ “Nashville Scene,” *Billboard*, April 24, 1965, pp.45-46.

²⁸ Red O’Donnell, “Tin Pan Valley,” *Variety*, September 15, 1965.

²⁹ “Nashville Scene,” *Billboard*, April 24, 1965, pp. 45-46.

³⁰ “Purcell Opens a Personal Management Office,” *Billboard*, September 25, 1965, p. 8.

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Ridge Boys. As first such talent agency in the gospel music industry, Light also located his offices in the RCA Victor Building. By November Jake Hess and The Imperials were working with the Stamps Quartet, managing the business from the RCA Victor Building office. In 1966, Pete Emery was booking both Hess and J.D. Sumner and the Stamps, who had been based in Memphis, across the South for concert dates while the groups recorded sessions at the RCA Victor Building. With Hess, Sumner, and Light in residence, the building, thus, became the center of the southern gospel music industry, both as an administrative center and recording venue. In 1967, the John Benson Publishing Company and Heart Warming Records—still a major force in the genre--finished constructing their new headquarters next door to the RCA Victor Building, and regularly used the RCA Studios for their recordings.³¹

The success of the RCA Victor Building, as previously noted by the new construction of Columbia Studios and Tree Publishing, impacted the look and prestige of Nashville's "Record Row," now more commonly called "Music Row." In October 1965, that impact became even more pronounced with the announcement that Hill and Range Music of New York City (the publishers of Elvis Presley) had purchased almost the entire block across from RCA Victor Building for \$400,000. A *Billboard* reporter called the purchase the largest yet on "Nashville's famed 'Record Row' area for construction of an office building." The story adds:

The 10 parcels of land are on 17th Ave. South. Main artery of Record Row has been 16th Ave. South, but expansion has been developing on 17th Ave. in recent months [since opening of RCA Victor Building]. Land in the area has increased greatly in price since it began growing as a music and record center.³²

Julian Auerbach, vice-president of Hill and Range, commented: "We have *the utmost confidence in Nashville's stability and prestige and its continued growth* as a music publishing and recording center and want to be an active participant on a *larger scale* than before."³³

Certainly the activities and recordings at the RCA Victor Building across the street from the Hill and Range development justified such optimism. Representative examples include the careers of Waylon Jennings and Charley Pride. One of the leading Nashville songwriters of the decade was Harlan Howard. In May and June 1966, Jennings used Studio A to cut a tribute album to Howard. He recalled in his autobiography:

In two sessions spaced a week apart, on May 24 and June 1, 1966, the Waylors and I did twelve of Harlan's numbers, one right after the other. . . All of our recording was done in RCA Studios. This was strict company policy, etched in magnetic tape. Chet thought there was nothing wrong with that. 'Studios are all alike,' he told me. "Same equipment, everything.' But even at RCA, there were differences. Studio B was an older studio, with a reputation for warmth, a long room with a control room where the speakers had room to

³¹ "Gospel Music: Shaped Notes," *Billboard*, June 5, 1965; "Light Forms Talent Agency," *ibid.*, October 16, 1965, p. 12; "Hess and Summer Dreams Come True," *ibid.*, November 16, 1965, 34; Don Cusic, *The Sound of Light* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2002), 262-263.

³² "Hill & Range Buys Nashville Property," *Billboard*, October 9, 1965, p. 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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pump. Studio A was narrower and bigger, with high ceilings and a brighter sound. I cut more in Studio A, as a rule.³⁴

When Jennings returned to the studio in February 15, 1967, to record one of his signature songs, “Only Daddy That’ll Walk the Line,” he recalled the nature of recording in Studio A:

Where it finishes is late some night in Studio A. The musicians have gone home. The track is done. They’ve moved the microphone from the vocal booth to the floor, so I can have more room to move, though I don’t move much. We’re working on ‘Only Daddy That’ll Walk the Line.’ I’m going to sing harmony with myself, the moaning OH of “Only.” If you slide into the control room, maybe with Bare or Johnny Darrell, you might catch Chet and the engineer bent over the board, listening to me in solo with the track shut off, trying to get a fix on the frequency where my voice is wandering. I’m out in the studio. I’ve got the headphones turned up high. I’m walking’ the line and talkin’ the line, doing a little dance to Wayne Moss’s stuttering Tex-Mex guitar solo as it comes blazing through. Chicken-pickin’. Singing along to the chorus. Oooooohh-nly Daddy . . . Bobby turns to Chet. ‘Damn, I believe he’s got something treed.’ Oooooohh.....Howling at the moon.³⁵

Charley Pride’s entire early career—1966 to 1970 when he became the genre’s first bona fide African American star--centered at the RCA Victor Studios Building. According to a story from his producer, Cowboy Jack Clement,

I run into Chet Atkins down by the coffee machine downstairs next to the big studio. He said, ‘What did you ever do with that colored boy?’. I said, ‘Well, I haven’t done anything yet. I’m thinking of pressin’ it up myself.’ He said, “Well, I’ve been thinkin’ about that, and we might be passin’ up another Elvis Presley.”³⁶

Clement and Atkins worked together to record Pride’s first RCA album *Country Charley Pride*, and within a year he was a major star, the first major African American recording star in modern country music. Pride’s emergence and success helped RCA, and country music, as a whites-only genre in a racially charged period of history.³⁷

RCA executives in New York City and Nashville always looked to Studio A for its potential in pop music. The work of Elvis Presley in RCA Studio B had launched the label in Nashville; it is only appropriate that company executives wanted to score again, with a pop sound that was Nashville based. Recording records by Perry Como, Al Hirt, and Ann-Margret in 1965 were good, but the studio hoped for a bigger name. In the spring of 1967, it happened. Reprise Records artist Nancy Sinatra, with Lee Hazlewood producing, recorded at the RCA Victor Studios Building. Nashville’s music industry was so excited that it held a “press party” to

³⁴ Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: an Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 132.

³⁵ Jennings, *Waylon*, 137.

³⁶ Michael Kosser, *How Nashville Became Music City USA* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2006), 117.

³⁷ Hughes, *Country Soul*, 133-139.

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welcome Sinatra at the building on April 18, just before she started recording. The final album was *Country My Way* (1967).³⁸

In June 1967, RCA celebrated its Nashville success with a special section in *Billboard* of June 3, 1967, titled "Salute to Mr. Guitar," which aimed to celebrate Chet Atkins' 20th year as a recording star for RCA along with his 10-year anniversary of running the company's Nashville headquarters. The writer added to the growing legend of Atkins through a description of his inner sanctum at the RCA Victor Studios Building:

Atkins has a somewhat secluded office. One must pass two lovely receptionists, and then be confronted by Miss [Mary] Lynch, whose offices adjoins that of her boss. Far more than a secretary in the strict sense of the word, she is able to handle a multitude of the matters which are aimed at Chet, thereby conserving his valuable time and efforts. She is, in every way, a treasure. Once inside the Atkins office, one often is a recipient of a cigar, a handshake and frank conversation. Chet has an underserved reputation for being a poor conversationalist. Actually, he says a great deal but wastes few words. One gets the distinct impression he has no use for small-talk, and he does not engage in it himself. Nonetheless, he is a great storyteller, and is possessed of a remarkable memory. The office is located only a few strides from the recording studios and even fewer strides from the rear entrance to the building. Those who wait hopefully in the lobby to get a glimpse of Chet, or try to catch him entering or leaving are denied that opportunity. He parks his Cadillac on Victor's back lot, and enters through a locked door [the rear stage entrance]. He leaves the same way."³⁹

A few weeks earlier, *Billboard* writers noted how Nashville had grown as a recording venue in the two years since the RCA Victor Building opened. RCA Victor was already planning for an expansion of its building after two years of operating Studio A, since there was now an "unprecedented demand for studios." Atkins reported that his staff grew from 3 (the Studio B years) to 18 (since Studio A). "There are 20 offices in the upstairs portion above the RCA studios, and it's estimated that the recording company will need these for their own use in the near future as growth continues." Artists booked for the studio included "Porter Wagoner, Norma Jean, Perry Como, Dottie West, Floyd Cramer, and "Palito Ortega from Argentina." This same article discussed similar expansion planning by Columbia and that Decca might build a Music Row studio. Monument Records was also looking for a new studio site. The new Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum had announced an April 1967 opening.⁴⁰

Nor had demand for office space in the RCA Victor Studios Building slacked. In May 1967 Dot Records placed two of its publishing firms, Sun-Vine (BMI) and Vin-Sun (ASCAP) into offices at the RCA Victor Building. Henry Hurt of Dot explained the company move: "I have to get re-acclimated to the Nashville Sound and country music."⁴¹ By mid-September, the office led by Hurt also managed the interests of Gulf & Western, which expanded its move into Nashville publishing and recording. By October, Huey Meaux, who

³⁸ "Nancy Sinatra to Wax in Nashville," *Billboard*, April 29, 1967, p. 63.

³⁹ "Salute to Mr. Guitar," *Billboard*, June 3, 1967.

⁴⁰ "Columbia and RCA Mapping New Facility Roads for Nashville?" *Billboard*, March 25, 1967, p. 46.

⁴¹ "Dot Steps Up Country—Opens in Nashville," *Billboard*, May 27, 1967, p. 52.

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specialized in Cajun music, established an office in the RCA Victor Studios Building, where he planned to stay 4 days out of 10, to cut masters to sell to other labels. He ran the Crazy Cajun Music Company and enjoyed his greatest music success through the Sir Douglas Quintet in the 1960s and Freddy Fender in the 1970s. His career ended in disaster decades later, in 1996, when he was arrested for child pornography, in Texas.⁴²

Home to a thriving RCA business, together as the base for other prominent producers, record companies, and music publishers, the RCA Victor Studios Building had become an unmistakable anchor for what everyone was now recognizing as "Music Row." In a feature story titled "Nashville's Music Row," *Billboard* writers observed that after RCA moved "into the plush structure on 17th Avenue, one block west of the Bradley duplex-complex [the Quonset hut studio]," a new era started. "After that, it was a story of mushrooming, or lava-spreading."⁴³ They added that a distinct place now existed within the city. It was a neighborhood "once-proud but now frayed and scarred old houses which 'make do' for other businesses, virtually all of them music. Fortunately, many of these have tasteful interiors. . . Most of the actual land in the area has been bought (and often resold), and investors have made bundles." Despite the speculation, they concluded,

Music Row, however, is more than an avenue (or future boulevard) on which structures of various nomenclatures stand as a sentry on the first hill up from the downtown section. It is an avenue of casual clothing, and an atmosphere to match. It is a section in which thousands--side men, stars, promoters, writers, secretaries--know each other on a first-name basis. It is a street without histrionics, no matter who may be recording. . . Even if the artist happens to be Perry Como or Nancy Sinatra or Eddy Arnold or Chet Atkins [they were all recording at RCA]. It's a nonchalant sort of street. . . One seldom rushes along this section: it's not the way things are done. Yet things get done, and how they get done. . . . Memphis has its Beale Street, New Orleans its Basin Street, Atlanta its Peach Tree Street. But no song of consequence has been written about 16th Avenue. It's pretty tough meter. Maybe, though, when it's Music City Boulevard . . .⁴⁴

By the end of 1967, Nashville's Music Row had more than 5,000 recording sessions--a new high and a 20% increase. Thirty-eight labels ran 1,211 sessions in the RCA Victor Studios Building while Columbia had over 1600 sessions. Even labels with their own studios used RCA and Columbia so they could get multiple track sound. "Cal Everhart, [RCA] Victor's studio manager, noted that several labels turned to the Nashville studios this year for the first time. All types of music was recorded, from hand rock to gospel, with the bulk of it country. However, pop became more and more a factor in the scene here in 1967."⁴⁵

Understanding the physical context of Music Row at this time is a perspective that adds context to the position and role of the RCA Victor Studios Building in the Nashville music industry. Journalist Paul Hemphill gives his valuable insight in his now classic book, *The Nashville Sound* (1970). Hemphill traveled

⁴² "Gulf & Western in New Move," *Billboard*, September 16, 1967, p. 16 and "Meaux Establishes Office in Nashville," *Billboard*, November 4, 1967, 8; "Controversial Producer Huey Meaux Dead At 82," *Houston Press*, April 23, 2011.

⁴³ "Nashville's Music Row," *Billboard*, October 28, 1967, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ "Nashville Sessions Beat Out with Record Rhythm in '67," *Billboard*, December 30, 1967, pp. 1 and 26.

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to Music Row and interviewed Chet Atkins at the RCA Victor Building offices. His book became the most definitive and important study of the city and its music during these years. Hemphill writes:

Music Row (or, sometimes, Record Row) is the local name for an eight-square-block area about two miles from downtown, in the urban renewal area around Sixteenth and Seventeenth Avenues South, near Vanderbilt University and a vast Negro section, where almost all of Nashville's music-related businesses operate out of a smorgasbord of renovated old single- and two-story houses and sleek new office buildings. Music Row is, then, the very heartbeat of the country music industry.⁴⁶

Hemphill believed that beyond the Country Music Hall of Fame and BMI Building "Music Row isn't anything worth taking pictures of except for the three-story sand-colored RCA Victor studios and the more modest Decca, Capitol and Columbia buildings." He ended: "The rest of The Row is a montage of FOR SALE signs, old houses done up with false fronts to look like office buildings, leggy secretaries swishing down the sidewalks, dusty Cadillacs parked close to the buildings as though they were stray dogs hiding under houses in the mid-August heat."⁴⁷ Of the six specific buildings Hemphill mentioned in this description only the RCA Victor Studios Building remains intact to that era.

Cultural historian John Grissin largely agreed with Hemphill's assessment, and emphasized how the RCA Victor Studios Building was a world apart. As part of his research for his book *Country Music: White Man's Blues* (1970), Grissin observed a recording session of Jessi Colter at RCA and then closed with: "What is so amazing is that one can leave the company of such talented, wealthy artists and musicians working in such a technical environment, walk out the front door onto 17th Avenue South, and see weed-filled lots, run-down buildings, and private homes for senior citizens."⁴⁸ He added: "Between the chrome and glass of modern one- and two-story office buildings, the place continues to look pretty dumpy."⁴⁹

As Music Row evolved so too did the corporate response to the rise in popularity in country music, from 81 in 1961 to 208 radio stations in 1965 to 328 just two years later (and approximately 500 by the decade's end).⁵⁰ RCA Victor added new managers and producers at its Nashville headquarters. At the first of 1968, RCA sent Danny Davis from New York to Nashville to run the RCA Victor Building as Nashville Executive Producer, to bringing a more business attitude to the studio's operation. Davis told *Billboard*: "Nashville, as a music center, is still expanding and become more important in the music industry." Davis added: "I don't think many people have any concept of how much recording is going on in Nashville," ending with the almost arrogant observation that "Almost everyone on our roster could adapt himself or herself to the Nashville Sound and turn out a top performance."⁵¹ The new personnel led to some re-arrangement of office and work space. Mary Lynch became the building's administrator, reporting to Atkins. The bulk of

⁴⁶ Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ John Grissin, *Country Music: White Man's Blues* (New York: Coronet, 1970), 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁰ Hemphill, 180.

⁵¹ "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, February 3, 1968, pp. 36-37.

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producing shifted to Bob Ferguson and Felton Jarvis, who soon in April 1968 moved into newly renovated second floor offices.⁵²

By fall 1968, RCA officials had claimed all of the space they needed and once again the building opened its doors to new tenants. In November Lawton Williams, a Texas songwriter, set up Nashville offices for TRO Publishers at the RCA Victor Building. The next month, Ballyhoo, Inc., a public relations firm aligned with the varied interests and businesses of Shelby Singleton, established an office in the RCA Victor Building, headed by Barbara Bucy. Shelby Singleton at that time was riding high as the company who recorded “Harper Valley P.T.A.” Then at the first of 1969, Kapp Records, a company which major label MCA Records had absorbed in 1967, established an office in the third floor of the RCA Victor Building.⁵³

Nashville television and radio personality, and songwriter, Teddy Bart also counted the various independent music publishing firms with offices at the RCA Victor Studios Building in the late 1960s: Cramart Music, Inc.; Four Star Music; and Southern Music Publishing Company, Inc.⁵⁴ The connection between songwriters, publishers, and the RCA Victor Building is vitally important. As historian Michael Kosser points out:

Despite all of the studios, record labels, booking agencies, publicity companies, radio stations, and other music organizations that make up the Nashville music business, Music Row is first and foremost a place where songs are written and published. . . . Hank Williams and Fred Rose were the founders of this glorious tradition. From that time forward, Nashville’s music business, and later Music Row, would be built around relationships between songwriters and their publishers.⁵⁵

The first major updates to the RCA Victor Studios Building were announced in July 1969: a \$600,000 renovation plan to install 16-track equipment at its studios. A *Billboard* story gave details: “All tenants have been moved from the second floor . . . with construction due to start [in August] “a complex of suites for Chet Atkins, vice-president, and the four producers, one [Ronnie Light] just added to the staff.” The story also detailed other changes:

Also on the second floor complex will be an office for Dot Boyd, administrator, and an audition and conference room. This floor will contain the main reception area. On the first floor, in addition to a smaller reception section, will be a new overdub studio with 16-track equipment [what became known as Studio C]. This will be in the location of the present Atkins office. RCA Custom sales, headed by Ed Hines, will be in this area, and the teletype equipment. There will be a large office area for Wally Cochran, director of public relations and country promotion; the engineering area under Cal Everhart, and new equipment for

⁵² Ibid., pp. 36-37 and “Light Agency in Own Building,” *Billboard*, April 6, 1968, p. 36.

⁵³ “TRO Completes Nashville Plans,” *Billboard*, November 9, 1968, p. 6; “Singleton Forms TV & Movie Wing,” *Billboard*, December 21, 1968, pp. 36 and 38; and, “Kapp Production Posts to Haynes,” *Billboard*, February 1, 1969, p. 62.

⁵⁴ Teddy Bart, *Inside Music City USA* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, 1970), 156-159.

⁵⁵ Kosser, *How Nashville Became Music City, USA*, 23.

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Studio B.” Finally, “a new telephone system will be installed to insure better and prompter promoter communication.⁵⁶

The new investments not only documented the company’s success in Nashville over four years; it also reflected a renewed interest in pursuing as much music business as possible. RCA Vice-President Chet Atkins admitted to John Grissin:

It’s going more and more pop, I’m afraid. There isn’t a Country singer livin’ that doesn’t want pop sales. So while he makes records for the Country market he’s continually throwing in little things and arrangements that will maybe appeal to the pop market. Which is bad, I guess. But I’m as guilty of it as anybody. ‘Cuz you want those pop sales. That’s where the money is...We’re going through a period right now where you’re hearing a lot more Country type songs and a lot more Country type arrangements in pop music. Steel guitars and maybe fiddles, things like that. But I think we’ve reached the point where we’re liable to lose our identity . . . just have one music. And that would be bad because I’d like to see Country music keep its identity.⁵⁷

The 1960s tradition of the Nashville Sound and Chet Atkins leading RCA’s Nashville efforts were nearing a crossroads. As Atkins admitted to Grissin in 1970, he feared that the push for numbers would mean that the music would lose its identity. He once admitted to writer Nicholas Dawidoff that for some time he had made fun of the constant questions about the Nashville Sound by jingling coins in his pocket and drawling that the sound the coins made was the Nashville Sound. He told Dawidoff: “People were in it to make a living. The Nashville Sound is just a sales tag.” But then Atkins admitted it was more than that, it was an effort to “make hit records . . . The way you make hit records is to incorporate a new rhythm feel or something lyrically different. In my case, it went more uptown.” And there was no more uptown place than the tradition Atkins and the others has established at Studio A.⁵⁸

Industry expansion marked the years 1970 to 1972 at the RCA Victor Studios Building. Some of the expansion came through the introduction of new industry leaders. In June 1970, Jerry Bradley, the son of legendary Nashville producer Owen Bradley and friend and admirer of Chet Atkins, joined RCA as an administrative assistant to Atkins and he soon replaced Danny Davis as a RCA A&R producer.⁵⁹

At the same time, a desire to expand the footprint and look of Music Row began to take shape in the summer and fall of 1970. Metro Nashville government announced plans to redevelop the Music Row area by turning 16th Avenue S and 17th Avenue S into one-way streets and to create a Music City Square to highlight the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Owen Bradley, who like Chet Atkins owned much prime real estate in the area, was a vocal critic of the new plan: “We have had seven years of promises and of inactivity concerning a Music City Boulevard” so the industry was cold to the idea of a Music City Square being

⁵⁶ “RCA Mounts 600G Renovation Plan,” *Billboard*, July 12, 1969, pp. 57 and 78.

⁵⁷ Grissin, 194.

⁵⁸ Dawidoff, *In the Country of Country*, 49-50.

⁵⁹ “RCA Advertisement,” *Variety*, June 17, 1970, p. 51.

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proposed by the Metro Planning Commission. An earlier Metro Nashville proposal in 1963, according to Bradley, had skyrocketed land prices and property taxes. Then in 1967 Metro Nashville froze potential new redevelopments, keeping the high valuations in place even though no public project was underway and Metro Nashville already had spent, according to Bradley, some \$800,000 for planning and initial land acquisition for the boulevard. Bradley explained: "Because of the uncertainty of conditions, they are building nothing, but are paying heavy taxes on unused pieces of earth. Additionally, the money invested in the property is not being used to make more money, and investors simply are going to stop getting involved."⁶⁰

Nashville *Tennessean* reporter Frank Ritter surveyed property owners in the area and found that many agreed with Bradley. Over 250 people signed a petition to Metro government that said in part: "we have been promised many times that the Music Row Boulevard would be constructed. Because of the slowness of the city to construct this boulevard, our neighborhood has deteriorated."⁶¹ Lillian Scott, who owned property on 17th Avenue South, commented: "Music Row deserves the boulevard. The music industry was promised that and I don't think one-way streets will do anything to solve the problem."⁶² Harold Hitt for the Country Music Association agreed that the boulevard should be built, no matter what Metro Nashville did about its square plan.⁶³ Paul Hemphill asserted that, "The movers along Music Row are ready whenever the city is, and they see the proposed Music City Boulevard as not only a better place to work but also as a classy showcase for country music."⁶⁴

In October 1970 the Metro Council voted to scrap the boulevard plan and to accept the idea of dual one-way streets.⁶⁵ Music industry officials were not pleased and some wondered out loud if Atlanta and Memphis would be better locations.⁶⁶ That did not happen but Paul Hemphill saw a pattern of major change—the plans for Music Row combined with the announcement of the new Opryland complex and new Grand Ole Opry House to suggest that "this is getting country music out of Tootsie's Orchid Lounge in a hurry. Which is totally in character for this whirlwind romance between Nashville and country music."⁶⁷

New clients at the RCA Victor Studios Building in 1971 mirrored the changes planned for Music Row with the construction of the one-way streets. In June, a group of music executives and songwriters established Aliases Inc., a publishing firm formed to serve jailed songwriters, and located its offices at the RCA Victor Studios Building, probably on the third floor due to the recent expansions by RCA itself. In the fall, another group formed Equity Dynamics, Inc., an investment-advising firm for country music performers and songwriters, establishing its offices in the building. The creation of the firm and its location in the heart of Music Row signified a growing recognition that country music could be big business. Country comic Archie Campbell had become a nationally recognized entertainer through his work in the *Hee Haw* television show.

⁶⁰ "Decca's Bradley Scores Music Row Plan," *Billboard*, July 25, 1970, p. 36.

⁶¹ "Petitions Show High Boulevard Support," *Nashville Tennessean*, Sept. 27, 1970.

⁶² "Decca's Bradley Scores Music Row Plan," *Billboard*, July 25, 1970, p. 36.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Hemphill, 37.

⁶⁵ "Council OKs Music Row 1-Way Plan," *Nashville Tennessean*, October 21, 1970.

⁶⁶ "Slums Creeping Up Music Row," *Nashville Tennessean*, December 22, 1970.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

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He too established his Nashville office in the RCA Victor Studios Building, giving the building its first resident television celebrity.⁶⁸

II. The Jerry Bradley Era, 1972-1982

Then in 1972 came controversy, if not scandal. Industry press revealed that studios had been giving “kickbacks” to independent producers to do their recording sessions at label studios. Fingers pointed at Columbia more than RCA as being guilty of studio kickbacks. But almost all Nashville studios were guilty to one degree or another. And kickbacks hurt the bottom line of label studios, forced them to reconsider their commitment to operate their own studios, and led RCA to shuffle its executives in Nashville.⁶⁹

In late 1972, RCA announced another step away from the Nashville Sound tradition by reshuffling its Nashville studio personnel to give Chet Atkins more time to perform and produce. Atkins was a legend. As Bill Ivey later remarked in his introduction to Atkins’ 1974 autobiography, *Country Gentleman*:

his work with RCA Records as an executive and A&R man has spanned the popularity of country music. Decisions he has made have helped shape the overall direction that growth has taken. . . his broad understanding of all music in America has aided him in making innovative changes in country performance style and helped in his efforts to make Nashville a major recording center for all forms of music.⁷⁰

Atkins’ move also led the company to elevate Jerry Bradley to be director of the country music division, giving him administrative and creative reins over Nashville operations. Bradley’s arrival in the administration of RCA in Nashville introduces a new chapter in the building’s history, an era later called the “Outlaw” years. Bradley’s rise had been quick but Atkins had confidence in him. In 1973 RCA officials in New York City decided to complement the young Bradley as division head by transferring Joe Galante from New York City to Nashville to be the label’s administration manager in Nashville. Galante recalls:

When I first moved here, it was very tough—no one would even talk to me. It was a very closed world, people who had grown up together, whose fathers had grown up together, everyone knew each other, and I didn’t know anybody. People couldn’t even pronounce my name. It was ‘who are you? Why are here? What do you want?’ I went to meetings and listened as much as I could. I didn’t have a feel for things at all. Jerry [Bradley] didn’t exactly want me here; he had no idea what to do with me.⁷¹

Galante was not imagining things. Nashville was a closed world in 1973, and remained so for a decade more. Edward Morris of *Billboard* wrote: “While there is nothing particularly secretive or sinister about

⁶⁸ “Pub Formed for Writer Inmates,” *Billboard*, June 12, 1971, pp. 1 and 32; “Investment Consulting Company Established,” *Billboard*, October 16, 1971, p. 40; and “Nashville Scene,” *Billboard*, October 30, 1971, p. 42.

⁶⁹ “Studios: Payoffs in Nashville,” *Billboard*, September 23, 1972, pp. 1 and 43.

⁷⁰ Chet Atkins with Bill Neely, *Country Gentleman* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1974), xii.

⁷¹ Kay West, “They Barked, He Bit Back,” *Nashville Scene*, November 6, 2003, no pagination, available at www.nashvillescene.com/nashville/they-barked-he-bit-back/.

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these business connections, their existence explains why outsiders tend to see the country music industry—particularly in Nashville—as a clannish and close-knit world.”⁷² Soon enough Bradley and Galante gained trust and learned to play off each other’s strengths. Bradley knew the music and musicians; Galante knew how to package it and reach new markets. As studio head, Bradley was his own man, proving it when he allowed Waylon Jennings to negotiate an agreement that he could use his own producer but still record at RCA Studio A. Jennings explained in his autobiography: “Chet always worried that I was out to destroy something; he thought I was determined to ruin country music, that there would no longer be a reason for people like himself or Owen Bradley to produce records. That was never my intention.”⁷³

Jerry Bradley’s new approach for Waylon Jennings kept him with the label but the process of allowing Jennings to use his own producer for RCA Studio A sessions proved difficult. When Jennings began to record his semi-independent session at Studio A, he recalled that RCA employees “were on the phone half the time calling Jerry Bradley upstairs at RCA and telling him what I was doing. I was still screwed.”⁷⁴ Jennings remarked that “I liked Jerry, but he drove me a little nuts. He didn’t have a clue about music, though he always tried to get involved in it, usually by remote control. . . . We’d have fights so loud in his office that secretaries would be grabbing aspirin bottles and running for cover.”⁷⁵

In 1973 Jennings moved his sessions for the album *This Time* to the Glaser studio. RCA responded that it could not release the record, due to union agreements that it was not cut with “an RCA engineer and that RCA artists had to use RCA studios whenever they were within a 200-mile radius of Nashville. Jerry Bradley even went to Washington to get a waiver for one album, but the union wouldn’t go for it,” recalled Jennings.⁷⁶ When RCA decided to go ahead and release the album in 1974, company officials knowingly “violated their contract with the union. That broke the whole system’s back. . . . Pretty soon, RCA [Studio A] was only getting transit business”—they no longer had a monopoly over RCA artists.⁷⁷

In September 1974, Atkins had handed over all of RCA Nashville operations to Jerry Bradley, a promotion that the music industry reported “creates a family dynasty situation unprecedented here.”⁷⁸ When Bradley took charge, RCA built a new 3rd floor office for Atkins, who as part owner of the building itself wanted to stay there as a management consultant and (still) as a RCA label artist. A year later, in an interview with *Billboard*, Bradley was bullish about the label’s future, denying that RCA had any plans to close the studio. He also was proud of his stars-- Parton, Pride, Wagoner, Milsap, Jennings, and Bare--and the records coming out of RCA Studio A from such new stars as Gary Stewart.⁷⁹

In the fall of 1974, Bradley began the process of creating a compilation record that would show the new direction for RCA. He decided to release *Wanted: The Outlaws*, using older material that all of the artists had

⁷² Edward Morris, “The Interlocking World of Country Music,” *Billboard*, October 16, 1982, p. WOCM-29.

⁷³ Jennings, *Waylon*, 181.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

⁷⁸ “The Bradleys: Owen and Jerry Compete for Chartbusters,” *Billboard*, September 7, 1974, p. 33.

⁷⁹ “RCA’s Bradley Did His Soul Searching,” *Billboard*, November 1, 1975, pp. 5 and 18.

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already recorded with RCA. Bradley first wanted to include only Willie Nelson, Jessi Colter, and Waylon Jennings, but was convinced to add Tompall Glaser. He designed the album in an effort to keep his job since sales had been slow.⁸⁰ Jennings admits that “I remixed the album at RCA’s studios, on the sly, going in late at night,” adding that “There wasn’t anything slick about the album. It was loose-limbed, and true, and that’s what people were looking for. They couldn’t find it in rock, and they damn sure couldn’t find it in country.”⁸¹

The impact of *Wanted! The Outlaws* is difficult to over-estimate. It was the first Nashville album and the first country music album to sell more than one million copies. Its success singlehandedly launched the “Outlaw” movement in country music. Suddenly a new generation got interested in what was happening in Nashville. It also proved that Bradley and Galente were very much the future of the RCA operations in Nashville.⁸²

In late 1976, *New Musical Express*, a very influential London music magazine, sent Mick Ferren to Nashville to do a feature article on the jangle of music genres then in Music City. Ferren was not impressed with a lot of what he encountered, but when he went to the RCA Victor Studios Building to interview Chet Atkins, he found what he had been looking for. About Studio A, Ferren wrote: “This is the RCA de lux, numero uno studio. No cowboy tack here. This is the grounded starship style studio that I’m used to. Here Chet Atkins is doing a mix.” Ferren added: “If Chet Atkins isn’t the king of Nashville, he must certainly be the Talleyrand of Music City, USA.”⁸³ Ferren later returned to interview Dolly Parton at the RCA Victor Studios Building. Parton was late in arriving for the interview but Ferren reported that the waiting is “not entirely fruitless. I do meet a number of other happening Nashville people” such as the songwriter Dickey Lee.⁸⁴ The people working on a daily basis in the RCA Victor Studios Building had changed since 1965 but it remained under Jerry Bradley a very creative place, full of, in Ferren’s words, “happening Nashville people.”

The success of *Wanted! The Outlaws* did not ensure RCA’s commitment to its Nashville studios, however. On January 10, 1977, RCA announced the closing of Studios A and B since it could not reach an agreement with the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET) union on contract modifications.⁸⁵ But the union dispute was not the only reason. Industry magazine *Broadcasting* added that RCA closed studios in Nashville and Hollywood because “in recent years, more and more recording artists and groups have demanded more artistic and technical control over their recording projects,” and the current union contract could not handle such flexibility. The studio had lost business to independents.⁸⁶ Add to that the impact of studio kickbacks cutting into profit, the major labels no longer saw the studios as money-makers. Waylon Jennings believed that unless label studios had a monopoly on the work of their artists,

⁸⁰ Kosser, *How Nashville Became Music City USA*, 191-210.

⁸¹ Jennings, *Waylon*, 230;

⁸² Kosser, *How Nashville Became Music City USA*, 191-210.

⁸³ Mick Ferren, “Nashville,” *New Musical Express*, November 20, 1976, pp. 21-23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁵ “NABAT Dispute,” *Back Stage*, January 14, 1977.

⁸⁶ “RCA Continues to Cut Back,” *Broadcasting*, January 17, 1977, p. 44.

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they eventually had to sell their studios. I tried to buy one of them. I was up on the executive floors at RCA, and had my eye on Studio B, but they wanted to turn it into a museum, so I put in a bid for Studio A. Chet was standing there, lighting a cigar. 'Why don't you let me buy that?' I asked him. 'You've got the nerve of Hitler,' he said. 'You're the reason we're having to sell it.' He started laughing, but they still wouldn't let me have the studio.⁸⁷

In 1977 Jerry Bradley, however, did not see the RCA decision to sell the studio as a death blow to the company's Nashville operations. He placed faith in his vision of "progressive country" [what is now called Outlaw music] and what it would mean for the industry. Bradley said: "a whole new generation has come in that still call it country—but the tastes are different." Bradley believed his new stable of artists, "are tuned a little bit different," and that's led to RCA's success." Bradley also understood that progressive country was growing in popularity "because a majority of today's generation of producer wants it to happen. . . 'it's more of a subliminal back-of-the-mind kind of thing, with the program directors and deejays in real close communication with the producers, affecting their work and what they think the stations will play.'" Bradley even promised that the label wanted to do more with the Outlaws: "We've got several similar things in our minds, but I don't know if too many would work. A few like 'Outlaws' are healthy for the business. It was a big boost for Tompall and Willie and pushed Waylon into the top ranks. And if we could get Jessi and Waylon together, it would be a dynamite album." As for Studio A, Bradley reported that it had a secure future:

'it's a hell of an inconvenience now, but in the long run the relative costs of our going outside will be about the same. We just couldn't compete with that inflexible national contract with the union, even when we upgraded to 24-track to make it one of the best recording environments in town. We've got hopes of a lease or sale and will be moving on it very soon.'⁸⁸

In late March 1977, Owen Bradley bought the studio and announced plans to reopen it. He, his brother Harold and Atkins already owned the RCA office building.⁸⁹ Bradley explained his decision to *Billboard*: "It's sad to see a place like that not open . . . I think we can build the business back up. Maybe we can get the people into the habit of coming back around.'" The trade weekly reporter gushed: "Now with Nashville's most legendary producer at the helm of Nashville's legendary ex-RCA, now MasterSound, studios, it looks as though victory might have been snatched from the jaws of the RCA dog."⁹⁰

RCA Nashville kept its offices in the office building wing. The company also continued to record and produce many albums at the former RCA studios, now called Music City Music Hall. Although RCA sold Studio A, it kept its corporate operations in the office wing. In May 1977, RCA Nashville discussed its recording operations: "It's not necessarily all pop or all country anymore. . . pop, country-pop, and pure

⁸⁷ Jennings, *Waylon*, 182-183.

⁸⁸ "The Country Deejay," *Billboard*, February 26, 1977, pp. 70 and 72.

⁸⁹ "Bradley Reopens RCA Recording Studios," *Variety*, March 30, 1977, p. 63.

⁹⁰ "Bradley Bullish on Potential of Studio," *Billboard*, April 9, 1977, 40 and 53..

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country are the ingredients RCA is working with.”⁹¹ A new era in Nashville’s country music industry was on the horizon.

Historical Coda: the Music City Music Hall era, 1977-1990.

In May 1978, pleased with recent growth in country music sales, RCA decided to re-invest in its Nashville operations. That month RCA New York vice president Mel Ilberman remarked that RCA would use a national full-line record company approach operating out of Nashville. The organization will operate with complete autonomy in control of its own promotion, merchandizing, advertising, and selling through RCA distribution.⁹²

Joe Galante was promoted to director of marketing, and given more authority to make marketing and public relations decisions for country music productions, especially for pop music and country-pop music recorded by Music City Music Hall. Jerry Bradley believed that the 1978 corporate decision would boost Nashville as a music center: “If we can pull it off, it’ll really be a plus for Nashville.”⁹³ He also enjoyed the potential of having “more freedom to make decisions for artists like Milsap, Waylon and Dolly.”⁹⁴ Indeed, all three artists enjoyed considerable success with their Nashville recordings for the rest of the decade. Joe Galante recalls:

Jerry taught me so much. You put the two of us in a room, and you couldn’t find two more different people. But it worked. We began building a great partnership. He was doing what he loved, finding and making music, and I was figuring out what I was good at and what I loved.⁹⁵

In April 1980, due to the influence of promotion department secretary Shelia Shipley, who had heard the group perform live and loved their energy plus the young crowd they attracted, RCA Nashville signed Alabama, a group that would be kings of country music radio and stage throughout the 1980s. Working out of the RCA Studios Building offices, Galante admitted:

We used a pop model to market Alabama, we did it like it had never been done in country music. We did a total, brutal, all-out blitz, from city to city, booking them into rock clubs and inviting radio, broadcast and media, not just country, but pop and rock. There was no video to speak of back then, so we had to bring them right to the people who would put them in print, on the radio, in the store.⁹⁶

Alabama reached heights even beyond the success of the Outlaws, and became the first group to be awarded the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year award in 1982.

⁹¹ “RCA Pulls Various Music Styles into 1,” *Billboard*, May 21, 1977, p. 54.

⁹² “RCA Nashville Stepping Out,” *Variety*, May 24, 1978, p. 85.

⁹³ “RCA Beefing Up Nashville Office,” *Billboard*, May 21, 1978, p. 52.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁵ West, “They Barked, He Bit Back.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

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In this same early 1980s period, work at Music City Music Hall continued to be broad and creative. Neo-traditional artist George Strait recorded six of the ten songs for his debut album, *Strait Country*, in June 1981. He returned in early 1982 to record all of his classic second album, *Strait from the Heart*, at Music City Music Hall.⁹⁷ Blues artist B.B. King recorded album, *Love Me Tender*, at Music City Music Hall in December 1981.⁹⁸ Later that same winter, sessions with James Galway, classical music artist, and a collaboration between Joe Cocker and The Crusaders took place at Music City Music Hall as well as recording the soundtrack for *Coal Miner's Daughter*, a movie about Loretta Lynn's life and career.⁹⁹

In a feature story about the studio in *Billboard*, Kip Kirby provides a valuable description of the technical side of Music City Music Hall at the time of these early 1980s recordings. She called the studio:

one of Nashville's largest facilities; it was originally constructed to handle symphonic orchestrations, and the main room measures approximately 75 ft. by 50 ft. However, for sessions where smaller dimensions or closer recording atmosphere is desirable, the studio has a system of electric-eye doors which can close off different sections of the room. [The Bradleys had introduced this change c. 1977; it was later removed at an unknown date.] It's been remodeled several times over the past years. Today, even in the competitive studio business of Nashville, Music City Music Hall ranks as one of the better-equipped facilities. It uses a Neve 8039 console, automated with Allison Research Fadex, 32 inputs and 24 out. It relies on Studer tape machines with a BTX unit linking the 16- and 24-track machines. Control room speakers are Urei 813 time-aligned with JBL 4313 mixdown monitors. It furnishes a variety of outboard gear and instruments, including acoustical and electric harpsichord, vibes, marimba, clavinet, and an assortment of keyboard models. Also in the same structure is Randy's Roost, a mastering lab run by Randy Kling, formerly RCA's in-house mastering engineer.¹⁰⁰

In September 1982 Jerry Bradley announced his decision to leave RCA and to become an independent producer; Joe Galente would take his place. Bradley first considered a transition period, planning to stay until the spring. But RCA officials in New York City decided to make the switch quicker. By November, the company held a "lavish reception" to announce Galente's promotion as RCA Nashville division head at the Hermitage Hotel (NR, 7/24/1975) in downtown Nashville.¹⁰¹

Galente shocked many in Nashville by deciding not to renew contracts with several long-time RCA country artists, such as Hank Snow, Jerry Reed, Charley Pride, even Waylon Jennings over the next several years. Even Chet Atkins left RCA in late 1982 to join Columbia Records. Galente told journalist Kay West:

⁹⁷ Liner notes for *Strait Country* (1981) and *Strait from the Heart* (1982); "Strait Country" and "Strait from the Heart," Wikipedia web pages, accessed March 24, 2015.

⁹⁸ Kip Kirby, "Stronger Pop Thrust in Nashville," *Billboard*, December 5, 1981, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Kip Kirby, "Nashville Studio Broadens its Non-Country Horizons," *Billboard*, February 6, 1982, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰¹ "Galente Sees Some Cuts in RCA Country Artist Rolls," *Variety*, November 17, 1982, p. 73.

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You can like all the music you want, but if they are not selling records, they are not adding value to the company. The bottom line was my responsibility to the company. In sports, in entertainment, in anything, a career has a life span. People in the industry were made at me, they said I was cutting the heart out of country music. I didn't dislike Charley Pride, I didn't dislike Waylon. It was nothing personal It was just time.¹⁰²

In their place, however, he developed a roster of stars—The Judds, Vince Gill, K. T. Oslin, Clint Black-- that defined the label as an innovator in the genre, and also brought new success to RCA Nashville. Country music historian Robert K. Oermann observed: “I was one of those who was furious when he was dropping some of those legends from the label. But then to my great surprise he signed The Judds, Clint Black, Keith Whitley, K. T. Oslin.”¹⁰³ The Judds recalled their sudden, unexpected live audition for Galente at his offices in the RCA Victor Studios Building in 1983. Wynonna Judd said: “They were expecting country and of course we are country but I don't think they were ready for us.”¹⁰⁴ Galente became a believer in this type of direct music audition, and at another in 1985 he signed Ballie and The Boys, another important RCA act in that decade.¹⁰⁵

In March 1985, *Billboard's* Kip Kirby proclaimed that Nashville was a boom town, with much new and needed development in its country music industry. Music Row Redevelopment, Inc. had raised \$85,000 to beautify Music Row, with its funds being matched by the Metro Nashville Development and Housing Agency. She also documented the impact of digital recording and how every studio in the city had upgraded their technology to use digital recording.¹⁰⁶

In June 1985, Galente put his full imprint on RCA Nashville operations when a six-month process of reorganizing the office was finished. The reorganization placed Mary Martin into the A&R department, part of a general movement across Music Row in the 1980s that saw more women placed in meaningful roles within the country music industry. Music historian Robert K. Oermann wrote: “Things begin to shift. More women were being promoted to executive positions at the labels.”¹⁰⁷

In 1986 German music conglomerate Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) bought RCA. Three years later, BMG began the construction of new company headquarters for RCA Nashville, to be located on Music Circle. Also in 1989, Music City Music Hall was sold to a new group of investors who established Javelina Studio, the new name for the historic RCA Studio A. Javelina's owners painted the exterior of the building in a bland green tone and upgraded the technology of the sound booths and soundboard of the studio. Michael Kosser noted: “by 1989, Music Row was big time, with all the competitiveness, jealousy, and fear of failure that success brings.”¹⁰⁸ The 1989-1990 transformation of the historic RCA Victor Studios Building into Javelina Studio ended the RCA era associated with the property, especially once RCA Nashville moved

¹⁰² West, “They Barked., He Bit Back.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.; also see Kosser, *How Nashville Became Music City USA*, 321-325.

¹⁰⁴ Bob Millard, *The Judds: A Biography* (New York: Dolphin, 1988), 130.

¹⁰⁵ Jack Hurst, “From Backup to Front,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1987, .

¹⁰⁶ Kip Kirby, “Boom Town Heard ‘Round the World,” *Billboard*, March 30, 1985, pp. N4 and N26.

¹⁰⁷ “The women who ruled the Row,” *Nashville City Paper*, January 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Kosser, 259.

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its offices to the new RCA Nashville building at 1 Music Circle North in May 1990. Much like 30 years earlier, RCA officials treated the opening as an important corporate event, with RCA president Bob Buziak and BMG chairman Michael Dornemann both attending the grand opening.¹⁰⁹

Three months later, in August 1990, BMG announced that Joe Galente was leaving Nashville, having been promoted to president of RCA's entire record operations in the United States. BMG chairman Michael Dornemann said: "Under Joe's leadership, RCA has become a dominant force in country music and I believe that in his new position he'll have the same impact on the larger U.S. operation."¹¹⁰

The Galente era was over. In assessing his impact on the Nashville country music industry, music artist manager and Nashville attorney Bill Carter remarked that Galente "professionalized what was notoriously a very loose environment; it was more fun back then, but no one was making any real money. He brought a business model to Nashville's music industry," a model that still shapes the industry today.¹¹¹

Conclusion

The RCA Victor Studios Building is an exceptionally significant property due to its associations with and impact on the music industry in Nashville. Between 1965 and 1977, events and individuals directly associated with the RCA Victor Studios Building shaped and nurtured not only the "Nashville Sound" and the "Outlaw Movement" but also laid the foundation, both in the recording studios and in the administrative offices, for the modern country music industry. The impact of the activities and individuals associated with this building has been deep and lasting in the history of country music nationally and in the history of Nashville's music industry locally.

In its first era of significance, 1965-1972, the building is not only significant for its transformation of the Nashville Sound, the role of Chet Atkins as the acknowledged leader of the local industry, and the history of RCA Victor in Nashville. It also served as an administrative center for a wide range of music industry institutions, helping to launch Nashville as the center of the southern gospel music industry and providing a creative haven for songwriters, publishers, and such influential producers as Cowboy Jack Clement.

In its second era of significance, 1972-1977, the building not only was the starting points of the influential careers of country music executives Jerry Bradley and Joe Galente, it also was a birthplace of the "Outlaw Movement," which still shapes the genre and industry today. The building served as the center of the RCA Nashville operations throughout these years but also served as the staging ground for the revolution in the country music industry brought about by Joe Galente. What happened in the 1980s and 1990s also proved important, but that history is better associated with the building's second life, recently preserved in 2014, as an independent center for now much larger and broader Nashville music industry.

¹⁰⁹ "RCA's New HQ," *Radio & Records*, May 18, 1990, p. 68.

¹¹⁰ "Galente Ascends to RCA Presidency," *Radio and Records*, August 17, 1990, p. 1.

¹¹¹ West, "They Barked, He Bit Back."

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Havighurst, Craig. *Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City*. Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

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Streissguth, Michael. *Eddy Arnold: Pioneer of the Nashville Sound*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.

Streissguth, Michael. *Outlaw: Waylon, Willie, Kris and the Renegades of Nashville*. New York: It Books, 2013.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	State Historic Preservation Office	
previously listed in the National Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other State agency	
previously determined eligible by the National Register	<input type="checkbox"/>	Federal agency	
designated a National Historic Landmark	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local government	
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	University	
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #		Name of repository: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation; Belmont University	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):			

RCA Victor Studios Building
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .63 acre USGS Quadrangle Nashville West 308 NE

Latitude/Longitude

36.149613 degrees -86.793030 degrees

Verbal Boundary Description

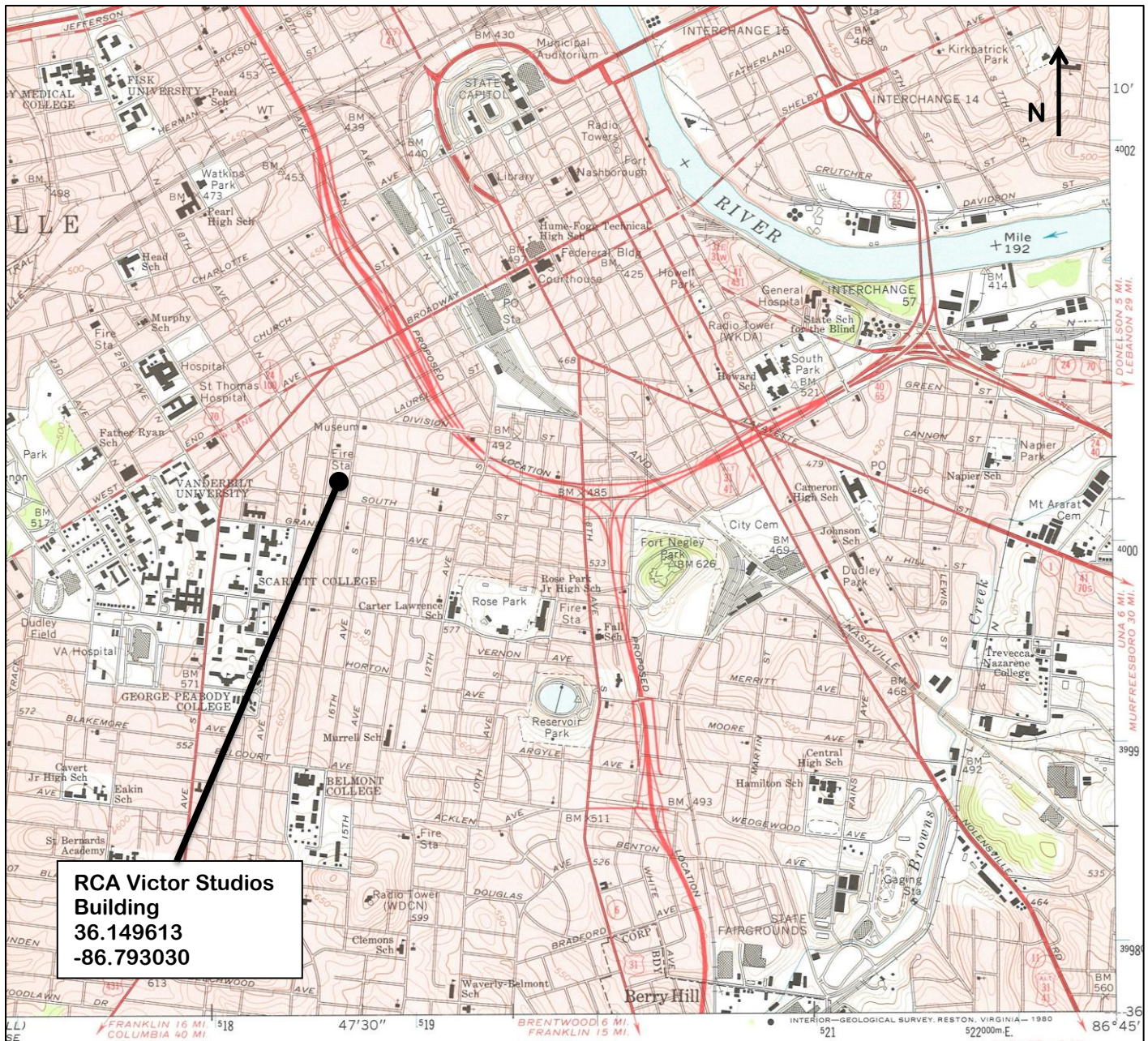
The nominated property is at 30 Music Square West or 17th Avenue South in Nashville, TN, and comprises Lots 52-53-54-PT 55 O B Hayes 1st Addn. The north boundary adjoins the lot that RCA Studio B sits on. The south boundary adjoins the lot at 40 Music Square West which is the home of Starstruck Studios. The east boundary is along an alley located between Music Square West or 17th Avenue South and Music Square East or 16th Avenue South. The parking area for the RCA Victor Studios Building is in an “L” shape and is on the east (longer side) and south sides of the building within the boundary.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property encompasses the land on which the historic RCA Victor Building sits along with its rear and side parking lots that was established at the time of the building’s construction. It includes all of the property historically associated with the RCA Victor Studios Building.

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USGS Topographic Quadrangle showing the location of the RCA Victor Studios Building in relation to Nashville, Tennessee. Scale is 1:24 000.



RCA Victor Studios Building
Name of Property

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11. Form Prepared By

Name	Carroll Van West		
Organization	MTSU Center for Historic Preservation		
Street & Number	Box 80	Date	January 2, 2015
City or Town	Murfreesboro	Telephone	615-898-2947
E-mail	carroll.west@mtsu.edu	State	TN Zip Code 37132

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

RCA Victor Studios Building

Name of Property

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Photo Log

Name of Property: RCA Victor Studios Building
City or Vicinity: Nashville
County: Davidson State: Tennessee
Photographer: Katie S. Randall and Carroll Van West
Date Photographed: November 2014 and January 2015

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_001
Façade, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_002
Façade, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_003
Façade, entrance, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_004
Façade, detail of brick work, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_005
Façade and north elevation, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_006
North elevation, facing east

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_007
Façade and south elevation, facing northeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_008
East elevation (rear), facing southwest

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_009
East elevation (rear), facing northwest

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_010
East elevation at southeast corner, facing northwest

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_011
Connector between building and Studio B, facing east

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_012
1st floor lobby, facing N

<u>RCA Victor Studios Building</u>	<u>Davidson County, TN</u>
<u>Name of Property</u>	<u>County and State</u>
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_013 1 st floor, west hallway, facing south	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_014 1 st floor, east hallway, facing south	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_015 2 nd floor to 1 st floor, center staircase, facing southeast	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_016 1 st floor, rear staircase, facing east	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_017 1 st floor, Studio C, facing east	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_018 1 st floor, Studio C, facing south	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_019 2 nd floor, lobby, facing south	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_020 2 nd floor, lobby, facing north	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_021 2 nd floor, men's restroom, facing west	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_022 2 nd floor, men's restroom, facing north	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_023 2 nd floor hallway, facing south	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_024 2 nd floor executive (Atkins) office, facing east	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_025 3 rd floor lobby, facing north	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_026 3 rd floor water fountain, facing northeast	
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_027 3 rd floor hallway, facing south	

RCA Victor Studios Building

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TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_028
3rd floor men's restroom, facing north

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_029
Studio A, vestibule and reception area, facing north

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_030
Studio A, vestibule from reception area, facing south

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_031
Studio A, door to control room from reception area, facing east

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_032
Studio A, control room, facing southeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_033
Studio A, control room, facing north

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_034
Studio A, door from control room to hallway, facing east

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_035
Studio A, vending machine, water fountain, hallway, facing northwest

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_036
Studio A, hallway, storage, facing north

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_037
Studio A, hallway, storage, facing northeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_038
Studio A, doorway from parking lot into building, facing west

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_039
Studio A, doorway into studio, facing northeast

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_040
Studio A, facing north

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_041
Studio A, facing northwest

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_042
Studio A, ceiling, facing north

RCA Victor Studios Building
Name of Property

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-
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_043
Studio A, facing northeast
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_044
Studio A, facing south
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_045
Studio A, facing southwest
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_046
Studio A, facing southeast
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_047
Studio A, sound booths, facing northeast
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_048
Studio A, sound booth detail, facing northeast
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_049
Studio A, sound booth, facing west
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_050
Studio A, platform to 2nd floor access, facing southwest
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_051
Studio A, facing northwest from platform
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_052
Studio A, chandelier detail, facing west
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_053
Studio A, facing southwest from platform
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_054
Studio A, facing north from platform
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_055
Studio A, 2nd floor artists break room, facing north
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_056
Studio A, 2nd floor artists break room, facing south
- TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_057
Studio A, 2nd floor artists break room, facing west

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TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_058
Studio A, 2nd floor office, facing north

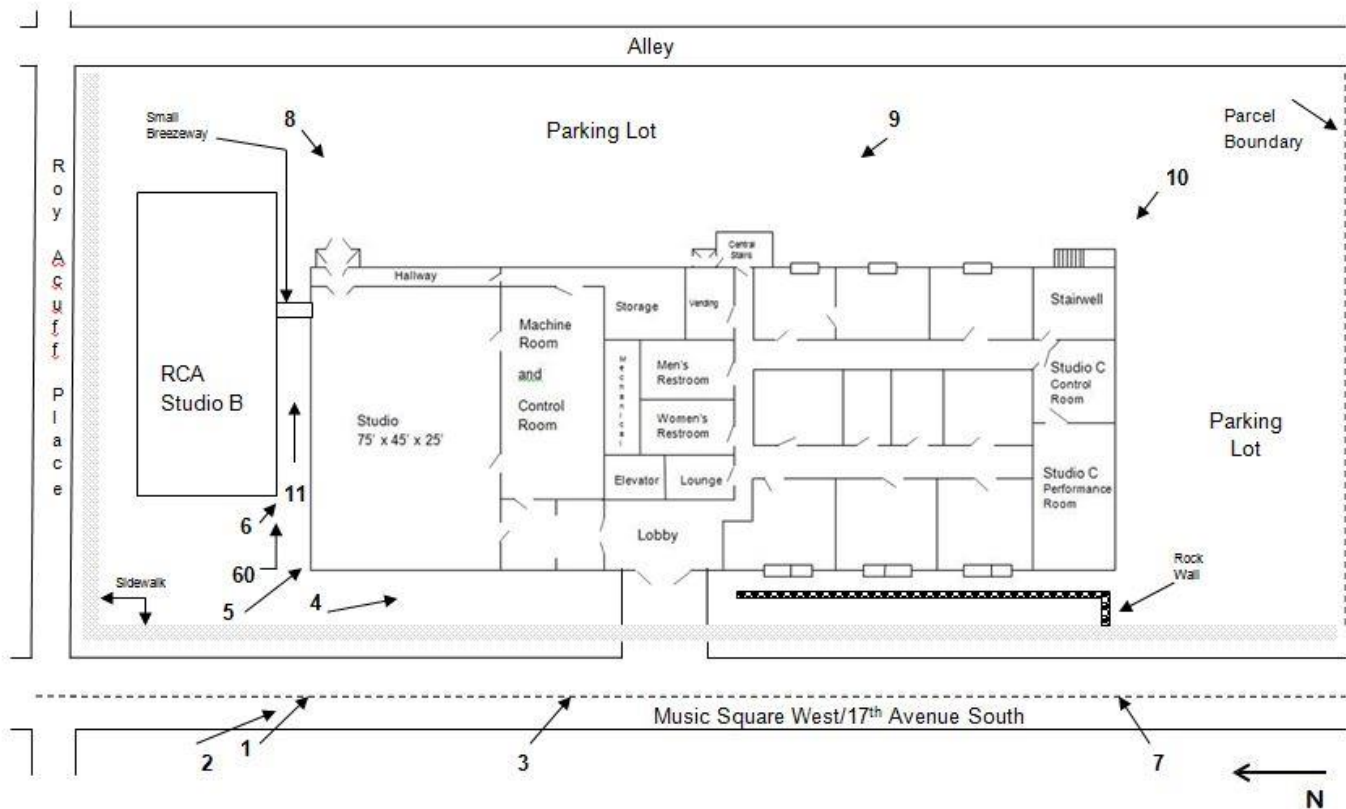
TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_059
Studio A, 2nd floor office hallway, facing east

TN_Davidson_RCA Victor Studios Building_060
Studio B and connection to RCA Victor Studios Building, facing east

RCA Victor Studios Building
Name of Property

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Site Plan with Photo Key (not to scale)

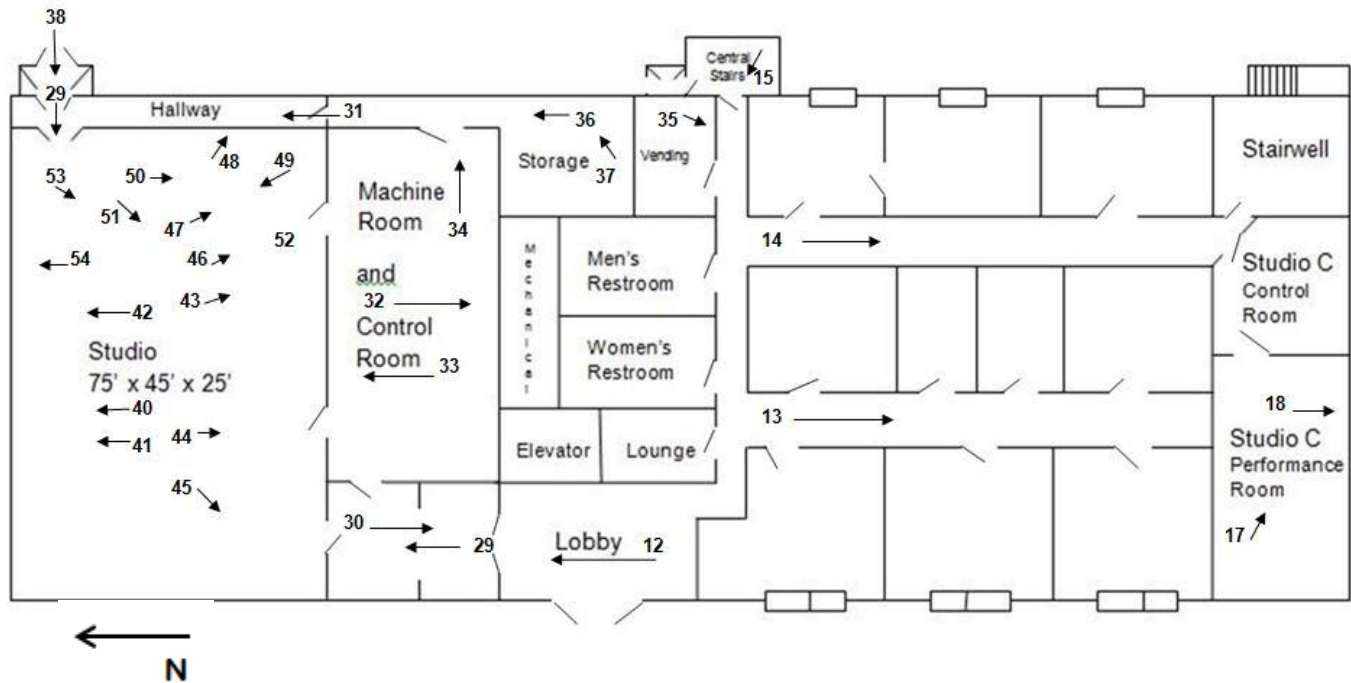


RCA Victor Studios Building
Name of Property

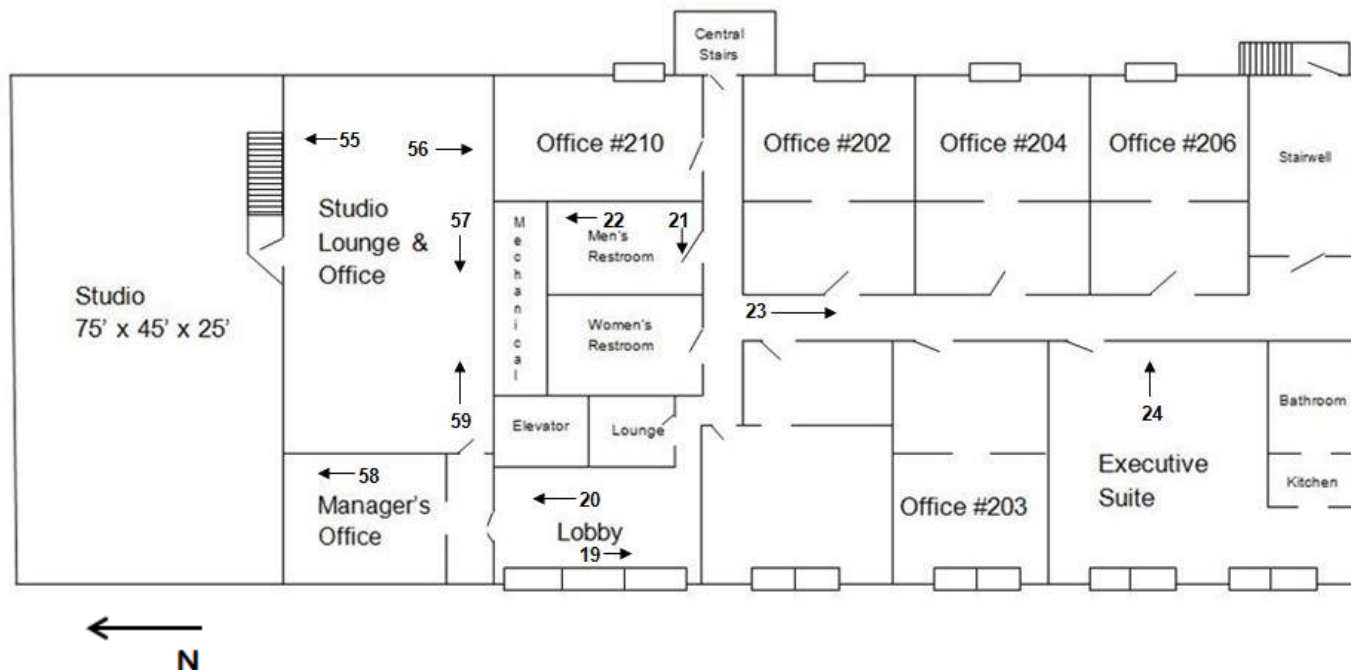
Davidson County, TN
County and State

Floor Plans and Photo Keys

First Floor Plan and Photo Key



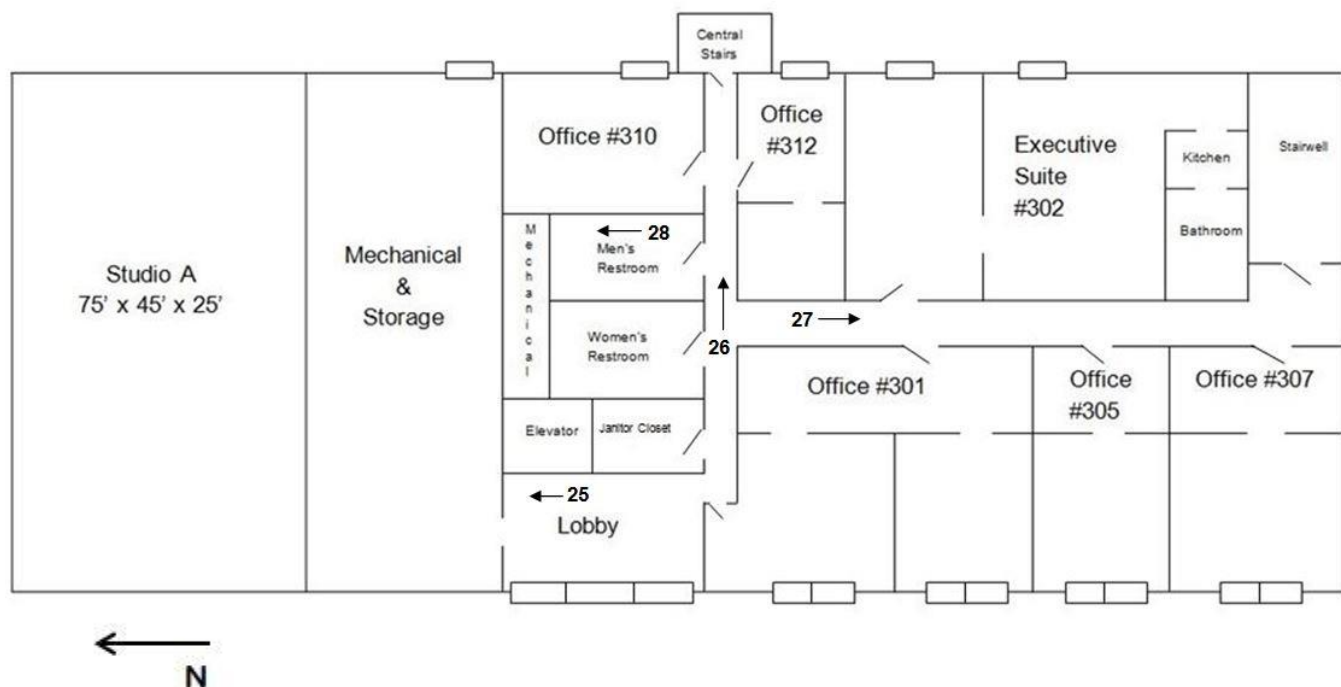
Second Floor Plan and Photo Key (not to scale)



RCA Victor Studios Building
Name of Property

Davidson County, TN
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Third Floor Plan and Photo Key (not to scale)



**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page 47

RCA Victor Studios Building

Name of Property

Davidson County, Tennessee

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



This photo from 1964 shows the construction site on the day of the groundbreaking ceremony. *Photo courtesy of Grand Ole Opry Archives.*

Property Owner

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

Name	Studio A Preservation Partners (Aubrey Preston, contact)		
Street & Number	1973 New Highway 96 W	Telephone	615-715-8990
City or Town	Franklin	State	TN 37064