



SEEKING EDEN

A Collection of Georgia's Historic Gardens

Staci L. Catron and Mary Ann Eaddy Photography by James R. Lockhart



Historic fountain on Salubrity Hall's east patio

Salubrity Hall

SALUBRITY HALL, once the winter retreat of the wealthy northerners Olivia and John Herbert, is an exceptional example of a Country Place-era estate developed in the Summerville area of Augusta in the late 1920s. The site is also significant for its story of rebirth in the twenty-first century, thanks to the careful attention of the current owners, Karon and Don Williamson, and the landscape architect William T. Smith. The property is appropriately named Salubrity Hall both because of its historical roots as a salubrious site and because it is conducive to the well-being of its residents and all who are fortunate to experience its beauty.

Augusta, the second-oldest and currently the second-largest city in Georgia, was established on the western bank of the Savannah River in 1736. By the late 1700s, it had become a thriving manufacturing center. The city played an important role in the American Revolution and later served as the temporary capital of the new state of Georgia between 1785 and 1795.¹ Augusta was home to a large inland cotton market. Local farmers brought their cotton to the city to be shipped to the port of Savannah via boats down the Savannah River, or to Charleston, South Carolina, by rail. Augusta continued to prosper in the antebellum period because of improvements in transportation. Completed in 1845, the Augusta Canal, a source of water, power, and transportation, attracted cotton mills, ironworks, and other manufacturers along its banks, making Augusta one of the few industrial centers in the South. The year 1845 brought a railroad link between Augusta and Atlanta, connecting the city with more markets around the country. To support the war effort, the Confederate Powder Works was established. It was a critical producer of ammunition for the Confederates during the Civil War. Augusta's economy rebounded from the war with the expansion of the Augusta Canal in 1875, which brought the construction of large textile mills and

The gardens in Augusta are numerous and beautiful. Each is lovely for some special characteristic all its own. Here, truly, one sees why Augusta is known as the "Garden City of the South."—Mary C. Alexander, *Garden Gateways*, 1940

brickwork, stonework, urns, and statuary that lent an air of age.

Olivia placed the formal, rectangular garden on the west side of the mansion. Its main feature was a large quatrefoil-shaped pool and fountain that sat at the center of an open grass lawn; the pool's edges were punctuated by four urns. One side of the garden held a "weeping willow drooping over a semi-circular marble seat,"⁷ and another contained a brick patio with an impressive rose-covered pergola made of antique columns and flanked by old iron grillwork. The back of the pergola was composed of "weather-beaten brick, with a niche for a leaden figure of a boy holding a tray of flowers."⁸ The north side of the garden contained a decorative balustrade overlooking a bronze dragonfly fountain, which was

"cleverly screened on two sides by a graduated planting of junipers and yews."⁹ The formal garden was filled with a large collection of irises.

Brick steps from the formal garden descended to a boxwood-bordered walk that led to the sunken garden. The sunken garden featured a small pool bordered by irregular rocks surrounded by large old English boxwood. The two additional formal gardens were located behind the mansion. A rose-draped pergola led to the rose garden, which contained, at its center, a Swedish porcelain fountain surrounded by plantings of low-growing junipers and blue hyacinths.¹⁰ Adjacent to it was the rectangular arabesque garden, framed by two rows of flowering crab trees. It had a central lawn flanked on each side by planting beds laid out in arabesque patterns of scrolling



Quatrefoil fountain in the west garden



Formally planted herb garden in a corner of the west garden



Rose-covered pergola in the west garden

and interlacing ornamental designs. These beds ran north to south and were filled with perennials and bulbs, including narcissi, tulips, and irises.¹¹

Olivia placed the wild garden on the far northeast corner of the estate, beneath a wooded area of the property filled with native pines and oaks. A winding dirt path through the garden led to a sizable one-room Tudor Revival-style structure that served as a teahouse where the Herberts could serve light refreshments to guests. The path was bordered by native shrubs, including yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Carolina cherry laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*), mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), and flame azaleas (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*). Closer to the teahouse were masses of Indian and Kurume azaleas.¹² Many types of bulbs were naturalized throughout the woods, and Carolina jessamine and woodbine climbed many of the trees.

During her nearly two decades of wintering at Salubrity Hall, Olivia Herbert generously opened her gardens to the public to benefit local charities. For an event for the Woman's Auxiliary of St. Paul's Church in March 1935, the *Augusta Chronicle* announced to its readers: "Flower lovers in Augusta

will welcome the opportunity tomorrow to enjoy the beautiful informal and formal gardens of Mrs. John W. Herbert at Salubrity Hall. Mrs. Herbert is being most gracious in giving Augustans and visitors a chance to enjoy the lovely flowers which are now in full bloom in her garden."¹³ The property was included on many garden tours throughout the 1930s and 1940s, including the Garden Club of Georgia's pilgrimages between 1937 and 1941.¹⁴

Salubrity Hall went up for sale in April 1946. Olivia Herbert had died the previous August at the age of eighty-two, eleven years after the death of her husband. The listing in the *Augusta Chronicle* advertised it as "the famous winter home and garden of the late Mrs. Olivia A. Herbert in Augusta, Georgia, and one of the most outstanding in the entire Southland."¹⁵ Between 1947 and 2002, the estate changed hands nine times, and as the decades rolled by, most of Olivia Herbert's formal and informal gardens were lost. In the late 1940s or early 1950s, the wild garden and the wooded areas were subdivided into smaller lots, including the northeastern corner containing the teahouse. During that period, the building was enlarged into a single-family home



White blooming annuals and perennials in the west garden



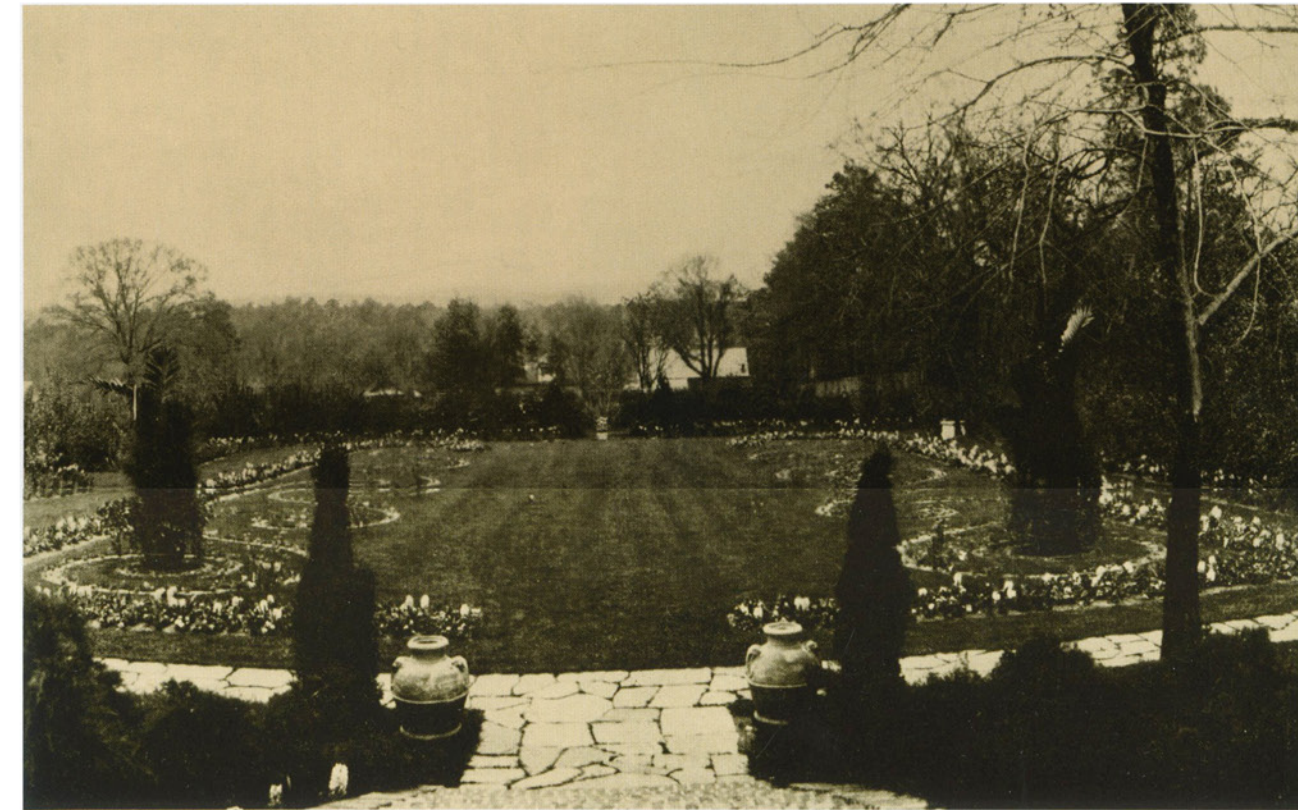
Below the west garden railing, a sunken garden containing a pool

that maintained the Tudor Revival style of the original structure. Elizabeth Robinson Anderson and her husband currently live in the former teahouse; she grew up there, and in 2007 she inherited it from her parents, Clara and Frank Robinson Jr., who had purchased it in 1959.¹⁶

In 2003, Karon and Don Williamson, the current owners of Salubrity Hall, purchased the remaining portion of the property containing the mansion, roughly three acres. By that point, time had taken its toll on both the house and the gardens. Their first priority was to restore the once-elegant English Tudor country home to its 1920s grandeur, which was a significant undertaking because of the complexity of the

architecture. The Williamsons restored the large carriage house and stabilized the caretaker's cottage. They turned their attention to the gardens in the summer of 2006, hiring Bill Smith, an Atlanta landscape architect and owner of William T. Smith and Associates, which specializes in residential garden design. Over the past twelve years, Smith and the Williamsons have collaborated on reviving what remained of the original gardens and designing a series of new garden rooms that echo elements of the past while meeting twenty-first-century needs. Smith used a blend of historic plants with newer cultivars.

When the Williamsons purchased the property, the large oval lawn in the center of the broad



East garden, from *Garden History of Georgia*

semicircular drive was filled with a group of trees that obscured the house. Smith suggested they be removed so that the impressive front façade would be visible, as it was during Olivia Herbert's day. He called it "the best five-minute advice he has ever given."¹⁷ The oval lawn is now surrounded by a low-clipped boxwood hedge. The brick gutter and curb running along the front drive were also restored.

The most intact historic garden remaining on the property was the formal garden on the west side of the mansion. Smith restored the surviving historic features, including the quatrefoil-shaped pool with fountain and surrounding lawn, the brick patio with its brick wall and iron grillwork, and the balustrade. The Williamsons outfitted the patio with a wrought-iron table and chairs for outdoor entertaining. Smith designed a number of new elements inspired by the original garden features. In place of the original four urns that stood at the edges of the pool, Smith added four large round planters filled with Boston ferns. No photo documentation exists showing the design of the original rose-covered pergola. Nonetheless, Smith climbed up the brick wall to determine the original anchor points and created an elaborate pergola in scale with the mansion.¹⁸ The

now-lost dragonfly bronze statue has been replaced by one featuring two angels.

Smith added a stunning semicircular white garden on the far western edge of the formal garden with an array of shrubs such as slender deutzia (*Deutzia gracilis* 'Nikko'), gardenias (*Gardenia jasminoides* 'Frost Proof' and 'Grif's Select'), hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Lime Light', 'Quick Fire', and 'Tardiva'), tea olives (*Osmanthus fragrans*), spireas (*Spiraea prunifolia* 'Plena' and *Spiraea × vanhouttei*), hammocksweet azaleas (*Rhododendron serrulatum*), roses (*Rosa* 'Iceberg'), and a variety of viburnums. The white garden, located on the west side of the formal garden, is also home to numerous white-flowering perennials, including asters, clematis, daisies, daylilies, dianthus, garden phlox, and verbena. Seasonal color comes from *Cleome spinosa* 'Helen Campbell', Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*), delphinium (*Delphinium* 'Galahad'), foxgloves (*Digitalis* 'Emerson' and *D. purpurea* 'Camelot White'), salvia (*Salvia coccinea* 'Snow Nymph'), and *Zinnia angustifolia* 'Crystal White'.¹⁹

Smith added a parterre herb garden inside the formal garden adjacent to the house; Karon Williamson enjoys cooking with fresh herbs. In keeping with the original brickwork found on the property, Smith

OPPOSITE: Large perennial garden to the east



Walled path leading to the west garden

to the brick patio on the east side of the house, which features a restored wall fountain. Smith continued the use of brickwork in the perennial garden: a brick-lined pathway frames the garden's outer perimeter and bisects the garden from the east and west entrances. The center of the perennial garden consists of a lawn sculpted into three overlapping circles, the largest at the center. Deep perennial borders, much like those of the famed early twentieth-century English garden designer and horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll, flank the lawn; they are planted with perennials in complementary cool colors of blues, purples, pinks, and whites. Several varieties of foxgloves emerge strikingly in early summer.

As it has been since its earliest days, Salubritiy Hall continues to be admired for its noteworthy architecture and gardens. In 2008, the Williamsons received a preservation award from Historic Augusta

for their restoration of the mansion. Because of its architecture and importance in the history of Augusta, Salubritiy Hall is a contributing site to the Summerville Historic District. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the district claims one of the most extensive collections of historic residences and gardens in the state of Georgia, displaying myriad architectural and landscape styles and periods. The Williamsons have upheld Olivia Herbert's tradition of opening the gardens to the public for the benefit of local groups. In 2014, they hosted Historic Augusta's famous Cotton Ball, which supports the organization's mission "to preserve historically or architecturally significant sites in Augusta and Richmond County, Georgia."²³ With the restoration of the mansion and the revival of its gardens, Salubritiy Hall once again emanates elegant charm.

OPPOSITE:
Front edge of
the property

15. Contract between Joseph J. Wilder and Wm. Annandale, November 28, 1885, photocopy, Cothran Papers.
16. Anne Page Wilder to John J. Wilder, Oakton, July 24, 1884; Anne Page Wilder to Georgia King Wilder, Oakton, June 19, 1889, both in Wilder and Anderson Family Papers, 1837–1938, Collection No. 01255, SHC.
17. Frey, *Marietta*, 21.
18. “Historic Oakton Sold to Goodman,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1939, 10K.
19. Robert M. Goodman Sr., original lots for Oakton subdivision, ca. 1950, photocopy, Cothran Papers.
20. Will Goodman, interview by Staci L. Catron, Marietta, May 16, 2014.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*

Rock City Gardens

The epigraph is drawn from the world-famous advertisement motto created by Garnet Carter in 1935.

1. Andy Peters, “Lookout Mountain,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 1, 2014, accessed July 5, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/lookout-mountain.
2. NRHP, “Rock City Gardens,” Lookout Mountain, Walker County, Georgia, 2014, National Register #14000619, item 7, p. 3.
3. Hollis, *See Rock City*, 7.
4. Elizabeth B. Cooksey, “Walker County,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, March 5, 2013, accessed July 5, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/walker-county.
5. Morgan, “From Old South to New South,” 18–19.
6. Hollis, *See Rock City*, 9–10.
7. *Ibid.*, 11.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 17.
10. Hollis, *Land of the Smokies*, 164–65.
11. *Ibid.*, 167.
12. NRHP, “Rock City Gardens,” item 7, pp. 3–4.
13. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
14. *Ibid.*, 10.
15. Cooney and Rainwater, *Garden History of Georgia*, 354.
16. *Ibid.*, 354, 357.
17. *Ibid.*, 357.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. NRHP, “Rock City Gardens,” item 7, p. 10.
21. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

22. *Ibid.*, 5.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 6, 21.
25. *Ibid.*, 8.
26. *Ibid.*, 17.
27. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
28. *Ibid.*, 19.
29. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 25.
32. McKechnie, *USA 101*.

Salubrity Hall

The epigraph is drawn from Mary C. Alexander, “Augusta—of Yesterday and Today—Welcomes You,” *Garden Gateways* 6 (April 1940): 5.

1. Edward J. Cashin, “Augusta,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 12, 2013, accessed August 18, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/augusta.
2. Cooney and Rainwater, *Garden History of Georgia*, 281–310.
3. National Park Service, “Summerville Historic District,” accessed August 15, 2016, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/Augusta/summervillehd.html.
4. Erick D. Montgomery and Kim Overstreet, “Augusta, Georgia: Discover Our Shared Heritage Travel Itinerary,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, accessed August 19, 2016, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/augusta/.
5. Cashin and Eskew, *Paternalism in a Southern City*, 56.
6. Cooney and Rainwater, *Garden History of Georgia*, 300.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 302.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. “Social Chat,” *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, March 26, 1935, A5.
14. Olivia showed her further love of Augusta in 1937 when she purchased the historic house called Ware’s Folly (also known as the Ware-Sibley-Clark House) and saved it from demolition. She donated it to the Augusta Art Club and requested that the site be renamed in memory of her daughter, Gertrude Herbert Dunn, who died in 1933. The Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art in Augusta remains a nonprofit art school primarily serving

citizens of the central Savannah River region and showcasing the visual arts through exhibitions, classes, and other programs.

15. “For Sale: Salubrity Hall,” *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, April 11, 1946, A2.
16. Carole Hawkins, “History Lives at Tea House,” *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, November 13, 2010; Richmond County Property Records (online) for Elizabeth R. Anderson Property.
17. William T. Smith, landscape architect, interview by Staci L. Catron, Augusta, May 1, 2010.
18. William T. Smith and Associates, “Plan for Rose Arbor,” for Dr. and Mrs. Don Williamson, Augusta, Ga., August 29, 2011; updated September 19, 2011, Smith drawings.
19. William T. Smith and Associates, “Plan for Fountain Garden with White Perennial Borders,” for Dr. and Mrs. Don Williamson, Augusta, Ga., October 12, 2010, Smith drawings.
20. William T. Smith and Associates, “Plan for Herb Parterre Garden,” for Dr. and Mrs. Don Williamson, Augusta, Ga., February 9, 2011; updated March 14, 2011, Smith drawings.
21. William T. Smith and Associates, “Rondel Garden Plan and Planting Plan for Woody Shrubs,” for Dr. and Mrs. Don Williamson, Augusta, Ga., May 30, 2012; updated November 26, 2012, Smith drawings.
22. William T. Smith and Associates, “Motor Court / Lawn Area Site Plan,” for Dr. and Mrs. Don Williamson, Augusta, Ga., February 15, 2011, Smith drawings.
23. “Our Mission Is to Preserve and Protect Historic Buildings in Augusta, Georgia,” Historic Augusta, Inc., accessed August 25, 2016, www.historicaugusta.org/about-us.

Savannah Squares

The epigraph is drawn from Latrobe, *Rambler in North America*, 2:20.

1. Edward J. Cashin, “Trustee Georgia, 1732–1752,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, September 2, 2015, accessed October 1, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/trustee-georgia-1732-1752.
2. Edwin L. Jackson, “James Oglethorpe (1696–1785),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 16, 2016, accessed November 28, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/james-oglethorpe-1696-1785.
3. Cashin, “Trustee Georgia, 1732–1752.”
4. Buddy Sullivan, “Savannah,” *New Georgia*

Encyclopedia, August 4, 2016, accessed September 27, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/counties-cities-neighborhoods/savannah.

5. *Ibid.*
6. Buddy Sullivan, “Naval Stores Industry,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 2, 2016, accessed October 1, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/naval-stores-industry.
7. Sullivan, “Savannah.”
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Beth Reiter, “Historic Savannah Foundation,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, February 16, 2015, accessed October 21, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/historic-savannah-foundation.
11. Beth Reiter, “Savannah City Plan,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, March 10, 2016, accessed October 2, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/savannah-city-plan.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Wilson, *Oglethorpe Plan*.
15. *Ibid.*, 135.
16. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 9.
17. Sullivan, “Savannah.”
18. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 9.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Reiter, “Savannah City Plan.”
21. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 9.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, 106.
25. *Ibid.*, 107.
26. *Ibid.*, 13.
27. Sieg, *Squares*, 31.
28. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 17.
29. Sieg, *Squares*, 43–44.
30. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 17.
31. Julie A. Sweet, “Tomochichi (ca. 1644–1739),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 16, 2016, accessed October 21, 2016, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/tomochichi-ca-1644-1739.
32. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 19.
33. *Ibid.*, 33–35.
34. *Ibid.*, 33.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 38.
37. *Ibid.*, 37.
38. Sieg, *Squares*, 185.
39. *Ibid.*, 186–87.
40. Jordan and McCay, *Savannah Square by Square*, 41.