

The 'spook house'

JACKSON — Children who walked to school past the Carmichael House just a block from downtown Jackson used to say it was haunted.

But if spirits lurk in any of the 12 rooms, stare out any of the 77 windows, or make any of the 47 doors in this Victorian mansion creak ... well, they certainly stay well-hidden.

J.R. "Red" Carmichael Jr. and Norma Keyes Carmichael have shared many things in 49 years of marriage, including some laughs about school kids calling their home a "spook house."

But that was before Mr. Carmichael came home in 1972 and fixed up the house where he was born 82 years ago.

Carmichael roots run deep in Jackson. John Robert Carmichael Sr., father of the present owner, was a banker, farmer and builder of fine buggies. He had the mansion built in 1897-98.

It cost a shade under \$16,000. But you couldn't construct the main stairway for that amount today — if you could still get a stairway built of such rare woodwork.

As Mr. Carmichael said, "It wasn't built by builders. It was built by craftsmen."

BORN THE NINTH of 11 children who grew up in the house, Red Carmichael left the mansion in 1920 to earn a degree in engineering at Georgia Tech and then go to work for Georgia Power Co. He stayed with the utility 43½ years, until he retired in 1966.

Meanwhile, the house was occupied by his mother until her death in 1953. Then Mrs. Mattie Morris, a family friend, lived there until 1970.

By 1972, it was known as "the spook house" among school children, because the exterior was in need of paint and few lights ever burned in it.

When the Carmichaels decided to refurbish it, they could find few people who would paint from a 60-foot ladder or climb the steep roof to make repairs.

However, Marvin Standard of Jackson painted the exterior with 156 gallons of paint, and J.T. Ozburne of Jackson was "the only man I could find who would go on top of the house" to install gutters, Mr. Carmichael said.

RED CARMICHAEL stood outside it one day this week and talked about the mansion his father built.

It has five chimneys and 10 fireplaces, he said, and it measures about 100 feet by 140 feet.

Inside the house, I saw:

- A living room furnished with century Victorian



Photo by BILL BOYD

J.R. and Norma Carmichael in front of their Victorian mansion in Jacks

with a table that's 10½ feet long and nearly 5 feet wide. It has 12 chairs, and Red Carmichael ate off of it as a child. Longevity, for sure.

- A kitchen with a wood stove that's been there since 1915, and it's equipped with one of the earliest waffle irons, which still turns out waffles faster than an electric waffle iron, the Carmichaels said.

- A pantry with a pie safe 9 feet high and 10 feet long — big enough to hold the pies to feed a platoon of

- A master bedroom that still contains the bed where Red Carmichael was born. Some of us can't find the house where we were born. Mr. Carmichael was showing me the bed where he was born. Longevity, yes.

- Upstairs bedrooms filled with memories — pictures, furniture, views of the neighborhood — that are dear to Red Carmichael.

least, none that I could see or hear. I wanted to make that point because the Carmichaels are opening this magnificent home for public tours on Oct. 2 from 3-7 p.m.

Admission will be \$2 for adults, \$1 for children under 12. And I'd like to explain that, too. The Carmichaels are giving half the money raised to Jackson Presbyterian Church and half to restoring the McIntosh Hotel at nearby Indian Springs. Both are