Historical Background

The city of Murfreesboro celebrated its bicentennial in 2011-12. Located on the Stones River thirty-five miles southeast of Nashville, Murfreesboro was designated in 1812 as the county seat of Rutherford County (founded in 1803) and named after Revolutionary War veteran Colonel Hardy Murfree. Another Revolutionary War veteran, Colonel William Lylte, donated the land for the town.

Murfreesboro developed into a regional transportation nexus. Several turnpikes and, as of 1851, the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad passed through the town. This distinction and its proximity to Nashville brought the Civil War to Murfreesboro’s doorstep twice in 1862, through the small-scale Battle of Murfreesboro and the major Battle of Stones River that resulted in approximately 24,000 casualties.

During the 1920s and ’30s, Murfreesboro became home to two groundbreaking rural health institutions, a county hospital and a county health department. In the 1960s, strong local black leaders helped bring about a relatively peaceful transition to integration. Murfreesboro’s location at the geographical center of the state and its educational institutions fueled its growth into one of the state’s largest cities. Middle Tennessee State University, founded as a normal school in 1911, is now a major regional university.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:
- Tennessee State Library and Archive Photograph Database (keyword: Murfreesboro)
- Tennessee Encyclopedia entry on Murfreesboro
- Rutherford County Archives
- Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University
- Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area
- James E. Walker Library Special Collections at Middle Tennessee State University
- What We Remember: Interpreting a Civil War Battlefield (TPS-MTSU Lesson activity on the Battle of Stones River)

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS:

The Library of Congress digital collections contain several primary sources from Murfreesboro’s past. These sources can be used to help your students understand how local history and the country’s history intersect. Most of the sources you will find deal with two periods: Civil War and the Great Depression. When teaching either of these periods, ask students to think about what was happening on the local level. How did national events impact ordinary citizens? Have students examine the sources to look for clues to answer this question.

To increase the students’ engagement with the local stories, organize a field trip to one of our local historic sites and museums. The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro offers free walking tours of the downtown square and has a variety of exhibits exploring local history. Stones River National Battlefield offers a variety of educational programs to help students understand the events of the battle and its impact on the Civil War. You might also consider taking students to Bradley Academy or Oaklands Historic House Museum.
Topographical sketch of the battle field of Stone River, [Dec. 31, 1862]

Battle of Stone River, Near Murfreesborough, Tenn. --Dec. 31, 62, Jan. 2-3, 1863--Union (Gen. Rosecrans) ... Conf. (Gen. Bragg) ... [c. 1891]

“Come out of that coat” [...], [1862]

The battle of Stone River or Murfreesboro' [n.d.]

Major General Rosecrans on contributions for the sick and wounded. Headquarters Department of the Cumberland, Murfreesboro, February 2, 1863.

Oaklands, North Maney Avenue, Murfreesboro, Rutherford, TN [n.d.]
Church in Murfreesboro, Tenn., now U.S. hospital [Between 1860 and 1870; detail]

Cottage in Murfreesboro, Tenn. [Between 1860 and 1870; detail]


Civil War atlas to accompany Steel's Campaigns. [10 maps of the Stones River Campaign; 1941]

The First Pictures of Recent Tornado to Reach Washington, Showing Fearful Havoc in Trail of Wind [March 26, 1913; detail] Read the caption.

Interview: Ann Matthews [pg. 43-48; Between 1936 and 1938] Note: Contains politically incorrect language
Electrical cooperatives. The wholesale power of the Authority is distributed among rural consumers by cooperatives formed and managed by the farmers. The headquarters buildings of the cooperatives, usually located in small towns or in open country, are for many of the local residents the first contact with modern construction, architecture and interior appointments, as well as with electrical power and modern business methods... [Between 1933 and 1945]
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is November 14, 2011.


“Electrical cooperatives. The wholesale power of the Authority is distributed among rural consumers by cooperatives formed and managed by the farmers. The headquarters buildings of the cooperatives, usually located in small towns or in open country, are for many of the local residents the first contact with modern construction, architecture and interior appointments, as well as with electrical power and modern business methods. The buildings contain reception rooms, which also accommodate the display of appliances; offices; garages; warehouses; and meeting rooms, usually in the second story. They are built within strict cost limitations and perform a much needed service as clubs or minor cultural centers for the rural population. This one is located at Murfreesboro, Tennessee.” Photograph. Between 1933 and 1945. From Library of Congress: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. https://www.loc.gov/item/2017877281/.


