Promised Land Final

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New South Associates, Inc.

Narrative History of the Promised Land

Introduction

This narrative history provides a chronological historic background of the Maguire-Livsey House and farm, focusing on its agricultural history. The history is presented in three periods: the Thomas Maguire ownership from c. 1825-1886, the forty-year post-Maguire tenancy of the property, and the Robert and Morena Livsey ownership from 1926-1969. First, Maguire's establishment and property expansion in the Rockbridge community is discussed, followed by an overview of his plantation operations, his landholdings and their value, and antebellum farming practices. Study of his diary descriptions of fields, crops, and weather events has enabled both a speculative map of the plantation and a table of his fields and crops grown each year. The interim period between the Maguire and the Livsey families and the residency of the Robert H. Haney and Sam Lucas families at the Big House is next addressed, although briefly, as records pertaining to the occupants as renters are few. The last section reviews the Livsey family's history with regard to farming, crop production, and African American traditions. Using the 1938 aerial photo and oral history interviews, outbuildings, fields, and other physical features of the Livsey estate are identified. Through historic photos, the appearance of the Big House before mid-twentieth modifications occurred is better understood. Finally, similarities and parallels between the two lengthy ownerships of The Promised Land are drawn.

Research materials examined for this context included deeds, plats, tax and census records, agricultural schedules, historic maps, historic aerial photos, books, journals, articles, government publications, web resources, and Thomas Maguire's diaries from 1859-1866, 1872, and 1876. Information about Robert and Morena Livsey and their farm was obtained primarily through oral history interviews with two children, a daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren who all either resided in the Big House at some point or grew up in a nearby house.

The Thomas Maguire Era (c. 1825-1886)

The Maguire Family

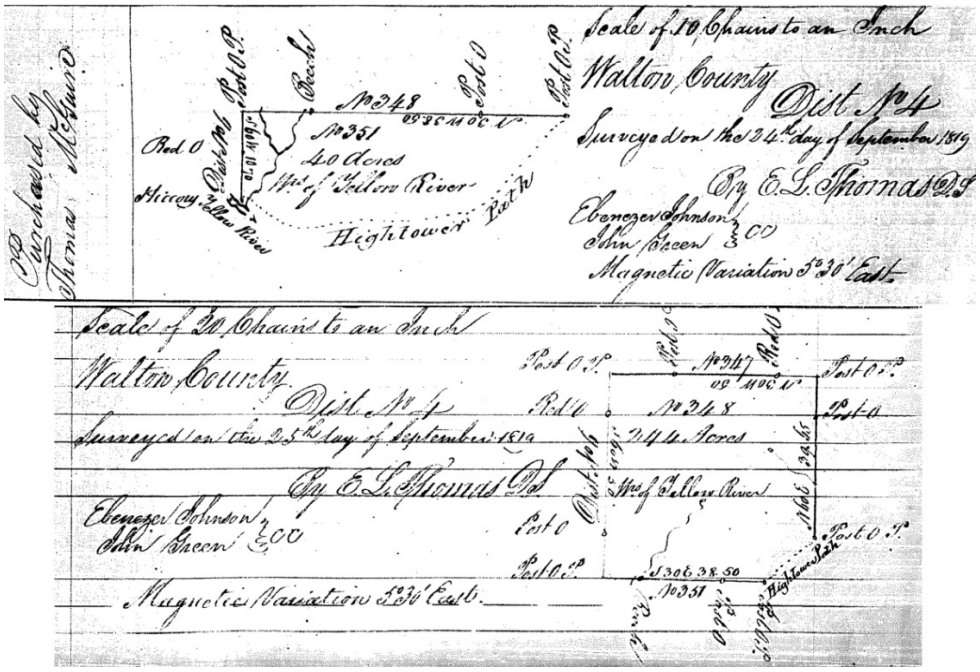
Thomas Maguire was born on Ireland's east coast in Dundalk in 1801, the same year the British and Irish Parliaments passed the "Act of Union" that unified England, Scotland, and Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. As a Roman Catholic family, the Maguires had also endured the prejudice against their religion through the British Test Acts, which came into effect in Ireland in 1782. In order to hold a public or political office or for municipal employment, Catholics were required to pledge allegiance to and receive Communion according to the rites of the Protestant Church of England ("Test Act," *Encyclopedia Britannica*). This religious discrimination, coupled with the creation of the United Kingdom that many Irish viewed to be the end of the Irish nation, may have propelled the Maguires to emigrate to the United States (Nash, 1). That both Thomas and his older brother James Patrick both later held public offices and took immediate active involvement in the Rockbridge community shortly after moving there demonstrates the value placed on such freedoms.

The first Maguire to move to the United States was James Patrick, as early as 1813, but as a resident of Augusta, Georgia, he did not petition the court to become a U.S. citizen until May 1820 (Nash, 1). In November of that year, Thomas followed his older brother to America, sailing to Savannah as a nineteen-year-old passenger with the occupation of labourer. Naturalization required five years of residence in the U.S. for citizenship, and Thomas officially obtained his in 1825, at about the same time his parents, James and Catherine Murphy Maguire, his older sister Margaret (later Mecaslin), and another older brother named John J., also settled in Augusta (*Naturalization Act of 1795*; *Atlantic Ports Passenger Lists, 1820-1872*). Why James Patrick and the rest of the Maguires chose Augusta is not clear, but Irish immigrants in general were flocking to Georgia as more Indian land cessions opened up cheap land parcels in central Georgia. Thomas' parents came to America with fine furniture and the economic means to help their grown children purchase land and establish businesses (Nash 1). Thomas Maguire's love of reading and writing implies receipt of a good education while in Ireland, and a certain degree of family wealth.

The Promised Land Establishment

Contrary to popular belief, Thomas Maguire did not begin his life in Gwinnett County by entering and winning the 1820 Land Lottery that parceled up and redistributed land once occupied by the Cherokee Nation and Creek Indians. As a younger bachelor, lottery rules stipulated U.S. citizenship and Georgia residency for at least three years in order to participate in the drawing (*Act of December 15, 1818; Act of December 16, 1819*). However, his name appears as the original purchaser of Land Lot 351, a 40-acre Fraction in the 4th District of Walton County (later Gwinnett County) on the surveyed plat map. Whoever won the lot chose to sell it rather than claim it. Still, when he returned to Ireland in 1825 to help bring the rest of his family to Georgia, his residence remained in Augusta (*Georgia Surveyor General Plats*; *Atlantic Ports Passenger Lists, 1820-1872)*.

Figure 1. Land lots 351 and 348, surveyed in 1819. Courtesy of the Georgia Archives.



Thomas and his brother James Patrick established themselves in Rockbridge at the southern tip of Gwinnett County a short time later. Maguire earned both the title of Captain of the Militia Rockbridge District #571 and Postmaster of Rockbridge in the spring of 1828 (Harrison, iv; *U.S. Appointments of Postmasters, 1832-1971*). His brother James married Sarah McFarland in 1822, and he became Justice of the Peace in Gwinnett County in 1833 (Nash, 2). How long Thomas Maguire resided on his original 40 acres on Rockbridge Road before acquiring more land is unclear due to missing records destroyed in the Gwinnett County courthouse fire in 1871. He may have first built a temporary house on the lot or resided with his brother. In Maguire's surviving farm journals from 1859-1876, he mentioned storing things and salvaging wood from the "old house." This old house may have existed at the time he purchased Land Lot 348, on which the Maguire-Livsey Big House stands, or it could be a reference to an earlier house he built on his original Land Lot 351.

In 1830, Maguire married Jane Anderson from a neighboring family that lived just to the north on Rockbridge Road. Census records from later that year indicate that he resided with his new wife, her sister, and his mother-in-law, and that he owned one slave. His brother James, his wife Sarah, and their children lived nearby, but Sarah, listed as head of household in 1840 indicates that James had recently passed away. Jane Maguire, with whom Thomas had three children, also tragically died very young in 1837 from a blood infection that arose after a pin in her clothing scratched her while riding a horse. The following year, Thomas married Jane's younger sister, Elizabeth, and it is believed by Maguire descendants that Elizabeth did so out of concern for her sister's motherless children (Nash, 2).

Maguire's house was made a voting precinct in 1834 and the Rockbridge post office in 1839, and by 1840 he owned 12 slaves (Nash, 2). He also ran a small mercantile from 1834-1838, either out of his home or from another small building on his property, where his neighbors traded and purchased coffee, tea, liquor, keg powder, grains, yarns and fabrics, books, shoes, kitchen pots and utensils, and various sundries. Being appointed county road commissioner in 1836 and a representative to the Georgia state legislature in 1838 added to his early status in Gwinnett County (Nash, 2). In the Antebellum South where mules pulled plows, 18 acres of row crops could be planted, cultivated, and picked per person (Phillips 207). With 12 slaves, most of them working the fields, Maguire had an estimated 120-150 acres to farm, not including more than that in unimproved land. Moreover, his distinctions and public uses of his house suggest a large home. Therefore, it can be assumed that he bought his 242 acres of Land Lot 348, located directly east of Land Lot 351, and built on it his large Plantation Plain style house in the early 1830s after getting married. When Maguire's parents passed away in 1828, it is possible that he obtained an inheritance that he put toward house construction or increased landholdings.

The Thomas Maguire Diaries

Through the years, Thomas Maguire kept several journals in which he recorded daily occurrences and thoughts. One of the journals survives from 1859-1866, and excerpts from 1872 and 1876 exist, all kept at the Atlanta History Center. In these diaries, he considered every aspect of his farming worthy of note. His entries were not typically written once a day but added to throughout the day, especially after running an errand, noting weather changes, or monitoring planting and plowing progress. He recorded the outside temperature and sky, daily farm activities in each field, the bales, pounds, and bushels produced or sold, other plantation work tasks, and the misdoings and punishments to some of his slave

"hands." Every day he mentioned anyone on "the sick list" or if the family and hands were all in good health. Rain, too much or lack thereof, was of particular concern to Maguire. When road or creeks flooded and fences or bridges washed away, he detailed the damage and constant repair work.

He also wrote about church and social events, Masonic meetings, impassioned views on Temperance, and visits to and from neighbors. Maguire recorded the many day trips he often took with his best friend and brother-in-law, David Anderson, son-in-law B.P. Weaver, or son John E. He rode to Lithonia for the mail, to Sneezer (later Centerville) two miles up the road, to mills to grind corn or saw lumber, and to Atlanta on overnight trips to visit his sister. When tragedy struck and members of his family or neighbors passed away, he noted these events matter-of-factly with little to no mention of the grief, except for his niece Maggie Mecaslin's passing during a smallpox epidemic in late 1862. A few months later, the Maguire family doctor came and performed the big task of vaccinating the family, including the slaves, recipients all listed in an entry.

Figure 2. Thomas Maguire journal entry listing family and slave vaccination recipients, February 8, 1863. Courtesy of the Atlanta History Center.

Elizabeth, Maguire's second wife, took on the role as a caregiver in the community. He wrote of her frequently tending to sick neighbors and slaves and helping to make shrouds for deceased neighbors. Socially active, she often entertained company at the Big House, whether neighbors and family or through quilting and sewing gatherings. Maguire enjoyed the company of his wife. When Elizabeth spent nights away from home, he expressed boredom or loneliness in the quiet house.

Interested and involved in local politics, Maguire recorded elections, and, on the national level, the latest word of mouth news about skirmishes during the war. While hiding in the woods, he witnessed the destruction of much of his property during Sherman's March to the Sea. With communication impaired, news of Lincoln's assassination, to which he penned "good news," arrived a week after the fact. Hopeful rumors of Confederate victories continued to circulate amongst the farms, unaware for over five weeks of Lee's surrender. He lamented briefly, expecting "hard times for the balance of my life," but Maguire fared better than most due to his perseverance and focus on rebuilding the farm.

Figure 3. Early photo of Thomas and Elizabeth Maguire.
From Public photos at ancestry.com.

Farm Operations

Thomas Maguire called his new home in the center of Rockbridge "The Promised Land," as the unspoiled, fresh land promised a biblical flowing of milk and honey. True to its name, Maguire achieved remarkable success as a planter. By 1850, his land acquisition had grown to what was considered a large plantation of 810 acres, 260 acres of it improved farmland, and 22 slaves (*1850 Agricultural Schedule*; Harrison, iv). With his final purchase of land in 1863, his 26 slaves worked a plantation containing 1,232 acres, with 400-500 acres of that improved farmland. Only six percent of "white" Georgia landowners maintained plantations of this size, which amounted to half the land farmed in Georgia (Inscoe).

The Promised Land was located on the northern periphery of the Cotton Belt, in the upper Piedmont of Georgia. In the antebellum years, twice as many acres of cotton were grown than corn, but because corn production required less labor, corn gradually increased to equal, and in some areas, surpass cotton acreage (Phillips, 207). According to the *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture*, 80 percent of all arable land in the South contained cotton and corn in 1867 (the remaining 20 percent for grains, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables). At 44 percent, cotton was slightly higher than corn (116). In Georgia, however, more land was devoted to corn than cotton by 1876 at 48 percent and 35 percent (121). From the 1850s to the 1870s, Maguire grew crops in rotation in at least 30 fields, patches, and orchards. Between 12 and 15 fields were farmed each year prior to and during the Civil War, dropping down to less than 10 fields as he became older and was without his large supply of slave labor.

Maguire's approach to farming was diligent and enlightened at a time when scores of southern cotton planters recklessly abused thousands of cheap acres of farmland by exhausting the soil and not replenishing the depleted nutrients (Bonner 61). Rather than solely depending on "King Cotton," Maguire rotated crops, diversified his income, and spent money and time nourishing and preparing the soil.

According to the *1850 Agricultural Schedule*, the cash value of Thomas Maguire's farm totaled $6000. Out of 41 farmers in the Rockbridge District, Thomas Maguire was listed first with the highest valued farm. He owned 4 horses, 3 mules, 11 milk cows, 4 working oxen, 25 heads of cattle, 18 sheep, and 120 swine, all worth $800. In bushels, his grains amounted to 135 wheat, 1,650 corn, 400 oats, and 10 rice. His plantation produced 19 bales of cotton at 400 pounds each, 25 pounds of wool, 100 bushels of peas and beans, 50 bushels of Irish potatoes, 300 bushels of sweet potatoes, and 200 pounds of butter. The value of his homemade manufactures totaled $150 and animals slaughtered $250. Ten years later, his production and earnings had grown substantially, in some instances doubling, as further discussed in this section.

The prosperity at the Promised Land may be credited to Maguire's knowledgeable and methodical approach to farming, and to his resourcefulness and discipline, but his slaves, some skilled laborers, produced the crops and made the plantation's agricultural products. Merritt, whom Maguire mentioned frequently and clearly depended on, carried out the bulk of his construction and repair work. In the winter of 1859-1860, Merritt constructed a schoolhouse at Rockbridge, presumably on Maguire's land. He helped Maguire make shoes, build fences, fix chimneys, and many other tasks. No mention exists of an overseer at the Promised Land, so Maguire may have handled the labor management himself. He regularly punished his slaves through whippings for what he deemed to be wrongdoings, and, in one instance, refused when Louis pleaded to be sold so that he could be with his wife, who had been sold. In October 1964, at least six of his male slaves (Merritt and Louis among them) went missing one morning, about which Maguire lamented, "supose they are gone to the Yankees. This is bad but it cannot be helped." After the war, Maguire wrote that some of "the Negroes" with families stayed on to work at the Promised Land, and a few women went to neighbors in the area for employment.

Maguire recovered financially after he lost his crops, livestock, and his full labor at the close of the war and continued to operate his farm until he passed away in 1886. As he approached the age of 80, he farmed 400 acres of his 1,112 acres of land in 1880, which was valued at $6000. Farms were decreasing in size throughout the South, so Maguire's holdings and production ranked comparatively high. That year, his orchards included three acres—two for peaches and one for apples. Indian corn was grown on 20 acres, with 240 bushels for the year, 86 bushels of wheat on 6 acres, and cotton on another 20 acres, producing 13 bales. Statistically, Maguire's production of corn and wheat was above the average. In 1876, the average yield per acre in Georgia consisted of 11 bushels of Indian corn and 6 bushels of wheat, but Maguire's land produced 12 bushels of corn per acre and an impressive 14 bushels of wheat per acre (*Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture*, 94). He no longer grew oats or raised sheep but had 20 swine, 40 poultry, six beef cattle and one milk cow.

No amount of time was wasted at the Promised Land. Only extreme weather conditions such as heavy amounts of rain prevented work from being done outdoors. In January and February, Maguire and his hands fixed fences, cleared field debris for planting and wooded areas to create new farmland, burned straw in fields, filled up gullies prone to flooding with rocks, repaired buildings, spun wool, planted oats, made salt by boiling water, and hauled out manure to the fields.

When the weather warmed in March and April, his labor "knocked off" and ditched cotton and corn stalks, planted cotton and corn, "bedded out" Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes to produce sprouted slips for planting, planted a variety of garden vegetables, sheared the sheep, and spread more manure. Additional unimproved land might be cleared of trees and brushy grass such as canebreak to make way for growing crops. He also sent his hides to the tanner.

The summer months were spent hoeing, plowing, and chopping the soil around the crops, planting peas by dropping them in the furrows, putting out the potato slips, planting turnip seeds for a fall crop, harvesting upland corn, and hauling and thrashing the cut oats and wheat. Once dried and sunned, the wheat and oats amounted to 200-400 bushels in the 1860s, rising to double the amount listed in 1850. Maguire's orchards yielded peaches and apples, and he had a strawberry patch and "watermelon hill." In 1862, they turned timber to fashion a syrup mill and crushed and boiled corn into corn syrup to sell. The following year, his "syrup corn" made over 80 gallons. Despite losing much to the Yankees in 1864, Maguire still produced 21 gallons of syrup the next fall.

From September to December, Maguire's slaves picked and ginned the cotton from fields and pulled down fodder. In 1860, his cotton fields yielded 31 bales, an over 60 percent increase from ten years earlier. Potatoes were harvested in October and November, which they put in a covered potato house, and thrashing time for peas and corn, collected and hauled up from higher ground at the creek bottom. As soon as those low-lying fields were cleared, they sowed the pre-soaked wheat there. By late fall in 1861, five different fields contained 65 acres of planted wheat. December was also hog killing month, and Maguire butchered 12-24 hogs each year from 1859 to 1864. These months also typically included "drawing" or "taking up" coal in the coal kiln or tar kiln for charcoal and tar production. Pine tar was used as a wood protectant, but it also possesses antiseptic skin properties and treats cracks on horse hooves (Barnes and Greive).

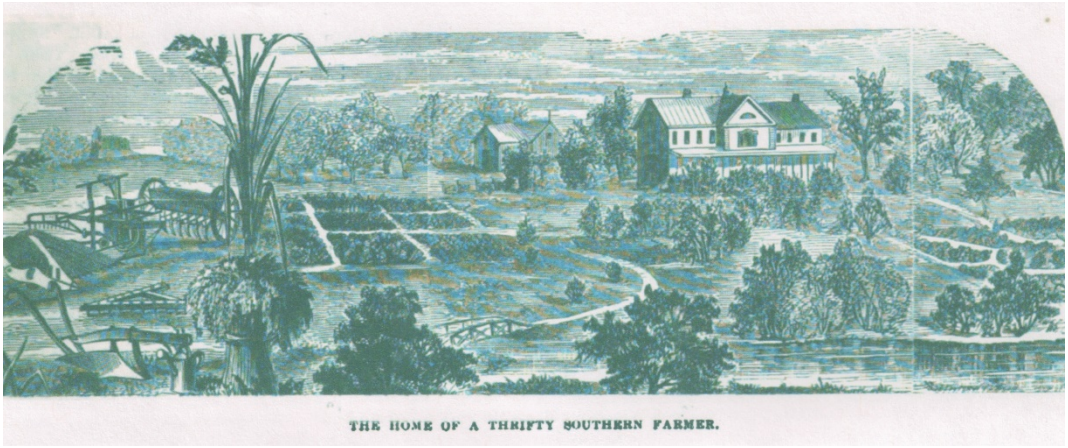
The Promised Land served as a small brick factory every few years. They fired up a brick kiln to manufacture 17,000 bricks in the summer of 1859 (and more bricks in the winter of 1863). As he aged, Maguire helped to take care of his chickens and geese and spent time tinkering with his tools in his shop, making horse shoe nails, painting his house, or taking wagon trips to the sawmill or grist mill. He also harvested bee gum, that is, he raised beehives in hollowed out wood logs. For his slaves and family, he cobbled shoes out of leather each year and helped to make mattresses and weave baskets for manure and cotton picking.

Although not related to farming, Maguire also inadvertently operated a business enterprise as the war ended and weary, hungry soldiers and other travelers passed through Rockbridge. He received lodgers, charging them $5.00 or 7.00 for the night and offering what food he had to spare. Some nights the Big House filled to capacity, and the overflow, usually soldiers, slept outside. With Maguire's home not burned during Sherman's March, it was one of a few large houses that remained on the travel route.

Planting

Maguire's use of phrases such as "plows going around" fields or "running along the hill" suggests he followed the contours of his land and practiced horizontal planting to reduce erosion. While this method was introduced in Georgia in 1830, not all planters practiced it before the war (Bonner, 97). In fields that grew cotton for one or two seasons, Maguire planted wheat the following season, or in some fields, corn or oats. Maguire was a well-read man who, at the end of the 1850s, may have read *The Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer* articles about his contemporary David Dickson, of Sparta, Georgia, arguably one of the most successful southern cotton planters. Mirroring Maguire's farming at The Promised Land, Dickson advocated growing cotton for a few years, followed by corn, then a grain, and a fallow season (Bonner, 189). Maguire, an experienced and successful planter himself, may have come to his own similar conclusions drawn from decades of trial and error. Crop rotation and terracing for long-term benefits and increased productivity characterized the postbellum era of progressive farming (Messick, et.al, 55). That Maguire farmed sensibly and responsibly in the 1860s before most others demonstrates that he was at the cutting edge of agriculture.

Figure 4. Illustrations of thrifty, model southern farms.
From *The Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer* (1887:1,45).



VIEW OF A MODEL SOUTHERN FARM HOME.

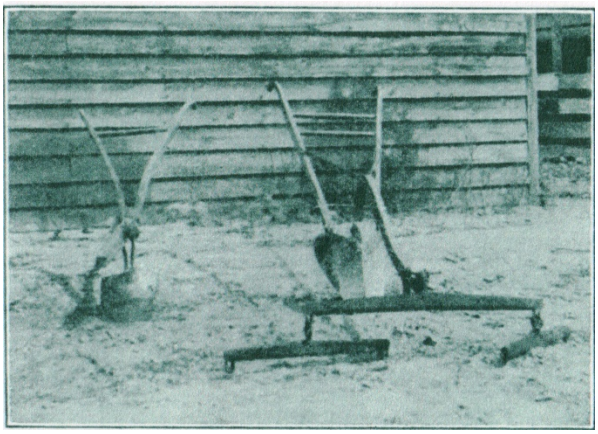
To keep the farmed fields in healthy condition, Maguire combined growing corn with legumes and clover grasses. At that time, farmers noticed a better crop when they practiced this "green manuring" even though the nitrogen-releasing qualities of companion plants were not yet fully understood (Bonner, 186). For growing cotton, tons of manure were incorporated into the soil before planting. Depending on the history of the field, whether fresh and unplowed or previously deep plowed, it was common practice for a cotton planter to apply five to seven tons of manure per acre in the latter years of the nineteenth century (*Jones,* 64; Goodrich, 13). Commercial fertilizers were readily available in the 1870s and easier to use than composting. However, it was advised to not rely upon them alone. A primary mixture of homemade fertilizer—the natural minerals of decaying animal and vegetable matter from the pens, fields, kitchens, woods, and marshes—yielded the best results (*Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture,* 122). In Gwinnett County, the common practice was to supplement farm compost and manure with 150 pounds of commercial fertilizer per acre, costing from $20 to $60 per ton (125). At the Promised Land, they raked up animal waste manure from the wood pile and ground cotton seed into meal for an excellent nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer. In 1862, Maguire built an ash house so that accumulated ash could be spread as fertilizer. In the 1870s, Maguire was purchasing guano in Lithonia and mentioned making his own swift guano. He described mixing a ton of guano with his stable manure to create "guano scatters."

The process for planting cotton included first "laying off" cotton rows four to five feet apart, plowed seven inches deep with a single mule straight shovel plow. Manure or other fertilizer was then placed in the furrow, covered by a scooter plow or bull-tongue plowing each side of the furrow. The cotton beds were then built up by running a turning plow, also for seven inches of depth, on each side of the scooter furrows (Goodrich, 12; True 239). According to Maguire, in 1860 he laid off his cotton in February, about eight weeks prior to planting in mid-April. However, after that the hands were preparing to "run the shovel deep enough to put guano in" in early April just prior to planting cotton. This change in preparation of the soil may be explained by Dickson's recommendations in journals, beginning in 1859, to break the land as close to planting time as possible (True 239).

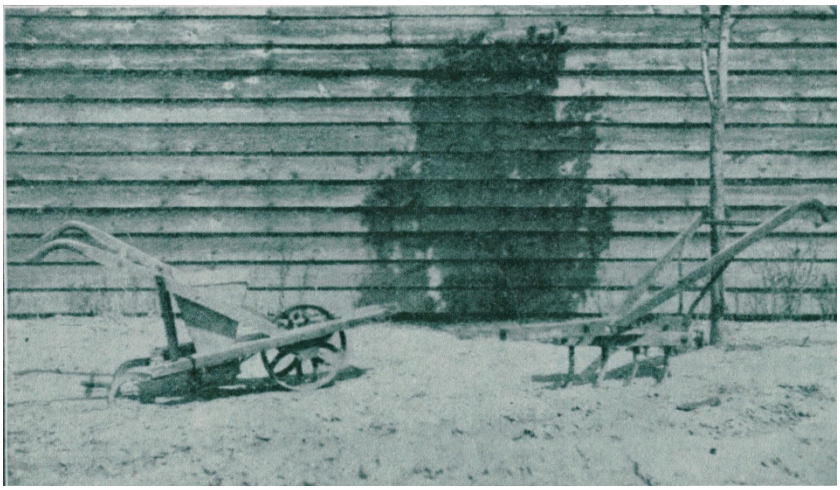
When time to plant the cotton seed, the furrow was plowed once more to thoroughly mix in the manure and open the furrow for planting. Two weeks after planting, once the cotton had sprouted well, Maguire noted that the hands were "sweeping round cotton" then "chopping" the cotton, which meant thinning

out the plants. A side harrow and then sweeper approximately two feet wide was run down the sides of the rows, sweeping to a depth of less than an inch to both level out the ground and disturb any newly sprouted weeds. The process of hoeing and plowing to maintain the fields was done every few weeks from early May until the end of July, as Maguire recorded in his diaries. Generally, it required one mule per 30 acres to plant and work the cotton (Goodrich, 13-14; True, 239). Picking cotton by hand at the Promised Land laboriously lasted from September through January.

Figure 5. Nineteenth century plows. From Goodrich (1909:11-12).



a. Straight-shovel plow for single mule and opening plow



b. Fertilizer distributer and a side harrow

Generally, cotton did better on the higher, more level grounds, but Maguire still rotated crops in his upper fields. Transitioning from cotton to corn in a field entailed a similar soil preparation. Guano and cotton seed meal was commonly used as fertilizer, and planting corn involved a deeper furrow. After sprouting, plows skirted along the sides of the corn to create banks along the furrows. When ears formed in June, peas were dropped next to the corn and swept over (Goodrich, 15). Maguire harvested both the corn and the peas in early October. He grew less in acreage of wheat and oats, but these grains were relatively easy to grow except in period of hot, dry weather.

Plantation Layout

Thomas Maguire's large plantation spread over three districts in two counties and ten land lots within those districts (see Table 1). As mentioned previously, a fire destroyed Gwinnett County deeds and plat records in 1871, which included all but two of Maguire's land purchases. Those two deeds involved Land Lot 5 in District 6. In 1849, Maguire acquired the whole 250 acres of the lot from Joshua Ballard and had it recorded in the books shortly before his death. Maguire later deeded to his son James H.C. Maguire 120 acres of that same lot later in 1873. From his diary and deed purchase after his death, it is also known that Maguire purchased three parcels to the south and southeast of the Big House (Land Lots 346, 349 and 11) from Mrs. Rebecca (Zachariah) Lee in 1863. Fortunately, county property tax digests from the 1870s list all of the lots and acreage owned next to the taxpayer's name and valuation. From this information and original land lot maps, the approximate boundaries of Thomas Maguire's plantation can be plotted. His land boundaries in Land lots 4 and 6 are speculative. During the ten-year period from the Lee purchase in 1863 until his sale to his son in 1873, Maguire owned his peak acreage of 1,232 acres in both Gwinnett and Dekalb counties. Table 1 represents this decade of ownership.

Table 1. Thomas Maguire's landholdings by land lot and acreage, from Gwinnett County property tax records, 1863-1873.

District 6 (Gwinnett County)	Land Lot	Acreage
	4	100
	5	250
	6	73.5
District 4 (Gwinnett County)	337	33.5
	346	112
	347	213
	348	242
	349	157
	351	40
District 16 (DeKalb County)	255	11

Historic maps designated the community of Rockbridge at the junction of Rockbridge Road, Lawrenceville Road, and Loganville Road (Lee Road), entirely on Maguire's property. Other roads referenced in Maguire's diary include the "Trail" and "Mill" roads, which in later deeds were called the Old Hightower Trail Road and the Old Mill Road. These two roads ran south from Rockbridge Road and over Nobusiness Creek, as shown on the 1888 Geological Survey map (see Figure 6). The Hightower Trail Road ran from the west side of the Big House down southeast to the creek, crossing it and heading down to meet up with the Hightower Trail in Rockdale County. This is the road taken to go to "The Circle" or Social Circle. The Old Mill Road followed the Hightower Trail after it crossed over the Yellow River at Rock Bridge until just before the ford of Nobusiness. After crossing the creek at the ford, it turned south and followed present day Norris Lake Road to Pleasant Hill Road then west to Chupp's Mill on the Yellow River. Thomas Maguire sometimes traveled to or from Lithonia this way.

At Rockbridge stood a church, which Maguire often called the meeting house, built in 1825, and the 1859 schoolhouse. The location of Maguire's schoolhouse was possibly to the west of the Big House, near the Gin House on Rockbridge Road. This speculation is based on Maguire's references to stopping

by there on the way to Lithonia, and, from the schoolhouse, heading up to see David Anderson. Whether or not the Rockbridge Post Office or mercantile that Maguire ran was located in a building separate from the Big House is not certain, but plantations sometimes had small stores for local trade that doubled as post offices (Messick, et. al, 78). The "old house" Maguire mentioned, assumed to be from Maguire's earliest days at the Promised Land or from a previous land owner, also remained somewhere on property. It was quite common for a farm family to build a newer home and reuse the previous one for storage (69).

Figure 6. 1888 Geological Survey map showing Rock Bridge, the textile mill owned by John E Maguire, Nobusiness Creek, and Trail and Mill roads. From the University of Texas library on-line map collection.

In 1860, the Federal Census Slave Schedule recorded Maguire's 26 slaves residing in four houses on the plantation, with six to seven thus occupying each house. In late 1865, Maguire dismantled his kitchen partition and the flooring of one of the slave houses for the construction of a sawmill, referred to as Anderson & McGuire & Co. in the 1866 tax lists, and located on the Yellow River on David Anderson's property. These seven floor boards in "Mary's House" each measured 15 feet by 11.5 inches, suggesting that the slave houses were likely 15 feet in length. On one stormy day, Maguire recorded that those working in the Potato patch behind the carriage house were caught in the sudden violent weather and raced to take cover in the crib (perhaps a crib-barn), the kitchen at the rear of the Big House, or "down home." Maguire consistently described the Nobusiness Creek bottom as "down" in direction, thus implying that the slave houses were in the proximity of the kitchen and crib and toward Nobusiness Creek, behind the Big House. It was not uncommon for slave houses to be clustered behind but not too distant from the main house so that activities could be monitored (Messick, et. al, 88). A small stream ran through this area, in the present location of Lake Sheryl, about 800 feet east of the Big House. The slave houses may have been grouped on either side or both sides of the stream.

Farm outbuildings that Maguire mentioned in his diary included a barn and stable, a crib, a shop for woodworking, tool repair, and Mr. Jarrell's blacksmithing, a smokehouse, a gin house shared with neighbors, a store house (which may be the same as the "old house"), a carriage house, a chicken house, a potato house, and an ash house. The kitchen at the back of the Big House was originally detached not more than a few feet, which spared the house from the noise and bustle, reduced heat, and protected the house from kitchen fires. There was also an area for slaughtering hogs, kilns for making bricks, charcoal, and tar, and a mule-powered syrup mill. Fifty years after Maguire's death, farm outbuildings stood across the road from the house or immediately surrounding the house and yard. It is possible that a few of them survived from Maguire's occupation, or the old buildings were rebuilt on the same spot. Farmstead landscapes typically included a main house surrounded by women's domestic activity buildings such as smokehouses, chicken coops, cellars, wells, privies, carriage houses, and gardens, while agricultural buildings where men worked such as sheds, stables, cribs, and mills centered around the barn (Messick, et. al, 63). Maguire lost his barn, stable, gin house, and other outbuildings when the Yankees burned them in November 1964 during Sherman's March to the Sea. Continuing to operate his farm another 20 years, outbuildings (except possibly the gin house) were rebuilt.

Although not described in the diary, the Anderson-Maguire Cemetery was situated on Maguire's original Land Lot 351, but it presently lies in DeKalb County. This family graveyard on top of a wooded hill contains about 30 marked burials with interments ranging in date from 1837 (Jane Anderson, Maguire's first wife) to 1898 (Maguire's son, John E.). Thomas Maguire himself is buried there. When John E. Maguire acquired this parcel from his father's estate, he sold it to N.J. Jones in 1892, "reserving one acre at Grave Yard" (Deed Book 5 p. 300). One of Maguire's slaves, Peter, passed away in 1864, as likely did others, but whether the African Americans were buried within the cemetery in unmarked graves or in a separate cemetery elsewhere on Maguire's land in not known. A deed from 1913 referred to a seven-acre lot just southeast of the Big House as "the graveyard field." This field, later bisected by the construction of Ford Place in the Norris Lake development, contained a house visible on the 1938 aerial map. Thomas Livsey, owner of property adjoining this parcel, recalled that a grave on Ford Place was dug up and reinterred elsewhere when the Norris Lake houses were built there in the 1960s. He believed it to be a singular backyard grave of a person who had resided in the old house. However, the deed referenced no residence, only a field, suggesting that the house was built after the 1913 deed. If the old slave quarters were in fact nearby and to the north of this field, the existence of a slave cemetery in the Ford Place area should not be ruled out.

The fruit orchards of subsequent years to the east and west of the Big House may have been relics of the apple and peach orchards established by Maguire. Another landscape feature that probably dates to Maguire's occupation was described in a deed from 1915. An old rock wall marked the southern boundary of Land Lot 347, from its southern corner where the Old Hightower Trail Road crossed northeastward to Nobusiness Creek. A second wall remnant 200-feet long was described on the other side of the road. The wall divided the land owned by Maguire and the Zachary Lee estate.

In his diary, Maguire named each of the fields that were cleared and farmed and recorded the crops grown each year in the fields (see Table 2). He referred to them according to a.) proximity to a geographic feature or building, b.) the former owner of the parcel or c.) a neighbor adjacent to field.

Table 2. Field names and crops from 1859-1866 and 1872, taken from Thomas Maguire diaries

	1859	1860	1861	1862	1863	1864	1865	1866	1872
Creek field	Oats Corn Cotton	Wheat Corn Cotton	Wheat Oats	Corn	Wheat Corn	Corn		Corn (syrup)	
Orchard field	Cotton or corn	Cotton	Cotton	Wheat	Cotton Corn Peas	Irish Potatoes	Wheat	Corn (syrup)	
Bottom (Little & Big)	Wheat Corn	Wheat Corn Cotton	Corn	Corn	Corn	Oats Corn	Corn	Corn Wheat	Corn
Farmer field	Cotton or corn	Corn	Oats Wheat	Oats	Corn	Oats	Wheat		
Roundabout	Cotton	Cotton		Wheat	Peas Potatoes Corn (syrup)	Corn (syrup)	Corn (syrup)	Wheat	Watermelon Peas
Trail field	Corn or cotton	Oats	Oats	Corn Oats	Oats	Oats			
Schoolhouse field	Cotton	Wheat	Cotton	Wheat	Corn	Wheat		Oats	
Sawmill field	Cotton	Wheat							
Campbell field	Cotton	Oats							
Taylor field		Oats							
Jackson field		Oats	Oats						
New Ground	Cotton	Corn Cotton	Peas Corn	Peas Corn					
Ford field	Oats	Cotton	Cotton	Wheat	Corn		Oats	Oats	
Gin House field	Wheat	Cotton		Cotton	Wheat Potatoes	Turnips			
Potato Patch	Irish Potatoes	Cotton	Irish Potatoes	Irish Potatoes	Apple trees	Irish Potatoes	Corn	Cotton	Irish Potatoes
Negro Patches	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	Cotton and other	
Little Creek field			Wheat	Corn					
Freeman field			Peas Corn	Wheat	Corn Cotton	Corn	Wheat	Cotton	Cotton
Fresh field			Wheat		Peas Corn	Wheat	Corn	Wheat	
Moore field				Corn	Wheat	Corn		Corn	Cotton
Nelson field				Corn Cotton Peas	Wheat	Corn	Wheat	Corn Cotton Peas	
Bradberry Patch				Beans	Corn Peas		Corn (syrup)	Cotton	
Lee Bottom						Corn	Corn	Oats	
Mill field						Corn	Corn	Wheat	
Rocky field	Wheat								
River field	Old field								
Store House field	Old field								
Rice field	Old Field								
Other:	House garden, Turnip Patch, “Watermelon Hill,” David’s Patch, Dixie Patch, Elizabeth’s Patch, Caroline’s Patch								

Determining the location of these fields and which descriptors above determined what names is problematic for two reasons. First, some fields fit two of the possibilities. For example, there were surnames such as Ford and Rice living in the Rockbridge area in the 1830s, but the ford of Nobusiness Creek also extended across his bottom field. And, he grew some rice in his early farming years, as reported in the 1850 agricultural schedule. Second, Maguire did not describe fields in terms of directions and distances and rarely divulged fields adjacent to one another or to other properties and features. Diary anecdotes and descriptions of walks around the plantation nevertheless provide clues. For example, when a fox made its rounds to the River field and Roundabout, they found it under the Gin House. These three fields were probably adjacent to each other and close to the Yellow River. Maguire mentioned the Farmer field being near the Trail field, and the Ford field adjacent to the Creek field, and the Moore field adjoined J.J. Moore's land to the north. There was an east and west to the creek bottom, where corn and wheat was grown. Patches were around the house, as well as a "house side" and "road side" of the garden. He referenced the potato patch behind the carriage house and the orchard behind the stable. If apples trees were planted in the potato patch one year, then the carriage house and stable stood side by side. Placing in the context of the rolling topography of his land, Rockbridge Road and Hightower Trail, the centralized location of his house, deeds records from after 1871, the 1819 original land lot survey, the eastern boundary of Nobusiness Creek and its branches, and the Yellow River. Historic topo maps, county maps, road maps, and aerial photos from 1938 help to make connections and locate original land lot boundaries (some of those boundaries visible on the aerials) and the Promised Land cultural landscape.

William A. Maguire, The Haney Family, and the Lucas Family (1886-1926)

Thomas Maguire passed away in 1886, five years after his wife, Elizabeth, as a wealthy man with a significant amount of land. As executors of their father's will, John E. and William A. Maguire, the only sons of Thomas Maguire still living and working in Gwinnett and DeKalb counties, and Elliot P. Minor, who married Maguire's daughter Cora, purchased the large plantation with Maguire's inheritance money. At the time, in order to inherit land from deceased relatives, the estates were put up for public auction at the county courthouse, and family members bid on the parcel(s), paying for any winning bids with inheritance money (Nash, 8). The two brothers and son-in-law purchased Maguire's estate, divided it up into at least 14 parcels, at the Gwinnett County courthouse auction in November 1887. Minor bought 368 acres of the southern and eastern portion of the estate and 64 acres of the northern part (Deed Book 8, p. 339; Deed Book 4, p. 256). John E. already owned 120 acres on the northern end, part of which later passed into the hands of the Mason family. The Masons were descended from the Lee family who originally owned hundreds of acres surrounding the Promised Land up until the 1860s, their estate size once rivaling Thomas Maguire's. In the 1890s, Starling Humphries and N.J. Jones acquired the western part of the estate, 83 acres in Land Lot 348 and the 40 acres of Land Lot 351, and J.C. Johnson purchased 100 acres of the northeastern section along Nobusiness Creek and Loganville (Lee) Road.

William A. Maguire purchased the central 120 acres of the Promised Land that contained the Big House and associated farm buildings, garden patches, and orchards, in 1889 for $480 (Deed Book 2, p. 175). He and his family resided at the Big House a very short time, as they relocated to Athens, Georgia in 1890. From William A., the 120 acres passed to B.H. Davis for $805 (Deed Book 15, p. 559), who owned the lot

for 15 years. However, no B.H. Davis is listed as residing in Rockbridge District 571 in the 1900 Federal census. Those residing at the Big House were likely renters, perhaps with a farming tenancy agreement. In other words, if not paying the rent with money, they may have shared a portion of their crops as rent. B.H. Davis deeded the 120 acres of the Thomas Maguire estate to L.M. Brand, owner of numerous properties in Gwinnett County, for $1800 in 1905 (Deed Book 12, p. 329). Brand also is absent from the Rockbridge census, further implying that The Promised Land became a rental property after the Maguires left and through the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1908, a posed family portrait in front of the Maguire-Livsey house shows Robert H. and Margaret Haney and 12 of their children in their Sunday best. According to the Federal census, the Haneys were residing in Rockbridge in 1900 as renters, but it is not clear if they lived at the Big House then. By 1910, the census lists the Haney family in Rockbridge as "owners" and on the same pages as the Masons, Andersons, and Minors, who were known to be living near the Big House. The ages of the children in the photograph closely match the children and their ages listed in 1910, so what looks appears to be an "8" on the "Our Home" caption likely means it dates to 1908. Although the census recorded ownership in 1910, the deed for the $1221 purchase of Thomas Maguire's 120 acres by R. H. Haney dates to November 1913 (Deed Book, 27, p. 580). Haney may have been making payments toward ownership for several years on a bond for title.

Figure 7. Haney family photo in front of the Big House, 1908. From public photos on ancestry.com.

Three days later, R.H. Haney conveyed 30 acres on the southwestern edge of the property to E. M. Haney (sometimes recorded as Henry) for $800 (Deed book 24. p 161). This lot contained the aforementioned 7-acre "grave yard field," which E.M. Haney sold to Elliot P. Minor for $200 a few days after that (Deed Book 24, p. 493). During this rapid exchange at the end of 1913, as soon as R. H. Haney sold the 30 acres to E. M. Haney, he sold the remaining 90 acres to A. J. Almand for $2500 (Deed Book 24, p. 237). Gwinnett County records show no warranty deed and ownership title of the property existing for R.H. Haney, so he may have owned in under bond and not title. In 1920, the Robert H. Haney family was residing in the Diamond District of DeKalb County. The Haneys thus lived at the Promised Land for at least five years but perhaps as many as 20 or even 25 years.

A.J. Almand sold the 90-acre Thomas Maguire farm (later discovered to be 110 acres) to Sam Lucas for $2500 in 1919 (Deed Book 33, p. 275), under what also appears to be a bond for title. The Lucas family became the first African-American residents to live in the Big House and make payments toward its ownership. In the 1920 Federal census, Sam Lucas, his wife Maggie, and their nine children are listed as owners on the same page as both E.P. and E.J. Mason, who lived just up Rockbridge Road from them. Sam Lucas was 74 years old when he made the deed purchase. In 1922, he sold the property back to A.J. Almand for $1067 (Deed Book 40, p. 305), with no deed warranty found. This sale coincided with the arrival and destruction of the boll weevil, which may have affected the Lucas farm if they relied on cotton for income. In counties with cotton production, land values declined after the boll weevil destroyed the cotton economy. Georgia's cotton industry experienced a depression in 1921, with the highest crop losses in the Cotton Belt (Lange, Olmstead, and Rhode, 694; Haney, Lewis, and Lambert, 11). The Lucas family may have continued to live in the house for a while. The Livsey descendants remember the Lucas family being the occupants of the Big House when Robert and Morena "Penny" Livsey purchased The Promised Land estate in 1926.

The Livsey Family Ownership (1926-2017)

The Livsey Family

Like the Maguires, the Livsey family traces their family history to the Rockbridge area in the antebellum era. Green H. Livsey, born in Virginia in 1779, moved from the Toombs Plantation in Wilkes County, Georgia, to Gwinnett County near the Walton County line in 1840 with his family of eight. While an overseer at the Toombs Plantation, he allegedly conceived his biracial son, Sandy, with one of the biracial female slaves. In the 1870s, Sandy Livsey owned 138 acres in land lot 261 in the Harbins District (in between Dacula and Loganville), and his brother, Green's son Charles H. Livsey, owned both land lots 2 and 3 (500 acres) in District 6, as well as over 100 acres of land lots 347 and 337 in the Nobusiness Creek and Lee Road area, thus being Maguire's neighbor directly to the northeast. Charles H. Livsey Jr. and F. I. Livsey later owned 64 acres of Maguire's land lot 5 in the 1890s.

Robert A. Livsey descended from Sandy Livsey, and he and his wife Morena Peeks Livsey moved to southern Gwinnett County in the 1920s from the Dacula area, where their family had lived for a few generations. Morena Peeks was the daughter of Felix and Amelia Peeks, who farmed in the Dacula area for most of their lives (Cheeks-Collins, 10). When exactly they moved to the Big House is not clear, but

the $1,900 bond for title purchase of the 90-acre (110 -acre) property from Almand to Livsey dates to April 1926 (Deed Book 47, p. 102), and the warranty deed to November 1, 1928 (Deed Book 42, p. 429).

Robert Livsey worked for the railroad, and A.J. Almand helped to incorporate the Atlanta and Carolina Railway in 1906 (*Railway World*, 677.) The railroad may have connected the two men to each other and the property transaction. Census records from 1910 reveal that the Livseys moved into a racially mixed Rockbridge community with other African American property owners such as the Andersons, Echols, and Browns living close by. The tiny New Bethel A.M. E. Church was built and founded along the Yellow River and Rockbridge Road, at the site of the actual Rock Bridge along the Hightower Path, in 1891.

Farming

The early years at The Promised Land were not without challenges for the Livseys. The boll weevil had recently ravaged the cotton crop in the South, and within a few years, the Great Depression crippled the country. Moreover, as southern African Americans living in the 1920s, Robert and Morena were unable to obtain a mortgage loan to purchase the Promised Land. Livsey family oral history recalled the worry over the possibility of losing their land if land taxes or payments toward the house could not be made. With one of the quality pieces of land in Gwinnett County, Robert employed strategic ways to keep his farm against the odds. After all, the two previous residents seemed to have worked for years toward owning the property outright but ultimately never received the title. Livsey saved money through his work on the railroad, and he also bartered with smoked hams and other farmed foods to pay debt until he became, as granddaughter Theresa Livsey Lemons describes, CEO of his own "enterprise" in the 1930s and 1940s. Taking care of family and providing for the community were important, as neighbors were part of their extended family. The hard work of Robert and Morena, their diversification of the farm, and close relationships with their neighbors helped them not only keep the farm but live comfortably at a place that, as their children and grandchildren claim, grew and produced "everything you needed."

For Thomas Maguire, cotton was king at the Promised Land. For the Livseys, cotton prices fluctuated from fairly high in 1927 at $.20 per pound, plummeting to only $.06 per pound during the early 1930s, up to $.12 in 1936, and $.14 to $.21 during World War II. In the postwar years, the price rose to $.28 and eventually to $.40 per pound, but throughout the 1950s, the price of cotton gradually declined (*The Cotton Situation* reports, 1941-1957; Pytlak*,* 249). This may explain why in the 1950s and 1960s, corn and smoked hams were the main source of income for the Livseys. At that time, grandson Hiram Gaither remembers the farm grew an estimated 15 acres of corn and 5 acres of cotton that produced four to five bales each year. In postwar twentieth-century Georgia, "King Corn" rang true. The price of corn per bushel amounted to $.67 in 1935 but jumped to $1.42 in Georgia 1948. In 1950, Georgia had the most acreage in corn and ranked as the leading producer of corn in the South Atlantic region until, like cotton, corn production and the number and sizes of farms steadily decreased through the decade (Lee; USDA *Agricultural Statistics 1950,* 43).

When cotton prices boomed, Robert Livsey may have grown more acres of cotton, taking advantage of the market. After it was picked and ginned, he kept his cotton on the back porch waiting to see if the

price per pound rose before selling it. To combat the boll weevil, dusting cotton fields with calcium arsenate and other chemical mixtures achieved some success, but Robert

Figure 8. Early 20th century photo of the Maguire-Livsey Big House. Courtesy of Thomas Livsey.

experimented with creating his own insecticides, not necessarily on the market (Haney, Lewis, and Lambert, 16). He would make a concoction and test it on patches to monitor effectiveness.

Robert and Morena Livsey, their 13 children and their grandchildren plowed, cultivated, and maintained the ground like the Promised Land farmers of the past, with homegrown fertilizer from horses and chickens, a mule pulling a plow, and hard labor. To lay off cotton in one acre, a farmer expended approximately 34 hours of labor (Aiken, 99). When the cotton bolls opened up in the fields for picking in September, the Livsey children participated in the harvest, and, as her daughter Pecola Scott recalled, Morena Livsey maintained the fortitude to easily pick 200 pounds. Whereas 20 percent of the labor consisted of plowing and planting, and another 20 percent devoted toward thinning and weeding, harvesting required the remaining 60 percent of labor (Aiken, 99). It was not unusual for a southern farmer to not modernize with new machinery in the 1930s and 1940s. Mules still provided the best labor for cultivating, only one of the three steps involved -planting, cultivating, and harvesting and the purchase of a tractor was not necessary for breaking up the land (Aiken, 102). An aging Robert Livsey ultimately did buy a tractor in the 1950s, which is today in the possession of his son Thomas.

In addition to their corn, cotton, and the 4 to 5 hogs slaughtered each year, Morena grew peanuts and sold them to make the tithe to the New Bethel Church. The farm produced a variety of garden vegetables such potatoes, sweet potatoes, collard greens, cabbages, turnips, and carrots, which Morena canned for the winter. The fruit on the farm included apples, pears, plums, strawberries, watermelons, muscadines and scupperdines, and blackberries. They also grew their own wheat and ground it into flour, and their mule-driven syrup mill made sorghum syrup. Robert took the majority of meats, vegetables, and syrups to downtown Atlanta to sell at the farmer's market on Edgewood Avenue, later called the Sweet Auburn Market.

With the trees on the property, Robert turned pine wood into charcoal in earth pits for people to use in coal iron presses when ironing clothes. Oak wood on the property was burned for heat in the wintertime. When crops were not plentiful or good enough to sell, he cut and sold wood instead. From straw and thick fabric, Morena fashioned ticks for the family to sleep on every year, and, like Maguire, Robert weaved baskets to hold the picked cotton. Their thriftiness extended to reusing fertilizer sacks by sewing clothing out of the cloth. As described by granddaughter Lillie Mae Livsey Johnson, they did not waste anything and made good use out of everything, such as saving apple peels to make jelly.

Many of these practices represented early to mid-twentieth farm life, especially southern agriculture, but aspects of African American heritage were also present at the Promised Land. For instance, the yard as an extension of the house where activities took place such as basket making, laundry, and food processing required regular sweeping, a West African tradition passed to African American descendants. At the Big House, Thomas Livsey explained that the kids would go to the field to get brush brooms to sweep the yard. Willie Bob Livsey remembered how fresh sweet potatoes remained throughout the winter when stored in a dug-out hole covered in straw. This subterranean pit feature known as a vegetable kiln is a traditional African method of storage commonly found in an African American yards (Messick et. al, 58). Cooking and roasting foods in fire pits and hot ashes, African and Caribbean in origin, was passed down through generations in the Antebellum south, and the Livseys roasted peanuts, sweet potatoes and pigs this way (Covey and Eisnach 59).

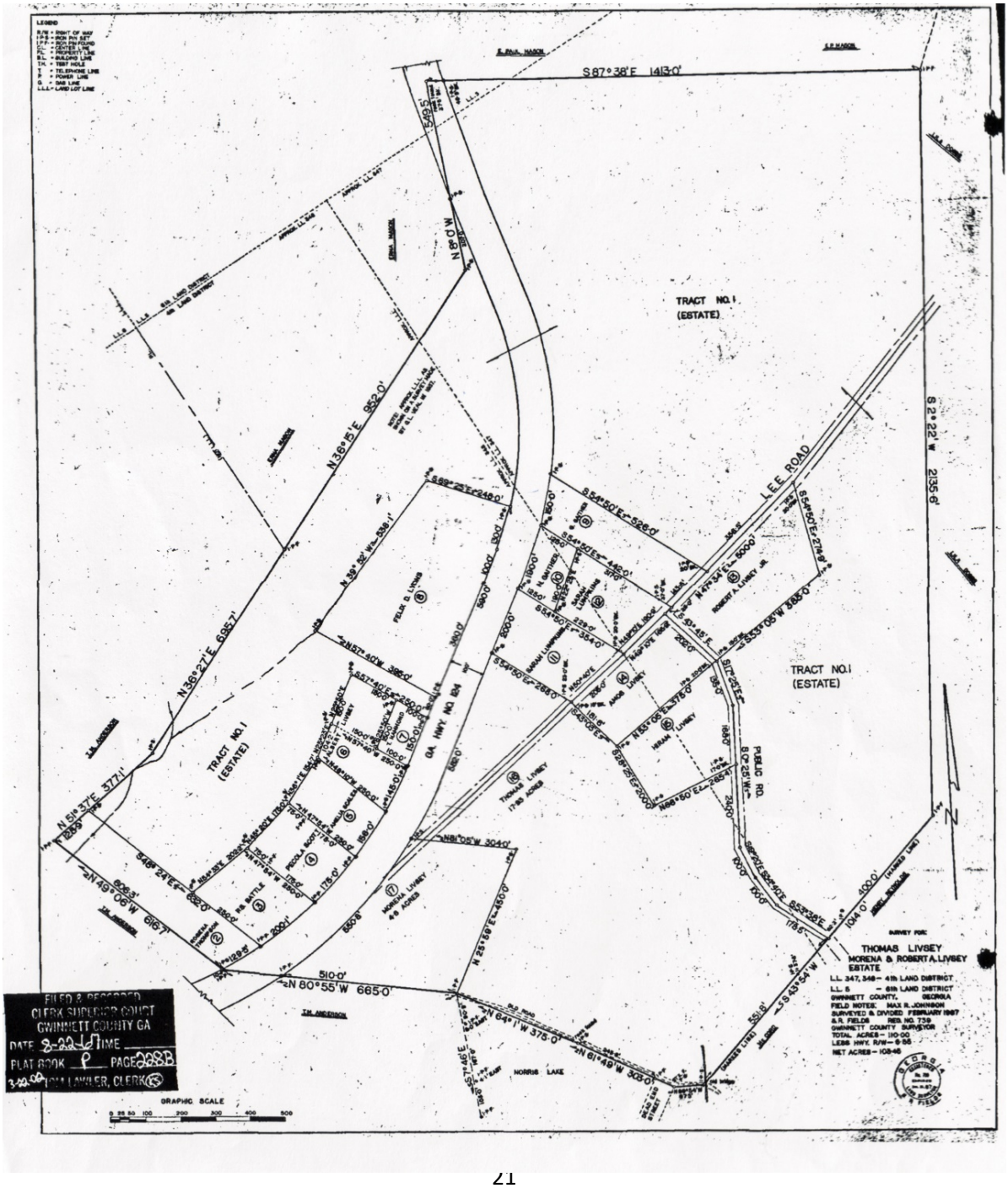
Figure 9. 1938 Gwinnett County Highway map. Courtesy of the University of Georgia Map Library.

Property Layout

Consulting the 1938 aerial photo during interviews with the Livsey family helped to identify buildings and features of the Livsey farm and property. All of the roads were dirt, and the area, in general, was way out in the country. In the vicinity of the Big House stood a smokehouse with a pig pen at the north side, a tool house and chicken coop at the south side, and a privy, pecan and black walnut trees behind the house. Across the road were the big barn with stables, a corn crib, the syrup mill, and other storage sheds. The Anderson family property bordered the property to the south, and the Mitchell Anderson

general store, across the road, sold various produce, jams, cookies and candy. In between the two properties, grew apple trees in a small orchard in the same area described by Maguire as located behind the stables and carriage house. North on Rockbridge Road, Thomas Livsey recalled the sawmill shown on the 1938 highway map, at the north end of their property, just before the Mason property. At the time of the aerial photo, Rockbridge Road had recently been rerouted around the old mill. The Livseys used another sawmill in the area of Anderson-Livsey and Norris Lake roads in the 1950s and 1960s. Shortly after his farm purchase, Robert Livsey built a house on McCord Livsey Road for his oldest son, Hiram.

Figure 10. 1967 plat map of the Livsey estate



The strip of land in between Hiram's house and the Big House contained the vegetable garden, the pasture for cows and mules, the orchard, and a strawberry field prior to the creation of Lake Sheryl in the late 1960s. Near Hiram's house, a line of muscadines, scupperdines, and blackberries grew, with pear trees behind them, and peach and plum trees behind those. Between the lake and the Big House was a small field of corn and a watermelon patch. Along McCord Livsey and Lee Road they grew cotton and corn throughout in the fields, probably rotating them. Morena's peanut patch was located where Lee Road met Rockbridge Road, on the exact spot of the Promised Land store and other businesses that Thomas Livsey built in the 1960s.

Owning land was of vital importance to Robert Livsey. Theresa Livsey Lemons explains that the one thing he could leave his children was land, of which "they didn't make any more." The Livseys began dividing up their parcel into one to five-acre lots among the children in the late 1950s. Robert Livsey deeded the lot on which the barn stood to their daughter Sally and her husband Perry in 1961, but according to family, he continued to farm his land until his death in 1965, when he passed away while on his tractor.

Figure 11. Photos of Amelia Livsey Scale's house across the road from the Big House and Thomas Livsey's pasture and Lake Sheryl on his 18 acres east of the Big House, c. 1970. Courtesy of Thomas Livsey.

The Big House

Electricity was not installed in the Big House until the 1940s, and an inside bathroom was installed in the 1950s. A photo from 1951 shows the house as it looked prior to additions and alterations and as several of the Livseys recall from their earliest childhood memories. The dirt floor cellar beneath the kitchen held the canned vegetables, and a shoe closet under the stairs provided the only other storage space in the house until a shed built over the garage behind the house in the 1960s created utility storage. A "rear porch" like the porch on the north side flanked the house on its south side, which was later converted into rear rooms. The Big House had five fireplaces for cooking and heating, four wide ones in the front and one in the kitchen.

As the house aged, repairs and replacements fixed problems. Thomas Livsey rebuilt the front porch in the 1950s, but when the untreated wood rotted, he replaced it with a concrete porch and brickwork in the late 1960s or early 1970s, around the same time as the application of stucco and brick siding to the house and the enclosing of the side porch. Additions to the house in that same time period included a newer kitchen and small bedroom onto the former rear porch, additional bathrooms, and a sewing room onto the old kitchen. The old smokehouse also became a residence for a Livsey relative. After Morena passed away in 1969, her two daughters, Rosena Thompson and Amelia Scales resided in the Big House until their passing in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Other relatives rented the Big House and the "little house," converted from the garage, after that.

Figure 12. The Big House in 1951 (before alterations) and in c. 1970 (after additions). Courtesy of Thomas Livsey.

The Promised Land Community

The 1938 aerial map shows a newly created Norris Lake south of the Livsey property. H.C. Norris purchased the parcels of E.P. and A.M. Minor's land in 1938 and dammed up Nobusiness Creek to create the lake. In the late 1950s, residential development of the Norris Lake area began, and at the same time, the New Bethel Church was moved from the east side of the Yellow River a few hundred feet north to the top of a hill for the construction of Scenic Highway. During the 1940s and 1950s, children in the community went to the small New Bethel School on Rockbridge, less than a half mile west of the Big House, and as mentioned previously, the Anderson family operated a country store adjacent to the Livsey property on its west side. In the late 1960s, the commercial development at Anderson-Livsey and Lee roads of Thomas and Dorethia Livsey's store, with a restaurant, washerette, beauty parlor and barber shop, and a car wash across the street, replaced the peanut field. Baptisms were also performed by nearby Macedonia Baptist Church in Lake Sheryl (Cheeks-Collins, 55).

Figure 13. The Promised Land businesses and Lake Sheryl and in the 1970s.
From Black American Series Gwinnett County Georgia (2002:55,128).

The Maguire-Livsey Big House, like the century before, remained the central "hub" of activity for family, friends, and neighbors in the Promised Land community throughout the twentieth century. Family that had grown up at the Promised Land and moved to Decatur continued to drive over every Sunday bringing their food dishes for the weekly gathering. Robert and Morena Livsey were known for their hospitality, welcoming all to their home and exuding warmth and love. Morena always offered a delicious meal complete with pies made from the fruit on their farm. While prominent members of the African American community at Rockbridge, the Livseys had social and family connections to many other communities in Gwinnett and Dekalb counties, including the Dacula area, Buford, and Suwannee.

The Livsey descendants credit their diverse business enterprises and successes to the hard work and entrepreneurial spirit of their parents/grandparents, Robert and Morena. From them, they learned how to confidently take risks and chances, and if one thing failed to pan out, it became an opportunity to branch out and try something new and innovative. Furthermore, they gained an understanding of the importance of family and community and sharing and helping one another. As Theresa Livsey Lemons phrases it, "If one person didn't have and another one did, you had. You never thought about 'Well, I don't have.' . . . We had each other and we knew we had each other's backs."

Figure 14. Robert and Morena Livsey and their thirteen children. Courtesy of Theresa Livsey Lemons.

Conclusion

Throughout its history, The Promised Land has retained a prominent role in the community. In Maguire's era, people came to the house to cast a vote, trade goods, or perhaps pick up their mail. There were often visiting family and friends staying overnight, and travelers flocked to the Big House on their way through to other destinations. As newer and larger houses emerged across the landscape, the Big House in the Livsey era remained the central gathering spot in the community for dinners, holidays, and events.

Maguire and Livsey as farmers from two different backgrounds and eras also shared many similarities. With regard to farming methods, little had changed in 100 years with the mule and plow and the types of crops grown. As Thomas Livsey claims, anything that Thomas Maguire grew, the Livseys grew as well. Both men carefully managed their businesses, were respected members of the community, had connections to other local communities, and knew how to tend their land and reap its rewards. Thomas Maguire and the Livseys employed the same ingenuity, resourcefulness, and tenacity to succeed when others failed, and to creatively find alternatives during difficult times. When the Livsey grandchildren describe how Robert Livsey did not know the meaning of the word "fail," the same could be said of Maguire. The following quote about Robert Livsey could likewise characterize Thomas Maguire:

> *When the Depression hit, it wiped out some families. . . When it hit this family, he looked for a new way. So, he was always looking for inroads. That's the innovator—the innovator in him. He was a strategist. He was a visionary. –Theresa Livsey Lemons*

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