



The History and Legacy of The Jones Center at Ichauway

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“Land management  
is an art  
that builds on history  
and is  
based in science.”

*Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr.*





## Beginnings

From his earliest days, Robert W. Woodruff found great enjoyment and relaxation among the wonders of nature. He had dogs and horses as a child and learned the pleasures of the outdoors while hunting and fishing with family and friends. One of Woodruff's first dreams was to be a big game hunting guide – tough and competent, imbued with the spirit of the pioneer and a love of the back country where survival depends on ingenuity and resourcefulness. Throughout his life, these human traits seemed to be among those Woodruff prized most in both himself and in others.

This passion continued into Woodruff's professional career. As a salesman for the White Motor Company in the early 1920s, he was a member of a group that acquired a quail hunting preserve on the Georgia-Florida state line that they called Norias. This group, along with others in the region and in collaboration with the federal game authorities, commissioned Herbert Stoddard, a well-known scientist and ornithologist, to make a study of the bobwhite quail. The result, now well known, was the most complete work on the bird and included recommended management practices to bring the quail population to the carrying capacity of the land.

During this time, Woodruff worked his way from salesman at the White Motor Company to Vice President, but he resigned in 1923 to take the presidency of the Coca-Cola Company at the young age of thirty-three. His intention was to spend one year turning around the fledgling company before returning to the White Motor Company. Instead, he ended up maintaining effective control of the Coca-Cola Company for the rest of his life, building it into one of the world's most successful businesses and most recognizable brands.

A few years after assuming the presidency of Coca-Cola, Woodruff and his former boss, Walter White, sold their interests in Norias to purchase their own hunting preserve. They chose to focus their attention on forest and farmland bordering the Flint River in Southwest Georgia, where there was little swampland and game was plentiful. They hired a well-regarded real estate agent named Richard Tift from Albany, Georgia to assemble the preserve. When they finished acquiring land in 1941, they had amassed roughly 36,000 mostly-contiguous acres along the Flint River in Baker County. Of special attraction were the aquatic features on the land, particularly the Ichawynochaway Creek. The creek was named by the Muscogee tribe for the deer ("icho") that slept there ("anocha"), indicating its banks were heavily populated with game. It coursed more than 15 miles through the property and emptied into the Flint at its southeast corner, and it was from this creek that Woodruff and White chose the name Ichauway for their preserve.

Woodruff and White enjoyed only one hunting season together at Ichauway. Before the second, White was killed in an automobile accident. By prior agreement, Woodruff was able to acquire White's interest to become the sole proprietor of the property. There is evidence that Ichauway strained Woodruff's resources in those early days. During one of





his first visits to Ichauway, Ernest Woodruff, Robert's father, called it a beautiful place. "Wouldn't you like to own part of it?" the younger Woodruff asked. "I am going to own it all," said his father. "I'll buy it at the Sheriff's sale when you go broke."

Woodruff set about transforming the various parcels and farms into the sportsmen's retreat he and White had imagined a decade before. He began by hiring Roy Rogers, a friend and hunting companion, as the plantation's first manager and dog trainer. Rogers was a graduate of the University of Georgia Agricultural College and worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture when they met. But it was Rogers' renowned hunting dog, Lloyd George, that drew Woodruff to Rogers. After hunting with Roy and his dog, Woodruff brought Lloyd George to Ichauway as a member of the hunting team. Shortly thereafter, Roy followed his pup to South Georgia to serve as Ichauway's dog trainer and later its manager.

Woodruff and Rogers followed the proven land management practices that had been developed at Norias by Herbert Stoddard. Cash crops of soybeans, corn, peanuts, and grains were grown, but only in relatively small fields and never with irrigation. Cattle were raised on parts of Ichauway near the Flint River, but not in great numbers. While Rogers served as manager, some two hundred families lived and farmed on Ichauway. In the 1935 operating statement of Ichauway Plantation, Rogers wrote that, "it has been our purpose to improve the methods of farming and rehabilitate impoverished tenant farmers... make them self-sustaining and generally improve the standards of living in this community." Farmers were advanced the necessary supplies and paid a cash sum at the end of the year if they made a profit. Debts were not collected. In pursuing such a generous policy, Ichauway maintained heavy financial losses that Woodruff funded with personal loans.





# Emory Field Station

Not long after Woodruff acquired Ichauway, Rogers found that roughly 60% of Baker County residents suffered from malaria. Woodruff helped Rogers engage the U.S. Public Health Service, along with physicians and scientists from Emory University, to address the pervasive problem. With the help of Emory's Robert C. Mizell, Woodruff established a field station at Ichauway in 1937 to study and eradicate the disease.

An article was published in the Baker County News in 1937 praising Rogers for the initiative. Upon receiving it, Woodruff, who was later known to the philanthropic community as "Mr. Anonymous," wrote to Roy: "It's easy to spend a little money to furnish facilities and do things for people and have them compliment you and put your name and picture in the paper etc., but it's difficult to keep your feet on the ground in the face of all the compliments and flattery."

Yet, when the station closed in 1957 after 20 years of research, malaria had effectively been eliminated in Southwest Georgia. This malarial work at Ichauway and elsewhere in the South was ultimately the genesis for today's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 1946, the modern CDC was established in Atlanta, on land adjacent to Emory University that was purchased and given for that purpose by Robert W. Woodruff.

The success of the field station also illustrated to Woodruff what Ichauway might become. In 1945, Mizell wrote to Woodruff saying that he imagined Ichauway's ultimate use to be "a science station where workers in Biology, Public Health, etc., come to live and work." Later, in a letter to Joseph W. Jones, Mizell prophesied that the field station "would continue to grow in usefulness, will attract more scientific attention, and will ultimately crystallize Mr. Woodruff's thinking about how Ichauway should be used when he is through with it." These are the earliest outlines of what would ultimately become the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center, established by the trustees of the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation in 1988 following Woodruff's death.







## *The Land*

As part of the Coastal Plain of the southeastern United States, the expansive lands of Ichauway were once filled with old-growth longleaf pine. The original forest was heavily timbered in the early 1900s, but young trees too small for harvest were left and reforested the property. Under Woodruff and Rogers, the remaining longleaf pine forest was then carefully managed over most of Ichauway, allowing the tree and its wiregrass understory to become the dominant natural feature of the property.

Subsequent managers continued the traditional farming, forestry, and game management programs established by Woodruff and Rogers. They exercised a responsible stewardship of the land, which informs the conservation and land management practices utilized on the property today. The program was designed to protect, conserve, beautify, and improve the forestlands without unnecessary interference to other activities on the property. Some timber harvest did take place, but always by using selection harvest, in which individual trees were marked for removal while most were left to maintain the overall forest canopy. Prescribed fire was used to control hardwoods, maintain the open understory of the forest, reduce the fuel load and the likelihood of wildfire, and to stimulate the growth of legumes and other plants that feed quail and other wildlife.

Quail hunting was the principal activity at Ichauway, but Woodruff and his guests also hunted turkey, doves, and ducks in season. The deer population was kept under control by employees who shared their harvest with residents of Ichauway. The kennels always contained outstanding quail hunting dogs, usually pointers. When asked if Woodruff had a favorite dog, he replied, "It's really hard to say. I have so many close friends here. I guess, if I had to choose, it would be Lloyd George, 'The Old Master.' Together we had some of my finest days in the quail woods." Following Lloyd George's death, all of Ichauway went into mourning and hosted a funeral for the revered friend. Ichauway's historic dog cemetery still holds the remains of the best, each with a headstone designed and commissioned by Woodruff himself.



# Hospitality

The guest books at Ichauway tell the story of the many family, friends, business associates, political leaders, and prominent citizens that came to Ichauway to enjoy its pleasures. Stories survive of Woodruff and Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. strategizing about how to recruit white Atlanta business leaders to Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Prize dinner and of Ichauway's all-black plantation baseball team that claimed it could beat the Atlanta Braves. From 1930, when the main house was completed, to 1985, the year of Woodruff's death, guests came readily at his invitation and benefited richly from his and Mrs. Woodruff's generous hospitality. One guest, Max Gardner, the former Governor of North Carolina and former U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James, wrote:

Dear Bob -- I'm back at Shelby with a full night's sleep to my credit, with no fox hunt up to midnight last night, no turkey shoot at 3:30 this morning, no dove shoot at 7:00, no long horseback ride to the luncheon rendezvous, no quail shoot this afternoon--and with no arrangement about what kind of horse I should ride tomorrow, nor when I should shoot skeet or how much of the plantation I should inspect with you on a fresh horse--with all these in mind a firm determination to sleep and rest for a week, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your dogmatic hospitality.

In 1968, Mrs. Woodruff suffered a cerebral hemorrhage at Ichauway and died shortly thereafter. After her death, Mr. Woodruff continued to find comfort and enjoyment at Ichauway, supported by his long list of guests and the devoted employees and their families who made it such a welcoming place. Though the Woodruffs had no children of their own, he considered the people who worked at Ichauway to be like family. He paid for the college education of any child who grew up at Ichauway, paid countless medical bills for Ichauway residents and their families, and made specific bequests to many employees in his will. Mr. Woodruff died in 1985.







## Transitions

Woodruff also provided in his will that Ichauway was to be given to the Trebor (Robert spelled backwards) Foundation, which he created in 1937. In a codicil to the will, Woodruff stated that it was his “desire that Ichauway Plantation remain a wildlife sanctuary and to the extent practical its natural resources be maintained and conserved.” However, in his closing years, he mused aloud on several occasions what the Foundation trustees would do with Ichauway once he was gone, clearly suggesting that he trusted and expected them to make the decision about its highest and best use.

For millennia, the longleaf pine stood at the center of a delicate ecosystem that supported a diversity of insects, animals, and plant life unrivaled outside of the tropics. To this day, the longleaf pine ecosystem remains one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in North America. It is also one of the most endangered, with over 95% of the original longleaf pine woodlands in the Southeast already lost to development and changes in land use. Woodruff apparently understood that the resources at Ichauway were of such magnitude that prudent analysis of its most valuable and productive use should prevail over sentimentality or economic interest.

One of the first acts of the Trebor trustees after Woodruff’s death in 1985 was to change the name of his foundation to the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation. Although modestly endowed prior to Woodruff’s death, after receiving the bulk of his estate it became the largest private foundation in the South. Boisfeuillet Jones was President of the Woodruff Foundation, and Charles H. “Pete” McTier served as Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

The trustees quickly addressed the matter of Ichauway’s future and commissioned McTier to study the options for Ichauway’s utilization. McTier consulted Donald O’Brien, an attorney for the Rockefellers who guided the family in its preservation of large tracts of land. O’Brien recommended that the trustees engage The Nature Conservancy to conduct an inventory of the natural features at Ichauway. Knowing the value of its natural features was, in O’Brien’s view, a principal factor in making a sound judgement about the property.

The Southeastern Office of The Nature Conservancy completed the inventory over a nine-month period in 1986 using a multi-disciplinary team of botanists and zoologists. With the inventory as a reference, appraisals of the significance of Ichauway’s natural resources were then sought from knowledgeable sources including National Audubon Society, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, USDA Forest Service, University of Georgia, Emory University, Florida State University, and Tall Timbers Research Station. Representatives of these organizations and others visited Ichauway to assess its natural assets and to recommend how best it could be utilized.

Various organizational alternatives for protecting Ichauway were examined along with the financial requirements of maintaining it and operating appropriate programs. Information





was assembled concerning existing preserves in the U.S. with ongoing educational, scientific, and conservation programs. The benefits of donating Ichauway to a public institution or private conservation or educational organization were also investigated. Conversely, the option of selling Ichauway and adding the sale proceeds to the Woodruff Foundation's endowment was analyzed. Without exception, those consulted urged the preservation of Ichauway and the conservation of its remarkable natural resources.

In a special meeting of the Woodruff Foundation Board of Trustees in 1987, McTier noted that "it was not possible to find a comparable land holding with [Ichauway's] size, diverse features, and management history because none exists." Then, with the strong support of the consultants, he presented to the foundation trustees a recommended utilization plan for Ichauway that included the following purposes:

- ◇ To preserve Ichauway intact, managing it in such a way as to protect and enhance the diversity of natural communities and their component species that exist on the property.
- ◇ To retain as much as possible the land management practices and hunting traditions that set Ichauway apart from all other land holdings in the region.
- ◇ To establish an ecological education and research center for faculty and graduate students of area universities with specializations in natural history of the longleaf pine and wiregrass community, fire ecology, indigenous wildlife particularly quail, turkey, and other birds and animals considered rare or endangered, and the interaction of native ecosystems.
- ◇ To operate a training center for managers of public and private lands demonstrating the effective integration of forestry, agriculture, hunting, wildlife management, and enhancement of ecological diversity.
- ◇ To create an outdoor conservation laboratory and outreach program aimed at identifying and encouraging the protection and effective management of sites in the Coastal Plain region outside of Ichauway's holdings.
- ◇ To conduct an interpretive program for the general public which would offer periodic lectures and guided tours featuring Ichauway's cultural heritage and the significance and diversity of its natural communities.







## The Center

The Woodruff Foundation trustees adopted the plan, and a study on initial program activities, staffing, budgeting, and financing was commissioned to make it actionable. At its April 5, 1988 meeting, the Woodruff Foundation board authorized establishment of a private operating foundation to manage Ichauway in accordance with the purposes previously approved. During that meeting, the trustees excused Foundation Chairman Joe Jones from the room and, without his prior knowledge, voted unanimously to name the new enterprise The Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center.

Among the first orders of business was forming a scientific advisory committee to advise both the Center and the Woodruff Foundation on best practices for land management and establishment of a high-caliber research program. Dr. Jerry Franklin, Dr. Art Cooper, Mr. Walter Rosene, and Dr. Eugene Odum sat on the committee, and Dr. Gene Likens, Director of the Institute of Ecosystem Studies at Millbrook, New York served as its Chair. Drs. Likens and Franklin continue to serve as Founding Members of the Jones Center Advisory Committee, which is still comprised of eminent scientists and professionals in the ecological and natural resource management fields who have broad, multidisciplinary and complementary perspectives. Dr. Robert Naiman from the University of Washington's School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences succeeded Dr. Likens as Chair before yielding to Dr. James Vose, Co-Founder of the USDA Forest Service's Center for Integrated Forest Science, who was followed by Dr. Wes Burger, Interim Dean at Mississippi State University's College of Forest Resources. Individually and collectively, these outstanding leaders and those who have followed on the Jones Center Advisory Committee have provided essential guidance to Center staff and Foundation officers in building The Jones Center, its team, and its integrated research, education, and conservation programs.

The advisory committee also played a key role in identifying the Center's first Director, Dr. Lindsay Boring, who was a young faculty member at the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources. Dr. Boring took a leap of faith in leaving a tenure-track university position to join the new Center in rural Southwest Georgia and build its programs, staff, and infrastructure from the ground up. Mr. J. Lee Tribble came from the administrative staff at Emory University to serve as the Foundation's Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer, and liaison between the Foundation and The Jones Center. In late 1991, modular facilities were put in place to temporarily house the laboratories, offices, and meeting rooms. Planning for permanent facilities got underway after core members of The Jones Center team were recruited and Center programs began to take shape. Tribble's expertise in facilities development was the key factor in the successful completion in 1996 of the permanent buildings now housing The Jones Center.

As The Jones Center grew, great care was taken to place the facilities on sites that would benefit the Center most and that would be separate from the historic areas of Ichauway that are protected and preserved as part of Woodruff's legacy. As Woodruff's colleague





Robert Mizell envisioned in his 1945 letter, Woodruff's house is "kept intact just as [he] left it, with the same furnishings, same books, [his] guns in place." Although four buildings containing 50,000 square feet of modern offices, state-of-the-art wet and dry laboratories, spacious meeting rooms, and up-to-date information technology have been put in place to support the work of The Jones Center, guests are still able to come to Ichauway and to see it largely as Woodruff built it, enjoyed it, and left it.

Equally important to the Center's early success was hiring Jimmy Atkinson to serve as Natural Resource Manager. Atkinson joined The Jones Center from Tall Timbers Research Station, where he apprenticed under Leon Neel, who was an acolyte of the same Herbert Stoddard who served Woodruff and White at Norias. Atkinson brought the Stoddard-Neel forest management method to Ichauway, continuing the tradition of practical land management and ensuring that the property's longleaf-wiregrass ecosystem would flourish for generations.

Witnessing Ichauway's beauty provides a ready forum for its scientists to discuss pertinent water and land management issues with guests that range from policymakers to land owners to eminent scientists and natural resource professionals. As Dr. Boring stated in a published chapter on the Center, Ichauway's distinctive partnership between researchers and land managers "has the goal of providing a cooperative working environment where resource management plans and policies are science based, and where research directives, in turn, are influenced by the user community of land managers and policy makers."

In its first quarter century, The Jones Center has matured into a research and conservation site of regional, national, and international significance. Ichauway's 29,000-plus acres contain almost 18,000 acres of mature longleaf pine woodlands, 4,000 acres of young restoration plantings of longleaf pine, 100 depressional wetlands, 29 miles of rivers and streams, and 3,000 acres of field and food-plot habitat. Through effective management and translocation, Ichauway's federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker population has grown from a single bird to a sustainable population of more than 125. Today, most of Ichauway is dedicated to research and







educational demonstrations. The land base is complemented by 400 miles of roads and a full-time staff of 85, plus additional seasonal workers. More than 150 graduate students have completed their field work at Ichauway under the advisement of Jones Center scientists.

The Center's research is now organized into three programs: Woods, Water, and Wildlife. The Woods and Wildlife programs focus on the ecology, restoration, and management of the longleaf pine ecosystem and its associated wildlife, while the Water program conducts research on the water resources, wetlands, and aquatic ecosystems of the southeastern Coastal Plain. Over 30 educational events are held annually for natural resource professionals and university students, including workshops, short courses, and field trips. Center staff are renowned as experts in longleaf pine ecology, restoration, and management, including prescribed fire management. In 2017, Center scientists published *Ecological Restoration and Management of Longleaf Pine Forests*, a technical volume synthesizing 25 years of research about managing the longleaf ecosystem. The Center has also made significant contributions to regional and national conservation partnerships and was a founding member of the America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative and the Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils, with staff serving in leadership roles in both of these efforts.

Dr. Kier Klepzig succeeded Dr. Boring as Director of The Jones Center in 2017, bringing with him a career's worth of experience in the USDA Forest Service and a renewed enthusiasm for the Center's mission and potential. In its most recent strategic plan, Dr. Klepzig wrote that "the best use of Ichauway is to understand our natural resources, demonstrate excellence in their conservation, and promote the best science-based management approaches." Through this work, he also aims to ensure that all who encounter The Jones Center become inspired advocates for its conservation and research philosophies.

The distinctive ethos established at Ichauway over the twentieth century continues to guide it into the twenty-first. Today, The Jones Center is run with the same ingenuity, resourcefulness, and attention to detail that Woodruff brought to his own work, and Ichauway's employees all carry with them a deep reverence for the land and its rich history. Yet, perhaps most apparent of all Ichauway's enduring qualities is that each visitor receives the same uncommon hospitality Woodruff displayed there for over 50 years.

Today, by building understanding through research, demonstrating knowledge through conservation, and promoting sound management through education and outreach, The Jones Center at Ichauway aims to remain a prudent steward of its resources and deliver impact worthy of Woodruff's remarkable legacy.

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*Ichauway Plantation* by Charles Elliott; Lane Brothers Commercial Photographers records, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta; Robert W. Woodruff papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; and a chapter entitled "The Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center: Co-Directed Applied and Basic Research in the Private Sector" by Lindsay Boring.



