

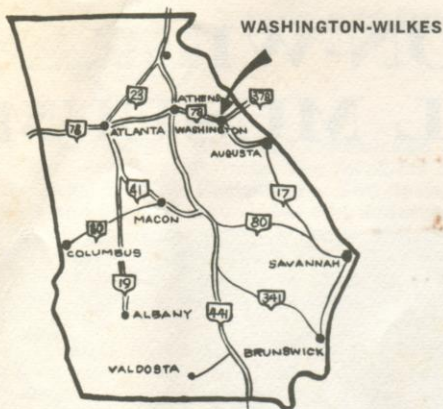
# WASHINGTON-WILKES HISTORICAL MUSEUM



*Restored and furnished ante-bellum home containing a fine collection of Confederate items and other exhibits.*

At 308 East Robert Toombs Avenue (US 78, US 378) in Washington, Georgia

**GEORGIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**



# WASHINGTON WILKES HISTORICAL MUSEUM

## I. WILKES COUNTY

On June 11, 1773, the Royal Governor issued a proclamation offering the newly ceded lands in northeast Georgia, acquired from the Creek and Cherokee nations, to prospective settlers along the Atlantic seaboard. Settlers came from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. In 1774, three years before this rich land, "fit for the production of wheat, indigo, Indian corn, tobacco, hemp, flax, etc.," became Wilkes County, these pioneers erected Fort Heard, at what is now the town of Washington. This stockade, named for one of the Virginia families, was constructed for protection against possible Indian attacks, and later served as defense against British assaults during the Revolutionary War. Soon after its completion, another stockade, called Heard's Fort for its builder, Stephen Heard, was constructed eight miles away on Fishing Creek. (Heard's Fort served as a temporary seat of government in 1780 during the British occupation.)

In early 1779 Wilkes County men, under the leadership of Elijah Clarke and John Dooly, overwhelmingly defeated the British in the Battle of Kettle Creek, eight miles from the site of present day Washington. Momentarily relieved of British assaults, Clarke and Dooly united these men again to fight and defeat a band of 800 Creek Indians in March, 1779. They distinguished themselves in Revolutionary battles in other states, e.g., Cowpens and the Battle of Kings Mountain.

From the spring of 1780 until July, 1781, the British occupied Augusta, sending raiders into Wilkes County to subdue the zealous patriots. One band murdered John Dooly in his home; Stephen Heard's wife and child died from exposure in a snowstorm when their cabin was burned; and Elijah Clarke's wife and children were driven from their home and forced to flee to North Carolina. Nancy Hart, a Wilkes County mother, became the heroine of numerous legends including one in which she killed two Tories and held others at gunpoint while her daughter ran for help.

In July, 1781, Wilkes County troops assembled for the last time and drove the British from Augusta. On July 11, 1782, the British left Savannah, and in November the War was over.

After the Revolution, Wilkes County began to prosper. The cotton era began. Wagons and flatboats, loaded with the money-making fiber, traveled post roads and rivers to reach their market. And with wealth came fine white-columned homes of the ante-bellum period, replacing early log cabins and austere plain-style homes.

Prosperity and peace brought the promotion of education and religion. Washington Academy, one of the first three public schools chartered by the State, was opened in 1786 for boys and girls of all ages and offered a traditional academic education. Succoth Academy was opened near Washington by the Methodists in the 1790's, operating until 1803; the Rev. John Springer, first Presbyterian minister to be ordained in Georgia, operated a school at his home, Walnut Hill, from about 1788 until his death. One of his first pupils, Jesse Mercer, later founded Mercer University.

In 1783, the Fishing Creek Baptist Church was organized in the northern part of the county by Sanders Walker. And two years later, the Methodists sent a missionary into Wilkes County.

## II. WASHINGTON, GEORGIA

On January 23, 1780, the Legislature appointed five men to lay out a hundred acres in Wilkes County into a common and town, "which shall be called Washington."

By 1783, a legislative act stated that a town named Washington, in honor of the great American General, had been laid out in the County of Wilkes. Stephen Heard and Micajah Williamson, two of five men appointed by the legislature, served as commissioners to see that lots were sold, a free school was built, and surplus money was used for the construction of a church.

In 1786 Micajah Williamson opened a tavern, located on the present site of the Wilkes County Courthouse. Here politicians met, and one of the tavern rooms temporarily served as a courtroom. In 1790, Washington had thirty-four dwellings, a courthouse, a temporary jail, and an academy, maintained in a rented house. The town also served as a stop for stagecoach lines from Augusta on their way North.

In 1804, a stage line was incorporated to operate stages between Augusta and Washington. A year later the town of Washington was incorporated. New business enterprises took root in the expanding town, and rapidly replaced the few remaining residences around the public square.

The railroad began to develop in Georgia in the late 1830's. But it was not until 1847 that Samuel Barnett and other members of the Washington Railroad and Banking Company were able to induce the Georgia Railroad to build a branch from the main line to Washington. The spur was completed in 1853.

On the night, of January 19, 1861, messengers brought the news of Georgia's secession, and a new Confederate emblem, a blue flag with a single five-pointed star, was raised in front of the courthouse. Four years later on May 5, remnants of the Confederate cabinet from Richmond met in Washington and dispersed.

### III. WASHINGTON-WILKES HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Washington-Wilkes Historical Museum, built on land once owned by Micajah Williamson, is a white frame, two-story house. Its earliest section was probably constructed in 1835 or 1836 by Albert Gallatin Semmes who acquired the land in 1835 from his brother-in-law, William L. Harris. Half-brother of Brigadier-General Paul Jones Semmes, C.S.A., and a cousin of Admiral Raphael Semmes, C.S.N., Semmes later served as an Associate Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. He sold the property, dwelling and outbuildings to Mrs. Mary Sneed in 1836 for \$4,500. About twenty years later (1857) the house and the hundred acres surrounding it were acquired by Samuel Barnett, Georgia's first Railroad Commissioner.

Mr. Barnett greatly enlarged the house by the addition of the front rooms, hallways, and the present staircase. His descendants lived here until the death of his daughter, Mrs. Edward McKendree Bounds, in 1913.

At that time, the surrounding acreage was divided and sold separately, the house with its present lot going to Mr. William Armstrong Slaton, whose family lived here until 1955. Shortly thereafter, the City of Washington acquired the property and home, and deeded it to the State of Georgia for the establishment of a museum. The restoration of the home by the Georgia Historical Commission was planned and directed by the late Thomas G. Little, historical architect.

Many of the furnishings in the Museum were given to the City of Washington by Edward Fauntleroy Willis of Richmond, Virginia. They originally belonged to Mr. Willis' great-grandfather, Dr. Francis Thomas Willis, who was a native of Washington, and are typical of things to be found in fine Georgia homes of the mid-19th century.

A collection of Civil War relics on the second floor of the house, gathered for many years by the Last Cabinet Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, is one of the finest in the South. It includes Jefferson Davis' camp chest given to him by English sympathizers and used until he left his generals, cabinet members and staff after the final cabinet meeting. Other exhibits are original photographs, signed documents, Joe Brown pikes, Gen. Robert Toombs' uniform, and Ku Klux Klan regalia of the Reconstruction days. Casts of the original busts of the men in Georgia's Hall of Fame by sculptor Bryant Baker are on display, as is a collection of Indian relics gathered by a native of Wilkes County, the late Morton Reese. A fine collection of guns of the period are on loan by Alexander Wright.

The main floor of the museum is furnished as a typical double parlor, dining room, and bedroom of the mid-19th century. The ground floor has been restored as a kitchen and storage area, including a dry well. The corner cupboard in the plantation office on the ground floor was made in Wilkes County.

Following an early garden plan, the Commission used plants typical of ante-bellum gardens in landscaping the grounds of the museum. The camellia in front of the house is an early variety and one of the largest in this section of Georgia.

The Georgia Historical Commission continually endeavors to locate appropriate furnishings for the Washington-Wilkes Historical Museum in order to offer future generations an accurate representation of life in ante-bellum Georgia.



## THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The Georgia Historical Commission was created in 1951 within the Department of the Secretary of State. The members and secretary are appointed by the Secretary of State, Ben W. Fortson, Jr. The duties and powers of the Commission are to promote and increase knowledge and understanding of the history of Georgia from earliest times to the present; to promote and publicize historical resources of the State; to coordinate its objectives with similar agencies; to cooperate and counsel with local organizations for historical purposes. In addition to maintaining historic sites, the Commission has erected historical markers over the State, that Georgia's past may be known in detail to residents and tourists.

Joseph B. Cumming, Augusta, is Chairman of the Commission. Members are: Dr. James C. Bonner, Milledgeville; Mrs. William Lawton Brannen, Metter; Dr. James T. Bryson, Washington; Beverly M. DuBose, Jr., Atlanta; John H. Goddard, Griffin; Thomas H. Gignilliat, Savannah; Dr. Henry T. Malone, Atlanta; Gordon F. Price, Atlanta; Mrs. Sidney B. Jewett, Avondale Estates, is Executive Secretary.

### HISTORIC SITES IN THE COMMISSION'S CUSTODY

- CHEHAW INDIAN MONUMENT, Memorial to a friendly Indian town, Ga. 195, 3 miles north of Leesburg.
- CONFEDERATE NAVAL MUSEUM, 4th Street just west of US 27 in Columbus.
- DAHLONEGA COURTHOUSE GOLD MUSEUM, US 19 at Dahlonega.
- EAGLE TAVERN, Stagecoach stop, store and tavern, US 129, US 441 at Watkinsville.
- ETOWAH MOUNDS ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA, Indian ceremonial center, west of US 411 and US 41 at Cartersville.
- FORT KING GEORGE, in 1721 the southernmost English outpost; prior to that the site of a Spanish Mission, on the Altamaha River, east of US 17 at Darien.
- FORT JACKSON MARITIME MUSEUM, 3 miles east of Savannah on river.
- FORT McALLISTER, Confederate fort for defense of Savannah, 10 miles east of US 17 at Richmond Hill.
- FORT MORRIS, Revolutionary Fort, 10 miles east of US 17 at Midway.
- CRAWFORD W. LONG MEDICAL MUSEUM, honoring first doctor to use ether as an anesthetic (in 1842), US 129 at Jefferson.
- MACKAY HOUSE, Revolutionary shrine, 1822 Broad Street in Augusta.
- MIDWAY MUSEUM, Memorial to founders of Georgia's "Cradle of Liberty," US 17 at Midway.
- NEW ECHOTA, Last eastern capital of the Cherokee Nation, north of Calhoun, on Ga. 225, 2 miles east of US 41.
- NEW HOPE CHURCH MONUMENT, Important battle site of the War Between the States, Ga. 92, 4 miles northeast of US 278 at Dallas.
- HISTORIC TRAVELER'S REST, Pioneer home and inn, US 123, 6 miles East of Toccoa.
- TROUP TOMB, Restored tomb of Georgia's original "State's Righter" who defied a President, 8 miles west of Soperton off Ga. 46.
- VANN HOUSE, Restored finest home in the Cherokee Nation, Ga. 225, US 76 at Spring Place.
- WASHINGTON - WILKES HISTORICAL MUSEUM, Confederate Museum and ante-bellum home, US 78, US 378 in Washington.

For further information, please write

Georgia Historical Commission  
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