

Col. Daniel Stein: Farmerville's Nineteenth Century Entrepreneur Extraordinaire

by Timothy Dean Hudson

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Daniel Stein was one of the most prominent citizens of Farmerville and among the most well-known of north Louisiana's businessmen. Upon his arrival in north Louisiana in the early 1860s, Stein joined the Confederate Army and saw military action in 1862 and 1863 before officials assigned him to the Quartermaster Department. After the War, he helped to revitalize the lower Mississippi Valley's transportation industry frozen by the conflict by investing in the thriving steamboat industry. In 1865, he assumed ownership of Farmerville's two most successful antebellum mercantile firms, Brunner Bros. and Brunner & Shlenker, and merged them into his own firm. Stein's business acumen and strong work ethic led his firm to thrive, and his gregarious and charitable nature quickly endeared Stein to the denizens of Union Parish and the surrounding region. By the early 1870s, "*Daniel Stein & Co.*" had the most extensive and lucrative business of any mercantile firm in north Louisiana outside of Shreveport.

Daniel Stein was born on 28 September 1833 in Asselheim, Bavaria, now southern Germany, to Jewish parents. We know nothing of his life in Bavaria, but about 1855, he came to the United States with four of his siblings. The Steins settled first in Mobile, Alabama, but Daniel moved to Louisiana about 1860, presumably due to his work in the steamboat industry, and settled in Farmerville. In October 1862, Stein enlisted in the "*Phoenix Rifles*," Company C, 17th Louisiana Infantry Regiment, then serving as part of the garrison at Vicksburg, Mississippi. He joined his unit at Vicksburg and saw action at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou in December 1862 and at the Battle of Port Gibson on 1 May 1863, where his unit bore the brunt of the fighting during the Confederate retreat. Between May 19th and July 4th, Stein served with his unit during the Siege of Vicksburg. Later in the war, officials placed Stein in charge of his regiment's Quartermaster Department, and he served in this capacity until the end of the conflict.

While back home in Union Parish on parole following his unit's capture at Vicksburg in July 1863, Stein married Karolina Shlenker Brunner (Caroline), the widow of Farmerville merchant Lazarus Brunner. With his marriage, Stein acquired the inventory of Brunner's original Farmerville firm, "*Brunner Bros.*," that had survived the fire that destroyed much of Farmerville's business section during the early 1860s. After the war, Stein formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, Jacob Shlenker, and Emanuel Brunner. Shlenker operated their corporation's firm

in Vicksburg and Brunner the New Orleans firm, leaving Stein to manage the Farmerville store. Its success led Stein to expand his business and open another store at Stein's Bluff, located on Bayou Corney about a mile upstream from its mouth on Bayou D'Arbonne, located where the modern the Bernice highway crosses the Corney.

Like most Louisiana mercantile firms of that era, Stein's stores provided food, farming tools and supplies, clothes, etc. to farmers of Union Parish and the surrounding region on credit, with the balance to be paid in baled cotton immediately after each year's harvest. Stein then sold the bales on the New Orleans markets to recoup his money. Whereas the major cities in the lower Mississippi Valley began to depend on the railroads for transportation of passengers, goods, and farm produce after the war, the smaller towns such as Farmerville continued to rely on steamboats until after the turn of the century. As his business depended upon reliable transportation between Farmerville and New Orleans, Stein invested heavily in steamboats, owning stock in several transportation companies that operated steamers on the bayous of the upper Ouachita Valley.

Stein encouraged his stepson, Lazarus Brunner Jr., to become involved with steamers at an early age. By the time he was twenty, Brunner had become a steamboat pilot, and within a few years, he served as steamboat captain, plying the waters throughout the Ouachita Valley. Using Stein's capital, Capt. Brunner acquired or built numerous steamers used specifically for the D'Arbonne and Ouachita trade, with many of them named after their relatives. In 1877, Brunner named one of his steamers the "*D. Stein*," and she plied the Ouachita River as well as Bayous D'Arbonne and Bartholomew throughout the latter 1880s.

By the 1870s, Daniel Stein had become the wealthiest and most successful businessman in Union Parish, as well as one of the most respected and admired. His fairness in dealing with farmers and his philanthropic nature endeared him to the community. He also helped to bring progress to Union Parish quicker than it reached other regions. On his regular business trips to New York, Stein often saw demonstrations of new innovations and then brought them back to Farmerville. He constructed the first telegraph lines in Union Parish, paying to have the lines run to his store in Farmerville. Years later, he had the first telephone lines run to his store, and Stein's telephone was the only one in Union Parish until the early 1900s.

In the spring of 1883, at the height of his business success, Stein suffered several devastating tragedies. First, in early March, his immensely successful Farmerville store caught fire and burned, destroying his entire inventory. Stein attracted business from across the region, including parts of Union and Columbia Counties, Arkansas, and Claiborne and Lincoln Parishes, Louisiana. The sheer

volume of business conducted by D. Stein & Co. caused the destruction of his store to make national news. As if the loss of his store was not enough, the aftermath caused more tragedy.

Stein's two-story storehouse was in the block across the street from the Union Parish Courthouse in downtown Farmerville, and he had surrounded it with a brick firewall, but it was contiguous with other buildings in the block. Next door to his store, and separated from it by the firewall, was Hugh Glasson's saloon. After the fire, the charred brick walls towered above the wooden saloon. On April 21st, a month after the fire, a tornado struck Farmerville, and the swirling winds caused the brick firewall to collapse on top of the saloon.

Thankfully, it was a calm day in Farmerville, with only five men in the saloon when the falling bricks demolished it. The disaster killed two of Stein's friends, Hugh C. Glasson and Judge William A. Darby, and seriously injured the others. After erecting tombstones to honor his deceased friends, Stein spent several years in court battling with insurance companies over the settlement for his losses. The outcome of the litigation proved unfavorable to him, and Stein closed his store in October 1884 and filed for bankruptcy. He used this opportunity to formally retire from business, and never reopened his stores in his own name. Instead, he operated as a silent partner in support of his sons, Abe and Jacob, his brother, Simon, and his brother-in-law, Julius Arent, in their Farmerville business endeavors.

Stein did continue his steam sawmill at the junction of Bayous D'Arbonne and Corney just south of Farmerville during the 1880s and 1890s. He also performed numerous civic duties after his retirement from the mercantile industry, serving on the Farmerville Town Council and in other such capacities.

Daniel Stein and his family formed the core nucleus of Farmerville's small but tightly knit Jewish community during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although many of Farmerville's most successful businessmen during the nineteenth century were Jews, they never established a synagogue in town. Instead, they attended religious services in Monroe and New Orleans.

Stein's wife, Caroline, died in 1883, and he never remarried. After her death and his sons' marriages, he made his home with his wife's stepdaughter, Ellen Brunner Laupheimer Levi. Stein's stepdaughter, Donie Laupheimer, married Farmerville farmer and businessman, Capt. Oscar Baughman, and their children and grandchildren continued Stein's tradition of mercantile and civic service to Farmerville into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

After an illness of several months, Daniel Stein died on 30 August 1903. The editor of the *"Gazette"* lamented, *"Mr. Stein's pleasant face and cheerful voice will be sadly missed in our community where he has lived so long."*



Col. Daniel Stein

