

Photographs: Geoffrey Gilbert

Don Gallagher (right) sits beside four of the fine handcrafted guitars made in his family's shop in Wartrace, Tennessee.

Businesses line the main thoroughfare (below) in Wartrace, a town that clearly honors its connection with the development of the Tennessee walking horse.



The tall, wide halls of Tennessee's Walking Horse Hotel, open again for business, recall former times.

Wartrace, a Tennessee Delight

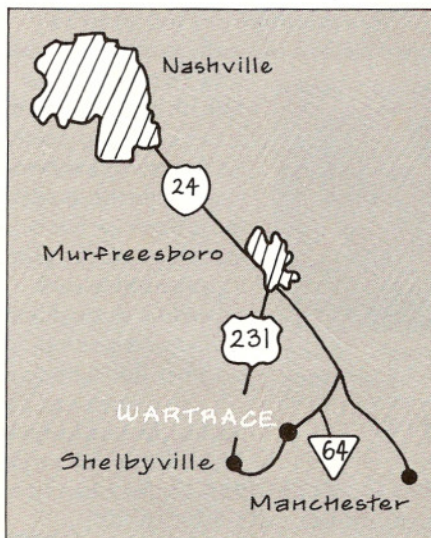
Wartrace, Tennessee, isn't on the way to anywhere. But detour a few miles off I-24 south of Nashville, and you'll find a delightful little town of 450 people. There, rich pieces of rich yesterdays are laced around a modern-day center of careful craftsmanship.

A scattering of 19th-century houses, private homes, pepper the hillside along Main and Vine Streets behind downtown.

The main landmark, though, Tennessee's Walking Horse Hotel, has stood in the middle of downtown Wartrace since 1917, a time when this tiny community was a bustling stop along the rails south of Nashville. That year, a Smyrna innkeeper named Jesse Overall built a large rooming house for overnight travelers.

Early in its years, the Hotel Overall not only rented rooms but housed families, local teachers, and even offices. Then in 1938, Floyd Carouthers, a walking horse trainer, bought the hotel. He quickly made his enthusiasm known, changing its name to Floyd's Walking Horse Hotel. In stables behind the hotel, he trained his horse Strolling Jim, which became the first World Grand Champion Tennessee Walking Horse. Carouthers even hung a painting of a walking horse and rider on the hotel's front and added a weather vane of that symbol on top. Carouthers and his wife, Olive, also began collecting pictures and photographs of local Tennessee walkers.

This is the era that the hotel's newest owner, George W. Wright, aims to restore. He bought the hotel in 1980, modified the name to Tennessee's Walking Horse Hotel, and set about renovating it. He's done 25 rooms, all finished with an



eye to the hotel's slower-paced days. "It's a step back in time," says Wright. "I'm trying to maintain the atmosphere of the 1920's and 1930's. I'm trying to take you back to the time when the walking horse industry was first beginning."

No telephones or televisions jar the peace of the old-fashioned inn. Instead, an oldtimey atmosphere fills its wide, high-ceilinged halls. Pictures from the Carouthers' original collection still line the walls of its three floors, and lunch and dinner are served by reservation in its comfortable, first-floor dining room.

Small businesses line the town's main thoroughfare, directly across the tracks from the hotel. A grocery store and an antique shop are among those along this stretch. Here, too, you'll find J.W. Gallagher & Son Hand Crafted Guitars. Behind its nondescript exterior waits another Wartrace surprise, a handmade-guitar business that's achieved international fame. J. W. Gallagher, whose family settled in Wartrace in the 1820's, first began woodworking furniture in 1939. In the early sixties, he switched his attention and expertise to guitars, and by 1965, he was producing guitars full time.

Gallaher's son Don, who assisted his father, now runs the business. He shows visitors through the small works, detailing how the guitars are made. The wood is stored and cured for three years, and then it is cut, steamed, formed, glued, and finished. To make a guitar takes about 240 different operations and two months' time. The factory produces about 200 instruments a year, all numbered and recorded so Gallagher knows where his instruments are.

"I don't play a guitar," Gallagher will admit. "We're woodworkers, and we've approached it from that point of view. We've tried to design a guitar that was well balanced, with a good projection geared toward flat picking."

They must have succeeded, for Gallagher guitars are shipped all over the world, from Israel to Australia to Japan. Gallagher guitars have been ordered by the likes of Doc Watson, Grandpa Jones, Waylon Jennings, and even Paul McCartney—no faint praise for Gallagher's quality of workmanship.

Gallaher's hours are from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 6:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Friday. To learn more about the guitars, write to J.W. Gallagher & Son, Wartrace, Tennessee 37183; or call (615) 389-6455.

Tennessee's Walking Horse Hotel charges \$28 double occupancy. Meals, served six days a week, are by reservation. Lunch is from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and dinner from 5:30 to 9 p.m. For information or reservations, write to Tennessee's Walking Horse Hotel, Wartrace, Tennessee 37183; or call (615) 389-6407.