



[Home](#)
[Facilities](#)
[Events](#)
[Cattle](#)
[Location](#)
[Lodging](#)
[History](#)
[Memoriam](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Classifieds](#)

The History of Pine Top Farm and The Thomas Watson Family

McDuffie County, Georgia
 (Formerly Columbia County)

The land that is now known as "Pine Top Farm," located 2 miles east of Thomson on the Augusta Highway and the Georgia (now CSX) Railroad, has been in the Watson family since before the Revolutionary War. The property was first brought into the family when Thomas Watson was granted 500 acres on July 3, 1770, by Sir James Wright, the British Colonial Governor of Georgia. (Grant Book I, Page 164, Surveyor General's Records of Georgia, Exhibit "A"). Thomas Watson was a Quaker leader that fled the oppressive rule of British Governor Tryon's Colony of North Carolina. Along with 40 other Quaker families, the Watsons began their 300 mile trip into the Georgia wilderness. They traveled by oxcart and horseback heading for their new land, which had been set aside for the Quaker petitioners and which became known as the Wrightsboro community (the village of Wrightsboro is located in McDuffie County, about 10 miles to the Northwest). Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth Coats, "Susannah", daughter of James Coats, found virgin Georgia forests, which were dark and gloomy from the thick overlapping tree branches of huge trees.

Upon arriving on their new land the first thing they had to do was cut trees to build a shelter. When this was done, they "girdled" the rest of the trees on the land intended for farming and planted seeds around the stumps in holes dug with handmade hoes.

Their first home was probably a crude shelter made from saplings, slabs of bark and white oak shakes - a "lean-to". It was a temporary shelter. By hand they harvested lumber and waited for it to dry. Then they built their cabin. They had to use greased paper for windows, because glass was scarce and too expensive. Leather served as door hinges until a blacksmith could make metal ones.

Supplies of food and materials were limited. Until they could harvest crops, they lived off the land. This land was plentiful with wild turkey, deer, bear, rabbit, berries, nuts and fruit. They would eat the game, then dry the hides and trade them in Augusta for gun powder, salt, and other necessities.

The Watsons cleared their land, grew their crops and raised chickens, cattle, pigs and sheep. They helped the Wrightsboro community by making roads out of Indian paths and by helping build rafts to carry the crops to the markets down the Little River and the mighty Savannah River to Augusta and Savannah.

Besides the burdens of their primitive living, the Quaker families had to contend with hostile Indians. Many of Watson's neighbors could not take rough pioneer life or Indian raids and they went back to North Carolina, but not the reddish blond-haired Watsons, who were known for their stubborn ways. They didn't let hard work and rough primitive life stop them. Tall and proud, they decided to succeed and conquer this virgin land.

It was a rough but promising first decade for the Watsons. With the onset of the Revolutionary War, peace was interrupted by American Rebels who wanted to be free of British tyranny. The plight of the Watsons as Quakers became worse than it had ever been. The Rebels were against them because they wouldn't fight the British while the British were against them because they wouldn't fight the Rebels, and the Indians were against them because they were white.

Raised as pacifists, the Watsons and other Quakers were confused, "Should we fight or should we not?" Deciding as their ancestors did when they came to the New World that freedom from tyranny was most important, Thomas Watson and his son, Peter Watson, chose to fight as did many other Quakers. They joined the Continental Army. Peter Watson served with the 3rd South Carolina Battalion of the Continental Army. ("Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution" (1979), by Robert S. Davis, Jr.).

After the war, Georgia was practically destitute. Thomas and Peter returned home to find their once productive fields a tangle of briars, pine saplings and sedge grass. Like their ancestors, they were resilient and accustomed to working hard. They reclaimed their neglected lands and grew tobacco as the cash crop. They would take the hogsheads of compressed tobacco to the local station, called Sweetwater Creek Mill, about 3 miles to the southeast, to eventually find its way to the Savannah River at Augusta for shipment to northern and European markets. This was where Joseph Maddox, also a well-known Quaker leader, had built a mill and operated it with the help of his sons.

Things began to get better for the Watsons now that peace and a small measure of prosperity had been achieved. An influx of new neighbors, non-Quakers, began to have influence on Peter and his family. Slowly they drifted from their Quaker heritage and adopted the manners and customs of the newcomers.

In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, which changed the cash crop of the area to cotton instead of tobacco. Cotton brought more money, which encouraged Peter and other planters to increase their cotton acreage. The Quakers found, to their dismay, they were not going to be able to live their lives as their faith dictated. It was against their belief to use slaves, but they were unable to compete with planters who used slave labor. Frightened by Quaker prophet Zachary Dick's prediction that a slave insurrection would soon happen, many of Peter's neighboring Quaker families decided not to use slaves and they moved West to Ohio and Indiana. Peter's religious beliefs soon slanted toward those of John Wesley and the Methodist religion. Soon he joined other planters and became a slave owner himself.

Peter married his first wife, Diana Miles, sometime before 1798. They had one son, Thomas Miles Watson, born December 13, 1798. Diana died before 1811, after which, Peter married Elizabeth McCormick on October 15, 1811, in Columbia County, Georgia. (Columbia County, Georgia Marriage Records. (Pine Top Farm was originally in Columbia County, before McDuffie County was surveyed out of the original

Columbia and Warren counties in 1870. More on this later.).

Elizabeth was a widow with children when she married Peter. Peter and Elizabeth raised their children and they accepted neighbor William Abner Smith's two children, Elizabeth and William, to raise. (Columbia County, Georgia Inferior Court Minutes, November 23, 1798)

Peter Watson was a true citizen soldier, helping his fellow man in whatever way he could, whether it was to join the Militia and fight Indians, or to serve on inquest jury duty. He served as a jurist when John Parks was murdered by Daniel, a negro slave belonging to Parks, on the 31st of December 1821 (Georgia Journal Newspaper, April 30, 1822).

Peter died in 1827, leaving a will that was recorded in Will Book W, Columbia County, Georgia Records (Exhibit "B"). In his will, Peter left one-half of his land to his wife Elizabeth for life or widowhood, and the other half and remainder to his son Thomas. He gave his wife his negro slaves named Peg, Sam, and Peter, free and clear of any reservations. He gave a negro girl named Nane to his stepdaughter, Levinia Wade, wife of Edward Wade. The remainder of his slaves and land he gave to his son Thomas. He appointed his son Thomas and his good friends and neighbors, James Shields and William Wiley, as Executors.

In 1835, the Georgia Railroad was surveyed, starting at Augusta and going west. J. Edgar Thomson, who later became famous for building railroads through the rugged mountain passes of the Allegheny Mountains and who later became President of the Pennsylvania Railroad, surveyed the route of the Georgia railroad, which passed through the Thomas Watson farm (and which now forms the back boundary of Pine Top Farm). The Georgia Railroad was eventually completed to Terminus (now Atlanta), and was so ably surveyed by J. Edgar Thomson that only two trestles were required in the 160+ miles from Augusta to Terminus. The town of Thomson was named after J. Edgar Thomson, having been previously known as Frog Bottom. The first train passed by the Thomas Watson farm and through Thomson in 1840, causing one local farmer to remark, "If that thing had come through here sideways it would have killed every one of my cows!" This railroad carried Longstreet's corps to the Battle of Chickamauga in September, 1863, and was the last supply route to Hood's army during the siege of Atlanta in 1864. Returning trains from Atlanta would unload wounded soldiers that had died on the train, several of whom, some unknown among them, were buried in the Thomson City Cemetery in burial plots donated by private citizens. This railroad line, now owned by CSX, remains one of the busiest in Georgia, with numerous freight trains passing each day, and the present owners of Pine Top continue leasing a strip of railroad right-of-way adjoining the farm as has been done since the 1800's.

On September 30, 1850, Thomas deeded his interest in the 550-acre tract that he had inherited from his father to his step-mother Elizabeth (Deed Book OO, page 342, Columbia County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "C"). She then deeded 162 acres of that land to her grandson Thomas Peter Wade, son of Levinia and Edward Wade. Note: This 162-acre tract was deeded to John T. West by the heirs of Thomas Peter Wade, and from him to John F. Watson (Deed Book OO, page 342, Columbia County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "C"). It now comprises a portion of Pine Top Farm.

The Tax Digest of 1844 for Columbia County, Georgia, shows Elizabeth Watson owning 557 acres and 15 slaves in Columbia County and 40 acres in Cherokee County. She drew the 40 acres in Cherokee County, Georgia, being Land Lot 28, 16th District of Cherokee County in the Land Lottery of 1832, as a widow of a Revolutionary Soldier. ("The Cherokee Land Lottery" by James F. Smith (1838), Page 269, Exhibit "E")

Elizabeth Watson died in 1861, at the age of 81. (Columbia County Federal Census of 1860, Page 654, showed her age as 80 in 1861) Her will was probated in 1861. (Will Book J, Columbia County, Georgia Probate Records, Exhibit "F") She named her stepson, Thomas M. Watson, as a trustee of the property she left her granddaughter.

Thomas Miles Watson was born December 13, 1798, in Georgia. He married first on June 8, 1826, in Columbia County, Georgia, Mrs. Catherine Smith Jones, born November 2, 1802. She was the widow of Allen H. Jones (Columbia County, Georgia Marriage Records). She died on December 1, 1854. They had six children; Emily Diana Watson, born September 25, 1828, died October 28, 1834; Tom Peter Watson, born July 18, 1832, married Martha J.H. Watson February 15, 1853, died 1868; John Smith Watson, born August 13, 1833, married Ann E. Maddox December 22, 1853, born January 28, 1833, the daughter of Henry and Letitia Maddox of Richmond County, Georgia; William Miles Watson, born June 11, 1839, who came home on furlough from the Confederate Army and died December 8, 1863; Catherine Elizabeth Watson, born October 5, 1836, married Virgil M. Borroum December 21, 1854; George Washington Watson, born May 26, 1841, and died six months later on December 10, 1841. (Family Bible Records in possession of Mrs. John H. Terry, Macon, Georgia. Also in DAR Records, Georgia Archives, Atlanta, Georgia, Exhibit "G")

Thomas Miles Watson was a large plantation owner with many slaves. He was a kind-hearted man, and never permitted his overseer, Jim Morgan, to mistreat his slaves. He provided them with good clothing, plenty of food, and a comfortable house. The slaves were contented and happy and devoted to their "Master". If there was a young couple among them wishing to get married, "Master" would read the passage from the family Bible and pronounced them "man and wife." Every Christmas he made sure each received a gift. This family tradition was carried forward to the Tenant Farmers of Pine Top Farm during the 20th Century.

Thomas Miles Watson was an educated man with culture. He had a collection of rare books that later were a source of pleasure and inspiration to his children and grandchildren. Called "Squire Tom" by his neighbors, he was respected for his honorable and upright nature.

Thomas married a second time, Mrs. Mary Ann Cooper, May 26, 1860, in Columbia County, Georgia. They did not have any children. On June 3, 1865, he had a stroke and died at his home. His will is recorded in Will Book "J" Columbia County, Georgia Probate Records.(Exhibit "D") Watson's estate consisted of 19 slaves and 1600 acres of land. He left the home place, consisting of 500 acres, to his wife, Mary Ann, for and during her natural life. At her death it was to be divided equally between his sons, Tom Peter, John S., and his daughter, Catherine, less any previous advances that he had made to his children when he was alive. He appointed Catherine's husband, Virgil M. Borroum, as Trustee for her and her children's share of his estate.

According to the land records, Tom Peter Watson received 370 acres of good farm land on Germany Creek (a few miles north of Pine Top) plus previously conveyed land. Catherine Watson Boorum and her brother, John Smith Watson, divided the land on Sweetwater Creek (to the southeast of Pine Top). Catherine got the land South of the present U.S. Hwy. 278 (which now belongs to W.C. "Top" Watson). John S. got the North half consisting of 600 acres that was considered poor farm land. This division was approved by the Judge of Superior Court.(Minute Book A, Pages 36-38, McDuffie County, Georgia, Superior Court Records. Also Deed Book A, Page 53, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibits "H" & "I")

John Smith Watson was a planter with only a common school education, but he was gifted, cultured and refined. He loved music. His father, Thomas Miles Watson, saw him trying to make a fiddle out of a gourd, and made no comment, but on his next trip to Augusta, he bought John a violin. John learned to play his violin and cherished it all of his life as his prized possession.

The Watsons were never rich, but were comfortable, with a good farm, and fat stocks. When the War Between The States broke out in 1861, like his ancestors who fought before him, John joined the Confederacy, along with his brothers, Tom Peter, and William. He was wounded twice during the War and discharged in 1863. His wife and son went to Macon, Georgia and brought him home.

John and his wife, Ann Eliza Maddox, raised seven children; Addie Augusta Watson, born November 22, 1854, married John E. Garner, and she died at her home near Williston, SC, on October 15, 1920; Thomas Edward Watson (later a U.S. Senator), born September 5, 1856, died in Washington, D.C. September 26, 1922. Over 10,000 people were present at his funeral in Thomson. He married October 9, 1878 Georgia

Durham born January 9, 1840, died May 14, 1923. William Augustin Watson, born February 12, 1859, called "Top". Julian Cumming Watson, born September 1, 1860, died October 19, 1893, Mary Isabella Watson, born January 18, 1863, married George W. Ustry, died February 27, 1918. John Forrest Watson, named after Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, born November 17, 1865, and Julia Watson, born August 15, 1868, died 1941.

With the War over, and the slaves freed, the family suffered hard times during Reconstruction. Fortunately, Sherman's army did not pass through and destroy everything on their March to the Sea, as they did further west, causing even greater hardship. In 1870, the Columbia and Warren County boundaries were redrawn when McDuffie County was created by act of Governor Collins, and the surveyor who surveyed the new boundaries for McDuffie County was Captain John R. Wilson, C.S.A., ancestor of the present owners of Pine Top Farm. Since then, the farm has been in McDuffie County. The original hand-drawn map with pictures of the survey crew including Cpt. John R. Wilson today hangs in the back hall at White Columns Inn. Cpt. John R. Wilson, CSA, was the great-grandson of Captain John Wilson of the Continental Army, the first Wilson to settle in the area and for whom the local DAR chapter is named. He is buried in the Wilson cemetery on the Ben Howell property on Cedar Rock Road west of Thomson, near his log cabin which still stands. The present owners of Pine Top Farm are seventh generation direct descendants of Captain John Wilson of the Continental Army, and of the original Thomas Watson who received the land grant for present day Pine Top Farm in 1770.

John S. Watson endured the hard times, unpleasantness and tyranny of Reconstruction, only to feel Mother Nature's wrath in "The Great Storm of 75," which was perhaps the most devastating storm ever to hit McDuffie County. It occurred March 23, 1875, and people who heard about it from their parents still talk about it.

They called it a tornado, even though none of the observers mentioned the funnel shape, and it cut a path of destruction a mile wide across McDuffie County.

It started in Lee County, Alabama, and entered Georgia at Harris County, then traveling through Talbot, Upson, Monroe, Jones, Baldwin, Hancock, Warren, McDuffie, and Columbia, then crossing the Savannah River into Edgefield, SC. After it traveled through Warren County and taking off the roof of the Camak station, it entered McDuffie at the 42 mile post on the Georgia RR, coming from the Southwest. Wreaking ruin through many farms in Southwest McDuffie County it passed north and west of Pine Top Farm, but fortunately only blew off some shingles and downed a few trees. Other farms weren't so lucky. At Seaborn Ivy's plantation every building was razed. A bizarre sidelight, a horse at Henry Ivey's place was blown into a well, but was saved. The next tragedy occurred at the Lazenby House on Cedar Rock Road (and within sight of the original Captain John Wilson homeplace and cemetery dated from Revolutionary days), then occupied by the J.T. Stovall family, (whose descendants still own the house and adjoining acreage). The members of the Stovall family took shelter in the kitchen, which they thought would be safer than the rest. (It was made from a log cabin, which had been built by the property's first owner, John Hodgins, a Quaker). Unfortunately the chimney collapsed, killing Mr. Stovall, and injuring his wife so badly that she was an invalid for the remaining part of her life. A.W. Faucett's Mill on Brier Creek was badly damaged, and what seems to have been a waterspout is said to have sucked all the water out of Hobbs Mill Pond. The second story of the Edmunds House north of Thomson was shifted sideways about 6 inches and this can still be observed as the house still stands today.

Eleven years later an earthquake shook McDuffie to its foundations and cracked a few fireplaces and shook up everybody at John S. Watson's Farm. The most startling result of the "Shake", came at a meeting at Fountain Campground near Wrightsboro, where revival meeting was being held. Sinners became converted in record time, and in unprecedented numbers.

The Watson family overcame these and many other obstacles and were prominent citizens of the community. Thomas Edward Watson was an author, U.S. Representative, and a U.S. Senator. He is the father of the Rural Free Delivery mail delivery service that we take for granted today. This system allowed citizens to receive mail delivered directly to their home or farm instead of the post office. Tom Watson also edited his newspaper, "Weekly Jeffersonian", the magazine "Watson's Magazine", and he wrote "The Story of France", a biography of Napoleon, "The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson", "The Life and Times of Andrew Jackson", and a novel called "Bethany, A Story of the Old South" (the Bethany house still stands today on Salem Road near Pine Top). William A. "Top" Watson is known for introducing the famous "Tom Watson" Watermelon Seed. For many years he was Tax Collector for McDuffie County. His grandson William C. "Top" Watson now owns the same farm, which is across the Augusta Highway from Pine Top, and was Clerk of McDuffie County Superior Court for many years until retiring several years ago.

John Forrest Watson, an entrepreneur (and grandfather of the present owners), was extremely successful as a planter and built much of Thomson's business district. Born in November 1865 and raised during the hard days of Reconstruction, he was determined to be successful. His mother Ann Eliza Maddox Watson, the mother of seven children and devoted wife of John S. Watson, was a model mother and educated woman who encouraged and supported her children. She was highly versed in history and biography. Ann was a walking library of French history. She held the attention of listeners for hours discoursing about Josephine, Marie Antoinette, and many other great women of historical literature. From Miss Ann, her children got their passionate sympathy for oppressed humanity, their driving power, their work ethic, their love of the higher life, and their kindness to others. Her descendants today are much like her.

On October 19, 1893, tragedy struck the Watson family. John S. and Ann Watson lost their third son, Julian. He is buried at Sweetwater Church. He had been a successful merchant in Thomson for many years. Two years later, on June 12, 1895, John S. Watson died at his home, and is buried in the Thomson Cemetery. His grave is marked as a Confederate War Veteran. Although some say that he died a poor man, neither he nor his wife ever drew a Confederate pension, casting doubt on this viewpoint.

After John S. Watson's death, Ann moved in with her son, Thomas E. Watson. On March 20, 1909, she died. She was buried beside her husband. Neither John S. nor Ann left a will. Their family farm was divided between their sons and daughters. There are no recorded deeds or estate records on file showing how the property was divided, which was common to that period.

John Forrest Watson, called "Forrest", and Ella Delle Bussey were married on January 19, 1893, at Union Church, about 10 miles away on the Cedar Rock Road west of Thomson, during an ice storm. They left the church in a horsedrawn carriage heading to their home in the pecan grove at the top of the hill (facing "Top" Watson's home across the Augusta Road) on the 217 acre farm (now part of Pine Top Farm) that he inherited from his father this home burned in 1954, but the pecan trees still stand, across the Augusta Road from Top Watson's house. The ice was so bad on the road that one could follow the blood trail left by cuts in the horse's hooves (Note: Research by this author into the Probate Court and deed records of McDuffie County yielded no deeds to John Forrest Watson for this 217 acres. We have to assume he inherited it because there are no estate records for either John S. Watson or his wife on record in McDuffie County). In addition to the 217 acre farm that John F. Watson inherited from his father, he bought 173 acres from John T. West on November 22, 1890, known as the Wade Place (Deed Book F, Page 358, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "J"). The Wade Place was part of the original Colonial grant to Thomas Watson in 1770. On December 3, 1910, he bought his brother William A. Watson's share of the John S. Watson family farm consisting of 87 acres (Deed Book J, Page 37, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "K").

Together John Forrest Watson and his wife raised six children: Robbie Watson B. Clary (1893-1922), Norma Watson Wilson (1896-1982, mother of the farm's present owners), Mildred Watson Rivers (1901-1982), Ola Watson Ivy (1899-1979), Mary Watson Garrett (1905-1984), and John Forrest "Bubba" Watson Jr. (1910-1973).

John Forrest Watson Sr. died unexpectedly on February 18, 1916, without a will. His large estate was divided between his widow and children

as follows; the store buildings on Greenway and Railroad Streets in Thomson were divided between his daughters, each receiving three buildings. The whole street block on Greenway consisting of a blacksmith shop, livery and sales barn and sales pen went to John Forrest Jr. Also, each heir got a farm.

Norma Watson Wilson, mother of Pine Top Farm's present owners, got most of the John S. Watson home place and farm, which was two miles east of Thomson on the north side of the Augusta Road and which is now included in Pine Top Farm. This included the Watson cemetery where her father, John Forrest Watson Sr., her sister Robbie Watson B. Clary, and her brother-in-law Charley Walston Barksdale are buried.

Mrs. John F. Watson, called "Miss Delle", inherited part of the "John S. Watson's Old Home Farm" (Minute Book D, Pages 687-688, McDuffie County, Georgia Probate records, Exhibit "L"). Eight years later she deeded 21 acres to her son-in-law, James E. Wilson, who had married her daughter Norma in 1915. (Deed Book P, Page 188, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "M"). Later she deeded 53 acres to him on September 22, 1927 (Deed Book R, Page 384-385, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "N"). Miss Delle died September 22, 1955.

James Edgar Wilson Sr., father of the present owners, bought 231.5 acres that was known as "The Holliman Tract" and adjoining the 217 acre John Forrest Watson farm from the heirs of Horace T. Clary on January 6, 1927. His son H.E. Clary was administrator of his father's estate and signed the deed to James E. Wilson, and he married John Forrest Watson's first daughter Robbie. H.T. Clary had bought this land from William A. "Top" Watson, John S. Watson's son, on December 5, 1910 (Deed Book J, Page 251, McDuffie County, Georgia Deed Records, Exhibit "O"). This was the remainder of "Top" Watson's share of his father's estate and is the present eastern part of Pine Top Farm adjoining Moose Club Road and CSX Railroad.

James Edgar Wilson was a successful planter and business man who managed the farm, cotton gins, a prosperous feed and fertilizer business (MOFCO - McDuffie Oil and Fertilizer Co.) and several cotton warehouses. His great-great grandfather was Captain John Wilson (1756-1847), a Revolutionary War soldier, who fought with Georgia's 1st Battalion of the Continental Army ("Roster of Revolutionary Soldiers in Georgia", Volume III, by Mrs. Howard H. McCall (1969). His grandfather, Captain John R. Wilson CSA, surveyed McDuffie County in 1870. Captain John R. Wilson of the Continental Army was one of the first settlers of St. Paul's Parish, later named Richmond County, then named Columbia County, and in 1870 McDuffie County.

James Edgar Wilson continued to farm the land with the assistance of many tenant farmers. In 1935, during the depression, Mr. Wilson decided to build his family a new brick home on the same site as the old John S. Watson home place. Not wanting to destroy his wife grandfather's home, he hired a man for \$75.00 to move the old two-story house and its detached kitchen approximately 500 feet to the rear adjoining tenant houses, called "The Quarters," where the wage hands lived. This was done very slowly by placing logs under the house and using stump pullers, mules and leverage to move it to its new foundation, where it stands today. \$75.00 shows how much people would do for so little money during the depth of the depression. At this time the average wage hand would earn 50 cents per day from sun-rise to sun-set.

The former kitchen, now a "shotgun" rental house, also still stands at the opposite end of the "quarters" from the former "big house" and was the home for many years of Mary Lou Ivery, Norma Wilson's housekeeper. Mary Lou is still alive, living with her daughter in Augusta.

The fine, spacious new home and many barns were built with timber cut by sawmills set up on the farm. The foundation trenches for one of these sawmills can still be seen at the edge of a clearing at the farm, and a rusty old pair of log tongs was found half-buried in a wooded bottom a few years ago and once again put to good use by the present owners.

There were much joy and many pleasant experiences as James E. Wilson's boys, the present owners of the farm, grew to be men. They loved their horses and competed for use of the one saddle horse. It was usually decided who got to ride their horse by the first one waking up in the morning saying, "I bid for the horse today."

At times the families in "The Quarters" would come down and sit on the porch at the big brick house to listen to Joe Louis's boxing matches and President Roosevelt's fireside chats. There were no radios in "The Quarters" since electricity was not generally available until about 1940.

Sometimes they might kill a hog on a cold winter's day and salt him down for storage in the smoke house. Or they might barbecue a small pig in August at "lay-by-time". The neighbors and friends were always invited.

When the cotton crop was mature and the cotton bolls started to open, the pickers would start picking. It was always an honor to have the first bale of cotton ginned in the fall. It always brought a premium price and a picture in the "McDuffie Progress" newspaper.

Everyone on the farm helped with the cotton picking. Men and women would have a sack hanging from a shoulder strap and go between two rows at a time picking. The pay was around 40 cents per hundred pounds, and a good picker could pick 400 pounds a day. Full bags were emptied onto a burlap sheet, and the corners tied together. The sheets were weighed in the field each evening at "weigh up" time. There was a daily contest about who picked the most cotton. They would take the cotton to the Gin on Railroad Street in Thomson by two-horse wagon. The road was dirt until the Augusta-Thomson road was built in 1932.

James Edgar Wilson was a man of unquestionable character, confident, and always well dressed in a suit. During the Depression of the Nineteen Thirties he managed to prosper. He managed his farm, cotton gins, cotton warehouses and other enterprises well. He was able to send his three sons to the University of Georgia. He died November, 15, 1951, leaving his wife, Norma, and three sons, John Watson Wilson, James Edgar Wilson Jr., and Robert Norman Wilson. His will is recorded in the Probate Court Records of McDuffie County, Georgia. He willed his brick home with four acres to his wife. The remaining land he owned he left to his three sons equally, (Probate Court Records, McDuffie County, Georgia, Exhibit "P") including a 45-acre tract directly across the Augusta Highway that was purchased in 1932 from Mrs. Esther Guy Jones when the Augusta Highway was paved. This land had been part of the original grant to Thomas Watson in 1770, and still adjoins "Top" Watson's land. Today, five families of direct descendants live on this tract.

Following the death of James Edgar Wilson in 1951, an overseer, Mr. Walton W. Willoughby was hired to oversee the farm. This was a return to the custom of earlier days to have an overseer for the farm. An overseer's house was built for Mr. Willoughby and his family. Mr. Willoughby helped raise the grandsons on the farm teaching the boys how to work and to love the outdoors. Mr. Willoughby is commemorated by a bronze plaque at the brick wall between the twin barns. The plaque reads, "These 22 oak trees serve as a living memorial to the man who planted them, Pine Top Farm's beloved overseer, Walton P. Willoughby, 1896-1975, Father, Farmer, Friend, Teacher of Boys." He was well liked by all and respected for his farm knowledge. He kept bird dogs to hunt for quail. In his later years if he missed many quail, he would trade his gun in, blaming his missing shots on his gun.

In 1970 and 1971, Mrs. Norma Watson Wilson deeded the 217 acres she inherited from her father, John Forrest Watson, to her three sons in two deeds (Deed Book 75, Page 536 & Deed Book 77, Page 83, Exhibit "Q" & "R"). The 301 1/2 acres she inherited from her husband was deeded by her to her three sons in 1972 and 1973. (Deed Book 81, Page 364 & Deed Book 83, Page 669, Exhibits "S" and "T").

On December 23, 1977, John W. Wilson sold his one third interest in Pine Top Farm, consisting of 518.5 acres (217 acres and 301 1/2 acres), to his brother James E. Wilson Jr. (Deed Book 102, Page 866, Exhibit "U"). After that transaction the owners of the 518.5 acres were

James E. Wilson Jr. and his brother Robert N. Wilson Sr., and their mother Mrs. Norma Watson Wilson who still owned the family home and the family cemetery, which consisted of 3.43 acres.

James E. Wilson Jr. and Robert N. Wilson Sr. divided the 518.5 acre tract into two parcels in 1978. James E. Wilson Jr. took the eastern parcel that contained 317.95 acres, formerly called "The Holliman/Wade Place and John S. Watson Home Place," and Robert N. Wilson Sr. got the 198.13 acre parcel comprising the west end of the farm, nearest to Thomson (Deed Book 102, Pages 665-668, Exhibit "V").

On December 18, 1982, Mrs. Norma Watson Wilson died. She left a will that was probated in the Probate Court of McDuffie County, Georgia. In her will she left her entire estate to her three sons, except the family cemetery, which she left to her son, James E. Wilson Jr. She appointed her oldest son, John W. Wilson as Executor. John W. Wilson, as Executor, deeded the 0.19 acres, known as the Family Cemetery, to his brother in May of 1983 (Deed Book 125, Page 642, Exhibit "W"). On the same day he deeded the home of his parents, consisting of 3.31 acres and a large two-story brick house, to himself and his two brothers in accordance with his mother's will. (Deed Book 125, Page 644, Exhibit "X") They in turn sold the home and 3.31 acres to Robert N. Wilson, Jr. and his wife Cindy Lou T. Wilson, who now reside there (Deed Book 125, Page 646, Exhibit "Y").

As of June 2, 1994, Pine Top Farm consists of four parcels and is owned by:

James E. Wilson Jr. 317.95 acres "East Part of Pine Top Farm"
 James E. Wilson Jr.19 acres "Family Cemetery"
 Robert N. Wilson Sr. 198.13 acres "West Part of Pine Top Farm"
 Robert N. Wilson Jr. 3.31 acres "Brick Home"
 & Cindy Lou T. Wilson

Note: All deeds recorded after 1870 are recorded in the Superior Court Clerk's Office, McDuffie County, Georgia. Acreage is "more or less".

This narrative was prepared by John I. Bruno, Attorney at Law, 1427 Hwy 138 S.W., Conyers, GA 30208-2553, Phone # 404-922-8377/8489, and edited by James and Glenn Wilson.

10/10/95

Addendum to History of Pine Top Farm
For the period March 1995 through August 1996

In early April, 1995, Pine Top Farm was the site of McDuffie County's first-ever visit from the Red Carpet Tour, an annual economic development tour for national and international CEO's sponsored by the State of Georgia and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. The tour coincides each year with the Masters Golf Tournament in Augusta, which is always a stop on the tour. The Pine Top/McDuffie visit was jointly sponsored by McDuffie and surrounding counties, and was the only tour stop in the greater Augusta area that was not actually in Augusta.

The entourage arrived in the late afternoon on four chartered buses filled with the tour guests and their official state-level hosts. They were greeted by a large group of local hosts from McDuffie and surrounding counties. The guests were boarded onto trolley wagons for a cross country tour of the farm complete with equestrian demonstrations and commentary by local hostesses. The destination was a grassy rise at the rear of the farm, within sight of the Georgia Railroad (now CSX) and overlooking hayfields, ponds and distant woods. A large dining tent was set up for a southern buffet dinner prepared by local Chamber of Commerce volunteers. It was a beautiful evening for open-air dining and the tour participants commented that it was a most welcome change from their usual itinerary of plant and industrial site tours and seated dinners in banquet halls. Organizers agreed afterwards that it was very successful and left a good impression on the participants.

Pine Top's Olympic connection was a large reason for it being chosen as the host site for the Red Carpet Tour. In 1993, representatives from the British Equestrian Federation visited the farm and later chose it as their site for acclimatization prior to the 1996 Olympic Games. In the winter of 1993-1994, the 40-stall British Barn was built behind the Willoughby house for competition stabling as well as to house the British team (and hopefully others) in 1996.

This was followed by the farm being chosen by the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) as the training site for 6 European horses who came in August, 1994, for two weeks of intensive monitoring and research into the effects of our hot climate on Olympic horses, most of whom will be coming from the much cooler climates of Europe. These horses were from Germany, England and Italy.

Subsequently, Germany also decided to acclimatize their 3-Day Event team at the farm in 1996 prior to the Olympics, and furthermore to utilize the farm in August 1995 for further training and acclimatization studies on two German horses who would go on to compete in the 1995 Olympic equestrian test event, the Atlanta Cup 3-Day Event, at the Georgia International Horse Park in Conyers. One of these Pine Top-hosted German horses was victorious in this event, Local Yokal ridden by Maria Mehrdorf, whose father had ridden for Germany in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

In March, 1996, Pine Top hosted its regular spring horse trials competition which attracted nearly all of the contenders for the U.S. and Canadian Olympic Equestrian Teams. Most notable of these were David and Karen O'Connor, who eventually made the U.S. team and were history-making husband and wife Olympic silver medal-winning teammates in the team 3-Day Event. Also Kelli-McMullen Temple, who lives in Chatsworth, GA, and who rode for Canada and had the best individual score in the team competition of all the U.S. or Canadian Riders but did not earn a medal because her teammates did not do as well.

As spring 1996 progressed, the farm learned that, in addition to British and German Olympic horses, it would also be hosting horses from Hungary and Denmark prior to the Olympics. In addition, listing of the farm on the National Register of Historic Places was achieved and a bronze plaque to that effect was installed on a brick column at the farm entrance.

In late June, the first Olympic horses arrived after their 747 cargo jet flight from Frankfurt and their 36-hour quarantine in Atlanta. There were 10 German horses, 5 Hungarian horses, and 1 Danish horse. They were accompanied by grooms, riders, coaches, veterinarians, farriers, owners and mountains of gear and feed. The feed had flown over with the horses was kept in air conditioned storage in the British Barn so it would not spoil. The German riders included past Olympic gold medalists, as was the Danish rider. All settled in nicely in the British Barn and were very pleased with the facilities, the ample acreage for riding, and the relaxed, peaceful environment for the horses.

In early July the British team arrived with 8 more horses and equivalent numbers of people, trunks and feed pallets. Some of the most famous horses and riders in the world were on the British team and it was a wonderful privilege to watch and become friends with them. The British had won back-to-back world championships in 1994 and 1995. After their arrival, the British Barn was positively humming with activity because it was home to 25 Olympics-bound horses at one time.

While these teams were here, they participated in social activities including a reception and dinner by the Thomson/McDuffie Convention and Visitors Bureau, cookouts at the barn, skiing and swimming at Clark Hill Reservoir (they thought it was one vast hot tub!), cocktails at the home of James and Ruth Wilson, dinners out in Augusta and lounging around the pool at White Columns Inn, one of the James Wilson family's enterprises. The people from the various countries all had great fun together, which is what the Olympics is all about.

One of the barn cookouts coincided with Robert Alan Wilson's birthday (son of Glenn and Janet Wilson), and the German team surprised him

with a German Equestrian Team hat, a silver key ring, and a beautiful decorated birthday table laden with German treats and a birthday cake. Robert Alan was also later presented with the Olympic hard hat cover with German flag insignia that reserve rider and past German gold medalist Matthias Baumann would have worn in the Olympic competition if his horse had not gone lame.

On July 13, James Wilson's 74th birthday and the same day that the team later departed the farm for the Olympic horse park in Conyers, the entire German team mounted up for an early-morning surprise birthday serenade in his front driveway. All 10 riders were mounted and all other team personnel, about 25 people, accompanied them on foot. They lined up in front of the house, horses in front and dismounted people behind with locked arms, and sang German songs and presented a birthday gift. They sang the German versions of "Happy Birthday" and "Auld Lang Syne." It was a very unique and stirring occasion.

By mid July, all had departed for Conyers except two German reserve horses. Meanwhile, the Olympic Torch Run took place on July 14 and the route followed US 78/278 right past Pine Top, with a torch handoff taking place at the farm entrance. On that same day the Argentine Team called and asked if they could spend a week at the farm, and they began arriving that afternoon during the Torch Celebration which took place at the Courthouse in Thomson in front of thousands of people. It was during this ceremony that the German and Danish past gold medalists were introduced and the announcement was made that the Argentine team of 5 horses was coming for a week.

Pine Top's Olympic involvement continued even after the horses left for Conyers. Due to the Pine Top crew's involvement in the 1994 and 1995 research projects, Janet and Glenn Wilson were chosen as ice water wash-down crew leaders for the Olympic games. Many of their 15-person Olympic crew were also connected to Pine Top as boarders and had also helped with the 1994 and 1995 research and practice projects which had developed the technique of applying ice-cold water directly to hot horses' bodies during the competition to help remove body heat under hot, humid weather conditions.

The Pine Top crew members had a unique "hands-on" opportunity to help the horses and riders, many of whom they had gotten to know, right in the midst of the Olympic competition, and they are all now the owners of the official Olympic volunteer uniform consisting of credentials, shirts, hats, shoes, socks, Swatches, fanny packs, belts, pants or skorts, compliments of ACOG. The volunteer uniform and credentials also entitled everyone to free soft drinks, admission during other equestrian events, and access to restricted areas of the horse park core area during the Olympics.

Unfortunately, none of the horses or riders that had trained at Pine Top won any medals at the Olympics. It appears that their decision to move into the Olympic horse park and its high-pressure atmosphere several days before the competition began was detrimental, as the horses and riders from other countries that did win medals waited until the last possible day to move in and their horses and riders were undoubtedly fresher. In spite of the lack of medals, we heard from numerous third parties that the various teams' personnel had told them how they had thoroughly enjoyed their stay at Pine Top.

Pine Top hosted a total of 30 Olympic horses from 5 countries, which is believed to be more horses and more countries than were hosted at any other Olympic training site. These totals increase to 38 horses and 6 countries when the Olympics-related horses hosted in 1994 and 1995 are included.

It will be hard to top the Olympic experience, and it will be a special memory for the rest of our lives.. It's amazing, though, to think that it never would have happened if our ancestors had not held on to this special piece of ground that is so ideal for horses that it has attracted the best in the world!

Glenn Wilson
September 13, 1996

**Copyright © 2014 Pine Top Farm All rights reserved.
Site Design by HorseCity.com
Action Photography by Bob Branam**