

STEP INTO History

by Wesley Broome

Along the waterfront in Bath, North Carolina, church bells chime on the hour. This quiet community beside Bath Creek, a branch of the Pamlico River, is the state's first town, established in 1705.

This is just one of many "firsts" the town has to offer. In addition to being the first port of entry into North Carolina, Bath boasts the first public library, and was situated along the first postal road, which ran from Boston to Charleston. Many of Bath's significant historical structures remain intact, standing shoulder to shoulder with the quiet residences that now line Main Street.

BLACKBEARD'S STOMPING GROUNDS

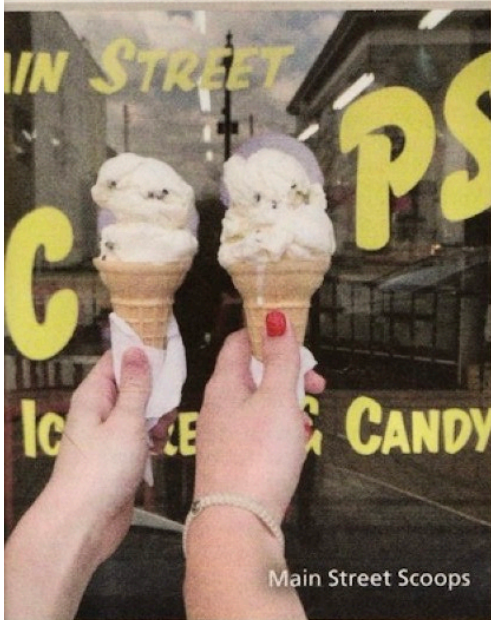
Edward Teach, the infamous pirate Blackbeard, is said to have frequented Bath and was granted a royal pardon by Gov. Charles Eden. Blackbeard's time in Bath was relatively peaceful, though he soon returned to piracy along the North Carolina coast and beyond. In 1718, he was killed in nearby Ocracoke during a battle with the British Navy.

Bath has a long history as a seafaring town, being the first port of entry into the state. Most of the town's early residents were involved in sea trade in some way. The waters of Bath Creek are still traversed by motorized boats and white sails, recalling a time when these waters were busy with schooners, sloops and ferries transporting goods across the water.

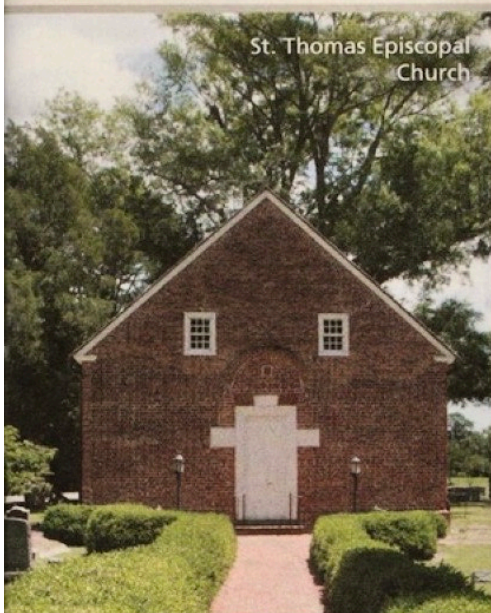


Statue by St. Thomas
Episcopal Church

WESLEY BROOME, MAIN STREET, 2008



Main Street Scoops



St. Thomas Episcopal Church



WALKING TOUR

Small and compact, Bath is easily traversed on foot. The visitor center offers guided tours, but you can experience just as much of the town on a self-guided walk along historic Main Street and adjacent Front Street.

Built in 1734, St. Thomas Episcopal Church is the oldest standing church in the state. It's still in service today. Two of its early reverends, John Garzia and Alexander Stewart, are reportedly buried beneath the smooth brick floor, worn by three centuries of footsteps. Visitors can sit in the black pews and absorb the peaceful silence while contemplating the generations of visitors and parishioners who have passed through this ancient building.

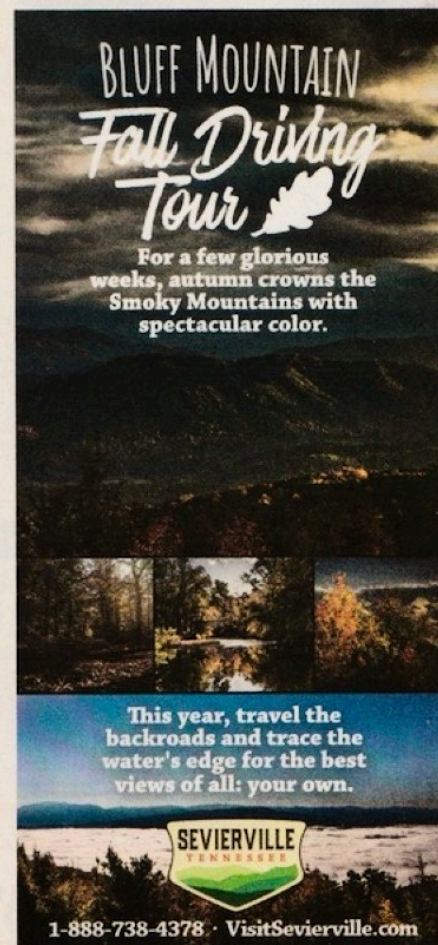
While St. Thomas remains standing, another significant church has since vanished from sight. The Bath A.M.E. Zion Church was established during a time when African American Christians formed their own congregations due to the discrimination they experienced in other churches. Today, the site where this church once stood overlooks a long, green lawn stretching down to the water. A lone grave marker indicates those who are said to be buried on this lot.

There are several historical residences on view from the street or as part of a guided tour, including the Bonner House and the Palmer-Marsh House. Both of these handsome homes were owned by prominent Bath citizens, with nearby gardens and grave markers that remain to this day.

During your walk through town, stroll along Harding's Landing, a free public dock, or stop at Pirate's Treasure gift shop to check out their Christmas Room, filled with handmade ornaments such as okra pod angels. Lawson's Walk is a short promenade lined with a variety of native trees and named for John Lawson, an early North Carolina explorer who was one of the first residents of Bath.



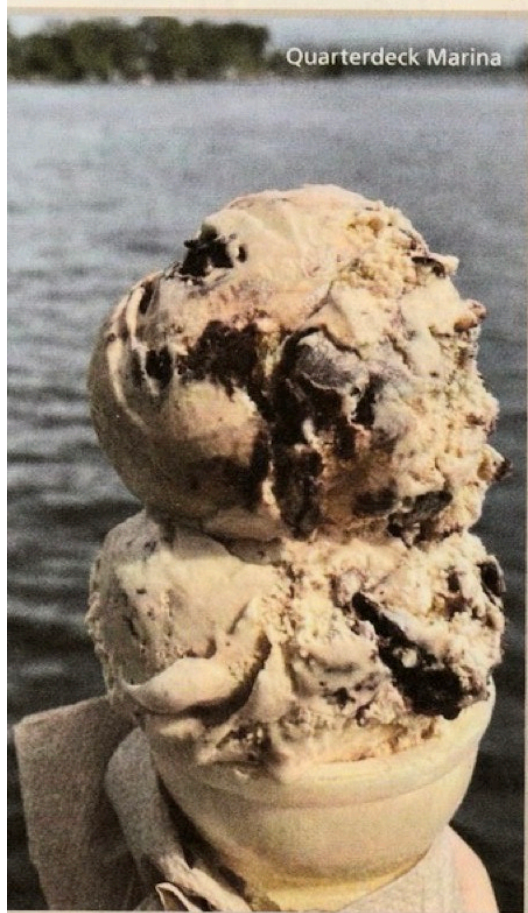
The Ava Gardner Museum is remodeled and reopened in Downtown Smithfield. Come explore new exhibits, and rarely seen items now on display.



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Quarterdeck Marina



Quarterdeck Marina

WATERVIEW DINING

If you'd like to enjoy a meal by the water, Blackbeard's Tavern offers a view of Bath Creek and the bridge crossing into town. Quarterdeck Marina, which serves ice cream, burgers and hot dogs, has a shaded upper deck overlooking the water, perfect for warm days.

You can also plan a picnic on the waterfront across from Bonner House, which offers picnic tables and ample lawn space for enjoying a view of Bath Creek from the shade of pine trees along the shore. The sound of water lapping against the docks brings to mind the centuries of water trade that sustained this historic port.

LINGER LONGER

If you'd like to experience more of Bath and the surrounding area, consider spending the night at The Inn on Bath Creek, a bed and breakfast situated on historic Main Street. For more time in nature, nearby Goose Creek State Park offers tent and RV camping, as well as cozy cabins.

While you're on Camp Leach Road, check out Raindrop Ridge Farm, an herb nursery located on land that has been in the family for six generations. The nearby town of Washington, another significant site along the Historic Albemarle Highway, offers additional dining and shopping options. Wrap up your trip with ice cream or a beverage from Main Street Scoops in Washington while overlooking the historic waters of the Pamlico River. ■

NEXT STEP

Visit AAA.com/GoTravel for all the travel resources you need for your Bath vacation!