



Courtesy photos

Jack Cassidy and his dog Bo.

CAST & BLAST

Columnist finds history while on a bird hunt



BY COLLINS DOUGHTIE

Believe it or not, I still remember my history lessons about the Great Reconstruction after the Civil War from way too many years of schooling.

Growing up here in the South, I have always been intrigued with the Civil War, spending cold winter days scouring places around the Lowcountry looking for Civil War artifacts.

Old bottles, telegraph keys, musket balls and sections of ornate dinner plates are just a few of the items I have stashed away in baskets piled high with the results of these searches. There is just something about holding any one of these objects that gets my wheels turning. "I wonder who dropped this item? Was it a Union soldier or Confederate soldier?"

In a couple of cases, I found relics that went all the way back to the Revolutionary War. I always loved history throughout my formative years, but I'll gladly admit that math was, and still is, my Achilles heel.

So why ramble on about the Old South and the Great Reconstruction? As more things change here in the South, where a Walmart or golf course is built right on top of an artifact honey hole, it makes me kind of sad.

Even driving inland a ways, time has taken its toll on many of the small towns that now lie deserted and broken.

Cotton was once king, and between this highly touted fiber and fields standing tall with corn, soybeans and peanuts, many of these towns once flourished. But now it seems so many farmers



Dining area at Woodside Plantation.

have parked their plows in favor of planting pine trees where massive fields of grain were once the norm.

Change is inevitable, but oh how I miss the days when I could easily find a place to go on a good dove shoot or quail hunt. I have never been a big game hunter, but when it comes to wing shooting, I absolutely love it. This may sound odd, but for me, it was never about how many birds I might bag but rather being part of a centuries-old Southern tradition.

With that said, this past Tuesday my friend Will Thompson and I were invited to go quail hunting at Woodside Plantation in Estill by Will's friend and Woodside owner Jack Cassidy. As we drove along, I recounted the

many hundreds of times I had traveled that very same road to go hunting back before timber replaced corn.

Talk about déjà vu, as we neared Woodside Plantation I realized it was on the same road where many years ago I had leased a place called Hamilton Ridge for bird hunting. It had probably been more than 10 years since I had traveled that particular road, so I was shocked to see that many of the old neglected plantations had spiffy new iron gates and just plowed fields.

Arriving at Woodside Plantation, it was more of the same but on a grander scale. The main house, built in 1870, was white, of course, with a tin roof and stood at the end of a driveway lined by 150-

year-old oaks that looked like Civil War pickets gnarled by time and age.

Touring the property with Jack, it was simply spectacular. Instead of razing old structures, he had brought them back to life. From dining areas for hunters to a woodworking shop that any master woodworker would die for, he had done it right. Just planted fields of sunflowers, peanuts and corn meant to attract and feed doves, quail, ducks and turkeys made me remember when the entire area was like this. I'll bet to Jack's eyes I looked like a mule eating briars. It was just that good.

After a quick, all-Southern sit-down lunch with out-of-town hunters, we all grabbed our guns and headed for the woods with dogs in tow that were so excited it sounded like a pack of wolves taking down an elk.

Quail hunting is all about watching good bird dogs work mixed, at first at least, with a twinge of anticipation as to whether I would be able to hit the broad side of a barn. I hadn't pulled a trigger in two years, and if this hunt was true to form, serious ribbing can occur when easy shots become impossible shots. Thank the lord that on the first covey rise Will and I both dropped birds.

The pressure was off, and from that point on the four of us who were hunting got along like we had known each other all our lives. That, along with being outside in wonderfully diverse habitat, is what makes this great Southern tradition nearly impossible not to like.

Tired from walking, snap shooting at covey after covey, I was bushed by the time we headed in. But I'll have to admit it was a good tired. Even as I fell asleep while eating dinner with my face firmly planted in a bowl of lukewarm chili, I couldn't help but smile. Jack and his masterful job restoring Woodside Plantation gave me a glimmer of hope that a new Southern reconstruction is in the works that may just help revive a part of the South that to me is sweeter than the sweetest sweet tea. Check it out yourself at woodsideplantation.com, the photography is amazing.



Woodside Plantation's main house.