

*From "I Remember When" by Pauline R. Brandon*

## **A FEW HISTORICAL FLASHLIGHTS ON COLUMBUS**

Compiled by R. E. Johnston for the Columbus Centennial Homecoming Week, October  
17-22, 1921

In 1540, Hernando Desoto crossed the Tombigbee River near Columbus on his expedition to the West, when he discovered the Mississippi River. He was the first European to tread the soil of this part of the country.

Captain Bernard Romans, a Hollander by birth and at one time an officer in the British Army, visited this section 1770-1771, and a fluvial expedition down the Tombigbee River. (A local Chapter of the DAR is named for Captain Romans)

Fort Choctaw, or Cedar Long Fort, was established at Old Plymouth, near Columbus by the Spaniards in 1790.

Columbus was formerly an Indian trading post, known as Shuk-ho-ta To-ma-ha or O'Possum Town.

The land on which Columbus is located was ceded by the Choctaw Indians to the United States Government on October 24, 1816.

Military Road, extending from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Nashville, Tennessee, passes through Columbus. This road was built by the United States War Department during the years 1817-1820, on the recommendation of General Andrew Jackson.

John Pitchlynn was the first white man to reside permanently on the soil of what is now Lowndes County. He was born on the Island of St. Thomas, in 1760. Previous to coming to this country, he had served as Government interpreter with the Indians for forty years. He died in 1835.

The first house in Columbus (a log-cabin hut) was built in 1817 by Thomas Thomas (or Thomas Moore, as he was also called) upon the ground where the residence of James B. Cox now stands, at the corner of Main and Third Streets.

The first stock of merchandise was brought to Columbus in 1819 by Robert D. Haden, from Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

The first hotel was opened in 1819 by Richard Barry on the site now occupied by the Gilmer Hotel or the First State Bank (authorities differ on this point).

It was upon the suggestion of Silas McBee that the village receive the name of "Columbus".

According to the records of the United States Post Office Department, the Columbus post office was established March 6, 1820, and Thomas Sampson was appointed postmaster. (It is claimed by some authorities that Gideon Lincecum was the first postmaster.)

Gideon Lincecum, who came to the village in 1819, was physician, botanist, entomologist, and historian, besides being connected with all local activities. He left Mississippi in 1848 for Texas, where he died in 1873.

In 1821, Monroe County, of which Columbus was then a part, was organized, the first sheriff being Bartlett Sims, elected in 1822.

On February 10, 1821 by act of the Legislature, Franklin Academy was established-the first free public school in Mississippi, antedating all others by 24 years.

William L. Moore was the first mayor of Columbus.

The first steamboat-the "Cotton Plant"- came to Columbus in 1822, under the command of Captain Chandler.

In 1821, Columbus had a population of about 100; in 1831, 500; in 1840, 2,500.

Robinson Road, which runs in a southwesterly direction from Columbus, was established by the Legislature of 1821, from Jackson to Columbus through the Choctaw Nation for the transportation of mails. This road is mentioned in the text of the Dancing Rabbit Treaty in 1830 and in the bill extending the Lowndes County line in 1831.

In January 1830, Lowndes County was organized out of the southern portion of Monroe County and named after the South Carolina statesman, William Lowndes.

The first courthouse was built in 1832, by a county tax and a subscription by the citizens of the town. It stood on the southwest corner of the present courthouse square.

The first officers of Lowndes County were: Nimrod Davis, sheriff; William Dowsing, circuit clerk; Robert D. Haden, probate clerk; Isaac R. Nicholson, circuit judge.

About 1833 the first bank was organized--the Planters' Bank of Natchez-on the site now occupied by City Hall.

In 1831, the Methodists erected the first church in Columbus on the corner of the present Jewish Synagogue. Previous to that time the various religious denominations used the Franklin Academy as a place of worship.

In accordance with the terms of the treaty, the Choctaw Indians moved from Lowndes County in 1832.

The first newspaper, THE SOUTHERN ARGUS, was established in 1833, the editor being S. Nash and F. W. Bonnell.

The meaning of the Indian name from Tombigbee, or Tom-beck-be, is "Box Maker."

For Buttahatchie the Indian meaning is "Pretty River."

For Luxapalila, the meaning is "Floating Turtle."

The oldest store building now standing is at the southwest corner of Main and Market streets, built in 1831 or 1832, now occupied by Hirshman Brothers (1921).

The financial panic of 1837 swept away four banks of Columbus, and for the following fifteen years the banking business of the town was done with banks of Mobile and other southern cities.

The oldest bank now in Columbus-The Columbus National Bank- was organized in 1852, as the Columbus Life and General Insurance Co. It weathered the ravages of the Civil War and has been open for business continuously since its organization.

The first telegraph office in Mississippi was opened in Columbus on the corner of Main and Market streets adjoining the building of the Columbus

National Bank, the operator being known to fame for many years as "Telegraph Brown." This line extended from Nashville to New Orleans.

The first railroad to enter Columbus was the Mobile and Ohio, which completed its road from the main line to Columbus in 1861.

During the Civil War, Columbus was never attacked or entered by the Federal Army, notwithstanding the fact that 238 battles were fought on Mississippi soil.

At Columbus, the Confederate Government established a large arsenal for the manufacture of arms and munitions of war.

After the Battle of Shiloh in April of 1862, Columbus was a hospital center for the treatment of wounded and sick of the Armies of Mississippi and Tennessee.

The remains of 1500 soldiers were buried in Friendship Cemetery, the Federal graves being estimated at from 50 to 150.

In 1864, for a short time Columbus was the seat of the State Capital, the officers of the State Administration being compelled to move here from Jackson because of the approaching Federal troops on the latter city.

The first Decoration Day in the United States was observed by the women of Columbus on April 25, 1866, when they placed flowers on the graves of both the Southern and Northern soldiers who were buried in Friendship Cemetery. It was the act which inspired the poem, "The Blue and the Gray," by F. W. Finch, first published in the ATLANTIC MONTHLY in September, 1867. The poem has the following head note: "The women of Columbus, Mississippi, animated by noble sentiments, have showed themselves impartial in their offerings to the memory of the dead. They strewed flowers on the graves of the Confederate and The National soldiers."

General Stephen D. Lee, a Lieutenant-General in the Confederate State Army (born in South Carolina) came to Columbus at the close of the Civil War and resided here until his death in 1908. During the war he married Miss Regina Harrison of this city. He was the first president of the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College at Starkville. His home is now annexed to the S. D. Lee High School in Columbus, the city having acquired the property. His son, Mr. Blewett Lee, General Solicitor of the Illinois Central Railroad, resides in New York City.

In 1873, the ladies of Columbus Monumental Association erected in Friendship Cemetery the first monument to be unveiled in honor of the Confederate dead.

Since 1873, Columbus has taken an active interest in the education of young women, as witness the following: Columbus Female Seminary organized in 1832, Mississippi Female College organized in 1838, Columbus Female Institute organized in 1847, Mississippi Industrial Institute and College (now the Mississippi State College for Women) organized in 1884.

President W. H. Taft, while president of the United States, visited Columbus in November 1911.

Hon. J. M. Dickinson of Chicago, Illinois, a native of Columbus, was Secretary of War for one year in the Cabinet of President W. H. Taft.

Hon. T. W. Gregory of Texas, a native of Lowndes County (near Crawford) was Attorney-General for two years in the Cabinet of Woodrow Wilson.

Columbus and Lowndes County furnished to the Civil War 2,201 soldiers; to the recent World War, 826.

In the late World War, 31 soldiers from Columbus and Lowndes County were killed or died while in the service. .

The Mississippi State College for Women at Columbus is the first State college to be established in America-organized in 1884. On its opening day, there were 250 applicants-more than could be accommodated. The enrollment at this time is 1000. It was largely through the efforts of Mrs. Annie Coleman Peyton that this college was established and the first appropriation made by the Legislature. Later she became a citizen of Columbus and a member of the college faculty.

The Columbus Reading Circle, organized in 1892, is the oldest Literary and Civic Woman's Club in Mississippi.

Columbus has four banks-the Columbus National, the First State, the Merchants and Farmers, and the National Bank of Commerce-their total resources being \$3,474,755.00.

The population of Columbus is 11,000.

The total assessed valuation of property in Columbus on January 1, 1921, was: Personal \$2,344,714,00; Real, 53,402,440.00; Total, \$5,747,154.