

# Journey of Hopsewee

## Frank and Raejean Beattie turn Hopsewee Plantation into a destination

BY JOANNA ARNSMEYER

**FOR 20 YEARS**, Frank and Raejean Beattie have opened their home to many visitors—up to 15,000 a year, to be precise. But their home is not the average house. It is the beautiful Hopsewee Plantation.

Hopsewee, which means “high island on river” in the local Sewee tribes dialect, was one of the South’s major rice plantations and the birthplace of Thomas Lynch Jr, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Santee Electric Cooperative started serving Hopsewee in 1947, and since then a great relationship and partnership has grown.

Since it was built around 1740, only six families have owned Hopsewee Plantation. The Beatties’ story began at Hopsewee in 2000 when Frank Beattie made an offer on the plantation. At first, the idea was shut down. But Beattie knew, God had told him to buy Hopsewee.

After a series of fortunate events and an unexpected check from past work—Beattie was a practicing attorney at the time—the Beatties became the official owners of Hopsewee

Plantation on January 8, 2001, which also happens to be his birthday.

“I walked to the post office, as most attorneys did in the old days, opened my box and I had received a check from a past case I had completely forgotten about. I looked up to the ceiling in that old post office and said, ‘God, I knew it was you all along,’” says Beattie.

And that is when the work began. With a pole saw, a worn-out Husqvarna mower and their hands, the Beatties started to clear the land, transforming it into the beautiful landscape it is today.

“It felt like we were living in paradise. We wanted to make it as beautiful as possible and share it with as many people as possible to glorify God,” says Beattie.

Jonah Stephen, tour and grounds guide of Hopsewee Plantation, adds, “If the Beatties hadn’t come along, Hopsewee might not be here.”

A tour of Hopsewee Plantation allows visitors to take a step back into history and explore a home that has stood the test of time for more than 200 years.

The home features rooms opening into wide center halls on each floor, as well as a full brick cellar, attic rooms,

hand carved molding and random-width heart-pine floors. Hopsewee Plantation is living history and draws in many people with its peaceful atmosphere.

“It was beautiful. The land was beautiful. The river was beautiful. It was very interesting to see the home of someone who signed the Declaration of Independence,” says visitor Ann McDermott.

Visitors can top their experience off with a treat or a meal at the River Oak Cottage Tea Room.

The Beatties opened the River Oak Cottage Tea Room in 2008, serving tea and sweet and savory treats. In 2010, they adopted a menu full of recipes created by Raejean Beattie, who is a gourmet cook. The menu reflects the tastes and traditions of the Lowcountry region.

The Beatties started out hiring a couple of tour guides and now they have close to 15 employees, after opening the restaurant.

Another feature the Beatties have included is offering Hopsewee Plantation as a wedding or event venue. With its natural beauty, it is the perfect spot for any special occasion.





Frank Beattie is proud to have a replica of an original Hopsewee desk.

The next big adventure for the Beatties is adding a museum. Two years ago, with the help of a friend, Dwaine Patrick, they began to conduct a ground penetrating radar study. Since then, they have learned the story of Hopsewee on an entirely different level.



Dwaine Patrick (left) and Lance Comfort use ground penetrating radar to find precious pieces of history on Hopsewee.

“The creativity of the (archeology) team is amazing,” says Raejean Beattie.

The archeology team has started to uncover all the secrets the ground has hidden in the last 300 years, which will be on display in the new museum. Based on the amount of shells located in the area, the state archaeologist has said the site was the first home of a large Sewee tribe.

The Beatties have succeeded in making Hopsewee Plantation a beautiful home and wonderful place to visit.

“The design to recreate the past is pervasive in human nature. That’s why Thomas Wolfe’s quote is often repeated ‘You can’t go home again.’ But I am here to tell you as God as my witness, over the last 20 years I have found out that I could go home again. And I have been here for 20 years,” proclaims Beattie.

**Hopsewee Plantation is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, to book a tour or plan an event, visit [hopswee.com](http://hopswee.com).**



The beautiful River Oak Cottage Tea Room with its gourmet cook and owner, Raejean Beattie.



Elizabeth Huntsinger (center) guides tourists through the historic home on Hopsewee Plantation.

## Hopsewee—birthplace of a signer

**THOMAS LYNCH JR.** had the shortest life of any signer of the Declaration of Independence, dying at sea at age 34. The home where he was born and spent his boyhood, however, lives on with vibrant history in Georgetown County.

Hopsewee Plantation is located on the shores of the North Santee River. The name is derived from the Sewee tribes that had inhabited the region before the land was granted to Europeans in the 17th century.

The home was built between 1735 and 1740 by Thomas Lynch Sr., a wealthy indigo planter and statesman, who played a significant role in colonial governance in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War. The home’s materials were sourced from the property—the riverbank’s clay made up the foundation bricks and the wood from the black Cyprus trees provided the siding.

Lynch Jr. was born there in 1749. He served alongside his father in the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration in his absence due to illness.

The Lynch family sold the plantation to Robert Hume of Goose Creek in 1762. With ties to Scottish nobility, his son John Hume declined the position of Earl of Marchmont so that he could remain “the earl of marsh mud in South Carolina.” Hopsewee was one of the largest rice plantations in the South until the Civil War.

It remained in the Hume family until 1945 when it was purchased by the International Paper Company, which had started its paper mill in Georgetown the previous decade. Two years later, it was sold to retired Army engineer Col. Reading Wilkinson and his wife, who made significant updates to the property, including adding electricity and plumbing.

Jim and Helen Maynard acquired the property in 1969 and secured its place on the National Registry of Historic Place in 1971. They also began opening the plantation to the public, a legacy continued and enhanced by Frank and Raejean Beattie, who became the owners in 2000.