

The
LEGACY

WINTER 2025 / VOLUME 25 / ISSUE 1



THE CREATIVE
Process

GOODRUM HOUSE

The Journey
IS
WORTH IT

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

HOW DOES YOUR
Garden Grow

T.R.R COBB HOUSE

A PUBLICATION OF

WATSON  BROWN
FOUNDATION



WALTER J. BROWN

Our Founder

Walter J. Brown was a journalist and a broadcast pioneer who built and chaired what would become Spartan Communications, Inc., one of the larger privately held TV companies in the country.

Early in his career, Brown had an office in the White House when he served on the staff of Secretary of State James F. Byrnes. Brown's enduring love for politics was eclipsed only by his respect for

Jimmy Byrnes. Inspired in part by Byrnes's philanthropy – which in 1948 established the James F. Byrnes Foundation – Brown created his own private Foundation in 1970. Named for Thomas E. Watson and J.J. Brown, the men to whom Brown attributed his success, the Watson-Brown Foundation today continues to ensure that hundreds of deserving students are provided the opportunity to excel at the college of their choice.

OUR MISSION

The Watson-Brown Foundation, through creativity, diligence and financial support, labors to improve education in the American South by funding its schools and students, preserving its history, encouraging responsible scholarship and promoting the memory and values of our spiritual founders.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Goodrum House 4

BY BARBARA HYDE

Campus Notes 7

BY SAMUEL N. THOMAS, JR

Cobb House 12

BY FRANKE L. SMITH

Sticks & Stones 14

BY TIARA HODGES

Alumni Spotlight 16

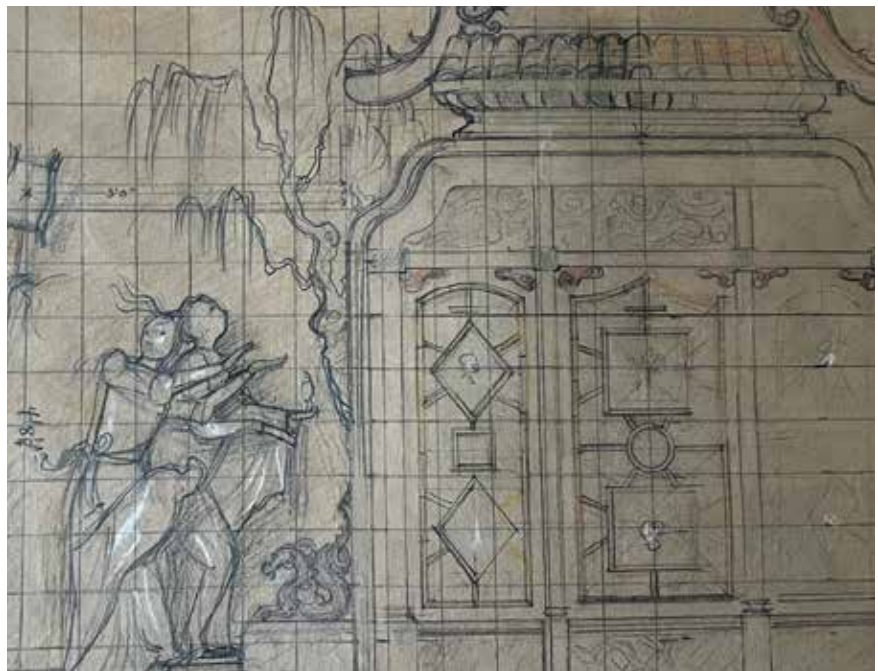
BY TIARA HODGES



THE CREATIVE PROCESS

BY BARBARA HYDE

It is always fascinating to see the artistic process of conceiving a work of art through to its completion. Thankfully, Allyn Cox (1896-1982), creator of the dining room murals at the May Patterson Goodrum House, intuitively left many clues to his methods of conceiving this project through to the final decoration that we see today. The son of Kenyon and Louise Cox, two important American painters of the 20th century, Allyn was always well aware of his place in the lexicon of American art, particularly regarding the pictures he created in the Capital Building in Washington, D. C. throughout the 1970s. While he kept many of his doodles and sketches of various projects throughout his lifetime, he donated the bulk of the



Need Caption



Need Caption

Cox family papers to the Archives of American Art in D.C., creating an extensive repository for the study of his life's work. Sifting through this 12-box archive with 10.9 linear feet of papers and works of art has been a continuous undertaking, each time revealing more of Allyn's ideas and processes.

Fortunately for us, Allyn did not donate everything to the archives; from time to time,

items have come up for auction. Thankfully, Jonathan LaCrosse, an Atlanta architect and Allyn Cox scholar has been purchasing various items of Allyn's work – everything from preparatory sketches, Allyn's personal address file box, to large-scale works of art. It was through Jonathan's generous donation that we received six of the original "cartoon" scenes of the seven created in oil on canvas and installed on the dining room walls.



Need Caption

To start, Allyn, Philip Trammell Shutze (the architect of the home), and May Goodrum would have agreed upon a theme for the room. Allyn would draw out elevation plans of each wall with exact measurements, like the one seen in Figure 1, which was conceived for a later project for a client in Chicago, Illinois. The procession of figures across the wall was worked out to give a sense of the final scale and proportion in the room. At this stage he also sent color renderings of each scene to Philip and May for color approval. Through an online search of auction house

records, we know Allyn created color renderings of the Goodrum House project as they were purchased through Grogan & Company Auctions in 2011, but unfortunately the buyer has not revealed himself (Figure 2). It was from these initial plans that May might have made suggestions or changes before the final scheme was agreed upon.

Once the final scheme was settled, Allyn created the full scale “cartoons” (a preparatory drawing for the final work of art). At this point, Allyn would decide on a method of transferring

the drawn images to canvas. In our case, he created a grid over the entire cartoon image, thereby allowing him to scale the images up or down based on his final measurements (Figure 3). With a grid in place on the canvas, he would begin transferring his drawing square by square, making any adjustments prior to applying the final layers of paint. All this work was completed in Allyn’s studio in New York City. He had professional photographs taken of the individual canvases in his studio prior to rolling them up and sending them to Atlanta for the final installation.



Need Caption

While we do not have primary source confirmation that Allyn was at the house during the installation, presumably he would have made the trip to Atlanta to oversee the final steps of the project. Applied like wallpaper, the canvases were

adhered to the plaster walls in 1930, where they have remained relatively untouched for 94 years.

But survival throughout the years was not guaranteed. In the late 1950s when May decided to sell the home,

Philip wrote to Allyn that it was possible the dining room paintings would have to be removed as the decorative scheme seemed to be a detriment, according to feedback from potential buyers. The home sold to Mary Rushton with the paintings intact, but for how long? Henri Jova, an Atlanta architect who lived on the property in the 1950s, recounted a tale in his oral history of the home that one day Mrs. Rushton called him to the house. She too wanted to wallpaper or paint over the canvases. Henri strongly dissuaded her, and thankfully, she finally acquiesced.

Sadly, not all of Allyn's work was as fortunate. Most of his residential decorative schemes have not survived in situ, much of it removed from its original site or simply destroyed. Goodrum House remains one of the few homes, perhaps one of four, where one can view his residential work in its original context. As Allyn once reminisced in a letter to Philip about the Goodrum House dining room, "We really seem to have struck something that time that has lasted all these years." ■

CAMPUS NOTES

Watson-Brown Scholars in Action



JEAN-CHARLES ATIEH

SENIOR, CLEMSON
UNIVERSITY

This year, I had the toughest yet most rewarding year of my college career. I served my first season as the vice commander and my second season as a drum major in Clemson University's Tiger Band, both of which added extra responsibilities on top my course load. After that full semester, I took time off from schoolwork doing my second co-op rotation at AFL in Duncan, SC. The experience I gained there was extremely valuable and instrumental in developing into an engineer.

HONOR CHIANG

SOPHOMORE, GEORGIA
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

My greatest accomplishments this year were converting SolidWorks

to CAD and overcoming my fear of presenting. One of the projects that I liked most was the individual project we had to do in my ME 1670 class at Georgia Tech. I was able to submit a sketch for review, model the object in SolidWorks, and have the object printed out! I chose to model a toy duck with three different features and four different parts. Each part had interlocking features such as hinges and snap fits so that they would fit together without manual adjustments. It was really rewarding seeing my pieces turn out how I planned with everything piecing together appropriately. I was originally struggling quite a bit with solid modeling, and I wasn't sure how to create something without a detailed outline, but with a lot of trial and error, I was able to find my way through with little help from the TAs and professor.



In another class, I was able to overcome my fear of presenting with a 15-minute presentation. Although I took an Intro to Communications class before, I was still hesitant about public speaking. When I was informed I had to present for 15 minutes in front of the whole class, I was terrified, but with preparation, I was able to overcome this.



GURUTTAM DEV

SOPHOMORE, UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COLUMBIA

Although I ventured into the beginning of my college career with undeniable excitement, I was equally apprehensive at the prospect. On one hand, I was excited to be somewhat independent and take my first steps into my adult life, on the other I was concerned to be on my own, away from the support system I had been able to rely on throughout my academic career. However, my fears were alleviated within mere days of my college career. Soon I found myself forming close relationships with my fellow students. Some of my most cherished moments stem from the late-night study sessions we would undertake, and the joy of success was only amplified by sharing it with my peers. I was astounded by the sense of community I felt on campus, not simply from my peers, but from the faculty and staff. Never once did I feel hesitation or dread approaching a professor. In fact I can confidently say that some of the strongest relationships I formed throughout this

academic year were between myself and my instructors, relationships that I'm sure will prove beneficial for my larger academic career. Without these connections with my peers and instructors, I am certain that I would not have performed as well as I had throughout my rigorous coursework. Even though I had lost access to the support system I had grown up in, I found myself immersed and even participating in a new one within the university. In fact, I have even taken on a position as a supplemental instructor for my peers. While I was admittedly hesitant to be thrust into a new, unfamiliar environment, my college experience has taught me how to better integrate into my community and even how to be of better service to it.



KATRINA HENNESSY

JUNIOR, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

This year was really fun and exciting! I joined an organization called Dawgs Raising Dogs (or the Athens Area Puppy Raisers) that raises service dogs for the Guide Dog Foundation. After camping for a while, I decided to raise one myself, and I now have a five-month-old black lab named Ash who follows me everywhere I go. I know she's going to do great things. Training her has been one of the most rewarding things I've ever done, and I cannot imagine my life without her anymore!



NADIA JACOBS

JUNIOR, COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

My first semester of college, I applied to numerous on-campus jobs and ended up with an interview at the school newspaper, where I had applied to be a copy editor. Despite my lack of experience with anything press-related, I was apparently qualified by my writing portfolio, and for the past two semesters, I've had the wonderful experience of being a paid copy editor. I love the work, and while I think editing alone is exciting, I've also been able to branch out into journalism. In addition to building my résumé, this job has opened up so many more opportunities for me, including the chance to attend the National College Media Convention and network with professionals last

KENDALL HOOBLER

SOPHOMORE, GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

I have had a wonderful college experience during my freshman year at Georgia Southern. I have absolutely loved getting into my major and getting to know my professors and other students in my major. I volunteered a lot in the archaeology lab during my first semester, and I had my first field school experience during my second semester. At field school, we worked on an 18th-century colonial site, and I learned a lot of useful skills in archaeology that I can use when I start working in the field. Outside of academics, I love working with Sustain Southern to help better the campus, improve campus life for all students, and advocate for important environmental topics. I had the honor of being admitted into the Sustainable Leadership Committee, and I have been able to take more of a leadership role regarding sustainability and teaching others about it. During the summer, I will be working at Hickory Hill as the summer intern, and I am very glad that I have been given the opportunity to join the team!



fall. I've always loved writing and editing, but before college, I never had the opportunity to work with the press. Because of this job, I've found something new that I'm passionate about. My enthusiasm has not gone unnoticed; after just one semester, I was promoted to senior copy editor. This position has given me the opportunity to edit more, write more, and improve my leadership and management skills, and I've grown so much in this role. Thanks to the people around me and the resources

with which I've been provided, I've had tons of wonderful opportunities like this one to pursue what I'm passionate about and grow and develop as an individual.



ABBY MCDONALD

SENIOR, ANDERSON
UNIVERSITY

This year was by far the most challenging of any I've had in college so far. I accepted several leadership positions in my church and at school as a small group leader, a freshman mentor, and as a student employee, and I learned a lot about when to push myself and when to give myself grace when I'm overwhelmed. In my experience, tough seasons in life usually teach me more in retrospect than they do in the moment, and that certainly rings true for this year. Looking back, I see the joy of having a strong and diverse group of people around you to support and be supported by; I see the goodness of the local church to provide its members proverbial shade and heat, and I also see the importance of knowing your limits and when to adjust them.

This past year, my design cohort created several large-scale projects including magazines, a bespoke furniture exhibition (for which we also designed the furniture), typefaces, and a conference that we planned and hosted within our design building in downtown Anderson. I feel extremely

grateful for the gift of getting to be in this design program because it is a singularly unique experience and is preparing me for a design career in so many important ways.

I also got to study abroad this year in Greece over spring break! AU offered a trip that followed Paul's second missionary journey from Philippi to Corinth to Berea to Athens, and it was an incredible experience. Not only was it incredible getting to see and read about what Paul did in those precise locations, but it was also neat to simply experience a new culture and get to meet locals and hear about their stories, too! My favorite place we visited was Meteora, where the monks live on the cliffs. It was probably the coolest place I've ever been.



JARI SMITH

SOPHOMORE, FURMAN
UNIVERSITY

Throughout this year at Furman University, I have been exposed to various topics, but the ones that connected with me the most were values, stress and time management, and fostering an inclusive community. Each of these areas has played a crucial role in shaping my journey and personal growth. Starting with navigating time and relationships:

Initially, it was difficult to find my footing in college. It took time to not only discover the right friends but also to establish productive study groups and teams. However, after this rough start, I found my rhythm. My time management and communication skills saw remarkable improvement as I learned to balance classes, extracurricular activities like BTB (a male acapella group), mock trial, and academic team commitments, all while maintaining connections with friends and family. Through this process, I learned the importance of prioritization and effective communication skills.

Furthermore, one of the most rewarding aspects of this semester was witnessing the power of inclusion firsthand. By participating in diverse groups and observing teams coming together across various platforms, I gained insight into what it means to create inclusive environments. More specifically, Due to the cohesive environment of Furman's mock trial team we were able to set new presidents, new achievements, and new expectations by being the only team in the college's history to receive a perfect score during competitions. These experiences not only broadened my perspective but also inspired me to actively contribute to fostering inclusivity wherever I go.

As I reflect on the semester, I'm grateful for the opportunities for growth and learning that have been provided not only through my hard work and efforts but also through the support of the Watson-Brown Foundation. From honing my time management skills to mastering inclusivity and making remarkable, never-before-seen achievements, each lesson has been instrumental in shaping both my academic journey

and personal development. Moving forward, I carry with me a deeper understanding of my values, enhanced skills in managing my time and relationships, and a commitment to academic achievement wherever I go.



MAKARI STOKES

JUNIOR, SPELMAN COLLEGE

My first year of college has been about discovering myself as a person and student. I am starting to recognize how far I can push myself and how I can test my limits. I had much self-doubt at first, feeling that I was not good enough, but once I gained more confidence, I could see what I was capable of. This year, I was nervous about taking my English class since it had been a long time since I had to write academic papers, but I put my head down and did my best. I am proud to say the English department has hired me to work in my school's writing tutor center. I have also finished out the year with a 3.86 GPA. Having a high GPA is a significant achievement for me because not only does it help me achieve my goal as a future physician's assistant, but it demonstrates that I am on the right track and should keep doing my best. This summer, I am taking a statistics course and trying to get my Certified Clinical Medical Assistant certification.

SONG TING TANG

SOPHOMORE, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

I can't believe freshman year is already over! It was the fastest school year I have experienced so far, and it flew by. Maybe the reason it went so fast was because I was always busy and was thoroughly enjoying everything. Some of my greatest accomplishments of the year are getting a solid grade in all my classes, including tough ones like molecular biology and writing seminar, making lots of truly amazing friends, and taking away so much from each of my classes. Over spring break I went to Delhi, India with my South Asian Studies class, and it was so much fun. India is such a different place than America, and my perspective was broadened by this experience. What has surprised me most about college is the difficulty of the classes, and I think it's a Princeton-specific thing.



Each class required a lot of time and effort to be put into get satisfactory grade. But I have learned so much from each of my classes. The academic scene at Princeton is truly unmatched. I was also surprised by how busy college can be. I wanted to do so many things, but I only had so little time. I think next year I'm definitely going to do a better job at time management. My favorite organization I was involved in was The Daily Princetonian. I was the copy editor for it, and I got to read many interesting

articles from many sections, including sports, opinion, news, cartoon, and more. This summer I will be spending eight weeks in Ishikawa, Japan taking two intermediate-level Japanese classes through the Princeton-in-Ishikawa program. I am super excited, and I know I will have a great time. To conclude, the word "learning" defined my freshman year. I learned so much in my classes, from the people I interacted with, and from college life in general. I can't wait to use all the things I have learned to better myself and make my summer and sophomore year fulfilling and successful.



TALIESIN VANEMAN

SOPHOMORE, YALE UNIVERSITY

This year, I've been busy as a bee with all the opportunities I'm lucky to have here at Yale! I've been challenging myself with coursework, taking a range of classes from a course on English words to introductory physics, multivariable calculus, and linear algebra. I've also been trying my hand at a variety of music groups, including the orchestra, the band, and the marching band, all of which have taught me so much more about performance and music than I expected. In between all of this, I saw an eclipse, went to many shows and concerts, and met a lot of very interesting and amazing people, some of which are now some of my

closest friends. This summer, I'm lucky enough to be doing research in Dr. Meg Urry's group studying supermassive black holes and calculating their masses to get a better idea of what goes on inside a black hole – It's gonna be a blast!



JANE YANG

SENIOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

This year in college was a mentally tough one. As I involved myself in more scientific research in dentistry, I had to build up my time management, including making some sacrifices to achieve my goals. However, it was also a fulfilling year: I made great progress on my research project and was even able to present my work as a poster at the annual Penn Dental Medicine Research Day, being one of only very few or none other undergraduate students. In my aspirations towards dentistry, my school year culminated with the start of dental applications, and I hope to give my absolute best efforts in them.

Ending my junior year, I joined my class in "Hey Day" which is a Penn

tradition where we celebrate our entrance into senior year, dressed in our bright red matching shirts, canes, and hats. I was also fortunate to receive the Joullie Award from the department of chemistry at Penn for expressing the highest achievement and promise among rising seniors in the major. My year couldn't have ended on a better note!



OSCAR ZELLER III

SOPHOMORE, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA COLUMBIA

This year brought many challenges and high points, many of which I expected; however, there were a few that stood out to me, whether for their significance or sheer unpredictability. Of these unexpected occurrences, the most surprising had to be just how easy it was to meet new people. Since no one knew exactly what was going on yet, it was easy to approach just about anyone without worry of judgement. On our first night in the dorms, my friend Kirsten and I threw

a gathering in the basement where everyone could meet each other and play card games. We brought down the few decorations we had and then went door to door throughout our dorm inviting (quite literally) everyone. Lots of people showed up and had a good time; however, this gathering meant more to us than we originally thought. Throughout the entire year after that, we would have people coming up to us asking if we were doing another basement event, or even just to catch up. No one knew what was going on as we were all new to college, and that little bit of confidence on the first night truly set the tone for an amazing first year. Something else that deeply surprised me was the difference in workflow between high school and university. In all honesty, I was horrified about the difficulty curve and came in expecting the worst. However, I was pleasantly surprised as most of the work was manageable. It was still difficult, but the more individual style of learning was only to my benefit, and I was able to complete the year making Dean's list both semesters. I wouldn't trade my first year at Carolina for the world, as I have had the opportunity to meet so many people, gain new perspectives of the world, and to work in a style which better suited the way my brain functions. I know the coming semesters will be difficult, but with how well this year went, I am going into them with high expectations which I am sure to exact on.



A Japanese wood cut from 1720 by Morikuni Tachibana featuring Rose Mallow (aka Confederate Rose). Photograph from Library of Congress.

The Coach Dooley Confederate Rose, as seen in the T.R.R. Cobb House Garden in October 2024.

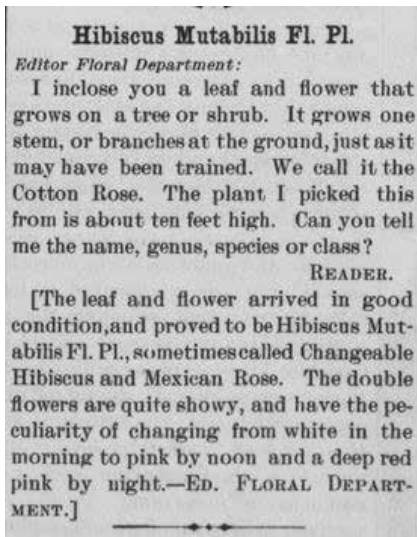
HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

SAMUEL N. THOMAS, JR

Exploring the Shift from Practical Gardens to Symbolic Landscapes in 19th-Century America.

Once humans evolved from a hunter/gatherer society into a more settled civilization, cultivation of plants began to take off. At first, cultivation was a communal activity designed to provide for the food needs of the village. Before long, individuals took to gardening to provide for their individual families. During the 18th century, all landholders had their own vegetable gardens that provided the necessary food for the board table. These staples were augmented by the occasional game taken down by the skillful hunter in the family. Eventually, the necessary protein needs of the family came about with the domestication of livestock.

This practice of individual gardening continued for the everyday person into the 19th century, with one major change - the introduction of decorative gardens. Now, decorative, or formal gardens, were around



An article to the editor of The Florida Agriculturist (DeLand, Fla.) from the October 23, 1889 issue.

much early than this, but for the common person, a decorative garden was something that the great majority did not have the space for, nor the leisure time to tend to.

The Great Exhibition, also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, held in London's Hyde Park in 1851 changed that. The exhibition, organized in part by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, brought together the whole world in displays of Industry, Commerce and Manufacturing. Exhibits included ironwork, pottery, furniture, perfume, firearms, hydraulic presses, pianos – and plants. More than six million people from all over the world viewed the exhibitions and experienced the amazing sights and sounds, including plants from around the globe. Attendees were introduced to such botanical treasures as the Amazonian water lily, so large and strong that it would support the weight of a small child, orchids from Central and South America, huge cabbages from the north of Europe, and hundreds of varieties of roses.

Following this first World's Fair, everyone who was anyone started including decorative gardens on their properties and in their home plans. A decorative

garden, tended by the mistress of the household was a sign of wealth, elegance and refinement. And the most sought-after plant for the decorative garden was the rose.

At the T.R.R. Cobb House, we know from documentary evidence that Marion Cobb had a vegetable garden just outside her kitchen. We also know that Marion took great pride in her Rose Garden, tended by herself and Jesse, the enslaved carriage driver for the family and the family's chief gardener. Jesse was well-known in the community for his gardening skills.

We do not know what roses Marion raised, but one rose she most likely included was called the Cotton Rose. The Cotton Rose is not native to the United States but comes from southern China where it is known as the fairyland flower. The rose reached Rome by 1632 and entered the United States as early as the colonial era. It was already well-established in the southern coastal areas by the time of the American Revolution.

The Cotton Rose is not a true rose, but a hibiscus with the scientific name of *Hibiscus* (Latin for mallow) *Mutabilis* (meaning change). The plant shares the same family (Malvaceae) with the cotton and okra plant. They have similar leaves and growing periods (late summer to fall). Also known as the Rose Mallow, the plant is considered an heirloom, especially best known in the South, where it has become a "pass-along" plant. So common in the South during the 19th century, the plant became a symbol of the region, better known as the Confederate Rose.

The fast-growing plant used to be seen throughout the South, although not so much these days with all our hybrids and new exotic imports. When in bloom, it is a showstopper! The most extraordinary characteristic of the plant's blooms is that when the bloom first opens it is almost pure white and changes its color over the course of the day to a pink and finally to a blood red before dying.

The plant received its name during the years following the Civil War when it became symbolic of the lives lost during the war. The plant is said to have soaked up the blood shed by the South's lost generation.

The Confederate Rose is a deciduous plant that can grow 12-15 feet tall, although in some isolated areas they have been known to reach 30 feet. They are recognized, and sought after, for their strikingly attractive solitary blooms. These five petal blooms reach four to six inches across. The two downsides to the blooms are that they have no real discernable fragrance and tend to last only 24 hours. They are, however, very popular with hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees.

We have a Confederate Rose growing in the formal garden on the east side of the T.R.R. Cobb House, a gift from one of our dear friends, the late Coach Vince Dooley. Our Confederate Rose has bloomed each year in the fall, generally from mid-October to mid-November. Only once did our Confederate Rose not bloom until later. That day came about in 2022. That year our first Confederate Rose bloom did not open until the 28th of the month – the same day that we lost our dear friend and true Southern gentleman. ■



Need Caption

THOMSON'S TABLES OF TRAIL

BY FRANKE L. SMITH

Over 50 years before the Belle Mead Hunt became a fixture in McDuffie County, another group of hounds ruled the day – at least when it came to the local social calendar. From 1903 until roughly the beginning of World War I, there was a very popular game called Trail that swept

the nation, making its mark even in small communities like Thomson. Our staff learned about the game while perusing the society columns of the 1910s for mentions of the Watsons. Thomas E. Watson's daughter Agnes Watson Lee, also known as Mrs. O.S. Lee, and his daughter-in-law Jessie,

Mrs. J.D. Watson, were mentioned frequently in the Thomson papers, often as members and hosts of the local "Trail Club." The game appears to have been very popular with the ladies, and the local papers often reported on how many "tables of Trail" were played at different luncheons

and parties. According to the papers, players with the highest scores often received prizes for their efforts. While the little details about the game that we found in the society columns were interesting, they did not truly give us a better understanding of the game, and we could not determine whether it was a card game or some version of dominoes that had the ladies so enthralled.

Our attempts to research the game online came up short, and in a fit of curiosity, we decided to reach out to the museum and library community for help. A missive was sent to the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, and within a couple of hours, we received a reply from their games curator Mirek Stolee. While Mr. Stolee had never heard of the game before our inquiry, he was able to find a deck of Trail cards on Etsy that was manufactured around 1904. To our surprise, we discovered that Trail was a card game that required a special deck

and was designed to mimic a fox hunt! Instead of regular suits of diamonds, hearts, spades, and clubs, the Trail deck consists of four suits of hounds, each suit in a different color and containing cards numbered 1-13. Instead of jokers, the deck includes one red fox card. The red hounds represent the fastest hounds and are the trump suit. Game play is similar to War. At the beginning of each hand, a lead trail card is played and players try to win the hand by laying down the highest valued card of the same suit. Once a hand is won, however, the winner sets aside the cards from the round in their kennels, and these cards contribute to the player's score at the end of the game. The winner of the hand then plays the next lead trail card. The fox card can be played at any time except as the lead trail card, but if someone plays a red card of 10 or higher during that hand, the fox card will be won by the person playing the highest red card, and they receive five

bonus points for "jumping the fox." Once all of the cards have been played and the kennels are full, the person with the most red hounds, by counting the number of hound heads on the cards, "catches the fox" and receives five bonus points. To tally the final scores, only cards greater than 10 are counted; with the 10 cards counting one point each, 11 cards counting two points each, 12 cards counting three points each, and 13 cards counting four points each.

According to the Atlanta Constitution, in a 10-day span during December of 1903, one store in Atlanta sold 15,000 Trail decks! Perhaps it was the simplicity or novelty of the game that made it so popular, but whatever the reason, it was definitely in vogue. Now that we have discovered the game, once so beloved by the Watson ladies, we hope to eventually host a Trail party at Hickory Hill, perhaps to coincide with the Belle Mead Hunt! ■

Alumni Spotlight

JEFF KOON

BY TIARA HODGES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ?

For Jeff Koon, the president and founder of Atlanta-based commercial real estate firm Stratus Property Group, the reward is in the work. “There’s no substitute for putting in the effort. It’s a competitive world, and you’ve got to be ready to work hard,” Jeff said. A 2002 Watson-Brown scholarship recipient, Jeff attended Columbus High School in Columbus, Georgia, and went on to graduate from UGA. Despite having interests in medicine and law, his true calling was real estate. “I looked at law school, but I also

wrote some books in high school and college. We even created a website called DumbLaws.com. It got pretty popular, and we ended up publishing 22 books through Simon & Schuster, plus a board game,” he recalled, adding that, while many assumed he would go into law, “it just wasn’t my cup of tea.” Instead, his entrepreneurial spirit led him to real estate, where he found a perfect fit. “I’ve always had some kind of goofy business, like selling mistletoe in the neighborhood when I was young, or running a small

newspaper. When I looked at the business majors offered at Georgia, real estate just seemed like the most fun, so I picked it.” Having started with residential projects, Jeff eventually gravitated toward the more complex world of commercial real estate, where he now specializes in multifamily housing and large-scale developments. “I did some residential to start with, but day-to-day, we focus a lot on multifamily, especially student housing development. We also work on retail, office, industrial, and land



development,” he explained. What attracted him to the commercial side? “Residential is really about catering to someone’s personal needs – their livelihood, their family. Commercial is more numbers-based, and every project is like its own little business. You’re figuring out how to make it work, how to improve things that aren’t done correctly. It’s a challenge, and I enjoy that.”

One of the most rewarding parts of his work is seeing a project come to life, especially when it directly benefits a community. “We always try to cater our projects to the community and the site we’re working on. One project that stands out is Haven of Athens, which we did on a family-owned property that had been in the family for decades,” Koon continued, “it took a while to earn their trust, but when we finally closed the deal, the matriarch of the family gave me a hug. It was very touching, and we even dedicated part of the land as a nature preserve in their honor.”

As with any career, challenges are part of the journey, but for Jeff, these obstacles are often opportunities in disguise. “One of the most unique projects I worked on involved saving a 100-year-old water tower in Athens,” he said. “We brought in a water tower consultant. We restored it, stabilized it, and incorporated it into the development. It became the focal point of the project.”

He adds that the diversity of projects keeps things exciting. “Every development is a little different. We don’t want to be the group that does the same thing every time. It’s about thinking outside the box.”

While based in Atlanta, Stratus Property Group operates throughout Georgia and beyond, with projects in North Carolina, South Carolina, and North Florida. “We’re mostly in Georgia, but we’ve worked on projects as far as Wake Forest, North Carolina,



and Columbia, South Carolina. We've also recently finished a student housing project at Wake Forest," he shared. Yet even with the company's expanding footprint, there's a strong local focus. "Right now, we're working on redeveloping a city block in downtown Carrollton, Georgia. It's the oldest retail center in the area, and we're working with the city to bring new life into it as part of their larger downtown revitalization effort. It's exciting to be a part of something that's shaping the future of the city." Looking back at his journey, Jeff

shared words of wisdom for students and young professionals looking to chart their own path. He encourages students to keep an open mind. "You might think you're going to end up doing one thing, but it might turn out to be something completely different. And don't underestimate the value of a good mentor— someone who can steer you in the right direction," he advised. When it comes to running a business, he admits it's not always smooth sailing: "There are definitely days when you want to pull your hair out. The business can be slow at times, and you question yourself, but as long as

you keep going, there are more good days than bad." Reflecting on his own mentors, the developer credits his father with providing invaluable advice early on, although he admits he didn't always listen. "I probably could've listened to him more," he said with a chuckle. "But I had some great professors in college, and even now, I have clients and other people who offer tips and tricks. It's important to keep your eyes open for those who are willing to guide you." Even after these years since he was awarded the Watson-Brown scholarship, Jeff still keeps up with the foundation, "I always had a soft spot for the foundation that helped me, and I recently reconnected with them. We're even talking about setting up our own scholarship fund for the future. It's great to be in a position where you can help others." As he continues to build his company and contribute to his community, his advice remains clear: "Find something you love doing, but don't expect it to be a cakewalk. Every path has its hurdles, but as long as you're doing something you enjoy, the journey is worth it." ■

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