

During his visit in 1895, Presidential Candidate McKinley was quoted by the reporters of the Thomasville Times Enterprise to say that the skies of Thomasville, Georgia were as "blue and as clear as those of Italy." Indeed, the future President made much of the town's genteel hospitality, piney woods and beautiful spring season, characteristics which may have been forgotten by socialites and travelers over the course of the century, but certainly have not faded. The heyday of the resort era of Thomasville was well in swing when McKinley made his remembered visit. During this time northern socialites flocked to Thomasville in search of a resort area on the East Coast that was well removed from the malaria epidemics of Florida. People such as the influential Howard Melville Hanna, founding member of the Standard Oil Trust, strode the red clay streets (as smooth as asphalt they claimed) and wintered in the antebellum cotton plantations that could be bought for a song.

Melhana Plantation Resort elegantly recreates the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by those who came to Thomasville at the turn of the century in search of days filled with recreation, hunting, sport and leisure. The resort is located on the first plantation in Thomasville to be purchased by Howard Melville Hanna, who was eventually to own 14,000 acres in the area and whose friends, acquaintances and family would finally own a total of 150,000 acres between Thomasville and Tallahassee, Florida. In 1896, Mr. Hanna purchased his first tract of land and the antebellum plantation house, which still stands today. He transformed the worn-out cotton plantation into a magnificent estate to be enjoyed and inherited by his descendants.

Paul Coalson established the original plantation with the purchase of 750 acres of land for one dollar an acre in 1825. It is believed that Mr. Coalson built the original antebellum main house, a weather boarded log cabin with a dogtrot, designed in the Greek Revival style. This house, which was substantially expanded in 1905 by Howard Melville Hanna, Sr., is the core of the main house and the Inn at Melhana Plantation Resort. When Mr. Coalson died, in 1835, Mrs. Blackshear Coalson married Henry Wyche who increased the acreage of the cotton plantation to 1500 acres.

The next two owners of the plantation were migrants from coastal Georgia who were attempting to escape the ravages of the Civil War. During the ownership of Mr. William Gignillait and Dr. Samuel Jones, the plantation struggled in its production of cotton and other crops. The cotton, which had been sold to merchants in England, lost its value during the war. The time was opportune for the investment of wealthy industrialists who were seeking ideal southern resort.

In 1891 Dr. Jones's widow, Mrs. Lizzie Jones, sold the 1500 acres for \$10,000 to Mr. Charles Chapin who had visited Thomasville from his native New Jersey in the winters to convalesce. Mr. Chapin was the son of Salome Hanna Jones who had bought a plantation, named Elsoma, some years earlier. Under the ownership of Mr. Chapin the plantation metamorphosed from a working cotton plantation to a hunting resort. After five years of ownership, Chapin sold the plantation, for a dollar and other considerations, to his uncle, Mr. Howard Melville Hanna.

In 1901, Mr. Hanna renamed the plantation "Melrose" and proceeded to begin construction of the estate as it exists today. The Melrose rose, which now grows on trellises on either end of the veranda of the main house, is pink in color and is the same color of the Inn at Melhana Plantation Resort. Hanna also quickly proceeded to buy land around the Thomasville area. In 1901 he purchased Pebble Hill Plantation, (located adjacent to Melrose and open to the public for tours) and deeded it to his daughter, Kate Smith Hanna Ireland.

In 1905 Mr. Hanna enlarged the main house at Melrose by adding the north and south wings as well as a kitchen. He also opened two of the four main rooms into one large double parlor (the Hanna Room) which offers a lovely view of the sunken garden. The Hanna Room is uniquely paneled in magnolia. A porte cochere was added to the back of the house, which changed the orientation of the house. Mr. Hanna also ordered major plantings on the grounds and built a guesthouse with a bowling alley that is unfortunately not standing today.

Melrose Plantation was given to Howard Melville Hanna, Jr. in 1923 on the event of his father's death. Howard Melville Hanna, Jr. followed in his father's footsteps as an affluent businessman and made impressive additions to his father's estate, all in the spirit of the Progressive Era. The architectural firm of Walker and Weeks was hired from Cleveland, Ohio to build many new outbuildings on the property. The new outbuildings were designed in the Georgian Revival style, which is characterized by the use of red brick, porticos and a formal stylization that disguises the everyday use of the buildings. In 1927 the Owl's Nest was built as a guesthouse to the main house, followed by other cottages, barns, stables and a greenhouse.

In 1934, the two most impressive additions to the grounds were made: the Showboat and Pool House. The Showboat, a theater and cinema, was designed to resemble the stage set of the eponymous Broadway musical. The interior is constructed of pecky cypress and has a barreled ceiling, both of which contribute to the acoustics of the theater and add to the nautical motif of the building. Movies shown at the downtown cinema were shown simultaneously for the Hanna's and their guests in the Showboat. The first private screening of *Gone With The Wind* occurred at the Showboat in 1939 due to the fact that the owner of Metro Media, Mr. John Hay Whitney, happened to be a family friend of the Hanna's. When the final editing was complete and Whitney was asked for additional funds for marketing and distribution, Mr. Whitney requested to view the film. The movie, which was received with as much enthusiasm by the Whitney's and Hanna's as it is around the world today, was given to Mr. Whitney to be viewed privately at the Showboat.

The Pool House, built at the same time as the Showboat, testifies to the lifestyle of luxury in which the Hanna's indulged. The pool is fully heated with an adjacent sitting area and fireplace. The decorative elements of the Pool House, including a set of unique iron gates, symbolically represent Poseidon in his many manifestations as well as the mythological realm of the sea, while the house itself serves as a terrarium laced with creeping fig that boasts huge orchids and ferns.

The late twentieth century saw the dispersion of the estate that had taken two generations to create. The daughters of Howard Melville Hanna, Jr., Mrs. Julian Bolton and Mrs. Warren Bicknell, divided the grounds into two parts known as Sinkola Plantation and Melrose. In 1986, Dr. William F. Hogan and his wife, Mary, purchased the main house and surrounding acreage at Melrose to be used as a clinic for his practice as a plastic surgeon.

Melhana Plantation Resort, as conceptualized by Mr. Charles Lewis and his wife, Mrs. Fran Lewis, recreates the elegance and luxury of Mr. Hanna's estate of the early twentieth century. The Lewis's purchase of the Sinkola portion in 1994 and then the Melrose portion in 1996 marks the first time in over forty years that one owner has reunited the entire estate. The beautifully restored plantation offers its guests a taste of an era of luxury long past. Visitors to Melhana will be overwhelmed by the peaceful elegance of this historic plantation, now reborn as a unique plantation resort.

Timeline of Ownership

<u>Date</u>	<u>Owner(s)</u>	<u>Construction/ Expansion</u>
1825	Paul Coalson Elizabeth Blackshear	Main House 750 acres
1835	Elizabeth Blackshear Henry Wyche	Added 750 acres (total 1500 acres)
1853	Henry Wyche Artemisia Lester	
1862	William Gignilliat	
1869	Dr. Samuel Jones Lizzie Jones	
1891	Charles Chapin Lili Lewis	
1896	Howard Melville Hanna Kate Smith Hanna	Addition to Main House Guesthouse (not standing) Added 6,500 acres (total 8,000 acres)
1923	Howard Melville Hanna Jr. Claire Hanna	Manager's House (at Sinkola) Implement Shed Stables Garage Chauffeur's Office Shop Milk Barn Dairy Barn

1927		Owl's Nest
1929		Mule Barn
		Parrish Cottage
1930		Groom's Cottage
		Greenhouse
		Walled Garden
1931		Banksia Cottage
1934		Showboat
		Pool House
1935		Waldorf Cottage
		Squirrel's Cottage
		Bull Barn
		Calf Barn
		Pump House
1945	Mrs. Julian Bolton Mrs. Warren Bicknell	
1953	Mrs. Julian Bolton Mrs. Warren Bicknell	Divided property: Melrose and Sinkola Plantations
1986	Dr. William F. Hogan Mrs. Mary Hogan	31 acres Restoration of Main House(for clinic) Tennis Courts
1994	Mr. Charles Lewis Mrs. Fran Lewis	Purchase of Sinkola portion: Owl's Nest Pool House Garage and Laundry Squirrel's Cottage Extensive Restoration
1996		Purchase of Melrose portion: Main House Showboat Outbuildings Extensive Restoration
1997		Melhana Plantation Resort Grand Opening