

The Oliver Sturges House



HEADQUARTERS OF
MORRIS NEWSPAPER CORPORATION
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA



CHARLES H. MORRIS

Welcome to the Oliver Sturges House

Restoring the Oliver Sturges House has been an exciting venture for me. Not only did Sturges House adapt beautifully as corporate headquarters for Morris Newspaper Corporation, but I welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the historic life of Savannah. I have long been interested in the revitalization of the historic area of Savannah and, as a Trustee, I have been involved in the work of the Historic Savannah Foundation.

Work on the Sturges House began in 1972. It was formerly opened with a dedication ceremony and reception September 20, 1973. Over 4000 people visited Sturges House during the day.

We welcome you to Sturges House, where we have tried to blend our historic past with an exciting future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles H. Morris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

**Charles H. Morris
President
Morris Newspaper Corporation**

A restoration
that blends
past traditions
with an
exciting future.



FIRST FLOOR HALL: The original staircase and rail through the archway has been restored from the condition shown in the picture below.



STURGES HOUSE was a rooming home in 1936, years before Historic Savannah preserved it for later restoration.





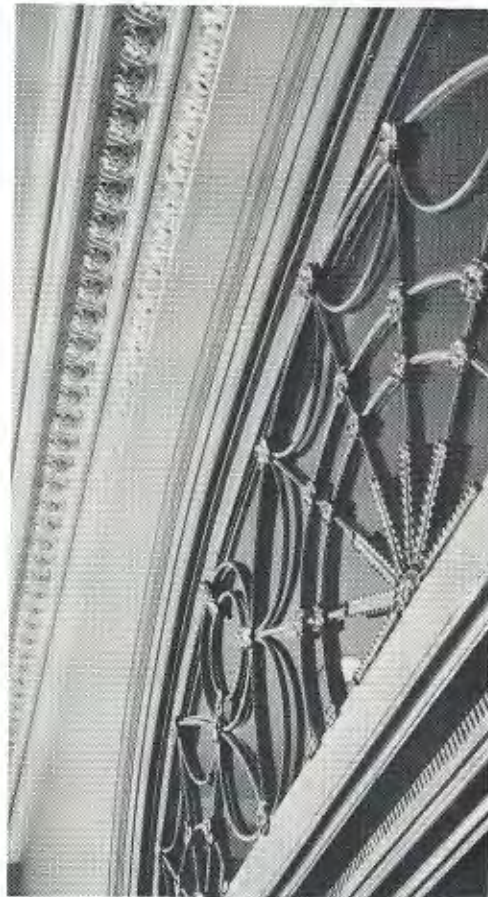
OCTAGONAL ROOM, the scene of the planning of the first steam ship crossing of the Atlantic. In this room, the journey of the Savannah was engineered. The ship's fate was closely tied to the success and failure of Oliver Sturges.



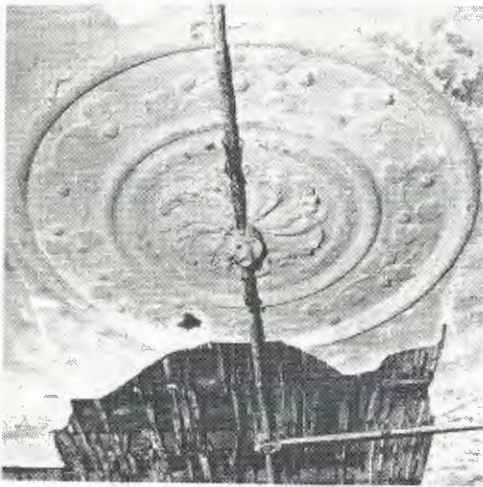
FAN-LITE DOORWAY is seen from the Octagonal Room looking toward the dining room prior to restoration.



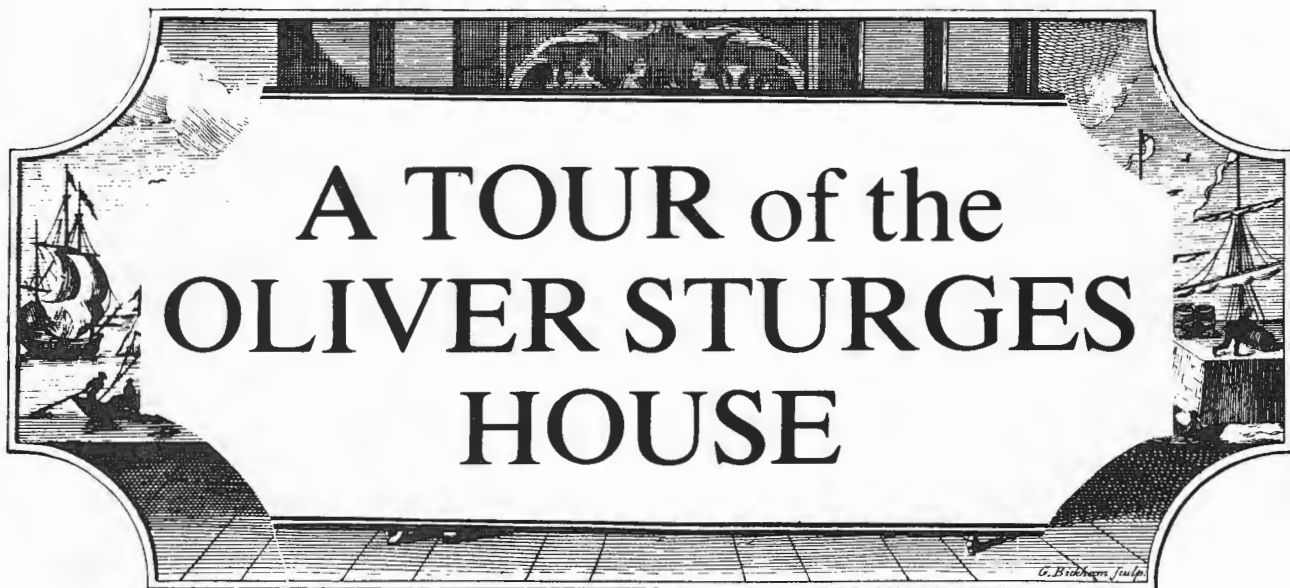
OCTAGONAL ROOM as seen through the bi-fold doors with fan-lite from the dining room. The Octagonal room was an addition to the original house.



DETAIL OF FRIEZE and fan-lite tracery in the Octagonal Room. The tracery was original, only the glass was restored. The frieze between the wall and ceiling is more intricate than in other rooms, indicating affluence at the time the Octagonal Room was added.



IN THE OCTAGONAL ROOM, this ceiling medallion and chandelier add grace to a charming room. The black and white photo at the upper left shows the same area before restoration.



The Oliver Sturges House, one of the purest residential restorations, was originally built between 1812 and 1813. The octagonal room was added sometime before 1819. The original house was two stories over a semi-basement. The roof had a pair of arched dormer windows on the back side and probably on the front also. The top floor modifications took place some time between 1850 and 1860.

All of the room sizes and shapes on the first two floors are as they were originally, with no changes in any of the floor plans. Some minor changes were made on the third floor and in the basement.

The colors used on first and second floor interior walls are known as Historic Savannah colors and are based on researching the pigments on walls of the period.

The flooring on the first and second floors is original heart pine. The mantels on these floors are all original with the exception of the reproduction in the octagonal room on the first floor.

All of the crown moldings, friezes and escutcheons were measured and photographed so that an exact duplication could be accomplished, with casts made from segments where necessary. The restoration was directed by architect Robert Gunn, long active in Historic Savannah, and architect for 45 historic adaptations and restorations.

THE OUTSIDE:

The front steps of the Oliver Sturges House are the original marble. The wrought iron hand rails match the original. There is one pilaster to the right of the door, none to the left. Since the building had a twin next door, the left pilaster probably was to the left of the twin house door.

The small face bricks were imported from Pennsylvania and Baltimore, and were laid in Flemish bond — a pattern that alternates full size brick with a brick end, thus forming cross patterns. This contrasts with the more traditional English bond in which same size bricks are laid side by side and the mortar joints in the next row are directly over the center of bricks in the previous row.

Just above the second floor windows the change in brick color shows where the third floor was added on. The shutters and windows are reproductions of the originals.

In the 1890's earthquake tremors were felt in Savannah, and tie rods were put through many older buildings. Tie rod plates can be seen on the front and side walls of Sturges House.

The stucco basement wall and belt course is a reproduction of the finish that covered basic stone construction. One can see part of the original brick wall that separated the Sturges and Burroughs rear gardens.

THE BASEMENT:

The kitchen was located in the basement, and food, when prepared, was taken upstairs by way of an inside stairway located where the basement stairway is now, at the rear of the hall.

A front entrance to the basement was added during the renovation, taking up a portion of the front garden, to provide private access to the downstairs. The cooking fireplace and the oven, as well as the firebox, have been restored. The exposed stones are rubble masonry ballast stones, used as ballast on the old cargo ships coming to Savannah. These stones, from all over the world, include granite, lava, slate, marble, and many other rock classes. Ballast stones were the "concrete block" of the times, and were not intended as "visible" finish material. The walls also include Savannah gray bricks which were made on the banks of the Savannah River during the early 1800's.

The octagonal room in the basement was part of a later addition built before 1819 for use as servants' quarters or for storage. It was all Savannah gray bricks.

THE PARLOR FLOOR: HALLWAY

Entering the hallway, note the six-panel colonial doors to the rooms. There is less reveal on the back side of the panels than there is on the front or hall side. The hallway boasts a chair rail with no wainscot. Two-thirds of the way back to the main stairway, a pair of engaged, smooth-surface square columns are capped with a plaster arch.

The staircase features simple handrail pickets. The original mahogany handrail has been completely restored as well as the original heart pine treads. The face of the stair stringer has a very delicate applied molding at each step.

The second floor hallway has an arch similar to that on the first floor. The crown molding is also the same as that in the first floor hall. There was no chair rail on the wall of the second floor hallway, however. The window on the second floor landing is Palladian-like, with a very simple arched transom light over it.

THE PARLOR FLOOR: MAIN PARLOR ROOM

In the main parlor room through the first hallway door on the right, is an original Georgian mantel with fluted pilasters. The walls of this room were done in plaster with a simple chair rail, whereas, in the later addition, which includes the octagonal room where the voyage of the steamship Savannah was planned, there is greater detail in the ceiling medallion.

In this room, and all of the sections of the house to be built first, details are much simpler than in later additions.

The arched transom over the bifold doors has been put back in plaster as it was originally. Demolition revealed that this framing was original, and a fan-like transom was never present. The fluted pilasters are original.

THE PARLOR FLOOR: DINING ROOM

Through the bifold doors into the center room would have been the dining room. There is a simple chair rail without wainscoting. The pilasters, flanking the bifold doors, are flat surfaced rather than fluted. No frieze was present, but the same crown molding as in the main parlor room was continued.

In the fan-lite over the bifold doors leading from the dining room into the octagonal room, the glass is new, but the tracery has been restored. This opening occurs in where there were probably paired Palladian doors in an exterior wall before the "octagonal addition."

THE PARLOR FLOOR: OCTAGONAL ROOM

Pilasters flank the bifold door openings. These are fluted in a finer manner than in other rooms, and a wooden wainscoting is used, rather than a chair rail. This indicated more affluence than in earlier construction. The crown mold is the most ornate of any in the house. The bottom band is executed in an acanthus leaf, the upper portion in scroll and flower design. The

center escutcheon is much more ornate than in the original part of the house. The fan-lite on the back exterior door is in very simple Georgian style and is a restoration. The mantel is the only reproduction in the house as the original was heavily damaged and could not be restored.

**SECOND FLOOR:
THE LIBRARY**

The library is directly above the main parlor room. The mantel is typical of the Georgian period. The door trim is also Georgian, as is the chair rail. The crown mold is very delicate, but not as complicated as in the downstairs parlor. The portrait over the mantel is of Mr. William S. Morris, father of Charles H. Morris.

**SECOND FLOOR:
CENTER BEDROOM**

This center room was a bedroom. There is a chair rail, but no wainscoting, a simple escutcheon and a very simple mantel.

**SECOND FLOOR:
UPSTAIRS PARLOR**

The upstairs parlor now serves as the office of Charles H. Morris. In this room, the original builders used a simple crown molding and escutcheon, rather than duplicating the more ornate works on the parlor floor addition directly below. There is a chair rail, but no wainscoting. The upstairs parlor once had triple hung windows leading out to the balcony in the rear of the house. These windows were replaced with a pair of French doors of similar design. Mr. Morris' dressing room apparently was a bathroom or a dressing room. The window in the dressing room is a handsome arched-top, double-hung window.

THIRD FLOOR:

The third floor was added to the Oliver Sturges House sometime between 1850 and 1860 for use as simple sleeping rooms. There was no particular fancy detailing of the trim. However, the six panel doors were similar to those in the rest of the building.



The Oliver Sturges House:
**AN HISTORIC
LANDMARK
RESTORED**

by WALTER C. HARTRIDGE
*Chairman, 1973,
Savannah-Chatham County
Historic Site and Monument Commission*

Facing one of Savannah's celebrated squares, Reynolds Square, the house built in 1813 for Oliver Sturges has long been admired as a fine example of the Federal style. Among the 10 oldest buildings in Savannah, its importance is more than local. The place it holds in the overall picture of American architecture has been recognized through its inclusion in the highly selective National Register of Historic Places. After years of neglect, this distinguished landmark has been carefully restored and put to use to house the corporate office of Morris Newspaper Corporation.

Once more the elements of its design, the brickwork, stonework, interior friezes and mantels, all have been brought back to their original elegance.

The architectural distinction of Oliver Sturges' house is equalled by its historical associations. The site on which it stands, the northern half of a block at one side of a tree-lined square, was marked off by James Oglethorpe in 1733 when he cleared the forest that stretched back from Yamacraw Bluff for the first settlement in Georgia. It was a conspicuous location in the

imaginative townplan, with its sequence of squares and broad intersection avenues. Oglethorpe's plan over the ensuing years, has won the acclaim of travelers, architects and city planners.

In the layout of Savannah a balance was struck between philanthropic and humanitarian uses, thus symbolizing the forces that went into the making of Georgia. The small paired blocks which flank each square on east and west were reserved for public buildings and were called Trust Lots because title to them was held by Trustees, the administrators of the affairs of the Colony. A Trust Lot fronting the principal square was reserved for the Church, the one directly behind it, on part of which Oliver Sturges was to erect his house, was designated for the Parsonage.

Several years passed before a church was built, services being held in the Court House, but no time was lost in providing a home for the minister. The earliest picture of Savannah, drawn soon after the colonists took possession of their lots, showed the Parsonage to be a simple wooden structure, one story high and identical in shape and size with every other dwelling in town.

What made this house unique was the use to which it was put, for religion played a notable role in Georgia. Clergymen sat on the Board of Trustees, charity sermons to raise money for the enterprise were

preached in London churches, and inducements were made to impoverished Protestants to begin life anew on the banks of the Savannah.

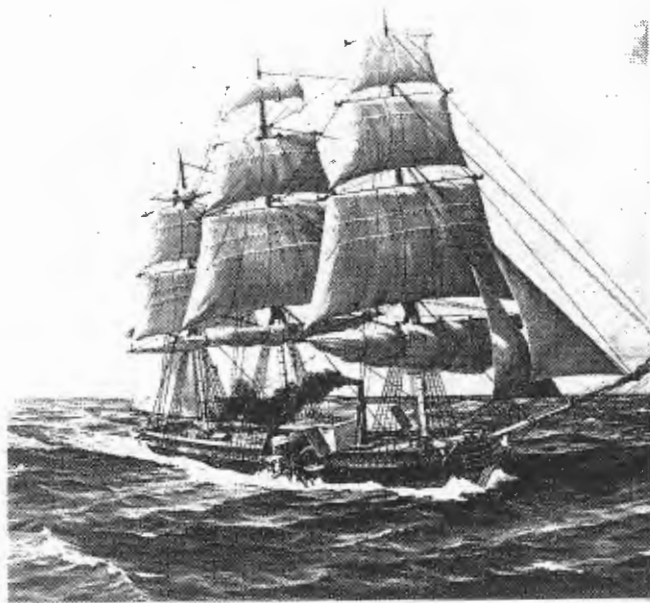
Once British subjects had planted the first settlements, a welcome was extended to religious refugees from the continent. Portuguese Jews, Piedmontese and Switzers, Frenchmen, Moravians and Germans, zealous defenders of mutually antagonistic faiths in the Old World, found their way to Oglethorpe's colony and there learned to live in harmony under the benign rule of the Trustees.

It was to this Utopia that John Wesley came in 1736 to care for the spiritual needs of the settlers. As the only minister of the Established Church in Georgia, his cure extended beyond Savannah as far west, on paper at least as the Mississippi River. The Parsonage placed at his disposal served the double purpose of church and dwelling. Here this pious and learned clergyman, a recent graduate of Oxford, would meet groups of his parishioners and lead them in prayer. Here he would prepare sermons that were to change many lives, and here he would compose hymns that are sung to this day by congregations around the world.

Here, too, he would make entries in his diary, which, when published after his death, was to take place among the most poignant of all spiritual autobiographies. Besides giving an insight into the mind of a religious genius, Wesley's journal draws a fascinating picture of conditions in colonial Georgia.

Although the Parsonage was the focal point of his activities, Wesley did not stay at home and wait for his parishioners to come to him. He set forth instead from Savannah on many journeys to distant frontier settlements, preaching and celebrating Holy Communion in several languages in order to make the service more meaningful to the diverse ethnic groups that composed his flock.

Personal misfortunes caused Wesley to leave Georgia before he had completed the second year of his ministry there but this short period counted for much in his spiritual development. Toward the close of his



THE SAVANNAH, 1819

long life he stated that it was in Georgia that he experienced his second conversion which led ultimately to the rise of Methodism. His travels throughout the colony prepared him for the day when he would journey the length and breadth of England bringing the Word of God to countless thousands and launching a religious movement that changed his and later centuries.

Wesley's successor as minister in Georgia was another great Evangelist George Whitefield. Whitefield's interests were not centered on the Parsonage as were Wesley's. Bethesda, the orphanage and school he established near Savannah, became his chief preoccupation, and after eight years he gave up parish work to devote all of his time to that institution. The sermons he delivered to outdoor audiences up and down the Atlantic seaboard were intended to raise money for Bethesda. They did that and more. Whitefield's gift of oratory launched a revival, known as the Great Awakening, which accomplished the same ends in the American Colonies that Wesley's sermons did in England.

During Whitefield's ministry a church

was built on the Trust Lot behind the Parsonage. In 1758 Georgia was divided into parishes; Savannah and the area adjoining it became the Parish of Christ Church.

A worthy successor to Wesley and Whitefield, Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, took up residence in the Parsonage, and dedicated himself to caring for the Negroes who were brought to Savannah in large numbers when the ban on slavery imposed by the Trustees was lifted.

The Revolutionary War was bitterly fought in Georgia. The colonists were almost evenly divided in their political allegiance, and with peace, retribution was meted out to those who had offended the triumphant patriots. As representatives of the Crown Anglican clergymen were banished from the state, the Church of England was disestablished, and many of its lands were confiscated. Out of gratitude for the selfless labors of its colonial ministers the Church and Parsonage in Savannah were spared, title passing to the wardens and vestrymen of Christ Church.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, prosperity came to Savannah. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin enabled cotton to become king throughout the South. Savannah, near the mouth of a long river, was in a strategic position to receive the yield of a vast region. Its merchants grew rich on cotton, storing it in their warehouses that lined the river below the bluff and shipping it in their vessels to Europe and New England. The look of the town changed as imposing new buildings rose on the squares that Oglethorpe had lined with simple homes for the first settlers.

In 1796 disaster struck. Fire laid waste two-thirds of its area and impoverished its citizens. Christ Church, which boasted an elegant portico modelled after Inigo Jones' design for St. Paul's Covent Garden and an organ second to none in the country, was reduced to ashes.

By the turn of the century most of the town was rebuilt, but with no inspiring preacher to voice their needs, the wardens and vestrymen lacked funds to build another church. Services were held in

rented quarters and the Church Lot remained as bare as it was when Oglethorpe surveyed it. A half-hearted attempt to rebuild was brought to nought in 1804 when a gale levelled the newly-laid walls.

By 1812, however, a new structure was well under way. Money ran out before the roof was raised or the tower built, and in their extremity, the vestry obtained permission from the state legislature to conduct a lottery and to sell the Parsonage lot.

The new owners of this historic block were Benjamin Burroughs and Oliver Sturges, former partners in a mercantile firm of the first rank. They paid \$5,000 for the lot, borrowed a like sum, and set about the joint venture of building paired residences for themselves on the 60 feet that faced the square.

No trained architect was then working in Savannah, but Burroughs and Sturges could call upon the services of several skilled master builders who were constructing handsome houses in the Federal style for their fellow merchants. It would seem that they chose the firm composed of John Crane and Calvin Baker, specializing in incorporating arched doorways and windows into exterior designs, and endowing interiors with arched halls and archways between rooms.

If the designer of these houses cannot be identified with certainty, the year of construction, 1813, is established by the city tax records. Each house was valued at \$7,000, a large figure for a Savannah dwelling in those days. Ownership of the houses was jointly held until 1816, when Burroughs obtained title to the southern half of the lot and Sturges to the northern.

The career of Oliver Sturges was long held up in his adopted city as an inspiration to ambitious young men. He had come to Savannah from Connecticut in 1802 at the age of 25, with a family to care for and his way to make in an unfamiliar world. Partnership with Benjamin Burroughs, an established merchant, opened the door to success for him.

From Dr. Jones' wharf below the bluff, the firm did a thriving business. Advertise-

ments in the newspapers indicate the scope of its trade. In addition to the usual goods carried by Savannah merchants — groceries, wines, and dry-goods — Burroughs & Sturges would on occasion add some novel line, such as bundles of fruit trees from a well known nursery in New York. The firm also acted as agents for ships plying the coastal trade and would export cargoes of cotton, rice, and lumber to Europe and the West Indies.

With an assured income from his commercial ventures, Oliver Sturges had time to devote to civic affairs. He served on the City Council, helped to organize the New England Society, a body which kept Yankees in Savannah in touch with one another and with northern political thought. And he was a director of the Office of Discount and Deposit. He joined the Independent Presbyterian Church, was elected a Trustee and led the movement to build a new meeting-house.

The War of 1812 brought a halt to Savannah's port activity. Foreign trade was eliminated by embargo and blockade, and coastal shipping dwindled in the face of threatened enemy attack. With peace, Savannah recovered.

Burroughs and Sturges had dissolved their partnership before the war. Sturges continued business on his own, moving his counting-room to what he described as a fire-proof store on Scarbrough & Taylor's wharf.

In 1816 Sturges joined with other merchants to incorporate the Steam Boat and Company of Georgia, and acquired an interest in its riverfront property near his store. This company, which provided steam transportation on the Savannah River, was an instant success. Each share increased in value from \$100 to \$800 and yielded dividends of 25 per cent.

Enthusiastic Savannahians now saw the future of their port lay with steamboats. In 1818 they formed the Savannah Steam Ship Company, commissioned the building of a 320-ton steam vessel in New York, named it for their city, and made plans to send her on a pioneer steam crossing of the Atlantic.

For some reason that is not recorded



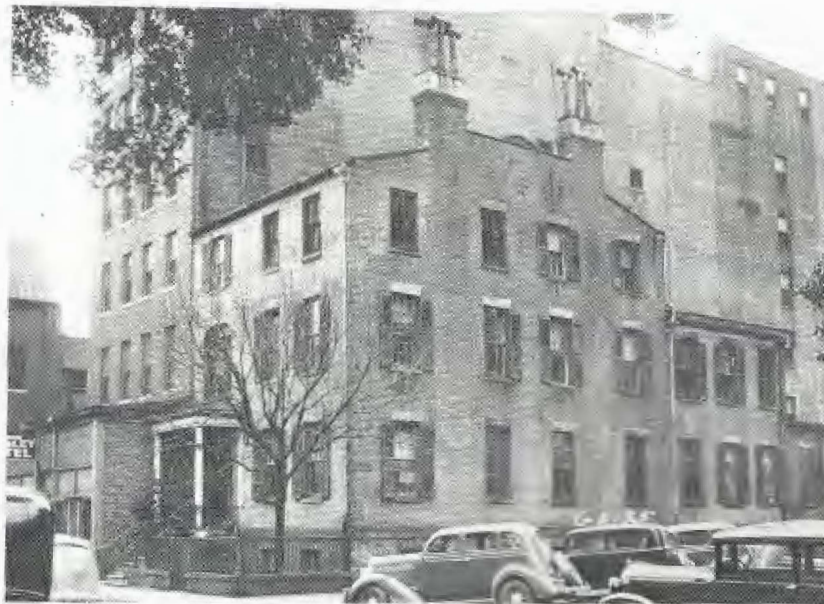
Oliver Sturges took no active part in the new enterprise. His name does not appear on the list of incorporators and he was not a stock holder. But as silent partners he and Benjamin Burroughs, together in business once more, played an important role behind the scenes. The late William Harden, librarian of the Georgia Historical Society and a recognized authority on Savannah's past, has written that their firm gave financial backing to the ship and sent cotton to Liverpool on the Savannah's epoch-making crossing in the spring of 1819.

To persons interested in historic houses Mr. Harden would point out the octagonal room in Sturges' residence where the Directors of the Steam Ship Company met and reached decisions of consequence to maritime history. The Directors' Room, as he called it, is a later addition to the house. Its octagonal form follows the precedent set in Savannah by the English architect, William Jay, of using the polygon, the semi-circle, and the curved line for shaping rooms. There can be little doubt that the extension to Sturges' house was built by Jay soon after he came to Savannah in 1817 to practice his profession.

Whatever his connection with the Steamship Savannah may have been Oliver Sturges derived much personal satisfaction from the prominence the vessel brought to her home port. When it became known that President Monroe would inspect the Savannah before she left for Liverpool, Sturges was elected "in town meeting assembled" to a committee to entertain the presidential



THE SECOND FLOOR LIBRARY features a portrait of William S. Morris, father of Charles H. Morris, over the Georgian fireplace.



IN 1936, The Oliver Sturges House appeared somewhat run down. Next door, where Sturges House's twin building once stood, a hotel was built. It has been updated in the past decade.



DEDICATION of the restored Sturges House took place in September 1973, when hundreds of guests and Savannah citizens toured the building. In the top picture, the Octagonal Room, now Morris Newspaper Corporation Board Room, is admired by dedication ceremony visitors. Below, Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Morris greet Don and Carol Carter, cousin of the President, at the dedication reception attended by notables in the publishing and preservation fields. Mr. Carter is an executive with Knight-Ridder newspapers.

PATENT TRADER, a twice-a-week 20,000 circulation newspaper published in the New York City suburb of Mt. Kisco, N.Y., serving upper Westchester and Putnam counties, was acquired by Morris Newspaper Corporation in December, 1972. The Thursday-Saturday newspaper has its own weekend magazine, **Week Ahead**, and also a free-distribution paper, **Bargain Trader**. Its modern, offset plant, with 4-unit Goss Metro web offset press, produces some 20 regional and national newspapers under contractual arrangements with other publishers.

Department store key to Kisco center plan



Week Ahead

PATENT TRADER
SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF UPPER WESTCHESTER AND PUTNAM COUNTIES

Oil leak, fumes close church; cause unknown

Westlake High given conditional approval

Morrow: Ok for 13

Philanthropist Lady Gabriel dies at 91

Report required May 1 on staffing inadequacy

Varicose veins can be hereditary.
Is an ounce a week too much to gain?
A dramatic look for your bedroom.
How to survive in a small car.

BARGAIN TRADER
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How to play safe with your chest

marcos courier

Barham was initial San Marcos tract

Transit board eyes \$533,000 in federal funds

Lounge hit for \$1,000

San Diego Mayor Wilson to speak at GSLR Council

DMV class scheduled

Police hunt captures two

North County

North County Courier

About code enforcement

Mobilehomers are angry

101 news

Current history revealed

Colony elects officers

Wedding adds beauty

Special Olympics set

Park director mobilized

O'Brien heads countywide program for alcoholism

Just goats to show ya...

Kid quartet doing well

School districts eye annexation

Discourts growing for seniors






The Steam Ship Savannah's role in history has particular significance to Morris Newspaper Corporation. The ship and its historic voyage across the Atlantic was planned in what is now its Board Room. Oliver Sturges was a partner in this exciting venture and was chosen Savannah's official host to President James Monroe when he inspected the ship prior to its historic voyage.

To honor this historic event, Charles Morris, President of Morris Newspaper Corporation, commissioned John Stobart, renowned maritime artist, to recapture on canvas the Steam Ship

Savannah as it sailed from Savannah's harbour May 20, 1819. John Stobart, who is known for his historical harbour scenes, used historical drawings and engravings, archival photos and early sketches and maps for background and landmark authenticity "to visualize the scene and to re-create the atmosphere of the day."

Several hundred prints were made from the painting and sold to the public.

Profits from the sale of the first 300 prints were donated to Historic Savannah Foundation to aid their efforts in preserving Savannah's history.





Morris Newspaper Corporation

P. O. Box 8167

Savannah, Georgia 31402

For

Mr. T. M. Hotchkiss, Chairman
Historical Section
The Friends of the Monrovia Public
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Monrovia, California 91016

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