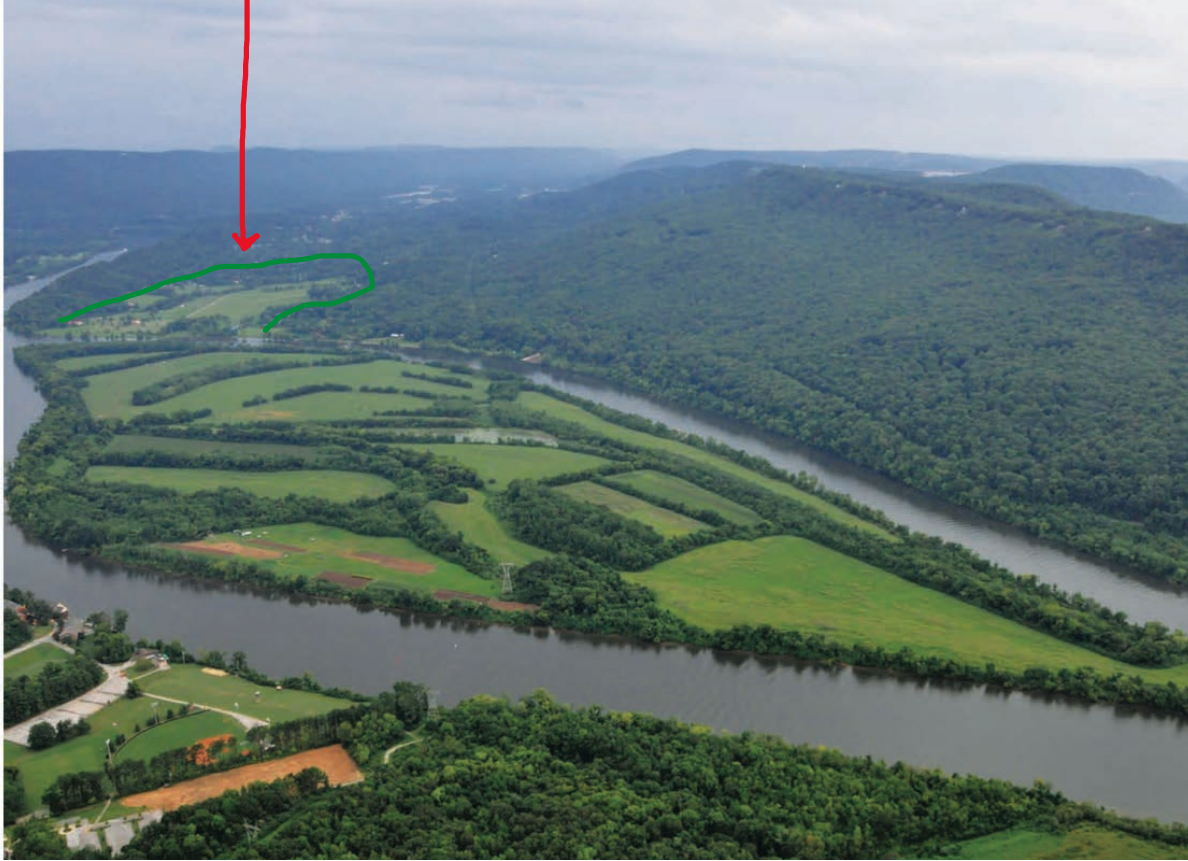


Tennessee RiverPlace

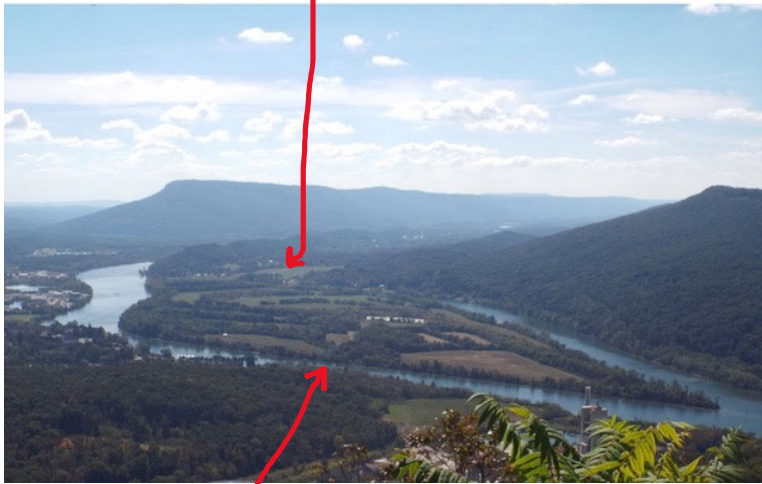


The Land Where We Stand:
A History

Prehistory to History (12,000 BC – 1540)

Humans have inhabited the land on which [Tennessee RiverPlace](#) currently resides for at least 14,000 years! [Archeological excavations](#) have uncovered human artifacts going as far back as 12,000 BC, which ranks Tennessee RiverPlace as one of the oldest continuously inhabited areas in North America. And across the river from us lies [Williams Island](#), an island that has acted as a residence and trading post for millennia. Numerous artifacts dating back thousands of years have been found here, including the armor of a Spanish conquistador dating back to the mid-1500s.

Tennessee RiverPlace



Williams Island

Tennessee RiverPlace



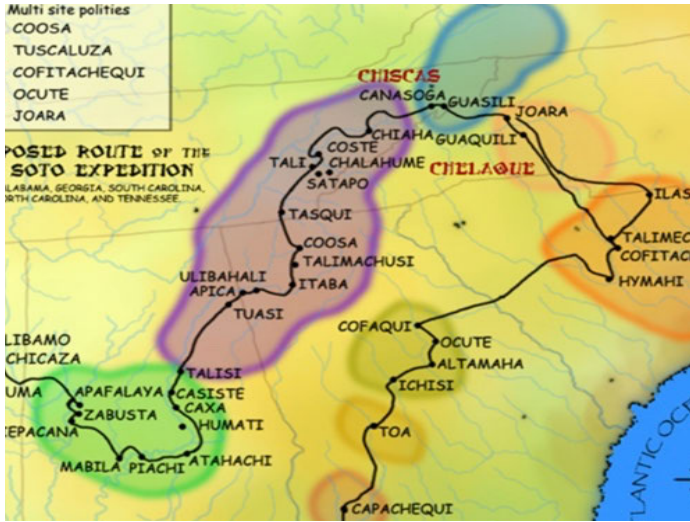
Williams Island

The first written records of this region come from [Hernando de Soto](#) and his Spanish conquistadors who were searching for gold throughout the American South from 1539-1543. Historians refer to the people that de Soto encountered as the [Mississippian culture](#). Lasting from about 800-1600 AD, the Mississippian culture flourished along the Mississippi and [Tennessee Rivers](#), mainly growing corn, beans, and squash (often referred to as the “three sisters”). The Mississippians constructed enormous earthwork mounds that acted as temples and royal residences, the largest being the [Cahokia Mounds](#) on the Mississippi River which stand more than 100 feet tall. De Soto and his conquistadors described the region in their journals and diaries as a patchwork of vibrant communities with an abundance of food and game, but no gold. A Mississippian Indian village thrived on Williams Island from around 1000 to 1600 AD.

Both Tennessee RiverPlace and Williams Island sit at the mouth of the [Tennessee River Gorge](#), known locally as Cash Canyon. The fourth largest canyon in the eastern United States, this area has been inhabited by different people at different times for well over 14,000 years.

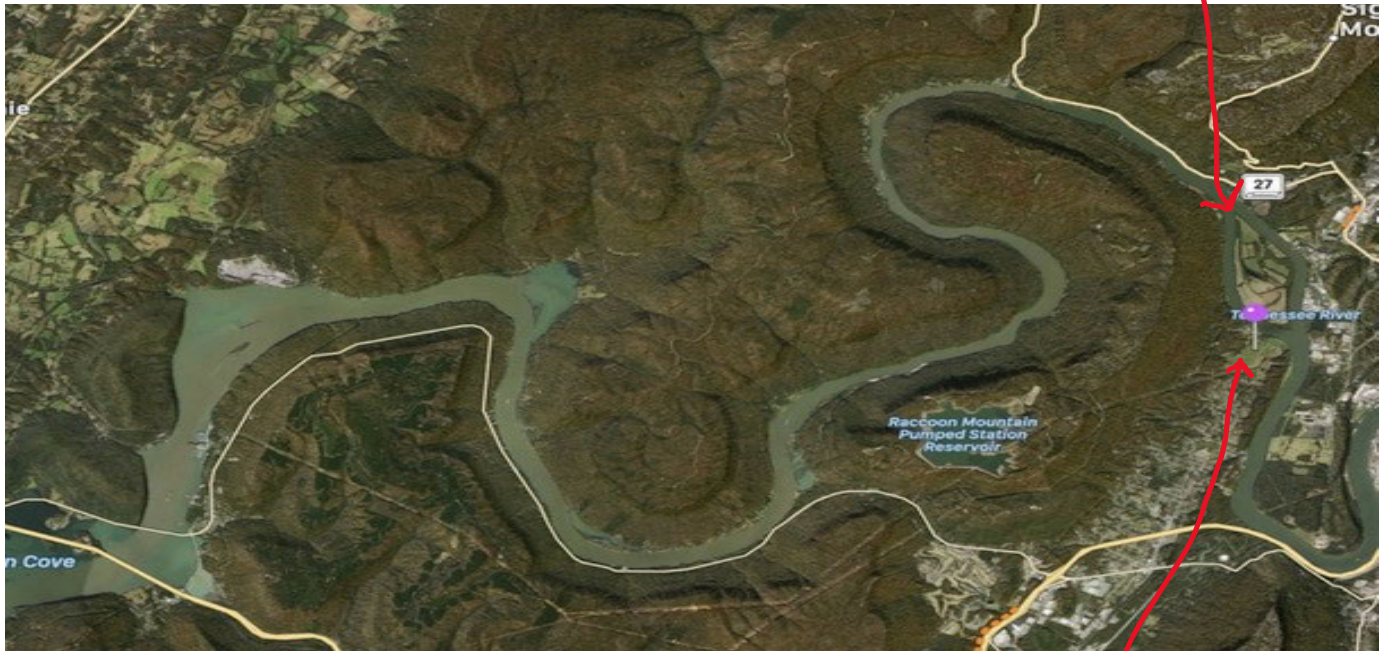


Hernando de Soto



Upon the arrival of the Spanish, it was the [Coosa chiefdom](#) that dominated the land where Tennessee RiverPlace now stands. The Coosa were a Muskogee people who lived throughout east Tennessee, western North Carolina and north Alabama and Georgia. The Coosa are the ancestors of the Creek Nation, or the [Muskogee Nation](#) as they refer to themselves. By the time the English and French reached this region during the 1600s and 1700s, however, the great majority of the Coosa population had been decimated by European-borne diseases like smallpox, influenza, and cholera.

Williams Island



Tennessee River Gorge

Tennessee RiverPlace

The Cherokee and Tennessee RiverPlace, 1600-1838

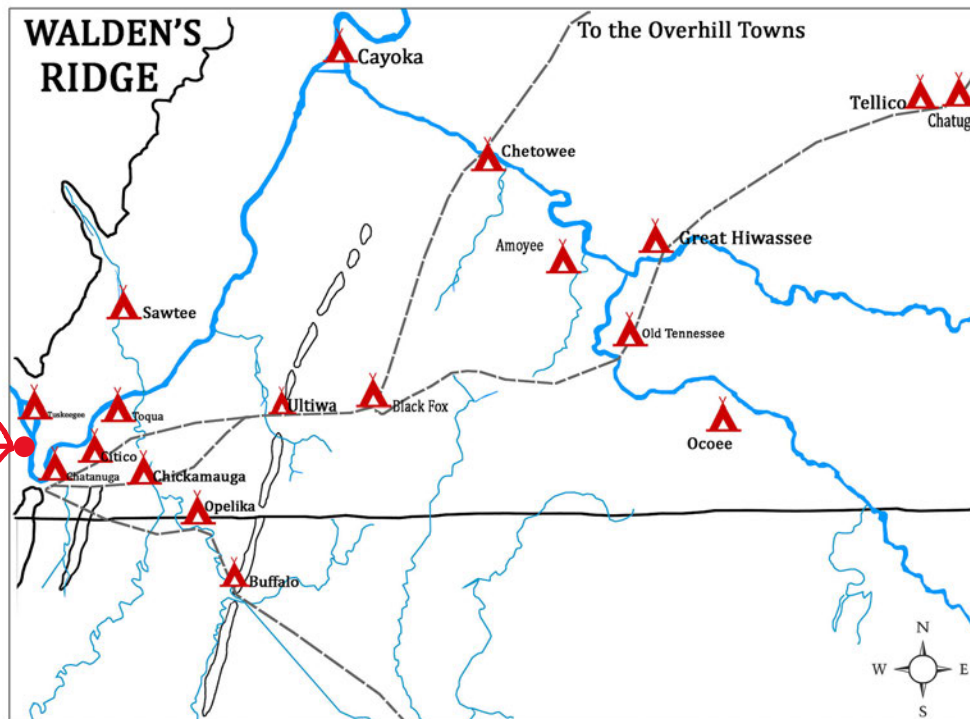
Many historians believe that the [Cherokee](#) moved into this region sometime during the early 1600s and forced the Creeks living here to migrate farther to the south. It is believed that the Cherokee are an Iroquoian people who inhabited the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region before migrating



southward. By the time the English and French began to settle Williams Island and Cash Canyon during the 1600s and 1700s, it was the Cherokee who inhabited the land where Tennessee RiverPlace now stands. More specifically, it was the [Overhill Cherokee](#) that resided here, named by the European settlers that had to cross over the Appalachian Mountains to trade with this band of Cherokee (which mainly included deer, beaver, and fox hides in exchange for guns, textiles, metal tools, and horses). The trade routes stretched from Williams Island to Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia on the Atlantic coast. This band of Cherokee are also known as the Lower Cherokee, or the [Chickamauga Cherokee](#).

View of the Gorge from Snooper's Rock

Overhill Cherokee Towns



Tennessee RiverPlace next to the Cherokee Town of Tuskegee

While humans have inhabited Williams Island for about 14,000 years, it was in 1776 that [Bloody Fellow](#), a Cherokee leader and chief of the Lower Cherokee, established a town here. It was called Tuskegee Town. Bloody Fellow was one of the Cherokee delegates that met with George Washington in Philadelphia in 1792 to voice grievances over Cherokee land rights and to try and negotiate a peace settlement with America. He earned his name during the [Cherokee-American War](#) (1776-1795) when the Cherokee were allied with Great Britain during the Revolutionary War and fought Americans along the frontier. After the Revolutionary War was over in 1783, the Chickamauga Cherokee, led by [Dragging Canoe](#), continued to fight American settlers over land rights. This conflict continued until the Chickamauga Cherokee were defeated in 1795 at Nickajack, just a few miles west of Tennessee RiverPlace.



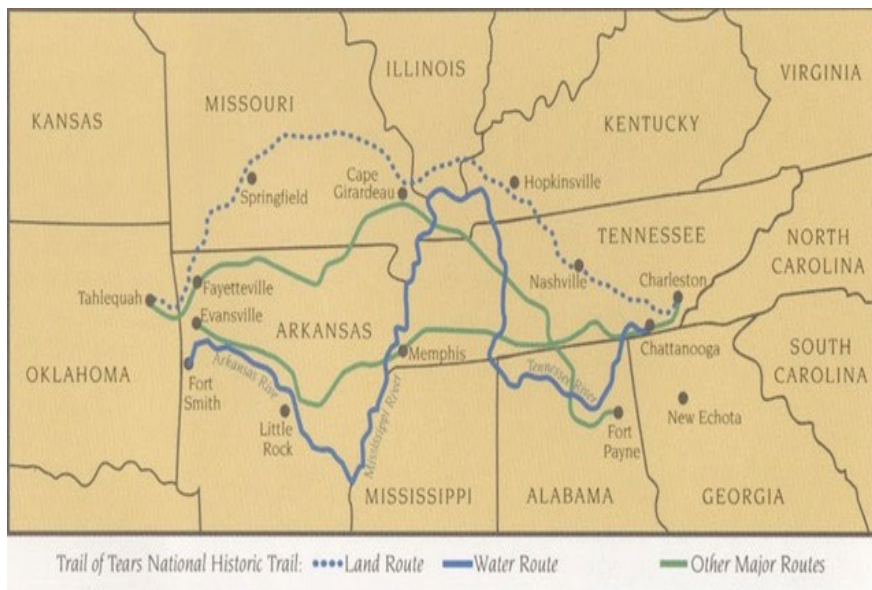
Brown's Tavern

Around 1800, [John Brown](#), who was half white and half Cherokee, began to operate a ferry at Williams Island on the north bank of the Tennessee River. Brown's Ferry is located about a half mile upstream from Tennessee RiverPlace. John Brown was also the owner of Brown's Tavern, a two story log cabin that still stands today and is the oldest building in Chattanooga. It is visible along the road as you travel to Tennessee RiverPlace (about five miles away). [Brown's Tavern](#) was located on the [Great Indian War Path](#), a trail that linked the northern tribes like the Iroquois and Shawnee with the southern tribes like the Cherokee, Muscogee, and Choctaw. This trail stretched all the way from present day upstate New York to Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Brown's Tavern was a famous stopping point and supply station for travelers, especially among frontiersmen who drove cattle and horses up and down the eastern United States. All of this, however, came to a sudden halt in 1838 when Brown and the surrounding Cherokee were driven off their ancestral lands and forced to migrate to Oklahoma during the [Trail of Tears](#). Brown went on to become the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation after the tribe reached their new lands west of the Mississippi River.



Brown's Tavern Today

It is estimated that about 20 percent of the Cherokee people perished during the Trail of Tears. State and federal soldiers rounded them up, often at gunpoint, removed them from their homes and property, and placed them in internment camps at Ross's Landing in downtown Chattanooga. Eventually they were forced to migrate westward to Oklahoma, many of which started their journey by crossing Brown's Ferry a half mile away from Tennessee RiverPlace. White Americans then quickly bought up the land previously owned by the Cherokee, and it was during this time that [Samuel Williams](#) bought Tuskegee Town, or Williams Island as it is called today.



Williams Island and the Underground Railroad, 1839

During the late 1830s when Tuskegee Town became known as Williams Island, a slave by the name of [Jacob Cummings](#) began to contemplate his freedom. Cummings was born around 1816, just three years before the Cherokee signed a treaty that established the Tennessee River as its border with the United States. Hamilton County was established on the north bank of the Tennessee River, including what is now called Moccasin Bend. It is around this time that a man named James Smith bought a large tract of land near Tennessee RiverPlace. He owned more than a dozen slaves, one of them being Jacob Cummings.



In 1839, Jacob Cummings was sent on an errand to retrieve supplies in downtown Chattanooga. It was then that Cummings met a man with the last name of Leonard who owned a store in town. Leonard reportedly was from New York and was an undercover abolitionist and agent of the Underground Railroad. After receiving certain *Jacob Cummings* advice and instructions from Leonard on how to travel north (following the North Star), Cummings escaped and found refuge on Williams Island. He was taken in by a poor woman, and after two days of hiding out on the island, he crossed the river somewhere in the vicinity of Tennessee RiverPlace. Following the North Star at night, Cummings eventually made it to the northern bank of the Ohio River where slavery was illegal. After becoming a free man, Cummings himself became an agent on the Underground Railroad, and in that role, helped other slaves gain their freedom.

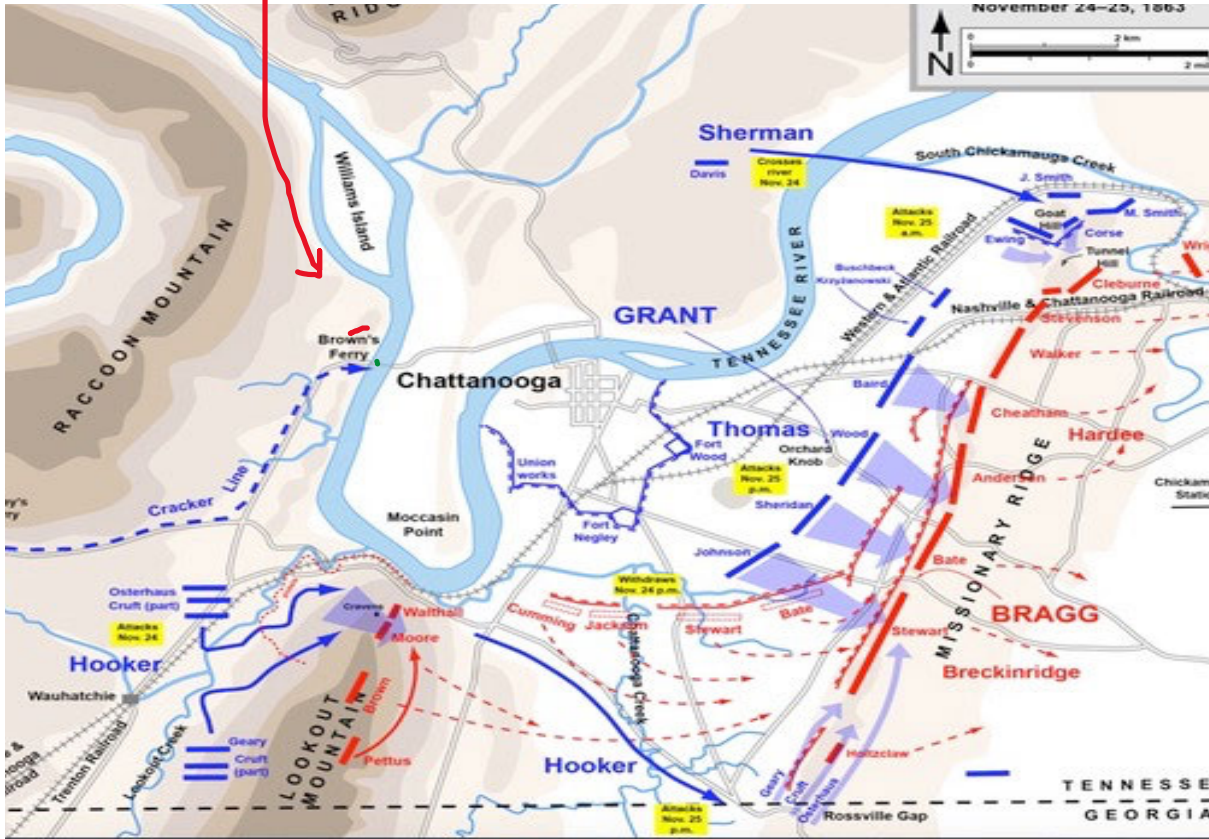
The Civil War and Tennessee RiverPlace

The Civil War began in April of 1861 and ended in April of 1865. More Americans died during the Civil War than all other American wars combined. More than 600,000 Americans died as Americans killed Americans. And like many other southern towns, it was during this time that Chattanooga saw its fill of battles, carnage, and destruction.

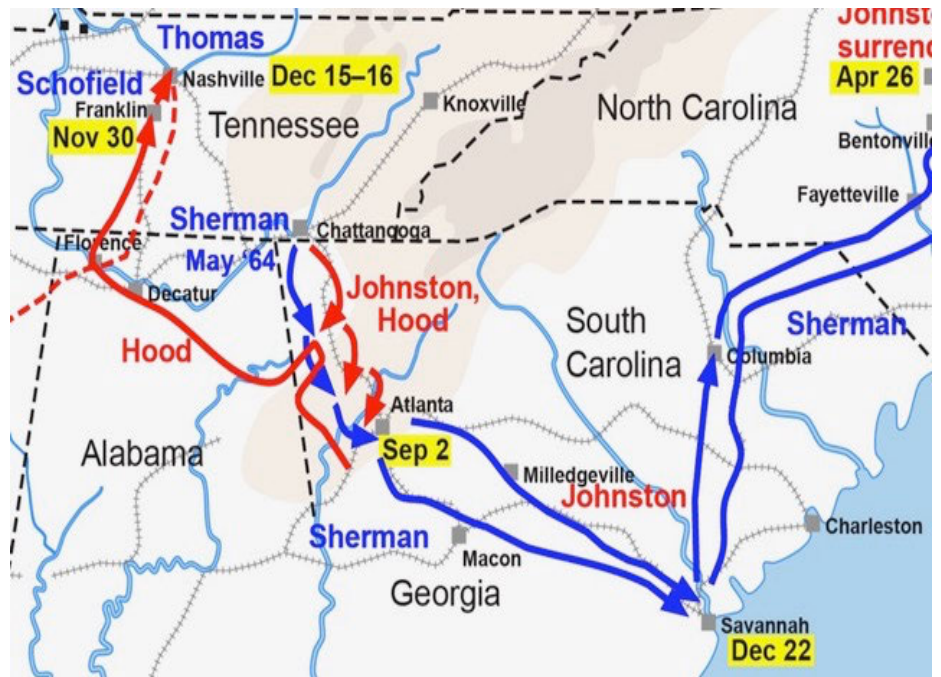
On August 21, 1863, [General Braxton Bragg](#) of the Confederacy, facing a much larger Union Army, ordered the evacuation of Chattanooga. The Union Army, under the command of [Major General William](#)

[S. Rosecrans](#), quickly occupied the city. Bragg marched his army south down the Lafayette Road (now HWY 27) into Georgia, and after being resupplied by other Confederate forces, returned to Chattanooga to lay siege upon the city. Bragg's forces made camp along the high ground that surrounds the city and were given the mission to cut off all Union supply lines. It was ordered that all barges and boats coming up or down the Tennessee River to resupply Union forces were either to be seized or sunk. By the Fall of 1863, the Union Army's food and supplies were almost depleted. It was at this point that [General Ulysses S. Grant](#) and [General Tecumseh Sherman](#) were ordered to Chattanooga to take command of Union forces.

Tennessee RiverPlace



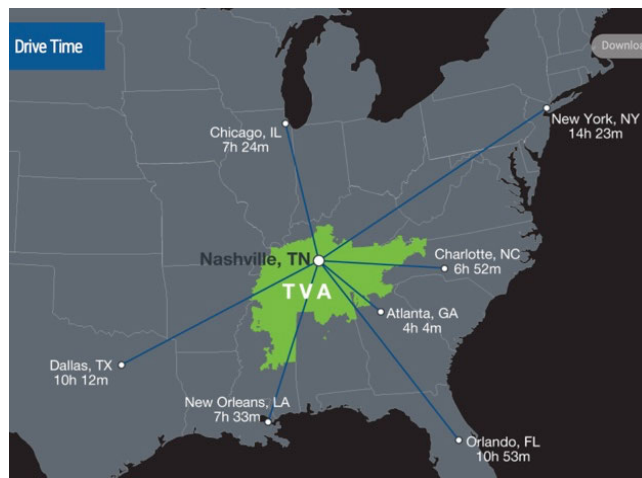
Confederate soldiers made fortifications on top of [Lookout Mountain](#), Missionary Ridge, and Walden Ridge. The 4th and 15th Regiments of Alabama were deployed along the high ground surrounding Tennessee RiverPlace and were given the mission to prevent Union supply ships from reaching Chattanooga. The area around Brown’s Ferry, just half a mile upstream from Tennessee RiverPlace, was guarded by Confederate sharpshooters. This passage became known as the “Cracker Line” because of the [hardtack crackers](#) that were supplied to Union troops along its defenses. And it was at this spot that one can argue that the outcome of the Civil War was ultimately decided! On October 27, 1863, the Union Army launched an attack on Brown’s Ferry, and in the process, opened up the Cracker Line. After a pontoon bridge was built across the river in less than 12 hours, the siege was broken and Union troops in Chattanooga were resupplied with much needed food, supplies, and ammunition. Now with the city firmly under Union control, Chattanooga became the launching pad to invade Georgia. In May of 1864, Sherman set out from Chattanooga to launch his famous “[March to the Sea](#)” which ultimately proved to be the death knell of the Confederacy. After Atlanta was burned to the ground, Sherman marched his troops to Savannah, and in the process, cut the Confederacy in half. Shortly thereafter, in April of 1865, the Confederate army laid down its weapons and surrendered.



Sherman’s “March to the Sea” from Atlanta to Savannah

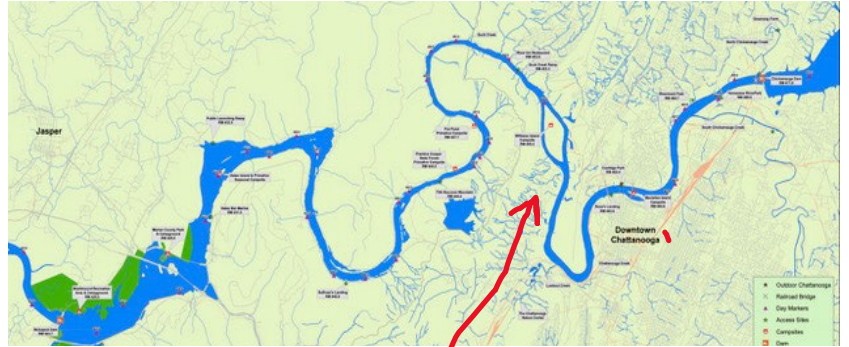
The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Tennessee RiverPlace

After the Civil War was over, several different families farmed the land that is now Tennessee RiverPlace. On the property today stands an old and historic barn dating back to the late 19th or early 20th century. During this time, the Tennessee Valley remained one of the poorest and less developed regions in the United States. As a result, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the [Tennessee Valley Authority](#) (TVA) in 1933 during the Great Depression. The TVA built dozens of hydroelectric dams that supplied the people of Tennessee Valley with electricity and good paying jobs. Among these are nearby Chickamauga Dam and Nickajack Dam.

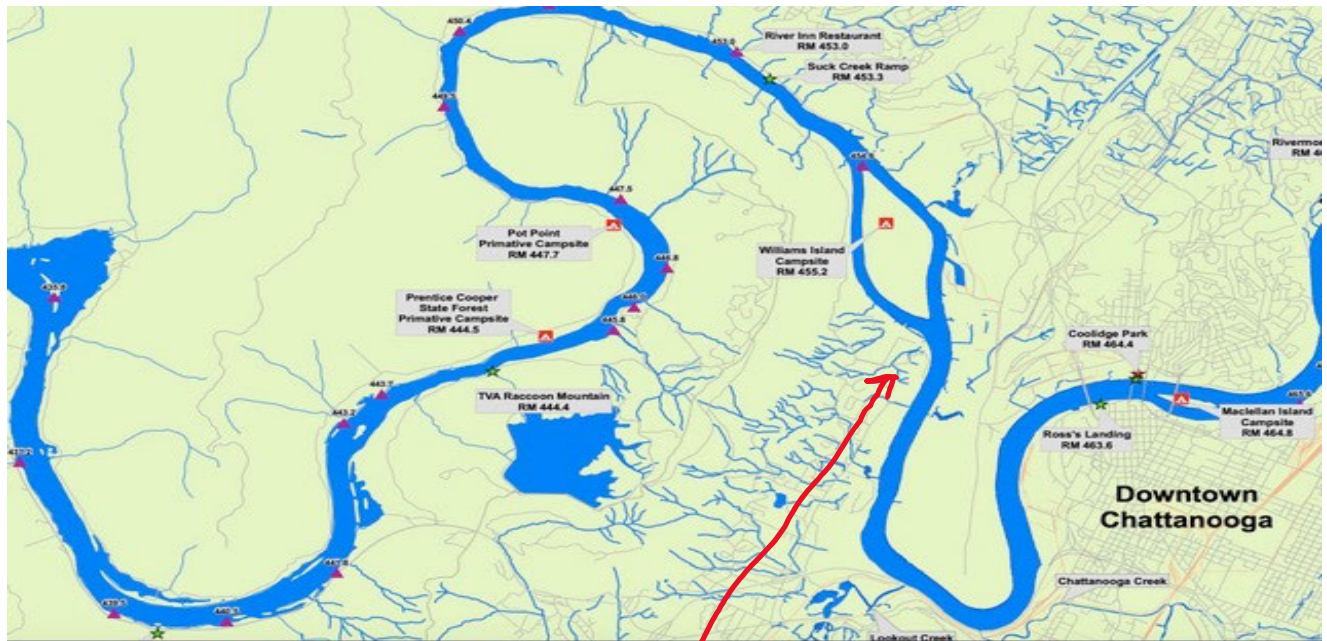


TVA today

TVA is currently the largest public power company in the United States and plays an integral role in maintaining and preserving the natural beauty of the Tennessee River Gorge. TVA is partnered with the National Park Service and Tennessee State Parks and manages approximately 485,000 acres of property located near Tennessee RiverPlace (which includes wildlife refuges and parks for camping, hiking, kayaking, fishing, biking, rock climbing, and bouldering). Among these are [Raccoon Mountain Reservoir](#) and the [Tennessee River Blueway](#) on which Tennessee RiverPlace currently resides.



Tennessee RiverPlace



Tennessee RiverPlace

Tennessee RiverPlace was established in 2001 with the mission of sharing this rich land and history with the public. We welcome you to visit Tennessee RiverPlace to soak up the beauty of the river, the valley it resides in, and the mountains that surround us. Whether it is a beautiful hike with sightings of bald eagles, ospreys, ground hogs, turkey, and deer, or maybe a kayaking and fishing trip down the Tennessee River Gorge, Tennessee RiverPlace has something to offer all people in search of getting away from the stress of everyday life. We are proud to be a part of this land and its rich history, and we consider ourselves fortunate to be able to help protect its beauty as the story of this place continues to unfold!