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A MAGICAL JOURNEY

Thomas Vail

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A MAGICAL JOURNEY

A MAGICAL JOURNEY

THOMAS VAIL

CLEVELAND, OHIO

DEDICATION

TO MY THREE GRANDSONS AND
TO MY GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN AS YET UNBORN

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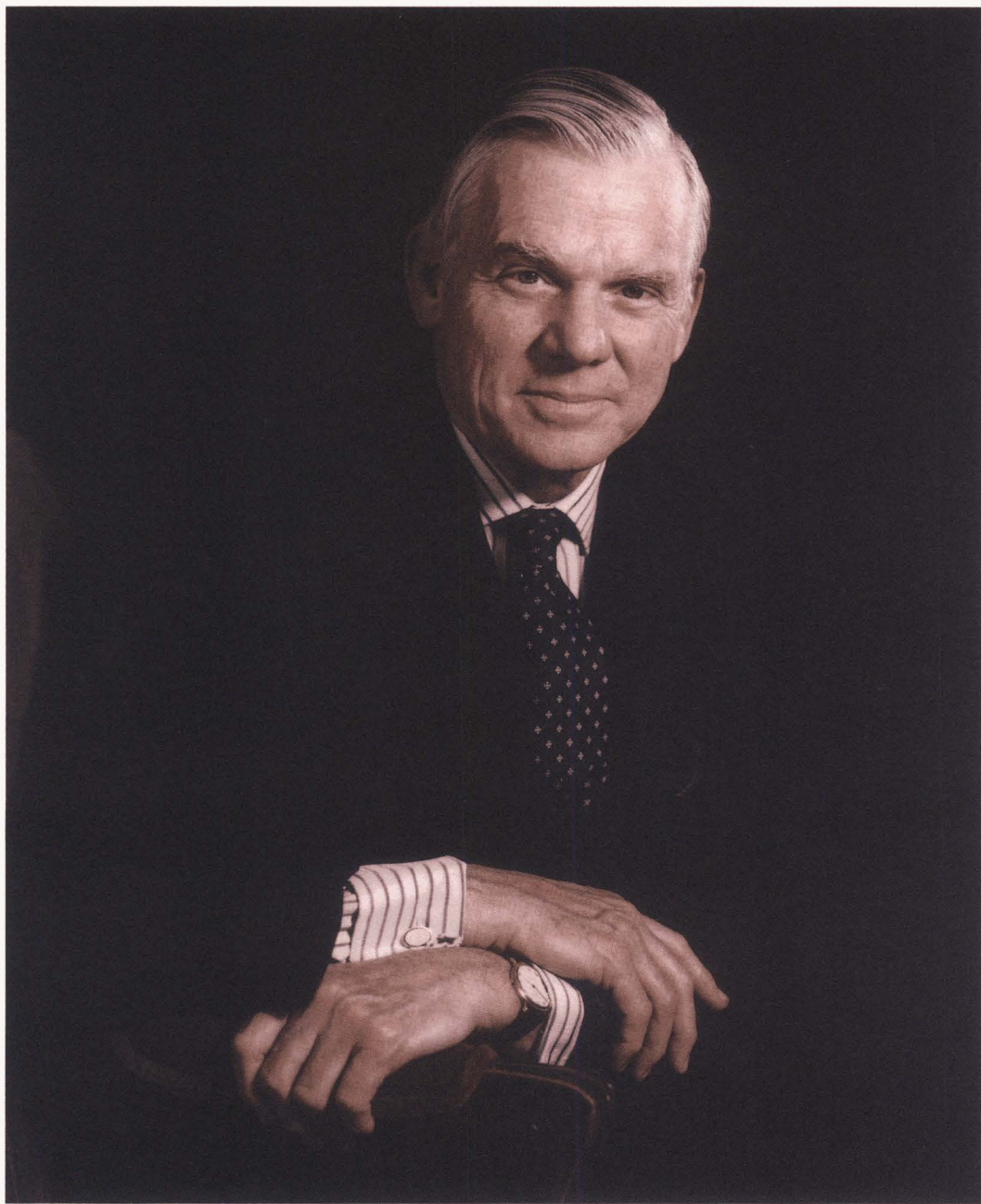
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	9
The Great Depression	13
Princeton and the War Years	19
Newspaper Days	23
Iris	33
A Passion for Collecting	41
Travel and the Sporting Life	47
Civic Engagement	67
Happy Locations	71
A Magical Journey	86



Thomas Vail at 65. Photograph by Yousuf Karsh of Ottawa, 1991

I NTRODUCTION

I am a child of my surroundings. This is a tale of how I related to the world I encountered over eight decades. My lifetime has spanned a revolutionary course of events that no one of my generation could have imagined.

I was born June 23, 1926, at Cleveland, Ohio, to a family of long social, economic and civic prominence. I am persuaded to tell my story, not to talk about myself for good or ill, but as a reporter to recount historic events as an observer and sometimes a participant in the sweep of history from 1926 through the first decade of the 21st century.

This period includes epic events in all aspects of human affairs: economic depression, world war, inventions in communications like television and computers, in transportation like jets, and in access to human knowledge via the Internet. It has also been a time of major changes in our social and political lives, including the absorption of minorities and the election of an African American president of the United States.

The pace of life has become so rapid and overwhelming it raises the question whether human beings have lost control of their destiny. The global economic downturn in 2008–2009 is an example of the lack of control over our affairs. It is obvious that no one knew it was coming or knew what to do about it.

And underlying this economic disaster is the question whether government of any kind anywhere is capable of solving economic problems.

In June 1930, during a period of economic depression similar to 2008–

2009, Winston Churchill made a speech at Oxford University. Elected officials, he said, cannot solve economic problems—because the right thing to do economically generally is not popular politically. When the greatest political mind and performer of the 20th century makes a statement like this it commands our attention, even if we hope Mr. Churchill was wrong.

To add some insights, and I hope some enjoyable moments about my life's journey from 1926 to the present, I will reach back in my memory to bring you a few glimpses of some worlds gone by.



Thomas Vail at 15 with "Dandy," 1941

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

I was three years old when the Depression began in 1929. But for a number of reasons, I was unaffected by it.

All my family on both my father and mother's side came to America in the 1650s and settled in the New England area. They were Anglo-Saxon Protestants. They eventually moved west to Cleveland, attracted by its industrial development. Starting at least with my great-grandparents, my family members were college educated.

By the middle of the 19th century some of my forebears had developed strong entrepreneurial ability. My great-grandfather Thomas Howard White started the White Sewing Machine Company in Massachusetts and in 1875 moved it to Cleveland. It was at one time one of the largest makers of sewing machines. His son, my grandfather, Windsor T. White, along with his brothers founded the White Motor Company in 1901. One of the first makers of automobiles, it became one of the country's largest heavy-duty truck makers after World War I. Windsor White sold his White Motor shares in 1927, which proved a good time to sell.

Because of all this successful economic activity in various branches of the family, my two uncles did not have to work. They spent most of their time playing polo and pursuing shooting sports in many parts of the world.

Growing up in the Depression, I never much noticed the hard times it

*Thomas Vail,
age 3, 1929*



produced for many people. Grandfather Windsor White was a fox hunting gentleman who founded the Chagrin Valley Hunt in 1908. He developed a 1,000-acre estate in suburban Hunting Valley that included a 40-stall stable, indoor and outdoor polo fields, a Guernsey dairy herd, beef cattle, sheep, thousands of chickens and heaven knows what else. All with beautiful rivers, scenic roads, flowers and vegetable gardens in a fabulous valley setting.

My parents owned a lovely English-style house surrounded by beautiful gardens in the Cleveland suburb of Bratenahl. I grew up in this atmosphere with chauffeurs, butlers, maids, cooks, valets and grooms. An English nanny made sure I understood the Anglo-Saxon world and the importance of the king and queen of England!

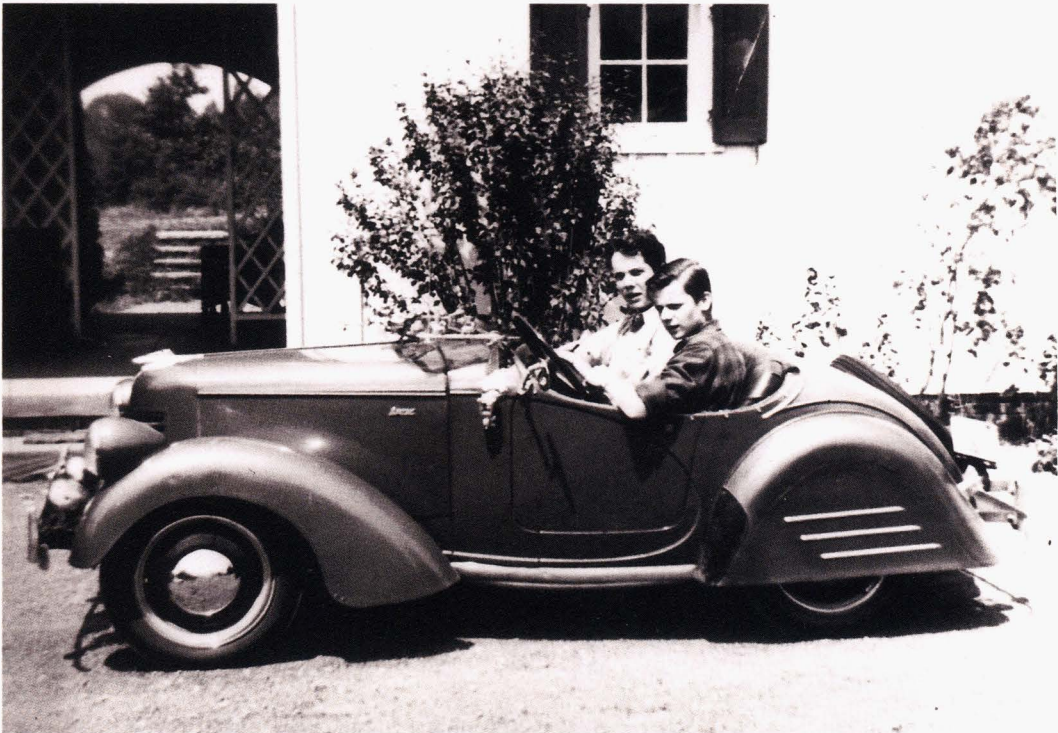
At one point, my parents had a flat on Jermyn Street in London. They hired an Oxford tutor named Teddy Quick to make up for the schooltime I missed during our travels in Europe in the 1930s. (I remember seeing the coronation of King George VI on May 12, 1937.) We also rented a house in Devon.

While the Depression continued, I was traveling, playing polo, fox hunting, hunting a small pack of Beagles and running around my family's properties with my Springer Spaniel in a little Bantam Roadster. My mother had bought the car so that I could enjoy our places as much as possible, which I did!

I had a lot of fun in those years. Studies and athletics were very easy for me, and I made a lot of friends along the way, both male and female.

The family I grew up in were all conservative Republicans who spent their whole lives telling me and anyone who would listen what a terrible person Franklin Delano Roosevelt really was!

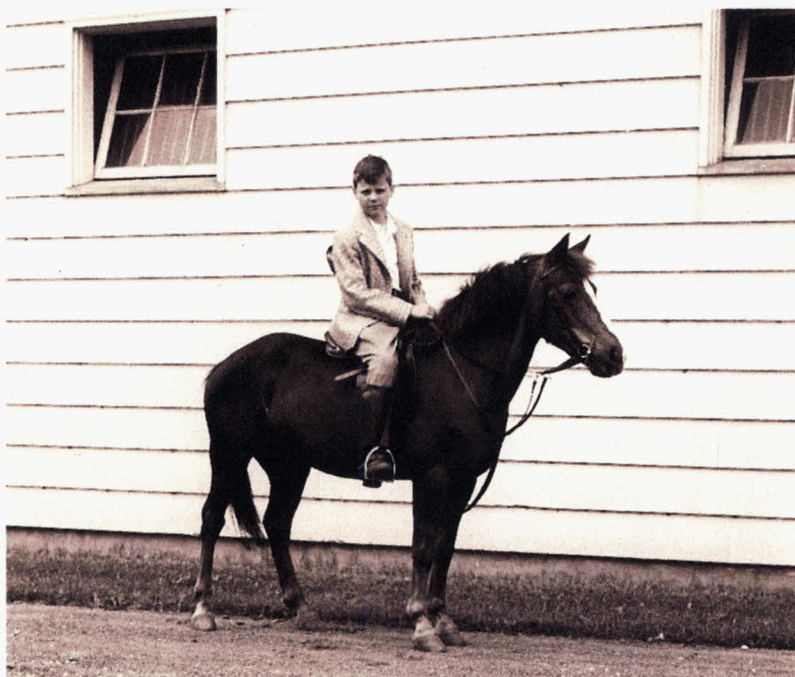
*Thomas Vail at 15 on
“Snip,” Halfred Farms
Polo Field, 1941*



Thomas Vail in his 1940 Bantam Roadster car with his cousin Walter White



*Polo instruction
at Halfred Farms.
(Left to right) Walter
White, Tim White,
Arthur Perkins,
Thomas Vail and
Lansing Vail*



*Thomas Vail on
"Geisha Girl," 1937*



Thomas Vail (at 10) waiting to play polo, Halfred Farms Polo Field, 1936

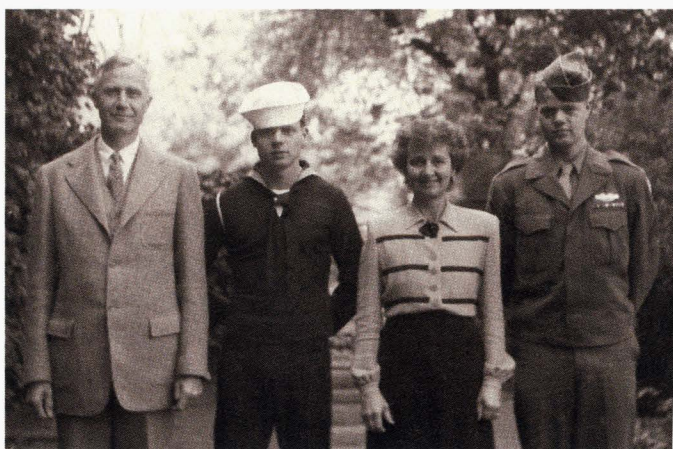


Thomas Vail, Deerfield varsity soccer, 1943

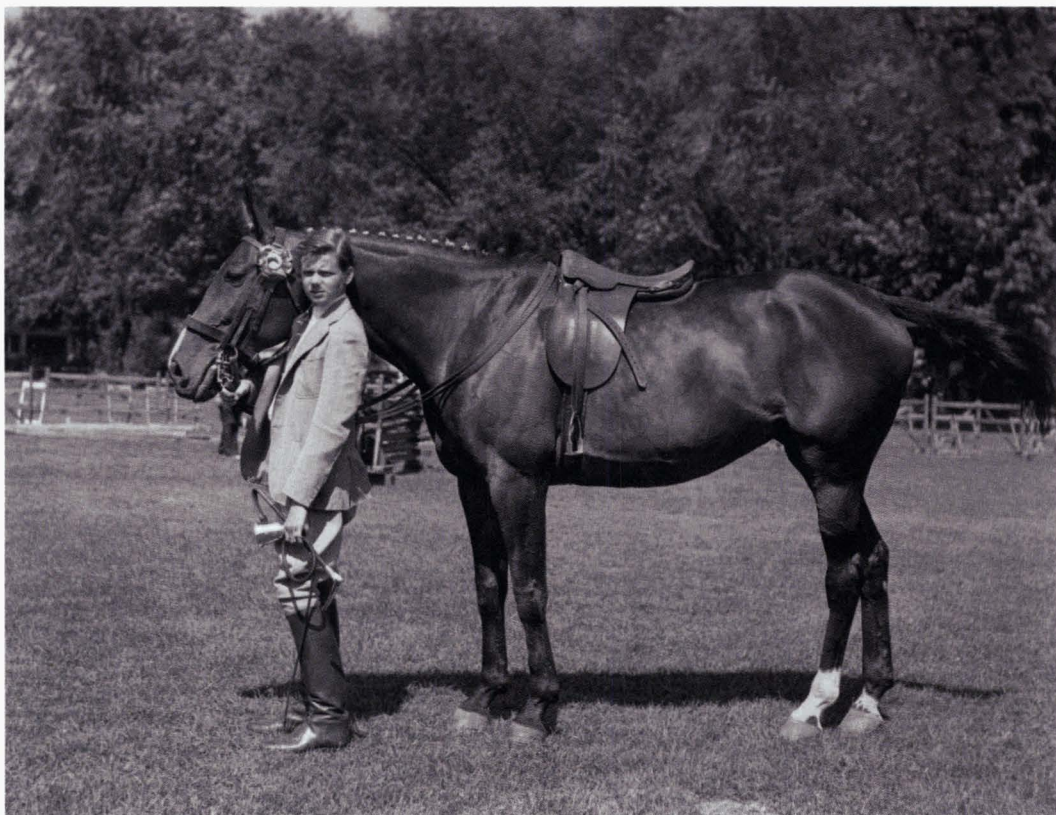
P RINCETON AND THE WAR YEARS

I never paid much attention to any other world than the one I was living in until the beginning of World War II. I spent my first school years at University School, a fine country day school near Cleveland (where in the eighth grade in 1940 I won the middle school prize for public speaking), and then went to prep school at Deerfield Academy at Deerfield, Massachusetts. I took the college boards and was admitted to Princeton, where my father had graduated. I made no study of colleges. I decided to go to Princeton because that seemed like a perfectly nice place.

But before I could enter Princeton, the war intervened. In 1944 when I was 17 years old, I joined the Naval Air Corps. Flight training required us to have some prior college training, so I was sent to two Naval units at Oberlin College and Miami University at Oxford, Ohio. Halfway through, with the war coming to an end and mortality rates dropping, we were told that in order to go to flight training we had to sign up for four more years in the Naval Air Corps.



*The Vail family in 1944.
(Left to right) Herman Vail, Thomas
Vail, Delia White Vail, Lansing Vail*



Thomas Vail and "Mountain Lass" with first prize cup and blue ribbon, Hunter Class, Chagrin Valley Hunt Horse Show, 1941

The alternative was to become a regular line officer, which is what I opted to do. Later I became a full ensign in the Navy.

When I was mustered out of the Navy in 1946, I went to Princeton, which by then was a totally different place because of the G.I. Bill of Rights. Just as I discovered a whole new world when I entered the Navy, I also discovered a whole new world when I entered Princeton. All of it was totally different from the special world in which I had been brought up. But the experiences and the challenges appealed to me. I enjoyed meeting people from different walks of life and finding out what they thought and wanted to do.

I joined the amateur Princeton theatrical group the Triangle Club and also the Charter Club for junior and senior students, eventually graduating *cum*

laude in politics in 1949. Up to this time I had never given any thought to going to work or getting married. Why bother with serious thoughts when you are having a good time?

During the Depression up to 1940, with the fall of France and the beginning of the Battle of Britain, I spent my time playing polo, fox hunting, shooting, playing tennis and generally having a jolly good time. I skated in national figure skating competitions as a young teenager in 1939 and 1940.

Sadly during these years, few Americans gave thought to the rise of Hitler and the disasters that would follow.

In his history of the Second World War, Churchill stated that no war in history could have been more easily avoided than WWII. The fact is that the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy in both America and Britain and a different kind of aristocracy in France simply ignored the dangers until the disasters came upon us. This lovely life I was leading as a youth helped lead to World War II.

Luckily for all of us, instant communications and rapid transportation have now brought the events of the world into all our living rooms. We can no longer ignore the world the way my family and I did in the 1930s and 1940s. The past may have been nice for some at the top, but it led to a disastrous time. Knowing as much as we do now, perhaps we can come up with a way of going that will be better for our future lives. This is my hope and wish.



*Thomas Vail at Halfred
Farms Stable*



Portrait of Liberty E. Holden, who purchased The Plain Dealer in 1885, with his great-grandson Thomas V. H. Vail, publisher and editor, 1963–1991

N EWSPAPER DAYS

In the summer of 1949, I went with my mother and father and my uncle W. Holden “Mike” White and his English wife, Ling, to shoot the red grouse in Scotland. Along the way my father had indicated that I should give some thought to “getting a job”! En route to the shoot in Scotland, my uncle and I went into a pub in York, England. Uncle Mike had always been a favorite of mine, and I like to think the feeling was mutual. He asked what I was going to do next. When he got no response, he said, “Why don’t you try the newspaper business? You are a person of many interests; you can work for the newspaper and see the world coming in every day and decide what you want to do.” Uncle Mike suggested I do this in Cleveland, my hometown. Starting in 1885 and later, my family owned two newspapers in Cleveland. However, no member of the family had ever had anything to do with running these properties. We had family “trustees,” but no “journalists.”

As I had nothing better to do and my mother and father were coming to the end of wanting to support me doing nothing, I returned to Cleveland. My perceptive mother suggested that I work for the *Cleveland News*, which was an evening paper. Her reasoning was that I had not really lived around Cleveland after age 15, having gone away to school, and then the Navy and college. She rightly said an evening newspaper had more regular hours of employment, leaving evenings free so that I could get to know some of the people around the city.

The editor of the *Cleveland News* was a delightful person named Nathaniel Howard who agreed to give me a position as a reporter on the police beat.

Miracles do happen. I loved the police beat and all the characters I met and worked with there. I liked again seeing a way of life totally different from what I had ever encountered before.

Reporting, writing and editing come to me naturally. I think it must be part of my genetic makeup, as I was never trained in any of these skills. Along that line I had written my thesis at Princeton about the rise of the Nazi Party and received for it the highest grade that Princeton gives. Writing was my craft.

However, despite my natural curiosity and writing skills, I had never thought of going into the newspaper business until my Uncle Mike suggested it.

So off I went into the newspaper world. After the police beat, I covered the criminal courts, the courthouse and city hall. In 1953, at the age of 27, I was named political editor. I loved that job, which is one of the most important in a newspaper's city room. I held it for four years and wrote a weekly column.

I liked political people. It was no coincidence that I graduated with honors in politics from Princeton University. As political editor of the *Cleveland News* I was up against competitors in Cleveland and in other parts of the state—real pros who had been in the business of writing about politics for a long time. But the pressure appealed to me. I learned a lot along the way about how our political system works. As many have observed, journalism is the closest thing to politics without actually being in politics.

I managed a few scoops—in particular the first story that a state senator named Anthony J. Celebrezze was going to run for mayor of Cleveland. Celebrezze was a good friend of mine and gave me the story, even though the *Cleveland News* was a Republican newspaper and he was a Democrat. Celebrezze was elected.

In 1957, after four years as political editor, I felt I had done about everything I could do with the job. Some of my perceptive friends, including my wife (I had married in 1951) and a political friend named Al Krenzler, suggested



Thomas and Iris Vail with Princess Margaret (center) at a luncheon for the princess at L'Ecurie, 1979

that I learn something about other aspects of the newspaper business—including how a newspaper was produced, how advertising was sold, and how the paper was distributed by the circulation department.

I went to Mr. I. F. Freiburger, a banker who was the chief executive of the Forest City Publishing Company, which published the evening *Cleveland News* and the morning *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. I told him I wanted to learn something more about the newspaper business. He told me that I was a really good political writer and maybe I should work for the *New York Times*. I told him that wasn't what I had in mind. So Freiburger sent me to see the president



Lester Chorpene

of our company, Sterling Graham. The idea was that I should transfer from the editorial department of the *Cleveland News* to the business department of the *Plain Dealer*, the bigger and more important of the two papers.

Graham told me that they could not afford to pay me as much as I was making as political editor of the *News*. I told him that I was willing to start again at the bottom and learn things from the ground up.

So I ended up working in the press room, in the circulation department riding the trucks, and in various other departments. Newspaper production at that time was largely a “mechanical” process, unlike the electronic production methods of today.

I also worked as a classified advertising salesman and sold display advertising, consisting mostly of ads from department stores. I was given

the most difficult advertising accounts—that is, the main accounts from the *Cleveland Press*, which in those days was a larger daily newspaper than the *Plain Dealer*. The *Press* did not publish a Sunday paper like the *PD*, but in daily circulation it was considerably ahead.

Along the way, I was assigned as an assistant in the labor relations department. There I encountered the *Plain Dealer* labor negotiator, a wonderful man named Lester Chorpening.

I never learned as much about the newspaper business as I did working with Lester Chorpening on our labor relations. This included coping with powerful labor unions in most of the newspaper's departments.

Chorpening was a superb negotiator of Welsh background who had a great sense of values and a strong work ethic. When he saw that I had similar attitudes, he not only taught me a lot but also began to tell company president Sterling Graham that I was a person to “keep an eye on.”

I knew none of this at the time. I just kept working, listening and enjoying what I was doing.

While I was pursuing the varied life of a newspaperman, other events were taking place at the company about which I knew nothing and over which I had no influence.

The directors of the Forest City Publishing Company, which ran both the *Plain Dealer* and the *News*, decided at long last that the company should institute a retirement program at age 65. As there had never been a retirement program, the average age of many people who worked at the company was somewhat advanced.

Suddenly people like Graham and other company officers started to give some thought to people who should succeed them. Several names were apparently suggested. One of them was James Garner of the law firm Baker & Hostetler. Garner handled the legalities of the *Plain Dealer*'s labor negotiations. Because I had also been working on labor negotiations, Graham asked me what I thought of Garner and I spoke very highly of him. I later found out that when Graham asked Garner if he would like to become the head of Forest City

Publishing Company, Garner apparently responded, "Why do you need me when you have Tom Vail?"

I also found out later that Tom Edwards, a lead attorney at Baker & Hostetler for our competitor the *Cleveland Press*, had said to the directors of our company, "The only hope for the *Plain Dealer* is Tom Vail."

While all this was going on, another amazing thing happened. Our advertising manager under Graham was F. William Dugan. Dugan would also have been a prime candidate to succeed Graham. On his own, Dugan went to the company's trustees and told them that the best thing for a family-owned company was to try to get some member of the family who was capable of running it. He said they ought to try Tom Vail.

As I was only 36 years old at the time, the trustees were reluctant to make me the chief executive when Graham retired. Finally, the trustees told Dugan that when Graham retired they would go along with the idea of Tom Vail as publisher of the *Plain Dealer* for six months and see how he did. Graham retired in 1962.

So that is how I became publisher of the paper. Although I was young, I had covered so many bases and made so many friends in the company that I was not afraid to tackle the job. In fact, I looked forward to it in every way. I felt I knew what a newspaper was and how it should operate.

In May 1963, after a few months as publisher, I ran up against an immediate problem. Graham had retired, so I was the head of the company. But I did not have complete control of the editorial department, which was run by a very nice Southern gentleman named Wright Bryan who had been hired by my father and the other Holden trustees.

Because I had covered the Cleveland area backwards and forwards, I had an idea what the people around Cleveland were thinking about and what they wanted from a newspaper. This was not what the *Plain Dealer* was doing or what Wright Bryan was doing. The paper then was staid, conservative, more or less Republican—and, in my opinion, an inconsequential operation.

I wanted to take on Louis Seltzer, the editor of the *Cleveland Press*.



The David Susskind Show, 1969. (Left to right) Thomas Vail, Otis Chandler, David Susskind, Kay Graham, Clifton Daniel

Seltzer was a good, very aggressive newspaperman who had the pulse of the community and was putting out the kind of newspaper that the people in the Cleveland area wanted to read.

So I went to the company directors and told them that I could not build up the *Plain Dealer* without control of the editorial department. I was able to persuade the directors who had hired Bryan to find a new editor. They said, "Well, who shall we get?" I told them I would be willing to take on this job as well. I had spent so much time in the editorial department at the *Cleveland News* that I understood how an editorial department worked and what it should be doing.

The directors said they would be willing to go along with this for a while and see how it worked out. From the time I first became both publisher and editor in 1963, instituting changes and hiring new, younger reporters, the

circulation of the morning *Plain Dealer* started to rise dramatically against the larger evening *Cleveland Press*. We matched the *Cleveland Press* circulation in 1967, and in 1968 we surpassed it to become the largest daily and Sunday paper in Ohio. We also surpassed the *Press* in community leadership, becoming the most important political power in Ohio. This was one of my main ambitions. With these results I did not have to convince the company directors that we were going in the right direction.

All this was quite interesting, particularly as our directors were conservative Republicans and my first act in a presidential election in 1964 was to endorse Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat. This took some persuading on my part, but the directors could see from a business point of view that we were headed in the right direction.

Three years later, in October 1967, I wrote a front-page editorial supporting Carl Stokes, who became the first African American mayor of a major U.S. city. Without our support he could not have won election. The editorial was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Nearly 40 years later, in a letter dated March 16, 2007, Carl Stokes' brother Louis, a longtime congressman, wrote to me: "The front page editorial you partly wrote endorsing Carl's candidacy for Mayor of Cleveland is something he and I will always cherish. Carl wanted that endorsement more than anything because he knew that meant getting the 15% white vote he needed on the west side of the city."

Other people were very helpful to me at the *Plain Dealer*. My two secretaries for over 30 years, Joe Simenic and Carl Bankovich, were the main bulwark against the many people who put pressure daily on the head of a major newspaper for various things they want for good or ill. In addition, Joe Simenic is the dean of the statisticians of baseball at Cooperstown, New York, and has written excellent books about baseball and the Cleveland Indians. Seeking to protect me in various ways, Carl Bankovich on his first day as my secretary suddenly got a call from "The President." Before he would put this person through he asked, "The president of what?" It turned out it was President Johnson calling from Air Force One, and the answer Carl got was, "The President of the United States!"

Another person who contributed a great deal during my newspaper career was Alex Machaskee, who was my assistant for nine years and later succeeded me as publisher of the *Plain Dealer*. Alex did a superb job and was instrumental in arranging private interviews for me with many famous people nationally and internationally.

Karen Ryba, my secretary for over 15 years, has also done a great job keeping me in touch with affairs in so many ways. Like Joe and Carl, Karen knows how to handle people in a diplomatic way and make sure I remember what I have planned to do every day.

After taking on the editorship of the *Plain Dealer*, I hired a lot of bright young reporters who gave the paper an exciting thrust it never had before. I was the subject of articles in *Time* and *Newsweek* covering the new competition in the Cleveland newspaper scene. I appeared twice on the *Today Show*.

Because of all this attention, we started to get a lot of offers from various sources to buy out my family's interest in the Forest City Publishing Company. Although my great-grandfather Liberty Holden had purchased the *Plain Dealer* in 1885, no family member had ever run the paper or taken any particular interest in it until I came along. In 1967, most members of the Holden family no longer lived in Cleveland and none had any interest in putting money into building up the properties.

So in 1967 we sold the *Plain Dealer* to the Newhouse group, who wanted to invest in the newspaper and support everything I was trying to do. The price was \$50 million, a record price for a newspaper at that time.

It was a good arrangement. I stayed another 25 years until my retirement in 1992. The nicest compliment I received at the time of my retirement came from one of the best reporters I ever hired, who ran the *Plain Dealer's* Columbus Bureau and whom I later appointed to head the *PD* editorial and opinion pages. Her name is Mary Anne Sharkey. She spoke on behalf of many of the reporters and managers in the *PD* editorial department, a group that seldom hands out compliments. "He brought integrity to the paper," she said. "He never let the big powers take him over. And he was a good newsman!"



Thomas and Iris Vail, 1978, with (left) "Lucky," High Point champion in 1979

I RIS

Another aspect of my life has been even more important to me than my love of journalism: meeting and marrying Iris Jennings of New York.

This is how it happened.

One of my roommates at Princeton, Richard Coons, formerly of Cleveland, was engaged in 1951 to marry a girl from Long Island named Dottie Johns. I was to be his best man. In that same year I had traveled to Cuba to visit some friends (whom I had first met in 1947 as an aide to my cousin, R. Henry Norweb, who was then the U.S. ambassador to Cuba). Upon returning from Havana to New York, I called my friend Coons and asked whether his fiancée knew any girls around New York. He talked to her and she replied, “There is one blonde and one brunette. Which one would he like to meet?” I didn’t know either one of them, so what difference did it make?

Dottie Johns arranged for me to meet the brunette Iris Jennings on February 13, 1951. I had four tickets to the play *Guys and Dolls*, which I think appealed to everyone involved. That night, I arrived to pick up Iris Jennings at her family’s apartment at One East 66th Street. The only problem was that neither Richard Coons nor his wife-to-be felt well, so they did not show up. Here I was with a blind date and four seats to a wonderful musical.

To make this short and simple, Iris Jennings and I were engaged to be married on Memorial Day of 1951 after being together for only six weekends. So



*Iris Vail on her honeymoon at
Portofino, Italy, September 1951*

far we have been married for 58 years.

Iris was the daughter of Beatrice Black Bremer. The Black family owned the jewelry firm Black, Starr & Frost in New York. Mrs. Bremer was first married to Lawrence K. Jennings, Iris' father. They were divorced and Beatrice Black Jennings then married Theodore G. Bremer from a social family in Boston.

The Bremers had a beautiful Georgian house in Bedford, New York. On September 15, 1951, we were married in the local St. Matthews Episcopal Church by the Rev. Arthur Ketchum.

The entire wedding party stayed in wonderful Georgian houses around Bedford that were owned by friends of the Bremers.

We spent our wedding night at the Hampshire House, a beautiful apartment building overlooking Central Park in New York City, then left for a wedding trip which I had planned to include what I thought were the most romantic places anywhere. Our first stop was Portofino, an Italian seaside fishing village resort in a spectacular setting. We then went to Venice, from there

through the northern Italian lake district to Lake Maggiore, and then down the steep alpine road to Monte Carlo. When I went into the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo, I noticed a roulette wheel about to start turning. Because I had met my wife on February 13, I put 50 dollars on the number 13. It came up! With 1,750 new dollars, quite a sum in those days, I immediately left the gambling rooms and used the money to partly pay for the wedding trip.

From Monte Carlo we went to Paris and then to London, where we met my uncle W. Holden "Mike" White and his English wife, Ling. From there we took the ocean liner *Caronia* back to New York. All this took about five weeks, which I was specially allowed by my newspaper. I was at the time a suburban reporter.

When we returned to Cleveland, we acquired the polo stable that was originally built for my Uncle Mike and started to make some rooms inside for a house.

The next development was the starting of a family. Our first-born was a daughter who arrived in 1953. During one of our travels to Europe, we noticed that in Holland and Sweden quite a number of females were named Siri, which is "Iris" spelled backwards. As I had some Dutch background, with the middle name Van Husen, the name fit right in. So we named her Siri Jennings Vail.

Our next addition came



*Iris Vail, 51, dressed for a dinner for Princess Margaret in Cleveland, 1979.
Front hall of the Vails' L'Ecurie home*



*Iris Vail (top to bottom):
 Château de Champs, France, 1965
 Africa, 1969
 Wiregrass Plantation, 1990*

in 1955, a boy we named Thomas Van Husen Vail, Jr. A second son, Lawrence Jennings White Vail, arrived in 1958.

I have never met anyone like Iris Jennings. She was a New York debutante whose family first started coming to this country in 1620. Her two great-grandfathers, Oliver Burr Jennings and Benjamin Brewster, were original partners with John D. Rockefeller.

Iris has always stood on her own two feet, never relying on her impeccable social and economic background. She pursued a career in decorating for five years before we were married. She has never realized how pretty she is or how well off. Her main interests are her husband, family and contributing to the social and civic world in which she lives. She is self-effacing and organized in every way. She has high moral standards and superb taste, never borrows money, and I believe has always had a game plan about the kind of life she has wanted to lead. She relates to men a lot better than to women. I knew little of this when I married her.

Her talents are many. Iris' late stepmother, Catherine Jennings, also a person of taste, once said, "The well-known decorator Sister Parish is the best decorator in America, with one exception—Iris Jennings Vail." When dealing with an upholsterer Iris first selects material from various sources and writes down exactly the way the upholsterer should do the work. She knows all this because in the 1940s she worked for Isabel Thornley, a superb New York decorator who sent Iris to the workrooms where she was taught in detail how to measure complicated designs to fit, and to work with the upholsterers themselves. Few people, particularly social people, ever receive training like this. Iris was brought up with a mother and grandmother who, like her, had taste and lived in beautiful houses. So for all our long married life at three major places, we have never used a professional decorator and saved a lot of money!

Iris also does a brilliant job with her own clothing. Unlike most well-off women who usually go to fancy dressmakers, she selects materials herself, decides what style she wants and then goes to dressmakers who make the clothing from pictures or ideas she gives them. The result is she gets the best looking clothes at

the lowest possible price. Iris is one well-dressed, stylish woman. (Of course, it also helps to be pretty and have a wonderful figure like hers.)

My wife loves numbers. She pays meticulous attention to her check-books. One of our professional accountants once said, "Iris Vail is the best book-keeper I know."

Iris is the most organized person I know, planning excursions and menus with equal ease. When we use caterers for parties, she selects the plates, the decorations for the tables and other details. She puts notes on everything so when the caterers arrive they know exactly what to do. And being a superb cook in her own right, she knows how to talk to professional chefs. Someone who knows my wife well once said to her, "You could run the Waldorf Astoria."



Iris Vail and "Smokey," L'Ecurie picnic ground, 2007



Iris and Thomas Vail, 2008

Some New Yorkers come to Cleveland with their “nose in the air.” Iris is the opposite—friendly to everyone and very happy to live a nice country life.

I never thought of getting married until I met Iris Jennings. Her support of me and my dreams has played a major role in bringing them all about.

Even now at age 82 I still feel the aptness of the lines from Robert Browning with which I toasted my wife on July 2, 2008, her 80th birthday: “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be.”



Thomas and Iris Vail with Maseratis at the Cypress Point Club, 1990

A PASSION FOR COLLECTING

My father's love of books had a profound influence on me. Herman L. Vail was a Princeton and Harvard Law School graduate and lawyer. He was a world-class rare book collector, mainly of first editions dealing with the Hudson Bay Company, the search for the Northwest Passage, and the circumnavigation of the globe. I still have these books, along with his first editions of every book that Winston Churchill ever wrote and many 1830s color plate books by Rudolph Ackermann. My father dealt with famous London book dealers like Maggs Bros., Quaritch, Francis Edwards and others. He always read the books he collected. I have never been interested in rare books, but I got from him a love of reading that has never left me.

My father inspired my mother to do some book collecting of her own. She collected many volumes on fox hunting, one of her sporting activities. She also collected all the first editions of the British author and illustrator Kate Greenaway, one of the first writers of children's books.

Herman Vail also had a distinguished wine cellar of first-class wines. So from a young age, I drank the best, especially French wines. My wife, who like her father has a keen taste for the best wines, shares my enjoyment of this world of taste.

In 1989 I was able to purchase at auction what is called a pre-phylloxera wine. Phylloxera was a disease that attacked and destroyed the French

Menu

<i>Waterloo sherry</i> 1815	<i>Chicken consomme with</i> <i>diced vegetables</i>
<i>Chateau Latour</i> 1874	<i>Ruffed grouse with</i> <i>bread sauce and red</i> <i>currant jelly</i>
<i>Chateau Latour</i> 1970 <i>Magnum</i>	<i>Extra long wild</i> <i>rice, hand thrashed</i> <i>Purée of butternut</i> <i>Squash</i> <i>Belgian endive salad</i> <i>with champagne</i> <i>dressing</i> <i>Brie cheese with</i> <i>crackers</i>
<i>Chateau d'Yquem</i> 1959	<i>Chocolate Marquise</i>
<i>Cognac Des</i> <i>Tuileries</i> <i>Reserve 1818</i>	<i>Coffee with</i> <i>Chocolate truffles</i> <i>H. Upmann Cigars</i> <i>Havana 1959</i>

December 2, 1989

At L'Ecurie

Chateau Latour produced almost 100 years apart.

Both wines were superb. The older wine was lighter in color, milder to the taste and, surprisingly, the 1874 bottle had no sediment in the bottom. I later asked Broadbent why this was the case. He said that in the 19th century French winemakers left the wine to mature in the barrel for ten years, whereas later on they started taking it out after two years. Thus, some sediment came out in later wines, but in the 19th century the sediment stayed in the barrels.

vineyards in the later part of the 19th century. The wine was an 1874 Chateau Latour. I checked the bottle with Michael Broadbent, who at that time was head of the wine department at Christie's, and he assured me that it had been recorked every 30 years since 1874 (which, by the way, was a very good year for wine).

When I got the bottle to Cleveland, my wife and I put together a black-tie dinner for six featuring ruffed grouse and the newly purchased bottle of wine. As I had a magnum of Chateau Latour of 1970 in my cellar, guests were able to compare glasses of wine from

Iris and I have spent our life together collecting antique furniture, “tabatier,” and various kinds of porcelain and objects of art that adorn our homes. We also have done a lot of work on a collection of paintings. Rarely over the years have we gone with a lot of money and told a dealer to collect famous pictures. Instead we have dealt with very good dealers but have usually bought things at a low price long before the artists became famous.

Our houses are full of sporting paintings by artists such as the 18th-century British horse painters Ben Marshall and George Stubbs, 19th-century painters like Arthur Tait, and original oils and watercolors by American sporting artists such as A. B. Frost. At one point I did buy a famous picture of the late 18th century by Ben Marshall of a horse called “Curricie.” An identical one by the same artist hangs in Queen Elizabeth’s private dining room at Windsor. We also have modern paintings by artists including Jean-Paul Riopelle of Canada and Richard Estes of the United States.

None of this had any rhyme or reason. We simply bought things we liked. To this very day one of our favorite pictures is not the most valuable. It was one of the first we ever bought together, a Mediterranean scene by the British artist William Lee Hankey. None of our pictures were ever purchased to fill a certain space or make a decorating scheme. Most had some relation to our life’s experiences together.

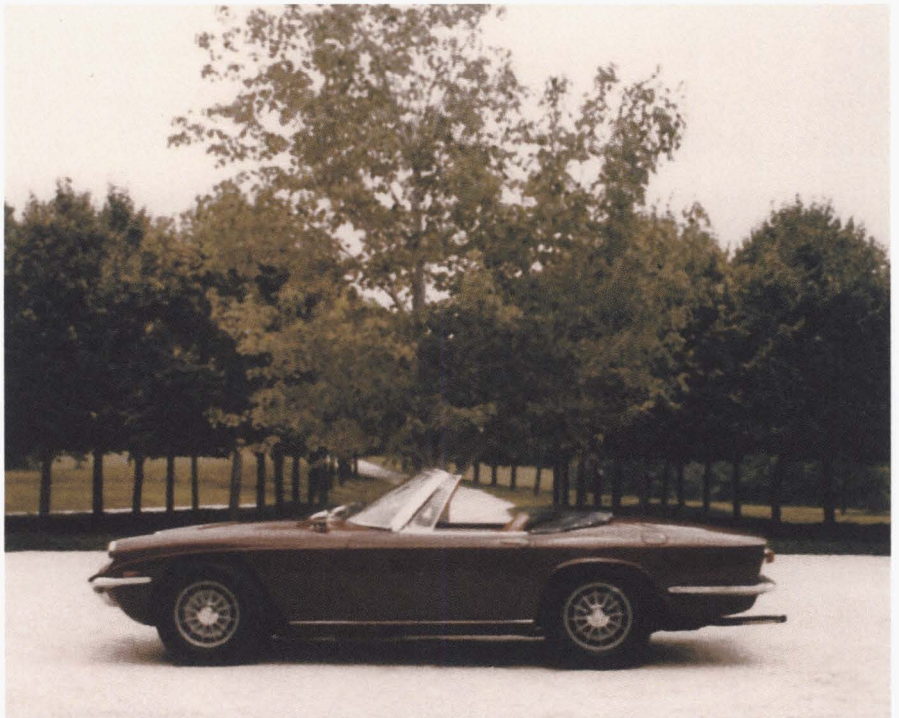
Automobile restoration is another shared passion. In the 1980s we restored three significant automobiles up to the highest standard, designated a “100 point car.” All were painted dark maroon with brown leather interior seats.

One was a 1967 Ferrari 365 California. This was one of only 14 ever built, with a fabulous body by Pininfarina. It was the only convertible Ferrari ever made with two small back seats. It has a 320-horsepower V-12 engine with single overhead camshafts from racing machinery designed by the famous Ferrari engine designer Colombo. We gave it to the Crawford Auto Museum of the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland.

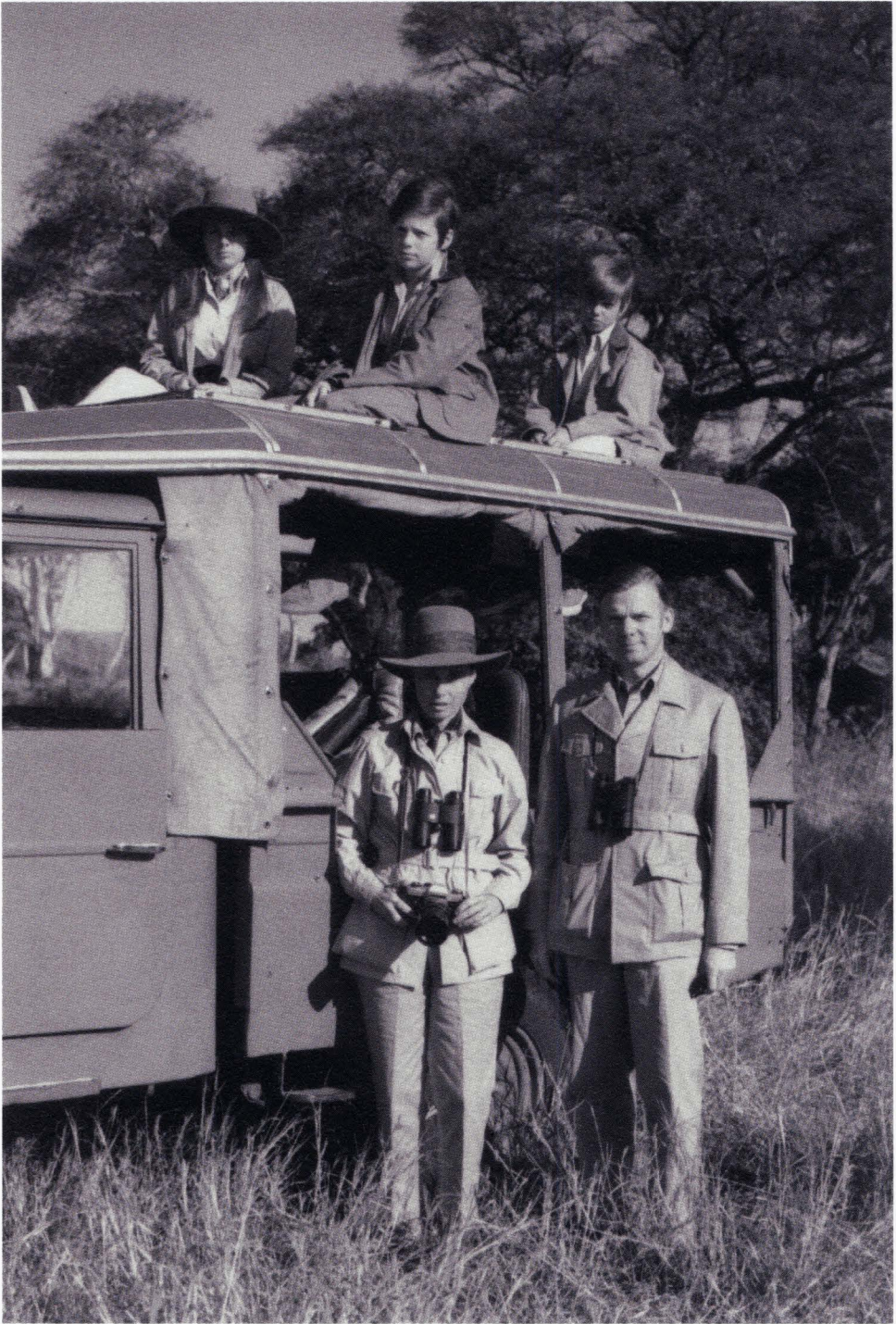
The two other cars are both Maseratis from 1967. One is a beautiful coupe called the “Mexico” with a body designed by Giovanni Michelotti for the

Italian firm Vignale. The engine is a V-8 with 290 horsepower based on the 450S racing Maserati that won the Sebring 12-hour race in 1957. Between 1962 and 1969, only 240 Mexicos were built.

The second Maserati is a 1967 convertible called “Mistral.” This unusual car has a straight six-cylinder engine with two spark plugs per cylinder. It was the same engine from the racing Maserati, the open wheel 250F in which Juan Manuel Fangio won the 1957 world’s champion racing title at Nürburgring in Germany. This Mistral, with a beautiful body designed by Pietro Frua, is almost all aluminum, weighing only 2,850 pounds with a 265-horsepower engine. It is one of 120 convertible Mistrals built; it would be unusual if even half of them exist today.



1967 Maserati “Mistral” convertible at L’Ecurie, 2008



Safari trip, 1969 (clockwise from top left): Siri, Tom Jr., Larry, Thomas and Iris Vail

T RAVEL AND THE SPORTING LIFE

I've long pursued athletic activities. In 1938 at age 12, I was voted the best athlete in my division at Keewaydin Dunmore, a boys' camp at Salisbury, Vermont. I also won the boxing cup in my division at the camp that same year. In 1943, I scored the winning goal for Deerfield varsity soccer, beating Northfield Mount Hermon 1 to 0 for Deerfield's third straight undefeated season; we were designated the best soccer team in New England that year.

My family is the reason I had so many sporting opportunities during my lifetime. My mother's family were fox hunters, polo players, and shooters with rifles and shotguns. My father was a 6-handicap golfer and a fine tennis player. I did not pursue tennis beyond a certain point in my teens, after finding that I could not play well more than one sport in a season.

But I need to correct my terminology. As my wife, Iris, has pointed out, you have to distinguish between a "sport" and a "game." Unlike games, in most sports there is no score.

In my opinion the most satisfying and exciting of these two types of activities involves a living thing: a hound, a dog, a horse, a fish, a bird. "Games" like golf, baseball, and football cannot compete with true sporting events. Sailing is an exception, a wonderful sport with a score (but only when racing).

My sporting activities were sharply curtailed when I got a job as a newspaperman in 1949. Most of the sports I describe here took place while I was



Thomas Vail with his lion, Africa, 1969

growing up and during short two- or three-week vacations that, mainly because of jet transportation, were possible when time permitted.

Shooting and hunting with Springer Spaniels has always played a big part in my life. My grandfather Windsor White was a keen shot with both shotguns and rifles. He made several trips to Africa on safaris in the 1920s. My mother imported famous Springer Spaniels from the English O'Vara Kennels and was a keen shot like her father. She gave me my first Springer Spaniel, "Star," when I was 10 years old. I trained him myself with the help of some capable advisors who were dog trainers for my family.

I do not like to miss, but I prefer hunting to shooting. And with this sport what you remember best is what the dogs did, not the number of birds shot!

I started shooting when I was eight or nine years old. At age 11 in 1937, I went with my mother to the gunmaker Boss & Co.'s proving grounds in England. My grandfather and my mother both shot the English Boss guns, although they also had some Purdey and Holland & Holland guns.

In those days, I shot a small .410-gauge gun. Our gun coach from Boss & Co. was John Robertson, a member of one of the company's owning families. As shooting came to me easily, Mr. Robertson had me shoot the trap going straight away. He then said, "I will bet you a shilling you do not get the next one." Without telling me he turned the trap (which was behind me) 90 degrees to the left. I did not see this but my mother said, "Watch out."

Luckily, I was able to turn and "killed" the clay pigeon.

My dear sporting mother said, "I think that will cost me a gun."

My mother and John Robertson got a wonderful little .410 for me that was made with Robertson's name on it by a firm called Harper in Birmingham, England, and they put it in a Boss & Co. case. I still have that gun and its case more than 70 years later.

My first bigger shotgun was a 20-gauge Boss over and under that my Grandfather White gave me when I was 14 years old in 1940. I have many happy memories of guns and dogs with my sporting family.



*Thomas Vail, Sr. and Thomas Vail, Jr. in the Brooks Range, Alaska.
Looking for Dall sheep, 1971*



Thomas Vail and Thomas Vail, Jr. after the son's double of teal at Winous Point Club, 1965

One of our most spectacular family trips was an African safari in 1969. This was led by an outstanding hunter, Glenn Cottar.

In those days, African safaris in this league were based on where the animals were located. A large staff of about 30 people would pull into an area and establish a camp with tents, remaining there until we had accounted for the animals we were after. This type of safari no longer takes place very often, with most now using fixed camps with permanent buildings

and a much fancier standard of living. Somehow this takes away from the charm of living in tents and listening to the sounds of the jungle every night. My experience is that if the living accommodations are too posh, the sport is not good.

During our 28-day safari, I took four of the Big Five game animals, leaving out only the rhinoceros—a strange-looking creature and not something I would like to mount. On one of our forays into the jungle my wife spotted a Defassa Waterbuck, which I took. It turned out to be the largest one shot in East Africa that year.

Our closest call was with an elephant. I did not know exactly where to shoot it in the head. Wounded, it went after me, my wife, and Glenn Cottar. Glenn shot it in the leg and brought it down.

Other close calls involved hippos, the most dangerous animals in Africa. One night some hippos roared through our camp. Another time a big hippo stalked us as we floated along in a rubber boat after our outboard failed. We finally got the motor going! Soon after, our 16-year-old daughter Siri shot a hippo from the shore with a .375 rifle. She still has the animal's beautiful back teeth, each of which forms a perfect half-circle with a clock mounted in the center.

Of our many shooting experiences, few would surpass being the personal guests of the late Viscount Allendale at his wonderful Allenheads Shoot in Northumberland. This was one of the great shooting places, with driven birds of the red grouse of Britain. "Wenty" Allendale was an old friend of mine and was married to a cousin-in-law, Sarah Ismay.



Siri Vail at 16 with her hippo, Africa, 1969



Thomas Vail skiing at Aspen, Colorado, 1980

My wife and I shot at Allenheads twice in 1976 and again in 1978. Allendale's other shooting guests read like a dossier of British nobility, including John Howard de Walden, Archie Kidston, John Jocey, Josh Rowley and others, all sporting figures from titled British society. The birds were driven over the eight guns by 30 "beaters" as it had been done on these great places since the time of King Edward VII. We had lots of fun with these English friends doing what has become a passing scene.

Other sporting experiences have taken us to many parts of the world. Starting about 1955 when I was 29, I took up skiing. I started in Manchester, Vermont, where my in-laws, the Bremers, had a beautiful house. We went to Mont Tremblant in Canada, and began going as a family to Aspen, Colorado, where we skied all the major mountains. We also skied in Austria at a wonderful ski resort at Zürs. Skiing came to me naturally, and with the help of professionals I was able to ski with some top athletes like the Norwegian Olympic skier Stein Eriksen. After a great run jumping moguls on expert slopes, Eriksen very kindly said to me, "It is nice to go up the mountain with an experienced skier."

We also skied at Alta and Snowbird in Utah and at Telluride in Colorado. At Telluride I skied the main expert runs like the “Plunge” and the “Spiral Stairs.” All lots of fun, but my favorite spot was Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which with a 4,300-foot vertical is one of the longest expert runs in the United States.

We skied a lot with our children Siri and Tom, Jr., who were also expert skiers. My wife had great form and skied the intermediate runs.

Iris and I also took up fly fishing. We went after the Atlantic salmon as guests of the Consolidated Paper Company, which in the 1970s owned Anticosti Island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. We fished the Jupiter and Le Loutre Rivers.



Thomas Vail with Stein Eriksen at Deer Valley, Utah, 1985



Thomas and Iris Vail, Paris, 1990

On a trip to Thailand, we stopped in New Zealand, where we fished for rainbow and brown trout. On another trip to Costa Rica, we went after tarpon, in my opinion the greatest game fish in the world. My wife caught a 95-pounder and I caught a 120-pounder in the open sea. I had never experienced such a great, strong fighting fish as the tarpon. It never gives up and jumps in the most spectacular and unusual ways.

Late in life I started fishing for the steelhead on the Chagrin River near our house in Hunting Valley. The steelhead is one of the five species of rainbow trout. It is also a marvelous fighting fish and a great sporting experience. In terms of great fishing experiences, I would rate the tarpon as number one, and the Atlantic salmon and steelhead as number two.

Golfing is another shared pleasure. The game of golf is the most difficult and mysterious I have ever encountered. Unfortunately, I never hit a golf ball until I was 23 years old at the Gavea Club at Rio, Brazil, in 1949. This was during a trip, and I thought it would be fun to try. When I returned home, I had little time for golf—or any other game or sport—for about ten years as I was so busy working for the *Cleveland News*. Luckily, Iris liked the game and played it well, having been taught by a pro at Gleneagles in Scotland in 1937 when she was nine years old. I wish I had started then instead of spending so much time playing polo before World War II.

Iris has always hit the golf ball in good form because of her early training. As we played together around Cleveland and elsewhere, she maintained a handicap around 20. I started working on my game in my later 30s and from the ages of 40 to 60 my handicap was 5. Although proficiency in games and sports has always come to me easily, I have always found golf difficult, to say the least. I have never felt comfortable with my golf ability or lack of same, regardless of winning or losing.

I did manage at age 40 to win the Harvey Brown Tournament over Labor Day in 1966, consisting of two rounds at the Kirtland Club in Cleveland. My scores were 72 and 73, which briefly put my handicap down to 3, but I could not maintain it at that level.

When I was 57, I joined the United States Seniors Golf Association. This organization of delightful people plans tournaments around the country. My partner and I managed to win one First Flight (championship) at the 1994 Indian River Tournament at Vero Beach, Florida. I was 68 then, with a 6 handicap which put me in the first flight. Iris and I have played in lots of Seniors tournaments around the country and made many friends along the way.

Our most unusual golfing experiences are thanks to our friendship with Maynard and Mary Garrison of San Francisco. Maynard had been on the Princeton golf team when I attended there, although I did not play golf in those days. We connected when I was on a national speaking tour as the Brotherhood Week chairman of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. One of my



Thomas and Iris Vail at Royal Dornoch, Scotland, 1990

speeches was at San Francisco. Maynard looked me up as an old friend and found we had lots of things in common.

Maynard loves cars (having restored about a dozen major Mercedes models), but his main interest in life is golf. He is a member of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrews in Scotland. In fact, Mary and Maynard bought a flat at St. Andrews right near the club.

In the 1990s Maynard organized trips for the four of us around Scotland and Ireland. We played the most famous courses, and he arranged for us to be received at these golf clubs by the local captains.

Iris and I were also his guests at a dinner held in the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, where women are invited only once or twice a year. It was a black-tie affair and we ended up upstairs in the office of the club's staff head, overlooking the famous first hole of the Old Course.

I number the Old Course at St. Andrews, for historic and special reasons, among the three greatest golf courses I have played. The others are the Pine Valley golf course near Philadelphia and Royal Dornoch north of Inverness, Scotland. There are more great holes at Pine Valley than any other golf course I have ever encountered.

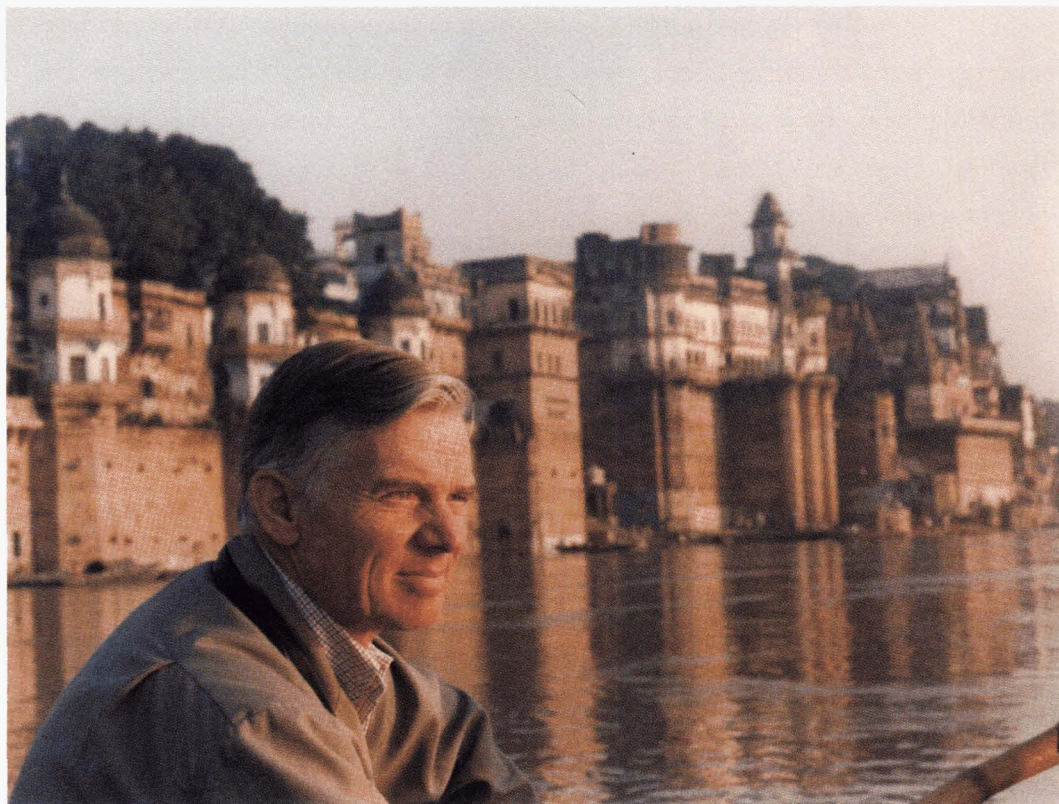
We have had a lot of fun playing golf, even though I have never figured out the proper way to hit the ball!

We enjoyed some other wonderful trips as well. A lot of them were for business reasons to learn about the rest of the world—a necessary task for the publisher and editor of one of the country's 15 largest newspapers. For instance, Iris and I traveled to the Middle East where I had personal one-on-one interviews with Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and other heads of state, ending in Israel with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Some of the trips were for pleasure. We took our children on many of these, in the beginning mainly to London, where my uncle Mike White and his wife, Ling, lived and knew so many people. My Aunt Ling was related to General Sir Hastings Ismay (Lord Ismay), and my uncle connected with the top people as a polo player at Midhurst, where he worked with Lord Cowdray and helped to teach the Duke of Edinburgh how to play polo.

Along the way we met and got to know quite well Prince and Princess Michael of Kent. As I had done her the favor getting one of her horses bred with another horse that had won the Kentucky Derby, Princess Michael asked if we wanted to attend the Chelsea Flower Show with the Royal Family. When we accepted she said, "Ask a group of your friends in England and Prince Michael and I will have a party for you and Iris at Kensington Palace after the flower show." I sent her a list of our English friends, which included the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the Earl and Countess of Westmorland, and Lord and Lady Howard de Walden. It was a wonderful day and evening—and a nice way to see the Chelsea Flower Show!

Other enjoyable trips included one in September 1979, when we chartered a 100-foot sailboat and took it down from Venice where we had parked it



Thomas Vail at 59 on Ganges River near Benares, India. Picture taken by Iris Vail, 1985

in front of the Doges Palace. We proceeded down the Dalmatian Coast.

In 1982 we planned a spectacular trip in France. It started with our friends Polly and David Williams on a barge and balloon trip in Burgundy with the balloonist Buddy Bombard. We then went to visit friends we had met in Cleveland; the French ambassador to the United States, François de Laboulaye and his wife, Antoinette, in their beautiful country house at Saint-Saens. Later we visited the cemetery for those who died on D-Day in Normandy, a most moving experience.

We then spent a night and day as guests at Malcolm Forbes' 17th-century chateau and proceeded on to Bordeaux where we stayed at Prieuré-Lichine, the house of Alexis Lichine, a wine merchant who was an old friend we first met in Cleveland right after World War II.

All these trips included social connections, people we have met either socially or through business. We always connected with people who lived in the places we visited. Included in this list was Tompi de Villarosa and his lady friend Franca Fiocchi, who entertained us in Milan and Sardinia. Tompi was a Sicilian nobleman who visited us in Cleveland, Jamaica and at Wiregrass in Georgia.

One of our more interesting trips was in 1981 when Iris and I spent five weeks in China. George H. W. Bush, Henry Kissinger and others were very helpful in getting us special entrée to the country's leaders. I had a most interesting talk with Bo Yibo, one of the five leaders of China at that time. We traveled to the interior and took a boat down the Yangtze River, a trip no longer possible because of the huge dam now on the river.

China was not developed then the way it is now, but we still got a very clear view of how the Chinese people think and what they think of themselves. In a nutshell, the Chinese people feel they are a superior race and belong to a special long background of civilization. In general, they look down on anyone who is not Chinese. This may be the only nation in history that was once a great power, went downhill, and then came back again to attain great power status.

Meanwhile, during the 1960s our children proceeded through various schools in Cleveland and elsewhere. Siri went to Hathaway Brown School, then Miss Porter's School at Farmington, Connecticut, where her mother, grandmother and great-aunts had attended. Tom, Jr. attended University School and then, for six years, St. Paul's School at Concord, New Hampshire. Larry struggled with University School, Eaglebrook Prep School and Suffield Academy. Siri eventually went to Skidmore; Tom attended Georgetown and later the University of Virginia Law School.

The greatest tragedy of our life was that my wife and I could not seem to connect with our son Larry. He was a real charmer, with a great extroverted personality. But he was leading a double life. This eventually led to drugs, and things went from bad to worse until his death at the age of 31. We tried everything to save him from himself, but were never able to come up with an answer; he never really confided with his parents. His loss was a tragedy for our whole family.



Thomas Vail and daughter Siri at L'Ecurie shoot, 1993

Several wonderful things have happened to our family, however. One is that, at age 46, Siri met and was married to Peter Burki. Peter is a bright, handsome and charming person who co-founded a very successful company called Healthcare. He and Siri are devoted to each other. Miraculously, they had a son, Bennett, when they were both about 50. Like his parents, Bennett is a delightful, charming young man who seems to like to do everything.

Another happy circumstance is that Tom, Jr. has two sons who are both a pleasure to be with. The eldest, Tom Vail III, is a bright and “literary” person who like my father, Herman Vail, loves books and reading. Tom’s younger son, Bob, excels at sports of all kinds, especially shooting. He is a crack shot. Interestingly, both of Tom, Jr.’s sons inherited his interest in sport and their great-grandfather’s interest in books and even rare books.

I have always had a special fondness for my late brother, Lansing Vail, who was two years older than I. I like to think the feeling was mutual. We worked together very effectively on the Holden/White/Vail trusts in Cleveland. These trusts were the best performing trusts in the bank for many years.

Although my brother and I both lived in Cleveland, we pursued different courses in our lives. But we had many happy times together.

My brother won a Bronze Star for bravery as an infantry sergeant in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. He won the medal because he drove a half-track vehicle to attract the fire of a German tank; by coincidence, the half-track was made by his grandfather's company, the White Motor Company.

In addition to overseeing the Holden/White/Vail trusts with my brother, I was asked by my father-in-law, Lawrence K. Jennings, to serve as the main family trustee for the Jennings trusts for my wife in New York and Connecticut. Financial affairs have always come to me easily. I have enjoyed working on these trusts almost as much as I enjoyed being a newspaperman.



Thomas Vail, Jr., age 21 and Thomas Vail, Sr., age 50 at a party for both at the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. Photo of father and son in Alaska above the Arctic Circle, 1971

Uncle Mike

My mother's younger brother, W. Holden "Mike" White, played an important role in my life. It was Mike White who built the stable near Cleveland that Iris and I made into a house and where we have lived for 58 happy years. And because of him, we befriended many members of British society.

Uncle Mike was a rather stocky person with a delightful personality and wonderful taste. He had great style and class. His friends and his wife, Ling, came from the top rung of Britain's social and sporting world.

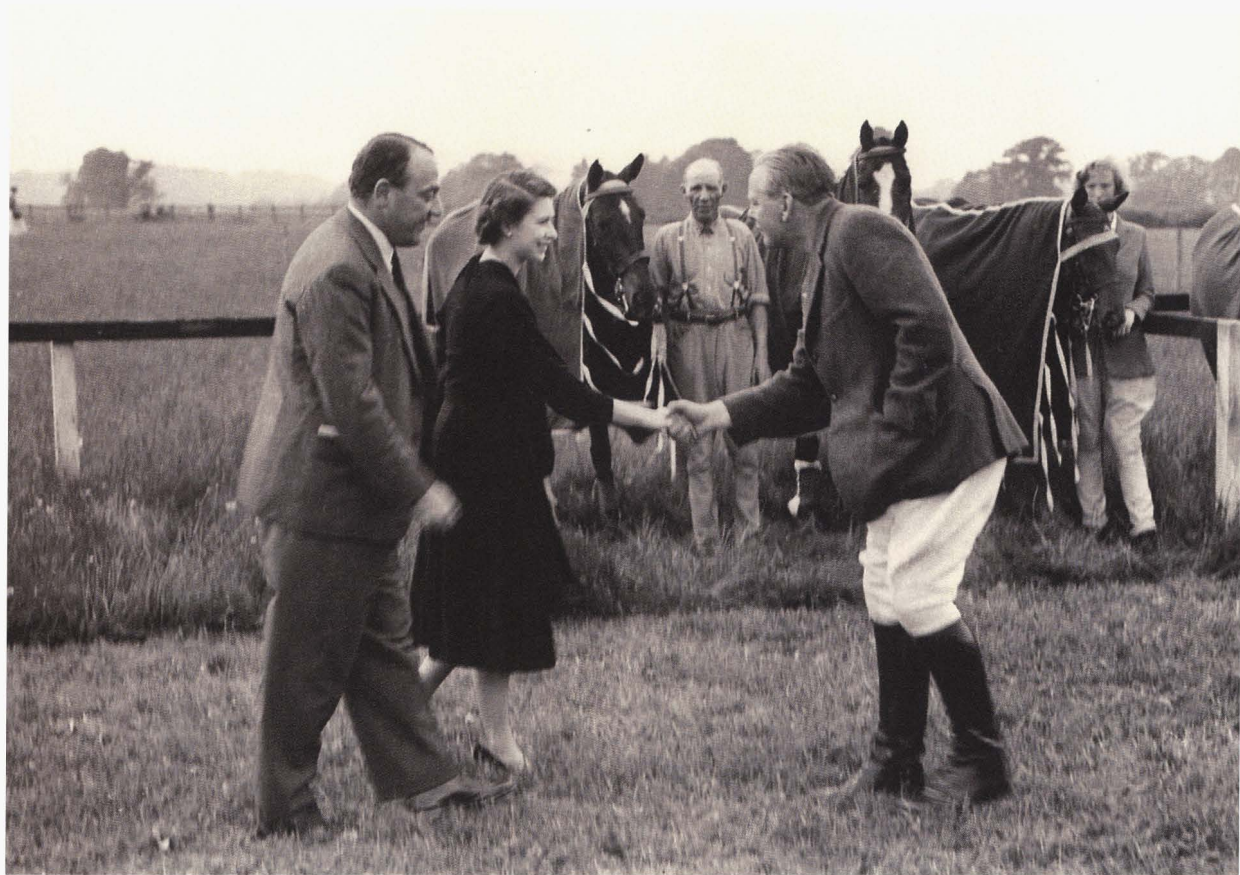
Uncle Mike's main interest in life was polo. He had a great eye for a horse and owned an outstanding string of polo ponies. I played polo with him in the 1930s on my grandfather's polo field and the other polo fields around Hunting Valley and Gates Mills. He was also a member and player at the famous Meadowbrook Club on Long Island.

Until the age of 16, I played a lot of polo around Cleveland—often with Uncle Mike, who was a 5-handicapper. One pleasant memory was when he said to me, "I always remember you hit in very good form."

After a divorce in 1943, Uncle Mike moved from Cleveland to England and married a delightful Englishwoman named Ling, who was related to Lady Ismay. Lady Ismay was married to General Sir Hastings Ismay, later Lord Ismay, who was British Chief of Staff during World War II.

Mike White established his polo operation near Midhurst, where he and Ling acquired a charming house they called "Polo Cottage." He sponsored a polo team also called "Polo Cottage." He twice won the polo pony championship of England with a horse called "Sweetheart."

At Midhurst the Whites became very friendly with Lord John Cowdray, who had a large estate there with several polo fields. Uncle Mike and Lord John Cowdray helped start up polo in England after World War II and helped teach Prince Philip how to play. Some of Uncle Mike's polo friends I met in the 1950s were Rao Raja Hanut Sing and the Maharaja of Jaipur. The latter won the Holden White polo cup with his team. Mike was a member of White's Club in London and also Bucks Club, which has a lot of sporting



Uncle Mike White greeting Queen Elizabeth II and Lord John Cowdray at Cowdray Park, Midhurst, England, 1952

members, especially in the horse world.

Starting in 1949, Ling and Uncle Mike introduced me to many people in England. Of these, Wenty Beaumont (later the Viscount Allendale) and his wife, Sarah Ismay, became two of my best friends.

When Iris and I were married in 1951, we continued to connect with all these British friends. The circle kept expanding to include Jane and David Westmorland, John and Gillie Howard de Walden, David and Ursula Westbury, Andrew and Debo Devonshire, Dickey and Susan Gaskell, and many others, all of whom knew each other well, most of them with titled backgrounds. They all liked shooting and horse racing.

One of the most delightful of these couples was Dickey and Susan Gaskell. They seemed to know everyone in England. They gave elegant dinner parties at their home at Chelsea Park Gardens, all with great guests and wonderful food and wine. The Gaskells visited us in Cleveland and at Wiregrass, and we took some wonderful trips in England with them. Susan's beautiful hand-stitched needlepoint cushions adorn the furniture in all our houses.

We also enjoyed evenings alone with the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at their house "Chatsworth" in Derbyshire, where we looked at a lot of fabulous things in their famous collection. Andrew Devonshire and I particularly hit it off because of a mutual interest in politics.

These connections made Britain a second home for us, providing lots of fun with people with whom we had a great deal in common. Our British friends, relatives and experiences played an enjoyable part in our life.

The White House

Starting in 1963 Iris and I visited the White House on many occasions, beginning with President Kennedy and ending with President Reagan. One of the most memorable times was a private gathering of 24 for dinner on the second floor with President Johnson. I sat at his table while he expounded about Vietnam, which was really bothering him. A few of us made some suggestions when we were asked, but my general observation was that President Johnson was not listening. He had made up his mind to try to pursue the war to the end, which turned out to be a drastic mistake, and for him the end of his remarkable political career.

During this time President Johnson also invited me to spend the night in the White House. He sent me to the Lincoln Bedroom to think over whether I wanted to serve as Secretary of the Navy. I decided to stay with my first love, journalism. As Billy Graham once told me, "Tom, don't go with politicians. They will just use you."



Thomas Vail and President Johnson, The Oval Office, 1965

Over the years I spent a lot of time, one on one, with U.S. presidents—from Harry Truman to George H. W. Bush. I have written a book about these nine presidents. I wrote another book about nine famous people I knew well who were from various walks of life.



The Heart Center garden, Cleveland Clinic

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

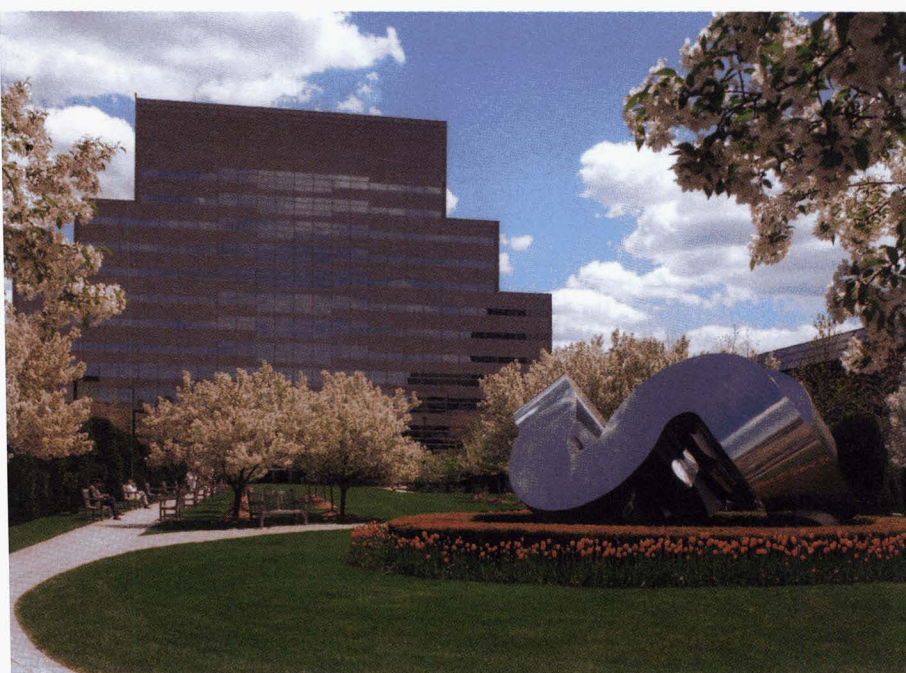
Over the years I've been involved in a number of civic activities. One of the most worthwhile has been serving on the board of the Cleveland Clinic for 35 years.

In the late 1960s I was appointed chairman of the Clinic Real Estate Committee. From this position I promoted the purchase of as much real estate around the Clinic as we could buy. The result has been that as the Clinic has expanded it has owned the surrounding areas. I also served on the Investment, Building and Grounds, Education, and Marketing committees.

Because of my interest in architecture, in 1983 I was asked by the former head of the Cleveland Clinic, Dr. William Kiser, to suggest an architect for several buildings that the Clinic wanted to construct. After considerable thought and investigation, I suggested Cesar Pelli of New Haven, Connecticut, who was just coming into his own.

Pelli started by designing what is now the Crile Building, an award-winning design completed in 1985. It set the tone for several other major buildings at the Clinic that were also done by Pelli's organization.

Along the way, Iris and I established a Vail Foundation at the Clinic. We used our foundation to add a major outdoor sculpture and two gardens around the newly constructed buildings. We selected the landscape architects after discussion with Dr. Floyd Loop, who was then head of the Clinic. The result



The Lerner Garden with sculpture donated by the Vails

was a major garden at the Lerner Research Institute and a garden at the entrance to the Heart Center.

It has been a wonderful experience for me and my wife to have been a part of the dramatic expansion of the Cleveland Clinic. The Clinic is not only the largest employer in the Cleveland area (with employees numbering 40,000 as of

2009) but also one of the world's major medical institutions. It has been a pleasure to work with the Clinic doctors, including chief executives Dr. William Kiser, Dr. Floyd Loop and later Dr. Toby Cosgrove.

From 1979 to 1988 I served on the board of the Cleveland Foundation, the second largest public foundation in this country. In 2008, it had a \$2.2 billion endowment. My main effort was to make Cleveland-area economic development the Foundation's highest priority as the necessary underpinning of all the other organizations receiving its support. Happily this priority remains today in 2009.

Along my newspaper way in the 1960s and 1970s, I served on major newspaper association boards, as well as the Associated Press board of directors, and was appointed to several presidential commissions by President Johnson and President Nixon. These included matters pertaining to the gathering of information, the 25th anniversary of the United Nations and a commission to deal with rules for amateur athletics.

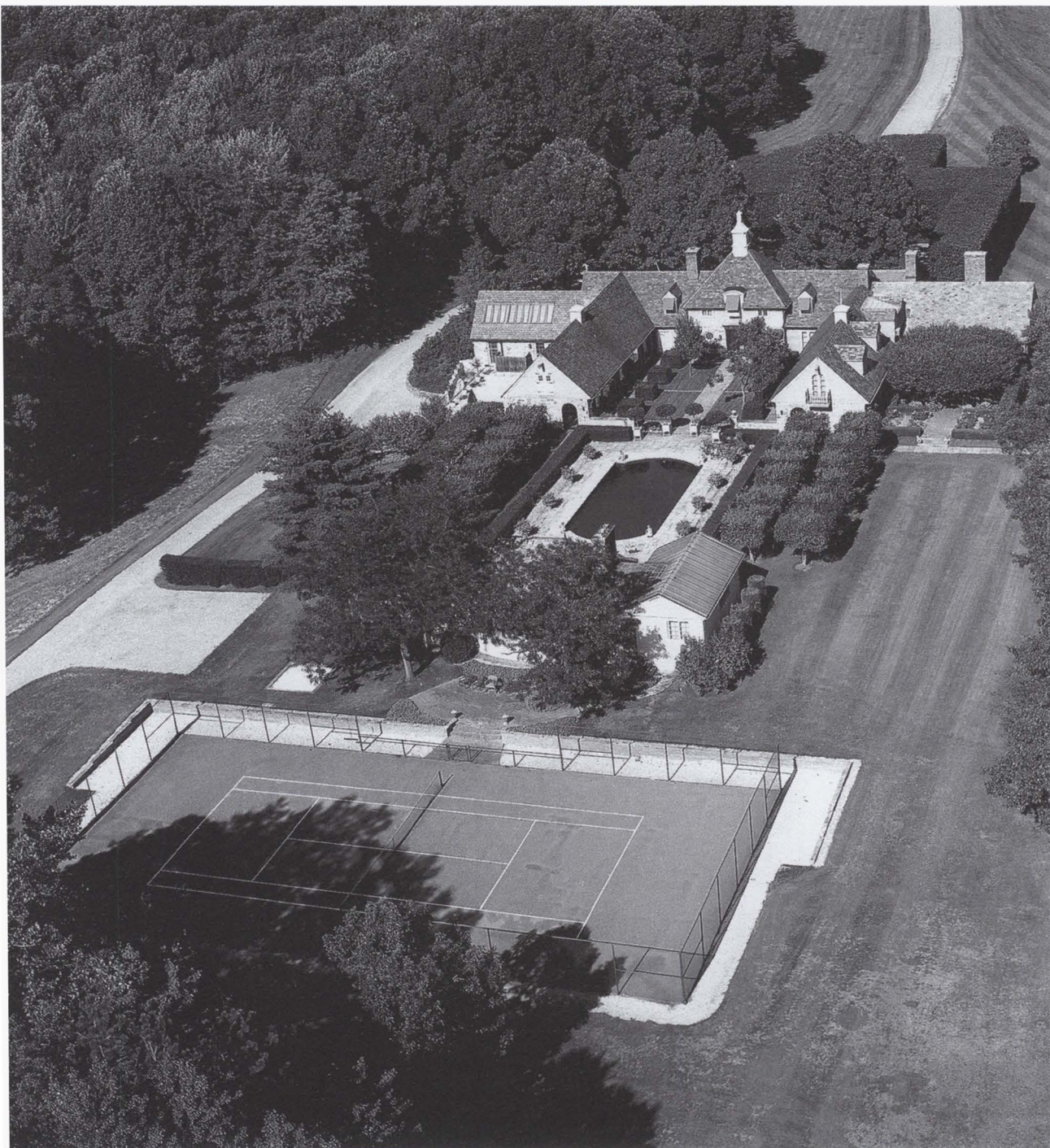
I've also been involved with the Cleveland Zoo. In the 1960s, the Zoo was owned and operated by the City of Cleveland. Various people informed me that the Zoo was broke and the City of Cleveland could no longer afford to operate it. I spoke about this with Jim Stanton, then president of City Council. I suggested and he concurred that the Cleveland Zoo should be transferred to the Metroparks. This was accomplished, all to good effect.

For a while I served on the board of the Cleveland Zoological Society but found it impossible to attend meetings on a regular basis. So Vernon Stouffer, then chairman of the Zoo's board, suggested that my wife might take my place. Iris served on the board for many years, earning a medal for distinguished service when she was made a life trustee.

One of Iris' outstanding accomplishments was to organize a party for 685 people to open the Zoo's RainForest. With everyone from the political and private community seated by name, the evening featured some wonderful performers—including stiltwalkers who simulated various types of animals.



Iris Vail at the opening of the RainForest party at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, 1990



L'Ecurie

HAPPY LOCATIONS

L'Ecurie

In March of 1951, on the day I asked Iris Jennings to marry me, I drove her past a beautiful 10-horse polo stable that had been constructed in 1936 for my favorite uncle, Mike White, before he moved to England. It was designed by Monroe W. “Monty” Copper, Jr., a distinguished Cleveland architect. “That stable would make a really nice house,” Iris said.

Known as “L'Ecurie” (the French term for “the stable”), the structure sat on eight acres in a valley. So we bought the property in 1951, moved the horses, and with the assistance of Monty Copper began creating a few rooms inside. As the years rolled on, we constructed more rooms inside the stable and added a library and a kitchen wing.

I have a special interest in architecture and design, particularly the proportion of interior rooms. During the years when we were working on L'Ecurie, I collected a lot of books on architecture—particularly French architecture—and shared them with Monty and Dick Burrows, who worked with him. Iris and I have always admired the purity and taste of French designs, and we had a hand in the design of everything. (Interestingly enough, when the British landscape architect Russell Page came to L'Ecurie in 1978, he himself leaned more toward the symmetrical designs of the French style.)

After the death of my grandfather Windsor T. White in 1958, we pur-



House (L'Ecurie) with kitchen wing on the move to new site, 1959

chased 400 acres of land that he had owned opposite the stable location. The property is full of deep gullies and includes about two and a half miles of the Chagrin River, which flows north to Lake Erie. Most of the land drops down into a valley that borders the river.

We sold our eight acres, but because of our sentimental attachment to L'Ecurie, we decided to try to move the house from its old location to our new property. This stupendous project took six months, from August 1959 to January 1960. It involved cutting our U-shaped stable into three separate parts, then moving not only these "parts" but also our swimming pool and a pool house across a state route (I obtained permission from Ohio's governor to do this) and up to the top of a hill about a mile and a half away. The job was done by a wonderful Czechoslovakian construction expert named Mural, who founded a company on the West Side of Cleveland that specialized in moving all kinds of buildings.

I wrote an article about the experience for the *Library Notes* of the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, of which I am a member. In the article I

observed that our house-moving project was “a sentimental and artistic triumph and a financial disaster!” But as a friend of mine noted, “First things first.”

Just before the house/stable was moved to the new site, we set about building there a kennel and a manager’s house, both designed by Monty Copper, and reconstructing an 1895 barn from my grandfather’s property. We found a beautiful site on a low promontory overlooking the Chagrin River where we established a picnic area and added a river-stone barbeque and round table. We also put in a 275-yard driving range and bunker to hit golf balls and added two small ponds that hold largemouth bass. The roads that ran around our land were improved and added to, including a beautiful road that runs along the river to the end of the property.

In 1978, we persuaded Russell Page, the famous British landscape architect, to transform the gardens around L’Ecurie. He flattened the area in front of the house and planted 48 linden trees, all arranged in symmetrical French style. He designed a small rill garden opposite the bay window of our library and added some other symmetrical gardens that gave the landscape areas around our house a composition and style they never had before.

We also re-established a long family tradition. Around 1935 Windsor White and his daughter—my mother, Delia—had begun a pheasant shoot on his 1,000-acre Halfred Farms. The pheasant pens were on the east side of the Chagrin River opposite the main stables. Our family had a wonderful time letting out pheasants and hunting them with the Springer Spaniels my mother raised.

Iris and I continued the shoot after acquiring the same area where the pheasant pens had been located. In the 1930s the shoot had been quite extensive, as my mother and grandfather purchased grown pheasants and also raised some. They employed gamekeepers to trap vermin like hawks and owls, making it possible to raise pheasants in the wild. With present rules against trapping some predators and with fewer people working on our place than my grandfather had before World War II, the shoots are run in a much smaller and simpler way. But it still can be very sporting, lots of fun and a special pleasure to have it all on your own place.



Halfred Farms Stable, 1955

Along the way we added Chukar partridges and Hungarian partridges that were placed in the woods before the hunts. On a high hill among the pine trees we also built a pen that holds about 20 pheasants, with a trap door at its front. Our staff people who run the shoot put the pheasants in the pen, open the front trap door, and force them off the platform. The pheasants fly very high over the guns down below the hill, creating shots similar to driven birds in Europe.

Our children, Siri, Tom and Larry, grew up shooting on this same ground. The land has provided a lot of sporting fun for four generations of our family.

We also maintained the "Findaway Kennels" of Springer Spaniels that my mother had started, developing quite a number of field champions. Most notable among them was "Findaway's Luck of Burnsget," a High Point Champion of the United States in 1979 and the father of "Findaway's Bon Chance" (or "Bonnie"), a U.S. High Point Champion in 1982. Bonnie's brother

“Mark” was second High Point Champion that same year. Because of our wonderful dogs, my wife and I were honored to be elected in 2009 to the Springer Spaniel Hall of Fame at Grand Junction, Tennessee.

L'Ecurie has been the scene of many parties. We held a beautiful party for our 20th anniversary in 1971, including a lawn tent and another special floral-lined tent that covered a sunken garden next to the library. Other notable affairs were a lunch for Princess Margaret in 1979 and a dinner for the Rev. Billy Graham, who spent the night. Another dinner included Ohio's governor and two United States senators.

The most spectacular party of all was in 1996 to celebrate our 45th wedding anniversary, my 70th birthday, and the 60th anniversary of the stable we made into a house. It was a dinner dance for 300 friends with a full orchestra and excellent singers, out on a lawn with a special dark green and white dance floor and a tent surrounded by our beautiful gardens.

Sadly, parties like this, in a private home, are few and far between. As one of our guests remarked, “People don't do this anymore!”

For the 58 years that Iris and I have been married, we have lived in the same house. It has been a great love story between two people, and between two people and a house.

Calabash

Iris and I first visited Jamaica in 1955. We returned several times in the 1960s, and in 1976 we purchased a house on the sea at a place called Tryall near Montego Bay. We have always been struck by natural beauty and have lived around it all our lives. Jamaica is one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

Measuring about 175 miles long and 60 miles wide at various points, Jamaica is a semi-hilly and mountainous island with spectacular views. The Blue Mountain at the eastern end of the island rises 7,400 feet.

Jamaica was the center of a sugar trade from about 1725 to 1837 when England stopped guaranteeing the price of sugar. Considerable fortunes were made in those years. Fine houses were constructed and the development of

literary and artistic traditions established a “civilization,” unlike places like the Bahama Islands which are mainly just sand and sea.

The island is full of spectacular horticulture. During Jamaica’s 300 years as a British colony, from about 1660 to 1960, British ships dropped off all kinds of flowers, plants and trees from around the world. Their propagation was helped by the island’s good rainfall and temperate climate; during the year, a hot day is 88 degrees and a cold day is 78 degrees. Lying south of Cuba, Jamaica experiences universally good weather.

When we bought our house at Tryall, I was busy with my job as publisher and editor of the *Plain Dealer*, so I did not have much time to spare. But Jamaica has a major airport at Montego Bay and our house is only 30 minutes away. I could come and go quickly and conveniently.

Iris and I have been all over the island, exploring every area possible. This included two trips at the island’s eastern end over what is called the Hardwar Gap, a spectacular road at the base of the Blue Mountains stretching from the north coast near Port Antonio to the south coast at Kingston.

We named our house “Calabash” after a tree that grows in Jamaica. Calabash sits right at the sea with easy access for swimming in the crystal-clear water. The four-bedroom house also has an oval freshwater swimming pool at its center.

Calabash offers a wonderful getaway. The weather is good the year round, and you can go to sleep every night listening to the sound of the waves. We continue to have many happy times there.

Wiregrass

My wife and I have been shooting in Georgia since the 1950s. A great number of Clevelanders, including the Hanna family, established shooting plantations in South Georgia after 1900. In 1928 my great-uncle Walter White, the brother of Windsor White, purchased the Ichauway Plantation with Robert Woodruff of Atlanta. One of my mother’s best friends in Cleveland was Pansy Ireland Poe. Mrs. Poe inherited the famous Pebble Hill Plantation in



*Calabash at Tryall,
Montego Bay,
Jamaica, 2008*



Thomasville, Georgia, and my mother visited there often. She was in the house when it burned in 1934.

Iris and I paid visits to friends like Kate Ireland and the Gilbert Humphreys at their plantations. A lot of shooting friends wanted us to have a quail plantation as well, but I was too busy with the newspaper business to think about it.

A new friend of ours in the 1980s was Harry Sears, originally from Boston but then living in New York. We had shot together with him in England. After Harry's death, his plantation at Albany, Georgia, became available. The year was 1983 and I was 57. My wife pointed out that I was going to retire at 65, and a quail plantation might be a nice thing to have in our retirement years. We purchased it.



Iris and Thomas Vail shooting quail at Wiregrass, 1993



Stable at Wiregrass, 2005

Called “Wiregrass,” the plantation is just under 5,000 acres and consists of fairly rolling land with nine lakes. The area of South Georgia starting around Albany (125 miles south of Atlanta) and continuing south to Thomasville on the Georgia/Florida line is in fact the best wild bobwhite quail shooting in the United States. If you want a quail plantation that has good wild bird shooting, this is the area to be a part of.

The only problem with these places is that they are very expensive, particularly when shooting only wild birds which require a lot of preparation in the woods. An operation like this includes about 15 horses, at least 30 or more pointers, plus retrievers—in our case, Springer Spaniels—and heaven knows what else. Also required are tractors, front-end loaders and various other kinds of equipment to maintain the whole operation.

Places like Wiregrass used to include a lot of mourning doves which were shot with about 20 guns around a field. But this type of shooting has fallen off since 1990. The number of turkeys has increased, however. Most of the plan-



Tom and Iris Vail with horses at Wiregrass, 1990

tation owners shoot turkeys, but on the ground and not driven—the way it was done in the 1930s when plantation “beaters” went into the marsh areas and drove the turkeys into the air over the guns.

The houses at Wiregrass are of a fairly modern design with a lot of sliding glass doors and windows that face a 25-acre lake and marsh. The houses all have tile floors so you can walk in with your boots and dogs. The general atmosphere of these houses is what the British call “a shooting box.” The walls

of the three or four small buildings that constitute the main living area are covered with pictures of various shooting-related subjects we collected. We have had a lot of fun with Wiregrass Plantation. I have been president of the Georgia-Florida Field Trial Club as well as a judge at the annual field trial.

In 1984 Don Hisaka, a very good architect from Cleveland, designed for us a picnic house with open sides and 130-year-old heart of palm beams forming the main part of the structure. The picnic house features a wonderful fireplace made out of local river stones, with all this facing a small pond called “Pop’s Pond.”

Several years later the stable needed to be replaced, so we built a new U-shaped stable with 14 stalls. It turned out to be a work of art. There is a beautiful atrium walk-through with a lantern where all the shooting parties first gather, as well as a very nice tack room and a staff room. Everything was designed to make it easy to maintain the horses. Iris worked out a wonderful paint job of green and white with beige trim.

After the Wiregrass stable was completed, the builder—a fellow from Youngstown, Ohio, who is in the business of building stables all over the country—commented: “I don’t care if I ever build another stable. I have never seen one as beautiful as this.”

Clubs

Although my wife and I are not really “club people,” preferring to entertain in our own houses, we have spent some very pleasant times with friends at various clubs around the country.

In 1973, I joined the Cypress Point Golf Club near Carmel, California. The clubhouse sits on a beautiful height of land overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In the foreground are the famous 16th and 17th holes of this wonderful golf course, designed by Alistair MacKenzie and opened in 1930. There are four bedrooms, three of them facing the sea, and the club employs an excellent cook and wonderful staff. It is a magical experience to have a drink on the outside terrace facing the ocean.



Thomas Vail at 16 on "Mountain Lass," Chagrin Valley Hunt Horse Show, 1942

With the help of my friend Maynard Garrison, I joined the Bohemian Club in San Francisco. The club also owns the famous Bohemian Grove, where a three-week encampment takes place every year among the redwood trees. The Bohemian Club was founded in the 1870s by mainly artistic people interested in music, dancing and theatrical performances, which the club puts on both at its clubrooms in downtown San Francisco and at the Bohemian Grove.

Despite a long waiting list, I got in quickly as a professional member on the basis that I would write some literary articles for club publications and

help arrange for speakers to appear at the annual Grove meetings.

I was honored to be asked to give a "Lakeside Talk" at the Grove. This club has a motto: "Weaving spiders come not here." In other words, you are not supposed to talk about your business and are only to comment about your hobbies and personal life. My talk was a witty takeoff on this mandate. I put together my thoughts about what kind of newspaper I would produce in the Bohemian Grove without mentioning anything important about the business or affairs of the day. It seemed to have been well received and was lots of fun.

Other clubs I have belonged to include the Kirtland Country Club near Cleveland, where I have been a member for more than 50 years. A social, family-type club, it includes a wonderful golf course (especially the back nine) designed by C. H. Alison in 1921. My great-uncle Rollin White was one of its founders.

Another favorite is the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. This club, only 10 minutes from our house in Hunting Valley, is rife with family associations. My grandfather Windsor White was one of its founders. I played polo on its field and rode in many horse shows held near the main clubhouse.

The original club was an old tavern that was converted to a clubhouse in 1909. It burned down in 1994. In a very happy circumstance the rebuilding was overseen by Charles Bolton (from an old Cleveland family) and Iris Vail. Many people helped in the rebuilding effort, but these two people guided the taste and produced the atmosphere that has made it a charming hunt club. My grandfather and my mother, Delia White Vail, won many championships at the annual horse shows. I also won a lot of prizes on my pony, named "Geisha Girl," and later as a teenager with my wonderful horse "Mountain Lass."

For many years I have also belonged to the Union Club in downtown Cleveland. This stalwart Cleveland institution, located in a beautiful 1912 Italian Renaissance building, has many family associations. My father, Herman L. Vail, my grandfather Windsor T. White, and my great-grandfather Liberty E. Holden have all served as presidents of the club. Holden was one of its founders.

At one time the Union Club was restricted to the community's male business leaders, but in the late 1990s this type of membership no longer proved

sufficient. Membership requirements were broadened to include more people, including women. The club lost its exclusivity and leadership cachet but gained a lot of business, which has kept it going. It is a good example of “changing with the times.”

Another club I have enjoyed is the Links Club in New York. Primarily an eating club, it is housed in a beautiful example of 1920s architecture. It has excellent food, a very good wine list and a distinguished collection of valuable golfing art. At one time the Links Club owned a golf course, but this is no longer the case. This club is conveniently located at 63rd Street only a half block from the Colony Club, a famous ladies’ institution where my wife is a member.



Royal Ascot, June 1973

A MAGICAL JOURNEY

This has been a story of love affairs with my wife and the places where we lived together, worked together, and raised a family. In all, a magical journey that started with wonderful childhood experiences, a special fondness and attachment to the newspaper business, and my marriage to Iris Jennings—my greatest love of all.

My life has proceeded as a series of miracles: a magical upbringing during the Depression, my perfect match with the newspaper business, the amazing meeting with my wife on a blind date, and a house—actually, a stable—built by a favorite uncle and moved to my family’s property where many happy memories reside along with us.

How all these amazing things happened, I have no idea. I had no game plan. I just proceeded by putting one foot in front of the other and making the best of whatever situation I encountered. I accepted it all, including the challenges, the lights and shadows, and most of all the glorious moments that have made my life so worthwhile. As I said at the start of this story, “I am a child of my surroundings.”

Those surroundings, and the life I knew as a child, are now gone and will never be back. Having been a reporter all my life, I am persuaded to comment about the United States as it currently exists. The economic downturn that began in 2008 and continues as I write these words has brought about revolutionary changes in the way America works and negatively affected our global

leadership position. Americans have never been particularly sophisticated about the rest of the world because we live on such a large and self-contained continent, protected by two oceans. Sadly, we have engaged in various activities—Vietnam, the invasion of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan—that have proved to be mistakes, sapping this country's great wealth and world position.

While we have indulged in these fruitless efforts, countries like China have paid attention to their own affairs and stayed away from trying to remake the rest of the world in their own image.

The current global economic decline, American interference in the Middle East, and the Obama administration's massive and unprecedented government action have left America with debts similar to those faced by the British Empire after two world wars sapped her wealth and left her as a minor power.

The American political experiment, which started in 1776 with the first government ever created from "the power of the people," has been an act of genius and provided inspiration for people throughout the world. For more than 200 years we created an atmosphere of opportunity, with people from all parts coming here to make the most of it and build a remarkable country.

But like most nations of great accomplishment we have squandered our advantages, and now are left with a country less important and quite different from the one we have known. Like all the great nations and civilizations of the past, we will pay the price for living beyond our means.

I started this autobiography with the statement that, "I am a child of my surroundings." But all my life I have tried my best to make my surroundings better. This is what drives me on. It is what I am.

I always had the idea that in the end I had to rely on myself to make things happen. I think I got this attitude from my mother. Either you have "get up and go" or you don't. No one else can give it to you. One of my favorite statements comes from Theodore Roosevelt, who in a speech once said, "Do what you can, where you are, with what you have." That will be my epitaph.

— *Thomas V. H. Vail*

June 30, 2009

