

abandoned. The British held the town, fortifying their position with a redoubt just outside the town limits. Toward the end of the war, skirmishes erupted in and around the town until the British evacuated in 1781. Historical records suggest they burned their extra supplies when they fled, damaging town buildings such as the church and the free school.

STOP H When Congregationalists first established this town, they built a meeting house at the center of their original land grant. This was also the highest ground within the grant. The ruins of the Old White Meeting House are located about two miles west along Dorchester Road. Members of the Church of England built a church here in the 1720s. For more information about the cemetery, refer to the cemetery guide available on the park website.

STOP I The work of enslaved men and women is woven into the fabric of the town. Artisans like shoemakers Carolina and Prince, tanner Simon, cooper Jemmy and domestics Sarah, Ben and Nancy lived within the town limits. Plantation slaves such as Mingo, Ishmael and Tom came into the town to trade, while boatmen like Manuel, Dick and Little Toney plied the Ashley River on schooners and other vessels moving goods and people. Today, their work can be seen in the two standing ruins- the walls of the tabby fort and the bell tower bricks.

Did you know? The epicenter of the 1886 earthquake was just a few miles from here and almost toppled what remained of the Bell Tower. The violent shaking collapsed the belfry and essentially split the tower in two. During the early 20th century, the SC Society of Colonial Dames **attempted to prevent further damage by placing steel ties around the tower. These ties held it together for over 50 years until more a permanent repair was made.**

Dorchester was never able to recover from the damage and economic disruption of the Revolutionary War. In 1788, a traveler wrote, *"I passed Dorchester, where there are the remains of what appears to have once been a considerable town: there are the ruins of an elegant church, and the vestiges of several well-built houses."*

Over the years, nearby land owners salvaged brick from the remaining walls and foundations to build their own structures. Then in 1886, an earthquake completed the destruction of the town.

In 1969, the site was donated to the South Carolina State Park Service. The town of Dorchester is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Help Us Preserve the Past

The South Carolina State Park System protects and preserves the physical remains of our state's heritage. The preservation of the site, for future generations, depends on our actions today.

Please do not damage or climb on walls, embankments, structural ruins, or buildings. If you find artifacts on the ground, please leave them and inform park staff of their location.



Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site
300 State Park Road
Summerville, SC 29485
SouthCarolinaParks.com/ColonialDorchester



Self-guided Walking Tour

In 1697, a group of Congregationalists sailed from Massachusetts to settle in Carolina. The town they created here along the Ashley River served as a center of trade for a hundred years, only to be abandoned after the Revolutionary War.

Today, scattered ruins and building foundations remain to mark the site, but deeds, wills, letters, diaries, and ongoing archaeological research provide us with a glimpse of what life was like here so long ago.

The colonists acquired 4,050 acres of land along the north side of the Ashley River to begin the new settlement. They named it Dorchester after the town in Massachusetts that they had left behind. The land was divided to create a New England-style township with farm lots, commons, a mill site, and a "place of trade". You are standing within the 50 acres that were set aside for the town. This area was divided into 116 town lots and a market place.

Today, many of the lot corners are marked by wooden posts carved with the adjoining lot numbers. Street signs mark the intersections of roads within the town grid.

The brown, lettered posts identify the stopping places on this tour. Be sure to read the other signs along the way for additional information about the site's history.

Begin your tour by walking behind the orientation kiosk to the first stop.



STOP A As the town developed, it became an important trading center on the Ashley River. The early economy of the area reflected the larger economy of the developing colony. The forests yielded lumber, tar, and pitch for England's shipbuilding industry and deerskins obtained in trade from the Native Americans provided another profitable commodity. Present-day Dorchester Road and Highway 61 began as well-trod trading paths, leading to the colony's frontier and beyond to the Mississippi. The local economy soon shifted as landowners began focusing on the cash crops of rice and indigo.

STOP B Ships carried trade goods, but they delivered communications to and from the young colony, as well. One of the first settlers in the town was the minister Rev. Joseph Lord. Interested in the natural world, he studied the plants and animals he found around Dorchester and shared his discoveries with other collectors. For several years, Lord collected samples of the plants he studied and took careful notes on his observations. These were then sent to England by boat for others to study.

Those plant samples, which date back to 1704 can still be studied today at the Sloane Herbarium in London.

STOP C The tabby fort at the top of the hill has aged a lot over the centuries. When the fort's construction was completed in the 1760s, the tabby would have had a fresh, white color and finished off with a layer of stucco to create a nice smooth surface. Today, the fort's gray color comes from weathering as the environment and centuries have taken their toll on the building material. You can help preserve this tabby fort for future generations by not touching or climbing the fort walls.

Walk up and explore the historic fort and powder magazine. The tour continues on the other side.

Did you know? In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt visited the Charleston Exposition. While in the Lowcountry, he made sure to stay at Summerville's Pine Forest Inn and to visit the tabby fort. When you stand by the fort wall and overlook the Ashley River, you are walking in his footsteps!

STOP D The town was a very small section of the Congregationalists' grant. It is located at the edge of the grant to take advantage of the Ashley River. If you stand with your back to the Market Place, the rest of the land grant stretches westward towards Bacon's Bridge. This land was divided into farm lots of 45-50 acres each.

STOP E Lot 52 is the current focus of State Park archaeologists. The 1742 map identifies "Blake"-most likely Joseph Blake, a wealthy planter- as the owner. To date, archaeological work has uncovered numerous 18th-century artifacts and a brick floor and foundation, most likely related

to a living quarters and cookhouse. As the excavation continues, the everyday items uncovered will help us better understand daily life in Dorchester.

STOP F You are standing near the center of the town. If you stand with the school lot to your back and look towards Dorchester Road, you are



looking towards the other half of the town. In colonial times, you would have had a clear view to Dorchester Road. Businesses in this section of the town would have included Mrs. Langley's tavern, Mr. Vanvelson's tannery, Mr. Rousham's carpentry shop and Dr. Davidson's medical practice.

STOP G The town was a flurry of activity at the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775, as Patriots fortified the town due to fear of a Loyalist attack. The parish revolutionary committee received authority to hire or impress slaves, horses, wagons, carts, a schooner—anything necessary—to prepare the town's defensive works. Even St. George's Church was to be fortified. In November of 1775, the warehouses on Lot 10 were possibly rented to serve as makeshift barracks for the country militia assembled in the town. As threats to Dorchester's safety diminished, small detachments guarded the powder magazine at Dorchester. Danger once again presented itself when the British launched a series of campaigns in the South. Patriot soldiers assembled at Dorchester before marching to the defense of Charles Town in 1779 and 1780. When Charles Town fell to the British, a foraging party found the town of Dorchester had been