

A nine part series of frequently overlooked sites in and around Corinth, Mississippi.

Corinth's Civil War - Tishomingo Hotel

It's gone now; it didn't make it through the war. In fact the iconic hotel, the symbol of war-time Corinth, stood for a mere six years. The site itself is paved over, a parking lot tucked between the Crossroads Museum and the Tourism office. Across the tracks are several exhibit panels sprinkled across Trailhead Park. A few moments spent with the historic markers, one graced with "Decision at the Crossroads" painted by Keith Rocco, and it's easy to slip back in time and see the old hotel still standing across the tracks of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad.

The hotel was designed and built by Swiss immigrant Martin Siegrist who was lured to Corinth in 1857 to build the Corona Female College. (Siegrist also built the Corinth Machinery Works which still stands adjacent to the old hotel site and is often mistaken for it.) Martin's vision became the two story brick hotel nestled into the southeast corner of the soon-to-be-famous railroad junction. Easily the largest building in town at the time, the hotel was easily identified by the eight chimneys, the two story wrap-around porch on three sides and the large sign proudly proclaiming "Tishomingo Hotel".

As with any building of size there were a number of out buildings. In a fenced backyard behind the hotel, stood four structures, the largest of which was the hotel's kitchen. Snug up against the back of the hotel, the yellow and white kitchen had two tall chimneys, tall enough so the smoke would not intrude on guests staying on the second story. Adjacent to the east side of the hotel was an artesian well which was known to rise to the surface in a fountain.

The hotel was located on the choicest piece of real estate in town and was destined for a long and rewarding future. Had it not been for the war, of course. In the earliest days of the war, Corinth was used as a marshalling point and training camp for Confederate troops. The hotel was pressed into service as a hospital and it was in this capacity it was used for most of the conflict. After the Battle of Shiloh in April of 1862, wounded men were placed in every corner of the hotel as well as every other public building, hotel and warehouse. A yellow flag fluttered from the roof, identifying it as a house of healing. Kate Cumming, a nurse from Mobile, working at the hotel in the days following the battle was aghast at the sight, "nothing that I have ever heard or read had given me the faintest idea of the horrors witnessed here."

The hotel was again pressed into service as a hospital during the Battle of Corinth in October, 1862. At one point Confederate artillery pierced the brick walls, eviscerating a

soldier being taken upstairs on a stretcher. Two Union generals, grievously wounded were brought in for treatment. General Richard Oglesby survived, General Pleasant Hackleman did not. During the very height of the battle on October 4th, fighting swirled around the hotel which briefly fell into Confederate hands.

In the months following the battle the hotel was still in use as a hospital but was allowed to take up its original function, providing lodging for visitors, as well as the site of an impromptu school house for the children of runaway slaves. Nineteen year old Maude Morrow of Aberdeen, Ohio, in Corinth to nurse her ailing father, wrote "From among the children of the refugees I organized and taught a school on the upper veranda of the Tishomingo. . . this was the first crude, little contraband school organized in the great state of Mississippi."

The Union abandoned Corinth in January of 1864. Over the following year troops from both sides came through Corinth but neither stayed for any great length of time. The end for the hotel came in January, of '65, surprisingly, at the hands of the Confederates. The Army of Tennessee, battered and bloody from its tragic defeat at Nashville, came to Corinth under the command of Lt. General John Bell Hood. When the army left town, continuing a retreat in the direction of Tupelo, the hotel was full of supplies with no available transportation to move them. To prevent the supplies from falling into enemy hands the torch was set to the hotel. Lieutenant James K. Newton, a Union soldier in the 14th Wisconsin Infantry wrote his mother about marching into Corinth and told her of the fate of the Tishomingo Hotel. He wrote, "We found the Old Tishomingo Hotel in Corinth in flames probably set on fire by the Rebs who left the place on learning of our approach". An old story about town holds that local citizens came to the still smoking rubble of the hotel and carted off the bricks for their own use. Who knows? Maybe a bit of the old hotel is still with us.

The original oil painting "Decision at the Crossroads" by artist Keith Rocco, which depicts the fighting around the hotel during the Battle of Corinth, is on permanent display at the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center. Also at the Center are numerous photos and drawings of the Tishomingo Hotel and other research materials. The Center is located at 501 West Linden Street and is open 8:30 to 4:30 daily. Park staff can be reached at 662-287-9273.