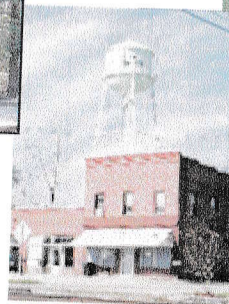




Main Street



Old St. Stephen's Hotel

Water Tower and
Old General Store

St. Stephen: History of a Historic Town

Embracing the past,
Understanding the present,
Looking to the future



124 Hood Street
St. Stephen, SC 29479
843-567-3597

For more information

<http://www.sccommunityprofiles.org/place.asp?PLACEID=282>[http://](http://www.southfest.com/southcarolina.shtml)

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St. Stephen
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Special thanks to:

Mrs. Louise H. Rich & Mrs. Martha Funk

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St. Stephen
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Town Hall 842-567-3597
124 Hood St.

Before the Revolution

That part of Craven County which lay south of the Santee comprised the parishes of St. James Santee and St. Stephen. St. James Santee Parish was established in 1706.

Near the line which divided the two parishes was Jamestown, one of the principal settlements of the French Huguenots, who fled from France to escape religious persecution. Another stream of Frenchmen poured in around the year, 1775, a portion of the ill-fated Acadians immortalized in Longfellow's, "Evangeline".

These French immigrants soon spread into the country to the north bordering along the Santee. They had been viewed with ill-will by the English in St. James Santee parish and by the revolutionary era most of them settled in the newer parish of St. Stephen, which was established May 11, 1754. They soon had virtual control there. From them we get many of our most well known names: Porcher, Mazyck, Gaillard, Marion, Gourdin, Maham, Mouzon, Bonneau, and Sinkler and in addition, such famous domestic terms as pileau.

They were industrious and thrifty and built beautiful mansions among the oak and cypress trees laden with Spanish moss.

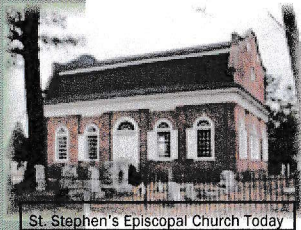
St. Stephen's Parish Church

In 1764 work was begun on the St. Stephen's Parish Church. The planning for this brick structure, which still stands today, was begun in 1759.

Contrary to some believe, the bricks for the church were made locally, by a Mr. Charles Canty. The following description of the church was written by Samuel Dubese, Esquire, in 1858: "While the mind is thus carried from one depth of loneliness to another a

dull object appears indistinctly before you; as you approach, its form gradually reveals itself, and soon the old parish church of St. Stephen stands before you, a handsome brick edifice. It stands at the head of one road which comes from the south and is so situated that it may be seen at a considerable distance by those who approach it, either from the east or the west. The church tells a story of former grandeur and present desolation. Though not large, it indicates a respectable congregation, it is finished with neatness, with some pretensions even to elegance, and the beholder mourns over the ruin to which it is doomed. All around it are graves which seem to be running into the woods. Some set apart for families, are enclosed by walls of brick, or timber, or even logs piled high to protect them from the ravages of hogs."

As we look at this church today we are glad that the prediction of Mr. Dubose "doomed to ruin", has not come to pass.



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Today

Prosperity in the Parish

About twenty years before the Revolution War, and for a short period following it, the land through the whole of St. Stephen Parish was the garden spot of South Carolina. These lands were not at that time liable to the high and sudden freshets of the Santee because the up-country was not cleared and this prevented the deluge of water from coming down the Santee. This lush and fertile land attracted the Huguenots as a favorable spot for their indigo plantations. One after another of the planters settled here until the population of the parish exceeded that of any other portion of the State, outside of Charleston.

Another reason for the prosperity of this era was that St. Stephen's Parish was then enjoying a greater share of health, before the later flooding.

The chief thoroughfare of the day was what we now know as the Old River Road (Hwy # 45). It extended from the Old Santee Canal, which was begun in 1792 and completed by slave labor in 1800, eastward to Jamestown.

Along this road there sprang up the plantations of the French families I have mentioned. There are on record fifty-three such plantations. These homesteads have given us such well-known place names as Belle Isle, Mexico, Savannah, Bluefore (Oakland Club),

Maham's, Peru, Oldfield, Mattersee, Betaw, Laurel Hill, Webde, and Gravel Hill. These were indigo and cotton plantations.

Swamp Fox in St. Stephen

In 1776 the Thirteen Colonies declared themselves to be free and independent of their mother country, Great Britain. This Declaration of Independence however was not the final decree for the things it declared had yet to be fought for and won. South Carolina contributed her part and among her illustrious heroes was Frances Marion. Being a true son of the Santee and familiar with every inch of the terrain along the river he and his band of faithful followers carried on a type of warfare, wholly new to the British Redcoats. Because of this he was called the Swamp Fox. He and his soldiers fought mainly at night and used the forest as their fort. He and his wife, Mary Videau, are buried at Belle Isle Plantation, which was the home of his brother. Belle Isle is located a short distance from St. Stephen, near Pineville.



St. Stephen in Decline

During the early 1790's due to the clearing of the up-country and the consequent flooding, St. Stephen Parish began to suffer from disease. It has been observed that those persons who lived in the pine lands were usually exempt from fever.

Because of the pine, in 1794, Capt. John Palmer, Capt. Peter Gaillard, Mr. John Cordes, Mr. Samuel Porcher, Mr. Peter Porcher, and Mr. Phillip Porcher built houses in the pine land, near to each other, and this laid the foundation for Pineville, the oldest summer colony in the southern country. The experiment proved successful and Pineville became the summer residence of the planters of St. Stephen's Parish and those of upper and middle St. John's.

In 1805 a grammar school was established under the name of Pineville Academy. It attracted pupils and teachers from all allover. One of the teachers from New Hampshire, Mr. Alpheus Baker is buried in the St. Stephen Episcopal cemetery.

The plantation system began to decline and with it a new era began. There was a period in the middle 1800's where almost nothing remained of the old St. Stephen parish. This was a period of desolation and ruin described Mr. Samuel Dubose in his "Reminiscences of St. Stephen's Parish", in 1858.

Survival of St. Stephen

With the passing of time and the progress of a new civilization, little communities grew into villages, and villages grew into towns. One of them developed around the old St. Stephen's Parish Church. With the building of the railroad, development of a road system and in spite of fire which destroyed almost the whole business district, St. Stephen survived. Craven County became what is now known as Berkeley County. In 1871 it was incorporated under the name of St. Stephens from the name of the parish. The name was changed to St. Stephen by a special act of the General Assembly in 1952.

The town limits were believed to exceed from the depot of the North Eastern Railroad three fourths of a mile in each direction.

According to old records the Main Street of St. Stephen has been destroyed by fire several times in its history, the most damaging around the year 1911.

St. Stephen Today

Today St. Stephen is in a revival phase. The annual Catfish Festival are April 2-3, 2004. St. Stephen Episcopal Church and cemetery are being restored; the 250th anniversary of the Church will be a community celebration, May 15-16, 2004. St. Stephen has an annual Christmas Parade and a festival of Christmas Trees in December.

A few historical sites are still viable for restoration, including the St. Stephen Railroad Depot. As we embrace the past, we must understand the present and always look toward the future.

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