

# A TIME NOT FORGOTTEN The Civil War in Baton Rouge



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# The Battle of Baton Rouge in the pre-dawn darkness of August 5, 1862...

Control of the Mississippi River proved crucial in the coming war. By late spring 1862, the U.S. Navy had blasted through the defenses at New Orleans to the south and Memphis to the north; only the fortress at Vicksburg remained outside Union control. The mayor of Baton Rouge surrendered the town in early May to the Union fleet, but no troops remained to occupy the place. Later in the month, when Confederate gunboats fired at a boat of Union sailors coming ashore, navy ships shelled the waterfront, causing mass panic among the town's citizens and serious damage to its buildings. At the end of the month, General Thomas Williams, a stern West Point trained regular officer, arrived with his brigade of over 3,000 Union volunteers drawn from Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Within several weeks, though, Williams and most of his men were called upriver in a futile effort to dig a bypass canal across from Vicksburg, an exercise in which hundreds fell sick or even died from poor sanitation, unclean drinking water, rotten food, heat, and exhaustion. When they returned to Baton Rouge in late July, the town looked more like a hospital than a military camp.

In the meanwhile, Confederate General John C. Breckinridge, a former vice president of the United States and presidential contender in 1860, had received orders to re-take Baton Rouge. He marshaled about 4,000 men at Camp Moore in Tangipahoa Parish, including soldiers from Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee. His assault was to be coordinated with the appearance off Baton Rouge of the C.S.S. *Arkansas*, an ironclad ram whose job it was to clear the Mississippi River of Union vessels. After several days of marching, the little army was in place just outside Baton Rouge, to the east at Ward's Creek, waiting in the pre-dawn darkness of August 5th. The *Arkansas* sat just upriver, likewise ready to move.

The battle of Baton Rouge opened that morning in confusion, as sentries, scouts, and jittery lead units fired wildly in the darkness. Then the Confederate forces, deployed into two divisions, struck westward along North St. through the part of town now known as Mid-City. The fighting raged from north to south, stretching along a line from near North St., down DuRoiq St. (modern-day N. 19th St.) to Government St., and spread out over a half-dozen blocks west to east. Magnolia Cemetery was at the very heart of this struggle.

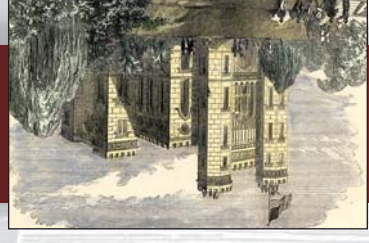
**The Fight in Magnolia Cemetery**  
"We crossed the cemetery, stopping at a paling fence that enclosed it. We remained here a short time, again on our faces, many of us firing from the baseboard of the fence. Others sat on graves, and fired from the tombstones which protected them."  
—Private Geravis Grainger, 6th Kentucky



**The Battle of Baton Rouge**  
Hand Colored Lithograph  
Library of Congress

The Confederates initially had success in driving Union troops along North St. towards the town before being turned back by massed artillery. Their attack through Magnolia Cemetery itself stalled out by about 7:30 a.m. to the south, beyond a dense wood. Colonel Henry Watkins Allen, a pre-war Louisiana planter and state legislator, led a charge of Louisiana troops across an open field at the present-day DuRoiq Elementary School. While his men did overrun the Union cannons they faced, Allen retreated in disorder after a Union countercharge. The action then moved back to the center of the line, where General Breckinridge launched several uncoordinated attacks into the Union regiments massed just west of Magnolia Cemetery, attacks which fell apart in the face of heavy rifle and cannon fire. It was during one of these frenzied efforts that the commanding general of the Union forces, Thomas Williams, was shot and killed while rallying his troops.

"With a mad rush, and a grand yell, the men . . . dashed into the opening before them, only to be met by a storm of shell, grape, and canister from the Federal battery, and a scorching fire from a strong line of infantry supporting the artillery."  
—Private A.P. Richards, 4th Louisiana



**Officer Parker hoisting the U.S. Flag over the Louisiana State Capitol, 1862**  
Library of Congress

The battle had been an inconclusive affair. In a few hours of fighting, close to 200 men were killed outright or died shortly after; another 650 were wounded or mangled. Each side appeared trampled. The Union forces huddled inside their defenses around the Arsenal grounds for two weeks more before evacuating to New Orleans. Before leaving, they destroyed many of the buildings in the northern part of town to create a clear "field of fire" for their cannon in case the Confederates resumed the attack. Breckinridge, respecting the Union superiority in artillery, wisely chose not to waste the lives of his men in such an assault. Although the Confederates did re-occupy the town after the Union withdrawal in late August, it was short-lived; they soon moved to the more strategic Fort Hudson position a dozen miles upriver. Union forces returned that December and would remain in Baton Rouge through the end of the war.

**Afterwards**  
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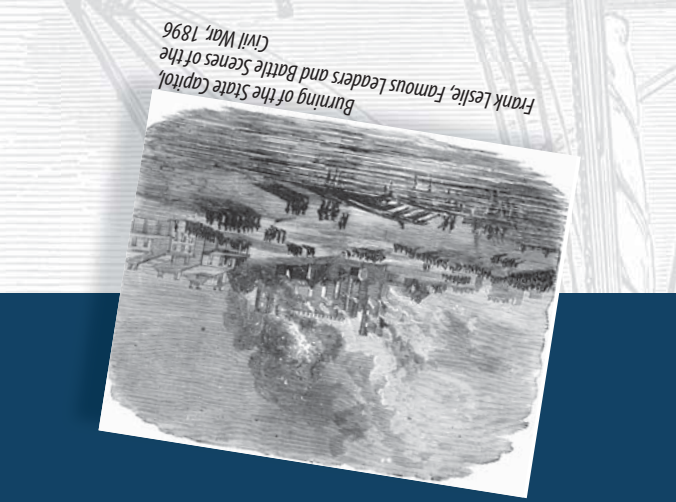
**Union Forces Fortify after the Battle**  
"The work on the entrenchments proceeded day and night until they were completed.... The fences of the arsenal grounds were removed; the trees in the streets of the village were felled for abatis [obstructions], and buildings and fences east of the arsenal grounds were burned to secure range for our guns. We were prepared to resist the attack of an army several times as large as the army of General Breckinridge."  
—Colonel Halbert Paine, 4th Wisconsin, August 1862

**Confederates Re-occupy the Town**  
"When I got to Baton Rouge, I found everything in a wretched state. The greater part of the town was in ruins and several fine buildings, besides those burned by the Federals as a military necessity, had been burned.... Nearly all the substantial former residents had left the place. Many of them having been driven from their homes were living in log cabins in the surrounding country. No business of any kind was being done, and hunger and privation reigned supreme."  
—William Watson, 3rd Louisiana, September 1862



**Confederate General John C. Breckinridge**  
**Union General Thomas Williams**  
**Confederate Colonel Henry W. Allen**  
Library of Congress

During the occupation, public buildings and private homes became makeshift officers' quarters, enlisted men's barracks, or hospital wards. From the countryside, Confederate lines in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Benjamin Grierson, who arrived in early May 1863 after a two-week jaunt behind the Red River into central and northwest Louisiana in 1864. Thousands of soldiers using it as a staging point for its operations against Fort Hudson in 1863 and up or Texas. The town became a military garrison, with the Union navy and army that time, though, most inhabitants had fled or "refugeed" to western Louisiana leaving a hulking wreck that would haunt the town for the next two decades. By perspective, Right after Christmas 1862, the capitol building went up in flames, the Union re-occupation got off to a bad start, at least from the local citizens' perspective.



**Burning of the State Capitol**  
Frank Leslie, Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War, 1896



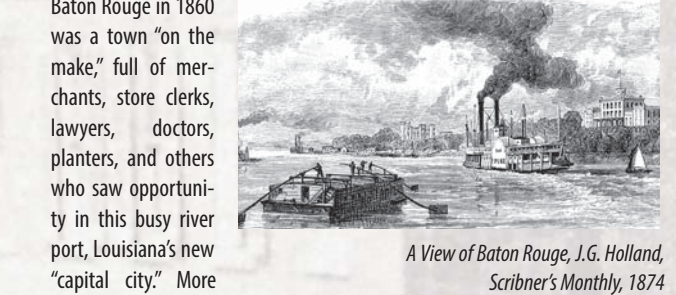
*The Secession Convention*  
Louisiana State Museum

**Secession and War**  
The issue of slavery dominated the national political discussion in the 1850s and ultimately pushed the nation into civil war. The election to the presidency in November 1860 of Abraham Lincoln, well-known for his anti-slavery views, proved to be the final straw for the South. As a river town dependent on trade and commerce, Baton Rouge was cautious about the idea of "secession," of leaving the United States to form an independent republic. But pro-secession forces, the so-called "fire-eaters," ruled the day. In early January 1861, Governor Thomas O. Moore ordered the seizure of Federal property in the state, including the buildings that made up the Arsenal complex at Baton Rouge. Then, a special convention met in late January at the state capitol and voted to officially leave the Union. In February, Louisiana joined the other Deep South states to form a new government, the Confederate States of America. When war broke out that April in Charleston Harbor, many of the local boys enlisted in military companies such as the Fencibles, Pelicans, and Creole Guards, and went off to the fight with bands playing, flags flying, and dreams of glory floating about their heads.



*Baton Rouge Waterfront At The Time Of The Civil War*  
MOLLUS-Mass.

**Baton Rouge on the Eve of War**  
Baton Rouge in 1860 was a town "on the make," full of merchants, store clerks, lawyers, doctors, planters, and others who saw opportunity in this busy river port, Louisiana's new "capital city." More than 5,400 people called the town home, almost triple the number from just 15 or 20 years earlier. It was a diverse crowd, too. These new people had come from other parts of the South, New England, the Mid-West, and even overseas, especially from Ireland, England, and Germany. African Americans, mostly enslaved but also including several hundred free people of color, composed more than a quarter of the town's total population. It was a bustling world, this Baton Rouge, but soon to witness great tragedy and radical change.



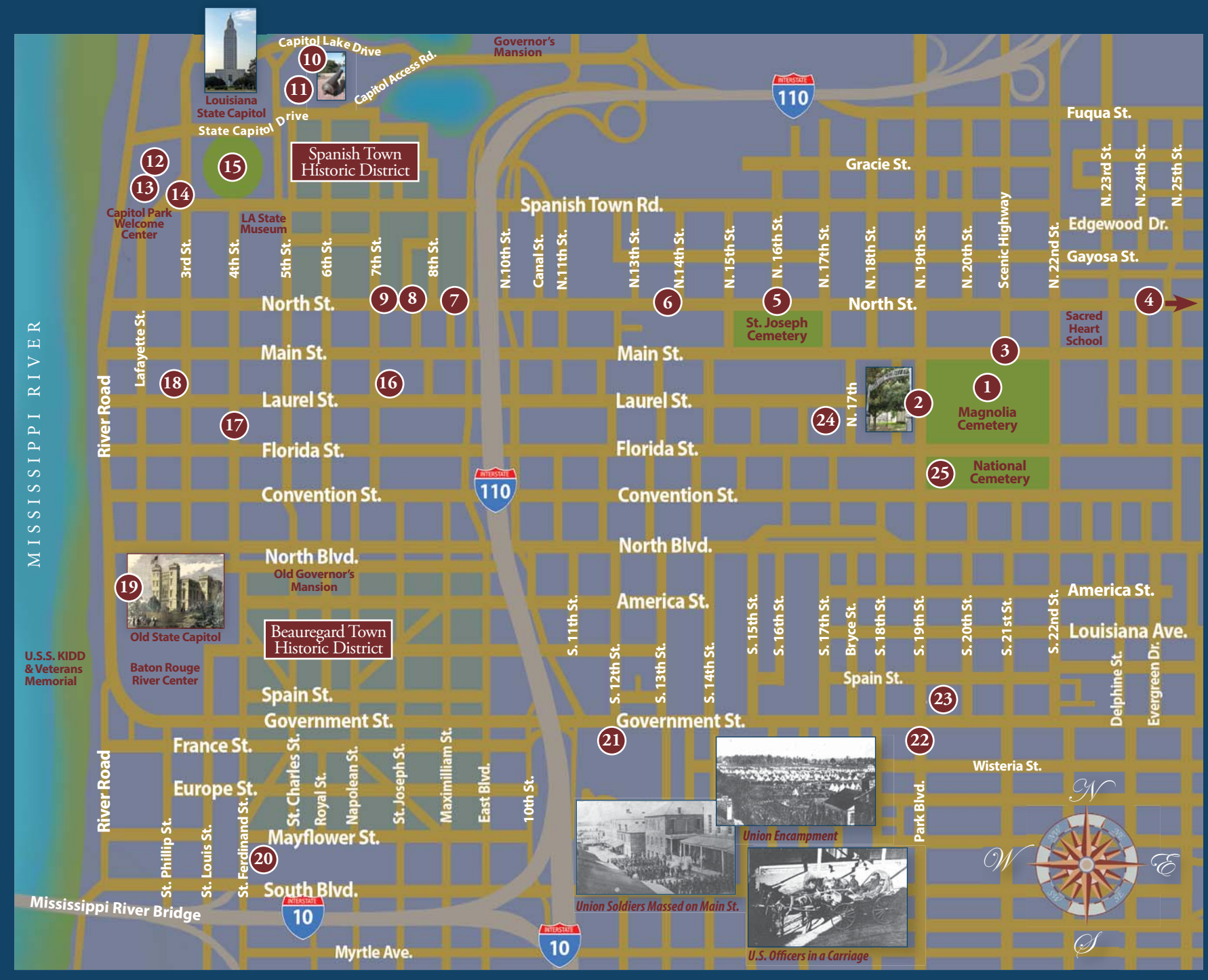
*A View of Baton Rouge, J.G. Holland, Scribner's Monthly, 1874*

## The Baton Rouge Fencibles Leave Town for War

"Capt. Herron marched his men up, preceded by a fine band of music, and brought them to a halt in the densest part of the crowd. When properly formed, Rev. Mr. Linfield . . . presented to Capt. Herron and his company a rich and beautifully worked banner — the glorious emblem of Louisiana's sovereignty, with her 'bright particular star' gleaming out. . . On behalf of the Fencibles, Capt. Herron accepted the banner . . . handed over the flag to the color-bearer, our friend George Garig, [and] escaped by giving a very emphatic order for his rear rank to close up, shoulder arms and march. And thus, they went away, leaving few dry eyes in Baton Rouge."  
—*Baton Rouge Daily Advocate*, June 4, 1861



# The Battle of Baton Rouge and Related Historic Civil War Sites



**1 Magnolia Cemetery**  
422 N. 19th St.  
This new "public cemetery" on the outskirts of town replaced the old Protestant burying ground near the U.S. Arsenal complex in the 1850s. At the time of the battle in 1862, only the western third of the graveyard was open, the remaining portion being planted in corn by the sexton. Local African Americans and Union soldiers initially buried most of the Confederate dead from the battle in makeshift graves around the area. Legend stated that their remains were reinterred later in a mass burial near the center of the cemetery. There is a three tier monument "To the Confederate Soldiers killed in the Battle of Baton Rouge, Aug 5, 1862." Many Confederate veterans who survived the war are buried inside Magnolia's gates, as is the famed photographer Andrew Lytle, who provided a remarkable view of Baton Rouge during the war years and in the following decades.

**2 Camp of the 21st Indiana**  
Laurel St. at N. 19th St., main entrance to Magnolia Cemetery  
In a wooded area just west of here, the Hoosiers of the 21st Indiana had set up camp before the battle. In the early morning darkness of August 5th, 1862, the firing of sentries alerted them to the approach of Confederate forces from the east. Around 5:00 a.m., Union Lieutenant Colonel John Keith moved his men forward to the area of the modern-day Sacred Heart School campus but then fell back into a defensive position here along the cemetery's western fence line. The fighting raged across the graveyard as Colonel A.P. Thompson's Kentucky and Alabama troops came on. The Indiana men held against the assault, which was largely spent by 7:30 a.m. as the Confederates paused to regroup.

**3 Shields' Attack**  
Main St. at Scenic Highway, looking north  
The 14th Maine was camped just northwest of here on the morning of August 5th. Although Union General Thomas Williams anticipated an attack, he strangely had not ordered his men to entrench or strengthen their positions. The battle began north of this point about 4:30 a.m. when Confederate infantry and artillery under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Shields attacked southward into the Maine regiment's camp. The Maine volunteers turned to hold Shields but were then swept away by the attack of General Charles Clark's 2,000 Confederates into their exposed right flank, or side. The Maine regiment retreated in a panic back towards town.

**4 Confederate Advance**  
North St. at N. Foster Dr., large stone tablet at intersection  
The local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected this monument to General John C. Breckinridge and his troops many years after the war in 1931. Breckinridge's men moved west along the Greenwell Springs Road near this point in the pre-dawn hours of August 5th. Well before dawn, Confederate scouts returning from the Union lines close to town collided with the lead Kentucky regiments near this spot, leading to an exchange of "friendly fire" that killed Lieutenant Alexander Todd, the half-brother of Mary Todd Lincoln, and injured General Benjamin Helm, married to the First Lady's half-sister.

**5 St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery**  
North St. at N. 16th St.  
Following the retreating 14th Maine, General Clark's Confederates advanced westward along North St. to the site of the Catholic Cemetery. Here, about 7:00 a.m., portions of the 21st Indiana turned to their left to attack Clark's men. The sudden assault on their exposed flank caused confusion among the Confederates, who lost their momentum and turned away.

**6 The Orphanage**  
1328 North St.  
By about 8:00 a.m., General Williams had massed a battery of nine cannon, supported by the 4th Wisconsin and 9th Connecticut, along this slight rise near the Female Protestant Orphanage. The guns, facing east, deterred any additional attacks by the Confederates along North St. The original wood-frame Orphanage building faced Main St. and actually survived the war. It was demolished in 1927.

**7 Potts House**  
831 North St.  
This house was constructed about 1850 and showcased the craft of Nelson Potts, one of Baton Rouge's premier brick masons and builders. He was active in the area up until 1867, when he returned to his native New Jersey. Being a northerner, Potts perhaps received preferential treatment of his property by the Union army. It is one of the few surviving antebellum homes remaining in the city. Private residence.

**8 Stewart-Dougherty House**  
741 North St.  
Influenced by the classical revival popular at the time, this house was built around 1850 by Nathan King Knox but was later purchased by Elvira McCalop Stewart, widow of a local sugar planter. The home quartered Union officers during the occupation of the town, which is perhaps the reason it was spared from demolition. This is a fine example of the type of home being built here during the prosperous decade or so before the Civil War. Private residence.

**9 Pino House**  
721 North St.  
This small cottage dates from the 1820s and is the oldest surviving home in the Spanish Town neighborhood. It was built by Antonio Pino, a member of the small Canary Islander population in Baton Rouge. The Pino family later sent several sons off to fight with the Confederate army during the Civil War. Thomas Pino, "tall and strongly built, with a nature mild but as brave as men are ever made," was wounded multiple times in Virginia before being killed near Baton Rouge. A post-war account noted that "two of the four" who bore the Pino name during the conflict were killed and "another desperately wounded." Private residence.

**10 Union Defensive Positions**  
Indian Mound in Capitol Park looking northeast  
In the pre-dawn hours of August 5th, General Williams placed the 4th Wisconsin and 9th Connecticut, along with some cannon, on the high ground that the Louisiana Governor's Mansion now occupies to the northeast of here. These troops protected the approach to the Arsenal across Grassy Bayou (Bayou Gras, today's Capitol Lake). Later that morning, the men and guns moved southeast to a blocking position in the vicinity of the Orphanage.

**11 Old Arsenal Museum**  
Capitol Park  
One of two surviving structures of the U.S. Arsenal at Baton Rouge, this ca. 1838 powder magazine protected the garrison's explosive stores. There were actually two magazines on-site but the other was destroyed in the early 1930s with the construction of Governor Huey P. Long's new state capitol building. Local society ladies rallied to save this building in one of the early preservation success stories of Baton Rouge. Today, it houses a small museum that focuses on the history of the Capitol Park area. Before evacuating the town in late August 1862, a soldier of the 6th Michigan left some spirited graffiti, still visible on one of the interior walls, for the returning Confederates.

**12 Pentagon Barracks**  
3rd Street  
Built in the early 1820s, thousands of officers and men of the U.S. Army passed through here in the 1830s and 1840s, and again during the Civil War years. Colonel Halbert Paine of the 4th Wisconsin called it a "very fine place for soldiers." After the war, the Barracks housed LSU cadets beginning in the 1880s. Today, out-of-town state legislators have access to private apartments during session.

**13 Naval Action**  
Capitol Park Welcome Center along River Road, overlooking Mississippi River  
Just upriver, past the present-day Capitol Annex building, the ironclad gunboat U.S.S. Essex remained in a supporting position of the Union forces throughout the battle. To the south of here were the gunboats U.S.S. *Katahdin*, *Kineo*, and *Sumter*. The early fog burned off by mid-morning, allowing these ships, with the aid of signalmen placed atop the state capitol, to train their heavy cannon on the Confederate positions. Capable of lobbing shells several miles in distance, these heavy guns encouraged General Breckinridge's withdrawal from the battle. Breckinridge had expected the ironclad ram C.S.S. *Arkansas* to support his assault by clearing the river of Union ships. Although the *Arkansas* arrived on time, it suffered a complete engine failure and could not get into the fight. The crew blew up the ship the next day to avoid capture. The wreck came to rest against the west bank of the Mississippi River near the current-day Huey P. Long/Highway 190 Bridge.

**14 Site of Zachary Taylor Residence**  
corner of Spanish Town Rd. and 3rd St.  
A weathered marble marker marks the approximate site of the small structure that served as the residence of the Spanish commandant at Baton Rouge prior to the 1810 West Florida Rebellion, and which later served as the temporary home of Zachary Taylor on his tours of duty through the "Old Southwest." Taylor was a stalwart of the "old army" and emerged as a national hero during the Mexican War. He received word of his election to the Presidency in 1848 while here. The building was still standing at the time of the Civil War. Many Union soldiers commented on its connection to Taylor, still a popular figure over a decade after his death.

**15 Site of the U.S. Arsenal**  
Spanish Town Rd. at 4th St., front lawn of State Capitol  
Centered here, within this square half-mile, existed a sizeable military complex that included an Armory building so large it could house "a thousand men," machine shops, powder magazines, an infirmary, officers' quarters, and a post commandant's house. A garrison cemetery was also on the grounds. Anticipating war, Louisiana militia seized the Arsenal in early January 1861. During the war years, the Arsenal was the nerve center of the Union occupation of Baton Rouge. Later, the buildings housed Louisiana State University before its move in the 1920s to the present campus south of downtown.

**16 Warden's House/Site of State Penitentiary**  
703 Laurel St.  
This structure was built about 1840 with the rest of the now-demolished State Penitentiary, the grounds of which are presently occupied in part by the Russell B. Long Federal Courthouse across the street. An exhibit of penitentiary artifacts recovered during archaeological excavations of the site is housed in the lobby of the courthouse. In need of fresh troops, Union recruiters supposedly enlisted some of the inmates here just before the battle.

**17 Site of Morgan House**  
east side of 4th St. between Laurel St. and Florida St.  
Sarah Morgan was the teenage daughter of Judge Thomas Gibbs Morgan and Sarah Hunt Fowler. Her father had moved the family to Baton Rouge in the 1850s and young Sarah grew up in the town, her vantage point being from this location. She recorded her impressions of the war in a detailed journal that her son published as *A Confederate Girl's Diary* many decades later. A complete edited version was published in the early 1990s by local historian Charles East. Union soldiers were not kind to the Morgan home. After they left the town in late August 1862, Sarah returned to find "a scene of ruin. Libraries emptied, china smashed, sideboards split open with axes, [and] cedar chests cut open . . ."

**18 Site of Fort Sumter Saloon**  
northwest corner of 3rd St. and Laurel St.  
German-born Charles Wieck opened the original Fort Sumter Saloon along 3rd St. between Main and Laurel, but then moved to this location in the 1880s. It received its martial name from the fact that Wieck opened the establishment in April 1861 just after Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina, fired on U.S. troops at Fort Sumter in the harbor. This event marked the beginning of the Civil War. With a keen eye for publicity, Wieck retrieved one of the old cannons lying about the Arsenal grounds and half-buried it, breech-side up, outside the saloon. After several moves, it's still here, hidden next to a fire hydrant but still visible. Wieck's business survived the war and continued as a well-known Baton Rouge watering hole until Prohibition.

**19 Old State Capitol**  
River Road at North Blvd.  
Designed by architect James Dakin, this neo-Gothic castle was completed by the early 1850s and housed state government offices and the legislative chambers up until 1862. When Union troops occupied the town, the library, paintings, and large statue of George Washington inside were crated and sent to New Orleans as "trophies of war," never to return. In December of that year, the building quartered Union troops and captured Confederates. A few days after Christmas, a fire of unknown origins gutted the place, leaving only a hulking ruin. After a comprehensive restoration and re-modeling, Louisiana's state government returned in 1882. One of the first acts of the new legislature was to bring the remains of Henry Watkins Allen, the Confederate colonel and later wartime governor of Louisiana who died in Mexico City in 1866, to a place of honor on the Capitol grounds.

**20 Site of the Asylum for the Deaf and Blind**  
northeast corner of South Blvd. and St. Ferdinand St.  
A suitable match for the neo-Gothic state capitol just up the street, the beautiful Asylum building was finished in the late 1850s. During the Union occupation of Baton Rouge, its spacious interior housed a general hospital while troops often camped about its open grounds. After the war, a re-located Louisiana State University set up shop within its walls before moving to the grounds of the U.S. Arsenal in the 1880s. The building was demolished in the 1930s.

**21 Site of Magruder's Collegiate Institute**  
south side of Government St. at S. 12th Street  
Professor William H.N. Magruder operated a boarding school and college preparatory academy for young men on this site from 1855 to 1889, although he closed the place during the years of the Civil War. A Mississippi native, Magruder had taught widely before moving to Baton Rouge in the 1850s. His school offered a rigorous curriculum in Greek, Latin, science, and mathematics, drawing students from all over the state. In 1860, enrollment stood at about 100. Immediately after the battle in August 1862, his house served as a hospital for wounded Confederates, with some who died buried in the back garden.

**22 Camp of the 6th Michigan**  
south side of Government St. at Park Blvd.  
This is the site of the old Magnolia Racetrack, an antebellum horse racing venue on the outskirts of Baton Rouge that later became Roseland Terrace, one of Baton Rouge's early Garden District suburbs. Just to the west of here, the 6th Michigan had made its camp in the woods. When the battle began, the men of the regiment moved north across Government St. to support the hard-pressed 21st Indiana and fend off the ferocious attack of Colonel Henry Watkins Allen's Louisiana troops.

**23 Allen's Attack**  
S. 19th St. at Government St., in front of Dufrocq Elementary School  
Colonel Allen's 1,000-man Louisiana brigade veered off from the main Confederate assault to the north and became separated by a heavy wood. Coming out of the cover about 8:30 a.m., Allen launched his men against Union troops from the 21st Indiana and 6th Michigan, supported by artillery, located in the vicinity of the S. 17th St. and Government St. intersection just west of here. The Louisianians had to cross some 300 yards of open ground, now part of the Dufrocq Elementary School campus, and suffered terrible casualties from the Union guns. Allen himself went down with serious wounds to his legs. A marker erected by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy at the front of the school, under a large oak, marks the approximate spot of his wounding. Although Allen's men captured two Union guns, the sight of their leader being cut down took the heart out of the attack and they fell back in disarray.

**24 General Williams Killed**  
Laurel St. at N. 17th St.  
Between about 8:30 and 10:00 a.m., General Breckinridge launched repeated attacks from the east through Magnolia Cemetery at this point, the center of the Union line. His opponent, General Williams, had brought up the 7th Vermont and 30th Massachusetts to support the 21st Indiana, which was being pushed back towards town. In the confusion, the Vermont regiment actually fired into the backs of the Indiana men, adding to the chaos. Rallying his forces, General Williams had just called for a counter-attack about 10:00 when he was shot from his horse near this spot and died almost instantly. Colonel Thomas Cahill of the 9th Connecticut assumed command of the Union forces and ordered a general withdrawal towards the Mississippi River and the protection of the navy gunboats.

**25 National Cemetery**  
220 N. 19th St.  
Sadly, the climate in south Louisiana proved more deadly to young Union soldiers from New England and the upper Mid-West than anything the Confederates could throw at them. These poor men died by the thousands from the assorted diseases they encountered here. Often buried in hastily dug, poorly marked graves, they did not receive a proper burial until after the war when the Federal government created national cemeteries like this one, established in 1867. Many are identified by name and regiment; still, row after row of "unknowns" lie here, a testament to the grim realities of war and time. Inside the gates is a graceful monument dedicated to Massachusetts soldiers who died in Louisiana. Down in a small corner are the graves of a handful of African American soldiers, men of the United States Colored Troops, mostly ex-slaves, buried here alongside their fellow comrades in blue.