

Historic St. George Walking Tour Town Square



Prepared by the Washington County Historical Society

Introduction

Settlers who arrived in St. George in 1861 laid out the town on a grid based on LDS leader Joseph Smith's Plat of Zion. Individual home lots were clustered in the town center, surrounded by fields held in common

by the villagers. The blocks in the historic heart of St. George are 528 feet square, with an area of 6.4 acres, and major streets are 90 feet wide. Each block was originally divided into eight lots. In addition to a house, each town lot contained gardens and orchards for food production, and pastures, pens, and corrals for domestic animals, along with outbuildings such as barns and granaries.



St. George Tabernacle 18 South Main
Circa 1876

When Brigham Young visited St. George about a year after the first settlers entered the valley in 1861, he found the citizens suffering from discouragement over dams washed out in the Virgin River, scarce food, and intense summer heat. Swarms of flies and malaria caused many to leave the Cotton Mission.

Brigham's solution was to unite his flock in a public works project where they could take pride and forget their personal problems. He wrote Apostle Erastus Snow, "I want you and the brethren to build, as speedily a[s] possible, a good, substantial, commodious well-furnished meeting house, one large enough to comfortably seat 2,000 persons and that will not only be useful, but also an ornament to your city, and a credit to your energy and enterprise."

These impoverished, overworked, hungry people they did just that. The cornerstone was laid on 1 June 1863, Brigham Young's birthday. The final stone was placed on the tower on 29 December 1881, and the interior of the building was dedicated in May 1876.

Workers hand-quarried the black lava stone for the three-foot thick basement walls from the foothills west of the city. Stonemasons hand-quarried red sandstone boulders for the 2½-foot thick walls from a site above today's Red Hills Golf Course and then hand cut each into serviceable stones. You can still see the individual chisel marks on each sandstone block.

The 56-foot wood trusses were cut on Mt. Trumbull, 32 miles away on the Arizona Strip, and hand-hewn with a broad axe. The twin spiral staircases, built by Benjamin Frederick Blake, were hand-carved, complete with balustrades and railing, and were completely self-supporting. The interior plaster of Paris ceiling and cornice work were locally cast and prepared. The clock was made in London and shipped to St. George via New York. The Tabernacle was put on the National Register of Historic Places on May 14, 1971. The Tabernacle underwent a restoration in 1993 while a second renovation occurred from 2016 to 2018. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Tabernacle is currently closed.



Town Square *50 South Main*
Circa 1861

Town Square, located inside the downtown historic district, was the site of the Old Bowery, where the early settlers held church and conferences until the completion of the Tabernacle in the 1880s. The scene of patriotic Fourth of July celebrations, today the square is surrounded by some of the city's most prominent historic buildings. The park features several dramatic water features, shade pavilions, a carousel, artwork, and a monument tower.



The Dixie Academy (St. George Children's Museum)

86 South Main

Circa 1911

The Dixie Academy building is significant as an example of late 19th century, regional, educational Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. The building expresses the early citizens' commitment to the value of higher education. In the early 1900s, St. George offered students only two years of high school education. After Apostle Francis M. Lyman encouraged establishing a local church school to meet the needs for a higher education institution, construction on the building began in 1909. With a \$20,000 donation from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and \$35,000 in labor and materials donated by the community, the construction was finished in 1911. Even though the windows were not set and the interior not completed until 1913, the St. George Stake Academy moved in and instruction began. The upper floor was used as a gymnasium until 1916, when the new Dixie Academy Gymnasium building was constructed next door on what is the current location of the Town Square. This Dixie Academy building served as a home for the St. George Academy, the Dixie Stake Academy, Dixie College, Dixie Junior College, and Dixie High School until 1963. It was later part of the Woodward Junior High Campus until about 2000.

From 2005-2008, the top floor gymnasium was renovated and restored by Architect Kim Cambell of Campbell and Associates. The space is now used for special events and conferences. The Dixie Academy building is currently the home of the St. George Children's Museum.

Washington County Library

88 West 100 South

(See the various addresses).

Circa 2008

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| 1864 | Utah Territorial Assembly incorporated the St. George Library Association |
| 1864-1877 | Libraries set up in the four St. George schools |
| 1877 | The Lyceum opened, with one room set aside as a library, managed by the Relief Society and Mutual Improvement Associations |
| 1911 | Dixie Academy school library opened in a room to the right of the main entrance. Ida Miles was the first librarian. |
| 1916 | The Carnegie Library opened to the public at 53. West Tabernacle |
| 1919 | The city library was converted to the Washington County Library |
| 1928 | Children's books were added, housed in the basement |
| 1981 | Carnegie Library demolished, the doors preserved and today used as the entrance to the Special Collections room in the Washington County Library in St. George |
| 1981 | Library built on site of the old Dixie Gymnasium opened |
| 2006 | Current building completed and opened at 88 West 100 South |
- This building holds 110,000 books and cost \$5 million.





Woodward School *15 South 100 West* Circa 1901

During the 1870s and 1880s, overflow from the local schools spilled into buildings such as the three rooms in basement of the Tabernacle, the courtroom of the Pioneer Courthouse, the Gardener's Club, the tin shop on 100 North and several others. In 1898, the citizens approved a 2% tax, the maximum allowed by law, to finance the Woodward School building.

Completed in 1901 using locally quarried red sandstone for the walls and black volcanic rock for the foundation, the Richardsonian Romanesque-style building was named after George Woodward, a childless resident who served as chairman of the school board and donated \$3,000 for the hardware and glass. He also financed the heating plant and the school's first piano. All the students from the First, Second, Third and Fourth ward schools were brought together into this new school with classrooms that sported blackboards on three walls and used radiator heat rather than pot-bellied stoves. Two years of high school were eventually offered at Woodward. The building housed various schools until May 2000 when it was closed. On 23 November 1980 the Woodward School building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Washington County School District Office

121 West Tabernacle

Circa 2002

Construction on the three-story building began in 2001 and was completed in 2002. The architect was Naylor, Wentworth Architects, P.C., and the construction company was Bud Mahas Construction, Inc.

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