

A new generation will soon be Gone with the Wind

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A new generation is on the verge of learning about the colorful and absorbing history of the U.S. Deep South, with the latest revival of the 1939 film masterpiece, *Gone With The Wind*.

For the 50th anniversary of the original showing of what has become one of the most popular movies ever made, the film and its sound track have been enhanced by means of today's advanced techniques.

Younger movie-goers will probably be surprised at the depiction of the opulence of Southern plantation society around the time of the U.S. Civil War, 1861 to 1865 - the setting of *Gone With The Wind*.

But it's no surprise to those who may have visited any of the remarkably large number of 19th-century mansions that have survived until the present. Many are still privately occupied and can therefore be observed only from a distance, but a substantial number of the mansions welcome fee-paying visitors, and even overnight guests.

In certain cases, the make-believe elements (such as young ladies in hoop-skirts) and the hard-sell of souvenirs may be a bit jarring, but probably excusable on the grounds of economic need.

BY THE RIVER

The biggest concentration of plantations is along the banks of the Mississippi River in the states of Mississippi and Louisiana.

They seem to be strung like pearls along the River Road, ideally situated for sightseeing by car or from the last two paddlewheel steamships still plying the length of the Mississippi - the Delta Queen (176 passengers) and the Mississippi Queen (398) - both based in New Orleans.

The continued existence of these stately plantation homes is a testament to the wealth of this section of the Deep South. Some historians say that the economic power of the Mississippi Delta (from Natchez, Miss., to New Orleans, La.) was greater than the combined wealth of the rest of the U.S., just before the Civil War.

The region owed its prosperity, in large part, to the rich alluvial soil in which cotton and sugarcane grow so well, to the mild climate and to the mighty river that carried those commodities down-river to New Orleans, there to be shipped to world markets.

Many of the plantation-owners seem to have been blessed, as well, with a good sense of esthetics, or at least the name of a good architect. The predominant plantation style is Greek Revival, and the color of choice is gleaming white.

HISTORICAL SITES

Here is a sampling of some of the stately old homes and other historical sites worth seeing on a trip down the lower Mississippi, whether by leisurely paddlewheel steamboat or by driving down the River Road:

-Vicksburg, Miss., was a major

battleground in the Civil War, fiercely defended by Confederate (southern) troops until it fell to Union (northern) armies after a 47-day siege in 1863. Today, a 25-km road winds through the battleground, now a pristine national park and the burial grounds of 17,000 Union soldiers who died in battle. (The Confederate dead, considered to have been rebels, were denied burial in the national cemetery.)

The museums of Vicksburg include one, in the former court house, that is largely devoted to the local history of the Civil War and Reconstruction era; another, in the building where Coca Cola was first bottled in 1894, is rich in memorabilia of that beverage, and still another displays 28,000 model soldiers and other toys of the past.

Southern mansions include Balfour House (1836) and Anchuca (1830), but the one that must be seen is Cedar Grove (1840), overlooking the Mississippi from a height and filled with a far greater number of period furnishings than most surviving ante-bellum homes.

CANADIAN FOUNDER

-Natchez, Miss., has grown from the original settlement founded in 1698 by Antoine Davion, a French priest who had come from what is now Montreal. Unlike Vicksburg, Natchez saw little fighting during the Civil War, so it still has hundreds of fine homes from the pre-1861 period. Largest is Stanton Hall (1857), a huge, white showplace that is unusual in that it is located near the centre of a busy city - which probably explains why it draws the most

visitors. Longwood, another popular and romantic Natchez mansion, has an interesting eight-sided design; its construction, begun in 1860 and interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War, was never completed.

-St. Francisville, La., is a typical, small Deep South town that, incongruously, became the capital city of the short-lived independent republic of West Florida in 1810 - a stage in the transition of the territory from Spanish colony to American statehood. The pride of the sleepy town is Rosedown, a two-storey colonnaded mansion with wide verandas, set in 28 acres of carefully landscaped gardens and greenery. Built in 1835 at a cost of \$13,109, and meticulously restored beginning in 1956, Rosedown still contains many of its

original furnishings.

HOME OF AUDUBON

-Virginia House, built in 1817 by a merchant from Philadelphia and now open only to passengers of the Delta Queen and Mississippi Queen, is probably the oldest in St. Francisville - the town in which famed naturalist James Audubon lived in the 1820s and painted many of his bird studies.

-Baton Rouge, Louisiana's capital and second largest city, is the site of Mount Hope, a mansion built in 1817 by a German planter. Its 3.8-metre (12.5-foot) ceilings are considered typical of early 19th-century plantation homes.

-New Orleans, La., is today a big and busy port city, but it retains reminders of its romantic past.

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