



Civil War re-enactors at Carnton Plantation, where the Confederate Army established a field hospital during the Battle of Franklin.

BATTLE OF FRANKLIN TRUST ARCHIVES

Quaint Franklin, Tenn., still shows battle scars

By RICH WARREN
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FRANKLIN, Tenn. — So many of the great battles of the Civil War were in the East, but that doesn't mean the central region of the country didn't have its horrible share of bloodshed. The battles there perhaps just didn't get the press that some of the Eastern battles grabbed.

One of the most horrific fights in what was known as the Western Theater occurred in Franklin in what became one of the last gasps of the Confederacy. And in this sesquicentennial period of the Civil War, the town presents a sterling opportunity to experience Civil War history less than an eight-hour drive from Chicago.

"Follow me boys. I'm almost home!" Tod Carter shouted to his companions, all battle-weary Confederate soldiers who had fought in several campaigns



Carter

across the South, most recently having failed to prevent the Yankees from taking Atlanta. As his army pulled back into Tennessee, Carter was astonished — and delighted — to find he was about to engage in battle in his own Williamson

County hometown.

Carter did make it home. In his own backyard, he was shot nine times and at battle's end was found mortally wounded and delirious. He was taken inside his home, where he died in the arms of his family.

Stories as dramatic as this one abound in Carter's hometown of Franklin, now a classic Southern town, complete with a war memorial in the town square and a bustling downtown filled with upscale boutiques.

But 150 years ago, on Nov. 30, 1864, it was the site of some of the most horrendous carnage of the Civil War. With nearly 10,000 casualties, most of them Confederate, more men died at Franklin than at Omaha Beach on D-Day in World War II.

The Civil War still pulls thousands of visitors to this placid, shady town with gracious 19th-century residences just 15 miles south of Nashville. Carter's home, now called the Carter House, is one of the principal attractions. Serving as a Union command post, it was the epicenter of the battle, and hundreds of bullet holes still can be seen in the outbuildings.

Some of the fiercest hand-to-hand fighting took place just outside, and when the battle ended, bodies were piled four and five deep around the house. Tours take you down into the basement, where the family and their neighbors huddled during the battle. "It was so loud you couldn't hear yourself scream," Alice Carter, Tod's niece, recalled years later. Perhaps the most sobering artifact is the bullet that lodged above Tod's eye. It was removed in a desperate attempt to save him.

Across town, another dramatic story centers on Carnton Plantation, which was put into service as a Confederate field hospital during the battle. Every available space on the floor was cov-



The Confederate Civil War Memorial in downtown Franklin's town square.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

ered with badly injured soldiers, and bloodstains still can be seen on the wooden floor of one of the bedrooms, which was used for amputations. At dawn the following day, the bodies of four Confederate generals lay on the front porch.

The wealthy McGavock family continued using Carnton as a hospital for months after the battle and took it upon themselves to bury nearly 1,500 Confederate soldiers on their property, now the largest private military cemetery in the country. Their story was told in the 2005 book

"Widow of the South" by Robert Hicks.

Another fascinating stop is the Lotz House, across the street from the Carter House. Lotz, a German master carver, built his Greek Revival home to advertise his skills, and his wood-working prowess is still evident. The Lotzes wisely chose to abandon the wooden structure during the battle and take refuge in the Carters' brick home. At battle's end, their home's walls resembled Swiss cheese, and a cannonball had penetrated the roof and second floor. The mark where it landed on the first floor can still be seen. Visitors here see magnificent period furnishings and porcelain and hear the moving stories of an average family's privations.

Still more engaging stories await on the walking tours offered by the firm



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Franklin on Foot. You'll hear about a woman who spied for the Confederates, carrying messages inside the corn-cob stopper of a whiskey jug. Another story centers on a slave, freed but then forced to purchase his own family to keep them from being sold to someone else.

To learn about what led to Franklin's bloody battle, consider taking the Old Tennessee Trail, a self-guided, 85-mile loop through the countryside that begins and ends at Franklin. It's one of 16

designated Tennessee Trails and Byways giving overviews of the best of rural Tennessee.

Along the way, you'll see signs for coon hunters' clubs, and people filling jugs from roadside springs. You also can make stops for frog legs and homemade pie at Nett's Country Store & Deli (4356 Skelley Road, Santa Fe, Tenn.; 931-682-2315) or make a short detour to taste award-winning wines at Amber Falls Winery & Cellars (931-285-0088, amberfallswinery.com), all while enjoying vistas of rolling, forested hills and horse pastures lined with picket fences. Detailed brochures outline nearly 100 potential stops.

You also will pass through tiny Leipziger's Park, a town that blends the rustic and the sophisticated. Enjoy breakfast

If you go

Franklin lies just off Interstate Highway 65. A re-creation of the Battle of Franklin takes place Nov. 15 and 16. More details can be found at 150thfranklin.com. To find out about other sesquicentennial events, including the comprehensive exhibit "Battle Scarred," or to get details on Franklin's attractions, go to visitwilliamson.com.

To download a brochure for the Old Tennessee Trail, visit trailsandbyways.com.

For attractions in Maury County, including Rippavilla on the Old Tennessee Trail south of Franklin, visit antebellum.com.

all day at the Country Boy Restaurant (615-591-4245, thecountryboyrestaurant.com), then hunt for chandeliers or watercolors in the antique shops and art galleries lining the main street.

Some famous musicians keep country homes here, and you may well find the likes of Wynonna Judd or Keb Mo performing at the open-mic nights at Puckett's Grocery (615-794-5527, puckettsgrocery.com).

In the beautiful Duck River Valley you'll see grand antebellum plantation homes, such as Rattle & Snap (931-379-1700, rattleandsnappplantation.com), a home named for the game of chance the land was won in, and Ferguson Hall (931-486-1677, tinyurl.com/ferghall), where an adulterous affair with a general ended in murder. Outside of Columbia, you pick up the trail of events that led to the Battle of Franklin. Several skirmishes occurred near this pretty town, and at Spring Hill an inconclusive battle took place the day before the carnage at Franklin.

But it's at the magnificent Rippavilla Plantation (931-486-9037, rippavilla.org) where you'll see the site of one of the most astonishing events in Civil War history. During the night after the battle at Spring Hill, a six-mile line of 20,000 Union troops managed to slip undetected past the sleeping Confederate army at a distance of perhaps 200 yards.

Go inside the stately home to see the very table and chairs where the furious Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood had a breakfast meeting the next morning and resolved to make the attack at Franklin.

From Rippavilla, it's just a few miles back to Franklin, where the Union troops had entrenched themselves and where Hood disastrously ordered a frontal assault greater than Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. It had been his aim to recapture nearby Nashville from the Union and to divert Sherman from his March to the Sea. Instead, the Battle of Franklin became a turning point, most likely hastening the fall of the Confederacy the following April.

But even more than troop movements and generals' calculated tactics, what will fascinate you most in Franklin are the stories of real people, those who died there or who lived to tell what they'd seen. Even after 150 years, those stories haven't lost their power.

ctc-travel@tribune.com