




# Millwood

## Where Traditions Live On

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Perched high along the sandy banks of the slow moving currents of the Black Warrior River, a bustling crowd of hunters gathers around a game pole to view the assemblage of white-tailed deer taken during that mornings “drive hunt”. Giggling children and fatigued hunting dogs weave in and out of the group that is now buzzing about the impressive bucks that were killed during the hunt. The “huntmaster” is centered in the crowd and announces its time to organize the “court”. He asks for a show of hands for individuals that may have violated one of the sacred rules of the hunt. Rule violators are given an opportunity to try and explain the extraordinary circumstances that may or may not excuse their recent indiscretion.



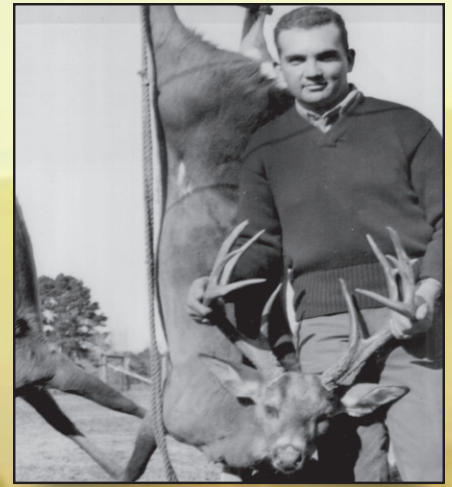
## **Another sunrise on the Millwood property signals an opportunity to create a lifelong memory.**

With a muffled swish, a long well-worn wooden paddle swings through the brisk winter air and lands on the posterior of a bent over hunter that during that mornings drive had shot at and missed a swift moving deer being pushed by a coordinated team of “drivers” and a few baying deer hounds, always considered to be a serious infringement of the “rules of the hunt”. This is the Millwood Hunting Club and this scene could have taken place during the 1880’s or just this past hunting season. Longtime landowner retired Federal Judge George Wright (known as “The Judge”), is now 92 years of age, has participated in these southern hunting traditions here since his great uncle, and previous landowner, Wiley Croom Tunstall, who bought the property in 1882, would bring him to hunt at Millwood as a young boy in the early 1940’s. The current landowners are the children of George Wright and his sister Camille Cook. Today the Millwood Hunting club hunts approximately 3000 acres that includes land that is still owned by the Poellnitz family, who are descendants of the original owner of Millwood, Dr. Robert Withers. Robert Poellnitz his son, Farley and his grandson Alston are active members of the Millwood hunting club and its Board of Directors.

Millwood not only has deep roots in the traditions of Alabama white-tailed deer hunting, but also in the early history and settlement of west Alabama. Dr. Robert Withers is credited for developing the Millwood property that he acquired in the 1820’s, after moving here from Virginia at the age of twenty five. Here he created a major steamboat landing and a “mill site” where locally harvested grains could be ground into fine meal and flour, cotton was “ginned” and pressed, and pine or hardwood logs cut into lumber; all from the power of a network of seven artesian wells that were drilled in 1844

on strategic locations across the property. Recent engineering created a new drill bit had been designed to cut through the deep limestone hard pan and blue marl of the blackbelt to get to its rich aquifers. The use of artesian wells to drive water powered turbines for these activities was new technology and was previously only used for crop irrigation or as a water source. These systems also hauled delivered goods from steamboats up the river bank, an incline on a fifty foot bluff to his warehouses. This triggered a series of articles that were published in issues of “Scientific American” magazine in the 1850’s describing them in specific detail. People traveled here from around the country to see this cutting edge facility. So much commerce and river traffic took place at Millwood, that an “Inn” was constructed in 1842 to offer lodging for people traveling to nearby Greensboro or Tuscaloosa, as well as steamship operators. Travel from Millwood was furthered by a four-horse stagecoach that ran to Greensboro and a river ferry that allowed travelers to cross the Black Warrior River towards Forkland. Two of the original historic structures are still standing and are still in full use, the old inn now serves as the Millwood Hunting Club camphouse. The famous gristmill would actually continue operations until around 1934.

Dr. Withers also had strong beliefs in land conservation and had serious concerns for the rapid pace that agriculture was using up the delicate soils of the west Alabama canebrake. He published a paper on the scientific analysis of these soils and gave a public speech on it to the Agricultural Society of Greensboro in 1830. In his speech, he warned his fellow Alabama planters that unless they practiced “scientific agriculture” they would find themselves tending worn out fields just as were farmers in Virginia and North Carolina. This organization



The huntmaster announces its time to organize the “court”... and punishment is served for missing a deer.

Federal Judge George Wright is shown with a buck taken during the 1850's.

advocated for better agricultural practices and the application of scientifically sound management principles that would prevent abuse of the rich soils and keep the area productive for many years in the future. Under the current ownership, this spirit of land conservation has continued at Millwood close to 200 years later. The property is enrolled in the Tree Farm program as a certified family forest, is designated as an Alabama Treasure Forest and is actively managed to restore the longleaf ecosystem that was indigenous in its deep sandy soils. Millwood was also enrolled in the ALDNR Deer Management Assistance program for many years and has a data set that dates back thirty five years.

Mature river bottom hardwood stands run parallel to the Black Warrior River. A slight elevation in topography created the uplands that are a now a mix of longleaf and loblolly pine stands, which are separated by wide hardwood drains. The current silviculture tools implemented on the property are prescribed burning, timber thinning and harvest. A generous network of wildlife openings are scattered across the land and provide quality forages for all forms of wildlife. The river bottoms reach all the way to the rich blackbelt prairies of Hale County and this “edge of ecosystems” results in the abundant populations of both game and non-game species of wildlife.

As an organization, the Millwood Hunting Club is a unique arrangement. This is not an equity hunting club where the members are also the landowners, which was very common for hunting clubs organized during the early 1900's. This organization is similar to most modern day hunting clubs, where a lease agreement is used for leasing the recreational access from a landowner. However, in this situation the family of the landowners are also mixed in with non-family to

form the club membership. The club is responsible for much of the property upkeep and maintenance and also organizes all hunting activities. There are now only five organized drive hunts each season, while the rest of the deer season is “still hunting” only. The club also actively enjoys waterfowl, wild turkey and squirrel hunting, running coon dogs and good fishing in several lakes. Annual elections appoint a board of directors to make decisions on club activities and budgets; the board also has representation from the landowners.

Besides great hunting and fishing opportunities, the Millwood members also enjoy good fellowship. There are organized gatherings like fish fry's or crawfish boils, but impromptu get-togethers are more common. The favorite hangout is the wide covered porch that runs the width of the side of the camphouse that parallels the river. Rocking chairs are strewn across the southern yellow pine veranda and are typically occupied with members telling tall tales about past hunts or bantering about that week's college football game. Another unique trait about the club is how the membership warmly receives guests and is sincerely interested in welcoming them to Millwood, not the normal experience for most guests visiting deer hunting clubs in these modern times. Millwood demonstrates the best in conservation, fellowship and outdoor sporting activities and those traditions are expected to last well into the future. 🌿

#### References

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