



## **An Introduction: Russell Lands, Inc. Development History**

For nearly 100 years, the Russell family has been stewards of some of the most prized acreage along the shores of beautiful Lake Martin, Alabama's largest man-made lake. The family first purchased land in south central Alabama in 1846 and continued to grow its holdings for the next 80 years while bequeathing acres for parks, schools, hospitals and other public-use along the way.

Russell Lands, Inc. began developing the area known today as Russell Lands On Lake Martin in the 1960s with the creation of the 167-acre Willow Point Golf and Country club. The exclusive Willow Point neighborhood followed in the early 1970s, which would be the first of many primary and second-home lakefront neighborhoods planned and developed by Russell Lands.

Long-time lovers of the land, the Russell family built a development company that is dedicated to working in concert with the natural surroundings. Long before sustainable development practices were the norm, Russell Lands was creating neighborhoods that minimally impacted the land, included large wooded lots, and featured acres of green space. For more than three decades the company has been quietly, meticulously building a lake-oriented retreat that offers residents the natural beauty and simple lifestyle of lakeside living – with an eye toward preserving the land and protecting property values.

Read on to learn more about the history of the Russell family and how the company built Russell Lands On Lake Martin.

## **Russell Lands, Inc. History**

**Written by Ben Russell**

### **Russell Family Roots**

Benjamin Russell was the origin of all things Russell, in Alabama today. Born on a small farm in rural Tallapoosa County, Alabama, exactly 100 years after 1776, Ben Russell's genealogy traces back to Richard Russell of Westchester County, England, in the 14th century. Beginning in 1603 the lineage traces on through the church records of London and finally, around 1750, James Russell crossed the Atlantic Ocean to Charleston, South Carolina. His son, John Russell, fought in the War of Independence. The family slowly migrated through Georgia and into Alabama.



*Russell homeplace in downtown Alexander City.*

In approximately 1845, John's son, Jesse Russell, moved from Chambers County to Tallapoosa County in East Central Alabama. In April 1846, he purchased 318 acres of property, including a tract of land purchased from the Creek Indians, by way of the U.S. Treaty of 1832. This property was in the North Half of Section Eighteen, Township Twenty-One, Range Twenty-One, and it encompassed the confluence of the Oakachoy (also Oakchoy) and Big Kowaliga Creeks. He built a house on this site in 1846 and started farming in this area, which was about a mile west of Bulgers Mill. This area is covered Hollow - all, being one half mile south of Ourtown, Alabama. Some of the Russell's are buried in the nearby cemetery at the old Liberty Church.

In 1865, Jesse's son, Benjamin Francis Commander (B.F.C.) Russell, returned home to the family farm a decorated Civil War veteran having fought under General James Longstreet. Sadly, B.F.C.'s two brothers, John James and Jesse Simeon never returned. B.F.C. married Sarah Elisabeth "Bettie" Henderson in December 1867 and began farming with his father. He and Bettie had three children: Sally, born in 1870, Thomas Commander in 1874 and Benjamin in 1876.



*Mrs. Benjamin Russell  
'Miss Rob'*

In the early 1880s, B.F.C. moved his family to Alexander City, Alabama, formerly Youngsville, to become a merchant with his nephew, W. Luther Waters.

B.F.C. and Bettie's son, Benjamin, was "a dedicated and hard working young man" and eventually worked his way through the University of Virginia, graduating in the spring of 1899 with a law degree.

Following his marriage in November 1899 to Roberta Bacon McDonald, Benjamin Russell practiced law in Birmingham for a few months. When his father, B.F.C., suffered a paralyzing stroke in early 1900, Benjamin returned to Alexander City to manage the family business. In the same year, he founded the Citizens Bank of Alexander City, which in 1904 became the First National Bank, predecessor to the present Aliant Bank System.

## Ben Russell - The Philanthropist



*Benjamin Russell about 1940*

On Friday, June 13, 1902, the entire business district of Alexander City burned, but Ben Russell did not confine his efforts to rebuilding his bank. The pioneering spirit of his lineage allowed him to quickly shake off the effects of "the great fire" and take a bold, new leap. By April that same year, he had founded Russell Manufacturing Company in a 50 x 100-foot wooden building with six knitting machines and ten sewing machines. The new company purchased yarn for the knitting machines, which made the cloth for the cut and sew operation. The company's first garment was a ladies and children's knitted shirt, produced at the rate of 150 a day.

Young Ben Russell was quite adept at most practical applications of his ingenuity, but in those early days, success in such a fledgling business was difficult. It soon became apparent that each garment cost several cents more than it could be sold for. He met with his employees and confidentially discussed the matter of quantity and quality of production. Following a grim "we succeed or we fail together" declaration, they came away with an even stronger resolve. Hard work and innovation were Ben Russell's greatest assets - these as well as a thousand other problems were ultimately solved.

In 1908, the ladies and children's shirts went out of style and Russell changed its product line to ladies' step-ins or teddies. Thus the first change in what would become a constant flow of designs and garments to meet customer demands - from underwear to dress, casual, active, and athletic wear.

In the spring of 1902, "Mr. Ben," as he was called by all, built a telephone line from Dadeville through Alexander City and on to Sylacauga establishing the first telephone service in Alexander City. The first exchange placed twenty telephones in service through a switchboard located in the basement of the First National Bank. This business was sold to Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph on February 24, 1904 for \$15,250.



In 1911, the banker and cotton miller needed electrical power for his little mill and he began construction of a dam at Buzzards' Roost *Thomas Martin speaking at Corner Stone laying, Cherokee Bluffs - Nov. 7, 1925* downtown Alexander City. Alabama Power had, however, begun preparation for the massive Martin Dam project farther downstream.

This impoundment would flood Mr. Ben's site. According to Thomas W. Martin, Chairman of the Board of Alabama Power Company, Mr. Russell was the "moving spirit" behind his new Industries Light Power Company. After much negotiation Mr. Russell sold this power project to the Interstate Power Company, which became Alabama Power Company in 1920.

In the words of Martin, "the broadminded Russell recognized the greater public benefit from the complete development of the power of the stream; thereupon a satisfactory agreement was reached with Russell for purchase of his Industries Light and Power Company and for supplying his enterprises with power through a very favorable power franchise." Most importantly, however, Mr. Ben promoted a personal friendship and an agreement with Martin that would lead to the purchase of a significant portion of the 750 miles of shoreline property of the new lake.

Ben, like his forefathers, remained "close to the land" and he continued to develop the family farm - the pioneering spirit seems to have continued to evolve. He ultimately combined some of the land acquired from the Alabama Power Company with the family farm - in the 1930s this comprised 30,000 acres of farm and timberland on the shores of Lake Martin.

Following the founding of Russell Mills in 1902, Mr. Ben was quick to build a church for the people that were moving into the new Russell mill village. The church was a typical white structure with wood columns, offering Methodist and Baptist services on alternating Sundays - the two preachers and one congregation system seemed to work just fine, over the years.

Mr. Ben realized the need to provide education for his employees and their families and in the fall of 1917 he brought into the organization Professor R.Y. Scott to establish the Russell Mills School and hold classes in the Russell Mills church building. By 1924, the school had outgrown the church facility and a new school building was built. In 1927, the Russell School became a part of the Alexander City School System offering grades kindergarten through ninth.

The mill village grew to 230 or so houses but beginning in the late 1950s residents were encouraged to purchase property that had been made available and build their own home. By mid 1960, the "old mill village" had been replaced by the ever expanding "cotton mill."

In addition to all the mill and bank related interests, Mr. Ben began buying or creating other businesses. In approximately 1916, he opened the Alex City Wholesale Grocery business in the area of the present day fire department and the old Outlook location. In 1918, he purchased the Alexander City Manufacturing Company, a "millwork" or woodworking industry. Mr. Ben became owner and operator and Mr. I.C. Kelley was appointed manager. This grew into a very successful operation and by 1941 consisted of two plants with twelve buildings and over one hundred employees.

In 1920, Mr. Ben purchased the Nolen Hotel, formerly the Alabama Hotel, from Leon Nolen and changed the name to the Russco Hotel. The name later changed to the Russell Hotel. The Russell Hotel was located on prime property across from the railroad station in Alexander City and the dining room became the in-place in Alexander City.

In 1923, Mr. Ben built a hospital for the rapidly growing community. Russell Hospital, which was located on Lee Street, began operation with thirty-five beds and provided equipment for surgery and general inpatient care. Throughout its 41 years at the Lee Street location, many additions were made to the hospital as the town and mills continued to grow. In 1964, the Russell Hospital built a modern facility on Highway 280. Today the continually expanding Russell Medical Center Park is now a progressive medical complex serving several communities.

In 1923, Ben Russell completed a dam across Elkahatchee Creek located three and one-half miles south of downtown Alexander City. He built a pumping station, pipeline filter plant and waterworks system that would supply the entire town until 1947, and the Russell Mills and Russell mill village until the early 1980s.

The early 1920s were outstanding years for Florida land and real estate speculation. Mr. Ben, the opportunist, purchased a hotel in Coral Gables, Florida. This would have been a very rewarding venture had it not been for the stock market crash of 1929. Florida's real estate boom did not begin again until well after World War II.

### **Russell Lands The Early Years**



*Construction of Martin Dam - Approx 1925*

Land alone was not challenge enough for Ben Russell, so in 1926, he formally created Dixie Farms. This was during the time Martin Dam was being constructed. Mr. Ben and his brother, Thomas C. Russell, from their offices in the First National Bank in Alexander City since 1902, had actually managed the family farming business. Thomas C. became Mayor of Alexander City in 1907 and served until 1947.

Ben Russell, always the entrepreneur, was intent on promoting farming and any other productive lifestyles for the people of this most rural area of East Central Alabama. He called on his bank to cooperate in setting up a number of innovative, financial vehicles in order to help the very cash poor farming families set up their own ventures.

Land was made available, mules were purchased, seed and fertilizer provided and supervision offered, along with cooperative purchasing and marketing arrangements.

There were many categories of this cooperative type venture - "one-horse (or one-mule) farms" and "two-horse farms." Usually one family of 3-4 would be allocated one "horse." Cotton was the primary crop early on. A bale of cotton would then sell for \$25 and a one-horse farm could produce 4-5 bales a season.

Mr. Ben's new farming venture, like the bank and the textile mill, was quite successful in those years and for an extended period approximately 100 families made their livelihood on the Russell farmlands surrounding the small settlement of Dixie. The primary crops were cotton, corn and peanuts. Later, cattle were also raised on this land. This "close to the land" thinking surely saved many a family from destitution during the harsh years of the Great Depression in the Deep South.

Better farming techniques and the use of advanced, hybrid seed stock were promoted on Dixie Farms. In 1928, a successful experiment was undertaken. Ben Russell set aside 3,000 acres to provide for the production of long staple cotton in east Alabama. These endeavors required much vision and commitment. A cotton gin, for example, had to be built at Dixie Farms.

The first farm superintendent, or overseer, of Dixie Farms was Mr. Arthur Worthy for whom the farm church, Worthy's Chapel, and the school were named. The church is now the Russell Farm Baptist Church. Dr. McElroy Dean, a local veterinarian, became farm superintendent of "Dixie" and remained until 1937 when Mr. Russell Ballard was appointed. Mr. Ballard, who had served as assistant superintendent when he joined Dixie Farms on November 20, 1933, became superintendent in 1937 and served in that capacity until his retirement from Russell Lands in December 1974. Mr. Ballard's assistant, Rudolph Evans, served as head forester for Russell Lands until 1982.

"Dixie" was the central location of the old Dixie Farms, which later became the Russell Farms operation. Previously, the site was home to the old Benson Sawmill. Dixie was located on the present Highway 63 just north of Windermere Road. All that remains today are the red roof buildings and a couple of the old farmhouses. The fields, barns and other farmhouses are gone now, along with the sawmill, turpentine mill, cotton gin, charcoal plant, blacksmith's shop, log pond, railroad, dairy, and superintendent's house.

During the early days of Dixie Farms, Lake Martin began to fill and Mr. Russell spent time and resources on controlling the erosion problem. It was then predicted that within 50 years the entire lake would fill with silt washing in from the farm fields.

Today it is hard to imagine that farmers, then, had no clue that the topsoil would soon be totally removed by erosion. Mr. Ben's solution was the promotion of soil conservation, thus the resulting terrace and drainage patterns that are still quite evident in the dense forest, which now covers most of the old farms. The majority of remaining small farm fields were soon rock strewn, red clay moonscapes and have not yet totally recovered from this devastation.

During these years, most small rural farms were being abandoned to erosion and the general population shift. His tree planting enterprise was then considered to be "fool-hearted," as the Alabama Power Company had just cleared and sold, burned, tied down or given away timber covering much of the 44,000 acres of land covered by Lake Martin.

Mr. Ben was also involved in the operation of a narrow gage railroad originating in the Dixie area and terminating near his Alexander City Sash and Door Company (present day location of Russell Corporation's Print Shop/Recycling Center). The old railroad bed parallels Elkahatchee Road and can be seen at several locations a few yards off the road. This narrow gage railroad was used to carry timber and turpentine from the Benson Sawmill to Alexander City and was also used by locals to ride into town.

Mr. William (Will) E. Benson, a black graduate of Howard College in Washington, DC founded the Kowaliga School in 1895 to improve the lives of the local black population. In 1896, the name was changed to The Kowaliga Academic and Industrial Institute. Unfortunately, however, in the mid-1920s much of the Institute's farmland had to be sold to Alabama Power Company for the creation of Lake Martin. Cotton prices also dropped to 5 cents per pound about that time. The school was then forced to

close and be absorbed, to a degree, by nearby Tuskegee Institute. Many people moved from the area of Lake Martin in these days, fearing malaria and other diseases, which had been publicized during the building of the Panama Canal. Dr. William Crawford Gargus had by then discovered the cause and cure for malaria and was on hand to ensure the eradication of the infamous mosquito.

Mr. Ben later purchased the Benson Sawmill and the Kowaliga School and its property. The school's farmland was then included in the farming activities of Dixie Farms. He employed many of its personnel in an attempt to convert the school's central facility into a large hotel. He also included many of the school's black families in his cooperative family-farming program on the Russell lands. This was another first step on the road to real independence for some of these families.

In 1881, the legendary Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee Institute in the heart of the rural farming belt, stretching over the agricultural South. The small rural town of Tuskegee, Alabama is located 49 miles Southeast of Alexander City, Alabama.

Mr. Ben was a great supporter of Tuskegee Institute and served on the school's board of trustees. Due to his intense desire to preserve the agricultural productivity of this rural area, he and Dr. George Washington Carver, the legendary agronomist, became friends over the years. Some of the Russell family members can still recall the excitement caused by the arrival of the famous figure for his visits with Mr. Ben and "Miss Rob" in the Russell home. Mr. Ben and Dr. Carver would often converse for hours on the large front porch – no doubt discussing their mutual interest in preserving the, by then, fading way of life – the family farm. Their efforts to save the eroding landscape with thousands of miles of soil conserving terraces will long remain a mute testimony to man's efforts to control his destiny.

Farming was a great love of Mr. Ben but today few people realize that he was looking "a mile down the road" by acquiring all of his land, based on its relationship to Lake Martin. Company property maps and records clearly show that lake frontage, not farmland, was his ultimate goal while others complained about Lake Martin and worried about malaria. Mr. Ben could scarcely believe his good fortune - "to have a gigantic lake dropped on top of us."

Mr. Ben believed that recreation was the wave of the future and that Lake Martin was our key to this future. He had been a charter member and officer of the Alexander City Development and Industrial Club upon its organization on April 29, 1901. He was instrumental in organizing the Commercial Club of Alexander City in 1910, which in 1920 was reorganized as the Chamber of Commerce of Alexander City, where he served as the local organization's president from 1910 to 1937. He was one of the driving forces in establishing the Alabama State Chamber of Commerce, and became its first president, serving for three years - from June 11, 1937 to the summer of 1940.

Mr. Ben was one of the pioneers of good roads in Alabama. He organized and was elected President of the Florida Short Route in 1920. This group was devoted entirely to the promotion of tourist travel. He was responsible for bringing the "Florida Short Route" through Alexander City and served as president of the organization until his death. He also opened the first subdivision on Lake Martin, the Lake Hills Subdivision, on March 27, 1928.



*Dedication Ceremonies of Martin Dam at Cherokee Bluffs - Oct. 16, 1936*

In 1940, Mr. Ben was among several industrial leaders who organized the Alabama Research Institute for the purpose of promoting scientific research in the use of local raw materials in the manufacture of finished products. Later the name was changed to Southern Research Institute when the organization's geographic area of interest broadened and it began attracting people from throughout the South. It grew to have research facilities in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina and Frederick, Maryland. In 1999, Southern Research Institute merged into a University of Alabama at Birmingham research program.

Mr. Ben had been ahead of his own time and with the coming of the second half of the century, long after his death, the greatest asset of Mr. Ben's "closeness to the land" began to come to fruition - the appeal of the shoreline property to a slightly more affluent population. This "affluence" might have only been the

ability of a textile worker to spend two or three hundred dollars to tear down an old mill village or tenant farmhouse and rebuild it in the form of a fishing cottage on lakefront property provided by the company. This affluence was also exemplified in the form of a banker from Birmingham paying \$25/mo for a "cabin" reconstructed by the farm crews. Thus went the old tenant farmhouses and many of the 230 or so Russell mill village houses that were torn down during the late 1950s. Of far greater importance, however, this phenomenon signaled an era of solid proof that "The Old Man" could, in fact, "talk to you while looking over your shoulder, 100 years into the future."

A typical example of Mr. Ben's enthusiastic management style was told by Carl A. Swanson who was traveling by train from Chicago to Florida when he happened to sit by Mr. Ben Russell somewhere north of Alexander City. By the time Mr. Ben reached home, he had persuaded Mr. Swanson, a highly educated and skilled electrical engineer, to spend the night and tour his mills the next day. Missing his train to Florida the next day, Mr. Swanson called his employer and turned down his promotion and new position in Florida.

This and innumerable other examples of the man's dynamic style prove that, in part, his success was due to the realization that even he could not make all of the decisions. He knew that he needed help in managing his varied enterprises.

During his lifetime, Mr. Russell, the young man from a farm in one of the poorest and most rural areas of the South, had created a bank, a textile mill, a development potential of hundreds of miles of prime shoreline, an entire farming community, a mill village, church, school, hospital, a phone company, a municipal water supply, a foundry, a wood working industry, a hotel, a dairy, a bakery, a laundry, a wholesale grocery and founded the State Chamber of Commerce. Sadly, however, he was not afforded the time to assemble sufficient managers to take on the awesome burden that he soon had to lay down.

The passing of "Mr. Ben" on December 16, 1941, brought great uncertainty to the rural community and many pondered the future of his vast and varied enterprises. Changing times and lifestyles soon caught up with the farming venture but the land remained. The farming interest had given purpose to the land for years but its real value soon emerged.

Upon Mr. Ben's death, the Benjamin and Roberta Russell Educational and Charitable Foundation was created from his estate to continue his philanthropic works. Each year millions of dollars are given in his memory through scholarships, endowments and grants to various educational and charitable causes.

He was further memorialized by the dedication and naming of the Benjamin Russell High School on September 4, 1950. His son, Robert, enabled the city to enjoy tremendous savings by personally supervising the building of the new high school and the addition to the grammar school.

Many of Mr. Ben's ventures such as the foundry, bakery, creamery, wholesale grocery, laundry and Florida venture simply could not survive without his incredible organizational and management skills. During the decade following his death, many of these businesses were sold or closed. The bakery was closed within a few years. The creamery was sold, and the Russell Pipe and Foundry was sold to "a couple of men from Anniston." The Alex City Wholesale Grocery moved from downtown to a location on the Sylacauga highway, but was later sold to another wholesale grocery company. The laundry survived until the mid-1970s.

Mr. Ben had also accumulated more land in adjoining Coosa County than he had in his home Tallapoosa County. All of this property was disposed of after his death.

There were obvious exceptions. Russell Mills, which continued to prosper over the years and in the eighties, under the direction of E.C. Gwaltney, began its meteoric rise to a Fortune 500 company, with sales and assets of \$1,250,000,000 and 18,000 employees worldwide in the mid-1990s. The name of the continually successful company was changed in 1962 to Russell Mills, Inc. and again, in 1973, to Russell Corporation.

Under the guidance of Sally Russell's grandson, John Russell Thomas, Mr. Ben's bank, now Aliant Bank

System, has grown to serve Alexander City, Birmingham, Elmore County and Montgomery - totaling 13 banks and branches.

Mr. Ben's old Dixie Farms was renamed Russell Farms in 1950, but production of cotton and corn had greatly diminished by the end of World War II. Many of the farm families went to work in the rapidly expanding Russell textile plants during the Second World War. Some of the remaining farm families found work in the company sawmills - others moved to town to work in the carpentry or woodworking plant, building supply business (later, Russell Do it centers) and Alexander City Sash and Door Company, which Mr. Russell had built to further promote the meager assets of this rural East Alabama community. The old farm operation was ultimately managed from the main office of Russell Mills and its operation could only receive "hand me down" support from Mr. Ben's family and his loyal, old-time employees such as Obie Thomas, Millard Yates, Roy M. Latimer, Kyle Neighbors, and Harold Scott. These and all other managers were desperately needed to run the expanding textile operations. Only Russell Ballard had a full time position as superintendent.

Mr. Ben was survived by his wife, Roberta Bacon McDonald, three sons and one daughter: Benjamin (Bennie) Commander, Thomas D., Robert A. and Elisabeth. Bennie, the eldest, took over the reins of the "mill" upon his father's death and served until his untimely demise in January 1945. Thomas D. Russell, the next eldest son, assumed the presidency and Robert, the youngest son, became vice president. Elisabeth was much loved for her benevolent works, such as the establishment and management of a day care-kindergarten for black children. She was best known and loved by all for her very active participation in the management of Russell Hospital.

The family and all available management were increasingly occupied with the problems of the rapidly expanding textile plants, bank and other remaining businesses. The old farming enterprise had to be left to its own, with Kyle Neighbors and the ever-loyal Russell Ballard continuing to carry the ball. Mr. Ballard meanwhile was training Rudolph Evans to continue his work.

After returning from the war in Europe in 1945, Robert Russell became interested in the old gold fields of Tallapoosa County. He later acquired the old Dutchman's Mine called Dutch Bend. Eventually, he opened the mining operation again as somewhat of a hobby. This and several other sites were mined for a number of years but like all those before him, Robert Russell never made a significant profit and turned to a more "normal hobby" - cattle farming. Likely, however, the monetary trend continued. Robert's "love for the land," however, encouraged him to personally acquire 1677 acres of wonderful, wild country on the beautiful Hillabee creek - actually a river. This fascinating block of property is now a part of the Russell Lands holdings and used as a game reserve and corporate retreat.

During the late 1940s and 1950s, a very significant portion of Mr. Ben's hard-won and highly prized lakefront property was disposed of - the east and west extremities of his holdings on the south side of Lake Martin.

The Russell family allowed the state to build a park on company property on Lake Martin next to the Highway 63 bridge at Kowaliga in 1948-49. In 1960, Robert Russell began construction of Wind Creek Park as a replacement for the tiny, overcrowded and outdated facility at Kowaliga. The park opened in 1961 and the family donated the use of this facility to the public. Robert continued to improve Wind Creek Park with the help of his friend, Omar McGhee, as manager.

In 1953, Julia Russell started Church in the Pines, a small inter-denominational church on company property near Kowaliga, on the shore of Lake Martin. The church grew over the years to become a major part of the Lake Martin community, and at this time, Russell Lands took over all of the responsibility for the facility. Later the management of the program and facility was passed on to the company and Luanne Russell directed the program.

**Russell Lands, Inc.**

In 1960, the old Russell Farms officially became Russell Lands, Inc. Also in 1960 Mr. Ben's grandson, Benjamin or Ben Russell (neither Mr. Ben nor "Little Ben" had a middle name) began full time employment with Russell Manufacturing Company.

In 1963, when Russell Mills, Inc. became a public corporation, the old Russell Farms property was spun off to remain as Russell Lands, Inc. - a private company, owned by all of Mr. Ben's heirs and some of his close associates - these were the original stockholders of "the Mills."

In 1970, Russell Mills was in a cash bind and its management, which was then the dominant portion of the Russell Lands management, decided to sell the wildly popular Wind Creek Park to the State of Alabama. This was a great disappointment to some family members. Governor George Wallace had, however, promised to spend vast sums to create a first rate state park. His campaign for the U.S. Presidency and the 1972 assassination attempt left him paralyzed and diverted his attention. The park that Robert Russell had created as a labor of love languished in mediocrity for years but is now greatly expanded and a wonderful asset to Alabama.

Apparently, due to an inherent, family "closeness to the land," Mr. Ben's grandson, Ben, began to spend more and more time on Russell Lands' matters. As an example, the year of 1971 was spent, for the most part, creating and promoting the Lake Martin Recreation Association - now the Lake Martin Resource Association.

In 1970, Ben was elected President of Russell Lands, Inc and officially left the employ of Russell Mills. His goals were to enhance the value of the "lands company" by discreetly developing the lake property and creating new and diversified assets.

In January 1973, Ben Russell persuaded Gene Davenport to resign a position with Rust Engineering in Birmingham and move his family to Lake Martin to become the ninth employee of Russell Lands. Then, Gene moved into the same tiny office with Ben in the Knit Goods Sales office at Russell Mills, Inc., where Ben had previously been employed and still maintained an office. In late 1974 they moved a floor down to a larger facility in the recently vacated personnel office. The "Lands" company was also given use of the old mill stores as a shop and "shade tree" garage. In 1977, Russell Lands, Inc. moved out of the mill office into the new Russell Lands office building at Willow Point Subdivision.

In 1985, Ben Russell was able to acquire the stock of 31 of the 35 individual stockholders. In that same year, he became the Chairman and CEO and Gene Davenport became President of Russell Lands, Inc., which is now a closely held private company - the principals being the families of three of Mr. Ben's direct descendants.

Russell Lands now has several major operating divisions. One of the original divisions is the management of Mr. Ben's 25,000 acres of timberland. Russell Lands' forest products division manages the company's forestland in the Lake Martin area. The primary thrust of the timberland management program is toward the improvement of its prime property assets, while continually improving its potential timber asset.

Today the company manages several hundred miles of its shoreline property on Lake Martin. This beautiful, freshwater lake consists of "44,000 acres of drinking water" with some 750 miles of mostly wooded shoreline. Lake Martin is a deep, blue-water lake - one of the most beautiful and unspoiled lakes in the Continental USA.

The rental properties division of Russell Lands manages more than 350 lakeshore, rental homes that began with the relocation of mill village and farmhouses and continues today with the building of large, custom rental homes. Today only a handful of the old farmhouses exist - primarily as a service to retired employees or their families who have lived there many years.

In 1964, the last of the Russell Farms cattle farms, locally known as "the Wedges Farms," (having once been a farm where workers were hired for "wages") was chosen as the location of the Willow Point Golf and Country Club. Mr. Ballard had saved this area from the random development of rental lake homes, as he - being related to Mr. Ben - was a farmer at heart and always seemed to find a "better" location for the new doctor or professor who he was to help find a suitable location on Lake Martin for his "cabin."



*Willow Point*

This beautiful championship 18-hole golf course meanders about on a peninsula totally surrounded by Lake Martin. The par 72 course was constructed as a private club to replace the original course, which was given by the family to the State of Alabama for the site of the Alexander City Junior College (now Central Alabama Community College). Eugene C. Gwaltney, who took over the management of Russell Mills from his father-in-law, Tom Russell, was instrumental in building the golf course. The senior management of Russell Mills wanted a golf club for the benefit of the "Mill" and Russell Lands was called upon to donate the land and some of the resources. Russell Mills furnished much of the labor and machinery.

On September 17, 1964, the property and improvements were incorporated as a private club. The membership could not cover the cost of operation and the club was soon deep in debt. In 1972, Russell Lands was asked to assume the debt and take over the property, as well as the operation of the club. Incredible as it might seem, this was viewed by many as quite a bold move for Russell Lands. Little hope was held for making this project a financial success.

The young management of Russell Lands, however, could easily see the value of this property as the centerpiece for their planned Willow Point Subdivision and for future lake-oriented development. Much concern was felt, however, regarding the ability to control the escalating cost of a division of the company, which was valued by senior members of the board only for its intrinsic value as a golf club. Regardless of their concerns, Russell Lands management assumed the debt, \$55,000, with the return of the deed to the 167-acre golf course. The arrangement seems to have worked rather well for all.

Russell Lands' first residential development, Willow Point Estates, was begun in 1972. Lakefront and interior properties are primarily single-family homes, but several condominiums are also included. The Russell Lands, Inc. Corporate Office and the 4,500-foot Willow Point Airport are also located in Willow Point. This exclusive residential subdivision on Lake Martin is adjacent to Willow Point Golf and Country Club and is one of the company's finest developments.

Today, the company has developed some 900 lots in nine subdivisions. Some 600 private homes are now completed on these deeded lots. These developments have been done in a very tasteful fashion and occupy only a small percentage of the company's shoreline holdings. In addition to Willow Point Estates, other major subdivisions include the following:

*Trillium* is a multi-phase development in the Kowaliga area of Lake Martin. An elegant gatehouse guards the entry to the large, wooded lakefront home sites and luxury homes featured in this impressive development. Here, some of the very finest properties on Lake Martin are only a half hour from Montgomery.

*Windermere* is a scenic, quiet, mid-lake, multi-phase development that appeals to homeowners of all ages. Beautiful, landscaped entrances lead to pristine, wooded, lakefront sites and homes with gorgeous shorelines and beaches.

*Windermere West* is one of Lake Martin's newest lakefront residential developments. It has breathtaking lake views, an abundance of wildlife, and all the best of lake living. Located less than one hour from Montgomery, one and a half hours from Birmingham this development has boating, owner's association, gatehouse, extensive landscaping, special lighting, underground utilities and city water.

*Windover* is adjacent to Windermere and affords similar amenities with a slightly smaller minimum square footage requirement.

*Raintree* offers the freedom of the great outdoors along with the convenience of city services. Homes blend with the natural beauty of the wooded, waterfront setting. Raintree is one of the few lakefront developments inside the city limits.

*River Oaks* includes multiple, carefully designed lakefront neighborhoods within the city limits. Neighborhoods include: Mountain Laurel, Columbine and River Oaks. It is on the north part of the lake near the municipal golf course and convenient to shopping, schools, and medical facilities.

*Riverbend* and *Lake Hill Estates* are located near the east end of the Highway 280 Bridge over the north end of Lake Martin. The rolling topography in these early subdivisions enables magnificent views of the lake and surrounding shoreline. Large, wooded home sites offer the best of country, waterfront living with close proximity to all of Alexander City's amenities.

*The Ridge* is Russell Lands' newest lakefront residential development. This community is located in the heart of Lake Martin and is the largest development to date. The initial offering of nearly 200 waterfront lots definitely sets the tone for *The Ridge* to become one of Lake Martin's premiere developments. *The Ridge* offers a beautifully appointed, gated entrance with cascading waterfall and ponds, street lights, sidewalks, underground utilities. *The Ridge* has a full-service marina and at the appropriate time, waterfront condominiums, a restaurant and several retail shops could follow. *The Ridge* has the potential to become a community within itself. It is located in close proximity to such well-known local points of interest as Chimney Rock, Children's Harbor, Dixie Sailing Club and Kowaliga Bay.

Kowaliga Marina was built in 1972. Subsequently, Real Island Marina was purchased in March 1997, and two super marinas, *The Ridge Marina* and *River North Marina*, were completed in the spring of 2001. Sales, service and indoor stack storage for over 1400 boats and outside storage and wet-slips for over 200 boats now combine to make the four marinas year-round operations. Russell Lands has the distinction of building the first covered wet-slips and first pump-out station on Lake Martin. All marinas offer complete dry stack storage, sales, service and storage.

In 1973, Russell Lands became involved in the energy field. Having grown up in the forestry and textile industries, company management, being "close to the land," was able to recognize the value of forest residues as an industrial fuel.

In the early 1970s, Ben Russell was invited by a forest products industry to tour numerous forest harvesting operations and sawmills in Scandinavia. The frugality of the Swedes, Finns, Norwegians and Danes was readily evident, especially in their use of all forest residues as fuel.

U.S. forest products industries were then analyzed and a proposal was made to guarantee Russell Corporation a 4-year supply of wood fuel at the equivalent, fixed price of \$0.14 per gallon of oil. This resulted in the construction, during 1975, of the first non-forest products industry wood-fired boiler plant in the United States in modern times.

The Russell Corporation boilers began operation in January 1976. The boiler plant, which supplies processed steam for use in the manufacture of textile goods, burns 125,000 tons of sawmill residues per year, resulting in annual savings of more than 6,000,000 gallons of fuel oil. Russell Lands has supplied this fuel under contract since January 1976.

In 1975, the price of oil quickly soared to \$0.70 per gallon and the project was an immediate success. The newly formed ECON Company's promotional efforts were rewarded with the building of two more boiler plants in other states. ECON acquired long-term contracts for supplying wood residue fuel to these facilities. In the year 2001, we are continuing our uninterrupted supply of fuel to Russell Corporation and one of the other two original plants.

The Russell Lands/ECON supplied plants have consumed 4.2 million tons of wood, which was accomplished without the cutting of one additional tree, by using a commodity that previously had a negative economic and ecological value - sawmill and forest residue. The use of this waste wood has saved the equivalent of 214 million gallons of oil.

The principal aim of ECON has been the promotion of wood and wood residue as an alternative fuel for industry. ECON has become a leader in the wood energy field. The main thrust of the company is, however, toward long-term fuel supply contracts with industry.

Russell Lands entered the building supply business in 1984 with the purchase of the then, Alexander City Building Supply, from Mr. Ben's estate. This business had been part of Mr. Ben's old Alexander City Sash and Door Company. This was later combined with the newly purchased Horton Supply, Inc. Since that time, the division has grown to include six locations, employing over 100 people in central Alabama.

In 1992, Russell Building Supply affiliated with Do-It-Best Corp., a 4400 member cooperative of building material and hardware dealers and began conversion of its retail and contractor business to Russell Do it center stores, offering a full line of building materials and home improvement items for both professionals and homeowners. Since 1996, three of the stores have also added tool rental centers.

In 1989, Russell Lands donated 50 acres, comprising one mile of the most beautiful shoreline Lake Martin property, to a charitable organization called Children's Harbor. Russell Lands was a major player in helping to plan and build this beautiful facility. Today, Children's Harbor is the principal charity of Russell Lands. The company management devotes countless hours to help manage the organization and promote the numerous fundraisers necessary to support it.

In 1998, Russell Lands made over 100 acres of shoreline property available for and constructed the Lake Martin Amphitheater (LMAT). The use of the LMAT is devoted to the Lake Martin community for the enhancement of the cultural and performing arts. Russell Lands also took over the financial burden of the famous July 4th fireworks show, which is now a local legend.



On June 18, 1999, landmark Kowaliga Restaurant burned and was rebuilt and opened in August 2000. Kowaliga Restaurant was built for lease in 1952 and opened in April 1953. Topy and Charlotte Hodnett leased and operated the facility. Fifteen rental cabins (Topy and Charlotte lived in one of the cottages) called Kowaliga Cottages had been constructed on the point on the southwest side of the Kowaliga Highway 63 Bridge, west of the restaurant. Later, ten more cabins were built across the lake. In 1959, a Sports Shop "marina" was built on the site of the old Lee Parks store near the restaurant.

*Kowaliga Beach Resort - circa mid-1950s*

The removal of these cabins and then the destruction of the Kowaliga Restaurant by fire made the fabulous sight available for a new restaurant.

The Lake Hill Restaurant was built on Russell Lands' property in the late 1950s, on an awesome promontory overlooking Lake Martin at Highway 280. This facility continues to operate as a leased facility today.

Area Concrete Inc. was a wholly owned and quite successful subsidiary of Russell Lands for many years, having been sold in 2000.

In 2001, Russell Lands began construction of a bark processing plant to produce and market a supply of landscaping materials. A synergy exists between this business and the sawmill residue system, which furnish 120,000 tons a year of wood fuel to Russell Corporation.

In 2004, Russell Lands purchased a tract of land south of Lake Martin and began Russell Materials, a sand clay gravel operation. The company has for a number of years been operating a granite quarry on company land for internal use.

Ben Russell purchased 1,327 acres of Mr. Ben's property, surrounding Elkahatchee Pond, from Russell Corporation in 2002 and began rebuilding an old water powered gristmill located on the property.

By the year 2006, Russell Lands employed a total staff of 342 people.

Russell Lands continues to grow and prosper in the 21st century. The company has many creative projects on the drawing board and the future is eagerly anticipated.