

Northern Hunting Plantations in the Red Hills Region, 1870-1930

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In 1919, Walter C. Teagle had already served two years as president of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. This was also the year that Walter E. Edge, a friend, and then governor of New Jersey, introduced Teagle to the Red Hills Region of southwest Georgia and northern Florida, an area already renowned by wealthy sportsmen for its winter hunting colony. Teagle liked the area shooting enough to purchase land in Leon County, Florida, for a collective hunting preserve that he and eight other hunters named Norias. The group proceeded to buy adjoining lands and eventually increased their holdings to 19,000 acres. Several years into the venture, Teagle bought all interest in the land and turned the hunting club into his private estate. The business ethos that Teagle cultivated as a mover in the oil refining industry permeated his leisure activities; his biographers note that his “drive for efficiency and perfection applied at Norias in the same manner as it did everywhere else.” According to the biographers, Teagle’s relationship with his estate workers indicated his efficient, yet progressive business sensibilities. When the hunters first acquired the land, they, in response to Teagle’s directive, used their own resources to improve the cabins of mostly African American farming tenants, build a school for the tenants’ children and supply each household with individual wells. Teagle not only wanted to make “Norias a fine Southern estate,” but he and his colleagues also acted out of “genuine concern for their tenants.” Teagle worked to micromanage all operations on the estate, such as

the cultivation of land, the raising and killing of livestock, and the management of game on the preserve.¹ In some ways, Teagle adopted native southern agricultural practices, such as maintaining the land tenure system and using controlled burning as a land management strategy. But more often, he preferred a scientific approach to all operations. In fact, after taking sole ownership of Norias, he began an individual study of the plantation's ecology, and doggedly sought the advice of experts in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior.² With the land and labor firmly controlled by a spirit of scientific management, Teagle was free to pursue the activity that brought him to the Red Hills region in the first place — hunting quail and other game.

Walter Teagle's experience is representative of a larger phenomenon that took place in the last decades of the nineteenth century and through to the mid-twentieth century. Across the South, wealthy sportsmen, many connected to Standard Oil, invested resources into building private estates where they could pursue their passion for hunting. Like coastal Georgia and South Carolina, the Red Hills Region held an abundance of wild fowl, deer, and fox, and the region's reputation for hunting gained nation-wide fame in the 1890s. By the 1950s, fifty hunting plantations spanned across the Red Hills Region in parts of Thomas and Grady counties in southwest Georgia and Leon and Jefferson counties in north Florida.³ Wealthy hunters created their estates with the aid of coalitions they developed with local elite whites, and initially employed southern strategies of plantation and labor management. Owners gradually implemented new styles of management that reflected three separate impulses: the first was to become, over time, a more insular community (one that did not rely as heavily on southern social networks); the second was informed by a business ethos firmly planted in industrial management; and the third was to study the preservation of game, particularly quail. Concerns

about game conservation especially led to a more scientific form of plantation management, but one that was not necessarily focused on mechanization and modernization of production. Instead of relying on the expertise of agricultural economists from the United States Department of Agriculture, for instance, northern hunters employed the studies of biologists and naturalists in order to justify their land and labor strategies.⁴

The history of the Red Hills winter colony involves intersections of region, class, and race. Northern sportsmen formed relationships with local southerners, white and black, who aided their quest to build a personal hunting paradise. Elite southern whites, also avid hunters and interested in seeing their communities benefit from Yankee dollars, happily formed coalitions with northerners in their pursuit of the best hunting lands, the cheapest local resources, and profit-making endeavors on the plantations. Participation in a shared hunting culture solidified these friendships and lent to the consolidation of postwar agricultural lands. In terms of the increasingly rigid racial hierarchy that defined the postwar South, northern and southern whites found common ideological ground. Elite northern whites, themselves inheritors of a society characterized by race and class divides, possessed similar attitudes about black subordination and white racial control. Shared attitudes regarding social hierarchy proved the essential building block of northern hunting plantations.

The key to understanding why and how the Red Hills Region became a hunting destination is in the social networks created through southern tourism after the Civil War. Although not ubiquitous in the postwar South, tourism as an industry supplied much-needed capital to many southern cities and towns and fostered relationships between northern and southern whites that led to industrialization and modernization efforts. The coalitions built between whites also furthered sectional reconciliation after the Civil War. Scholars who write

on this theme emphasize that northern and southern whites entered into a national project of reunion at the expense of African American political, social, and economic autonomy.⁵ The national tide of racism that heightened at the end of the nineteenth century facilitated common ground between once bitter enemies and allowed southern whites to again (after Reconstruction) control the lives of southern blacks. Northern tourism in the south played an important role in this process of reconciliation.

Thomasville, Georgia, became a resort in the mid-1870s for travelers seeking a refuge from the growing industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Surrounded by tall pine stands, the town gained repute for its aromatic pine resin, which purportedly aided respiratory disease.⁶ A local doctor, D.S. Brandon, referenced Thomasville's growing reputation (in a clever play on words) in a letter to his son James: "Our town is filled with Yanks. Many of them seeking what this or any other country will not afford – health. They pine away the day of grace so to speak – some of them too stingy to come before the death struggle is in sight."⁷

Those who were convinced of the remunerative possibilities of the nascent tourist industry embraced the early trickle of travelers that came to Thomasville in the 1870s. Newspaperman John Triplett, editor of the Thomasville *Times*, wrote portentously in 1873 that, "The tendency is growing stronger every year, among northern tourists, to stop short of the humid atmosphere of Florida, and take advantage of the high pine lands of southwest Georgia." He enticed his readers with the promise of profit: "What combination of capitalists will seize the opportunity of making an investment that ... is bound to pay handsomely..."⁸ Like other New South spokesmen, Triplett heralded the dawn of a new economic age in the South, although in Thomasville it would be ushered in by the town's transformation into a winter resort—something

he later called “the showiest particular of the wondrous change” that characterized the New South.⁹

The early resort era in Thomasville proved to be a gateway for the transformation of the Red Hills region into a winter hunting colony. Sitting at the very northern part of the region, it remained the nucleus of activity for many plantation owners. Although Tallahassee, in the southern part of the region, also played a large part in the experience of northern hunters, it was the social connections made early in Thomasville’s resort era that proved to be the crucial for the region’s development.¹⁰ Enterprising southern men, who saw the potential in these new connections, and wanted to see the growth of sport in the region, took the mantle in orchestrating the expansion of this territory. In the 1890s, no longer visitors to the region, the northern plantation owners were free, with the help of southern whites and blacks, to create their own kind of business enterprise.

The area’s potential for hunting was realized early on by northerners with the help of local whites. Hunting in the area was not a new phenomenon; generations had hunted for sport and to supplement their diet. When tourists began to come to the region, as we have seen, they were interested in observing and taking part in local social events. Hunting, whether it happened in formal events like a fox chase, or in informal quail shooting parties, was no different. In 1876, H.W. Hopkins, a local judge who eventually became the prime broker in selling local lands to northern sportsmen, hosted a foxhunt on the old wagon road that led to Tallahassee. Fifteen shooters took part in the event, as well as “several parties in buggies and carriages” that participated as spectators. The newspaper noted that, “Everybody, including quite a number of our Northern visitors, seemed to enjoy the fun hugely.”¹¹ Occasions like this sparked the Red Hills Region’s reputation for excellent shooting.

Northerners continued to come to Thomasville, too, for the health benefits. Those who owned homes still retreated to Thomasville to convalesce or relax. In 1909, when H.M. Hanna was suffering from an unnamed illness, John D. Rockefeller wrote him a note of sympathy and wish for a speedy recovery at his home in Thomasville. “You are wise to go to Thomasville,” he told Hanna, “where you can be out of doors and as free as possible from care.”¹² Years later, his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. wrote a similar note to Walter Teagle, then president of Jersey Standard. Teagle was hospitalized in Thomasville’s Archbold Hospital (named in honor of John D. Archbold), and Rockefeller hoped that he would soon be “in the woods following his dogs or fishing in the rivers as he has so long delighted to do.”¹³

Northerners, like these men, who opted for a permanent home in the region began building and buying homes in downtown Thomasville. By the early 1890s, a reporter from Wisconsin noted that while exploring the main streets of the town, he passed “the winter residences of many northern people—some from Chicago, but as yet mostly from New York.” Many of the men who formed the winter colony had ties to the growing post-war industrial order. The wealth made from railroads, steel, and oil conglomerates financed resorts across the South.¹⁴ Men such as William Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, William K. Vanderbilt and Marshall Field established the Jekyll Island Club on coastal Georgia, a tony winter retreat that was in use until the 1930s.¹⁵ In Thomasville, men associated with the Standard Oil directly or with the Rockefeller family socially built or bought hunting plantations and by the late nineteenth century had consolidated land in much of the lower half of Thomas County.

That land was available and cheap was crucial to the transformation of the Red Hills Region. H.W. Hopkins pointed to the growing trend, however, to purchase land outside of the town proper: “Land is very cheap near town and ranges from \$2 to \$10 an acre according to

improvements and location. ...Already some New Yorkers have estates of several thousand acres, notably the places of John W. Masury, S.R. Van Duzer, and J. Wyman Jones, all of New York.” The reporter attributed cheap land sales to the “thin farming population compared to the extent of territory...”¹⁶ It seems, however, that it was less an issue of sparse population than a growing inability in the region to hold onto farming lands. Historian and journalist Clifton Paisley notes, that by the early 1880s there was a “growing distress” among southern landowners in the Red Hills Region due to a scarcity of capital and an inability to maintain ownership of farms. Many began to sell off their lands, not yet in parcels but as whole plantations, and for relatively cheap.¹⁷ By the early 1880s, wealthy northerners were taking advantage of land sales to establish winter country homes. Dr. J.T. Metcalfe was one of the first northern men to do so. A native New Yorker, he spent his winters in Thomasville and, as historian William Rogers notes, he “was a tireless promoter of the area’s advantages.”¹⁸ The town appreciated his presence and efforts so much, in fact, they borrowed his name for a new railroad stop in 1889 — Metcalf (the ‘e’ was later dropped).¹⁹ Because of the area’s growing reputation, and perhaps due to Metcalfe’s proselytizing, other wealthy northerners followed Metcalfe in acquiring land. In 1888, John W. Masury, a paint manufacturer from New York, purchased Cleveland Park, a 1,500-acre property where he often hosted picnics and parties for wealthy northern and southern whites.²⁰ A year later, S.R. Van Duzer, also from New York, bought Greenwood, an antebellum plantation just south of Thomasville.²¹

Once northerners acquired property, they established a management system for their lands and labor. During the spring and summer months they were essentially absentee landlords, and left much of the business on the plantation, including managing labor, in the hands of local southern whites. Management decisions on the hunting plantations sometimes fell under the

purview of local men like Hopkins. Because he proved himself to be a trusted local contact, estate owners often looked to Hopkins to act as a sort of overseer of their plantations in the spring and summer months. Although northern estate owners sometimes overrode his decisions, they largely relied upon his advice on some matters of agriculture and labor. Hopkins' correspondence with northern estate owners letters gives insight into the scope of his work as plantation manager and agent; most importantly he oversaw farming tenants and sharecroppers on the estates and employed game wardens to stop poachers (as a state legislature and an early developer of the Georgia Department of Fish and Game, Hopkins could secure wardens easily).

While Hopkins was fulfilling his duty as plantation manager, he was also continuing to act as real estate agent for wealthy northerners. They were always at the ready to purchase contiguous lands or parcels that were advantageous for shooting, and slowly but steadily increased their estate acreage. A good example of the process is the accumulation of lands by J.H. Wade. In 1904, Wade wrote to Hopkins agreeing to purchase the "Girtman place," a farm next to his Mill Pond lands.²² In 1907, he purchased another parcel of contiguous land from a Miss McCartney of Green Bay, Wisconsin.²³ Three years later, he acquired two parcels owned by the McIntyres (known as the Futch lands), a prominent local family.²⁴ In 1916, Wade again wrote to Hopkins wishing to enlarge his holdings: "I would like buy the South ½ of lot 91 owned by Mrs. Lillie if she will sell it at \$15 per acre. This would connect my Futch land with the Hammond place I recently bought. Please see what you can do."²⁵ Lands were also passed from one northern owner to another; by 1923, for instance, John F. Archbold, son of the wealthy industrialist who at one time ran Standard Oil, had acquired the Futch lands from J.H. Wade and added them to his holdings (in total Archbold had 10,140 acres).²⁶

Consolidation of lands took hold all over the Red Hills Region. Clifton Paisley notes that by 1950 in Leon County for instance, northern owners together held 109,700 acres — a consolidation that reduced available agricultural land by eighty percent.²⁷ And because the estates grew so large, only wealthy northern hunters could afford them when they went up for sale. By 1915, Hopkins conceded to northerner Edward Crozer that, “property like yours is beyond the average villager for a home at anything like its value.”²⁸

The consolidation of lands was important to elite northern hunters and their southern counterparts because they wanted access to the best hunting grounds and sought to limit the game shot by local hunters. It became increasingly difficult for traditional southern hunting patterns to continue, which, as Steven Hahn points out, allowed for hunting and fishing to continue on unenclosed land.²⁹ As early as 1885, several local citizens attempted to keep their lands free from shooting by posting an advertisement in the *Thomasville Times*, warning that “all hunters are hereby forbidden to hunt on the grounds of the undersigned with dogs or guns.”³⁰ Notices of this sort, however, remained unheeded and poorly enforced, and until 1916 there were no fencing laws in Thomas County.³¹ When northern hunters built quail estates of their own, they substituted the informal practices for stricter rules, accompanied by more attempt at enforcement through fences and game wardens, often provided by Hopkins.³²

Local whites and blacks were aware of the consequences of land consolidation for small farmers. As Paisley pointed out, land for agricultural use declined steadily in the first half of the nineteenth century. He quotes several locals who voiced their concern about northern estates in the *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*. One writer compared the game preserves of the Red Hills Region to those of England, and noted that in both cases small farmers were forced out of the area. A 1914 editorial in the paper argued that,

As much as the *True Democrat* appreciates the good judgment of wealthy men buying up large landed interest in Leon County for game preserves, it prevents the prosperity we are so anxious to see. Small farms are the true source of dependence, and the policy that prevents an increase of population is wrong and damaging.³³

Earlier, the editor expressed a wish to see “the adoption of some plan whereby the large landed interests of Leon County could be converted into small, profitable farms.”³⁴ By 1920, this vision had not been fulfilled, prompting the editor to lodge another complaint in the paper: “Leon County is suffering much because large landlords are not bringing their immense acreage into production of needed crops.”³⁵

The editor pointed to a growing trend among northern landowners—to reduce crop cultivation in favor of game conservation. Whereas before they sought to increase tenant occupancy and rent amounts, by the 1920s they stopped doing so. This change was largely due to the decrease in the quail population, which became acute in the second decade of the twentieth century. Concerned about the lack of game, a group of hunters (including Charles M. Chapin, L.S. Thompson, owner of Sunny Hill Plantation, and Arthur B. Lapsley, owner of Meridian Plantation) hired the services of naturalist Herbert L. Stoddard to study the quail population and offer remedies to its decline.³⁶ Stoddard published his results in *The Bobwhite Quail*, which became the preeminent guidebook for protection of the bird. His suggestions included management techniques that argued against commercial agriculture—particularly a dismissal of then prominent cotton cultivation strategies. Large-scale agriculture depleted the soil, deteriorating the food supply for quails and leaving them with no cover for a habitat. Instead, less-intensive “patch-style” agriculture (small plots of cultivated land separated by brush or tree stands) was the best environment for the bird to thrive.³⁷ This directive was an incentive for northern hunters to maintain the sharecropping system, which employed patch-style farming, but

to allow for less intensive agricultural production. The result of the move towards conservation was as the *True Democrat* editor put it—less land for smaller farms and less cotton cultivation.

The game preserves not only affected local smallholders, they also put a ceiling on the upward movement of tenants and sharecroppers on the agricultural ladder. Not only did it become less likely to own land because of unavailability, it was also less likely for tenant farmers to produce enough cotton or corn to make a substantial earning above their rent. The new land management strategies also disrupted other tenant farming practices that had continued under northern purview. Stoddard, for instance, disparaged stock-raising practices on the northern estates: “There are entirely too many scrub cattle on many Southern quail preserves: Fifteen to twenty head per negro tenant family are not uncommon in an area where one or two well-bred cows would give more milk and do vastly less harm to the place.” Stoddard went on to argue that, “the most destructive practice of all is to run the animals out over the [quail] nesting ground ‘minded’ only by some irresponsible pickaninny, for many nests are then certain to be trampled on.”³⁸ With racist overtones, Stoddard reminded the northern owner to manage his labor with more efficiency. The warnings proved effective, as northern owners began to supply their tenants with purebred cattle at reduced rates so that the number of stock would be reduced.³⁹

Although northern owners moved away from southern methods of crop cultivation, they maintained their close connection with men like Hopkins, who continued to promote their interests locally and statewide. Hopkins acted as agent for many northerners through the 1930s, including L.S. Thompson, John F. Archbold, and George F. Baker, of New York.⁴⁰ The social networks that northern hunters created during Thomasville’s early resort era had proven to be long-lasting and effective ones. Shared interests between elite whites from the North and South

ushered in an era of land consolidation that affected local hunting patterns and limited land cultivation. Game conservation and scientific management, like that of proponent Walter Teagle, largely took the place of modernized agricultural practices that eventually came to the South, and the winter colony that Hopkins and northerners created remained in place through the twentieth century.

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ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ Bennett H. Wall and George S. Gibb, *Teagle of Jersey Standard*. New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1974, pp. 144-149.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ³ Clifton Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail: An Agricultural Chronicle of Leon County, Florida, 1860-1967*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968, p. 77.
- ⁴ For a complete scholarly study of conservation in the Red Hills region, see Albert Way, "Burned to be Wild: Science, Society, and Ecological Conservation in the Southern Longleaf Pine," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Georgia, 2008. Harold Woodman, "Class, Race, Politics, and the Modernization of the Postbellum South," *The Journal of Southern History*, 63: 1 (February 1997), p. 13.
- ⁵ See especially Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993, chapter 3; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War In American Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001; Rebecca C. McIntyre, "Promoting the South: Tourism and Southern Identity, 1840-1920," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alabama, 2004.
- ⁶ William Warren Rogers, *Thomas County 1865-1900*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1973, p. 131.
- ⁷ D.S. Brandon to James Brandon, 30 January 1878, Thomas County Historical Society (hereafter referred to as TCHS), Brandon Letters, Folder 6120-A, 77.33.140A.
- ⁸ "That Hotel," *Thomasville Times-Enterprise*, 5 April 1873.
- ⁹ "A Northern View of Southern Progress," *Thomasville Times-Enterprise*, 10 January 1903.
- ¹⁰ In his monograph on Leon County, Florida, agricultural change, Clifton Paisley also holds that Thomasville played a larger part in the development of the game plantations. See Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 77.
- ¹¹ "Fox Chase," *Thomasville Southern-Enterprise*, 23 February 1876.
- ¹² John D. Rockefeller to H.M. Hanna, 29 October 1909, Rockefeller Archives Center (hereafter RAC), JDR Letterbooks, 222, p. 264, RAC, Sleepy Hollow, New York.
- ¹³ John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to Mrs. Walter Teagle, 21 February 1950, RAC, RG 2 OMR Friends and Services Series, Box 118, Folder 881, "Friends and Relations, Teagle, Walter C., 1930-1960."
- ¹⁴ See Larry R. Youngs, "Lifestyle Enclaves: Winter Resorts in the South Atlantic States, 1870-1930 (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina)," Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2001.
- ¹⁵ C. Branden Martin and June Hall McCash, "From Millionaires to the Masses: Tourism at Jekyll Island, Georgia," in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, & Culture in the Modern South*, editor, Richard D. Starnes, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2003, p. 157.
- ¹⁶ Reprinted in the *Thomasville Times-Enterprise*, 4 February 1893, p. 4.
- ¹⁷ Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 72.
- ¹⁸ Rogers, *Thomas County, 1865-1900*, p. 116.
- ¹⁹ Rogers, *Thomas County, 1865-1900*, p. 116.
- ²⁰ Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 78; "On the River," *Thomasville Times-Enterprise*, 4 March 1893.
- ²¹ Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 78.
- ²² J.H. Wade to H.W. Hopkins, 2 August 1904, Folder 1978.010.269, "Real Estate Transactions, J.H. Wade documents (Mill Pond Plantation)," Box 3019A, Hopkins Collection (hereafter referred to as HC), TCHS.
- ²³ J.H. Tayler to H.W. Hopkins, 6 May 1907, Folder 1978.010.269, "Real Estate Transactions, J.H. Wade documents (Mill Pond Plantation)," Box 3019A, HC, TCHS. Tayler was the acting agent for Miss McCartney.
- ²⁴ Abstract of Title, "South half of lot number 94 in the 13th District of Thomas County, State of Georgia, H.J. and A.T. McIntyre to J.H. Wade, 1910, Folder 1978.010.269, "Real Estate Transactions, J.H. Wade documents (Mill Pond Plantation)," B box 3019A, HC, TCHS; Abstract of Title, "Lot 93 in the 13th District of Thomas County, Georgia," H.J. and A.T. McIntyre to J.H. Wade, 1910, Folder 1978.010.269, "Real Estate Transactions, J.H. Wade documents (Mill Pond Plantation)," Box 3019A, HC, TCHS.
- ²⁵ J.H. Wade to H.W. Hopkins, 26 October 1916, Folder 1978.010.269, "Real Estate Transactions, J.H. Wade documents (Mill Pond Plantation)," Box 3019A, HC, TCHS.
- ²⁶ H.W. Hopkins, "Archbold Estate – Taxes – 1923," Folder 1978.010.275, "Real Estate Transactions – John F. Archbold, Correspondence," Box 3019A, HC, TCHS.
- ²⁷ Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 94.
- ²⁸ H.W. Hopkins to Edward Crozer, 8 October 1915, Folder 1978.010.330-9, "Correspondence – Edward (Ned) Crozer," Box 3020A, HC, TCHS.

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- ²⁹ Steven Hahn, "Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Postbellum South," *Radical History Review* 26 (1982), pp. 36-64.
- ³⁰ Quoted in Rogers, *Thomas County, 1865-1900*, p. 260.
- ³¹ William W. Rogers, *Transition to the Twentieth Century: Thomas County, Georgia, 1900-1920*. Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 2002, p. 355.
- ³² Rogers, *Thomas County, 1865-1900*, p. 261.
- ³³ *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*, 3 July 1914, quoted in Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 84.
- ³⁴ *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*, 24 September 1909, quoted in William W. Rogers, *Foshalee: Quail Country Plantation*, Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 1989, p. 80.
- ³⁵ *Tallahassee Weekly True Democrat*, 30 January 1920, quoted in Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, 84.
- ³⁶ Charlie Young, "Reminiscences for Bill Rogers," vertical files, TCHS, 28; Rogers, *Foshalee*, pp. 112-117.
- ³⁷ Herbert L. Stoddard, *The Bobwhite Quail: Its Habits, Preservation, and Increase*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932, pp. 350-351.
- ³⁸ Stoddard, *The Bobwhite Quail*, p. 353.
- ³⁹ Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, p. 104.
- ⁴⁰ H.W. Hopkins to C.M. Chapin, Jr., 6 July 1933, 1978.010.416-4, "Correspondence - Thomasville Winter Hotel Company," Box 3020A, HC, TCHS.