

REDLAIR LAND USE AND CULTURAL HISTORY

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As is typical of the piedmont and indeed the entire eastern seaboard, the 1200-acre South Fork-Spencer Mountain Protected Zone (more conveniently known as Redlair) is more forested today than half a century ago or, indeed, probably a century and a half or even two centuries ago. Agriculture, however, was less prevalent on Redlair than it used to be elsewhere, because of the steepness of the red-clay terrain. The European settlers from the 1760's, coming from northerly climes with limestone-rich geology, had little concept of the power of erosion here, due to the intensity of the southern sun and the non-cohesiveness of a soil poor in carbonates, but they knew enough or quickly learned to avoid steep slopes. But most of the land except alluvial plains along the river was clayey and highly erosive, so it did not take too many generations of farming to deplete the soil in areas where fields were cleared, all the more so since the principal money crop was cotton (a particularly bad plant from the standpoint of replenishing the soil or holding back erosion).

Any aerial map today of Redlair readily shows the marked contrast between pine-dominated areas and all other forests. Piney areas were all previously fields. The native pines, Virginia pine (also appropriately known as scrub pine) and short-leaf pine, usually do not survive in a true climax forest here, but the Virginia pine often dominates a newly-abandoned open area, especially an abandoned plowed field. Forests here that have even occasional pines indicate tampering, i.e., that they were cut down in whole or part within the lifetime of those pines, or that possibly they suffered some form of extreme natural disturbance such as hurricane or tornado. There is no virgin forest anywhere in the North Carolina piedmont (as there is almost no virgin forest anywhere on the eastern seaboard), but there are many forest areas on Redlair devoid of pines or invasive plants, usually meaning that there has been little disturbance for a century at least.

The difference between "mere" cutting and putting under plow is profound, as a cut-over forest with stumps left intact will rebound much more quickly than an abandoned field, due to prevention of erosion, greater richness of soil, and regrowth from roots. However, there are some examples of pure hardwood forest on Redlair which show evidence of terracing or gullies indicative of early agriculture (agriculture abandoned as early as two centuries ago, not long after settlement, presumably due to rockiness, steepness, or too much shade from enclosing forests). Thus, determining areas of previous agriculture largely but not entirely depends on where pines are today, but also involves checking other forms of evidence, such as gullies, terraces, and invasive plants. Unlike the uplands, formerly plowed alluvial plains do not necessarily grow up in pines in the first stage of biological succession, but it is nonetheless clear that most alluvial plains, whether on the river or on creeks, were plowed at some point, typically early in European settlement.

The best starting point for understanding the land-use history of Redlair is comparison of present-day aerial photographs with the 1938 aerial photographs, both available on this website in the maps section. The 1938 photos are the earliest that exist. They were unfortunately scribbled on and are sometimes hard to read, but for the most part they are a mine of information. Some of the penciling-in is of property boundaries, which proves to be useful information. The year 1938 is a pretty good benchmark, about as good as any year between, let us say, 1830 and 1950.

Land use of course was always changing to some extent, with new areas cleared and old ones given up, but until 1950 this region was overwhelmingly cotton-based and agricultural and thus broadly unchanging. By 1950 cotton had been completely abandoned on Redlair, and very soon plowed agriculture was also abandoned except in the flat river bottoms. There was a short period from 1950 to 1960 when the fields were either given over entirely to hay or pasture, or planted in pines (invariably the loblolly pine provided by the Forest Service), or abandoned (quickly growing up in Virginia pine and early-successional hardwoods such as sweet gum and tulip poplar, and increasingly also in invasive plants, especially autumn olive, kudzu, and Chinese privet). From 1960, the area around Redlair began to feel the effect of proximity to Charlotte, with the pace of bulldozing and house-building accelerating with every passing year, only slowing down with the recession of 2008. Today Redlair is one of only two remaining farms (meaning fields and cows) on the eight-mile Hickory Grove Road, which in 1950 was entirely agricultural.

The pattern of settlement in 1938 was strikingly different from the automobile-dependent pattern today, although even then the automobile was beginning to have a profound effect. The ribbon development of ranch houses glued to paved roads was then still unimaginable. Hickory Grove Road was not even paved until 1952, and rural electrification had occurred not much earlier. People were poor, given the smallness of farms and relatively low productivity of the fields, but until the advent of the automobile they were self-reliant. Houses were built not with a view toward the convenience of a highway but in relation to the lay of the land and proximity to fields. On Redlair, the only farm that seems likely to have been prosperous was that of the Miller Rhyne family, whose house was a graceful two-story frame house typical of successful yeoman farmers throughout eastern America in the 1800's. All the other farmhouses on Redlair were single-story modest homes of a few rooms. All these houses are gone; Forney Rankin even dismantled the Miller Rhyne house in 1958, not wanting tenants on the back of the farm.

Gaston County became the center of the American textile industry after the Civil War with much effect on rural life in the county. Many of the textile workers (of the same Scotch-Irish/German stock as the "native" populace of Gaston County) were brought in from the direly poor mountains, but the yeoman farmers of Gaston County were also by and large quite poor (with the depletion of the soil and the break-up of the farms into ever smaller and smaller holdings) and they also flocked to the mills. A fairly common pattern, from the late 19th century right up through the 1950's, was for a yeoman to work his little farm during the day and work the late shifts in a textile mill in the evening or at night. Before the automobile era took hold in the community, it was common for this farmer/millworker to walk to work, often a distance of many miles. Considering the unimaginable amount of toil these yeomen expended on their farms (they had, for example, no machinery with which to clear fields or build terraces – only a mule, typically), it is hard to conceive how they were able to work all night at a textile mill, but many did.

The following more-detailed discussion of Redlair's land history proceeds from south to north.

THE FAR SOUTH

The Far South includes the 115-acre Big Bend or Bend-in-the-River property (also known as Pinhook) owned today by the Catawba Lands Conservancy, the 60-acre Wooten/Rice Farm owned for many years by the Rankin family but today owned by Charles and Lindsay Meakin and protected by a conservation easement held by the Catawba Lands Conservancy, and the Morgan/Hester Farm (perhaps 80 acres), which is the southernmost portion of land owned today by the Rankins, also under agricultural easement (as is the case of most of the Rankins' property) held by the Catawba Lands Conservancy.

The hallmark feature of the Far South is the extraordinary river bend. The South Fork approaches the Far South flowing due south, bends west, abruptly bends southeast, even flows briefly to the north, before finally "righting" itself with a long southeasterly flow. It is the most dramatic bend in the South Fork in Gaston County. What is today called Rankin Road bisects the Far South, clinging to a high ridge which slopes sharply to the river both to the north and to the south before the road gently descends to the river at the apogee of the river's bend. Along these steep slopes there are deeply-incised valleys, but because of the smallness of the drainage areas they contain no perennial streams.

Big Bend/Pinhook. The Big Bend/Pinhook tract belonged to Pharr Mills (based in nearby McAdenville) before being partially donated, partially sold to the Conservancy (via a substantial grant from the then well-funded Clean Water Management Trust Fund) over the past decade. By most accounts, this property had earlier been owned by Henry McAden and then the Stowe family, before being conveyed to the Pharr and Carstarphen families, present owners of the textile business in McAdenville. Until about 1950, a three-room house stood among oak trees at the high point of the property before the road begins to descend to the river. Charlie Wooten, who died in 2009, related that he was born and grew up in that house and that his father rented the house and farm from the textile-mill owners in McAdenville. Forney Rankin claimed that this homeplace originally belonged to the Rhynes, who in the eighteenth century received a massive land grant to the right bank of the South Fork all the way north to Lincolnton, and he called it the Sylvanus Rhyne Place.

In the 1938 aerial photograph, a second house is discernible across the road from the house where Charlie Wooten was born. Charlie Wooten's widow Ninabell relates that it was occupied by Charlie's uncle Bill Wooten and then Charlie's older brother but was dilapidated and was torn down probably around 1940. Down a deep valley ("Sylvanus Rhyne Creek") to the northeast of the Wooten house an old path leads to the remains of a moonshine still, which according to Don Bumgardner federal officers broke up in the 1940's. All of the Big Bend/Pinhook tract is forest today. The 1938 photograph shows that about half the 115 acres was at that time fields occupying all the not-too-steep areas around the two Wooten rental houses and sweeping westward in a widening triangle to the river bend. In the 1938 photograph, the upper fields are dotted with trees, suggesting that they had already been given over to pasture, while the lower portion along the river remained under cultivation. Don Bumgardner relates that he continued to plow the lower portion until the early 1950's, whereas the upper fields were too rocky.

At the apex of the Bend in the River there existed a government sand-dredging operation, which was in use until the 1970's, by which time the county had too few unpaved roads to merit hauling sand.

By the mid-1990's this area was consumed in kudzu, and there were other smaller patches of kudzu along the river and on Rankin Road. Haywood Rankin began a campaign against the kudzu in 1998 and had it largely eliminated by 2010 (although surveillance must be continuous, and new plants crop up every year in both the old area and new places). Autumn olive is a menace throughout the areas of previous cultivation, and Chinese privet along much of the river. A power line was cut across the Bend in the River in the 1970's, but since it comes across the river and then cuts back across the river, it has not been a route that all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles could use, as would normally be the case. (Thanks to the river and some no-nonsense neighbors, Redlair has been spared the scourge of trespassers common to other large landholdings.) Duke Energy widened the power-line cut area in the early 2000's and left the fallen trees, meaning that Haywood Rankin and Don Bumgardner could no longer bushhog the edge and a wall of autumn olive has grown up. Further down river from the apex of the Big Bend are the remains of a self-pulled cable car across the river. This cable was put in place, presumably in the 1920's, by the U.S. Geological Survey to help monitor water levels in the river. The cable was used by local folks living on the east side of the river to walk to work in the Lowell textile mills. In the 1930's the U.S. Geological Survey toppled the structure to prevent its being used in this manner, apparently out of safety concerns.

The two arms of the Big Bend/Pinhook tract upriver and downriver were forest then as today, for the obvious reason that they are extremely steep. One small exception is on the alluvial plain in the northern arm, which appeared to still to be in cultivation in 1938. Another exception is two areas of pine in the southern arm along the ridge top, where there must have been cultivation a century or so ago, but these areas are small and probably rocky and would undoubtedly have been of marginal agricultural interest. The southern arm of forest contains a modest stand of big-leaf magnolia, which appears to be the southern-most significant stand of big-leaves on the eastern seaboard. The northern arm contains a larger stand of big-leaves in a zone of mature forest that was one of the earliest areas in Gaston County to be denominated as a significant natural-heritage area. Big-leaf magnolias become more common proceeding further northward on Redlair.

Extremely noteworthy in the 1938 photograph is the presence of a large island due south of the old Wooten houses in the reverse bend of the river. This bit of alluvial plain appears never to have been cultivated (being difficult of access) but was always locally known as "The Island," despite not being an actual island in anyone's memory. The photograph however clearly shows it to have been an island in 1938, at least on the 7th of March when the photograph was taken and when the river is traditionally at its highest level. As is sadly the case for much of the alluvial areas adjacent to the river and despite having apparently never been farmed, The Island today is afflicted by invasive plants (Chinese privet, *Microstegium*, some autumn olive, as well as a nasty grove of tree of heaven). A campaign by Haywood Rankin, Andy Kane, and Conservancy volunteers to eradicate this tree of heaven infestation and some of the privet and autumn olive on and near The Island was mounted in the winter and spring of 2012. Further downriver is found the only quartzite area of Redlair, with significant rock outcrops on a steep slope descending directly into the river (creating also a significant rapids in the South Fork), topped by a hardwood ridge with magnificent mature oaks, never cultivated.

Rice/Wooten/Turner/Meakin Farm. The most southeasterly portion of Redlair, just down river from the Big Bend/Pinhook tract, is a property that used to be known as the Rice Farm, although no one today knows who the Rices were or where they went. By the 1930's the farm was occupied by Armstrongs who subsequently acquired and moved to land near the Hickory Grove Baptist Church. Charlie Wooten lived in the "Rice" or "Turner" house after he came home from the Second World War and married Ninabell but found the access road to be difficult for cars (an aspect that would not have

fazed the previous generation) and soon moved away. His father (still living in the "Sylvanus Rhyne" house, above) acquired it, and his daughter Gertie, married to a Turner, moved in. It was from Turner that Forney Rankin acquired the tract in the mid-1950's. He lost it in 1974, when it (along with all the field area up to Rankin Road, another eight acres) became the property of his two attorneys, as payment for the divorce proceedings with Jean Cantrell Rankin. Eventually, in 1999, Charles and Lindsay Meakin bought the tract from the lawyers' heirs and almost immediately put it under agricultural easement with the Conservancy.

The Rice-Turner house is visible in the lower portion of the large upland field in the 1938 aerial photograph. This homeplace consisted of a modest dwelling with modest outbuildings, which Forney Rankin tore down upon acquiring the property. He planted loblolly pines in most of the upland field and in the river bottom. He viewed the latter as too small and inaccessible to justify maintaining as a field, although as a bottom it was not susceptible to significant erosion and had apparently been cultivated for centuries. The only section of the upland field that still exists as a hayfield is its northernmost section (five acres). The hardwood section of the tract is the most severely afflicted by autumn olive infestation of any forest on Redlair, and the homeplace is today rife with English ivy.

Morgan/Hester Farm. Also east of Big Bend/Pinhook but north of the Rice Farm lies the approximately 80-acre Morgan Farm, neatly bisected by what is today called Rankin Road. (The 1938 aerial photograph provides an invaluable service here, since the borders of what appears to be the Morgan family's property are demarcated as "5.") Forney Rankin acquired the tract in the mid-1950's from a man named Hester, and the Hesters had been living there since at least 1945 when Charlie Wooten married Ninabell, but the farm was widely known as the Morgan Farm, as Morgans had lived there as late as the 1930's. (The Morgans sold to Bud Lee's son Harrell, who died, and then the property passed to Hester.) The Morgan/Hester house, a simple structure, is visible in the 1938 photograph in the eastern portion of the Morgan Farm, just south of what is today Don Bumgardner's house/barn (now the last house on Rankin Road). The Morgan Farm is bounded on the east by Bumgardner Creek and the Lee/Sherrill Farm (the daughter of Bud Lee and of Forney Rankin's paternal aunt Lillie, Melva Lee, married J.B. Sherrill) and on the north by the Miller Rhyne Farm. It is likely that the Morgan Farm, like the Rice Farm and perhaps Big Bend/Pinhook, once belonged to the Rhynes (whose extensive holdings of the late eighteenth century inexorably frittered away, as was the case with all such large landholdings). The several gold pits on the Morgan Farm, presumably dating from the 1800's, are not visible on the 1938 aerial photograph but would certainly have been deeper pits in 1938 than today.

Fields today on the Morgan Farm (either hay fields or pasture today) represent about half their extent in 1938. The piney areas adjacent to today's fields were all under cultivation, or at least in pasture, in the 1938 photograph. For example, what we now call the Cabin Field was not a separate field in 1938 but the final open area of a huge field area extending along the west/north side of the road. The ridge between North and South Cabin Creeks was open field in those days, though the deep valleys themselves were always a forest. Fields extended behind (east) of the Morgan house almost down to Bumgardner creek, an area which is now shamefully grown over in privet and other invasive plants. The field south of the road, leading to the Rice Farm, also continued unbroken on the south side of the road to what is now Don Bumgardner's tractor shed and mustering area, which was also a more extensive cleared area in 1938.

THE CENTER: SOUTH AND WEST

The southern and western belt of Redlair's Center contains the Miller Rhyne Farm (including what we today call the Cheney Place), the Adam Hunter Farm, and across the river, the Hoffman-Pharr tract. This portion of Redlair is its core and heart, indeed its soul. The South Fork is permanently protected here on both sides of the river for a mile and a half, thanks to the Hoffman-Pharr acquisition. The river valley includes two large bottoms that remain as fields today and which, according to archeological work done by the Schiele Museum, have been under cultivation for many centuries, well before the arrival of European settlers. The bluffs on both sides of the river plunge into the river and are covered with big-leaf magnolia and mountain laurel. The web of perennial streams flowing into the left (east) bank through deeply-incised valleys is the central zone of big-leaf concentration for the entire eastern seaboard of the United States. The federally-endangered Schweinitz sunflower is found on a ridge top on the Adam Hunter Place.

Miller Rhyne and Cheney Farms. Forney Rankin bought the Miller Rhyne Farm from Bill (also known as Arrie) Rhyne, one of Miller's sons, in the mid-1950's, when he also acquired the Cheney Place further east. The Cheney Place had also been owned by Miller Rhyne but he appears to have divided the property and made the Cheney Place over to his son Bill. At some point, after Miller Rhyne died, Bill moved back into the Miller Rhyne homeplace. It is not clear how someone named Cheney came into the picture. Perhaps this Cheney had acquired it from Bill Rhyne before selling it to Forney Rankin. Bill Rhyne told Forney Rankin, in effect, that the once-proud farmstead had played itself out, it was too hard to get to (by automobile), he was getting old, and no one else in the family wanted to put in the toil to eke out an ever more meager existence. Forney Rankin said that the Miller Rhyne purchase (from Bill Rhyne and Cheney) was a 200-acre property for a rock-bottom price, although he spent many years paying it off (indeed, in the 1974 divorce, when Jean Cantrell Rankin was awarded the southern portion of Redlair and thereby acquired most of the Miller Rhyne Farm, she also acquired the remaining mortgage to pay off). The noble Miller Rhyne homeplace, along with a large barn and numerous outbuildings, sat at the end of a high ridge overlooking the Lower Bottom, while the humbler Cheney Place, with a barn, was situated due east of the Miller Rhyne Place across from the spring feeding Deep Creek. After the Rhynes departed, Forney Rankin rented out both houses to tenants who failed to pay and largely trashed the houses (indeed, the Cheney house burned down), and he promptly tore down the Miller Rhyne home, much to his later regret.

Access to both the Miller Rhyne and Cheney Places was from what is today Rankin Road. The access track turned off at what is today a roofed "catch-pen" (for catching cattle for market), crossed the present-day cow pasture (formerly cultivated in cotton or wheat and often still referred to as the "Wheat Field") to a great solitary white oak (struck by lightning in the 1970's), where the main track went west down the fields to the Miller Rhyne Place and a smaller track went north more sharply downhill to the Cheney Place. Today's Redlair Lane (Trail No. 1) did not then connect across Big Lake dam (the pond was not built until 1958).

For all the size of today's cow pasture and the Lower and Upper Bottoms – these fields today represent the majority of the total remaining cleared area on Redlair – the fields in 1938 were considerably larger. The Lower Bottom's northern portion extended further to and up the river and up the slope. The entire zone around the Miller Rhyne homeplace is today in forest (mostly planted in loblolly pines in the late 1950's, to some extent replanted after Hurricane Hugo in 1989, and increasingly

converting into hardwood as the loblollies slowly die off). Only the steep area immediately behind (north and northeast of) the homeplace was never put under plow. That area to the north plunges precipitously into Deep Creek (aptly named), which is today a pristine stream with no houses in its entire watershed and whose narrow east-west valley hosts an extraordinary hardwood/big-leaf/mountain-laurel assemblage. (Deep Creek was a particular focus of two recent UNC-Charlotte hydrology master's theses.) The area to the northeast of the Miller Rhyne homeplace plunges equally precipitously into Deep Gulch, a canyon of equal grandeur to Deep Creek itself. The ridge top between Deep Creek and Deep Gulch was a field in 1938; it subsequently grew up in Virginia pines, which were demolished by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Immediately to the east of the homeplace there is a small area that even in 1938 appears in the photograph as forest but which had evidently been previously in field, to judge by terracing and even a presence of very mature loblollies. (The loblolly is not native to Gaston County though it happily grows here when planted, and is the tree usually offered by the Forest Service to landowners wanting to plant abandoned fields. What is intriguing here is how early in the 20th century loblollies appear to have been offered; perhaps it is more likely that this area was cut shortly after 1938, put into field, then planted in loblollies.)

In the 1938 photo most of the area sweeping down from the house/barns to the Lower Bottom was open, which would have given the inhabitants of the house a fabulous view of the Lower Bottom, South Fork, and Spencer Mountain. The present tractor connection from house to bottom is across what were formerly fields, but the original wagon track is just to the southeast and is deeply incised, as is typical of all wagon tracks in the area on slopes. At the bottom of the track, on a little promontory 25 feet above the Lower Bottom, was where another home stood, perhaps the original homeplace of the Rhynes settling in this part of the South Fork. The old well is still present, as well as a huge cedar (juniper) with only a single branch still living. The area is now rife with periwinkle, wisteria, and autumn olive. This house (size unknown) was washed away by the great flood of July 1916, when two hurricanes struck western North Carolina (the first on July 1 coming up from Charleston, the second on July 8 coming up from Mobile) and the South Fork rose 40 feet above normal level. Just up the nearby North Rhyne Creek (which is ephemeral despite a rather large watershed) lies the old spring for the old homeplace, dug into the side of the hill, as well as a large rock wall built into the valley where evidently generations of Rhynes hauled stones off the ever-eroding fields.

The North Rhyne Creek undoubtedly once flowed (if only in heavy-rain periods) directly across the Lower Bottom but today it flows into a man-made ditch – the Rhyne Dike – dug around the entire eastern (landward) edge of the Lower Bottom. In the 1938 photograph the area of the Lower Bottom across which the North Rhyne Creek would have flowed before the Dike was dug is the only portion of the Bottom not cleared as it is today – i.e., it appears that by 1938 the Dike was already not fully accomplishing its task of keeping the naturally-marshy bottomland dry and it had grown up in at least saplings. (Forney Rankin bulldozed a broad culvert there, which succeeded in drying the area out.) The Dike today remains deep but some large trees on it suggest it must have been excavated well back into the 1800's. How a few men with a mule and no mechanized equipment could have accomplished this mammoth earthwork is hard to fathom. Much of the area landward of the Bottom/Dike was also fields in 1938 and some that was then in forest (pines) had evidently also previously been in field.

The Dike ends at the South Rhyne Creek, near its juncture with Cabin Creek, which together flow around the lower end of the Lower Bottom into the South Fork. Both of these are perennial streams that flow out of deep valleys of great ecological beauty and individuality (and were also of interest to the UNC-Charlotte hydrologists). Most of the upland area between these streams was in cultivation in 1938 and much of the remainder appears to have been in cultivation prior to that. The high ridge south

of the Lower Bottom and Cabin Creek is today a magnificent hardwood forest, was forest in 1938, and appears never to have been put under plow, for the reason that it was very steep but perhaps also because it lay in the border zone between the Miller Rhyne and Morgan Farms. There was no cart track up this rampart, although today there is a steep farm road (Trail No. 20) connecting the Lower Bottom to Don Bumgardner. Boys in the neighborhood including Haywood Rankin, over several years from 1958 to 1964, built a cabin at the top of the ridge, with access from the Cabin Field (Morgan Farm). The Cabin burned down in 1964 and the chimney remains. After the divorce in 1974, when Jean Cantrell Rankin gave Don Bumgardner the two acres where he built his house/stable on Rankin Road and he became her farm steward, Don Bumgardner extended the track precipitously down to the Lower Bottom to give himself tractor/truck access. Further down river, on the northern arm of the Big Bend/Pinhook tract, there is an old wagon track up the steep, and extraordinarily beautiful, ridge paralleling the river and leading to the Sylvanus Rhyne/Old Wooten homeplace/Pinhook. This wagon track (Trail No. 23) shows that there was direct, if very steep, access between the Miller and Sylvanus Rhyne Places. (There was never direct wagon access along the riverbank to the Bend in the River because the ridge plunges directly into the river.)

The upland part of the Miller Rhyne Farm remains similar today to what it was in 1938, except, as is typical, a contraction of the field (what is today the "Wheat Field" or "Cow Pasture") in some areas and, as is less typical, opening up of a few areas that were not open in 1938. The Wheat Field continued directly to the Cheney Place in 1938, where today there is a wedge of loblolly pines, blending into Virginia pines to the west. North of that, where today there exists a hayfield we now call the Cheney Field, there was previously a pristine climax hardwood forest which Forney Rankin bulldozed, partly out of need for dirt to heighten the dam on the Big Lake in the mid-1970's (regrettably, not only because of the magnificent hardwoods lost but also because the lake is now too big for its limited watershed and therefore only has flow-through in time of very good winter rains). Thus, at the wedge of loblolly pine trees that today divides the principal arteries to the South and North (Trails No. 16 and No. 1, respectively), the area to the north is today field and used to be hardwood forest, and the wedge is today loblolly and used to be field.

Across the cow pasture, the upper reach of South Rhyne Creek appears in 1938 to have been growing up in trees but was re-cleared by Forney Rankin to create the "Great Bowl" of the cow pasture. The northern slope of South Rhyne Creek in 1938 was largely under cultivation. It was growing up in Virginia pines and other scrub at the time Forney Rankin acquired the Miller Rhyne Farm; he re-cleared it, planted it in fescue, found that the soil was too poor to make a productive hayfield, and then planted it in loblollies.

The upper reaches of both South Rhyne Creek and Cabin Creeks were fenced in by Don Bumgardner in the mid-1970's, a straight-line fence through the forest that had the advantages of straightness (thus less wire and work) and shade and water for his cattle. The cattle savaged the flora of these fenced-in forests. Haywood Rankin obtained a farm-assistance grant in 2007 to fence the cattle out of these upper reaches, leaving only the pine areas for shade for the cattle. Don Bumgardner had by then installed a watering-place across from his house/stable for the herd and it was no longer essential for them to drink out of creeks or the Big Lake. Haywood Rankin then worked for several years exterminating the invasive plants (mainly autumn olive and Chinese privet, some of the few plants cattle refuse to eat) that had begun to dominate the understory of the creeks' upper reaches. He waged an even longer campaign to eliminate autumn olive that had overwhelmed the forest around the Cheney Place, including the upper reach of Deep Creek. That is where the Cheney's had had their covered

spring, next to a huge white oak (still living) which at the time was open on three sides to fields but today is surrounded by forest (and, until the campaign, impenetrable autumn olive).

North of the Cheney Place lie the Lakes Creeks in deep east-west valleys, replete with big-leaf magnolia. West of the Cheney Place and beyond the little clearing where the Cheney barn and a great persimmon tree used to stand, Trail No. 1 (the "Spargo Trail") follows a high ridge before plunging to the Upper Bottom. In 1938, portions of that ridge south of Trail No. 1 were under cultivation, and portions appeared to have been recently under cultivation (they are all today grown up in Virginia pine which was much affected but not completely devastated by Hurricane Hugo). The area of the ridge north of Trail No. 1, however, was forest in 1938, though the slope going down to the Upper Bottom was field. It is today all loblolly pine, so it is evident that it was either cleared or clear-cut after 1938 and then planted in loblollies, and replanted after Hurricane Hugo.

The ridge between the Lakes Creeks stands out in the 1938 photograph as an undisturbed hardwood forest, and today it is an extraordinary example of upland piedmont climax forest almost entirely devoid of invasive plants. The maximum diameter of the dominant trees (tulip poplars, white oaks, red oaks, hickories, beeches, sweet gums, ashes, and maples) is never more than three feet at breast height, which either suggests that the forest was cut (at least partially) as recently as, say, a century ago, or that this sort of ridge-top climax forest seldom has trees larger than that. The slope down to the juncture of Old and Big Lake Creeks is traversed by a series of more or less deeply-incised cart tracks, indicating that there was a fair amount of wagon traffic between the Hickory Grove Road and the Upper Bottom at some point in history and that when one track became too muddy and eroded another came into use and then another. The several cart tracks converge at the juncture of the Lakes Creeks, where carts had to enter the Lakes Creek for a distance of fifty feet; thereafter the track ("Trail No. 2") follows the creek on the left bank, crosses over, follows it on the right bank, and then reaches the Upper Bottom at Stone Farm Creek, where there must have formerly been a ford, but there now exists a bridge.

Hoffman-Pharr Tract. A person can stand today in the Lower Bottom and in every direction as far as the eye can see all is permanently protected, including across the river. The protected property across the river – the Hoffman-Pharr Tract – is not large or wide (only 68 acres), but it is long (a mile and a half, running from the upper end of the Upper Bottom nearly all the way to the Bend in the River) and just wide enough to ensure a sense of magic for anyone beholding it from the left bank.

Credit goes to the Catawba Lands Conservancy for putting together a formidably complicated transaction, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund for immediately seeing the environmental importance of the project and putting up a significant pot of money, and Pharr Yarns, which owned two-thirds of the stretch and donated some of it. The complexity involved reaching and persuading 36 heirs of the Hoffman family, who continued to own the remnant of the Hoffman Farm that formed the 80-degree bend in the river across from the Upper Bottom, buying out a different owner of a key eight-acre piece, and working with Pharr Yarns, who gave up all its immediate river frontage in exchange for all the upland and ridge tops.

This miracle of protecting so much of the river banks is offset by the failure, thus far, of protecting the uplands and ridge tops. There never has existed a fund in North Carolina for protecting upland, and in the present era of recession, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund has also shriveled away. Pharr Yarns has repeatedly shown its deep concern for protecting the South Fork valley and has indicated no desire for developing these uplands for the time being. Moreover, Pharr Yarns avoided

cutting any of the hardwood-covered uplands when it brought in lumbermen in 2008. Most of the inland area to the south, as is clear from the 1938 photo, was part of an extensive farm which grew up or was planted in pines, and it was only the pine areas that were cut down in 2008. In the down-river portion of the Hoffman-Pharr tract the protected stretch along the river is 300 feet, behind which protected area all the pines (except along two creeks) have been cut down and replanted. (Three hundred feet proves to be only minimally enough to maintain the impression of naturalness along the river. Any corridor less than 300 feet, from a visual standpoint at least, would be hardly worth the effort.)

Immediately across from the Lower Bottom on the Hoffman-Pharr tract, there is a high bluff packed with mature, large big-leaf magnolias. It is probably the most dramatic bluff anywhere on the South Fork, and it is today entirely protected. The deep intermittent-stream valleys on each side of the ridge forming the bluff are also both owned and protected by the Conservancy; only the very top of the ridge is unprotected. The next ridge to the north, where an old wagon track to the Hoffman bottom land came across, is similarly unprotected. The Hoffman bottom was in cultivation in 1938, and indeed the entire right bank of the river, from the village of Spencer Mountain to the Hoffman bottom, was cultivated in 1938, much of it the Flowers Farm. Whether the principal access to the Hoffman bottom was via the Flowers Farm or down the old wagon track is not clear, but most likely preferred access would have been along the river from the Flowers Farm. No structures are visible on the Hoffman tract in 1938. The bottom today is full of large plane trees, river birch, water oak, walnut trees, and even the occasional big-leaf magnolia uncharacteristically growing in the alluvium (not its usual preferred habitat). There is much Chinese privet and autumn olive, although the alluvial plain has not yet become an invasive understory monoculture; also, because the understory remains partially open, there is heavy presence of the invasive grass *Microstegium*. Several patches of kudzu have recently appeared and have been attacked by Haywood Rankin and colleagues. The scourge of human trespassers (all-terrain dragsters and beer drinkers who continue to savage the slopes of Spencer Mountain), which seemed an insurmountable obstacle when the Conservancy acquired the property, has been largely suppressed by Pharr Yarns putting a gate at the top of the track with no-trespassing signs and Haywood Rankin keeping dead trees athwart the track.

Efforts must be maintained to protect the hardwood uplands for several reasons: Upland hardwoods are a more endangered ecological zone than riparian areas, and they too contribute to clean water. The merest glance at the looping boundary of Hoffman-Pharr shows that houses, particularly if built on the two high ridge loops, would have a devastating impact on the protected valleys and river. Finally, there remains hope that someday Spencer Mountain itself will be protected. If it is – and in any minimally rational society it would have to be –, it will be vital to ensure the protection of a natural corridor to Redlair from the mountain. The corridor which makes obvious sense, from every standpoint aesthetic and natural, is across the Pharr-owned land west of the Hoffman-Pharr tract, across one of those upland loops, across the Hoffman-Pharr tract, and across the river. Such a corridor needs to be part of Pharr's and the Conservancy's forward planning. The public deserves access to the top of Spencer Mountain, from whence it can behold the emerald island of Redlair immediately below and see the Charlotte skyscrapers in the distance, and down the mountain's eastern slope to the river and to that emerald island.

Adam Hunter Farm. Squeezed between the Stone Farm to the north and the Miller Rhyne/Cheney Farms to the south is the 40-acre Adam Hunter Farm (see separate document, "Adam Hunter Prairie" for a fuller discussion, especially on the Schweinitz sunflower). The Hunters were an African-American family who lived in a two-room cabin just off the cart track leading from the Hickory

Grove Baptist Church to the Upper Bottom. How they came to be present on this land is open to speculation, since there are no written records. Forney Rankin believed that this property, along with the Stone Farm, might have belonged to his forebears who migrated after 1810 to this area from Stanley Creek, where they originally settled after 1760. It was more likely part of the large Rhyne holdings, but there is no way to know. It is possible that the Rhynes at one point had slaves though it seems unlikely that they were sufficiently prosperous (the Rankins were probably not prosperous, to judge by the simplicity of the John Butch Rankin homeplace), but if so they may have wanted to do something for them after the Civil War. Alternatively, times were tough after the war, and perhaps some of the locals were willing to sell freed remote, steep land to former slaves. The Hunters simply pulled up stakes, when the land became too poor and their cottage burned down, and moved to nearby Mount Holly.

This land on the south side of Old Lake Creed is steep, although not as steep as on the north side. What is so striking in the 1938 photograph is how almost the entire Adam Hunter Farm, despite its steepness, was under cultivation, with hand-dug terraces standing out in the photograph like rings on a tree. One thinks of Java, without rice. Across the creek, then as now, lies the majestic north-facing hardwood forest of the Rhynes, never put to plow. The two sides of the creek are an object study in the effects of human intervention. The Hunters decamped, presumably at some time in the 1940's, and Forney Rankin bought the tract for \$15/acre at a tax sale in the 1950's. By then the Virginia pines were impenetrably thick on the ground, and by the time of Hurricane Hugo in September 1989 these pines were relatively mature. Hugo demolished most of the trees on the Hunter Farm; in many areas, where the Virginia pines had been virtually a monoculture with the occasional shortleaf pine, not one single Virginia pine was left standing (although most of the shortleafs survived); but around the Hunter cottage site, oddly, the pines were less affected. Much of the eastern and central part of the Hunter Farm was then quickly overtaken by kudzu, whose extermination was Haywood Rankin's first goal upon retiring from the Foreign Service in 1998. (Fourteen years later, in 2012, only a few new kudzu sprouts have been detected, showing that while there is never complete victory in kudzu combat, there can be progress, so long as the assailant never relents.) Further down the ridge, to the west, is where a little patch of the federally-endangered Schweinitz sunflower managed to survive and was discovered by a visiting botanist in 2002 (see separate document). Still further west, on the north-facing slope toward the Stone Farm, the devastated area has been amazingly colonized by, of all plants, the big-leaf magnolia.

THE CENTER: EAST

The only part of Redlair visible from the Hickory Grove Road is a stretch of a few hundred feet from Rankin Road to the Hickory Grove Baptist Church (and a sliver one mile north). In 1938 this part of what is today Redlair appears to have consisted of four principal land-holdings from south to north: The 40-acre Duffey Mine tract along the road; the 10-acre Wright Farm north of that along the road; the interior 10-acre Morris Farm down what is today Redlair Lane; and the 20-acre Loftin Tract (a portion of a much larger property) further north, behind the church. The 1974 divorce line that divided Redlair into a southern part belonging to Jean Cantrell Rankin and a larger northern part which continued to be owned by Forney Rankin started at the exact mid-way point on the Hickory Grove Road frontage, proceeded west just south of the Red Barn, cut through the Duffey Forest, swept north around the Big Lake (which was awarded to Jean Cantrell Rankin, including the Lake Cottage), then went west to the apex of the 80-degree bend in the South Fork below the Upper Bottom (cutting across the Cheney Farm and then south of Trail No. 1).

The Duffey Mine Tract property was Forney Rankin's first land acquisition in the Hickory Grove area, in the early 1950's. He had earlier acquired property around his birthplace on the northern outskirts of McAdenville, where his family had moved in 1910, just before his birth in 1912. But he had decided that that area was too constricted and, in any case, he wanted to own land where his family was truly "from" and had lived for a century. His great great grandfather John Butch Rankin had moved to Hickory Grove sometime after 1810 as a young man, and in 1871 as an old man he had donated the land for the Hickory Grove Baptist Church (even though he himself had remained a Presbyterian), where many of his offspring are buried. Forney Rankin's older brothers had been born in the Frank Abernethy house (Abernethy homeplace), on John Rankin's original holdings north of the church. The John Rankin homeplace stood further north (now in a housing development). Forney Rankin, despite decades of trying, could never acquire the John Rankin homeplace and surrounding farm, but he was able to acquire hundreds of acres from Rhynes.

Duffey Mine Tract. This 40-acre property was apparently owned by the heirs of A. P. Rhyne, a textile magnate in Mount Holly. According to Forney Rankin, the gold mine itself continued to operate until just before the First World War. It would appear that at some point A. P. Rhyne may have had a hand in the mine operation, or that he acquired the land, for unknown reasons, after the mine closed. The mine was located at the top of the hill above what is today the Red Barn. Today there are many pits and depressions there, and when Forney Rankin was clearing the area in the late 1950's a bulldozer dropped into an old shaft. For years, the field continued to sink in various places. Most of the gold pits elsewhere on Redlair (of which there are several) appear to have been simply that: pits. But the Duffey mines were apparently true mines with shafts.

The gold mines occupied only a few acres of this 40-acre tract, which was partly open and partly forest in 1938, as the area remains today but in a somewhat different pattern. No mining structures or mines are visible in the 1938 photograph, not surprising given the lapse of three decades from the abandonment of the mines. In 1938 only two buildings are discernible on the tract, a house at the corner of what is today Redlair Lane and Hickory Grove Road, and another building near where the Gray House is located today. The second building did not exist when the Rankins moved to Redlair in 1954, but the first building did still exist. Jerry Baker, who was born in the house, reports that the second building was a barn. The house, which the Baker family rented along with the rest of the farm from the heirs of A. P. Rhyne, was moved to become the core of the Gray House. Forney Rankin expanded the original dwelling, adding a second floor and garage, and it was the Rankin family residence for two decades.

In 1938, the road connecting Hickory Grove Road to the Miller Rhyne, Cheney, Morgan, Wooten/Rice, and Big Bend/Pinhook properties – only called "Rankin Road" from the 1970's – met the Hickory Grove Road just south of today's track to the Red Barn. The course of that road is still visible across the Duffey Field, even though terraces were subsequently cut across it and it has ever since been part of a productive hay field. Forney Rankin moved the road south to create today's Rankin Road intersecting with the Hickory Grove Road two hundred feet further south. In the 1960's and 1970's he built a housing development mostly on the southern side of that road. The Duffey Forest has largely remained intact until this day, although it was for the period 1958-1974 fenced in with the adjacent Duffey and Red Barn Fields, a pasture-forest area which sometimes supported as many as 100 cattle, serviced by the Red Barn (built in 1958). The cattle did considerable damage to the forest, and nearly forty years after the cattle were removed it remains moderately infested by invasive plants. It remains a forest of majestic proportions, but many of the grand oaks and tulip poplars have suffered markedly from Hurricane Hugo and more recent violent storms, particularly in 2003 and 2011.

The Morris Farm. The semi-triangular shape of the 10-acre Morris Farm is clearly penciled in in the 1938 photograph, showing the long straight-line boundary with Miller Rhyne to the west, the bent diagonal boundary with Duffey Mines to the southeast, and Wright to the north. Morris accessed his little farm along what is today Redlair Lane, which at that time ended at the Morris house, which was surrounded by several sheds and great old oaks (gone today), a hickory (still standing), a massive tulip poplar (gone), apple trees and crepe myrtles (gone), and a line of heirloom pear trees (still standing and producing). By the late 1950's Forney Rankin had acquired all the properties surrounding Earl Morris and Morris knew he could exact a heavier price than Forney Rankin had been accustomed to paying; he finally sold out about 1960 for \$1,000/acre, and Forney Rankin never ceased to fume whenever the subject of Morris's "extortion" came up.

The broad pattern of field and forest today on the Morris Farm is very close to what it was in 1938. The most striking feature is the sharp contrast between field on the Morris side and primeval hardwood forest, apparently uncut even in 1938 for many decades previously, on the Miller Rhyne side. Today there is a minor breach in that primeval wall, where Forney Rankin cleared the understory at the beginning of Trail No. 2 (which follows the Central Ridge to the juncture of the Old and Big Lake Creeks and then connects to the Upper Bottom), an area where the Conservancy has held its annual meetings for several years. On a nearby knoll, Forney Rankin established a family cemetery, where he was buried in 2002, to be followed by Jean Cantrell Rankin in 2005.

Notable in the 1938 photograph is the absence of either of today's ponds, the "Big Lake" to the south or the "Old Lake" to the north. In those days there was no easy access across either of those deep valleys, whereas today the dams creating those ponds afford vital access (the Big Lake Dam carries Redlair Lane/Trail No. 1, affording access to south, center, and north, while the Old Lake Dam carries Trail No. 3, affording access to the Loftin Tract and Stone Farm). The Old Lake already existed when Forney Rankin began buying property in the Hickory Grove area; it was built between 1938 and 1950 probably by Henry Wright, although it may have had to be with cooperation from Earl Morris, since the creek may have been the boundary and both property of Wright and Morris may have been flooded. The Big Lake was built in 1958 and heightened in the mid-1970's. Local teenagers built a cabin behind the Big Lake dam in the 1960's, which Forney Rankin expanded into a two-story house in the 1970's where Anne Rankin Farmer and her new family lived for several years. When Jean Cantrell Rankin moved back to Redlair in 1980, she lived in the "Lake Cottage" until the 1990's. She adored the ample wooden veranda opening into the primeval forest and was passionate about being able to swim every day in the pond. The Lake Cottage became derelict and was pulled down in December 2009.

A major difference between 1938 and today is the presence of the brick house, with outbuildings, built by Forney Rankin and his new wife Anna Lee in 1974 and now occupied by Haywood and Sabine Rankin, located in the field sloping toward the Old Lake. Forney Rankin planted water and willow oaks and crepe myrtles along a U-shaped paved driveway connecting to Redlair Lane, and these oaks and crepe myrtles today divide what used to be a continuous field into two sections (West and East Pastures). Forney Rankin considerably expanded the East Pasture northward toward the McCants Creek; impatient to have more pasture land, he did not wait for the stumps to rot out and that part of the pasture today is too hummocky for easy haymaking. A line of sweet gums and one dogwood stand where the old forest edge used to be. Forney Rankin did not immediately tear down the Morris house (a single-story dwelling with six small rooms) but used it as a horse stable in the early 1960's. The house served as a "fortress" for Haywood Rankin and other youths, where "wars" often took place. Forney Rankin did eventually take down the house as well as most of Morris's sheds, but he moved the largest

of the sheds to where the Morris House had stood and used it as the core of a new house, which is the White House present today, owned by Katherine Rankin and rented out. Forney Rankin had apparently considered the White House as a possible place for himself to live in his last years, but diabetes and loss of both legs forced him to move from the brick house to a retirement home in 1997.

Wright Farm. The approximately 10-acre wedge between Duffey Mines/Morris to the south and Loftin/Hickory Grove Baptist Church to the north may not have been a single landholding, although Forney Rankin always spoke of having bought Henry Wright's "13 acres." Wright was a fundamentalist Baptist preacher, who started out with Berea Baptist church (itself an offshoot of the next-door Hickory Grove Baptist Church) and formed his own "Missionary Baptist" congregation down Mountain View Road. Forney Rankin said that the property had earlier belonged to "Happy Jim" Hunter, an African-American kin to Adam Hunter. Two houses, each with outbuildings, existed on the property in 1938. Access to these houses was via a track which began at Hickory Grove Road just at the Duffey Mines line, proceeded west toward what is today the McCants House (which did not exist in 1938), curved north into the "bowl" of the Church Field, went west by the Duncan House, and ended at what used to be called the Old Schoolhouse. This latter house may have been the original "Happy Jim" Hunter home, but it is also where Henry Wright first lived. The house at some point served for a period as a school for black children in the neighborhood (while a two-room school for white children existed nearby at the intersection of Hickory Grove and Old Hickory Grove Roads), but by the time Forney Rankin acquired the property in the mid-1950's it was occupied by illiterate white tenants (no electricity or running water), and he tore it down. As with Adam Hunter, we do not know when or how "Happy Jim" Hunter may have acquired the farm. By the time the Rankins moved to Redlair in 1954 there were no African Americans left on the southern part of Hickory Grove Road at all. It is possible that at one time the "Happy Jim" and Adam Hunter farms were connected, but more likely the two were always separated by the southern point of the Loftin Tract.

The McCants House has the style of a 1920's house or earlier but does not appear on the 1938 photograph, and Don Bumgardner and Jerry Baker (both born in 1934) confirm that Preacher Wright built that house in the 1940's for himself. What we now call the Duncan House is plainly visible on the 1938 photograph and is still standing (but unoccupied) today. Henry Wright may have owned that house, although Jerry Baker believes it belonged to the Stillers (whose son was accidentally killed by Charlie Wooten). By whatever means, that house came into the possession of Andrew Duncan, who married Henry Wright's daughter Garelle. Andrew Duncan was born at the remote Duncan homeplace on the South Fork (see below). Forney Rankin was never able to acquire the two acres around the Duncan House, on which property Andrew's son Johnny built a brick house in the 1960's. Access to the Duncan property is now via a gravel road beside the cemetery of the Hickory Grove Baptist Church (Duncan Road). Forney Rankin donated some of the land behind the church for cemetery expansion (numerous of his ancestors going back to John Rankin's daughter Sarah Eliza Rankin are buried there, to include his mother, father, and brothers), and he removed an old house from elsewhere to a lot between the Duncans and the cemetery, remodeled it, and sold it.

In 1938 most of the Hunter/Wright Tract was in field. Forney Rankin put all the area north of the Old Lake and around the Old Schoolhouse into loblolly pine a few years after acquiring the property. This area, particularly the McCants Creek and its ephemeral tributary (Old School Creek), are overwhelmed today by Chinese privet, serving as an impenetrable sanctuary for deer. For many years, Sam and Mary McCants lived as tenants in the McCants (formerly Wright) house and had a milk cow they kept in a pasture along McCants Creek. Forney Rankin planted that pasture in loblollies in the 1970's after Sam died. Mary continued to live in the house until the 1990's. The field between Duncan

and the highway (Church Field) remains similar to what it was in 1938, although only two of the young cedars (junipers) that appear to have been growing in the middle of the field then survive today (as large trees).

Loftin Tract. The 20-acre Loftin Tract, north of Hunter/Wright and behind the Hickory Grove Baptist Church, might as well be called the Abernethy Tract or the Rankin Tract. In fact, this tract is the only one on Redlair that we are nearly certain was part of the original Rankin holdings of the early 19th century. Forney Rankin only was able to acquire it in the 1970's.

The two properties penciled in on the 1938 photograph as "9" and "10" on the west side of Hickory Grove Road (plus the Hickory Grove Baptist Church property, which John Butch Rankin donated in 1871) comprise the core, if not the entirety, of the original Rankin Farm. The homestead on "10" is the original Rankin home (now demolished and in a housing development) which John Rankin built and where, according to Forney Rankin, John Rankin's daughter Sarah Eliza, her illegitimate son William Rankin and illegitimate daughter Nancy, and William's son Tom Rankin (father of Forney Rankin) were born. The farmstead on "9" is the Frank Abernethy homestead, where Forney Rankin's two older brothers were born.

The Rankins and Abernethys were intertwined. Sarah Eliza, after giving birth to William and Nancy, and Nancy both married Abernethys, and Forney's maternal grandmother was an Abernethy. (The name is sometimes and sporadically also spelled Abernathy, although the place of origin in Scotland is the River Nethy south of Inverness; the spelling Abernethy is used exclusively herein.) In his old age, John Butch Rankin lived with Sarah Eliza and her husband Charles Burke Abernethy and apparently had a close relationship with William and Nancy, since he left half his estate to Sarah Eliza, William, and Nancy and the other half to his eldest daughter Mary and the heirs of his only son Alexander who predeceased him. At some point, one of the Abernethys married a Loftin, which is where that name enters the picture. Forney Rankin acquired this southernmost 20 acres of the core Rankin property in the 1970's from Richard Loftin. (Richard, a drunkard according to Jerry Baker, was married to Lovey May Hefner, who lived on in a brick house on tract "10" well into a period of advanced dementia. Richard's parents Roscoe and Renie lived in the old Rankin homestead; apparently Renie was an Abernethy.)

The term "core" is appropriate in the sense that these two tracts, "9" and "10" on the 1938 aerial photograph on the west side of Hickory Grove Road, amounting to perhaps 150 acres, were almost certainly John Butch Rankin's. However, Forney Rankin believed that John Butch Rankin owned a larger property, which seems possible, given the size of many land holdings in the early 1800's. Forney Rankin asserted that John Butch Rankin's land included the 200-acre farm to the west of the Rankin/Abernethy tracts "9" and "10," which became the Cloninger and later the Stone Farm – see below. The Adam Hunter tract, he believed, might have been included. He believed that there were also substantial Rankin properties across the Hickory Grove Road, to include the Rufus Smith Farm – "11" on the 1938 photograph. It is noteworthy that the number "9" is also scribbled on that photograph for the property directly on the other side of the Hickory Grove Road from Frank Abernethy, a large property with apparently no house on it, strongly suggesting it was all a single ownership. Don Bumgardner and Jerry Baker confirm that Frank Abernethy farmed on both sides of Hickory Grove Road, including well down Smith Road. Even more intriguingly, the number "10" is also used in 1938 for the Montgomery Farm at the intersection of Hickory Grove Road and Old Hickory Grove Road, likewise suggesting it was owned by the then-owners – whether Rankins or Abernethys or Loftins – of the original Rankin homeplace (as it is also "10"). Forney Rankin acquired the Montgomery Farm in the

1950's from the elderly widow Carrie Montgomery, his mother's sister, who were Bradshaws but daughters of an Abernethy on their mother's side. Forney Rankin used the Montgomery tract, which was no longer farmed and looks scraggly even in the 1938 photograph, to create one of the earliest housing developments on Hickory Grove Road, earnings from which were essential to his further additions to Redlair. If all the above properties did belong to John Butch Rankin, his holdings would have originally amounted to over 500 acres.

On the other side of the debate, it is notable that the John Butch Rankin homeplace was a sprawling but modest structure – single-story with small rooms that appeared to have been randomly added-on through the decades, a more modest home than one might expect for a large farm – in comparison, for example, to the nobler Miller Rhyne homeplace. Moreover, the relatively humble John Butch Rankin homestead sat at the end of a ridge with poor access to the west, close to the boundary with Emmanuel Rhyne, i.e., it would not have been central to any putative 500-plus-acre land-holding – curiously and poorly situated. In any case, John Butch Rankin – as was the case for his grandfather Samuel and father William, and as would be the case for his offspring including Forney – bought and sold land all his life, meaning that even in his lifetime there was no stable property definition. His will divided up his land in the usual fashion and his progeny were prolific in child-bearing so that by the third generation after him, at the beginning of the 20th century, it is little wonder that there was no core landholding remaining in the name “Rankin.” By the time Jerry Baker (born 1934) came along there were no farms in the community that were even vestigially known as “Rankin Farm.”

The 20-acre Loftin Tract – the small but vital chunk of the original landholding that Forney Rankin was able to acquire in the 1970's – had no structures on it in the 1938 photograph and was evidently farmed from the central farmstead at the Frank Abernethy house (Abernethy homeplace). The intermittent stream “Church Creek” bisects the tract. Most of the property north of Church Creek was in cultivation in 1938 while all of it south of it was forested. Today the entire tract is forested, but the southern part of the old field area was evidently put in pines decades ago while the northern part of it was relatively recently planted. The valley of the intermittent stream “Loftin Creek,” in the western sector of the tract, was always forested. The track leading to the Adam Hunter Farm (thence on to the Upper Bottom) led directly from the handsome old frame church (now the large parking lot for the brick church built in the 1970's) through this field (now piney forest), then through the south-eastern corner of the Cloninger/Stone Farm, and on down the ridge past the humble Adam Hunter cottage; present-day Damascus Road did not exist.

A signal feature of the Loftin Tract, at its extreme southwestern point on the Old Lake Creek (just behind the dam, which did not exist in 1938) is the presence of an eternal spring, locally known as the Indian (or Egg) Spring, perfectly carved out of bedrock in an oval shape. A well-worn path led directly from the church to this spring, which gently burbles water even in times of extreme and prolonged drought. The spring would have been too small for Baptist-type baptisms, so it is not clear why the Indian Spring was evidently so well-frequented from the church (and continues to be well-known to oldsters to this day).

THE STONE FARM

The 200-acre Stone Farm was broken up when George Stone died in the early 1990's. He, his father, and his brother had acquired the tract from the Cloningers probably in the 1930's and, as discussed above, it (or some portion of it) may have been part of the original Rankin holdings in the

early 1800's. In 1985 Forney Rankin made a vital land trade with George Stone, who exchanged the western strip of his land for a parcel northwest of his property, which Forney Rankin had purchased in the 1960's. He called this the Dave Abernethy tract. (Note that the Dave Abernethy tract is not indicated in the penciling-in of borders on the 1938 photograph. It is possible, if not likely, that the photograph is erroneous in this quadrant and that this "Dave Abernethy" is one of the Abernethy heirs devolving from John Butch Rankin. A Dave Abernethy, for example, married Sarah Eliza's illegitimate daughter Nancy. However, Jerry Baker says that this Dave Abernethy was not a close kin of the other Abernethys in the Hickory Grove community.) The Dave Abernethy tract divided Stone's northeast corner (containing Stone's house and barns) from his fields in the southwest of his tract, meaning that Stone had to cross someone else's forest to get to his fields. This acre-for-acre trade was beneficial to both sides, since George Stone consolidated his holdings and acquired better farmland, while Forney Rankin acquired most of the West Stone Farm Creek, one of the most pristine and beautiful on Redlair, as well as the great White Oak at the top of George Stone's west field. This is today the largest tree on Redlair, measuring four feet in diameter at breast height, with the wide-limbed crown of a tree accustomed to open space and an apparent age (perhaps 300 years) suggesting that it was protected, being possibly next to a homestead or barn at some point after European settlement, although there are no visible remains today of a structure.

When George Stone died, his heirs sold off the more accessible parts of the farm near Lane Road Extension (eleven acres to Gary Spargo, four to his daughter Martha Eudy, twenty to his grandson Chris Winston, and 37 to Duane Felton) and Damascus Road (20 acres to Tim Wilson, five to Todd McBride). The remaining 80 acres were hillier and much less accessible, and Forney Rankin was able to purchase them at a lower price.

(This 80-acre portion of the Stone Farm was Forney Rankin's last major land purchase. The old John Butch Rankin homeplace finally came up for sale by the Abernethy/Loftin heirs in the months just before Forney Rankin died in 2002 and he contemplated using his entire remaining capital to meet the \$300,000 price. Ironically, the old Rankin house at "Rankintown" on Stanley Creek, near Stanley, also came up for sale at that time, and Forney Rankin was even more eager to keep that home in the Rankin name. But he failed in both endeavors before dying. His estate went to his five children equally, rather than into a last massive land purchase. The John Rankin homeplace was sold to a developer, and the home at Rankintown passed out of the Rankin family. But at least Forney Rankin had been able to protect the most beautiful parts of the Stone Farm, which he believed had originally been owned by John Rankin.)

Although these 80 acres are a late addition to Redlair, they form one of the most important parts of it today. To this 80-acre purchase, Charles, Haywood, and Katherine were able to add a small but vital acquisition in 2001: the five acres, located in the southeast corner of the Stone Farm nearest Redlair Lane, that Stone's heirs had sold to Todd McBride. Because of the lay of the land, a house on this five acres (as McBride had intended to build until he was able to acquire the Loy Stone tract northeast of George Stone) would have blocked access to the rest of the Stone Farm and diminished the natural integrity of this part of Redlair. Haywood planted loblollies on the tract ("Wilson Field") in 2002 and ten years later, in 2012, the forest is already surprisingly mature, and Haywood has maintained an elaborate trail system there, as elsewhere.

The Stone Farm in the 1938 aerial photograph (at a time when the property either still belonged to Cloninger or had recently been sold to the Stones) is much harder to examine than other areas in the photograph because the agricultural service wrote numbers and lines all over it. It is possible that Stone

had just bought the property and had asked advice from the agricultural service about soil types and the like, so they wrote what might be soil indicators on the map. Nonetheless, enough can be seen on the photograph to assert that much of the property was in forest (albeit some in pine that must have previously been fields) and was thereafter cleared by the Stones. One conclusion is that maintenance of the farm had sharply deteriorated in the last years of Cloninger ownership. Most of the fields in 1938 appear to have been neglected and in the early (in some cases late) stages of reverting to scrub/forest. George Stone allowed the scrub area adjacent to Adam Hunter in the southwest to continue to grow into Virginia-pine-dominated forest, but he expanded other areas, including the "Wilson Field," his western field below the great White Oak, and especially his huge south central field. The last-named field is today divided between Redlair (replanted in loblollies in the 1990's), Felton, and heirs of Gary Spargo. George Stone put all the bottomlands along the East Stone Farm Creek back into cultivation. Don Bumgardner says that George Stone ceased plowing them when a violent rainstorm struck those plowed fields and the flooding creek caused terrible erosion; he says that thereafter George Stone only used those bottomlands for pasture.

Today, of the 85 acres of the Stone/Cloninger Farm which are now part of Redlair, only the four bottoms along the East Stone Farm Creek remain open land. The furthest bottom downstream (which the Rankins call Bottom No. 1, although the Stones called it Bottom No. 4) is now partially in trees which Haywood Rankin has allowed to grow up and around which he bushhogs in late winter. The next bottom (No. 2 for the Rankins, No. 3 for the Stones) has in recent years been cultivated in corn by neighbor Duane Felton, but the plan is eventually to plant it in native grasses. Its signal feature is a huge big-leaf magnolia by the creek which is the most prolific flowering tree on Redlair when the big-leaves bloom in May. The next bottom up the creek is the Long Bottom connected through a gap to Bottom No. 4 (or No. 1 for the Stones); together these form one of the most special, gorgeous places on Redlair: long, flat, and narrow, with steep slopes covered with big-leaf and maples gorgeous in the autumn, plunging into the bottoms from both sides.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided a grant for planting Stone Bottoms Three and Four in native grasses in 2008, and ample sunflower seeds were thrown into the mix. It took a couple of years for the native grasses to take hold, and it even seemed that the project had failed. Now in 2012 these two magnificent creek bottoms are full of healthy native grasses, as well as sunflowers that transform the fields into a river of gold in the month of September. The periphery of all four creek bottoms and all the slopes around them were choc-a-bloc with invasive plants (especially autumn olive), and Haywood Rankin mounted a campaign to eliminate this scourge, sometimes assisted by volunteers. Today, in 2012, the periphery is almost free of invasive plants, and some of the slopes have been cleared of invasives as well. George Stone appears to have harvested large trees selectively throughout his life and his heirs brought in the tree-cutters after he died (the typical pattern in Gaston County when a landowner dies), all of which interference with nature was a clarion invitation to invasion by aggressive non-native plants.

East Stone Farm Creek is profoundly different in character from West Stone Farm Creek, which it meets before the combined Stone Farm Creek enters a dramatic canyon-like deep-hardwood zone, flows down a major cascade with the largest natural pool on Redlair, and ends at the Upper Bottom and the river. East Stone Farm Creek flows out of a large housing development (at the old John Butch Rankin homeplace) and through property now owned by Duane Felton, who has largely cleared his forest and converted it into cow pasture. Thus, East Stone Farm Creek has heavy suburban and agricultural-erosional pollution, whereas the West Stone Farm Creek flows through a pristine near-canyon for half a mile, with headwaters that have fewer houses on Hickory Grove Road and little agriculture.

The several tributaries of the East Stone Farm Creek each have their own notable individuality. On the right bank, flowing from the north, is the appropriately named Hidden Creek amid a stunning hardwood forest (largely spared by the lumber men, perhaps being too difficult of access). Further up the right bank is Felton Creek, an intermittent stream also coming out of Duane Felton's farm, rather more degraded than the other tributaries by invasives, cows, and an adjacent old farm track. On the left bank (at the base of Long Bottom) first comes Big-leaf Gulch, a deep ravine crammed with big-leaf magnolias that thrive on its protection from the wind and east-west orientation; here is to be found one of Redlair's stoutest big-leaves at 12 inches diameter, sprouting from a huge root base that sends out several other trunks. Next up Long Bottom is the intermittent Wilson Creek, which also offers a north-facing slope with many mature big-leaves and a huge beech that grows on a massive boulder at a rock-strewn cascade. Up this tributary is a Virginia-pine zone (surprisingly unaffected by Hurricane Hugo) that must have been cleared by the early Rankins, Cloningers, or George Stone and then allowed to revert to forest. Next up, dividing Long Bottom from Bottom No. 4, is the intermittent Cloninger Creek flowing out of Tim Wilson's property, another big-leaf magnolia paradise with a rocky cascade (at times of flow), but an area whose understory was dominated by autumn olive (now largely eliminated). Finally there is the Doster Creek and the neck of Redlair/Stone Farm that leads to James "Bubba" Doster's property (the former Frank Abernethy homeplace). This is an extraordinary corner of Redlair, very hilly, very full of an odd couple: big-leaf magnolia and autumn olive. Haywood Rankin has been working slowly to reduce the latter, and with every cut autumn olive, the magnificence of the big-leaves becomes more apparent.

THE NORTH: CENTRAL – DUNCAN, SPARGO, AND BIRCHFIELD

The entire northern part of Redlair above the Upper Bottom is today forested. Even in 1938 there was more forest there than elsewhere on Redlair. In 1938 only four farmsteads existed on this large expanse: Duncan, Spargo, and Birchfield in the North Center, and Emmanuel Rhyne in the Northeast. As will be discussed, some of the forest was piney already in 1938, suggesting progressive disuse of fields going back much earlier than 1938, and some of those piney areas in 2011 are almost fully hardwood.

The Duncan Farm. Immediately upriver from (north of) the Upper bottom lies the former Duncan property. Forney Rankin was able to purchase two thirds (20-plus acres) of what remained of the original Duncan holdings in 1985 from two of Andrew Duncan's heirs; the final third (8-plus acres) is still owned by Andrew Duncan's grandson and is not protected. The size of the original Duncan holdings is not clear. Forney Rankin bought the upland area, along the ridge where Trail No. 1 (the Spargo Trail) leads to the Spargo Farm, from the Hickory Baptist Church, which had come into possession of it, presumably through donation, from Andrew's forebears. The most likely theory is that the original Duncan Farm was probably around 100 acres and included the upland fields formerly existing along the Spargo Trail as well as the relict property along the river. The Duncan homeplace was located near (due north of) the Upper Bottom, and it is likely that the Duncans owned part (if not the entirety) of what is today the Upper Bottom. From the 1938 aerial photograph it is clear that that bottom once extended much further upriver, almost as far north as the small power station that is still operating today, but narrowing down since the alluvial plain there opens out gradually down river. The narrowness of the upper part of that bottomland would have made that section of it shadier and less productive. Note that the ridge above the Upper Bottom was in hardwoods in 1938. Thereafter it was cleared into field, presumably by the Rhynes. Forney Rankin planted it in loblollies, and replanted it after Hurricane Hugo.

It is not clear when the Duncans abandoned their homeplace, or when they originally settled there. The house is clearly visible on the 1938 photograph, and its remains are discernible on the ground today (several small rooms, a cold storage pit, a tumbled chimney, remains of an old oak, a well, a terrace for a kitchen garden, and masses of daffodils struggling to survive amid Chinese privet). Almost certainly the house would have been washed away in 1916 and must have been rebuilt. The area around the house has a grown-over feeling in the 1938 photograph; the house may have been abandoned earlier than that, which is also likely to be when the upper area went to the church. The upper fields in the 1938 photograph have the appearance of being somewhat better tended, but this (pure speculation) may have been via Spargos who continued to have an active adjacent farm at that time and may have farmed those fields on behalf of the church (or perhaps they first acquired it and then passed it to the church).

Reasons for the abandonment of the property include, of course, progressive degradation of hilly fields (the Duncans had at one time also cultivated even the steep ridges around the homeplace, as is evident on the ground, and these would have lost all their good soil early on) and the isolation of the farm. Originally, the Duncans would have had access to their farm directly from the Charlotte-Dallas road, which crossed the river at the shoals at Spencer Mountain village. An incised old track is traceable up the river from the Upper Bottom to the power station that would have led to that road. However, the Spencer Mountain textile mill was built in 1874 (one of the earliest in Gaston County) and from the adjacent dam a canal was constructed leading to the power station which was completed in 1905. This construction blocked access to the Duncans along the river. From then on, their access was only via the Spargo Trail, but that meant that the Duncans were much further away from a public road, up a steep hill – so isolation was undoubtedly a factor, especially in a time when cars and tractors were beginning to have a dominating impact on people's lives.

Andrew Duncan's grandson in 1999 asked for a key to the gate at Hickory Grove Road on Trail No. 1/Spargo Trail, which would have given him full access to his 8-plus acres, but Haywood Rankin has consistently said that he will only permit access to guests if the Rankins are present – no one gets a key. The 8-plus-acre tract is surrounded by protected property on three sides and a virtual cliff on the fourth (river) side. The only access would be a mile down the Spargo Trail, which is not maintained for vehicular use. The interesting legal question is whether a surrounded property has the right to access when the original access was to a homeplace in a different area now owned also by the owners of the entire access route and when the owners of the property have not used even that access for more than two decades. So far this question has not been put to the test.

The topography in this part of Redlair is unusual in that the high north-south ridge traversed by the Spargo Trail nearly parallels the river, unlike the more usual pattern of ridges (right or oblique angle to the river). (The only other similar case on Redlair is the north arm of the Big-Bend/Pinhook tract, which is a smaller but even more dramatic example of a high near-parallel ridge.) This broad ridge ("Spargo Ridge") happens to be the locale of a major geological divide in the area, an old fault line, and it is exactly paralleled on the east side by the incredible West Stone Farm Creek, also quite an odd feature topographically in its straightness (except for one surprising meander). Particularly noteworthy on this portion of the West Stone Farm Creek is the best and most beautiful rock cascade on Redlair (which is otherwise largely deficient in rock outcrops), in an area heavy with big-leaf magnolia. This plant normally prefers east-west valleys which afford a north-facing slope, but here it seems happy with a north-south valley, perhaps because it is both deep (thus relatively wind-protected) and narrow (thus

shady, good for moisture which the big-leaves like, but bad for sun, which the big-leaves contradictorily also like).

The three valleys connecting the Spargo Ridge and the South Fork have sharply contrasting characters. The relatively short Duncan Gulch is as dry as it sounds, in the midst of a steep zone which the Duncans nevertheless attempted to farm, allowed to grow back up, and then (as is tragically typical) had clear-cut just before selling to Forney Rankin. Further north, the intermittent Duncan Creek is canyon-like in its source area. What is curious here is the hollowing-out of the intermittent stream bed, as if storms in the last decades were somehow more severe than previously, or perhaps the deepening and widening of the stream are a function of erosion when the upland was still in cultivation (though the process seems to be ongoing). Still further north, just beyond the Duncan Farm and into the southern portion of land Pharr Yarns sold to the Conservancy in the mid-2000's, lies one of the most perfect, unmolested valleys on Redlair, an intermittent stream we call either Pharr Creek or Pristine Creek, home of a very mature hardwood forest with hardly any invasives where Pharr's timber operation in 1958 did not reach and the 1989 hurricane did not have much effect. This is one of Redlair's most perfect forests.

The Spargo Farm. The place where the Spargo Trail/Trail No. 1 bends from northward to eastward (eventually ending at the Hickory Grove Road) is the center of the old Spargo Farm. It is the point where the Spargo Trail meets and joins the old Charlotte-Dallas Carriageway. Eastward, that road went (via what are today Hickory Grove and Old Hickory Grove Roads) to Mount Holly, where it met the road from Lincolnton and crossed the river at the Tuckaseegee Ford. Westward, down today's Trail No. 50, it proceeded across the South Fork at the Spencer Mountain village's shoals (perhaps where the dam is today), continued through what is today the Laurel Hill Farm, crossing Long Creek and thence proceeding directly into Dallas, which was the county seat from the time of Gaston County's creation (carved out of Lincoln County in 1846) until Gastonia grew up around the new railroad track and became the new county seat in 1909. Trail 50 is so deeply incised on the slope down to the river, from years and years of wagons churning their way through the mud, that superficially it appears in some places to be a natural valley. Much the same phenomenon may be observed on the Laurel Hill Farm (also protected by the Conservancy), where the carriageway is equally deeply incised on the upslope after crossing Long Creek.

The 1938 photograph shows the Spargo Farm to have been relatively substantial, with a house and several outbuildings, with stately oaks. The house lay on one of the main arteries of Gaston County, until the main road shifted to the next main ridge to the north (where the Stanley-Spencer Road now is) presumably on account of the building of the canal and power station and the concomitant flooding of the lowlands of the Holland Creek. (Inexplicably, the carriageway on the Laurel Hill side was also abandoned, in favor of today's less direct Dallas-Spencer Mountain Road; and then of course, from 1909, Dallas ceased to be a town of much importance.) The Spargo homeplace today is infested with the most extensive patch of wisteria on Redlair, consuming four acres, although Haywood Rankin has made some progress stemming the inexorable expansion of the vines into the surrounding former fields, now loblolly and Virginia pines. Just north of the homeplace, in an area of Virginia pine, is to be found the most extensive collection of pink ladies' slippers on Redlair (280 plants in April 2012, thirteen in bloom). It is clear in the 1938 photograph that the Spargo family's fields had contracted over the decades, as is typical of fields throughout the piedmont, through farmers' tendency not to plow right up to the forest edge, where Virginia pines (and today invasives) get a foothold and eventually become large trees, spawning another cycle of field retrenchment.

The Birchfield Farm. On the next ridge southeast of the Spargo Farm lay the smaller and evidently less prosperous Birchfield Farm. The 1938 photograph shows a small cultivated area around an humble house, where remains of a chimney may be seen today along with a couple of old oak trees among the loblolly and Virginia pines. In the late 1950's and early 1960's a large dilapidated barn still stood some distance from the house to the south but cannot be discerned in the photograph, although it must have been there in 1938. Curiously, in 1938 the area around the barn was in pines, suggesting that already at that early date the Birchfield Farm was on its last legs. The road into the Birchfield Farm came in north from the Spargo Trail (the old Charlotte-Dallas Carriageway) through a superb hardwood forest (then and now). Midway from that intersection to the Birchfield house, where the hardwoods give way to pines, one can still today make out on the east side of the track (Trail No. 11) remains of an old fence (still discernible since locust posts, which can last more than half a century, were used). The fence and the pines suggest cultivation or pasture, yet the 1938 photograph shows the area in forest. Two possible explanations are that (1) the area was subsequently cleared and then put into pines or (2) the forest was fenced in without being cleared. On the photo, there appears to be an area along the West Stone Farm Creek that had formerly been cleared, with a track leading down to it.

THE NORTHEAST AND FAR NORTH

Robinson Forest and The Far North. The furthest north section of Redlair parallels and then briefly includes a section of the Holland Creek, which is the largest tributary of the South Fork on Redlair. Property boundaries were not penciled-in on the 1938 photograph in this area (perhaps not being of much interest to the agricultural service), but it seems likely that the Robinson tract bordered Emmanuel Rhyne on his entire western border, cut over to near the Spargo homeplace and then went back north paralleling Holland Creek, i.e., a significant north-south box with a dent in the top, of perhaps 80 acres. There is no house anywhere on this tract and most of it was (and is) hardwood forest. Forney Rankin said that the Robinson from whom he bought it had held it simply for logging. It is not known who previously may have owned the tract (whether, for example, it had previously been part of Spargo to the southwest, or Medlin or other farms to the west and north, or Manuel Rhyne to the east, or Birchfield to the south). It is evident from the 1938 photograph (see 1938 Redlair North) that there had only ever been two modest-sized fields on this property. One in the Far North above North Manuel Rhyne Creek, sloping toward Holland Creek, was already mature pines in 1938 (still the case today, surprisingly slowly converting to hardwood all these years on) and the other, located north of and adjacent to the Spargo Trail, was beginning to grow up then in scrub (and is now mature Virginia pines). The former field in the Far North would almost surely have been reached, and therefore possibly been a part of, the Medlin Farm (now growing up in houses); the one on the Spargo Trail would possibly have been farmed by the Spargos or Birchfields.

There are several significant features of this extraordinary Robinson Forest. The portion of the forest next to the Spargo Farm (between Spargo Gulch and Robinson Creek) contains the principal chestnut oak concentration on Redlair, with some magnificent trees. Chestnut oaks would have been a signal to the settlers to avoid clearing, as chestnut oaks grow in rocky terrain. The broad ridge east of Robinson Creek also contains chestnut oak. Robinson Forest crosses North Manuel Rhyne Creek, becoming The Far North, and reaches to (and over) the Holland Creek and its more northerly tributary the Goble-Huffstetler Creek (named for the present neighboring landowners to the east). These creeks were one of the earliest parts of Redlair to gain natural-heritage status and one of the reasons Redlair today is denominated of national significance. They have a particularly high concentration of big-leaf

magnolias. The northeast corner where Redlair briefly crosses over the Holland Creek has the largest and most mature mountain-laurel forest on the property.

The Emmanuel Rhyne Farm. Manuel Rhyne owned a 200-acre parcel that straddled Hickory Grove Road. He lived near where the Spargo Trail/Old Charlotte-Dallas Carriageway/Trail No. 1 meets Hickory Grove Road. He lived to be nearly 100 and died in the mid-1970's. Before he died, his forest was probably the most perfect climax hardwood forest in Gaston County. If the Robinson Forest in those days was beginning to look impressive, Manuel Rhyne's forest was paradise. You could gallop a horse through it without need of clearing a trail. He refused to cut anything and lived with his wife simply, without electricity or running water, in an unpainted frame house among huge trees. The electric lines on Hickory Grove Road in those days came up from the south and down from the north to his property and stopped at either side without crossing his land; the highway entered a stunning forest for several hundred feet. Manuel Rhyne's barn and most of his fields lay south and across the road, and he had no problem walking some distance to them.

When Manuel Rhyne died, he devised his land to Holy Angels Nursery in the hopes it would protect his beloved forest forever. Holy Angels declined the offer and the property devolved to his two daughters, who promptly had every single tree on the place cut down, and they sold it off to the highest bidders. Forney Rankin acquired most of the tract on the west side of the highway, under a steep mortgage that necessitated that he figure out a way to use the land to pay for the purchase while preserving what he could of it. He ended up saving about one-third of the land that he had purchased, a wedge that starts narrowly at the old Manuel Rhyne homeplace (with only two hundred feet of frontage on the highway) and opens inland in a blunt-nosed triangle. He planted the defaced property in loblolly pines. For many years the forest was scrubby but now, nearly forty years on, it has become a remarkably beautiful and graceful pine forest beginning slowly to convert into hardwoods. In the 1980's Forney Rankin donated this property to the state for creation of a State Educational Forest, and a Forestry sign still stands at Hickory Grove Road so stating. However, he made this gift with the proviso that the state act within four years to bring the project into being. After no action by the state (other than putting up a sign), the property reverted to Forney Rankin, who put it under conservation easement (with the rest of the North) in 1990 and subsequently donated it to Charles, Haywood, and Katherine.

The Abernethy-Rhyne Tract. South of the above-mentioned Manuel Rhyne wedge lies a curious, complex, and remarkably beautiful 26-acre section of Redlair which is its own separate tax parcel and which may be called, for lack of a better term, the Abernethy-Rhyne Tract. It has a weird little tail that reaches over to Lane Road Extension, which is a tell-tale sign that Forney Rankin had created this as a separate tax parcel with the possible intention of selling it off in a housing development, using that corridor as the entry way. This nightmare never came to pass. The title "Abernethy-Rhyne" comes from the fact that the upper two-thirds of it were part of the Manuel Rhyne Farm and the lower third was the remainder of the Dave Abernethy Tract, much of which Forney Rankin had traded with George Stone in 1985 in order to acquire as much as he could of the valley of West Stone Farm Creek. By the greatest good luck, Forney Rankin managed to save all but three hundred feet of that creek (that portion, in the old Dave Abernethy tract, now being in the tract owned by Chris Winston, grandson of George Stone).

The deep ravines (Abernethy Creek, Abernethy Gulch, Manuel Rhyne Gulch) that cut south from Manuel Rhyne to the West Stone Farm Creek where it flows west before changing direction abruptly southward (in a remarkable hairpin meander) each has its own topographical drama and each is full of

big-leaf magnolias. There are invasives (especially autumn olive) in this area but the alluvial plain of the West Stone Farm Creek here is relatively free of Chinese privet, otherwise a scourge of alluvial areas on Redlair. Further up the watershed, the intermittent South Manuel Rhyne Creek comes through a mind-bogglingly beautiful valley that feels as if it were on a different planet. Haywood and Johanna Rankin have stemmed an incipient tree-of-heaven infestation there.

THE NORTHWEST

The Holland/Cook Farm. Rev. Odell Cook acquired 60 acres of the old Holland Farm in the 1990's and put the lower 30 acres, predominately mature hardwood forest, under conservation easement. As can be seen in the 1938 aerial photograph, there were no structures on this part of the Holland Farm. A portion (perhaps eight acres) of this tract was under cultivation in 1938, along both sides of the Holland Creek. Cultivation must have been abandoned soon after, because this part of Holland Creek has mature trees (no pines) today. The most impressive cataract, in the most beautiful section of this large creek, is located here. The viewshed is now protected from house-building on both sides of the creek. (Sadly this is not the case further upstream, where the Medlin Farm is unprotected and filling up with houses.)

The Spencer Wetland. South of Rev. Cook's property is a 50-acre area which the Conservancy acquired from Pharr Yarns in the same Clean Water transaction that preserved the Big Bend/Pinhook tract and the Northwestern Tract (see below). A few years after the Pharr Yarns acquisition, the Conservancy (also using a Clean Water grant) was able to acquire the Spencer Mountain Canal itself (except for the small area around the power station), so now this portion of the left bank of the South Fork is now almost all owned by the Conservancy.

South of Cook/Holland, the Holland Creek turns sharply due south into a flat alluvial plain that has been transformed into swamp and wetland through two different processes, human and beaver. The upper wetland was a dense alluvial forest (plane tree, river birch, walnut, box elder, water oak) until the early 2000's, when beavers began to arrive in the area. They built a long meandering dam across the width of this alluvial plain creating a shallow but large pond (more than an acre) that killed scores of large trees, although much of the Chinese privet has survived the inundation. In the ensuing decade the Holland Creek has often flooded and washed out the dam, which the beavers have usually rebuilt within a few months. The beavers have also built smaller dams further up the alluvial plain. Curiously, there is no beaver lodge in the middle of any of these beaver ponds. Their lodge is located, instead, further south in the larger Spencer wetland. Why the beavers felt the need to build a dam, when they already had a large water impoundment around their lodge, and why they have insisted on rebuilding it and building other dams, is not clear; presumably they have a need for practice and a penchant for work. The beavers have also gone up and down the South Fork now, felling trees (mainly sweet gum – some of them very large – and iron wood, but almost any species if those are not present).

The Spencer Wetland itself, between the beaver ponds to the north and the Spencer Mountain Canal to the south, covers as much as five acres, depending on the level of water in the canal. The canal was opened in 1905, for the purpose of hydroelectric energy production; the small power station is still in use and feeds into the general grid. The canal was built across the large alluvial plain at the base of the Holland Creek where it used to flow directly into the South Fork, so the canal is, in effect, a dam across the Holland Creek, backing water 800 feet up the creek, 300 feet in maximum width. When the canal is low, for example when the present owner of the power station is repairing the turbines, the

Wetland is exposed as mostly shallow. This is the area where the old Charlotte-Dallas Carriageway formerly came down the slope, met the South Fork and the track coming up from the south (Duncan Farm, Miller Rhyne Farm), and followed it up to the shoals where it presumably crossed in a ford. The now-flooded alluvial plain very likely, before the existence of the Wetland, was a creek/river bottom and a farm, although any habitation that may have been there was eliminated by 1905, as was the carriageway. When Haywood Rankin brought staff from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund for a tour of Redlair in the early 2000's, to see if the Wetland and Big Bend/Pinhook projects would qualify for funding, they took one look at the Wetland and gasped. It was immediately obvious that this place was precisely what the Fund had been created to protect. A million dollars was then forthcoming to protect these properties.

The magnificent bluff on the west side of the Wetland was not protected by this grant, except for a narrow strip along the west side of the Wetland (due to Clean Water's sole mandate to protect water and Pharr Yarns' desire to hold the property, directly accessible from Stanley-Spencer Mountain highway, for a future housing development). But, miraculously, Clean Water agreed to fund the Conservancy's purchase of the entire east side of the Wetland as well as a large ephemeral valley on the west side of the beaver ponds and the upland north of that. In the 1938 photograph, none of this 50 acres was cleared land except for a strip on the west side of the Wetland. Several areas of pines may be discerned on the eastern side of the Wetland, however. In most of these today the pines are completely or nearly completely gone, yet on the ground there are indicators (i.e., unnatural gullies) of ancient agriculture, i.e., cultivation perhaps 150 or even 200 years ago, when there may have been a farmstead in the alluvial plain, now flooded.

Pharr Yarns had this entire property selectively timbered in 1958. It brought in bulldozers to create a system of lumber roads for extracting the timber. The sight in 1958 was unbearable. Innumerable great hardwoods were felled and red gashes led straight up and down the hillsides where the bulldozers did their work. More than fifty years later, the forest has gone a long way toward repairing itself, but the lumber tracks still deeply scar the terrain. The bulldozers simply pushed earth (and trash) directly across the valleys, not using pipes except across Holland Creek itself. Floods had washed through these crossings within a few years. The largest tulip poplar on Redlair is to be found in the upper section of this broad eastern zone, near the Cook line; it is nearly four feet in diameter at breast height. It was saved, as is typically the case with unusually large trees that are spared the saw, because it is slanted, crooked, and difficult of access, and thus was of presumably of less interest to the lumbermen. South of this great tree, at the broad ridge top on the boundary with the Spargo Farm, is to be found the largest and most mature grove of holly trees on Redlair. (Hollies may indicate former pastures.)

As is repeatedly the case on Redlair, the valleys flowing off the Spargo Ridge all have their own unique and precious identity. The Pharr or Pristine Creek was described above – it is one of the most perfect hardwood valleys on Redlair, where Pharr Yarns' lumbermen did not quite reach. It is, however, curiously devoid of big-leaf magnolia. The deforesters did reach the next valley, the Bigleaf Creek, which flows into the Spencer Wetland, but this valley nonetheless today, a half century after the bulldozing and cutting, has the mood of an elegantly mature forest. It contains a fascinating stand of mature big-leaf magnolias with very few young magnolias (elsewhere on Redlair the pattern is more commonly reversed). It would appear that the big-leaves took advantage of the 1958 cutting of the forest but that today, when the forest is again reaching a climax stage, the big-leaves are having difficulty germinating. Redlair's largest and tallest big-leaf is located here, 13.7 inches in diameter and over 60 feet tall. It is such a large tree that visitors do not usually see it, as it appears to be just another large tree in a mature

forest, unless they happen to be looking up into the tree canopy and see big-leaf leaves at a height where they do not usually exist. It may be the largest big-leaf anywhere in the wild, although of course there exist much larger planted big-leaves (25 inches in diameter at Biltmore gardens, 28 inches diameter at Wye Plantation in Maryland – places where the big-leaf does not grow natively and are pampered). Near this great big-leaf is a cluster of rhododendron, the only example of it on Redlair. The native buckeye shrub is common here (the only place on greater Redlair where it is found). The occasional immature chestnut has been spotted as well. Further north, also flowing into the Wetland, are the intermittent South and North Spargo Creeks with some big-leaves amid gorgeous hardwood forests. An old gold pit is to be found on the ridge between these two valleys; other gold pits are on the ridge between Pristine and Bigleaf Creeks.

Northwestern Tract. The final property in this 1200-acre mix of what unofficially today goes by the name of Redlair is the great westward projection of Conservancy-owned property up the South Fork on its left bank, beyond the bridge over the river at Spencer Mountain village. The Conservancy acquired most of this property from Pharr Yarns, in the same purchase and through the same Clean Water funding as the Wetland/Pinhook purchase. The portion including the canal was subsequently acquired from the Northern Illinois power company that had briefly owned the canal and power station. The Conservancy does not separate this northwestern property from the Wetland, and it has never found a good name for it. “Northwestern Tract” is as good as any. Its shape is odd (because Pharr Yarns, as elsewhere, wanted to retain the upland for development) but its effect is profound. It adds upwards of a mile of protection to right bank of the South Fork and ensures that motorists coming down the Spencer Mountain slope on the Gastonia/Ranlo Road behold a magnificent undeveloped bluff on the other side of the river – truly a breathtaking sight for the general public. At the bridge, the Conservancy has transformed a local trash dump into a public access point for canoers and kayakers wanting to paddle the river to McAdenville, where Pharr Yarns has installed a take-out point. Unfortunately, where the bridge meets the canal there exists also the vortex of an old, widespread, and expanding scourge of kudzu.

The crown jewel of this tract is the far western section where the Conservancy-owned portion broadens to include almost the entirety of a high bluff that “blocks” the river and forces it into an “S” shape. A person climbing this bluff will feel he has just been transported into the mountains and that he is passing through different worlds on his way to heaven. He moves from an alluvial plain with its riparian flora (some autumn olive and privet thrive but do not yet completely dominate the understory, and beavers have decimated the sweet gums), up into ever rockier horizons at first replete with mature big-leaves (that seem surprisingly content with a western, rather than northern, exposure, open to winds) and then transforming, at the upper ridge, into chestnut oak. The view west to the river is stunning. The view to the north has now been trashed, as the owners of the property to the north, formerly 100 acres of pristine climax hardwood forest, have clear-cut it.

At the southern base of this bluff/mountain are to be found the remains of an old structure, presumably a farmhouse that existed before the Stowes acquired the land, or at least that existed before the flood of 1916 almost certainly washed it away. Even as early as 1938, according to the aerial photograph, there were no cleared areas anywhere on this property, but the old road to the ruin is plain on the photograph, just as it can be found and traced on the ground today. Some of the upland areas were thick pine in 1938 and those areas remain so today (interesting that these pine patches have not made more progress in transforming into hardwoods over three quarters of a century). Presence of the ruined farmstead at the edge of the wide alluvial plain indicates that these farmers’ greater interest

(whoever they may have been) lay in the richer and less-erosive plains and not the upland fields which are today the piney patches. It is difficult to tell the existence of former agriculture on an alluvial plain on an aerial photograph because the transformation there is typically not to pine (but to birch, plane, sweet gum, tulip poplar, and walnut), and the transformation is much faster than upland; but it is fair to conclude, simply from the presence of the ruined farmstead, as well as a small dike, that this alluvial plain was open and cultivated, as almost all large alluvial plains were.