

Inn at Webley is Cleveland County showplace

O. Max Gardner III and Victoria Harwell Gardner paid \$300,000 in 1989 for a three story house with eight fireplaces and 14 1/2 bathrooms expected to tumble to the grounds within six months.

When the Shelby couple bought the 11,000 square foot house they got a 1852 structure with 11 major roof leaks and virtually no foundation. The plaster walls were cracked and 800 balusters needed to be replaced. The house had been empty for eight years and had deteriorated.

Gardner, Shelby lawyer, said people asked why they wanted to restore the 19th century Colonial Revival house which had been in the Webb-Gardner families for years.

"I felt it was an important historical structure, something that doesn't belong to us but to the people of Cleveland County and North Carolina," said Gardner.

And restore it they did.

The magnificent structure was opened on May 1, 1993 as a bed and breakfast inn fit for a king. Since it opened, people from 32 foreign countries and 21 states have slept in the house's five guest bedrooms. It took the Gardners over 3 1/2 years to restore the major part of the house and grounds.

Approaching the front entrance on the circular driveway, you are transported back in time when Webley was the home of the most powerful political organization in the history of North Carolina. The "Shelby Dynasty" produced every governor of North Carolina from the late 1920s to the late 1940s.

The grand 1852 home has been owned by two North Carolina Governors, including the current owners grandfather O. Max Gardner, a US Senator and Congressman, a US Ambassador to the Court of St. James and by an Undersecretary of the Treasury. Every single Governor of North Carolina since 1900 has been in the stately old mansion at least once.

The list of political leaders who have visited Webley is not limited to North Carolina boundaries. Nationally renowned figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lady Bird Johnson and Margaret Truman have been guests in Historic Webley.

Framed pictures in the parlor are of each of the North Carolina governors since 1900; Roosevelts visit in 1936; Truman's visit in

1947; and portraits of Lady Bird Johnson, Bess Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt, among others. There's also a framed picture and clippings Governor Gardner received from President Roosevelt in February 1943 after Gardner sent Roosevelt nylon pajamas made from yarn in Cleveland County. Pictures of five First Ladies, including the popular Fay Webb Gardner, are here.

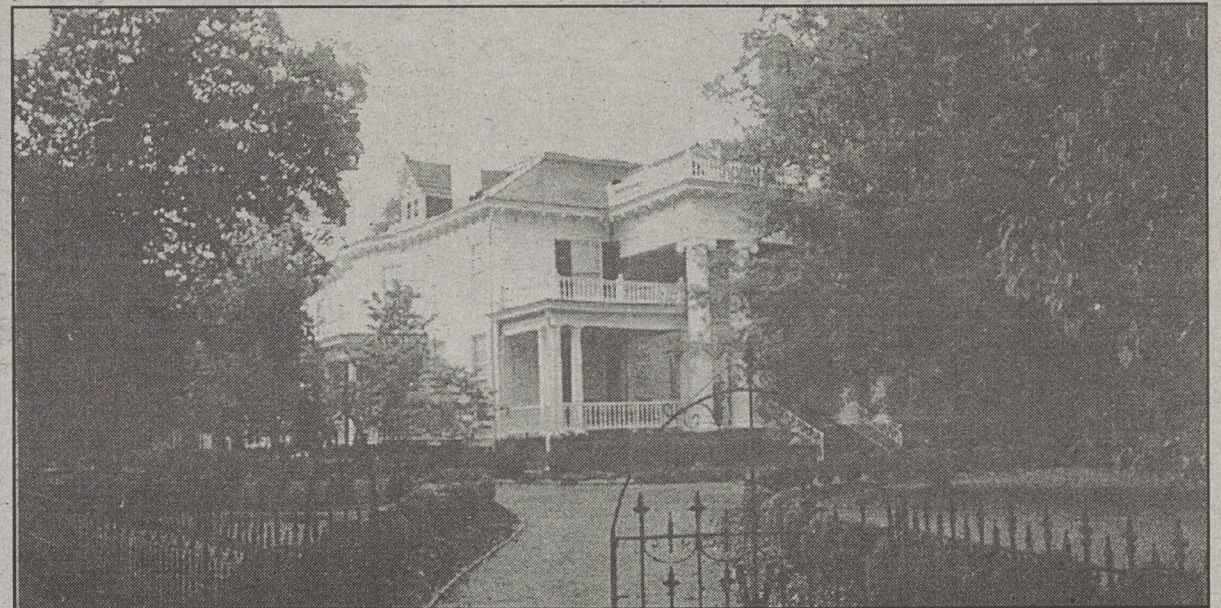
In the inn bar, Gardner has covered the walls with photos and newspaper clippings of his grandfathers lengthy career in North Carolina and the nation's capitol.

A featured wall holds five letters from three presidents, including one from Lyndon Johnson eight days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

"With everything President Johnson must have been going through after the assassination he took the time to write my grandmother," says Gardner. Johnson expressed appreciation for Mrs. Gardner's support during the crisis.

Even Gardner was surprised when he removed the kitchen ceiling plaster during renovation and found an unusual decorated crushed tin ceiling, unique in only about seven houses in the county at the turn of the century.

Over the years, actors and entertainers Jack Benny, Ava Gardner, Andy Griffin, Don Knotts and Joan Crawford have been honored guests. Floyd Patterson was a visitor during his reign as World Heavyweight Boxing champion. Recently, Whitney Houston was a guest when she



Inn at Webley Cleveland County's historic Webley on Lafayette Street in Shelby

was in the county for her brothers wedding.

The unique bed and breakfast inn is identified by the National Register of Historic Places as one of the most distinguished private residences in the state.

The current owners have received many awards for their loving and outstanding restoration of the home, including the Gertrude S. Carraway Award from Preservation North Carolina.

Twin parlors, a formal dining room and a bright and cheerful breakfast room have their own unique decor, including antiques, hardwood floors, Oriental rugs, designer fabrics, and museum-quality window treatments and drapings.

A group of five matching brass chandeliers adorn the formal areas on the main level of the house.

See WEBLEY, Pg. 7



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