

PRESERVATION IN SAVANNAH

Research compiled by Beth Lattimore Reiter. Additions from: Savannah Renaissance by Lee and Emma Adler.

Historic preservation in Savannah had its official beginning in 1955, when Historic Savannah Foundation was established and chartered. As this chronology will point out, however, the interest of Savannah's citizens in protecting the city's town plan and architectural heritage was alive in the nineteenth century, and the preservation examples set early on by caring individuals paved the way for monumental efforts later.

1875 – Mary Telfair leaves her home and furnishings to Georgia Historical Society.

1886 - Telfair is opened as a free museum.

1920 – The corporation is chartered as Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences

1921 -- Society for the Preservation of the Parks is formed to thwart attempts to eliminate squares.

1924 – Fort Pulaski National Monument is established.

1928 – National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Georgia acquires the Andrew Low House on Lafayette Square for the use as State Headquarters.

1934 -- Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Savannah Project brings team of architects and researchers to record buildings through photographs and measured drawings

1935 – Montgomery Street Squares destroyed and opened to traffic.

Savannah Commission for the Preservation of Landmarks begun by Mayor Thomas Gamble in response to HABS Savannah Project.

1939 – Society of the Preservation of Savannah Landmarks established.

1940s – Alida Harper Fowlkes restores the house of James Habersham, Jr. (1789) on Reynolds Square for use as a restaurant, The Pink House. (Adler)

Mrs. Marmaduke Floyd restores an old tavern on East Broad Street and christens it The Pirates' House.

1942 – St. John's Episcopal Church acquired the Green-Meldrim for use as a parish house.

1945 – Trustees Garden rehabilitation begun under the leadership of Hansell H. Hillyer, President of the Savannah Gas Company.

1946 – Efforts to open and pave through Habersham Street Squares thwarted.

1951 – Two bills before the Georgia General Assembly: one to permit the City to convert the City Market into a parking garage; the other to allow the city to make Habersham Street a through boulevard from Bay Street to Victory Drive. Society for the Preservation of the Squares of Savannah was formed to defeat the latter proposal.

Miss Margaret (Meta) Thomas bequeaths her house, the Owens-Thomas house, to the Telfair Academy.

1953 – Girl Scouts of the USA purchase Wayne-Gordon House for National Program Center.

1954 – City Market is demolished for a parking garage.

1955 – Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc. chartered “to acquire, hold, improve, preserve, develop, and restore sites, buildings, residences, and the squares which are a part of the original plan of Savannah, and to preserve neighborhood design in mass and scale and proportion, as well as other structures of historical interest in and around Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia, and to increase and diffuse knowledge and greater appreciation of such sites and structures.”

Historic Savannah Foundation acquires the Davenport House.

1957 – The Lachlan McIntosh House (1770) on East Oglethorpe Avenue is saved and held for resale.

1958 – The Francis Stone House (1830) on East State Street across from the Davenport House is saved, restored, and though Fred Wessels, is leased to the Unitarian congregation.

Emmett Park is saved from conversion to a parking lot through the efforts of Historic Savannah and the Trustees Garden Club.

1958-1962 – Historic Savannah Foundation undertakes architectural inventory.

The Junior League of Savannah contributes \$3,000 for the consulting services of Carl Feiss, F.A.I.A. Mr. Feiss recommends a professional inventory of the 2.2- square-mile area which developed from 1733 to 1856.

1959 – Marshall Row, Oglethorpe Avenue and Abercorn and Lincoln Streets, is saved.

1961 – The Davenport House becomes headquarters of Historic Savannah Foundation. Mrs. Nightingale McKinnon, Trustee, begins her long and dedicated service as chair of restoration and curator of the museum house.

1962 – Historic Savannah Foundation Revolving Fund established to preserve buildings.

1963 – Davenport House opens to the public.

1964 – West Congress Street Revitalization Project initiated as model for commercial redevelopment.

The Foundation works to improve lighting and surfacing of River Street.

1965 – Historic Savannah Foundation established the Davenport Trophy, whose first recipient was Hansell H. Hillyer.

Pulaski Square-West Jones Street project initiated.

Georgia Day established by Historic Savannah Foundation as annual education program.

Troup Ward Urban Renewal execution phase begun.

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) – 2nd Supplemental Project

McCaskey Report, “Savannah- A Travel Destination,” published on tourism, resulting in the formation of a Tourist and Convention Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce. The report was jointly sponsored by the Chamber and Historic Savannah Foundation.

1966 – Area of original City Plan designated a National Historic Landmark District.
Historic Savannah Foundation hires full time Director.

1967 – Historic Savannah Foundation’s architectural inventory published.

The magazine Antiques devotes an entire issues to Savannah, the first of many national publications to feature Savannah.

1968 – Georgia Constitution amended to enable Savannah to have historic zoning.

National Trust for Historic Preservation holds it annual conference in Savannah.

Savannah story given at the White House at invitation of Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson.

Historic Preservation Plan prepared under auspices of Troup Ward project.

1969 – Central Urban Renewal Project extends area for “312 loans.”

Save the Bay, Inc. formed to combat threat of high rise construction on the Riverfront.

1971 – RIPA zoning adopted for Historic District.

1973 – Historic Zoning Ordinance implemented by City.

Restoration of Scarborough House begun by Historic Savannah Foundation with generous support from the community.

Two grants received to survey Victorian District.

1974 – Savannah Victorian District placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Savannah Landmark Rehabilitation Project incorporated.

1975 – Riverfront Urban Renewal enactment phase results in Rousakis Plaza.

Central of Georgia Railroad shops measured by Historic American Engineering Record.

Green-Meldrim and Owens-Thomas House designated National Landmarks.

1976 – Scarborough House opened to public as Historic Savannah Foundation’s Bicentennial project.

1977 –First National Housing Conference hold in Savannah on the problem of displacement.

1978 – First Lady Rosalyn Carter visits Savannah Landmark project on Bolton Street and Price Street.

The Central of Georgia Railroad Complex receives National Landmark designation.

1979 – Victorian District designated a Neighborhood Strategy Area with a special Section 8 rent subsidy set-aside, and an Urban Development Action Grant area.

Historic American Building Survey, Victorian District Project.

New edition of Historic Savannah Foundation architectural inventory published including portions of Victorian District.

Heritage Interpretation Center established at Massie School as a community educational resource for the study of the development of Savannah's plan and architectural.

The Savannah College of Art and Design is founded by Richard and Paula Rowan, opening at the Guard's Armory with 79 student enrolled.

1980 – Survey of additional area in Victorian District from Price Street to East Broad Street and from Montgomery to West Broad Street, sponsored by City of Savannah and Metropolitan Planning Commission.

1981 – Savannah Victorian District Design Renovation Manual published by City of Savannah and Metropolitan Planning Commission, with technical assistance and illustrations provided by Historic Savannah Foundation.

Victorian District Design Review established as separate procedure for Landmark District Design Review.

1982 -- Extension of Victorian National Register boundaries to include 1870 City limits, as noted in 1980 survey.

City of Savannah establishes a committee to investigate the recreation of Franklin Square as a Sesquicentenary Project.

Savannah Landmark completes 300 apartments for low income renters in the Victorian District.

1983 – Savannah and Georgia celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding on February 12, 1733.

Survey of Ardsley Park and Chatham Crescent undertaken by Historic Savannah Foundation.

Second National Housing Conference held in Savannah.

1984 – The National Trust for Historic Preservation presents Crowninshield Award to Leopold Adler II.

Isle of Hope eligible for consideration as Historic District, pending approval.

1985 – Franklin Square restored by City and Historic Savannah Foundation funds.

1986 – City preservation officer position was created. Beth Lattimore Reiter appointed.

Northwest quadrant city festival market begun.

1987 – HSF Ward-by-Ward survey of Historic District completed.

The Lucas Theater is saved; the Lucas Theater for the Arts, Inc., a non-profit entity, is formed to guide the restoration.

1988 – HSF published Historic District Action Plan, begins livability task force activity.

1990 – HSF received donation to revive Revolving Fund, purchased properties on East Jones Street.

HSF transferred ownership of Scarborough House to Telfair Academy.

HSF received National Trust Critical Issues Grant for \$15,000.00 to provide Preservation/Economic Development guidelines for Savannah.

HSF successfully joins with other concerned groups to fight parkway planned for Liberty Street.

1991 – HSF moved headquarters to Broughton Street.

1997 – The City of Savannah adopts an ordinance prepared by Christopher Chadborne (called the Chadborne Guidelines) of Boston to protect the historic fabric of the National Historic District.

HSF moved headquarters to Sheftall House on the corner of Habersham and York Streets.

Ships of the Sea Museum opens at the Scarborough House.

1998 – National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual conference was held in Savannah.

2000 - Davenport House Committee undertook an extensive and well researched restoration of the Isaiah Davenport House Museum.

2004 – Lincoln Street Initiative announced in the Thomas Square Historic Streetcar Historic District.

2005 – City Council passed an amendment to the Landmark District Ordinance, which abolished a provision of law that allowed any historic building to be demolished simple by waiting twelve months.

City Council passed the Mid-City Zoning Plan.

Demolition of the City Market Parking garage.

Georgia Trust for awarded Historic Savannah Foundation its Distinguished Service Award.

Davenport House awarded the Preserve America Presidential Award.

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Ten Most Important Groups of Individuals to the Preservation Movement in Savannah:

1. The founders of Historic Savannah Foundation – Katherine Judkins Clark, Elinor Adler Dillard, Anna Colquitt Hunter, Lucy Barrow McIntire, Dorothy Ripley Roebling, Nola McEvoy Roos and Jan Adair Wright
2. Lee and Emma Adler
3. Walter Charlton Hartridge
4. Jim Williams
5. Hansell Hillyer
6. Mills Bee Lane, Jr.
7. Mills Bee Lane IV
8. W. W. Law
9. John Rousakis
10. Paula Wallace

Ten Most Important Buildings Lost

1. City Market

2. Union Station
3. Desoto Hotel
4. Odd Fellows Hall (at the northwest corner of Barnard and State Streets)
5. Bulloch-Habersham House
6. Wetter House
7. Royall Funeral Home
8. Star Theater
9. Savannah Tribune Building
10. Old Fort community (Bordered by Trustees Garden and Fort Wayne on the north to Liberty Street on the south and for Randolph Street on west to Habersham Street on the east. This community was replaced by public housing during the mid-1950s as part of urban renewal.)

Ten Most Important Buildings Saved

1. Davenport House
2. Marshall Row (four houses on East Oglethorpe Avenue between Lincoln and Abercorn Streets)
3. Cluskey Building (southwest trust lot on Oglethorpe Square)
4. Gordon Row (southside of the street between Whitaker and Barnard Streets)
5. Hamilton-Turner House
6. Troup Trust
7. Aimar/King-Tisdell Cottage
8. Charity Hospital
9. Carnegie Library
10. Scarborough House/West Broad Street School

Ten Worst Development Ideas or Proposals

1. Allowed the Hyatt-Regency Hotel cross River Street
2. Allowing Montgomery Street to go through Elbert, Liberty and Franklin Squares
3. Building the Savannah Civic Center in Orleans and Elbert Wards.
4. Tearing down most of Monterrey Square for an expansion of Armstrong Junior College.*
5. Making Liberty Street a four-lane expressway.*
6. Building the Chatham County complex on Montgomery Street.
7. The proposed condemnation and demolition of the Beach Institute Neighborhood.*
8. Running fire lanes through the Habersham Street Squares.*
9. Removing the Pulaski Monument and creating a concrete pavilion in Monterrey Square.*
10. Running Abercorn and Barnard Streets through their squares.*

*Proposal that never went beyond discussion.

Ten Greatest Challenges facing Historic Savannah Foundation in 2005

1. Restore and revitalize the remainder of Broughton Street.
2. Restore Elbert and Liberty squares (requiring the relations of the CAT transfer station and Civic Center)
3. Restore and revitalize the remainder of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.
4. Gain legal protection for the remainder of Savannah's historic districts.
5. Retain economic and racial diversity in Savannah's historic districts.
6. Relieve truck and other traffic contest on Bay Street.
7. Demolish or reface federal buildings on Telfair Square so they are more architecturally compatible manner.
8. Develop the areas east and west of the Landmark District in an architecturally compatible manner.
9. Remove the Interstate 16 flyover.
10. Restore the John Berrien House.