The Thrasher Newsletter

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WINTER 2023

Destination: Savannah

By PAULA THRASHER



It won't be long now. The 2023 Thrasher Family Association Reunion in Savannah is coming up May 5-7. We'll be staying at the Planters Inn, which is close to the city's coastal many attractions most within walking distance. We're getting really excited about the plans for the busy weekend. We think you will be, too!

Savannah – where the colony of Georgia was founded Feb. 12, 1733, by Gen. James Edward Oglethorpe – is one of the nation's most-visited tourist destinations. A big draw for many is lively River Street with lodging, dining, entertainment and shopping in converted cotton warehouses along cobblestone streets fronting the beautiful Savannah River. Watch packed cargo ships laden with goods from around the world headed toward the Port of Savannah, one of the busiest container ports on the East Coast.

Steeped in history, the charming city of Spanish moss-draped live oaks, lush gardens and grand 18th- and 19th-century homes and churches is built around 22 verdant squares laid out in a grid pattern by Gen. Oglethorpe. The Historic Landmark District is known for its mansions and museums, art galleries and ghost tours, trendy boutiques and laidback coffee shops. The more than 100 restaurants in the relatively small area showcase Southern cuisine with an emphasis on seafood from Georgia's coastal waters.

Here, too, is the City Market that spans four blocks on the site of the city's first marketplace in the 1700s. You'll find local artists at work, craft and gift shops, and dining options such as the upscale Belford's Savannah Steaks and Seafood, the casual Café at City Market, Neapolitan pizza at Vinnie Van Gogo's and Pie Society, a traditional British bakery.

Broughton Street, a block away from our hotel, is the city's old "downtown" brought back to life in recent years with shops, restaurants and art galleries moving into once vacant storefronts. Also on the thoroughfare is the restored 1921 Lucas Theatre, whose distinct architecture blends Greek Revival, Art Deco and Neoclassical periods.

What's up with the ubiquitous SCAD?

You can't miss seeing the acronym SCAD, which seems to be everywhere. That stands for Savannah College of Art and Design, whose campus comprises renovated buildings scattered throughout the city. SCAD is credited with spurring much of the city's more recent revitalization. It certainly has made its presence known and has made a positive impact, giving the whole city a youthful, artsy vibe.

Where we're staying

One could spend weeks exploring just to take it all in, but we've tried to give you a sampling in a relatively short period. Which is why you might want to extend your stay by a day or so. For that reason, we have arranged special group rates at the historic Planters



Inn for not only the nights of May 5 and 6, but also the shoulder dates of May 4 and 7.

The lovely red-brick boutique hotel that faces Reynolds Square, where stands a statue of Methodism founder John Wesley, is our home base in the heart of the city. The Friday and Saturday night rate is \$259 a night, plus taxes, which is something of a bargain in a city where one does not sleep cheaply! It's a good

choice not only for its affordability but its location and charming period accommodations. On the shoulder nights, Thursday and Sunday, the per night rate drops to \$159, plus taxes. (How's that for an enticement to extend your stay?) Optional valet parking is \$25 a night, but there's a self-park deck adjacent to the hotel. Most of the locations we'll visit are within a 10-minute walk, so bring your comfy walking shoes. Our group rates are available until March 4. When you call for reservations, ask for Julie Therrell and let her know you're with the Thrasher Family Reunion group. Call 912-232-5678 to book. The website is <u>www.plantersinnsavannah.com</u>

The Savannah adventure begins

Our first group event is an evening on the Savannah River Friday night. After gathering in the lobby around 5:45 p.m., we'll head down to River Street on foot – it's an easy fourminute walk. Driving isn't encouraged as parking is limited and it's sure to be hard a find a spot on a weekend night; but it's your call.



At 6 p.m., we'll board the mighty Georgia Queen riverboat as a group for a two-hour dinner and entertainment cruise. The vessel pulls away from the dock at 7 p.m. with horns blaring. The Southern buffet includes an enticing array of food, including Savannah's signature shrimp and grits, a beef carving station, fresh catch of the day, lemon and artichoke chicken with spinach, potatoes au gratin, squash casserole, seasonal fresh vegetables, garden greens with toppings and dressings and, as they say, "so much more." Non-alcoholic beverages are included, and those wish to imbibe may avail themselves of a full bar.

After feasting, you can burn calories cutting a rug on the ballroom's dance floor as an entertainer plays music from the '50s to the present. Or follow our leader John Paul Thrasher, who most assuredly will make a beeline for the top deck (don't worry, there are elevators) to take in the bright lights and panoramic nighttime views along the river. After disembarking, feel free to hang out on River Street – but do so at your own peril as celebrations of that all-American holiday Cinco de Mayo will be going full tilt. Back at the hotel the Board Room on the hotel's top floor will be open if you want to continue your conversations.

Another day dawns

Saturday morning begins at 8 in the Board Room, where the coffee will be brewing and

your boxed breakfast from Maple Street Biscuit Company (which is actually on nearby Broughton Street) will be waiting. The annual meeting begins at 9 and is expected to last about two hours. From about 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., you'll have free time to do some exploring and grab lunch on your own. Be back in time to board the Old Savannah Tours trolley at 2:30 p.m. for a 100-minute tour of the historic district. Costumed characters from Savannah's 270-year history will show up along the route with tales from the city's past and present.



Tally-ho! Don't hold your horses. Those who want to watch Saturday's Kentucky Derby on TV should race – or trot – back to the Board Room. Relax with some munchies and



complimentary soft drinks, wine and beer to enjoy while you watch the festivities at Churchhill Downs. We'll gather around 5:30 p.m. to pick horses to win, place or show in the main race – The Run for the Roses – which will be off after a post time of around 6:45 p.m. When the 2-minute race is done and the garland of roses has been draped over the victor's neck, it will be about time for dinner at 7:30 p.m. We'll depart the hotel on foot or by car by 7:15.

Ahoy, mateys! Landlubbers included

Feel free to sing "Yo! Ho! It's a Pirate's Life for Me" as we make our jolly way to The Pirates' House for dinner. It's just a few blocks away, so you may choose to walk. Parking is available, but carpooling is advised. The haunt of the pirate Blackbeard, the structure itself – a maze of haunted (or so they say) rooms – traces its beginnings to the Herb House. Georgia's oldest house, built in 1734, it was originally the quarters of the gardener for the Trustees Garden.



We'll have a plated dinner that begins with a salad course followed by your choice among three entrees: Honey Pecan Fried Chicken, Georgia Peach Glazed Salmon or New York Strip. Top off the meal with either key lime pie or pecan pie. Iced tea and biscuits are included. If you want wine or a cocktail, you may order from the bar. (Did I just hear "Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rum"?) You'll make your entrée and dessert choices on the Reservation Form at the end of the newsletter (and as a PDF attachment to print out). Learn more about the popular restaurant at <u>www.thepirateshouse.com</u>

Do breakfast your way

Sunday morning, try a nearby restaurant for breakfast on your own. There are no formal plans, but you could get together in small groups. Good options include Quinn's Cafe, a storefront diner on the backside of the hotel, features a menu that includes a Greek omelet, creamed chipped beef on toast, Southwestern wrap and Belgian waffles; Huey's, a New Orleans-style eatery on River Street, will transport you mentally if not physically to the Big Easy (think eggs Sardou, beignets and Sazeracs); b.matthews, a bistro on East Bay Street, serves creative American cuisine such as avocado toast and something called fried green tomato crab cake Benny; and Goose Feathers, a European-style café and bakery, features quiches, stuffed croissants, cornbread waffles and cage-free egg dishes. Check them out at www.hueysontheriver.net/, http://www.hueysontheriver.net/, www.bmatthewseatery.com and http://www.hueysontheriver.net/, www.bmatthewseatery.com and http://www.hueysontheriver.net/, www.bmatthewseatery.com and http://www.hueysontheriver.net/, <a href="http://www.hueys

Checkout is at noon. And that, dear cousins, brings us to the close of a jam-packed weekend. Unless, of course, you're staying another night. In which case, the fun doesn't end!

Counting the cost

You may be wondering what all this food, fun and frolic will cost. Am I right? This year's registration fee of \$190 per person may give you sticker shock. Granted, it is higher than for previous reunions. But the fee simply reflects the total cost per person for the TFA Reunion organizing committee to provide the following:

- Georgia Queen riverboat dinner cruise
- Breakfast boxes delivered from Maple Street Biscuit Company
- Old Savannah Tours chartered trolley tour
- Sit-down plated dinner in a private room at The Pirates' House

Saturday lunch and Sunday breakfast/brunch/lunch were not rolled in, one, to keep the registration fee where it is and, two, we thought you might enjoy trying some places of your own choosing.

Registration deadline is March 4. A registration form is at the end of this newsletter and also as a printable PDF attachment: <u>https://thrasherfamilyassociation.com/reunion/</u> Also, remember to make your hotel reservations by March 4 to get the group rate.

All the Georgia Thrashers really hope you'll join us for what is sure to be an exciting weekend with some old friends and familiar faces in a truly special city. You asked for Savannah 2023 and we got it for you. We need a lot of you to register to make this reunion a success, and we think you'll find it worth every penny!



The Thrasher Family Association is self-supporting through the dues and contributions of our members. Dues are \$20 and support our newsletter, website and research costs.

Please come to the reunion ready to pay this year's dues or put a check into the mail to our wonderful treasurer: Angie Grooms, TFA Treasurer. PO Box 1137, Davidson, NC 28036



A simple walk in Savannah is always charming

TFA SAVANNAH REUNION SCHEDULE

Events for which the cost is included in the registration fee are indicated by (included)

Friday, May 5

4:00 p.m. Check-in at Planters Inn, 29 Abercorn St.
5:45 p.m. Meet in lobby to walk to River Street.
6:00 p.m. Boarding begins for the Georgia Queen.
7:00 - 9:00 p.m. Buffet dinner and entertainment (included).
9:00 p.m. Return to hotel or stay on River Street; Board Room will be open on the top floor.

Saturday, May 6

- **8:00 a.m.** Breakfast boxes from Maple Street Biscuit Company (included). Board Room.
- 9:00 11:00 a.m. Annual meeting. Board Room.
- 11:00 a.m. 2:00 p.m. Free time for exploring and lunch on your own.
- **2:30-4:15 p.m.** Old Savannah Tours trolley tour with pickup and return at hotel (included).
- **6:00 7:00 p.m.** Gather to watch the Kentucky Derby. Soft drinks, wine and beer provided. Post time for the race is 6:45. Board Room.
- 7:15 p.m. Leave hotel on foot or in car for The Pirates' House.
- 7:30-9:30 p.m. Dinner (included).
- 9:30 p.m. Board Room will be open.

Sunday, May 7

8:00 a.m. Coffee in Board Room. Breakfast on your own. **Noon** Check-out for those not staying Sunday night at the hotel.

A Writer's Journey

By DAVID E. SUMNER

After writing about two dozen Thrasher profiles in the newsletter since 1992, it occurred to me that I had never written about myself. I thought perhaps TFA members would be interested in learning about my background (or maybe they wouldn't). Therefore, I will ask Paula and John Thrasher to edit this article. If they think it's boring, they can kill it before it goes to press (editor's note: It isn't boring).

Since my early 30s, my career has revolved around writing and teaching writing. I didn't start my first full-time journalism job until I was 34. In college I



Elise and David Sumner

changed my major several times before graduating with a social sciences degree from Stetson University. Then I changed jobs several times during my 20s trying to figure out what I was good at and wanted to do. Since I started writing, I have published hundreds of articles for newspapers, newsletters, magazines, websites, encyclopedias, scholarly journals, conference papers and 10 books (if you include 2nd and 3rd editions of two of them).

Nobody predicted this career for me. I didn't foresee it. I grew up in Dade City, Fla., where my father, two grandfathers, three uncles and great-grandfather were citrus growers. My great-grandfather, King Joseph Sumner (that's his real name) obtained 160 acres under the provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862. I still have a copy of the deed signed June 10, 1882, by President Chester Arthur. I grew up on this property where my dad grew oranges, limes, and grapefruit and raised cattle. My paternal grandfather, David Edwin Sumner, married Frankie Bethuel Thrasher in 1897, and that's where my Thrasher connection began. However, both grandparents died before I was born. My father, Joseph David Sumner, died in 1959 from cancer and my mother, Ruth, passed in 2011. Earlier this year I did some family research and self-published a 40-page book, "Seven Generations of Sumner Family History Since 1761," and gave copies to relatives.

For several years, I considered becoming an Episcopal priest and earned a master's degree in theology from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. In 1981, I became editor of Interchange, the newspaper for the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio in Cincinnati. I decided here that I loved writing and was best suited for a journalism career. I reported on church events throughout Ohio, a dozen states, Switzerland and Nigeria, and received some national awards. Those were also wonderful years because I met Elise, and we married in 1983 in Peterborough, N.H., where her parents had retired. However, in 1986 I began feeling burnout and wanting a bigger challenge. She was the first to encourage me to consider earning a doctorate and becoming a journalism professor.

After applying to three schools, the University of Tennessee offered me a graduate assistantship and generous stipend. So we packed up, sold the house and moved to Knoxville. I taught introductory writing courses while taking coursework and writing a dissertation about media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement in Nashville. Elise found a job teaching high school Spanish to earn her "PhT" degree (Putting hubby Through).

When we finished, I was offered jobs at three universities but chose Indiana's Ball State University because it offered an excellent salary as head of the magazine journalism program. When people ask why we moved to Indiana, that's the simple reason. For the next 25 years, I supervised the program, advised the student magazine, and taught courses in introductory and advanced magazine writing, editing, magazine management, opinion writing, religion reporting and literary journalism. I loved my students and took pride in teaching at a journalism school recognized as one of the best in the country with 1,000 majors and 25 faculty members. I always felt my main job was to help students succeed.

Living the Christian life has always been the top priority in our lives. In 2005, we were chrismated into the Orthodox Christian faith. That move has deepened and strengthened our faith. Our friends at St. George Orthodox Church in Fishers, Ind., became our church family. I am a parish council member, and Elise sings in the choir to use one of her many musical talents. I never regretted earning a seminary degree. From 2015 to 2021, I used it writing articles about trends in theological education for the In Trust Association of Theological Schools quarterly magazine. (https://intrust.org/Authors/David-E-Sumner)

The most recent books I published were "Amos Alonzo Stagg: College Football's Greatest Pioneer" (September 2021) and "The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900," 2nd ed. (December 2022). By the way, the biography "John Thrasher: Georgia Pioneer, Politician and Philanthropist" is still selling on Amazon for \$2.49 (Kindle) and \$5.49 (paperback). I am still writing because it has never felt like work.

My older sisters, Frankie and Joann, have attended a few TFA reunions but are not in good health. Both live in assisted-living facilities in Florida, one in St. Petersburg and the other in Dade City. I grew up among dozens of cousins on my mother's side in Dade City (she had eight siblings) but now have only one Sumner cousin with whom we stay in touch. The reason I enjoy attending TFA reunions is that it gives me a deeper connection with my father's side of the family. Plus, I like everyone.

Frank Gerald Rhodes obituary

TFA member Ivy Darnall of Atlanta let us know about the passing of her Uncle Jerry – Frank Gerald Rhodes. "He went by Frank after he joined the military," Ivy wrote. "He was a member – based in California – and I do not think he ever attended a Thrasher Reunion meeting, unless it was one of the early ones." Rhodes was the one who encouraged Ivy and her father Bill Rhodes (Frank's brother) to join the association. "His mother was Mattie Lee Thrasher Rhodes, daughter of Jesse Whitfield Thrasher," Ivy added.

Here is his obituary:

Frank Gerald Rhodes of Napa, Cal., passed away Dec. 24, 2022, in Vallejo, Cal. He was 94.

Frank was born to Thomas M. Rhodes and Mattie L. Rhodes in Atlanta, Ga., on Sept. 4, 1928. He grew up and attended grammar and high school in Atlanta. After graduating Tech High School in 1945, he enlisted in the U.S.



Navy in 1946. During his 24 years of service, he served aboard many different ships and was stationed at locations around the world including Sasebo, Japan, where he met his wife, Nobuko. After serving during WW II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, he retired in 1970, reaching the rank of Chief Petty Officer. After retiring, he and his family settled in Napa, Cal., where he became a drug and alcohol counselor and later as a substitute teacher in the county of Napa.

Frank is survived by his brothers William (Bill) Rhodes of Atlanta and Charlie (CJ) Rhodes of Newnan, Ga., his three sons, David Rhodes of Vallejo, Cal., Bruce Rhodes (Marianna) of Napa, Cal., and Mark Rhodes (Delia) of Fort Mills S.C. Other survivors include grandchildren Josh Hippauf (Jenny) of San Jose, Cal., Kevin Peterson of El Paso, Texas, Daniel Rhodes of Fort Mills, S.C., and Hannah Rhodes of Fort Mills S.C.; nephews, Dennis Dishner of Pine Bluff, Ark., Clinton (Clint) Rhodes of Atlanta; nieces Ivy Darnall (Klaus) of Atlanta, Kathy Davis (Robert) of Atlanta, Rebecca Hayes (Ashton) of Fredericksburg, Va., and Leigh Anne Sabia of Hackettstown, N.J.; and "Cousins by the Dozens" throughout the country. He is preceded in death by his wife of 55 years, Nobuko Rhodes, his brother, Travis Rhodes, and his sisters Mary Gormely and Anne Dishner.



Savannah, Georgia is a city of historic parks.

A Thrasher Texan Who Wowed the Art World

By PAULA THRASHER



Not deep in the heart of Texas, but in the rolling hills and fertile farmlands of the northeast region of the Lone Star State, a farm boy by the name of William Robert Thrasher discovered a love of art thanks to the paint-bynumber sets his mother gave him. Young Willie, as he was known, painted the world around him in the Red River Valley: wildlife, farm scenes and the pristine countryside of the early 20th century. He captured this rural beauty on anything he could scrounge up: beaver board, Masonite and whatever provided a crude canvas. Meager earnings from doing farm chores were all spent on art supplies: canvases, paint and brushes.

Soon, his works began to show up on the walls of homes in Lamar County, where he lived, and in surrounding areas. After his father died during the Great Depression, the family was forced to sell the farm and much of the family's possessions. William's paintings sold first and buyers clamored for more. His work was in great demand. This local popularity further inspired

the budding artist, now a young man. The farm boy knew his life's calling. No one could keep him down on the farm now. He was destined for a career in the art world.

Acclaimed Texas artist W.R. Thrasher (1908-1997) was once that boy with the big dream. A prolific artist, his works are found in galleries and at auction houses throughout Texas as well as in private collections around the country, in state offices in Austin, Texas, various universities, and in congressional offices in Washington, D.C. The works sell from hundreds of dollars to well into the thousands. In 2013, "Texas Farmland with Bluebonnets" sold at a prestigious Dallas auction gallery for \$53,131.

And like his younger self, William, who by then was using the initials W.R., painted what he saw around him: farm scenes that summoned memories of his childhood and evocative scenes of the vast and varied Texas landscape. A vivid description of his work comes from Southwest Gallery in Dallas: "Hot Texas afternoons with the sun filtering through moss laden live oak trees and with soft mint green prickly pears growing by a dusty road, awaken one to expect at any moment a covey of quails or perhaps a roadrunner scurrying from under a mesquite bush. Whether in the soft greens of spring with its beautiful bluebonnets or summer's paintbrushes, buttercups and thistle, or ablaze with autumn beauty, this is the world of W.R. Thrasher."

W.R. Thrasher came to our attention through TFA member Dr. David Thrasher of Montgomery, Ala., who, during a series of email exchanges with Dr. William Michael Thrasher, discovered a connection. The latter Thrasher, who goes by his middle name, is dean of the College of Communications and Fine Art at Troy University in southeast Alabama. He also happens to be the grandson of W.R. Thrasher. Michael's father, William "Ronnie" Thrasher, lives in Paris, Texas, the county seat of Lamar County.

The two Alabama Thrashers figured if they went back far enough in their family trees, they could find a common ancestor. Michael wrote to David, "I'm originally from Texas, where my family members have been since around since sometime around 1900. But our lineage traces back to Kentucky, and Tennessee prior to that, and ultimately back to North Carolina."

Michael provided his genealogical findings starting with his son Will, who lives in Tallahassee, and going back in time as far as he could trace:

Will Samuel Thrasher, who was the son of William Michael Thrasher, who was the son of William Ronnie Thrasher, who was the son of William Robert (the artist W.R.) Thrasher, who was the son of John William Thrasher, who was the son of Robert Young Thrasher, who was the son of Uriah Houston Thrasher, who was the son of Isaac H. Thrasher Sr. (North Carolina, later Tennessee)

Is there a link? It's possible. Many Southern Thrashers trace their heritage from Virginia and North Carolina. The two men share a common ancestor named Isaac Thrasher. Were these Isaacs the same man?

Time – and more research – will tell. But it all comes back to W.R. Thrasher, the most famous artist we'd never heard of until now, thanks to two Alabama Thrashers who began a correspondence. And to think, it all started with a paint-by-numbers kit.

A Message from the TFA President



By JOHN PAUL THRASHER

Welcome to the 2023 TFA Winter Newsletter. I want to express my thanks to our newsletter editor Paula Thrasher and chief contributing writer David Sumner for their many contributions. Also, thanks to Sue Thrasher for her work in laying out the newsletter. A big thank you to Dr. David Thrasher of Montgomery for reaching out to Dr. Michael Thrasher of Troy University. It was Michael supplied Thrasher who fascinating information about his grandfather Texas

artist W.R. Thrasher and our Texas Thrasher "cousins." I also want to acknowledge Emily and Warren Thrasher Jr., who will be our hosts for the 2023 TFA Reunion in Savannah May 5-7. The 2023 TFA Reunion Committee has been hard at work planning what is sure to be a memorable weekend in Savannah. You absolutely will want to be part of the Savannah reunion as we explore the history of Georgia's original settlement and first capital. Our headquarters for the weekend will be the Planters Inn in beautiful and historic downtown Savannah. The Thrasher Family Association will have its annual meeting on Saturday from 9-11 a.m. If you have an agenda item, please contact me (770-328-3991) by May 1 to discuss. I hope to see you in Savannah for fun and fellowship.

Editor's Note

The Thrasher Family Association newsletter needs your input. Share ideas for stories – or better yet, suggest an article you'd like to submit. We're looking for profiles of TFA members, articles focused on family history and heritage, genealogy, photographs, reviews of books on topics related to the family, features on books written by members, and news about people and places. Get in touch with newsletter editor Paula Thrasher by calling or texting

<u>770-328-7716</u> or email to <u>pthrasher@numail.org</u>. The newsletter is published four times a year on a seasonal basis and is published via email.

Staff members include:

Paula Thrasher, newsletter editor David E. Sumner, chief contributing writer Sue Q. Thrasher, layout and design John Paul Thrasher, production director

TFA 2023 Savannah Reunion Registration

Friday, May 5: Rolling on the River

- Check in at Planters Inn: 4 p.m.
- Dinner and entertainment aboard the Georgia Queen Riverboat: 6-9 p.m.

Saturday, May 6: A Day in Historic Savannah

- Catered breakfast from Maple Street Biscuit Company: 8 a.m.
- TFA Annual Meeting: 9-11 a.m.
- Free time and lunch on your own: 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
- Old Savannah Tours trolley tour: 2:30-4:15 p.m.
- Kentucky Derby watch party: 6-7 p.m.
- Dinner at the Pirates' House: 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 7: We Say Our Good-byes

- Coffee will be served in the Board Room where you can visit with your cousins: 8 a.m.
- Breakfast on your own

The registration fee of \$190 is all inclusive and covers the costs of:

- Private meeting room rental (Friday-Sunday)
- Friday dinner and entertainment on the Georgia Queen riverboat
- Saturday catered breakfast from Maple Street Biscuit Company
- Old Savannah Tours trolley tour
- Saturday dinner at The Pirates' House

If you have questions or need additional information about the TFA Savannah Reunion, please contact John Paul Thrasher at <u>john.thrasher@numail.org</u> or call 770-328-3991. Registration deadline is March 4. Please make your check payable to John Paul Thrasher. Mail your completed registration form and check to:

John Paul Thrasher 5 Woodridge Place Newnan, GA 30265

Name (s): _____

Number Attending: _____

Saturday dinner: Select one entrée and one dessert per person.

- Honey Pecan Fried Chicken
- Georgia Peach-Glazed Salmon
- New York Strip Steak
- Pecan Pie
- Key Lime Pie