

## Script for **Town Square Walking Tour**

**Introduction:** *The Mormon colonists who settled St. George 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 8 lots, 132 by 264 feet, with an area of 8/10 of an acre. 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 LDS Tabernacle, 18 South Main.**

Historian Mary Phoenix stated that when Brigham Young visited St. George about a year after the first settlers entered the valley, he found the citizens suffering from discouragement over dams washed out in the Virgin River, food was scarce and intense summer heat and swarms of flies and malaria had caused many to leave the Cotton Mission.

Brigham's solution was to unite his flock in a big project where they could take pride and forget their personal problems. He wrote Erastus Snow, presiding apostle, "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 [there were less than 200 people in St. George at the time] and that will not only be useful, but also an ornament to your city, and a credit to your energy and enterprise."

To the credit of these poor, overworked, hungry people they did just that. The cornerstone was laid on Brigham Young's birthday, June 1, 1863.... The last stone was placed on the tower on Dec. 29, 1881 and the interior of the building [was] completed for dedication in May 1876.

Miles Romney served as [local] architect [and project manager]. William Burt was in charge of the plaster work; David Milne, painting; Archibald McNeil, quarrying; Edward L. Parry, mason work; and Samuel Judd, lime-burning. They were assisted by the best workmen Southern Utah had to offer and by young men who learned a useful trade. The St. George Tabernacle was designed by LDS Church architect, Truman O. Angell. The black lava stone for the three-foot thick basement walls were hand-quarried from the foothills (West Black Hill) west of the city. Red sandstone boulders for the two-and-a-half-foot thick walls were hand quarried from a site near the Red Hills Golf Course and then hand cut 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 (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. Public tours were given in July 2018. The Tabernacle has been closed since March 2019 because of the COVID 19 pandemic.



### **Town Square, 50 South Main.**

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. Today it is surrounded by some of the city's most prominent historic buildings. The park features several dramatic water features; a splash pad fountain with jets that spray high into the air, a lazy river to cool your feet, and a splashing waterfall. Shade pavilions with tables and chairs provide a relaxing place to watch children playing in the water. With its grassy parade grounds, restroom facility, and monument tower, Town Square plays host to a variety of public events; First night,

Art Festival, Summer Movies on the Square and more. Town Square is a WiFi hotspot. You will also find the city's spectacular Carousel here too.



### **The Dixie Academy (St. George Children's Museum), 86 South Main.**

The Old Dixie College Building (Dixie Academy) is significant as an example of late 19th century, regional, educational architecture and is the last remaining structure of the original Dixie College. It expresses the commitment the early citizens of the region had on the value of higher education. Dixie College was eventually relocated to its present location near 100 South and 700 East in 1963.

The St. George Stake Academy, which officially began in 1888, moved into the Dixie Academy building in 1911 which cost \$55,000. Although the school opened for classes in September of 1911, following the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the

settlement of St. George, the windows were not yet set and interior work was not completed until 1913.

In the early 1900s, the Woodward School in St. George offered students only two years of high school education. In 1908, Francis M. Lyman of the Council of the Twelve of the LDS Church encouraged local Church leaders to establish a Church school to meet the needs for a higher education institution. The LDS Church pledged \$20,000 in cash to be matched with \$35,000 in cash, labor and materials contributed by the members of the St. George LDS Stake. The local LDS Church's board of education appointed Thomas P. Cottam, one of its members, to oversee the construction.

The upper floor was used as a gymnasium until 1916, when the new Dixie Academy Gymnasium building was constructed next door on what is now the current location of the Town Square. This building served as a home for 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.

Stylistically, the building may be regarded as a late derivation of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. Characteristics of this design style are typically symmetrically planned buildings, hipped roof structures of several stories, projecting gabled bays, and they are simplistic in plan and massing.

Variations of this style are found in educational architecture throughout the Intermountain West. The foundation stones are semi-regular coursed, gray volcanic rocks. Walls and window sills are of regular coursed red sandstone. Lintels are concrete that are colored and cut to appear as stone. Above the raised basement level are two full stories. Projecting from the hipped roof central mass on each elevation are gabled bays. The gables have pent ends and patterned shingle siding. Under the wide eaves are coupled decorative brackets. Part of the original scheme was a hipped roof extension of two stories projecting from the rear bay. This structure houses the lavatories, the mechanical spaces and an elevator.

The Dixie Academy building is currently the home of the **St. George Children's Museum**. The top floor gymnasium was renovated and restored. Architect Kim Cambell of Campbell and Associates, provided his services and oversaw the renovation work. The renovation work began in 2005 and was completed in 2008. The space is now used for special events and conferences.



**Washington County Library, 88 West 100 South (See the various addresses).**

St. George had one of the first libraries in the State. Almost before the people were settled and before they had any certain assurance of livelihood, they began to look for material for self-improvement.

The St. George Library Association was incorporated by the Utah Territorial Assembly on Jan. 22, 1864, and a library board of directors was appointed. They were charged with planning for a library in St. George. Various fund-raising projects were undertaken to purchase books and other reading materials. Other materials were collected in the individual “libraries” of the four St. George Wards. When the St. George Temple was completed in 1877, the supporting baker building on the west side of Main Street between Tabernacle and First North was converted to a cultural center and meeting place, the “Lyceum” under control of the Relief Society and Mutual Improvement Associations. One room was set aside as a library and the previously mentioned reading materials were collected there. They remained there until the establishment of the Dixie Academy Library, 86 South Main.

Under the direction of city officials, a library was set up in the new Dixie Academy building shortly after its opening in 1911. As you go up the stairs to the main floor from the front entrance, the library was on the right. The first librarian, Ida Miles, was appointed in 1912. When the new gymnasium building was opened, the library was moved over to it.

In 1912, city officials applied for a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to build a new stand-alone library which became known as the **Carnegie Library**, 53 W. Tabernacle. In 1915, they received a grant of \$8,000 to which the city added another \$4,000. A library building was constructed between the St. George Tabernacle and the Woodward School. It was completed in 1916. In June of 1919, the St. George Public Library was converted to the Washington County Library with the city retaining ownership of the property. In 1928, the children's books were partitioned out into a separate department in the basement of the building.

Over the years, various improvements were made. Air conditioning was added, an oil furnace replaced the old coal heater, a new roof was put on, and various cabinets and furnishings were upgraded. The old Carnegie Library building was finally demolished in 1981. The doors were preserved and are now used as the entrance to the Special Collections room in the Washington County Library building on 100 South in St. George. Replacing the Carnegie Library was the **Washington County Library** at 50 South Main. This library was built in 1981 on the site of the old Dixie College gymnasium, between the St. George Tabernacle and the St. George Leisure Services Building. The old Recreation Hall was also demolished to make way for this library, which was a one-story building with 56,000 books and included a computer lab and meeting rooms. In November of 2001 a bond election provided \$23 million to expand this library with a second story and to build other branches around the county. Later, a decision was made to demolish this building and build a newer, bigger one on 100 South in the style of the other buildings in the area. The library was closed on Nov. 4, 2006 and the site was cleared to make way for the new Town Square.

The **Washington County Library - St. George Branch** at 88 West 100 South, was constructed at a cost of \$5 million and holds 110,000 books, has a computer lab, meeting rooms, and lots of space for reading and working. The building opened on Dec. 22, 2006 and was dedicated on Feb. 19, 2007. This library is currently in operation. It houses the offices of the Washington County Library system and serves as the St. George branch of that library.



## **Woodward School, 15 South 100 West**

The Woodward School is a two-story structure built of locally quarried stone. Volcanic stone for the foundation had been intended for the earlier Stake Academy that was never. The walls are rough-faced, regular-coursed red sandstone. It is similar in style to what is now Washington Museum (formerly Washington Elementary) and the St. George Children's Museum (formerly Dixie Academy Building). From the rectangular,



truncated hip roofed central mass, gabled bays project on each elevation forming a symmetrical configuration. Atop the main entrance pavilion is a hipped roof bell tower or cupola. Under the wide eaves are decorative brackets. Entrances on the east and west elevations are round arched. Windows are double hung sash types arranged in groups of three or four. Lintels are rough-faced blocks, coursed in conjunction with the walls. Sills are fully dressed ashlar elements which break the coursing somewhat. Like the Old Dixie College building (Dixie Academy) the Woodward School seems heavily influenced by late Victorian forms, but especially by the Richardsonian Romanesque style in the handling of materials, which is the simplicity of forms, window treatments, and minimum details.

During the 1870s and 1880s, overflow from the regular schools spilled into buildings such as the basement of the Tabernacle (three rooms), the upper floor of the Pioneer Courthouse, the Gardener's Club, a building built by J.W. Nixon on 100 North (St. George Blvd.) for his tin shop and several others. In 1898, the citizens approved a 20 mill levy (2 percent tax, the maximum allowed by law) to finance the school building. Sandstone for the building was obtained from the same quarry that had supplied the building of the Tabernacle. The volcanic stone cut was used for the foundation. The city granted the site, and construction began in 1898. By the end of the year, \$7,000 had been spent putting in the foundation.

The Woodward School was finished and opened its doors in September 1901, named for George Woodward, a childless resident who had served as chairman of the school board during the construction. He donated \$3,000 for the hardware and glass. Then he

bought 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. The classroom had blackboards on three walls, and had radiator heat rather than pot-bellied stoves.

Two years of high school were eventually offered at Woodward. The elementary age students in St. George attended the Woodward School until the elementary grades (Kindergarten through sixth grade) were moved over to the new St. George West Elementary School. The seventh through 10th grades remained at Woodward and it became Woodward Junior High School. The Woodward School was renovated after World War II. The school operated until May 2000 when it was closed.

The Woodward School building was put on the National Register of Historic Places on Nov. 23, 1980.



## **Washington County School District Office, 121 West Tabernacle.**

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.



