



but McIntosh's name disappears. The path of the deed follows transfers, and small changes were made to accommodate apartments.

But in 1925 the home came into the hands of the O'Connor family. Mary Flannery was born in 1925, an only child to Frank and Regina O'Connor. Her onerousness showed itself early, and the young Flannery had few friends. Her most upbringing limited contact with others. She wasn't even allowed to walk the half a block from school to home by herself. She spent much of her time in the playhouse in the back garden, imagining. Her well-known love of birds showed itself when Pathe news sent a camera crew from New York to film Flannery's latest attention-getter. She had taught one of the family's chickens to walk backwards (Pathe Films, still in existence, uses the rooster as its logo and would be especially interested in any newsreels featuring their iconic symbol, however subliminally).

Flannery's father became quite ill and in 1938, at the age of 13, Flannery and her family moved to Milledgeville, Ga. Andalusia Farm belonged to Regina's family, but the property in Savannah remained in the family. After her father's and her aunt's deaths, the property was willed to Flannery. She remained in Milledgeville while renting out the Savannah home.

In 1989 the property was purchased by the Flannery O'Connor Home Foundation, a group of English professors and the president of Armstrong Atlantic State University. They determined to make the home a destination.

Dr. Bob Strozier, Dr. Robert Burnett and Dr. Hugh Brown heard about the

NESTLED BETWEEN imposing townhomes is a narrow dwelling, sitting at the feet of a Catholic cathedral.

In fact, the brick home sits with just 21 and a half feet facing the outside world. Inside, one of the great American writers spent her childhood. She clambered on the floorboards, played in the garden, read her stories to people in the bathtub and slept in the shadow of a towering steeple.

The structure was built in 1856 by Colonel William McIntosh, a wealthy appraiser at the Customs House, for his daughters. Records for the years 1861-1865 are missing, for obvious reasons,

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NEW ON BOOKSHELVES

Author Flannery O'Connor spent her early years in Savannah, living in the family home on east Charlton Street. In fact, she spent most of her life in Georgia. Most of her fiction is set in the state as well, in locales rich in symbolism and the ambience of Southern rural and small-town life.

A new book — "A Literary Guide to Flannery O'Connor's Georgia" — is to be published in late April by the University of Georgia Press. The guide introduces readers to the places where O'Connor lived and worked including her childhood home in Savannah, the Governor's Mansion, Cline House and Central State Hospital as well as the family farm, Andalusia.

The book contains more than 60 full-color photos and numerous black-and-white historical images in addition to maps to various sites, discussions of O'Connor's life and writings and suggestions for further reading.



impending sale and applied for a mortgage in the name of the organization. The story persists that the literature fanatics signed for the house saying they would figure out how to pay for it later. But current foundation President Rena Patton said, "We will have the mortgage paid off this summer."

Over the last 10 or so years, the foundation has very actively raised money to complete the purchase and restore the home to the period when the O'Connors resided there. The structure was slowly falling into disrepair, and some portions were sagging so badly they might have caved in.

The board hired an architect and construction crew, but little work happened, and they became anxious. Then Savannah College of Art and Design professor and local historic preservationist Jim Abraham arrived on the scene. He brought a group of students in to demolish the dining room area and peel away the ceiling to expose a falling beam.

"It had settled badly and was rotten and warped," Abraham said. "An engineer replaced it with a 3 1/2-by-14 1/2-by-17-foot, single beam to hold up the second floor."

The board was so pleased with Abraham's work that it hired him and his

crew to finish the restoration of the home. Noted for his attention to detail, Abraham embarked on a mission to bring the home back into the early 1930s. He went junk shopping on President Street to find an old clawfoot tub for the upstairs bathroom.

"Of course, the vintage plumbing cost as much as the tub did," he joked. The parlor floor was painted a faint, creamy yellow. It was undecided what color to paint it when the crew had to remove a small piece of plaster near the ceiling for some repairs.

That piece read like rings on a tree: a dream for preservationists. Each layer of wallpaper and paint was there. A certain sheet of wallpaper simply peeled off to reveal a stunning shade of green. Abraham took the sample back to the lab to test its age and compare it to other colors of the era. It was a match for the O'Connors' time. But reproducing that green proved difficult. Even with formulas in hand, the crew went through six different versions, and none of them was right. Then Abraham took the individual paints, mixed them himself, and it matched perfectly. It is this vibrant green that is now on the walls in the parlor of the home.

The crew also found a layer of gold leaf on the picture rail that was removed,

trimming out the room perfectly. All the doors had box locks, which Abraham took home. None were working until he sat and cleaned them out.

"You know, in every single lock in that house I found a little piece of paper stuck in them," he said smiling. "Someone was afraid of being peeped in on." He also stripped off the layers of paint on the doorknobs and found polished stone knobs, very expensive now. Patton said, "Jim just finished love on this place."

While Abraham and his crew were working on the home, Patton and the board were drumming up support, awareness and donations. The home has pieces of furniture and clothing that were actually used by the O'Connors, including Flannery's crib and parambulator and the family's wicker porch furniture. The crib looks a lot like a chicken coop and may be another reason Mary Flannery grew up to find so much in common with birds.

The Florencourts, O'Connor cousins, are bestowing the library with a collection of books owned by the O'Connors and letters written from the house about life in Savannah.

Two of the most active supporters of the Foundation may be surprising — Linda and Jerry Bruckheimer. Jerry's films are noted for spectacular car wrecks and explosions. But both are fans of Flannery O'Connor, and Linda has been active with the project for years. After the Bruckheimers visited Savannah and Linda saw the house, she became more and more interested in seeing it be restored. Since then she has donated countless hours and several thousand dollars and lent her name to the project. "She has such vision. She is patient and smart. And she truly cares about this humble, little house," Patton said.

That little house now has a growing library — dedicated to the Bruckheimers — and reopened in grand fashion in October. A gala event was held at the neighboring Tisch home, with the Bruckheimers, Stratton Leopold and Savannah's A-list in attendance.

The future of the childhood home of Flannery O'Connor looks bright. Patton says the mission has three parts: to be a house museum for the Depression Era; to promote the O'Connor legacy; and to act as a library center in Savannah.

The home is open for tours on the weekends, and its upkeep is maintained

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by volunteer docents as well as the board. They continue to fill the rooms with appropriate artifacts. The foundation also hosts numerous lectures, readings and films featuring the work of Flannery O'Connor. Board members hope the home will be a stop on the proposed literary trail of the South. The trail would feature the homes and haunts of other Southern writers such as Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Eudora Welty.

Yet even without an official name from a tour board, people find themselves standing outside O'Connor's childhood home.

"Every day," Abraham said, "during our work, someone would show up wanting to see the house. From everywhere. All over the world."

Patton agreed that the house has something of O'Connor's presence.

"It is where she shaped her vision of the world." And she is excited to be a part of the home's transformation. "It's such a wonderful opportunity because I think most people who are Flannery fans are of a certain disposition — they're fun, but they're also thinking people."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Childhood Home of Flannery O'Connor is located at 207 E. Chatham St. on Lafayette Square. The museum is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 1-4 p.m.

The Foundation is accepting donations via memberships or in the form of items for the home. They ask for items that would have been used by a middle-class Catholic family in Savannah in the years 1925-1958.

For more information, visit www.flanneryoconnorhome.org or call 253-6804.

WANT THAT GREEN PAINT?

B&B Paint has the official formula for Jim Abraham's concoction of green-tinted paint on the parlor walls of the Flannery O'Connor home. Just go in and ask for "Jim's Green."

Note: In addition to the graciousness of those interviewed, the writer would like to thank Amy Galavie for her very complete research done on the history of the property. It proved invaluable in the completion of this story. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
Meaghan Walsh, Sarah Churchill
and Robin Wright Gunn.



Meaghan Walsh

Meaghan Walsh is originally from rural Illinois and moved to Savannah after several visits. In addition to freelance writing, she enjoys photography, film, jazz and living downtown. She is also pursuing her master's in cinema studies and is currently the managing director of the Lucas Theatre.

Sarah Churchill

Sarah Churchill is a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design with a concentration in photography and a minor in fashion design. She is currently living in Savannah and working as a freelance photographer. Her fashion photography will be exhibited in shop8CAD in May to parallel the Savannah College of Art and Design's Fashion Show.

Robin Wright Gunn

Freelance writer Robin Wright Gunn is a "from here" Savannahian who moved away "for good" in the early 1980s. After nearly 14 years in Gainesville, Fla., Athens, Ga., and Portland, Ore., she came to her senses and returned to her hometown in 1994. Robin lives in the historic Parkside neighborhood.

Robin holds an English degree from the University of Georgia. Her varied professional background includes 10 years in urban planning and community development.

Since launching her writing career in 2004, Robin has published hundreds of news or feature stories in local, regional and national publications, including a weekly column for *Connect Savannah*.

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