

Hancock County

Hancock County was founded in 1793 by Revolutionary War Veterans. They named Sparta for its Greek culture counterparts of hardy and self-governing individuals. The rolling hills, forests rich in game, and gentle rivers attracted rugged men with a bent for farming. In a setting still occupied by the Creek Nation, they shouldered their way in to create a cultured and educated society. The county became known for its schools at Mt. Zion and in Sparta, the county seat of government. The Methodist Church so prominent in Georgia held its first Conference at the plantation home of John Lucas, named Old Dominion for its owner's Virginia roots. A meeting house was quickly established in 1805 and the town grew. The next few decades produced statesmen, educators, ministers, and planters who shaped state politics for generations. Lafayette visited Sparta in 1825 on his tour of the US. The Planters Club held agricultural fairs and its innovations changed the way crops were planted and fertilized in America, and the county was the wealthiest in the state in cotton production by 1850. In 1860 the descendants of the Revolutionary War veterans marched off to a different war. The county was spared the worst of Sherman's March in 1864, but some plantations sustained crop destruction and vandalism. After the war, many citizens left due to the destruction of the Southern economy. Others stayed and rebuilt, with a determination to be in charge of their fate.

Their descendants continued the patriotism into the 20th century world wars, Korea and Vietnam. Cotton eventually made a comeback with the railroad coming through in the 1870s, and by mid-century the economy was booming. As surrounding county seats grew, Sparta's remoteness led to a decline in jobs and development. Cotton gave way to pulpwood and pine forests. The rural county attracted people for its natural beauty and hunting. But its history is still all around the visitor, reflected in its architecture. Many fine examples of Greek Revival, Plantation Plain, Carpenter Gothic and various Victorian era styles attract tours of those who love historic homes, and a slower atmosphere. Come and discover stories of those who lived here in the past, and left their mark.

This brochure is an abbreviated walking tour of the Sparta National Register Historic District. The District is much larger than the streets featured here. Sparta has many significant homes on all its streets. We encourage you to explore on your own!

For Information on Sparta and Hancock County, Contact:

The Sparta-Hancock Historical Society
historicsparta.org

Sparta Hancock Chamber of Commerce
spartahancockchamber.com

How to Use this Brochure:

Respect personal property by staying on sidewalk. Mind that sidewalks are uneven and watch your footing. Highways are busy and dangerous. Keep to crosswalks when crossing. Enjoy using this tour as a healthy alternative for exercise. Red Trail is .6 miles. Green Trail is 1.1 miles.

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Original Art by Karen West

SPARTA Historic District Walking Tour



TOUR 1 OPTION

HANCOCK COUNTY COURTHOUSE.

1883. The current courthouse is a masterpiece of Victorian architecture, sited on the hill where the town was laid out.

The cornerstone was laid on the 150th anniversary of Washington's birthday in 1882, and completed in 1883 from funds loaned by planter David Dickson. Dickson left his estate to his mulatto daughter Amanda America Dickson. His white relatives contested the will. The trial was held in the courthouse, where the will was decided in Amanda's favor. This courthouse was destroyed by fire in 2015, but reconstructed around the original walls.



2. 12557 Broad Street. THE REESE HOUSE.

c. 1855. Now Hitchcock Law Office, the cottage was built by planter John Treadwell, who owned a plantation in the county. His daughters lived here while they attended the Female Model School on Maiden Lane.



3. 12560 Broad Street. SAYRE-TURNER-SHIVERS HOUSE.

1829. Built by Robert Sayre of New Jersey. His brother Nathan built Pomegranate Hall (now destroyed). Sayre collected materials from around the world to build his home. The drawing room mantle is reputedly made of marble from the Aegean Island of Paros. Doors and handrails are mahogany. Sayre sold the house to Thomas M. Turner. Forest Shivers, author of *The Land Between*, a history of Hancock County, was the last family member to live in the house. He was born there in 1918.



4. 12533 Broad Street. MANSFIELD HOUSE.

c. 1826. Plantation Plain. Built by Judge Hugh Taylor who served on the welcoming committee for



Lafayette's visit. Owned by Eli Mansfield whose niece visited from Connecticut in the 1830's. She wrote descriptive letters home about life in Sparta.

5. 12530 Broad Street. BIRD-CAMPBELL HOUSE.

c. 1830. Built by Wilson Bird, whose uncle helped draft the U.S. Constitution and was appointed to the Supreme Court by George Washington. Lovick Pierce, only son of Methodist Bishop Pierce, bought the property in 1870.



6. 12471 Broad Street. ROSSITER-LITTLE HOUSE.

c. 1790. Built by Dr. Timothy Rossiter. One of the oldest Sparta houses, it was built when the town was merely a frontier trading post, sited specifically with a defensive position against Indian attacks.



7. 545 Adams Street. LAFAYETTE POWELL HOUSE.

c. 1818. Built by Andrew Baxter. It is named for owner Lafayette Powell who came from Virginia with his family. He became a merchant and planter, served in the Civil War, and was mayor of Sparta. His brothers were prominent in the field of education, Dr. Thomas Spencer Powell founding the Southern Medical College (predecessor of Emory), and founding editor of the *Southern Medical Record* in 1854 while living in Sparta.



8. 101 Maiden Lane. DENNIS RYAN HOUSE.

c. 1804 by newspaper editor Dennis Ryan. He wrote a news article on Aaron Burr in 1807 when Burr came through the area under guard after killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Ryan moved to Milledgeville to cover political news more thoroughly from the capital.



9. 148 Maiden Lane.

HAYNES-WILEY-HUTCHINGS HOUSE.

c. 1820. Built by Charles Haynes, who served three terms in Congress as a Democrat and later two terms as a Unionist during Andrew Jackson's presidency. He hosted the ball for the Marquis de Lafayette in 1825 at the Eagle Tavern. The home was later bought by Dr. E.H. Hutchings, a town physician.



10. 161 Maiden Lane. BERRY HOUSE.

c. 1818. One of the oldest structures in Sparta, the house would feel at home in Williamsburg, Va. Richard Malcolm Johnston was a teacher at Mt. Zion Academy and lived here several years. He sold the property to James Berry in 1852 for \$2400, including the three and a half acre lot. Original stenciling and a planked ceiling are among its features.



11. 180 Maiden Lane. ALSTON-WILEY-BAXTER HOUSE.

c. 1820 by North Carolina native Colonel Robert West Alston. Three sons died violently, two in duels. In 1830 James Burnet of New Jersey bought the house and served as a Trustee for the Female Model School. His son served in the Confederate Army. The home was sold to Richard Bolling Baxter of Athens, whose sister Sally Baxter Bird lived at Granite Farm, a plantation in the county. Baxter changed the front of the house by adding the bay window where the front door had been, thus changing the entrance to Maiden Lane.



12. 240 Maiden Lane. SPARTA FEMALE ACADEMY-MIDDLEBROOKS HOUSE.

c. 1830. The Sparta Female Model School was built in 1831, and consisted of four buildings – one imposing building with a



clock tower. Three dormitories stood in a row, one of which was this house. The school was founded by Sereno Taylor, a Baptist minister from Vermont, who invested \$40,000 in the school. Ahead of its time in teaching young women, the school taught science, mathematics and chemistry. It had a library of 800 books and 20 pianos for the musical education of its pupils. Benjamin T. Harris bought the house when the school moved and became Wesleyan College. Harris served on Gov. Joseph E. Brown's staff during the Civil War. Elijah Andrews, a young woman traveling in 1865, found refuge here during her journey across the path of Sherman's Army. She wrote a book about her experiences, *The Wartime Journal of a Georgia Girl*. The Middlebrooks family were later owners, relatives of Methodist Bishop George Foster Pierce.

13. 297 Maiden Lane. ABERCROMBIE HOUSE.

c. 1795. Home of Sparta founder and Revolutionary War Gen. Charles Abercrombie who laid out the town in 1795. The militia drill field lay across the road, later being the site of the Female Academy. The grave of Abercrombie lies about a mile from the home on land that was his plantation.



14. CATHOLIC CEMETERY.

Corner Hancock and Court Streets. In 1869, Linton Stephens, brother of Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens, built a small Catholic Church for his wife Mary Salter. It sat on this site.



15. Court and Adams Sts. OLD JAIL

1906. Built of local Hancock County granite, it was originally a larger complex with outbuildings.



RETURN TO COURTHOUSE. END TOUR 1 OPTION.

TOUR 2 OPTION

Begin at War Memorial Square in front of Courthouse

16. WAR MEMORIAL SQUARE. Originally known as Confederate Square, the obelisk monument to the Confederate Dead of Hancock County was purchased and dedicated in 1882 by the Ladies Memorial Association of Hancock County. The plot was graded and prepared for the monument by Col. J.W. Nicholls, a Union officer who bought Glen Mary plantation during Union occupation. Four additional monuments were added to commemorate the service of citizens killed in 20th century wars. The square was re-dedicated as War Memorial Square to honor all veterans who died in service from Hancock County.

17. 12664 Broad Street. LAFAYETTE HOTEL.

1840. The current structure was built on the site of the Eagle Tavern where Gen. Lafayette was entertained at a ball in 1825. The Eagle Tavern burned in 1840 and the Edwards House was built. In 1896 the name was changed to the Drummers' Home because it served traveling salesmen. It was restored in 1994 and opened as a retirement home for elderly residents.



18. 12706 Broad Street. WATKINS-FRALEY BUILDING (MASONIC LODGE).

1840. Built by George W. Watkins, who chartered the Hancock Steamboat Company in 1850 and built the massive Montour Mill (now demolished). This building has served as a bank, post-office, telephone exchange, dentist office, funeral home and Masonic Lodge.



19. 12798 Broad Street. OLD ROCK SHOP.

The original structure on this site (demolished 1927) was the stagecoach stop in Sparta, where Lafayette arrived in 1825. In 1921 it was described by Harlem Renaissance leader Jean Toomer (1894-1967) as "filled with old wheels and parts of wheels, broken shafts, and wooden litter. A double door midway the street wall [with] a



widow and...a rickety smoke-blackened chimney, and hearth." Toomer immortalized the Old Rock Shop and Sparta in his 1923 novel *Cane*.

20. 14 Boland Street. HARRY BINION HOUSE.

Date unknown. Typical of the plain but commodious homes of Sparta, this 19th century building served as a Confederate Hospital and the home of Sparta's mayor in the 1930s.



21. SPARTA CITY CEMETERY.

Est. c. 1800. Oldest grave is 1802. See State Highway Marker.



22. 22 Elm Street. LANE-WALKER HOUSE.

19th Century home of "Aunt Julia" Dickson, mistress of David Dickson and mother of Amanda America Dickson. The house was moved to this location in 1856 by Andrew Jackson Lane when he built a much larger and impressive house at Granite Hill (now Vulcan Quarry). Previous to that the site was the town "gallows hill."



23. 15 Elm Street. HARLEY-HARRIS-RIVES HOUSE.

1845. Baptist Minister William Isaiah Harley built the house as a wedding gift for his bride, Mary Battle. Moses Harris acquired the house in 1896. It became a center of hospitality for Moses and his family of 9 children. It had a paneled billiard room. George and Sarah Rives bought the home in 1947. Now owned by Robert Curry.



24. 123 Elm Street. MOORE-LEWIS HOUSE.

c. 1820-1840. The house has an older section dating to perhaps 1820. In 1840 it was turned into a four-square with a center hall. Italianate trim around the eaves indicate this was added when the style became popular in the 1850s. It was the home of Sparta Mayor Robert H. Lewis, who also served in the state legislature. His tenure as mayor extended the town limits and built a new school in 1895. He and his brother Sidney co-edited the *Sparta Ishmaelite* newspaper.



25. 107 Adams Street. POMEGRANATE HALL.

(Destroyed by fire in 2005).The stately columned home was built in 1839 by Judge Nathan Sayre. Its walls were two feet thick and the main floor (second story) had an elaborate entrance hall with two reception rooms to the right. Judge Sayre had one of the finest libraries in the state. His brother William and orphans Ella Ann and Louisa Holsey also lived here. The house was a topic in Adele Alexander's book *Ambiguous Lives*. Mrs. Oliver Macy, widow of the founder of Macy's Department Store in New York purchased it in 1963.



26. 22 Myrtle Street. THOMAS COBB MOORE HOUSE.

Date unknown. Originally a log structure on the Pomegranate Hall property, it was rolled on logs to its current location. Owned by Thomas Moore, the business manager for the *Ishmaelite* newspaper in 1893.



27. 164 Boland Street. HATTAWAY HOUSE.

c. 1880. Built in Second Empire style with the iconic mansard roof so popular at the time.



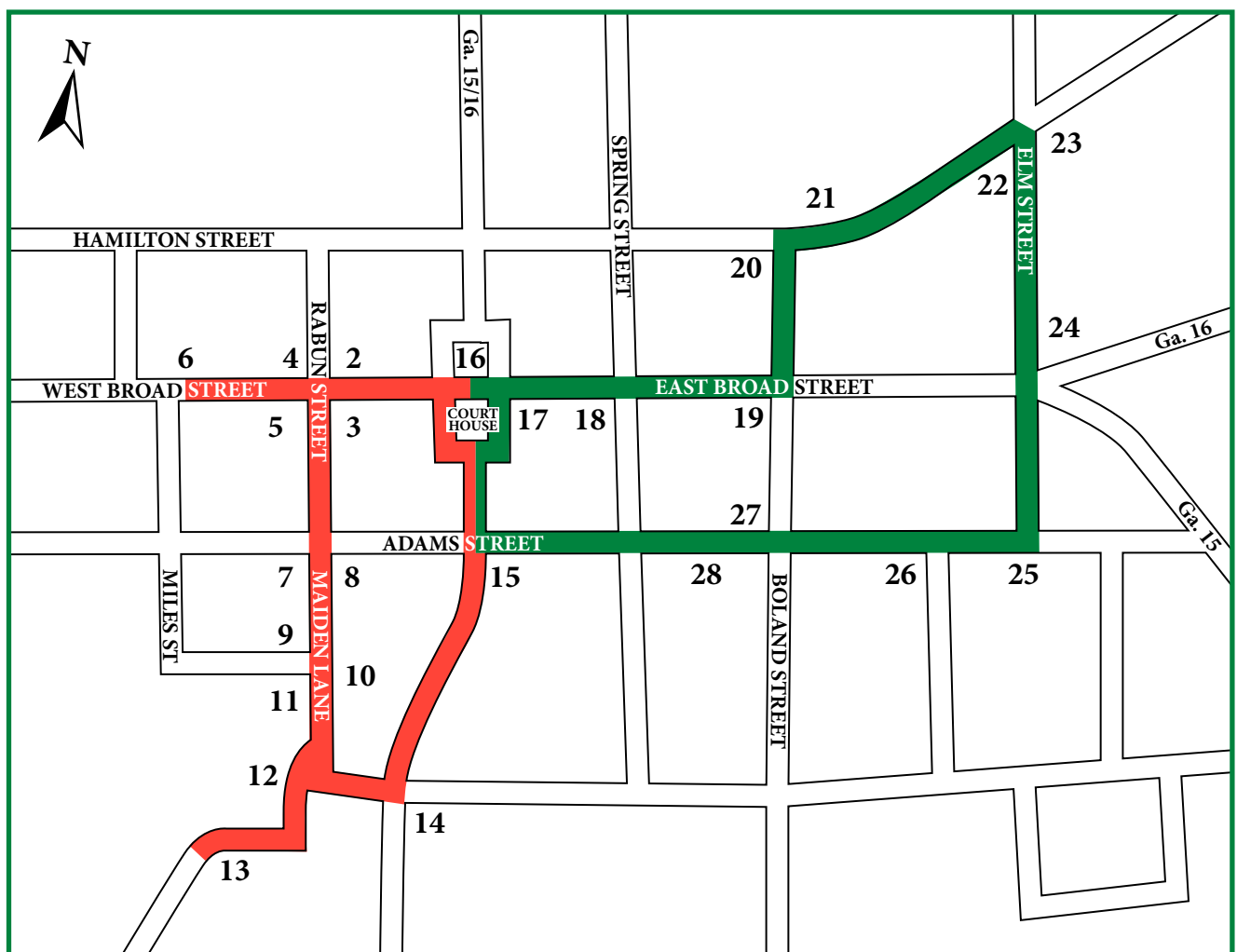
28. 305 Adams Street. GRAVES BARN AND PENDLETON GRAVES HOUSE.

An excellent example of an urban 19th century residence, the house and barn are all that remain of an original 1820s complex. Thomas Whaley built the house around 1820, and in 1853 Dr. Edmund Pendleton bought the house and added to it to accommodate his 11 children. Pendleton was one of the first to use cottonseed in the production of fertilizer, founding a company in 1867. He supported the Liberian establishment as a home for freed Africans. R.A. Graves added the Victorian embellishments and established the first commercial bank in Sparta, which opened in 1887. That building still stands on Broad St. They owned the house and barn for more than 100 years until its sale in 1983.



RETURN TO COURTHOUSE. END TOUR 2 OPTION.

SPARTA, GEORGIA



695 ft
Red Trail 0.6 miles • Green Trail 1.1 miles
Both Trails begin and end in front of the Courthouse