

Today in Columbus History:

On May 26, 1875, the *Columbus Daily Times* published an article with the exclamatory headline "Friday! Great Day in Columbus! Our Sister Cities Coming to See Us! Villa Reich." What was all the fuss about?

It was in anticipation of several large groups of excursionists coming to Columbus from Opelika, Montgomery, Macon, Eufaula, Troy, Auburn, Lafayette, and Alexander City. The story claimed that this would be the largest picnic since the war. The organizers anticipated that several military companies, including the Montgomery Greys, Auburn Cadets, and a couple companies from Macon, would join the Columbus Guards and City Light Guards for target practice, drills, a dress parade and possibly the largest military ball in the state.

According to the story on the 26th, the idea for the excursion started with the ladies of the Episcopal Church in Opelika. They were trying to raise money to complete their church building.

Another article appeared on the 27th with updates on the progress of the event. The Montgomery Greys were due to decide on their participation, but their attendance was in doubt. The story also told of a silver pitcher on display at F. L. Brooks drug store that was the prize for the best average in the target practice.

The results of the picnic appeared in the *Columbus Daily Times* of May 29, 1875. The headline that day was "Yesterday's Festivity! Excursionists from Montgomery, Opelika, Eufaula and Other Points - Montgomery Greys - Drill, Dress Parade and Ball" While seemingly a success, some of the crowd did not materialize. The paper reported that the excursion from Macon failed altogether and only a few of the Auburn Cadets were able to attend. However, the Montgomery Greys did make it. They were escorted to the Columbus Guards armory by both local companies, along with Professor Davie's Brass Band. They enjoyed some refreshments then went to Villa Reich for dancing. The Greys did not come prepared to shoot, so the target practice was cancelled. However, the drills went off as planned with the companies forming a dress parade afterward, then followed by a tea. That evening there was a string band for dancing at Villa Reich until time to board the excursion trains between eleven and twelve that night.

This was early in the history of Villa Reich, an entertainment complex that appears to have opened in 1875. The first stories of the place appear just a couple of months earlier, as "Villa de Reich," a very cosmopolitan sounding name with Italian, French and German components.

In Joseph B. Mahan's book, *Columbus, Georgia's Fall Line Trading Town*, he describes the origin of Villa Reich as the brainchild of tailor Frederick Reich. He and his wife took their son to Germany in 1873 to begin his university education. He returned to Columbus with plans for a famous gambling house to use for his new venture. More than a saloon or beer garden, Villa Reich included a dance hall that measured 50 by 100 feet and a mechanical music machine that could make the sounds of an orchestra.

The address was 110 Front Street but, according to Mahan, the garden took up the northern two thirds of the block between 6th and 5th Streets and Broad and Front. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1900 shows it still took up a sizable portion of that block.

Villa Reich was not the first attempt to entertain Columbus. This led to some trouble in the years before the Villa was built. In 1871, Reich was in court for opening a tippling house on Sunday, having a beer garden open on Sunday and running a gambling house – all within a week.

The city directory of 1873-74 shows Frederick Reich as a tobacconist with a saloon at 112 Broad and his residence on the corner of Front Street and Fulton Street (present day 5th Street). That would put him living on the same block as the future Villa Reich.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

FRIDAY!

Great Day in Columbus!

Our Sister Cities Coming to See Us!

Festivity at Villa Reich:

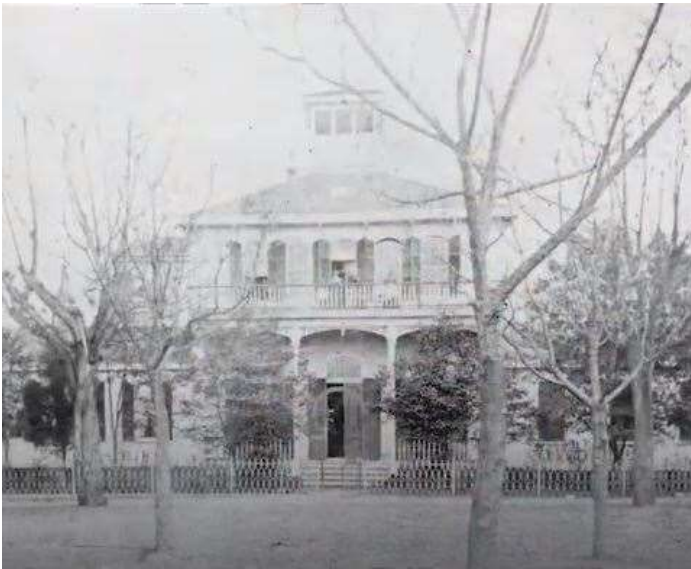
The indications are that the crowd which will visit the city on Friday will be very large—one of the largest ever seen here.

Opelika is coming almost en masse. Montgomery will send her "Greys" and a large excursion. Auburn will be largely represented. Arrangements have been made for a large excursion from Macon. Eufaula, Troy, LaFayette and Alexander City all promise to furnish their quota.

If all these cities furnish separate excursions, the picnic will be the largest had in Georgia since the war. It will be a mingling together of Georgia and Alabama; a meeting of different sections; a friendly intercourse of cities that lie far apart; a grand convocation of people,

Announcement of the large picnic at Villa Reich expected on Friday with people coming from various parts of Georgia and Alabama in the *Columbus Daily Times* on May 26, 1875,

<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Villa Reich, courtesy of Historic Columbus Foundation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7KZbjvN0FU>

YESTERDAY'S FESTIVITY!

Excursionists from Montgomery, Opelika,
Eufaula and Other Points.

MONTGOMERY GREYS.

DRILL, DRESS PARADE AND BALL.

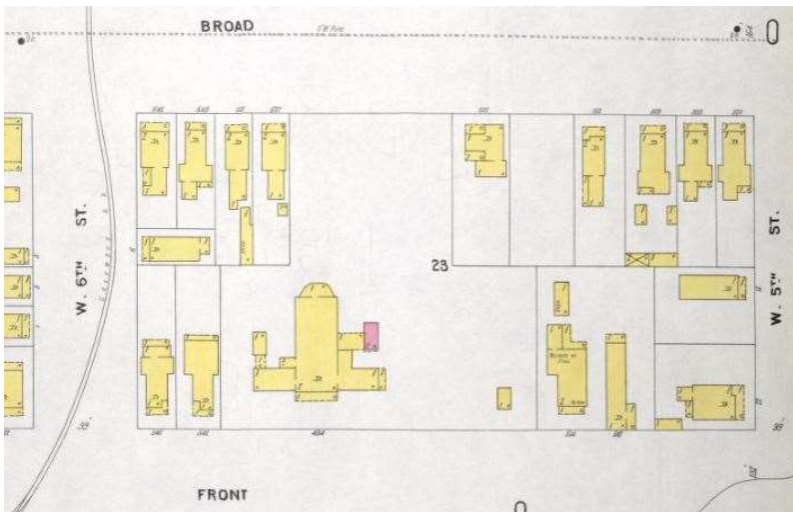
Yesterday was the day which had been set apart for some time as the occasion of a grand excursion to Columbus from Opelika, Montgomery, and several other cities in Alabama, as well as from Macon. The ladies of the Opelika Episcopal Church originated the idea with the hope that they might raise funds in this way to complete their church edifice.

Owing to some difficulty experienced in making arrangements with the railroads the excursion was by no means so large as was anticipated a week ago.

The proposed excursion from Macon failed altogether, and the party from Montgomery was much smaller than the managers had hoped to bring over.

Mr. A. W. Walthour, the general manager of the excursion, came to the city on

Story of the picnic from *Columbus Daily Times* of May 29, 1875, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Sanborn Map with Villa Reich, in the middle of the block on Front Street, between 6th Street and 5th Street, in 1900 from the Digital Library of Georgia, https://dlg.usg.edu/record/dlg_sanb_columbus-1900#item.

EXCURSION AND PICNIC
 FROM
Montgomery, Troy and Eufaula,
 By way of Union Springs;
 AND FROM
Alexander City, Lafayette, Auburn,
 By way of Opelika.

Trains from the above and intermediate points, will reach Columbus at about 12 o'clock, delivering their passengers at the crossing of the Mobile and Girard Railroad, at a short distance from the grounds—the splendid Public Garden known as

VILLA REICH.

The Montgomery Greys, Columbus Guards, Columbus Light Guards, and Auburn Cadets will be present, and Companies probably from Eufaula and Troy.

Military Parade and Target Practice in the afternoon. Brass Band from Auburn, Lafayette and Opelika. Proceeds will be applied to the completion of the Episcopal Church now building in Opelika.

TIME AND RATES FOR ROUND TRIP:
 (Where no time is mentioned trains leave on regular time.)

Montg'ry, 6 a. m. \$2 50	Fort Mitchell	50
Troy	LaFayette	1 50
Eufaula	Alexander City	2 00
Linnwood	Dadeville	2 00
Thomas	Auburn, 9 a. m.	1 00
Union Springs	Opelika, 10 a. m.	1 00
Chun'gee & Sug'n	Yong're & Salem	75
Guern & Hurt's	Smith Station	50
Seale	\$1 25	

Two trains from Opelika. One returning at 6 P. M., the other between 11 and 12 o'clock. LaFayette train leaves Columbus at 4 A. M.

E. C. BOWEN,
A. M. WALTHOUR,
E. C. JETER,
 my27 2t Committee of Arrangements.

Excursion ad in the Columbus Daily Enquirer May 28, 1875, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.