



# More Than Mercer House: Savannah's Jim Williams & His Southern Houses

*Dorothy Williams Kingery*

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Savannah has captivated the hearts and imaginations of countless visitors and residents but no one was more fascinated by her charm or devoted to her preservation than Jim Williams. One of the city's earliest private restorationists, Jim restored three historic old houses in 1955 when he was only 24 years old. It was the beginning of a career that would span nearly 35 years and results in saving over 50 houses in Savannah and nearby coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina. A knowledgeable collector, an ardent student of history and architecture, and a born storyteller, Mr. Williams wrote a series of essays about the great impact that these special houses had on his life. Using these essays as a guide this book takes its readers on a journey that begins with Jim's childhood visits to his grandparents' home at Turkey Creek in middle Georgia, and ends at a secluded marsh-front retreat called Indian Bluff. Along the way we learn about Savannah's early restoration movement - the critical period when many fine old houses were lost, the almost insurmountable problems faced by early restorers and the thrill of victory when a house was saved. We visit some of the houses Jim saved: sharing the challenges of moving the three-story 100-ton wig Barnwell House through the center of Beaufort, SC, the painstaking restoration of the Tombee Plantation's Big House on St. Helena Island, the two-year restoration of Mercer House on Monterey Square and the joy of savings and living in homes that are vital part of the preservation history of Savannah and the Lowcountry.

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