

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Georgia

We left DC Dulles at 12:30 pm on Thursday, February 18, for a direct flight to Savannah, Georgia, and the Georgia Elks Convention hosted by Savannah Lodge 183. We were met at the airport by PGER and State Sponsor Val Bates and his wife Claudia, State President Larry Emmett and his wife Mickie, and SDGER Stan Jones and his wife Margie.

When we arrived at our hotel, the Courtyard Marriott, our room was not ready, so we went to Stan's room, where we had the opportunity to meet several other Georgia Elks and Florida State President Carl Ledig and his wife Dolly. Thursday night we went to dinner with about forty State Leaders at Johnny Harris' Restaurant, which has been in business for ninety years, but is about to be torn down and replaced by a shopping center.

Friday morning we got to sleep in, something that is unusual on the road, before our tour of historic Savannah. Savannah was established in 1733 by James Oglethorpe as a buffer between the English colonies to the North and the Spanish in Florida. Originally, the laws provided for no slaves, liquor, lawyers or Jews, but after a Jewish doctor saved the town following an outbreak of Yellow Fever, the rule against Jews was lifted, and the others soon followed. Over ninety movies have been filmed in Savannah including "Forrest Gump" and "In the Garden of Good and Evil." During the Civil War, City leaders negotiated peace with General William Tecumseh Sherman, so he was welcomed into Savannah and it was not burned to the ground like many other Georgia cities on his "March to the Sea."

We had visited Savannah a few years ago when our daughter, Katie, considered going to



Ron, President-Elect Gary Robinette, and President Larry Emmett.



A view of the Savannah River and the Talmadge Memorial Bridge from the rooftop of the Bohemian Hotel on the downtown Savannah Riverfront.

school at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). (She ended up at Virginia Tech.) Started in 1978 with seventy students, SCAD now has over 13,000 students and has become an integral part of the City. The school has revitalized several areas and renovated many of the buildings, and has essentially made the City its campus. On our tour we noticed that the Savannah City government with its gold-domed City Hall is located at the end of Bull Street, which seems rather appropriate for most cities. Savannah Harbor is the second largest container harbor on the East Coast and Savannah hosts the third largest St Patrick's Day Parade in the country.

During our tour of the "Hostess City of the South," several "characters" boarded our trolley, which provided a nice touch to the experience. Abel Clayton, whose family was



The lovely Sarah Owens, describing her beautiful and "modern" Savannah home on our tour.

divided in their loyalties in the Civil War; a Pirate from the Pirate House Tavern, which had tunnels to the river to bring in illegal liquor; Sarah Owens, who lived in the premiere home in Savannah, the first with a dining room and indoor plumbing, and which hosted Lafayette; and, Julia Scarborough, the "Dutchess," a socialite, married to the owner of a steamboat company, who lived in one of

the grandest homes in the City, which hosted President James Monroe. The Girl Scouts were founded in Savannah in 1912 by Juliette Low and the Methodist Church was started here by John Wesley. The original Savannah Lodge 183 was located in the Historic District among the lovely homes, twenty-four beautiful Squares and several Parks.

Dinner Friday night was at the Lodge, followed by a dance. The Georgia Elks conducted the Eleven O'clock Toast around 9:00 pm, so we left the floor to



Trolley Tour. Our driver and tour guide Joe donated his fee to ENF.



A pirate from one of the ships in the busy Port of Savannah at the Pirate House Tavern.

the good dancers (Georgia has many), and called it an early evening. Saturday morning was filled with Committee meetings, Ron attended as many as he could and spoke at most of them. There were many great reports and planning. Elks Aidmore has been the State Major Project for eighty years. Led by CEO Abe Wilkinson and his wife Theresa, Aidmore provides youth and families residential and therapeutic services and resources to heal hearts, restore hope, and re-build lives. Georgia is a great supporter of Elks National Foundation, every Lodge has attained the GER's Goal this year and they are currently number three in the Nation in per capita giving. Georgia is also very active with the dictionary Program, Veterans, Drug Awareness, and Scholarships.



Ron and Morgan Stapp, ER of the Lake Oconee Lodge and Chairman of the Georgia Elks Board of Directors.

After lunch Ron met with the State Board of Directors, chaired by Lake Oconee ER Morgan Stapp. Saturday afternoon, incoming President-Elect Dwaine Lovingood held a reception, the Good Fortune Shoot Off was conducted, and the Georgia Elks held a Horseshoe Tournament, won by Exalted Ruler Al Duetsch and Tom Mulvaney of the Savannah Lodge. The Elks sold 400 Tickets at \$100 each for the Shoot Off



Ron and Savannah Lodge ER Al Duetsch.

and Ron had the privilege of firing the rifle, at numbers on three spinning targets, to determine the number of the winning tickets. The winner received \$10,000 and second, third, and fourth prizes were \$5,000, \$3,000, and \$2,000, respectively, with the net proceeds of \$20,000 going to the Georgia Elks to support Aidmore and other charities.

Nancy joined Claudia Bates, Mickie Emmett, Margie Jones, and Dolly Ledig for lunch Saturday afternoon near the hotel. They just happened to be driving past a Shopping Center on the way back to the hotel and heard the call of a couple of the stores for a little "retail therapy." The good news is they did help boost the economy of Savannah just a little.

Saturday night we were back at the Lodge for another dinner and dance, and before dinner we were entertained by a local Barbershop Quartet. The GER Wine Raffle, which was conducted by PSP Stanley Santee and his wife PDD Jane

Santee, was won by Stan Jones from the Albany Lodge, and \$595 went to ENF in Stan's name and the name of the Lodge. Another early Toast and we were back at the hotel around 10:00 pm.

Sunday morning began as a joint Session of the Georgia Elks and the Ladies Auxiliary. The Ladies Auxiliary, led by President Mary Louise Clements, is very strong in Georgia and contributes greatly to the success of all Georgia Lodges and of the State Programs, especially Elks Aidmore. Ron spoke at the Session and congratulated the Auxiliary and the Lodges for their hard work and dedication to Elkdom. Elks Aidmore CEO Abe Wilson also spoke, and afterwards, a "Line of Giving" was conducted by the Lodges and Lodge Auxiliaries, and in just a few minutes over \$50,000 was contributed to Elks Aidmore.

The Ladies then left the room for their own Meeting and the Georgia Elks continued with their Business Session consisting mainly of Committee Reports from the day before. The Georgia Elks will hold a joint ER Academy and DD Clinic in April on the Elks Aidmore Campus.

After the joint meeting and a short break, the Ladies Auxiliary held their Business meeting led by President Mary Louise Clements. Reports were given on the various activities the ladies have been doing including fund raising for Elks Aidmore, decorating for Christmas, and gifts that were given to the children at Elks Aidmore. Nancy thanked the ladies for the great "southern" hospitality she and Ron had experienced while in Savannah and applauded them for the support they give to their spouses and the Georgia Elks and especially Elks Aidmore.

We left Savannah Sunday afternoon at 2:47 pm, arriving back at Dulles about 4:30. Next up the "Natural State," and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org

