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# SCAD PROFESSOR TAKING STEPS TO PROTECT, PROJECT CITY'S HISTORIC PAVEMENTS

**S**avannah College of Art and Design professor Robin Williams hopes to add another element to downtown's long list of attractions — the distinctive and historic pavements on the Bay Street ramps, River Street and other avenues.

Savannah has the largest variety of those features in a concentrated area of any city in the United States, said Williams, the chair of architectural history for SCAD. Along with squares, trees and historic buildings, they play

a critical role in defining the city's distinct urban identity.

The uneven cobblestones that line the ramps from Bay Street to River Street are an uncommon bridge to the past. Used as ballast, they date to the 19th century, when ships unloaded them on adjacent wharfs.

"They came from all over the world," said Williams, and he offered indisputable proof, the story of a portion of a Chinese tombstone that was once part of the Whitaker Street ramp, immediately east of what is now the Bohemian Hotel. The char-

acters on the stone date it to 1798. It's now on display in the rotunda of Savannah City Hall.

Just a few feet away, the granite Belgian blocks of River Street offer a different texture, and a different story. These blocks are usually found in industrial areas, said Williams. They are strong, and stand up to heavy loads. On the downside, they are, of course, bumpy, and were noisy as well when metal horse hooves clopped over them.

Other examples of historic pavements in Savannah include the



SCAD professor Robin Williams

vitrified red bricks of Jones, Wayne and Lincoln streets; the vitrified yellow bricks of Berrien and 31st streets; the asphalt blocks of Abercorn Street and Chatham Square; and 1950s concrete with oyster shell aggregate.

Savannah has the most extensive collection of cobblestones in the country, said Williams, who is one of the authors of “Buildings of Savannah,” an architecture-centric tour guide to the city.

Currently, he is calling on the city to

create an ordinance that would protect historic street and sidewalk pavements, with guidelines for maintenance and procedures for repairs. A number of recent repairs have removed historic pavement, including the replacement of cobblestones on the Whitaker Street ramp with stamped concrete.

Philadelphia is the only city in the nation with a Historic Paving Thematic Historic District. Other cities, besides Savannah, with similar stretches of historic pavement include Baltimore, Charleston, St. Louis, Wilmington, N.C., and Alexandria, Richmond and Lynchburg, Va.

Williams freely admits he was a late-comer to this endeavor. As an architectural historian, “my job was to get people to look up,” he said. That changed several years ago when he noticed an unusual triangular pattern of asphalt blocks outside one of SCAD’s buildings.

Now, he said, his interest is a “fascination, almost an obsession.” For more information on the project, go to [www.historicpavement.com](http://www.historicpavement.com).

