259# McKenzie House (Script by Peggy Macdonald)

The 1895 McKenzie House, a three-story Queen Anne style house, is the crown jewel in a collection of Victorian homes and cottages that comprise Sweetwater Branch Inn.

J. F. Lambeth constructed the building, which Reed McKenzie purchased in the 1920s. His family lived there for the next 50 years. The Holbrook family carefully restored the house after Juan and Giovanna purchased it in 1978. In 1982, the McKenzie House was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Giovanna and one of her three children, Andrea, lived in the house from 1982 to 1998.

Today, the building is a bed and breakfast with The Sweet Tea restaurant on the ground floor and additional seating on the spacious wrap-around veranda, which culminates in an octagonal gazebo. Another unique feature is the three-story octagonal turret on the west side of the building.

Although purchasing the McKenzie House was Giovanna Holbrook’s idea, the inspiration to open a bed and breakfast came from her daughter, Cornelia. When she was just 14 years old, Cornelia told her mother she wanted to have a bed and breakfast when she grew up. She named her future bed and breakfast Sweetwater Branch Inn, after the creek that flows through downtown Gainesville, between the Matheson History Museum and the Headquarters Library.

The beautifully preserved buildings of Sweetwater Branch Inn host events ranging from destination weddings to reunions and organizational meetings. Each room in the McKenzie House is furnished and decorated distinctively. A dramatic lion’s face by Peruvian artist Victor Delfín covers the fireplace at the entrance to the McKenzie House. Other rooms feature colorful murals painted by local artists.

Stop by the McKenzie House and step back in time in one of the most opulent Victorian houses in Gainesville.