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## **Savannah's East Side Renaissance: What Began On the East Side Continues East of Bull**

*"On Savannah's east side, you get two places for the price of one -- the historic town, with its genteel, old-Savannah ambience and nostalgic stories, plus the vivacious, transforming city of creative entertainment and bespoke renewal," shares marketing executive Sandy Traub.*

SAVANNAH, Georgia (June 11, 2008) -- When General James Oglethorpe sailed up the Savannah River in 1733 he was a man with a vision -- a structured and specifically designed city to be built in the new colony of Georgia. America's first and most famous planned city was laid out in a grid of squares by Oglethorpe himself with the first four perched on the bluff overlooking the Savannah River. As the city grew, the grid of squares extended so that twenty-four squares were eventually created, stretching south from the river.

Today, the beautifully landscaped squares that serve as both park and memorial are regarded as Savannah's crown jewels. Considered to be one of the largest National Historic Landmark Districts in the United States, the city has maintained its original vision, with a historic and unique architectural downtown area that attracts millions of visitors. Passengers in horse-drawn carriages are awed by the majestic churches that surround the squares. Fine old homes that pre-date the revolutionary war are now open to the public as museums.

Nature lovers laze in the many green spaces and parks scattered throughout the downtown area. Shoppers find unique wares at little boutiques and specialty shops along East Oglethorpe Avenue. Art galleries, antique shops, and tea and coffee houses are tucked away on charming streets and lanes.

### **Downtown Savannah's Revival Began East of Bull**

Downtown Savannah wasn't always so sublime. After World War II, automobiles, television, and the city's population move south of the city to suburbia, all contributed to the decline of the downtown area. By the mid-1950s, historic Savannah had deteriorated into an unkempt and deplorable slum, with the lovely parks scraggly and unlandscaped. Many of the elegant old homes had become rooming houses. And Savannah officials fell for the national example in urban renewal -- tearing down blocks of historic homes and significant commercial buildings. According to Mrs. Anna Hunter, one of the founders of Historic Savannah Foundation, "The core of the city was rotting."



*The Presidents' Quarters*  
HISTORIC BED AND BREAKFAST INN  
ON OGLETHORPE SQUARE

Mrs. Hunter, along with six other determined, civic-minded women joined to preserve and restore Savannah. The Historic Savannah Foundation incorporated on July 6, 1955, then immediately set about to raise \$22,500 to purchase the Isaiah Davenport House overlooking Columbia Square. The endeavor was a success -- the funds were raised, the Davenport House was purchased and saved from demolition. In 1963, the fine Federal-style home opened as a museum. This first effort was the beginning of the historic renaissance in Savannah, a movement still in progress today.

### **Arrival of SCAD**

The foundation of the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in 1979 was a significant key to the revitalization of Savannah. Instead of constructing new classroom buildings, SCAD began renovating and adapting reuse of many notable downtown buildings. The college was also greatly instrumental in supporting **The Lucas Theater** for the Arts. The theater opened in December 1921 on the largest movie screen at that time in Savannah. Threatened with demolition in 1986, the building was purchased by a motivated group of Savannah citizens who pooled their resources and formed the nonprofit Lucas Theater for the Arts. Supported by donations from local citizens and celebrities such as "Midnight in the Garden of Good And Evil," director Clint Eastwood, actor Kevin Spacey and cast and crew of "Forrest Gump," the complete restoration took nearly thirteen years.

The Lucas Theater (32 Abercorn St., 912-525-5040) reopened in December 2000 with a screening of "Gone with the Wind," and in the following months hosted Broadway shows and famous musicians. The theater's future is now assured by the art college's support.

In 1989, SCAD also acquired the abandoned Weis theatre, just around the corner at 216 E. Broughton Street to serve as the college's performing arts department. The structure reopened as **Trustees Theater** (912-525-5040) in 1998, with a performance by singer Tony Bennett. Both theaters are an integral part of the annual **Savannah Film Festival**, which has screened Academy Award-nominated films and hosted actors including Michael Douglas, Tommy Lee Jones, Vanessa Redgrave, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Chris Cooper.

### **The Renaissance Continues East of Bull Street**

In 2004, media publisher Charles H. Morris acquired 6.3 acres of The Trustees' Garden, an area of Savannah set aside in 1733 as an experimental farm where peaches, rice, cotton, flax, hemp, indigo and mulberry trees, essential to the fashionable silk culture were grown. At one time, the town's largest structure was the filature where the cocoons were unwound into silk thread. Large-scale silk production failed, and eventually the garden closed in 1748. Overlooking the Savannah River, the property included historic buildings on the north and south end.



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ON OGLETHORPE SQUARE

In spring of 2008, **The Charles H. Morris Center** (10 East Broad Street, 912-443-3277) opened its doors as a versatile venue to be used as business meetings, trade shows, wedding receptions and many more. This is the first phase of the entire Trustees Garden nine-acre project, which involves the restoration and renovation of a historic 1881 building made of Savannah grey bricks. The Center provided an ideal location for many of the **Savannah Music Festival**'s springtime performances. The 2009 musical performances are scheduled for March 19 - April 4, 2009. (912-234-3378, [www.savannahmusicfestival.org](http://www.savannahmusicfestival.org)).

Nearby **Washington Square** bordered Trustees Garden in 1790. Named in honor of General George Washington, this area was more generally known as Eastern Common. Today, this beautiful square, with its moss-draped oaks and dazzling springtime flowers, is one of the city's most popular sites for outdoor weddings.

In 2007 and 2008, extensive restoration has taken place on the East Side at **The Presidents Quarters** Bed and Breakfast Inn. Known for its ideal location on Oglethorpe Square and overly spacious accommodations, the twin Federal-style townhomes were originally transformed for bed and breakfast lodging in 1987 to host Savannah's most discerning travelers. Renowned concierge services promise an informative and pleasant stay. The two mansions were constructed in 1855 for the estate of William Washington Gordon and George Wayne Anderson, men who championed railroad service in the south. During the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, a modest colonial-era home on the Trust Lot site was the personal residence to Georgia's first Royal Governor. (225 East President Street, 912-233-1600, Toll free 800-233-1776, [www.PresidentsQuarters.com](http://www.PresidentsQuarters.com)).

The annual **Savannah Tour of Homes and Gardens** offers guests an opportunity to sneak an intimate peek into the homes and gardens of select homes, during the city's fantastically beautiful springtime. Each day of the tour features a different neighborhood, approximately 6 sites that include both private homes and/or gardens. Tours are self-guided, and information on schedules, maps, and ticket purchases can be found at [www.savannahourofhomes.org](http://www.savannahourofhomes.org). The 74<sup>th</sup> annual tours are scheduled for March 26-29, 2009. (Tour office: 18 Abercorn Street, 912-234-8054).

**River Street** and the **Factors Walk** are easily considered to be Savannah's key spots for nightlife, music and dining. **Factors Walk**, once referred to as the "Wall Street of the South" during the days of King Cotton, is located along the river bluff on East Bay Street. This area was a 19th century meeting place and center of commerce for cotton merchants. The top floors contained offices for cotton brokers, and the lower warehouses on **River Street** contained the cotton that was shipped from Savannah to the world. Today, revitalized tourist and business areas house shops and restaurants, connected by bridge ways. Cobblestones used as ballast in ships from around the world now pave Savannah River bluff ramps and walkways.



## **Just For Fun Dining**

**Vic s on the River** - Located on the top floor of an antebellum cotton warehouse, Vic s offers a fantastic view of the Savannah River and bustling River Street. The quirky menu features selections like the pulled-pork eggroll, the fried green tomato sandwich with goat cheese, and wild Georgia shrimp over grits smothered in gravy. Union soldiers occupied this building during the Civil War, and hand-drawn strategic battle maps were uncovered during a restoration. (26 East Bay St. on Factors Walk, just east of City Hall. Additional entrance is at 15 East River St. Dinner reservations recommended -- 912-721-1000.)

Built in 1771, **The Olde Pink House** has functioned as a private home, a bank, and headquarters for a Civil War Union general s headquarters, and is now one of Savannah s most popular dining spots. Known for Low Country cuisine favorites like Georgia Shrimp, the restaurant is also home to Savannah s most frequently seen ghost, thought to be the ghost of Colonial general James Habersham, who lived in the home with his wife and three sons. Savannah has been called the Most Haunted City in America, so anything is possible. (23 Abercorn Street, 912-232-4286).

**Leopold s Ice Cream** is a favorite with the after-theater crowd. Savannah Hollywood producer, **Stratton Leopold** reopened the nostalgic ice cream parlor with his family s original, secret ice cream recipes, including the flavor that made them famous Tutti Frutti. Made with all natural ingredients, the surprising flavors include lavender, rose petal, along with standard vanilla and chocolate. Truly refreshing on a hot Savannah afternoon. (212 East Broughton Street, 912-234-4442)

## **New Eats**

**Local 11 Ten** - Open only a year, this minimally decorated eatery has quickly become a local s favorite. Housed in a repurposed bank building just off Forsyth Park, the restaurant s staff is passionate about Going Local, with a constantly changing menu that makes use of the area s freshest and finest ingredients available -- from Sapelo Island clams and soft-shell crabs caught off the Georgia coast to figs grown right down the street (1110 Bull Street, 912-790-9000).

**Harris Baking Company** - Sam Harris and his family have been in the Savannah food business for nearly 50 years. Today, the new Harris Baking Company, located at 102 East Liberty Street (Drayton side of Drayton Towers), is turning heads with old Harris family favorites, such as the Regency Salad and fresh soups, and the delectable aromas of freshly-baked bread including specialties -- Kalamata olive and multi-grain wheat. There are even gourmet dog cookies, made with all natural ingredients. (102 East Liberty Street with entrance on Drayton Street, 912-233-6400).



**Zunzi's Restaurant** is an interesting new addition to the Historic District. Located in a building that formerly housed a military hospital, the take-out eatery's menu includes South African sausage, Italian pastas, spicy curries and comfort food, all at amazingly affordable prices (108 East York Street, 912 443 9555).

### **Health Conscious**

**Cha Bella** Organic, fresh, and local could be the mantra chanted at this East Side diner. The menu offers salads, pastas, and other healthy fare, and the pretty outdoor patio area is a fine place to enjoy a meal (102 East Broad Street, 912-790-7888).

The hip and trendy **Firefly Café** offers pleasant outdoor sidewalk dining as well. The menu here has a vegetarian/vegan slant, with salads, pastas and fresh-squeezed juices. But if you believe you are eating lo-cal here, think again. Their brunch Belgian waffles and killer omelets are fun and filling. (321 Habersham Street, 912-234-1971).

Former Georges Chef Blake Elsinghorst and Andrea Mongelli quietly opened **Café on 37<sup>th</sup>** at the corner of 37th & Abercorn, a short drive from the historic district in the Thomas Square streetcar district. With off-street parking, the charming ambiance is perfect for dining with friends in a secret place just off the beaten path. The salads, artisan breads, Goat Cheese appetizers, Oyster Stew and Pork Confit sandwich are highly recommended. Call ahead for a gourmet take out or impromptu picnic in Forsyth Park (205 East 37th Street, 236-8533).

### **Tidbits of Forgotten Eras**

Sightseeing tour guides may point to forgotten nostalgic reminders East of Bull Street -- **Shoeless Joe Jackson's** residence on Abercorn Street near Oglethorpe Square, a **Sear catalogue home**, located on Habersham on Warren Square, and tales of the fashionable private **Oglethorpe Club (founded in 1870, the oldest gentleman's club in Georgia)**, which refused admission to George Ferguson Armstrong. In 1920 Armstrong simply built his magnificent home immediately west on Bull Street, later to become Armstrong Junior College (1935-1966).

The ongoing eastside transformation the sensitive blending of the old and the new places, people, stories and happenings gives yet more reasons that travelers continue to choose historic Savannah as a Deep South, must-visit metropolis worthy of visiting again and again.

### **ABOUT THE PRESIDENTS' QUARTERS**

The Presidents' Quarters is acclaimed as an influential place where generals, governors, politicians and business pioneers have shaped Savannah, Georgia and the nation's history. Freshly renovated in 2007/2008, the two stately Federal mansions (ca. 1855) feature sixteen one-of-a-kind guest quarters (each named to honor U.S. Presidents who visited Savannah),



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ON OGLETHORPE SQUARE

panoramic courtyard, free on-site parking, balconies and private entrances at street level. The top-tier bed and breakfast inn is magnificently situated on Oglethorpe Square, one of the 21 famed garden parks in the downtown historic district.

Praised for extraordinary service and marketed as "Luxury with a Lineage," the property is featured in [Fodor's](#) short list of [Savannah and Charleston's Best B&Bs & Inns](#) (2007), [Travel Girl](#) Magazine (2008), "Roots" movie location, and famous as a home where General Robert E. Lee visited overnight with his old West Point classmate. 225 East President Street on Oglethorpe Square, Savannah, Georgia 31401. Telephone 912 / 233-1600 or USA Toll Free 800 / 233-1776, FAX 912-238-0849. Email [info@presidentsquarters.com](mailto:info@presidentsquarters.com) and on the Web [www.presidentsquarters.com](http://www.presidentsquarters.com).