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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 Cox 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 the Old Dixie Highway ("the first interstate highway") that passes before the house.



*Mary and Bob McCauley on porch
of their historic guest 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 to place the 2008 conservation easement on the property was, "we wanted to 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 circa 1900 tenant houses. One of these has been converted to a guest house and another awaits further stabilization.

The conservation 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 Georgia Land Trust, 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.



View across property to historic home

“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. We can’t keep adding pasture palaces.” 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 Georgia Land Trust conservation easement even supports some of the local fauna. “The deer love to eat the phlox. And my roses.”