

The Chatham Historical Journal

Volume 17, Number 2

Chatham County, North Carolina

September 2004

Borden/Bonlee Shooting Club

by Jane Pyle*

For twenty years, a small group of men -- and, once or twice, a woman -- enjoyed the fellowship, challenges, and satisfactions of quail hunting in southwestern Chatham County in one of several shooting clubs that flourished during the '20s and '30s. Borden's Shooting Club was modest in size, the members leasing land and employing local men as guides and dog handlers.¹ Unlike wealthier men, who built mansions on thousands of acres in nearby counties,² these men boarded with Braxton Edwards to hunt during the season from late November through February.

Following their decline at the onset of World War II, Borden's and other shooting clubs became memories and then stories retold by children and grandchildren.³ Grounding these stories in a factual record is a log preserved by Jim Edwards of Siler City. This log is the primary source for the account that follows, supplemented by several loose papers that stayed with the log.

DESCRIPTION OF LOG BOOK

An ordinary 9½" x 11½" ledger, "Shaw's Multi-Column Book No. 297" has no title page or list of founding members. Two names for the group were found, one on the inside back cover with a poem,

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A digitized image of the log book may be viewed at the Chatham Historical Museum.

"Liquor & Longevity," dedicated by T. F. Wilcox "to the Borden Shooting Club, January 23, 1940, the day of the Big Blizzard, and not a drop of Rye in the house." The other name comes from one of the loose papers entitled "Braxton C. Edwards Account with Bonlee Shooting Association."

Ninety-nine pages of the ledger were used. The first three hunting days are incompletely recorded, as though the headings had not yet been decided on. After some trial phrasing on back pages, the eight pre-ruled columns across two pages became: Date, Names, Territory, Guide & Dogs, Coveys, Birds Killed, Weather Conditions, and Remarks. A column was proposed for time of day, and this was incorporated into the Names column to show who hunted in the morning and who in the afternoon. Action of birds was included under "Remarks," as was type of bird. "Shells used" was suggested but never used. After page 90, the ledger ceased using column rules, and for a few years they were drawn in. In mid-January 1940, weather conditions and remarks are merged into one wide column.

MEMBERS OF THE CLUB

The log opens with a six-day visit, from 20 November to 25 November 1922, by Lewis M. Borden, Elting Harp, and M. W. Munsill; they were followed in December by D. C. Adams and William D. Judson. It seems likely that these men founded the club, for they continued to hunt in many of the years that followed.

The difficulty of finding biographical detail for club members suggests a subject for further research, but the 1920 federal census provides background informa-

Date	Names	Territory	Coveys	Birds Killed	Dogs
1922- Nov 20	E. L. Harp & Mark Munsill	Whites & Munsow	10	29	
" "	L. M. B. & Jack	Philips	4	3	Check & Jack

Opening entries of log of the Borden/Bonlee Shooting Club

(Jim Edwards, Siler City)



"Borden & Judson"

(Photo courtesy of Jim Edwards)

tion for some of the hunters. Lewis M. Borden, 40, modestly identifies himself as a "milk merchant." It was his father, Gail Borden, who patented a process for evaporating milk in 1856.

Borden lived in New York City with his wife, three sons, one daughter, and six servants. He hunted every year through the 1934-1935 season, twice visiting on five different occasions in a single year. His son Gail, 11 years old in 1920, accompanied him the first eight winters and again in the last year, and another son or daughter, Bunny, was with him for three seasons in the early 30s.

Elting Harp, 59 in 1920 and living in New Paltz, New York, gave his occupation to the census taker as "real estate agent." He hunted in eight of the first twelve seasons. On his last visit, Harp became seriously ill and spent most of the time in bed. Borden stayed on with him almost ten days after the season closed before returning to New York.

Marcus Munsill, 26 years old in 1920, is listed as head of household, living on Park Avenue with his widowed mother, 45, and one servant. He claims to have no occupation. After hunting four of the first six years, he disappears from the record.

D. C. Adams remains unidentified; he hunted for three seasons, either alone or with a son, Howard, before dropping from the log. Perhaps he became discouraged. Three days in February 1924 brought the comments, "Unspeakable. Incessant rain. . . Unwriteable. More Incessant rain. . . 4" Snow to Noon! And 2 days of the season left. Well, it's all in the sporting game!" The next year in January was not much better, when he and Howard hunted for five days with Borden and his son. One day he "didn't see a bird," and on another day the boys went rabbit hunting, killing four, and then possum hunting at night. Adams comments, "Moon too bright, or not bright enough. I forget which." His last entry is, "It's no use!"

William D. Judson, 49 in 1920, is listed as a "dry goods merchant" living in Westchester County and served by a governess, chauffeur, and cook. Having neglected to record them in the log, he sent details of his December 1925 visit, using letterhead stationery from Parker, Wilder & Co., commission merchants of Boston and New York. Judson missed only one season over the life of the club and in two seasons made three

separate trips. His son, W. David Judson, was with him during six seasons. Judson was usually a meticulous record-keeper, especially in the early years.

Close to fifty other names appear in the log over the twenty-year period. I could identify very few of them in the census. Ralph Hubbard, 36, was a cotton broker; Isham Henderson, 42, a lawyer; G. Aberdeen Young, 31, a securities salesman; Frederick Godley, 34, architect; James Kineon, 36, no occupation; F. N. Bedford, 26, with Standard Oil. Helen Bedford made two trips to North Carolina and was considered an excellent shot, one of the few hunters to be credited with "a double" and an exception to what was apparently an all-male sport. Unidentified frequent visitors were H. P. Shedd, Burgoyne Hamilton, A. W. Putnam, William F. Irwin, and E. B. Boies.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Weather during quail season bounced from hot to cold, typical of North Carolina winters. During one visit, D. C. Adams recorded clear, 32° on Wednesday and Thursday, 65° on Friday, 36° on Saturday, 66° on Monday, 40° with high wind on Tuesday, 30° on Wednesday, and 50° on Thursday. His visit in January 1924 started "wet, wind, raw" and continued "cloudy, raw," "cold, cloudy, very cold in late afternoon" and on Sunday "8°, water froze in pitchers, couldn't warm house," but the next day brought the sun and warmth and Tuesday was "warm, ideal day." The temperature didn't seem to affect hunting so much as the rain. When it rained, the hunters often did not go out; however, in January 1937 after rain four days out of five, the comment was "Very bad weather but we found birds every day" and 68 coveys yielded 60 birds. And after four days in January 1935 he described as "the worst quail hunting weather I ever saw - clear, cold, windy, wet in fields," B. C. Edwards reported that James P. Kineon and his son found 26 coveys and killed 34 birds.

HUNTING TERRITORY

Visits might be as few as three days long or as much as a week. Hunters usually went out in pairs, morning and afternoon, with a local guide and dogs. Braxton C. Edwards, "Brack" or "Brax," was the only guide in the early years, but

other guides listed in the log are Eugene Straughan, R. L. Edwards (Brack's father, usually referred to as "Mr. Edwards"), and Bert Brewer (for hunting tur-

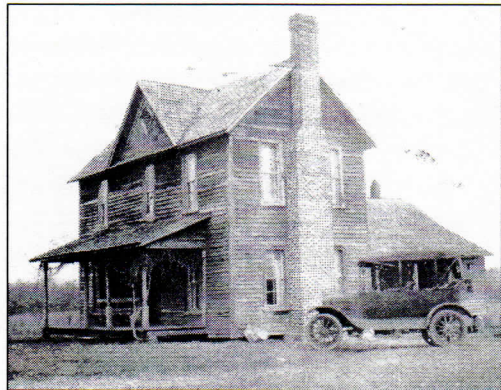


"Brack"

(Photo courtesy of Jim Edwards)

key). Later, when four men wanted to hunt both morning and afternoon, Clyde Phillips was the second guide.

B. C. Edwards lived on property adjoining Providence Church, about five miles south of Siler City. His wife Faye taught school. Their son Jim, current owner of the log, recalls that the family moved to Bonlee in the early



"Providence"

(Photo courtesy of Jim Edwards)

1930s when Mr. Borden decided he needed access to a telephone and perhaps other amenities, such as electricity. Edwards's 45-acre farm was used as hunting territory, both before

and after the move to Bonlee, and other acreage was leased as well. One of the loose papers in the log book is "A List of North Carolina Hunting Leases" for the year from December 1931. It lists 108 lessors leasing 11,378 acres at a rate of 10¢ an acre, but I could identify fewer than half of these in the log entries for the 1931-32 season. Leases ranged in size from as little as ten acres to one of 420 acres; most were smaller than 100 acres. In the log the same names or places repeat over the years: White, Harper, Phillips, Yow, Crabtree, Harper's Crossroads, Bonlee, Hickory Grove, Rabbit Crossroads, Welch, Brewer, Brafford, and others. In 1937, according to Braxton's report, leases were negotiated for 10,000 acres at 7.5¢ an acre.

Although no hunting was done on Sundays, occasionally Borden noted the day's activities. On 20 January 1927 he attended morning service at Providence Church, hunted arrowheads in the afternoon (finding none), and bought two pointer pups for \$10 each from F. C. Houston in Mt. Vernon Springs. He noted that because they were his property there would be no club charge for purchase or keep. In December 1928 Sheriff Lane paid a call and invited Borden to dinner, where he met the rest of Lane's family. In January 1935 Borden called on Alex Cockman, Mr. Cummings, Sr., Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Everet at the Hickory Mountain club, and left pointer pups Mutt and Jeff with Mr. Fields at Goldston for him to handle and break. Other callers through the years were Mr. and Mrs. Kitt Miller, Mr. Lane, Jr., R. L. Edwards (Braxton Edwards's father), and Mr. Murrow, who ran a shooting club nearby.

FINANCIAL RECORDS

Several of the loose pages found in the log book provide a glimpse of financial arrangements between

Braxton Edwards and the Bonlee/Borden club. One is a letter from Edwards to Borden written in June 1933. Edwards had just returned from a trip to New York, where Mr. Bedford had shown him the sights. He seems to be confirming the sale of hunting dogs to Shedd, Bedford, Judson, and Borden. He proposes that he lease the land, look after it as in the past, and take other hunters out when club members had not reserved dates. Each club member would pay \$100 toward the lease and would be entitled to ten days hunting with choice of dates. The hunters would pay separately for transportation to either Sanford or Greensboro, using either Edwards or someone else. (The hunters usually arrived and departed by train from Sanford, and these facts are frequently noted in the log.)

In a report of the 1936-1937 season, Edwards received loans to meet his cash flow needs: \$100 in April, \$500 in May, \$100 in August. He charged \$4 a day each for boarding ten dogs, \$140 for auto expenses, \$40 for sale of a trained dog, and reimbursement for miscellaneous expenses (\$12 in taxes for the ten dogs, \$5 for three bushels of corn for turkeys, and \$7.71 for three cartons of clay pigeons). His accounting left the club owing him \$225.29.

In another report, Edwards calculated his net income for the same period at \$296.50. He received \$10 a day per hunter, from which he paid a second guide at the rate of \$4 a day, netting a total of \$636. Chauffeuring hunters to and from the railroad station in Sanford cost \$5 a trip and totalled \$87.50 for the season. Gratuities to Edwards and his wife, at the rate of \$10 a day per guest, came to \$150. Total receipts of \$896.50 were offset by leasing costs of \$950 (of which the club paid \$250), wages to a hired hand and a cook, and supplies (\$1 per day per man).

GOOD AND BAD DAYS IN THE FIELD

There were good days and bad days for the hunters. The good days brought laconic comments, such as "Good bird day . . . exceptionally good conditions. . . Fair Bird Day" and one exuberant "More birds than I ever saw" in 1938. The disappointing days were noted with more particularity: "ground wet, no birds out . . . singles would not stick . . . poor shooting. . . a pleasant walk [ironically, for no coveys were encountered] . . . birds in woods, hard shooting. . . birds wild, would not stick. . . coveys in thickets, wild. . . from 1 P.M to 6 found 1 covey. We think they left the country."

The Chatham Historical Journal is an occasional publication of the Chatham County Historical Association, Inc., whose mission is to preserve and communicate the history of Chatham County, North Carolina. Correspondence should be addressed to CCHA, P.O. Box 93, Pittsboro, NC 27312.

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While the hunting was primarily for quail, both woodcock and turkey were shot and became part of the record. Turkey hunts were led by Bert Brewer on his land. The first turkey was shot in 1927 and merited a recording in large letters. Over the twenty years, only fourteen turkeys were shot and but thirteen woodcock were recorded. One of the best hunts recorded was in February 1928, when nine coveys netted 20 quail; however, Borden was constrained to note that Mr. Edwards was shooting.⁴

Daily bags were totalled for a season's record, though these are not easily compared because both number of days and number of hunters varied considerably. In the 12-day season of 1924-1925 (noted above as a particularly dismal season), only 28 coveys and 38 birds were totalled, while in 34 days in 1928-1929 the hunters flushed 268 coveys, shooting 431 birds, two turkeys, and one woodcock.

Borden enthusiastically summed up the season with the comment, "Good season -- lots of quail and turkeys left for seed and prospects for next year excellent."

The log names the dogs used for each hunt, noting "setter" or "pointer" when two dogs

have the same name. The names repeat for several years and are slowly replaced with new ones: Beauty, Bone, Jack, Old Jack, Jake, Lady, Mack, Max, Dan, Old Dan, Queen, Friskie, Speck, Spot, Sport.

CONCLUSION

The log kept by Borden's Shooting Club does not address many aspects of the quail-hunting clubs in Chatham County, and we can only wish that the stories told by hunters and handlers were written down for their insights into the men (and a few women) who were involved. The log does provide, however, the detail that helps us see William D. Judson and his son David going out with Brack Edwards and the dogs Frisky and Dan the setter on a clear, bright, warm December afternoon, hunting from Brooks's to J. R. Gilbert's and flushing five coveys, three in the last hour, to shoot twelve birds: "good shooting."

NOTES

1. Hadley, Wade H., Doris G. Horton, and Nell C. Strowd, *Chatham County, 1771-1971* (Pittsboro: Chatham County Historical Association, Inc., 1971), p. 352-353.
2. Earley, Lawrence S., "Quail Paradise in the Piedmont," *Wildlife in North Carolina*, December 1986, p. 18-23.
3. Gilmore, Brooks, "Gilmore Lodge," *Chatham Historical Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, August 2003.
4. Earley cites oral histories collected by Don Follmer in 1968. Dewey Bulla, one of the men interviewed, said that "stirring up 18 to 20 coveys a day was average, but that the Yankees were terrible shots" and one was so bad that the dog handlers, fearful that he might become discouraged, shot birds the day before taking him out to hunt so that they could plant them for a dog to "retrieve."



"Friskie & Dan, 1933"

(Photo courtesy of Jim Edwards)

3	3	overcast & with north east wind with rain 3.30	Birds in open
4	9	" " " " " " " "	Birds open & flushed 2 in 20 min.
0	0	cloudy & warmer Brack shot 1 Turkey 2 Rabbits	Net of very soft underfoot
7	12	south west wind, with many cumulus clouds, some rain in P.M. to 6	flushed 2 coveys, 2nd shot they left the country
9	20	Temp - about 50 & cloudy	My Edwards shot
43	51	1 Large Hen Turkey L.M.B. (Note - Turkeys seem to be on the increase - 10 seem to be in flock in field) Weather cold raw & windy shot clay birds in afternoon	Cold & Windy - Raw there 2d shot at two (2)
Total for Season		168 242	- Note - Both quail & turkeys seem to be on hand turkeys for release to mate with wild birds and will admit for release to mate with local birds - L.M.B. Going to give em H... next year

Final entries for 1927-1928 season. Column headings are Coveys, Birds Killed, Weather Conditions, Remarks.