The Civil War is one of the great transforming events of American history. We still recall with horror battles such as Shiloh and Vicksburg; we remember the famous generals who strode across the South; and we praise the heroism of both Yankees and Rebels who died by the thousands. Too often, however, we do not realize that this all-consuming war touched almost every place in Tennessee, and towns like Collierville, located on the historic Memphis-Charleston railroad line in Shelby County, have their own Civil War stories to tell.

Clockwise from top left: The Battle of Collierville marker and cannon; Frisco Steam Locomotive #1351; Magnolia Cemetery Confederate Soldier Memorial; and the Historic Train Depot.

COLLIERVILLE OFFERS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE BY PRESERVING ITS PAST FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

THIS BROCHURE MADE POSSIBLE BY:

The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area
histpres.mtsu.edu/tcwwar

Main Street Collierville
www.collierville.com/mainstreet

Wigfall Grays Sons of Confederates Veterans
www.tennessee-scvo.org

Collierville Culture, Recreation & Tourism Commission
www.tourcollierville.com

On the cover: Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, United States Federal Army
Suddenly, in what proved to be a stroke of luck for the Union army, a train carrying Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman and his headquarters staff—an estimated 260 men—pulled into the Collierville depot. Chalmers never knew Sherman was coming—in fact, Sherman was headed east to review his troops at Corinth, Mississippi, before they moved to Chattanooga to help the besieged Army of the Cumberland.

Gen. Sherman quickly sent his troops from the train to push back the Confederate assault while he ordered local commander Col. D. C. Anthony to refuse Gen. Chalmers’s demand for surrender. Soon the Confederates were close enough to fire volleys into Gen. Sherman’s train, and Sherman ordered the burning of nearby buildings that potentially sheltered enemy fire. The Confederates set fire to the rear of the train, and even captured Sherman’s favorite horse, Dolly, but they never gained control. Orders were sent to Germantown: “Sherman completely surrounded at Collierville. Come quick.” Once Gen. Chalmers learned of approaching Federal reinforcements from Germantown, he withdrew his troops, to fight another day.

Despite the damage, Gen. Sherman was back on track, headed to Corinth, in a day. But the encounter at the Collierville depot taught the Union general that dependence on this railroad was unwise. He told Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant: “To depend on a road so precarious as this would tie us down to localities that can have material influence on events.” In less than a year, Sherman put his thoughts into action, launching his “March to the Sea,” where his army would “move about and learn to live on the corn and meal of the country.”

It took much longer for Collierville to recover from the ravages of war. When residents rebuilt the damaged town after the war, they designed it in a square, although the railroad line formed one side, a feature unusual in Tennessee. Today, that square, named Confederate Park, along with many other late 19th and early 20th-century buildings in Collierville, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The war first came, indirectly, to Collierville in 1862 as the community cared for wounded Confederate soldiers left behind by the trains always passing through town. After the battle of Shiloh and the later capture of Memphis, Federal troops occupied Collierville, built fortifications to protect the railroad, and stationed several hundred troops in and around the town.

Conflict came to the doorsteps of Collierville residents once Confederate cavalry began a concerted series of raids to disrupt Union supply lines and communications in the summer and fall of 1863. On October 11, 1863, 3,000 Confederates, under the command of Brig. Gen. James R. Chalmers, swooped down on the tiny garrison protecting Collierville. The Confederates chased the Federals into their fortifications and captured wagons of supplies.

Losses in the battle totaled over 200. The Federal dead were buried and later removed to the National Cemetery in Memphis. One Confederate unknown soldier is buried in Collierville’s Magnolia Cemetery.