



## For Immediate Release

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## **New Biography Explores Earliest Decades of Memphis and the Life and Times of Founder Marcus Winchester**

**UNION CITY, Tenn., Nov. 10, 2025** — “[Townmania: Marcus Winchester and the Making of Memphis](#),” a new biography by R. Scott Williams, is now available on Amazon.com and at select bookstores.

The timing of the release aligns with several major anniversaries in 2026, including the 230th anniversary of Marcus Winchester’s birth on May 28, the 230th anniversary of Tennessee’s statehood on June 1, the 200th anniversary of Memphis’s incorporation on Dec. 19, and the nation’s America250 celebration.

Marcus Winchester served as Memphis’s first real estate developer, mayor, store owner, banker and postmaster. He championed vital transportation and communication infrastructure, including a stagecoach line, regular ferry crossing, major roads and the first train tracks laid in the Mid-South. The city’s earliest residents could also thank Winchester when the town’s first newspaper rolled off the press.

“Through a unique combination of creativity, diplomacy and strong business acumen, Marcus Winchester guided the transformation of a sparsely populated outpost on the Mississippi River into a thriving commercial hub,” said author Scott Williams. “Sadly, as significant as he was to the birth and early decades of the city of Memphis, his story has been mostly forgotten.”

Winchester lived in a time of increasing polarization in the decades leading up to the Civil War. He assisted enslavers who sought to free the people they enslaved by navigating a complicated and evolving legal system. He also operated one of the few banks in West Tennessee that allowed enslaved individuals to save money to purchase their own freedom or that of family members. Winchester was a close friend of Frances Wright, founder of the experimental commune Nashoba, located on the Wolf River in present-day Germantown, Tennessee. Wright’s goal was to prepare those who were enslaved for eventual freedom.

Winchester was also a friend and supporter of Robert Owen, a Welsh-born industrialist, philanthropist and social reformer, who was the founder of the New Lanark mill community in Scotland and later established the utopian settlement of New Harmony in Indiana, where he promoted progressive ideas about education, labor reform and the creation of a cooperative society.

The plight of free and enslaved Black and mixed-race individuals was personal for Winchester because his wife, Amarante Loiselle, was a free woman of color from a landowning family in St. Louis. Together, Marcus and Amarante had eight mixed-race children. The racism directed at him and his family included a city ordinance declaring that no white man could “keep a colored wife.” The measure forced him to move his family outside the city limits of the town he founded and faithfully served.

Raised at Cragfont, his family’s home in what is now Castalian Springs, Tennessee, near Nashville, and educated in Baltimore, Winchester was present at some of Tennessee’s most historic moments, and he counted several key figures among his friends. He was captured by the British during the War of 1812, stood beside Andrew Jackson during negotiations with the Chickasaw, supported David Crockett’s congressional campaigns and witnessed Native Americans being ferried across the Mississippi River on the Trail of Tears. Winchester also befriended James K. Polk and served as John Overton’s “boots on the ground” in Memphis as Overton worked to ensure the city was not overlooked at the state capitol.

“In addition to the birth of Memphis, this is the story of a Tennessee family that played a significant role in some of the most pivotal moments in our nation’s early years,” said Williams. “This biography of Marcus’s journey begins before the American Revolution with his grandfather’s arrival in America from London and ends just before the Civil War with Marcus’s death. Three generations made their fortunes by taming the wilderness and building cities. The heart of the story lies in how they navigated a time of great risk, impressive accomplishments and terrible atrocities.”

Winchester died Nov. 2, 1856, at age 60. His obituary noted he was, at the time of his death, “the oldest inhabitant of Shelby County, white or black.” He was buried in what was then known as the Winchester Burying Ground, but several years after his death, the city stables were built over his unmarked grave.

Williams, who grew up in Memphis and graduated from the University of Memphis, is the chief operating officer of Discovery Park of America, a museum and heritage park in Union City, Tennessee, and the incoming board chair of the Friends of the Tennessee State Library and Archives. He previously served as COO of the Newseum in Washington, D.C., and before that held several positions at Elvis Presley’s Graceland for more than a decade.

His previous biographies include “The Forgotten Adventures of Richard Halliburton: A High-Flying Life from Tennessee to Timbuktu,” “An Odd Book: How the First Modern Pop Culture Reporter Conquered New York,” and “The Accidental Fame and Lack of Fortune of West Tennessee’s David Crockett.”

For more information about “Townmania: Marcus Winchester and the Making of Memphis,” or to schedule a book talk for your group, visit [rscottwilliams.info](http://rscottwilliams.info), email [rscottwilliamsemail@gmail.com](mailto:rscottwilliamsemail@gmail.com) or call 731-885-5455.

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### **About R. Scott Williams**

*Scott Williams is an author dedicated to uncovering overlooked stories in American history and culture. His books include biographies of Richard Halliburton, Odd McIntyre and David Crockett. In his latest work, he explores early Memphis settler Marcus Winchester. Williams has led teams at the Newseum and Elvis*

*Presley's Graceland and is now CEO of Discovery Park of America. He actively serves on several historical and tourism boards and committees across Tennessee.*