

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN GREENSBORO

WALKING TOUR

TALES FROM DOWNTOWN GREENSBORO, GEORGIA



GREENSBORO

Established in 1786, Greensborough (later shortened to Greensboro) and Greene County were named for Revolutionary War hero, General Nathanael Greene. The city was laid out in a traditional quadrangle from between North, South, East and West Streets.

START



1 *Chamber of Commerce* 111 N. Main Street

Built in the late 1890's, the upstairs was known as the "Gossip Central", where the Bell Telephone switchboard patched in numerous towns across the city. Downstairs, the Bank of Greensboro served a growing business district.

2 *The Herald Journal*

107 N. Main Street

Our next building was built in the 1850's and now houses the Greensboro Herald Journal. Ironically, this was the site of the original 1800 Greensborough Observator, a widely read weekly newspaper. In the early 20th Century, Charlie Poulas, a Greek immigrant from New York, opened and ran his City Café. In the back was a pool hall and in the basement, Charlie installed a bowling alley.



3 *The Thompson Building*

101 N. Main Street

The two buildings at the end of the block were built in the 1850's and served various functions. The Thompson Building was a grocery store, a fabric store and several other shops. The upstairs apartment was once the studio for the famous, local artist, Henry Barnes. During the 1920's, when the grocery closed, people would enter a local office at the back, tap on the bookcase, and were let into the back of the building where they were led down a trapdoor stairwell to Greensboro's first "Tea Room", full of hooch from local moonshiners and jazz music.

4 *Dreamcatcher's Antiques Palm Garden*

As you cross Broad Street onto South Main, The Copelan Corner stares back at you. Built in 1889, it has various unique features and stories that give any visitor pause. East on Broad, the iron Indians pay tribute to the local Native American heritage of Greene County.





5 *Genuine Georgia*

102 S. Main Street

The Copelan Bank's original brick walls and marks from the vault were saved by the present owner of *Genuine Georgia*, Greensboro's premier artisans' marketplace. The corner also housed the Chandler Pharmacy, one of three in town, and the pharmacy that introduced Coca Cola to Greensboro mixing it with flavors like chocolate, vanilla, cherry and orange (called "orange dope" at the time).

The corner door pre-dates the present building when the famous Statham Hotel sat at the heart of the Historic Greensboro Commons. It was famous for its fine hay for its patrons' horses and the most beautiful women upstairs. A famous porter and greeter at the hotel, Ned, regularly met the many trains that stopped in Greensboro.

6 *Dreamcatcher's Antiques*

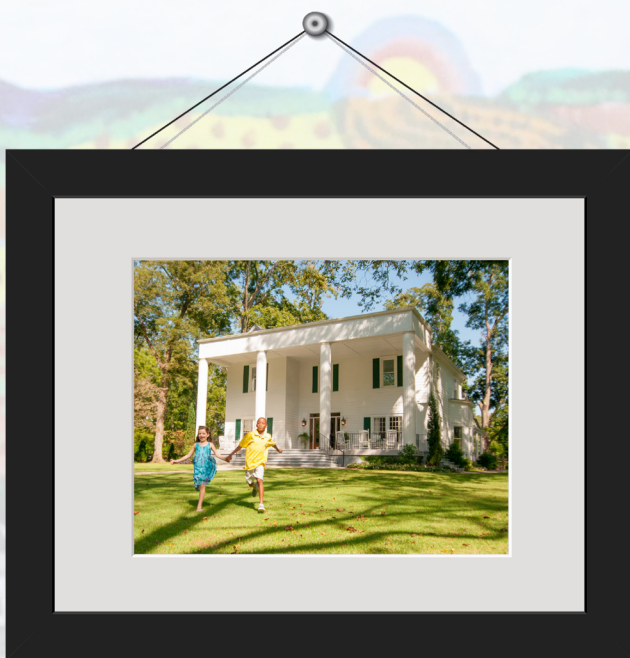
104 S. Main Street

Dreamcatcher's Antiques encompasses three-fourths of the Copelan building, which was built as a bank in 1889. This side of the building became primarily a general store in the 1920's.

Prior to the Copelan Building, this site boasted the Statham Hotel, owned and operated by the Statham family with the assistance of an enterprising local character named Ned. Ned's role was "house-boy, porter, waiter, and general utility man" (Rice, 1961). He would regularly meet the trains at the Greensboro Depot and solicit customers for the hotel. He hawked the Statham Hotel as having the prettiest girls in town, often getting into fistfights with rival solicitors.

During the Civil War, the hotel served as a meeting place for women making bandages, blankets, and other provisions for soldiers. On several occasions, the hotel was a makeshift hospital.

During the years of Federal occupation, a Union officer was stationed in Greensboro for the purpose of controlling the town. He was so despised that one day a sniper climbed into an upper window of the Statham and killed the rascal with one shot as he passed below.



7 *Goodwin Manor*

306 S. Main Street

Dating back to 1908, Goodwin Manor and the surrounding two acre pecan orchard are enriched in family history. Having served as a private residence to different members of the Goodwin family for over 100 years, in 2010 Goodwin Manor opened its doors to serve the community as a Bed and Breakfast and special events venue.

8 *First Baptist Church*

203 S. Main Street

The building is eclectic in style with Romanesque arches. The congregation was organized in 1821 by Rev. Jesse Mercer, founder of Mercer College in Penfield. They originally met in a meeting house on cemetery hill north of here, later sharing another meeting house with the Presbyterians. The present building dates from 1902.





9 *First Presbyterian Church*

117 S. Main Street

The original building was built in 1859-60, but was destroyed by fire in 1869. The present church was built on the original foundation and with the same interior arrangement in the Romanesque Revival Style in 1873; the spire and bell were added in 1893. Four pulpit chairs and a Bible, given by the students of the Greensboro Female College, are all that were saved in the fire in 1869.



10 Greensboro Post Office

115 S. Main Street

In 1939, as part of the Works in Progress Administration (WPA), two unique murals (*Cotton Picking in Georgia* and *The Burning of Greensborough*), depicting the razing of Greensborough by Creek in 1787, were painted in the Greensboro Post Office by Carson Davenport.



11 *Oscar* 103 S. Main Street

One hot August day in 1937, a vagrant got off the train in Greensboro and set out on foot to Madison. He was discovered collapsed on Highway 278 - Madison Road in Greensboro - and dead. He was taken to The Big Store and embalmed by Mr. W. H. McCommons, Coroner, who named him Oscar.

Scores of people who had missing relatives came and looked at Oscar, but none claimed the body.

The story of Oscar spread and he became an outstanding tourist attraction for Greensboro.

All this changed when a Georgia Health Department Official was dispatched to investigate the Oscar situation. He asked a question of Mr. McCommons, "Is this really true that you have a man here who died 15 years ago?" Mr. McCommons replied, "No, he died 25 years ago!" The official insisted that the Funeral Home bury Oscar, thus ending the story of the town's most famous unknown man.

12 *The Big Store*

101 S. Main Street

Walking back up Main Street, you will find the massive Big Store. Built in 1858 by Charles Davis, it was the largest retail store between Atlanta and Augusta.

In 1900, the Big Store, the largest emporium between Atlanta and Augusta, was purchased by Mr. J.H. McCommons. He added a funeral home and caskets to the stock of dry goods, hardware, ready-to-wear, and millinery. The Big Store rightly boasted that it sold “everything from the cradle to the grave”.

Out back, there was a large, manually-operated elevator attached to the building. It was part of the McCommons funeral business. Coffins stored upstairs were lowered onto a horse-drawn hearse that carried the departed to the cemetery at the end of the street. This oversized, outdoor dumbwaiter was also used to transport large items up to the second floor of the department store.

The upper level of the Big Store was the place to buy farm equipment, plows and even a brand new automobile, for there was always at least one car on display.

By 1936, W.H. McCommons, a licensed embalmer, installed his work area in a section of the upper floor. In later years, parts of the building became offices for doctors and lawyers, and even the town newspaper, The Herald Journal. Today the Big Store still forms the heart of the downtown, housing three separate businesses. Visitors to the second floor can still see the antique dumbwaiter.



13 *Major Fauche Home*

109 W. Broad Street

As you cross Broad Street heading north, you will see a large white house, the oldest house in Greensboro. Built by Major Fauche in 1799, it served as home and military offices in Georgia's early frontier days.

In 1800, newspapers across the eastern United States advertised the Great Greenesborough Horse Races. Beginning at Love's Spring, the race proceeded to Greene Street and then west to Laurel and back east again on Broad Street, in front of the Fouche House and back to the old barracks (near Love Springs). Anyone could enter to ride, but only Georgia horses could race.



14 *Greensboro First United Methodist Church* 202 W. Broad Street

Four buildings have housed the congregation: A log meeting house built on Laurel Street in 1799, a frame building constructed in 1825-26, which was later rolled to 301 W. Broad Street where a building was put on that site in 1859. The present building was erected in 1911.

When the frame church was rolled to W. Broad Street in 1825, and was part way down the road, harvest time arrived, and the church was left about where the bridge is and in the middle of the road until the harvest season was over. The fellowship house (old Parsonage) once stood on the corner of W. Broad and West Streets, but was moved for the construction of the present building.

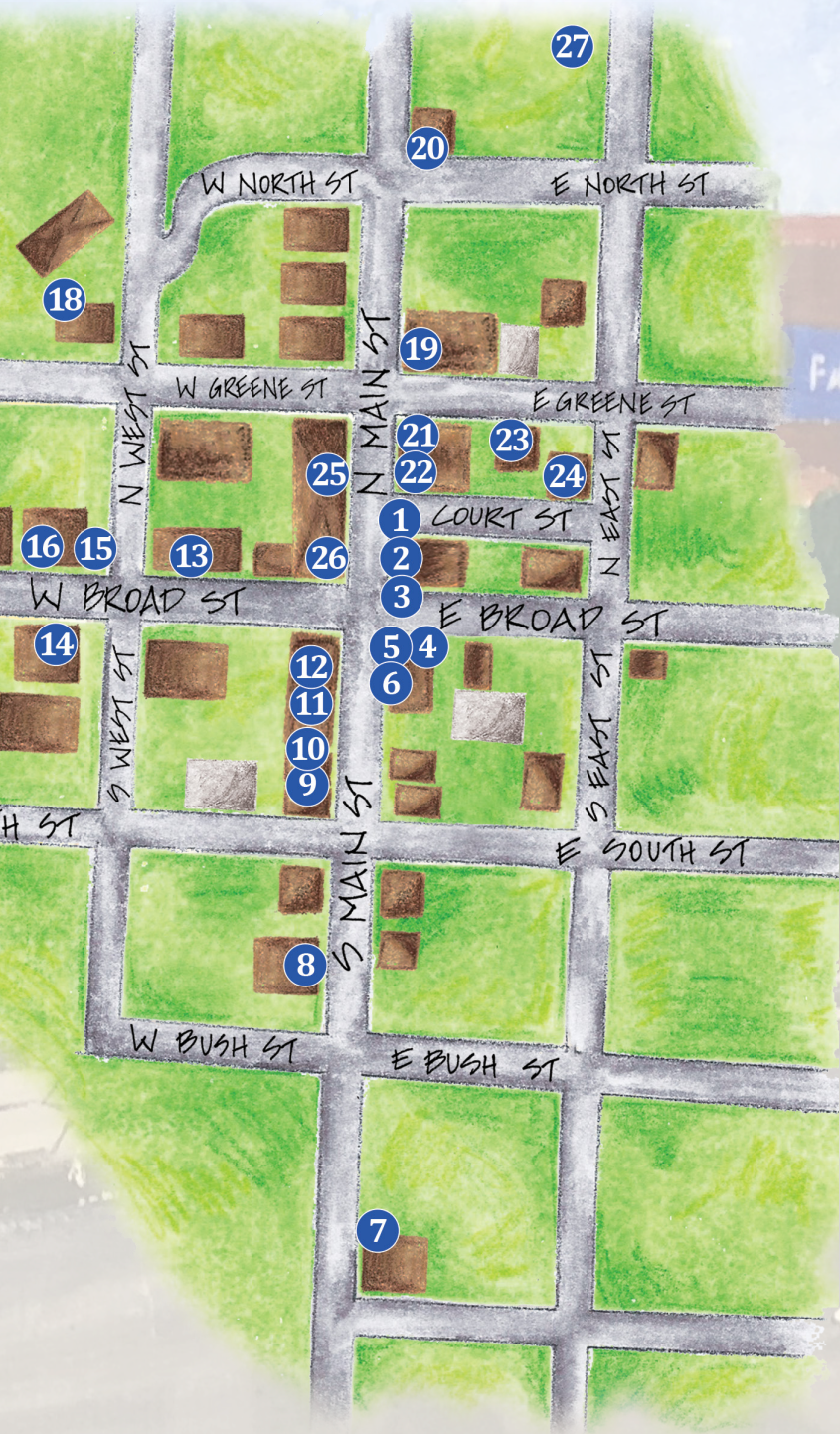
15 *Copelan-Evans House*

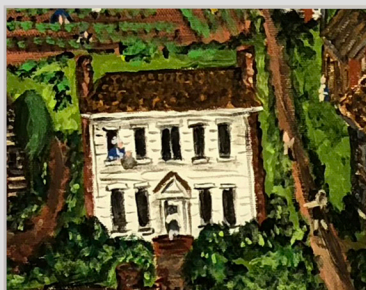
201 W. Broad Street

Completed in 1885 by E.A. Copelan who co-founded the Mary Leila Cotton Mill, this many gabled Queen Anne House was home to Copelan descendants until 1983. It has been lovingly restored and has been home to several families in recent years.









16 *Happy Times - Home*

203 W. Broad Street

Built in 1824, this home became a college dormitory for the Greensboro Female College in 1824. The school was rumored to have had Louisa Mae Alcott, the renowned author of *Little Women*, as a teacher at the school.



17 *Highgate Estate & Gardens*

301 W. Greene Street

Highgate Estate & Gardens is one of the oldest and most beautiful of Greensboro's architectural treasures. This grand lady celebrated her 210th birthday in 2018. The land on which Highgate sits was originally owned by the University of Georgia as the original site for its campus. In 1809, James H. Nickelson bought the lots from the trustees of UGA. He built the mill directly behind the house, and in 1810, the first part of the house, which consisted of two rooms (one above the other) was built.



18 *Oconee Brewing Company* 202 N. West Street

Once an old soda bottling company, this building was sold in 1920 to the Mary-Leila Cotton Mill as a warehouse. Now almost 100 years later, this building houses the Oconee Brewing Company.



19 *Festival Hall*

201 N. Main Street

Festival Hall was constructed in 1939 by the Federal Works Agency as a Public Works Administration project. The 8,000 square foot building housed a basketball court, wooden bleachers, and a stage that were used for multi-purpose functions for Greensboro High School until 1976. The Greensboro Auditorium functioned not only as a school gymnasium and auditorium during the time period, but also a space that was very much a central gathering place for community events. Reopened in 2010, Festival Hall has once again become a gathering place for community events.



20 *Episcopal Church of the Redeemer* 303 N. Main Street

This Gothic Revival structure was built in 1868 after Civil War refugees and two local families in 1863 petitioned for an Episcopal Church to be established here. Regular services have been held here ever since. The stained glass windows inside cast a lovely glow on the altar and cross in the early morning hours of services.



21 *Greene County Courthouse*

113 N. Main Street

The Greene County Courthouse was built in 1849 and was the third courthouse to be built. This Greek Revival structure was designed by Atharates Atkinson of Madison and built by David Demarest of Athens. The third floor was built by and for the San Marino Lodge #34 F&AM and served as their meeting place until 1997. Wings were added in 1939 and renovation completed in 1998.

22 *Artist Weymon Miller*

Artist Weymon Miller was a lifelong resident of Greene County who wove baskets, chair backs and seats until well into his 90's. He would sit, weaving and selling his craft on the courthouse lawn. He was proud that he made his own splints for the baskets. He formed each basket from the ribs to the rim. Not too long after his wife Hattie reported that he "took to his bed", he departed this life leaving a beautiful legacy worthy of the finest artisan.

** an example of his basket is on display at Genuine Georgia*



23 *The Old Gaol*

E. Greene Street

Believed to be the oldest standing masonry jail structure in the state, the building has remained virtually unchanged since its completion in 1807. The gallows and trap door still remain where prisoners were dropped to their death. In use until 1895, the jail with its two foot thick granite blocks was patterned after the Bastille of Paris.

24 *Wyatt Jail*

N. East Street

In 1925, L. L. Wyatt began his law enforcement career as a Greene County policeman who waged a “one man war” against the making of illegal corn whiskey. Prior to his arrival, moonshine production was considered the leading industry in Greene County and its product was enjoyed in all the finest hotels of Atlanta. After having rid the County of its moonshiners, Wyatt ran for the Office of Sheriff in 1940 defeating the incumbent. He served as Sheriff until he died in 1977. At the time of his death he was the longest standing Sheriff in the state, with thirty-seven years of service.



25 *Marble Slab - Greensboro Jewelers* 118 N. Main Street

Back in the 1820's, Greensboro boasted a bakery and candy factory. The bakery was located under the stores now known as Greensboro Florist and Greensboro Jewelers. A stairway from the sidewalk to the basement led to the oven, located under the sidewalk.

Around this time, Mrs. Charity Grimes ordered a marble slab to mark the grave of her beloved and recently departed daughter, Lucy Adeline Grimes-Gresham. Not long after the slab had been placed over the grave, it mysteriously disappeared and no trace of it could be found.

Somehow Mrs. Grimes learned that there was a suspicious looking marble slab in the underground bakery, which was being used in making candy. She immediately paid the bakery a visit. Mrs. Grimes demanded that she be shown the under-side of the slab. Alas, it revealed the name of her beloved daughter.

Her ultimatum was that if the slab was not thoroughly cleaned and placed where it belonged by daybreak the next morning, the aforesaid baker would find himself in the Old Rock Jail. He complied immediately, and the marble slab was returned to its proper place in the cemetery.



26 *Charging Dog - Maggie Lane* 102 N. Main Street

Maggie Lane building (c.1860), at Broad and Main Streets, was once the Hunters Drug Store. This drug store was family ran for over 100 years. It had many loyal customers during the three generations of Hunters that ran the pharmacy. But none of these was as loyal as Ralph, the Charging Dog. The Drug Store had a popular soda fountain. In the 1940's, a customer and his dog came in every day for a scoop of Hunter's best ice cream. When the old man died, the dog kept coming. Dr. Hunter just charged the scoop to the family's account.

27 *Greensboro Cemetery*

104 E. Richland Ave

The Greensboro City Cemetery is the resting place for several notable Georgians. The oldest gravesite houses Revolutionary War soldier, Major Jonas Fauche who was in charge of Greene County military operations during the Creek Raids of 1780. Among others resting in this historic cemetery: Governor Peter Early (1813-1814), Jeremiah Sanford, Revolutionary War soldier and close friend of George Washington, and 45 unknown Confederate soldiers.



SPECIAL THANKS TO
JAN WYLLSON

FOR THE ARTWORK THAT CAPTURES
THE HISTORY OF GREENSBORO



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