



- *Historic Preservationist*
- *Journalist*

## *Anna Colquitt Hunter*

1892–1985

### ***Inducted 1995***

Anna Colquitt Hunter's long life unfolds in two distinct segments. The first half follows a familiar, happy pattern: a young Southern lady is brought up and schooled, leaves college to marry, bear children, enjoy success. Then the untimely death of her husband causes a sudden reversal: she has to earn money to support her children, uncovering previously unsuspected talents. The latter half of her life saw her become a self-taught artist, and head the list of those credited with the preservation of historic Savannah.

Anna Colquitt Hunter was born in 1892, and grew up in old Savannah and on ancestral properties along the river in Georgia and South Carolina. She attended Agnes Scott College but left before graduation to marry George Lewis Cope Hunter, then a student at the University of Georgia. The young couple had three children.

But George Hunter died in 1936. In her forties, with three children to support, Anna decided to follow the example of her older sister, a successful journalist and editor in South Carolina. She went to work for the Savannah Morning News and the Savannah Evening Press as reporter, columnist, society page editor, book page editor and editorial writer.

Eager to be of service in World War II, despite being over fifty, she persuaded an acquaintance who was also an Army General to recommend her appointment as Red Cross Field Director. At spots behind the lines in North Africa and Italy she directed rest and recovery stations for GIs coming off combat duty. Some of her assignments were highly irregular. Once in Oran, she demonstrated the use of the bazooka in antitank warfare! When she left Italy for home, she was recommended for the Bronze Star.

Back at work in Savannah, she turned to reporting and reviewing the arts. With characteristic directness, she decided that the only way she could qualify as an art critic was to teach herself to paint. She then proceeded to turn out scenes of planting and harvest, market in the Old Town, games, dancing, singing in church and on the street. She had a one-woman show in New York and

others across the south. As her eyesight began to fail, her colors and forms became more primitive. One professional critic called her "the Grandma Moses of the South."

Despite success along so many unexpected avenues, however, her biggest assignment was still to come. The old city of Savannah was falling to pieces, decaying into slum property. Individual efforts to save particular houses had been too puny to reverse what appeared inevitable. The real alarm signal was the demolition of the old City Market to make way for an unsightly parking lot.

In 1955 Anna Hunter assembled a group of ladies and inaugurated the Historic Savannah Foundation, an organized effort for the systematic purchase and renovation of historic sites. Her speeches and writings on the subject are not the musings of an ivory-tower aesthete. They exhibit a shrewd understanding of the legal and financial aspects of such an endeavor, and persuaded bankers and merchants that Old Savannah was a potentially profitable asset, worth preserving. Leopold Adler, Trustee Emeritus of the National Trust for Historic Preservation seconded this nomination, writing:

*"Anna Hunter was the founding spark of Historic Savannah Foundation. It was her energy, brilliance, determination, and tireless work that awakened the citizenry to the value of restoring the deteriorating buildings in the old part of Savannah. ... She led the way to the amazing and wonderful restoration of 1100 irreplaceable historic and architectural buildings and to awareness of the value of the squares and public spaces in what is now one of the largest national historic districts in the nation."*

Anna Colquitt Hunter spent her last years in a studio apartment with a wide balcony overlooking the Savannah River dying in 1985 at the age of 92.

### **Additional Resources**

**Historic Savannah Foundation**  
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