

SHO-BUD STEEL GUITAR COMPANY
(Robert's Western World)
416B Broadway
Nashville
Davidson County
Tennessee

HABS TN-266
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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SHO-BUD STEEL GUITAR COMPANY (Robert's Western World)

HABS No. TN-266

Location: 416B Broadway, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee.

The coordinates for this building are 36.161003 N, -86.778068 W and were obtained through Bing maps (www.bing.com/maps/) on July 11, 2012. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: This simple two-story, flat-roof, brick commercial structure is thought to have been built ca. 1890 and is located on the lower end of Broadway, which has been a primarily commercial district of Nashville since the mid-nineteenth century. The association of this part of the street with country music began in the 1940s because of its proximity to the Ryman Auditorium. The Ryman Auditorium was the venue from where the popular country music radio show the *Grand Ole Opry* was broadcast between 1943 and 1974. It is only half a block north of the 400 block of Broadway and the success of the show drew both musicians and fans to the area.¹ This in turn led to various music-related businesses setting up shop nearby, including record stores, such as the Ernest Tubb Record Shop, and live performance bars, like Tootsie's Orchid Lounge.

In 1965, 416B Broadway also became home to a music business, namely the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company, which had been established by steel guitarists Harold Bradley "Shot" Jackson (1920-1991) and Buddy Gene Emmons (b. 1937) some years before. Among the instruments that they created together was the Sho-Bud steel guitar, which was both an instant and enduring success. Once the company moved into the Broadway building, it became a magnet for Nashville's steel guitar players.

In ca. 1980, Baldwin/Gretsch bought out the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company but Shot Jackson stayed on at 416B Broadway for several years, and thereafter it became a liquor store for the rest of the decade. In 1991, Robert Moore, a former manager of Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, opened Robert's Western Wear, a Western style clothing store, within the building. This subsequently evolved into the honkytonk bar Robert's Western World, which remains resident at 416B Broadway today.²

Description: 416B Broadway is a simple two-story, flat-roof, brick structure which is estimated to have been built ca. 1890. Its front façade faces south onto Broadway and the back (north) entrance opens onto the alleyway that runs between it and the Ryman Auditorium. On the south (front) façade, some of the bricks are a fairly bright red; others are more brown/grey in hue. The brickwork is mostly in the form of stretcher bond veneer and appears to have been redone well after the building's estimated date of construction.

The storefront level has been altered and consists of a utilitarian glass wall with metal mullions and an aluminum and glass door on the east side. The glass wall is topped by a row of wood frames with particle board insets and four fixed clerestory windows above.

¹ *Ryman Auditorium Timeline*. <http://www.ryman.com/history/> (accessed July 6, 2012).

² *About Robert's Western World*. <http://robertswesternworld.com/about/> (accessed July 13, 2012).

On the second floor, there is a row of six consecutive metal frame windows that extends for most of the width of the building. All but one of these are in the form of nine over six sash windows. The exception is the second window from the west, in which the upper part of the sash has been replaced by a single pane of glass.

The building itself is largely free of ornamentation except for a small cornice directly above the first floor windows, which separates the storefront and the second story level. However, there is a large neon sign perpendicular to the south façade, which extends from the top of the glass and metal wall at the storefront level to the top of the windows of the second story. The sign bears the words:

Robert's
Western World
Home of Sho-bud
Honkytonk Heaven
Hillbilly Grill

A large guitar forms the outer (south) part of the sign and on the guitar body are the words "Brazilbilly" (Brazilbilly is the name of the house band). A very large pink boot sits on top of the main part of the sign and apparently this was added by Robert Moore during the 1990s when the building became a western wear store.³

A photograph taken in 1980 shows that the upper part of the storefront, from above the level of the windows, and the whole of the upper story apart from the windows, were entirely covered by metal sheeting.⁴ This has since been removed.

On the interior of the building, the first floor is split into two levels by a mezzanine. There is a bar, bar seating and raised platform stage on the lower level and further bar seating on the mezzanine level. The ceiling of the first floor consists of tin square paneling and appears to be historic. The second floor is given over to offices and storage in the former steel guitar workshop. The ceiling in this part of the building consists of historic bead board.

History: This simple two-story, flat-roof, brick commercial structure is thought to have been built ca. 1890 and is located on the lower end of Broadway. The association of this part of the street with country music began in the 1940s because of its close proximity to the Ryman Auditorium, from where the popular country music radio show the *Grand Ole Opry* was broadcast between 1943 and 1974.⁵ The success of the show drew both musicians and music fans to the area which in turn led to various music-related businesses setting up shop nearby. In 1965, 416B Broadway became part of this trend when the building was purchased by the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company.

³ Jesse Lee Jones, current owner, interviewed by author, July 19, 2012. According to Jones, and as also indicated by a photograph on the wall of Robert's Western World, the sign originally hung outside an instrument shop/music school belonging to the country music star Hank Snow. Snow's business, which opened in 1958, was located at 810 Church Street and the sign bore the words "The Hank Snow Music Center".

⁴ Photograph kept in the Downtown Survey at the Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library. The Downtown Survey was carried out by Historic Nashville Inc. during the 1970s and early 1980s.

⁵ *Ryman Auditorium Timeline*. <http://www.ryman.com/history/> (accessed July 6, 2012).

This estimated 1890 construction date for 416B Broadway comes from a number of sources. Firstly, the footprint shown in the 1897 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* is almost identical to the one in the 1952 map. Because the 1952 map distinctly depicts the current structure, it seems clear that the building was in place by 1897.⁶ Furthermore, the 1888 *Sanborn Map* shows a distinctly different building, one that is much shorter in depth and constructed of brick and wood.⁷ For that reason, it can be assumed with some certainty that the building was constructed during the years between the publication of those two maps, i.e. 1889 and 1896. Meanwhile, the deeds for the property show that it went through one sale during this time frame, namely from Mr. Weissbaum, who had owned the lot since March 1882, to Mr. Chadwell on February 12, 1890.⁸ Buildings are often built immediately prior or subsequent to the sale of their respective lots and for that reason, and taken in conjunction with the information offered by the Sanborn Maps, the date of construction is estimated to be in or around 1890.

Once erected, the building stood on the lower end of Broadway in an area which had been primarily commercial in nature since the mid-nineteenth century.⁹ Originally, the majority of the businesses that set up shop on this part of the street dealt in furniture, hardware, feed and grain. City directories indicate that by the early twentieth century, there were also several grocery stores, barbers and pawnbrokers on the 400 block, along with at least one hotel, a restaurant, a watchmaker and shoemaker.¹⁰

Determination of the use of 416B Broadway prior to it becoming the home of the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company is not a straightforward matter due to changing street numbers during the early twentieth century.¹¹ The earliest Nashville city directory to include street listings is that of 1910, at which time the current 416B Broadway was designated 418. At that time, it was occupied by a Moses Underberg who sold soft drinks.¹² By 1914, the building was vacant.¹³ In the following decades, prior to 1952, it is not easy to pinpoint the street address for this building. However both 416 and 418 housed a variety of tenants or sat vacant for brief periods. When uses were listed in the city directories they included dry goods dealer, leather shop, and a furniture company.

⁶ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, Nashville, TN, (1897), volume 1, sheet 1; *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, Nashville, TN, (1952), volume 1, sheet 3.

⁷ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, Nashville, TN, (1888), sheet 4.

⁸ *Register of Deeds, Davidson County, Tennessee*. The 1882 sale was recorded in deed book 72, page 35, and the 1890 sale in deed book 139, page 153.

⁹ David Paine, *National Register of Historic Places – Nomination Form: Broadway Historic District, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee* (United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1979).

¹⁰ *Nashville City Directory* (Nashville, Tennessee: Marshall, Bruce, Polk and Company, 1910), 1080.

¹¹ The building was known variously as 418, 416, and finally 416B. In the 1897 and 1914 Sanborn maps, the building is referred to as number 418, while the building to its east is 416 and that to its west is 418½.¹¹ In 1952, today's 416B is called simply 416 while the building directly to its west is called 418 (and west of that is a building numbered 418-420) and the building to its east is number 416A. This suggests that the building numbering changed at some point between 1914 and 1952. Therefore the listings by street number within the city directories, which would ordinarily be a good source of information about the occupants of a particular building, must be approached with some caution in this case.

¹² *Nashville City Directory* (1910), 1080.

¹³ *Nashville City Directory* (1914), 910.

By 1953, the Kantor Furniture Company was occupying both 416 and 418 Broadway and it remained there into the 1960s.¹⁴ However by 1965 it was listed as being only at 418 Broadway and the following year a new occupant of 416 Broadway appeared: the “Sho-Bud Guitar Company Inc and Sho-Bud Sales Company Music Sales.”¹⁵ Meanwhile property deeds indicate that the Sho-Bud company had actually purchased the building on January 29, 1965.¹⁶

The presence of the Sho-Bud Guitar Company - also known as the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company and Music City Manufacturing - at this location was part of a general trend of music-related businesses moving into premises on lower Broadway. This was due to the street's proximity to the Ryman Auditorium from where the popular country music radio show the *Grand Ole Opry* was broadcast between 1943 and 1974.¹⁷ Located at 116 5th Ave North, the Ryman Auditorium is only half a block north of the 400 block of lower Broadway and the success of the show drew performers and fans to the area. Record stores (such as the Ernest Tubb Record Shop, which is across the road from 416B Broadway), live performance bars (including Tootsie's Orchid Lounge three doors west of 416B Broadway) and other related businesses accordingly began to set up shop nearby.¹⁸

The Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company had been established by two steel guitarists - Harold Bradley “Shot” Jackson (1920-1991) and Buddy Gene Emmons (b. 1937) - in the 1950s, which was an era when the pedal steel guitar was gaining prominence in country music.¹⁹ The instrument had actually existed since the 1940s, but in 1954 one was featured on a hit country record for the first time. The song was Webb Pierce's “Slowly.” The sound of strings being raised in pitch from a I to a IV chord by the foot-operated pedal created a sensation and steel players quickly started attaching pedals to their non-pedal/lap steel instruments using coat hangers and other implements.²⁰ In Nashville, respected session musician Shot Jackson became expert at rigging these pedals and in 1956, he approached his fellow musician Buddy Emmons - the steel guitar's top innovator both musically and technically - with the idea of their designing a new instrument together.²¹ The result was the Sho-Bud steel guitar, which was created in 1956 in Jackson's garage in Madison, Tennessee. The two men sold a few models locally, word of their quality quickly spread, and soon the instruments were much in demand among Nashville's steel guitarists.

¹⁴ *Polk's Nashville City Directory* (Nashville, Tennessee: R. L. Polk and Co., 1962), 101.

¹⁵ *Polk's Nashville City Directory* (1965), 138; *Polk's Nashville City Directory* (1966), 138.

¹⁶ *Register of Deeds, Davidson County, Tennessee*, book 3857, page 829.

¹⁷ *Ryman Auditorium Timeline*. <http://www.ryman.com/history/> (accessed July 6, 2012).

¹⁸ In 1943 C. V. Hitchcock, who was one of the city's earliest jukebox operators and wholesale record salesmen, took out a lease on 416A Broadway, the building next door to 416B Broadway and used it as the premises for his jukebox/recording sales company Hermitage Music. He later moved it across the road to 421-423 Broadway. See Martin Hawkins, *A Shot in the Dark: Making Records in Nashville, 1945-55* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press/Country Music Foundation Press, 2007), 21.

¹⁹ Walt Trott, “Shot Jackson,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 258-59; Daniel Cooper, “Buddy Emmons,” in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 163.

²⁰ Bob Kramer, steel guitarist and staff member at the Country Music Foundation, personal communication with author, August 16, 2012.

²¹ Buddy Emmons (as told to Tom Bradshaw), “Buddy Emmons - Pedal Steel King,” *Guitar Player* (May 1976): 16-50.

For the first year or so, the Sho-Bud Guitar Company continued to be based in Jackson's garage and it then moved to Nesbitt Lane in Madison. By the time of its 1965 relocation to the prominent site at 416B Broadway, Emmons had left the company, though he remained on good terms with Jackson and often dropped by to visit his former colleague.²² 416B Broadway was intended to function both as a retail store and as a manufacturing workshop. Thus, the lower part of first floor was given over to the retail area and there were also some small rooms for music lessons. The mezzanine level was used for hospitality and parties, and the second floor was given over to the workshop.²³

According to Leslie Elliot, who worked as Jackson's secretary for nearly twenty years, "practically everybody that was a steel guitarist at that time came by the store" to try out the Sho-Bud instruments. Among them were renowned Nashville players like Jerry Byrd, Curly Chalker, Jimmy Day and Lloyd Green.²⁴ Sho-Bud's clientele also included members of the bands The Monkees and Yes.²⁵ The company was so successful that by the late 1960s, the bulk of the manufacturing had been moved to a location away from the Broadway shop.²⁶

In ca. 1980, Jackson sold the manufacturing rights and the name of the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company to Gretsch/Baldwin, but he remained at 416B Broadway and renamed the business Shot Jackson's Guitar & Service Center. City directories indicate he stayed in the premises for several years, but by 1984 it had become a liquor store.²⁷ In fact, Broadway by that stage had been in a state of decline for over a decade and many of the buildings around 416B were occupied by adult movie-houses and peep shows.

In response to this decline, a downtown revitalization program was put in place by the Metro Development and Housing Agency, along with other organizations, and it sought to bring more diversity to the nature of the businesses operating on lower Broadway and develop the street as a historic district.²⁸ As a result, Broadway slowly evolved into a tourist destination and became home to many music bars, restaurants and other businesses likely to attract visitors, particularly those interested in Nashville's association with the country music industry. As part of this, Robert Moore, a former manager of Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, opened Robert's Western Wear at 416B Broadway in 1991.²⁹ Robert's Western Wear was a Western style clothing store which subsequently evolved into a honkytonk and was renamed Robert's Western World. In 1999, Moore retired and Jesse Lee Jones, the Brazilian-born musician and leader of the current house band

²² Buddy Emmons, "Buddy Emmons, Shot Jackson and the Birth of the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar." Accessed via <http://www.planet.eon.net/~gsimmons/shobud/buddy.html> on August 23, 2012.

²³ Leslie Elliot, secretary to Shot Jackson 1966-1983, personal communication with author, August 23, 2012.

²⁴ Elliot, personal communication with author, August 23, 2012.

²⁵ The Robert's Western World website states that other visitors included Billy Robinson, Smiley Roberts, Jack Boles, Ron Elliot, Don Helms, Don Warden (manager of Dolly Parton), Big Ben Keith (who played with Crosby, Stills and Nash and now plays with Neil Young), Doug Jernigan, Bill West and Russ Hicks. *About Robert's Western World*. <http://robertswesternworld.com/about/> (accessed July 13, 2012).

²⁶ This factory was initially housed in a building on Dickerson Road in Madison. In April 1972, it moved to 609 9th Ave South, Nashville and in 1974, it relocated once again to 178 2nd Ave North, Nashville, which was only a couple of blocks from the retail store.

²⁷ *Nashville City Directory* (Michigan: R. L. Polk and Co., 1984), 115.

²⁸ Bill Hudgins, "Lower Broad can be transformed," *Nashville Banner*, 17 December 1982, n.p.

²⁹ *Nashville City Directory* (1991), 68.

Brazilbilly, took over.³⁰ Robert's Western World remains in situ at 416B Broadway today.

Sources:

Published Sources and Reports

Cooper, Daniel. "Buddy Emmons." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury, 163. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Emmons, Buddy (as told to Tom Bradshaw). "Buddy Emmons - Pedal Steel King." *Guitar Player* (May 1976): 16-50.

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Paine, David. *National Register of Historic Places – Nomination Form: Broadway Historic District, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee*. United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1979.

Trott, Walt. "Shot Jackson." In *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kingsbury, 258-59. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Collections, Repositories and Archives

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE:

Davidson County Register of Deeds: Property deeds.

Frist Library and Archive of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum: Clippings files and journal archives.

Metro Archives: Clippings files and maps.

Metro Historical Commission: National Register of Historic Places nomination documents and clippings files,

Nashville Room, Nashville Public Library: City Directories, downtown survey, clippings files, maps, photo archives and microfilms.

Tennessee State Library and Archives: Records of business incorporation, maps, photo archives and microfilms.

Websites

"About Robert's Western World." <http://robertswesternworld.com/about/> (accessed July 13, 2012).

Ryman Auditorium website. <http://www.ryman.com/>

Project

Information: Written Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation of the Sho-Bud Steel Guitar Company building was undertaken as part of the 2012 HABS-SAH Sally

³⁰ Interview with Jesse Lee Jones, current owner, July 19, 2012.

Kress Tompkins Fellowship. The Fellowship is jointly sponsored by HABS and the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) to allow a graduate student to work on a HABS history project. Rachel Hopkin (Western Kentucky University), 2012 Fellow, produced historical reports for several buildings related to the development of Nashville's music industry. HABS is within the Heritage Documentation Programs (HDP) division of the National Park Service (Catherine Lavoie, Chief, HABS; Richard O'Connor, Chief, HDP). Project planning was coordinated by Lisa P. Davidson, HABS historian and Chair, HABS-SAH Sally Kress Tompkins Fellowship Committee. Assistance was provided by Tim Walker, Executive Director, Nashville Metropolitan Historical Commission, and by Robbie Jones, Historic Nashville Inc. In addition, the assistance of Deborah Cox (Archivist, Nashville Metro Archives), Leslie Elliot (former secretary of Shot Jackson), Jesse Lee Jones (current owner of the property), Bob Kramer and John Rumble (both at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum), Robert Oermann (journalist and writer) and Eileen Starr is gratefully acknowledged.



Figure 1: Robert's Western World. Photograph by Lisa P. Davidson, 19 July 2012.