



**Restored Classic Southern Home**

**VIEWING THE EXTERIOR . . .** The restored splendor of historic Kenansville's top attraction, Liberty Hall, is viewed by three Greenville visitors — Mark Tripp, LaRona Murray, and

June Taylor. Built in 1800, restoration was completed in the spring of 1968 with the house and grounds opened to the public.



**METICULOUS CARE . . .** is given to the grounds as well as to the maintenance of the beds located in the spacious grounds of house and other buildings. Here, Norwood Liberty Hall.

# Liberty Hall, An Eastern Carolina Historic Showplace

*Text And Photographs By Jerry Raynor*

Liberty Hall, an impressive plantation home, is another North Carolina architectural gem that has been restored and preserved as an important part of eastern North Carolina's cultural heritage.

Unlike the majority of the state's gracious plantation homes, Liberty Hall has a town location — in Kenansville, county seat of Duplin County — instead of being situated in a rural setting.

For a number of years in this century — 1920 until his death in 1964, Colonel Owen Hill Kenan used the house as a storage place for his art collection. Three of the colonel's great nephews, Tom, Owen, and James, inherited the property from him, and they in turn sold their interests to Frank Hawkins Kenan of Durham. Late in 1964 Frank Kenan and his

wife, Harriet Dubose Kenan, deeded Liberty Hall to the Duplin County Board of Education.

An agency — the Liberty Hall Restoration Commission was formed to provide guidelines for authentic restoration work of the house and 12 acres of grounds. A Kenan descendant, Thomas S. Kenan III headed the commission. In addition to deeding the property to a Duplin County public agency, the Kenan family contributed substantial funds — \$400,000 plus, for use in restoration work.

Though in relatively good condition, the main house and accessory buildings had deteriorated and required extensive reworking and in some instances, replacement. Restoration got underway in the summer of 1965, and in May, 1968 the major phase of restoration work was completed, with Liberty Hall opened to the public in a gala celebration held to mark the occasion.

**A Major Attraction**

Today, 15 years later, Liberty Hall is a major eastern North Carolina historic attraction, a place of keen interest to history buffs, to those interested in exceptional pieces of period furnishings, and to all who love the serenity of open space and the beauty of finely constructed buildings. And its history is an integral part of Duplin County's history.

Liberty Hall was built in 1800 by Thomas S. Kenan, son of Revolutionary war hero General James Kenan. Several pieces in the house are from the first Kenan plantation house which was located at nearby Turkey Branch.

One of the happiest events in the history of Liberty Hall was the 1901 wedding of Mary Lily Kenan to Henry Morrison Flagler, an extremely wealthy man from Palm Springs, Florida. Reporters from New York and other large American cities

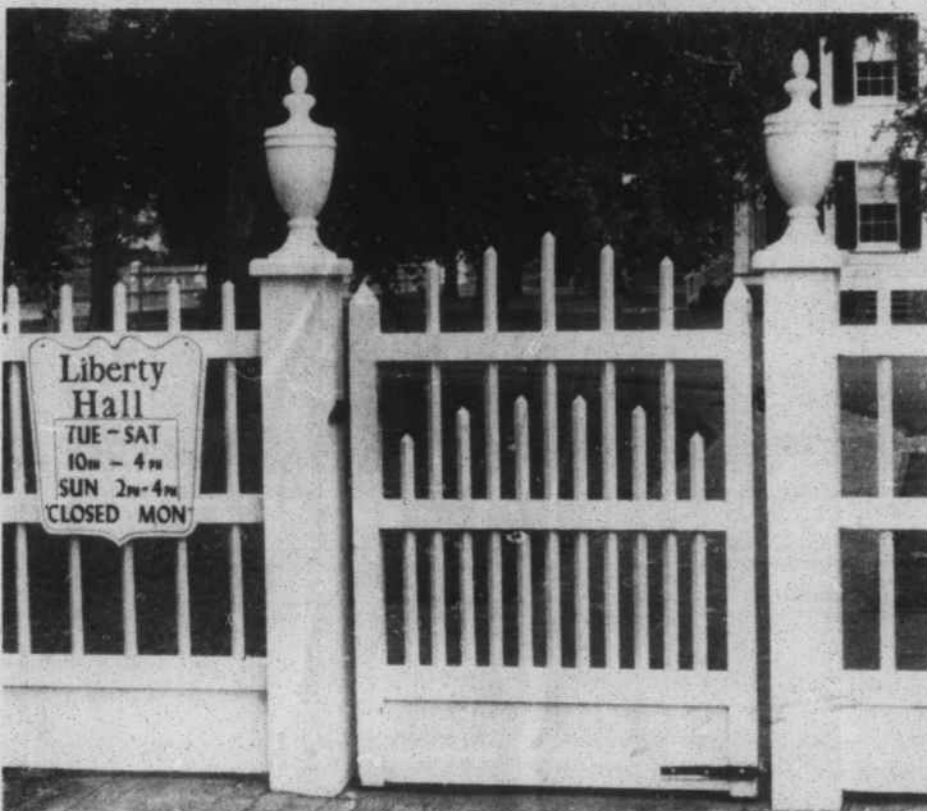
were not permitted to see the wedding which was restricted to family members and close friends. An orchestra was brought in from New York, and the groom arrived by train at the town of Magnolia, 20 miles from Liberty Hall. The train was equipped with special ramps for unloading his horses and carriages used for the journey to Kenansville. The newly wedded couple, after a wedding party, returned by carriage to Magnolia to board the groom's private train for the trip to the Flagler summer estate on Long Island. This chapter in Liberty Hall's history is like a southern fairy tale come true for a lovely belle.

**Not Just A Museum**

At the time Liberty Hall was restored, hope was expressed that care would be taken that it would not be just another museum of the past. Nothing, of course, can take the place of a house being an active

family home, but Liberty Hall succeeds better than most in giving a feel of continuance even in the absence of the family long associated with the house. Young trees are growing which will eventually take the place of ancient trees when age takes its toll of these giants. Caretakers on the ground cultivating flowers in due season add a nice workmen's touch, and visitors seem more like family friends calling than mere curiosity seekers. The leisurely life styles of the entire 19th century is accentuated by outbuildings necessary for the running of a large household.

The past and the present are pleasantly combined at Liberty Hall in a town that is rich in other fine historic homes, churches and public buildings. Kenansville is also the site of one of North Carolina's history-based outdoor dramas, "The Liberty Cart" which will open for the 1983 season within a few weeks.



**THE GATES . . .** giving access to Liberty Hall are copies of authentic 18th century gates, which were considered a good design at the time. The simplicity of the white gates and fences are complimentary to the grounds and building.

Hours for visiting Liberty Hall are from 10 to 4 Tuesday through Saturday, and from 2-4 Sunday, closed Monday. A nominal fee is charged to tour the house. From Greenville to Kenansville is just over 60 miles. Take N.C. 11 to Kinston, Deep Run, Pink Hill, and Kornegay.

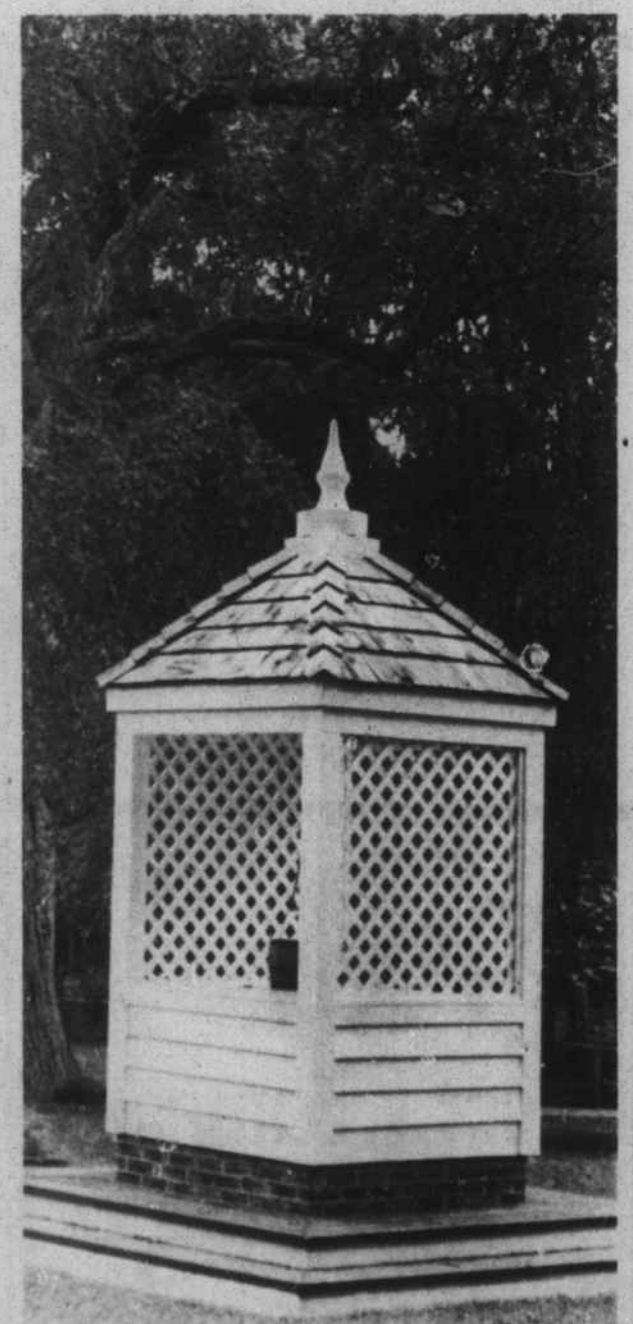


**NUMEROUS OUTBUILDINGS . . .** on the grounds include this row consisting of, from left, a storage barn, a sheltered washstand, a two section privy, and at the far end, rest rooms for visitors. Other buildings on the ground include an overseers

house, a carriage house, a large gazebo and other storage buildings. Hand-fashioned cypress shingles are used on Liberty Hall buildings.



**YOUNG TREES . . .** in the backyard area behind work buildings give an ambience of continuing growth and natural changes. A low split-rail fence is an authentic touch in dividing areas of the yard.



**A LATTICE-WORK . . .** gazebo, with a split-shingle roof topped by a wooden ornament is a motif repeated several times on buildings at Liberty Hall. The one shown here covers a well near the house.