

Savannah Congress Coaster Set #5 – Savannah Architecture



Davenport House - The 1820 Federal-style dwelling was built by Isaiah Davenport for his growing household, which included his wife, ten children, and nine slaves. It was his family home until his death. In 1827, his wife, Sarah Clark Davenport, converted it into a boarding house. She lived in the residence until 1840, when she sold it to the Baynard family of South Carolina. The house remained in their hands for the next 109 years.

Even in an advanced state of neglect, New Deal surveyors recognized the architectural significance of the home when they identified and measured it for the Historic American Buildings Survey in the 1930s. Threatened with demolition in 1955, a group of community-spirited citizens joined forces to purchase the Davenport House. This was the first act of the Historic Savannah Foundation, which has gone on to save hundreds of buildings in the historic city. Davenport House became the office for Historic Savannah Foundation. The first floor was restored and opened to the public as a museum in 1963. The Davenport House Museum received the Preserve America Presidential Award and the Georgia Governor's Award in the Humanities.



Mercer - Williams House - Designed by John S. Norris for General Hugh Mercer (great-grandfather of the songwriter Johnny Mercer), construction of the house began in 1860. Construction was interrupted by the American Civil War, and finally completed around 1868 by the new owner, John R. Wilder. Nobody of the Mercer name ever lived in the house.

In 1969, 11-year-old Tommy Downs fell from the roof of the house and was killed after being impaled on the iron fence on the West Gordon Street (southern) side of the house. It is believed he was hunting pigeons. One of the two spiked prongs he landed on is still broken.

For a period in the twentieth century, the building was used as the Savannah Shriners Alee Temple. It then lay vacant for a decade until 1969, when Jim Williams, one of Savannah's earliest and most dedicated private restorationists, bought the house for \$55,000 and fully restored it. Williams died in 1990, and Dorothy Kingery put the house up for sale later that decade with a price tag of just under \$9,000,000. This was later reduced to about \$7,000,000. It takes up a city trust lot — the only building in Savannah in private ownership to do so.



Tybee Island - Tybee Island, barrier island lies 18 miles east of Savannah. The Euchee tribe likely inhabited the island in the years preceding the arrival of the first Spanish explorers. Tybee is the Euchee word for "salt". In 1520, Spain claimed Tybee Island and named it Los Bajos. It was at the northern end of the Guale missionary province of Spanish Florida. It was frequented by pirates to hide from pursuers and for a fresh water source. Warfare increased between the English and their pirate allies and the Spanish and their Native American allies.

It is one of the few locations where the U.S. Air Force dropped an atomic bomb—by accident (during a botched 1958 military training exercise). Though the "Tybee Bomb" did not detonate (and, according to some reports, was not armed with a fuse), there has been ongoing concern, since the Mark 15 nuclear bomb lost during the mishap was never found. Tybee Island is home to the first of what would eventually become the Days Inn chain of hotels.

Tybee Island's strategic position near the mouth of the Savannah River, it was ideal for a lighthouse. First built in 1736, the lighthouse was made of brick and wood, and stood 90 feet tall, making it the highest structure in America at that time. The original lighthouse has been replaced several times. Part of the third lighthouse at the site, built in 1773, still stands as the bottom 60 feet of the present lighthouse. During the Civil War, the Union Army placed siege batteries along the north coast of Tybee Island that aided in their successful bombardment and capture of Fort Pulaski. This was the first significant use of rifled cannons and demonstrated that masonry fortifications were obsolete.



First African Baptist Church - The current sanctuary is located in the historic area of Savannah at the corner of West Bryan and Montgomery streets, across from Franklin Square. It was built in the 1850s (completed in 1859) by both free African Americans and slaves. The builders made the bricks and built the church after the slaves had labored in the fields. The church was the first building constructed of brick to be owned by African Americans in the state of Georgia. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing property of the Savannah Historic District.

First African Baptist Church, located in Savannah, Georgia, claims to be derived from the first black Baptist congregation in North America. While it was not officially organized until 1788, it grew from members who founded a congregation in 1773. George Leile, a slave who in 1773 was the first African American licensed by the Baptists to preach in Georgia, played a part in the founding of the Savannah church by converting some of its early members. His initial licensing as a Baptist was to preach to slaves on plantations along the Savannah River, in Georgia and South Carolina.

Leile's master, a Baptist deacon, had freed him before the American Revolutionary War. Over the next few years, Leile converted and baptized slaves in the area. After the Revolutionary War started, Leile made his way to the British-occupied city of Savannah, to ensure his security behind British lines. In 1782 hundreds of blacks were evacuated from Savannah by the British. Leile and his family sailed with the British for Jamaica.

Andrew Bryan founded Bryan Street African Baptist Church, affectionately called the Mother Church of Black Baptists. Bryan, who had purchased his and his wife's freedom, was the only one of the three early black Baptist preachers in the colonies to stay in Savannah. He continued to preach and organize other slaves in the Savannah area despite persecution from local Episcopal authorities. He is known as the church's first pastor. Bryan led the First African Baptist Church at their regular meeting place of Brampton's barn, approximately three miles west of Savannah. In 1794 the congregation built a frame structure on land Bryan had purchased the year before. They called the church Bryan Street African Baptist Church. Bryan lived to see the church grow to over 400 members. His brother Sampson, who assisted him, remained a slave. In 1800 the congregation had grown to 700. By 1802, Bryan Street renamed itself First African Baptist Church.

By 1830 the congregation purchased a building to use on Franklin Square. They constructed a new sanctuary facility across from Franklin Square. It has since been continuously occupied by First African Baptist. The holes in the sanctuary flooring form a design meant to look like a tribal symbol. These were air holes for escaped slaves who would hide in the church, which served as a stop on the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, the church housed runaway slaves in a 4-foot space beneath the sanctuary floorboards. The 9-squared ceiling showed that the church was part of the Railroad. The upstairs balcony contains some of the original pews were made by the slaves. On the sides of the pews is Hebrew Cursive etched by the slaves who made the furniture. The stained-glass windows in the building date to 1885 and depict African-American subjects. The original bell tower of the church was destroyed by a hurricane in the early 20th century.



Telfair House - Telfair Museums, in the historic district of Savannah, Georgia, was the first public art museum in the Southern United States. Founded through the bequest of Mary Telfair, a prominent local citizen, and operated by the Georgia Historical Society until 1920, the museum opened in 1886 in the Telfair family's renovated Regency style mansion, known as the Telfair Academy. The Telfair Academy contains two nineteenth-century period rooms, housing nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and European art from the museum's permanent collection including paintings, works on paper, sculpture, and decorative arts.

The museum currently contains a collection of over 4,500 American and European paintings, sculptures, and works on paper, housed in three buildings: the 1818 Telfair Academy formerly the Telfair family home; the 1816 Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters, which are both National Historic Landmarks designed by British architect William Jay in the early nineteenth century; and the contemporary Jepson Center for the Arts.