

Occupied Murfreesboro:
Historic Photographs
from the Civil War Era

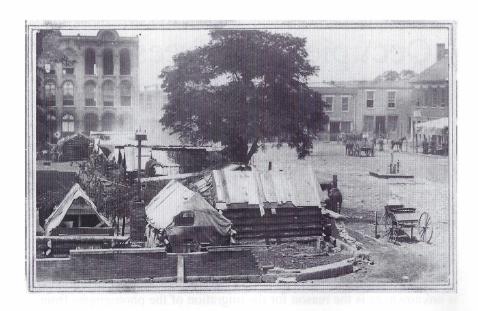
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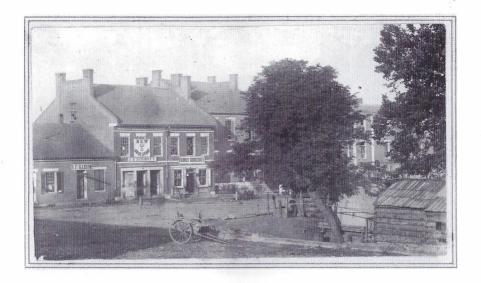
Murfreesboro, an early capital of Tennessee and site of one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, comes to life in the eight historic photographs reproduced here. These stirring images, dating to the mid-1860s, are the oldest known photos of Murfreesboro. The photographer is unknown, as is the reason for the migration of the photographs from Murfreesboro to Colorado, where they were purchased about 20 years ago by Sheryl and Don Jones, who donated them in 2003 to the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University.

Regardless of their origins, the photographs uniquely capture a community in transition. They show a town literally under the gun, with military structures surrounding the Rutherford County courthouse. From 1862 to 1865, Murfreesboro residents experienced Union Army occupation, the horrific Battle of Stones River, and the demise of slavery—events that significantly altered their lives. As the citizens regrouped and rebuilt, they would transform Murfreesboro's physical appearance into the Victorian cityscape that still dominates the downtown today.

Reprinted here, the photographs are accompanied by three essays that provide additional insight into the Murfreesboro community during and after the Civil War.



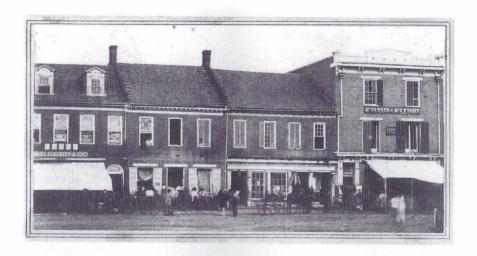
View of the public square looking west. In the foreground are structures from the Union encampment on the courthouse lawn. A stone and brick wall that surrounded the lawn is partially demolished; Union soldiers used the wall's materials to construct chimneys for their tents. An iron fence replaced the wall in 1870. The town well is visible to the right.



View of the public square, possibly the south side. Note the evidence of the Union camp on the courthouse lawn.



View of the public square, possibly the south side. John McDermott opened a drugstore on the square in 1850.

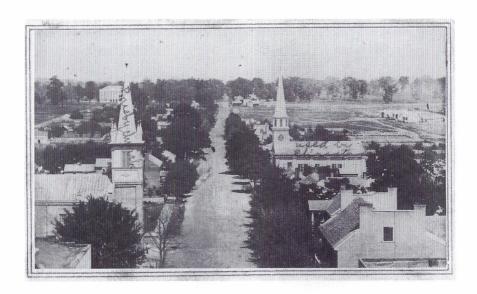


View of the public square, possibly the west side. On the square during the war, Robert D. Reed managed a jewelry business dealing mainly with watches. The business closed following the war.

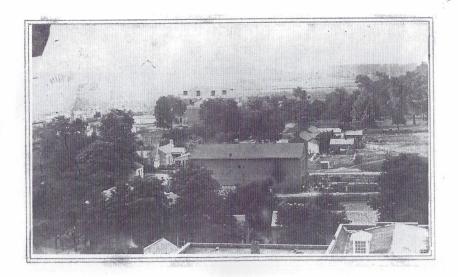


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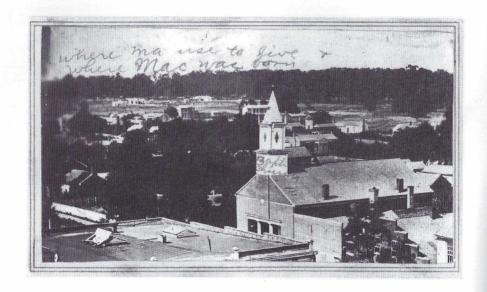
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View from the courthouse cupola looking east down Main Street. On the left is the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, built in 1859. During the war, this church served as a hospital, barracks for Union troops, and prison for Confederate soldiers. On the right is the Christian Church. This church was used by various ministers for services during the war and therefore suffered little damage. The large building in the upper left is Union University, founded in 1848. During the war, this school served as a hospital and then as a refuge for former slaves.



View from the courthouse cupola looking north. In the foreground is one of several carriage shops located in Murfreesboro. The large building in the distance with numerous chimneys is the Soule Female College. Soule was founded in 1852 and served as a hospital during the war.



View from the courthouse cupola looking north. Someone labeled the church in the foreground as the Baptist Church, but it is believed to be the Methodist Church at the corner of North Church Street and College Street.



View from the courthouse cupola looking southwest. The owner of the house in the center foreground is not known. The building in the background is thought to be a mill building close to Lytle Creek and the railroad spur. Note the train cars to the right of the building.

The Look of Antebellum Murfreesboro

The images of the town square and scattered buildings in Murfreesboro, captured by the unknown photographer in the collection donated by Sheryl and Don Jones, are invaluable documents of the architecture of a typical Southern antebellum town, in this case a place that had once been the capital of Tennessee.

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o a contemporary eye, little seems familiar other than the glimpses of the courthouse itself and the general layout of the town and buildings. The most jarring structures are those hastily thrown up by Federal troops around the courthouse itself. Remnants of a wall define a square of shacks—some of cut lumber, others of logs thrown together, all using swaths of canvas as walls and roofs. Recent scholarship and interpretation have spoken of Murfreesboro as "an occupied city" for most of the Civil War. Rare indeed are such photographs that graphically document what the physical face of occupation was like.

The photographs of the square show us not only the Civil War face of Murfreesboro but also its roots as a prosperous county seat and one-time state capital. The many two-story brick buildings show the stability of the local business class, one that had gained prosperity in the past generation. Yet most buildings, in their architecture, are quite conservative, representing various degrees of Federal style in their symmetrical facades, their central entrances, and their plain appearance. In a few corners, Murfreesboro's late antebellum prosperity may be glimpsed in a grand three-story commercial building and a Victorian-influenced cornice. But in general, these photographs tell us that today's prized courthouse square, full of Victorian-styled storefronts, is a more recent reflection of the past. Today's square represents the changes made about one hundred years ago, when citizens had rebuilt most of Murfreesboro in the wake of a brutal war and destructive occupation.

When the photographer climbed high in the courthouse, his camera captured overviews of occupied Murfreesboro. The image of Main Street facing east shows us grand educational and religious buildings dominated by Greek Revival styling with massive porticos. The two-story columns of Union University, facing the courthouse at the eastern end of town, convey the seriousness that Southern elites associated with classical education. The prominence of the large brick churches tells us of the centrality of religion and that many congregations had grown in the past decade, leading to the construction of fine, architecturally imposing sanctuaries.

Other overviews document the rather different face of industrial Murfreesboro, with comparatively huge, long brick buildings housing carriage factories and other smaller, unadorned buildings housing a multitude of firms and manufacturers. The overviews also convey the general settled nature of the townscape: well-defined streets, fences defining lots, and mature trees and shrubbery. For a town that had celebrated its 50th anniversary at the time of the Civil War, Murfreesboro had exchanged the temporary look of a frontier settlement for the more permanent and prosperous appearance of a mature and promising county seat.

The photographer concentrated on the square and its commercial buildings, but his images also record bits and pieces of Murfreesboro's domestic architecture. What the camera lens captured matches our understanding of the built environment still documented by surviving antebellum homes. Like the storefronts and businesses of the square, the homes of Murfreesboro were conservative in style, linked more closely to their colonial antecedents than to the latest in architectural styling associated with the Victorian era.

A conservative yet stable town—that was Murfreesboro as reflected in its buildings and architecture on that unknown day when a photographer walked around the courthouse square and took a series of images that captured a warweary town.

Carroll Van West Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area

The Experience of Home Front Murfreesboro

For the residents of Murfreesboro, the Civil War brought a range of experiences and emotions. Families with loved ones on the front lines lived through the strain of uncertainty, and many experienced the despair of mourning. The town's citizens grew accustomed to hunger and want as shortages, foraging by soldiers, and exorbitant inflation took their toll. Supporters of the Confederacy, which included most white residents, chafed under Union occupation from 1862 to 1865 and cheered on the soldiers in gray whenever possible. Most slaves, on the other hand, welcomed the Union presence, and all experienced the jubilation of freedom by war's end. Throughout the town, citizens of every political leaning and social class shared the horror of Murfreesboro's most traumatic wartime event—the Battle of Stones River, accompanied by unimaginable death and destruction, a little more than a mile from downtown.



n 1861, most residents of Murfreesboro predicted a short and relatively painless war. Businessman John C. Spence described his neighbors as "never once dreaming that they should ever hear the roar of cannon, the rattle of muskets, or the groans of the dying." Murfreesboro's role as a primary depot along the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, however, would soon forcefully bring the conflict home to this community of about 4,000 persons.

Early on, residents made use of the railroad and the many turnpikes emanating from Murfreesboro to contribute to the war effort. Businesses shipped out such equipment as ambulances, guns, cartridge boxes, and cavalry saddles. Citizens

donated food, blankets, and clothing to the troops; a women's soldiers relief society sent supplies to the Confederate front.

After Union forces took Nashville in February 1862, Murfreesboro's identity as a transportation nexus made it a clear target. By mid-March a garrison of about 1,500 Union troops had set up camps throughout the town and replaced the Confederate flag at the courthouse with the United States colors. Soldiers searched homes for guns and ammunition, arrested some vocal Confederate sympathizers, established a contraband camp for runaway slaves, scoured the countryside for food and wood, and required an oath of allegiance from businessmen, professionals, and local officials, as well as those who wanted to travel beyond Union lines.

Local Confederate supporters resented the intrusion of Union troops and found the oath of allegiance particularly galling; most tried to avoid taking it. At the same time, Murfreesboro's slaves turned out in large numbers to watch the troops' weekly dress parade. Many blacks signed on with the Union as laborers and eventually soldiers, while some found themselves impressed into service. Murfreesboro resident Kate Carney recorded in her diary the increasing tensions that resulted from Union occupation, including slaveholders' rising distrust of their slaves and the eruption of personal antagonisms between neighbors.

Three events in 1862 cheered the town's Confederate supporters. On July 13, Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry attacked the occupation forces and compelled them to surrender. The raid included fighting at the courthouse and at a hotel on the square; a few townspeople found themselves in the line of fire, including a young girl shot in the face. Locals cared for the wounded and buried the dead. Union troops, however, soon reoccupied the town until September. General Braxton Bragg's Confederate forces arrived in November. On December 13, many residents welcomed Confederate President Jefferson Davis to Murfreesboro, as he met with General Bragg and his officers at Lewis Maney's Oaklands residence. The next day many celebrated the wedding of Kentucky cavalryman John Hunt Morgan and Murfreesboro's Mattie Ready, who had drawn Morgan's attention by her outspoken defense of him to Union officers over the summer.

The revelry occasioned by the Morgan-Ready wedding would soon be shattered by the carnage created at the Battle of Stones River from December 31, 1862, to January 2, 1863. The hard-fought conflict resulted in more than 24,000 casualties, more than any other battle fought on Tennessee soil. Murfreesboro was overwhelmed with severely wounded men, who were cared for in churches, hotels, schools, homes, and the courthouse. "The whole town appeared to be one general hospital," wrote John Spence. Some of the injured lay on sidewalks, lawns, and porches.

General Bragg's retreat after the battle gave the Union a narrow, but desperately needed, victory. Demoralization set in among many Confederate supporters as Union forces again occupied Murfreesboro. During the first half of 1863, Union General William S. Rosecrans focused on building a massive earthen fortification, named Fortress Rosecrans, as a supply depot northwest of town. Local African American workers contributed to the construction, and others cut wood for the upkeep of the railroad. Some black women, meanwhile, worked as cooks for soldiers stationed at the fort. In these same months, Union troops dismantled the First Presbyterian Church, once the state capitol, and used its materials for military buildings and fortifications.

Daniel Miller, a Union soldier who served on guard duty at Fortress Rosecrans, wrote to his family early in 1864, optimistically predicting an imminent end to the war because "the people at home are more peaceful, they see that as long as they rebel at home there cannot be peace." Preoccupied with survival as shortages and inflation mounted, confederate supporters may simply have become resigned to Union occupation. Late in 1864, the bloody face of war arrived in middle Tennessee again with the battles of Franklin and Nashville. Escaped slave John Finnely, who helped bury some of the Union dead in Murfreesboro, later prayed that he would never have to witness such desperate suffering again.

When the conflict ended in April 1865, Murfreesboro's residents were finally free of the immediate horror of war. They would, however, continue to be buffeted by the changes brought about by the war, especially the transition

from slavery to freedom. Former slaves sought to reunite their families, build churches and schools, establish their right to public assembly and citizenship, and find work that provided them with at least a degree of independence. Former slaveholders tried to make do without the amount of household and agricultural labor they had once commanded and to reconcile themselves to seeing their former slaves as soldiers, citizens, and independent workers.

At the same time that this transition was taking place, the Murfreesboro community began the process of rebuilding its infrastructure and renewing its economic life. The transportation network that brought the war home would help the town on the road back to productivity and prosperity.

Antoinette G. van Zelm Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area

The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Murfreesboro

During and after the Civil War, millions of enslaved African Americans became free. Throughout the South, these newly freed persons formed social and benevolent organizations, built schools and churches, and formed new urban and rural communities. They also benefited from the assistance of Northern benevolent organizations, such as the American Missionary Association and the United States Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau. Freedom gave former slaves the opportunity to build viable black communities.



n 1810, the newly formed county of Rutherford had 10,265 inhabitants, including 7,527 free whites and 2,701 enslaved African Americans. These slaves belonged to 412 owners, most of whom owned fewer than five slaves. By 1860, there were 14,743 whites living in Rutherford County, 190 free persons of color, and 12,980 slaves belonging to 1,316 owners. Thus, while the number of white settlers only increased by about 100 percent between 1810 and 1860, the number of blacks in Rutherford County increased by more than 400 percent.

During the Union occupation, Murfreesboro witnessed a large influx of refugee slaves. In the summer of 1863, resident John C. Spence noted "greater numbers of [Negroes] coming to town . . . some days by the wagon load." These fugitive slaves found shelter in such buildings as the old city jail, the Presbyterian Church located beside the old city cemetery, and the building and grounds of Union University, located six blocks east of the courthouse. This migration of refugees to Murfreesboro constituted a demographic metamorphosis from a

majority of whites in 1860 to a majority of blacks immediately following the war. By 1870, there were 1,816 African Americans residing within the city limits of Murfreesboro, double the number of African Americans held in bondage there before the war. These newly freed blacks made up 52 percent of the overall population.

The first occurrences of black community formation during Reconstruction took place with the reconstructing of family units. Emancipation gave freed men and women the opportunity to reunite families separated during slavery because of sales, inheritances, or "abroad" marriages between partners who had different masters. After the war, the Freedmen's Bureau authorized its agents to give civil sanction to slave marriages, which had had no legal standing. Bureau agents encouraged former slaves to obtain legal marriage certificates at local courthouses. In August 1865 alone, 1,136 black marriages were listed in the Rutherford County marriage records.

With the rebuilding of family units, the acquisition of land and accommodations became of vital importance to freed men and women. By 1870, 374 black households existed in the city of Murfreesboro. Yet, most former slaves did not possess the financial means to buy property and so rented housing. Between 1865 and 1880, only thirty deeds involving black ownership of city lots were recorded at the courthouse. Most of these black property owners purchased their lots from whites. Of the 119 slave owners living within the city limits in 1860, the 1870 census reveals that at least 13 still had blacks living with them.

Religion played a crucial role for African Americans both before and after emancipation. Worshipping had provided slaves an outlet for expression through prayer, song, and dance. Communal religion had also allowed slaves to build social bonds outside their immediate households or plantation communities. Whether slaves attended white churches or held their own services, church meetings gave slaves the opportunity to form strong social bonds that later held them together during the transition to freedom.

Refugee and emancipated slaves in Murfreesboro showed an eagerness to establish independent black churches. During and after the war, black churches were started wherever a place could be found. During the war, for example, black Methodists in Murfreesboro worshiped in individual homes, in the basement of the white Methodist church building, and, finally, in the white Primitive Baptist Church. This black denomination became the future Key United Methodist Church, which continued to use the Primitive Baptist Church building at the corner of Church and Lytle streets until late in 1865. By 1870, there were four black congregations in Murfreesboro: North Methodist Episcopal Church (Key United), African Methodist (Allen Chapel), Mt. Zion Baptist Church, and the Missionary Baptist Church (First Baptist).

Education became another key element in the communal and social development of newly freed African Americans. Lacking the authority to distribute land to former slaves, the Freedmen's Bureau relied on formal education to raise the social and economic standing of emancipated slaves. While the bureau provided money for the building of schools, such organizations as the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission and the American Missionary Association sent thousands of Northern teachers into the South. Learning to read and write enabled former slaves to understand their civil rights, to master trades and leadership, and to better themselves economically. Early black schools were often branches of black churches. The First Baptist Church on Sevier Street served as a school in the late 1860s. It had two white teachers and one black teacher. The Key United Methodist Church started a school for blacks in 1867. When the Murfreesboro school system was reorganized in 1884, the abandoned Bradley Academy school building was designated the first formal institution of public education for the African American community.

As did ex-slaves in other cities throughout the South, former slaves in Murfreesboro came together during and after the war to form families and communities. They built churches, schools, and businesses to provide for their economic and social needs. By 1880, Murfreesboro's African Americans had created a complex social network and a viable black community through family, religion, and education.

John Lodl Cultural Center

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Conclusion

Historic documents such as these eight photographs often raise more questions than they answer. Who took these photographs and why? Are these wartime photographs or images taken shortly after the fighting was over? Are these all of the images taken by the photographer, or are there more, of buildings or residents, to be discovered? What did the residents who were captured in these images think of the photographer? Did they think he was recording a place in decline or a place ready to rebuild? How had the war and occupation affected the lives of Murfreesboro's residents? While we may never discover all of the answers to these questions, the photographs remind us that there was a Murfreesboro beyond the battlefield and that the demands of living in an occupied city shaped residents and visitors alike for the next generation.



he generous donation of historic photographs by Sheryl and Don Jones of Arvada, Colorado, to the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University began the process of creating this exhibition and accompanying booklet. Both were designed and produced through funds from the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area with the support of the Bradley Academy Museum and Cultural Center, the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, and the Albert Gore Research Center.



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