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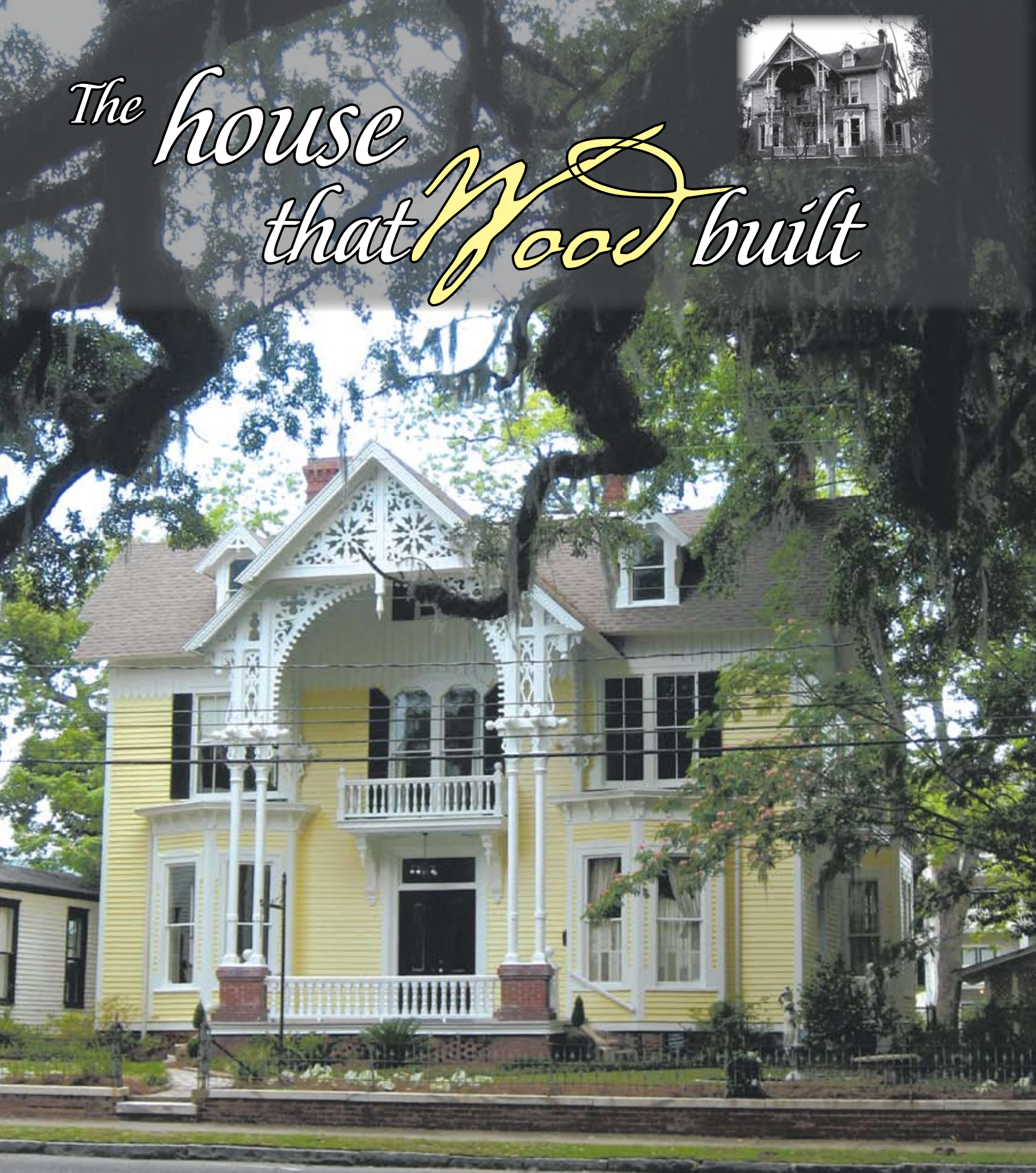
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Golden Isles

MAGAZINE

Through the Garden Gate
Our Home and Garden Issue

The house that Wood built



Story By *J.M. Lacey*

Photos By *Yvonne Buss*

Architect J. A. Wood was already known for designing luxury hotels, churches and residences by the time Timothy Mahoney approached him to construct a house at 1709 Reynolds Street in Brunswick. Born June 11, 1837 in Bethel, N.Y., Wood began his career in 1863 in Poughkeepsie. He developed a reputation for a certain style of architecture, particularly the Moorish design seen in many of his buildings. He had a scathing distaste for the Queen Anne style as was evident in a letter he addressed to the editor of The Thomasville Times in 1886: "Dear Sir — Please correct the statement in Saturday's Times that the 'Piney Woods Hotel is built in the Queen Anne style.' Neither the Piney Woods nor any other hotel that I have ever designed is in that beastly style, which is at best no style at all"



*A*cross from Brunswick's historic courthouse, through the live oak trees that adorn Magnolia Square, sits a house at 1709 Reynolds Street, lovingly tended after more than a century.

Pass through its ornamental gate, stroll up the walk and open its doors to bright, relaxing color tones, and you'll instantly feel you've stepped into a beach cottage. As you gaze upon the décor of antique furniture and genteel ladies in paintings framed upon the walls, you will think you've stepped back in time. And when you are greeted by its owners, Mark and Yvonne Buss, you are made to feel as though you have come home.

This is exactly the atmosphere the Busses were hoping for — a Victorian home on the coast they can share with friends and family. A place where friends can visit and relax, throw down their luggage and not be afraid to touch anything.

"We don't want it to feel too stuffy," Yvonne says of the design and layout of the home. And indeed, it is a place to kick off your sandals and sit by one of the large French doors open to the summer breeze, sipping iced tea.

In 2004 the Busses purchased the Victorian, still referred to as the Mahoney-McGarvey House. The home stood empty for 18 months before Yvonne discovered it on the Internet when searching for historic homes.

"As soon as the picture came up, I thought, 'My gosh! What a darling little Victorian cottage.' It was so cute," Yvonne relates. When they visited the house in person, the three-story, 5,426 square foot home turned out to be more than just a little cottage. By the time the Busses were finished with renovations, the house included 10 rooms, three bathrooms, a small morning room and a butler's pantry.

Nearly all the hardwood floors in the home are original. The shiny floors, made of heart pine wood an inch and a quarter thick, create an elegant scene in the long hallways. The ceiling medallions are also original and each one is unique. The one in the drawing room has a seashell design, perfect for the Busses' coastal layout. The only remaining original light fixture hangs in the parlor from a medallion design of corn, wheat, birds and apples. The 400 pound sliding doors that separate the parlor and library are also original to the home.

"You won't find this much original work in a lot of homes," Mark explains. "There haven't been that many people that have lived here, which is why the house has survived."

The house was built for Timothy Mahoney, a railway engineer. He commissioned architect J.A. Wood to



Classic Victorian on the outside, comfortable cottage on the inside. The remade Mahoney-McGarvey House in Old Town Brunswick has found new life with new owners.

design the house, the same architect credited for designing Brunswick's Oglethorpe Hotel and the Tampa Bay Hotel in Florida. The house was completed in 1891. Wood's familiar Moorish influence is prominent in the home's gingerbread design. Its tall peaked roofs, two prominent porches, and bay windows are instant trademarks of Victorian dwellings.

Timothy's last surviving child, Julia, left the estate to her friend, Virginia McGarvey, in 1949. Virginia opened the house in 1956 as a home furnishing shop, "Trendition House." The house was later purchased by Melanie "Mellie" Youmans, who opened a tea room and antique shop in 1996.

The structure of the house is solid with its woodwork made of heart pine. But during the Busses' first year of owning their new home, they still had to do a lot of work.

"The backyard was awful," Yvonne explains. "Stuff was growing everywhere and there were piles of debris." They cleaned up the yard

and ripped out the chain link fence, allowing for a better view of the river. The large pecan tree in the backyard is believed to be original to the home.

The siding of the house was pink, but soon was repainted a more sophisticated soft yellow. The spindles along the porch were redone in keeping with Wood's original design. They also painted the porch ceiling blue, one of the original colors Victorians used on porches so the bees wouldn't nest in them, Mark says. The porch ceiling at the Tampa Bay Hotel used a darker blue.

The decorative spear-tipped fence is also original to the home, with the exception of the gate, which the Busses replaced with a duplicate they found on

e-Bay after the original was stolen. Inside, the Busses upgraded the bathrooms and refinished the interior design. The only major damage they encountered was the bay area in the dining room. The roof collapsed under the weight of debris and water that had collected over the years. The area needed to be replaced, including the flooring.

The staircase was another major renovation. When the Busses moved in, the hand-carved woodwork on the staircase and woodwork in the halls had an antiqued or "pickling" effect, which had been done by the McGarveys when they opened their shop in the 1950s.

"It was very depressing," Yvonne says. The lower half of the hallway was orange and the woodwork was very dark. Their contractor suggested stripping and staining the double rail. The rest of the staircase was painted white. An original design of a hand-carved

daisy remains in the newel post. A similar design of a daisy can be seen on the ceiling medallion on the second floor above the staircase.

All of the rooms are painted with soft seaside colors of blues, taupes, yellows and variations of aqua, creating a bright, open and cheerful atmosphere in the home.

The dining room, originally "dead red" as Yvonne refers to it, is now in a soft Robin's egg blue, a color you would see on a sandy beach, she says. The painting that hangs in its gilded frame above the fireplace is a perfect match for the room. It is of a young lady in her early 19th century yellow dress and white shawl. The blue ribbon that pulls back her raven



hair matches the belt on her dress.

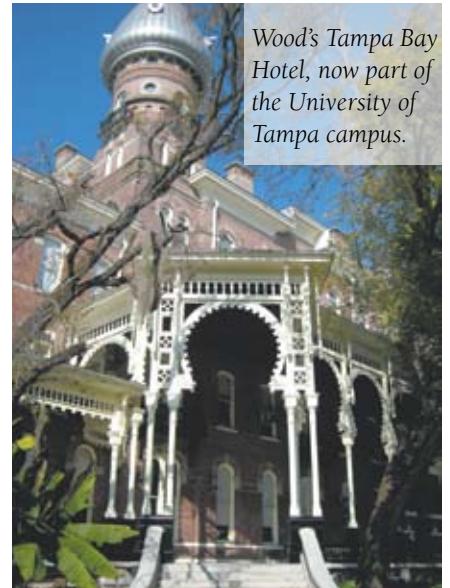
"Everyone thinks I painted around her," says Yvonne, "but I found her later, in an antique shop."

The ornate fireplaces found throughout the house attest to the era in which it was built. Downstairs, each fireplace is adorned with hand-carved relief tile. The ceramic tiles have their own unique designs, such as the acorn design in the library. Profiles of Queen

Victoria and Prince Albert are carved into the dining room's tiles.

The drawing room, dining room, parlor and library all have French doors that, when opened, allow a free-flowing breeze, or cooling system, throughout the house, necessary for homes built in the pre-air conditioned South. The house feels open with its 12-foot high ceilings and many tall windows.

The Busses' diplomatic mixture of the



Wood's Tampa Bay Hotel, now part of the University of Tampa campus.

modern and the original make the house more livable. The tiny staircase in the butler's pantry that led to the servants' quarters was removed long ago. What was once a servant's bedroom has been taken over to expand the bathroom. The other servant's bedroom is now a dressing room, but the Busses have kept the large fireplace in the kitchen that served as the original oven.

The Busses' sophisticated style and desire to keep to the theme of the 117-year old home is seen in the antique furniture displayed in every room. Most of the furniture was purchased from local antique shops. Yvonne learned that two of her purchases, a wicker chair she put in the little girl's room and the lamp on their kitchen table, at one time belonged to Mellie Youmans when she owned the home.

Yvonne's classic style and creative flair is seen throughout the home. She designed and made all of the drapes and blinds — not an easy task with some windows as high as 10 feet. Her little touches also make their home unique. Antique purses are framed and hung on the wall of the dressing room, and her embroidery work is displayed in one of the guest rooms. Each room has a chair atop the sitting room mantle. The miniature was also a treasure from an antique shop.

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"This [house] kind of reflects my personality," says Yvonne. "I thought my granddaughter put it best when I brought her here and it was still pink, and she said, 'Grandma, it looks like Barbie's dream house.' I guess if you look at it, it's been a doll house for me." She has spent the last few years contributing just the right pieces and paintings to her doll house.

One has to have a lot of passion for a home like the Mahoney-McGarvey house on Reynolds Street, explains Yvonne, because it takes a lot of work to maintain it. But for now, the Busses are enjoying the close community atmosphere. Restaurants and a marina are within walking distance and the beach is close by.

"We don't really need all of these bedrooms," Yvonne says, "but it's sure fun to share the home with friends and family. It's not everyone's typical beach cottage." ■



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