



**SUPPORT LAND CONSERVATION IN GEORGIA AND ALABAMA**

In this issue of our newsletter, we profile conservation easement donors and what is special and so-worth-protecting about their lands. We also write about annual monitoring and our increased success using aerial monitoring practices to supervise the more-than-400 conservation easements that we monitor in perpetuity.

We're proud of what we do and what you have helped us to do. We look to the future with a clear vision of our perpetual commitment to land conservation. We're proud, too, that our work, mission, staff, board of directors, and supporters remain so focused on protecting land in Alabama and Georgia.

As a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, we rely on support from conservation easement landowners and donors, charitable supporters, and grants from conservation-minded charities and foundations to keep the work going.

Perpetual monitoring is costly, as is

keeping a professional staff with biologists, foresters, and conservation planners who work with landowners to get conservation easements done in a timely and efficient manner. Right now, we are working with landowners on more than 50 new conservation easements in Georgia and Alabama, including permanent conservation of several restored wetland and stream sites with our partners. The last quarter of the year is always a busy time for us, too, as conserva-

tion easement work by its nature faces year-end deadlines.

Your donations and support makes the successful, perpetual protection of special land in Alabama and Georgia possible.

So, as summer turns into fall, and year-end giving moves into your thoughts, please remember Alabama Land Trust, Inc. and Georgia Land Trust, Inc. in your year-end donation plans. Also, we ask that you please perpetuate our perpetual protection of land by remembering us in your will and estate planning.



The donors listed below have provided support in the last three months. Their generosity helps us achieve our mission.

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**CRISSY STEELE, LONG-TIME BOOKKEEPER, REMEMBERED**

Cristine Louise King Steele, 40, of Collinsville, Ala., valued employee and bookkeeper for Alabama Land Trust and Georgia Land Trust and affiliates, died May 31 following a seven-month battle with pancreatic cancer.

Crissy, as she was known at the Piedmont, Ala. office where she worked, left as survivors her daughter Melissa Steele, 18, a student at Gadsden State, son Matthew Steele, 12, mother Gail Wilder, all of Collinsville; and father George King and brother Robert King, both of McAlpin, Fla.

Services were Thursday, June 3, in Collinsville with co-workers from the land trusts serving as pallbearers.

Crissy owned and operated Bookkeepers Plus in Collinsville with her mother Gail for five years, and it was that contract work with the land trusts that resulted in her employment with the land trusts. Crissy worked for four years handling financials, bookkeeping, payroll, and accounting duties.

**CHATTAWAH OPEN LAND TRUST**

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PROTECTING LAND FOR PRESENT & FUTURE GENERATIONS

**GEORGIA LAND TRUST**



Mountain hardwoods

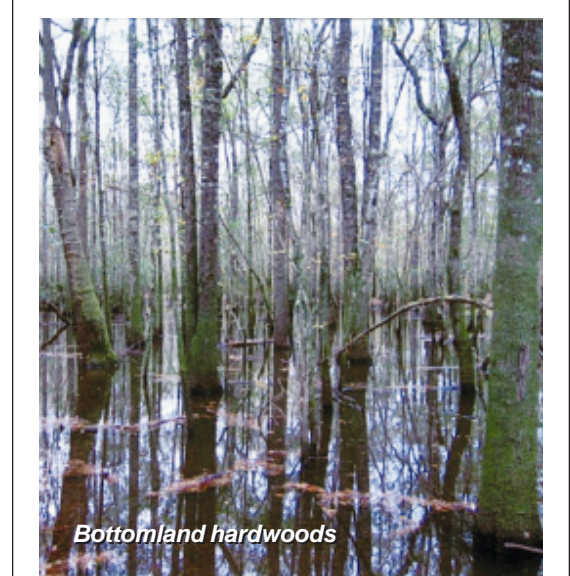
**ALABAMA LAND TRUST, GEORGIA LAND TRUST ARE AMONG SOUTHEAST LEADERS IN PRIVATE LAND PROTECTION**

Georgia Land Trust, Inc. and partner organization Alabama Land Trust, Inc. combine to protect more private land than any other southeastern regional conservation group, according to recent a Land Trust Alliance survey and report on non-government conservation efforts.

With more than 153,000 acres of private land protected in Alabama and Georgia in more than 400 conservation easements as of the end of 2009, Georgia Land Trust, Alabama Land Trust, and founding organization the Chattowah Open Land Trust are proud to rank among the leading land trusts in the southeast.

Georgia Land Trust, headquartered in Savannah with an office in Columbus, Ga., and Alabama Land Trust, headquartered in Piedmont, Ala. with an office now in Birmingham, protect land primarily by working with private landowners to establish conservation easements on their family and investment lands.

Conservation easements are voluntary agreements between the Land Trusts and the landowner whereby the landowner protects the conservation values of the land, potentially resulting in significant income and other tax savings. Learn more about the Land Trusts, conservation easements, how they work, and potential tax benefits at [www.galandtrust.org](http://www.galandtrust.org).



Bottomland hardwoods

**IT'S ABOUT THE LAND CONSERVATION EASEMENT LANDOWNERS SHARE DESIRE TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT**

- A six-generation farm family growing Georgia's prize Vidalia onions.
- A historic preservation enthusiast and activist on a mission.
- An east Alabama donor determined to save the land her father loved.
- A Georgia family fulfilling their patriarch's vision.

All these folks have one thing in common. They are conservation easement landowners with Alabama Land Trust and Georgia Land Trust. And, they tell their story in profiles featured in this summer 2010 issue.



Oak lined road, southwest Georgia

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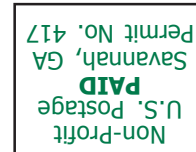
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THE LANDOWNERS LAND TRUST



Brian, Tracy, Vince and R.T. Stanley

**STANLEY FARMS  
SIX GENERATIONS WORK  
THE LAND IN GEORGIA**

Six generations of Stanleys have worked land in Georgia's Toombs and Tattall counties, and another generation is learning to love the land and how to work it.

The Stanley family has been living and farming in the Toombs County area longer than there has been a Toombs County, which formed in 1901, and almost as long as nearby Tattall County which officially became a county in 1801. The family's history mirrors the history of the community. One of the Stanleys helped start the local hospital, and current conservation easement owner R.T. Stanley was president of the local

farm bureau for 30 years (although he notes, "I don't like politics").

The real history of the Stanleys is their work on the land, including the 1,635-acre tract in Tattall County the family preserved in 2009 with a conservation easement held by Georgia Land Trust.

"I started out sharecropping with my great uncle," R.T. says. "Some of the land we worked, the family now owns. In sharecropping, we'd receive equipment, the use of land, and fertilizer in exchange for working the land and a share of the crops brought in. Our land was mainly in cotton

and tobacco back then; cash crops but hard on the land. Most of our land is now mainly in onions and some soybeans."

R.T. says that sharecropping helped strengthen his determination to own land. "As I was growing up, I always wanted to buy land and own it. It's in my blood. It's always better to own it; you never know what will happen when you lease it." The land in the conservation easement, which features around two miles of frontage on the Ochoopee River, is a more recent acquisition.

"The downturn in the economy was a two-edged sword. It hurt some people, but it helped make this tract available," says R.T., whose sons Vince, Brian and Tracy joined him in donating the easement. "Buying this tract is the biggest transaction in my life; it's a big step—a big chance to take."

All the Stanleys agree that it was chance worth



Man-made pond on Stanley property—home to some good fishing

taking. "It's just so big and diverse," Vince says. "There are a couple of hundred acres of longleaf and wiregrass, and we planted another 150 acres of longleaf. There's a variety of hunting and fishing, and the land is good."

Good indeed: 43 percent of the property is rated either prime soil or soil of statewide importance. Almost 300 acres are Tifton soils, highly desirable for production of sweet Vidalia onions. Much of the fine soils on the property are also under irrigation, highly important given a few recent periods of prolonged drought in Georgia. "We know that when you're messing with Mother Nature, you never know what she'll throw at you," Brian noted.

In addition to growing onions, the Stanleys now operate Vidalia Valley Farms™, which produces Vidalia Onion™ products, including salad dressings, barbecue sauce, and even a Vidalia Onion Slow Burn Peach Hot Sauce™. Recently, Vidalia Valley's Organic Vidalia Onion Tomato Basil Dressing™ won the Taste of Georgia Award.

"It's vertical integration. We get more use out of all of our onions. We grade them as they come in and some grades used to just be taken back to the fields and harrowed in. The number 2 grades taste just fine but have some sort of visual defect that would keep you from selling them, and they could be up to 20 percent of the year's yield. Now, we use them for our sauces and other Vidalia Valley products."

When asked who created the recipes for the sauces, Vince reports that is another aspect of vertical integration, combining his entrepreneurial and culinary abilities. Who created the recipes? Vince says simply, "I did." His inspiration? "Well, I do like to make money. And they taste real good, too."

Not long ago, onions were the new crop for the Stanleys. Now, the family is trying other things to diversify Stanley Farm's crops. Some of their

property is now in kanaf, a fibrous plant native to the Middle East. The fibers found in kanaf's core are blended with plastic to produce a strong plastic useful for pipes and other applications needing exceptional rigidity. The crop, recommended to them by USDA, revealed another important use in the wake of the Gulf oil spill. The plant's fibrous core is highly absorbent, and kanaf plastics were used extensively in the cleanup efforts.

The Stanleys' conservation easement with Georgia Land Trust will ensure that the Stanleys will always have a place not only to continue working the land but also to gather the family in some of their favorite pursuits. Much of the property is used for hunting and abounds with deer, dove, and turkey. It also features man-made ponds that supports healthy populations of bass and white perch.

Vince says, "I handled a lot of the work on the conservation easement. When you're talking forever, and trying to keep land in the family forever, you look at everything very closely."

"Working with the land trust, we feel like we covered everything. We kept changing the easement around a good bit and got it where it was a win-win. We can continue using the land, mixing in food plots, timber and crops on a lot of the property, but there are over 140 acres of well over 100-year old bottomlands that will never be touched."

And even more important to the sixth generation of Stanleys is what the conservation easement means to the seventh generation. "Now, we know our kids will grow up on this land. They love to go out on it with us. They all say they want to go to 'The Plantation.'"

**JACKIE WALBURN IS  
NEW DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

Jackie Romine Walburn joined Alabama Land Trust, Georgia Land Trust and affiliates as development director in March of 2010.

A Birmingham native and Auburn University graduate with a B.A. in journalism, Jackie most recently served as corporate communications manager, regional public affairs manager and as a registered lobbyist for Weyerhaeuser Company.

Jackie also served as public relations manager for MacMillan Bloedel Packaging and managed the MacMillan Bloedel Foundation. She was an award-winning reporter, editor and photographer for *The Selma Times-Journal* and reported for *The Birmingham Post Herald*, *The Auburn Bulletin* and other newspapers and publications. She worked in public relations for a variety of not-for-profit organizations including the Alabama Sheriffs' Boys and Girls Ranches and The Edmundite Missions.

For the land trusts, Jackie is working out of a Birmingham office and is responsible for development including foundation grant writing, fundraising, public outreach, public relations and communications. She is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.



THE VIDALIA ONION:  
SWEET SUCCESS

©Dagmar Nelson

The Vidalia onion and its renowned sweetness helped turn around the economy in south-central Georgia years ago and remain essential to local agriculture's sweet success.

Depression-era farmers—long held down by poor commodity prices—discovered that the sweet onions the area produced were bringing the then-unheard-of-price of \$3.50 for a 50-pound bag. The onion's fame was spread by its location along U.S. Highway 1, the I-95 of that era, and the Piggly Wiggly distribution center located in Vidalia, which shipped the sweet onions throughout its regional supermarket chain.

The onion's commercial success lead to more interest in growing the onions, with resultant rises in acreage devoted to the crop and more interest outside the region where growers "pretended" to grow the onion named for the south Georgia area where it grows best.

In response to calls from local onion producers who had banded together to protect the integrity of the onions, the Georgia General Assembly passed the Vidalia Onion Act in 1986, delineating a 20-county area in which Vidalia onions could be grown and marketed under the Vidalia name, the ownership of which was given to the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Other steps to protect the Vidalia's integrity include the establishment of an Onion Commodity Commission. The Growers' Referendum in 1987 and the 1989 U.S. Department of Agriculture Federal Marketing Order No. 955 gave federal protection to the Vidalia onion and created the Vidalia Onion Committee, which supports marketing and research initiatives for Vidalia onions.

The Vidalia onion was named Georgia's official state vegetable in 1990, and in 1992 the state of Georgia became the owner of the Vidalia onion

trademark. This protection of the franchise became more important as new controlled atmospheric storage facilities enabled storage of onions for months past the fresh market season, leading to large increases in acreage in the mid-1990s.

Around 14,500 acres of Vidalia onions are now under cultivation. These onions representing about 40 percent of total national spring onion production. Annual gross sales of the Vidalia are \$90 million. An annual average of five million 40-pound boxes of Vidalia onions are shipped from south Georgia.

All of this success is generated by the sweetness, and that sweetness requires a combination of special care, the right seeds, soils and geography. Only yellow granex hybrid seeds are used, and the same seed grown somewhere else will not be as sweet. The soil must be sandy enough to let sulfur (a component of many fertilizers) wash through to the clay substrate—sulfur being what gives onions some of their hotness and aroma.

South Georgia's plentiful rainfall of about 50 inches of rain annually, supplemented by irrigation in dry weather, helps leach sulfur out of the sandy root zone.

Most Vidalia onions are started in seedbeds, raised to seedlings and moved into precise field rows to mature, at a rate of about 80,000 seedlings per acre. Transplanting requires more labor, but transplants are less susceptible to cold weather, weeds and other perils. It takes one person about a day to plant a half acre of seedlings. Vidalia seed only matures during winter at latitudes where the short days are also mild. Every onion is like a clock measuring day length. It all depends on latitude. Plus, ample rain assures bulbs have high water content, another secret to the Vidalia's unique flavor.

Sources: Vidalia Onion Committee, New Georgia Encyclopedia



Bottomland along the Ochoopee during last winter's flooding



Mrs. Burrows and grandson Craig

Talladega County, Ala. into a conservation easement held by Alabama Land Trust.

Legard had mined gravel on the property. The resultant borrow pits were reclaimed as ponds that are now outlined with mature hardwoods. Silver mining was common throughout the area, although it is now remembered only in place names like Silver Mine Road, which runs near the property.

The ponds provide great fishing, according to Burrows' grandson, Craig, and the bottoms provide habitat to deer, turkeys, bobcat, fox, all kinds of snakes, Canadian geese...and beavers. "One year the beavers cut down a lot of the trees," Craig notes, "but they're not as busy now."

Mrs. Burrows reports that one of her favorite aspects of the property is the profusion of wildflowers it hosts and her father's favorite pecan tree. "I used to love to come out here with my father. He loved the whole property and particularly the old pecan tree in the back yard. We would come out together and gather the pecans."

Her father raised cows and soybeans on the property and maintained a cattle auction business with a sales barn. She recalls that her husband, Huey Burrows, loved the wildlife and kept barrel of corn on the property to feed the ducks there. "They would hear his truck and come running."

Mrs. Burrow's father bought the land when he came back to Alabama from Arkansas where he'd also raised cattle. "He was from this area, but moved to Arkansas. It took him a while to make up his mind between Arkansas and Alabama," she says.

Saying she was "always a city girl," Mrs. Burrow laughs that "I wasn't country until I came here." After she and Huey assumed ownership of the property, Mrs. Burrows felt they needed to move onto the property to properly protect and maintain it. The property had been leased by hunting clubs but their stewardship wasn't adequate to the task.

At one point the property provided the only connection between two county seats, Oxford in Calhoun County, Ala. and Talladega in Talladega County, Ala. A hardened stream crossing allowed traffic to cross Choccolocco Creek and carry on commerce between the cities.

Transportation also played helped in Mrs. Burrows' decision to convey the easement. She hopes that the easement will provide the land some protection from a proposed new route coming down from Oxford.

"I didn't want that to happen to the land. I want it to stay like it is forever."

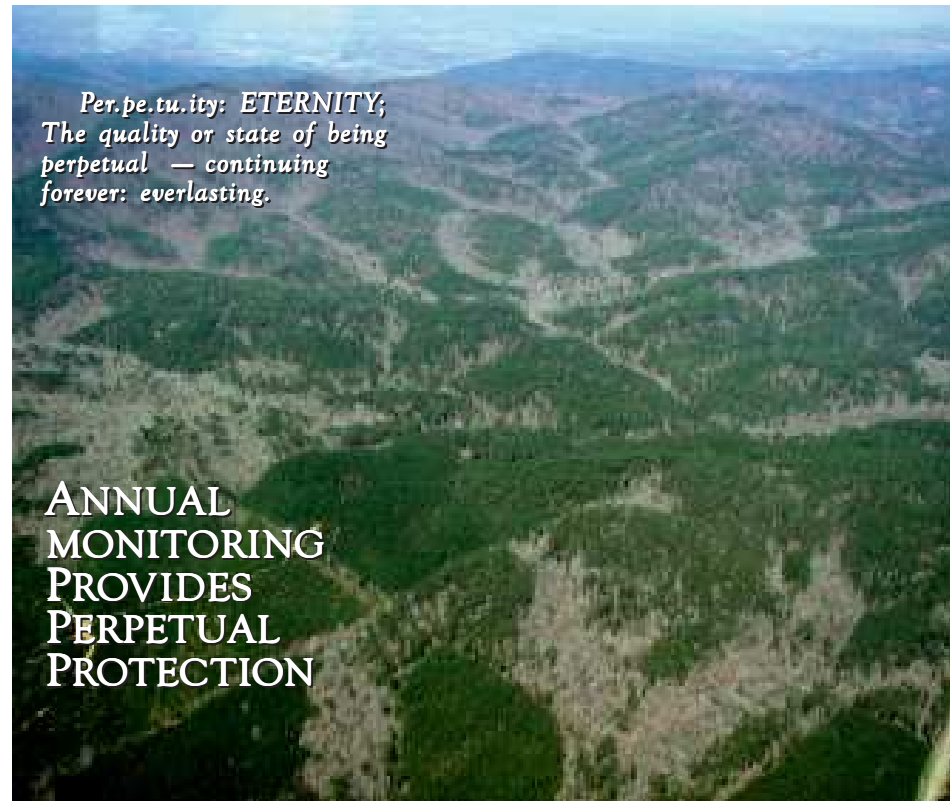
### BURROWS EASEMENT HONORS FATHER'S LOVE OF CHOCCOLOCCO CREEK PROPERTY

The last owner of the Burrows property along Choccolocco Creek, John Legard, "never sold a piece of land," says Doris Burrows, "except to Dad."

Her father's great love of the property compelled Mrs. Burrows in 2009 to place the 45-acre property in



Man-made pond on property resulting from excavation for mining



*Perpetuity: ETERNITY; The quality or state of being perpetual — continuing forever: everlasting.*

### ANNUAL MONITORING PROVIDES PERPETUAL PROTECTION

This aerial photograph of land in northeastern Alabama is one of the hundreds of aerial photographs and on-the-ground documentation of the annual monitoring of the more than 400 conservation easements held **in perpetuity** by the Georgia Land Trust, Alabama Land Trust, and the Chattowah Open Land Trust.

Because the land protected the Lands Trusts now covers an area spanning more than 100,000 square miles, more annual monitoring visits are being conducted aerially. Reserving on-the-ground visits for

small urban easements or those with sensitive requirements deserving a closer look, land trust staff use low aerial flights – flying from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the ground.

Observing the land from this bird's eye view allows land trust staff to make the best use of time and resources as they document on-going land management and take annual site visit photographs like this one to make sure that every easement and every piece of land the Land Trusts protect continues to be protected **forever**.

### WEBSITE REDESIGN IN WORKS

The website for Alabama Land Trust, Inc., Georgia Land Trust, Inc., and founding organization the Chattowah Open Land Trust, Inc. is getting a new look to be revealed in the fall.

The redesign is aimed at making the [www.galandtrust.org](http://www.galandtrust.org) website more interactive. The new website will highlight the beauty and values of the land, watersheds, and natural resources that the land trusts and our landowner and other partners work together to protect.

In addition, our goal is to communicate in the best ways possible with supporters, landowners, and the public about conservation easements, what we protect in Georgia and Alabama, and how our work is supported.

The new website will allow visitors to donate on-line, sign up to receive e-mail

alerts or to get on the mailing list for our printed newsletter, now being issued three times a year.

The redesign project is being managed by new development director Jackie Walburn, with the help of Kate Holloway, a free-lance designer and master's degree student at Syracuse University.

The site will also easily direct visitors to the land trusts' blog (<http://algalandtrust.wordpress.com/>), where land conservation and natural resource protection are on-going topics, and to the land trusts' Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Alabama-Land-Trust-Georgia-Land-Trust/115133924304>) where we post links to our blog or other conservation news, and ask our Facebooking friends and supporters to "like" us and spread the word about land protection.

### CHOCOCCO CREEK: THE PREHISTORIC INTERSTATE

In building their home on land adjacent to their Talladega County, Ala. conservation easement property, the Burrows discovered that their potential residence location had been a home site for quite a while – centuries in fact. Arrowheads and other Native American artifacts discovered on the site near Choccolocco Creek were linked to the Woodlands Indian culture that flourished in the area from 1000 B.C. to A.D. 800.

"The area is rich in prehistoric Indian sites in part because Choccolocco Creek provided a natural 'interstate highway' for prehistoric Indians moving from northwest Georgia southward through northeastern Alabama," according to Dr. Harry Holstein of Jacksonville State University.

These Woodlands and then the later Mississippian peoples first began agriculture in the area, clearing fields and planting and harvesting corn, beans, squash and sunflowers. Agriculture allowed Choccolocco Valley population to grow, resulting in numerous larger permanent villages to be settled along Choccolocco Creek.

One large Mississippian village near Oxford featured a 40-foot-tall flat-topped truncated earthen ceremonial mound much like the famed Etowah Mounds of Northwest Georgia. A Chief or Great Sun of this tribe held political and religious control over tribe members from Chattanooga down through northwest Georgia and along the Coosa River Valley to just north of present day Montgomery.

Chief Coosa, a mid 16th-century Great Sun, gave his name to the principal river of the region. He wielded enormous



A later pathway for travel: site of creek crossing along old road from Oxford to Talladega

power, in part through control of the area's minerals. Greenstone, one of the many rocks found in the area, was prized by Native Americans.

Another part of the Coosa's prosperity was the travel corridor facilitated by Choccolocco Creek, where the Alabama Land Trust now protects more than 10 miles of creek frontage and more than 780 acres in the Choccolocco Creek watershed, including the Burrows conservation easement.

The Choccolocco Creek travel corridor brought not only lucrative trade but also brought undesired visitors. Many villages featured defensive moats and stockades, evidence of rising inter-village warfare in early Mississippian times. Historians believe Choccolocco Creek also have brought Hernando de Soto's 1540 expedition to the area, with some 700 Spanish soldiers and 300 Native American and African bearers. In the summer of 1560, another Spanish expedition under Tristan de

Luna came up the Coosa from Pensacola to the town of Coosa.

After these initial Spanish contacts, native populations declined tremendously due to multiple epidemic diseases. The Creeks, descended from surviving Mississippian peoples, dominated the Choccolocco Creek area until the 1830s and President Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policies.

The Creek Indian War of 1813-1814 began with Jackson's volunteers cataclysmically defeating the Creek at the Battle of Tallasahatchee, a few miles west of the Choccolocco Valley, and resulted in the eventual end of Creek and Native American dominance along the prehistoric highway of Choccolocco Creek.



Native American ceremonial mound in northwest Georgia

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Mary and Bob McCauley

**HISTORIC HOME IS AT THE HEART OF MCCAULEY EASEMENT IN GEORGIA**

At the heart of the McCauley conservation easement is Mary and Bob's historic house between Rutledge and Madison in Morgan County Ga. Although the home almost slipped away when they hesitated before purchasing it, "Once we had it we said, 'What have we done?'"

Constructed by the Cox family prior to 1850, the house remained in the family for more than 120 years. During that time the railroad came (Mr. Cox evidently negotiating the right to stop the train to pick up and discharge passengers at his home in exchange for allowing passage through his oak grove), as well as the Old Dixie Highway ("the first interstate highway") that passes before the house.

Along the way, it was "Victorianized" in the late 1800s, before returning to a configuration closer to the original Greek Revival in the 1950s. Despite these travails, the house was "built like a fort" and is the focal point of a traditional farmstead.

Mary says a prime motivation in working with Georgia Land Trust (GLT) to place the 2008 conservation easement on the property was, "we wanted to



View across property toward house

THE LANDOWNERS LAND TRUST

preserve the house for Madison-Morgan's future; we didn't want to see it cannibalized." The house, part of the surviving two percent of Georgia farmhouses built from 1830-1850, also features other historic structures on its surrounding 10.2 acres, including two c.1900 tenant houses. One of these has been converted to a guest house and another awaits further stabilization.

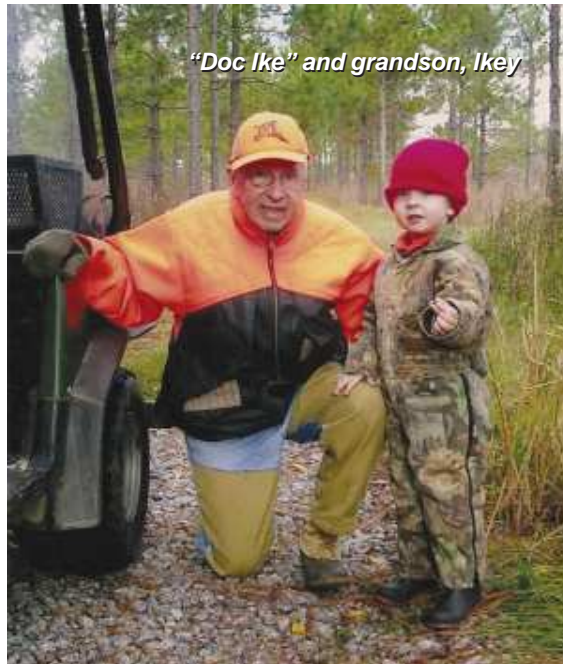
The easement removed development rights from the property and protects traditional land use patterns, while allowing some reconstruction of pre-existing structures from the property's "period of significance" (roughly 1830-1910). Old aerial photographs of the property show the outlines of a barn and a smokehouse. There is evidence of a sunken garden that allowed landowners "to winter over plants by opening the doors to the sun by day and closing them to protect plants from cold and freezing nights."

Mary's commitment to historic preservation and conservation drives her ongoing work with the Madison-Morgan Conservancy (MMC), which she helped found in 2000 and served as president. Daughter Christine McCauley serves as executive director of the MMC, which has a long relationship with GLT, which holds 13 Morgan County conservation easements encompassing more than 1,000 acres. The MMC also helped develop the Morgan County Greenprint Plan, the first such county-wide plan in Georgia, as well as the first Greenprint adopted as part of a county comprehensive plan.

"The Greenprint is used by county planners to judge the impact of proposed land use changes and by the Conservancy in planning our annual Greenprint Ramble," Mary says. "My only fear is that even though we've identified properties contributing to the scenic viewsheds along Old Dixie Highway, that we won't preserve all that is preservable. We have this land and we will always need it. We'll be remembered for how it is preserved and passed on to the next generation."

She adds that the downturn in the economy gave a little "breathing space" from development pressures from Atlanta's eastward expansion, allowing more mapping of places important for preservation and "looking at the best uses and where to put them. We'd like to see building within areas served by existing infrastructure." Madison, the county seat, has also adopted a Greenprint to help preserve its small city charm.

The McCauleys believe donating conservation easements is a good way to achieve greenspace protection. In addition to protecting the property's historic resources and the view from Old Dixie Highway, Mary notes that her property protected by the GLT conservation easement even supports some of the local fauna. "The deer love to eat the phlox. And my roses."



"Doc Ike" and grandson, Ikey

**"DOC IKE" ROLADER'S VISION FULFILLED, ENJOYED BY FAMILY**

When "Doc Ike" Rolader purchased the Paces Farm and Land property in Emanuel County, Ga., his simple concept was for the land to support quail hunting and where his family—kids, grandkids—could "forever gather."

When the senior Rolader bought the property from a land bank, he told his family it would be increasingly hard to find the large contiguous properties his vision required. It took Doc Ike's vision to see the possibilities.

The land—totally cleared, with four large center pivot irrigators—was terribly depleted from years of leaseholders' "deficient practices."

**OGEECHEE'S FREE-FLOWING WATERS PROVIDE ECOLOGICAL BENCHMARK**

The Ogeechee River is Georgia's river that flows the greatest distance under one name.

The blackwater river begins in Greene County, Ga., east of Atlanta, and falls 650 feet to sea level, where it flows into Ossabaw Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. Undammed along its 245-mile run to the sea, the Ogeechee is among the few "untamed major rivers" in America. Its most significant tributary, the Canoochee, is also undammed.

The free flow of these rivers and the lack of population density (Statesboro with its 21,000 population is the largest city wholly within the basin) provides ecologists a benchmark against which to study restoration efforts in river basins more significantly altered by mankind.

The Ogeechee River basin encompasses more than 5,500 square miles. The swamps and bottomland hardwoods—protected by the river's broad floodplain (in some cases, the river was almost a mile out of its banks this winter)—are relatively undisturbed in many areas.

Tupelo and cypress grow in the river's wetter areas and the bottomlands support laurel oak, red

Doc's son Bob describes the land at time of purchase as "a sea of pigroot and coffee weed." The family jokingly referred to it as "Paces South: A Treeless Development."

The Roladers launched a quarter century of aggressive land management with "a month of bushhogging." They planted over a million pines, creating a mosaic of small game fields, openings and cover areas. They planted wild plums, bicolor lespedeza (which they are now trying to eradicate) and even "fertilized briars, where we could find them."

Now, the Roladers are transitioning their pine to longleaf. "When we started out, we didn't know our trees as well as we could have. After a few thinnings, we started planting longleaf." Last year's planting of 30,000 longleaf brings the total to 70,000. The land, even after the long siege of depletion, is extremely good soil; about 45 percent of the property is rated prime soils or soils of statewide importance by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"We've been fortunate to have stable land management much of our time here," Bob says of his land manager of 16 years, Keith Claxton. They manage for quail, which encourages almost all forms of wildlife; there are healthy populations of deer, turkey, rabbits, foxes, bobcats and, less fortunately, coyote.

Bald and golden eagles visit the property's two large lakes. Bob, an avid falconer, trains red-tailed hawks that he hunts for one or two seasons and then returns to the wild. The hawks are fond of the property's plentiful gray squirrels, and Bob recalls with a smile when one took on a fox squirrel in a losing battle.

The 860-acre conservation easement donated in 2009 to Georgia Land Trust protects nearly 350 acres of wetlands along Rocky Creek, a significant tributary of the Ogeechee River. The wetlands are crossed by an

maple, swamp blackgum, sweet gum and the river's namesake tree, the Ogeechee Lime, which peppers the waters with bright red fruits during the fall. Rare plants found near the river include pitcher plants, witch-alder, needle palm and spider lily. Wild azalea blooms in the spring.

The secluded river swamps also shelter woodpeckers, ducks, songbirds and wading birds. Mississippi and swallowtail kites and osprey hunt the river; owls and hawks feed on the bottomland forests' plentiful prey.

Anglers on the Ogeechee find plentiful, varied fish: American shad (with its delicious roe), redbreast, crappie, striped bass, shellcracker, and catfish. The endangered shortnose sturgeon breeds here. Toward the coast, wood storks and southern bald eagles feed from the Ogeechee. Water snakes and alligators are common and manatees occasionally swim upriver. On reaching the salt marsh's rich estuarine systems, the river provides commercial fishermen with blue crab, shrimp and baitfish. The locals also work the marsh edges and creeks with their cast nets and crab lines.

Prehistoric remains are plentiful along the river. The Smithsonian Institute has dated remains of settlements and burial grounds to around 8,000 B.C.



Mown-grass road threads through pines and openings

old rail bed from the Wadley Southern line. The Greenaway Whistle Stop might have served as many as a hundred sharecropper families working the property's fields, then owned by Enon Lamb.

Beyond protecting the land from fragmentation, the family sees the conservation easement as a way to reduce "downstream squabbling, allowing us to concentrate on land management." Bob continues, "It also allows me to plant things like long-leaf pine and live oaks. I know I won't walk under them all but somebody's got to plant them."

As I move around the property, I can age myself by how things are growing."

Watching the property grow was a particular pleasure for Doc Ike, who passed away a year and a half ago. The property projects a natural appearance, with pines flowing in natural rhythms across the landscape. Live oaks planted by the family provide shade in the heat and mast for foraging game. The open plots and ground cover are lush. Thanks to Doc Ike's vision, this land welcomes wildlife and generations of family yet to come.



Flooded area near Ogeechee in Georgia Land Trust conservation easement