



TOP

10

HISTORIC WEDDING SITES

Saying "I do" at Savannah's unique wedding venues



Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum Garden

LYN BONHAM PHOTOGRAPHY

When Atlanta paralegal Kortny Ficke married her fiancé, Corey, in Savannah last year, she knew that she wanted their wedding to be romantic, special and unforgettable.

This Georgia Southern University graduate, who originally hails from Memphis, Tenn., always found Savannah's history to be captivating and decided to plan her wedding reception at the spacious Southern garden at Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum, an increasingly popular choice for brides and grooms.

"It was important to me to get married somewhere historic and unique," Kortny explained. "Our love of Savannah is very much related to the city's history. We enjoyed the fact that our wedding captured the essence of Savannah, which we couldn't have done in a ballroom somewhere."

In fact, Kortny is part of a growing number of brides and grooms planning weddings at Savannah's historic sites. Wedding planner Julie Musselman, the owner of Hostess City Celebrations, explained that Savannah boasts an incredibly wide selection of historic sites for couples looking to tie the knot. The city's abundance of vintage venues, she said, appeals to local residents and also has led to an increase in destination weddings,

planned by couples who elect to wed in Savannah because of the city's wide selection of high-quality historic wedding sites.

"We're the oldest city in Georgia, so we have more historic locations to start with," added Musselman. "It's also a tribute to Savannah's preservation efforts that we have so many historic venues to choose from. Couples planning weddings really can't find anything comparable in other cities, in terms of the variety."

Here is an overview of 10 of Savannah's most popular historic wedding venues. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, it has been designed to offer insight into the remarkable range of options available to brides and grooms planning their special day in Savannah.

1 SHIPS OF THE SEA MARITIME MUSEUM GARDEN

41 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

232-1511

www.shipsofthesea.org

With the largest enclosed private garden in Savannah's National Historic Landmark District, the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum has become an

BY ALLISON HERSH

*Bethesda Chapel*

increasingly popular daytime and nighttime wedding location. The garden can accommodate events with up to 200 guests, providing a romantic, elegant environment for any outdoor wedding.

Originally designed by the Historic Savannah Foundation with cooperation from the President's Garden Club in 1976, the garden has since been upgraded by designer John McEllen, who also designed the Fragrant Garden in Forsyth Park and the garden at the Society of the Cincinnati's Harper-Fowlkes House on Orleans Square. The outdoor garden is based on Victorian parlor design and is divided into separate "rooms," providing a large central area as well as more intimate areas for socializing.

The Scarborough House, which currently houses the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum, was originally built in 1819 for William Scarborough, a shipping merchant who served as one of the principal owners of the *Savannah*, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Scarborough's architect, William Jay, created one of the earliest examples of the Greek Revival in the South. Used as a public school from the 1870s, the mansion was abandoned for 20 years before being restored by the Historic Savannah Foundation in the 1970s. After another period of neglect, the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum was restored to its present glory in 1996.

2 BETHESDA CHAPEL

9520 Ferguson Ave.

691-5294

www.bethesdahomeforboys.net

When Paula Deen, Savannah's queen of Southern cuisine, wed tugboat captain Michael Groover in 2004, she chose the Whitefield Memorial Chapel at the Bethesda Home for Boys as the site of their nuptials. Country music superstar Joe Nichols also recently planned a wedding at the Bethesda Chapel, as do approximately 50 couples each year.

Surrounded by moss-strung live oak trees, the Bethesda Chapel has a rustic elegance that attracts brides and grooms in search of a cozy, old-fashioned wedding site. The church, which features traditional wooden pews and lovely stained glass windows, seats 135.

Originally built in 1925 by the Georgia Society of Colonial Dames of America, the chapel is still in continuous use today.

This quaint chapel is located on the spacious grounds of the Bethesda Home for Boys, the oldest existing home for children in the country. Founded as an orphanage in 1740 by British evangelist George Whitefield, the Bethesda Home for Boys continues its mission by educating boys in need by providing a quality education and vocational training with an emphasis on religion, character and hard work.

3 DAVENPORT HOUSE GARDEN

324 E. State St.

236-8097

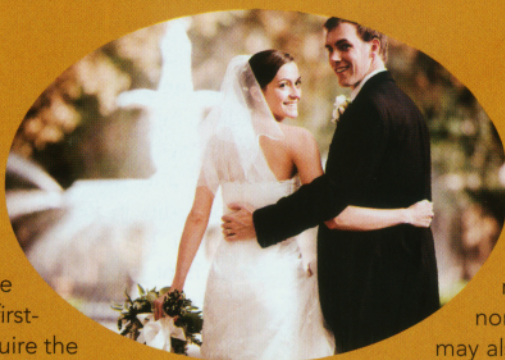
www.davenporthousemuseum.org

Every Valentine's Day, the Davenport House in Savannah's National Historic Landmark District hosts an annual tradition of marrying couples every 10 minutes for a modest donation. However, the Davenport House also serves as an ideal place for wedding receptions all year round. In 2007, this historic site hosted

*Bethesda Chapel*

HOW TO GET MARRIED

IN FORSYTH PARK OR AN HISTORIC SQUARE



All of Savannah's public parks and squares can be rented for weddings or other private functions throughout the year. Permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis and require the completion of a special event permit application, which can be downloaded online at www.savannahga.gov (click on "Squares, Monuments, Parks and Cemeteries," and then "Park and Square Rental").

A special event permit application and maintenance deposit are required to confirm a reservation. Applications must be received by the City of Savannah no later than 20 days before the event. Insurance is required for all weddings with an expected attendance of more than 150 or for any tented events.

The fee to rent a city square is \$175 for up to three

hours (which includes setup and cleanup time), with an additional fee of \$50 per hour, not to exceed \$700 per day. A non-resident fee of \$100 per day may also be applicable.

The fee to reserve space in the northern area of Forsyth Park is based on the acreage used for a wedding event. The charge is \$150 per acre for up to three hours (again, including setup and cleanup time), and then \$50 per acre per hour for every additional hour, not to exceed \$700 per acre per day. A non-resident fee of \$100 per day may also be applicable.

To plan a wedding ceremony or reception in Forsyth Park or in any of Savannah's squares, call Chris Foran with the City of Savannah at 351-3837.

approximately 20 weddings, all of which took place after hours, when the house closes to public tours.

One of only a handful of garden locations in downtown Savannah, the Davenport House offers an intimate, private setting for wedding ceremonies or receptions. Flowers are always in bloom at the home's traditional Southern garden, which can be tented and accommodate up to 200 guests. Originally designed as the Bicentennial project of the Trustees' Garden Club in 1976, the courtyard garden has since been re-designed by English landscape architect Penelope Hobhouse and features a scenic arbor that serves as an ideal wedding location.

Built as a family residence by Isaiah Davenport in 1820, this Federal-style home has been meticulously restored and serves as one of Savannah's leading house museums, attracting visitors from across the country and around the world. When the Davenport House was threatened with demolition in 1955, the effort to save this historic home launched the Historic Savannah Foundation and ushered in a new era of historic preservation in Georgia's First City.

4 FORSYTH PARK

Located between Gaston Street and Park Avenue
351-3837
www.savannahga.gov

Forsyth Park, the crown jewel of all public spaces in downtown Savannah, hosted 80 weddings in 2007, from small ceremonies by the fountain at the center of the park to large tented events in the grassy area on the park's north end. This 30-plus-acre park serves as a true showcase for the City of Savannah's Park and Tree department, which maintains the site's lush plantings of live oaks, magnolia trees and azaleas.

Most weddings take place in the northern portion of the park, which features ample space for ceremonies and receptions of virtually any size. The City of Savannah issues permits to rent areas of the park for weddings throughout the year.

The history of Forsyth Park actually dates back to the 1840s, when William Hodgson donated 10 acres of wooded land for the establishment of the city's first recreational park, called Forsyth Place. In 1851, the park was renamed in honor of John Forsyth, who served

as the governor of Georgia at the time. Originally created as a military parade ground, the 21-acre park extension was added in 1867. The majestic fountain at Forsyth Park, which was constructed in 1858 and restored in 1988, currently serves as a scenic centerpiece for wedding ceremonies and photos.

5 GREEN-MELDRIM HOUSE

14 W. Macon St.
232-1251
www.stjohnssav.org

History truly comes to life at the Green-Meldrim House, which served as Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's Civil War headquarters during the Union troops' occupation of the city in 1864-65. In December of '64, General Sherman wrote his legendary telegram to President Abraham Lincoln from his bedroom at the Green-Meldrim House, offering the city of Savannah as a Christmas present.

Today, this elegant home serves as the parish house for St. John's Episcopal Church and is the site of a number of wedding receptions each year. The Green-Meldrim House is typically available for receptions for church members only, although the priest has the discretion to make exceptions on rare occasions. Wedding ceremonies are required to take place at the adjoining church, which also stipulates that receptions serve white wine and champagne in lieu of beer and liquor and that receptions must conclude by 10 p.m. Bands, disc jockeys and dancing are all forbidden on-site.

Built between 1851 and 1853 for wealthy cotton merchant Charles Green, the Green-Meldrim House serves as an extraordinary example of a Neo-Gothic Revival architecture. Designed by architect John Norris, the mansion overlooks Madison Square and is a National Historic Landmark that boasts a number of exquisite period antiques as well as a grand staircase for the bride to descend and a special changing room upstairs for the bridal party.

6 OLD FORT JACKSON

1 Fort Jackson Road
232-3945
www.chsgeorgia.org/jackson

Old Fort Jackson, the oldest standing brick fortification in Georgia, proudly hosts unique, historically themed Southern weddings and receptions for brides, grooms and their guests. From cannon firings to Civil War reenactments, weddings at this Coastal Heritage Society site feature a generous dose of history.

Named in honor of Georgia governor and Revolutionary War soldier James Jackson, Old Fort Jackson is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. The former headquarters for the Confederate Savannah River defenses during the Civil War, this historic structure is one of a handful of pre-1812 forts still standing in the United States.

Wedding ceremony packages, reception packages and rehearsal dinner programs are available. All proceeds from weddings at Old Fort Jackson go toward the ongoing preservation of this National Historic Landmark.

7 OWENS-THOMAS HOUSE MUSEUM GARDEN

124 Abercorn St.
790-8879
www.telfair.org

The Owens-Thomas House Museum Garden provides a lovely outdoors setting for an intimate, beautiful wedding. The parterre garden can comfortably seat 50 guests for dinner and serves as an ideal location for smaller wedding receptions.

OTHER HISTORIC PLACES TO CONSIDER

THE GASTONIAN

220 E. Gaston St.
232-2869
www.gastonian.com

HARPER-FOWLKES HOUSE

230 Barnard St.
713-4690

MACKEY HOUSE

190 Red Gate Farm Trail
234-7404
www.mackeyhouse.com

MARSHALL HOUSE

123 E. Broughton St.
644-7896
www.marshallhouse.com

OLDE PINK HOUSE

23 Abercorn St.
232-4286

SAVANNAH HISTORY MUSEUM

303 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
651-6825
www.chsgeorgia.org/shm



Owens-Thomas House Museum Garden

COURTESY OWENS-THOMAS HOUSE

Nestled between the Owens-Thomas House and a carriage house that includes one of the oldest intact urban slave quarters in the South, the garden is surrounded by a high wall, providing security and controlled access. A central fountain provides a perfect place for photographs with uniquely Savannah backgrounds, while a broad porch overlooking the garden can accommodate up to six musicians.

Widely considered to be the finest example of English Regency architecture in America, the Owens-Thomas House was designed by the British architect William Jay, one of the first professionally trained architects practicing in the United States, at the age of 24. The elegant residence, which overlooks Oglethorpe Square, is now a National Historic Landmark, was built for cotton merchant and banker Richard Richardson and his wife, Francis Bolton.

8 ROUNDHOUSE RAILROAD MUSEUM

601 W. Harris St.

651-6823

www.chsgeorgia.org/roundhouse

Owned and operated by the Coastal Heritage Society, the Roundhouse Railroad Museum provides the ideal location for weddings for history buffs or train lovers. This preservation site features a number of unique sites for weddings, including an outdoor garden and several historic buildings including a tender frame shop, blacksmith shop and overnight train shed.

The oldest and most complete antebellum railroad manufacturing and repair facility still in existence, this National Historic Landmark tells the story of industry and how it shaped Savannah and the state of Georgia. When the Central of Georgia Railway headquarters and repair shops complex began in the 1830s, its design was truly revolutionary, combining all the railroad's cutting-edge facilities in one place. Today, this historic site features seven historic railroad structures, an operating roundtable and a growing collection of locomotives and rolling stock.

The Roundhouse staff can provide interpreters dressed in period clothing and organize live blacksmithing demonstrations and steam engine demos for wedding parties. The train shed can accommodate up to 350 guests, making it one of the largest historic wedding venues in Savannah.

(Continued on page 166)

(Continued from page 79)



CHIA & HON PHOTOGRAPHY

9 TELFAIR ROTUNDA

121 Barnard St.
790-8879

www.telfair.org

For weddings with a touch of class, the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, a former neoclassical mansion on Telfair Square, serves as a popular choice. In 2007, the Telfair Academy, which has the distinction of being the oldest public art museum in the South, hosted 16 weddings.

The newly refurbished Rotunda, which features a dramatic circular ceiling and highlights from the museum's permanent collection, can accommodate as many as 150 for seated dinner and has ample room for musicians and dancing. The Telfair Academy's romantic ambiance serves as an ideal place to say "I do" in Georgia's First City. Art lovers rejoice in the rotunda's striking blue walls, high ceilings and world-class collection of paintings, which together provide a romantic, inspiring atmosphere for weddings large and small.

A National Historic Landmark, the Telfair mansion was designed by English architect William Jay in the neoclassical Regency style and built between 1818 and 1819 for Alexander Telfair. Mary Telfair, an early patron of the arts, bequeathed the stately home to become a public "academy of arts and sciences." In 1883, the Telfair mansion was enlarged with the addition of the Sculpture Gallery and the Rotunda, built to accommodate the museum's growing permanent collection. The museum's grand opening in 1886 was attended by many dignitaries, including Jefferson Davis, former president of the Confederacy.

10 WHITEFIELD SQUARE

Habersham Street, between Taylor and Gordon streets

351-3837

www.savannahga.gov

Gen. James Edward Oglethorpe founded Savannah in 1733, creating a distinctive, democratic urban plan that eventually consisted of 24 public squares strategically scattered throughout the downtown area.

When it comes to weddings, however, all of Savannah's squares are not created equal.

Of the city's verdant squares, Whitefield Square has earned the distinction of being the most popular place to say "I do," with 75 weddings taking place in the square's picturesque gazebo in 2007. Located on Habersham Street in the heart of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District, this square was named in memory of the Rev. George Whitefield, an early minister in the colony who founded the Bethesda Orphanage — now known as the Bethesda Home for Boys — in 1740. Completed in 1851, Whitefield Square earned the distinction of being the last of the city's squares.

The square's white gingerbread-inspired gazebo provides a picture-perfect location for an intimate wedding ceremony and serves as an ideal backdrop for photos. Sheltered by massive live oak trees dripping with Spanish moss, Whitefield Square also boasts paved brick walkways and scenic views of historic downtown Savannah. Permits to marry in the square are issued by the City of Savannah. ■

**All phone numbers are in area code 912.*