
Historic homes worth drive

By **Jay Blinderman**
Staff Writer

Most people driving south on Highway 6 drive right past the exit leading to Navasota.

But for those who take the exit, the town is full of surprises.

The heyday of Navasota occurred in the era from 1850 to 1900, the time when cotton was king. Cotton is no longer king, and an area that once bustled with life now rests quietly off the beaten track. But interesting sights and relics of the cotton days have been left behind, some restored to their original beauty.

The Castle Inn, now a bed and breakfast, is one of the more beautiful homes in Grimes county which has been restored.

What makes the Castle unique is its availability as a nightly or weekend retreat. The three-story inn has four bedrooms available for rent, each fully furnished.

The Castle, built in 1893 by Ward Birrell Templeman, was restored last year by present owners Helen and Tim Urquhart who bought the property two years ago.

Tim had been a pilot for Continental Airlines for 28 years.

"Because of the bankruptcy and the strike I decided to kiss off," Tim says about his retirement from Continental.

"But I'm not out to pasture, I've never worked so hard in my life."

The Urquharts have collected antiques for 30 years and almost all of their collection furnishes the bedrooms and living areas, or

is displayed in some way in the home. Guests are free to roam about the house and admire the antiques.

Although the Castle is available for luncheons and meetings, the Urquharts say most of their business comes from the rental of the rooms, with a majority of the visitors coming from the Bryan/College Station area. It is also popular as a honeymoon spot, they say.

The Castle Inn is not the only thing to see in Navasota. The downtown business district is registered on the state historical register and antique shops and specialty stores line the streets.

One business that does not find its home directly in the downtown area but is still worth visiting, is the Texas Basket Factory's Navasota outlet.

The actual factory and mill operation is based in Jacksonville, Texas, but some baskets and small wood products are hand made and painted at the Navasota location. The inside of the outlet is stacked wall-to-wall with every size and shape of basket imaginable.

The outlet also sells toy items and arts and crafts accessories. Handmade wooden sleds are another of the many specialty items sold at the basket store.

David Woods, an employee of the Navasota outlet, also paints landscapes and Western scenes reminiscent of a time when Texas was almost totally dependent on agriculture. Woods, who has been commissioned to paint throughout the state, displays a few of his paintings at the basket factory.



Duster Fritsche and Mrs. Wilbert Feldman pass the time at the Schroeder Grocery in Whitehall, just south of Navasota. The store, which serves the surrounding rural community, opened in 1929 and originally stood across the street from the grocery's current location. The structure which now houses the grocery was built in 1934. Mrs. Feldman bought the store in 1977.