



CLARKSVILLE IN THE CIVIL WAR



Changing Hands



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Clarksville, a communication and transportation center, was strategically significant because of the Cumberland River and the Memphis, Clarksville and Louisville Railroad. The area's rich agricultural produce—grain, livestock, tobacco, and corn—and the products of its iron industry reached the nation and world via these transportation assets.

Three forts, including Forts Donelson and Defiance on the Cumberland River, protected this pro-Confederate town and many of Clarksville's residents rushed to join Southern military units. After the surrender of Fort Donelson in February 1862, however, Union gunboats and troops from Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's army occupied Clarksville.



Col. Sanders Bruce
Courtesy Howard Winn



Clarksville Foundry – *Courtesy Lane M. Lyle*

Federal control proved tenuous. The Confederates briefly reclaimed the town in August 1862; it returned temporarily to Union control in September 1862. The Federals occupied Clarksville permanently in December 1862 when Col. Sanders Bruce's brigade took charge of the town and Fort Defiance, which was renamed Fort Bruce.

Clarksville became a gathering place for white Unionists and escaped slaves who were housed in tobacco warehouses along the river

and near Fort Bruce. Eventually more than 3,000 refugees converged on the town, outnumbering local residents.

In 1863, after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the Federals began to recruit free blacks and former slaves for military service. Some 1,800 joined the Federal army and were inducted into the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, and 101st U.S. Colored Troops in ceremonies on the Clarksville public square.



Clarksville, 1876 bird's-eye view – *Courtesy Lane M. Lyle*