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In Kentucky

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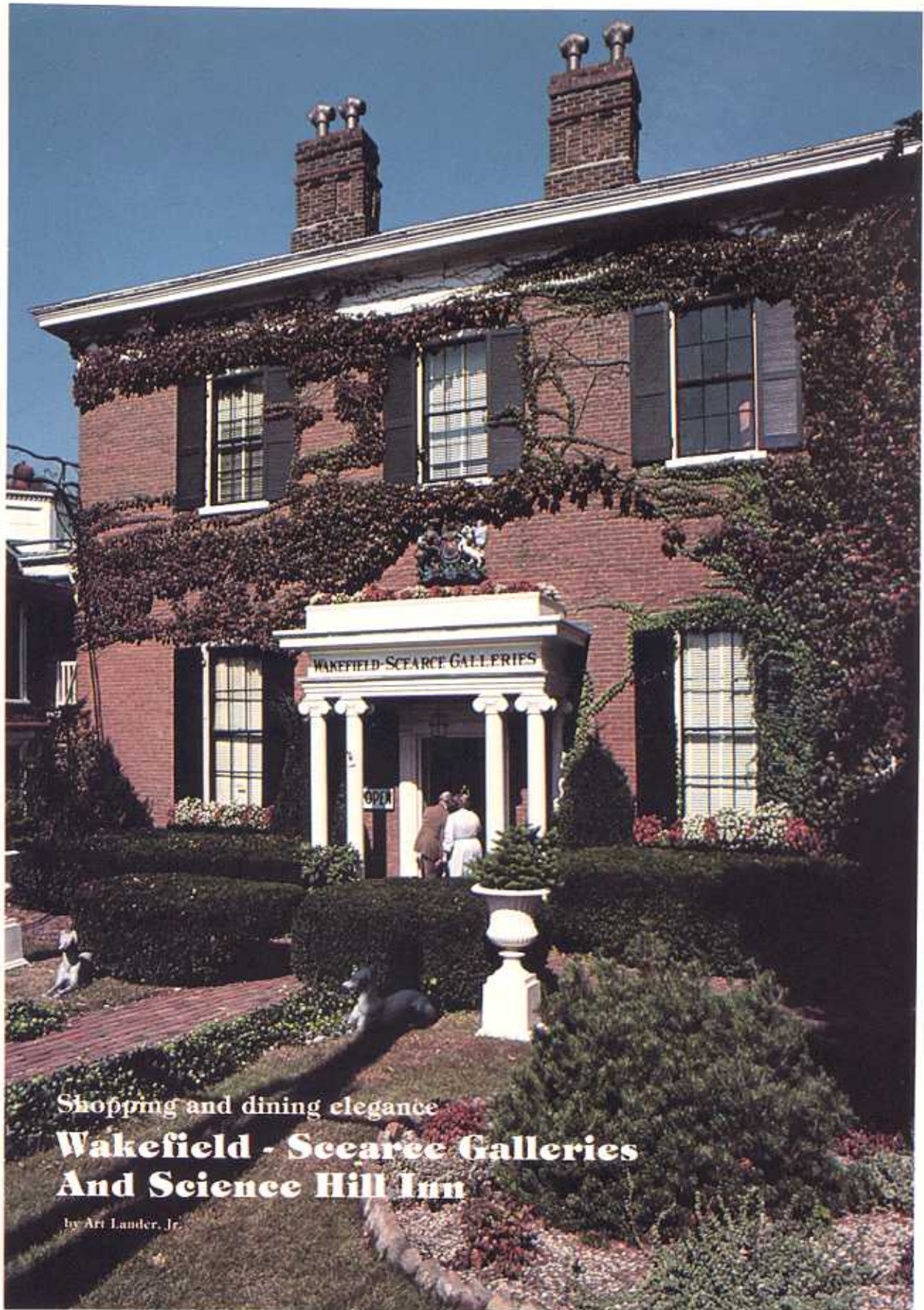
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Shopping and dining elegance
**Wakefield - Searce Galleries
And Science Hill Inn**

by Art Lander, Jr.

Photograph By: David Talbott - The Studio



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The early 19th century was the beginning of the "Old South Era" in central Kentucky. The frontier had been tamed, and the citizenry of America's 15th state were hard at work building empires in tobacco and cattle, whiskey-making and breeding thoroughbred horses. The landed gentry were the impetus for the development of the cultured society, and their sons and daughters were sent to private academies to further their educations by studying art, music, science, elocution and the military. It was a foregone conclusion that they would provide the leadership on the battlefield as well as in agriculture, business, politics, the arts and religion.

Shelbyville was one such town in central Kentucky that prospered during this genteel era. As the county seat, the geographic center of rural Shelby county, Shelbyville not only became known for its tobacco auctions, but drew enterprising merchants with hopes of sharing in the wealth. It was an ideal setting for educational institutions, a bustling economic environment set against the backdrop of aristocratic bliss.

At one time there were seven private schools in Shelbyville, among them Stewart's School for Girls and George Searce's School for Boys, but the one that gained the town the most prestige in educational circles was Julia

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Tevis's Science Hill School, which became one of the nation's foremost college-preparatory academies in the 114 years that it was in operation. Its founder, a school teacher from Virginia who married a Methodist minister, was a crusader of sorts for the rights of women a century and a half before anybody ever heard of the Women's Movement. As the story goes, Mrs. Tevis stood on a hill north of downtown Shelbyville and vowed to start a school where women could learn about science in addition to the social graces (English and home-making), which was just about all women were taught in those days. Thus the name Science Hill School, and a educational tradition that was proudly upheld from 1925 to 1939. Young women from all over the U. S., but mostly the South, attended Science Hill. Many of them later went to Vassar or Wellesley Colleges.

By 1850 as many as 300 students were enrolled, including the boarders and commuting day students. During the 114 years that Science Hill School was open it had only four principals, and was solely owned and operated by members of the Tevis and Poynter families. The Poynter family was a synonymous with education for almost a century in Kentucky. Elmwood Academy, in Perryville, was founded and run by T. C. Poynter, and his sister, Mrs.



Sarah Poynter Griffing for 30 years between 1895 and 1925.

In 1939 when Science Hill School closed, two local businessmen bought the 87-room brick building on 525 Washington Street, and converted it into a residential inn, where rooms were available, and family-style meals were served in the spacious dining room. It was not until eight years later that Mark J. Searce in partnership with the late Mark A. Wakefield leased out the east wing of the building, which had been a chapel for the girl's school. Their partnership founded the Wakefield-Searce Galleries. That same year Mr. Searce made his first trip to England in search of rare antique silver, furniture, oil paintings, glassware, and other imported furnishings that would earn the gallery a reputation of excellence.

In 1960 Searce was able to purchase the entire building, and in doing so saved it from being razed by a supermarket chain. The red brick building now houses a dining/shopping complex that includes the Science Hill Inn; Wakefield-Searce Galleries; Country Lady, a women's clothing store, and The Linen Press, a shop that specializes in imported handmade tabletop linens.

After Mr. Searce purchased the old school building he initiated an extensive restoration program that took 13 months to complete. More than 37 miles of new wiring, and 14 miles of plumbing were installed. There are ac-

tually five connected buildings with a floor space of approximately 58,000 square feet in the historic Georgian structure which Mr. Searce says dates back to 1790. "The west end of the building is definitely the oldest. You can tell by the workmanship, the timbers especially," he added. A great deal of time and money has been spent to learn what little is known about the complex of buildings that are believed to have been an inn or tavern originally. For years attorneys have been searching through wills to verify dates of early ownership, and uses of the building. It is believed that in 1850 the fifth building was constructed. The rectangular courtyard between the four original buildings was enclosed in glass in 1850.

In the late 1840's when a cholera epidemic swept through Shelbyville, and several dozen residents died, Science Hill's wells were the only safe source of water. In all there are three wells on the two and one-half acres, the largest one, eight feet wide and 26 feet deep, is under the closed courtyard. At one time all the rooms in the building had fireplaces. In the 1970's the Science Hill Inn/Wakefield-Searce Galleries complex was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The annual Christmas celebration is the busiest time of the year at the dining/shopping gallery complex. An 18-foot Christmas tree decorated with teddy bears, candy canes, tinsel and handmade ornaments is traditionally



placed just inside the doorway to the Wakefield-Searce Galleries. The whole complex is elaborately decorated. Preparations begin at least a month in advance. The four-day party and open house is open to the public. All rooms on the three floors have their own Christmas trees, and are decorated for the holiday. The 17 regular employees (there are a total of 33 employees including delivery men and cabinetmakers) are involved in the preparations for the Christmas celebration. Dwight Cobb, Mr. Searce's assistant, is in charge of laying out all the room settings, which are changed each spring, summer and just before Christmas.

The Christmas showing and party began in 1963 as a one-day affair, but by the 1970's it had grown to three days. This year the event lasted four days for the first time. Christmas music this year was provided by the Henry Robbers Trio, a group from Louisville. In past years the entertainment has been provided by the Louisville Boy's Choir and other groups. Punch and hors d'oeuvres were served. Invitations are extended mainly to those who have purchased articles from the gallery in the past. More than 7,000 persons attended the three-day Christmas celebration last year. This year's showing and party was held November 8, 9, 10, and 11.

A walk through the gallery takes visitors through rooms and rooms of impressive and exquisite furnishings. Mr. Searce has three full-time buyers in England. Georgian cups, candelabras, dishes, plates, silverware and tea trays of marked Old Sheffield and Victorian plate are imported. Regular shipments of furniture, paintings, brass and limited edition porcelains by Doughty, Boehm, Cybis, Linder, Granget, Van Ruyckeevelt, Burgues and Ispanky are featured at the gallery. Upstairs there are 10 rooms of bedroom and dining room furniture, and items such as English tea kettles, coach lamps, ornate mirrors and china cabinets. The second floor balcony of the enclosed courtyard features prints by such noted artists as Joseph Petro, Paul Sawyer and James N. Slick, and original English oil paintings of rural scenes. On the ground floor by the fountain in the foyer is a plaque commemorating the birthplace of Carl Ernest Bricken, educator, pianist and composer who won a Pulitzer prize in 1929. Couches, shrubbery and a large steel Spanish knight in armour astride a papier-mache horse grace the courtyard. Wakefield-Searce Galleries is open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Saturday. The telephone number at the gallery is (502) 633-4382.

Many visitors who spend the morning shopping at Wakefield-Searce Galleries, exploring the many splendidly decorated rooms in the historic building, take their lunch at the adjacent Science Hill Inn. It's easy to imagine the hallways filled with the frivolous giggling and laughter of Science Hill school girls. Millions of meals were prepared in the "old kitchen," which was recently renovated. For more than 150 years three meals a day were cooked in it for as many as 200 persons a sitting.

Today, a far more gracious style of dining than the school girls even knew is one of the reasons Science Hill draws visitors from near and far. They come for the dining experience as much as the delicious, wholesome country

food that is so much a part of Kentucky's heritage. Fine china and crystal, white table cloths with a fresh floral centerpiece each day, grace the circular walnut tables. The dining room is decorated with English prints, tasteful drapes and wallpaper. The courteous waiters are attired in pressed white jackets and black bow ties.

The Science Hill Inn is operated under a lease agreement by Donna and Terry Gill. Open Tuesday through Sunday, 11:30 to 2:30, the inn menu features soups, sandwiches, and entrees (complete with vegetables, homemade breads and salad). The Sunday buffet includes country ham from Shelby County, and fried chicken, regulars on the noonday menu, in addition to a third meat choice such as barbecue chicken or beef. The noonday spread also includes a daily special not on the menu, which the waiters will be happy to bring to your attention.

Sometimes the special of the day is such dishes as quiche lorraine or shrimp creole. Five vegetables, as many as seven salads and at least two homemade desserts are included in the Sunday buffet.

Mrs. Gill, with the assistance of two women, does all the cooking, including the pies, buttermilk biscuits and hot water corn bread which are a house specialty. Mrs. Gill teaches a gourmet cooking class through the University of Louisville. The tastefully decorated Georgian Room is the namesake of what is perhaps the all-around favorite on the noonday menu, the Georgian, an incomparable sandwich of turkey, swiss cheese, and ham served on rusk topped with 1000 Island dressing garnished with asparagus spears, ripe olives, bacon strips and slices of hard boiled egg. Reservations are not required; the telephone number of Science Hill Inn is (502) 633-2825.

At the rear of Science Hill Inn is the Red Lion Room, reached by a separate entrance - a narrow sidewalk through the gardens at the rear of the building. The Red Lion is decorated in a Tudor style giving it the atmosphere of an English pub. Open Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 to 2:30, the cozy short-order restaurant specializes in homemade soups and sandwiches. No fried foods are served. The house specialty is a turkey, swiss cheese, corn relish, cucumber, and mayonnaise sandwich on whole wheat bread. Beer and wine are available with meals. The Red Lion Room is a favorite with businessmen on the go; the service is prompt.

For more than 170 years the building has been in continuous use. The brick sidewalks, wrought-iron fencing and aged maples, mulberry and oaks go hand and hand with the rich history that began in the 1790's. The Science Hill Inn and Wakefield-Searce Galleries are a major drawing card for tourism in Shelbyville. Figures indicate that as many as 100,000 persons are drawn to Shelby county each year to visit the inn and gallery. This translates into millions of dollars each year for the local economy, Shelbyville Chamber of Commerce officials estimate. Visitors come from all around the U. S. and Europe. Mr. Searce said that he is delighted to have people browse, and eat lunch. For as much as the gallery and inn are businesses, they are a showcase of historic Shelbyville and the "Old South" lifestyle that even today is a living part of Kentucky's heritage. ■