

Documenting Historical Homes in Thomasville, Georgia



Laina Leslie, Florida State University

Anne McCudden, Executive Director of the Thomasville History Center

In collaboration with Dr. Kurt Piehler, *Department of History*, Florida State University



Abstract

In southwest Georgia, about thirty minutes from the Florida-Georgia border, there lies a town named Thomasville. Thomasville, Georgia was founded in 1826. It is a small town packed with a rich history. In the 19th century and early 20th century, there were distinct economic areas of the community with the different structures representing the availability of resources or the lack thereof. From dilapidated sheds to majestic mansions owned by wealthy politicians, Thomasville has been home to all types of people and stories. Over the last several months, as a part of an internship through the Thomasville History Center, I have been documenting historical homes and other structures by means of photography. There are nearly 400 houses and buildings that have been recognized by the Thomasville Historical Society. Many of the houses in Thomasville are 100 years or older, with some even pre-date the Civil War. Today, although many houses are adorned with a sign including the date it was built and the name of the previous owners, there is still no formal record of each of these structures. My role in this project was to ensure that this history is well-preserved and organized for future generations, as well as to create a foundation for further research. Through my documentation, researchers will be able to explore the architectural history of Thomasville for years to come.

Methods

At the beginning of my internship with the Thomasville History Center, I was given a list containing some of the historically significant houses in Thomasville. My role in this project, as the photographer, was to create a visual record of every address on the list. Initially, it included around 380 homes and other establishments. Through the process, however, I added my own entries and corrections regarding properties I deemed to be of historical interest. The methods I used as I documented each structure are fairly straight-forward. Once a week, I traveled to Thomasville and chose a certain section of the town to photograph. As I walked around the area, I took pictures of each of the houses and marked off the address once I had images of the left side, right side, and front of the structure. Once each building was fully documented, I uploaded the pictures to the Thomasville History Center's database, where I then organized them according to street name and labeled them with their corresponding address. The vulnerable nature of historical structures necessitates other means of preservation. Thus, the goal of this process was to protect the architectural history of Thomasville by digitally storing photographic documentation. Through these photographs, the Thomasville History Center hopes to provide insight into the different communities that inhabited Thomasville as well as an architectural record for interested individuals in the future.

Photographs

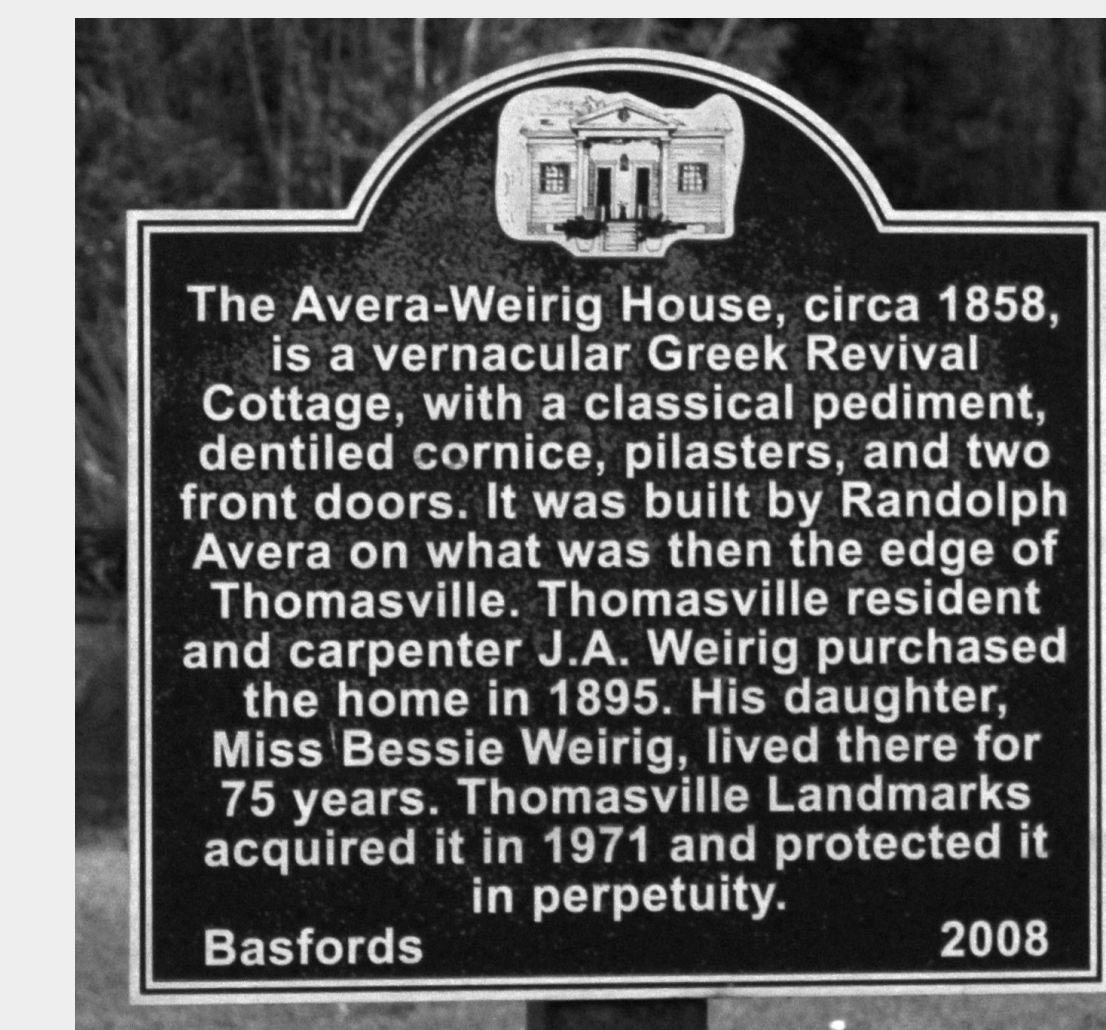


The right side, front, and left side of a 116 year old 3-story mansion owned by Elijah Leon neel.

The right side, front, and left side of a dilapidated house on Alexander Street.

Significance

One way the people of Thomasville demonstrate their great passion for architectural history is through the time and attention they give to knowing the background of the structures. Many of the older, well-preserved houses have signs with information about the previous owners and the date of construction. A few even have more descriptive signs that address the type of architecture involved, and details about the structure's historical significance. It can be clearly seen that the community of Thomasville is dedicated to maintaining their beautiful town and the rich history that is so deeply connected to it.



A sign outside a house on Calboun Street.



A plaque including the names of the previous owners and the year of construction.

Conclusion

In the book *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*, the authors state, "Uncovering what has taken place over the years in a family, an organization, or a community reveals the origins of conditions, the causes of change, and the reasons for present circumstances" (Kyvig, Marty, & Cebula, 10). Preserving and understanding local history is crucial to our humanity. It not only brings us closer to the community around us, but it provides us with cultural richness. Buildings specifically offer much insight into surrounding history. As *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* explains, "Buildings are not only the most prominent artifacts in the cultural landscape but the centers of human activity as well" (Kyvig et al., 153). Thus, buildings are pivotal factors in comprehending the history of a community. Unfortunately, buildings are often difficult to maintain. In most cases, preservation is very expensive and requires much time and attention. Consequently, structures fall down, wear out, and deteriorate. That is why other forms of documentation are crucial. Although a photograph is incomparable to an actual house, my documentation for the Thomasville History Center will provide a base for historians, locals, researchers, and any interested individuals to learn from, explore, and build upon in the future.

References

Kyvig, David E. et al. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*. 4th ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.