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Millpond:
The Cleveland
Connection



All of the first floor rooms open into the lush interior courtyard of the main house.



Photo by Alicia Osborne, courtesy of The Wright Group



MILLPOND PLANTATION: THE CLEVELAND CONNECTION

By Kathleen Crowther

At the turn of the last century, many of Cleveland's wealthy families went south during the winter to Thomasville, Georgia. Thomasville was a resort community with luxury hotels that catered to northern families wishing to escape the cold. Hailed for its mild climate and therapeutic pine-infused fresh air, Thomasville was a direct connection from Cleveland on the railroad. In fact, Thomasville was the terminus. In 1897, *Harper's Weekly* considered Thomasville "the best winter resort on three continents."

Beginning in 1895, dozens of wealthy Cleveland families visited Thomasville and the surrounding region. They began to purchase the southern plantations that were available for sale after the Civil War. The northern buyers often converted large areas of the plantations to hunting grounds for wild bobwhite quail, fishing, and other outdoor pursuits. Where possible, cash crops were also raised to bring income to the plantation and retain employment in the region.

The Cleveland families associated with Thomasville and its environs are familiar to us today because of their legacy of philanthropy to area institutions. Those families include the Hannas, Harknesses, Humphreys, Ingalls, Irelands, Paynes and Wades, just to name a few. In 1976, one estimate is that Cleveland families owned 41 plantations in the general region comprising over 150,000 acres.¹ Over the last 100 years, plantations have been passed down through generations and are infrequently sold.

The Wade family of Cleveland has maintained a direct tie to Thomasville since 1903 through ownership of Millpond Plantation. Millpond was developed by

Jeptha H. Wade II who purchased the land and commissioned Cleveland architects Hubbell and Benes, along with landscape architect Warren Manning, to create a large home, garden and naturalistic woodlands. Today, Millpond is considered the quintessential Thomasville plantation property that embodies the post-Civil War values of conservation of nature, gracious living and outdoors sportsmanship. Millpond was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

For the first time in five generations, Millpond and associated acreage is for sale through The Wright Group in Thomasville. "Very little has changed over the 100+ years at Millpond," says Ben McCollum, broker for The Wright Group. "The family still owns approximately 10,000 acres. Their stewardship of the land demonstrates an unparalleled conservation and preservation ethos. Almost the entirety of their vast land holdings have been protected utilizing conservation easements, thus ensuring that the landscape and sport enjoyed by five generations of Wades will be protected and maintained in perpetuity."



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Photo courtesy of the Georgia-Florida Field Trial Club



Photos courtesy of the Sedgwick Family



- A) 1940 hunt wagon and spaniel
- B) Historic image of the main house
- C) Historic image of a hunt party
- D) Hunt party in the field



Photo by Alicia Osborne, courtesy of The Wright Group



AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THOMASVILLE

Prior to the wave of wealthy northerners making their way south, the Thomasville region contained farms and plantations which produced cotton, rice, and timber with enslaved labor. In 1860, Thomas County had 29 plantation owners with over 50 enslaved African Americans each. These enslaved African Americans comprised 58% of the population and produced 6,582 bales of cotton alone.²

At the close of the Civil War, many of the former slaves stayed in the area and became sharecroppers. Coincident with northerners purchasing the old plantations, quail hunting became a popular sport. In addition, the training and breeding of dogs for hunting was perfected. Today, the suppliers of hunting dogs for the quail sport are dominated by African-American trainers, a legacy carried down through the black families.³

REFERENCES

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2. Brueckheimer, William R, "The Quail Plantations of the Thomasville-Tallahassee-Albany Region" (Florida State University, Tallahassee), p 150, 1979.
3. Greenstein, Irwin, "Where Quail is King, the Untold Story of Georgia's African American Dog Handlers," *Shot Gun Life Magazine* 2016.



The following information is an excerpt from the National Register of Historic Places with minor alteration. Written by Martha F. Norwood.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF MILLPOND

Millpond Plantation is one of Thomas County's most unusual estates. The buildings are in the Spanish stucco revival style and were designed by Hubbell and Benes, a prestigious Cleveland, Ohio firm that designed the Cleveland Museum of Art. The landscaping, greatly influenced by the owner's interest in nature, was designed by Warren Manning, noted Boston landscape architect and designer of the Biltmore Estate, gardens at Asheville, N.C., and the Jamestown Exposition. Construction for the main house was begun in 1903 and completed in 1905. By 1910, the entire complex was complete.

THE MAIN HOUSE

Millpond's main house is a sprawling Spanish Revival style mansion, measuring 130 feet by 140 feet. The house is constructed of brick with trim and foundation of granite, but the brick is stuccoed completely. The house is built around a 100 square foot courtyard and all of the first floor rooms open onto this court.

Millpond's main house is a sprawling Spanish Revival style mansion, measuring 130 feet by 140 feet.

The courtyard is covered by a steel and glass canopy which can be removed. Lush plants fill the courtyard and the canopy enables the courtyard to act as a greenhouse so that plants will flourish year round. Originally, a tunnel ran under the house, connecting the courtyard with the grounds to allow gardeners to enter and leave unnoticed. The center section of the front and rear facades have a second story level, originally used as servants' quarters. The living room extends almost the entire length of the east side of the house and features an immense window overlooking a garden with magnificent views of majestic live oak trees and a shooting range.

A hall connecting the first floor rooms to the courtyard parallels the courtyard on every side and features typical Spanish arches along the courtyard. The roof is arched tile, characteristic of the Spanish Revival style structures.

The estate proper has numerous gardens and outbuildings. Gardens flank the house on three sides. Across the road from the rear of the main house are several employee dwellings also of stuccoed brick but of simpler design. A large shingled water tower rises above the other outbuildings. Most of the buildings in the complex, including the main house, are covered with vines. The architecture of the complex, the lush growth and the moss-draped trees give one the impression of an old Spanish fort.

The plantation complex is well off of the county roads that border the property. The complex can be reached by two tree-lined, dirt plantation roads that wind along for almost a mile. Gatehouses stand at both entrances.



Photo by Alicia Osborne, courtesy of The Wright Group



HUBBELL & BENES

Courtesy of Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, Case Western Reserve University

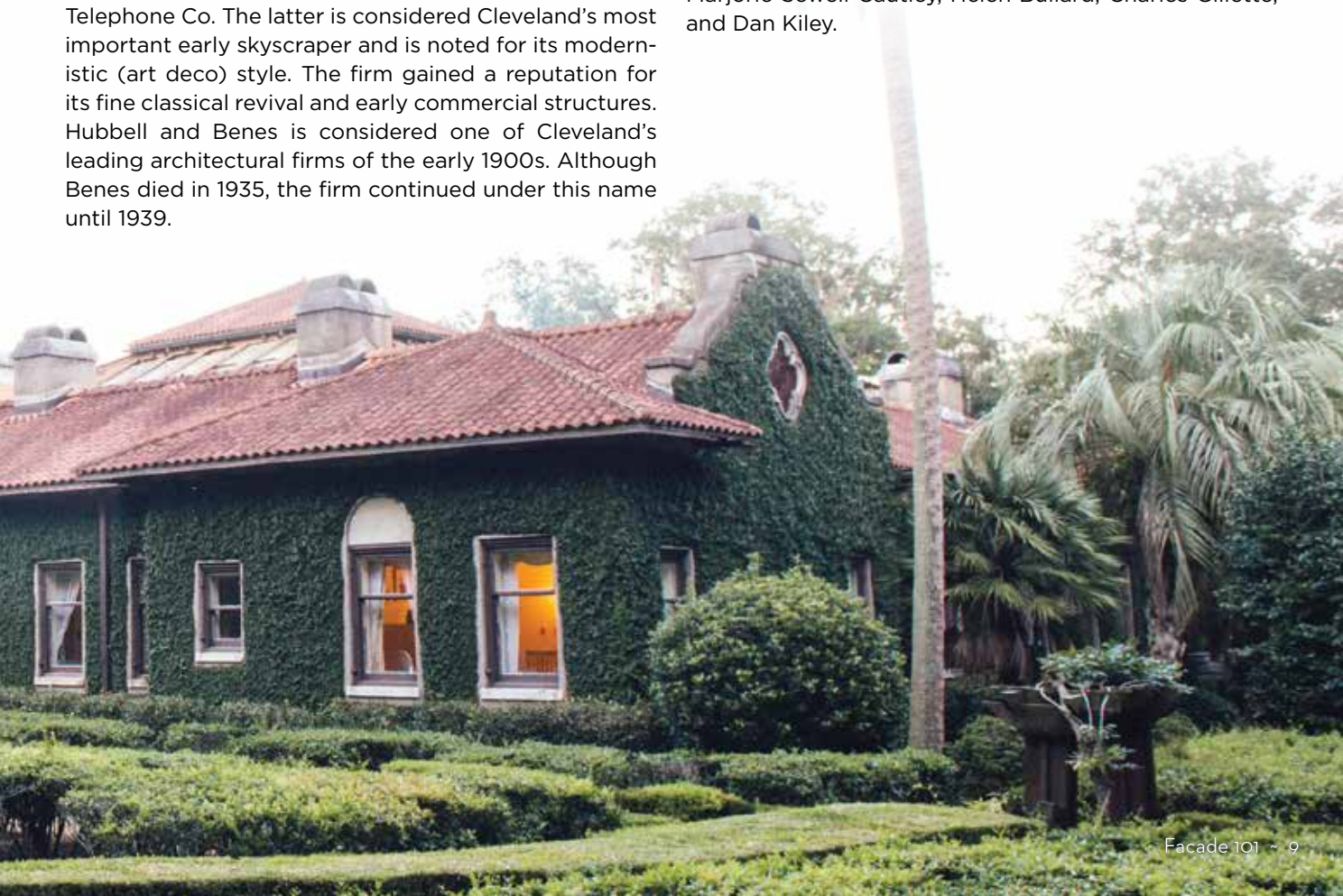
The architectural firm of Hubbell & Benes designed several of Cleveland's most noteworthy buildings. W. Dominick Benes (1857-1935) began working for the firm of Coburn & Barnum in 1876, and Benjamin S. Hubbell (1867-1953) joined the firm in the mid-1890s. By 1896 the firm had evolved into Coburn, Barnum, Benes & Hubbell. The latter two architects then struck out on their own in 1897.

Their first major project was Wade Memorial Chapel (1901) in Lake View Cemetery. Other projects in Cleveland include the Citizens' Bldg. (1903); the Cleveland School of Art (1905), demolished; the Mather College Gymnasium (1908); the West Side Market (1912) and the designs for adjacent (unbuilt) structures; the YMCA (1912); and the Illuminating Bldg. (1915) on Public Square. Perhaps the firm's most important building was the Cleveland Museum of Art (1916). At this time they also drew up plans for cultural buildings around the Wade Park Oval. Afterwards came the Masonic Auditorium (1921); the *Plain Dealer* Building (later used by the Cleveland Public Library) at Superior and E. 6th (1922), demolished; and, in 1927, the Phillis Wheatley Assn. Building, St. Luke's Hospital, and the Ohio Bell Telephone Co. The latter is considered Cleveland's most important early skyscraper and is noted for its modernistic (art deco) style. The firm gained a reputation for its fine classical revival and early commercial structures. Hubbell and Benes is considered one of Cleveland's leading architectural firms of the early 1900s. Although Benes died in 1935, the firm continued under this name until 1939.

WARREN H. MANNING

Courtesy of The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Born in Reading, Massachusetts, Manning worked for Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., from 1888 to 1896, initially as a horticulturist. He worked in collaboration with John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and was strongly influenced by Charles Eliot, with whom he worked on the Boston Metropolitan Park System. With the firm, he worked on such projects as the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and gained experience in the design of planned industrial communities. In 1896, Manning opened his own office in Boston. During his career, he worked on over 1,700 projects, including estates, parks and park systems, city plans, campus plans, subdivisions, golf courses, and institutional grounds. The Pinehurst resort in North Carolina, Stan Hywet Hall in Akron, and Gwinn in Cleveland represent preeminent surviving examples of Manning's estate work. Manning's approach to town planning was informed by principles of resource-based planning, in opposition with the prevailing methods of the City Beautiful movement. A founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Manning served as its president in 1914. His talented employee roster included Fletcher Steele, A.D. Taylor, Marjorie Sewell Cautley, Helen Bullard, Charles Gillette, and Dan Kiley.





Photos by Alicia Osborne, courtesy of The Wright Group

A) Millpond dining room

B) Springer Spaniel in the Millpond study



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FIVE GENERATIONS OF THE WADE FAMILY OF CLEVELAND AT MILLPOND

THE FIRST GENERATION AT MILLPOND

Mr. J. H. Wade II (1857-1926) was a wealthy Cleveland financier and philanthropist, grandson of the founder of the Western Union Telegraph Company. In 1880, he married Ellen Garrettson of Cleveland and they subsequently had three children, Jeptha H. Jr., George Garrettson and Helen. Mr. Wade's numerous business ventures included: owner and president of Wade Realty Company, president of Montreal Mining Company, and director of the Union Trust Company, Guardian Trust Company, Grasselli Chemical Company, Sandusky Cement Company, Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, National Refining Company, Baker Rand L Company and the Cleveland Stone Company.

Jeptha Wade's philanthropic endeavors were directed toward the Wade Benevolent Fund, the Community Fund, Lakeside Hospital, the Cleveland Protestant Orphanage, the Western Reserve Historical Society, the Museum of Natural History, local schools, the Cleveland Museum of Art (of which he was president), and countless other organizations. He donated a large and valuable collection of paintings, sculpture and other art objects to the Cleveland Museum of Art. Jeptha H. Wade was said to be Cleveland's greatest benefactor. He also made contributions to the Thomas County area during his residency there.

Jeptha Wade increased his Thomas County land holdings to upwards of 10,000 acres and built his massive Spanish Revival style home on Millpond. Since landscaping was a hobby, Mr. Wade took an active part in developing the grounds. He increased the size of the millpond and leveled a hill beside the house in order to view the pond from the main house. He ordered the planting of separate gardens for roses, palms, poppies, dogwoods, crabapples, lilies and tropical ferns and shrubs.

The gardens were kept and nurtured from 1915 to 1955 by the superintendent, Alfred F. Wilkinson, who had been trained in the gardens of England. Millpond, upon its completion, was declared by editors and plantation owners to be a superior showplace of the South. After 23 winters in Thomasville, Jeptha Homer Wade died at Millpond on March 6, 1926. His passing was much lamented in Cleveland and Thomasville; newspapers of the day carried lavish accounts of his many accomplishments and contributions.

THE SECOND GENERATION

In 1926, Millpond was placed in trust and its use was given to Jeptha Wade's children Jeptha Jr. (1924-2008), Helen (Mrs. Edward B. Greene) (1911- 1996) and George Garrettson (1882-1957), all lifetime residents of Cleveland. The new owners continued to maintain Millpond until the 1950s. That they retained the traditional beauty of the house and gardens is evidenced by a glowing account of Millpond's gardens in a 1948 article by the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*.

THE THIRD GENERATION

In 1959, Millpond had to be sold according to the terms of the trust which had been set up by the first Wade of Millpond. The children of George Wade and Helen Wade Greene then purchased Millpond from the trust in 1961. The new owners were Jeptha H. Wade III (1924-2008), Irene Wade (Mrs. Ellery Sedgwick, Jr.) (1913-2013), both children of George Wade, and Helen Greene (Mrs. A. Dean Perry) (1911-1996), daughter of Helen Wade Greene.

THE FOURTH, FIFTH AND SIXTH GENERATION

Today Millpond Plantation is owned by the fourth generation of the Wade Family. According to one of the current owners, Theodore Sedgwick, the children and grandchildren of the fourth generation also enjoy Millpond. "In some ways the place has become less formal and in some ways we keep the formal traditions such as served dinners, coat and tie for dinner. We have a Christmas lunch that usually takes in 18-22 family members."

Millpond is an extraordinary bobwhite quail hunting plantation, outfitted with seven quail courses, two established dove fields, an eighty-five acre lake stocked with trophy fish and imprinted ringneck ducks, a fourteen stall horse barn, a thirty-six run dog kennel with whelping room, and a six run cocker kennel. Let us hope that the next owner of Millpond will respect its historic integrity and contribute to the community as have the Wades over these many years. ❖