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The Lafayette Square & Neighborhood

Lafayette Square was created in 1837 and named for Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert de Motier, otherwise known as the Marquis de Lafayette, the Frenchman who served as Washington's Aide decamp during the American Revolution.

The square is bounded by Jones Street -- named for Major John Jones, who was killed in the Siege of Savannah; Charlton Street -- named for Thomas Usher Pulaski Charlton, a noted lawyer and jurist; Macon Street -- named for Nathaniel Macon, a revolutionary hero and U. S. Senator; Harris Street, named for Charles Harris, twice mayor of Savannah and son-in-law of General Lachlan McIntosh of the Continental Army.

Until 1846 the square was home to the Savannah City Jail, to which it was demolished to rebuild a larger jail in another area of Savannah to house the growing number of occupants.

It is here that the first electric street lighting in Savannah was tested and placed in 1883. That year there was only one other square [believed to be Madison Square] that received electric lighting. Electric lighting of the streets was at first only used on nights that there was not sufficient moon light to light the way. It is significant that Samuel Pugh Hamilton (whose family mansion was the first building in the city with electricity on the west side of Lafayette Square), was the President of the Brush Electric and Power Company at the time the square was fitted with electricity.

To honor the 250th birthday of Georgia a 3-tiered fountain was donated by the Colonial Dames of America and had it placed in Lafayette Square. Ground breaking ceremonies were held in November 1982. The cast iron fountain was designed to coordinate with the historic structures on the square.

The first residence to be built around the square was what is now known as the Andrew Low House (329 Abercorn), a home built in 1846 for a wealthy English cotton factor. Andrew Low and his first wife, Sarah Hunter Low, lived in the house for several years until tragedy struck the family. Years after Sarah and their son passed away, Andrew Low remarried Mary Couper Stiles and she gave birth to William Mackay Low. There the melded family lived for several years. In 1886, William (their only son) married Juliette Gordon. The newlyweds lived at the family home as well in England.

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Jane and Rob Sales, owners of The Hamilton-Turner Inn, commissioned the research for this summary in August and September 2004. Compiled by historical researcher Felicity Joy Beall -- (912) 228-4131

Architecturally Notable Park Mansion, Savannah Family-friendly historic hotel, Luxury Inn & Romantic Bed and Breakfast
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The Andrew Low house was visited by William Makepeace Thackeray⁽¹⁾(1853 and 1856) and General Robert Edward Lee on several occasions. (In 1870 was General Lee's longest stay at the house). Juliette Gordon Low kept #329 Abercorn Street as her home in the United States until her death in 1927. She and William were childless. The house was eventually sold to the Colonial Dames in 1929 (or 1930) to which it was transformed into the Colonial Kitchens [restaurant] and museum. In 1934 the kitchen was closed and in 1954 the entire house was opened as the museum it is today. The Low House is a nationally significant example of the Greek revival in the Victorian era.

North of the Low House was the home of Octavus Cohen. His wife, Henrietta, lived there until her death. For several years the house stood vacant until the Southern Bell Telephone Company took possession of the house and demolished it. In 1928, the present building was built and used as the Southern Bell telephone center until the phone company out grew the building. In 1985, the Lafayette Condominiums became the home of 321 Abercorn.

On the North East of the Lafayette Square is the impressive Cathedral of St. John the Baptist which is nestled next to what is now St. Vincent's Academy. St. Vincent's started out as the convent for the Sisters of Mercy in 1845. Soon after their arrival from Charleston the sisters started a boarding school for girls and day school for boys. The convent became a mother house able to train novices in 1849. The die hard school stayed open during the many yellow fever epidemics and the Civil War, where many Georgia families sent their daughters for safe keeping during that troubled time. It is through the efforts of the Sisters of Mercy that the Cathedral was built at 314-318 Abercorn Street.

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist immediately to the south of St. Vincent's Academy is one of the many impressive churches found in Savannah to day. The Cathedral was started in 1873, dedicated in 1876 and completed in 1896. Sunday night on February 6, 1898, the cathedral was nearly destroyed by fire. Only the spires and four walls withstood the fire. It is still unknown as to how the fire started that night. The Savannah Catholics threw themselves into the rebuilding of the Cathedral within the framework of the original walls. October 28, 1900, the Cathedral was finished and rededicated to the worship of the Lord. In 1912 the Cathedral was redecorated. In 1920 the debt on the Cathedral was paid in full and the building was consecrated. In 1984-85 repairs were done on the Cathedral to make it safer, and in 1996 major repairs were made on the entire building and the project was finished in November 2000, in time for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the rededication of the Cathedral. The Cathedral is a wonderful example of the French Gothic Style.

South of Georgia's oldest Roman Catholic Church [the Cathedral] was the home of William Urquhart Garrard, a decorated Civil War hero for gallantry. He was one of Savannah prominent lawyers who served as city attorney for many years. William

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Garrard served as Lieutenant Colonel in the Spanish-American War in charge of the 2nd regiment Georgia Volunteers. He died in 1918 and his wife Frances continued to live at their home at 324 Abercorn until her death in 1925. The Garrard home was purchased by the Cathedral soon after Mrs. Garrard's death and was turned in the St. Vincent's grammar school. #324 continued to be a part of St. Vincent campus until in 1940 it was disbanded as a school and made into the Catholic Young People's Association. The house was demolished and a new building was built in its place which was used as Cathedral Day School, later renamed Notre Dame Academy, for a short time. Now the building is used occasionally for meetings.

On the East edge of Lafayette square [South of 324 Abercorn Street above] is 330 Abercorn Street, other wise known as the Hamilton-Turner Inn.

South of the Hamilton-Turner Inn is the house where Flannery O'Connor was born. Miss O'Connor is an author known best for her short stories. She lived at 207 East Charlton Street with her parents Edward & Regina O'Connor until she was 12, at which time her family moved to Milledgeville. It was at the O'Connor house that the national newscast filed her at age 6 teaching her pet chicken to walk backwards. Today the house is a museum where readings of her work are presented regularly. The O'Connor house is a wonderful example of the Greek Revival Townhouse.

On the South edge of Lafayette Square, [West of the O'Connor house] is the Battersby-Hartridge house, a fine example of Charleston architecture, built in the manner of the mid-19th Century. Today the brick mansion, now called "Marist Place," serves as offices to prominent father and son attorneys, Joseph B. Bergen and his son, Frederick S. Bergen.

Notes:

(1) William Makepeace Thackeray, born in Calcutta (1811-1863), was an English novelist of the 19th century. He was famous for his satirical works, particularly *Vanity Fair*, a satire of middle class English society.

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