

Williamson County Courthouse and Market House

A two-story brick courthouse was constructed where you are standing in about 1809. A building called the “market house,” where farmers and vendors sold their produce and wares, stood “in close proximity” to the courthouse. For nearly half a century human beings were also sold and traded within the market house’s walls, as well as on the courthouse steps and elsewhere in the square. The local newspaper often carried advertisements for the “Sale of Slaves,” and men, women and children were sometimes sold to pay the debts of a deceased owner. Families were often ripped apart. In 1854, for example, a 25-year old woman named Mary and her children Daniel, Pryor, Ann, and an infant child were sold here.

James F. Carter purchased slaves at the market house. Carter, the son of Fountain Branch Carter, bought John and Patsy Bostic in 1854 and took them to Mississippi where he lived for several years. He moved back to Franklin and died in 1859. The Bostics probably were sent to Carter’s father’s farm just outside town that the Battle of Franklin enveloped on November 30, 1864. John and Patsy Bostic and their children were residing in Franklin as free people in 1870.

The courthouse that stood here was torn down early in December 1855 to make way for the new courthouse, which stands today on the south side of the square. Soon after the old courthouse was demolished, the market house was likewise torn down. However, the buying and selling of people continued on the new courthouse steps and in the square through the outbreak of the Civil War.

United States Colored Troops (USCT)

During the Civil War, on May 22, 1863, the U.S. War Department created the Bureau of Colored Troops. Over the next two years, ~~nearly 180,000 more than 175,000~~ African American men enlisted and served in segregated U.S. Army regiments under white officers. USCT units served in all Army branches, including infantry, artillery, cavalry, and engineers. More than 2,700 died in combat.

Commented [WL1]: 179,000 is the most recent number I have seen. If my memory serves me, there were at least 80 commissioned officers. I talk quite a bit about one, Maj. Alexander T. Augusta, in my Civil War classes.

USCTs fought at Fort Pillow and Johnsonville in Tennessee, the Battle of the Crater in Virginia, and at Brice's Crossroads in Mississippi, among other battles. At least 300 Williamson County men enlisted, as did many from neighboring Maury County. Perhaps as many as half of Williamson County's USCTs participated in the Battle of Nashville on December 15–16, 1864, when eight USCT regiments were engaged. On December 16, 1864, the 12th, 13th, and 100th USCT together lost 80 killed and 388 wounded.

Several of the casualties were from Williamson County. Pvt. Asbury DeGraffenried, Co. K, 12th USCT, was mortally wounded and died on December 20, 1864. Pvt. Horace Winston, Co. F, 13th USCT, was also mortally wounded and died on January 6, 1865. Pvt. William Redman, Co. I, 13th USCT, was killed in action. Pvt. Freeman Carothers, Co. K, 12th USCT, was among those who survived the fight. After his discharge, he took a new last name and lived as Freeman Thomas until his death in 1936. He is buried nearby at Toussaint L'Overture Cemetery.

Col. Thomas Jefferson Morgan, who commanded a USCT brigade at Nashville, later wrote, "I cannot close this paper without expressing the conviction that history has not yet done justice to the share borne by colored soldiers in the war for the Union."

The Franklin Riot of 1867

Numerous armed clashes occurred among various political groups and the white and black populations after the American Civil War. In May 1866, a riot in Memphis killed about fifty. At the end of July 1866, a widespread riot engulfed New Orleans. When it ended almost 240 were dead, including more than 200 African American U.S. Army veterans. Fortunately, Franklin did not experience such levels of violence, but on July 6, 1867, an incident unfolded that reflected the boiling tensions in the post-war South.

On that day, several Republican candidates, often called Radicals, made speeches in the courthouse here without incident. Later, Joe Williams, an African American aligned with the Democrats, or Conservatives, gave a speech there after making one earlier at Spring Hill. Some Radicals became upset and attempted to leave the gathering, but Conservatives accosted them. John L. House, a former Confederate officer, struck J. C. Bliss, a white merchant aligned with the Radicals. Members of the Colored League (African American Republicans) also were present, and tempers flared.

The Colored Leaguer members were persuaded to leave the square, but not without firing a few shots into the air. During the late afternoon the tension increased, as did the number of weapons in the hands of the Colored League. Meanwhile, Conservatives gathered in and around the public square and near John House's store.

Just after 8 P.M., the Colored League marched to the square. According to A. N. C. Williams, the Leaguers intended to lay down their arms and House had been informed. As the procession passed the Conservative crowd, however, a white Conservative fired two pistol shots into the Leaguers and both groups started shooting at each other. Michael Cody, one of the white Conservatives, was killed, while six white and several black members were wounded. Twenty-seven members of the Colored League were wounded. Most of them had been shot in the back or in the backs of their limbs.

United States soldiers were sent from Nashville the following day to maintain order and prevent further confrontations.

338 words

Reconstruction - From Slavery to Freedom

When the Civil War ended in 1865, Reconstruction began. The war saved the Union and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ended slavery. During Reconstruction, the 14th and 15th Amendments were ratified, guaranteeing citizenship and voting rights to black men. Former slaves seized their freedoms, rebuilt their lives, and reunited with their families. In Franklin, A. N. C. Williams, Mariah Reddick, and Harvey McLemore became respected residents. McLemore built a home in the Hard Bargain community, Reddick lived downtown and worked as a midwife, and Williams owned a general store on Main Street and founded Cummins Street Church of Christ in 1877.

Reconstruction also marked the beginning of black participation in Southern political life at the state and national levels. Sampson W. Keeble, born into slavery in Rutherford County, in November 1872 became the first black Tennessean elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives. In Mississippi, Hiram Revels, a minister, filled a vacant seat in the U.S. Senate in 1870–71, while Blanche K. Bruce, a successful plantation owner, served from 1875 to 1881. There were no other black members of the U.S. Senate until 1967.

Other Reconstruction achievements included the South's first state-funded public school system for blacks and whites, black colleges and universities such as Fisk University in Nashville were founded, and the comprehensive Civil Rights Act in 1875 was passed to protect all citizens. In 1877, however, President Rutherford B. Hayes's election ended Reconstruction. The Democratic Party that had dominated the South before the war reasserted itself. In 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Civil Rights Act unconstitutional, and the era known as Jim Crow began.