

The New

SOUTHERN VIEW

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ARTICLES • INFORMATION • COMMUNITY CALENDAR

VOL 3 ♦ NO 4

A Quarterly Journal Serving the Greater Jackson Metropolitan Area

SPRING 2004

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TAKE ONE

The Glory of Baroque Dresden Behind the Scenes

Emerald Mound

A Window on the Past

A Healthy Cycle

Pedal Your Way to a Better You

Grasping the Night Sky

The Jackson Planetarium

Whatever Happened To...?

Cooper's Well at Raymond

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for Spring Activities

Check back with us monthly for updates, articles, stories, and photographs.

People must work hard to make beautiful things. In our yards, beautiful things appear easily and incidentally—especially in Mississippi where our revitalizing climate encourages spring growth as early as January. The gifts of nature don't sleep long under winter's blanket in this part of the world. Flowers and birds flaunt their grace with cushy insolence, using what is ordinary—nesting in rain gutters, blooming along the edges of trash bins—dazzling us with their small glories. But why do we respond to beauty in nature? Because, in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "There is no fact in nature that does not carry the whole sense of nature."

We humans, on the other hand, must make an effort to create. This seems one response to what is pleasing in nature: the need to rebuild it in symbols. If God, the Divine Logos, created the world through words and will, then in our small way we attempt similar invention through favored symbols. The first man to create in symbols was Adam, when God told him to name the animals and then to have dominion. God gave Adam a little taste of what it means to be God.

To follow Emerson's thoughts about the artist, "Things admit of being used as symbols because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part. Every line we can draw in the sand has expression; and there is no body without its spirit or genius."

Accomplished ballerinas, writers, architects, artists, and musicians—may start with inspiration, but they toil at their

crafts so that when they are ready to show their work, their efforts no longer seem like work. Profound, though man-made, beauty might appear as a casual act of grace: an effortless gift to the artist, but you better believe that there was some sweat involved. The artist must work and listen hard to wrench true meaning from things: "The path of things is silent. Will they suffer a speaker to go with them? A spy they will not suffer; a lover, a poet, is the transcendency of their own nature—him they will suffer. The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms" ("The Poet," Emerson).



I appreciate hard work that produces good or beautiful things. A frustrated student recently asked me— "Why should we have to memorize poems in school?" I asked "Is the poem beautiful?" "Yes." "Did the poet work hard to write the poem?" "Yes." "Is the poem a good or a bad thing?" "Good." "Then why wouldn't you want to memorize it?"

Kathy

Editor/Publisher

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On the cover:

Raising the ceiling painting for installation in the recreation of the Audience Hall of Dresden Castle at The Glory of Baroque Dresden Exhibit
Photo by William Pitts

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How are we doing? Any comments you'd like to make?

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

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Scenic & HISTORIC Mississippi #1

The Bayou Moon First published in The Southwest Guide on March 11, 1976.

by Benjamin Root, Sr.

Mississippi is a land of bayous. Its vast river frontage provides many and decorates them with cypress and moss. They offer some of the most outstanding scenery in all of our nation. Life is represented there in a vast multitude of forms, both below and above water. It is not sterile. Nothing better portrays our vague attachment to the sea than do the gentle dark waters of a Mississippi bayou.

And when a bayou is softly illuminated by a newborn moon, low on the horizon, it becomes a vision worthy of the greatest of painters, a scene demanding to be locked in place. The moon becomes a bayou moon, different than all others because it has inherited an added brilliance which alters its character. Its identity remains beautifully embellished so long as its reflections dance upon those dark waters.

There is revealed by the combination of moon and bayou a mystery which reaches



back toward the start of time, giving to twentieth-century viewers a momentary vision of the recipe of beginnings. Society itself does not manufacture bayous and newborn moons. Most surely does society not create for itself a bayou moon. Such grandeur can be displayed by only One, the One who interlinks the deepest of all the mysteries. Man can only look and wonder. Orange fireballs which seem to rise out of dark still waters are most impressive. And where the land is flat, the fireball appears much earlier and much brighter.

Those exposed to the bayou moon might learn that they and it are part of the same and continuing mystery. Both meet at the water's edge and there share together the Oneness of it all.

Therefore when traveling near delta bayous at the moment of moonrise, be aware that a primeval scene begun so long ago somehow continues, and all under the spell of the bayou moon.

The Garden Gate

The South is Never at a Loss for Spanish Moss

by William Pitts

If you've never taken a really close look at Spanish Moss, then you've missed seeing an integral part of our Southern landscape, an important environmental character in many a Southern-oriented theatrical play and cinematic film. And by close look, I don't mean briefly turning your head to look at it as you speed past some moss-laden trees on the side of the road.

While it may not look like much more than a hopelessly tangled mass of filaments weighing down the tree on which it grows, Spanish Moss is an interesting plant-form that plays host to a number of animals, and supplies animals and humans with useful living material.

Tillandsia usneoides isn't really a moss, according to John Hays, State Botanist with the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson; he refers to it here by its Latin name. "Spanish Moss is a native, perennial epiphytic herb, a plant that grows on another plant for support, and not for water and nutrients as parasitic plants do." As for examples of parasitic plants, think mistletoe and lichens.

"It is neither 'Spanish' nor a moss, but rather a flowering plant that belongs to the Pineapple family, or Bromeliaceae. Spanish Moss occurs along the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains from Maryland to Texas," is also found as far south as Argentina and Chile, and requires high humidity and sufficient light to grow well.

It can be found in large clumps as long as 25 feet, sometimes weighing down a branch so heavily as to snap it off. Rain water can increase the weight up to ten times. If thick enough, Spanish Moss can even block sunlight to the supporting tree, indirectly causing harm.

The plant's flowers bloom from spring to early fall and are very small and pale blue, one of the many aspects of Spanish moss that go unnoticed by the casual observer. But it "does not flower in cultivation," says Hays. Spanish Moss reproduces through seeds "that have a tiny cluster of hairs at their base known as a coma." These are dispersed by the wind and lodge in the branches of neighboring trees.

The uses of Spanish Moss by animals are many and varied. Hays reports that among other birds, the Yellow-throated Warbler, a year-round resident on our Mississippi Gulf Coast, the Northern Parula Warbler, a summer breeder in our state, and the Carolina Wren, another year-round resident, all use Spanish Moss as nesting material. Grey and Flying Squirrels, owls, egrets, and Mockingbirds are known to use Spanish Moss to line their nests, while rat snakes and three species of bats use this epiphyte for shelter, too. Hays



A rest stop along the south Natchez Trace, a good place to get a close-up look at Spanish Moss.

notes that "there is even a tiny spider that lives only in Spanish Moss." It shares its scientific name with the plant—*Pelegina tillandsiae*. Red bugs or chiggers are Span-

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/photo by George Centy

Photo by William Pitts

OUTDOOR TREASURES

Emerald Mound A Window on the Past

by William Pitts

It has been more than 40 years since I first saw Emerald Mound near Natchez. I don't recall my exact age on that visit, but I do remember being extremely impressed with its size. I thought it was big, way big. But, then again, I was quite small and anything larger than my house would have looked big to me.

So, with this in mind, I was wondering what my impressions of Emerald Mound would be today. We turned off of the Natchez Trace Parkway near mile marker 10, just north of Natchez, and drove a mile west on a narrow winding road towards our destination. We arrived at the mound unexpectedly. I was distracted by the local hair salon and an abandoned country store on the left side of the road when Emerald Mound suddenly jumped into view on the right. It was not exactly the type of location I would have expected for the second largest Indian ceremonial mound in the United States.

But there it was; no visitors' center, no concessionaires, no crowd. Just an empty parking lot and eight acres of history to wander over. The fact that we were only a small group on the mound that day made it seem that much larger. Once again, as when I was a child, I was impressed.

Looking out across the vast platform of earth from the top of the trail that leads from the parking lot, I recalled a conversation I'd had a week earlier with Jim Barnett, the director of the Grand Village of the Natchez. I had asked him what there was to see be-



Photo courtesy of the National Park Service; trees still grew atop the mound.

sides the mound. He'd told me that "Not a lot of artifacts have been dug up at Emerald Mound." Among archaeologists, continued Barnett, the philosophy of wanting to dig everything up has changed. If an archaeological site like Emerald Mound is being

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Photo courtesy of the National Park Service



Cotter's 1948 dig helped to give a general date to Emerald Mound through ceramic fragments found there.



Five ceremonial pipes, each approximately five inches long, were found at Emerald Mound in the early 20th Century by Vincent Perrault of Natchez. They were described by Calvin Brown in his book *Archeology of Mississippi* as (from left) a winged serpent, an owl or hawk, another winged serpent, an unidentifiable monster or animal, and a crouching man. Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Public Museum.

TO THE NINES!

The Natchez Confederate Pageant Fashion and Custom in the Pre-War South

by Kathy Root Pitts—drawn from Natchez Pilgrimage Tours information

The Natchez Confederate Pageant is a trip back in history, a chance for tourists to visit the life styles of Natchez's privileged past in the here and now. More millionaires resided in Natchez, Mississippi—for a town of comparable size—than in any other city in American during the early 1800s. This river city, named for the Indians who lived there, was the oldest settlement along the Mississippi River, having been established by the French in 1716.

The Natchez Pilgrimage, of which the Natchez Confederate Pageant is part, was organized in 1932, during the Depression years, by a group of ladies who wanted to preserve a realistic depiction of the antebellum culture of Natchez society at its peak. Approximately thirty homes are opened for tour during the early spring each year.

The Natchez Confederate Pageant, a series of tableaux, chronicles the Golden Age of the Mississippi River steamboat and Natchez-Under-the-Hill with showboat-style performances, dances, singing, and drama. Polkas are recreated to give viewers

a look at typical social gatherings among the affluent in Natchez before the Civil War.

There is a young children's presentation with dancing around an elaborate May Pole to celebrate the coming of spring. A tribute is offered to the famed naturalist, Audubon, who lived several years in Natchez, teaching French, music, and dancing. The marriage of Jefferson Davis to Mariana Howell is recreated and the first soirée, held at Jefferson College is immortalized. The tradition of the Farewell Ball shows Confederate soldiers in uniform dancing with their ladies at a ball before going to war. It is during this performance that the Pilgrimage Garden Club and the Natchez Garden Club chose Kings and Queens of the ball.

The 19th Century Southern clothing and customs presented at the Natchez Confederate



Photos courtesy of Rudi Holmsteiner

mens sana in corpore sano **SOUND MIND & SOUND BODY**

A Healthy Cycle Pedal Your Way to a Better You

by William Pitts

Photos by William Pitts

No doubt you've seen them out on our Mississippi backroads. And you've probably passed them on streets like Highland Colony Parkway north of Jackson—these Lycra-clad athletes with the expensive bicycles and legs of steel, riding along in a coordinated group as if they were one. It can be a pretty intimidating sight for the person who has considered taking up cycling for his health. "I could never keep up with guys like that," you may think. But don't let their polished movements dissuade you from improving your own health. They're probably members of a racing team (the fact that their outfits match is a dead give-away) and, if so, they train very hard on a regular basis. These guys are extremely serious about cycling.



Members of the Jackson Metro Cyclists club gather before a group ride through rural Madison County.

But recreational cycling for the average Jane and Joe is an accessible activity that you can put as much time and effort into as you'd like. And, according to Tom Martin of The Bike Rack, the benefits are legion. "Weight loss and control, improved muscle tone and strength, enhanced cardiac performance, and aerobic capacity." Jim Snider of Ride South Bike Shop agrees, saying that cycling "is an excellent way of relieving stress." In short, you'll feel better and enjoy yourself. Remember how much fun it was as a kid?

"I haven't a clue as to where to begin!"

The person who hasn't pushed a pedal in years may ask, "Where does one start?" The answer to that is easy. Don't jump into a multi-mile jaunt with seasoned riders. For some people, a ride around the block is enough to leave them gasping for breath, but a reasonably healthy body acclimates to cycling fairly quickly. Cycling is easier on the legs (especially the knees) than running is, plus you can coast down hills if you wish. If you haven't ridden in a while, start off slowly on short rides until you build up your stamina.

"I would hate to ride by myself. What if I get lost somewhere?"

There are a number of groups who regularly ride together around the Jackson Metro area. To find them, pay a visit to one of the local bike shops; in the Jackson area, visit Ride South Bike Shop, The Bike Rack, or Indian Cycle Fitness and Outdoors. Snider of Ride South has maps showing popular routes around the Reservoir, and Joshua Gordon of Indian Cycle is the president of Jackson Metro Cyclists. You'll find route maps on JMC's web site at www.mssports.com/JMC. "Generally, cyclists can locate others in their speed range with a few test rides," says Snider. Don't be intimidated by the stronger cyclists in the group, however, who may like to forge ahead in order to push their own personal envelopes. They tend to circle back and regroup after a while.

"I would feel so foolish to be seen on my old three-speed."

Don't let pedal-envy stop you from improving your health. When you get right down to basics, a bike is a bike is a bike; your physical conditioning is the goal. But do make sure that your bicycle is ready for the road. Any of the bike shops in the Jackson Metro area can offer maintenance and repair for a bike that has been sitting idle. Maintaining and repairing the body that has been sitting idle, though, is entirely up to you.

"Riding a bike is a young person's activity. I'm too old!"

Age isn't necessarily an obstacle. A friend's father, Robert Turner, represented Mississippi in the National Senior Olympics in Tucson, Arizona at the age of 82. He placed sixth nation-wide on a 12-speed bicycle. What more can be said except that as with all physical activities, be sure to get checked over by your physician before diving in.

"I'd like to start riding but with my budget, I can't afford to."

Don't torpedo your desires until you've shopped around first. Sure, there are bicycles out there that can cost the price of a small
continued on the back cover



A small group of JMC cyclists on a country road in south Madison County.

Pageant transport tourists and locals alike into a haunting time of romance that, similar to the French and Russian aristocracies before revolution, would not survive war and social balance. But the memory is preserved with great and loving care by the hosts of the Natchez Pilgrimage.



Chronicling a Golden Age with costume and performance at the Historic Natchez Pageant.

The Historic Natchez Pageant will be presented Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—March 12 through April 10 at the Natchez City Auditorium.

Contact Natchez Pilgrimage Tours for information on the Pageant and other Pilgrimage events: 1-800/647-6742 or go to www.natchezpilgrimage.com for their spring and fall pilgrimage calendar.



Scenic & HISTORIC Mississippi #2

Mount Locust on the Natchez Trace

A Two-Century's Old Inn

by Kathy Root Pitts

Information drawn from *The National Park Service* and from Marlo Carter Kirkpatrick's book *Mississippi: Off the Beaten Path*

Mount Locust began as an English land grant to a Thomas Harmon in 1779, during the English occupation of Natchez District. The property was soon transferred to the Swiss-born John Blommart, who began construction of the building to meet the conditions of the grant. Blommart, a merchant, farmer, fur trader, and land speculator was one of the richest men in the Old Natchez District by 1781.

A failed English rebellion against the Spanish led to Blommart's imprisonment in Havana, and the Spanish Governor granted the land to William Ferguson from Virginia. After some shuffling of residence between the town of Natchez and the Coles Creek area where Mount Locust stands, Ferguson settled at Mount Locust and became the first sheriff of Pickering County, Mississippi—later to become Jefferson County.

After Ferguson died in 1801, the large family, including wife Pauline—who later married James Chamberlain and produced more children—inherited the thriving Mount Locust Inn. In 1810, travelers along the Natchez Trace numbered about 10,000, including "Kaintuck" boatmen who needed a place to stay. "Mount Locust became one of nearly fifty inns or 'stands' that would serve Trace travelers during the next twenty or so years and the only one to survive to the present day." (National Park Service)

With the steamboat, though, in 1812, travel turned to the Mississippi River. One could move faster and more safely along the River than along the wilderness of the Trace. The Chamberlain family stayed at Mount Locust until 1937, when the

Inn was bought by the National Park Service.

According to Marlo Carter Kirkpatrick, "For approximately 25 cents, weary travelers enjoyed a supper of 'mush and milk' and the privilege of sleeping in a room packed with saddles, bag-



Photos courtesy of the National Park Service



Several of the sights at Mount Locust include Paulina's room at right, and Philadelphia's bed, below right. On both beds shown here, note the rope support for the mattresses, visible where it wraps around the frame.



gage, and other wayfarers. Located approximately a day's walk apart, these establishments offered not only a meal and a place to rest, but a spot of civilization in the vast wilderness surrounding the Trace."

Mount Locust Inn retains some of its original woodwork. The house's color scheme is the same as in 1810, painted only up to the

continued on next page

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Whatever Happened To . . . ?

Cooper's Well at Raymond

by William Pitts

Photos courtesy of Rebecca Drake

Mineral springs, both hot and cold, have been a popular gathering spot for centuries. Egyptians valued the therapeutic properties of mineral laden waters as early as 2000 B.C., while the Greeks and Romans both built extensive baths around natural springs.

Mississippi was no stranger to this desire to "take the waters," with a number of popular spots for devotees of the therapy scattered across the state. One of these Mississippi resorts was named after the owner, the Reverend Preston Cooper, a Methodist minister. Cooper had built his house on the crest of a hill several miles southeast of Raymond on land that he purchased in 1837, and needed a well dug on the property.

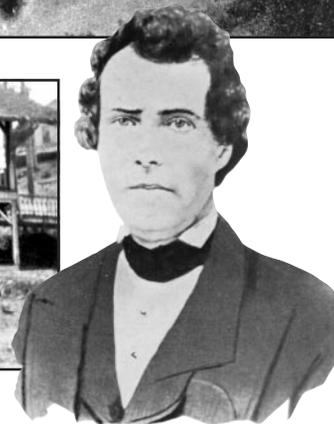
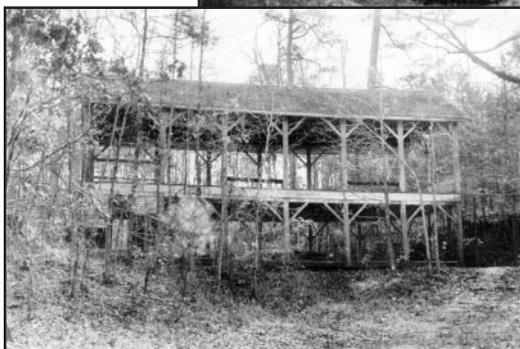
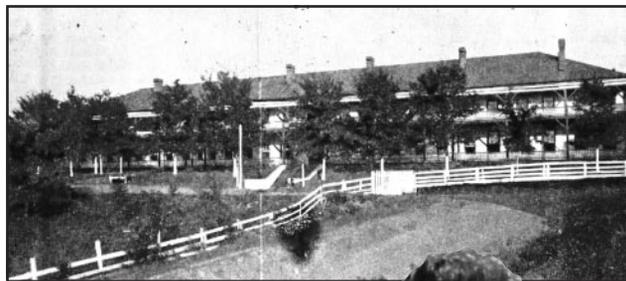
This attempt ended at a depth of 30 feet when the diggers hit bedrock. History does not record how the Reverend got his potable water after that, but his reoccurring dreams about the project are well documented. His journal relates: "I dreamed that I saw a figure of a man with a familiar face stand before me, and when I looked, the man said: 'Cooper resume the digging of your well; much depends on it; it is all important you should do so, see you do it!' and vanished." Cooper was revisited by these dreams for several years until, according to his writings, he dreamed that he was watching the digging of the well from above. He saw at the bottom the reflection of the sky, and called down to the diggers, "What is it?" One of the men in his dream responded, "It is water, but it stinketh mightily, it stinketh so bad you can never use it."

Whether dreamed by Cooper or actually uttered by a digger, this last statement was proved incredibly wrong, as Cooper's Well grew famous across the south prior to the Civil War, offering among other attractions ballroom dancing, sumptuous dining, outdoor sports, and boating on a large man-made lake. Coming to be known as the "Saratoga of the South," the resort's future success seemed well-assured.

But the Civil War took its toll on Cooper's Well as it did on much of Mississippi; the first hotel was possibly burned by Union soldiers as they swept through on their way to torch Jackson. Although attempts were made over the next century to rebuild and keep going, fires, economic hard times, and the changes in trends toward health proved to be its undoing. The last structure, the dance pavilion built over the well site itself, burned down in the 1970s.

The property has passed through many hands. The old well is still there but over the years has been filled in with trash and debris. The present owner, who wishes to remain anonymous, has indefinite plans: "The future [of Cooper's Well] is undecided at this point."

Perhaps, as the Phoenix, it too will arise from the ashes of the past to reacquire the fame and grandeur it once knew so well. Imagine, if you can, just what effects such a resort as Cooper's Well might have on the area today.



Cooper's Well, founded by the Reverend Preston Cooper (above) was once a bright spot on Mississippi's tourism map. It slowly fell into hard times over the years.

The dance pavilion (above) was built over the well down hill from the hotel. Pictured at left surrounded by small trees and brambles, it was the last structure standing on the property.

This sign (below) once marked the location of the entrance to the Cooper's Well property when modern-day plans for a park were being made.

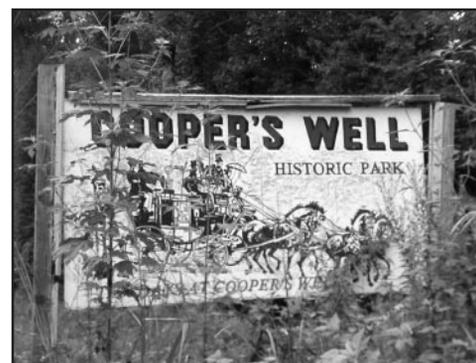


Photo by William Pitts

Mount Locust on the Natchez Trace

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level that it could be seen by a passerby. Dye ingredients were walnut hull juice, blood, and indigo. Burnt lime was the base. The 16 by 20 foot central room was constructed in 1799 to comply with the conditions of the original British land grant.

Wood used in construction came from the surrounding area as it was cleared: pecan, oak, sassafras, yellow poplar, pine, and cedar. Though the original window glass did not survive, the restoration glass is from the 1810 time period. Bricks for the walk are original and were fired at the house's own kiln. The fireplaces are shal-

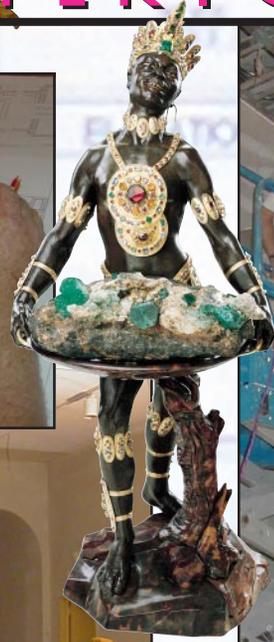
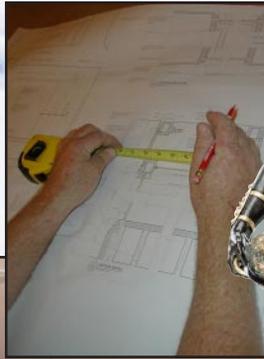
low, and the sandboxes near the hearth were for extinguishing fires.

Not far from the house is the family cemetery. William Ferguson and his wife Paulina are buried here, as well as four of their six children, and two of Paulina's from her later marriage to James Chamberlain. Here one can also find the graves of five generations of the Chamberlain family as well as a guest of the inn, Robert Law, who died in 1825. Mount Locust Inn was restored by the National Park Service in 1956.

Mount Locust is near mile marker 15.5

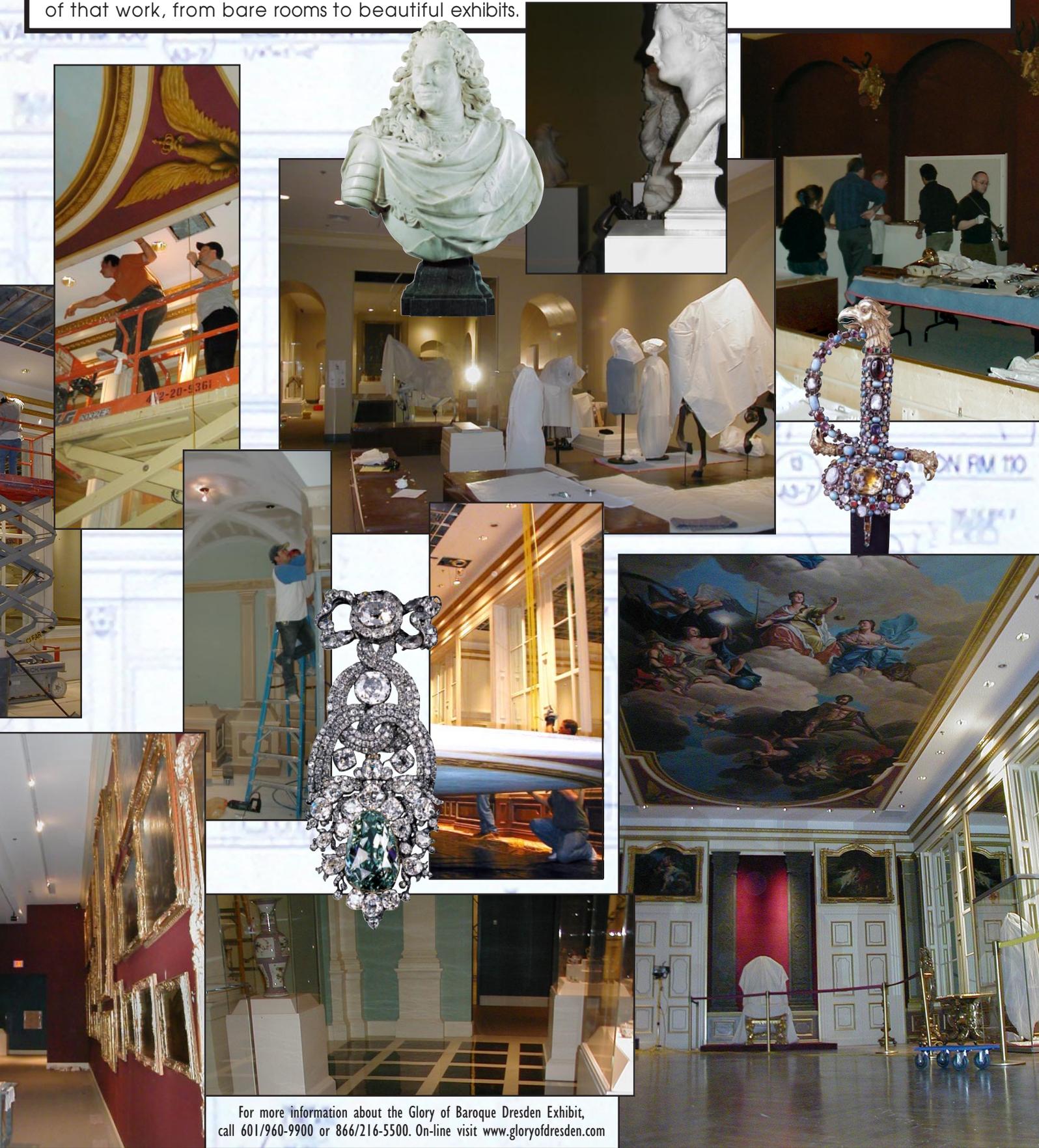
near the southern end of the Natchez Trace. Interpretive programs are offered from February to November and the Inn is closed to the public December and January. Public restrooms, exhibits, and a ranger station are also found here. Mount Locust can be toured from 8:30 am until 5:00 pm every day during its open season. On Saturday, November 6 2004, Mount Locust Inn will host the Natchez Trace Parkway Frontier Day with various demonstrations including frontier cookery, quilting, tomahawk throwing, and Native American basket weaving.

INTERIORS & EXTERIORS



Photos by William Pitts; inset photos ©Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

The Glory of Baroque Dresden is a spectacular exhibit, there's no denying that. But as the visitor wanders through the many galleries, marveling at the display of treasures, paintings, and porcelains from the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, Germany, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that an incredible amount of labor went into the transformation of this previously empty exhibit space into a recreation of royal audience halls and treasure rooms (from left to right). Here is a sampling of that work, from bare rooms to beautiful exhibits.



For more information about the Glory of Baroque Dresden Exhibit, call 601/960-9900 or 866/216-5500. On-line visit www.gloryofdresden.com

Arts & Literature

The Natchez Museum of Afro-American Culture “We Exist to Tell Our Story”

Information taken directly from the NAPAC Natchez Museum of Afro-American Art and the Historic Natchez on the Mississippi African American Heritage brochures. For more information, contact either the Museum or the Natchez Convention and Visitors' Bureau at 1-800-647-6724.

The Natchez Association for the Preservation of Afro-American Culture, NAPAC, was created in 1990 to present and preserve cultural and historical contributions of Afro-Americans in the growth of Natchez and the nation.

Natchez Afro-American history and culture. After many years of groundwork, on Sunday, February 17, 1990 Mary Lee Davis-Toles, Patricia A. Washington, Josie Anderson, Flora Terrell, and Mary White formed NAPAC. The group applied for a charter and were approved in March of 1990.

The mission of NAPAC is to research, collect, exhibit, interpret, and preserve materials depicting Black Life. The organization brings to life the Black experience through photography, lectures, and exhibits of art and artifacts. Special emphasis is placed on local and state Blacks, however, some National Black experiences are presented.

According to historian Ronald L. F. Davis, author of *The Black Experience in Natchez 1720-1880*, to partake of Natchez “is to comprehend the burden of its history. . . . To know Natchez is to understand that it has always been a tragic and magical place—a town filled with people endowed with great charm, dignity, and a tremendous sense of the past.”

To live in Natchez is to live among symbols. Dunleith, the white-columned mansion of Homochitto Street, is

not just a symbol of the white cotton planter, it is also a symbol of the strength of the African-American spirit. John R. Lynch, who fanned dinner guests in Dunleith's dining room as a young slave emerged from slavery to become one of
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“Diana, the Singing Lady,” a cedar carving by Lavern Hamberlin, a retired educator from Fayette (above, left). The kitchen area (above, right) is part of a larger exhibit representing a shot gun house.

Photo by William Pitts



The Museum is located on the intersection of Main and Wall Streets across from the Natchez Convention Center.

In 1979, Mary Lee Davis-Toles began developing the concept of preserving

Cookhouse Special • • • • • Belzoni's Annual World Catfish Festival Invites the World to One Abundant Table

by Kathy Root Pitts—information taken from a Humphrey's County Press Release and Food Festival! The Ultimate Guidebook to America's Best Regional Food Celebrations by Alice M. Geffen and Carole Berglie

In the mid 1960s, catfish farming became a new cash crop in Humphrey's County, Mississippi. The raising of catfish was so successful for the area, that by 1976, as part of the Delta County's Bicentennial Celebration, the very first Bicentennial Catfish Festival entertained 3,000 people on Thursday, April 7, 1976 in Belzoni, on the Humphrey's County Courthouse lawn. Since that significant year, the Annual

World Catfish Festival has come to cover all of downtown Belzoni and has commanded universal recognition. Now more than 20,000 hungry visitors attend the festival each year; local as well as country-wide and foreign guests enjoy contests, children's games, music, arts and craft show, and copious catfish.

Alice M. Geffen and Carole Berglie, the authors of *Food Festival! The Ultimate*
continued on page 13



John R. Lynch (above), a former slave at Dunleith, went on to become the first constable of Natchez and later the first African American to represent Mississippi in both the State and Federal legislatures.

Photos courtesy of NAPAC

Photos courtesy of the Catfish Capitol/Background photo courtesy of the Mississippi Development Authority/Division of Tourism



The Bluz Boys, always popular festival entertainers.



Business Flash

The MetroJackson Chamber of Commerce: A Fellowship of Businesses at the Corner Firehouse

by Kathy Root Pitts

Information and photos the courtesy of the JacksonMetro Chamber of Commerce

Photos courtesy of the JacksonMetro Chamber of Commerce

Since 1975, the MetroJackson Chamber of Commerce has made its home in the 100-years-old Central Fire Station on the corner of President and Pearl Streets. This building's usefulness to the Jackson area has been profound. After all, a community's needs vary greatly, and this noble building, in its antiquity, now serves as what might be called a "Central Business Station" in downtown Jackson.

While exploring the basement storage of this 1904 Firehouse, I was struck with the lively history of the local Chamber of Commerce, a history that began on August 23, 1880 under the name Jackson Board of Trade and Cotton Exchange. In 1921, this group became known as the Jackson Chamber of Commerce.

There before me, among photographs and papers, was evidence of the vigor and momentum of a city being built by strong-willed people who wanted a good and stable business life for all Mississippians. Profit wasn't bad; it meant security for families—a chance to meet peacefully in a comfortable place.

Glancing over the minutes of a 1919 meeting, I noted the public responsibility and compassion expressed by the then Board of Trade, just after World War I, for "returning soldiers and how we should proceed to care for our boys." The Board was looking to reassimilate these servicemen into the work force, and encouraged "our monied people to put up rentable and

suitable houses here for good people to live in."

Over the years, our Chamber of Commerce has been present and active in the erection of monuments, shopping centers, roads, parks, the reservoir, factories, schools, colleges, the airport, farming improvements, Memorial Stadium, office buildings, banks, the zoo, railways, churches, museums, hospitals, the Planetarium, utilities, hotels, oil development, and even the 1940 Capitol Street Christmas lights.

In 1992 this organization rechristened itself the JacksonMetro Chamber of Commerce to indicate all of Hinds, Madison, and Rankin Counties—building on its name as it builds the business strength of the community. Yet, after 123 years, the driving force behind this fellowship of businesses has remained constant. In 2004 as in 1880, the now JacksonMetro Chamber of Commerce desires and works diligently toward prosperity and happiness for all Mississippians.

Continue to check our web site monthly for a variety of photos on the growth of Jackson, the state of Mississippi, and the effective outreach of the JacksonMetro Chamber of Commerce.



The "electric" Christmas lights along Capitol Street (left) when they were new in the 1940s.

Excited participants in the Jackson Back Scratch—a 1940s promotional for business opportunities and connections (below).



Jackson Mississippi—The Crossroads of the South (left)—where three federal highways intersect in front of the Alamo Plaza. Looking east at the present day Highway 80 and Terry Road intersection.



Aviation Goodwill Tour (top) boosts the "Progressive City of Jackson."

Chamber Ground Breaking event at the future site of Highland Village (above).

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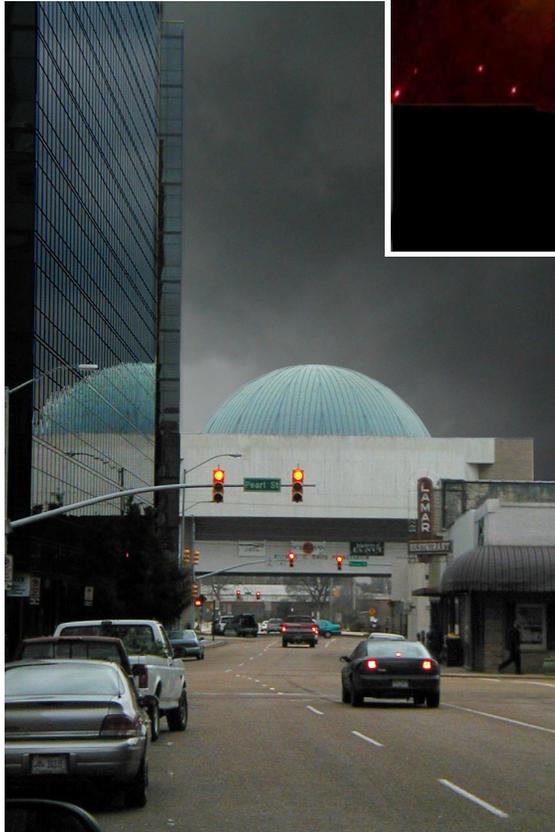
The Davis Planetarium Grasping the Night Sky

by Kathy Root Pitts—
drawn from information provided by Gary Lazich, Planetarium manager

The Russell C. Davis Planetarium, situated in Jackson's downtown cultural district, marked its Silver Anniversary in 2003. In all this time, the "Planetarium's great success has certainly justified the dreams and efforts of those who planned the combined Museum of Art and Planetarium facilities more than a quarter of a century ago." Now, nearly 50,000 people visit our Planetarium each year to watch large-format films, multi-media sky features, laser features, and school programs. The Jackson Planetarium is among "the largest in the world, with a huge hemispheric wrap-around screen that presents regular Sky Shows on astronomy, astronauts, and space exploration." There are only 25 other planetariums in America that equal or surpass our own in size.

In 2000, the Davis Planetarium installed a "new MEGA-HD Cinema, the first large-format theater in Mississippi, enhancing the magnificent astronomical simulations for which the Davis Planetarium is famous, expanding programming across the full scope of the natural sciences." Planetarium visitors now enjoy IMAX® films projected onto the Planetarium dome itself, just as they've long enjoyed the still projections prior to this.

Since 1981, the Davis Planetarium Foundation, a non-profit membership organization, has expanded the Planetarium's role in science and the community. The Foundation's first project, with the help of a handsome Gannett Foundation grant, was a documentary filmed on the space shuttle with an Arriflex motion picture camera. Lockheed Corporation gave engineering support as NASA astronauts took this specialized camera into orbit to film *The Space Shuttle: An American Adventure*, which premiered in January 1985. The documentary won a Gold Medal in an international film competition, and has since given "over a million viewers the vicarious experience of orbiting the earth."



The Planetarium's dome is a distinctive part of Jackson's skyline, located next to the Mississippi Museum of Art and straddling Lamar Street at the Pascagoula Street intersection.



Mississippi's Russell C. Davis Planetarium "aims to provide for all segments of its service area a distinctive blend of science entertainment, enrichment, and educational experiences with special emphasis on astronomy and space exploration." The facility is a true educational tool for adults as well as young students.

The Planetarium is open daily, except for major public holidays. Sky Shows: weekdays at 9 am, 11 am, and 1 pm (scheduled by reservation only); Friday and Saturday at 8:30 pm; Saturday and Sunday a matinee is presented at 3 pm. Family sky shows: Saturday at 1 pm. MEGA-HD Cinema films: weekdays at 10 am and noon; Friday and Saturday at 7:30 pm; Saturday and Sunday at 2 pm and 4 pm. (Show times may vary without notice.)

The Planetarium is located downtown at 201 East Pascagoula Street at Lamar Street. For more information, telephone 601/960-1550. or visit the planetarium's web site at www.city.jackson.ms.us/CityHall/planetarium.htm.

continued from page 4

Emerald Mound

preserved under National Park Service ownership, then the best thing to do is leave it alone. "We have enough information from the two digs there to know the general time period that Emerald was built, to know who built it, and the way it was built," he said. "And that's enough information to interpret the site."

Barnett was referring to two digs that

took place in 1948 and in 1972. The '48 dig was directed by John L. Cotter under the auspices of the National Park Service. This took place just before the property was given to the Park Service. Among other items, ceramic fragments were found that helped archaeologists assign some general dates to Emerald Mound. The second and last dig was conducted by Jeffrey Brain of

Harvard University. A series of small excavations uncovered more about the approximate age of the mound from pottery fragments found there.

Vincas Steponaitis, Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, was a student on the dig in 1972. He states that "Emerald is one of

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Photos by William Pitts; Eagle Nebula courtesy of the Space Telescope Science Institute

talk to the animals

The White-tailed Deer

Gracing Mississippi's Woods and Fields

by Kathy Root Pitts from facts provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The white-tailed deer, indigenous to Mississippi, is a magnificent and beautiful animal. Spotting them along the edge of the woods gives a childlike thrill, and then they are gone. The effect is like having caught a glimpse of Santa.

Deer spend their days hidden in wooded cover, and move about but little. Toward evening, they come out to eat and drink. Deer like to eat leaves and twigs, fruit, seeds, fungi and mosses, grasses, and occasionally fish and bugs. They are ruminants, like cows. "On bright moon-light nights they may feed all night, but on dark nights they are more active in the evening and again early in the morning.

During winter when food is scarce, they may feed longer hours and even during the day. In stormy, windy weather they are restless; they

browse more than usual and often change their bed spot several times a day."

Deer can live to be 20 years old. They can run as fast as 30 miles per hour, and can leap and swim. Their coats are reddish-brown in the summer and turn grayish-brown in the winter, often called the "blue" coat. Male deer have antlers that they shed each year.



Deer are shy, and they generally maintain their home range within one-

square-mile. During the winter, deer are communal animals, sometimes traveling in groups of as many as twenty-five. During the warmer seasons, deer are more solitary animals, except when a mother is with her fawn.

Seeing a deer in the wild is true pleasure, even if all that you see

is the white turned-up tail of this timid and fleeing gift of nature.

The Natchez Museum of Afro-American Culture

the most powerful political voices in post-Civil War America.

Natchez African-Americans have a remarkable history that is nationally significant. Ibrahima, the famous enslaved African prince, lived in Natchez. America's first African-American concert singer, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, was born into slavery on a Natchez plantation. William Johnson, important chronicler of free African-American life in the antebellum South, lived his entire life in Natchez. Hiram R. Revels, the first African-American to sit in either house of the United States Congress, went to Washington from the pulpit of Zion

Chapel A.M.E. Church. Richard Wright, one of the most powerful literary voices of the Twentieth Century, was the son of Natchez sharecroppers.

On May 4, 1991, NAPAC opened its Natchez Museum of Afro-American Art at 307A Market Street. Seven years later, on February 1998, a tornado tore the roof off the Market Street building and all of the valuables had to be removed and restored.

On September 11, 1999, NAPAC reopened the museum at 301 Main Street, only two blocks from the original location. The present site is located in the Old Natchez Post Office, which was built in

1905. The post office stands on the site of the barber shop operated by free African-American diarist William Johnson.

The support and contributions of the public help NAPAC to preserve and showcase the courage, struggles, achievements, and aspirations of Blacks, both past and present.

NAPAC Natchez Museum of Afro-American History and Culture hours: Tuesday through Saturday—1 pm to 4:30 pm.

Other tours by appointment/no tour too small. Call 601/445-0728.

Holiday hours are posted prior to each holiday for visitors' convenience.

Belzoni's Annual World Catfish Festival

Guidebook to America's Best Regional Food Celebrations, describe the crowds, many arriving by bus, the catfish pond tours, racers receiving awards, "in front of the courthouse, Minnie Simpson's

School of Dance was presenting the 'Catfish Follies.'" and the unbelievable quantities of food prepared for the occasion.

Belzoni's Annual World Catfish Festival has been recognized among the Top 100

Events in North America and Top 20 Events of the Southeast.

For more information, please e-mail: catfish@catfishcapitalonline.com or call: 1-800-408-4838.

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Spanish Moss

ish Moss residents, too, so if you plan to use any Spanish Moss for decorative crafts or bedding, keep this in mind.

The uses of Spanish Moss by humans dates back to the Native Americans, according to Hays: "fibers were used to make ropes, scrub cooking utensils, [they were] mixed with clay to form dwellings, used for tanning hides, and boiled to make a tea for chills and fevers," the last being a medical treatment that *The New Southern View* does not suggest trying. Todd Ballantine, in his book *Tideland Treasures*, reported that "Henry Ford stuffed seats in his first Model Ts with this treeline upholstery," and that "herbalists use it as tea to relieve rheumatism, abscesses, and birth pains," another practice that this magazine does not recommend.

Spanish Moss has been used as fodder

continued from page 3

for livestock, albeit unsuccessfully, as it has very little nutritional value. Ballantine writes that "deer, wild turkey, and horses eat this epiphyte." On a more successful note, its uses have ranged from caulking for cabins, "kindling...mulch...packing material, saddle blankets, bridles, braids, and even filaments to repair fishermen's nets," according to Dennis Adams, writing on the Beaufort County, South Carolina Public Library web site.

"The plant grows easily in cultivation," Hays says, and is "best grown in full sunlight or partial shade." Summer temperatures of at least 70° is preferable while winter temperatures below 50° can cause some damage. But, as is more than evident, even our "deep southern freezes" aren't sufficient to take out our much-beloved Spanish Moss.

Emerald Mound

the largest and most spectacular mounds in North America." Steponaitis told me that he eventually wrote up the results of the dig as his undergraduate thesis.

Emerald Mound, built sometime around the 13th Century by ancestors of the Natchez people, was occupied during the Mississippian period and probably served as a ceremonial center. The Mississippian period was a time roughly between 800

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AD and 1500 AD, when Native Americans were developing a mound-building culture unrivaled in all North America. Emerald is the second largest example of an earthen mound built by this culture while Monks Mound at the Cahokia Mounds Historic Site in Illinois, a United Nations World Heritage Site, rivals in size any of the three great pyramids at Giza outside Cairo, Egypt, according to an article in the February issue of *Discover* magazine ("Uncovering America's Pyramid Builders," *Discover*, Feb. '04).

Barnett says that the Emerald Mound location was abandoned prior to Rene-Robert de La Salle's 1681 expedition down the Mississippi River for France. He also mentions that, unlike some other mounds, Emerald was not used for burials.

John C. Tramp, writing about Emerald Mound in his book *Prairie and Rocky Mountain Adventures, or Life in the West*, recognized the magnificence of the structure in the 1870s. "When walking on the vast terrace one can but think of thousands who trod the same earth centuries ago, of the battle songs that might have rolled in thundering volumes into the still air above, of the chant over the dead, of the ceremonies of a wild and mysterious worship—and of the dreadful hour, when before the tempest of battle or the anger of pestilence, national power melted away, and the surge of empire, in its flow to other lands, ebbed from this mural thrown, leaving it voiceless and a desert."

In May of 1838, Tramp explored Emerald Mound along with "a large company of gentlemen, about twenty-five in number," contemplating "the vastness of the creation" that "renders a full measure of homage to the proud unknown nation that left behind them such a mysterious hieroglyphic of power," while uncovering pottery that exhibited "a rare, and oftentimes beautiful structure."

Following in Tramp's footsteps 134 years

Webventing[®]

by William Pitts

Here's a mixed bag of sites that I found recently; finds like these underscore the enjoyment I get out of a good web-safari. All addresses current as of press time.

<http://webexhibits.org>

WebExhibits is a surprising web site that I found because I was curious about the origin of that paper item that most everyone has hanging on a wall—the calendar. WebExhibits covers this as well as the history of Daylight Saving Time, the causes of color, plus everything you'd ever want to know about pigments, and, oddly enough, the history of butter; it's as old as King Tut!

<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/>

To quote from this site's self-description, "The purpose of NASA's Earth Observatory is to provide a freely-accessible publication on the Internet where the public can obtain new satellite imagery and scientific information about our home planet. The focus is on Earth's climate and environmental change." Hey, it's free!

<http://BluesOnAir.com>

For blues 24/7, tune into this terrific Korean site celebrating the music that had its origins right here in Mississippi. Using iTunes or WinAmp, this site's appeal is for both the ears and the soul.

contact us:

info@newsouthernview.com

What is YOUR favorite Web site?

later, it's easy to understand his feelings about Emerald Mound. There is nothing else in our common experience that compares. Standing atop the larger sub-mound, the wind gives one an unnatural sensation of movement.

And looking out over the broad expanse of the plaza below, the scene of countless ceremonies, one can begin to gain a very slight glimpse of this area through the eyes of their chief, the Great Sun, standing high above his subjects, on level with the tree tops, closer to his god, the Sun, from whom he is descended.

Emerald Mound is truly a remarkable sight, well worth the trip no matter where in the state you live. Don't make it a quick stop-and-go visit, though. Plan to spend at least an hour there. Walk the length of the plaza. Sit atop the smaller sub-mound for a while and gain a feel for the immensity of this structure. Climb the stairs to the top of the larger sub-mound and gaze out over the tree tops as the Great Sun might once have.

In the words of Steponaitis, "It's one of Mississippi's great archaeological landmarks."

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EXHIBITS

Masters of the Night - A true story of bats through Tuesday, March 9

Come and find out the real story on these misunderstood creatures. You'll gain a new appreciation as you learn about their true wonders and ecological importance. Visit the real and imaginary bat hangouts such as a Gothic castle, a cave and a rain forest. Admission. MS Museum of Natural Science. 601/354-7303 or www.mdwfp.com/museum

To Be An Astronaut Monday, March 1-Sunday, August 1

Follow the exciting story of astronaut training from the emotional first phone call from NASA, through the rigors of training, to the vast expanses of space, the film is shot entirely on location and stars the men and women of the astronaut corps. Join them as they share the wonder and the deep personal reflections of what it means *To Be An Astronaut*. Admission. Davis Planetarium. 601/960-1550 or www.city.jackson.ms.us/CityHall/planetarium.htm

The Glory of Baroque Dresden Monday, March 1-Monday, September 6

Consisting of more than 300 major artworks from eight collections of the State Art Collections Dresden, focusing on Baroque art in Europe from 1697 to 1763, this exhibit will showcase a unique variety of German objects not seen in the U.S. since the reunification of Germany. Admission. Mississippi Arts Pavilion. 601/960-9900 or www.gloryofdresden.com

Paris Moderne Saturday, March 6-Sunday, July 11

Jackson will serve as the only venue in the United States for a spectacular exhibit, "Paris Moderne: Art Deco Works from the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris," showcasing art deco works from the 1920s and 1930s celebrating the rich, decorative style of Parisian home and office interiors. Admission. MS Museum of Art. 601/960-1515 or www.msmuseumart.org

Great Flood of 1927, Jackson Flood of 1979 Monday, April 12-Sunday, October 31

Two Rivers Unleashed will tell the stories of the 1927 Mississippi River flood and the 1979 Jackson flood, two of the most devastating floods to hit Mississippi. There will be photographs, maps, and video footage to show the 1979 Jackson flood's toll on the capital city. Free. Old Capitol Museum. 601/576-6920 or www.mdah.state.ms.us/museum/new.html

EVENTS & HAPPENINGS

MARCH•MARCH•MARCH•MARCH

The Best of Broadway: *Kiss Me Kate* Tuesday, March 2-Wednesday, March 3

One of the all-time great musicals, *Kiss Me Kate* sparkles with wit, romance, fantastic dancing and 18 unforgettable songs by Cole Porter including "Another Op'nin'," "Another Show," "Too Darn Hot," and "Wunderbar". It's a fight to the finish in a saucy, classic battle of the sexes. Admission. Thalia Mara Hall. 601/981-1847

New Stage Theatre—*Ride a Blue Horse* Tuesday, March 2-Saturday, March 13

In this fun-filled and inspiring tale, we follow a boy who was different from everyone else. Luckily, he used his active imagination to become the American poet James Whitcomb Riley, who wrote many poems, including "Little Orphan Annie." Admission. New Stage Theatre. 601/948-3531 or www.newstageattheatre.com

Millsaps Arts & Lecture Series—Deborah Willis Thursday, March 4

Deborah Willis' book, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present*, shows images of pride,

dignity, beauty, and success. This work is largely a recognition of the cultural contributions of African Americans to American society in sports, music, dance, literature, and politics as well as a celebration of black social and economic life. Admission. Gertrude C. Ford Academic Complex recital hall. 601/974-1422 or www.millsaps.edu

ARTMix

Thursday, March 4 (actually, the first Thursday monthly!)
Fondren art walks, called ARTMix, will be held on the first Thursday of every month. Participating galleries and retail stores will host special art showings and refreshments. The extended hours for ARTMix are 5 pm-8 pm Participating galleries and stores include: The Artery of Fondren, The Art of State, Baubles & Beads Boutique, Brown's Fine Art and Framing, Bryant Galleries, Cups, dwello, Fondren Corner (the Gaddis Group), Fondren Traders, Gallery 119, Soma, and the Treehouse Boutique.

Metropolitan Atlanta Community Band Sunday, March 28

Jackson State University Music Hall Center. 601/979-2141

The Taming of the Shrew

Thursday, March 25-Saturday, March 27

Tuesday, March 30-Sunday, April 3

Belhaven's rendition of this ageless classic on relationships is enriching for the entire family. Admission. Flexible Theatre, Center for the Arts. 601/968-5930

APRIL•APRIL•APRIL•APRIL•APRIL

World Performance Series: P.D.Q. Bach and Peter Schickele Thursday, April 1

"The greatest comedy-in-music act before the public today" Robert Marsh, *Chicago Sun Times*. Composer, musician, author, satirist—Peter Schickele is internationally recognized as one of the most versatile artists in the field of music. His works, in excess of a hundred for symphony orchestras, choral groups, chamber ensembles, voice, movies, and television include performances by Yo-Yo Ma, the National Symphony, and the N.Y. Philharmonic. Admission. Belhaven College Center for the Arts. 601/968-0090 or www.thaliamarahall.org

Puppetry JAM: Performing Arts Festival for Children

Thursday, April 1-Friday, April 2

Puppets take center stage in this annual event for children. The 2004 program complements the Glory of Baroque Dresden exhibit through stories from Central Europe featuring Karagan Marionettes in Rumpelstiltskin. Admission. MS Agriculture & Forestry Museum. 601/977-9840

SPEBSQSA Harmony Fest

Saturday, April 3

The 55th Barbershop Quartet performance presented by the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America with the Magnolia Chorus and The Sweet Adelines. Admission. Thalia Mara Hall. 601/992-1050

Belhaven College Dance Ensemble

Thursday, April 15-Saturday, April 17

Classical and modern works by the Belhaven College dance faculty plus three guest artists. Many will be premiere presentations. Admission. Belhaven Arts Center Flexible Theatre. 601/965-7026 or www.belhaven.edu/arts

Mississippi Symphony: The Four Seasons

Friday, April 30 & Saturday, May 1

Violin virtuoso and University of Southern Mississippi faculty member Stephen Redfield will be the featured soloist for Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Mary Anderson Pickard, daughter of famed Mississippi artist Walter Anderson, will serve as narrator prior to each movement of the *Four Seasons*, one of Mr. Anderson's favorite works. Admission. Galloway

United Methodist Church will host the Friday concert and St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral hosts the Saturday concert. 601/960-1565 or www.msorchestra.com

MAY•MAY•MAY•MAY•MAY•MAY

DOXA Dance performance

Saturday, May 1

An evening of student dance, the culmination of two semesters' effort. Admission. Belhaven Arts Center Concert Hall. 601/965-7026 or www.belhaven.edu/arts

New Stage Theatre—The Drawer Boy

Tuesday, May 4-Sunday, May 16

Two farmers, boyhood friends and WWII veterans, share a mysterious secret. Their workaday lives are comically disrupted when a young actor shows up at their door wanting to live and work with them as "research" for a play about farming. As he becomes a part of their lives, their fascinating story becomes a part of his play, and the lines between theatre and life, and memory and reality become blurred. Hilarity and heartbreak mix in this award-winning play about the power of art to help us remember what's important. *Time* picked this heartwarming play as one of the Ten Best of 2001. Admission. New Stage Theatre. 601/948-3531 or www.newstageattheatre.com

Mississippi Symphony: Pepsi Pops

Friday, May 14

This annual outdoor event has become the "unofficial start of summer" for Jacksonians, and the Symphony's largest and most popular concert of the year. Includes pre-concert entertainment, food and drink vendors, and a large-scale fireworks display over the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Admission. Old Trace Park. 601/960-1565 or www.msorchestra.com

The Robot Zoo

Saturday, May 22-Sunday, September 12

Come see Mother Nature at work- as robots. These larger-than-life robots will show you how real animals work. Get the insight on how a chameleon changes colors and many others. Admission. Mississippi Museum of Natural Science. 601/354-7303 or www.mdwfp.com/museum

Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra

Sunday, May 23

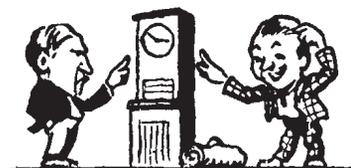
Classical and Baroque music performed by this group of local musicians. Free. Old Capitol Museum. 601/576-6920

Memorial Day Weekend Event at The Zoo

Saturday, May 29 & Sunday, May 30

This holiday weekend event has hosted children's favorites like Scooby Doo and Nickelodeon's highest rated television character, Sponge Bob Square Pants. Last year, we celebrated with "Characters on Parade" where a number of popular animals stopped by to visit. This year we will have another great character. It's definitely a don't miss celebration. Great times, photo opportunities, and fun for the entire family. Admission. Jackson Zoo. 601/355-5475

contact us with your event:
NewSouthernView@jam.rr.com



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MASTERS OF THE NIGHT

The True Story of Bats

Maligned and misunderstood, these mysterious creatures may become your new best friends as this exhibit turns popular bat myths upside down. You'll appreciate the wonders of their world and be enlightened on bats' ecological importance to your own. *Check out our website for more details!*

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A Healthy Cycle

luxury car, but there are also many bicycles made from materials naturally occurring on this planet, bikes without the suspension of a Ferrari, or the electronics of a Navy missile-cruiser. Keep that, and your budget, in mind as you cruise your local bike shops. And don't be put off by the appearance of today's bicycle—it still has, in most cases, two wheels. Ask questions. That's what the sales people are there for. The majority of them are cyclists, too, and they'll be happy to help you select a bicycle to fit your budget and your needs. Once you've made your purchase, they may even suggest some contact names for a group ride.

"Some of the bikes I've seen I can pick up with my little finger while some look like they're built for a tractor-pull! How do I know what's right for me?"

Again, ask the sales people. Let them know what kind of cycling you have in mind. There is an incredible variety of bicycles today from which to choose. Snider of Ride South Bike Shop recommends recumbent cycles for those who find long rides on a conventional upright bike too much to bear. "You're in a comfortable, laid-back position that gives you a different awareness of your surroundings. So you're able to react to situations more quickly and you can enjoy the ride a lot better. They are

also more efficient and easier to pedal." And for the rider who prefers the conventional diamond-frame upright, the choices are many, and the prices are varied.

"What's the next step for me?"

Decide what you expect to gain from cycling. "Test a few bikes and get ready to have some fun," says Snider. "The money spent on a comfortable bike will provide a good investment on one's health, fitness level, and social life."

So keep up the pace, and maybe one day you'll be one of those cyclists whom others watch with awe and envy as you effortlessly cruise down a Mississippi road.

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