



The City That Has It All!

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**A Civil War raged, but healing actions spoke louder
than cannon in Columbus, Mississippi.**

COLUMBUS, MS: There were false cannons at Corinth, carnage at Coffeville. There was Forrest's fury at Brice's Crossroad and fires that lit the skies in Holly Springs.

However, in the midst of the conflicts and conflagrations that raged across North Mississippi during the American Civil War, there was one place that gained national and lasting fame for peace and healing. While Union bullets and bonfires never touched the buildings of Columbus, Mississippi, the peace-loving actions of this city during and after the fighting touched and transformed the entire nation.

A monumentally important resting place.

Is she sleeping? Or is she weeping? The iconic stone angel resting atop the Teasdale family grave at Columbus' Friendship Cemetery is only one of the many monuments that make this historic and picturesque resting place a compelling draw for photographers and artists as well as history-loving visitors who come to walk amidst the graves of four generals, 2,000 soldiers and the only Confederate nurse to be officially recognized by the U.S. Government. How those soldiers came to rest in Friendship Cemetery and how their graves have been cared for—and cared about—is at the heart of the extraordinary Civil War history here.

As a supply point for armaments and munitions, Columbus was carefully guarded, protection that proved important for soldiers from both sides after the Battle of Shiloh when homes and churches across the city opened their doors to nurse the more than 3,000 wounded, both Union and Confederate, streaming into the city. Thousands of those who didn't survive were laid to rest in Friendship Cemetery.

And if residents' care secured the city's reputation as a hospital town, what the citizens—in particular, the ladies—did after the war set an example of healing far beyond the physical. On a late spring day in 1866, the members of the Ladies Memorial Association set out with flower-laden baskets to decorate the graves of the fallen, and once again, despite lingering psychic wounds, the city's healing gesture included both Confederate and Union soldiers.

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One tribute leads to another, and a national commemoration is born.

When the New York judge and poet, Frances Miles Finch, read a *New York Tribune* article about the Columbus women's care for Union graves, he was inspired to write his poem "The Blue and The Gray" with a final stanza saluting the women's generosity of spirit: *No more shall the war cry sever/ Or the winding rivers be red;/ They banish our anger forever/ When they laurel the graves of our dead!*

The poem became an immediate sensation, and other communities were inspired to follow Columbus' example; what started as a thoughtful and generous act in a small Southern city grew, and the flowers laid by the Columbus ladies bloomed into America's national Memorial Day.

Stories that continue to reach, and touch, a nation:

Today Friendship Cemetery continues to draw visitors all year round as an historic landmark of uncommon beauty and character, and a particular highlight during Columbus Spring Pilgrimage, when it becomes the stage for "Tales from the Crypt," dramatic recreations of the fascinating lives of those interred here. Since 1991, students from the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) have researched, written and performed these recreations, holding audiences spell-bound with candle-light dramas about figures ranging from august leaders to everyday citizens. A finalist for the History Channel's "Save our Classroom" Award, "Tales from the Crypt" has earned praise from across the nation, in both regional and national news media, including National Public Radio and *The New York Times*.

Key to the event's broad appeal is MSMS students' engaged and enthusiastic participation. Located on the campus of Mississippi University for Women, MSMS is the only public residential high school in the state, and brings together a diverse geographic and ethnic group of students whose dramatic performances are matched by academic performance that prepares them for the world stage.

Of course, bringing people together seems to come naturally in Columbus, which remains one of Southeast's top tourism destinations, known as "The City that Has It All" for its national and global attractions such as the annual Columbus Spring Pilgrimage. During the 10-day Pilgrimage some of those grand homes that once served as hospitals now open their doors to celebrate the finest in Southern architecture and culture.

"The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks," Williams once wrote. Here in Columbus, blooms broke the lingering fever of strife, and today great ideas and great experiences continue to flourish in the city that promoted peace in the midst of war.

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