This downtown walking tour showcases the intertwined and uneasy relationships which existed among the city’s residents during the Civil War. The notion of secession fiercely divided Knoxville and East Tennessee citizens. The economy here was not based on slave labor. Thus, the perceived threat to the right to own slaves brought on by Abraham Lincoln’s election was not as strongly felt as in other parts of the South. Yet many of Knoxville’s wealthiest citizens had business ties to the South. The majority of the white population in East Tennessee did not take issue with the institution of slavery. Many staunch Unionists, in fact, owned slaves. However, when forced to choose between the planter states’ rebellion and the Union, the majority in East Tennessee chose the Union. O.P. Temple, a lawyer and a Unionist, told his regional audience that slavery was better protected under the Constitution than in the South. The majority of the white population of East Tennessee did not choose to join the Confederacy and the Union, the majority in East Tennessee chose the Union. O.P. Temple, a lawyer and a Unionist, told his regional audience that slavery was better protected under the Constitution than in the South. The majority of the white population of East Tennessee did not choose to join the Confederacy.

The first Confederate General to attempt to quiet the Unionist population of East Tennessee was Felix Zollicoffer. Ironically, he had not been in favor of secession but volunteered his services to the state when it joined the Confederacy. He was killed at the Battle of Mill Springs in January of 1862.

Blount Mansion was inhabited by the Boyd family during the war. Judge Samuel Beckey Boyd had bought the house in 1845. When he died in 1855, the house was left to his eldest son John, a trained surgeon who in 1861 joined the Confederate Army. In his absence, his mother and 5 sisters ran the house. Enter Belle Boyd in the spring of 1863. A cousin of the Knoxville Boyds, she was sent south from Virginia by Stonewall Jackson (for whom she had provided “much useful US Army intelligence”) when it was feared Federal authorities would arrest her for spying. Her notoriety preceded her and in her autobiography she tells of non-stop balls, parties, and riding excursions while in Knoxville. She stayed several months then continued further south.

2 The view from Gay Street Bridge helps point out important features of the land around Knoxville. There had never been a bridge across the river until the Federal army under engineer Orlando M. Poe built a pontoon bridge in November of 1863. The pontoon bridge provided access to the high ground south of the city. On these knobs several earthen forts were constructed by the Federals as defense against a Confederate approach from the South.

Federal troops occupied Knoxville in the fall of 1863 and Blount Mansion was known as the place the ladies of the Boyd family would entertain Federal officers. Young Sue Boyd, 19 years old at the time would often play the piano and sing for them. She had a particular fondness for General William P. Sanders and fancied that they were courting. The piano thought to be the one she played for Sanders is in the Gateway. Sanders, a cavalry officer, was killed in the early days of the Confederate siege of Knoxville.

3 The brick building present today is the Knox County Courthouse that replaced the one standing during the war. The wartime structure was located directly across Main Street. The arched marble monument you see was erected in honor of John Mason Boyd and is symbolic of the assimilation of former Confederates into Knoxville’s culture. It was a long and difficult process, and for many proved impossible. Boyd, you may recall, was the same man who left Blount Mansion in order to become a surgeon for the Confederate Army.

4 We have only one known photograph of the Knoxville jail, which stood at the time of the war. The photo is taken from the high ground south of the river looking at the back of the jail, known as Fox’s Castle because of its unique style. Today, the First Baptist Church stands on the jail’s location. Early in the war, the jail housed Unionist bridge burners, some of whom were hanged here in town. The virulent and outspoken editor of the Knoxville Whig, William Brownlow was imprisoned here during the Confederate occupation. When the Federals were back in power he sought revenge. Prominent Confederates were imprisoned from 1863 until 1865, perhaps even the former jailer himself, Robert Fox.

Early in 1864 these forts were maintained by troops of the 1st U.S. (Colored) Heavy Artillery. Significant remnants of those structures exist today and are being preserved. Fort Stanley is on the high ground directly above the south end of the Gay Street Bridge. You may visit Fort Dickerson on the high ground immediately west of Fort Stanley as it is now a city park.

The pontoon bridge in November of 1863. A cousin of the Knoxville Boyds, she was sent south from Virginia by Stonewall Jackson (for whom she had provided “much useful US Army intelligence”) when it was feared Federal authorities would arrest her for spying. Her notoriety preceded her and in her autobiography she tells of non-stop balls, parties, and riding excursions while in Knoxville. She stayed several months then continued further south.
Where the Bank of America building stands now was the home of Perez Dickinson. He was from Amherst, Massachusetts and, in partnership with Knoxville native James Cowan, became an extraordinarily successful businessman. As someone originally from the North, he was regarded with suspicion by local Confederate authorities. He sold his home to southern relatives and lived in Syracuse, New York until he deemed it safe to return in 1864. Dickinson is a prime example of the murky nature of slave ownership. After the war he was known for his philanthropy, but post-war history accounts inaccurately described him as an abolitionist when county records and archaeology findings prove he owned, bought and sold slaves.

The Frank H. McClung House site was at Cumberland and Walnut. The Federals condemned the home as rebel property with the contents to be sold. Frank McClung was working for the Confederacy in Saltville, Virginia but his wife Eliza and four small children were living in the house. She and her family ended up sharing living quarters with Federal officers in 1864 and then were allowed to go to St. Louis to live with her parents. After the war, Frank and the family returned to their home and he continued to prosper in his wholesale business.

The majority of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church were decidedly Confederate in their leanings. As the city’s oldest church, many of the members had developed lucrative business ties to the slave labor economy of the Deep South. Once the church building was taken by Federal troops in 1863, it was not returned until after the war. First it was used as a hospital and then as barracks. There were reports of horses being stabled in the sanctuary.

Standing with your back to the East Tennessee History center and looking across the street is the site of the 2nd Presbyterian Church. The beautiful new building opened in 1872 and occupied a full block on Clinch between Walnut and Market (named Prince during the war). Despite having Unionist Horace Maynard and family as members, the minister and the majority of the congregation were decidedly pro-Confederate. Its cemetery was the resting place of Gen. William P. Sanders until the 1890’s.

During Union occupation. Sanders was shot on November 18, 1863 and died in the early morning hours of the next day. His burial was at night and was made secret except for one person. Sue Boyd was told in order that she could view his coffin being carried to the graveyard at 2nd Presbyterian Church. The church site no longer exists and Sanders’ body was moved to the National Cemetery in Chattanooga.

Now owned by the Gulf and Ohio Railroad this brick house on the southeast corner of Cumberland and Walnut was the home of the Park family from 1812 until 1910. Dr. Park was the minister at the 1st Presbyterian Church and President of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum and a staunch Confederate. When Confederate forces tried to retake Knoxville in November of 1863, he unsuccessfully tried to convince General Longstreet of the true geographic location of rivers. He also informed the General about food being floated down the Holston (now known as the Tennessee) river for the Union troops of General Burnsides.

Reverend Thomas Humes was the minister at St. John’s Church, but since he was a Unionist did not preach during Confederate occupation. Union General Ambrose Burnsides returned him to the pulpit in 1863. Miss Sue Boyd gave a singing recital here in 1864. Ellen Renshaw House mentions the church often in her history. Her husband was a Confederate officer and her pastor was Rev. Thomas Humes, a Unionist. He was also a slave owner. In 1888 she wrote “Loyal Mountaineers of East Tennessee.”

The entrance to the East Tennessee History Center is at the corner of Gay and Clinch. The original structure completed in 1874 covered half a block along Clinch Avenue, but an addition in 2004 allowed the building to span the entire block. The Calvin M. McClung Collection on the 3rd floor is one of the finest genealogical resources in the southeast. The photo shows the building under construction in 1872.

Near the Lamar house was the site of William Brownlow’s newspaper office. Known as Parson Brownlow, he was a Methodist minister and editor of the Knoxville Whig. He was jailed then expelled from East Tennessee during Confederate occupation. He was a popular speaker throughout the North and returned with the arrival of Federal troops in 1863. He resumed his newspaper, now the Whig and Rebel Ventilator, urging revenge against all Confederates. He became governor of Tennessee immediately after the war in 1865, then US Senator. He died in 1877.