

Stagville preservation center

Drive to a quiet place where history lives on

By SUSAN MAUNEY

As summer simmers down and term papers loom in the distance, cabin fever hits the average college student like a lead pipe. Getting away for even an hour becomes a necessity.

There are several all-purpose getaway spots within a short distance of Chapel Hill that often can serve as a buffer between school and sanity. One, for history buffs in particular is Stagville Preservation Center north of Durham.

Getaways

Stagville Preservation Center, a state-owned historic site, is located on a former tobacco plantation that was one of the largest in the Old South.

Stagville Plantation, begun by Richard Bennehan in 1768, once covered parts of Granville, Person, Wake and Durham counties. The center is the Bennehan-Cameron House, a 1½-story Georgian-style home, built in 1799. Unlike many houses in the era, it has few flourishes, such as ornate ceiling moulding, because, Bennehan, a tough old Scot, said he did not approve of such frivolity.

The tobacco plantation reached its height before the Civil War under the supervision of Bennehan's grandnephew Paul Cameron who was known as the richest man in North Carolina and owned almost 500 slaves.

Three two-story slave houses remain on the plantation, built in Scottish half-timber style around 1860. The houses still are structurally sound and were built with brick and timber by slave labor.

The Great Barn, near the Horton Grove houses, also reflects the Scottish background

of the Cameron family.

Horton Cottage, also a part of the center, was built in 1776 by the recipients of the original land grant from the King of England. It is located on an old heavily traveled Indian trading path from Edenton to Salisbury.

Even though the house is well-preserved for its age, some restoration has been necessary. New hardwood floors have been installed and each brick in the structure's foundation has been remortared to match the original appearance as closely as possible.

Except for the recessed electric lights in the house's ceilings, the house will one day look very much like it did when its builder lived there.

The plantation's land is owned by Liggett and Myers Tobacco Co., but the center's 71 acres is maintained by the state.

A trip to Stagville offers an interesting day out of academia offering fresh air, exercise and a chance to touch the past.

Plantations often are pictured as Tara in *Gone With the Wind*, of stately mansions glimpsed through moss-hung oaks. Stagville is different, yet still as magical and as easy to touch as a 35-minute drive.

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If you're going... Stagville is located north of Durham on Old Oxford Road. Take U.S. 15-501 to I-85 in Durham. Stay on I-85 North until the Old Oxford Road exit. There will be signs directing you to Stagville Preservation Center. Approximate mileage: 25 miles. Approximate time: 35 minutes. 

Susan Mauney is managing editor of *The Daily Tar Heel*.



Bennehan House was completed in 1799... now serves as preservation center



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