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**The High Society Mansion at #330 Abercorn Street
(originally numbered #86 Abercorn Street)**

Lafayette Place, The Latter-day Tara, the Hamilton House, the Turner House, The Hamilton-Turner House or the Hamilton-Turner Inn. No matter how it is known or remembered, this beautiful Victorian Lady was the talk of Savannah.

When she was built she was an impressive site to behold. The house was one of the first to have a basement that was used for more than storage. In 1872 several articles were written about the building of the house and its impressive workmanship and size. The arts and skills of local and imported craftsmen went into the basement three storied showplace. She was being built during a time that Savannah was rising from her knees from the devastating effect of four years of war.

Sarah V. Hamilton made her home a salon for local and regional society activities for three decades until the death of her husband, Samuel P. Hamilton. It was only then that the lights were doused and the fabulous house was boarded up. Hamilton House enjoyed an illustrious reputation as a showplace and social-culture Mecca. It was alive with music, lights, and laughter; and, aglow with old names and new personalities. Representatives of the Savannah Four Hundred, as well as royalty from abroad, mingled with the celebrities of their day here. Cotillions, christenings, debuts, balls, receptions, dinners, weddings, high teas, costume parties and anniversary celebrations were hosted at the Hamilton House with the accomplished Mrs. Hamilton seeing to her guests.

Mr. & Mrs. Hamilton used their house as a display case for the finest objects d'art obtainable from craftsmen in Savannah and abroad. The house never remained the same year after year. It was always changing both inside and out. When stuccoing became the fashion, Mr. Hamilton ordered the Savannah Gray brick covered. In 1883, Mr. Hamilton had electricity installed in the solon to which many people feared the house would explode. Yet still, they – both invited guest and curious commoner -- came from near and far to see the light turned on. By 1886 the whole house had electric lights; this was done to encourage the use of the skeptically received invention.

The Hamilton family was served by a head cook, assistant cook, butler, 3 housemaids, a gentleman's gentleman, a ladies maid, and a nanny, a tutor for the children, a gardener, and liveryman. This was considered a skeleton staff to keep the house well ordered and run. More people were employed during the height of the social season. While the family and guest enjoyed the yards and garden, the servants were permitted

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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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Hamilton-Turner Inn

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Page 2 of 3

the luxury of the roof where they could enjoy the sites of the growing city and fashionable society activates. The fleur-de-lis wrought iron railing kept the venturesome form falling off the roof.

The house was spared in the fire of 1898 due to the fact it had a tin roof as did the rest of the houses on Lafayette Square. Even though the hot embers covered Abercorn Street the roofs of Lafayette square withstood the heat.

When Samuel Pugh Hamilton died the wrought iron balconies (which were added after the house was built) and the porticos were draped with black crepe. Soon after Mr. Hamilton passed, Sarah V. Hamilton had the house closed and boarded up. She followed her husband to the grave 21 years later after suffering years of illness in the Oglethorpe Sanitarium.

Dr. Francis Muir Turner, a local osteopath, bought the 42-year-old house from the Hamilton estate. Dr. Turner and his family lived in the house for a short time and then opened it up as a boarding house for 5 years. They boarded one to four people, or couples. The Turners discontinued their boarding business in 1926 and 1927, but in 1928 they turned their house over to the Marine Hospital to use as a nurses' house.

The Turner House was at the time placed under the management of John T. and Mary B. Curtis. The house-turned-nurses' home continued to function so until 1940. The Turner family returned to its home and Dr. Turner moved his office from 52nd street to the basement of the house where he practiced until his death in 1961. Ole Doc Turner was well known by his neighbors for his electric car which he kept in running order well into World War II. He could not abide the noise and smell of the gas cars.

Mrs. Turner sold the house just before her death in 1965 to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The Cathedral had plans to demolish the house and put in its place a playground for the students of their nearby schools. When news of these plans was published, the neighborhood and the Savannah Historic Foundation started negotiations to save the house. Representatives of the Cathedral offered the house to the Savannah Historic Foundation free of charge only if they would move the house from its present lot to another location. After months of engineering inspections it was deemed impossible both in financial ability and an engineering standpoint. After years of negotiations, the Cathedral agreed to sell the house to the Savannah Historic Foundation after they (Savannah Historic Foundation) found another place for the playground.

In March of 1972, the Hamilton -Turner house was under new ownership and getting a facelift from her new owner, Gilbert DiLucia. He planned to remodel her interior into four apartments, but those plans never came to fruition. She stood empty until 1980 when

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The High Society Mansion-#330 Abercorn Street (orig. #86 Abercorn Street)


Page 3 of 3

she was opened as an 8-unit apartment house. Ruben Lee Harper purchased the house in 1987. Where the house continued to be an apartment building until 1997.

Ruben Lee Harper, otherwise known as "Buzz," was the cousin to Joe Odom, who managed the apartments. The 117-year-old Hamilton-Turner House becomes the center of controversy due to Joe Odom's management. The controversy involves outrages parties, party goers camping in the yards and in Lafayette Square, and the selling of liquor without a permit. The neighbors are up in arms with all the problems left with the campers and parties at all hours of the night. Their biggest complaint is the traffic congestion and drunken behavior of the people leaving the house. After several appearances in the council chambers of the City of Savannah over the problems of the selling of liquor and complaints of continued parties, Ruben decides the problems with the house are not in his best interests to continue to own the house.

In 1991, Ruben sold the house to Dr. Charles Hillis and Nancy Hillis. For a short time the house falls into quiet coexistence with its neighbors as an apartment building. Then, once again, the Hamilton-Turner House is plunged into controversy. John Berendt's book "Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil" is published. By this time, Dr Hillis and his wife, Nancy, are separated and seeking divorce. Nancy continues to live at the house and she tries to capitalize on the book by converting the basement into a museum and a souvenir shop dedicated to "the book." Mrs. Hillis is sued by the publisher for non-payment of supplies. In 1996, the basement and first floor were damaged by fire. Her attempts to have the first floor turned into a café are contested by the people of Lafayette Square and Ward. The problems from her for-profit tours included too much traffic in the streets and sidewalks. No parking for the residents of Lafayette Square became their loudest war cry against the 50 seat café idea. In 1996, Nancy bought the house from her ex-husband as part of the divorce agreement.

The 124-year-old grand dame is given a new lease on life when the Strickland's buy the house from Nancy Hillis in 1997. Their plans to turn the Hamilton-Turner House into a bed & breakfast are met with enthused support from the neighborhood. The problems on parking and traffic are addressed and worked out by the City and neighbors. By contract, Nancy Hillis continued to live on the basement level as manager of the inn. However, after five years in the bed & breakfast business, the Strickland decide they wish to return to their old 9-to-5 jobs and sell the Hamilton-Turner Inn to Rob & Jane Sales in February 2003.

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