

HISTORIC SAVANNAH

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HISTORIC SAVANNAH FOUNDATION, INCORPORATED

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Leopold Adler II; Craig Bell; Carl Feiss; Arthur Gordon; James H. Grady; Robert D. Gunn, A.I.A.; Mrs. Lilla M. Hawes; Alex A. Lawrence; Miss Robertine K. McClendon; Eric Meyerhoff, A.I.A.; Frederick D. Nichols; Albert H. Stoddard; J. Reid Williamson, Jr., Russell Wright; Raiford J. Wood.

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INTRODUCTION

Historic Savannah

No city anywhere resembles the two square miles of old Savannah. This can be said with assurance and pride. The special patina of the city, with its textures of brick, slate, cobble and ballast stones, greatly contributes to the difference that makes Savannah's charm. Factors Walk in the Bay area, the magnificent Oglethorpe Plan spot-lighted by twenty garden squares that retain greenery and breathe light and life into the downtown area, are all uniquely Savannah's. It is true that from time to time the people of Savannah have been careless custodians of the unique character of their town. By absorbing into it some of the standard problems and characteristics of other modern American cities, they lost much more than they gained.

Fortunately in 1955, alarmed by mounting losses of historic sites and galvanized by the highly successful rebuilding and restoration work carried out in the Trustee's Garden area, leading citizens established the Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc. From then on, the story of the historic preservation movement in Savannah has been an exciting one. It is told in Chapter V of this book. While there are still many battles to be fought and won, old Historic Savannah, as a place of unique value, has been saved. What has been saved, and what still should and must be saved, are the subject of the pages that follow.

The special character of Historic Savannah defies analysis. Simply stated, Historic Savannah is the downtown area and the riverfront. But it is impossible to state it simply. One has to take into consideration the intriguing interface of open spaces heavily wooded with live-oak and magnolia, through which one walks—or saunters—in the normal course of business. The squares

and boulevards are not separate recreation areas, nor decorative adjuncts hacked out of building masses. They are integral to the entire place, as much a part of it as the streets and buildings that make up the rest.

Not all of it is flawless. Broughton Street, the main shopping thoroughfare, retains none of the old Savannah character. It might be Main Street, Anytown, U.S.A. And on the fringes there are certain derelict blocks. But the rest of the two square miles in which the wooded squares and boulevards are evenly distributed provide a landscape that is the city's true beauty, and not an applied beautification.

To get the feeling of old Savannah, one should walk the squares on a warm spring evening with a soft east wind drifting off the sea marshes. It is a walking city anyway. Nothing is very far from anything else and there are benches on the squares under the trees. The grey brick houses, mellowed by the gentle climate, are an ideal background for wisteria and azalea and dogwood. The trees are high enough and thick enough to hide much of the ugliness of scattered badly designed or disfigured buildings and the azaleas can be used physically and mentally to screen out parking lots. Bad as these things are, for once they take second place in an American city scene.

One of the advantages of the Historic Savannah street plan is that most of the houses and churches are clearly visible. Except for a few completely hidden by trees, nearly every old building and many of the fine rows of town houses can be seen from some vantage point down a boulevard or across the corner of a square. Part of the fun of exploring Savannah on foot is finding these points for viewing. Maps of the wards, with the good buildings indicated, are in Chapter IV, and can be used additionally to guide the way.

The Special Architecture

In Savannah, three building materials have predominated in every period since the Revolutionary War. They are wood frame and siding, local grey bricks (the "Savannah Greys,") and a tawny stucco on brick. Scattered through the old part of the city are some outstandingly grand houses, most of them built by the architect William Jay between 1817 and 1824. But there are no groups of great houses as at Charleston or Athens, nor are there compact street scenes as in New Orleans. Savannah's houses are generally tall, rising directly from the sidewalk, with a high basement which requires a prominent flight of stairs to a formal door at the top. Fine iron work is frequent. Right up to late Victorian times, Savannah buildings were quiet, dignified, and very good looking. Later ones often developed a charming exuberance in wood. The great Greek Revival pillared manse so frequently found in upstate Georgia does not exist here. But it is not missed because its urban equivalent here is so handsome.

This is a sedate city with streets lined, as in London and in old parts of Boston and Philadelphia, with what we now call "Town Houses." The variety and charm of these buildings are limitless. Frequent changes in style, detail, ornament, and in the use of materials through the years, made little change in the integrity of the special Savannah architectural quality. Some of this homogeneity has been lost in recent construction. It is to be hoped that the architects of today and tomorrow will recapture the feel of their town again, the softness and dignity that permeates Savannah's architectural heritage. The architect of the future in Savannah does not need to import styles. He

needs to understand the deep and abiding quality of his own wonderfully rich and vital urban design heritage. This book is arranged to help him do just this.

The Inventory

In the early 1960's, Historic Savannah Foundation realized that there must be a careful inventory of buildings and places in Savannah that have historic importance and architectural and city planning merit. . . . What was needed was an immediate and accurate survey of the entire downtown area (old Savannah), listing all such structures . . . , classifying them by type, condition and occupancy. Also needed was a classification of streets and squares and a complete index and cataloguing of all elements of the city of historic and architectural value. Ultimately, the hope was to prepare working scale models of the squares, planning for designs and redesigns which would provide a harmony between the old and new, and recreate beauty and distinction where such character was then missing.

The inventory was to stand as the basis for future public and private action and would give Savannah the key to projects and programs for the future.

The inventory was undertaken in July and August of 1962, under the direction of Professor Paul S. Dulaney of the University of Virginia and sponsored by Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc., Leopold Adler II, President, and with the assistance of the Junior League of Savannah. All properties in the two square mile historic area were listed on index sheets, and selected buildings of architectural and historic value were photographed. The inventory was put to work immediately by the Foundation and others with great success. It served as a basis for establishing an active historic property rescue operation by the Foundation, later culminating in the dramatic Pulaski Square-West Jones Street Area Redevelopment Project.

The inventory came just in time. Fine buildings were being mined for the "Savannah Greys," whose price had risen astronomically. The Foundation resorted to buying fine houses from contractors who had acquired them for their brick, which often had greater value than the building itself. Historic buildings in Savannah were serving (as once did the Roman Forum) as the source of local building materials; the demand for "Savannah Greys" was becoming a serious hazard to the historic preservation movement.

Happily the whole situation has changed, thanks to the dynamic actions of Historic Savannah Foundation and the tireless efforts of numerous enlightened Savannah citizens. In the last four years, historic preservation has moved rapidly forward. The few great historic buildings are no longer islands. Factors Row is no longer derelict. The waterfront is being renovated. Whole wards, squares and all types of fine historic architecture are being repaired, renovated, restored and rehabilitated. The Washington and Warren Square areas have been dramatically rebuilt. Business organizations, at first slow to recognize the economic benefits of the movement, now back it with enthusiasm and recognize that restoration and rehabilitation is the strongest way to recreate true values in the central city area.

Finally, the publication of the inventory for everyone to see and use is now an accomplished fact.

The Living City

The preservation of Historic Savannah does not mean the freezing of the

city in a mould. The two square miles of the old city are not and should not be a museum of antiquities. Chapter IV shows the historically valuable buildings and their location. The ward plans show their scatter pattern. The removal of old buildings has caused gaps in scattered lots, usually creating parking areas. There have been some fillings, both good and bad, but a great potential exists for superior structures to be erected in the existing voids that will attractively complement the historic buildings.

The purpose behind the planning recommendations of 1962 was to make use of the inventory to establish guide lines for filling the building gaps throughout the old city with appropriate new structures. The right use of these properties and their design, or redesign where applicable, is vital to the entire historic preservation program as well as to the correct growth and revitalization of the central city. This problem is common to historic preservation anywhere. In using this book, therefore, we must look beyond the inventory to visualize the entire preservation, restoration and rebuilding task as a unit. The inventory is the first and most important step in this endeavor. In a few years, when this book is updated, it shall be able to clearly show the implementation of a total plan for central Savannah.

The Unburied Treasure

The dedication and devotion of the many men and women of Savannah who have made this book possible are worthy of the utmost praise. The renaissance of Historic Savannah which is now so splendidly in progress has required courage, hard work and faith in the city and its historic resources.

The basic purpose of this book is to reveal Savannah. To recognize the treasure and safeguard it from future loss is a constant battle with the forces of indifference, ignorance, and sometimes self-interest. The spirit of good will, the progressive thinking and action of citizens and public officials together now make the promises of preservation a reality. There can be no question that what Savannah now presents and will present to the world is a city of such special quality and distinction that it can be a source of pride, not only to the people of Savannah but to the nation as well.

Carl Feiss, F.A.I.A., A.I.P.
Savannah, Georgia

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HISTORIC SAVANNAH ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY

Figure 46: The Study Area



As the first step in acquiring information to systematically inventory all the architecturally significant buildings and places of Historic Savannah, a field study was begun under the direction of Professor Paul S. Dulaney of the University of Virginia during the summer of 1962. Originally, the area covered by this survey included that part of Savannah bounded by East and West Broad Streets, Gaston Street and the Savannah River. In the process of reviewing and updating the original survey, this area was expanded to include the west side of West Broad Street, Trustees's Gardens, and the south side of Gaston Street. A final revision to the study area was made in late 1966 to include the area south of Gaston Street, to Gwinnett Street. The study area now conforms to the area designated by the National Park Service of the United States Department of Interior as a Registered National Historic Landmark.

Inventory cards were prepared for use in the field, a copy of which appears on the following page. Approximately 1,800 cards were used in the original survey, with an additional 200 being prepared for the later additions to the study area. Of this total of 2,000 cards, 1,500 were provided with photographs of the buildings or site inventoried. The remaining 500 cards were concerned with buildings of no architectural importance. All of the buildings in the study area, with the exception of a number of minor accessory structures of no architectural or historic importance, are accounted for by the inventory cards. In some cases, it was found desirable to prepare two or more cards for a single piece of property where there were two or more buildings that warranted such coverage. In other cases, such as a parking lot in multiple ownership, several properties were combined on a single historic inventory card.

After completion of this initial field survey and the recording of the data on the inventory cards, each building or site was evaluated and rated. Based on the criteria developed in the *College Hill Study*,⁶ the following point values were assigned to each of the five items scored.

Historical Significance—30 percent of total score

- National 30
- State 20
- Community 15

A maximum of 30 points was allocated for a nationally significant building or site, with 20 points being credited to a building or site of statewide significance and 15 points for a building or site of community significance. The scoring of such buildings as the Wayne-Gordon House or the Green-Meldrim House is obvious. Such buildings as the earliest surviving churches of each denomination have social significance to the community, apart from their architectural quality, and are scored accordingly.

Architectural Significance—25 percent of total score

Three factors relating to the design of the building were taken into account; together these account for 48 percent of the total score. These factors are: 1) significance as an example of architectural style; 2) importance to the neighborhood; and 3) modifications of the original design which have been esthetically detrimental.

Significance as to an Example of Style—25 percent of total score

- Exceptional 25
- Excellent 20
- Good 15
- Fair 5
- Poor 0

Here the quality of the architecture is evaluated, apart from any

BUILDING DATA SHEET - HISTORIC SAVANNAH INVENTORY				Card No.	Color Code		
Street and Number		Ward	Lot				
Present Owner		Original Owner		Architect or Builder			
Original Use		Assessed Value		Assessors File No.			
		Land	Building	Total			
No. of Stories Basement 1 2 3 <input type="checkbox"/>		Present Use		Remarks			
Year Built		Material					
Altered <input type="checkbox"/>							
STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE							
Early Republic - <input type="checkbox"/> Victorian ----- <input type="checkbox"/> Greek Revival ----- <input type="checkbox"/> Not Classified ----- <input type="checkbox"/> ----- <input type="checkbox"/>							
Intrusion on the neighborhood: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>							
OTHER DOCUMENTATION:			EVALUATION				
			HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE				
			National ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
			State ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
			Community ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	
			ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AS AN EXAMPLE OF ITS STYLE				
			Exceptional ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
			Excellent ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
			Good ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
			Fair ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	
			Poor ----- <input type="checkbox"/>				
IMPORTANCE TO NEIGHBORHOOD							
Great ----- <input type="checkbox"/>							
Moderate ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>				
Minor ----- <input type="checkbox"/>							
DESECRATION OF ORIGINAL DESIGNS							
None or little ----- <input type="checkbox"/>							
Moderate amount ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>				
Considerable ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>				
PHYSICAL CONDITIONS							
Structures ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>		
Grounds ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Neighborhood ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Relation to green ----- <input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
					Total Score <input type="checkbox"/>		
Date		Surveyed by		Checked by			

Figure 47: Historic Savannah Inventory Card

associative values or historical importance. An outstanding example of a particular style of architecture was credited with 25 points, while a building of no importance as an example of style or design received no score in this category.

Importance to the Neighborhood—15 percent of total score

Great	15
Moderate	10
Minor	0

In addition to the architectural merit of an individual building or site, each building was evaluated as to its relationship to its environment. A building which may be rated as only fair in terms of its architectural style may, by virtue of its scale, material and place in the immediate area, receive up to an additional 15 points in this category.

Desecration of Original Design—8 percent of total score

None or little	8
Moderate amount	4
Considerable	0

Many of the buildings and sites in Historic Savannah have undergone some transformation in appearance; frequently this has been detrimental. The Davenport House is an example of an historic building which has survived with virtually no change in its external appearance. The McIntosh House, though attractively maintained, has in the past been altered from its original appearance to the extent that it no longer exemplifies its original style; it is thus penalized in the scoring to some extent. The former cathedral on Drayton Street had been substantially changed in the process of conversion to commercial use, and for this reason received no score under this heading. In other words, it is penalized 8 points. A structure is not scored at all under this heading if it is not

rated at least "good" in terms of architectural significance as an example of its style.

Physical Conditions—22 percent of total score

Structures	10-5-0
Grounds	4-2-0
Neighborhood	4-2-0
Relation to Green	4-2-0

The evaluation in this category embraces both the building and its environment. A maximum of 10 points is allotted to the structure itself, with the remainder of the score being divided between the appraisal of the grounds, the neighborhood, and the relation of the building to public open space, square or landscaped street. The structural evaluation is based solely on external evidence of building condition.

Rating the Scored Buildings

After each building and site was scored, it was placed in one of five broad categories. The categories, based on a total point score, are as follows:

Exceptional	70-100 points
Excellent	55-69 points
Good	40-54 points
Fair	20-39 points
Poor	0-19 points

It is important to note that in order for a building or site to be rated exceptional, it must have received at least 15 points in the Historic Significance category. The scores obtained in this evaluation represent the judgment of a single evaluator and are total scores reflecting a quantified measure of each building and site's overall significance and importance to Historic Savannah. This report, however, deals only with the architectural value of Savannah's buildings and sites, and as such is concerned with only the architectural criteria for evaluation. The ratings used in the following pages are the results of an evaluation of the archi-

tectural significance of each of the 2,000 buildings surveyed in Historic Savannah. This scoring of buildings and sites as to their architectural value was completed in December of 1966 by the Historic Savannah Foundation and its consultants, Carl Feiss, Professors Paul Dulaney and Frederick D. Nichols and Russell Wright.

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, all buildings originally rated as fair or good under Architectural Significance were combined and listed as Notable. The two higher categories, Exceptional and Excellent, remained unchanged. Of the 2,000 buildings and sites rated by this review committee, 111 buildings and sites were rated Exceptional, 122 Excellent, and 565 Notable. In addition, 211 buildings and sites were considered Worthy of Mention. The buildings and sites rated in the top three categories are shown on the accompanying map, Figure 48.

The following pages present the results of this architectural evaluation on a ward-by-ward basis. A brief history of each ward, together with a key map locating the ward in the study area, is followed by a map of the ward showing the architectural rating of each building. A photograph of every building rated "notable" or higher, keyed by number to the ward map, is then presented. Each photograph is captioned to include the address, name of the building if important, date of construction, and its architectural rating. If the builder or architect of the building is known, this information is also included.

The ward-by-ward presentation begins with Derby Ward and progresses, chronologically, to Bartow Davis and Stephens Wards, laid out in 1893, and finally to the area west of West Broad Street.