



Calling in Canada geese is part of the rhythm of the season at Mount Airy Plantation on the Northern Neck.



public. But that is changing. Tayloe has decided to open this magnificent property to those who wish to hunt, fish, eat, and spend the night by offering turkey, deer, duck, and goose hunting on a limited basis. Emery, like most sportsmen, is a conservationist and refuses to allow his acreage to be an “all-you-can-shoot” hunting destination. Managing a great property is a great responsibility, especially one that has been in your family for hundreds of years. Emery considers the stewardship of Mount Airy as a high calling, and believes every resource must be used to its full advantage.

“Our hunting operation is that when you hunt Mount Airy, you hunt and dine with the Tayloe family and live in the Tayloe home,” states Emery. “When you come to hunt at Mount Airy there will not be four other groups here—it will just be you. You also may be the only person that hunts here in a month.”

Although there is demand to hunt on the property, Tayloe does not want to put too much pressure on native wildlife. “As opposed to many operations

where the idea is to make it easy to shoot a great deal of game, we are going to be the opposite. We do not put out birds for you to shoot. If you want to hunt here, you will have to *hunt*,” insists Emery. “But I will tell you—having hunted here my whole life—there is plenty of wild game.”

Mount Airy:

HUNTING WITH TRADITION

by Clarke C. Jones

The old gander directed his flock down from just outside Holtwood in southeastern Pennsylvania. He steered toward one of his favorite feeding and resting spots near Warsaw on Virginia’s Northern Neck. As they flew over the Rappahannock near Menokin Bay, the group made a hard-banking turn at Clark’s Run, then navigated over the elegant Mount Airy manor house. By following the same route their ancestors had traveled over 250 years ago, back when the plantation stretched from Tappahannock to Fredericksburg, the geese were “flying through history,” as outdoor writer Charley Waterman once said.

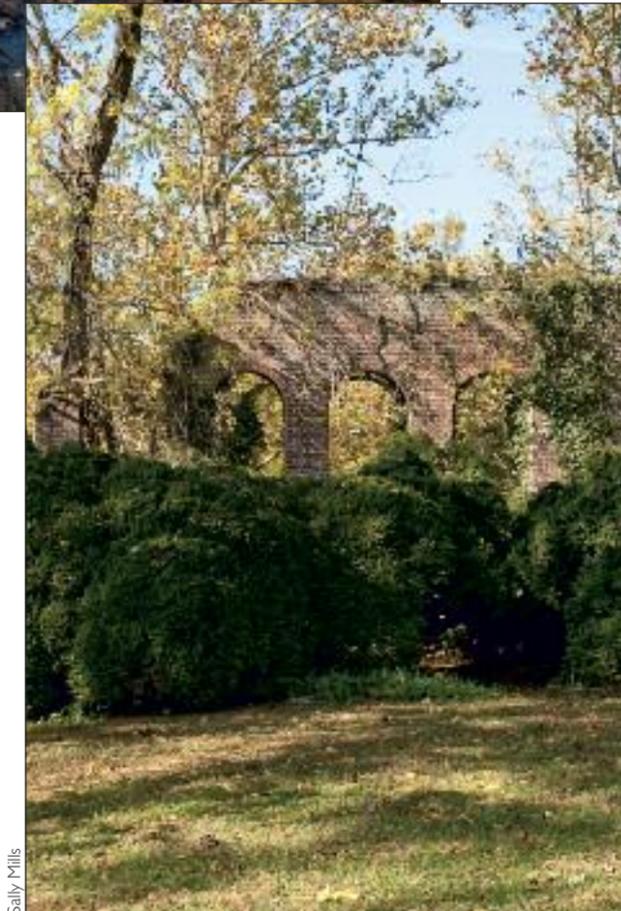
Circling back, the aging bird led the trailing geese over Chestnut Hill Road and slowly began his descent. He used Mount Airy millpond as a safety gauge. The millpond was a duck haven, and if ducks or herons were working the pond, he felt reasonably sure hunters were not nearby. He glanced at the wild turkeys strutting in the corn field next to the spot where he intended to land. Through the scattered clouds, the gander could see silhouettes of his kind already feeding below. He had set down in this field many times over the years and felt confident there was nothing to worry about. So confident that, as he led his flock earthward, he did not notice the new pit blinds and a yellow Lab, hidden from view, intently watching his descent.

The expansive property known as Mount Airy, together with neighboring farms, meandering waterways, and wetlands, has been a destination of choice for migrating waterfowl for centuries. The 1,400 acres of the Mount Airy estate originally included a stud farm owned by the Tayloe family in the 1700s and early 1800s. It may well have a legitimate claim as the birthplace of another sport in America—horse racing. Many Kentucky Derby winners can trace their influence to Mr. Tayloe’s horses, most notably Sir Archy, one of the fastest thoroughbreds to run the track.

Visitors to the extraordinary neo-Palladian stone and brick house on the old plantation over the centuries have included George Washington, the Carters, and the Lees.

When the wife of the Marquis de Lafayette brought the Tayloe family an orange tree as a gift, it was placed in the orangery, a building where fruit trees and other plants were kept—a large greenhouse of sorts—which gives you some idea of how splendid an estate Mount Airy was in the 1700s. The remains of that building are still visible and thought to be the oldest standing orangery in the United States. Mount Airy is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Francis Lightfoot Lee, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, is buried here.

Today, J. Tayloe Emery and his family join nine other generations of Tayloes to reside at the estate. Other than for special occasions, Mount Airy has not been open to the



Remains of the oldest surviving orangery in North America can be seen at Mount Airy.



Sally Mills

Owner and guide Tayloe Emery caters to those who wish to bring their own gundog along, or he will make one available. Right, the Mount Airy garden tradition is kept blooming by Catherine Emery.



Sally Mills



Sally Mills

"Muse" is one of the two 19th-century English setters that greet you upon arrival.

With its fields, woods, and wetlands in close proximity to the Rappahannock River, Mount Airy offers ideal opportunities for successful turkey, deer, and waterfowl hunting. There is no schlepping through bogs or swamps. You arrive at the blinds on Polaris ATVs. Aside from living in a 250-year-old historical home, Tayloe hunts just like the rest of us who own a retriever or bird dog. He has retrievers and bird dogs available to pick up game for his guests, but he also understands how much pleasure people have hunting with their own gundogs, so he encourages you to bring your own.

Emery is no novice to turkey or waterfowl hunting and one of the advantages of having him as an experienced guide is that he knows how to call ducks, geese, or turkeys. A good guide also knows when to *stop* calling. Even though I have a couple of waterfowl bands on my duck call lanyard, I defer to the more experienced caller. Tayloe's calls sound to geese like a comforting dinner bell, while my calling screams, "ABORT! ABORT!"

Having participated in a number of goose and duck hunts in Maryland,

Delaware, and Virginia in my younger years, it became apparent to me that roughing it was part of the, shall we say, "essence" of waterfowl hunting. Waking before dawn to venture out into cold and wet weather is expected. Therefore, it helps to spend the night close to where the waterfowl rest for the evening or plan on feeding in the morning. Often the eating and sleeping accommodations in duck and goose camps can be Spartan, at best. Contrast that with the anticipation you feel as you journey down Mount Airy's winding driveway, passing by the timeless outbuildings, and finally stopping at the massive entrance to the mansion. Age-old boxwoods grace classic stone columns, which flank the front walkway. A boot scraper, strategically placed at the bottom of the worn, stone steps to the house, causes you to pause for a moment and wonder who has cleaned their muddy boots on it over the last few hundred years. As your glance moves toward the large, wooden double doors inviting you to enter and partake, you understand immediately that hunting at Mount Airy will be an entirely new experience.

Comfortable, redesigned sleeping quarters await you in what once was one of the grandest homes in the colonies. Down the hall you stop by the elegant, yet cozy library (yes, library), its shelves stuffed with books. Some date back to the 1700s and bear the Tayloe Crest. The room, with dark wood and 14-foot-high ceilings, trophy antlers mounted on the walls, and comfortable chairs gives you the feeling of relaxing in an old English manor house. Yet there is no hint of stuffiness from the home nor from Emery's personality. He fully understands how rare a place Mount Airy is and he wants you to enjoy it, too.

Because it is so close to the Rappahannock and the 800-acre Virginia Wildlife Preserve, Tayloe Unit, as well as expansive farmland and access to blinds on Cat Point Creek, at Mount Airy "...we have tons of geese here most every day," Emery assures me.

Not only is the Mount Airy millpond a scenic spot, it is also home to large bass. If casting and blasting is your idea of a fun way to spend the day, Tayloe can set that up for

you as well. Quail hunting is also available, but Emery will shoot you straight on that and concedes, "We are not a go-to quail plantation... maybe someday. If you want to hunt quail, you will have to *hunt* them."

Tayloe's knowledge of waterfowl hunting influenced him to set up his duck hunting differently from the way he operates his goose hunts. "I will offer only a minimum number of duck hunts per season because I do not want to put too much pressure on the ducks. I don't want to have a duck hunt or promote a duck hunt if I know the ducks aren't plentiful," says this conscientious host.

When you book a hunt, everything is included—lodging, meals, drinks, as well as the hunt itself. Nothing could be more satisfying after a hunt than a dinner prepared especially for you. It might be a pig roasting on the outdoor spit, served al fresco, or an abundance of wild game including goose, pheasant, quail, or perhaps seafood presented in the Mount Airy dining room.

While the main farm grows soybeans and corn, Tayloe's wife Catherine continues the gardening traditions started centuries

ago. Tomatoes, peppers, figs, and eggplant served to guests may have been pulled from the kitchen garden plot she tends. Catherine has organized a Community Supported Agriculture Program (CSA), in fact, which allows members in the community to purchase a "share" of produce which she harvests from her garden.

At day's end, enjoying a refreshing beverage on the veranda as you unwind from the hunt, you catch the sunset—*spectacular*—as it descends in a bold stroke of glowing red behind the tree line. Just as they have in years gone by, the evening mists sift unnoticed through the slumbering pines of the Northern Neck. All in preparation for another remarkable morning at Mount Airy. 🦆

Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time with his black Labrador retriever, Luke, hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their website at www.clarkecjones.com.

Contact Information
www.mountairyplantation.com/Home.html



Sally Mills

Tayloe Emery and his Lab, Johnny Cash, set some decoys.