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 News
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Historical marker notes the day Columbus women rioted on Broad Street

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On April 11, 1863, a group of Columbus women got together to go grocery shopping. With knives and guns.

What was about to happen was one of many food riots, or "bread riots," that took place in the South that spring. In the midst of the Civil War, women were having terrible trouble feeding their families, according to historical accounts, so they took matters into their own hands.

At 3 p.m. today, on the 1300 block of Broadway, an historic marker recognizing the events of that day in Columbus will be unveiled. Todd Groce, president of the Georgia Historical Society, and Columbus State University history professor Virginia Causey will speak.



Photo illustration/Stockphoto.com This drawing, published in "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper" in May 1863, depicts the Richmond bread riot, which took place a month earlier. There, several

The violence arose, historians say, because farmers were planting more cotton and tobacco than food crops because they were so much more profitable. Much of the food that was grown was going to feed the Confederate Army. What was left for the homefront was very expensive because of its scarcity. On top of that, speculators and some merchants were hoarding what little was available and holding it until prices went even higher.

On the morning of April 11, about 65 women gathered at the intersection of Broad Street (now Broadway) and Franklin Street (Now 14th Street). They marched down Broad "to raid the stores of speculators," according to a Historical Society description.

The armed rioters, shouting curses as they went, first struck George A. Norris' dry goods store and "commenced helping themselves to whatever they wanted," the GHS said. Police

were called and prevented any more merchants from being robbed.

The riot in Columbus was not unique. Similar uprisings took place in Atlanta, Savannah, Augusta and probably most famously, in Richmond, Va., where Confederate President Jefferson Davis personally appealed to the women to stop. Groce said.

They didn't stop.

Historian David Williams described the women's plight in his book, "Rich Man's War."

"Abandoned and starving, thousands of women became beggars just to keep their families alive. Leaving children at home for days or weeks at a time, they roamed the countryside pleading for food ...

"Some planters gave them what they could, others did not. But even the more generous viewed these unfortunates with contempt. One planter called the unfortunate women perfect nuisances."

Some women, Williams said, resorted to trading sex for food to feed their families.

According to another of Williams' books, "Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War," seven months

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