



The Off-Side Undo

English Motoring Club of Mississippi

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"A GENTLEMAN DOES NOT MOTOR ABOUT AFTER DARK." -- JOSEPH LUCAS, ATTRIB.

EMC visits "haunted" Mississippi!

by Terry Trovato

JACKSON, MS — Dense clouds and unusually cool weather ushered in the 2002 version of our annual Drive Through History. The dismal, cloudy skies were most appropriate since this year's tour was of the haunted variety.

The tour, entitled "Haunted Mississippi," was led by Tour and Rallye Master Supreme John Simmers, with able assistance from his wife Florence. At most every stop there was a history of ghosts residing on the premises.

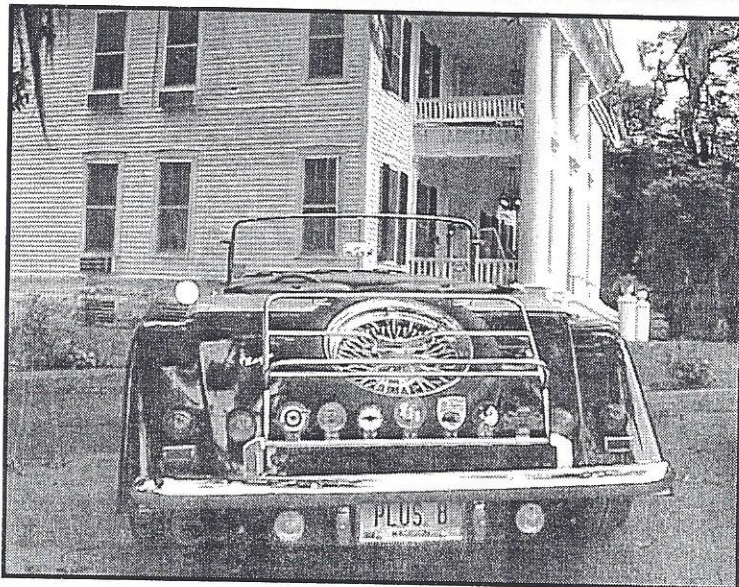
The Simmers were in their 1969 MGC GT. EMC members on hand to participate were Al and Debbie Adams, MGB; Pat and Barbara Cashman, TR6; Wilbert and Jean Easom, MGB; Dennis and Mary Katherine Lofton, Jaguar E-type roadster; Joe and son Chris Speetjens, Morgan Plus 8; Cappy and Judy Stahlman, Rolls-Royce Corniche convertible; Richard and Cheryl Branyan, Rolls-Royce Silver Wraith; and John Turbeville, TR8.

Also on hand were J. T. and Audrey Seale, MG Midget; Steve Collins, TR6; James and Faye Enzman, MGB; Gene and Martha Johnston, MGB GT; and Barry and Patti Schmidt, TR7.

Non-members joining the tour were Melissa and Bill Silhan (Pensacola, FL), E-type coupe; Roger and Carol Gibson (New Orleans, LA), Jaguar XJ6; and Joe and Evonne Daquila (Abbeville, LA), TR6. The EMC Prez and First Lady, Terry and Merideth Trovato, brought up the rear of the stately procession in their Sunbeam Alpine.

Since a part of the tour involved War Between the States sites, it was appropriate that the day began by splitting the entire group into two divisions to journey along the picturesque Natchez Trace Parkway, with one heading south from Jackson and the other heading north from Natchez. They converged at The Old Country Store, founded in 1875, in Lorman, MS — where they quickly attacked a fabulous breakfast prepared by Chef Alvin Davis and his staff. (Man, love that bacon!)

Then, the entire unit headed a



Joe Speetjens' Morgan Plus 8 at Rosswood. "Helloo..." Photos by Terry Trovato

few short miles to the antebellum plantation "Rosswood," built in 1857, where two ghosts allegedly reside. The home served as a hospital after the Battle of the Cotton Bales on the property in 1864. Legend has it that a Union officer who died there was buried in an unmarked grave, and his spirit lingers today. He has been heard to greet guests with a falsetto "hello." A second ghost is that of a woman first seen by a teenage girl in 1863.

Departing Rosswood, the group headed on to the Natchez Trace Parkway. The Parkway began as a mysterious pathway some three centuries ago and it crosses much of the middle Southern states. It takes its name from the city of Natchez, MS, and there are many strange tales and legends related to the forerunner of the road. Just south of Tupelo there is a sign that states "Witch Dance," and here, allegedly, witches gathered to dance. Legend has it that wherever the witches' feet touched the ground, the grass withered and died and refuses to grow to this day.

Exiting the Natchez Trace Parkway and motoring through Port Gibson, MS — which Union General

Ulysses S. Grant spared, saying it was "too beautiful to burn" — the group headed for the Grand Gulf Military Park. The Mississippi River town of Grand Gulf was settled by the French in the 18th century, but during the 19th century a number of significant disasters turned the place into a "ghost town." A yellow fever epidemic, a tornado, a change in the flow of the Mississippi River that destroyed 50 city blocks, and, finally, an attack by Union soldiers who burned what was left has eradicated what was a bustling river community.

The Grand Gulf Old Town Cemetery was the group's first stop. It covers several acres with monuments dating to the early 19th century. Because of the battle and killing that took place here, locals say many ghosts appear in their Confederate or Union uniforms. The Park Museum contains many artifacts, including three large Confederate flags, one of which was an unusual hand-sewn and painted regimental banner emblazoned with the statement "Go On, Boys."

Leaving Grand Gulf, the group journeyed toward Church Hill, MS, (See More EMC, page 26)

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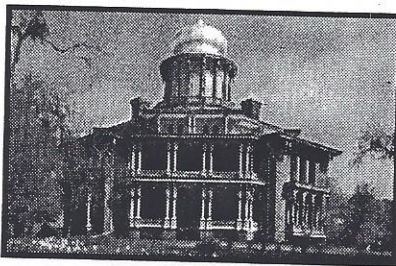
More EMC (Continued from page 25)

with a stop along the way and "photo opportunity" at Bethel Church, built in 1843. Entering the Church Hill community, the group stopped for a tour of the grounds of Christ Episcopal Church, circa 1857, made famous in the made-for-television mini-series *North and South*. In *North and South*, the church was used in a wedding scene and at its conclusion Patrick Swayze and his pals emerge from the front door laughing and in light conversation. The church's small cemetery is located within walking distance of the structure.

Heading to Natchez, the group entered the grounds of one of the most interesting and famous houses in the Deep South, "Longwood," an eight-sided, five-story mansion that is known for the tragic ending surrounding its owner.

Planned in 1859 for millionaire cotton planter Dr. Haller Nutt by Philadelphia's fashionable architect Samuel Sloan, Longwood was begun in 1860. Work halted abruptly in 1861 when Confederate bugles echoed across the South. The Pennsylvanian artisans dropped saws and hammers, heading north to pick up rifles and bayonets, never to return. The home's exterior had been completed, but the interior was still in skeletal shape save the basement, with living quarters on the ground level.

Deprived of his workmen, Dr. Nutt dejectedly settled his family into the completed lower floor, thinking the "war" would be over in a few months when hot tempers subsided, and the Pennsylvania crew would return to finish the interior of his



Longwood, prior to its restoration by the Pilgrimage Garden Club.

home. As we know now, that was not to be. Although Dr. Nutt was opposed to secession and a Union sympathizer, it did him no good when the Yankees arrived in 1863. In a period of a few days they burned a million dollars' worth of his crops, primarily cotton, and took all of his livestock. A broken man and now penniless, he died of pneumonia, and some say a broken heart, in 1864.

The incomplete house still stands just as the Pennsylvania workmen left it 141 years ago. Now owned by the Pilgrimage Garden Club, it receives tourists year-round and it is said that the ghosts of Haller Nutt and his wife, Julia, have been seen repeatedly — she likes to stay near the staircase while he prefers the garden area.

Leaving the sad tale of Longwood's owners/ghosts behind, the group paraded through downtown Natchez and the city's Under the Hill District, stopping for rest and relaxation at King's Tavern. Over the years, literally dozens of employees and guests have encountered a ghost named Madeline here. The building was constructed in the 1760s and became a tavern and

stagecoach stop in 1789 when it was purchased by Richard King. Madeline, so the legend goes, was one of the waitresses and also his mistress. She was said to be a happy and mischievous girl and her ghost follows suit. During the 1930s, three mummified bodies were accidentally discovered under the floor of the tavern's cellar, one of whom is thought to be Madeline.

At King's Tavern a short business meeting was conducted. Florida's Melissa and Bill Silhan were made "Members of the Entourage," which equates to honorary membership in EMC. The Silhans have been great supporters of EMC events over the years.

Additionally, because it was John and Florence Simmers' last appearance at an EMC event as Mississippians (they are moving to Virginia this summer), they were presented awards in recognition of past contributions to the club.

Florence received "The Golden Cleat Award" for her surefootedness in helping John push one of their MGB GTs when it stalled several years ago.

John, an EMC founder and past President, created the Drive Through History event and has supervised the acclaimed "Brits on the Bluff" Annual British Car Show and Competition since its inception. He was presented with a plaque which stated, "John and Florence Simmers/In Recognition of Invaluable Service to the English Motoring Club/From This Day Forward/The EMC Annual Best of Show Trophy/Will Be Designated as/The Simmers Award."