

Hampton Terrace china comes home

■ Museum acquires china from short-lived grand resort created by N.A. founder.

By **PHYLLIS BRITT**
News Editor

Sometimes perseverance pays off. A couple of years ago, Brenda Baratto, the assistant director of the Aiken County Historical Museum, was invited to check out some of the land on which the Hampton Terrace Hotel once stood.

She had learned that shards of china from the gracious resort were easy to find in certain areas up on the hill off Carolina Avenue, where North Augusta founder James U. Jackson's dream of a grand resort had become a reality in 1903, only to be dashed by a fire in the early morning hours of New Year's Eve 1916.

So she went in search of such artifacts, all that is left of the wooden structure hotel, which had welcomed such guests as Harvey Firestone, President William Howard Taft, Marshall Field and John D. Rockefeller.

"As we were picking up pieces of china, I looked on the back of one and found 'Syracuse China,'" Baratto said.

Thus, a quest was born.

Baratto wrote to the company in upstate New York in May 2008, and received a quick response from Bill Calnan,



Staff photos by Phyllis Britt

Aiken County Historical Museum Executive Director Elliott Levy, left, and local historian Allen Riddick check out the museum's latest acquisitions – four sample plates from which the Hampton Terrace china was made and one from the old Highland Park Hotel (held by Riddick).

ceramic engineer for the china company and a volunteer curator for the archives.

He told Baratto the company indeed still had some sample plates from the hotel.

"It was around the time that the Arts and Heritage Center was being built," said Baratto, who also serves as the president of the Heritage Council of North Augusta.

"I asked [Syracuse China] about their reproducing the

china for the Arts and Heritage Center," she said, explaining the Council thought replica plates would be a good fundraiser for the Center's gift shop.

"But by the time the Arts and Heritage Center opened, Syracuse China had closed," she said.

That didn't stop Baratto. She was referred to the Onondaga Historical Association for Central New York, which has a museum and to which the entire

stock of Syracuse China went. "We wrote and asked if the [Aiken County] museum could have the sample plates on a permanent loan," she said.

She had called and was told the Syracuse museum had received 20,000 artifacts and 1 million pieces of paper (order, bills, etc.) from the china company.

In the interim, museum store

Please see CHINA, page 10A

China

Continued from 1A

manager Sally Barrett was talking up the Bouckville Antique Fair in a suburb of Syracuse. She had recently visited the town.

By this time, Baratto had decided that if anything was to come of her pursuit of Hampton Terrace artifacts, she might need to go there. So she flew to Syracuse and met Aiken County Historical Museum Executive Director Elliott Levy and his wife, who were returning from a vacation to Maine.

They enjoyed the antique fair, and Baratto made a side trip to check on the china. "I thought if they saw us making an effort (to actually go there), maybe they'd release the plates," she said. Baratto even sent Calnan the Hampton Terrace commemorative tin produced by the Heritage Council, plus some photos of the old hotel.

She was informed they'd be willing to sell the plates.

"The Hampton Terrace plates had no pertinence to their collection," she said of the Syracuse museum.

So Baratto was able to bring the plates and copies of the order forms to the place where they do have pertinence.

The plates will be on display at the Aiken County museum. Two belong to the



Staff photo by Phyllis Britt

This version of the china used at the Hampton Terrace shows the elegant logo along with a Greek key decorative border.

museum and two are from private collections on permanent loan to the museum.

Tom Hunter, curator at the Onondaga Historical Association, dug out anything they had on items commissioned in the South Carolina area. He found one plate from the Highland Park Hotel in Aiken and paperwork from the Bon Air in Augusta.

Now, the folks in New York are putting together a list of everything they have that might be of interest locally. They are sending the list to Baratto who will then disseminate the list to the S.C. Federation of Museums and the S.C. Confederation of Local Historical Societies.

"This way we can get the plates back where they should be," Baratto said.

When asked where folks may view the plates in the museum, Levy said he is still looking for the right spot.

"Probably in the parlor," he said, explaining that location has appropriate display cases to provide the proper security for the treasures.

"Or maybe eventually in the Ladies of Aiken County room or the North Augusta room," he added, saying that would happen only if such secure display cases can be located there.

"These are too special not to have them protected," he concluded.