

The Mississippi River has long played a part in the historical, economic and residential development of Vicksburg. Founded in 1811 and incorporated on January 29, 1825, Vicksburg rapidly grew as a center for commerce, agriculture and river traffic.



In the 1800's, river travel up and down the Mississippi was fraught with danger. Riverbends were littered with the remains of hundreds of riverboats. In 1838, Congress passed the first federal steamboat safety regulations. Although the Steamboat Act of 1838 made passenger safety requirements federal law, inspections and certifications were virtually impossible and the law was effectively unenforceable.

The hazardous conditions of river travel enabled the railroads to make significant inroads throughout the lower Mississippi River regions. In 1831, the Vicksburg and Clinton Railroad was organized for the purpose of shipping and receiving cotton and other products between the river port and inland Mississippi. Early rail operations in Vicksburg consisted of "mule power," but by 1840 the line was complete to Clinton and "on track."

In 1846, the line and track spanned the state and was renamed the Vicksburg & Meridian Railroad, the only east-west railroad between Memphis and New Orleans.

Vicksburg's best known contribution to American history is probably the part she played in the epic known as the Civil War.

In 1859, the Mississippi state convention adopted an official resolution calling for immediate secession from the Union if an abolitionist was elected president. Following Abraham Lincoln's election, the state seceded by a vote of 8415 on January 9, 1861. With this vote, Mississippi followed South Carolina into the Confederate States of America.



By February, seven states had seceded. On February 9, 1861, representatives of these states met in Montgomery, Alabama and the provisional Confederate Congress elected Jefferson Davis as President of the CSA. Two days later, in Vicksburg, President Davis gave his first address as the first President of the Confederate States of America. In this address, he stated that he struggled "earnestly" to maintain the Union and the constitutional equality of all states but "our safety and honor required us to dissolve our connection with the United States. I hope that our separation may be peaceful. But whether it be so or not, I am ready, as I have always been, to redeem my pledges to you and the South by shedding every drop of blood in your cause...".

Both the Confederacy and the Union expected a war, if fought, to be over after the first battle. After the first meeting near Manassas Junction, Virginia in July 1861, both factions were to realize the war would be long and hard.

Throughout the war, no matter the outcome of the battles, the South remained intact as long as the river remained open. As the North's attention narrowed to the 150 mile area between Port Hudson and Vicksburg, the South's economy was disrupted . The fall of New Orleans and the surrounding strongholds resulted in major evacuation procedures along the Lower Mississippi Valley region. Cotton was removed or prepared for destruction. Storekeepers loaded their goods and headed inland. Families left to visit relatives and acquaintances elsewhere in the state, and those left behind waited for the arrival of the Union fleet.

Vicksburg maintained rail access to the heart of the Confederacy at this time but most of the other towns along the river could not. They soon found their situation untenable.

Two weeks after capturing New Orleans, Farragut started up the Mississippi with repaired and resupplied warships. Although not an easy voyage, the northern troops pressed on. Baton Rouge fell first. On May 12, 1862, Natchez surrendered without a fight.



The first advance Union units arrived off the coast of Vicksburg on May 18, whereby Commander Samuel P Lee of the USS Oneida delivered an order for the surrender of the city. The city's reply, delivered five hours later, was "No!" According to Colonel James L. Autry, Military commander of Vicksburg, "Mississippians don't know and refuse to learn how to surrender to an enemy."

After a period of intermittent bombardment from the river, Farragut conceded that he could not run his fleet past the "Gibraltar of the Mississippi." As he was not equipped for river combat, his guns could not be elevated high enough to strike the city, and 1,400 troops would be hard pressed to scale the hills to overtake the garrison. Farragut withdrew his ships and returned to New Orleans.

Farragut arrived off Vicksburg again on June 25, with a force including 3,200 troops on transports and several mortar schooners designed to bombard the elevated shore batteries. The following two days of bombardment marked the city's first concentrated assault and provided her first casualties.

The bombardment was only the beginning of continuing strife for the residents of Vicksburg. During the historic Siege of Vicksburg, the citizens of Vicksburg and her defenders began living in caves dug out of the hillsides, conducting their daily business as well as possible ... while under constant bombardment from all sides. The siege caves of Vicksburg have long remained one of the most unique aspects of the city.



On July 1, 1863, General Pemberton met with his commanders regarding the prospect of being relieved or fighting their way out of the besieged city of Vicksburg. Two days later Generals

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Grant and Pemberton met in the afternoon to discuss surrender. Grant's final terms stopped short of unconditional surrender, with a major point being that 30,000 Confederates in Vicksburg would be paroled rather than imprisoned.

Pemberton officially accepted the terms around midnight. The next morning, a victorious Union army marched into Vicksburg following the forty-seven day siege.

In 1899, the Vicksburg National Military Park was created through an Act of Congress. This park, now a member of the National Park System, commemorates and preserves the infamous siege line and the historic heritage of Vicksburg. Considered by many to be one of America's most beautiful national memorials, it is the final resting place for 17,000 Union soldiers, 13,000 of whom are unknown.

The Civil War ended in Mississippi on May 4, 1865, with the surrender of the last Confederate forces by General Richard Taylor to General Edward R.S. Canby.

With the final surrender of the Confederate States of America, the North tried to stabilize local conditions. President Lincoln's wishes to reunite the nation with forgiveness, understanding and welcome for the Southern states, died with him. The South's reconstruction under the new President, Andrew Johnson, was harsh and stories of individual states and cities were similar ..



bankruptcy, devastation, internal strife under reconstruction governments.

Vicksburg pressed forward during this trying period. The levee system, vital to river communities, was rebuilt with the return of the Army Corps of Engineers. Land was returned to planting and harvests were shipped to market towns. The rebirth of the steam boat industry, which made a remarkably rapid comeback, was a vital component of Vicksburg's "rebirth."

In April 26, 1876, the Mississippi River accomplished what the Union army could not accomplish 13 years prior -- the river cut across DeSoto peninsula, breaking DeSoto Point and destroying what was left of the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas railroad terminal and ferry. This break effectively cut off the east-west rail line. More importantly, it left the river port of Vicksburg with no river. The economic effect on the city was devastating.

The change in the river course helped change Vicksburg's course. In 1873, a Vicksburg office of the Army Corps of Engineers was established to coordinate federal and local river management and flood control efforts. The city still enjoys the pleasure of being "home" to the Corps.

In 1878, the city appealed to the government for assistance in restoring its port area. An extensive study of port restoration by the Corps of Engineers resulted in a massive undertaking that diverted the Yazoo River south through the former bed of the Mississippi River. The Yazoo River Diversion Project, along with other stabilization projects, took 25 years to complete. On January 7, 1903, the city of Vicksburg officially opened the diversion canal and started to reassert herself as a river city.

Throughout the years the growth and economic climate of Vicksburg and Warren County have been heavily influenced by "Ole Man River." With the recent legalization and development of the dockside gaming industry, a new chapter in the area's history is being written.

We face the future with a sound basic economy and unlimited possibilities. We can look to the future with faith, determination and confidence from a strategic location that will lead to a commercial prominence approaching the importance of our military history.

We hope you will join us in saying "Vicksburg-Warren County is a GREAT place to live!"