

Dove Hunting: A Family Affair

Story and photos by Hay Hardy



John Austin with sons Bobby, age 10 and David, age 13

It was 10:30 in the morning when Julia Rose of Carysbrook Plantation called me.

“There is going to a dove hunt here this afternoon. Can you come?”

The temperature registered 70 degrees, warm for a January morning. The sky was blue with not a cloud in sight. What better invitation could one receive on a day like this? I hopped in the car and left immediately, driving two hours to reach Carysbrook, a 660-acre farm on the Rivanna River in central Virginia.

Hunters were already scattered throughout the harvested cornfields on both sides of the road. As the afternoon drew on, gunshots became more and more frequent. Flocks of birds were seen flying through the sky. Hunters calling out: “Birds! Birds!” “To your left!” “Look to your right!” Dogs running to retrieve them. Fathers calling out to young boys, “Al, look to your right, fill your gun later!”

Sons calling to fathers, “Dad, Dad, above you. Shoot, Dad, shoot!”

I had just returned from documenting a dove hunt in Mexico where the men paid handsomely to shoot. There, they sat silently, very focused. Here, it was a totally different ballgame—a family affair.

After the hunt, the doves were counted per member and separately identified. Guests always get to take a few home. Jack Eure provided a smoked goose and Dick Cardwell, smoked clams. Bloody Marys, cheese, dips and other fine foods were served and there was great camaraderie.

The hunters were members of the prestigious Richmond Dove Club, formally known as the Richmond Dove Association, Inc. Established 1961, it is the oldest continuous dove club in the area. Past members include Governor Dalton, Governor Holton, State Senator Edward E. Willey, and Frank Sutton,

Game Commissioner. Another well-known club member in the late 1960s was “Mr. Mac” (then in his late 90s), short for McNamara. His job from 1900-1915 was to introduce the automatic shotgun for the Winchester Arms Corporation up and down the Mississippi Flyway.

The club has developed hunting relationships with several farms in the counties surrounding Richmond. During the dove season, members will hunt three times a week: Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. According to Mev Van Doren, a professional fly fishing guide, “The Club is the best hunting bargain in town” because of the frequency of hunts and the excellent scouting system the club has adopted, which enables the members to be at the right place at the right time. Every week, a captain is assigned with four to six scouts. The scouting team’s responsibility is to check all the farms twice during that week to determine where the birds are.

Mac Wells, the president of the club, said that about a third of the 50 members have trained retrievers, and that they seldom lose any birds. Often, club members include two or three generations of the same family. Some of the senior members are Ed Givens, age 96, probably the oldest member of the club; Jack Eure, age 86 and Tom Disharoon, age 83.

Both Jack and Tom hunted that day. Tom was there with sons Ben and Tommy and grandson Al. Tom shot 20 shells and ended up with seven birds. Members are also allowed to bring guests. John Austin, who was at the hunt with sons Bobby, age 10, and David, age 13, brought his friend Mac McElroy. Dick Cardwell, 82, who was there with son Judge Cardwell, did not shoot that day. He said, "The quota per person is 12 doves. But you better stop at 11, because it is going to take you a whole box of shells to get the 12th dove." Wisdom from a seasoned hunter.

Carysbrook, the historic Rivanna River plantation, is one of the best-known

estates in Virginia and one of the oldest. The original grant for 6,000 acres was made from the English Crown in 1727 to Mrs. Archibald Blair for her son, Miles Cary, then underage. Wilson Jefferson Cary, a nephew of Thomas Jefferson, inherited Carysbrook in 1817. A member of the Virginia legislature and a justice of the peace for Fluvanna, Cary died in 1823

Mac McElroy and son Lee



Tom Disharoon, 83, shooting comfortably



Retrieving doves is not a problem for the Richmond Dove Club.





Carysbrook Plantation is a 660-acre farm on the Rivanna River



The quota per person is 12 doves. But you better stop at 11, because it is going to take you a whole box of shells to get the 12th dove.

Dick Cardwell



The Richmond Dove Club



Mac Wells of Wells Coleman accounting firm and president of the Richmond Dove Club

at the age of 39. The original frame structure is believed to have burned in 1826, and the present brick mansion was built about 1828 for Cary's widow, the former Virginia Randolph of Tuckahoe Plantation, and her children. Thought to have been designed by John Hartwell Cocke of nearby Breemo Plantation, the home is of brick laid in Flemish bond, with beautiful woodwork, pine floors, 12-foot ceilings and slate roof. Dick and Julia Rose purchased the property in 2003 and have completely renovated the home.

The lands of Carysbrook extend to approximately 660 acres, bordering the Rivanna River for some two miles. Virtually all of the land is open and is presently in crops. Wild fruits such as persimmons, grapes, blackberries, strawberries and plums are abundant. Deer, bear, quail, turkey, and fish are plentiful.

In *Gunnerman*, a book published in 1939 by local author Horatio Bigelow who resided in nearby Glen Burnie, he wrote about a dove hunt with his friend Hal Sheldon, author of *Tranquility*, and then author of the column "Guns and Game" in *Country Life* and *The Sportsman*:

After the inner man had been assuaged, I told the army the bad news—the dove supply was mightily limited and



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all signs pointed to a slim hunt.... The best bet was at Henry Campbell Jones' farm Carysbrook, where one afternoon the past week two guns had killed twenty....

In fact, doves were so plentiful at Carysbrook this winter that the club hunted there twice prior and again the week of the January 13th hunt.



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