

## **Savannah River, the First River**

### **Visiting the Revolutionary War Zone**

---

#### **Day 1, March 19, 1825—Entering Georgia on the River, Arriving in Savannah**

---



The Mouth of the Savannah River, from Cockspur Island's north shore. The Atlantic is to the right, South Carolina left foreground.

Before we can begin to follow Lafayette through Georgia, he first has to get here. Lafayette had visited the coastal city of Beaufort, SC, at midnight between March 18-19th, after the ship had left a requested stop at Edisto Island, south of Charleston. The ship, the *Henry Schult*, leaves Beaufort accompanied by South Carolina's governor, but it has to stop to let him and his entourage off, as state law will not allow a sitting governor to cross the state line. They travel down the coast during the rest of the night, reaching the mouth of the Savannah River at sunrise. In the future the large Fort Pulaski would be there; in 1825 it had not even been dreamed of yet.

But the river has two entrances, the North Channel which is larger and the more traveled one, and the South Channel, separated by Cockspur Island which now houses the remains of Fort Pulaski, a fort not yet built in Lafayette's time. It also travels sluggishly, against the current, and falls way behind schedule.

When Cockspur Island's west end is reached, it has to pass Elba Island, on a large bend in the River. Shortly afterwards, the two Channels merge into one for a few miles, then the ship must switch to the South Channel to pass below Hutchinson Island. It passes Fort Jackson on the southern river bank, now a museum, near a water treatment plant, to reach the city.

The coastline today is as marshy as then and there are few coastal roads to follow. To get to the start of Lafayette's entrance into the River, yet remain in Georgia, one must drive out of the city of Savannah....(See Map #1)

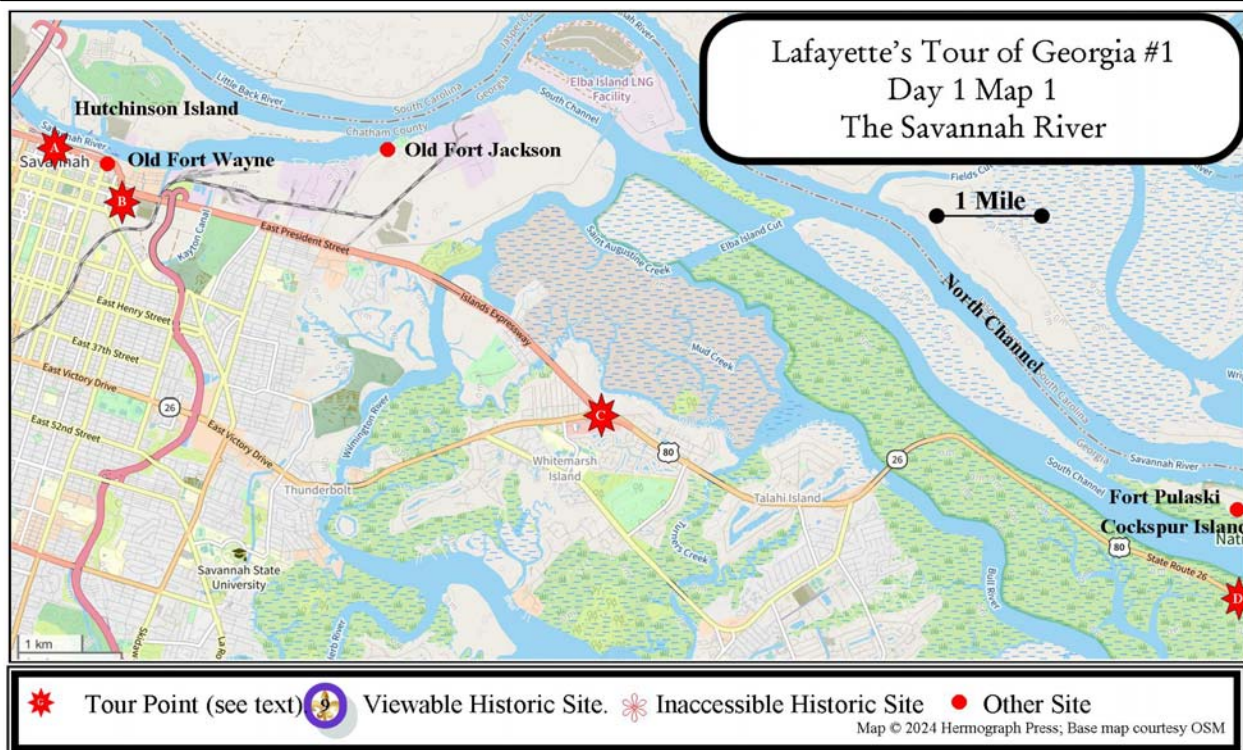
**\*A From Downtown Savannah's City Hall, on Bay Street right on the River, at the intersection of Bull Street, head eastward 0.8 miles until it curves to the right and ends at E. President Street.**

**\*B Turn Left and head east on E. President. This becomes Island Expressway, a faster route to the recreational areas of Tybee Island and the Atlantic beaches.**

**\*C In 5.5 miles Island Expressway ends when it merges into US-80. Route 80 eventually heads past beach houses and through the marshes to ride alongside the South Channel.**

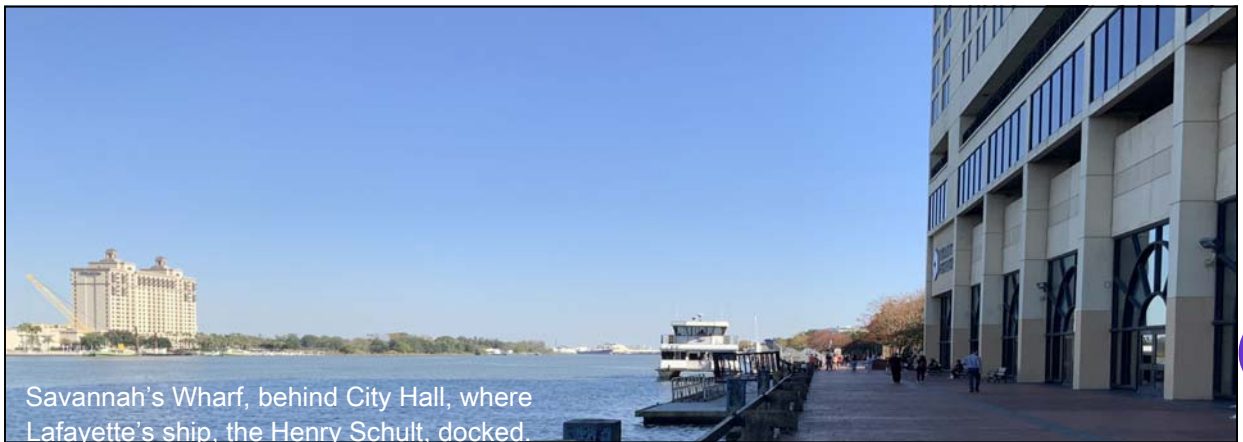
**\*D Turn left after 7.1 miles onto Fort Pulaski Road (well marked) and pay your entrance fee to go over the Channel to drive to the parking lot next to Fort Pulaski.**

**A hiking trail of a mere 1/4th mile takes you to Cockspur Island's north edge, where you can see the North Channel, South Carolina across it, and the mouth of the Savannah River at the Atlantic far off to the right.**



### Side Trip: Fort Pulaski

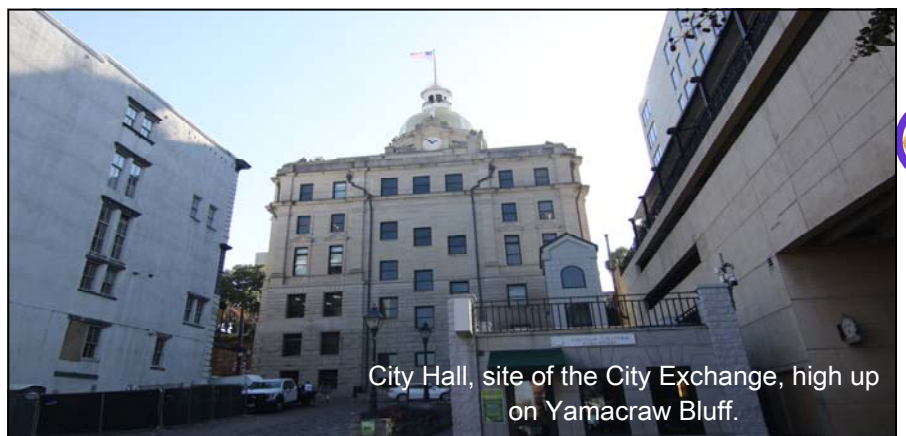
Fort Pulaski was not in existence when Lafayette passed by; it was started until 1829. In 1833 it was named for Casimir Pulaski, a Polish commander who trained Revolutionary War. Completed in 1847, it was one of thirty with walls 11-foot thick. But it was poorly staffed and little utilized. Because of that, it was an easy target for Confederate troops during the early days of the Civil War. Their control of it didn't last long. It fell in 1862 to Union forces, using the new rifled cannon bores that could go miles farther with more accuracy than smooth-bore Rebel cannon. After two days of attack, the fort surrendered. It became both a Union fort that blocked Savannah's port too well, and a prison for Confederate soldiers later. It briefly became a national monument in 1924, reverted back to Navy use during World War II, then back to being a park, adding a museum.



Savannah's Wharf, behind City Hall, where Lafayette's ship, the *Henry Schult*, docked.



Lafayette's ship is late; it was expected early in the morning. The citizens and politicians, bands and militia are all lined up to meet him. Except there was no 'him.' Many slowly wander off. In the morning, a signal rider from Fort Jackson sends a message that his ship has been sighted passing the Fort Jackson—accounts differ between 8 and 11AM. But somewhere in the morning, the *Henry Schult* finally gets past Fort Wayne on the eastern end of the city on the river. A collection of boats and barges had met the steamboat mid-channel near Fort Jackson, and Lafayette and some others are taken off the boat in advance of docking and brought to the wharf directly behind **Yamacraw Bluff**, the site of Oglethorpe's first landing, and today's **City Hall**.



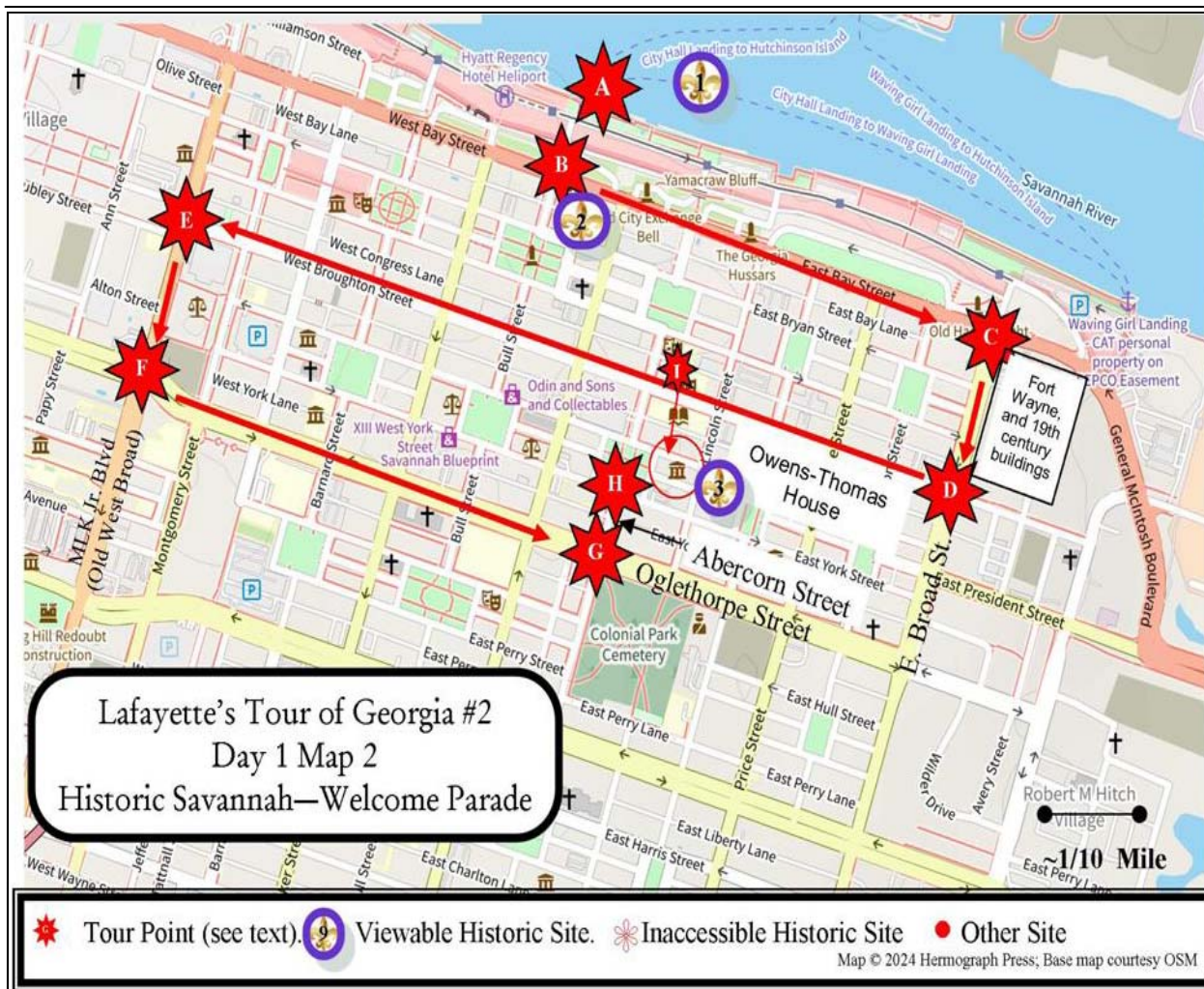
City Hall, site of the City Exchange, high up on Yamacraw Bluff.



The latter, for a reference point, is at the intersection of Bay Street, parallel to the River, and Bull Street, perpendicular to it. Bull Street is the ‘Greenwich Meridian’ of Savannah. All streets that run parallel to the River are today divided into East and West portions here. And, one of Savannah’s greatest charms, streets are arranged very rectilinear, with major streets making large square outlines with park-and-monument plots in their center, THE Squares of Savannah.

The Bluff is rather high and the entire modern downtown is well above the River level. There are numerous stairs that lead up from the River to Bay Street. Along the River today is first River Street, and then, for part of the way, Factor’s Walk. The former is crammed with restaurants, souvenir shops and other stores and is a fun place to visit. It is much fun watching the traffic on the river that often includes very large ocean going container ships that float high over the water’s surface. The steps are steep and worn from many years of exposure to the elements and foot traffic. But on top of the Bluff was the then-government center, City Exchange, now the City Hall. A number of tour boats dock where Lafayette’s ship eventually docked, behind and slightly downriver from being directly behind City Hall.

After giving a short speech at the Bluff, Lafayette is taken on a welcoming parade of about a couple of miles. To follow along, begin in front of the site of the City Exchange (i.e. the City Hall at Bull and Bay Street), and....(See Map #2)



**\*A** Head east, back down river, on E. Bay Street, past the upper levels of the River entertainment area. You will go seven streets, to East Broad Street (photo right), but at some point, cross the street to avoid closed sidewalks due to construction and to also avoid traffic that either goes down the ramps to River Street, or on the Bluff parking... anywhere they can find it. Turn right here.



**\*B** Heading south of E. Broad Street, you will see, especially on the east side (left side in the photo to the left), you pass first some ruins of Fort Wayne, and then a string of buildings, mostly housing commercial enterprises but some residences, too, which Lafayette would have seen as they date back to the 1700s!

**\*C** Head south for six intersections, to wide and busy E. Broughton Street, and turn right to head back into historic downtown.



**\*D** The parade goes the whole way west on Broughton Street, where it ends in a T-intersection on today's Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, but was then and for most of history, West Broad Street (photo left).

There are still concrete corner markers showing the old name (photo right).



**\*E** Turn left and head south, away again from the River. It is just a short walk to West Oglethorpe Avenue, an extremely busy and wide road with a grassy median beginning just east of the intersection with MLK Jr. Blvd. Turn left.

West Oglethorpe Avenue is far more residential than places passed up to now, but still an active area with lots of traffic. SCAD, the Savannah College of Art and Design, and the Civic Center, take up much of the territory on West Oglethorpe. After crossing Bull Street, this street becomes East Oglethorpe Avenue.

**\*F** Two intersections later (counting on the left side, three on the right), you reach Abercorn Street, with a Savannah Fire Department and the Colonial Cemetery on the right. Turn left onto Abercorn Street (left photo on the next page).



**\*G** In two streets you reach E. York Street, and Oglethorpe Square. Turn right. (Photo, below right, the Owens-Thomas House in the background from York).



**\*H** Go one short stretch right to the offset Abercorn. Turn left here.

**\*I** Stop in one block, at E. President Street. At that corner is what is today known as the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. (photo right).

Back then, the Owens-Thomas House was one of several homes operated as boarding houses by a Mrs. Maxwell. This house was once owned by merchant Richard Richardson; by 1825 it had been forfeited to a bank.

It was here that Lafayette's welcome parade ended, followed by a short speech by the mayor. It is said that Lafayette responded to the Mayor but it is not recorded for certain that it was done on the building's very narrow balcony. And then Lafayette was done, officially, for the day.



Owens-Thomas House from the right side.



What Lafayette would see today if he stood on the Owens-Thomas House balcony. To the right is Oglethorpe Square.