

SOAPSTONE FARM, *The Home Place*

February 11, 2002

Documented history of Bill and Judy Caskey's Soapstone Farm located at 2893 River Road, Decatur Georgia, begins over 5,000 years ago. In the heart of South Dekalb County, SoapStone Ridge is one of the most important archaeological sites on the North American continent. It is a place where small tribes of families hunted and gathered soapstone to make bowls. The stone was valued because of its soft texture, non-resistance to high temperature and no-stick quality. This history was prior to the discovery of pottery. The farm is part of this valuable ridge and many soapstone fragments are located there.

Later, great plantations were a part of South Dekalb's past. The land that Soapstone Farms is on was part of a 3000 Acre plantation dating back to 1830 that extended past the South River and included the land known today as the Federal Honor Farm.

Soapstone Farm, The Home Place has indeed been a home and farm to many families. It's rich soils have provided agricultural products without interruption for over 179 years. The Caskey's have raised registered Senepol Cattle there since 1979. It could be said that this truly is "The last operating farm in Dekalb County".

However, fate almost dealt this land a fatal blow. In 1965 Aunt Fanny's Baking Company bought the farm as an investment. They sold it in 1966 to AR. Weeks Construction Company for development and Dekalb County approved a large subdivision plan for it at the same time. It was saved from destruction during the recession in the 1970's when AR. Weeks filed for bankruptcy. As a result, C&S Bank took possession of it and sold the Home Place along with 10 acres to the Caskey's.

The land includes a farm house dating back to around 1892, barn, carriage house/garage apartment, hen house, three wells, pecan grove and the site of what is rumored to be a slave cabin. All that is left of the cabin is part of a fire place and a well. When purchased by the Caskeys, all of the buildings were in poor condition from years of neglect. They have spent the past 23 years restoring all of the out buildings and house to their original condition taking pains to preserve their architectural value. They moved there in 1986. The home is made of much building material cut from timber that grew on the land. It is unique for the time period in a rural Dekalb County during the late 1800's. The house is shaded by huge trees planted there in past years and is surrounded by shrubs and plants dating back many years. A lake was built in 1998 and is teeming with Bass, Bream and Catfish.

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Much soapstone is located around the house placed there by previous owners as fields were cleared. Wild life abounds, with deer, fox, coyote, turkey, geese, ducks, raccoons, and possum seen there almost daily. Hawks nest there every year.

In 1980, the Federal Government and C&S Bank purchased 35 Acres adjacent to and behind the Caskey's property and turned it over to the Dekalb County Parks Department to be used exclusively as a "Passive Park". Dekalb County named the park Fork Creek and designated the Caskey farm as a Historic District in 1997.

Much of the property close to the Home Place has been developed either as subdivisions, town houses or gas stations/stores. The Caskey's continued to resist developer appeals to purchase their land. They understood the historical value of this very special and beautiful farm. They have attempted to be good stewards of this property for many years.

Dekalb County purchased the property from the Caskey's to be preserved for Green Space initiative.

It is hoped that Dekalb County will show patience and constraint with the future plans for it's use. The Dekalb County and Atlanta Historical Societies as well as Archaeological and Geological Departments of the state Universities should be consulted before any changes are made.

The Caskey's welcome County officials, Historical Society leaders and university interest to visit our farm and home to help plan for its future. We are emotionally attached to this land and buildings and desire that it be properly preserved and used for the future use of education and society. We have many pictures and periodicals from the past that we would be interested in turning over to the proper authorities if there is interest.

Soapstone Farm, The Home Place

Claudin Hopkins Boye told Bill Caskey by phone on February 3, 2001 about life on the farm at 2893 River Road. Claudin was born in 1924 and was 77 years old when she recounted this story.

Claudin Hopkins Boye's parents, Columbia Grant Hopkins and Claude Hopkins purchased the 75 acre farm located at 2893 River Road in Decatur, Georgia in the year 1932. The family formerly lived in East Atlanta, Georgia. Claudin their only child, was about 10 years old when the family moved to the farm. Two houses were located on the property at that time. The main structure was a frame tenant house without electricity, running water or indoor plumbing. There was another house located under an old oak tree that was used by "share croppers" who helped with the chores of the farm. Farming it those days was with the assistance of mules and very hard hand labor. All that is left of the share croppers house is the oak tree, a fire place and well.

The year 1932 was very different in Dekalb County Georgia. In fact it is hard to find someone today that can relate what it was like at that time. Claudin told of a very country place on a dirt road that was a long way from any town. Living without electricity meant using an out-house, cooking and heating with wood or coal. Water had to be lifted out of a well for drinking and cleaning. Seventy five acres was not enough land to make a living on but was enough to supply two families with food.

Claude Hopkins worked in downtown Atlanta on Peachtree Street and Auburn Avenue until his retirement. Columbia or Peggy as she was known, handled most of the farm work. River Road was not paved until the late 1950's. Electricity did not arrive in the area until around 1938. That's when the lights came on and an indoor bathroom was installed. The Hopkins made improvements to the house by completing the living room. In the back of the house, was a root cellar used to help preserve food since there was no refrigeration. Several wells were dug in an effort to have sufficient water.

Peggy was a very resourceful and talented lady. She, with the help of the share croppers, built the out buildings by hand. Those same buildings stand today as a testament to their craft. She was born in Hartwell, Georgia in 1897 and her parents must have prepared her for the farm duties she undertook. What they did not teach her, she must have learned from trial and error. She must have had a pioneer spirit to have accomplished what she did. The farm looked a lot different when she sold it 1963.

During the early 1960's, Claude Hopkins and Peggy's sister died. Peggy and her sister's husband, Olin Buckner married in 1963. Peggy sold the farm in 1965. She and Olin then built and moved into a new house located on Panthersville Road. Olin died in 1976.

Claudin tells the story about her father asking a CO-worker of his to go with him so that he could buy his wife Peggy some underwear as a celebration to her building a barn. Both men were around six feet 3 inches tall and in those days men were very shy about making those type purchases. They went to Rich's department store in downtown Atlanta and bought lingerie for her. Claudin said she just couldn't understand why her mother could build a barn, and she couldn't.

She also tells of a large family by the name of Sims who lived in their house before they moved to the farm in 1935. Apparently the house was vacant and the family just moved in. No permission was granted or rent paid. The family made their living by making moonshine whiskey in the back of the property. One of the kids was always placed just outside the woods as a lookout and would whistle if someone came up. Claudin told of walking back there one day with her father and stepping through a covered up hole. She accidentally found the still and her father had to pull her out. As far as she knows no one was ever caught.

Many of the rocks located around the house were hauled to the site by Peggy Hopkins where they were used for rock gardens and are still today right where she left them. Peggy also loved shrubs. Many of her plants are still where she

planted them. She built her daughter, Claudine a tennis court at the side of the house that is surrounded by pican trees today.

Around 1949 the Hopkins built a chicken house and attempted to sell eggs. That was not a very successful enterprise. Over the years, the farm was used mostly to provide food for the families living there. Vegetables, meat, dairy products and fruits were grown and at one time cotton was tried as a crop. In addition, sugar cane was grown and syrup was made from it. Peggy was able to buy a tractor (a Ford 9N) just after the second world war and that must have made her farm chores much easier.

Claudin married John Boye in 1944 and moved to Oakridge, Tenn. After Olin Buckner died in 1979 Peggy moved to Tenn. to be with her daughter Claudin and died in 1983.

Bill and Judy Caskey bought the farm from C&S bank in 1979. They purchased the "Home Place" with 10 acres. The house must have been just like Peggy had left it when it was sold. There never was a heating system other than wood burning stoves and a fireplace and the house was in poor condition. No one had lived in it for many years. The Caskey's restored the house in 1986 and added a bedroom, bath, screened porch and deck. In addition, all of the outbuilding have been restored. The property is used today as their home and where they raise beef cattle. A lake was built in 1998.

This farm has been continuously used for agriculture since 1830 and is listed in the book "Atlanta and Environs" under the name of , John Bird who was the owner at that time. It was a large cotton plantation extending beyond the South River. The Bird Plantation house is still located on River Road about 1000 feet east of the Caskey farm.

Dale and Nancy Black own part of the original farm next to the Caskey's. About fifty five of the original seventy five acres that the Hopkins owned are still not developed.

History of District 15 Land Lot 41 Dekalb County Georgia

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Deed</u>
June 25, 1830	USA	Henry L. Edwards	All	Land Grant
1832	Tyree Harris	James Jones	All	H212
1835	James Jones	John Bird	All	H-19
1858	John Bird	Francis G. Stowers	All	O-361
1882	Cornelia Black	William H. Sprayberry	15-41	W-637
September 17, 1928	J. Kuniansky	T. M. Williams	73.75	290-261
April 22, 1932	Mazie V. Grant	Claude W. Hopkins	73.75	380-271
May 19, 1965	Columbia R. Hopkins	Aunt Fanny's Baking Co	73.75	1989
March 31, 1966	Aunt Fanny's Baking Co	A. R. Weeks Const	181.75	2084-731
November 20, 1972	C&S National Bank	First Centena Corp	181.75	2919-180
July 1, 1975	First Centena Corp (chapter 13)	C&S National Bank	181.75	3356-69
July 20, 1979	C&S National Bank	Floyd W. & Judy P. Caskey	10.0	4094-102

Note: Check the following records

1846	John Bird	James J. Winn	40	L-591
1860	W. H. Ryals	James J. Winn	50	P-120



Jill Sweetapple <sweetapple@dekalbhistory.org>

Fwd: FW: Fork Creek Mountain Park - Destroyed Structure

1 message

Leslie Borger <borger@dekalbhistory.org>

Tue, Nov 27, 2012 at 3:11 PM

To: Jill Sweetapple <sweetapple@dekalbhistory.org>

maybe we should put this in the subject file?

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Gannon, Kathie** <kgannon@dekalbcountyga.gov>

Date: Tue, Nov 27, 2012 at 3:04 PM

Subject: FW: Fork Creek Mountain Park - Destroyed Structure

To: Leslie Borger <borger@dekalbhistory.org>

After quite a few emails this came back. Thanks for alerting us. I don't think anyone over here knew about the fire. Sorry I didn't forward this to you sooner.

Hope you had a great Thanksgiving!

Michelle Walldorff

Constituent Services Coordinator

Office of Commissioner Kathie Gannon

Super District 6

Manuel J Maloof Center 1300 Commerce Drive Decatur, GA 30030

PH: 404.371.4909 FAX: 404.371.7004

www.kathiegannon.com



From: Nagarkar, Vineet S.

Sent: Wednesday, November 21, 2012 12:22 PM

To: Gannon, Kathie; Billups, Marvin F.; Sims, Robert K.; Fox, Davis

Cc: Wilson, Roy; Karikaran, Hari; Jacobs, Larry C.; Rhinehart, William E. (Ted); Jaugstetter, John; Wu,

David W.

Subject: Fork Creek Mountain Park - Destroyed Structure

All,

In a follow up to the emails/inquires below regarding the structure that was destroyed in a fire at Fork Creek Mountain Park, I was able to research the matter yesterday afternoon. Visiting the site, it was a sad to see that the structure that we were going to retain, "Red Barn", had been totally destroyed by fire. Attached is the report from Fire Rescue Services that was forwarded to me today. The report indicates that the incident took place on October 7, 2012 around 6PM. Also, attached are some pictures of the site taken yesterday. Unfortunately there is nothing remaining that can be salvaged.

Please note that the hazmat study is in process for remaining structures onsite. If areas containing asbestos, lead paint, etc. are found, they will need to be abated before the demolition can take place.

Best Regards,

Vineet S. Nagarkar

Project Manager

DeKalb County Government

Infrastructure Group

Engineering Services

Project Management Office

Clark Harrison Building

*330 West Ponce de Leon Avenue, 4th Floor,
Decatur, Georgia 30030-3221*

404-687-3709

vsnagarkar@dekalbcountyga.gov

From: Walldorff, Michelle M. **On Behalf Of** Gannon, Kathie
Sent: Wednesday, November 21, 2012 9:55 AM
To: Nagarkar, Vineet S.
Subject: RE: Fork Creek Mountain Park Project

Hi Vineet,

Did you get any information on the burned structure at Fork Creek?

Thanks,

Michelle Walldorff

Constituent Services Coordinator

Office of Commissioner Kathie Gannon

Super District 6

Manuel J Maloof Center 1300 Commerce Drive Decatur, GA 30030

PH: 404.371.4909 FAX: 404.371.7004

www.kathiegannon.com



From: Nagarkar, Vineet S.
Sent: Tuesday, November 20, 2012 11:01 AM
To: Gannon, Kathie; Billups, Marvin F.
Subject: RE: Fork Creek Mountain Park Project

I have not been made aware of any structures that have burned down at the site. I have a meeting with Matrix this afternoon on site as they are performing a Hazmat study for the various structures on the property besides the "Red Barn". I will verify if there has been any such incident on the property and let you all know.

Best Regards,

Vineet S. Nagarkar

Project Manager

DeKalb County Government

Infrastructure Group

Engineering Services

Project Management Office

Clark Harrison Building

*330 West Ponce de Leon Avenue, 4th Floor,
Decatur, Georgia 30030-3221*

404-687-3709

vsnagarkar@dekalbcountyga.gov

From: Walldorff, Michelle M. **On Behalf Of** Gannon, Kathie
Sent: Tuesday, November 20, 2012 10:36 AM
To: Billups, Marvin F.; Nagarkar, Vineet S.
Subject: FW: Fork Creek Mountain Park Project

Leslie, from the DeKalb History Center, was told by the former owner that one of the structures burned at Fork Creek. Do you have any details?

Thanks and have a terrific Thanksgiving!

Michelle Walldorff

Constituent Services Coordinator

Office of Commissioner Kathie Gannon

Super District 6

Manuel J Maloof Center 1300 Commerce Drive Decatur, GA 30030

PH: 404.371.4909 FAX: 404.371.7004

www.kathiegannon.com



From: Jaugstetter, John
Sent: Tuesday, November 20, 2012 8:31 AM
To: Gannon, Kathie
Cc: Nagarkar, Vineet S.; Billups, Marvin F.
Subject: RE: Fork Creek Mountain Park Project

Michelle,

Vineet Nagarkar or Marvin Billups should be able to provide additional info.

We are managing the HUD grant, but I do not have any details regarding burned structures.

Thanks!

John Jaugstetter, LEED AP

Senior Planner

Community Development Department

DeKalb County Government

150 East Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite 330 Decatur, GA 30030

404-286-3316 direct

404-286-3337 fax

jjaugstetter@dekalbcountyga.gov

From: Walldorff, Michelle M. **On Behalf Of** Gannon, Kathie
Sent: Monday, November 19, 2012 10:30 AM
To: Jaugstetter, John
Subject: RE: Fork Creek Mountain Park Project

John,

Leslie, from the DeKalb History Center, was told by the former owner that one of the structures burned at

Fork Creek. Do you have any details? Or know anyone who would?

Thanks,

Michelle Walldorff

Constituent Services Coordinator

Office of Commissioner Kathie Gannon

Super District 6

Manuel J Maloof Center 1300 Commerce Drive Decatur, GA 30030

PH: 404.371.4909 FAX: 404.371.7004

www.kathiegannon.com



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Leslie Borger
DeKalb History Center
404-373-1088 Ext. 20

Please note my email addresses is changing to borger@dekalbhistory.org. Please make this change in your address book so that I continue to receive your emails!

5 attachments



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