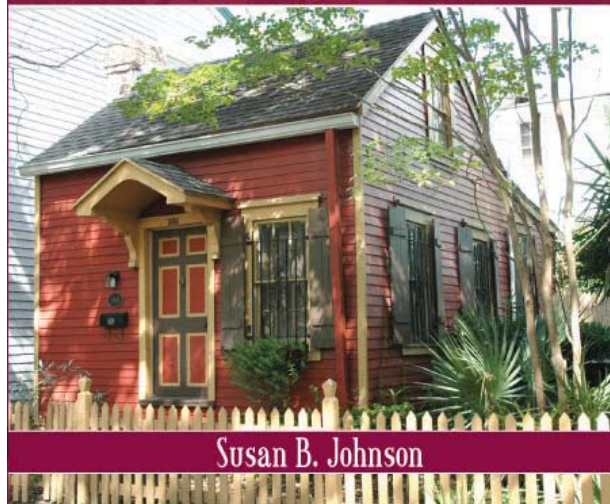


Savannah's Little Crooked Houses

If These Walls Could Talk



About *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses: If These Walls Could Talk*

Much has been written about Savannah's rich history and elegant old homes, but until now one unique aspect of that history—the story of the dozen or so antebellum cottages that dot the city's National Historic Landmark District—has been ignored.

In her new book, Savannah writer Susan B. Johnson explores the past of these architectural treasures and examines the lives of the families who called them home. Who built these tiny dwellings? Who lived in their 1,200 (or fewer) square feet of space? And what sort of world did they see when they gazed out their windows? This meticulously researched book answers all these questions—and more.

Who, for example, can resist the story of Dr. Samuel Furman, who married sisters, first Lucy and then Henrietta Williams? Or the sad tale of Edward and Jane Harden, who both died of "bilious fever" in 1804—he on her birthday, she on his—leaving their minor children in the care of slaves? Or the mystery of lively and conniving Eliza Howell, whose three husbands all died under the same dubious circumstances?

In ***Savannah's Little Crooked houses: If These Walls Could Talk***, Susan B. Johnson reveals some of Savannah's secrets that have been hidden for over two hundred years.

An Interview with Susan B. Johnson

Interviewer: I see from your resume that you are originally from the mid-west. What drew you to Savannah, Georgia?

SBJ: In 1979 my husband and I left Chicago and sailed our 40' ketch across the North Atlantic. We spent two-and-a-half years exploring England, Holland, Belgium, France, and Spain via canals and rivers. Then we sailed back to America determined to find a place that felt like home. It had to be a place where we could keep—and temporarily live on—the boat, one where we could find work to replenish our coffers. Coming up the Intracoastal Waterway, we sailed past Isle of Hope with its lovely, antebellum homes and, as so many do, we fell in love. We've never regretted the decision to settle in Savannah.

Interviewer: What inspired you to write *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses: If These Walls Could Talk*?

SBJ: Eventually, we bought a cottage in the oldest, loveliest part of Savannah. By this time I was teaching at the university and writing a column for the *Savannah Morning News*. One rainy Saturday, as I stood looking out the front window of my house, I thought *two hundred years ago some woman stood in this very spot doing exactly as I am doing*. I wanted to know who she was, what she saw, and what her life was like. I began researching the history of my house and found the process totally addictive. It occurred to me that despite all the books that have been written about Savannah's elegant, old homes, nobody had ever written about the dozen or so antebellum cottages like mine. I researched them for nearly three years before I actually began to write the book.

Interviewer: Why did you choose *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses* as the book's lead title?

SBJ: My children loved nursery rhymes, especially the one that goes, "There was a crooked man who went a crooked mile. He found a crooked sixpence . . ." If you recall, the last line is ". . . and they all lived together in a little, crooked house." I found the verse a wonderful metaphor for what I was doing. The "crooked mile" represented the circuitous path of research. "Sixpences" were still in use in the late 1700's when my house was built. My husband and I actually have a slightly crooked cat. And of course all of Savannah's little crooked houses have floors that slant a bit, doors and windows that are slightly out of square.



Interviewer: *Savannah's Little Crooked Houses* portrays the lives of some fascinating characters who lived in the South during the 18th and 19th century. Do you have a favorite?

SBJ: I'm a great admirer of Sarah Davenport, whose husband Isaiah built the cottage at 416 E. State Street known locally as "Laura's House". She was a strong, independent woman. For example, during Sherman's occupation of the city, Union soldiers often forced their way into people's houses and took whatever they fancied. When that happened to Sarah Davenport, by then a widow of 77, she put on her hat, marched over to Sherman's headquarters (the Greene-Meldrim House at Bull and Harris Streets), and demanded to see the man himself. Of course she was refused entry on the grounds that General Sherman was much too busy to be bothered by such trivia. But Sarah would not be rebuffed. She protested so vehemently that Sherman himself made an appearance to see what was going on. She told him of the looting and added that she had six sons—three of whom were currently holding office in the Confederate army and three who were serving in the United States government in an official capacity. He stopped her in mid-sentence, replying that no one was more deserving of his protection than she and that he would assign a guard to her door for the duration of the occupation. Sarah thanked him, turned on her heel, and marched off, her dignity very much intact. She died four years later at age 81.

Interviewer: At what point in your life did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

SBJ: Of all the Christmas gifts I received when I was six, the one that thrilled me most was a one-year diary with a lock and key. I wrote my first short story that year—about a princess who lived alone in a tower and spent a lot of time sitting on her thorne (sic). Years later I recognized that story as an allegory about me—the princess. The tower represented the solitude for which every writer craves. Clearly, the "thorne" represented the pain in the ass of being a writer.

Interviewer: People are always interested in how writers work. Will you tell us a bit about your writing habits—and perhaps a word about any present projects?

SBJ: My energy level is at its highest in the morning, so my day often begins about 5 a.m. I usually work at my desk for two or three hours while the house is dark and quiet. Then I walk four vigorous miles around Forsyth Park—sometimes listening to audiobooks on my iPod and sometimes just thinking about my current writing project. I'm usually back at my computer by 9:30 and I work until about 2 p.m. By that time I'm tapped out and ready to do something else.

I just finished writing a screenplay based on my stage play that was published in 1995 and performed by the Savannah Actor's Theatre in October, 2006. The man who directed the performance is an experienced film maker with about ten films to his credit. He liked the play so much that he plans to film it in May, 2007, using most of the same cast.

My novel *Spirit Willing: A Savannah Haunting*, will be published later this year. In the meantime, I'm working on a half-finished novel—my fourth—tentatively titled *Dead Reckoning*.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Susan B. Johnson

Susan B. Johnson has been a professional writer for nearly thirty years. Her play, *Finders Weepers*, won second place in a national playwright's competition, enjoyed a stage reading in Atlanta, and was published in 1993 by Stage Door Press of American Fork, Utah. In August, 2006, *Finders Weepers* was performed by the Savannah Artist's Theatre as part of its annual one-act play festival and is currently being filmed by Offshoot Entertainment. Her second play, *Another Man's Shoes*, won honorable mention in Ohio State University's 2001 Eileen Hackert competition.

Her short stories and essays have appeared in *Teen magazine*, *Sunshine magazine*, *Greenprints*, the 1994 and 1996 issues of *Savannah Literary Journal*, and others. Her column "Washed Up" appeared for two years in the Pulitzer Prize winning newspaper *Georgia Gazette*, and for three years she wrote "The Grammar Game," a weekly column she created for the *Savannah Morning News*.

She has written extensively for such newspapers and magazines as *Yachting*, *Cruising World*, *Sail*, *Motor Boating and Sailing*, and *Savannah Morning News* about two trans-Atlantic voyages she and her husband made aboard their 40' sailboat. In addition she has served as guest speaker before various boating and civic organizations.

Her non-fiction book of local history, ***Savannah's Little Crooked Houses: If These Walls Could Talk***, was published by The History Press of Charleston, SC/Gloucester, MA in February, 2007. She anticipates publication of her novel, ***Spirit Willing: A Savannah Haunting*** in summer, 2007.

She earned her B.A. from Denison University in Granville, Ohio, and M.A. from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. For seventeen years she served as head of the General Studies Department at South University in Savannah, Georgia, supervising faculty and teaching composition, literature, and literary research. During the same years, she worked as adjunct faculty in the Department of Languages and Literature at Armstrong Atlantic State University.

Susan Johnson resides in the historic heart of Savannah, Georgia, and in cyberspace at www.susanbjohnson.com.