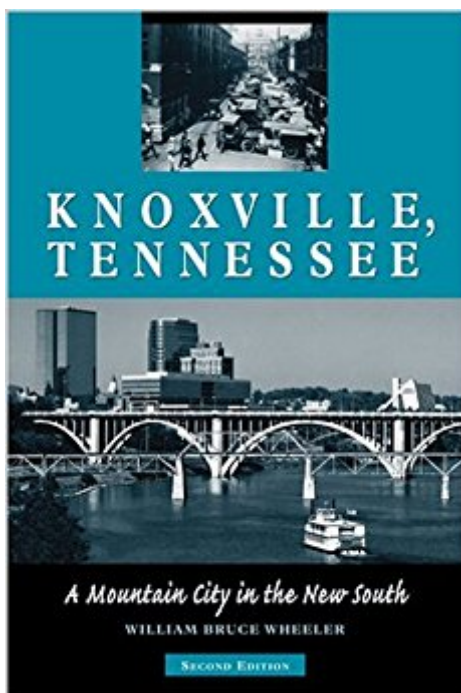


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Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City In The New South



Synopsis

Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South is much more than an update to the 1983 edition; it is virtually a complete rethinking of its predecessor as well as an updating of Knoxville's story from the 1982 World's Fair to the death of the nearly legendary Cas Walker. In this new edition, Wheeler argues that, like Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Knoxville has fabricated for themselves a false history, portraying themselves and their city as the almost impotent victims of historical forces that they could neither alter nor control. The result of this myth, Wheeler says, is a collective mentality of near-helplessness against the powerful forces of isolation, poverty, and even change itself. But Knoxville's past is far more complicated than that, for the city contained abundant material goods and human talent that could have been used to propel Knoxville into the ranks of the premier cities of the New South if those assets had not slipped through the fingers of both the leaders and the populace. In all, Knoxville's history is the story of colliding forces—country and city, North and South, the poor and the elite, as well as the story of colorful figures, including Perez Dickinson, Edward Sanford, George Dempster, William Yardley, Louis Brownlow, Cas Walker, Carlene Malone, Victor Ashe, and many, many more. This is not, however, a history or a future without hope. Wheeler charts positive changes as well, such as downtown residential movements, urban renewal initiatives, political progressivism, and improving race relations. In many ways, Knoxville's story parallels the struggles facing all American cities, making this revised edition of interest both as a regional history and as a fascinating case study of American urbanism.

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Customer Reviews

Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South is much more than an update to the 1983 edition; it is virtually a complete rethinking of its predecessor as well as an updating of Knoxville's story from the 1982 World's Fair to the death of the nearly legendary Cas Walker. In this new edition, Wheeler argues that, like Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Knoxvilleans have fabricated for themselves a false history, portraying themselves and their city as the almost impotent victims of historical forces that they could neither alter nor control. The result of this myth, Wheeler says, is a collective mentality of near-helplessness against the powerful forces of isolation, poverty, and even change itself. But Knoxville's past is far more complicated than that, for the city contained abundant material goods and human talent that could have been used to propel Knoxville into the ranks of the premier cities of the New South if those assets had not slipped through the fingers of both the leaders and the populace. In all, Knoxville's history is the story of colliding forces—country and city, North and South, the poor and the elite, as well as the story of colorful figures, including Perez Dickinson, Edward Sanford, George Dempster, William Yardley, Louis Brownlow, Cas Walker, Carlene Malone, Victor Ashe, and many, many more. This is not, however, a history or a future without hope. Wheeler charts positive changes as well, such as downtown residential movements, urban renewal initiatives, political progressivism, and improving race relations. In many ways, Knoxville's story parallels the struggles facing all American cities, making this revised edition of interest both as a regional history and as a fascinating case study of American urbanism. William Bruce Wheeler is professor of history at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He is the co-author of *TVA and the Tellico Dam: A Bureaucratic Crisis in Post-Industrial America* and is currently at work on the sixth edition of *Discovering the American Past*.

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Professor Wheeler has done a fine job of assembling hundreds of years of Knoxville history and attempting to make some sense of it. For most of the early part of the book I was thinking that he had his facts correct but was making all kinds of wild conclusions. Then, part way through, I no longer seemed to notice that. Now, I think I know why. Dr. Wheeler seems to have come to UT in Knoxville in 1970, four years after I left there. I grew up in Knoxville, and feel that many events

extremely important to modern Knoxville were totally ignored (the long fight over the building of the Auditorium/Coliseum; the Market House fire - only mentioned- and its consequences; the struggle over planning of the freeway system, and the abrupt ending of it in midtown for many years). He also seemed to make what I know (I remember) were very minor events turn into key turning points. I think his treatment of Cas Walker is quite condescending. I also was condescending in my view of him for many years. At least I knew him personally, as I was his paper boy for a time, and he paid me, even gave me a tip. In truth, Cas was a great businessman giving Knoxville its most significant super market chain for many years. He did his own commercials on the radio and TV, supported many local artists, and contrary to what Dr. Wheeler might have us believe was a great moderating influence on the community. He gave voice to what the people thought, but often toned it down a whole lot from what the masses REALLY thought. He gives major credit to Mildred Doyle, who in many cases was a much more reactionary influence than was poor old Cas. After 1970, when he was there and I was not, I find it extremely interesting in explaining some of the things that I heard about but did not live with. I really enjoyed that part. I do think his treatment of Chris Whittle was much too kind, making a modern-day huckster into a hero. Interestingly, he gives a very balanced picture of the Butcher brothers, which is hard to do for criminals. But I think he is correct in his assessment. The book is quite readable most of the time but never an irresistible page turner. The references are many, and I was unable to find any serious errors even when I thoroughly disagreed with his conclusions. Knoxville prepared me for the world by giving me what I believe was a very balanced view of that outside world. Somebody needs to write a truly interesting story of Knoxville that pares down a lot of the unneeded information here, but fairly deals with the long term growth and success of the city. I have lived in many cities. All have problems. Sometimes Wheeler makes it seem that Knoxville just moved from once crisis to another, always getting worse, but ending up better in the end. How can that happen? But, overall, if you want to know about Knoxville, this book is indispensable.

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