

SEDGEWOOD PLANTATION

By Duncan Dent

Sedgewood Plantation in rural northwest Madison County was built in 1842 and designed by acclaimed southern architect William Nichols, whose other credits include the Mississippi Governor's Mansion, the Old Capitol and the Lyceum at Ole Miss.

Located between Flora and Canton just north of Mississippi 22 near Kearney Park, the antebellum plantation home has housed four generations of the Howard family with roots that extend 176 years into the state's rich history.

The manor house is an 1842 Greek Revival raised cottage with a center hall floor plan that is typical for homes built in the antebellum period.

Dr. Bill Howard grew up at Sedgewood and later restored the manor house in the early 1990s. Family legend holds that one of his great-great grandfathers, likely Rev. Thomas Griffin, was a guest at the house warming.

"To me, Sedgewood's story is one of riches to rags and then redemption again after many years of hard times.

Sedgewood's crowning glory is for it to be preserved in perpetuity and to be recognized as both a U.S. National Register of Historic Places property and as a Mississippi Historic Landmark," Howard said.

Howard's family came to the Mississippi territory in 1798, where one of his ancestors and Rev. Griffin's father-in-law, John Ford, was one of three on the committee that wrote the first state constitution in 1817.

By 1833, his family had set roots in Madison County and in 1901 his grandfather, Percy O'Leary Howard, moved to Sedgewood Plantation and farmed cotton there for the rest of his life.

After Percy died, his son John W.G. Howard, Bill Howard's father, took over the farming operation and added Angus cattle in 1930.

Now, the Howards still run Angus cattle on the place but rent the cotton land out to a neighboring farmer. It is a family-run operation, largely consisting of Howard, his wife

The Howard family — Dr. Bill Howard, Nancy Howard, Dr. John Howard, Dr. Ann Howard Hinds and Ashley Howard Schurch



TOP: Sedgewood Plantation is a storied home that has been completely restored.

MIDDLE: Dr. Bill Howard holds his daughter Ashley while preparing the new foundation before moving the house back to its original location.

BOTTOM: The Howard family hired professional movers to relocate Sedgewood back to its original location.

Nancy, and sister-in-law Judy Moyers.

Past help has included their son, Dr. John Howard, and two daughters Dr. Ann Howard Hinds and Ashley Howard Schurch, all three of which are now married and currently live out of state.

The lack of help does not appear to slow down Howard and company who now run about 200 head of cattle.

Bill, Nancy, and Judy Moyers manage and do all the work required to keep the farm going.

Sedgewood was originally a 1,200-acre cotton plantation.

The house and its 1,200 acres survived the Civil War, the Great Depression, and other threats and remained intact until World War II broke out.

In 1942 the United States Army returned to Mississippi to build the Kearney Park Military Ordnance Plant.

The ordnance plant took 500 acres from Sedgewood Plantation and drew a new property line that went right through the middle of the manor house.

The Army told Howard's father to move the house or they would demolish it. After an appeal to save the home was denied, Bill's father moved the house to prevent it from being

demolished. The house was jacked up, put on logs that rolled on wood beams oriented in the direction of travel. Over the course of a few days, with the help of a mule and some pulleys, the house was rolled the approximately 80 feet over the line.

The chimneys crumbled and horse-hair reinforced plaster ceilings and walls shattered and fell. Structurally, the house was still intact, but the move severely damaged it.

The house was saved from total destruction but it would be decades before the home would again resemble its prior glory.

Bill and Nancy planned for years to restore the derelict home back to its former glory. Finally, they made it happen and completed the two-year restoration process in 1994.

The home was moved to its original location on the property, this time with heavy equipment and the help of professional movers. The restoration drew on the valuable input of Ken P'pool, Director of Historic Preservation for Mississippi Department for Archives and History, and Mimi Miller with the Historic Natchez Foundation and the ample talents of Michael Collins, a restoration contractor from Jackson, and Kenneth Ross, the lead carpenter from Flora.

Restoration challenges included finding the hard-heart cypress like originally used throughout the house and restoring the original stain glass windows in the entryway which was missing many glass panels.

This task fell to Nancy's "jack-of-all-trades" sister, Judy Moyers, who replaced the missing panels with glass that matched the color and style, but was a little bit more opaque and differentiates the old from the new.

The family was able to move into the home in late 1994.

"Nancy and I have a great sense of pride and accomplishment in bringing this architectural and historical jewel back from the brink of destruction. We want it to last another 176 years," Howard said.

After the restoration was finished, Sedgewood was listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

Todd Sanders with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History later did research that determined the house was designed by the architect William Nichols.

Bill documented the restoration process with both video and photographs. Later, when Bob Vila featured Sedgewood on his HGTV series "Restore America," he extensively used those



The master bedroom features a full tester rosewood bed made in 1840 by the noted New Orleans cabinetmaker William McCracken.

Photo by Sonny Blossom



TOP: Dr. Ann Howard Hinds' bedroom features a mahogany half-tester bed made in 1850 by C. Lee for the New Orleans furniture trade. The 1840 mahogany veneer Empire armoire is a Madison County piece that was purchased at an estate auction in Sharon.

MIDDLE: The central hallway features 14-foot ceilings and bi-leaf entry doors flanked by diamond shaped stained glass sidelights and transom, which were popular during the 1840s. The chandelier is a reproduction of an 1840s gasolier (gas chandelier) that is in the Philadelphia Museum. The hall also features a portrait of Col. Thomas St. Vincent Ward, who was a good friend of Dr. Bill Howard's grandfather, Percy O'Leary Howard. Ward was a prominent lawyer in Canton, who served as mayor and in the state legislature when the 1890 Constitution was adopted.

BOTTOM: The living room features an 1840 mahogany Empire linen press from Tennessee and an oil painting done by Scottish painter Otto Leyde in 1892 that came from the No Mistake Plantation estate auction in Satartia.



Photos by Sonny Blossom



TOP LEFT: The central hallway before restoration work began. Shattered plaster is visible and fallen ceiling pieces were replaced by wooden boards.

TOP RIGHT: Workers restore the crown molding in the central hallway.

BOTTOM LEFT: A water leak around the chimney in the East front room did not damage the Cypress lumber around it.



images for his segment on Sedgewood. The Bob Vila video can be viewed on the farm website at www.SedgewoodAngus.com. In order to preserve Sedgewood Plantation for generations to come, the Howards placed a Preservation Easement on the manor house and the remaining 700 acres of the original 1,200-acre plantation. This means the house and 700 acres can never be separated or subdivided in the future. "No residential or commercial construction can ever be done on the place. The house will remain unaltered and will forever be attached to its 700 acres which will always remain agricultural," Howard said. "No developer can later come along and butcher the place to make a housing development or a strip mall." As a result, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History recently designated Sedgewood Plantation as a Mississippi Historic Landmark. For more information, go to <http://www.sedgewood.com/>.



Photo by Robby Followell

The Howard family with "Aunt" Judy Moyers. Moyers was a second mother to the Howard children and served as a "jack of all trades," an integral part of the family.