

Arrowheads, General Sherman and casseroles - 160 years of the Jarrells

By Rick Maier

Visiting the Jarrell Plantation State Historic Site in Juliette is not a *Gone With The Wind* kind of experience. It's much more rugged, real and alive. It's the continuing story of one family's journey through the past 160 years, and a testament to the ingenuity and tenacity of early settlers in Middle Georgia.

The state took over the working farm portion of the plantation, but the big white residence next door, the Jarrell 1920 House, is still privately owned.

Together the House and Plantation have one of the oldest and most complete collections of family artifacts in the Southeast.

While the Plantation is open Tuesday through Sunday year-round, tours of the 1920 House are only available on Sunday afternoons. That's because your tour guides, Phil and Amelia Haynes who own and live in the house, have a lot of other things to do during the week – including running an advertising firm.

Plus the Haynes have developed a bed and breakfast inn at the house. There are currently two guestrooms, and two more are planned to be available next year. People on the B&B circuit come here from all over the world to visit the area and enjoy a genuine Southern experience. They leave raving about Amelia's egg-and-sausage casserole and cinnamon swirls.

Host Phil not only knows a lot about the 1920 House, he knows a great deal about the people who have lived there over the past eighty-some years. His mother is one of twelve children of Dick Jarrell, the man who, with his sons, built the place.

The property has been a part of local history ever since John Fritz Jarrell settled there in 1840. Before that it must have been a popular spot for native Americans judging from all the arrowheads found on the land.

Sherman's troops paid a visit in 1864, and boll weevils and soil erosion caused havoc in the 1920s and 1930s.

Governor Jimmy Carter dedicated the State Site in 1974. Since then the state has made many improvements including a visitor center and paving The Big Road (now called Jarrell Plantation Road).

Phil can tell you how his grandfather designed and built the large frame house between 1916 and 1920, on a spot near the old farmhouse where he grew up. Without formal training Dick Jarrell designed and constructed the home with wood milled on site from trees grown on the land. The wood paneled ceilings, walls and moldings are heart pine – built with incredible skill and attention to detail.

Each room is filled with impressive furniture pieces, some made by Jarrell in his on-site mill and others contributed by children and relatives, including Dick Jarrell's uncle, Richard Burden, founder of Burden and Smith Department Store in Macon. The old record player and pre-transistor radio no longer work, but as with all the old knick-knacks lying about, you get the impression that the Jarrells never threw anything away.

Phil tells a little tale in each room.

“When I came here as a kid on holidays, this dining room would be filled with the chatter of all my aunts and uncles and cousins. Grandfather sat sternly at the table not saying much, but when he cleared his throat, everyone fell silent. Grandfather had something to say.

“Grandfather enjoyed having ice cream on July Fourth. It was a big treat for everyone except one of my uncles who had to ride a mule-driven wagon into Macon to pick up a block of ice. He had to leave by 3AM to be back by 3PM.”

Sit on one of the many rocking chairs on the big wrap-around porch and listen. Hear it? Nothing. Yes, complete silence. You're miles from any highway or runway. “It may now be even quieter than it was a century ago when a village existed near the farm,” adds Phil.

And one more lasting image. Stand at the 1920 House and look out over the landscape. Now try to imagine that most of the trees are gone and all you can see are rolling fields of cotton in every direction, all the way to the banks of the Ocmulgee River.

The Jarrells may have spent six hours getting to town by wagon, but you can travel about half an hour from Macon north on Riverside Drive (then follow the signs) for a wonderful trip back in time. Come and sit a spell.

For more information visit www.jarrellhouse.com.