

The Squares of Savannah

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City of Savannah

The Original Six Squares

Upon establishing the settlement of Savannah in 1733, General James Oglethorpe laid out a unique town plan utilizing a grid system composed of building blocks called wards. Each ward included a central square surrounded by four tythings divided into 10 building lots for residences, and four trust lots reserved for the town's public buildings. The central squares have always been public spaces, but they have fulfilled a variety of functions over time, evolving into the lush urban forest Savannah is known for today.

1. **Johnson Square** was Savannah's first square, laid out in 1733 by General Oglethorpe, and named for South Carolina Governor Robert Johnson, who provided aid to the colonists. The cornerstone for the fifty-foot obelisk honoring Revolutionary War hero Nathanael Greene was laid in 1825 by the Marquis de Lafayette.
2. **Wright Square** was selected by Oglethorpe as the final resting place for Tomochichi, chief of the local Yamacraw tribe, as a sign of his importance to Savannah. Today a monument of Georgia granite in the southeast corner honors this important leader in Savannah's history, as does the Tomochichi Federal Courthouse overlooking what is also called "courthouse square."
3. **Ellis Square** was home to a series of public markets until 1954 when the last City Market building was demolished for a parking garage, helping to spark Savannah's world-famous historic preservation movement. Ellis Square has since been rehabilitated into a new outdoor public space, serving as an anchor for the surrounding City Market district
4. **Telfair Square** was renamed from St. James Square in 1883 to honor the Telfair family, which included Georgia Governor Edward Telfair. Through a bequest of his daughter Mary Telfair, the family home became the first public museum in Georgia, and the Telfair Academy footprint on Telfair Square expanded in 2006 with the addition of the Jepson Center for the Arts.
5. **Reynolds Square** is named for Georgia's first Royal Governor, John Reynolds, and is home to one of Savannah's few remaining 18th century buildings, the Olde Pink House built in 1789. At the center of Reynolds Square stands a bronze monument to Reverend John Wesley who served as rector of Christ Church in the 1730s before founding the Methodist Church.
6. **Oglethorpe Square** was the last of the original six squares laid out by General Oglethorpe before he returned to England, and in 1787 the square was renamed from Upper New Square in his honor. Overlooking Oglethorpe Square is perhaps the finest example of English Regency architecture in the United States, the Owens-Thomas House designed by English architect William Jay in 1819.

The Neighborhood Squares

As Savannah's population grew, additional wards were added to the town plan, expanding Savannah's unique grid. Each ward was in essence a little neighborhood unto themselves, with a central square that served as a neighborhood gathering spot or park. These neighborhood squares are peaceful, public gardens of Savannah.

1. **Warren Square** was laid out in 1791 and is named for General Joseph Warren, a Revolutionary War hero killed in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Warren Square and Warren Ward are just across East Broad Street from Trustees Garden, originally developed as an experimental garden during the early days of the Georgia colony.
2. **Washington Square** is named for President George Washington who visited Savannah on his southern tour in 1791. A small brick monument in the square honors the Washington Fire

Company, one of several volunteer fire organizations that fought Savannah's fires before the creation of the City's official fire department.

3. **Columbia Square** is named for the feminine personification of the United States. The Davenport House, overlooking the square, was the catalyst for the formation of the Historic Savannah Foundation in 1955 and was an early turning point in the restoration of Savannah's National Landmark Historic District, designated in 1966.
4. **Greene Square** was historically an important center for Savannah's African American community, anchored by the Second African Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr. reportedly previewed parts of his "I have a dream" sermon in 1963. One of the most notable homes fronting the square is Savannah's smallest free-standing house in the historic district, a cottage of just over 500 square feet.
5. **Crawford Square** represents the changing uses of squares over time as the needs of Savannah's population changed. It is the only square still used for active recreation, with a basketball court dating back to the 1940s, and a bronze plaque marks the location of the brick cistern, which all squares once had for firefighting.
6. **Orleans Square** was laid out and named in 1815 and commemorates the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. The fountain in the center of the square, commemorating German immigrants to the colony of Georgia, was placed in 1989.
7. **Pulaski Square** is named for Revolutionary War hero Casimir Pulaski who died of wounds received during the 1779 Siege of Savannah. In 1914, the Jewish community built Savannah's original Jewish Educational Alliance on one of the trust lots facing the square to serve as a multi-purpose community center.
8. **Lafayette Square** is named for Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette and is graced by the 1876 Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and a fountain commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of Georgia. Noted American novelist and short story writer Flannery O'Connor spent part of her childhood in one of the townhomes overlooking the square.
9. **Troup Square** was renovated in 1968 through the support of local philanthropist Mills B. Lane, Jr. according to the design of renowned female landscape architect Clermont Lee, including a bronze armillary. The Unitarian Church was originally located on Oglethorpe Square and was moved in 1860 to serve as the first African American Episcopal Church in Savannah.
10. **Chatham Square**, like Chatham County, is named for William Pitt, the First Earl of Chatham, who championed for the rights of the colonists. Chatham Square features a bronze and granite sundial as a monument honoring Louis Burke Toomer, founder and president of Carver State Bank, Savannah's oldest locally owned bank.
11. **Calhoun Square** is the home of Massie School, Savannah's first public school when it opened in 1856. The square served as a playground for the students and still hosts the annual May Day celebration for students from across Chatham County.
12. **Whitefield Square** is named for 18th century English evangelist George Whitefield who established Bethesda Orphanage in Savannah in 1740, the oldest institution of its kind in the United States. In the vicinity of Whitefield Square was the city's earliest public burial ground for African Americans, relocated in the 1850s when Laurel Grove South Cemetery was opened and residential construction expanded into this area.

The Lost Squares

As Savannah grew, the Oglethorpe Plan was expanded to 24 wards with 24 squares. Unfortunately, with the introduction and explosion of the automobile the three squares on Montgomery Street fell victim to the need for speed as Highway 17 was allowed to cut through the squares, leaving just slivers of the squares along the sides of the roadway.

1. **Franklin Square**, named for Benjamin Franklin, is home to First African Baptist Church one of the oldest black congregations in the United States, founded in 1773 with a sanctuary completed in 1861 by its members, including both enslaved and free blacks. The square was restored in

1985 and a monument honoring the contributions of black soldiers during the 1779 Siege of Savannah was dedicated in 2004.

2. **Liberty Square** is one of Savannah's two lost squares, leaving Savannah with only 22 intact squares. Liberty Square, dedicated in 1799 to the Sons of Liberty, remains dissected by Montgomery Street but was recently returned to two-way traffic.
3. **Elbert Square** is Savannah's second lost square and was laid out in 1801 and named for Georgia Governor Samuel Elbert. Urban Renewal in the 1960s and the construction of the Savannah Civic Center drastically altered the architectural landscape surrounding this square, once characterized by modest residences.

Bull Street Beauties

Starting from City Hall on Bay Street, and meandering through Johnson and Wright squares, Bull Street provided the spine through Savannah's historic district as the city expanded south. The squares along Bull Street were often given the grandest monuments, most elaborate landscaping designs, and culminated in Savannah's grand civic park.

1. **Chippewa Square** is home to the 1910 bronze statue honoring General James Edward Oglethorpe, sculpted by Daniel Chester French who also created the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. On the northeast trust lot, stands the Savannah Theatre, the oldest continuously operating theater site in the United States.
2. **Madison Square's** centerpiece is a monument to Sergeant William Jasper who was killed in the 1779 Siege of Savannah while trying to save his unit's flag. Overlooking the square, is the Green-Meldrim House used by Union General William T. Sherman as his headquarters when he ended his "march to the sea" in Savannah in December 1864.
3. **Monterey Square's** name honors an American victory in the Mexican-American War in 1846 and the square has an elaborate monument dedicated to Casimir Pulaski, considered the father of the American Cavalry. Congregation Mickve Israel, the third oldest Jewish congregation in the United States, built a beautiful Gothic Revival synagogue overlooking the square in the 1870s.
4. While not part of the official town plan, many consider **Forsyth Park** as Savannah's ultimate and last square, with acres of public space featuring both quiet tree lined paths and large open recreational fields. The jewel of the park is the cast-iron fountain installed in 1858 featuring spouting tritons, swans, cranes, and a graceful lady atop ordered from the Janes and Beebe Foundry.