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**ALL PROFILES WRITTEN BY FRANK MCINTOSH**

## **DAN AND MARY EMMA McCONAUGHEY**

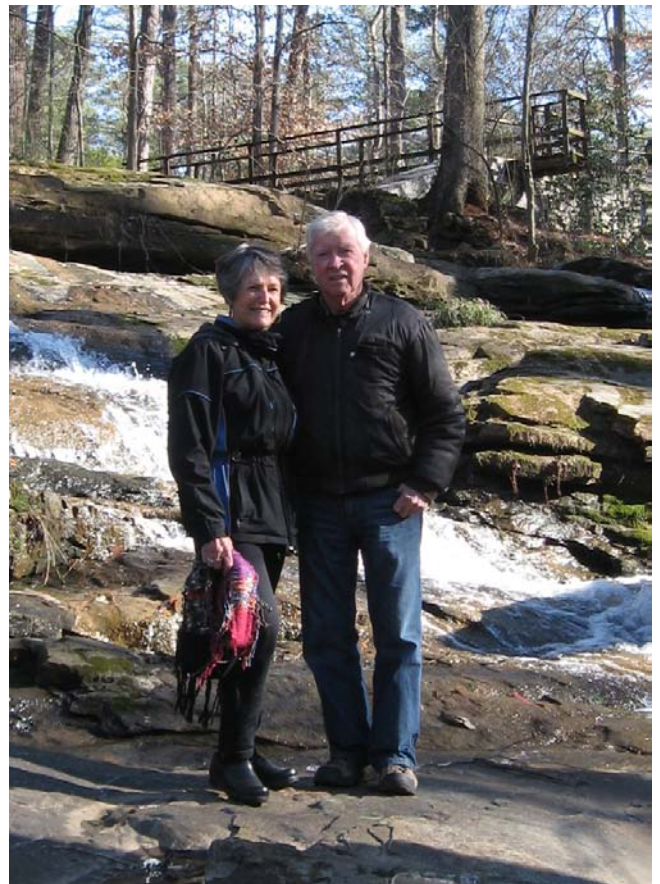
Dan and Mary Emma McConaughey have recently granted a conservation easement to the Georgia Land Trust on their home place and the surrounding four-and-one-half acres situated in Druid Hills near Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Outstanding features include a 120-foot cascading waterfall and the historic site of Durand Mill circa 1830.

They spent three years “reading Frank Lloyd Wright” and working on the house’s plan to ensure that the house they eventually built would blend into the property and would not excessively disturb the site. Only three trees were removed to build the home. The house built of cypress, stone and glass in classic Wrightian fashion, invites the outside in and the inside out through large windows. Large viewing decks offer dramatic vistas of Peavine Creek as it cascades across the property. The interior of the house is built from one fallen wormy chestnut tree which had been preserved under water and which they brought down from the north Georgia mountains.

The McConaugheys constructed two-thirds of a mile of low impact nature trails and bridges through the property so that it may be enjoyed from many vantage points.. The trails are lined with fallen limbs and the many varieties of trees and indigenous wildflowers are labeled. The property is an Audubon Society Bird Sanctuary and the Society likes brush piles preserved for the benefit of the many avian species that enjoy the property. The nature preserve is also habitat to many wild animals including raccoons, rabbits, otters, and a pair of wood ducks.

“We enjoy having nature loving groups tour our property,” Mary Emma said and she named a list of visitors to the property, including the Druid Hills Tour of Homes and Gardens, the Georgia Conservancy (the McConaugheys helped found the organization in the 1960s), the Decatur Garden Tour, numerous local garden clubs, bird watching groups, and various school groups, including a history class from nearby Emory that studied the history of the old mill on the property.

Part of the drama of the property’s setting stems from a historic sluice dynamited into bedrock to channel Peavine Creek to power Durand Mill, originally constructed in the 1830s. The spring fed creek originates about a mile and a half upstream in Decatur. The mill used the power of the creek first to mill flour and later to turn furniture.



The creek runs even in the driest weather. Interestingly, the property is very near a divide in hydrology between the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. The creek flows into the Chattahoochee River and on into the Gulf; a short distance to the east and it would have drained to the Atlantic.

The McConaugheys enjoy the day to day process of cleaning out the invasives that had overwhelmed the property at the time that they purchased it. “The beauty of pulling up ivy, honeysuckle and privet,” Dan notes, “is that after you do clear the land the wildflowers miraculously come up. Each slope has different wildflowers after you clear out the invasives.” The McConaugheys then named a few of the native species that beautify their property: rue anemone, wild geranium, lady slippers, trillium, hearts-a-busting, and spiderwort. They pride themselves on the strides they’ve made bringing back the natural ground cover, “preserving the good and fighting the invasives without poison,” says Dan.

The McConaugheys love of nature manifested itself early on in many outdoor adventures with their children, Memmi, Dan, Jr., and Warner. Dan recalls the whole family piling into their Volkswagen bug and heading for the north Georgia mountains and hiking the Appalachian Trail for four days in the rain. Looking back the family cherishes the experience.

The McConaugheys mulled over their decision to protect the property for several years. “As Atlanta grew and we realized that an astounding number of acres are lost each day to development, we decided to proceed with the conservation easement.” Mary Emma and Dan agree, “Our nature preserve has become more valuable and precious to us as the years have passed. We are so happy to be able to preserve it from development for future generations. We hope others will protect their property as well.”

