

► Atkins' grandparents married at Holbrook during a camp meeting 100 years ago. As a child, little Anne chased lightning bugs, caught frogs, swung in tire swings, tossed water balloons, and rode bicycles around the campground—all idyllic activities she sees children still partaking in today. As a preteen, she committed herself to Christianity during an altar call at Holbrook.

Every year, Atkins reconnects with friends from those early days. Her family "tent" was rebuilt in 1997, raised from one story to two, the sawdust floor exchanged for cement. When her children, Austin, 26, and Hannah, 21, were teenagers, the one-bathroom cabin sometimes held as many as 18 of their friends. Sometimes hosting that many teenagers under one roof could be a chore, she confesses, but perhaps all the hassle was worth it, as today many of those teens still attend as adults.

Anne said she and her husband, Gary, keep coming back because "this is very much holy ground, and there's a sense of peace here. It's an opportunity to soak in and feel like you're sitting at the feet of Jesus for a week. You can't do that in everyday life. Or most of us don't."

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Milledgeville

On a hot summer's day, Mary and Dan O'Connor, touring the South from Dayton, Ohio, have found themselves in the nave of an old Episcopal church that they discovered through a AAA book. They were drawn to this place by the guidebook's dramatic tale about Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's troops.

The story goes that St. Stephen's Church, which was constructed in 1843, was co-opted for use as a barracks for the 107th New York Infantry during Sherman's March to the Sea, in November of 1864. Soldiers burned the

pews for warmth and vandalized the organ by pouring molasses on its workings. When the troops blew up a nearby arsenal, it obliterated the church's then-flat roof and its windows.

The O'Connors sat enrapt. "We love history," Dan said.

"IT'S IMPORTANT FOR AN OLD CHURCH TO STILL BE ALIVE." — Carol Grant

Today, the rebuilt St. Stephen's is an exquisite example of the style known as "carpenter Gothic," a North American variation with wood construction instead of stone but featuring pointed arches, steep gables, and towers.

Most of the chancel furniture was built from walnut lumber over a decade by communicant John Wilcox, beginning in 1874. Wilcox's great-grandson is a current parishioner.

As for the organ, the pipes were cleaned of molasses, but it is said that the quality of sound never recovered. In 1909, the 11-year-old daughter of the church organist, a girl named Nylic Bland, decided to take matters in hand. Nylic's name was an acronym of New York Life Insurance Company, her father's employer. She decided that if New Yorkers had damaged the organ, as they did in the fall of 1864, then New Yorkers should repair it. She wrote a letter to her father's boss, the head of the company, and he graciously responded with a telegram: "Buy an organ. Send me the bill."

Of course, the church today is much more than its past. "It's a vital church," said Carol Grant, whose children are fourth-generation members. She lists activities for children, college ►

OPPOSITE Dorothy Brown, a retired art professor at Georgia College and State University, created the icons hanging in St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Milledgeville, where she is a parishioner.

