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Gamble mansion was hideout for Confederate official

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ELLENTON -- The Stars and Bars of the Confederacy flies on one flag pole and the Stars and Stripes of Old Glory flies on a twin pole at the Gamble Mansion here, just a block off U. S. 301.

This handsome sugar plantation home, featuring 18 columns supporting wide double verandahs on three sides, was built in the second half of the 1840s by a bachelor banker and soldier, Robert Gamble. The structure utilized "tabby" material, consisting of burned oyster shells, sand and cane syrup used as a binder. Some ruins of the old sugar mill also are on the grounds. At one time the plantation contained 3500 acres.

Major Gamble went broke in the panic of 1857 and the mansion changed hands. During the Civil War it was occupied by Capt. Archibald McNeil, who was a Confederate commissary agent, and family.

A distinguished visitor traveling under an alias arrived at the mansion in May, 1865, and asked for lodging. He was Judah P. Benjamin, Secretary of State of the Confederacy. Benjamin and President Jefferson Davis had left Richmond on April 2 with the intention of reestablishing the Confederate government west of the Mississippi. But the party of officials split up when the hopelessness of their cause became apparent. They then hoped to escape to the West Indies via the Florida West Coast.

There was a $50,000 reward offered for Benjamin's capture. Federal gunboats arrived in the area and the Gamble Mansion was raided. Benjamin escaped disguised as a Negro cook and slipped on board a small sloop and wound up in England.