

Self-guided downtown walking/architecture tour

1.) Americus Municipal Building (Visitor Center) – 101 W. Lamar St.

This Italian Renaissance style structure was completed in May 1910 at a cost of \$75,000. Originally, the building was the U.S. Post Office building. The postmaster was Frank P. Mitchell. Second-floor offices were used for federal agencies such as the Internal Revenue collector and Civil Service Department. U.S. Congressman Charles R. Crisp secured \$100,000 for the building's enlargement and a third floor and elevator were completed in January 1933. The name was changed to "U.S. Post Office and U.S. Court Building." With the erection of a new post office in 1969, the city acquired and renamed this building the Municipal Building.

2.) Windsor Hotel – 125 W. Lamar St.

This building, opened on June 16, 1892, defines eclectic Victorian and gracious Southern elegance. Thousands attended the grand opening. The building was designed by noted Swedish architect Gottfried L. Norman of Atlanta and was named for successful capitalist John T. Windsor, a native of neighboring Webster County. The hotel closed its doors in 1974, but underwent a more than \$5 million renovation and reopened in September 1991. Among the most notable guests have been Franklin D. Roosevelt; John Dillinger; William Jennings Bryan; Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy; and President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter. It has 53 period rooms today; when it opened, it held 100 rooms.

3.) Americus Fire Department – Beside Citizens Bank at 119 N. Lee St.

This building was built in the 1890s and also served as the city's police department for many decades. The curved bays that are visible are where the fire trucks exited the building.

4.) Old Planters Bank Building – 120 N. Lee St.

George W. Council and Reddick J. Perry began construction on this building in June 1899. Upon completion in April 1900, it opened as Planters Bank, with Lee G. Council (1869-1945) and Charles M. Council as president and vice president. It was the first building of the Italian Renaissance style built in Americus. After the collapse of Planters Bank in 1928, Citizens Bank of Americus opened here in 1937 with Thomas O. Marshall (1895-1953) as chairman and Lee Hudson as president. Citizens Bank moved across the street to its new building in 1961.

5.) Thornton Wheatley Building – 122 W. Forsyth St.

Israel Thornton Wheatley, a Pennsylvania transplant who moved to Americus in the early 1850s and fought with the “Sumter Light Guards” throughout the Civil War, was a clothier by trade until his retirement in 1905. He constructed the building adjoining this one on the west in 1889. In November 1892, he completed this building, known as the Pythian Castle, because the third floor was utilized by the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization. The Victorian Romanesque style building was a Georgia Main Street Awards winner in 1998.

6.) Glover Opera House – 111 W. Forsyth St.

George W. Glover, one of the original 10 men who formed the Windsor Development Corp. to raise money for the construction of the Windsor Hotel, built this building about 1882. The cost was \$14,000. The main floor had a six-tiered balcony that seated about 1,000 people. Plays were performed here by Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress. Town meetings and boxing matches also were held here. Former heavyweight champ John L. Sullivan, known as the “Boston Strong Boy,” boxed here. Commercial space filled the street level. “One of the most popular saloons of the day” occupied a spot.

7.) Americus Bakery – 118 W. Forsyth St.

This building, built in 1889, features ornamentation in terra cotta highlighted by the trim paint. Egg and art motif above the windows and framing include the 1889 date. A lion’s head above the door and twining decorative bands are at the edge of the building. Now a restaurant, the building for decades was owned by popular baker William Theodore “Theo” Baldwin, Sr., who died in 1985.

8.) Old Americus Hardware Building (The Maze) – 131 W. Forsyth St.

John W. Sheffield and business partner Charles A. Huntington, both of Quincy, Fla., purchased the original wooden structure on this site in August 1872. The present brick edifice was begun in April 1882 and completed in January 1883. Architecture of this building includes elaborate cast stone quoins at the corners and cast keystones above the arched windows. For almost 120 years, the Sheffield family ran a hardware store on this corner. The business was variously known as Sheffield-Huntington Co.; J.W. Sheffield and Co.; Sheffield Co.; and Americus Hardware. It reopened as The Home Place in the 1990s and has been called The Maze since 2004.

9.) Barlow Block – 104 N. Jackson St. (west side)

Buildings in this block are typical of commercial Victorian architecture. Details include overall asymmetry, heavy cornice, cast iron ventilators and at the second level, stone crowns or hoods above the windows. A remnant of the original cast-iron store fronts can be seen to the left of the central floor entry. For decades, an S.H. Kress & Co. department store was located in this block. Structures here were built by the widow of Dr. William W. Barlow (1811-1879), for whom the strip is named.

10.) Bank of Commerce – 217 W. Forsyth St.

This building was opened on Jan. 7, 1892. The counter was made by Americus Furniture Co. This building was the home of Bank of Commerce from 1908 to 1960. The banking institution was capitalized at \$65,000. J.W. Sheffield was president; Frank Sheffield was cashier; and Lott Warren was assistant cashier. The Board of Directors included: J.W. Sheffield; C.A. Huntington; J.E. French; E.J. Miller; J.R. Stapleton; D.J. Sheffield; and W. A. Dodson. In 1960, the third floor was removed and extensive renovations were completed.

11.) J.W. Harris and Co. Hardware – 302 W. Lamar St.

This building, constructed about 1880, is one of the oldest surviving commercial buildings in downtown Americus that has not been substantially altered. Harris Hardware sold items such as stoves, crockery and tools for many decades. The building has been remodeled and restored. The first floor became multiple office and business spaces, including Draw Products and a barber shop.

12.) Rylander Ford building (Habitat headquarters) – 322 W. Lamar St.

Built in 1916 as a Ford Motor Co. dealership, this building is one of the state's oldest surviving buildings built specifically for an automobile dealership. Habitat for Humanity International invested more than \$5 million to renovate the building in the 1990s to house Habitat for Humanity's International Headquarters. Millard Fuller founded Habitat for Humanity in Americus in 1976.

13.) Monroe's – 318 W. Lamar St.

This legendary eatery has been a downtown Americus icon for decades. The first Monroe's was located in the Windsor Hotel. The restaurant goes through approximately 600 pounds of wieners a week. It is famous for its chili cheese dog. The eatery's slogan is "Best Dog Ever Bitten By Man."

14.) Rylander Theatre – 310 W. Lamar St.

Walter Rylander, Sr. announced construction of this theater in 1919. The grand opening occurred on Jan. 21, 1921 and featured the national touring company of the hit Broadway play "Lightnin." Early acts and shows included Charlie Chaplin films, Vaudeville shows, the Ziegfeld follies, and Alvin C. York. The theater originally seated 800 and was adorned with elaborate plaster ornamentation and murals. Closed in 1951, the theater reopened after a more than \$4 million renovation in October 1999 and hosted a 75th birthday celebration for President Jimmy Carter.

15.) Empire Bank Building (RVRC) – 228 W. Lamar St.

This building was built in 1910 in the Classical Revival style. An unusual feature on this bank building is the four stone columns. Each one has a different gargoyle face. The building originally was owned by William Crawford Wheatley, who helped bring what is today Georgia Southwestern State University to Americus in 1906. The original name given was Commercial City Bank in 1911. The roof was burned in a fire in the 1970s and later rebuilt. Formerly, this building housed First Federal Savings & Loan for years.

16.) Kinnebrew Co. – 208 W. Lamar St.

This building, which has been renovated, is the oldest surviving brick commercial building in Americus. It was built by Joseph J. Granberry and Timothy M. Furlow about 1850-1853. The southwest corner of Jackson and Lamar streets was known as "Granberry's Corner" because Mr. Granberry once operated a dry goods store here. Southern Bell telephone operators were housed on the second floor of part of this building in the 1930s. The Kinnebrew Co. opened in this location in 1947.

17.) Carnegie Library Building (Canterbury Kitchen) – 111 S. Jackson St.

In January 1878, the Americus Library Association, with Thornton Wheatley as president, organized the city's first public library on this site. The wood-frame structure was completed in October 1879 by general contractor Charles M. Wheatley, brother of the association's president. The first librarian was Miss Emma Rylander. Construction on this building began in October 1908, with the official opening of the Carnegie Library in April 1909. It served the community until March 1976. Cut ashlar stone, Corinthian columns and heavy cornice mark the Beaux Arts style that is associated with civic buildings.

18.) First Presbyterian Church – 124 S. Jackson St.

This building, built in 1884, is the oldest existing church in town. The architecture is Carpenter Gothic. It was designed by a Columbus architect and built by Charles M. Wheatley. The sanctuary was constructed entirely from material found in Georgia. The church claims priority as having brought the first pipe organ to Americus.

19.) Allison Building (Minick Interiors) – 124 W. Lamar St.

Richard E. Allison moved to Americus in 1888 at age the age of 22 and built this furniture store in 1906-1907. Allison earlier owned a book/stationery business here with a partner. The partner died and the store failed, but the experience was not a complete loss. He married his partner's widow, named Georgia, in 1893. This building originally housed two businesses. In addition to the furniture store, a Dr. Davenport owned a drug store here. Allison put money in the stock market and lost it all in the crash of 1929. He committed suicide in the top floor of this building on April 6, 1932.

GEOGRAPHIC INFO:

Tour starts inside Americus Welcome Center.

Proceed to outside Windsor Hotel.

Look across parking lot to Fire Department building.

Then look diagonally across parking lot to tall building.

Proceed down Windsor Avenue to corner of Albamonte Immigration/Johnston Realty building.

Look across street to Glover Opera House (old Bittersweet) building.

Walk just down street to City Grill (Americus Bakery) on the left.

Walk to corner in front of Allie's; point across street to The Maze (Old Americus Hardware).

Look down Jackson Street to old Kress building (Barlow Block).

Walk down Forsyth to Wells Fargo bank on right (old Bank of Commerce).

Turn left on Cotton Avenue and talk about Harris Hardware building straight ahead.

Cross street in front of Harris building and go to end of street to Habitat headquarters building (Rylander Ford 1916).

Come back up to Monroe's Hot Dogs.

Walk just up to Rylander Theatre (and mention Walk of Fame bricks).

Continue up Lamar Street to Empire Bank Building on right (RVRC).

Proceed up Lamar to Kinnebrew Co. on corner.

Turn right on Jackson Street to Carnegie.

Proceed down to First Presbyterian Church.

Come back up Jackson and turn right on Lamar and proceed up to Allison Building (across street from Welcome Center).

END OF TOUR