

BSNP Notes

Blue Springs featured in *Business Alabama* magazine

Business Alabama published a feature story on Blue Springs Nature Preserve as part of the magazine's Spotlight on St. Clair County in its February 2008 issue.

Writer Jim Dunn interviewed Steering Committee Chairman Spencer Weitman for the article, which recounts the inception of the idea for Blue Springs Nature Preserve, and development of the master plan and notes the spirit of cooperation among local leaders regarding the project.

"The county saw what we were doing there, and so they got behind it. We've got the mayor and the county commission involved, and they're doing a great job in helping us achieve our plans for Blue Springs. It's just starting to

take on a life of its own," said Weitman.

Finance chairman Lyman Lovejoy is also quoted in the article.

"Blue Springs Nature Preserve is an important project because there is currently nothing like it in St. Clair County," said Lovejoy.

Business Alabama is a statewide monthly publication that reports business news in all sectors of the Alabama economy. Each month, the magazine focuses on a different Alabama county (or set of counties), sharing business news of interest in that area. The publication has a readership of more than 50,000 businesspeople each month.

Weitman, Lovejoy visit Lanark

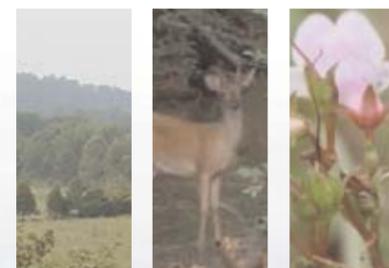
This month, Spencer Weitman, chairman, and Lyman Lovejoy, finance subcommittee chair, visited the Alabama Wildlife

Federation headquarters at Lanark in Millbrook, Ala.

"It was a very good visit," said Lovejoy. "Lanark has several features, such as wetlands boardwalks, a variety of plants and interesting buildings that would be great to use on the Blue Springs Nature Preserve."

The original Lanark home was a log cabin built in 1827. When Isabel and Wiley Hill moved to Lanark in 1948, they built a new house. Lanark features a garden cultivated by the Hills that covers more than 30 acres with a multitude of plants and flowers, wooded paths, streams, lakes, lawns and bridges.

The Lanark estate, including the two houses, the gardens and more than 300 acres of land, was donated to the Alabama Wildlife Federation in 2001 when Isabel Hill passed away.



Blue Springs Nature Preserve

Steering Committee Newsletter / March 2008

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Steering Committee Member,

After visiting the Alabama Wildlife Federation's headquarters in Millbrook, I cannot help but notice the exciting similarities between Lanark and Blue Springs Nature Preserve.

The Lanark estate was originally settled in 1827, less than ten years before the oldest recorded deed for the Blue Springs property. Both properties have a long history of ownership by families that loved nature. Lanark provides visitors with educational opportunities similar to those that Blue Springs will offer to St. Clair County.

Lanark provides for us a model for what Blue Springs Nature Preserve can become. It will take the same kind of dedication that the Hill family gave to cultivating Lanark and an equal amount of the hard work that the Brannon family put into their farm.

I hope you enjoy the engrossing account of Charlie Brannon's childhood on the farm that we now call Blue Springs Nature Preserve. Charlie's childhood reflects the experience that we hope the children of St. Clair County will be able to enjoy.

Sincerely,

Spencer Weitman



Blue Springs Nature Preserve Steering Committee

Spencer Weitman
National Cement Company of Ala.
Steering Committee Chairman

Lyman Lovejoy
Lovejoy Realty
Finance Chairman

Bill Phillips
Envision Ecology
Land Use Chairman

Darlene Rotch
Panorama Public Relations
Communications Chair

Ed Gardner, Sr.
St. Clair County EDC
Facilities and Infrastructure

Marsha Boswell
Ragland High School
Education Chair

Rep. Blaine Galliher
State Representative
Finance Committee

Hon. Charles Robinson
St. Clair County Circuit Court
Finance Committee

Hon. Gary Daffron
Mayor, City of Ragland
Finance Committee

Committee At-Large:

Jean Claude Brocheton, National Cement; Joan Ford; Jeff Hardy, Ragland High School; Charlie Brannon; Jerry Sue Brannon; Chairman Stan Batemon, St. Clair County Commission; Commissioner Paul Manning, St. Clair County Commission; Ed Gardner, Jr., St. Clair County EDC; Don Smith, St. Clair County EDC; Bob Champion, National Cement; Con. Larry Means, State Congressman; Randy Gray, National Cement; Dr. Jenny Seales, St. Clair County Board of Education



Blue Springs Nature Preserve
2000 SouthBridge Parkway
Suite 600
Birmingham, AL 35209



In This Issue:

Growing up on Blue Springs

BSNP featured in *Business Alabama* magazine

Steering Committee representatives visit Lanark

You can't take the farm out of the boy

Charlie Brannon shares his experiences growing up on the Blue Springs site

If the Blue Springs Nature Preserve needed a tour guide, there would be no better candidate than Charlie Brannon. After all, he and his family have lived and worked on the land for more than 85 years.

The first known landowner of the Blue Springs property was Louis Watkins, who acquired the deed to the property in 1836. The property changed hands several times before Charlie Grant Davis, Brannon's grandfather, purchased the land and mineral rights to the 400-acre property in 1921 for \$2,000.

The primary use of the Blue Springs property has been agricultural. Brannon and his father planted cotton and corn on the land -- the former as a cash crop, and the latter to use as food for the family and feed for livestock.

They raised a variety of animals, including chickens for eggs (which were sold to a hatchery), cattle for milk and beef and hogs for pork. The Brannons also maintained a fleet of four mules and five horses for plowing and riding the property. At one point,

Charlie Brannon even bred Dalmatians at the farm, and became known as the man with the "fire dogs" by many in Ragland.

While the family employed workers to help on the farm, Brannon and his father, Clarence Eugene Brannon, handled the plowing of the fields. The family was one of the few that owned a modern tractor, and Brannon learned to use it at a young age.

"My ambition even at four or five was to help Dad," said Brannon. "When I was about eight years old he put me astride a Farmall tractor. We had to use it day and night because we were cultivating nearly 200 acres."



Charlie Brannon (right) shares his memories of life on the farm that will become Blue Springs Nature Preserve with Ragland Mayor Gary Daffron during the charrette in 2006.

He even modified the tractor with a cigarette lighter and equipped it with a fan and umbrella to help keep cool. He often found arrowheads and other artifacts on the property simply from plowing the fields.

His father usually gave him time-off on Saturday afternoons, as well as 35 cents that he was not to "spend all in one place." Brannon would walk two miles into town and spend ten cents on a picture show - usually an old western - which he watched three or four times to make sure he got his money's worth. He would also spend five cents each on a bag of chocolate candy, a drink, and a

bag of popcorn, leaving him with ten cents.

"My father would give me two nickels for that dime. On Sunday, I would put one nickel in the offering plate for the morning service, and the other at the evening service," said Brannon. "And I would be broke again until next Saturday."

However, Brannon usually was able to entertain himself in the woods and streams surrounding the farm. Brannon started hunting at nine years old with an 1897 twelve gauge pump, and he often tracked squirrels, rabbits, duck, deer and snakes. While the deer population was not as plentiful as it is today, there were plenty of cottonmouths. Brannon also enjoyed fishing, and was able to catch pike, small-mouth bass and - after a rain, when the creeks were muddy - catfish.

Brannon had always dreamed of being a farmer like his dad, and as a teenager, it appeared that he was heading in that direction. He was active in Ragland's 4H Club, earning trips to Chicago to receive national awards and, eventually, a scholarship to Auburn University to study soil conservation. Instead, he attended Jacksonville State University, where he studied soil conservation and business administration.

"I guess I could have been a farmer my whole life," said Brannon. "It was truly in my heart."



Charlie Brannon at Blue Springs

However, after graduation, Brannon went to work for Alabama Power Company. He initially worked for the surveying and construction departments before moving to the production side. After working at a plant in Mobile, Brannon transferred to the steam plant in Gadsden, which allowed him to commute from Ragland. He worked there for 33 years - until he retired - as a turbine operator for two 70-megawatt generators.

While the Brannons' interest in the property was its fertile soil, the land below it provided the perfect combination of limestone, two types of sand and chert for use in the manufacture of cement. Over the years, the Davis and Brannon families subdivided the property into three parcels, each sold separately to National Cement Company. The first two parcels were developed into quarries.

"That whole mountain is chert," said Brannon of the ridges that surround the Blue Springs site. "The whole area is just blessed with limestone strata."

Brannon lived on the property until 1954, when his family moved to their current residence in Ragland, though he continued to tend to the farm in his spare time until he and his mother sold the remaining parcel to National Cement in 1976, with the prospects of one day becoming a quarry as well. Of course, now that the land has different plans for its future.

"It just tickled me to death!" said Brannon of his reaction to learning the land would become a preserve. "I am just anxious to see it get started. I am going to volunteer my services...I can still operate a bulldozer or do anything else they ask me to do to help."

Brannon believes the preserve will be an ideal venue for school children to learn about nature first-hand, without distractions.

"I think it will be one of the best things that ever happened in this state," said Brannon. "It means a lot to keep something going that has been part of this community since 1876."

About National Cement

National Cement is a major producer of cement in the United States. Established in 1908, the company employs over 1,255 employees in Alabama and California.

The company is highly committed to environmental stewardship and supporting the communities in which it operates.

About Blue Springs Nature Preserve

Blue Springs Nature Preserve, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is located in the town of Ragland in St. Clair County, Ala. The 147-acre preserve was made possible thanks to a land donation from National Cement Company of Alabama.

For more information, please contact Tommy Palladino at (205) 328-9334 or send an email to info@bluespringspreserve.com.