



BELLE GROVE



The misty memory of a beautiful lady haunts me - a beautiful lady that I never knew. My first introduction to her was in 1969 when I saw her picture in a book, "Ghosts along the Mississippi." Her beauty was not created from flesh and bone, but brick, mortar, and lime. For you see, my beautiful lady was a house - Belle Grove.

Belle Grove was built in 1857 by John Andrews. Located near White Castle,

Louisiana, she was the largest plantation home ever built. Her architect, Henry Howard, also designed Nottaway, another, still extant, Louisiana plantation home. Belle Grove was a vast house that stood on a twelve-foot, arched foundation. The shafts of her soaring Corinthian columns were thirty feet high, the column's carved capitals the height of a six-foot man. Her interior was spacious, and filled with carved-marble mantels, highly-polished hardwood floors, and richly-detailed molding and pilasters.

However, Mr. Andrews did not enjoy Belle Grove's beauty and pleasures for long. He lost his fortune during the Civil War, and Belle Grove, built to last the Andrews family for generations to come, was sold to Henry Ware in 1867. Over the years that followed, the Ware family - rich, powerful, and extravagant - filled Belle Grove with exquisite antiques, rich tapestries, Dresden china, and gilded paintings, most of which they had purchased in Europe.

During the reign of the Wares, Belle Grove glistened with life. Her lavish dinner parties, sumptuous balls, and private race tracts were the talk of the state. Yet all this grandeur was dependant on the simple stalks of sugar





cane that grew in undulating vastness on the vast plantation that surrounded Belle Grove. When the sugar cane crop went “bust” three years in a row, so did the Ware’s fortune, and that lost fortune led to Belle Grove’s demise. In 1924, the Wares closed up Belle Grove, moved to New Orleans, and seldom returned to visit their grand house, which set so regally under its cathedral of majestic oaks.

And so Belle Grove sat, and thus began her tragic downward spiral into oblivion. For more than twenty-five years she languished, abandoned, and mostly forgotten. Her rooms, which had once bubbled with life, were now silent – a creeping lush mantle of greenish-brown mold covering her fading beauty. Time, neglect, and the onslaught of southern summers took it’s vengeance, as did the vandals who are credited with setting her on fire. By the morning of March 16, 1952, Belle Grove was a smoldering ruin. A subdivision now sits atop her grave.

I’ve often wondered who was the last person to leave Belle Grove? Was it a member of the Ware family, who walked down her long sculpted hallway, locked her front door, and never returned? Or was it a faithful servant who had

walked down that same hallway for years, answering that same front door that he would now lock one last time?

And what of the ensuing silence in that vast, empty house? Did it prance up and down the hallways, staircases, and out onto the pillared porticoes? Did it twist itself around the soaring Corinthian columns like ivy? Or was it like itself and the house it infested – silent and forlorn?

Here’s hoping that somewhere there is a box in someone’s dusty attic full of old photographs of the beautiful lady who haunts my memory. And here’s hoping this article will resurrect a few. For more information on Belle Grove, please visit www.bellegrove.net. ☀

Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers. May God bless, and keep a song in your heart.



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