

Experience the “*City Isaiah [Davenport] Knew*”: New Tour Discovers 1820s Savannah

Do you ever wonder what is left of the city Lafayette saw, the city William Jay walked, the city Isaiah Davenport helped build? A new early morning walking tour, presented by the Davenport House Museum , explores what is left of early 19th century Savannah and reflects on what is no longer there. “As we thought about this new tour we wondered what is left of the early 19th century city that boomed in the 1810s, busted in 1819, burned in 1820 and recovered throughout the following decade,” offers Jamie Credle, director of the Davenport House. After consulting [Historic Savannah: A Survey of Significant Buildings](#) and Georgia Department of Natural Resources’ NAHRGIS database, she continues, “What we found is that there is a lot to see – both precious and functional.” The new tour, passing by at least 44 of these structures, is offered on Saturday mornings in May at 7:30 a.m.

The experience covers 2.5 miles and visits eight of the fifteen squares in Savannah in 1818 viewing some of Savannah’s most treasured structures – the Davenport House, the Telfair Academy, the Juliette Gordon Low House –as well as the cottages, Federal style houses and commercial buildings. As one writer says, at the time the “city [was] filled with wooden two-story Federal houses and one-story center hall cottages . . . Neighborhoods looked more like New England than southern places.”

It is fascinating to place the city in a context other than its modern guise and imagine what life was like when it was a compact seaport of 7,000 people and which was “one mile wide along the river and about three quarters of a mile deep from the river south to Liberty Street.” In researching the tour’s content, staff consulted old maps and found interesting tidbits in “Recollections of Old Savannah” of Charles Seton Henry Hardee published in the [Georgia Historical Quarterly](#) in 1928. Hardee reflects on his boyhood in 1835 Savannah – a time very close to when the Davenports lived in their home on Columbia Square . In one of his passages, Hardee notes on how dark and startling the city was at night saying, “It was not unlawful for cows to be out on the streets at night, and it was by no means uncommon to have one of them rise up in front of you as you groped your way on the pathway in one of the squares.”

The tour has been a revelation to Davenport House volunteers and staff who had – up until now - spent most of their time thinking about life *inside* the stately house. Getting out and seeing other buildings Isaiah built, seeing the location of other property he owned and the places he would have known -- the Exchange, Gibbons Range, the City Hotel, the Independent Presbyterian Church-- helps getting a fuller and richer picture of life 190 years ago. Credle concludes, “It’s one thing to read about these places or see pictures of them and another to see them in front of you or see where they stood. It gives you a sense of scale and the tastes of the time as well as the daily hustle of the people whose footsteps we walk in but whose lives were so different from our own. I mean cows in the streets at night!!”

Located on Columbia Square at 324 East State Street in Savannah, the Isaiah Davenport House Museum is open for tours daily – Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. with the last tour beginning at 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. with the last tour beginning at 4 p.m.