

# AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT

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Providence returns an esteemed  
property to family hands.

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**W**e enter this world with nothing but our nature, and we exit with the experience of a life lived. Those precious moments between our arrival and departure become our only possessions while everything else finds its next custodian. These worldly assets often lose their familial continuity of ownership, and when this happens, the fullest measure of their value is lost to time. But providence intervenes on special occasions and restores a kindred connection between these properties and their original familial heirs.

Such an occasion occurred five years ago when Dr. Charles Campbell idly entered “Butterfield Plantation” into a Google search field one evening, and the results of his query launched an effort to acquire and rehabilitate the ancestral grounds of his fondest childhood memories.

Slow and easy was the only pace to approach Butterfield, as a series of scenic byways doglegged through rural towns dotting the South Carolina Lowcountry. Forests choked by understory opened into pristine piney savanna ahead of the sign marking the entrance. The gravel drive wound its way through the pines and past a bamboo thicket before reaching the outbuildings and big house. Keith Smith, manager of Butterfield, waved me into a parking spot while Dr. Campbell pedaled up







on an off-road bicycle with oversized tires. Both men wore broad-brimmed hats and tattered clothes stained with flecks of paint and other evidence of their labor. We exchanged pleasantries and climbed the front porch steps of Butterfield, where a thick wood door framed by glass panes guarded the main entrance. Keith opened it, and I followed him into another place and time as we crossed the threshold. Once inside, Dr. Campbell invited me to have a seat on an antique sofa while he detailed the genesis of Butterfield, its departure from his family's ownership, and how it landed in his hands.

Dr. Campbell's great grandfather, James Gordon "J.G." Campbell, grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and moved his family west to Devil's Lake, North Dakota, while it was still a territory. He opened a dry goods store before joining his brother-in-law, A.B. Lynch, in a business venture buying small oil and gas wells. They assembled sufficient properties to launch the Columbia Gas Company, and when their venture went public, they moved to New York City in 1905. J.G. sold his interests in

the company in 1917, seeing another lucrative business opportunity in providing timber for new construction along the East Coast. He imported timber from South America and harvested it from several forests in the Southeastern United States. J.G. assembled his own farm from a patchwork of 40-acre plots between Allendale, South Carolina, and the Savannah River. This collection of properties grew into a 5,000-acre swath, and between 1925 and 1929, he constructed a grand home fashioned after nearby antebellum structures he admired. He dubbed this holding "Butterfield" from his mother-in-law's maiden name, which was synonymous with John Butterfield—creator of the Butterfield Express stagecoach that merged with

#### THE OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Childhood memories mixed with young partners create workable opportunities and great futures, and both are needed to sustainably restore old places.

Wells & Company and Livingston & Fargo to become American Express in 1850.

Butterfield offered reprieve from the harsher winters along with outdoor experiences for generations of the Campbell family. Dr. Campbell, who first visited Butterfield as a child over Christmas breaks in the 1950s, recalled, "We lived in Philadelphia and would board the train at 3:00 p.m. and arrive in Fairfax, South Carolina, the following day. My grandmother would pick us up, and we'd load up the station wagon and ride to Butterfield." With guidance from Butterfield farmhands, he milked cows before first light and stayed outdoors until sundown, squeezing every possible ounce of enjoyment out of his days before returning home. The family sold Butterfield before Dr. Campbell bid a proper farewell, but he and his wife paid a visit in 1977 for what he thought might be the last time. Mrs. Maner, whose husband E.C. Maner was caretaker of Butterfield during Dr. Campbell's childhood, swapped stories with him during this farewell tour, and he didn't see Butterfield again for over 40 years.

Continental Can Company purchased Butterfield between 1956 and 1957 to include all contents and equipment—with the exception of a Jeep and sideboard the Campbell family moved to another of their holdings in Virginia. Continental Can executives used Butterfield as their exclusive sporting lodge until major shareholders demanded they sell it. Three stockbrokers from Atlanta purchased the property in 1985 before selling it in 1990 to a South Carolina real estate developer who lived there until his passing.

Dr. Campbell casually typed "Butterfield Plantation" into Google, and when the results produced an MLS number, he drove four hours the following day from his home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on an investigative journey. He established contact with the listing agent and toured Butterfield for the first time in over 40 years. "It was a playpen for a good many years, so it needed work, but it wasn't a disaster," he said. While searching the records at the Allendale County Courthouse, Dr. Campbell mentioned an interest in Butterfield to the clerk who suggested he meet the county probate judge. "She said, 'He'll be in court until 5:00 p.m. and then at the funeral home after that.' It didn't make sense at first,







but I pulled up to an old Victorian-era funeral home, and the man on the porch looked a lot like that fella,” Dr. Campbell said while pointing at Keith. In addition to his duties at Butterfield, Keith served as the county probate judge and ran a funeral home with his wife, Elizabeth. He and most lifetime residents of Allendale have fond memories of Butterfield and the positive impact its presence once had upon the community. Keith knew locals who declared their wedding vows atop Butterfield’s grand porch and others who harvested game from its fertile grounds as guests.

Keith and Dr. Campbell sat a spell on the funeral home porch, and it became evident they aspired to rehabilitate Butterfield together. “We visited until long after dark, and before I left there, I knew that I would rescue Butterfield, but only with Keith.” It took two years of negotiating with the prior owner’s estate to close on Butterfield, and the morning after closing, Keith appeared with a truck, trailer, and dozer to repair the driveway. Dr. Campbell said of his close friend and comrade, “Keith manages this place exceedingly well and with all the dignity, imagination, and energy it requires. It’s hard work, but together we have a lot of fun.”

With a humble acknowledgement of this compliment, Keith rose from his seat and suggested we tour the property before daylight left us. We climbed into a Jeep Wrangler, sans its roof and doors, and drove across the back lawn toward the outbuildings. Keith stopped and explained the former purpose and renewed intent for each rehabilitated structure at Butterfield. “The main house accommodates 16 people comfortably, and the renovated outbuildings collectively provide sleeping arrangements for an additional 10,” he said. We rode a little further before Keith cut the motor and the Jeep rolled to a stop near the stables. He pointed out a barren of mules grazing on grasses in a nearby paddock along a refurbished quail carriage in the equipment shed. Its spoked wheels carried a fresh coat of bright yellow paint while the wood grain shined beneath a recent layer of stain. “When we hunt, we go at a comfortable and casual place... just riding along slow and soaking it in.”

Keith’s sons, Duncan and Porter Smith, rounded the paddock and parked their trucks beside us to discuss their progress in rehabilitating Butterfield’s habitat. Duncan, who manages the deer and turkey populations, established a science-based management program with regular consultations from area biologists. “When we got here, there was dense understory with a few food plots here and there, along with a lot of predators. Young deer and turkey weren’t allowed to mature given the constant pressure. Aggressively managing for predators, along with better land management, has dramatically improved the quality of our herds and flocks,” he said.

Duncan departed and Porter joined our Jeep tour to elaborate on Butterfield’s quail hunting and habitat. Before lending his talents to Butterfield, Porter guided quail hunts for other outfitters and raised gun dogs for over 15 years. “This place needed work, but I knew we could have quail. Neighboring



#### TRADITION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Mule-drawn wagons follow happy dogs across a land largely unchanged over the last half century. Fresh faces with new ideas hope to change that.





properties in the area have wild coveys, and doing this right meant we could have them, too,” he said. A forestry company thinned their woods and established a three-year cyclical burn program for opening the forest floor. Evidence of a recent burn left fire-kissed pines with blackened bark standing among young beds of wildflowers and clump grasses.

As we drove, Porter directed my attention to serpentine trails planted in sorghum and millet running parallel to the road. “Snaking the feed trails through the cover keeps the quail fed until spring and offers some protection from avian predators. This’ll be our third year running an early-release program and our retention rate gets better every year. We also leave our wild coveys alone in hopes they’ll take over.”

We dropped Porter at the kennels before riding back to the big house. Keith and I summited the side porch where his wife Elizabeth met us with Dr. Campbell, and together we entered the formal dining room where place settings awaited our arrival. Chef Delia Smith emerged from the kitchen with bowls and platters and placed them on brass trivets atop the table.

“We’re having bacon-wrapped quail glazed with cranberry chutney and stuffed with blue-crab dressing, a side of haricots verts sautéed in bacon drippings with Vidalia onion, and fresh-baked yeast rolls,” she announced. We plated our food family-style, serving ourselves from each tantalizing element before passing it along. The quail’s sweet chutney glaze and savory bacon cocoon prevented dehydration of the supple gamebird and made each bite a decadent delight.

Once the plates were cleared, Chef Smith said, “I’ve got one more little treat for y’all.” She returned with glass wine tumblers filled above the rim with creamy pumpkin mousse layered with ginger snap crumble and topped with candied walnuts. With every spoonful, the velvety dessert satiated my sweet tooth beyond any reasonable measure while heralding the flavors of fall. “Let’s allow our food to settle with a tour of the house,” Keith suggested, to which I wholeheartedly agreed.

Keith explained the extensive interior renovations room by room, detailing their refurbishment from the custom crown molding to the distressed wood floor. “We thought about tightening up the floor planks, but having creaking old floors sounds more authentic,” he said. Keith and Dr. Campbell maximized their efforts toward *restoration* as opposed to *renovation*, keeping everything as authentic

#### EYES ON THE PRIZE

The focus of a bird dog never fails to amaze, and sunlight through tail feathers is only a small part of what keeps us going back afield.







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as possible and adding modern amenities where required. Reclaimed wood from Butterfield's outbuildings and other structures around Allendale provides character and continuity to the finish work, and converted closets house full bathrooms finished in authentic fixtures and tile patterns. Most of Butterfield's furnishings are original, but other carefully curated pieces from the era augment its décor with line-dried bedding and service linens providing an exceptional level of nostalgia. "You won't see televisions or telephones or clocks anywhere around the big house. We want people to see this place as it was when it was built," Keith said.

A map of Butterfield hanging on the parlor wall showed its westernmost boundary bordering the Savannah River. Keith suggested we take a trip down there, and while Dr. Campbell packed a small cooler, he fetched a bolt-action Remington rifle for dispatching wild pigs or predators. He laid the rifle across the dash of the Jeep, and with a cooler of light provisions, we launched our journey into the bottomlands of Butterfield. The creeks and tributaries providing water to upper portions of the property drained into a basin, and when combined with periodic flooding from the Savannah River, it created a separate experience within one holding. "It's a whole different program down here, and you couldn't have planned it any better," Keith said. He halted the Jeep at the edge of a boardwalk that probed into the heart of the swamp.

#### GOING HOME AGAIN

If we can never go home again, then maybe we make a place a home, a process only enhanced by our history with it.

We walked its length beneath the boughs of cypress trees draped in Spanish moss and aged over a thousand years. The limbs and branches of these ancient hardwoods subdued the sun, disguising the waist-deep water as a fathomless abyss. Before exiting the swamp, Keith passed a food plot where a flock of wild turkey numbering near 30 birds loafed and scratched at the soil within 100 yards. They seemed oblivious to our presence, and their indifference proved the pace of life at Butterfield was as relaxed for the wildlife as it was for the people.

Of all the assets someone can accumulate through the course of their lives, landownership bears the greatest responsibility. The sublime duty of conserving our natural resources—the only habitable spaces we now know of in this entire world—rests mostly upon the shoulders of private landowners. And in this vein, it seems a precisely timed intervention of destiny or deity favored Dr. Campbell to assume ownership of Butterfield. It needed aid at a time when Dr. Campbell wanted a challenge, and with the family farm now delivered into the capable hands of this caring Campbell, we're all going to be much better off. 🌿