

**Project:** *Driving Tour Narrative and Map of Historic Talbotton, Georgia*

**Community Partner:** Talbot County Chamber of Commerce, Georgia

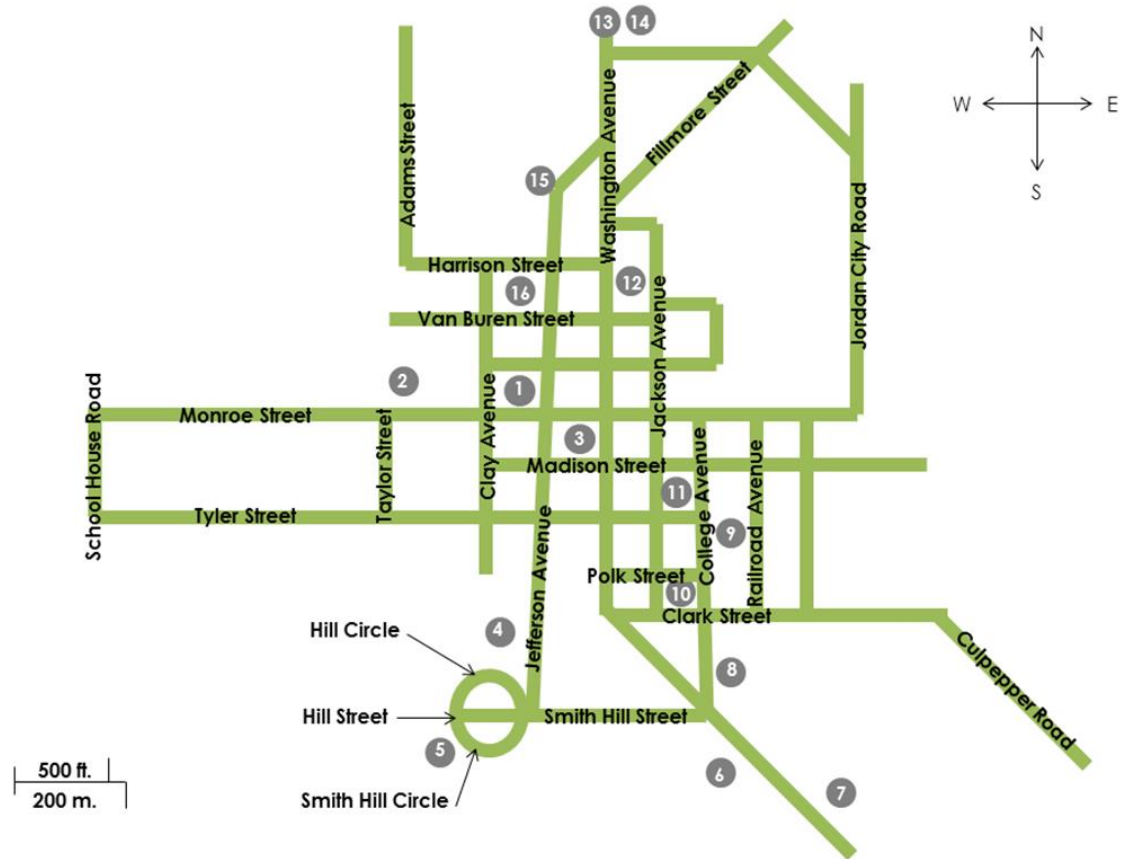
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**Class:** GEOG 3556 Cultural Geography – Research Seminar

**Department:** History and Geography, Columbus State University **Semester:** Spring 2013





## Location of Historic Buildings on Tour

1. Hill & Warner-Simpson-Jordan Houses
2. Towns-Person-Page House
3. Town Square
4. Saint Phillips African Methodist Church
5. Smith Hill
6. Smith-Persons-Battle-Palmer House
7. Pew-Hill-Dean House
8. Talbotton Methodist Church
9. Straus-LeVert Memorial Hall
10. Zion Episcopal Church
11. Blount-McCoy-Maxwell House
12. Carreker-Watkins-Basset House
13. Rebel Ridge
14. Sims House
15. Pou-Thornton-Olive-Calhoun House
16. Strauss Home Site

**Overview:** Talbot County Chamber of Commerce approached the Columbus Community Geography Center in December 2012 seeking help to update their historic driving tour of the county seat, Talbotton, GA. Students and faculty met several times with our community partner in spring 2013. Students proposed preparing a new historic driving tour narrative and a tri-fold handout that would include a map locating each historic building featured on the tour.

**Outcomes:** Students developed a one-hour driving tour narrative that emphasized one major theme: the importance of the cotton economy; and three subthemes: the community's architectural history, the central role of education, and its prominent citizens. Students felt that the cotton economy drove the extensive investment in buildings that created the community's rich architecture heritage. The cotton economy also drew educational institutions to the community and it helped to form a crucible for the development of influential leaders in education, politics and business. Students established the history of each site but did not include any information after approximately 1970. Students felt that references to present owners would quickly date the tour.

**Recommendations:** Students recommended that the Chamber of Commerce:

1. take away the driving tour's original signage from the historic tour established in the 1990s as it would impede way finding for visitors taking the new tour;
2. establish new way finding signage that would align with the numbered sites on the brochure map and in the narrative;
3. web-publish the historic driving tour brochure and a downloadable tour narrative in addition to the planned CD rental from the Chamber of Commerce office. This would promote greater access for visitors. In addition, this would share the community's rich history to a viewing and listening public within and beyond Georgia.
4. consider safe places to indicate to tourists for turning automobiles around after the Towns-Persons-Page House (stop number 2) and the Rebel Ridge (stop number 13). Visitors may be in large vehicles, including motorhomes, and safety is important for local residents and visitors alike.

## Introduction

On behalf of the Talbotton Chamber of Commerce, I welcome you to our city. Today we will embark on a journey back in history when Talbotton was a bustling center of cotton production. ‘White gold,’ as cotton was sometimes referred to, created a vibrant antebellum economy. Its profits established major educational and religious institutions while affording the community’s remarkable architecture. The expansive cotton economy in Talbot County drove our economy, built our fortunes, forged our future, and shaped our destiny.

Talbot County was established 1826 when the Georgia legislature passed the “Act to Organize the Territory Lately Acquired from the Creek Indians, Lying Between the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers.” The county seat of Talbotton, established in 1828, was located along an old Creek Indian trading route called Old Horse Path. This trail crossed Creek Indian Country from Fort Hawkins (now Macon) to the Alabama River near Mobile, Alabama. The trail was used by Indians and Carolina traders prior to the founding of the Georgia Colony. It was an important immigration and postal route to the west. This trail then became the Old Federal Road. Talbotton was in the middle of the action and poised to grow.

By the 1850s Talbotton had reached its zenith and was a town of over 16,000 people, about half of whom were enslaved in the cotton industry. Talbotton was Georgia’s fifth largest county in 1860 and the home of many influential people: two Governors, five U.S. Congressmen, two Chief Justices of the Georgia Supreme Court, two generals, and five college presidents. Cotton was our primary cash crop and at its high point the community produced about 18,000 bales per year. Most of this cotton was shipped to Columbus and loaded aboard river steamers bound for both national and international commercial centers.

The money that flowed back to Talbotton was invested in many of the buildings you see today. The architectural heritage of the community is extensive including the LeVert Historic District, established in 1976. Talbotton contains residential and religious architecture that includes antebellum, post Civil War and distinctive twentieth century architectural styles. Our architectural heritage includes a variety architectural styles that are common throughout the United States including a variety of Greek Revival homes, a Queen Anne courthouse, and Gothic Revival and Spanish Colonial churches styles. The town also includes an example of a Sears and Roebuck catalogue home. However, Talbotton also hosts a uniquely southern style, that Plantation Plain style (also known as “I” house) that was designed to suit the hot and humid climate of Georgia. You will notice that our homes often have long names reflecting the various owners of the home such as at our first stop: the Warner-Simpson-Jordan House. The house acts as a genealogy for each home.

In the antebellum period, there were three major educational institutions in the community established between 1839 and 1856: Rose Hill Seminary, Collinsworth Institute and LeVert College. In the post-Civil War period, African American education was instituted by the AME church.

I look forward to sharing with you this trip through time. Please make a right onto Washington Avenue and then a left onto Monroe Street just past the Courthouse. Drive two blocks to the corner of Monroe Street and Clay Avenue where you will see Marker One. That is Destination One on our tour.

Turn me off now, and on again when you get to Destination One.

## **Destination One**

The first stop on our tour has two interesting homes for you to consider. On your right is the remaining portion of the famous Mansion House, a hotel that served as headquarters for the federal officers in this military district following the Civil War. Later, the building was cut into two sections and moved from its original position at the prior end of this block. The bottom floor of the hotel was located here at the corner and the top floor was just to the east. The upper level was destroyed in a storm in the 1920s, but the lower floor remains as the Thelma Hill House on your right.

In front of you on the left, you will notice a two-story white house with a front porch covered by an upper balcony. Named the Warner-Smith-Jordan House, it was built in 1832. The Plantation Plain architecture was designed to address the hot and humid climate of Georgia. This was the home and law office of Judge Hiram Warner. Judge Warner was a Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court and was present at the court's first meeting held in Talbotton on January 26, 1846. Often called an "I" house, this architectural style shows a tall narrow profile with two stories. It has a simple gabled roof with a shed roofed porch, and masonry chimneys on either side of the house. This home has high ceilings and a layout that maximizes the amount of light and cross ventilation.

There is a fascinating story attached to this house. Judge Warner, a law partner with George Washington Towns, was living in this home when it was raided by Union soldiers during the Civil War. Although he was in his sixties, he fought valiantly. After being subdued by the soldiers, and because he was a prominent Rebel leader, he was sentenced to hang. He was strung up in a tree in his own yard! Miraculously, instead of being killed, he was merely rendered unconscious and enjoyed sixteen more years of public service. The Simpson family bought the

house in 1894 and lived in it until the 1960s. It then became the law office of Frank Jordan, Jr., now a Superior Court judge. Mr. Jordan's father was a former Georgia Farmer of the Year and was selected by the State Department to visit Russia in the late 1950s and China during the Nixon Administration.

We are ready to proceed to the next stop on our tour. Please continue ahead along Monroe Street approximately 0.1 miles and you will see a historic marker on the right shoulder. Park at the sign for Destination Two.

Turn me off now and back on at the Towns-Persons-Page home.

### **Destination Two**

This is the Towns-Persons-Page House. Originally built by the lawyer George Washington Towns, in 1830 this is a Greek Revival home. It has a pedimented gable with a wide, plain frieze, symmetrical shape, a heavy cornice, and simple yet bold moldings. The house has an entry porch with four Ionic columns. This is what most people imagine when they hear the term Antebellum home.

Cousin to the famous Creek Indian Chief William McIntosh, George Washington Towns was one of Talbotton's most famous sons. He served two terms in the United States Congress and was Governor of Georgia from 1847 until 1851. His administration fought to improve the conditions for slaves in Georgia, completed the Western and Atlantic Railroad between Atlanta and Chattanooga, and was an early advocate for free public schools.

During the 1840s Mrs. Towns had the columns added, an addition was built on the house, and the interior was embellished in order to better suit a man of her husband's position. Towns'

mother passed away in 1843 and is buried just east of the house. Her grave has been marked and restored by the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Included on the grounds are several brick buildings. First, there is the original kitchen. Having the kitchen separate from the house kept the main home cooler in the summer and reduced the risk of a fire consuming the entire house. Slaves and helpers used this kitchen to prepare all the family meals. There was also a seven-seat outhouse. Both buildings were built of bricks fired on the Towns plantation.

The Persons family owned this house from 1850 to 1962 and it was home to Talbotton's Mayor, Henry Persons. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 7, 1973.

Our next destination is the Courthouse in the town square. Safely turn around and drive back toward town. Once you are at the Courthouse, turn right on Washington Avenue and park in front of the Courthouse at Marker Three. Turn me off and I will rejoin you at that point.

### **Destination Three**

As you may have already noticed, Talbotton, the county seat, is built on a square. This is true for many early Georgia towns. In 1850s, the Talbotton Square was quite different from what you see today. The square had three hotels that offered fine dining and lodging. Stores supplied everything from groceries to dry goods, furniture to high-fashion clothing. There were doctor's and dentist's offices, banks, law offices, a saloon, and even a two-story opera house. Across the street from where you are now you can see the arched doorway in the brick building that once led to the opera house. To the right is A&G Hardware with the Masonic Lodge #10 above it (on the eastern side of the square. Organized in the 1830s, the Lodge was one of the earliest in Georgia. The east and north sides of this square provided the location for part of



Universal Studios' 1976 movie, *Bingo Long and the Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*. Many Talbotton citizens were cast as extras.

The Courthouse is built in Romanesque form; note the harmonious proportions, thick and heavy walls with structural and decorative arches, and the basilica-style plan. The building was rebuilt in 1892 after the original burned. It features a Seth Thomas clock weighing over 3000 pounds, having 1350 pounds in weights to keep it in motion, a strike that weighs 1200 pounds, and a 135 pound pendulum. The chimes can be heard all over the city.

Of all the famous trials held in this building, one in particular comes to mind. In 1921, Major Lee Coart stood trial for the murder of county school superintendent Mr. A.B. McNeice concerning a love triangle they shared with Mrs. McNeice. Coart was convicted but none of the parties involved ever gave details or reasons for the shooting, heightening the speculation and notoriety surrounding the incident. The major's appeals ran as high as the Georgia Supreme Court and an opinion was handed down by Chief Justice Russell, father of the U.S. Senator from Georgia Richard B. Russell. In a refreshing break from standard legal jargon and embracing literature and romance, Justice Russell wrote, "David did not scruple at the basest ingratitude, the most intense cowardice, and even murder itself ... to possess Bathsheba; and Jacob ... not for five months, but for seven long years, labored faithfully and well for Laban, buoyed by hope that at the end of that long time he should possess Rachel, the object of his love. Somehow, in the economy of nature, there is nothing stronger than sexual affection ... and long before Leander swam the stormy Hellesponte to embrace Hero, and ever since ... love ... whether pure and inspired by God, or impure and inspired by the devil, has been the monarch of human passions." What a colorful way for a judge to uphold a lower court's ruling!

Diagonally across from the square is the Chamber of Commerce Building. Originally the Ford Agency, this two-story brick building was designed by the Ford Motor Company. Constructed in 1916, it housed a showroom and sales offices on the ground floor and a repair shop above. The building has the first elevator in Talbot County. Model T's and other cars were raised by that elevator to the repair shop on the second floor. Oil stains can still be seen in the maple flooring. Of course, this didn't deter the Talbotton youth from having frequent dances on those hardwood planks!

We will now proceed to the next stop on our tour. At the end of this block, turn right onto Madison Street and then left onto Jefferson Avenue. As you make this turn, notice the modern home on the right. The structure that preceded it was the Claiborne Hotel, built in 1833 by Colonel John Birch. This hotel hosted the first session of the Georgia Supreme Court on January 26, 1846. The state legislature located the Supreme Court in Talbotton due to the large number of prominent lawyers in the area. Continue on Jefferson Avenue until you arrive at St. Phillips African Methodist Episcopal Church and Marker Four. Turn me off now and back on at Marker Four.

#### **Destination Four**

Organized on April 15, 1870, Saint Phillips African Methodist Episcopal Church has served Talbotton for over 140 years. The original building was destroyed by a storm in 1875. With the help of the trustee board and the hardworking pastor Rev. A. S. Grangin, the church was rebuilt that same year. The basement of this building was used as a school for local African-American children during this time as there was no provision for teaching Black children in the county.

The most famous student to graduate from this school was Elizabeth Evelyn Wright. She was born in the Smith Hill neighborhood on April 3, 1872. She was the seventh child of John Wesley and Virginia Wolfe Wright.

Now we will head up to the Smith Hill neighborhood where Elizabeth Wright lived. Continue straight on Jefferson, turning right onto Smith Hill Street at the top of the hill. When you come to the place where the street curves sharply left, stop near the small cemetery at Marker Five.

Turn me off until you arrive at Marker Five.

### **Destination Five**

Elizabeth Evelyn Wright was born on Smith Hill in 1872; she was one of twenty-seven children. The location of the house is not known and may not exist today, but her life is noteworthy nonetheless. She was born to a carpenter father and a mother that may have been a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. On school days, she would walk down to St. Phillips and attend the basement school where she excelled.

Evelyn's extraordinary talents and academic excellence allowed her the opportunity to enroll at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. While studying at the Tuskegee Institute, Evelyn was mentored by both Booker T. and Margaret Washington. Before graduating from Tuskegee she moved to Hampton County, South Carolina and assisted at a rural school for Black children. The school was burned by White residents and Evelyn returned to Tuskegee to finish her education.

Rededicating herself to the education of African-American youth, in 1897, Evelyn moved to Denmark, South Carolina. There she opened the Denmark Industrial School with a \$5000 donation from New Jersey philanthropist Ralph Voorhees that went to purchase land and the

construction of the school's first building. In 1902, Voorhees Industrial School opened for male and female students at elementary and high school levels with Evelyn as its principal. For years this was the only high school for Black children in the area. The school became Voorhees School and Junior College in 1947. With its accreditation as the four year institution, it became Voorhees College in 1962 an Historical Black liberal arts college affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

Evelyn became ill and died on December 14, 1906. She is buried on the Voorhees college campus. On February 28<sup>th</sup> of each year, Evelyn is honored with a feast day at the Episcopal Church. Likewise, Voorhees College honors her by offering scholarships to students from Talbot County.

We will now continue the tour and drive to Destination Six. Continue around Smith Hill Circle and turn right on Smith Hill Road. Drive until you reach Washington Avenue (also called Highway 80) and turn right. Immediately, you will see a house set back away from the road with a semi-circular drive. Park at Marker Six.

Turn me off until you arrive at Destination Six.

### **Destination Six**

You have arrived at the Smith-Persons-Battle-Palmer House. This home was built in the early 1830s for prominent Talbot County landowner Ezekial Smith. It was originally located in the community of Geneva six miles from Talbotton and was moved to this location around 1845. In 1890, wings were added and the veranda was extended. Note the brick buildings to the left of the house. The farthest one is the original carriage house and is built to house two carriages ... a rare sign of wealth in those days! The second brick building, nearer to the house, is a pump

house built by Henry Persons as a private water system for his home, livery stable, and mercantile and plantation supply stores. He also provided water delivery from this pump system to some buildings and businesses on the Talbotton square. Persons served as a captain in the Confederate Army and later served as a member of the 46<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress. He also began a law practice and was a trustee of the University of Georgia from 1894-1910.

Let's move on now to Destination Seven. Continue on Washington Avenue (Highway 80) for another 0.5 miles and you will find Marker Seven.

Stop the audio until you arrive at Marker Seven.

### **Destination Seven**

Built in 1852, the Pou-Hill House is another powerful example of Greek Revival architecture. One unusual feature of this home is the two-story columns on the rear of the house that match those along the front. Shortly after construction was completed, the house was bought by the Hill family. Dr. Hill was a professor at LeVert College (a school for women) that we will see later in the tour. His son, Walton B. Hill, attended Collinsworth Institute, a school for Talbotton males just down this road a few miles.

Dr. Hill practiced law in Macon for a number of years and later became Chancellor of the University of Georgia. He is remembered as an influential college leader and moved the university from being primarily a teachers college to a true state university. He was also an enthusiastic supporter of Charles Herty, a young chemistry professor that became the university's very first coach in the obscure sport of ... football!

We will head back to Talbotton now for Destination Eight. Turn around and drive approximately 0.4 miles toward Talbotton and turn right onto College Avenue. Go about one block to the Talbotton Methodist Church. Park at Marker Eight.

Turn me off now and back on when you get to Marker Eight.

### **Destination Eight**

In the nineteenth century, Methodism was sweeping through Georgia, and Talbot County became a focal point. The Talbotton Methodist Church was established in 1830 in a wooden building on this site. In 1857, that wooden building was replaced by the brick structure you see now. This was the first brick church in the South Georgia Methodist Conference and it hosted the South Georgia Conference in 1873. There were two Methodist colleges in Talbotton by the start of the Civil War (LeVert College for young ladies and Collingsworth Institute for young gentlemen). The church is built in the Greek Revival style emphasizing the large columns across the front. The congregation was segregated, with slaves sitting in the balcony at the rear of the sanctuary.

To the right of the church is the Methodist parsonage built in 1898. It's architectural and furniture styles were influenced by the designs of Charles Locke Eastlake, the preeminent English critic of style. His book *Hints on Household Taste* published in 1872, celebrated functional, unostentatious, simple design and his views were influential in both England and the United States. The parsonage is a cottage version in the Victorian style and featured a "Widow's Walk" on the flat portion of the roof between the chimneys; this was removed in the 1920s. Note the Victorian features: asymmetrical design, gabled roof lines, decorative trim, bay windows, and wrap-around porch. Built over a gravesite, it is sometimes said to be haunted with the occasional "eerie" slamming of a door.

Directly across the street set well away from the road is the Chapman-Willis-Gordon House built around 1845 to 1850. By 1859, the home was owned by wealthy planter and

businessman Asa W. Chapman. Upon the death of Mrs. Chapman in 1891, the house was sold to Paletia Willis, wife of a prominent Talbotton lawyer. The Willis family remained in the house until 1925 when it was transferred to Jasper and Tillie Gordon. This home had the only tennis court in Talbotton for many years.

Before we leave Destination Eight, notice the house on the corner to the right of the Chapman-Willis-Gordon house. It is interesting because it was a ready-to-assemble kit house sold through mail order by Sears, Roebuck and Company and shipped via boxcar. Between 1908 and 1940, 70,000 of these homes were sold in North America.

We are now ready to drive to the next location on our tour. To reach Destination Nine, please follow College Avenue to LeVert-Straus Hall and Marker Nine on the left.

Turn me off until you arrive at Marker Nine.

### **Destination Nine**

This is Straus-LeVert Memorial Hall. In the 1850s it was the defining structure of LeVert College. Originally established as Talbotton Female Academy, LeVert College was one of the first schools for women in Georgia. Founded in 1856 it was subsequently named for Octavia Walton Le Vert.

Born in August, Georgia in 1811, Octavia Walton was part of a prominent family. Her grandfather, George Walter, signed the Declaration of Independence, while her father was acting governor of Territorial Florida. Octavia showed a unique proficiency for European and Native American languages. When she was twelve years old, General Andrew Jackson gave her the honor of selecting a name for the capital city of Florida. She chose a Seminole Indian word meaning “Beautiful Land” ... Tallahassee. A well-known socialite in both in the North and

South, she married a French physician, Henry S. Le Vert, and they had five children. Le Vert traveled widely in Europe and America and she authored the book *Souvenirs of Travel* in 1857 recording her two trips to Europe in the mid-nineteenth century.

LeVert College was a Methodist school dedicated to the education and refinement of young ladies and its curriculum and teacher qualifications followed that of Wesleyan College in Macon. After a period of growth, LeVert's success was hampered by the Civil War and the school struggled to survive. Still, education was LeVert's critical mission; subjects taught by instructors included Latin, French, natural science, moral science, and others.

A separate school for boys was also established. Collingsworth Institute, founded in 1839, was inspired by Josiah Flounoy of Columbus. Flounoy wanted a school to prepare boys for careers in various fields, including agriculture. He selected Talbotton as the site because it was thriving economically and understood as a center of education. Founded under the auspices of the Methodist Church some of its famous alumni include Isidor, Oscar, and Nathan Straus, members of Talbotton's famed Straus family. Other alumni of Collinsworth include Walter B. Hill, a Chancellor of the University of Georgia and John B. Gordon, who served as a Confederate general and later as Governor of Georgia. The school fell on hard times after the Civil War and in 1877 it finally merging with LeVert to become a co-educational institution. The college was a pioneer in the field of co-education. Local and boarding students came from miles around to attend. In 1880 there were 109 students being taught by four full time professors ... and tuition was \$40!

LeVert's success, like that of Talbotton in general, was tied to cotton. With the collapse of the cotton economy, Talbotton was in decline and LeVert was forced to close in 1907. The building was taken over by the county and a public school was held in the building until 1926



when a new school was built. Today, the building is known as Straus-LeVert Hall in honor of the Straus family that lived in Talbotton for three decades during the 1800s. After the Civil War the Straus family moved to New York and became owners of Macy's and Co department store. The Straus family has remained close to Talbotton and their generous support has helped to maintain this building that now hosts the county's social, civic, and cultural events.

One-half block ahead on the right of where we sit is the Freemont-Watts-Kring House. This home was built in 1892 by W.A. Bennett, the contractor in charge of building the new courthouse. The veranda, encompassing three sides of the house, is greatly admired for its elegant scroll work. Woodwork, including mantels and walls, is of the same quality and style as the courthouse and wide heart pine flooring is featured throughout the house.

We will now make a square loop so that you can see a wonderful church one block east of here. At the end of this block, make a left onto Polk Street and the very next left onto Jackson Avenue. Park in front of Zion Episcopal Church at Marker Ten.

Turn me off now and we'll resume at Zion.

### **Destination Ten**

This is Destination Ten on our driving tour. Constructed in 1848, Zion Episcopal Church is a perfect replica of a typical rural English church in the Tudor-Gothic style. The Tudor arch is a significant architectural design element of this period. Zion was built by master craftsmen and features native walnut altars, communion rails, and pulpit. The entire structure put together by means of handmade iron nails and wooden pegs. The locks are original and require a large brass key about five inches long to open the doors. The sanctuary has a cathedral-style ceiling and there are upper galleries along two sides as well as raised choir lofts. These galleries and lofts

were the seating areas for slaves who attended services with their owners. The original box family pews – each with its own door – are still just as they were built. Music was provided by a rare Pilcher organ, installed in 1850, that has fifteen decorative pipes of gilded wood above the organ. This is the oldest Pilcher organ in continuous use in the United States and until recently the organ was operated by a hand pump.

Let's return to our tour by completing the square loop. From here you will turn left onto Clark Street and then left again onto College Avenue near LeVert-Straus Hall. Drive along College Avenue until you turn left onto East Madison Street and immediately stop at Marker Eleven.

Turn me off now and back on at Marker Eleven.

### **Destination Eleven**

Destination Eleven on our tour is the Blount-McCoy-Maxwell House. It was built in 1855 for the family of John Thomas Blount. Notice how the hipped roof terminates in a pyramid rather than the customary ridge. The verandah is supported by six Doric columns.

In the spring of 1896 a tragedy occurred in this antebellum home that would leave an indelible mark on the house ... and on Talbotton. Sallie Emma Owen was visiting her friend Jenny McCoy. While they were sitting in the parlor, an estranged admirer, Dr. Will Ryder, entered the home and shot and killed Owen. Ryder fled the scene but was found later that evening. He had stabbed himself in the neck and drank an overdose of a drug in an attempt to commit suicide. Dr. E.L. Bardwell worked feverishly and was able to save Ryder. After a long and well publicized trial, Ryder was found guilty and sentenced to hang. Defense attorneys worked to secure a new trial; this new trial was postponed after further legal wrangling.

Unwilling to wait any longer, a vigilante mob captured Ryder as he was being taken to the Columbus jail. Ryder was taken to an oak grove and hung.

Pinkerton detectives were called in to investigate but after six weeks they were unable to produce enough evidence to bring anyone to trial. The vigilante group remains anonymous to this day. It is said that the heart pine floor in the parlor where Sallie Emma Owen died is permanently stained with blood. Residents of the house have occasionally reported strange footsteps in the hallways and mysteriously moving chairs.

Let's continue along our journey now and make our way to Destination Twelve. At the next street, turn right onto Jackson Avenue and drive until you see Marker Twelve at Talbotton Baptist Church on the right.

Turn this audio off now until you arrive at the church.

### **Destination Twelve**

Organized in 1829, the Talbotton Baptist Church was a wooden meeting house that served the congregation until 1924. Inspired by the Spanish Colonial style architecture that shaped much of Florida's real estate boom in the 1920s, the church includes a flat roof, thick walls, and wooden support beams exposed in the interior. Ornamentation is generally limited to arches and small windows. Next to the church is the pastor's home that was moved to the site and remodeled in 1917.

Along the right side of the street beyond the church are three notable houses. The first house past the church is the Carreker-Watkins-Bassett House. Completed in 1884 by Captain Newton Perry Carreker, a quartermaster in the Confederate Army, the home is sometimes called the Liberty Bell House. The Bell styling of the gables at the roof of the home might have been inspired by the architecture of the Centennial Exposition of the United States in 1876 (the first

World's Fair in the United States). A servant's house stood in the side yard and the remnants are now used as a garage.

Next is the McGehee-Rowe House. Built in 1914 of heart pine lumber by John H. McGehee, this house was the first to pipe gas throughout to provide fuel for lights. The gas was produced by burning carbide in a small utility building in the back yard. There are twelve rooms in the house, five of which are bedrooms. The house was believed to be used by the Union Army as a campground during their pass through Talbotton. Several cannon balls and a number of U.S. Army horseshoes have been recovered from the site.

The third house on the right is the Spain-Baldwin-Maxwell House and was home to the niece of Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy. It was built between 1850 and 1855 in the Greek Revival style we have seen in a number of Talbotton houses. It is distinguished by its scale and one-story portico with six columns across the front. Taking advantage of Talbotton's location along the Old Federal Road, Spain, the original owner, operated a stagecoach and mail line, livery stables, and other interests nearby.

It's time now to visit our next stop – Rebel Ridge. Follow Jackson Avenue as it curves left and meets U.S. Highway 80 East. Turn right onto Highway 80 and drive about 0.4 miles. On the right you'll see an imposing home called Rebel Ridge. Stop at marker Thirteen.

Turn me off now and we'll resume at Rebel Ridge.

### **Destination Thirteen**

Rebel Ridge is a distinctive example of antebellum architecture. Originally the David Shelton Mansion, this cotton plantation home was surrounded by 3,500 acres of forest preserve and 1500 acres of crop land tended by slaves. This house has a colossal portico inspired by

ancient Greek architecture. Twenty-six Doric columns surround the house. Indeed, it is one of only a few antebellum homes remaining that have columns around the entire perimeter of the house. Thirty feet tall with a six foot base circumference, these columns are crafted from cypress timber to withstand centuries of weathering. Unusually, slave quarters still survive on this site.

As was the tradition in southern architecture, the kitchen was a separate building and it was connected by a dog trot to the rear patio and dining room. House slaves brought food from the kitchen to the dining room, where a butler and maid waited upon those at the table. The interior of the home is a fine example of the traditional southern plan of four up and four down rooms separated by wide halls for maximum air circulation. A stairway, with mahogany railing and spindle balusters rises on the right side of the lower hall. Another stairway leads from the second floor to the attic. There are double parlors separated by folding doors and a library, both with windows down to the floor and lower sashes that can be opened for summer entertaining. Guests could enjoy a promenade on the portico, had refreshments from tables spaced at intervals, and danced on the wide planks that composed the floor.

The house was purchased in 1944 by George W. Dunaway and it was he that assigned the name Rebel Ridge. A full size Parrott cannon was installed on the front lawn and Confederate battle flags floated from the upstairs gallery over the front entrance. The mansion was purchased by Otis Nathaniel and Nor Lee Maddox in 1970 who worked to restore the home.

We will now head back to Talbotton to complete our driving tour. Turn around and drive 0.4 miles on Highway 80 back to Washington Avenue. At the stop sign turn right and drive 0.1 miles and look for Marker Fourteen on the left. Enter the parking lot on the right and turn to face the home across the street.

Turn me off until you arrive at Marker Fourteen.

## **Destination Fourteen**

The Greek Revival home you see here is called Rose Hill Seminary. In about 1846, an Episcopal Missionary priest named Rev. Richard Johnson came to Talbotton. He organized a congregation and built Zion Episcopal Church that we saw earlier in the tour. Johnson also started a school for boys and girls on this site. Beginning in a simple cottage, as funds became available a seminary building and other facilities were added to become Rose Hill Seminary. In 1852 Rev Johnson left Talbotton and Rev. Wesley Gahagan was sent by the church to manage the school. The original cabin was remodeled and upgraded into the Greek Revival house you see and it served as the residence for the Headmaster. More classes were built nearby. One such building had four large rooms and a central hall. That house, to the left of Rose Hill, is still standing. Rev. Gahagan died in 1857 and the academy was sold by the Talbot County Sheriff at auction in 1858. The headmaster's home was sold with 27 acres of land for \$2000.

We will leave Rose Hill Seminary and proceed along our tour. On our way to our next location, we will pass Shady Grove Baptist Church. This church was founded in 1873 by Rev. Wiley Jones and is recognized as one of the oldest churches in the county. The land for the church was deeded to the church by Talbotton Baptist Church under the direction of Rev. Simeon Maxwell. Shady Grove Baptist Church has successfully ministered to its members, growing even when times were lean. At one point the church boasted 1500 members and was the largest Black Baptist Church in Georgia south of Atlanta.

Let's head on over now to Destination Fifteen. From the parking lot, turn left onto Washington Avenue and drive 0.1 mile until you come to North Jefferson Avenue. Turn right, at an angle, onto North Jefferson Avenue. Look for Marker Fifteen about 0.1 mile ahead on the right.

### **Destination Fifteen**

The second to last stop on our tour today is Pou-Thornton-Olive-Calhoun House, another fine example of Greek Revival architecture. Built in 1836, this home was the residence of Captain Seaborn W. Thornton, a Civil War veteran that served in the Army of Virginia under General Robert E. Lee. Upon returning to Talbotton after the war, Captain Thornton was elected Clerk of the Superior Court. Thornton was instrumental in organizing the Talbotton Railroad Company and served as its president for twenty-four years. He was so well respected in Talbotton that when he died in 1905 every store and business in the town was closed so that all could attend his funeral. There are several original outbuildings on the property that served to support the home and those that lived there.

We have one final stop to make today ... the former homestead of the Straus family. Continue along Jefferson Avenue about 0.1 mile and you will see Marker Sixteen on the right. Turn me off now and we'll meet at the Straus home site.

### **Destination Sixteen**

The final location on our historical tour is the Straus family home. A German Jew, Lazarus Straus emigrated in 1853, from Europe leaving his family behind. Arriving in Talbotton in 1854 he sold goods from his wagon to plantation owners, he found an economically vibrant southern community. Deciding to settle in a small cottage in the community he sent to Germany for his wife Sarah and four children: Isidor, Hermine, Nathan, and Oscar. Lazarus Straus became successful and opened a dry goods store on the town square. His sons attended local schools, and although they were Jewish, the children attended Talbotton Baptist Church Sunday

School. The family then moved to Columbus, GA in 1863 before leaving an economically torn post-Civil War South, for New York in 1865.

Once in New York, Straus and his sons Isidor and Nathan, established a china, porcelain, pottery and glassware business. In 1873, Nathan convinced the department store owner Rowland L. Macy to let them set up a concession in the basement of one of his department stores. By 1896 the Straus' family was the sole owners of H.M. Macy's and Co.

Oscar Straus became a career diplomat. He served as ambassador to Turkey in the administrations of presidents Cleveland, McKinley, and Taft. He was also Secretary of Commerce for President Theodore Roosevelt. Nathan Straus became a leader in public health with his promotion of milk pasteurization that reduced the prevalence of tuberculosis. Hermine married Lazarus Kohns who became part of the Straus business.

There are several interesting chapters in Isidor's life. The first occurred during the Civil War when he was sent to Europe by the Confederate Government to sell cotton in exchange for ships and supplies. He was not able to complete his mission and remained in there until the war ended. Having traveled North, Isidor went on to represent New York in Congress.

The final chapter of Isidore's life was written in 1912. Isidore and his wife, Ida, were returning to New York from England aboard the *Titanic* when it struck an iceberg and began to flounder. As it became clear that *Titanic* was sinking, Ida refused to leave Isidor's side to board a lifeboat. When Isidor was offered a place aboard a lifeboat, he too refused a seat as long as women and children remained on the stricken ocean liner. Instead, Ida insisted that her maid Ellen Bird take their place. Ida is reported to have said, "I will not be separated from my husband. As we have lived, so will we die... together." She gave her fur coat to Ellen, stating



that she would no longer need it. Isidor and Ida were last seen on deck arm-in-arm in what eyewitnesses described as a “most remarkable exhibition of love and devotion.”

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking an interest in Talbotton and for sharing our driving tour. We hope you enjoy your stay in our town and please come back for a visit any time. You are always welcome in Talbotton!