

# 100 Years Ago Nashville Was an Unhappy City

## Hopes Flared, Died In Roar of Guns

WHEN Nashville fell to the Federals, in the early spring of 1862, Harper's Weekly took note of the Northern victory with a double-page spread on the city which contained the drawings shown here. The cover that week was a full-page portrait of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, the "hero of Fort Donelson."

Along with the drawings, Harper's published the following report on the city. "On page 152 we give a view of the city of Nashville, Tennessee, from a sketch kindly placed at our disposal by Mr. R. J. Meigs, a loyal citizen of Nashville, now resident in New York.

"It is, as everybody knows, the capital of Tennessee, and is a fine city of about 20,000 inhabitants situated on the Cumberland River. Two bridges, a railroad bridge (McCallum truss) and an iron suspension bridge span the river opposite to the city.

"Nashville stands on a bluff on the south side of the river. It is surrounded by hills, which command it, and render its defense extremely difficult against an army approaching from various points. The large building of which we give a picture herewith is the capitol of Tennessee, a new and handsome structure. Governor (Isham G.) Harris lives in a little shanty opposite the capitol, which was used by the architects during its construction. He is too mean to take lodgings in a hotel."

"We likewise append a fine view of the fine railroad bridge across the Cumber-

land, which reports stated the Rebels have destroyed."

### Lifted a Column

Harper's then "lifted" a column of information on Nashville from the New York Herald. Among other items the Herald reported:

- "The population of Nashville before the rebellion was 24,000, but has since much decreased. (After Federal occupation it grew rapidly.)"

- There are five railroads radiating from Nashville—viz., the Tennessee and Alabama, Louisville and Nashville, Memphis and Ohio, Hickman and Nashville branch, Nashville and Chattanooga and Nashville and Northwestern.

- The new (state) capitol is approached by four avenues which rise from terrace to terrace by broad marble steps. The edifice is considered the handsomest State Capitol in the Union.

- The new court house is a large building on the public square. The State Bank is a handsome Doric building.

- Gas was introduced into the city in February, 1850.

- The neighborhood of Nashville is a famous stock raising country, and has a high reputation for blood horses, jackasses, mules, cattle, sheep, hogs and Cashmere goats.

- The leading business of the city is in dry goods, hardware, drugs and groceries.

- Book publishing is carried on more extensively than in any other Western town, and the publishing house of the Western Methodist Conference, one of the largest book manufacturing in the United States.

### City Had Fallen

Harper's then concluded: "At the hour we close this re-



This "general view of the city of Nashville, Tennessee" appeared in Harper's Weekly when the Federal Army captured the city in the early spring of 1862. The drawing was made from the river bank, in the vicinity of the present General Hospital.

ord the telegraph reports that the gun-boats and General Buell reached Nashville late last week, and that the city surrendered."

"At the time of the Battle of Nashville, and from the beginning of the Civil War, Nashville adhered to the Confederacy. The decision to join with the seceded states did not come easy, nor was it unanimous.

Following President Lincoln's call for troops a group of distinguished Nashvillians issued a public address to the people of Tennessee which said:

"We unqualifiedly disapprove of secession, both as a continuing right and as a remedy for existing evils. The present duty of Tennessee is to maintain a position of independence, taking

sides with the Union and the peace of the country against all assailants, whether from the North or the South."

This appeal was signed by such prominent men as Neill S. Brown, Cave Johnson, Bailie Peyton, Russell Houston, John Bell, Return J. Meigs and Andrew Ewing. "their deeply imbedded love of the Union," historian Stanley Horn wrote, "blinding them to the hopeless futility and impossibility of the position of neutrality they suggested."

### Confederate Arsenal

Personal opinions aside, the city, along with the state, was caught up in the war. In the spring of 1861 Nashville went on a war footing, and various organizations were set up to aid the Confederate war effort. The city quickly became an arsenal of supplies for the Confederacy, as it later became for the Federal army.

Some of the more ambitious citizens dreamed of moving the Southern capital from Montgomery to Nashville, and the State Capitol was offered as the capitol for the Southern government. The city aldermen voted \$500,000 to provide a mansion for President Jefferson Davis, but the plan died a-borning when the capital was moved to Richmond.

In the early winter of the next year Nashville's citizens were plunged into a state of panic when Forts Donelson and Henry fell to Union Gen. U. S. Grant, and the loss of the city became inevitable. When the news reached Nashville the people were beside themselves with terror.

### A Day of Panic

"Never before or since," wrote Horn, "has Nashville experienced such a tragic day of blind panic. All through that terrible, turbulent Sabbath (Feb. 16) the terror-stricken men, women and children surged through the city's streets."

During this panic plunderers and looters attempted to take home all they could of Confederate stores that would otherwise be destroyed or fall into the hands of the Federals. The looting was stopped when Confederate Gen. Nathan B. Forrest rode into town. His cavalmen used the flat of their sabers and a fire-hose on the mob until order was restored.

When the blue-coated Yankees marched in with their bands playing Yankee Doodle a few Union sympathizers displayed their Stars and Stripes, but the Federals were unimpressed by this display of "bunting." Most Nashvillians remained in their homes, or got out of town. "An air of gloom," Horn remarks, "hung heavily over the whole city."

### Thrown Into Jail

For the rest of the war Nashville was an occupied city. Many prominent citizens were thrown into the state penitentiary for one cause or another, including six of the city's clergymen.

A puppet municipal government was set up which proved ineffective and Horn quoted a local paper:

"The health of Nashville is wonderful considering the amount of filth that is to be found in the streets and alleys. When the sun shines out these hot days after a light fall of rain, it is absolutely nauseating to pass through even our most frequented thoroughfares."

The Federals proceeded to fortify the city, impressing Negro labor to build Fort Negley and other fortifications. Some of these unfortunate people were taken bodily from church services and put to work on the fortifications. The forts were needed, and at times the big guns roared as the Confederate cavalymen of Forrest and Morgan swept to the very edge of the city.

Life in occupied Nashville, Horn wrote, developed along patterns similar to those in occupied France during World War II. He divided the citizens into four groups:

- 1 Some sincerely loyal Union men who eagerly welcomed the blue-clad armies.
- 2 Some unprincipled collaborationists, actuated by sordid and selfish motives, who played to the winning side for private gain.

3 Some who collaborated, but with their fingers crossed, because that seemed to be the easiest way to do the most good for the Confederacy.

4 A minority constituted an active and tireless underground, smuggling medicines and weapons into the Confederate lines.

When the Federals marched out to fight at Stone's River, Gen. O. M. Mitchell, Federal officer commanding, threatened the city with destruction.

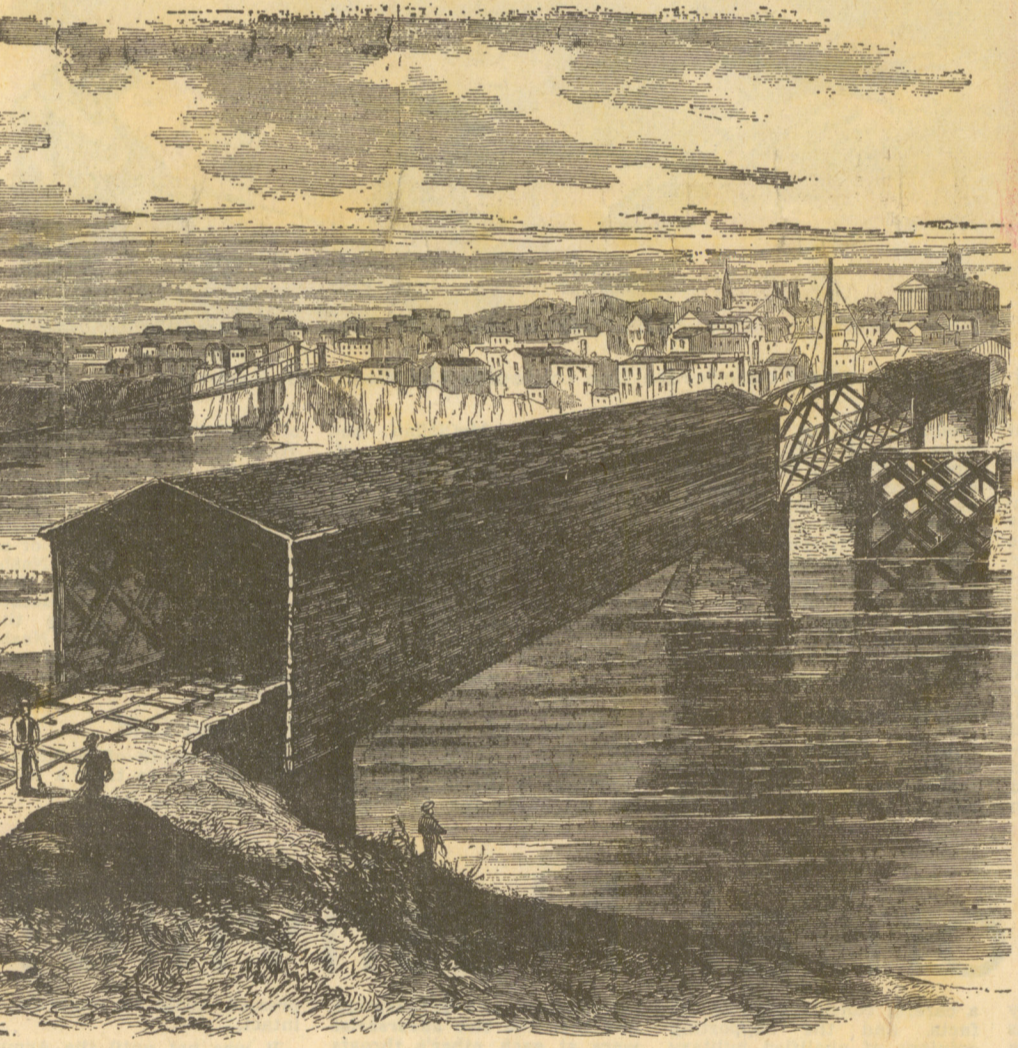
"If Rosecrans is driven back," Mitchell swore, "not one stone of Nashville shall be left upon another. I'll blow the damned town to fragments if I am compelled to leave it."

When Hood's army moved on Nashville in December of 1864 hope leaped once more in the hearts of the Confederates, and Union sympathizers were disturbed. In hostile, sullen crowds the people gathered on hill tops and at the State Capitol. But hope died as swiftly as it had risen, and as Horn put it:

"It was a bitter Christmas and an unhappy New Year for the people of Nashville."



The American flag has not always floated from the cupola of the State Capitol as it now does. This drawing in Harper's of March, 1862, shows the Union flag flying from the roof top behind the tower.



Railroad bridge over the Cumberland at Nashville.



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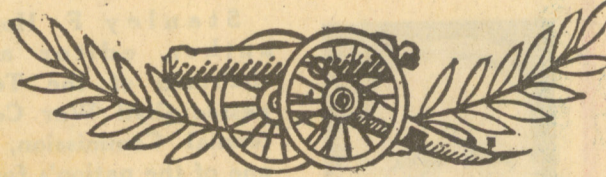
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