

Self-Guided Tour of Historic Downtown Columbia, SC

1. SC State House Construction on the current building began in 1856. By 1865 the exterior walls were finished, but the building still lacked a roof and interiors. The building was not destroyed during the occupation of Columbia because Sherman considered it “handsome” and decided to spare it. On the western and southern sides of the State House, stars mark where the walls were hit by Union cannonballs.

2. Trinity Episcopal Cathedral The present structure was constructed in 1846 as a replica of Yorkminster Cathedral in York, England. During the Civil War, the iron spikes on top of the church were melted to make cannonballs for the Confederacy. The parsonage and Sunday school buildings were destroyed during the war, but the sanctuary was not seriously damaged. A plaque on the wall is dedicated to the members of the church who died for the Confederacy. Five South Carolina governors, three Confederate generals (Wade Hampton III, Ellison Capers, and States Rights Gist), and the unofficial “poet laureate of the Confederacy” Henry Timrod, are all buried in the Trinity cemetery.

4. University of South Carolina (SC College) Founded in 1801, the university was closed in 1862 and its facilities were leased to the Confederate government for use as a hospital and used by Sherman’s army for the same purpose. “The Horseshoe” contains 10 of the 11 original pre-1860’s campus buildings. The South Caroliniana Library’s holdings include the surrender note sent to General Sherman by Columbia Mayor Thomas Goodwyn and the original diaries of Mary Chestnut.

5. McCord House Built in 1849, this house became a clearinghouse for donated food and supplies for the hospital on the university’s campus, and part of the house was used as a hospital ward. It later served as headquarters for Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, commander of the Federal Army of the Tennessee and Sherman’s second-in-command. The house was looted twice and set on fire but was saved from destruction because of Howard’s presence.*

6. Hampton-Preston House This house was built in 1818. In 1823 it was sold to Gen. Wade Hampton I. When Sherman’s troops entered Columbia, the XVth Corps commander, General John Logan, used the house as his headquarters. Logan was prepared to burn the house upon his departure, but the Sisters of the Ursaline Convent asked Sherman to allow them to move into the house since their convent had been burned—a request he granted.

7. Mills House (Columbia Theological Seminary) This house, designed by Robert Mills, served as the Columbia Theological Seminary. During the war, the seminary rented dormitory space to Confederate refugees. Hospital supplies were stored in the institution’s chapel. While the city was burning, many Columbians fled to the school’s yard to escape the fire.

12. Elmwood Cemetery In September of 1862, city officials designated a portion of Elmwood Cemetery to be a Confederate burial ground. Approximately 175 Confederates are interred in the cemetery, most of whom are unknown, along with Generals Maxcy Gregg and Milledge Bonham. The last Confederate remains were laid to rest here in 1986. Additionally, Reconstruction Era Union Soldiers are buried next to the Confederate section.

14. Palmetto Armory/Palmetto Ironworks Built around 1850, the owners received a state contract to produce weapons. After that contract ran out in 1853, the armory became the Palmetto Iron Works. The building was not destroyed during the fire on February 17, but Sherman ordered the building and machinery to be destroyed the next day. The shell of the building remained and was rebuilt.

19. Confederate Printing Plant Built around 1863, the building was used to print Confederate money and postage stamps. Before Sherman arrived in Columbia most of the printing plates were thrown into the Columbia Canal. One plate survived and is in the S.C. State Museum. The building was partially destroyed by Sherman's troops but was rebuilt and purchased by the state after the war. It was used as a warehouse until the 1970s and is currently the location of a Publix grocery store.

20. SC State Museum and SC Confederate Relic Room & Museum The fourth floor of the State Museum houses displays of Civil War swords, guns, and artifacts, along with a full-size replica of the CSS Hunley and a copy of the Ordinance of Secession. The Confederate Relic Room collection, begun in the late 1800s, contains Confederate battle and regimental flags from SC, uniforms, and weapons.

22. Horry-Guignard House Built before 1813, this house is one of the oldest in Columbia.*

23. First Presbyterian Church The present structure was built in 1853. Because the church's spire was the tallest structure in Columbia at the time, Union artillerymen used it as target practice when firing their cannons from across the Congaree River. Although everything around it was destroyed in the fire, the First Presbyterian Church escaped destruction. Buried in the cemetery are the parents of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson; Columbia merchant Ainsley Hall; Jonathan Maxcy, the first president of SC College; and two U.S. Senators.

25. First Baptist Church The sanctuary of this church was completed in 1859, and it was here that the Secession Convention first met on December 17, 1860.

26. Gen. James & Mary Chesnut Cottage Gen. James Chesnut and his wife Mary rented this house (circa 1850) in 1864 and 1865. Mary wrote much of her diary here. Confederate President Jefferson Davis, a friend of the Chesnuts, stayed at this cottage and gave a speech to local citizens from the back porch on October 5, 1864. Today the cottage serves as a bed and breakfast inn.

28. Crawford-Clarkson House Although spared from destruction, this house built in 1837 was ransacked while the family spent the night in the First Presbyterian Church cemetery.*

29. DeBurhl-Marshall Mansion This mansion was built around 1820. Gen. Joseph Johnston used the house as his headquarters from 1864 to 1865. The attic timbers still show char marks from an attempt by Union soldiers to start a fire in the attic.*

30. Mann-Simmons Cottage This circa 1825 house was owned by a former enslaved Charlestonian and mid-wife, Celia Mann, who acquired her freedom and walked to Columbia. Celia Mann and her descendents owned the house from about 1845 until 1970. During the Union occupation of the city, white Columbians supposedly buried their possessions in Mann's backyard in an attempt to keep them safe.

31. Maxcy Gregg House Maxcy Gregg was an active promoter of states' rights and signer of the Ordinance of Secession. Gregg formed the 1st SC Regiment in January 1861. During Sherman's occupation of Columbia, his home (circa 1840) was ransacked but escaped serious damage.*

32. Seibels-Hale-Elmore House This house is generally considered the oldest structure in the city of Columbia and is believed to have been built in 1796. It remained in the Seibels family from 1860 and 1984.

33. The Asylum (State Hospital) The original building of the State Hospital, completed in 1828, is located to the right of the main entrance. From December 1864 to February 1865, the Asylum grounds served as an encampment for Union POWs who had been kept at Camp Sorghum. On the night the city was burned many families went to the lawn of the Asylum to escape the fire.*

* Not open to the public

DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA SITES

