

# CHAPTER 4: Heritage of Downtown Collierville



Figure 4-1

## INTRODUCTION

Collierville has a great deal of history and historical properties in and around its vibrant Downtown, which has been the cultural heart of the community for decades (see Figure 4-1). Many historic properties exist within a five minute walk to the Square; however, many historical structures were lost during the Civil War, removed for new development, or destroyed through fires or tornadoes. This includes the actual Battlefield site of the best known Civil War battle in Collierville. Very little of the October 1863 battle battlefield remains untouched by the Town's growth and expansion over the past 140 years. Most of the battles that occurred during the Civil War, both in Tennessee and throughout the south, occurred in the rural countryside surrounding communities. In contrast, the Battle of Collierville occurred along the railroad line, within the Town, and adjacent to what would become the Town's urbanized area. The loss of much of this historic resource and its lack of visibility in terms of interpretation has been a source of concern within the community, particularly during recent years. The Town acknowledges the importance of historic preservation and battlefield preservation as a key component of its ongoing planning efforts. The completion of a Historic Preservation Plan in 2001, the adoption of revised Historic District Guidelines in 2002, the advent of the Morton Museum of Collierville History in 2010, and the creation of the Collierville Heritage Commission in 2010, are evidence of this commitment. This chapter is intended to build upon the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Plan and upon other work that has been accomplished relative to the identification of key sites and historical evidence. Included are:

- An Historical Analysis of Downtown Collierville
- A Summary of Historic Preservation Efforts
- Coordination/Action Steps





Bayou to Alabama Avenue and then to what is now known as Poplar Avenue. The trail then traveled east on Old Poplar Pike on a ridge that ran through the towns of White Station, Germantown, Forest Hill, Bailey Station, and Collierville where it turned south at Holly Springs Road (now Mount Pleasant Road) (see Figure 4-4) into Mississippi. Although the location of this route is virtually unchanged, its character has changed beyond the first settlers' imagination by the increasing demands of progress. The early settlers used this route to travel to and from Memphis.

The Town received its name from Jesse Collier, who subdivided his tract of land into lots and advertised for their sale under the heading "The Town of Collier for Sale... It is a high and salubrious situation and well watered."

The name Collier was changed to Collierville with the arrival of the post office in 1837. Within the first 30 years of its existence the Town was known as Oak Grove, Collier, Colliersville, and finally Collierville. Collierville was often referenced as Colliersville on maps and in military orders and references.

#### FIRST INCORPORATION

The first incorporation of the Town was February 7, 1850. It had a corporate limit encompassing approximately 320 acres or one-half square mile. The early Town of Collierville was centered at State Line Road (Poplar Avenue) and Holly Springs (Mt. Pleasant Road). Even in its early development Collierville already had common schools, funded by local property taxes, two private high schools, produce houses, several mechanical shops, two water-powered lumber mills, and four different churches established. A coach (Figure 4-5) ran three times a week to Macon, Tennessee; constructed in 1850, the original stage coach cabin (Figure 4-6) is now located in the Town Square.



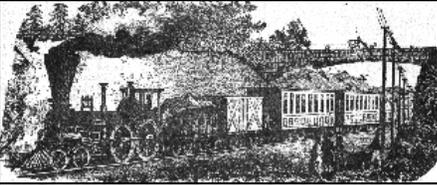


Figure 4-7

The Memphis and Charleston Railroad (M & C RR) became active in Collierville in October of 1852. It linked the Mississippi Valley with the east coast through Charleston, opening the trade market for Collierville, stimulating growth of agriculture in and around Collierville. Produce could be sent to larger, more lucrative markets located far beyond the markets that were available to Collierville. Even with the availability of plank roadbeds laid from Memphis (Figure 4-8) to La Grange, the rail road allowed citizens to move about much easier and faster than ever possible.

In October 1852, the fare from Memphis to Germantown was 50 cents. To continue on to Collierville would be 75 cents. Children under 12 were half price. Records indicate that the original depot was constructed in 1854.

By 1860, Collierville had approximately 500 residents with 2000 people living in Civil District 10, supporting three general stores, three grocery stores, one flour mill, one livery stable, and one hotel. There were also a surprisingly large number of tradesmen and professionals including: a dentist, three physicians, three blacksmiths, tailor, banker, nursery & seedman, coppersmith, justice of the peace, saddle & harness maker, druggist, carpenter and cabinet maker, telegraph operator, boot and shoe maker, rail road agent, water flour mill operator, wagon & plow maker, railroad agent, and a court appointed road agent.

#### **CIVIL WAR HISTORY**

In 1861 the Civil War began. Eighty men from Collierville were appointed to the Home Guard called the Wigfall Grays. They fought in many battles including, but not limited to, Atlanta, Chattanooga, Shiloh, Nashville, and Perryville. Of the 80 men who served, 29 were taken prisoner and 41 lost their lives.



Figure 4-8

In 1862, Ulysses S. Grant (Figure 4-9) was on an early morning trip from LaGrange, TN to Memphis when he stopped at the home of Josiah Deloach. Grant sat and drank a glass of water while talking with Mr. Deloach until he was warned that southern troops had been advised of his presence.

He continued on his way to Memphis. The Deloach Home (Figure 4-8) was located at the northeast corner of Shea Road and Poplar Avenue. It was torn down when the Baptist Hospital built their medical office park. An interpretive sign describing the home's significance now stands at the historic homesite encircled by the old magnolias that once stood around the home.

The Memphis and Charleston Rail Road (M&C RR) continued to operate during the war. Early in the war they manufactured cannons and cannon balls at their Memphis machine shop and transported confederate troops and supplies where needed. The Federal troops quickly understood the importance of taking control of railroads. By May of 1862, the US Government held the M&C RR with few exceptions until the end of the War.

Records show up to 15,000 Union troops were stationed in camps along the railroad between LaGrange and Memphis to protect the rails (see Figure 4-11), bridges, telegraph depots, and intersecting roads.

Collierville held a strategic location along the M&C RR (see Figure 4-19 partial map of the Memphis and Charleston route). The Town was used as a Union supply depot and was occupied early in the Civil War and remained occupied until the end of the war. This resulted in many skirmishes in or near the Town in the five years of the Civil War.

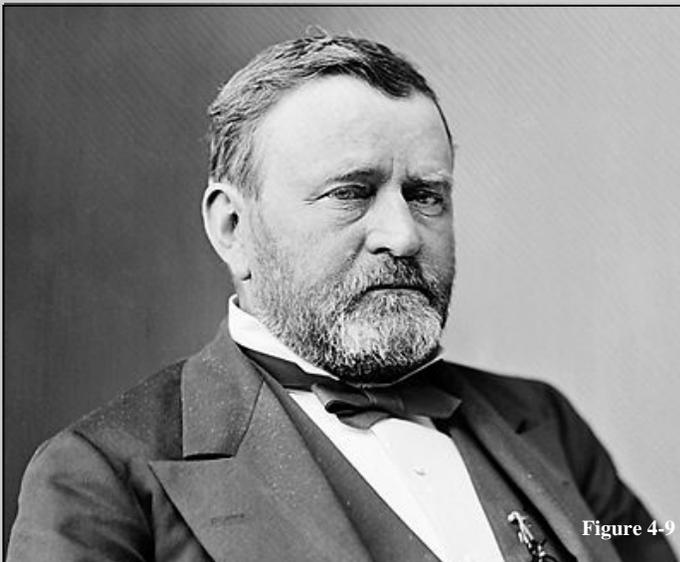


Figure 4-9



Figure 4-10

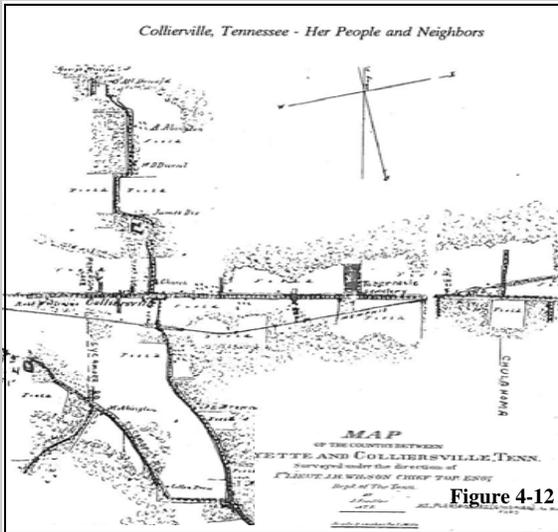
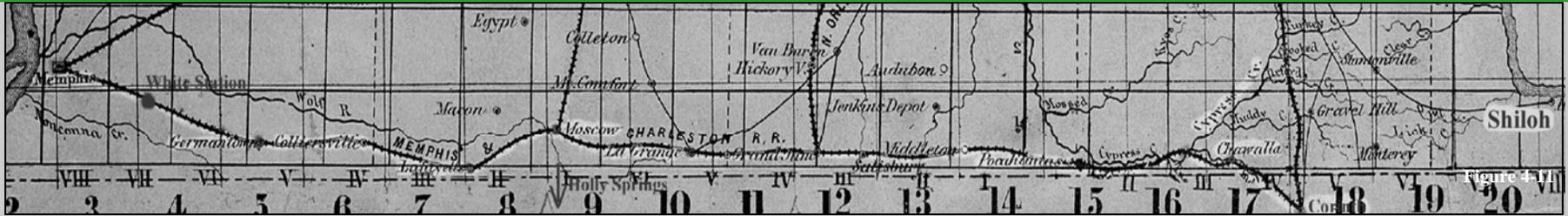


Figure 4-12

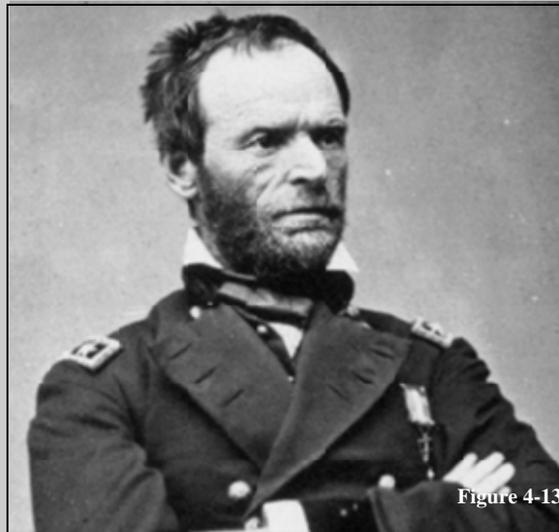


Figure 4-13

The best known was the Battle of Collierville. It occurred Sunday morning on October 11, 1863. On board one of the largest military trains that had ever entered Collierville was the Major-General of the Union Army, William Tecumseh Sherman, Division Commander of the Fifteenth Army Corps (see Figure 4-13). He was leaving Memphis just eight (8) days after the death of his young son, Willie. Gen. Sherman was traveling to Corinth, Mississippi with his staff and a small battalion of 260 men with the Thirteenth U.S. Regulars.

The forces that held the small Union garrison/supply depot were the Sixty-Sixth Indiana, totaling 240 men. An additional camp of 200 men composed of the sick, injured, and mostly unarmed men located north of Collierville.



Figure 4-14



Figure 4-15

As Sherman's train arrived, Confederate Gen. James R. Chalmers (Figure 4-15) was closing in on Collierville from Mt. Pleasant Road with about 3,000 ± men. He was ordered to draw attention away from an action east of Collierville.

Chalmers raid included a concurrent confederate raid to disable the railroad between Collierville and Germantown. It was not successful. If it had been successful, all train traffic east of Germantown would have been stopped including Sherman's Train and the Union reinforcements that came from Germantown that ulti-



Figure 4-16



Figure 4-17



Figure 4-18

mately ended the battle. The battle lasted almost five hours with a combined loss of over 100 men. In a tactical style that will be used many more times during the Civil War, General Sherman ordered the depot along with any homes and businesses used to shield the confederates burned during the battle. This resulted in the destruction of much of Collierville. One local newspaper article notes that Collierville only had three structures standing by the end of the war.

Several homes were used as hospitals during the war to care for soldiers that were brought in by train from as far away as Shiloh (see Figures 4-16 & 4-17). Official records indicate that there were approximately 120 federal soldiers buried behind the Federal Hospital in Collierville. During the years 1867-1868 there were 50 known Union Soldiers and 67 unknown soldiers disinterred from Collierville and re-interred in Mississippi National Cemetery now

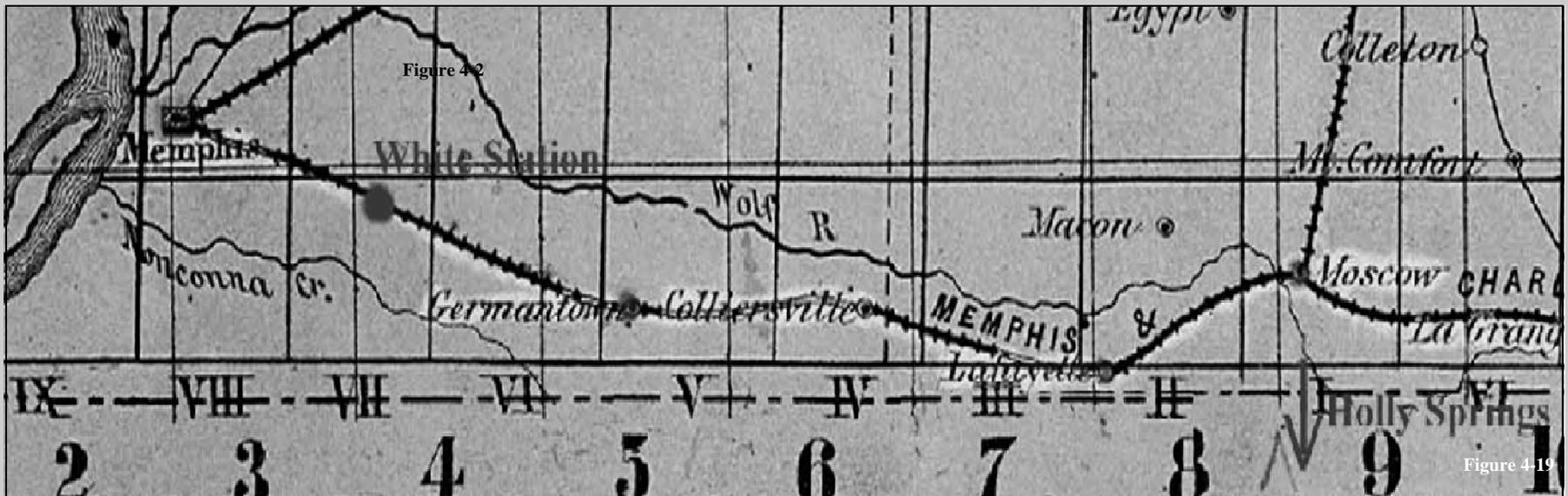


Figure 4-2

Figure 4-19

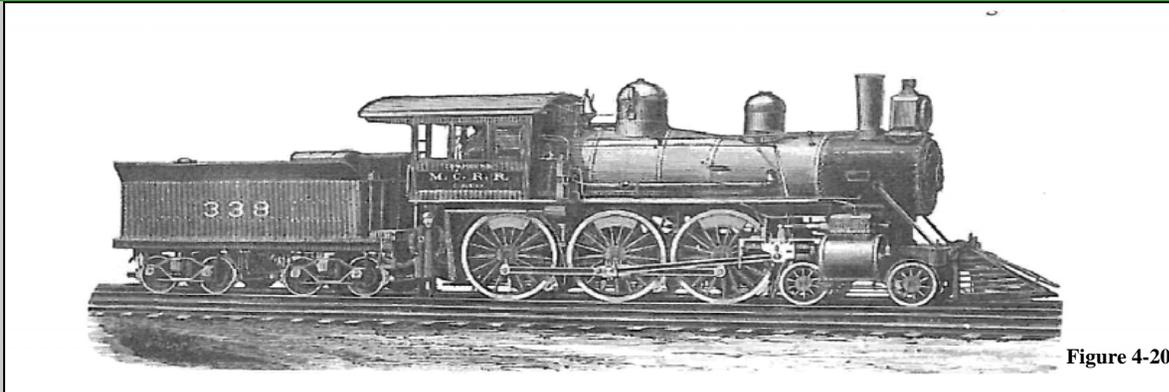


Figure 4-20

known as Memphis National Cemetery. Two additional unknown soldiers were removed from the property south of Tom Brooks Park and re-interred in National Cemetery in 1905. Furthermore, there is at least one confederate dead buried in Magnolia Cemetery (see Figures 4-18, 4-23, & 4-31). Although the Official Records of the War Of The Rebellion (published 1880) says that confederate dead were actually interned on the battlefields in Collierville, no records have been discovered specifically noting where they were buried in the newly-emerging town.

### NEW BEGINNINGS/RE-INCORPORATION

Due to the cost of repairing the lost depots, track, bridges, engines, and cars destroyed during the war, the Memphis and Charleston Rail Road (see Figure 4-20) never regained its strength. It changed hands several times before it was purchased by Southern Railroad in 1896. In 1982 it merged with Norfolk Western and is now know as the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

Five years after the war the Town of Collierville re-incorporated in 1870. Some of the first orders of business were adopting ordinances by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA). One such ordinance required all buildings on the square to be brick. Another required all existing trees in and around the Square to have a protective wood box built around the base of the trees to protect them from activities and animals. Trees were not a prevalent part of the landscape after the war because they were used by the soldiers for housing, construction of fortifications, or fuel for fires and trains. Also, many structures were dismantled during the time of the war and used for these same proposes.

The Town embarked on a lengthy reconstruction period after the war. This process included rebuilding on ninety acres adjacent to the Mem-

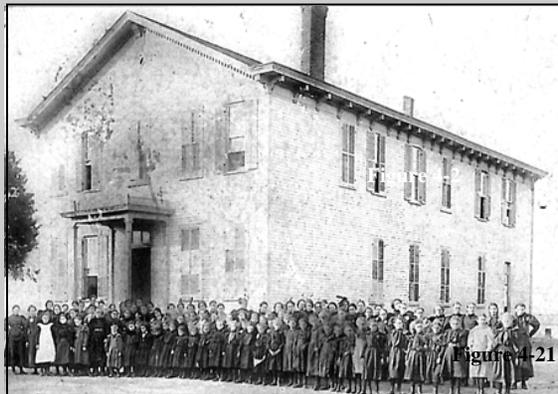


Figure 4-21

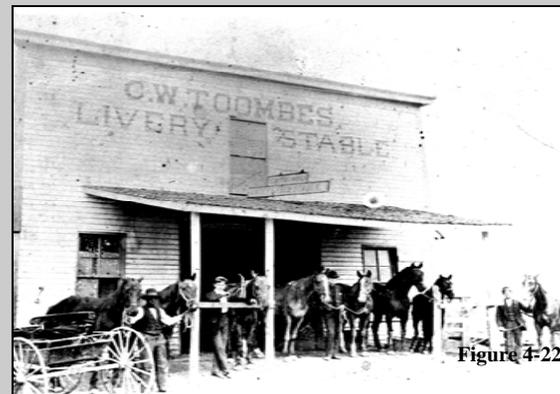


Figure 4-22



Figure 4-23



Figure 4-24

PART OF TOWN  
OF COLLIERVILLE

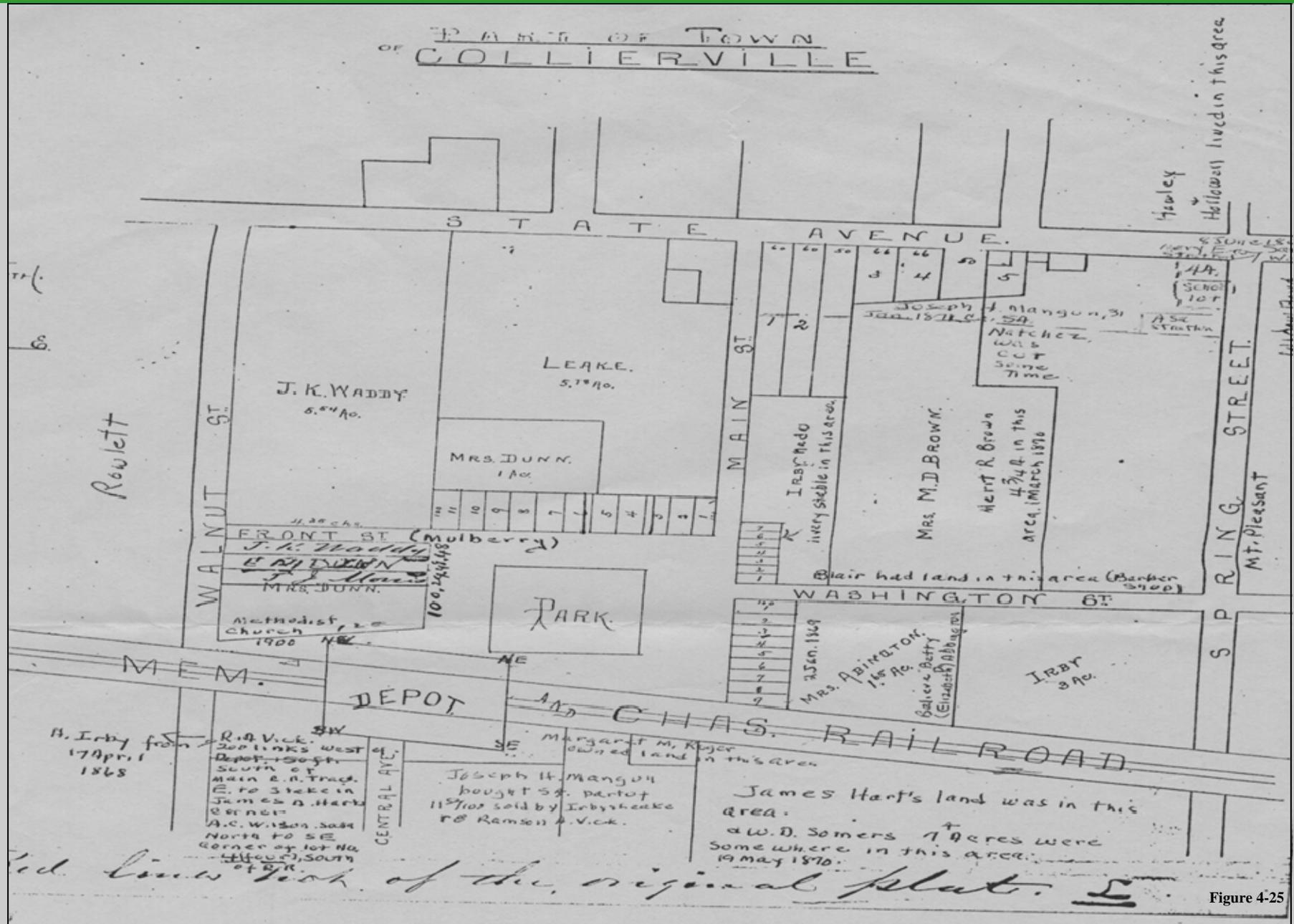


Figure 4-25



Figure 4-26

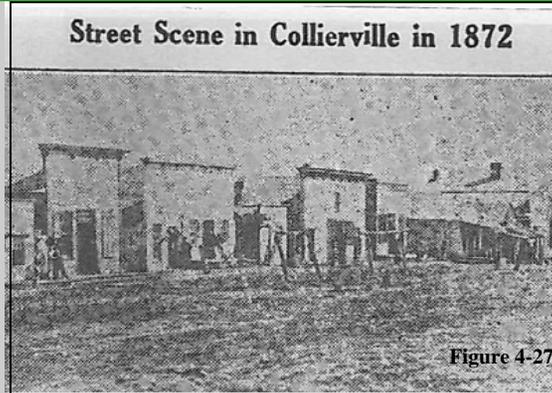


Figure 4-27

phis and Charleston Railroad (MC&RR) (Figure 4-25).

### EVOLUTION OF THE TOWN SQUARE AND NOTABLE EVENTS

The Town Square was laid out with narrow building lots on three sides of a park and the M&CRR on the south (Figure 4-25). The original park was a simple open space. This is unlike most towns who had the courthouse and/or other public buildings located within the park. The first improvement to the park was a white picket fence built in 1872 enclosing the park for peafowl and a deer. Then in 1876, a two story bandstand was constructed (Figure 4-24), but it was lost in October of 1955 when it was destroyed by a tornado. The bandstand was replaced by a wrought iron, cedar shake roofed, octagon-shaped gazebo which is located towards the center of the Town Square.

According to the Memphis Business Directory of Memphis, Tennessee, and other Towns published for 1871-1872:

*Collierville is a flourishing little town (Figure 4-27), pleasantly situated on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad in the eastern part of Shelby County. During the late war the town was entirely destroyed, only two or three houses escaping the general destruction, but has risen from her ashes to become a progressive community. There are two colleges (Figure 4-21) and two churches, one Methodist and one Christian (Figure 4-28). It has a neat public square, upon which no expense has been spared to enhance its beauty. The shipment of cotton averages from eight to twelve thousand bales yearly. The population is about 700.*

The 1878 the Yellow Fever (also called Yellow Jack) epidemic had hit Shelby County hard with the brunt of the epidemic in Memphis. Even with a quarantine, Memphis was unable to ef-

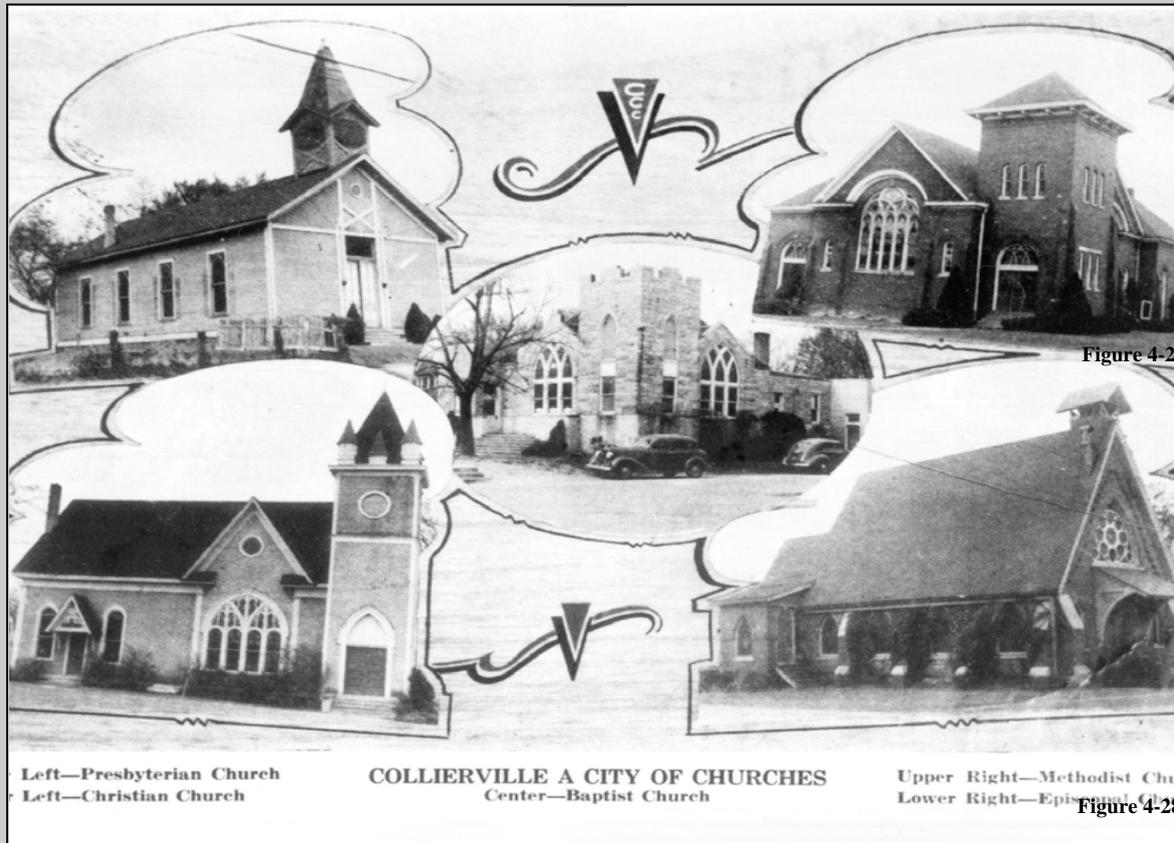


Figure 4-2

Figure 4-28

Left—Presbyterian Church  
Left—Christian Church

COLLIERVILLE A CITY OF CHURCHES  
Center—Baptist Church

Upper Right—Methodist Church  
Lower Right—Episcopal Church