

My Memories of Gaddy's Goose Pond

BY BUCK WHELESS

The pond that is known today as Gaddy's Goose Pond was constructed in 1933 and 1934 by hand labor and mule drawn drag pans. It took two summers work during the off season from farm work, July and August, to complete the one acre pond. The purpose that Mr. Gaddy had in mind for this pond was to provide a place for Mrs. Pat Ross, mother of Mrs. Hazel Gaddy to have a place to fish. She (Mrs. Ross) loved to fish.

After the pond had filled with water, Mr. Gaddy moved the six Canada geese that he had used as live decoys to hunt wild geese in the fields along the Pee Dee River, to the pond. The use of live decoys for hunting was prohibited beginning in 1934. The decoys had been kept in a pen with a small water hole behind the Gaddy's home on Grassy Island Road in Ansonville.

In the fall of 1934 the six decoys were joined by nine wild geese. These geese were fed and protected by the Gaddys until they migrated north the next spring. The wild geese in this flyway are known as Southern James Bay geese. They nest and raise their young on Southern James Bay, Canada. In the fall they migrate south, spend the winter and fly north again, usually in March. These geese returned the following fall and brought a few more with them for a total of 14 wild geese the second year.

By early December 1940 Mr. Gaddy, who was a nightly visitor and rummy player at my Uncle Jim's store told us that the flock numbered 192 that day. Since we saw Mr. Gaddy nearly everyday we got first hand information about what was going on at the pond. The Gaddy's kept close watch on the geese and provided plenty of corn. By 1942 the flock had grown to 800 and by 1944 several thousand geese were wintering at Gaddy's Pond. The pond had to be enlarged and was expanded several times. A new pond was dug several years later increasing the area in water to eight acres.

The geese were now flying out to feed in farmer's fields around the refuge and along the creeks and rivers in this area, sometimes flying 15 to 20 miles to feed. Hunting the geese was becoming a very popular sport in the Ansonville area.

There is a low-lying area about a mile southwest of Gaddy's that covers about 38 acres. It is surrounded on the Brown Creek side by a levee that is about one half mile long. No one living knows when it was built, but it is believed that it was built to grow rice. This place is known as the Mash. When Brown Creek floods, this area is covered in water and is a natural area for waterfowl. The geese from Gaddy's would fly to the Mash late in the afternoon, usually after sunset, roost and then fly back early in the morning, providing shooting for hunters who were waiting along the way for them. This property was owned

by the Thomas Tyson estate and was bought by Mr. Gaddy in 1946.

Gaddy's goose pond was becoming very popular and widely known. Many newspapers and magazines were sending writers and photographers to Gaddys. The NC State and Life are two that come to mind but there were several national magazines that published articles about the Gaddys and the geese.

In 1945 Jim Wheless moved into the Colson house at the pond to help Mr. and Mrs. Gaddy care for the geese. He lived there for five or six years and was succeeded by Lane Lee, Bill Little, Hamer Burr, Gene Pond, Frank Lanier, Robert Bennett and Thomas Smith were all caretaker over the years.

Near the end of the 1945-46 season, the Gaddys were feeding many bushels of corn each week and had covered all costs out of their pockets up to this time. A decision was made to charge a small admission of ten cents per person to cover some the cost. This was not enough to cover the expenses, so in 1946 the admission fee was raised to twenty cents. Sometime later it was raised to twenty-five cents and at a later date to a half-dollar.

During the winter of 1947 the Gaddys drove to Kingville, Ontario Canada to visit the Jack Miner Sanctuary. Jack Miner had been, as Mr. Gaddy had a goose hunter who decided to become a friend of waterfowl and started to feed and protect them. After they began to congregate on his ponds, he wanted to try to follow their migration routes. He decided to try to catch birds and place on the leg a band with his name and address so that hunters could notify him when they killed a bird that he had banded.

He (Jack Miner) built a large catch pen with a gate that would open on one side, allowing the ducks and geese to walk or swim in to get food. When a large number—from one hundred to several hundred—were inside the gate would be dropped, trapping the birds inside. They were then banded and released. The first band was placed on a duck on September 10, 1909. That duck was killed near Greenwood, SC in January 1910. Since that time, many thousands of birds have been banded. Hunters in the Ansonville area have recovered many Jack Miner bands.

Mr. Miner began putting a verse of scripture on every band soon after he began. Each band now reads—Jack Miner, Kingville, Ont. —a verse of scripture and the year that the bird was banded. Some birds wear these bands for years. One band was recovered that the goose had worn for 26 years. Several geese wearing Miner bands could be seen on the bank at Gaddys at the same time on days when the geese were being feed. This was when the flock numbered several thousand.

Jack Miner died on November 3, 1944 and Jaspar Miner, son of Jack Miner was operating sanctuary, at the time on the Gaddys visit. The year following the Gaddys visit to Canada, Mr. and Mrs. Jaspar Miner visited the Gaddys in Ansonville. They spent several

days here. Mr. Miner was very knowledgeable about waterfowl and was a very interesting and entertaining person.

Mr. Jasper Miner seemed amazed at how tame and trusting the geese were here. He said three or four hundred feet was as near as they would let you come at his place, and here they were almost underfoot. This is still a mystery to many people. The way Mr. and Mrs. Gaddy handled them had to be the reason.

In early 1950 Mr. Rufus Ingold finished building a four-acre pond behind his service station and café on Highway 52. This is the present location of the Ansonville and Joel's restaurants. Mr. Ingold started to feed and protect the geese that came to his pond which is only one half mile from Gaddys. The geese moved between the two ponds and this area was protected. No hunting was allowed between the ponds. By this time an area within one half mile of either pond was closed to waterfowl hunting.

Mr. Ingold had several thousand geese on his pond, and he hired a caretaker to look after and feed them. Ingold's pond was operated as a refuge through the spring of 1953. During that time the geese were being fed and protected at both locations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that the goose flock in Anson County reached 18,000 birds, mostly in the Ansonville area.

Mr. Lockhart Gaddy, who knew that he had a serious heart condition died suddenly in the early afternoon of February 19, 1953. He was sitting by the pond with Mrs. Gaddy at his side. He was buried a short distance from the pond. The NC Legislature closed for business upon learning of Mr. Gaddy's death. Many people attended the funeral, which was held at the pond. It is said that the geese remained silent during the service.

Mrs. Gaddy carried on the work of caring for the geese after Mr. Gaddy's death. Mrs. Gaddy was assisted by her niece; Mrs. Patti Pond and her husband Gene.

In the fall of 1953, Mr. Rufus Ingold reached a decision to convert his pond and fields from a refuge to a commercial waterfowl hunt. He built blinds and rented them to hunters on a one-day basis. Goose shooting was good at Ingold's and it became a very popular hunting site. Hunters came to hunt with Rufus from a wide area and his blinds were booked months in advance. His wife, Mrs. Glennie Ingold, kept all the hunters in the area well-fed in her café. Her fame as a cook was widespread and much discussed among hunters and others. Rufus and others used to say that there were more hunters who come to eat Mrs. Glennie's cooking than there were who really came to hunt.

Many geese were being killed in the Ansonville area, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not believe that the flock was being overshot or endangered. The government encouraged hunters and landowner blind operators, offering suggestions as to what crops to grow other ways to legally improve hunting.

George Ross, who lived in China Grove, was the Federal Agent in charge of enforcement of waterfowl regulations. He was a fair and reasonable man and was respected by hunters, landowners and blind operators alike. Relations were also good with most of the State Game Wardens. Ralph Griffin was the local warden and got along well with the landowners and hunters.

After the hunting began on the Ingold Farm, due to lack of sufficient water, space, and good the goose population in Anson County was reduced to between 10,000 and 12,000 birds. Hunting was being done over a wide area of the Ansonville area. Some landowners were leasing their property to private hunt clubs but several continued to offer commercial blinds. This substantially aided the economy of this region. Hunters from all over North and South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia and many other states came to Anson County to hunt geese.

Visitors from every state in the Union and at least sixteen foreign countries signed the registration book one season at Gaddy's. These ledgers were kept on a stand on the outside of the store building and visitors were encouraged to sign the book. Many did sign but some did not. Many dignitaries, politicians, sport figures and religious leaders were among those who come to see the geese.

In late summer of 1962 the people of the community learned by the news media that the U.S. Department of the Interior planned to purchase land and establish a federal wildlife refuge in Anson and Richmond counties. The media quoted some officials, as saying some 10,000 acres would be necessary. No landowners had been informed by the government of this plan. There was some support for it among local citizens, but many people and most landowners opposed it.

Meetings were held with the county commissioners in both counties and with Congressman Charles Raper Jonas. The commissioners in both counties were divided despite the fact that they had been asked by many people and practically all of the landowners to vote against it. Mrs. Gaddy bitterly opposed the government plan. Feelings ran high for some time. The committees in Washington allowed it to proceed without giving local residents an audience. Well, it passed and negotiations began with some landowners to purchase their property.

In the early fall of 1964, a large military maneuver was held in Anson and surrounding counties. This began in September and lasted until the day before Goose season opened on November 7th. There were thousands of troops, many vehicles and aircraft involved. Many fighter planes were used to strafe conveyors on the highway and many helicopters were used in the Ansonville area. This came at a bad time of the year for waterfowl because the geese were scared to death of the helicopters. We believe many geese left and never returned because the population dropped to 6,000 or so birds.

One-year later two men from Concord went to Gaddy's pond early on a Saturday morning and started shooting geese on the pond. They shot many times, 20 to 25 it was said and killed some geese and crippled many more. They were retrieving geese from the water when Mrs. Gaddy arrived. She held them at gunpoint until Sheriff's deputies arrived and took them into custody. They were later tried before a federal magistrate in Charlotte, and let off with very light fines. I believe they were only fined \$100 each. Many people were upset about how light the fines were.

The government began to acquire some property and one tract was the Sullivan place on the south side of Brown Creek. A sizable waterfowl impoundment was constructed on this land by Pee Dee Refuge and it attracted many ducks. The Refuge office was also put on this tract. The office was built along Highway 52 about a half-mile south of Brown Creek.

Mr. Rufus Ingold who had fed and protected the geese for several years and then provided hunting opportunities for thousands of hunters later died in a tragic accident on September 14, 1970. His farm tractor overturned into one of the ponds that were used for hunting geese. Mr. Ingold was found several hours after the accident under the almost completely submerged tractor.

Less than two years later, Mrs. Gaddy, who had gone through a rather lengthy period of declining health, passed away on April 13, 1972 after many years of wonderful work with her beloved geese. She was buried beside her husband a few feet from the pond. [The pond then went to Dr. Bill Boyce-nephew to Mr. Gaddy and Mrs. Patti Pond -niece to Mrs. Gaddy.]

Mrs. Patti Pond and her son Tommy carried on what the Gaddy's had done for so many years. They kept it going for three years after Mrs. Gaddy's death, despite having to deal with the fuel shortage, with gasoline being rationed and with motorists being unable to purchase gasoline on weekends. Practically all travel for pleasure was stopped, so visitors who were able to visit the pond were few. Due to this and other factors Tommy and Mrs. Pond chose to close the pond to the public after April 1, 1975. A group of local people talked to Tommy about letting this group try to keep the pond open part time, but he and Mrs. Pond thought it was best not to do so.

So Gaddy's Pond was closed to the public and remained closed for fifteen years. The geese that remained in the dwindling flock continued to use Gaddy's Pond for home. The Refuge was providing more than ample food and habitat but the geese stayed at Gaddy's. Despite all that was being done on the Refuge the flock was becoming smaller each year. The area around the pond was rapidly becoming overgrown with trees and brush and the dam on the upper pond had broken in a hurricane rain in 1979 and it was dry and growing up too. The island had large pine and gum trees growing on it.

In September 1990 Tommy and Mrs. Pond decided to offer some interested people an

opportunity to try and save the flock which had now dropped to fewer than one hundred. Nine people, including Tommy, worked four full afternoons with chain saws, a winch provided by Tom McRae and two tractors, one of which was furnished by Jeff Martin. This crew cleared and removed the trees and brush from about an acre along the bank and in front of the buildings. This space was large enough to feed the eighty-six geese that came the first winter. The nine men who made up the work crew that did this work were: Smoky Tyson, Tommy Pond, Alan Gibson, Bobby Tyson, Jeff Martin, John Hill, Charles Perry, Bo Stukes and Buck Wheless.

Bill Thompson, Tommy Pond and Buck Wheless kept the geese fed. Two of the geese in the group that spent the first winter were wearing yellow collars, but we did not have a spotting scope, so we did not record these numbers.

John Springer learned of the effort being made to try to clean up the feeding area around the pond and very generously offered the use of his large bulldozer for the entire summer if we could find an operator. Bill Thompson's health was failing and he had retired from his world as a salesman. He saw that this was an opportunity to get the pond and surroundings cleaned up, so he said "I know how to do what needs to be done, and I can work two or three hours a day" and he did.

Bill spent most of the first summer working a little while almost everyday. It took two more summers for him to restore the grounds around the pond and several acres of the hillside to the condition that it was in before the pond closed in 1975. He also repaired the dam to the upper pond that had been washed out since 1979. It has since refilled with water. Bill did a beautiful job and deserves much credit. Thanks Bill.

Also, without the use of John's bulldozer this work could not have been done. He accepted no pay and even furnished the fuel to run the machine the seventy-five to one hundred hours that it was used the first summer. This was a major contribution and all that are involved are grateful to John for his help. He has also donated corn

The winter of 1991-92 showed a slight increase in birds. We reached 110 and the next year we had 200 to spend the winter. During this time we had several geese that were wearing orange collars. One season there were nine, then seven, another year five then one, and then we had none for a year or two. The collars are only put on the geese in Southern James Bay in Canada. Since 1992 the staff members at the Pee Dee Refuge, beginning with Rick Roseman, have read the collars with spotting scopes. Harold Patterson had been very cooperative with the Goose Pond crew.

We have only had one collared goose to return to Gaddys for a second winter. That leads us to believe that these geese are being killed when they return to Southern James Bay in the spring. Many wildlife officials also think this is happening and we are told that an effort is being made to work out an agreement with the Canadian Wildlife Service to try to

at least slow it down. The few people, they say that live in this area stay frozen in all winter, and when spring and the geese arrive they want fresh meat and outside activity too.

We reached a high of 220 birds on one day in 2001-2002. In November of 2001, Lee Efird, JD Bricken, Walter Gibson and Buck Wheless traveled to Kingville, Ontario to visit Kirk Miner at the Jack Miner Sanctuary. Kirk is a son of Jaspar Miner and grandson of Jack Miner. Kirk told us that his father talked of his trip to Ansonville until his death in 1999. We had hoped that Tommy Pond and Bill Thompson would go with us, but Tommy said that his workload would not permit him to leave. Bill did not feel well enough to make the trip. He was hospitalized a day or two after we returned.

While we were at the sanctuary Kirk and his assistant Joe caught about 40 geese and 150 ducks in the same catch pen that was used by his father and grandfather. Some of the birds in this catch and been banded previously, but we placed bands on 29 geese and 127 ducks. The ducks that we banded included the 100,000th duck to be banded at the Jack Miner Sanctuary. This was placed on a young mallard drake. Band number 99,999 was put on a mallard hen by JD Bricken, manager of Pee Dee Refuge. The number of geese that have been banded reached 98,981 that morning. So on November 26, 2001 the number of ducks and geese banded by the Miners totaled more than 199,000. It was a thrill to be able to see and be a part of this, and especially to place the band on the 100,000th duck. Two Jack Miner bands were placed on a goose by Kirk for Bill Thompson to watch for at Gaddys. We all hoped that Bill would spot this goose one day but it did not happen. We will still be looking for this goose.

The bank on the east side of the pond had never been properly cleared because we didn't have the necessary equipment. George and Andy Beachum volunteered to do this for us with their backhoe. JD Bricken, Darin Brandenburg and Mack Rodgers from the Pee Dee Refuge brought their new bulldozer and cleared away the debris after George and Andy had dug it off and away from the bank. Nat Black also helped move the brush with his skidder. This project required several hours of work with the equipment and it was all done without charge. Many thanks to everyone who helped.

JD, Darin, Lee Efird and John Bishop cut down the trees and brush on the island again, and after it had dried for several weeks Lee did a real good burn on it while Bill, John, Samson (Buck's dog) and Buck watched. When he had finished and waded back to the trucks on the bank, Bill said, "Lee, WE really did a good job!"

It should now be stated that since the cleanup began in 1990, all the work done has been free. No one has charged one cent.

After reaching 220 geese in 2001-2002 we were hopeful that we were heading up. The first 14 geese arrived on Oct. 15, 2002, about 3 weeks earlier than they had since we started

over in 1990. There were new additions nearly every day and on Oct.31, we had 270 geese. Greg Walmsley of the Pee Dee staff and Lee Efird are the official counters. We depend on these two. Some of the early arrivals left and on Nov.18, 2002 we only had 160 birds. (We don't know where they go but we suspect that they may migrate south to the Santee Cooper. The refuge there had 1200 Southern James Bay Geese in 2002-03.) Then new geese arrive and on Nov. 30, 2002, Lee counted 350. This was the first time we had passed the 300 mark. On Dec. 18, 2002 Greg counted 363, including one white front goose, which is not usually found in this flyway. This was the high count for the season. Two geese wearing orange collars also arrived on this date. The white front goose left after 3 days but the two collared geese stayed until they migrated on March 4, 2003. The last geese left on March 19, 2003.

Bill helped feed the geese for the last time on December 29, 2002. He became ill and was placed in the hospital the next day. Bill died on Jan. 7, 2003 and was buried at Bethlehem Cemetery. They said that there were more people at the visitation than the Funeral home had ever seen before. Many people also attended the funeral.

All the corn that has been fed to the geese for the past twelve years had been donated by farmers and purchased with contributions from interested citizens. Tom and Dale McRae, John Springer, Carey Edwards, Bobby, Joe and Cecil Sikes, Jr., John Bishop, Lee Efird and Pee Dee Refuge have donated corn. Those who gave cash contributions include: Billy Thompson, Vance Ponds, Cary Sullivan, David Griffin, Alan Gibson, Bill Thompson, John Bishop, Paul Fowler, George Beachum, Tommy Pond, Jim McMillan, Charles Perry, Leondias Ross, Gary Griffin, and Buck Wheless.

Phoebe Medlin and the staff at the Lighthouse Restaurant gave a cash memorial after Bill's death on Jan. 7, 2003. Phoebe, Amy, Carla and other members of the restaurant staff also looked after Bill when it was necessary for him to go the pond alone. They always made sure that he had returned safely. This will always be remembered and appreciated by all members of the Goose Pond Crew. There may be others who contributed cash or in other ways, but Bill kept the records and if anyone has been left out it is not done intentionally.

John Bishop, Lee Efird and others hope to begin to renovate the buildings at the pond in the near future. It will never be the same without Bill but we will try to move one. Working with Bill was a privilege for which I will always be thankful.

May God bless everyone who had contributed in any way to the work at Gaddy's Pond. Many thanks to Tommy, his late mother (Mrs. Patti Pond), and Dr. Bill Boyce for giving us the chance to try to rebuild this flock of Southern James Bay Geese. Thanks to Tommy for encouraging Mrs. Pond and Dr. Boyce to let us try. We know you did it.

I hope there will be good news in the future, but for now this is what I remember about

the past 69 years at Gaddy's Pond.”

— Buck Wheless, 2003