Savannah History (Courtesy: Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce)

When General James Edward Oglethorpe and the 120 travelers of the good ship *Anne* landed on a bluff hight along the Savannah River in February 1733, Oglethorpe named the 13th and final American colony "Georgia" after England's King George II. Savannah become its first city.

Oglethorpe and his 19 associates received a charter from the King of England creating them "Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America." The plan was to aid the working poor in England and to strengthen the colonies by increasing trade. The colony of Georgia was also chartered to be a buffer zone for South Carolina, protecting it from the advance of the Spanish in Florida. Under the original charter, individuals were free to worship as they pleased, and rum, lawyers, and slavery were forbidden -- for a time.

Upon settling, Oglethorpe was aided by the native Yamacraw Indian Chief, Tomochichi. Oglethorpe and Tomochichi pledged their friendship and goodwill, and the Yamacraw chief granted the new arrivals permission to settle in Savannah on the bluff. The town flourished without warfare and hardship that stifled the beginnings of so many of America's early colonies.

Savannah is credited as being America's first planned city. Oglethorpe laid the city out in a series of grids that allowed for wide-open streets intertwined with shady public squares and parks that served as town meeting places and centers of business. Savannah had 24 original squares, with 21 still in existence.

During the American Revolution, the British took Savannah in 1778 and held it until July 1782. A land/sea force of French and Americans tried to retake the city in 1779, first by siege and then by direct assault, but failed.

The colony would see a generation of peace where Savannah flourished on the world scene as a cosmopolitan city. Soon, farmers discovered that Savannah's soil was rich, and the climate was favorable for the cultivation of cotton and rice. Plantations and slavery became a highly profitable system for whites in the neighboring Low Country of South Caroline. So, Georgia, the last free colony, legalized slavery. The trans-Atlantic slave trade would bring millions of Africans to the Americas, with many passing through the port of Savannah, forming the Gullah culture of the Atlantic coastal communities in Georgia and South Carolina.

Due to the economic renaissance brought on by the exportation of cotton, residents built lavish homes and churches throughout the city that reflected the affluence of the times. With the growth of trade, and especially after the invention of the cotton gin on a plantation outside of Savannah, the city became a rival of Charleston as a commercial port. Many of the world's cotton prices were set on the steps of the Savannah Cotton Exchange. The building still is in existence today.

In 1819, Savannah made worldwide news as the home port of the steamship, *SS Savannah*. The *Savannah* was the first steam-powered vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean. She left Savannah on May 22, 1819 and arrived in Liverpool, England 29 days later. Through a century of glory and growth, even Savannah was not spared form certain misfortunes. Two devastating fires in 1796 and 1820 each left half of the city in ashes, but residents rebuilt. 1820 also was the year of the yellow fever epidemic that eradicated a tenth of Savannah's population. Savannah survived fires, epidemics, and hurricanes, always bouncing back to glorious life afterwards.

Rich and prosperous, pre-Civil War Savannah was praised by many as the most picturesque and serene city in America, with grand oak trees dripping with Spanish moss and gentel people who exhibit exceptional charm. The Georgia Historical Society was founded in that era, and Forsyth Park got its grand, ornate, cast-iron fountain in 1858.

With the onslaught of the Civil War, the city suffered from sea trade blockages so strict that Savannah's economy was soon crumbled. Fort Pulaski, built to be impregnable on Cockspur Island at the mouth of the Savannah River, was captured by Federalist Soldiers in 1862. The city did not fall until Union General Sherman Tecumseh Sherman entered the city walls. In 1864, Sherman began his march to the sea, burning the city of Atlanta and everything else in his path on the way to the Coast. Savannah was evacuated and avoided destruction. Upon entering Savannah, Sherman was so taken aback by its beauty that on December 22, 1864, a legendary telegram was sent from Savannah and delivered to then President Abraham Lincoln, by which Sherman presented the city of Savannah to Lincoln as a Christmas present. With the arrival of Sherman's troops, the war was over for Savannah, and a period of reconstruction would begin.

Food was scarce and the economy was in ruins, making reconstruction a trying time for Savannah residents. Many of its men did not survive the war. After the war, many freed slaves remained in Savannah. Though living in deplorable conditions, and suffering through the hardships of the post-slavery era, Africans in Savannah founded their own churches, schools and communities. Savannah, Georgia's oldest black community, went on to become one of the most historically significant African-American cities in the nation.

After the war and reconstruction, the economy improved and cotton again was king. Savannah entered the new century reestablishing herself as the "Bell of Georgia". New industries were thriving, including the export of ships' stores like rosin and lumber. Unfortunately, after the First World War, the cotton industry dies, victim to the boll weevil that by the 1920s had destroyed half of Georgia's cotton. The county was cast into the Great Depression.

The post-war years brought about a new movement in Savannah in the realms of aesthetics, culture, and economy. A group of concerned women organized in the 1950s to preserve historic structures threatened by the wrecking ball of urban renewal. Te brave endeavor gave rise to the Historic Savannah Foundation who, since its inception, has saved multitudes of buildings whose beauty and appeal was the foundation of Savannah's charm. Savannah's Historic District was designated a national historic landmark in 1966 and remains one of the largest historic landmarks in the country. Many of Savannah's old buildings have survived and been restored, including the Pirate's House (1754), an old seaman's inn mentioned in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*; the Herb House (1734), the oldest existing building in Georgia; and the Pink House (1789), site of Georgia's first bank. The mansion birthplace of Juliette Gordon Lowe (built 1819-21) is owned and operated by the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. as a memorial to their founder. The Telfair Academy of Arts and Science opened as one of the South's first pubic museums. The many restored churches include the Lutheran Church of Ascension (dating from 1741); the Independent Presbyterian Church (1890s);the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (1876), one of the largest Roman Catholic churches in the South; the First African Baptist Church whose congregation dates back to 1788; and Temple Mickve Israel, the third oldest Synagogue in America.

As the Millennium turned, Savannah experienced resurgence in tourism. Annually, since the 1990s, more than 50 million people visit the city. Visitors revel in the elegant architecture, , ornate ironworks, fountains, and lush green squares. Savannah's natural beauty is rivaled only by the city's hospitable reputation, creating, one of the country's most popular vacation spots. Guests who visit Savannah are truly captivated by the city's charm, the richness of her heritage, and all the activities the city offers every day of the year.

