

WINTER 2016 \$ 3.95

Thomasville

M A G A Z I N E

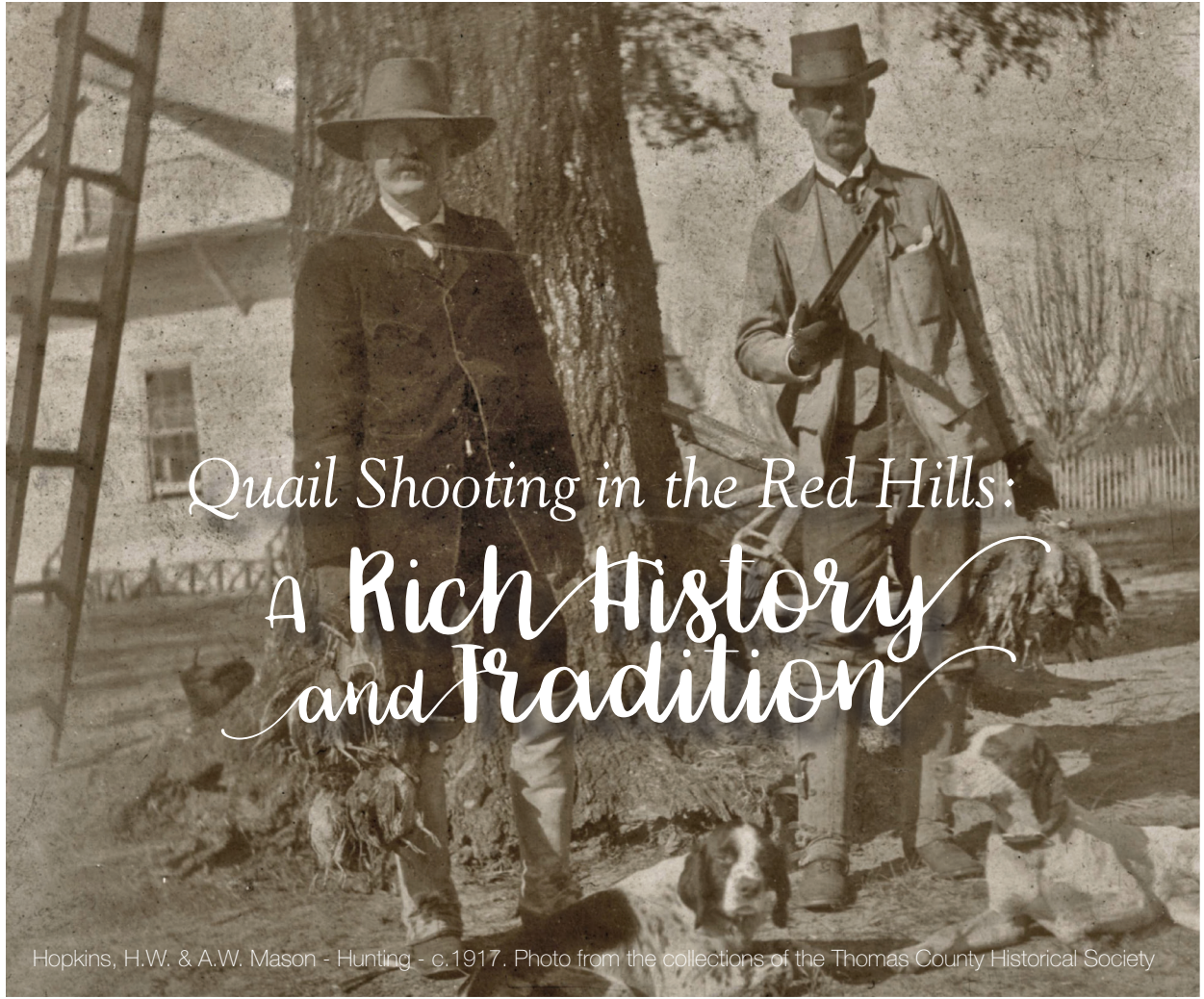
The First & Finest

www.thomasvillemagazine.com

Volume 13, Issue 4



*Quail Shooting in the Red Hills:
A Rich History
and Tradition*



*Quail Shooting in the Red Hills:
A Rich History
and Tradition*

Hopkins, H.W. & A.W. Mason - Hunting - c.1917. Photo from the collections of the Thomas County Historical Society

Two hundred years ago, Thomasville didn't exist. Our neck of the woods was considered the southeastern frontier of habitable land, and hardly that until the Creek Indian removal in 1818. Settlers farmed the soil for subsistence but had no real commercial prospects until 1861, when the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad connected Thomasville to the port at Savannah. That same year, Georgia seceded from the Union. Thomasville sent more than 2,000 of its men to fight, but the fledgling community remained far removed from the action except as a producer and shipper of agricultural goods and prison for 10 days after the Battle of Natural Bridge in North Florida. When Thomasville surrendered its limited Confederate forces and supplies in May of 1865, it was in a unique position to benefit from Reconstruction because it hadn't been devastated by the war.

Haddock, Worth S. & Frank Pittman - Hunting - 1924
Photo from the collections of the Thomas County
Historical Society



Thomasville's Reconstruction investment in infrastructure improvements such as roads and railroads gave it an advantage over surrounding communities. These routes made it relatively easy for wealthy Northerners and Midwesterners to take advantage of the mild winters on the advice of their physicians in smog-filled industrial cities such as Cleveland, Chicago and New York. Thomasville's historic train station was the last stop on the railroad from Savannah, making it the logical destination for folks headed as far south as the line would take them. At Thomasville's peak in the 1890s, Yankee visitors supported several five star hotels on Broad Street, including the Mitchell House and the Piney Woods Hotel. Repeat visitors began buying up cheap acreage by the thousand, where they would construct their second homes, and the Red Hills plantation community was born.

Notable Yankee families such as the Hannas, Whitneys and Wades bought up tens of thousands of acres from the local plantation owners and sharecroppers, converting what was primarily agricultural land into bobwhite quail shooting plantations. They built a country club to play cards and brag about their quail numbers and introduced their friends to the sport with week-long hunting parties.

A guest's day in the field would begin before sunrise with a biscuit and coffee as the staff paddled him to a duck blind, where he would watch ring necks circle, hundreds at a time, and wood ducks in twos and threes whistle between the cypress trees standing throughout the plantation pond. When the duck hunters returned from their shoot, the entire hunting party would meet over a hot breakfast before donning their riding boots and setting out by 9 a.m. in search of Gentleman Bob, the most distinguished of game birds.

The party's four shooters ride horseback and observers

ride the wagon. Three to five staff manage the hunt. A scout keeps an eye on the two dogs – pointers and the occasional English setter – as they zig and zag several hundred yards ahead. The dog man grabs panting dogs when they swap 'em out to rest, and keeps horses from wandering when shooters are on the ground to honor a point. A wagon man drives the matched mules and releases the retriever after a successful covey rise. The symphony's conductor, the hunt master, is responsible for the safety of the party and the strategy of the hunt. All work in concert to make the experience feel like a ride in the woods until the dogs go on point.

The outings are a curious social occasion - not a quest for blood. You'll not hear a host brag of the number of birds killed. His pride is in the coveys per hour his land has cultivated and his dogs have found, then his own shooting percentage, not quantity. The supporting details that separate him from his peers with similar bird numbers are the pomp of his polished mule drawn wagon, the gentility of his hunting staff, and the English-fashioned attire they don.

The host will establish a rotation of shooters as the party saddles up. The savvy gun can keep up with the conversation of the riders and perhaps even the wagon while always keeping his eye on the master of the hunt's hat. When that man halts his horse, and raises his hat, the dogs are on point, and the gun is expected to dismount, grab his shotgun, and approach the point unloaded without causing a delay. A gun who holds up the approach because he is not paying attention will reduce the likelihood of a good covey rise and the total number of coveys the party will find that day. In a social circle that prides itself on how many coveys are moved in an hour, sluggish guns aren't the first to be invited back.

Guided Quail Hunts & Skeet Range

Half and full day hunts available.



Abbott
Shooting Preserve

Stephen Abbott
229.561.4472

Barney, Ga

www.facebook.com/abbottshootingpreserve



Shot on location at an exclusive Red Hills Region plantation. Contact The Wright Group for more information on like properties. Photograph by Gabe Hanway.



Two staunch, intense pointers, the dog behind honoring her brace mate's point as a quail flushes. Photograph by Chris Mathan.

As two guns approach the dog on point, they pass another dog “honoring” its companion, even though he wasn’t the first to find the birds. The master of the hunt gives brisk final instructions, including the go-ahead to close their break-action shotguns. They hold the muzzles high as they march through broom sedge and brambles in the direction of that pointer’s nose. The master of the hunt, between and just behind the shooters, swings his crop, making a “swish swish” sound meant to flush the covey.

And then, after 30 yards of marching and a redirect to account for wind, just when the guns are out of breath, an explosion of feathers leaps out of an impossibly small space and becomes two dozen whizzing, whirring darts that don’t stay their course until they’re 40 yards out. The first-time shooter on the left never even levels his gun; he’s overwhelmed by the shock of the covey rise and subsequent difficulty picking one of them out. His host to the right is quick to shoot and misses. Unfazed, he picks up another in his sight line and adjusts his swing, leading him like you would with a water hose, and gently squeezes the trigger, following through the mark. The master of the hunt sagely remarks, “you cain’t get a double unless you get the first,” and calls for the retriever from the wagon. As the family’s

labrador retrieves his prize, the master of the hunt pulls out his notebook and marks the time, place, and number of birds in the covey.

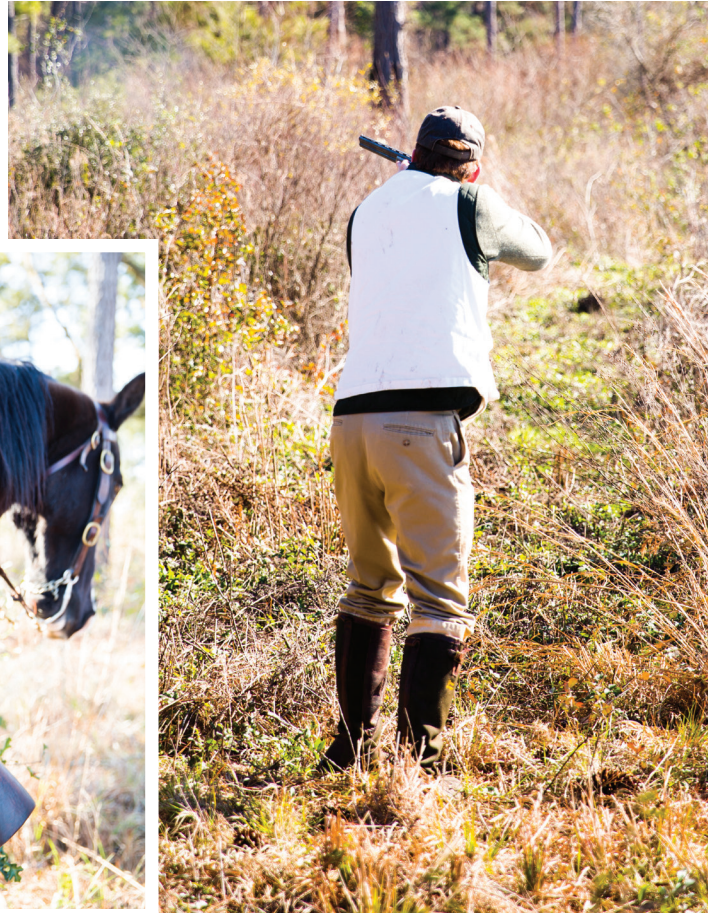
The hunt party winds its way through the longleaf and wiregrass to a convenient gathering of stately oaks, the scout calls in the dogs and the wagon stops to load up pointers and lay out lunch. The wagon gallery congratulates the guns on their best shots, including a few doubles, and everyone finds a camp chair in which to recline while the hot soup and sandwiches are laid out. A few of the party wander over to an adjacent sharecropper’s field with the promise of good arrowhead hunting and stories about the Creek Indians who once held court on this ridge. The horses wander, eating exotic greens they don’t find in the white-fenced paddock they left this morning. The dogs nap in the wagon, knowing they’ll have another go at it before long.

As the world has moved on around us, little has changed on the quail plantations of the Red Hills region. Flagler’s railroad south into Florida gave wealthy Yankees other, more exotic winter destinations, and the opulent hotels of downtown Thomasville mysteriously burned within a short time around 1905. But those who had come and fallen in love with the piney woods were here to stay. The same families

have passed down their property for five generations, and many of their decedents call Thomasville home.

The Georgia-Florida Field Trial Club continues testing the dogs of the Red Hills plantations each President's Day as it has for 100 years in a hotly contested and much grumbled about rivalry. In lieu of the train from Savannah, the tarmac of Thomasville's airport hosts a billion dollars of private planes on weekends such as the Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival in mid-November and the Thomasville Antiques Show in late February. These events conveniently correspond with the beginning and end of quail season.

Plantations are an oddity in today's world. Nothing has changed about the technology or tradition of the hunt. This crowd of folks attracted by our mild winters stayed because of these confounded little birds who spend their entire lives on the ground, and only fly when they must. And Thomasville



Photographs by Gabe Harway



Magnolia Place *of Cairo*

IF YOU CAN'T BE AT "HOME" MAGNOLIA PLACE IS THE PLACE TO BE!

RESIDENTS are our primary focus at Magnolia Place and RESIDENT care, satisfaction and happiness is our mission.

1710 South Broad Street • Cairo, GA 39828

229.377.6811

www.magnoliaplacecairo.com

wouldn't be different than any other small, Southern town without the continued investment of those who pursue them. Competitive owners have made a science of ecosystem management to maximize their quail numbers, an effort led by Tall Timbers Research Station. Consequently, more than 300,000 acres around us has been shielded from development.

Thanks to the legacy of those Yankee families and their love of quail, the big woods that support bobwhites has created a buffer between our community's unique culture and the world around us. Recently, the threat of development from surrounding cities has been stopped by the conservation efforts of countless families who have linked arms, putting their properties in permanent conservation easement to ensure the landscape will remain unchanged in perpetuity. At this point, more than 150,000 acres in the Red Hills have permanent protection either by easement or trust. This contiguous habitat is what makes our region "the quail capital of the world." We have the last large concentration of high-density bobwhite quail.

We are secluded from the uncertainty of the rest of the world, knowing that here, time passes a little more slowly – about the speed of a mule drawn wagon carrying tired hunters back to the mantle of the fireplace to swap stories about their day in the field. We have those wily little birds to thank for that. **TM**



THRIVE
experience

NancyFeinberg.com 229.560.6778

FOR A **NEW YOU** IN THE
NEW ISH YEAR

Independent Brand Promoter

A GREAT TIME TO START, OR START AGAIN...LET'S THRIVE!

LV-1315

ASK ME ABOUT THE THRIVE EXPERIENCE level.com




TBR
Taylor Benefit Resource

- Self-Funded Plan Administration
- Fully Insured Plans
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- COBRA Administration
- Wellness and Cost Containment

Our success is measured by the satisfaction of our clients.

Taylor Benefit Resource, Inc. is a Third Party Administrator providing a wide variety of customized benefit services for employers both large and small. Whatever your employee benefit needs, we can help. TBR provides recommendations that not only help ensure the benefit package selected meets your needs, but also meets your budget.

164 Commercial Drive, Thomasville, Georgia 31758 229.225.9943