

Frontis, Stephen ^[1]

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by Edith M. Clark, 1986

18 July 1792–12 Apr. 1867

Stephen Frontis, Presbyterian ^[2] minister, was born in Cognac, France, the son of John Baptist Jehoiachin and Etienne Borel Frontis who were married on 7 Apr. 1786 at Port au Prince, Santo Domingo. His father was a Roman Catholic ^[3] and had all his children baptized as Catholics. His mother was born of Protestant parents in Geneva, Switzerland, where Stephen spent sixteen years of his childhood and youth. Initially, the Frontises had lived in Port au Prince, where John Frontis acquired a moderate fortune as a tailor and merchant-trader. After the revolution forced them to leave in April 1792, they settled in Cognac, France. In April 1793 John Frontis left his wife and children in France to establish a business as merchant-trader in Philadelphia and Jamaica; he did not see his family again until 1800. Mrs. Frontis and their three children lived in Cognac for a year in straitened circumstances, then moved to Geneva, Switzerland, to be near her relatives. While living there, Stephen was trained as a cabinetmaker and took special training in drawing and writing. During his youth he was under the influence of his Protestant relatives and joined the Church of Geneva.

In 1810 young Frontis left Switzerland to avoid conscription in Napoleon's army and joined his father in Philadelphia. There he worked as a journeyman cabinetmaker and endured a brief and unsatisfactory experience as a clerk. His friend Joseph Conrad, who later became a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church in Lexington, N.C., invited him to hear the Reverend James K. Burch, and in 1813 he joined the Presbyterian church. In 1817 Burch was offered a post as head of an academy in Oxford, N.C., and he asked Frontis to go with him to teach French and Latin. The Oxford connection lasted only a short time, so Stephen Frontis went to Raleigh ^[4] where the Reverend Dr. William McPheeters ^[5] engaged him to teach French in the female academy. In October 1820 he entered the Theological Seminary in Princeton ^[6], N.J., where he was graduated with honors in the class of 1823. He was ordained by the Orange Presbytery in November 1823.

For five years Frontis did missionary work in Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. He then became stated supply and pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church in Iredell County ^[7]. While serving in that capacity, he was chosen as one of the commissioners to select a site for Davidson College ^[8], where he later taught.

On 2 Feb. 1830, at Lincolnton, N.C., Frontis married Martha Dews, who had come from the Guernsey Islands with her parents in 1817. In April 1836 he became stated supply of the Presbyterian church in Salisbury and was ordained on 12 Sept. 1839, remaining as pastor until 1846. During the nine years he was with the Salisbury church, forty-four people were received into membership including two of his sisters, Jeanne Marie Euphrosine Frontis and Elizabeth Frontis, who were received by certificate of transfer from their church in Geneva, Switzerland. Frontis also taught French in the Salisbury Female Academy.

In Salisbury, he purchased from Maxwell Chambers ^[9] a frame house where he lived while serving as stated supply to Thyatira and Franklin churches during the period 1846–49. Martha Dews Frontis died on 10 July 1849 and was buried in the Lutheran cemetery in Salisbury beside their two small children, Martha Dews and Thomas Dews Frontis.

From 1849 to 1856 Frontis served Center Grove Church in Iredell County. He purchased a farm near Prospect Presbyterian Church in Rowan County ^[10], and on 20 June 1854 he married Rachael Beaty in Iredell County, intending to retire from church work in favor of farming. This plan was not carried out, however, because in 1856 he became an acting professor at Davidson College where he taught until his death. He was buried in the Prospect Presbyterian Church cemetery beside his daughter, Mary Long. He was survived by his second wife, two sons, Stephen, Jr., and David Beaty Frontis, and by two daughters, Catherine Chambers and Elizabeth Euphrosine Frontis, as well as a sister, Jeanne Marie Euphrosine Frontis.

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Additional Resources:

Frontis, Stephen 1792-1867 in World Cat: <https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-nr96-44857> ^[11]

Memoirs of My Life, undated (collection no. 01994). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/f/Frontis,Stephen.html> ^[12] (accessed July 26, 2013).

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