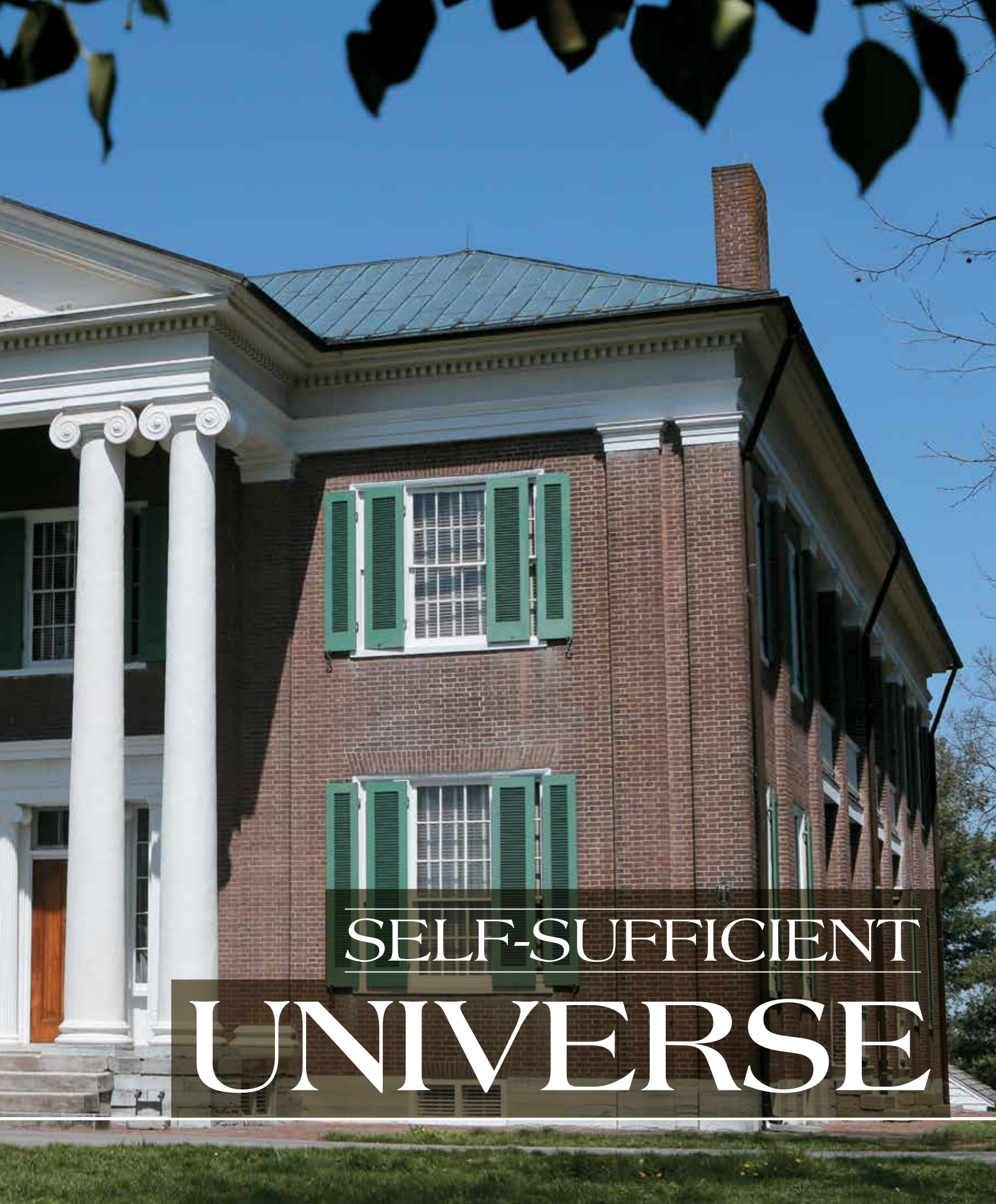
GREAT
KENTUCKY
HOMES

Waveland State Historic Site embodies the intertwined histories of the Boone and Bryan families in a well-preserved plantation that gives a fascinating glimpse of antebellum Kentucky

By Jacalyn Carfagno

Photos By
Kirk Schlea Photography


SELF-SUFFICIENT
UNIVERSE

Original oil portraits adorn the parlor. From left, Margaret Bryan, Joseph Henry Bryan, and Joseph Bryan

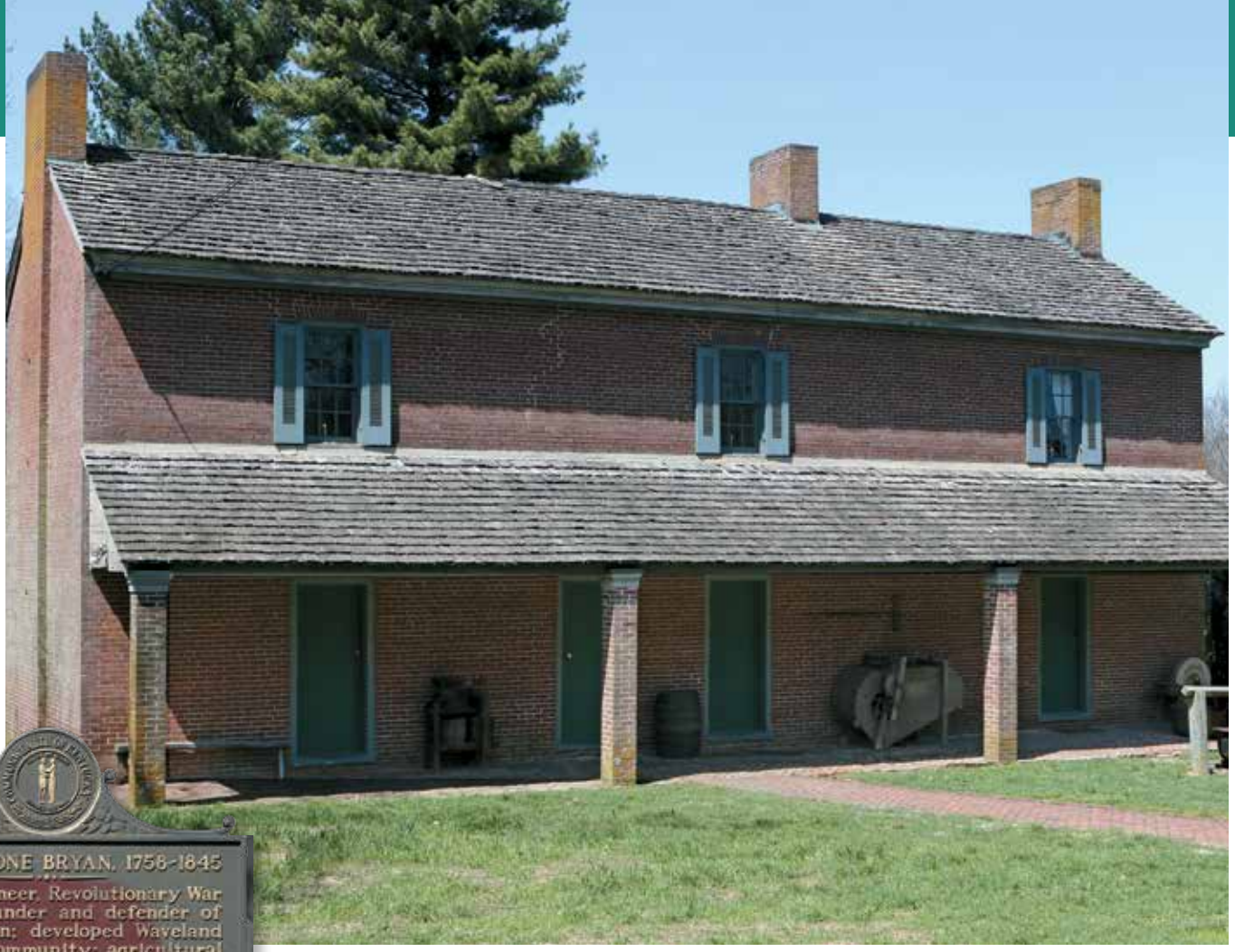
Joseph Bryan built the office in his new home with seven doors. As the master of Waveland in 1847, Bryan oversaw a huge, diverse enterprise that produced hemp fiber sold in distant markets, butter and hams eaten locally, and fast horses.

Three of those doors gave him direct access to — or perhaps away from — the formal parlor and dining room and an upstairs bedroom.

But the others defined his wealth: two sealed closets or safes where he could store money and valuables.

Two others led outside. One gave way to the plantation's fields, so he could oversee production, whether it was curing or churning, planting, or harvesting. The other door provided direct access to the road and the many business callers who traveled the six miles from downtown Lexington to Waveland.

Now a state historic site, Waveland welcomes visitors. Guests can tour the Greek Revival home Bryan built at Waveland, the slave quarters where the family's meals were cooked, the smokehouse, and a family cemetery. The hundreds of acres of crops that waved in the breeze — hence



Slaves, who lived in quarters such as these pictured, were instrumental to the success of Waveland. An exhibit based on research on slavery at Waveland will be installed there in June.

IF YOU GO

Waveland State Historic Site
225 Waveland Museum Ln.
(off Nicholasville Road just south of Man o' War Boulevard)

Public tours April through November:
Wednesday-Saturday – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday – 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., last tour starting at 4 p.m.
Price: $10 adults; special rates for seniors, military, AAA members, children, and school groups

Tours available throughout the year by appointment.
Phone: (859) 272-3611
Email: charla.reed@ky.gov
Website: parks.ky.gov/parks/historicsites/waveland/

the name — have been whittled to only 10, but the rural setting, beautiful gardens, and elegant house provide a welcome respite from 21st-century life.

Waveland and its grounds are reason enough to visit, but the story they have to tell encompasses the Revolutionary and Civil wars, Kentucky's earliest European settlers and explorers, and, since this is Kentucky, racehorses.

Family bonds

About a century before Joseph Bryan built the Waveland mansion, his great-grandfather moved his family to North Carolina's Yadkin Valley. A few years later, another restless family, the Boones, settled in the same area. "From that time," as the Kentucky Encyclopedia puts it, "the two families' histories are linked."

It's easy to get lost in the intertwined family trees as the Bryans and the Boones intermarried, but suffice it to say that Daniel Boone was Joseph Bryan's double great-uncle. In 1756, Boone married Rebecca Bryan, and her brother William — Joseph's grandfather — married Boone's sister Mary.

A tall case clock, situated on the landing halfway up the formal staircase, dates to the 1830s.

The families remained in the Yadkin Valley through the Revolutionary War, although explorations beyond it were common, including a venture into what is now Kentucky by William Bryan and Daniel Boone in 1773.

During the Revolutionary War, Boone served in the militia, fighting British-allied Native Americans in Kentucky, while William Bryan and his son Daniel, both accomplished gunsmiths, worked in North Carolina making and repairing guns for the Colonial army, earning the same pay and benefits as soldiers.

After the war the early settlement of Boonesborough in Kentucky was secured with fortifications and, in 1779, Boone and his friend and fellow adventurer William Bryan led 50 families from North Carolina to what is now Kentucky.

Bryan and three of his brothers (an 1882 story in the Louisville Courier-Journal says that William, "although not the oldest, was the boldest, most active and self reliant of the brothers") established a fortified settlement on the Elkhorn Creek, known as Bryan Station.

STUDENT RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON WAVELAND SLAVE LIFE

In April 1865 a man called Essex appeared at Camp Nelson, 15 miles south of Waveland and joined the Union Army. He had spent most of his 65 years up until that time enslaved by the Bryan family at Waveland.

Students at the University of Kentucky uncovered the fascinating story of Essex Harrison (the last name he took when he joined the Union Army and gained his freedom) through a research project in the spring of 2017 on slavery at Waveland. Their findings will form the basis of an exhibition that will go up at Waveland in June.

Although Harrison never learned to read or write and was already 65 when he gained his freedom, he went on to buy real estate in Lexington, something few former slaves managed to do. Harrison also married and had a son, Samuel, who was literate, became a cobbler, and owned his own shop. Essex Harrison died sometime between 1878, when he wrote his will, and 1881 when his wife, Martha, is listed in a county directory as widowed.

An upstairs bedroom in the slave quarters provides a glimpse of life during this era.

The students, working with professor Amy Murrell Taylor, traced slaveholdings at Waveland beginning in 1818, finding the slave population ranged from two to as many as 19 in 1848 and 1849. Following the trails in property records, they found that the Bryans, like other slaveholders, bought, sold, and even mortgaged slaves as their enterprises demanded more labor or they needed cash to cover debts or expand holdings. For example, an 1824 deed book entry suggests that Daniel Bryan — father of Joseph who built the current Waveland mansion — had pledged Essex and others slaves to satisfy a debt. If Bryan didn't pay by the assigned date, his creditors had the right to "advertise and sell said several negroe's or so many of them as will satisfy the amount due and unpaid to either of them," according to the deed.

Essex remained with the Bryans, though, and the students were able to find traces, including his 1841 membership in Providence Church (which still exists today), which was attended by members of the Bryan family as well as their slaves.

There is also a pass written by Joseph Bryan on May 21, 1850: "Please let Essex and Gilbert pass to the Lexington Markets, Fayette Co., to return this evening to my farm on Lexington & Danville Turnpike."

As the students note, the pass is both a sign that Bryan apparently trusted the two men to do business for him in Lexington, and that they were not free to move about unless they had "permission" from their owner.

Joseph Bryan's office contains a total of seven doors, a testament to his prosperity.

Although the settlement survived, the Bryans left in 1780 after Native Americans killed both William Bryan and his son William.

Many of the settlers returned to North Carolina to stay but one of William's sons, Daniel, made his life in Kentucky, where he founded Waveland.

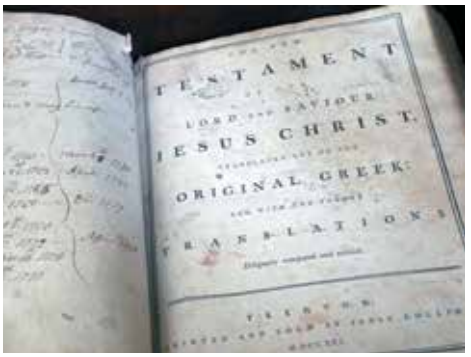
Like many other things in the Bryan story, it is sometimes hard to tell where fact ends and family lore takes over. Unverified accounts say the land was part of a grant to Daniel Bryan for his Revolutionary War service. Legend also has it that the land was surveyed for Daniel (often known as Daniel Boone Bryan, although he had no middle name legally) by his uncle, Daniel Boone.

What is known for sure is that 600 acres passed into Daniel Bryan's ownership in 1790, and he built a stone house where his son's Greek Revival mansion now stands.

Thriving enterprise

It was Daniel Bryan who developed Waveland into a large, complex enterprise. In addition to farming crops and raising livestock, Bryan had a thriving operation making guns and gunpowder, crafts he had brought with him from North Carolina. By 1839, tax records show Waveland included more than 1,000 acres in Fayette and Jessamine counties, 10 slaves, 22 horses, and 245 head of cattle, all valued at $68,495, equivalent to about $1.8 million today.

When Daniel Bryan died in 1845, at the age of 87, Waveland passed to Joseph, one of his 10 children. Family lore says that Daniel had asked his son to build a great house to replace the original stone house, and so Joseph soon began working with John McMurtry, a prominent local architect, to build Waveland in the elegant, symmetrical Greek Revival style popular at the time. The brick



Mary Boone Bryan's bible

Daniel Bryan's watch

Joseph Bryan's wine flask and Margaret Bryan's tea box

Dating from the early 18th century, Squire Boone's chair is the house's oldest and most treasured item.

Women wore these decorative items, called chatelaine, during antebellum times.

A "fluter" for making ruffles in clothes was used in the mid-1800s.

exterior, laid in Flemish bond pattern, is dominated by the central, two-story classical portico supported by four Ionic columns. The decorative frieze over the columns is modeled after one found on the Acropolis in Athens.

The exterior walls are three bricks deep and the interior a full foot thick — an important form of insulation before central heat and air. Bryan family history also recounts that most, if not all, of the wood used in building the Waveland mansion came from the family's land: oak for supporting beams, ash for floors, and cherry and walnut for doors and woodwork.

Joseph prospered as his father had. Tax records show that by 1863 he owned 17 slaves, two mules, 70 cattle, and 30 hogs. That year, although the acreage had decreased to 543 acres (historians speculate because land had been given or sold to children), Waveland produced 3,500 bushels of corn and 350 bushels of wheat.

And horses. The horse population had grown to 81 by 1863, an indication that Joseph had launched Waveland into equine breeding. Joseph, a Confederate sympathizer, sold some hors-

Tea Tuesday is a popular addition at Waveland. Historical interpreter Susan Miller, in period costume, serves tea and scones.

es as mounts to the Confederate Army. After the South lost the Civil War, Joseph fled to Canada but eventually returned. In later years he moved into town, leaving Waveland in the care of his son, Joseph Henry.

A few years before his death in 1887, the elder Joseph recalled spending time with his great-uncle, Daniel Boone. In a letter that his wife, Bettie, wrote for him because of his "feeble state of health," she shares her husband's memories of an 1815 visit with Boone. "He remembers asking Boone how many Indians he had killed. Boone replied, 'I am very sorry to say that I ever killed any, for they have always been kinder to me than the whites.' "

Under Joseph Henry Bryan, Waveland became very much like a modern horse breeding operation with sales of its prized trotting horses recorded to a Rockefeller in New York and a buyer in Mexico. His Waveland Chief was recognized as "a celebrated sire," and his Wild Rake never lost a heat. But, despite success at the track, Joseph Henry ran into financial troubles. By 1894, there were 23 mortgages on the farm and everything on it, including the trotters. The house was sold through foreclosure and the era of Bryan ownership ended.

But the elegant Waveland mansion that his father had built survived. It passed through two private owners before, in 1956, the University of Kentucky acquired the house and significant acreage. In 1971, UK sold what is now the Waveland historic site to the state park system, retaining most of the acreage for the research farm that still exists.

Set far back from the road and surrounded by a graceful lawn and large, mature trees, Waveland still inspires awe and admiration. With relatively few owners during its long history, the house has not suffered major alterations, despite a fire in 1984. In 2000 Waveland received a grant to replace the roof and install carpets appropriate to the period of its construction, one of which is based on a carpet remnant found in the house.

Some Bryan/Boone items have found their way back to Waveland, including the Squire Boone chair that Daniel Boone's father acquired in the 1720s. One of the first pieces visitors see is the tall case clock (the term grandfather clock came into use later), situated halfway to the second floor on the landing of the stairway that dominates the formal entry. Daniel Bryan brought the clock, made in Connecticut in the 1830s, to the property and it was returned to Waveland about a century and a half later by his great-grandson, Volney Bryan.

Guides dressed in period costume now greet Waveland visitors to the house and grounds for tours and special events, including teas, bourbon tastings, a Kentucky Derby breakfast, and an annual presentation of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," written in the same period Waveland was built, that is acted out from room to room. The site is also home to games of the vintage baseball team, the Bluegrass Barons, and now hosts weddings in a barn that's been moved to the property.

It's a different world from the one Joseph Bryan oversaw from his seven-doored office, but attentive visitors might still hear the echoes of the Bryans and the Boones at Waveland. **KM**