

Downtown Walking Tour

Researched & Updated by Carrie Wheless January 2014



COURTHOUSE

- The city of Thomaston was incorporated in 1825 and made the county seat of Upson. The present courthouse is the third one to have been built on this site. All three structures were built when the roads were still dirt (the streets were paved in the 1920s).
- The building of the first courthouse began in 1826 and completed in 1828 at a cost of \$10,000. Early improvements included digging a well on the north side of the public square (there was also a well on the south side), planting shade trees in 1830, adding a brick or stone pavement around the courthouse in 1831, in 1835 hiring a supervisor to help protect the building from any vandalism which had occurred earlier and to start locking the doors at 6:00 p.m., and adding a plank fence in 1844 to enclose the square.
- Just before the second courthouse was built the following description of the town appeared in *White's Historical Collections* first published around 1849: Thomaston, a remarkable neat village, is the seat of justice for the county. It has a handsome brick courthouse, jail, one excellent tavern, two churches, Methodist and Baptist, one male and female academy, each averaging fifty pupils, four stores, one family grocery, seven attorneys, three tailors, four blacksmiths, two wheelwrights, one tinner, one cabinet maker, one tannery, two carpenters, one

shoe factory, five physicians, three ministers...The Columbia stage passes through Thomaston every day.

- The second courthouse was built in 1852, due to substantial cracks appearing in the first one. It was claimed that inferior materials had been used. They tore down the former, using its brick, which was sufficient to construct one story. The second story was made of wood; later a mansard roof was added.
- The present courthouse was built in 1908 at a cost of \$60,000, without a bond issue (with ad valorem tax- the building was paid for in two years). There were some citizens who strongly objected to the building of the courthouse and tried to block it through legal channels. The case went all the way to the Georgia Supreme Court. One commissioner was not reelected.
- The architects were Frank Milburn and Co. of Washington D.C. One local resident was watching the news of heart patient William Schroeder returning to his hometown of Jasper, Indiana and noticed that their courthouse is identical to Thomaston's. It was soon learned after a phone call to Jasper, Indiana that the same architects were building on there about the same time this one was being built. Wilcox County, Georgia also has the identical courthouse.
- This structure is a three-story blond brick building, constructed in the Neo-Classical Revival style. It is symmetrically arranged with a colossal pedimented portico supported by brick columns of the Ionic order at each of the structure's four sides. The hip roof is covered with terra cotta tile and has a parapet clock tower at its center. The first floor is raised. All windows are single light sashes. The courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places (as in the Sydney Barron House, Harp House, Rose Hill Mill House, and the former 1892 Covered Bridge--It was restored in 2002).

COURTHOUSE Additional Points:

- Inside the courthouse, the 2002 restoration project uncovered an original sixteen-foot square stained glass ceiling skylight centered over the courtroom hidden for decades behind a suspended ceiling. First Team Construction of Auburn, Alabama removed the dropped ceiling in the courtroom to reveal the stained glass skylight. Restoration work on the stained glass was completed by A Touch of Glass in Forsyth, and master plasterer Harry Durham of Macon recreated the ornamental plaster to repair the existing plaster walls and ceilings. The Palladian windows also received featured treatment when the suspended ceiling was removed, and a splendid pressed ceiling was revealed.
- A plaque honoring WWI dead including Pete Thurston (first casualty from Upson County)- the American Legion Post is named in his honor, and P.D.

Worthy (first black casualty). Later a monument was erected on the lawn. There is a plaque naming the county commissioners serving at the time the courthouse was built.

- From the clock tower one can see the Pine Mountain Range, the Methodist Church Steeple, etc.
- In 1927 a circulating (public) library was started by Mrs. Giradeau in the former tax collector's office and was supported by the city council and county commissioners. She had first begun the library in her home, which was located next to the Weaver Dallas House.

OUTSIDE THE COURTHOUSE

- Notice the brick detail. One column today is estimated would cost well over \$60,000 (total original cost of the building); the rounded brick was fired in a kiln.
- Is the building square? NO. The North and South sides are longer than the East and West sides.

Monuments around the square:

NW Corner—memorials to soldiers of WWI, WWII, Korean and Vietnam Wars. (The Woodsman of the World is the only regional monument; the others are local. No one knows how it came to be that the WOW Monument was allowed to be placed there.)

SE Corner—Said to be the first cannon ball fired by Confederate forces at Fort Sumter. P.W. Alexander, a noted Civil War correspondent and Thomaston attorney retrieved it. He sent it to the White family in Thomaston, with whom he had lived.

NE Corner—Confederate monument erected May 2, 1908; notice broken stripe in flag, symbolizing defeat; soldier is not wearing a uniform- did not have one. Monument to John B. Gordon (sun dial originally on top), who was born and spent his childhood in Upson County. He became a general during the Civil War and later the Governor of Georgia and an U.S. Senator. His father, Zachariah Gordon, was one of the earliest Baptist ministers and leading citizens of the county.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE COURTHOUSE AND SQUARE

- The town was laid out in an orderly way with parallel streets running N&S, E&W with the courthouse in the center of town.
- The gazebo covering a well on the square was moved to the John Thurston home (now the First Baptist Church parking lot) and later to the Victor Thurston home. It is no longer there and was moved out of the county.

- At one time pecan trees were on the lawn and granite (kerosene) lamp posts were around the square.
- Men would play country marbled (marbles made of granite) on the square and also checkers.
- Market day was normally on Saturday. There were hitching posts for the mules and wagons or buggies and horses. Cars came around 1906 (just before the present courthouse was built).
- In 1861, the Thomaston Brass Band under the leadership of Professor Litterbart played music on the square, and they were present when most of Upson County's Companies left during the Civil War. Approximately 1,200 men from Upson County served in the Confederate War, about 25% of the male population.
- In 1863, a fire destroyed three sides of the public square (including a number of barrooms and pin alleys). The fire was thought to have originated in a hotel called The Snell House (present site of Barron Building/Day Realty) and a Yankee agent was suspected of starting it. The courthouse (2nd) was on fire several times and was saved by the active exertions of a slave of Dr. Rogers to who was paid \$100 by the Superior Court. Owen C. Sharman, a local businessman, also helped to save the courthouse and he was paid \$100 for his efforts as well. The City rebuilt only to be subjected to two more fires exactly a year apart: May 16, 1867 and 1868.

MULE CAPITOL

From the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century, Thomaston grew into one of the largest livestock trading centers in the south. It was second only to St. Louis in the volume of mules traded.

There were areas to park mules and water them.

Large sale barns surrounded the square and also off the square. Some of these locations were:

- Where the Ritz Theatre is now, in 1885 was the location of a mule shed
- The Thomaston Café
- Where Thomaston Health Spa, WTGA, and Baby Lane's
- Also, Hometown Printers on the corner of E. Gordon and Hightower Street was the location of a mule shed in 1885

NORTH SIDE OF SQUARE

Jail

- **(NOT ON SQUARE) FIRST JAIL:** In 1825 on the site of the city water tank, the first jail was built. (Where the fire station is on Thompson Street.) In 1834 and 1849, it was recommended to build a new jail, the old one was branded as “unfit, unsafe, unsanitary, a nuisance.”
- **(NOT ON SQUARE) SECOND JAIL:** In 1856-57 a new jail was built at the same location and was later burned by escapees.
- **THIRD JAIL:** In 1896 the first brick structure was built at a cost of \$5,000. (This building was built where the county annex is now.)
- **FOURTH JAIL:** In 1926, the jail and city office building, built at the same location as the third jail was built by architects Oliphant & Dunwoody of Macon. Architect William Oliphant was one of the founding fathers of R.E. Lee Institute and later head of the Academy for the Blind in Macon. He was the grandson of Judge W.S. Oliphant, Thomaston’s first mayor.
- (Located next to the finance company) Bakery- In 1925 Fred Kitchen’s mother and father operated the bakery until 1945 when they sold it to Bob Varner and Harvey Green. There were two additional owners before Fred Kitchen’s bought it in 1953 when he got out of the army and owned and operated the bakery for 32 years until he sold it. The building is currently vacant.
- At the sesquicentennial in 1975 the largest cake in the world was made in the bakery. It was 2,451 feet long. The commissioners had a table made the length of the block to hold it. It fed 8,000 people.
- In 1973 thirty-eight Japanese came to view Mr. Kitchen’s method of operation. Fay Kitchen’s had an exhibit comparing the cost of bread in 1935 to the cost in 19985. It was 5 cents in 1935. 3 cents for the ingredients.

EAST SIDE OF SQUARE

- In 1930 the following stores were on the eastside of the square: Williams Pharmacy, Weaver’s Mercantile, A&P (where the cars would double and triple park on the street), Maxwell’s 5 and Dime (where Reems Jewelers is now), O.W. Jones & Son (location of Rescue Me Market).

WEST SIDE OF SQUARE

- In 1930 the Ritz Theatre was at its current location, dentist, Dr. Black had his office over the former Stephens Automotive (where FD Studio and Gallery is now). In the back of the building, housed Stephens Funeral Home. Reds Pharmacy was next door to the Ritz on the south side, and the Blue Goose Café was where the mortgage/loan department is in the Bank of Upson. Wynnes Jewelry was also on this side of the square.

SOUTH SIDE OF SQUARE

- (Location of Thomaston-Upson Arts Council) Fincher Building constructed in 1872 is the oldest downtown building. It is a two-story brick and cement plaster façade with a stain-glass window. The second floor was originally hotel rooms before being converted into office spaces in the early 20th century. It was home of Finchers Jewelry in the 1930s.
 - 1.In an earlier building on the site, the *Hickory Nut & Upson Vigil* published in 1830-36
 - 2.Dr. John L. Cheney built this building. His famous Cheney's Expectorant- a remedy throughout the south was first manufactured here. Dr. Cheney first moved to Thomaston in 1842.
 - 3.The Fincher building housed the first telephone exchange in the city.
- West Central Georgia bank was originally Farmers & Merchants Bank in 1900. Thomaston Banking in the 1930s and then C & S Bank.
- Two stores down from the bank was the vicinity of Hannah & Chatfield's, Lyon's Finer Food, and J & M Variety.

HOTEL UPSON

- The hotel was constructed in 1928 for \$150,000 (plans were announced in the Thomaston Times, November 11, 1927).
- Selling bonds in the community financed construction for the hotel. It opened October 11, 1928 with a party of 400 at the opening dinner. On Tuesday, October 1, 1991 Noell's and Hotel Upson sponsored "A Night to Remember" in the hotel ballroom on the closing of the hotel. The hotel has been a mainstay of the community- a place where dignitaries visited such as former President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter.
- Architectural design: The Biltmore in Atlanta heavily influenced the plans. Georgian Revival Style. When it originally opened, it was said to be the only "thoroughly modern" hotel between Macon, Atlanta, Albany and Columbus.
- The First Baptist Church Bell tower is now located where hotel once was.