

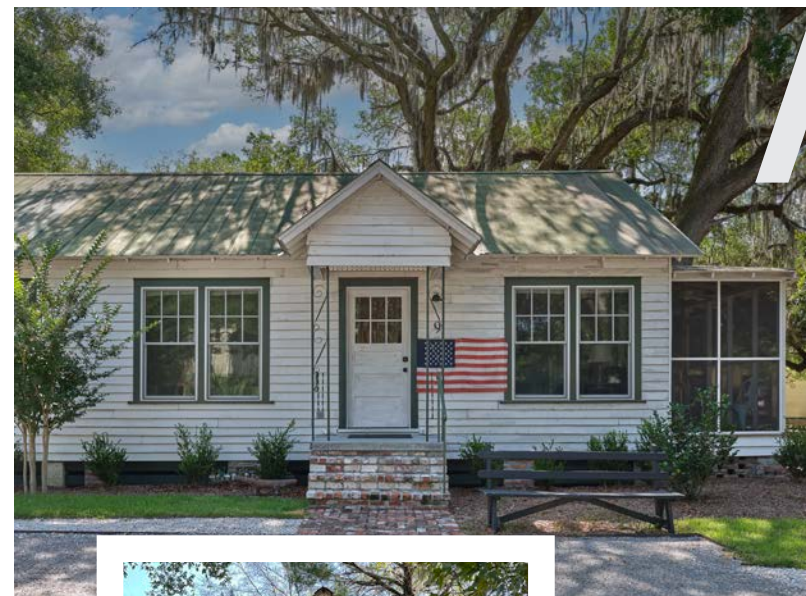


BEFORE & AFTER

At the corner of Main Street and Happy

GUIDED BY HISTORY, THE JOINER FAMILY HOMESTEAD BEGINS ITS NEXT CHAPTER.

STORY BY BARRY KAUFMAN + PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. SAVAGE GIBSON



History is never a straight line; finding the true story can sometimes be like trying to capture smoke with a fishing net. This is especially true in Bluffton, where the “official” story is sometimes just the one that’s more interesting to tell, where much of the history is locked away in the memories of long-time locals, and record-keeping can often be as casual as a sandbar Sunday.

But if anyone can cut through the haze of Bluffton’s history, it’s Eugene and Melanie Marks. As owner of CT House Histories, Melanie has made it her life’s work to delve into the morass of scattered papers and artifacts that make up the official record, piecing together the truth one scrap at a time.

Her seasoned approach shed light on the history of the Garvin-Garvey house, then a dilapidated storage shed at Oyster Factory Park, with only the oral history of a family line that had been long extinguished.

Her efforts informed a full restoration effort that saved the historic site from demolition. She was also responsible for solving the long-running mystery of Burnt Church Road’s name, her findings informing the front hall at Burnt Church Distillery.

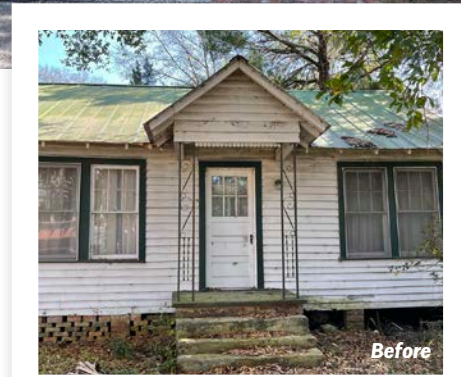
When the Marks purchased the Joiner Homestead in 2022, the scrub-brushed lot on Bluffton’s famous four-way stop, priority one was unearthing as much as possible about the home’s story.

“We didn’t know exactly what the overall lot could look like,” said Eugene. “But we did know that we could bring the structure of the house back to life – the siding, the roof, the bricks – and that would bring back the history, the people and the stories.”

What’s known about the property’s past is this. On May 16, 1881, Joseph Joiner purchased the one-acre lot “bounded on the south by the north May River Road (now Bruin Road) and on the west by the new road.” That new road, now Bluffton Road, has gone by names ranging from Fashionable Street to East Happy Street in its lifetime. The lot cost him \$25.

Generations of Joseph’s descendants would call that corner lot home, establishing the Buffalo Nickle Shop and selling, according to one advertisement that survives, “milkshakes, snowballs, bottle drinks, select candies, etc.” On the side that fronted Bluffton Road, a small barbecue pit sold smoked chicken and pork raised right on the property, well into the 1960s.

But at the heart of the family plot, the one piece of physical evidence that still told the Joiner family story was their home. When Eugene and Melanie Marks purchased this piece of history, they were determined to preserve at least that one chapter.



BUILDING ON LEGACY
The renovation of the Joiner Homestead artfully preserved its historical essence by reusing many original materials. Salvaged siding, roof panels, brickwork and wrought-iron columns were carefully integrated into the new structure.



ALL IN THE FAMILY Bertie Joiner (suspenders) and his wife Bessie (far left) are shown at the front of the house with family members. The couple married in 1901 and had 11 children — four daughters and seven sons.



Raw materials

Before they could preserve the spirit of the house, Eugene and Melanie had to know how much of the structure could be saved. Working alongside **Element Construction** and **Pearce Scott Architects**, they approached this project with an eye on keeping the past alive. It wasn't easy.

"We were able to tour the property with some of the family members, and you'd have to walk from one side of the hallway to the other because the floor joists were gone," said Andrea Eldred with Element Construction. "Basically, the carpet was the only thing holding the floor system together."

Extensive damage from termites and a small fire in the attic added to this. As much as everyone involved with the project had been hoping to preserve the structure, it was clear there was little left to preserve. Realizing that the home's interior was beyond saving, the question became — what could they save?



Before



Before

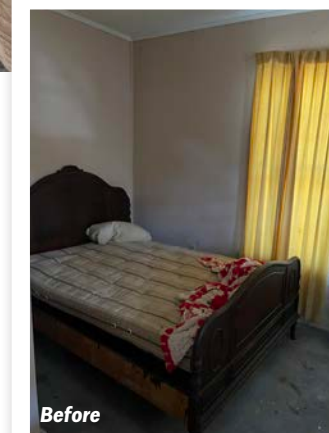


A new look inside

Amanda Denmark with Pearce Scott Architects was tasked with reimagining the inside of the home. Fortunately, she had been given a little leeway in determining the home's unique historic importance. As with many structures in Bluffton that had been built, changed, and added onto over generations, only part of the Joiner house was considered "historic."

"Going through the process with the Historical Preservation Commission, we learned that the front half of the home, the oldest part, had to remain as far as all the siding and windows and doors," she said. "The stuff toward the back, which was the 'newer' part, could change a little bit because it wasn't part of the contributing structure. But I still wanted to keep it as close as possible."

Using the puzzle-solving strategies she's used on several similar historic homes, Denmark was able to add livability to the home, turning two bedrooms and a bath into two beds, three baths and a bunk space while opening up the main living spaces. All she had to do to the "newer" old part of the home was remove an exterior door that would have opened into a bedroom.



Before



Before

And where the front bedroom had been, she could open the space up to create a beautifully modern living area.

"We were really just putting the house back together for our time and how people live now," she said. "Opening the kitchen and dining room helped it seem larger, and with the ceiling being vaulted, we were able to work with the engineers to give it that volume."

The results have helped this old house tell a brand-new but familiar story. "We're able to see that same sense of scale. We didn't overdo it," she said. "We wanted to be cognizant of salvaging everything that could be saved. But if you can prolong things through different construction techniques, let's at least try."

TRANSFORMING TRADITION The bedrooms were thoughtfully reimagined to blend historical charm with modern comfort. By reconfiguring the space to add an additional bathroom and a bunk area, the renovation preserved the home's legacy while creating a functional and inviting environment for contemporary living.

Better yet, the teamwork that brought this home to life might spark a change in Old Town, helping bring these crumbling reminders of the town's history back to life.

"Since doing this project, we've looked at other homes in the historic district that are in the same shape," said Edwards. "Being able to educate owners on the options they have; hopefully, it will take off."

For the homeowners, that means just as much as having a beautiful new home in the heart of Old Town.

"For Melanie and me, legacies and proper design and thoughtful development are important," said Eugene. "This shows that you can accomplish all those things, and we were all very proud we came up with a good end product." LL

