

## Col. Daniel Stevens, 1746-1835

Col. Daniel Stevens served as Charleston's 26th intendant very briefly in 1819, yet he left a lasting impact on the Lowcountry in several significant ways. Daniel was born on March 14, 1748 to Samuel Stevens, a Boston merchant, and Katherine Mathers Willard, the granddaughter of New England Puritan minister, Cotton Mather. They had one son, Cotton Mathers Stevens, before relocating to Charleston where Daniel, was born. Samuel's untimely death in 1754 left the family destitute. Katherine Stevens moved into the household of Rev. Joachim Zubly of Christ Church Parish where she remained until her death in 1759.

At the time of his father's death, Daniel came under the care of Rev. George Whitefield, who oversaw his education, first in Charleston, and later at the Bethesda Orphan House in Georgia.<sup>i</sup> Whitefield, a graduate of Pembroke College at the University of Oxford, came to America as a newly ordained minister in 1738. His theatrical style of preaching and focus on strict discipline gained him a wide following and he became a central figure in the Great Awakening.<sup>ii</sup>

While still a resident of the Bethesda Orphan House, Daniel Steven married Patience Catherine Norton in 1767. The young couple moved to Charleston in 1768 where Stevens entered an apprenticeship with a local merchant and factor, John Champness. The Stevens had two children both of whom died in infancy, followed not long after by a daughter, Patience.<sup>iii</sup> Struggling to establish himself, Stevens wrote to his great-uncle, Rev. Samuel Mather, indicating his desire to enter the ministry. Mather's response in 1769 must have seemed a cruel blow as he discouraged him: "You are not furnished with those Qualifications of Learning, which are not only useful but even absolutely necessary to constitute an Evangelical Preacher, and however honest and well-meaning I take you to be, you have convinced me by that weak and crude performance that you sent me, that you have not the strength of mind adapted to the Divine Employment of publickly [sic] instructing."<sup>iv</sup>

Despite this harsh criticism, Mathers furnished Stevens with funding in the form of a 75-acre tract of land near Boston. Proceeds from the land sale provided Stevens with the means to enter into a full partnership with Champness. Together, they purchased a large wharf behind the Exchange Building and grew their factorage business. In 1770, Stevens settled down with second wife, Sarah Sproul. They had four children, only one of whom survived infancy. Stevens and Champness later added a third partner and became the firm of Stevens, Sharp & Company.<sup>v</sup>

The start of the Revolutionary War in 1775 interrupted Stevens' mercantile pursuits. He and his partners dissolved their company and enlisted in the Charleston Rangers under the Command of Capt. Thomas Savage. In June 1776 he fought in the Battle of Sullivan's Island. That winter, Stevens moved to Beaufort, South Carolina, with the Continental Regiment of Artillery under the command of Col. Barnard Buchanan, where he served as commissary. Stevens' daughter, Maria Willard Stevens, was born there in February 1777. Six months later, Sarah Sproul Stevens died at the age of twenty-seven. Stevens soon after left his position with the Regiment of Artillery and returned to Charleston with his infant daughter.<sup>vi</sup> In March 1779, he married Mary Adams of Beaufort, "a lady of mild and agreeable and endearing manner," who Stevens hoped would become "a tender and affectionate parent" to his daughter.<sup>vii</sup>

At the time, Charleston was in constant preparation for an expected British invasion. In February 1780, a British fleet led by Gen. Henry Clinton arrived on the South Carolina coast thirty miles south of Charleston. They advanced toward Charleston taking control of surrounding areas, including Johns Island and James

Island. On April 9 the British captured Fort Moultrie and on April 12 the assault on Charleston began. Outmanned and outgunned, the Continental Army nevertheless endured a forty-two-day siege. On 12 May 1780, Gen. Benjamin Lincoln called a Council of War and offered Charleston's surrender.<sup>viii</sup>

The stipulations of the Continental Army's surrender allowed members of the militia to return to their homes and remain on parole as de facto prisoners. On account of severe illness, Stevens was released from one of the prison ships and allowed to remain in his home. Approximately one month later, Maj. Fraser of the British Army accused Stevens of writing a letter that told of the retreat of British Gen. Alexander Leslie from Virginia. Based on this pretext, Stevens was then imprisoned in the Provost Cellar under the Exchange Building where he remained in "irons near two months."<sup>ix</sup>

The British eventually released Stevens in a prisoner exchange and he joined a small party that chartered a schooner to Philadelphia. In Boston, New Hampshire, and, eventually New York, Stevens visited with family and friends, including Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Based on the advice of Gen. Lincoln, he decided to join the forces of Gen. Nathaniel Greene in upper North Carolina. There he fought in the Guilford Courthouse Battle in March 1781. Stevens remained with Gen. Greene's Army through the Battles of Eutaw Springs and Brick House.<sup>x</sup>

When Gov. John Rutledge ordered an election for members of the South Carolina General Assembly, Stevens served as a military escort at the polls. He was subsequently elected a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives for Charleston. At a second election two months later on 20 November 1781, Stevens was elected to a three-year term as High Sheriff of the District of Charleston. On 14 December 1782, Stevens was among a group that including Gov. John Matthews and Maj. Gen. Anthony Wayne, who reentered Charleston after the British surrender and marched to the State House at the corner of Meeting and Broad Streets. Col. Daniel Stevens, thus, began a lifelong career as a civil servant and politician.<sup>xi</sup>

In his duties as high sheriff, Stevens held responsibility for implementing the Confiscation Act, the Amercement Act, and the Pardon Act passed by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1782. These acts allowed for the confiscation of property held by loyalists and British sympathizers, the issuance of fines, and, in extreme cases, banishment from the state. As high sheriff, Stevens arrested and confined roughly 126 men in the Exchange Building. He also confiscated and sold property, including large numbers of enslaved African Americans, held by loyalists and others owing money to the state.<sup>xii</sup>

After the expiration of his term as sheriff, Stevens held several state and local positions. He represented St. Philip and St. Michael Parishes in the South Carolina General Assembly from 1785-1790. He likewise served as warden for Charleston's thirteenth ward from 1786-1788 and ninth ward from 1788-1789. In 1791, Stevens was elected to represent St. Luke Parish in the South Carolina General Assembly. He resigned from that position the same year when Congress he accepted the appointment of Supervisor of the Revenue of the United States for the District of South Carolina.<sup>xiii</sup>

As supervisor of the revenue, Stevens held responsibility for enforcing highly unpopular laws related to the taxation of imported goods, alcohol, and tobacco. Despite the unpopularity of his duties, Stevens continued as supervisor of the revenue until the dissolution of the position in 1801.

In the ensuing years, Stevens continued to hold many local positions of power. He served as warden of Charleston's 4<sup>th</sup> ward from 1814-1816 and 1818-1819. He also served on numerous boards and

commissions, most notably as a Commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House from 1790-1827 and as a member of the Board of Firemasters from circa 1797-1826. On January 11, 1819, Stevens was elected to fulfill the unfinished term of Intendent John Geddes who stepped down to serve as Governor of South Carolina. He was reelected September 6, 1819. During his time as intendant, Stevens welcomed President James Monroe as he toured the southern states to examine defensive fortifications in the wake of the First Seminole War.<sup>xiv</sup>

Given his own family history, it is fitting that Stevens's position as a Commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House proved his longest serving role. He considered his position on the Commission a "sacred duty" and spoke proudly of bounding out nearly 2,000 children as "apprentices, handicrafts and seamstresses."

After stepping down from his role as a Commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House in 1827, Stevens retreated from the public eye. In 1830, he moved to Beaufort to live with his granddaughter, Sarah Matilda Somarsall, and her husband, William John Grayson, a member of United States House of Representatives. Stevens wrote his autobiography there in 1833 in order to convey "how vain are ancestral honors" and expound upon the value of public service.<sup>xv</sup> Stevens passed away two years later on 20 March 1835 in Charleston where he was buried with full military honors.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### **Col. Daniel Stevens Timeline, 1746-1835**

1738	Samuel Stevens and Katherine Mather Willard, the granddaughter of Rev. Cotton Mather, marry in Boston, Massachusetts
1746	Birth of Daniel Stevens to Samuel and Katherine in Charleston, South Carolina
1754	Death of Samuel Stevens, after which Daniel becomes the ward of Rev. George Whitefield
1759	Death of Katherine Willard Stevens
1767	Marriage to Patience Catherine Norton (d. 1769), with whom he had two children who died in infancy
1768	Apprenticeship to Charleston merchant, John Champness, which later becomes a co-partnership
1770	Marriage to Sarah Sprowle (d. 1778), with whom he had four children, only one of whom, Maria Willard Stevens (b. 1777), survived infancy
1776	Enlistment with the Charleston Rangers, under the command of Capt. Thomas Savage
June 1776	Fought in the Battle of Sullivan's Island
Fall 1776	Enlistment with the Ancient Battalion of Artillery under the command of Capt. Thomas Grimbald
March 1779	Marriage to Mary Adams (d. unknown)
June 1779	Fought in the Battle of Stono Ferry

May 1780	Fall of Charleston to the British
August 1780	Arrest of 150 men including Stevens, who is held in the cellar of the Exchange Building
Jan. 1781	After release in a prisoner exchange in Philadelphia, Stevens joins Gen. Nathaniel Greene's forces in North Carolina
March 1781	Fought in the Guilford Courthouse Battle
Sept. 1781	Fought in the Battle of Eutaw Spring ca. 1781-1784 High Sheriff for the Charleston District, a three-year term
1782	Representative of St. Philip and St. Michael parishes in the SC General Assembly
1785-1790	Representative of St. Philip and St. Michael parishes in the SC General Assembly
1786-1788	Warden for Charleston's 13th Ward
1791	Representative St. Luke Parish in the SC Senate
1791-1801	Supervisor of the Revenue of the United States for South Carolina
1791-1827	Commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House (Chairman 1820-1827)
ca. 1797-1826	Served on the Charleston's Board of Firemasters
1814-1816	Warden for Charleston's 4th Ward
1835	Death and burial with military honors

#### References

“Advertisement: Death Notice.” *Southern Patriot* (Charleston, South Carolina), March 21, 1835: [3].

“Autobiography of Daniel Stevens, 1746-1835.” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 58 (1957).

Bailey, N. Louise, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor. *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985*. Vol. 3. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986.

McCady, Edward. *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1902.

McCady, James Waring and C.L. Bragg. *Patriots in Exile: Charleston Rebels in St. Augustine during the American Revolution*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2020.

Stevens, Eugene R. *Erasmus Stevens, Boston, Mass., 1674-1690, and his Descendants*. New Britain, C.T.: Press of Tobias A. Wright, 1914.

Webber, Mabel L. “Inscriptions from the Independent or Congregational (Circular) Church Yard, Charleston, S.C.” *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 29, No. 1 (January 1928): 55-66.

---

<sup>i</sup> Stevens, Daniel, "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens, 1746-1835," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* LVIII, no. 1 (January 1957), 2-3.

<sup>ii</sup> Cashin, Edward J., *Beloved Bethesda: A History of George Whitefield's Home for Boys, 1740-2000*, (Macon, G.A.: Mercer University Press, 2001), 32, 96.

<sup>iii</sup> *Beloved Bethesda*, 96; "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 4.

<sup>iv</sup> Rev. Samuel Mather to Daniel Stevens, October 1769, in *Erasmus Stevens, Boston, Mass., 1674-1690 and His Descendants*, (New York: Tobias A. Wright, 1914): <https://archive.org/details/erasmusstevenshi00stev>.

<sup>v</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 3-4; *Beloved Bethesda*, 96-97.

<sup>vi</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 4-7.

<sup>vii</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 7.

<sup>viii</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 9-10; Fraser, Walter J. Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City*, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 159-162.

<sup>ix</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 11; McCrady, Edward, *The History of South Carolina in The Revolution, 1780-1783*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1902), 369.

<sup>x</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 12-14; Bailey, N. Louise, Morgan, Mary L., and Carolyn R. Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985* Vol. 3, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 1546.

<sup>xi</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 15-16; Snowdon, Yates, ed., *History of South Carolina, Vol. I*, (Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company), 444-445.

<sup>xii</sup> Lambert, Robert Stansbury, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 289-290; "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 16.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bailey, N. Louise, Morgan, Mary L., and Carolyn R. Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985*, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 1546-1547.

<sup>xiv</sup> Bailey, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985* Vol. 3, 1547; "The following Address," *City Gazette* (Charleston, South Carolina), April 28, 1819: [2].

<sup>xv</sup> "Autobiography of Daniel Stevens," 1.

<sup>xvi</sup> "Advertisement," *Southern Patriot* (Charleston, South Carolina, March 21, 1835: [3]; Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application File S.18,214, for Daniel Stevens, South Carolina, March 5, 1834, Record Group 15: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs Series, 1773-2007, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, National Archives, Washington DC, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/196718666?objectPage=8>.