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GARY LICKLE AND  
HIS DAUGHTER SASHA  
BY THEIR SEA PLANE



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## THOMASVILLE: A TRADITIONAL WAY OF SPORTING LIFE RENEWED

BY JAMES MACGUIRE

**TUCKED AWAY IN** the southwest corner of Georgia near the Florida border is one of the world's foremost bird shooting paradises. For over a hundred years, the Red Hills region has been one of the great bobwhite quail bastions in the country and, given the devastating drought in Texas over the last seven years, is now the last redoubt of birds living in the wild for this exciting and highly civilized way of sporting life.

The Indians were the first conservators of this land, but the treaties they entered into with settlers were broken and in the mid-1800s they were exiled west on the Trail of Tears. Before the railroad was extended to Florida Thomasville had

several winter hotels, such as the Queen Anne-style Piney Woods Hotel, built in 1875, where Yankees would come for the winter months.

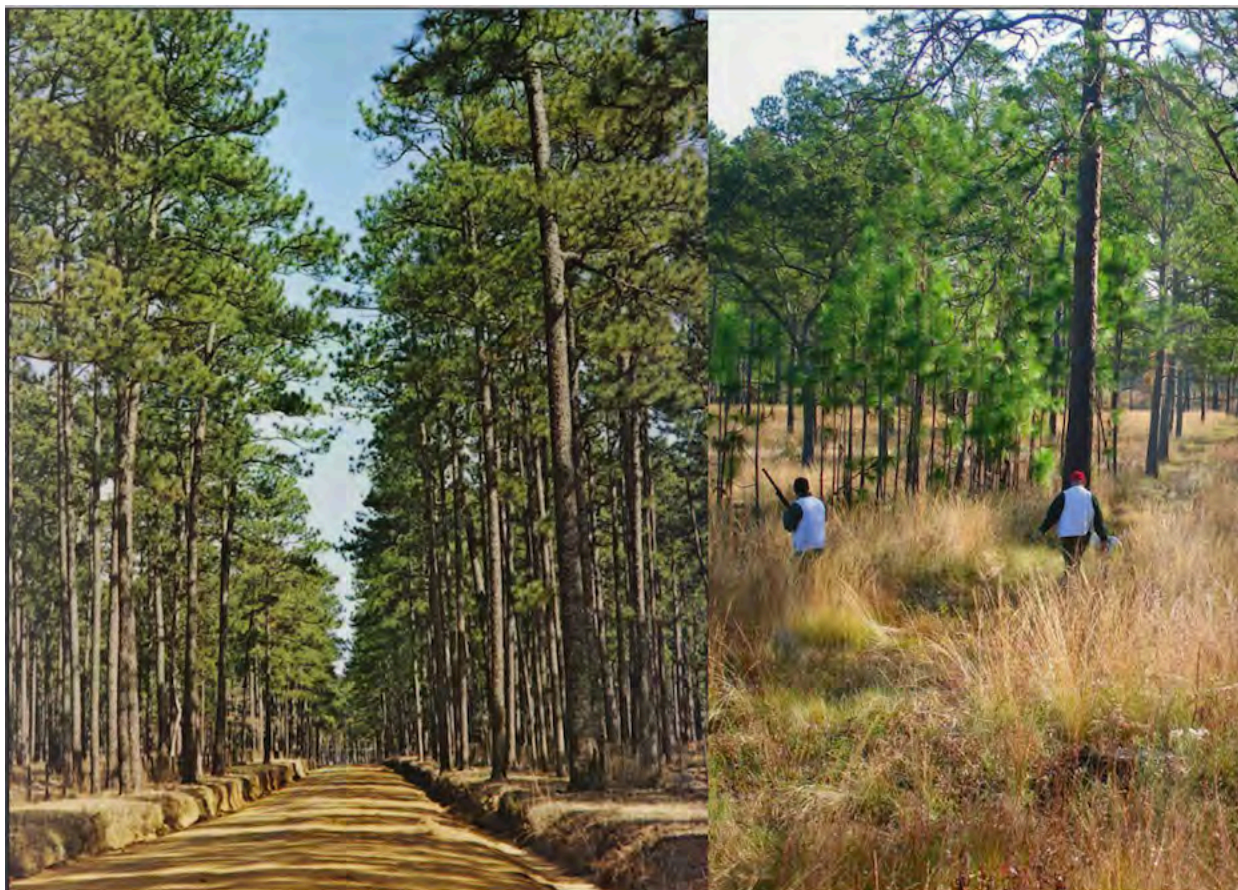
While dove, duck, and 'gators have always been plentiful for locals to pursue, the first quail shooting plantations in Thomasville were developed over a hundred years ago by the Hanna family from Ohio. Charles Chapin was the first Hanna to set foot in Thomas County, probably in about 1885, and since then Hanna descendants and many others have acquired land and erected homes and lodges so that the Red Hills plantation belt now contains the highest concentration

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*Opposite page: The Georgia/Florida Field Trial Club's annual shooting dog trials. This page, from top: Live Oak hounds, casting off for a hunt; the home of Mrs. Parker Poe on Pebble Hill Plantation; John M. Olin and Richard Tift shooting on one of the many area plantations famous for their quail shooting preserves.*





*“I’ve hunted...all over the world,  
and there’s nothing that compares  
to the quail hunting here,”  
one transplanted Northerner says.*

of traditional quail hunting in the world. Families like the Whitneys, Fords, Irelands, duPonts, Perkins, Fitzgeralds, Humphreys, Loves, and Gerrys have maintained a way of life that is reminiscent in its graciousness of the Antebellum South. Its past is dotted with marks of distinction; President Eisenhower and the Duke of Windsor have been among the many honored guests to enjoy Thomasville’s legendary hospitality and unparalleled sport.

Along the way, traditions have taken root that continue to flourish into today. The Georgia-Florida Field Trial Club was formed by 30 members in 1916 and at its first trial only 10 dogs ran. The Field Trial is always held on the third Monday in February, and at a recent renewal 23 dogs ran before a crowd of 407 members and guests.

All of these plantation owners share a common conservation

and land-management ethic to preserve this precious part of the world for future generations to come. Tall Timbers, the local land-preservation group, has been highly acclaimed for its innovative research and effective advocacy for conservation easements in the Red Hills. Productivity and conservation have been so sensitively managed that today there is more wildlife than ever before—even more than in the time of the Indians.

Why have those on the inner circle of the bird-shooting world flocked to Thomasville for generations? The first reason is undoubtedly the quality of the sport. Quail living in the wild are more wary than those bred on devoted shooting lands, and they flush more quickly and fly much faster, which is a thrilling challenge for Americans and visiting Europeans alike. Then there is the quality of the dog work. The pointers quiver in anticipation, as they hold steadfast for the quail to be flushed, while the retrievers methodically work the ground in order to locate the birds that have been shot.

Still, beyond the sporting life, the appeal of this area also owes to the many-faceted traditions of the plantation lifestyle. “There cannot be anything more beautiful than an early-winter morning with frost on the fields and a warm sun rising through the tall pines,” writes James Mason. From there—in a region rich with forests, lakes, and rivers—inhabitants and

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Above, from left: Pinetree Boulevard, going through Greenwood Plantation, allows the public to catch a glimpse of the historically beautiful forest around it; modern hunters out on a plantation; a lunchtime picnic in 1939 on the Milestone Plantation. Below: A 1998 map of plantation ownership in southwest Georgia.





visitors alike ride out to the shoot on horseback or on the back of a mule-driven wagon in traditional shooting attire. "Nooning" takes place for some in the fields, where the wagon-drivers and other shoot staff prepare delicious meals deep in the wild. For others, picnic cabins host long cookouts. As long as anyone can remember, lunches have always included a warm casserole, carted out in a part of the shooting wagon called "the hot box." Southern banter and liquid refreshment stimulate the bonhomie of the sport at hand. In the evening there are elaborate dinners and frequent entertaining of neighbors and fellow sportsmen at the plantations themselves. And the plantation houses are beautiful homes: red brick or white with black shutters, countless chimneys and columns, porches and gardens, all reminiscent of Tara in *Gone with the Wind*. Their very names evoke another era, too—El Destino, Hines Hill, Easter, and Mandalay, to name but a few.

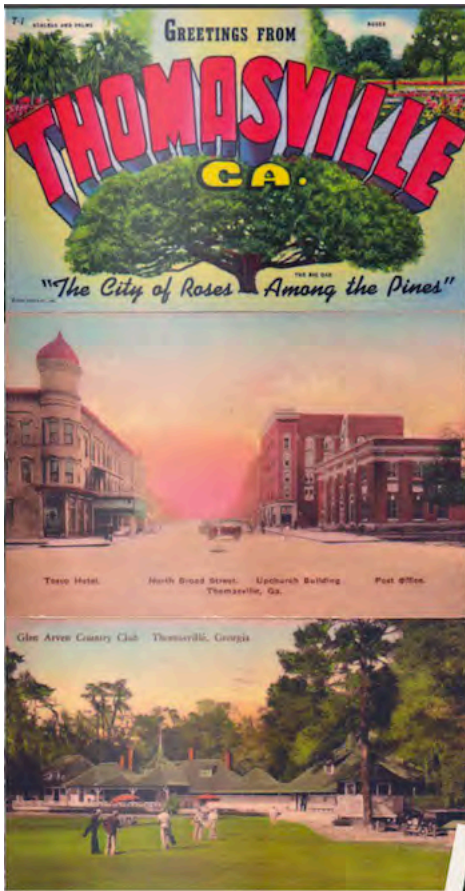
After the evening's entertainment, residents and guests retire to bed, a fire blazing in their rooms on chilly nights, and before shooting begins the following morning, breakfast is served in-room. In fact, in his autobiography, band leader Peter Duchin recalls a too-early-in-the-dawn knock on the door by a servant at John Hay Whitney's Thomasville plantation and having to beat a hasty retreat from his fiancée's bed back to his own

room. Those were the days!

"We continue to be engaged by an elite group of sportsmen who recognize the uniqueness of the Red Hills area and who are looking to create their own plantation legacy," states Ben McCollum, whose firm The Wright Group serves as the leading authority on plantation properties. In his elegiac memoir *This Land I Have Loved*, Thomasville's historian Robert C. Balfour, Jr., spoke for many when he wrote, "If I were to be granted one last wish it would be that this unspoiled land might stay unspoiled. I would like for my children and their children, and all children for that matter, to be able to fill lungs with its clean, soft air, to watch its wildlife, to listen to its birdsong, to the yelping of turkeys, the distant scream of a hawk, the plaintive, muted cooing of doves high up in the tall pine trees."

Thomasville has been a great American sporting tradition for over a century and is poised to remain so for like-minded generations to come. In addition to its famous quail hunting, the region is home to phenomenal turkey and deer hunting. With recent news of a bumper hatch of quail last summer, as well as many ongoing local cultural events like the Wildlife Arts Festival, Thomasville guarantees a good time for sporting and non-sporting visitors alike. Come on down to southwest Georgia and see Thomasville and its beautiful plantations for yourself! ♦

BEN MCCOLLUM, THE GEORGIA-FLORIDA FIELD TRIAL CLUB, ROBERT C. BALFOUR, JR.



*Opposite page: A hunter takes aim;  
 one of the hunting wagons used during  
 the trials; Winstead Plantation (inset).  
 This page, clockwise from top left:  
 Old postcards illustrate the Thomasville  
 of yore; the result of a good day's hunt;  
 Foshalee Lodge; a happy couple  
 coming in from a duck hunt.*

