

Welcome to Cola!



Columbia, a city with small town charm

History and Heritage in South Carolina's Capital



Kerry Egan

From the time Native Americans known as the Congaree roamed this land, to the earliest settlers' camps along the river to Gen. William T. Sherman's capture and burning of the city during the Civil War, [Columbia](#) has had a rich and varied history. Columbia is the largest city in South Carolina, the state capital, home to the University of South Carolina, famously hot and the "Capital of Southern Hospitality." And it's also a great place to see and experience history.

South Carolina State House

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A bronze statue of George Washington sits at the foot of the Capitol's north steps.

[The State House](#), a beautiful granite building at the intersection of Gervais and Main streets, was still being built when the Civil War began. When Sherman approached the city from the other side of the Congaree River in 1864, the Confederates ordered that the bridges spanning the river be burned to stop the oncoming Union Army. Sherman ordered artillery strikes across the river as a pontoon bridge was built. The State House was struck five times with enough force to damage and gouge the granite. The damage was never repaired, and it was marked by bronze stars instead. When you visit, see if you can find all of them.



[Take a tour](#) of the interior of the State House and learn a bit about the governing that goes on there. Spend some time walking among the memorials on the State House grounds. Especially moving is the African-American History Monument, which remembers the African-Americans enslaved before the Civil War.

USC Horseshoe



The picturesque Horseshoe is the oldest part of the USC campus.

The University of South Carolina was founded in 1801. The oldest part of the campus in Columbia, circa 1805, is known as the Horseshoe. Located at the intersection of Sumter and College streets, it is truly lovely. Brick walkways, undulating and buckling over the centuries, crisscross the grass under ancient trees. The old buildings stand like sentinels over the expanse, and secret gardens hide in the crevices behind and between buildings. [The South Caroliniana Library](#) holds special collections and archives that let readers explore the history of South Carolina. [The McKissick Museum](#) traces the human and natural history of the state.

Historic Columbia



This Italian villa-style residence once served as the home of Woodrow Wilson, 28th U.S. president.

[Historic Columbia](#) is a nonprofit group dedicated to sharing and illuminating Columbia's history. It operates several historic house museums that tell the story of a certain time and family; from the [childhood home of a future president](#) to the stately mansion of a wealthy antebellum family to the [cottage of a family of freed slaves](#). Historic Columbia also offers [dozens of fantastic tours](#) of houses, gardens and even whole neighborhoods.

Columbia Canal



Riverfront Park features a trail that runs along the Historic Columbia Canal.

Columbia, like Atlanta, Raleigh and many other cities, lies at the fall line of the Piedmont. This is the long, geological line at which the glaciers stopped and then retreated thousands of years ago. It's the place that the broad, flat Congaree River splits into the Saluda and Broad rivers at a place of treacherous, rocky shoals. Early explorers and traders could not navigate a boat through it. This meant that anyone wanting to continue inland in the Colonial era

needed to get off the river and portage around. Those shoals are the very reason Columbia exists, and the reason that the Columbia Canal was built in 1820. The Canal, widened at the end of the 19th century, is still vital to the city today as part of hydroelectricity and water treatment plants.

[The Riverfront Park and Historic Columbia Canal](#)

offers visitors a chance to see and understand how the canal has been used for the past 200 years. Placards along the walking path, located on the berm that creates the canal, explain the how and why. Old pump houses are open to the public and let you gape at the massive size of the turbines once used. You can walk across the old wooden dam, too. Back on the other side of the river, a memorial to the indentured Irish servants who built the canal offers a touching reminder of the human cost of technological advancement.

South Carolina State Museum

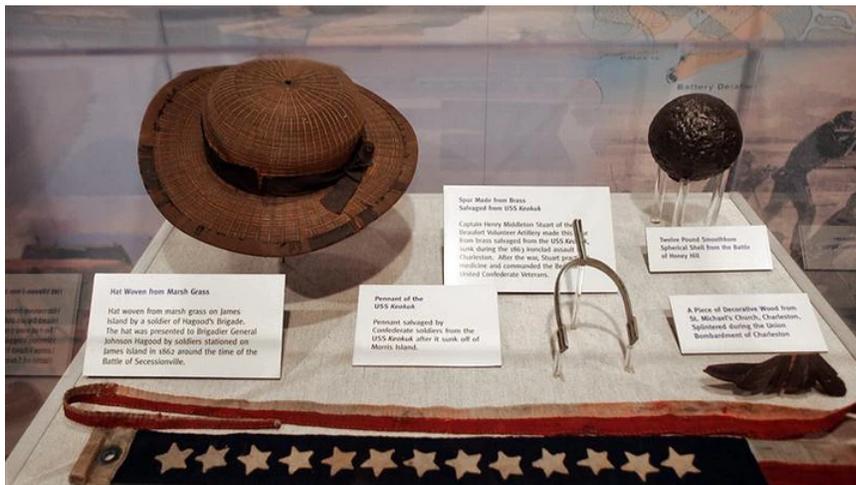


The South Carolina State Museum holds impressive natural and human history collections .

[The South Carolina State Museum](#), the largest museum in the southeast, holds impressive natural

and human history collections, including artifacts from Columbia's and South Carolina's recent and ancient history. The massive and beautiful building itself also is part of that history. The Columbia Mills Building, opened in 1894, was the first totally electric textile mill in the world. That electricity was supplied by the dams just up river.

Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum



The Confederate Relic Room features exhibits on South Carolina's military history.

[The Confederate Relic Room](#), housed in the State Museum, explores South Carolina's military history, including the Revolutionary War, the state's central and pivotal role in the Civil War, through the wars of the 20th century up to the ongoing war on terror. It's rich with artifacts and memorabilia, and is a Civil War buff's dream.

Fun Insider Places to Check Out



The graveyard of Trinity Cathedral contains the graves of several Revolutionary War and Confederate generals.

While Columbia has plenty of well-preserved historic sites and museums, it also has a wealth of historic sites that are hiding in plain sight, often only known to locals but fascinating to history buffs.

On the corner of Huger and Gervais streets, the former [Confederate Printing Plant](#), where the Confederacy printed its currency, is now a Publix grocery store and condos.

Across the Blossom Street bridge in Cayce, strange, round, squat brick buildings sit in a grassy field. They are the remains of the Guignard Brick Works and were built almost a century ago. The beehive kilns, where the rich red clay of the Midlands was turned into brick, were built in the 1920s.

Many of the churches spread throughout the downtown area have played important roles in history, even as they still remain places of worship. The leafy graveyard of [Trinity Cathedral](#) across from the State House, contains the graves of several Revolutionary War and Confederate generals. Tours of the church are available Monday through Friday.

The First Baptist Church, not far from Trinity, is where South Carolina voted unanimously to secede from the Union in 1860. Local legend says that when Union troops, eager for revenge, asked the First Baptist sexton which church was the place where secession began, he pointed them to a church down the street. That church burned; First Baptist survived.



Kerry Egan

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SC Department of
Parks, Recreation
and Tourism
1205 Pendleton
Street Columbia, SC
29201

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