

SOAPSTONE PRESERVATION ENDOWMENT

OVERVIEW: *Soapstone Preservation Endowment (SPE) was established with the sole purpose of protecting and promoting the story and history of Soapstone Baptist Church and the Liberia Community in rural Pickens County, South Carolina.*

VISION: *Establish a perpetual endowment to maintain the buildings and grounds and to include the site in a “historical trail” along SC Scenic Highway 11 that will help promote African American history and contributions to the state.*

*“Protecting and Promoting
the History and Story of the
Liberia Community”*



History: SBC was founded by freed slaves in 1865 in an area that held little economic potential or importance. Against enormous odds the church persisted battling poor soils and crop failures, Caucasian neighbors who came to desire the now valuable land, Ku Klux Klan burning the church, and out-migration.

The seven-acre site donated by the great-grandparents of Mable Owens Clarke boasts the church, the original one-room school that served as the sole education facility for area children prior to school consolidation in the 1950s, and two cemeteries (one serving as the final resting place for the original freed slaves who settled the area).

Soapstone Today: The Liberia Community which was comprised exclusively of African Americans has experienced a greater than 95% loss of its Black residents. Mable returned to the area in the late 1990s to aid her aging parents. On her mother’s death bed, Mable’s mother urged her youngest child to never let the doors of Soapstone close. For more than two decades she hosted monthly fish fries to generate funds to support the declining congregation.

Soapstone boasts less than a dozen members and a part-time pastor, yet they continue to host weekly services that are livestreamed around the world. Rather than deny the inevitable, Mable, her pastor, and some friends and supporters are working through SPE to ensure that the story of Soapstone and the Liberia Community will live for generations to come.

Progress To Date: Two vital steps laid the foundation for the creation of SPE: 1) the church’s debts were paid (2020); and 2) a conservation easement was placed over the property (2022) to forever prevent development of the site that looks up to South Carolina’s iconic Table Rock Mountain.

Steps to Achieving the Vision		
Goal	Metric	Status
#1: Charter a public charity to advance the vision	✓ IRS grants public charity status	✓ Accomplished 6.22.2022
#2: Establish a seasoned Board to guide the entity	✓ 7 members committed to the vision	✓ Accomplished 6.22.2022
#3: Establish financial need	✓ \$500,000 <u>by 12.31.2025</u>	✓ <i>In process</i> 11% in accounts
#4: Walk the talk	✓ 100% of members giving	✓ Accomplished 5.18.2023
#5: Set first preservation project	✓ Corporate partner to aid school renovation	✓ Accomplished 6.1.2023

Updates: SPE's first project to advance the site as a regional tourism/education stop will be the refurbishment of the school. Greenville-based Harper Contractors has agreed to become SPE's corporate sponsor to aid in rehabbing the building as the foundation for this key step.

While we will continue to seek financial support from interested individuals, we are now looking for support from area foundations in achieving the \$500,000 goal by the time the church reaches its 160th anniversary in 2025. To help us reach this goal we are seeking foundations and/or businesses that will invest \$30,000 or pledge \$10,000/year over three years leading up to the 160th Anniversary.

For more information:

www.soapstonepe.org

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