

# *Beersheba Springs, A History*

2017 Edition

Volume I: General History, the Hotel-Assembly, and Shops

Clopper Almon, Editor

Beersheba Springs Historical Society

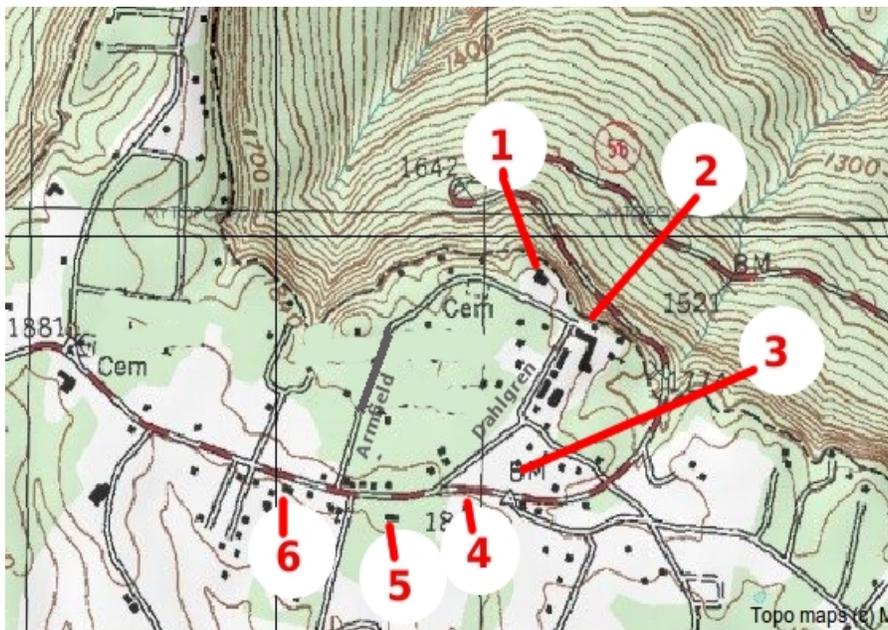
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*Map of central Beersheba Springs. 1. The Cliffs, the Armfield-Glasgow House; 2. the Hotel - United Methodist Assembly; 3. Cockrill - Mayhew Beersheba Porcelain; 4. Mountain Home, Otey-Argo house; 5. Howell Cottage; 6. The Store - Beersheba Springs Market*

## Preface

This publication is a comprehensive revision of the book *Beersheba Springs: 150 Years, 1833-1983*, written and edited by Margaret Brown Coppinger, Herschel Gower, Samuel Harwell Howell, and Georgianna Overby and published by the Beersheba Springs Historical Society in 1983. This new edition is printed in three volumes. *Volume I: General History, Hotel-Assembly, and Shops* is intended to be of interest to every Beersheba visitor or resident, especially to participants in programs at the United Methodist Assembly.

*Volume II: Families, Homes, Lore and More* is for all those more deeply connected with Beersheba. We have tried to be inclusive of the homes and families in the Historic District, but are aware of the incompleteness of the result. All three volumes are now produced by a print-on-demand process and can be easily revised and improved. We urge anyone who has been left out to get in touch with the editor to be included in future editions. It is, however, necessary to be willing to write. Our resources for going out and gathering oral history and writing it down are very limited.

*Volume III: Classics* contains items which will need no updating.

Warmest thanks go to all those who contributed to this edition. In general, their names appear at the end of the articles they contributed. Besides her major contribution on the history of the United Methodist Assembly, Ann Hale Troutt has read and commented on the whole of this first volume. Joan Almon and Thelma Hinton have also proof-read the entire volume.

The full text of the first, 1983 edition is on the Internet at <http://grundycountyhistory.org>, where it is fully searchable. That edition forms the basis of this one, but it proved impossible to update the section "First Families" by Margaret Coppinger on the genealogy of Beersheba families, and the original has not been reprinted.

Of the original authors, only Herschel Gower is alive in 2012; he encouraged this update but asked to rest on his laurels during its preparation. A new editor and new contributors had to be found. None of us have the knowledge of Beersheba history that Margaret Coppinger had acquired, and few can match the graceful prose of Herschel Gower and Sam Howell. But we hope to have put together a book that will in some way convey the very special feeling that Beersheba Springs inspires in all of us.

Some of us come to enjoy and be refreshed by the nature, some come for religious deepening, some choose to live here to be part of this special community. I myself often think of the words of my aunt Isabel Howell as we paused on the bluff above Greeter Falls, "This place is so beautiful it has to be sacred."

Clopper Almon, Editor

## General History

The written history of the settlement of Beersheba Springs begins in 1833 when Beersheba Cain with three companions rode horseback up the mountain and found a mineral spring. The history of the place before Beersheba's ride, before the white man, before the red man, before the mountain itself is written in the rocks that she passed on the way up. Today we drive up too fast to notice them; and indeed, they are mostly so covered over and weathered that it requires some effort to read them. But if we make that effort, they tell a remarkable, indeed, almost incredible story.

## Geological History

As Tennessee Highway 56 starts up the mountain to Beersheba, it is in the Monteagle Limestone of the late Mississippian epoch. Geologists put the date of its formation at some 320 - 330 million years ago. There is a nice exposure in the cliffs to the right of the road about 0.2 miles before starting up the mountain. If we drilled down we would probably soon come to a black strata known as the Chattanooga shale. It seems to have been formed as a shallow sea spread and then receded and spread again over much of the United States east of the Rockies. As it spread, an area would become swampy and a layer of black sediment would form over the ground. If the water became deeper, the land plants would die and the pressure of the water would turn the sediment to shale. Worm tracks through the shale show that it was formed in water shallow enough to have adequate oxygen for the worms. When the land rose again, the bottom became dry land and eroded, and then sank, became a swamp, and the process was

repeated over and over. Eventually, by the time the Monteagle Limestone at the bottom of the Beersheba mountain was formed, the water had risen considerably and was fairly deep, maybe a hundred feet or more.

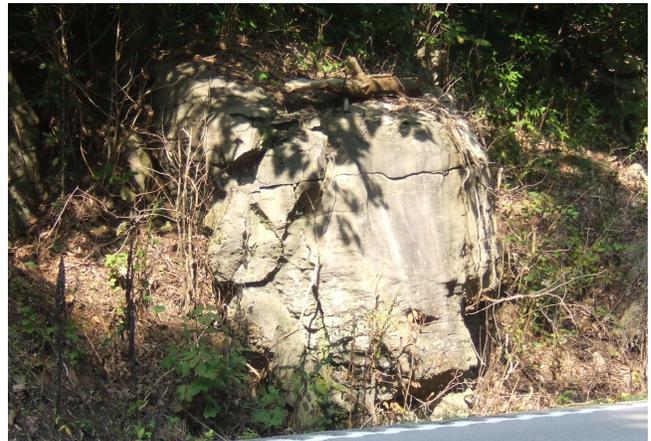
The limestone was deposited by precipitation of calcium carbonate. There are in it millions of skeletons of tiny, beautifully geometric one-celled animals called *foraminifera*. Bits of crinoids, animals that resemble plants enough to be called sea lilies, are also found. The medium to thick beds indicate long periods of stable conditions.

As we go up the mountain and get about halfway to the lower switchback, we enter the Bangor Limestone. Its petroleum-like odor when freshly broken indicates more organic material and a shallower sea.

Around the first switchback we come into the Pennington Formation. The lower part is dolomite but the upper part is a mixture of shale, clay, and



*Monteagle Limestone at the foot of the mountain.*

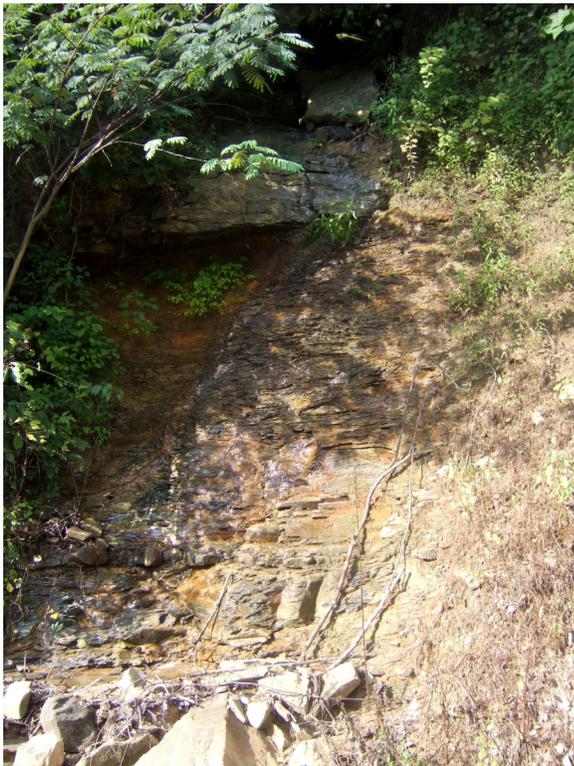


*Bangor Limestone just below the lower switchback*

thin-bedded limestone that indicates formation in shallow water. Gone are the quiet days of slow deposition of limestone. Continental collision was pushing up the Appalachians to the east and erosion was dumping material here. The upper Pennington has been a major problem for road builders, because it does not form a firm embankment and slides are frequent.

Just above the second switchback, we enter the Raccoon Mountain Formation, also a shallow water formation of thinly bedded shale and clay, with some thin coal seams at the bottom. Because the road encounters it at a steepest part of the mountainside, its tendency to slide has proven the hardest problem in maintenance of the highway. Huge steel I-beams driven into the ground and wooden beams between them pin the road on the side of the mountain. But slides still happen, as shown in the picture on page 29.

With the Raccoon Mountain Formation, we have entered the Pennsylvanian epoch. The sea floor was rising, and this part of Tennessee was



*Shale of the Raccoon Mountain Formation in the lower three quarters of the picture, Warren Point sandstone in the upper quarter.*

the scene of constantly shifting coast lines as the sea advanced and receded over and over again. Sandy beaches, barrier islands, tidal flats, lagoons and swamps alternated. Above the friable, shifty Raccoon Mountain Formation comes a sharp line of demarcation with the stable Warren Point sandstone. Stable though it is now, it was laid down by successive, shifting beaches. On the top of the mountain we reach the Sewanee conglomerate with smooth, rounded quartz pebbles embedded in sandstone that tell of an ancient beach. The sand came from the weathering of the Appalachians to the east. Ripple marks are frequent. Coal deposits, indicating land plants, were found in this stratum at the end of the Grassy Ridge Road, about 2 miles southeast of the center of Beersheba.

Farther east, the Appalachian mountains were pushed up with much tilting and distortion of the layers. Here the layers are in their original horizontal position. Why the difference? Along the line of the Sequatchie valley there occurred an overthrust fault with the sediments from the east sliding over those from the west and thus relieving the pressure. The overthrust is still in place at its northern end; the fractures in the top layers resulting from sliding over the western side caused it to weather away quickly. Likewise, the overthrust fractured the lower layers, which then also weathered away quickly. And thus was created the arrow-straight Sequatchie valley. Here



*Warren Point sandstone on State Route 56 just below the top of the mountain.*

at Beersheba we see the peaceful depositions of the Paleozoic spared from the violence of continental collision by the great Sequatchie overthrust. The result is a high, flat or gently rolling table land with a slight slope towards the Mississippi basin in the center of the continent.

The fact that coal was found on top of the plateau indicates that the whole area had once been under enormous pressure. Geologists estimate that there must have been at least 2,000 and more likely 8,000 feet of detritus from the weathering of the Smoky Mountains piled above the present surface of the plateau. Gradually it washed away and now forms the Mississippi delta.

There was still no mountain, or perhaps better said, there was no valley. But the rains came and found tiny cracks in the sandstone and got into the shale and limestone underneath. The sandstone is not soluble in fresh water but shale and limestone are. So the water began to hollow out subterranean passageways to the sea. When they got wide enough, the sandstone above them collapsed creating coves and bluffs. Then water running down the face of the sandstone bluff ate out the shale and limestone below, leaving the sandstone overhanging the space beneath. The

overhang grew wider and wider until it broke off, crashed down the mountainside and the process began again. And so the history that put materials soluble in fresh water under the insoluble sandstone gave us the bluffs, valleys and views we enjoy today.

These geological processes are continuing. The underground aquifers are still being formed. Between Beersheba and Altamont, the road crosses two creeks, first Firescald and then Piney. They soon come together to form the stream that creates the Blue Hole and Greeter Falls, (formerly called Long's Mill and Long's Falls). A little below the falls, it is joined by Big Creek (which passes under Highway 56 south of Altamont). The combined stream rushes down the mountain side, makes several nice swimming places in the valley, and then disappears! The creek bed continues but with water in it only in very wet weather. From the observatory in front of the Hotel in Beersheba, one can see this stream bed, known as the Dry Wash. From the observatory one also sees, to the left, the Backbone, a spur of the mountain extending northward into the valley. At its foot, the water comes out again at the Big Spring, which begins the year-round flow of the Collins River. The 8 or 9 mile passage underground, however, has chilled the water to about 58 degrees.

## American Indians in the Area

If one follows the Collins valley on Highway 56 about ten miles north of the foot of the mountain below Beersheba, one comes to the town of Irving College. Here the Hill's Creek Road leads off to the east. In about a mile, it crosses the Collins River and just on the other side of the river, on the north side of the road, is a quite substantial American Indian ceremonial mound. Many such mounds were built along the tributaries of the Mississippi River, and the culture is referred to as the Mississippian or Muscogean. Little or nothing was learned from this particular mound, and the people were gone before the first white settlers reached the Collins valley.

Elsewhere, however, the culture survived well into the historical period and from the

accounts of explorers and archaeology much is known. The mound builders practiced agriculture with corn and beans as their staples, supplemented with pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes, and many wild roots and berries. Dogs were their only domestic animals. They were skilled potters, workers of flint and weavers of plant materials. Most of the arrowheads found in the Collins valley are thought to belong to this culture.<sup>1</sup>

The Muscogee of this area became known to the white settlers as Creeks. During the Revolutionary War, they sided with the British. Nonetheless, Washington, as President, maintained that they should have rights equal with white citizens but would need to accept private property and, in general, European civilization. Genuine efforts at



*The Indian mound at Irving College. The person on top at right gives an idea of the scale.*

education were begun, and some twenty years of peace ensued. But during the War of 1812, the British instigated a rebellion which was put down by troops, including Cherokees, under Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. The Creeks were not a significant factor in the further settlement in this area.

The other group of American Indians in this area in the historic period were the just-mentioned Cherokees and in particular the dissident group known as the Chickamauga. De Soto encountered Cherokees in 1540 and referred to them as the Chelaque. His guides were Muscogean and were probably using the word now written *tciloki* meaning "people who speak a different language." for the Cherokees were related to the Iroquois but not at all to the Creeks.

By the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals in 1775, Cherokee leaders sold to the Transylvania Company of North Carolina all the land between the Kentucky River and the Cumberland River and south of the Ohio River. The young chief Dragging Canoe was among those present. He opposed the sale with such a powerful description of what lay in store for the Cherokee that they called off the sale. But the whites produced another feast the next day with rum flowing freely, and the treaty was signed and the sale made. Dragging Canoe rose and said, through a translator, "You have bought a fair land.... If you try to settle it, you will find it dark and bloody ground." He devoted the

rest of his life to making that prophecy come true.

He and his followers first established towns along the banks of the Chickamauga Creek, which flows into the Tennessee in Chattanooga, and took the creek's name as their name.<sup>2</sup> After several destructions of these towns in retaliation for their raids on the Cumberland settlements, the Chickamauga moved down the river and built the "five lower towns" in the vicinity of Nickajack cave on the left (south) bank of the Tennessee River. They considered these strongholds impregnable and continued their attacks, aided by British and Spanish agents. Their war path to the settlements they sought to destroy began at the mouth of Battle Creek on the right bank of the Tennessee (just above South Pittsburgh), came up the mountain to the present site of Tracy City, then to Coal-mont, then to Beersheba, then down the mountain to the Collins valley, then north to the Caney Fork River at Rock Island, and then along its valley into the Cumberland valley.<sup>3</sup> The route became known to the white man as the Chickamauga Trace, but had probably been in use for hundreds of years. Though often defeated, the Chickamaugas kept up the attacks.

Dragging Canoe died in 1792 and was succeeded by John Watts. He organized nearly a thousand warriors in an attack on Knoxville. John Sevier pursued him and defeated him near the present Rome, Georgia.

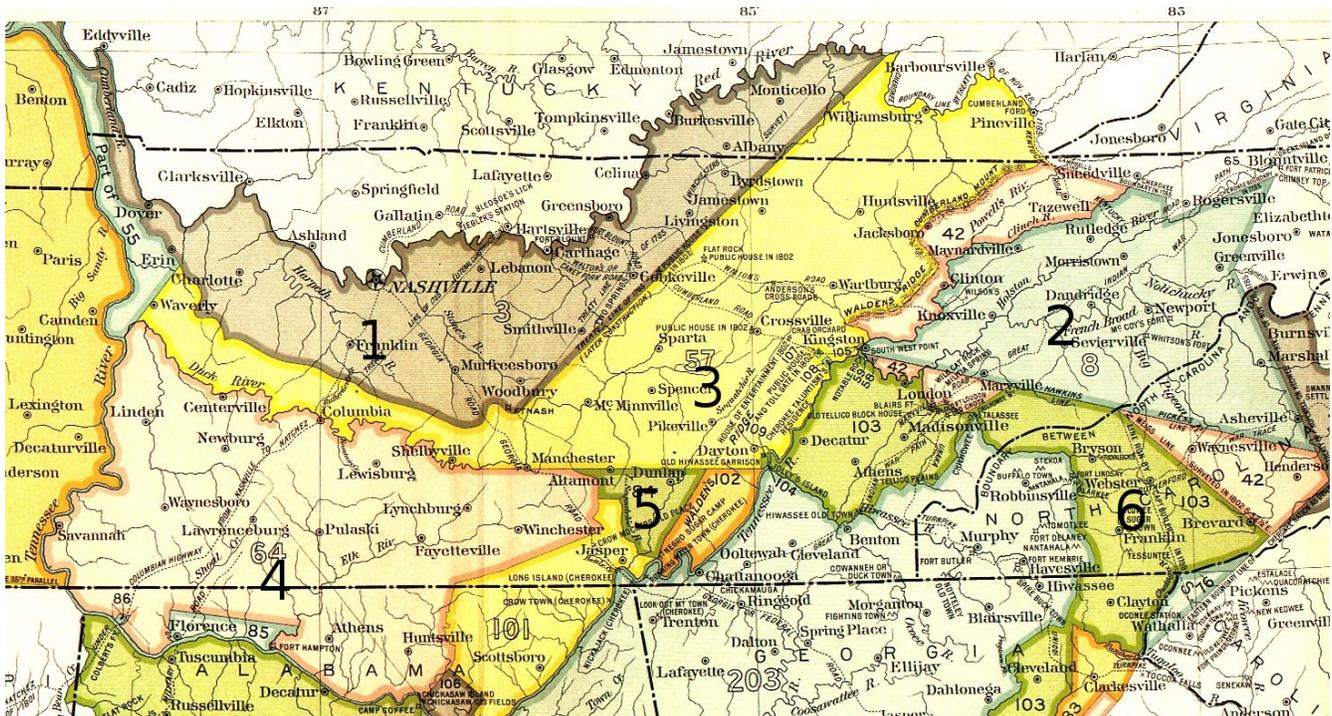
But, on a day in October 1793, there came

along the trace past Beersheba, "a company of Chickamaugas and Creeks, their objective point, Rock Island, where an encampment was to be made as base of supplies for attacks upon the Cumberland settlers. They marched in single file, the Chickamauga chief, it is claimed, leading his own warriors, who were armed with war clubs, scalping knives, and bows and arrows, while each Creek bore, as a gift from his Spanish allies, a bundle wrapped in bear skins containing a gun, knives, and vermilion war-paints. A week or ten days later, a sunrise fight – one of the last important engagements in Tennessee Indian history – occurred at Rock Island between these same Indians and scouts from the Cumberland, and a band of fugitives in precipitate flight again crossed the mountain to their villages at Nickajack."<sup>4</sup> In 1794, Joseph Brown, a white boy who had been a captive among the Chickamaugas, guided an expedition led by Maj. James Ore down the trace to attack and destroy

Nickajack and Running Water, two of the five lower towns. This defeat in their home base broke the spirit of the Chickamaugas; they sued for peace and rejoined the other Cherokees.<sup>5</sup>

1. For more information, see Thomas M. N. Lewis and Madeline Kneberg, *Tribes that Slumber: Indians of the Tennessee Region* (University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1958)
2. The name is written Chikamaka by the organization of the present survivors.
3. William E. Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, Forty-second Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1924-1925 (1928).
4. Blanche Spurlock Bentley, *Sketch of Beersheba Springs and Chickamauga Trace* (Chattanooga, no date but prior to 1933) p. 33. This booklet has been reprinted in Part III of this *History* and by the Southern Museum & Galleries of Photography, Culture & History, 210 E. Main St., McMinnville, TN 37110, artgallery@multipro.com
5. Zella Armstrong, *The History of Hamilton County and Chattanooga* (Overmountain Press, 1992), p. 279.

## The First White Settlers and Charley's Camp in the Horseshoe



*Cherokee Land Cessions to the Federal Government. (1) Hopewell Treaty 1785, (2) Holston Treaty 1791; (3) 1805; (4) 1806; (5) 1817; (6) 1819. The area north of the Cumberland River was included in the Transylvania Purchase in 1775.*

When Tennessee was admitted to the union in 1796, large parts of it were off limits for settlement by U. S. citizens. The Cherokee Nation was still recognized by U.S. treaties and was under the “protection” of the U. S. government. Piece by piece, more land was purchased. First, still under the British, there was the private Transylvania Purchase in 1775 which opened the area north of the Cumberland River to settlement. Then the southern side of the Cumberland basin was purchased in 1785; then East Tennessee, in 1791 by the Treaty of Holston. This treaty explicitly forbid settlement or hunting by U.S. citizens in Indian territory, which then still included all of the areas labeled 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the accompanying map. Thus, during all of the Chickamauga period, Beersheba and the whole area marked 3 on the map was Cherokee territory and closed to new settlement, though the building of specified roads was allowed. It was not until 1805 that this area was acquired and opened to legal settlement. That is not to say that settlement did not occur illegally earlier, but it was less risky after the main body of the Cherokees had agreed to it. The land south of where Altamont now stands remained Cherokee territory until 1817.

Once open in 1805, settlement was quick. Most of the early pioneer settlers of Beersheba first came to the Collins River valley from Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. They were mostly of English, Irish, Scottish, or German stock. Among the men in the 1820 Census with family names still familiar were:

- Reuben, James, William, and Isaac Roberts
- John Gross
- Henry, Robert, Alexander, Aaron, and John Tate
- Isham Dykes
- Gabriel, Samuel, and James Walker.

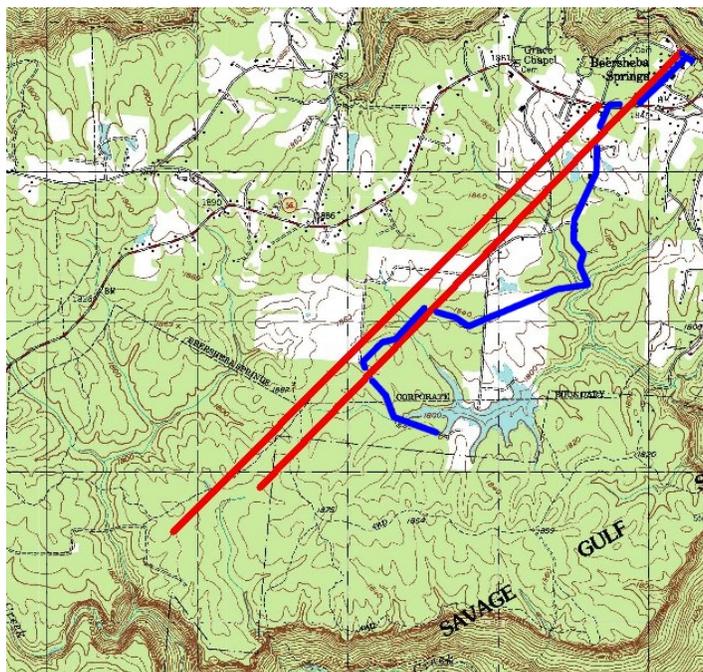
Some settlers walked and others rode horseback across the mountains. Many others came by flatboat down the Tennessee or Ohio and then up the Cumberland River with all their household goods as well as their horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, and chickens on board.

The earliest recorded land transaction on

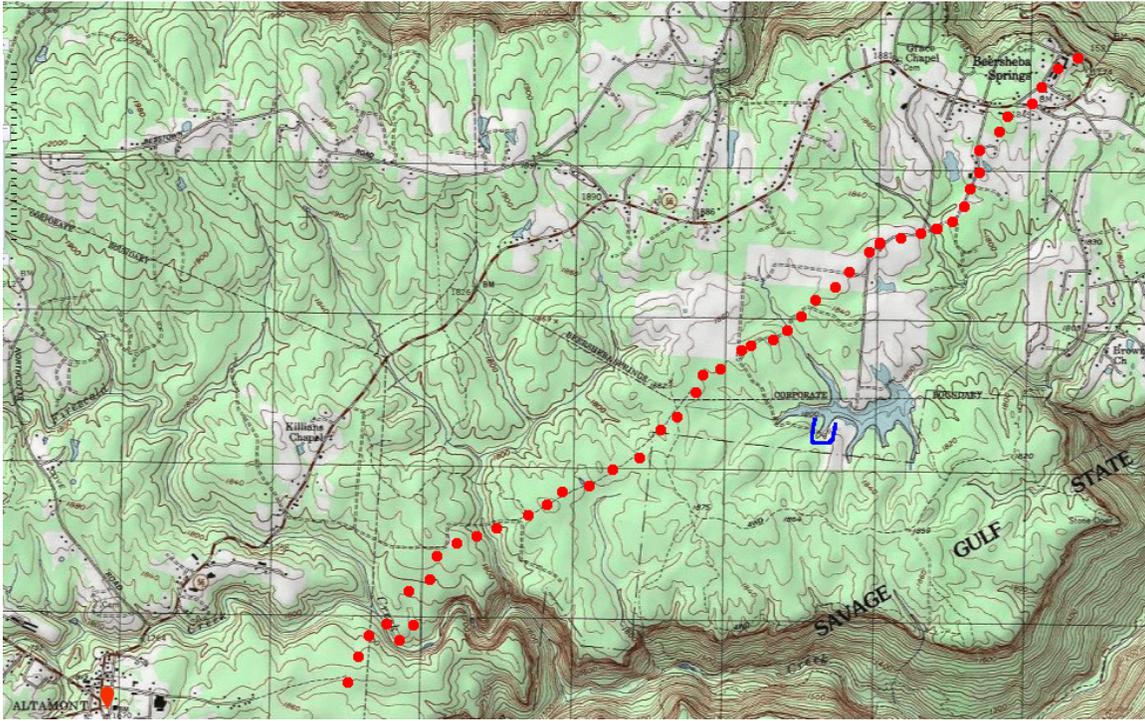
top of the mountain in the vicinity of Beersheba is an entry of 115 acres for William Dugan in 1824. Two years later, in 1826, there is another entry for Dugan of 150 acres "in the Horseshoe known as Charley's Camp" said to be on the south side of Little Laurel Creek of the Collins River.<sup>1</sup> According to local tradition, William Dugan and his wife, with babe in arms, rode horseback from North Carolina to take up this land.<sup>2</sup> The name of the place seems to point to even earlier times when Charley had a camp there. But where was the Horseshoe and who was Charley?

We get a better clue of the location when, on January 10, 1838, William B. Smartt acquired from John Dugan, son of William, apparently the same 150 acres "about two and a half miles southwest of Beersheba."<sup>3</sup> The Horseshoe is thought to be a peculiar shaping of the land resembling a horseshoe.

Three possible interpretations of this location are shown on the accompanying topographic map. The two straight lines are 2.5 miles long and run due southwest. One starts from the spring in front of the Beersheba Hotel and the other from the beginning of the Hunter's Mill Road. They come out rather far from Laurel Creek and with no pronounced “horseshoe” nearby. To get to the



*Possible locations of Charley's Camp*



A plausible route for the Chickamauga Trace southwest of Beersheba is shown by red dots. The plausible site for “the Horseshoe” is marked by a blue U. The base is the USGS Topographic map.

bends of Firescauld Creek, one would have to go three miles and Laurel Creek would be irrelevant to the location. If, however, we start at the spring, walk along Dahlgren Avenue to the highway, then to Hunter's Mill Road, down it and follow an old road around the upper reaches of Laurel Creek to a cove on the south side, we will have come 2.5 miles and ended up in a hollow, now covered by a man-made lake, on the south side of Laurel Creek. The net direction from Beersheba is south-southwest. It seems a plausible location for Charley's camp.

Who was Charley? About 1.5 miles north of Main Street in McMinnville, there runs a stream called Charles Creek on modern topographic maps but Charley's Creek in older sources. Pleasant Henderson lived on its banks between 1806 and 1811. He recalled that when the first white settlers came to the area, they found a group of friendly Creeks camped near the confluence of this stream with the Collins. Their chief was Chuwallee, and the white man gave his name to the creek. It became corrupted to Challee, then to Charley, and now finally, to Charles.<sup>4</sup> These Creeks continued to hunt in the area for a number of years without objection from the white man.

Chuwallee River is also a well-documented alternative name of Elk River. They may well be the Creeks who hunted on the mountain top and, to maximize game production, maintained it as grassland by periodic burning. If so, our Charley could well be Chuwallee.<sup>5</sup>

In 1794 Reuben Roberts, a Revolutionary war soldier, came to a small settlement near the Horseshoe Bend. In later years this old settler described to his grandson crossing the mountain by way of the Chickamauga Trace. He and many other early settlers were familiar with this route. Some were known as “squatters” because they settled on land to which they had no title.

Is the Chickamauga Trace mentioned in the early deeds? Probably. In 1828, in the records of Warren County, of which Grundy County was still a part, there is an entry for Samuel Turney entering 640 acres on the “headwaters of the Collins River, on a creek called Little Laurel, near a trace.” In 1831, there is an entry for William Dugan “on the headwaters of the Collins River on both sides of the trace leading from said Dugan's in the horseshoe.” On September 3, 1836, William Dugan sold to William R. Stewart and George R.

Smartt for \$1000 1500 acres “on top of Cumberland Mountain near the bluff and on both sides of a trace leading from said Dugans to the Horseshoe.”<sup>6</sup>

Can we be more precise about where the Chickamauga trace ran? The trace is shown and named on the map from Wm. E. Myer, *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, 42 Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnography, 1928. An extract from the map is shown on page 16 of Volume II of this book. Myer had located a portion of the Trace near Coalmont and another at the chalybeate spring in Beersheba. On his rather small scale map he drew the trace straight between the two. That would require going down over cliffs into the Big Creek Gulf and then back up over cliffs on the other side. It is much more likely that the trace came almost due north from Coalmont, crossed Firescauld Creek just above Blue Hole (now in the State Park) at a point near where Hunter later built a mill and then came to the chalybeate spring from the southwest. That route would be shortest which avoided cliffs. It was used for many years. Indeed, the 1895 Coastal and Geodetic Survey map (see page 24) shows two roads between Beersheba and Altamont, one following this route. The Beersheba end of this road is still open and bears the name Hunter's Mill Road thus leaving no doubt as to

where it led. It seems altogether probable that the builders of this road followed closely the old trace. On the current USGS topographic map there is still an indication of a trace – a road marked by a single line – over much of the western half of the route. By using this indication, the creek crossing at Hunter's Mill (where the Park's Blue Hole trail reaches the creek) and the remnants of Hunter's Mill Road in Beersheba, the route of the Trace can be reconstructed as shown by red dots on the map on the previous page. The area we identified as a plausible site for “the horseshoe” is marked by a blue U.

Let us now follow in the footsteps of the Cherokees coming from the southwest along the old trace past the spring at the brow of the mountain and down the mountain to the house of William Dugan, where the next chapter in the history of Beersheba Springs begins.

1. Plat Book No. 2, Registrar's Office, Warren County, page 60. Quoted from B.S. Bentley, p.31.
2. Margaret Copping, in *The Pathfinder*, vol.1, No.2, page 2, 1956.
3. Warren County Registrar's Office, Book K, p 379.
4. John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors*, Bureau of American Ethnology, No. 73, 1922, p.245
5. This explanation is offered by Blanche Spurlock Bentley, who attributes it to descendants of Pleasant Henderson.
6. All citations are from Blanche Spurlock Bentley.

## Beersheba Cain's Discovery

In 1833, John Cain (1793? - 1836?) was a prominent citizen of McMinnville. He was probably the only merchant in town and lived with his wife, Beersheba Porter Cain (1800? - 1863), and their six children in a large brick house on the southwest corner of Main Street and the courthouse square. (A seventh child was born in 1836; Beersheba also had a son by her first husband, a Sullivan. After Sullivan's death, she had married Cain in 1819.) The house was handsomely furnished and contained, according to an estate inventory, a "pianoforte brought from Philadelphia" sometime between 1820 and 1830. Cain was also a land speculator and had to ride

long distances to visit his lands and see new prospects. Beersheba often rode along with him on these trips. It was, to be sure, quite unusual in those days for a wife to accompany her husband on horseback on such trips, but Beersheba often did so. On August 1, 1833, they were joined by Wm. P. Lawrence, his daughter and a young gentleman, and rode to William Dugan's log cabin in the valley a few hundred yards to the west of where Highway 56 now starts up the mountain. While Cain and Dugan talked, Beersheba and the three others rode on up a well-defined path. Just below the top, they noticed a slight dampness of the soil. They cleared away dirt and leaves and

found a chalybeate spring, that is, with water tasting of iron.<sup>1</sup> When Beersheba returned and described her discovery, plans were soon under way to develop a spring resort. ("Chalybeate" was a common word in the heyday of spring resorts. The *ch* is pronounced as a *k*. *Chalybs* is Latin for steel, from the Greek name of a perhaps mythical people of northern Asia Minor believed by the Greeks to have been the first workers in iron. It must be emphasized that it was the iron flavor that made the spring valuable. Springs with good-tasting water were numerous and of no special value. The huge big spring in the valley, the beginning of the year-round flow of the Collins River and comparable to the big springs that gave rise to the towns of Huntsville and Tuscumbia, Alabama, was never commercially developed.)

It seems very likely that Beersheba and companions had followed the Chickamauga Trace. While it is hard to imagine that William Dugan had not followed the trace that led from his house in the valley to his house at Charley's Camp in the Horseshoe on top of the mountain, if

1 Letter to *The Republican Banner*, Aug. 12, 1858. "The Chalybeate Spring, whose water first attracted attention to the place, was discovered on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of August, 1833, by Mrs. Beersheba Porter Cain, an intelligent lady who still resides at Dan, about a mile West of here. Mrs. Cain was on a Mountain ride in company with the late Dr. Wm. P. Lawrence, of your city [Nashville], his daughter Minerva, and a young gentleman of Nashville, Mr. Richard Hays. .... There was but a slight dampness visible in the surrounding soil, and the party were obliged to develop the water by removing the leaves and dirt with their hands. The discoverer immediately employed Mr. Dugan to erect a cabin for her accommodation, which was located where the hotel now stands, and which she made her summer residence up to 1837. The year previous, 1836, the first public accommodations were offered at the Springs, by Stewart & Goodloe, who bought the tract from Mr. Dugan. They subsequently sold out to Geo. S. Smartt, Esq., of McMinnville. The first stage, and from all accounts the first vehicle of any kind, that ascended the mountain, was in 1836, the opinion having always before prevailed that it was inaccessible except on foot or on horseback. Among the first visitors in 1836, was Moses G. Reeves, Esq., of Rutherford county, who, with his family, is now among our guests, and to whom I am indebted for these items of history. In those olden times the cabins were constructed of unhewn logs, the dining room was an open shed made of forks and boards, with a natural free-soil floor."

he had seen the spring, he had thought nothing of it. It must have been Beersheba's excitement that evoked visions of a spring resort such as those already popular in Virginia.

Where is the spring? Vanished, as we will explain below, but roughly it was on the mountain side above the spot where the sandstone "igloo" stands beside TN 56 near the top of the mountain.

On April 19, 1834, Dugan conveyed to Cain the land and cabins in an "inclosure made around some cabins built by said John Cain" in "consideration of said Cain bringing into use a certain chalybeate spring on Dugan's land on top of Cumberland mountain." In a deed of 1836, Dugan conveyed to Dr. Alfred Paine of McMinnville a square of land six poles (99 feet) on a side centered on the center of the east cabin of a double (i.e. two-room) log cabin which Paine had already built on the land. The consideration was that the doctor would bring "into use and repute the waters of a certain chalybeate spring on Cumberland Mountain known by the name of Beersheba Springs." Later deeds show that the Cain's property was also a square six poles on a side.

Where exactly were these first two cabins? The 1858 letter cited above says that they were where the hotel was by then – and is now. The expression "east cabin" seems to imply that the long axis of the Paine's two-room cabin ran in an east-west direction, as does the front of the present hotel. It seems likely that the two cabins may have been aligned where the front of the hotel now stands. Pretty choice real estate and no wonder that Dugan was rather miserly in his six-pole grants on a vast unoccupied mountain top!

John Cain died in 1836, but Beersheba and presumably her children kept coming to the Springs. The 1840 Census shows her as a head of a household with 7 children and 6 slaves in McMinnville. In the 1850 Census, she and her youngest are in Taladega County, Alabama, with one of her older children. She seems to have been missed in the 1860 Census, but L. Virginia French, in her diary, records visiting her here on the mountain in the summer of 1863. She found Mrs.

Cain frail, and worried about her trip back to McMinnville planned for the next day. A month later, French got news of Beersheba Cain's death in McMinnville.

But we have gotten ahead of our story. Back in 1836, Dugan must have realized that he was not the man to develop the springs, for he sold to George R. Smartt and William Stewart for \$1000 a 1500-acre tract on top of the mountain including the chalybeate spring and on both sides of a trace leading to Dugan's place in the horse-shoe, but excluding the two six-pole squares owned by Cain and Paine. Later in the same year, Paine sold his square to Smartt, and in 1838, Stewart sold out to Smartt. Stewart also sold to Robert A. Campbell of McMinnville a tract of 500 acres on top of the mountain and lying east of the road from the Spring to Stone Door. (The Stone Door is a narrow crack in the bluff with a floor that rises at about the slope of a steep staircase. Thus, it provided a "door" through the bluff. All around the Door are spectacular sandstone bluffs.)

Smartt must have set to work quickly to build a resort. A tavern and rows of log rooms were built. By 1839 if not before, Smartt was ready to receive guests. Among guests of that summer was the family of James P. Thompson of McMinnville; and from reminiscences of his daughter, Louisa, given in later life, glimpses have been preserved of happenings of that long-ago summer at Beersheba. She remembered the rooms occupied by her father in Log Row. The manner of living was necessarily simple, but every attention was given to the pleasure and comfort of guests, with good servants in constant attendance, fine old-time cooks, big wagons from McMinnville loaded with all kinds of fresh table supplies and delicious mountain game brought by hunters.

“Late each afternoon large bonfires of pine knots were burned in front of the cabins, their brilliant flames not only frightening away wild animals and snakes – then a menace on the mountains – but giving light and warmth to the room. About sunset all repaired to the bluff above the Spring to listen and watch for the stage coach coming from McMinnville, bringing passengers

*Advertisement from a Nashville Newspaper in 1845.*

### **Beersheba Springs**

The undersigned announces to his friends and the public that the above delightful watering place (situated eighteen miles South-east of McMinnville on one of the highest points of the Cumberland) is now ready for the reception of visitors. The establishment consists of fifty comfortable rooms with ample stabling and other means of taking care of horses. In addition to the pleasures of beautiful and picturesque scenery, fine mineral and free stone waters, free air and cool and refreshing breezes, which secure an exemption from the oppressive heat of summer, the undersigned feels assured that he will be able to afford, to as many as patronize him, such accommodations as cannot fail to give satisfaction. The undersigned here takes occasion, in the name of the former proprietor, to return to his friends and former patrons his sincere thanks for their favors in times past.

W.B. Smartt, proprietor

June 10

N.B. The Springs are rendered entirely accessible by good roads. A four-horse post coach will regularly meet the stage at McMinnville. Persons leaving Nashville in the morning on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays will reach the Springs on the succeeding evening, without the loss of sleep or the necessity of traveling after night.

W.B.S.

#### **Terms of Boarding**

Per month	\$16.00
Per week	\$5.00
Children and servants	half price
Horses, per week	\$2.50

and mail. It could be heard far below, lumbering and jolting up the mountain, and the clear notes of the driver's horn floated up through the shadows, sounded as he reached each successive resting place in the ascent. Later as the bonfires glowed and smoldered, the guests sat about them and talked and sometimes sang until the hour came for retiring, after which a stillness and silence rested on the mountain as in the days primeval."

In the same year, the Tennessee General Assembly incorporated four men – George R. Smartt, William B. Smartt (George's son), Alfred Paine (the doctor) and Samuel Edmondson – as a "body politic by the name of Beersheba Springs." This "body politic" was a private company, not a division of government.

In the same year of 1839, William White of McMinnville employed Aaron Moffitt, a carpenter of special skill, to build a house near the bluff west of the spring. It was to include rooms already on the site. According to a statement made many years later, the included rooms were of uncommon quality, built of solid red cedar logs and "double ceiled," that is, having not only a roof but also a flat ceiling of lathe and plaster. To whom these fine rooms had belonged is not recorded. The house built by Moffitt, however, was later bought by John Armfield and is now known as The Cliffs or Armfield-Glasgow cottage.

In 1836, a road from McMinnville to Chattanooga going over Peak Mountain had been authorized by the state. Before that time the only road crossing the mountain was the Chickamauga Trace. By 1839 the stagecoach and other vehicles were traveling the road between McMinnville and Beersheba Springs, passing William Dugan's house. In the same year, William Sanford Brown and his bride Nancy Dykes built a house on a bench on the east side of the Backbone, a spur of the mountain extending into the Collins valley. This house, later moved up the Backbone, has always been in the Brown family and is now owned by Odessa Brown, widow of James F. Brown.

On July 18, 1840, James K. Polk, then governor of Tennessee and future President of the

United States, held a political rally at Beersheba. It was "advertised far and near." Polk's wife, Sarah Childress Polk, had hoped to come; but heavy rains made the roads too muddy and she sent, via her husband, her regrets to Mr. Smartt. The fact that Beersheba was equipped to host a large meeting as early as 1840 is remarkable.

In 1845, William B. Smartt, who had succeeded his father as manager of the resort, ran the advertisement shown in the accompanying box in a Nashville newspaper. It mentions fifty rooms, and there must have been also a dining room. That is enough to cover all of the space occupied by buildings after the Armfield reconstruction fifteen years later.

On January 29, 1844, the Tennessee Legislature created Grundy County from Coffee and Warren and designated Beersheba as the county seat. William Dugan was appointed one of the commissioners to help organize the new county and the first court was held August 5, 1844, in Beersheba. The court continued to meet there until about 1848 when the town of Altamont was laid out for the new county seat.

When this new county was formed, it was named for Felix Grundy (1777-1840) a famous criminal lawyer, judge, United States Senator, and Attorney General of the United States under Martin Van Buren. It was no secret that he had been dealing in the mountain lands of this section and at his death in 1840 his daughters and sons-in-law fell heir to 100,000 acres of mountain land. The two sons-in-law named executors of Grundy's estate were John M. Bass, who later built a cottage at Beersheba, and Jacob McGavock, the father of Randal W. McGavock a visitor there in 1858.

A good quantitative idea of the scale of operations of the inn before Armfield is offered by an inventory found in a Deed of Trust made by Dr. H. R. Robards in 1853 evidently to reassure creditors (Book C Page 63)<sup>2</sup>. It included among many other items 26 cherry bedsteads, 12 walnut bedsteads, 40 cots, 24 servant beds and mattresses, 71 chairs + 48 split bottom chairs, 24

<sup>2</sup> Found by Ralph Thompson, whose paper on Beersheba roads informs nearly everything said here about roads.

walnut tables, 12 pine tables, 11 small cherry tables, 12 dozen each of knives, forks, tablespoons and teaspoons, and 3 milk cows.

A great obstacle to the development of Beersheba Springs was the difficulty of getting there and the uncertainty of the roads. So a “jury of view” was appointed by the County Court – William Dugan, Isham Dykes, James Lockhart, John Gross, and William B. Smartt – for the purpose of marking and laying out a road. The report, humorous to readers today because of its markers, is as follows:

*. . . beginning at the Grundy County line on a ridge in James Tate’s field some sixty yards from the old mill; thence with said fence over the ridge to a plum tree on the bank of James Tate’s spring branch; thence with the side of the hill to a wild cherry tree near his fence; thence with the fence outside of a little walnut; thence through the corner of Tate’s field to a sugar tree near Henry Clay’s; thence by a direct line through John Gross’ field, passing his barn; thence passing through his pasture, passing just below William Gross’ house and on to intersect the present road, at the foot of the hill; thence with the old road to some oat stacks in Isham Dykes’ field; thence the road again; thence with the road, from thence passing through Dugan’s field by a direct line to a white oak, and walnut tree, near the mouth of the lane at the Bond place and on through his hog pen at a white oak near the bank of the branch into the old road again at the ford of the branch; thence with the old road to a corner of Dugan’s field, and with the fence and road to a mud hole, in the road; thence by a direct line, through a corner of the field near William Ransom’s house to the wash; thence across the wash to B. G. Wilson’s field; thence with the fence on the bank to the corner of his new ground field; thence up the bank outside by the back of the school house, to the old road at the corner of the little field; thence with the road crossing the wash and passing through Aaron Bolm’s field, to a white oak near the road and with the road again passing William Morton, to the corner near Savage’s old field passing into the old field, near a large*

*walnut tree thence by a direct line through the field, to an old cabin; thence passing the corner of Savage’s new ground field to intersect at the turnpike road at the foot of the mountain – all of which is respectfully submitted.*

*Whereupon it is considered by the court that said road viewed by the jury aforesaid be established as a road of the first class and that Noah Bart be appointed overseer of said road and have the following hands to work under him to open and keep the same in repair to wit: Warren Savage, Samuel Savage, James Dugan, William Morton, Slaves of Major Tate, and James Tate.*

This road ran through the Collins River valley below Beersheba but did not come up the mountain here; the turnpike to which it connected ran up the south side of Peak mountain and on to Chattanooga.

The original one and only road to and in Beersheba was the trace – probably the Chickamauga trace – which Beersheba Cain had followed up the mountain. It of course continued on to the south, probably headed towards the present Altamont to avoid going down into the Big Creek Gulf below Stone Door and then coming up the steep other side. The present Dahlgren Avenue between Hege and TN 56 probably lies right on this trace; to the north it points straight at the spring; to the south it points – after an interruption – to a remaining section of an old, abandoned road to Hunter’s mill (later called Long’s or Greeter’s mill) a little east of Altamont – just the route the trace probably took. When the first structures of what was to be the Hotel were erected, the northern end of this road was bent to the west at Hege to avoid having it slice through the Hotel grounds. The resulting road was known as Spring Street. At the brow of the mountain, the road turned right and ran just below the present observatory over to the spring, where it re-joined the route of the old trace.

In the early 1850s, the top end of the road up the mountain was re-routed. It was kept well below the spring, then turned sharply up the ravine used by the present TN 56, and then made a backward S-curve to come up in front of the

hotel. This winding route by Vesper Point is still in use. A road took off from this S road to the southeast roughly parallel to the present Grassy Ridge but south of it.

Before 1855, a road to Laurel mill just above the falls was opened. It began at the present Hege-Dahlgren intersection and ran straight to the northern end of the present Fehery Lane, and continued out this road to Laurel.

## The Armfield Era



*John Armfield*

In the early 1850s, the resort received a visitor who was destined to transform Beersheba in a few short years and give it the general appearance it retains to this day. The visitor was John Armfield, who came with his wife, Martha Franklin Armfield, a niece of Armfield's former partner Isaac Franklin from Sumner County.

Armfield and Franklin had been partners in the slave trading business from 1828 to 1836, when

the business in Alexandria, Virginia, was sold. The firm had been engaged in selling slaves from Virginia to the deep south, especially the Natchez area. At one time, it had a fleet of at least five vessels which could carry about 150 slaves apiece.



Franklin and Armfield had made a huge fortune in their business, but it was hard, *Martha Armfield* distasteful work, and Armfield was glad to get out of it. For some fifteen or more years, he had looked for something to which he could devote his wealth and life. He found it in Beersheba.

By December 1854, Armfield had concluded his negotiations with Dr. H. R. Robards of Memphis. Robards had bought the Hotel from William White and L. D. Mercer, who had succeeded the original owners, Smartt and Paine. His purchase, for \$3,750, included the original tavern, dining hall, proprietor's rooms and the row of guest cabins. White's own double-ceiled home, built of red-cedar logs, he bought for an additional \$1,200. He then formed elaborate plans for improvements to the Hotel and for building homes, called cottages.

Armfield announced his plans in the Nashville Union and American of April 4, 1855, as follows: "Beersheba Springs will be closed until May, 1856. The place is now undergoing a thorough repair and will afford no accommodations for strangers, even for a night,



*West side of Post Office or Marcella V. Smith Row, 2009*

until the work is completed. The public part of the Springs will then be rented to a responsible person who shall be under bond to keep a good House of Entertainment, but under no circumstances to allow either gambling or the use of spiritous liquors." Actually, the reconstruction took longer than expected; and the resort did not re-open until the summer of 1857.

While living in Alexandria, Virginia (where his slave quarters are now a museum), Armfield had visited several of the most famous of the springs of Virginia, probably both the Old White and the Old Hot. Perhaps it was what he saw there, combined with his Quaker upbringing, that made him seek to restrain liquor and gambling in Beersheba Springs. Whatever restrictions he declared, they were never so severely administered as to give the place anything but a liberal name. All through the years it was known as a place where good people could do what they pleased, as long as they stayed within the bounds of decency and order.

It has been rumored that Armfield brought about 100 slaves from Louisiana to begin work, but this is not a known fact and indeed seems highly improbable. The 1850 Census, in the Slave Schedule, reports that he had 15 slaves at his home in Sumner County. A local, undated manuscript census taken in Grundy County sometime before 1860 records 32 for him. The 1860 Census shows that he had 22. He paid taxes on 14 in 1860, 16 in 1861, 16 in 1862, and 12 in 1863. The numbers in the neighborhood of 12 - 15 probably reflect household servants and staff at the hotel. The excess, 17, above that level, shown by undated manuscript census, may indicate how many were engaged in construction.

He also employed local white construction workers. By March 1855 he had brought Ben Cagle from Irving College to be his foreman. About this time, T. P. Argo came to run the brick kiln. A saw mill was built on Laurel Creek just above where the Stone Door road now crosses the creek. Prior to Armfield, no brick or sawn lumber was used at Beersheba.

Armfield's most striking new structure was the two-story main building of the hotel with its

16 square, white columns which have become the emblem of Beersheba. Along the east side of the courtyard behind it he built a spacious dining room with a ballroom above. Further south on the east side he built a seven-room clapboard row known as Family Row. Along the west side, he built a seven-room Brick Row.

As noted above, Smartt had claimed to have 50 rooms, more than enough to cover the ground occupied by Armfield's structures after their completion. The key to what happened to Smartt's structures is probably found in a comment of W. Jeter Eason in the original, 1936, entry for the hotel in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). He wrote, "Originally the building at the rear of the present court formed by the building group was at the front overlooking the valley. The Armfields, however, rearranged all the buildings and moved to the back the original buildings and built on the front an "L" shaped two story building ...." On his free-hand sketch he writes under Cross Row (= Log Row) "Note: This building was until 1857 at front of group – now occupied by two-story section."

Eason asserts that Family Row was "log covered with siding." When it was demolished, no logs were found, and thus it must have been entirely an Armfield construction. Thus, Eason's comments must be interpreted in the light of what we see or know from other sources. The most southern row, Post Office Row (now Marcella V. Smith Row) shows every sign of having been moved. Some of the logs are hand-hewn, suggesting that they came from Smartt's structures, but some others are sawn, and so must have come from Armfield's time. Moreover, there were brick fireplaces; and one brick with initials T. P. A. was found in the course of renovation in 2004. T. P. Argo was the master of Armfield's brick kiln. In short, Post Office Row was definitely put in its present position by Armfield but probably used a lot of material from Smartt's rooms.

Writing 80 years after Armfield's work, Eason is unlikely to have talked to anyone with first-hand knowledge of what Armfield did, but he could have talked with the grandchildren of the men who did the work. They could have told him

that Armfield moved buildings but were unlikely to have known exactly what was moved where. The 1857 date for the move is clearly two years too late. What of Cross Row, which Eason says was moved? Bear in mind that moving a log construction means taking it apart, log by log, and reassembling it. When Armfield did that in Post Office Row, he added fireplaces; there are no fireplaces in Cross Row. He also used some sawn logs; there are no sawn logs in Cross Row. Moreover, the construction is rather rough, not the fine log work that Armfield's men did. The 1973 HABS report attributed Cross Row to Smartt without mentioning any move. On balance, it seems probable that Log Row is right where it has always been.

Cozy Corner (now Marvell) in the northwest corner of the quad is also old, and looks very like two two-room log cabins each with a fireplace and a connecting door between the two rooms. They may well be the Cain and Paine cabins, moved by Armfield. The four-room Whiskey Row that stood where Lower Neal now is may also have been moved. If Smartt's claim of fifty rooms is correct, there would have been plenty of material for building "Bachelor Row" symmetric to Post Office Row. It is shown by Eason in dotted lines. Whether or not this row ever existed is unclear; if it did, it was destroyed before 1900. During construction in 2003, however, Phil Mayhew saw what could have been its

John M. Bass, Nashville	40 shares	\$4,000
Minor Kennor, La.	40 shares	4000
Joseph S. Williams, New Orleans	40 shares	4000
Charles G. Dalgren, Natches	40 shares	4000
John Waters, Nashville	40 shares	4000
Charles W. Phillips, New Orleans	40 shares	4000
Oliver T. Morgan, La.	40 shares	4000
Ferdinand M. Goodrich, New Orleans	20 shares	2000
Mason Pilcher, New Orleans	20 shares	2000
S. R. Cockrel, Nashville	20 shares	2000
A. Barron, La.	20 shares	2000
A. Hamilton Polk, Mississippi	20 shares	2000
Ben Johnson	20 shares	2000
Josiah Garret, La.	20 shares	2000
John W. Scarborrow	20 shares	2000
Making the total Sum of forty four thousand dollars		\$44,000
In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal at New Orleans this Eighth day of February A. D. 1860.		
John Armfield		

foundations. A large bachelors' quarters known as St. Paul's was built just south of where Vesper Point now is, but it was torn down before 1923.

Even with Bachelor Row, there would have been logs left over, which may have found their way into the Dahlgren House (Nanhaven) or the Cockrill House (Mayhew- Beersheba Porcelain), or the Beersheba Inn, which all have hewn logs. (The entire HABS report can be found on the Internet by searching for "Old Beersheba Inn" and Eason) There are precise architectural drawings and numerous photographs from 1973.)

Armfield's plans were to lease lots for an annual rent of \$1.00, giving the lessee the privilege of cutting timber to build cabins on the lots and have free use of the water from the Chalybeate Spring. Armfield used his own crew of workmen and materials to build twenty houses.

Two of the homes were built for bishops of the Episcopal Church, one (now Mountain Home) for James H. Otey of Tennessee and one (now the Howell Cottage) for Leonidas Polk of Louisiana. Polk, a West Point graduate and later known as the "Fighting Bishop," was one of Armfield's best friends. Armfield had asked the two Bishops to consider the mountain as a possible location for the University of the South to educate Episcopal youth. Later, a party including Armfield, the two Bishops, Mr. Bass and his son-in-law, Vernon K. Stevenson, who was president of the N. C. and St. L. Railway, rode horseback to inspect the tract of land offered by the president of the Sewanee Mining Company. The Sewanee location was confirmed in 1857 at a meeting of the Board of Trustees in Beersheba.

Other cottage owners at this time were Sterling Robertson Cockrill of Nashville, William L. Murfree of Murfreesboro, Oliver J. Morgan of Carroll Parish, Louisiana, and Charles G. Dahlgren of "Dunleith," Natchez, Mississippi. The cottages Armfield built were, as identified by their first owner (if known) and present name:

On Armfield Avenue:

1. Armfield - Glasgow "The Cliffs"
2. Bass - Turner
3. Harding - Papel

on Dahlgren Avenue and Beersheba Lane:

4. Cagle - Taylor (burned, rebuilt)
5. Dahlgren - Nanhaven (burned, rebuilt)
6. Nelson - Hopper (moved)
7. Beersheba Inn
8. Cockrell-Mayhew
9. Murfree-White House
10. Northcutt - T'Other House

Highway 56 – Grassy Ridge

11. Pierce (burned)
12. Polk-Howell
13. Otey-Mountain Home
14. Williams - Hemlock Hall
15. Castleman (burned)
16. Graves – Eve - Stanbury
17. Phillips (burned)
18. Garrett (burned) - Lovers' Leap
19. Kenner - Thomas
20. Morgan Lodge (burned).

In 1860, Armfield deeded the hotel to the incorporators of the Beersheba Springs Company for \$44,000. They were men of wealth and influence, even if the clerk recording the deed did not spell their names and homes correctly. Their names and shares are shown in the side box.

The summer of 1860 was the first and 1861 the last for the Beersheba Springs Company. Many Southern families rode from distant plantations in luxuriously appointed carriages drawn by splendid blooded horses, bringing retinues of servants and wearing clothes and jewels of an almost fabulous richness and beauty. The chef and all the cooks were French from New Orleans. A band from New Orleans played for dancing. The custom of having the band play for the coach to come up the mountain was continued, with the sounding of the coachman's horn when the horses stopped to rest. Rows of tents were stretched about the bowling alleys to receive those for whom there was no room in the overfilled hotel.

Armfield left his mark on the road system. To make a site for the Polk-Howell cottage, he deflected the old trace to come in perpendicular to the row of cottages numbers 11 – 16 in the above list. He opened a 60-foot wide Bishop's Avenue running in front of cottages 13 – 16 (Otey to Graves-Eve) and connecting to the road to

Laurel. The road to Laurel was altered; the part from the present Hege-Dahlgren intersection to the end of the present Febery was closed; instead, a road was built from that intersection perpendicular to and connecting to the new Bishops Avenue. (The northern end of this road is now called Beersheba Lane; the southern end was destroyed when TN 56 was built.) Most of the present Hege was built, and a road connected the driveways of the Garrett, Kenner and Morgan cottages to the Hotel area. In 1858, the Tennessee General Assembly chartered the Beersheba Springs & Tracy City Turnpike Company under the leadership of John Armfield. TN 56 follows generally the route of this road.

There are no records for the summer of 1861, but we know that Bishop Leonidas Polk became a major general that fall in the Army of the Confederate States. Charles G. Dahlgren equipped the Third Regiment of Mississippi Volunteers called the Dahlgren Guards, and he himself became a brigadier general. Armfield, too old for army duty, equipped a company of Grundy County men, organized September 11, 1861, and commanded by Col. Benjamin J. Hill of McMinnville. Albert Hanner, nephew of Armfield, was elected captain of Company A. While this company of Grundy County men was away, Armfield took care of their families and established a post office in his own house and had his family write letters to them.

It is clear that Armfield was an extremely wealthy man when he came to Beersheba. At the outbreak of the Civil War he had his foreman Ben Cagle, a former slave Nathan Bracken, who had become his personal servant, and another friend bury sacks of gold for him. The sacks were put in baskets and covered with towels so searchers would think they contained food. When Benjamin Cagle knelt down to place the sacks in the ground, a pistol he was carrying in his pocket went off and hit him in the wrist, causing his wrist to be stiff. At the end of the war when they returned to the hiding place the gold was not there. Evidently someone had watched them bury it. Other valuables, such as silverware and jewelry, he had placed in an old well and they were safely recovered after the war.

For the duration of the war, the Springs and Armfield's home were a place of refuge where distinguished men like Governor Isham G. Harris and Chancellor Bromfield Ridley could find hospitality. The ladies were busy sewing, knitting and weaving for the soldiers and the sick in the hospitals, according to Lucy Virginia French, a well known writer of that time. Her diary of the war years, now published by the Beersheba Springs Historical Society, provides the most revealing day-by-day accounts of life at Beersheba during the tragic years of the Civil War. She reports the pillaging of the various cottages, the heroism of Colonel and Mrs. Armfield, and the attempts to burn the Hotel. Marcus Hill recalls being told by his grandfather that his father (Marcus's great-grandfather), Irving Hill, a boy of about 11 at the time, saw Federal troops throw the hotel's china on the dining room floor and ride their horses over it to insure that it was all broken. When he remonstrated with them, they locked him up. He escaped, and having overheard their plans to march down the mountain, organized his friends with their squirrel hunting rifles to lie in ambush for them. None of the troops reached the bottom of the mountain.

Residents lived under constant threat of harassment and deprivation from Yankees one day and bushwhackers the next. Nobody was safe; personal property that could not be buried was sacrificed. Finally, hoping to achieve some kind of protection from the lawless gangs that scourged the mountain, Armfield and his guest John H. French gave in to the inevitable and went solemnly to McMinnville to take the oath of allegiance to the Union when it was clear that Tennessee was lost forever to the Confederacy.

So the leaders of the Old South who had conceived, built, and taken pride in Beersheba went down in bitter and total defeat. The elder statesmen who had seen the dream become reality in 1860 died broken men during the war, or soon after, and their heirs were hard put to hold on to the cottages or spend leisurely summers at the Hotel. Yet, miraculously, not a single cottage went up in flames – although most were plundered – and the Hotel, with its proud portico overlooking the valley, remained virtually intact in spite of

raids, broken windows, a fire, and a courtyard overgrown with brambles and Queen Anne's Lace.

As the Old Order passed away, the New Order gradually began to take shape at the resort. Armfield, because the owners were dead or bankrupt and unable to make a recovery, was forced to repossess many of the properties and sell them for whatever they would bring at the steps of the Courthouse in Altamont. These were his concerns during his declining years, and before his death in 1871, he had managed to interest a number of new people with new money – or with the prospects of new money – in the mountain plateau that he had come to love during the last fifteen years of his life.

In 1867 Captain Eugen H. Plumacher arrived in America, sent by the Swiss government to locate a place for a colony. President Andrew Johnson urged him to visit Tennessee, and he was a guest in the home of Col. Armfield at Beersheba. Plumacher was so impressed with the location that he began making the necessary arrangements to bring over the new settlers to a place they called Gruetli in memory of the meadow where tradition says the Swiss Confederation began. Gruetli is just on the other side of the Gulf from Stone Door, and the Swiss used the Door to bring their crafts to sell to the summer visitors to the resort. Plumacher himself, however, bought land in Beersheba for his own home, which he called "Dan." The first house burned but a portion of the second "Dan" is still standing and is occupied by Plumacher's great-grandson, John Bohr. Plumacher was a colorful figure who attracted attention. Few noticed his modest wife, Olga, or knew that she was a recognized figure in German philosophy and had published in Germany two books and several articles written in Beersheba. She also published in English in the Oxford journal *Mind*, but no one else in Beersheba was reading British philosophical periodicals.

Slowly the scars of the Civil War were beginning to heal, but Beersheba was never to be the same again. The cleanup task was enormous. Even the hotel dining room had to be scraped out with hoes where Federal horses had been kept. In the next few years the old Hotel changed owner-

ship many times.

It is a fact that the people of the community were divided during the Civil War. Some fought on the side of the Union and others with the Confederacy. This was true of the mountainous regions of both Kentucky and Tennessee. In the hilly country of East Tennessee the farms were small and the owners had few slaves. In the rich bottom lands of West Tennessee, where cotton was "King," slaves were needed on the large plantations. In middle Tennessee loyalties were divided. Most mountain people were loyal to the Union but more people in Beersheba and Grundy County fought on the southern side, probably because of their love and respect for John Armfield.

After the war was over and the men who had fought on opposite sides came back home to live together, it would have been almost impossible for there not to have been some bitterness, especially toward the robbers and bushwhackers, who deserted from both sides in order to prey on Armfield and the cottages as well as the mountain people. But we have been fortunate that there was not the hatred, resentment, and revenge which was generated in other places.

The following is taken from a letter to Benjamin S. Cagle written by Armfield, while in Nashville, on Dec. 2, 1868. The letter has been in the possession of a member of the Cagle family for over one hundred years:

*I want you to know of Nathan if he found the two or three hogs that were out when I left home and write me what he says. My health is very good now and I have nothing of importance to add. I wrote to you by last mail to go to Sam Henderson and get the money on the check. How is Fahery getting on? What is he doing? Has Nathan hauled up the new trough?*

*Your friend,*

*John Armfield*

The Armfields went to Florida for the winter of 1870 and returned in April 1871. On their way home they stopped in Nashville to visit his good friend Judge John M. Lea, who afterwards had this to say about John Armfield:

*I shall never forget the pleasant old home on the brow of the mountain, overlooking a panorama as extensive and grand as was ever presented to the human eye. There is within a few feet of the precipice a Druidical rock (the balancing rock) which equalled the character of Colonel Armfield. A child could give to it a gentle movement but no human strength could cause it to topple or be overturned; so his kind feelings could be touched by the slightest appeal to generosity, but in all matters where duty and principle were involved, he was firm and immovable.*

The following September 20, 1871, John Armfield died and was laid to rest in a small cemetery which now bears his name and is near his home. Soon afterwards Mrs. Armfield went to live with her nieces and their families.

The old slave and personal servant, Nathan Bracken, the only member of his race in the community, continued to live at Beersheba in the house given him by Armfield and, at Armfield's request, Nathan was buried in the same cemetery near him about 1916. He was beloved by all residents of Beersheba, especially the teenage boys who turned to Nathan for sympathy and support when they were in trouble with their parents. At Christmas, when the holiday baking was done, the children were soon on their way to take Nathan samples of their cakes. All the young people gathered frequently at Nathan's home, where he had church services. If there were not enough chairs to go around they sat on his furniture and on the floor. He was a symbol of the old order and they respected him as its surviving representative.

## La Belle Époque



*Hotel guests on the second wooden observatory.*

In European history, La Belle Époque is the period from 1873 to the outbreak of World War I. We will use the name for a period slightly longer, from Armfield's death to the beginning of the Depression. It was the period that the parents and grandparents of 2010's eldest generation of summer people, the owners of Armfield's cottages and similar houses of modern construction, looked back to as the formative years of the resort as they knew it.

In 1868 Richard Clark of Cleveland, Ohio, a former partner of John D. Rockefeller in the oil business, came to Beersheba and purchased the Morgan, Phillips, and Kenner places. Then he and W. W. Bierce, also of Cleveland, bought the Hotel and 3000 acres of virgin timber from John M. Bass for \$10,000. By 1870 Richard Clark was operating a stove factory, and saw mill at South Pittsburg. According to a member of the Hunerwadel family, Clark returned to Cleveland and traded the Phillips place in Beersheba to the Hege family for their home in Ohio. A deed in the

Altamont courthouse registered from Richard Clark to Mina Hege on August 6, 1872 supports this statement.

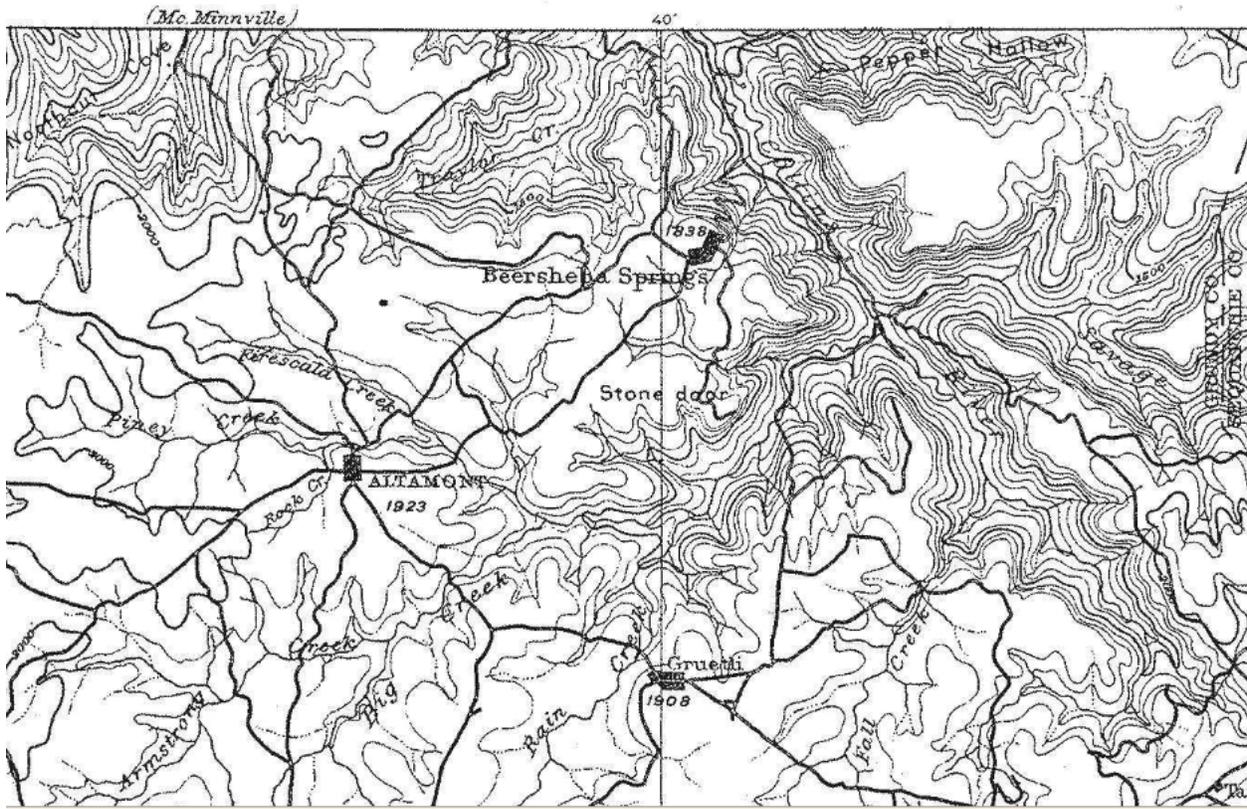
The hotel was reopened in 1870 by I. N. Nicholson with his wife as manager. One night about midnight there arrived a group of guests who were to play a major role in the subsequent development of the resort. The adults were two women, Lucy Curd Wilkin (Mrs. D. F. Wilkin) and her younger sister Bettie Curd. A third sister, Pattie, older than Bettie, had been the second wife of Morton B. Howell but had recently died. Howell already had three children, Sue, Alfred, and Morton, by his first wife, Isabel Elliott. Bettie brought with her these three children. As recalled by Sue Howell many years later, the party had left Nashville early in the morning by train. In McMinnville they were met by a stagecoach for the drive up the mountain. The roads were dreadful because no work had been done on them during the war. There was no luggage wagon, or if so, there was not room for all the trunks, for some

were tied under and on top of the coach. The holes in the road were more than the horses could pull through and the passengers got out and walked around them. At the foot of the mountain the driver blew a horn once for each passenger to let the people on top know how many to expect for supper. Everyone already there would wait on the observatory to welcome the guests, regardless of the hour.

Two years later, in 1872, the same group came again, but Bettie Curd had married her deceased sister's widower, Morton B. Howell, and they had a baby girl named Pattie. That summer they engaged rooms upstairs in the main building of the hotel. There were a great many people at the hotel and every room was full. The Adam G. Adams family had a cottage next to the hotel, and Sue Howell there met her future husband. In June of 1873, the two Curd sisters decided to use an inheritance from their maternal grandfather to buy the Polk cottage. That decision by the Curd sisters has had almost as much impact on the community as Beersheba Cain's discovery of the spring or

John Armfield's decision to develop the resort. Ten-year-old Alfred Howell was sent up to the cottage to guard the possessions that had been moved in. Fifty years later he recalled, "I slept in the room nearest the Schild cabin [the southeast room], or rather I lay on a bed in that room. It was so soon after the war that in that remote section there were many stories of 'bushwhackers' – ex-soldiers who were homeless and unable to adjust and locate themselves and just roamed around. I suppose these stories were exaggerated, but they had produced such an impression on me that I was expectant of almost anything. During the night the hogs walked around and their footsteps and voices were so humanized by fancy, that my hair stood on end most of the night. This happened only a night or two until there was more company and the terror of the hogs that talked like men subsided with familiarity."

Morton B. and Bettie Curd Howell had nine children who reached maturity and whose descendants today own the cottage Bettie and Lucy bought in 1873, now known as the Howell



1895 U.S. Coastal and Geodetic Survey Map, scan courtesy Ralph Thompson



*The Howell Cottage, originally the Polk Cottage. Photo from the 1940's or 1950's.*

Cottage. Some of Bettie's descendants have built another major house, Laurel Point. Sue Howell married Adam G. Adams, Jr., and they had seven sons, whose descendants today own eleven or more houses in Beersheba, depending on how you count them. Alfred Howell married Jennie Thompson. Jennie's unmarried sister, Frances (Fran or Nan), on visiting Alfred's family here, fell in love with Beersheba and in 1887 bought the former Dahlgren house, now owned by the descendants of Alfred and Jennie and called Nanhaven in memory of their Aunt Nan. Nan, moreover, had a sister Mat, who was guardian of three Trabue boys. Descendants or in-laws of one of them own another two houses at Beersheba. And sisters of one of the Nanhaven wives own two more houses. That is a total of 18 houses today owned by descendants or in-laws of descendants of three members of that group of guests at the hotel in 1870.

By 1875, the Hotel was being operated by Samuel M. Scott, who had spent the summer of 1863 with the Armfields and who operated the City Hotel in Nashville.

A letter recommending a visit to Beersheba for the sick and ailing of all ages is quoted below because of the extreme faith the author had in the

climate and the curative waters:

*Nashville, Tenn. April 25, 1873*

*Messrs. S. M. Scott & Co.*

*Gentlemen – Having spent the two past seasons at Beersheba, in charge of the health of its guests, I have had ample opportunity to judge and form opinions based on facts, and to my mind conclusive, that for teething children, Ene-mick females, and the broken down and exhausted in constitution of all classes, particularly those from the miasmatic districts of the extreme South and our large cities, Beersheba Springs merit a position as a healthful and pleasant summer resort, equal, if not superior to any on the continent. Its waters, both mineral and freestone, are of the best quality. The mineral springs contain iron, iodine, and arsenite of potassa – the two latter ingredients in minute proportions – so delicately blended as to set agreeably on the stomachs of all. I cannot speak quantitatively of the ingredients of this water, as no minute analysis, I believe, has ever been made.*

*The effects of a transfer of enfeebled and delicate children, and the broken down and exhausted invalids of all classes, some of whom I*

*had in charge before leaving Nashville, was a rapid improvement from the date of their arrival without the aid of medicine, and due alone to the effects of the water (which is peculiarly suited to weak bowels) and the general surroundings of Beersheba.*

*Very respectfully,*

*John D. Winston, M.D*

The 1895 Coastal and Geodetic Survey map of the Beersheba Springs area shows a road up the mountain with six switchbacks. It begins going up the side of the Backbone, the ridge that juts out to the north to the west of Beersheba. It reaches the creek bed, known as Dark Hollow, switches back to the east, and then weaves back and forth up the mountain almost directly below the hotel. The main street appears to be what Armfield called Spring or Locust but is now called Dahlgren, followed by the stretch of Highway 56 as far as the present Hunter's Mill Road. There are two roads to Altamont, one down Hunter's Mill Road and along the route of the old Chickamauga Trace past Long's Mill and a second along the route of present Highway 56. The Backbone Road, and the Stone Door Road are shown, but this is the road now known as Fahery or the Old Road to Laurel; the current Stone Door Road is more recent. Significantly missing are the Grassy Ridge Road, which now runs out to the southeast paralleling the bluff, and the old wagon road down the mountain at the end of the Grassy Ridge. These are more recent creations. Also missing is Armfield Avenue, which in those days went only as far as the Armfield house. In the valley, the stagecoach road runs up the valley to the foot of Peak Mountain and there divides. One fork goes up the south side of Peak and on to Chattanooga. The other fork continues up the Big Creek Gulf another two miles or so before turning south and mounting the plateau without switchbacks to arrive close to Gruetli.

Access had long been a problem for visitors to Beersheba. The early route, shown on the 1895 map, had been up the stage road between Nashville and Chattanooga and then by a tortur-

ous, steep road up the mountain, barely possible for a horse-drawn coach and out of the question for automobiles. One of the first good roads built for automobiles was the Dixie Highway from Chicago to Florida, a coordinated effort of the states along its route. The western route ran along the present course of U.S. 41 from Nashville to Chattanooga.

The stretch over the mountain at Monteagle was the worst part of the whole road. Before World War I, one driver described it as a "rocky creek bed out of place." The *Chicago Tribune* reported that fifty percent of those who braved it had to be pulled out of the ditch. In the early 1920's, this stretch was much improved and became the standard way up the mountain. The road across the top of the mountain was given a crushed rock surface that was usually passable.

In 1926, what is now Tennessee Highway 56, a much improved road, was built up the mountain at Beersheba. Tom Creighton (of Creighton Chevrolet in Tracy City) was the ten-year-old waterboy to the crew that started from the bottom of the mountain. In 2009, his memories were still



*The broad way, gentle grade, and good footing of the WPA road after 75 years with little or no maintenance make it ideal for elderly walkers.*



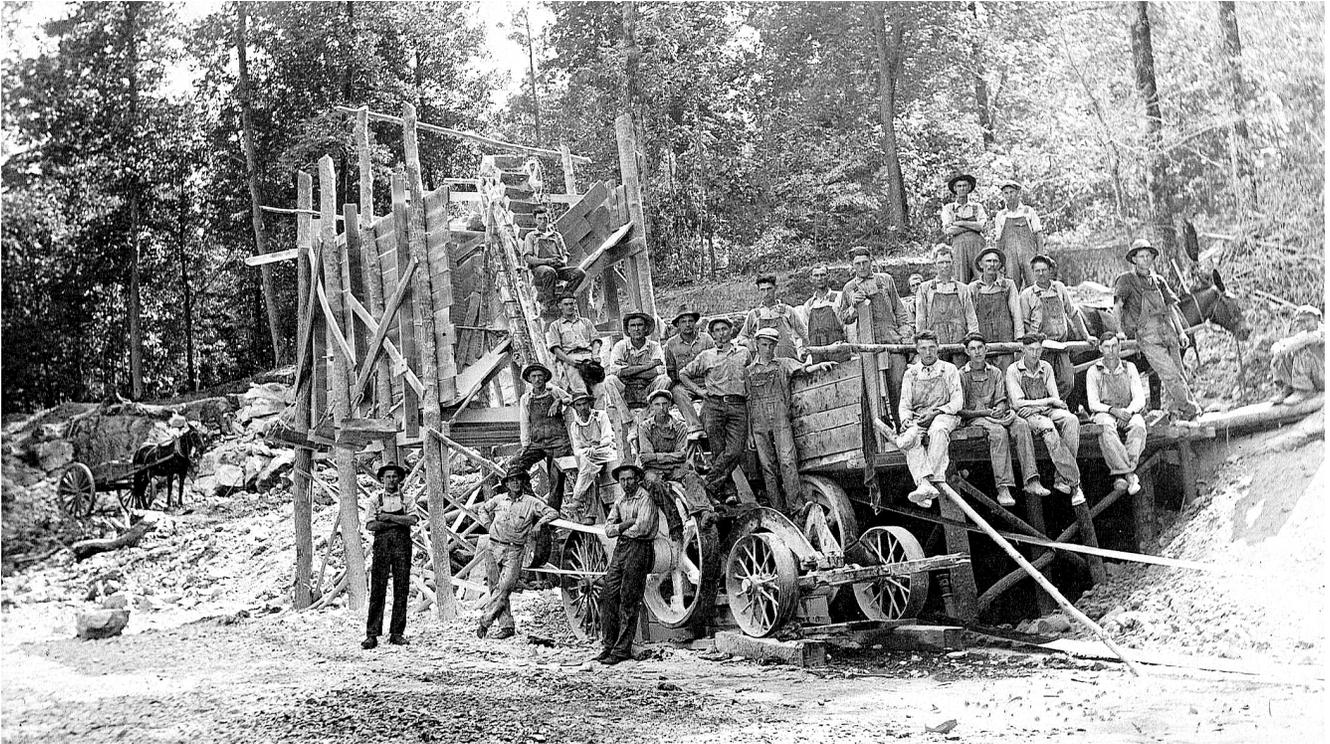
*The men, mules, and tools that built the highway up the mountain. A photograph from 1926. Kneeling, from left to right: George Carrer Tate, Ed Childers, Clayborn Green, Frank Creighton, Ernest Meeks, Champ Tate, Joe Wheeler Perry. Standing, left to right: Venus King, "Big Sam" Gibbs, Clifton Hill, Ernest Rubley, Melvin Meeks, Clarence E. Wooten, John R. King, (farther back and slightly higher) John (Whack) Brown, Hannibal Green, Ben J. Hill. Identifications by Marshall King in 1986.*

clear and sharp. The specifications called for a roadbed nine feet wide, the surface to be covered with crushed stone sprayed with oil. There were, besides the cuts, numerous bridges constructed entirely of wood, including wooden pegs for connecting the timbers. The earthmoving equipment was still primarily picks and shovels with some mule-drawn graders and wagons. For transporting the crushed stone for the surface there was a White truck and some T-model Ford dump trucks. There were two crews; one started from the top and the other from the bottom. Where blasting was required, the holes for the charges were made by two men alternately pounding a pointed steel punch into the stone with 9-pound sledges; a third man guided the punch. These details were learned from Tom Creighton.

The blasting at the top of the mountain

where the road came through the sandstone bluff caused a shift in the rock formations and put an end to the chalybeate spring in front of the hotel. At first the spring's water came out of the rock on the cliff side of the road just below the Hotel, and a sort of sandstone igloo was built over this new spring in 1929. In the course of time, however, the water shifted again; and the pool under the igloo is now dry or filled with surface water. The original site of the chalybeate spring is on the mountainside above the igloo, but very close to the edge of the bluff created by the blasting, so close that erosion carried the springhouse and the dirt of the level area on which it once stood over the bluff. There is now no trace of the springhouse or spring left.

It took four years to build the road. Once completed, it became the standard route for



*Rock crusher for building the road up the mountain and its crew. The crusher was powered by an engine and was at the quarry, which was in the side of Tother mountain on the far side of Tarlton. John Whittingham was foreman at the crusher. Note the wide, flat wheels well adapted for heavy loads on a soft surface.*

Nashville people. The highway had originally been surveyed to come up the mountain without switchbacks, to stay far from the springs, and to reach the top through a natural pass through the bluff near the present end of the Grassy Ridge Road. From there, it would have run west, south of the center of Beersheba, to join the present route of TN-56 somewhere past Grace Chapel. But the route was changed, the springs destroyed, and a perpetual problem created for those who had to maintain the road through its perilous cuts into the shale of the Raccoon Mountain Formation. It may never be known why the change was made, but local oral tradition attributes it to lobbying by commercial interests in Beersheba.

A few years later, in the Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built a wagon road up the mountain at the end of the Grassy Ridge Road, taking advantage of the natural pass through the bluff there. [See picture on page 26.] Its good design, using the geological

structure of the mountain, has enabled it to survive with no more maintenance than cutting an occasional fallen tree. It is now closed to motor vehicles, but its social history, its graceful curves, gentle slopes, and beautiful dry stone masonry retaining walls make it one of the most pleasant walks in the Savage Gulf Natural Area. Park authorities, unfortunately, have not included it in the trail system nor described its history in their maps. Gordon Brown, who had helped build this road, introduced it proudly to the writer, who was then a 15-year-old boy. Dennis Knight, who lived in the Cater cabin in the valley, used the road to walk to the top of the mountain to be met by the school bus and taken to high school in Tracy City. His father, Albert, had worked on the road. Winfield Dunn, Governor of Tennessee, rode down this road on horseback on April 30, 1971 on his historic visit to Savage Gulf, a crucial step in getting the Gulf purchased by the state and made into State Natural Area.

By way of contrast, Tennessee 56, with its cut through sandstone that destroyed the spring and its foundation on the clay and shale of the Racoon Mountain and Pennington formations has had frequent trouble with landslides such as that illustrated dramatically in the picture to the right.

Completion of I-24 in the 1960's, along with two good roads up the mountain to Altamont again changed the approach of Nashville people, but TN-56 remains the route to McMinnville.



*A spring's revenge: 2010 slide on TN 56 opposite the site of the chalybeate spring the road destroyed. Photo by Buddy Rogers.*

## Depression and Revival

No sooner was the longed-for road completed, however, than the Depression hit the Hotel hard. A vacation at a spring resort – especially one that no longer had a spring – was something people could do without. The Hotel changed hands several times and in some summers did not open at all. The recovery in the U. S. economy in 1939 - 1941 did not revive the business. Better roads meant more competition from the Great Smokies, Florida, and other more spectacular resorts. In November of 1941, it was bought for \$3000 by the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church to be used as a retreat grounds. In subsequent years, thousands of people, both young and old, have experienced Beersheba through the Methodist Assembly. Details of the restoration, necessary modernization and expansion are given in the article by Ann H. Troutt below.

The first city-owned library in Grundy County was established in Beersheba Springs by Mrs. Charles N. Burch of Memphis in 1917. After visiting the school and seeing the need for books, other than text books, she immediately began gathering up books to send to Beersheba. It was

not until 1923 that a building was provided. The Beersheba Library Association was formed with both citizen and summer-resident members. In 1923, the association engaged Henry L. Brown to build the log structure \$650 on condition that the community provide the logs and free labor. The library is now part of the eight-county Caney Fork Regional Library. Its public Internet access has made it a community meeting place. The program of reading for children draws a large attendance.

In 1934, Beersheba's tranquility and isolation attracted a short-term resident who called himself Boshee Bousch but was really John Dillinger, then the FBI's Public Enemy No. 1. He built a simple cabin on the Grassy Ridge Road. J.B. Nunley and Tom Creighton sold him vegetables; Marshall Whitman helped him dig a well. Creighton recognized him at the time, but when he was shot by the FBI in Chicago in July and the papers were full of his pictures, everybody realized who he really was.

The TVA and rural electrification brought power to Beersheba in 1941. Kerosene lamps, ice deliveries from Tracy City, and hand-operated wells soon became only memories. In 1952, there

came the opportunity to install a telephone in each house when the Ben Lomond Telephone Cooperative was organized with Dennis Brown as one of the directors. The summer people were generally opposed, because they had left the city to escape the telephone. Local residents were anxious to subscribe to be able to talk to friends and family on the mountain and to reach out to the world beyond. The logistics required a minimum number of subscribers. So the cottagers gave in, had telephones installed, and kept the receivers off the hooks or piled up pillows on top to deaden the ring. Piped-in water from the Big Creek Utility District came in 1964. DSL Internet connection was available by 2005. Wireless was available for Assembly guests in 2006. By 2009, even cell phones had penetrated to many parts of town.

The early 1950s saw an economic boom based on employment in the cutting and removal from the Big Creek Gulf of white oak for making staves for whiskey barrels. The operation – called snaking – was rather spectacular. A stave mill would be set up on the top of the plateau and a cable stretched to a point near the creek bed in the gulf below. A log would be dragged to the cable and attached to a two-wheeled trolley that ran along the cable. The trolley was attached to a second cable which ran to a winch on top of the plateau. When the log was firmly attached, the men below gave a signal, the winch began to wind, and soon the huge log was dangling in the air on its way up to the stave mill and ultimately to the distillery. Stanley Brown, an expert mechanic, did a big business in the repair of logging equipment.

In 1955, Beersheba Springs was incorporated as a town with 4.9 square miles of territory and a uniform city-manager-council form of government. Only two years later, in 1957, came the disastrous fire that destroyed the Browns' store and two homes. Jamie Brown persuaded the City Council that a fire department had to be created, and he and his brother, Carlos, went to Soddy Daisy to buy the first engine. The Rescue Squad received its charter in 1975. In 1980, the historic district of the town was placed on the National

Register of Historic Places.

Since 1967, the whole community has hosted the Beersheba Springs Arts and Craft festival each year on the fourth weekend in August. The first one was held at the school house (now the Community Center). All subsequent ones have been on the grounds of the United Methodist Assembly. The festival has close to 200 vendors and draws thousands of people from around the area. The proceeds from vendor fees and food sales go to benefit local charities in the community including the Beersheba Springs Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad.

The Historical Society, created in 1980 by Margaret Brown Coppinger, has not only published several books, held monthly meetings on historical topics during the summer, and created an attractive museum, but has also contributed to the restoration of the Community Center in the old school building, run summer art camps for all interested children, and supported the Easter egg hunt.

A number of new summer cottages have been built and others restored and adapted for modern living. The houses of the year-round people have also multiplied and been much improved in quality.

Despite such elements of “progress,” Beersheba still has its farms, livestock, nurseries, and home gardens. The air is clean and pure the year round. Sound still carries across the mountain top with remarkable clarity. The nightly chorus of tree frogs still sings loudly in summer. The crystal stars in the Big Dipper still shine brightly if one can get away from the street lights. But to scratch out a living and bring up a family at Beersheba has always been a touch-and-go proposition. Some breadwinners have to travel daily to jobs in Chattanooga, Tullahoma, or McMinnville. Some families have gone away for years to work elsewhere so they could save enough to be able someday to come back and retire on the misty mountain. Though in touch with the world around it, Beersheba Springs, like its name, retains an air of an age gone by, a tempo of life that is sustainable, a peace of people in touch with nature and with one another.

## The Beersheba Springs Medical Clinic

Beersheba is home to a unique institution, the Beersheba Springs Medical Clinic. Many people helped in its creation, but all would agree that the driving force that made happen was H. Garret Adams, M.D., MPH a fourth-generation member of a family of “summer people” here. In his life away from Beersheba, he was a Associate Professor of Pediatrics at The University of Louisville and had been president of Physicians for a National Health Program. For years he had informally seen, advised and treated all who came to him while he was “on vacation” here. He knew first hand the plight of the many uninsured or inadequately insured people in this community. He also knew from statistics that, as measured by Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL) before age 75, Grundy County had the worst health outcomes of any of Tennessee's 95 counties and one of the worst in the nation. And that in the midst of this seemingly idyllic environment! Dr. Adams resolved to do all he could to help.

After several years of preparation, the Beersheba clinic opened on November 23, 2010, operating under Dr. Adams's Tennessee medical license as the supervising physician. It was in a rented double-wide mobile home adapted with donated labor to provide two examining rooms, a reception and office area, a handicapped-accessible bathroom, a laboratory area, a conference room and a staff restroom. Dr. Adams writes:

We were fortunate to hire local people as our first employees, a certified physician assistant and an office manager. The advantage of local staff is that they know most of our patients personally. In 2012, with the help of a local grant, we hired a medical assistant.

I go every month to attend in the clinic. A volunteer radiologist comes from Oak Ridge to perform ultrasound studies, and from time to time other specialists visit the clinic. Specialist referral is challenging. Fortunately, we know specialists who see our patients either pro-bono or for a discounted fee, but some serious

or complicated conditions simply go untreated.

Tennessee statutes establish liability immunity for voluntary provision of health care services in the clinic unless an act or omission was the result of gross negligence or willful misconduct (Tennessee Code Ann. 63-6-708).

We treat acute illness and minor injuries; evaluate and manage chronic illness (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular complications of atherosclerosis, and depression); perform minor surgery; provide electrocardiograms and many inhalation therapy treatments. We focus on improving lifestyles (i.e., exercise and healthy nutrition, weight control, smoking cessation and immunizations). We also host mammography clinics. Routine laboratory tests are performed on site; others are sent out; lab test results are discussed with the patients.

We provide common medications free, and prescribe medicines that can be purchased at discount pharmacies. Outrageous price hikes in common medicines have been shocking. In June 2015, our cost for bulk doxycycline temporarily jumped from \$70 to \$700, and glimepride from \$13 to \$318. A generous donor has provided a small fund for patient assistance that we use sparingly in particular circumstances.

We quickly became aware that the desperate need for medical care extended far beyond Beersheba; patients have come from 13 surrounding counties. Clinic days are Monday and Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. On Wednesdays we have a second PAC, who volunteers. We average 30 visits per day and up to 3,000 visits a year.

The clinic does not charge fees, does not bill insurance and receives no government funding. Expenses are met entirely by voluntary donations from individual donors, patients

and small local grants. In the first few years, donations were matched by a generous donor. We do not solicit support from for-profit hospitals or health insurance companies. We gratefully accept support from area businesses and friends; donations are encouraged and are necessary to the clinic's sustainability. The gifts mean that mountain people now have relief from pain and suffering, which they did not have before. The clinic is diagnosing and treating illness earlier, and we are helping people manage their chronic diseases better.

Annual expenses are around \$100,000 — the largest expenses are salaries: 65 percent, followed by medicines: 15 percent and labs: 10

percent. In 2015, 85 percent of income was from donations: 55 percent philanthropic, and nearly 30 percent from patient donations. Dash to the Door, a 5K Fun/Run event, accounted for 15 percent of income.

The Beersheba Springs Medical Clinic has made free primary health care a reality for those in its area, just as it is in many other countries in the world – but not in America. Dr. Adams has served as president of Physicians for a National Health Program, a program that would provide for all Americans at least what the Beersheba Clinic has provided here. Can Beersheba lead the nation to a brighter, healthier future?

## Stone Door and Savage Gulf

From the resort's earliest days, walks in the woods have been a big part of the Beersheba experience, with Stone Door a favorite destination. The land was all privately owned, but the owners must have thought that being friendly towards walkers was a better policy than angering them by futile attempts to keep them out.

As mentioned on page 30, much of the Big Creek gulf below Stone Door was logged for white oak for making staves for whiskey barrels.

Not until 1968 do we hear of “parks”. On April 11 of that year, it is announced that the State will exercise its option to buy 700 acres, including Stone Door, from the J. W. Huber Corporation for future development as a state park. But the following January, a further announcement says that the purchase has “hit a snag” because the Attorney General's office has found that the title to some 150 acres is “questionable”. Some solution must have been found, for on June 26, 1969, in a ceremony in front of the new fire hall in Beersheba Springs, Charles Beatty of the Huber corporation handed Mike Baumstark of the Tennessee Department of Conservation the deed to 800 (*sic*) acres in exchange for the State's check. State Senator

Ernest Crouch from McMinnville, “whose efforts helped make the park a reality” looked on, and the Grundy County High School band “played patriotic numbers.”

The Stone Door tract was remarkable for its cliffs, views and the “door” itself, a ten-foot-wide crack in the sandstone cliff with a sloping floor that offered a way to get through the cliff's otherwise formidable barrier between the top of the plateau and the gulf below. The land, however, had been heavily logged and much of the area on top of the plateau recently burned in a forest fire. The area is now marked for “intense use” without endangering any rare plants or animals.

A few miles to the north, however, lay a naturalist's wonderland, a gulf of virgin forest with giant trees hundreds of years old and rich in plant species almost beyond belief. It bore the name of Savage Gulf for the pioneer family that had first owned it. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it had been acquired by Sam Werner with every intention of logging it as he did other areas. To get the timber out, he needed to run a narrow-gauge railroad over the plateau between his saw mill and the rim of the gulf. It turned out, however – no doubt to

his dismay – that there were title disputes over the land the railroad needed to cross, so the gulf had never been logged. Werner's heirs recognized the environmental value of the gulf and hoped that it could be preserved.

In it were giant beeches, basswoods, tulip poplars, sugar maples and other species typical of what ecologists call a “mixed mesophytic forest” meaning a forest that requires a moderate amount of rain – but only a moderate amount. More importantly, it was a “climax” forest, a forest in the steady state to which it evolves only after centuries of undisturbed development. In the 1960s, however, changes in land assessment laws had so increased the taxes on the property that the owners would soon be forced to sell to lumbering companies which, with modern equipment would quickly log the area and destroy one of the last virgin forests in the eastern United States. (The Tennessee Land Trust did not yet exist.)

One of the first and most ardent and influential proponents of conservation of Savage Gulf was Herman Bagenstoss of Tracy City, son of the founders of the Dutch Maid bakery. In addition to running the bakery, he was co-publisher of the *Grundy County Herald* and chairman of the Grundy County Conservation Board and used these positions to promote the idea of state acquisition of the area. It is a good guess that he had been behind the creation of the park at Stone Door. On a Sunday in October of 1969, he and Mack Prichard, the state naturalist, organized a four-mile hike into Savage Gulf to promote interest in saving it. Some eighty hikers turned up for the adventure. All of them thought themselves strong hikers, but the Savage proved too much for thirty of them who were caught in the Gulf by nightfall, and did not make it out until 4 a.m. the next morning, when they were rescued by the Trailblazers Jeep Club and the Grundy County Rescue Squad.

Mack Prichard proved tireless in his efforts to bring the situation to the attention of all who would listen. Elsie Quaterman, professor of ecology at Vanderbilt University, lent additional professional support to Pritchard's view of the

ecological importance of the Gulf. She added that it appeared that the flora of the Gulf had – unlike that of surrounding areas – survived the last ice age and had contributed to re-seeding of the area. She also made the first plant inventory of the Gulf.

On Friday, April 30, 1971, Tennessee Governor Winfield Dunn made a whirlwind visit to the Gulf. He arrived at the McMinnville airport at 6:45 a.m. and had breakfast at the Beersheba Hotel where his hosts were Alf Adams, Jr., his parents and brothers. (Alf had been the Governor's campaign manager and doubtless was largely responsible for getting him to come.) A group of 15 then went to the stables of Hugh Gerald Hill where they took mounts for a horseback ride out the Grassy Ridge Road, down the mountain on the WPA road, up Peak mountain on the old McMinnville Stage Coach Road and across the mountain top of Peak to a point that overlooks the Savage Gulf. There they left their horses and were joined by some ten hikers for the trip into Savage Gulf. They descended into the Gulf, stepping carefully from stone to stone, for there was no trail, walked some two miles along the creek bed, then climbed to the first bench on the north side to the head of a jeep road, where they were met by jeeps with lunch. They were then driven to an overlook north of the Gulf. The party included William Jenkins, conservation commissioner and Kenny Dale, staff naturalist with the U.S. Department of the Interior, as well as Mack Prichard and Elsie Quaterman. At the end of the trip, Dunn told a reporter, “I have never before seen anywhere such natural beauty as we have seen today here at Savage Gulf. Its natural beauty, along with its virgin timber should certainly be preserved for naturalists and others to enjoy for now on.”

In April of 1971, Robert W. Mayes, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in McMinnville, had alerted citizens there to the situation in Savage Gulf, and on November 4, 1971 the Savage Gulf Preservation League was organized there. Meanwhile, in Nashville, the Middle Tennessee Nature Conservancy Council made Savage Gulf its Number 1 priority.

On June 6, 1971, *Mid South*, the Sunday magazine supplement of the *Commercial Appeal*, the main Memphis newspaper, ran a cover story on Savage Gulf entitled "A Savage in Peril." The author, William Thomas, and a photographer had spent a day with Herman Bagenstoss in the Savage. He took them into the area in his Scout, an off-road vehicle made by International Harvest. Deep in the wilderness, the Scout mired down in mud, and it took them an hour and a half with ax and such tools as they had to get it out. Thomas's fine story, deeply respectful of the Savage, was particularly important because it gathered support for the project in West Tennessee.

On September 10, 1971, the Savage Gulf Preservation League and the Nature Conservancy Council presented plans for State acquisition of Savage Gulf to Walter Criley, Chief of Planning for the State Parks Division of the Tennessee Department of Conservation. Three versions were presented, a minimal 2,000 acre version with just the Gulf itself, an intermediate version of 4,000 acres including immediate surroundings, and an ideal version of 6,000 acres which would insure preservation of Savage Gulf and all virgin, climax forest adjacent to it. Mack Prichard argued for including the Collins River and Big Creek head waters and thus joining up with the Stone Door park. Others felt, however that this was asking for too much and might endanger the whole project. Criley assured the group that a proposal to purchase Savage Gulf would be presented to the General Assembly at its next session, which would be in 1972.

In March of 1972, Prichard, Quarterman, Bagenstoss and Mayes held a seminar devoted to Savage Gulf at the Cheekwood estate near Nashville. WLAC-TV in Nashville devoted a program to Savage.

In April of 1972, Governor Dunn included acquisition of Savage Gulf in his budget message, and Conservation Commissioner Bill Jenkins said, "We propose to begin surveys and start buying as much land as we can for \$500,000, if this figure is included in the state's capital outlay budget." On May 25, Criley told the Savage Gulf Preservation

League that the budget request had been approved, but nothing except planning could be done until the new fiscal year beginning in July. He added that the \$500,000 would be inadequate to complete the purchase, but that the State would borrow from the Nature Conservancy to do so. Senator Earnest Crouch of McMinnville and Rep. G. Stanley Rogers of Manchester and Rep. Ed Murray of Winchester sponsored a resolution that directed the Department of Conservation to purchase as much as possible of the Savage Gulf area with the \$500,000 asked by Dunn in his budget message. The resolution passed.

In July of 1972, a new and welcome force joined the movement: the TVA. At a meeting at the Sewanee Inn chaired by Herman Bagenstoss and attended by Lynn Seeber, general manager of TVA and William Jenkins, state Commissioner of Conservation, it was announced that TVA would work with the State on a plan that would include:

- \* Preserving the wilderness character of Savage Gulf
- \* A pilot strip-mining reclamation project on the west side of TN 56 in Coalmont
- \* Constructing a park management center on TN 56 between Monteagle and Tracy City
- \* Developing a conservation education center either at Foster Falls (already owned by TVA) or at Savage Gulf
- \* Linking the state parks in the area by a system of hiking trails.

Then on January 17, 1973 came the climatic announcement. The State would purchase not 2000, not 4000, not 6000, but 10,000 acres including the Savage Gulf. That is nearly 16 square miles. TVA would reimburse the State for half of the cost of this acquisition, not to exceed one million dollars. It looked like Mack Prichard's dream come true. TVA would construct public access areas on some of the land, and these facilities would be maintained and operated by the State. There were also plans for Grundy Lakes and Foster Falls. Ultimately, the State appropriated \$901,935.73 for the Savage acquisition and received a Federal matching grant of exactly the same amount.

In June of 1973, Tim McCall of the State Department of Conservation announced plans to begin negotiations with Charles M. Boyd and the Werner family. The Werners owned 3,700 acres of the 11,410 acres which the State intended to buy. In all, there were ten land owners in the area. McCall said that 100 acres would also be added to the Stone Door area.

The dream became a reality. An area including Savage Gulf, the Big Creek gulf up past Stone Door and upstream reaches of the Collins River was formally designated a State Park in 1974. Soon the headwaters of Big Creek on top of the plateau, including its tributary Firescauld Creek with Blue Hole and Greeter Falls were added bringing the total acreage to about 11,360.

A complete inventory<sup>3</sup> of the vascular flora of Savage Gulf was made in 1979 by botanists from the University of Tennessee. They found an extraordinary total of 680 taxa from 360 genera and 111 families in an area of about ten square miles. There were two endangered species, five threatened, and three of special concern. Their article, however, is written for specialists, and species are identified only by scientific name and located by one or more of six zones in or around the Gulf. A presentation of Savage Gulf for the layman is yet to be written.

By 2015, the South Cumberland State Park was recording some 600,000 visitors per year. But it offered no restaurant nor place to sleep other

than the primitive campsites. Invading the woods, however, with anything like an RV campground or a restaurant seemed undesirable. Then suddenly there was a new possibility.

As a consequence of the Great Recession of 2008, the Shady Valley Nursery in Beersheba Springs had gone out of business. Its beautiful 585-acre plateau-top tract with a 65-acre lake created by damming Laurel Creek was put up for sale. The tract undoubtedly included Charley's camp in the Horseshoe (page 10) and a stretch of the Chickamauga Trace. It was contiguous, on its south side, with the north border of the park a mile or so west of Stone Door itself and less from the ranger station. On its north side, the nursery

reached to TN highway 56. It had been created by Bill Earthman, who started with a nursery in the Collins River valley but in 1988 acquired this site and moved the operation to the top of the plateau – hence its somewhat inappropriate “Valley” name. Members of the local community recognized the site's potential for the park. It was beautiful rolling country, but here there could be support facilities for hikers such as RV and automobile campsites, restaurants, and shops with hiking and camping supplies. The lake offered canoeing, kayaking, and maybe even fishing. The State Senator for the district, Janice Bowling of Tullahoma, was invited to visit, and she became a strong and effective supporter. In the background, Sam Baggett of Beersheba Springs kept the project moving forward.

There was an important change in the process of land acquisition by the State since the Savage Gulf purchase. Now revenues from taxes on real-estate transactions went into a special fund for land acquisition. The executive department did not have to go to the legislature for an



Winfield Dunn, Bill Jenkins and Alf Adams, Jr. in Savage Gulf.

3 . B. Eugene Wofford, Thomas S. Patrick, Loy R. Phillippe and David H. Webb , “The Vascular Flora of Savage Gulf, Tennessee” in *SIDA Contributions to Botany*, vol. 8 nr. 2, November 1979. <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/10010391#page/139/mode/1up>

appropriation to buy Shady Valley. Adequate funds were available. But there was a hurdle. The State had an assessment done which came in at \$1,325,000. By law, this was then the maximum the State was allowed to pay. The owner, however, felt the property was worth at least \$1,500,000 and would not sell for less. Knowledgeable people in the local community felt the owner's valuation was reasonable and through the Friends of the South Cumberland successfully raised most of the missing \$175,000. But how to arrange the deal? Giving this sum to the State would not help; it still could not pay more than the assessment. Simply giving the money to the owner was not possible for a tax-exempt organization; something had to be bought with it. Someone came up with a brilliant idea. The dou-

ble trailer that had been used as the nursery office – and which the State wanted removed – was bought for the \$175,000; and the owner then, on December 16, 2016, sold to the State for the assessed value. The trailer was then sold, hauled off, and converted into a home nearby. Separately, Adams Family Enterprises bought some 115 acres adjacent to the nursery on the east and placed it in the Land Trust for eventual transfer to the park. As of this writing, summer of 2017, development of the Shady Valley tract lies ahead. It will not be a “natural area” and thus subject to many restrictions on use. Rather it will be a somewhat civilized base for adventures in the wild. Whether the route of the Chickamauga Trace through the property will be featured or ignored is an open question.



*Maples on Grassy Ridge Road planted by Howell Adams. Photo Buddy Rogers.*

## The Hotel: From Tavern to United Methodist Assembly



Three articles are grouped here. The first, by Herschel Gower, on the history of the hotel from its earliest days up to 1941, is from the first edition of this book. The second, by Carl L. Elkins and likewise from that book, details the story of its purchase by the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church in 1941. The third part, by Ann Hale Troutt, brings the story up to 2014. It includes revised and updated material from parts III and IV of her "A History of Beersheba Springs Hotel and Assembly" published in the *Tennessee Conference Review*, May 30 and June 13, 2008.

### The Fortress that Shrugged at Doom

"That doomed hotel," wrote L. Virginia French in her diary on September 2, 1863. The entry was made with a trembling hand and reasonable conviction, because on that day during the Civil War a group of lawless thieves broke into the apartment of Tom Ryan, the Irish overseer of the closed inn, took what they wanted, and set fire to papers, straw carpets, and clothes. Then they rode away to look back as the smoke from the famed hotel rose to the sky. This was one of

many raids, but it seemed the final blow to Mrs. French. Just then a maid of the French family was passing by and ran to tell her mistress, who was refugeeing from McMinnville and keeping house that summer at the Bass Cottage, that Ryan's rooms were in flames. Fortunately, young Walter Scott French, age 9, ran to the Hotel cistern with an earthen crock – the only vessel he could find at that crucial moment. He made many trips as he dashed water on the flames and thus saved the

Hotel from what would have been total destruction.

It is this lad Walter, called Bouse by his family, whom we can thank today when we look down the long

portico or enter the courtyard at Cozy Corner (now Marvell) or walk along Brick, Cross (now Log), or Post Office (now Smith) row. The son of John Hopkins French and Lucy Virginia Smith, Walter, saved the building that is central to the town of Beersheba.

Everybody gravitates to the Hotel and its view for good reasons. Architect Charles Warterfield has called it “the biggest and most imposing structure of its kind in the State of Tennessee.”

The origins of the Hotel were neither grand nor imposing. A few months after Beersheba Porter Cain discovered the chalybeate spring in 1833, a row of cabins was built and a tavern erected soon after. It appears that George R. Smartt and his brother-in-law, Dr. Alfred Paine, both of McMinnville, were the first owners and operators of this place of resort for those in the lowlands trying to escape malaria, yellow fever, and cholera.

Being 1,800 feet above sea level, Beersheba soon caught on, and other rows of cabins had been built by 1837. It was in that year that invitations were issued to a ball that was held on July 4, given by the young men who designated themselves as managers: E. Pendleton, Robert White, William T. Coons, F. K. Bell, Samuel Henderson, and William L. Cain. The ball, beginning at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, must have ended with

pine-knot flares lighting the dancers and must have been an affair long to remember.

In the years following, the Hotel and tavern were owned by a succession of investors. Then

John Armfield bought extensive properties on the mountain, including the Hotel, in 1854 and began his scheme of developing Beersheba as a major resort. He closed the Hotel in 1855 to make repairs and build the two-story hotel with the columned portico along the front. (The back porch was added in 1946.) With a large crew of workmen, Armfield made additions that were



*Old Trees and Older Logs. Looking west along Log Row with its hand-hewn logs thought to be part of the original resort built in the 1830s. Photo 2009.*

considerable.

Observers like Jack E. Boucher of the National Park Service speak of the buildings as resembling a western fort, likening it to a self-contained complex with quarters for officers, enlisted men, and servants. Alfred E. Howell remarked that the buildings in his time, 1870, formed a square figure 8. The courtyard-centered plan is reminiscent both of spring resorts in Virginia and Roman villas of two millenia earlier. By 1936, when W. Jeter Eason visited and sketched the Hotel for the Historic American Buildings Survey, the plan did not include a third cross row at the back of the figure 8; but, as noted above, he showed with dotted lines a row south of Family Row (now East Side) symmetric with Whiskey and Post Office rows (now Lower Neal and Smith rows). A bowling alley may have closed the south side of the figure 8.

By 1858, the Hotel was big enough to accommodate 400 guests and was presided over by

Lorenzo Dow Mercer of McMinnville. Among the visitors that year were Phillip H. Thompson of Memphis and Randal W. McGavock of Nashville. The next year Colonel Armfield, then past sixty, persuaded several men of wealth to form the Beersheba Springs Company, and on December 6, 1859, he sold out to a group of fifteen investors, many from the Deep South, and the Company took over in 1860.

When visitors to Beersheba in its heyday reported that it compared favorably with the watering places of Virginia, they were thinking not only of the water but of the Hotel and its furnishings and appointments. An inventory of the furniture, carpets, china, and miscellaneous items conveyed by Colonel Armfield to the Beersheba Springs Company in 1860 provides the reader with some fascinating details of the appointments enjoyed by visitors before the Civil War. For example, there were 150 guest rooms with bedsteads, cots, cribs, mattresses, blankets, counterpanes, and sheets. Each room had split-bottom chairs, a dressing table, and a washstand. Each had a wash tub and a foot tub, apparently. There were curtains at the door for privacy and these allowed the flow of air into the room.

In the public rooms there were sofas, rocking chairs, card tables, billiard tables, and parlor lamps. There was a long dining table with chairs to accompany it. The kitchen inventory indicates that guests were not roughing it when Beersheba

was in her prime: soup tureens, soup ladles, vegetable and fruit dishes; copper urns for tea, coffee, and hot water; glass tumblers and goblets for sherry, hock, ale, claret, and champagne, and even egg glasses, nut crackers, and finger bowls. Further lists of items conveyed were noted, according to the public inventory, in the ledgers of the Beersheba Company.



Spring House Beersheba Springs Tenn.

*The Spring House, with access to the water below and a nice view from above. The site is between the Burch Cottage and Vesper Point, but so close to the cliff created by blasting for the construction of TN 56 that erosion has carried away all trace of the structure.*

Chilling accounts of war-time Beersheba include the sound of hoofbeats in front of the Hotel as Nathan Bedford Forrest led his cavalry down the mountain to assemble his forces at McMinnville for the daring and successful raid on Murfreesboro on July 13, 1862. War-time reports also tell how Confederate leaders camped their troops beside the Hotel, received food and supplies from Colonel Armfield, and rode away a few hours ahead of their Yankee pursuers, who on one occasion camped on exactly the same spot occupied by their enemies the night before. Bushwhackers, led by Hard Hampton or Charlie Ainsworth, terrorized the community. Federal troops, as observed by L. Virginia French, backed up wagons to the Hotel

and hauled away beds, vessels, dishes, and supplies to furnish two Yankee hospitals. Doomed was the word.

Although shaken to its foundations, the Hotel escaped destruction. The Company which owned it was ruined by the war and went bankrupt. Most of the incorporators could not pay the notes they

owed Armfield. In fact the Company was sued on October 17, 1867 for \$3,911.76 by a Nashville merchant for groceries and other items he had supplied earlier. By 1867 the property had been returned to John Armfield and Dr. Thomas J. Harding. They negotiated a sale to W. W. Bierce and Richard Clark of Cleveland, Ohio, who had made fortunes during the war, and the Hotel was reopened in 1870 under the management of Mrs. I. C. Nicholson.

In reporting the Grand Ball staged that year, the Nashville Republican Banner described the elegant gowns of the ladies, the jewelry, and all the finery of the occasion. Mrs. Nicholson was singled out as a hostess “who lives to make others happy, in true holiday attire, and smiled a happy welcome upon all who graced the joyous occasion.”

The hotel brochure for 1875, when S. M. Scott and Company were listed as proprietors, strikes a different chord: “It will be the aim of the proprietors to make Beersheba, this season, a plain, quiet home for families, rather than a place of gaiety and fashion. P. S. Our supply of ICE this season is abundant.” It should be remembered that 1875 was only a decade after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox and that Federal occupation and Reconstruction in the South did not end until 1877.

In 1878, Richard Clark and his wife Adelaide sold their interests to Richard’s younger brother James H. Clark. James Satterwhite of New York bought out W. W. Bierce in 1883. Then Satterwhite in turn sold his part to Alexander Nelson, including “all the fixtures, furniture, utensils and improvements of every kind appertaining to the kitchen, parlor, barroom, billiard room,

bedrooms, all bedding, bedsteads, sheets, tablecloths, towels, napkins, blankets, knives and forks.”

The sixteen-page brochure printed for Alexander Nelson for the season of 1887 is rich in details describing the accommodations at the Hotel, including the billiard hall, bowling alley, and ballroom with its imported band. By common consent, the ballroom could be “changed to a theatre where concerts, charades, and tableaux are indulged in by amateur artists, which affords much amusement to the audience.” It was further noted, with some ambiguity:

“Guests will be furnished with the best wines and whiskeys for medical purposes” and “ice in abundance for all purposes.”

In 1887 board for a month was either \$40.00 or \$45.00, according to the location of the room, \$15.00 by the week, or \$2.50 per day. Children under ten and colored servants were welcome at half rates.

In spite of the fancy brochure, advertisements in several newspapers, and the considerable energy of

Nelson as manager, payments on the notes were not met and the Hotel reverted to James Satterwhite, who sold it in 1901 to the Beersheba Springs Improvement Company, a group of investors who included R. W. Turner, President, R. Boyte C. Howell, Secretary, Gates Thruston, Charles Mitchell, and Tom Northcut. Operating the Hotel for them were several managers over the years, including Mr. and Mrs. John Mears from Florida, who later joined Marvin Brown as co-owners. Brown had earlier worked for Tom Northcut in the store opposite the Hotel and then taken over the store before joining the Mears at the Hotel.



*Richard and Adelaide Clark at Balancing Rock*



HOTEL, BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TENN.

During the later 1920s – and then with the depression in the 1930s – the Hotel saw several owners and managers who tried hard but had little success in making the property pay. When someone in Nashville mentioned Beersheba and the beloved inn, the standard question was: “Well, wonder who’s running the Hotel this year?”

Deterioration caused by time and weather was more and more conspicuous during the depths of the depression. Standing on the rotting boards of the Observatory, visitors looked up at the crumbling edifice and thought to themselves what Mrs. French had written in her diary in 1863: Doomed.

Herschel Gower

## Purchase by the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church

[Because of the importance of the hotel to the Beersheba community], it is of particular interest to make known the contents of some of the documents relating to the purchase of the property and its subsequent use in the retreat and assembly program of the Tennessee Conference.

These documents were made available by Dennis Brown, a manager of the Beersheba Assembly for a number of years.

The earliest is a post card written by the Rev. W. M. Cook, District Superintendent of the

Murfreesboro District, to the Rev. O. B. Johnson, Executive Secretary of the Conference Board of Education, dated Aug. 12, 1941, which reads as follows: "Dear O. B., Thinking things over, I hope you can get things in shape to pay 1st payment, even though small, and get that place. I suggest you write each member of Board and ask if he or she will stand behind you in the deal. If they promise that over their signatures, it will be as good as if they were in session. You can hear from a majority before Friday or Saturday. When you

Hotel," together with all the personal property pertaining thereto, including furnishings, kitchen equipment, dishes, bed linens, sheets, spreads, etc.

"The condition of said sale is for a total consideration of three thousand dollars to be paid as follows: Five hundred dollars cash upon delivery of a fee-simple deed and abstract, the assumption by the purchaser of a loan of approximately fifteen hundred dollars, and the balance of one thousand dollars to be paid by the execution of



*Left to right, ministers O.B. Johnson, Dewey Organ, Sam Dodson, Jr. during repair of the old observatory prior to the opening of the Methodist Assembly in 1942. From the collection of Lorena Johnson Bass.*

leave, give me instructions of what steps to take in case I get the word in your absence. Sincerely –  
– Cook.”

On August 15, 1941, the letter which gives in detail the sale of the property to the Tennessee Conference reads as follows: "Received from C. H. Yarbrough, O. B. Johnson, C. B. Cook, E. H. Ayers, B. G. Hodge, H. E. Baker, Martin Gribble, George Comer, and Joe Gessler fifty dollars as first payment of certain real estate in Grundy County, Tennessee, known as "The Beersheba Springs

two five-hundred-dollar notes due respectively one and two years after date and bearing interest from date at six percent and retaining lien upon said property until paid. The fifty dollars today paid and received by me will be a payment upon the cash payment of five hundred dollars to be paid. Nell Farrar.”

On August 18, the Rev. O. B. Johnson wrote a letter to Martin Gribble, Joe Gessler, George Comer, and H. E. Baker which stated:

“We are asking you four men to look after getting the deed for the property. I am calling a meeting of our Board of Education for September 5 at which time we are going to ask them to appropriate \$1,500.00 for the Beersheba Springs property – \$500.00 of this to be paid on the purchase price, and \$1,000.00 to be used for repairs.”

An interesting letter was written on Aug. 25, by G. W. Comer to O. B. Johnson, E. J. Ayers, and C. H. Yarbrough, Jr., as follows: “Gentlemen: Some Nashville property owners in Beersheba are very much disturbed about us buying the Beersheba Springs Hotel property and have made some underhanded passes to try to get it away from us, and since that method has failed they are going to contact the commission proper so this is to put you on your guard.

“First, I am reliably informed that they had a Beersheba resident to call Miss Farrar and offer her \$100.00 more than our contract price. This is not guess work. I know it is fact for the party that called admitted it but didn’t mention the raised offer. But Miss Farrar says she has it sold to us and is making the deed as soon as Gessler is ready but that she has been offered the \$3,100.00 if we didn’t want it .... Sincerely, G. W. Comer.”

On Aug. 29, 1941, H. E. Baker wrote the following letter to O. B. Johnson: “I have this morning mailed a deed to Miss Farrar! She has agreed to sign this deed and mail to the City Bank and Trust Co. as her agent to hold until we are ready to make final settlement.”

The Committee on Camp and Assembly Grounds met on Sept. 15, 1941, with the following persons present: Bishop Paul B. Kern; O. B. Johnson; C. H. Yarbrough; H. W. Seay; Haynes Ayers; Willard H. Blue; B. G. Hodge; C. B. Cook;

H. E. Baker; W. M. Cook; Herbert Luton; E. C. Shelton; W. B. Ricks; Walter Durham; E. H. Crump; John Ferguson; and Alvis J. Davis. O. B. Johnson was elected chairman and A. J. Davis, secretary.

The minutes of this meeting contain the following statement: “Bishop Kern said that the Tennessee Conference needed a place of retreat rather than a campus. Walter Durham pledged the support of the young people. Willard H. Blue, E. C. Shelton, H. W. Seay pledged the support of the Clarksville, Cumberland, and Columbia Districts. E. C. Shelton moved that: ‘We approve the Beersheba Springs proposition and request the

Conference Committee on Camp and Assembly Grounds to work out a finance and purchase plan for securing the Beersheba Springs property and present the whole matter to the Tennessee Conference for approval and operations through a constituted group.’ The motions passed.”

On Nov. 28, 1941, O. B. Johnson wrote members of the Committee: “We have the deed drawn up transferring the

Beersheba Springs property to the Tennessee Conference Foundation and it is in Dr. C. B. Haley’s office, 808 Broadway, awaiting the signature of the men to whom the property was deeded.” Thus, Beersheba Springs Assembly became the property of the Tennessee Conference.

A report of the first year's use indicates receipts for summer activities as \$5,481.41, with expenses of \$3,631.26, and an ending balance of \$1,850.15. The Hotel was saved. Its purpose as a haven for assemblies ... has been realized. The Church can take pride in the achievement.

Carl L. Elkins, Director of Camping, Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church



Orange Fringed Orchid, *Platanthera ciliaris*, locally called monkey flower.



*Ministers gather on the new observatory during Pastors' School, June 17-21, 1946. From the collection of Carol Elkins Frazer.*

## The United Methodist Assembly at Beersheba

In October 1941 the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church approved the purchase of the Beersheba Springs Hotel for the purpose of developing an assembly and retreat center. The \$3,000 purchase consisted of 22 acres containing the antebellum inn, several other buildings in a quadrangular configuration on the south side of the inn and a row of sleeping quarters extending further southward from the quadrangle. (1)

The imposing two-story clapboard inn stood at the front of the complex facing northward, overlooking the valley. The Methodists began to refer to it as the "Hotel." From the Hotel, going in a clockwise direction, another two-story clapboard structure stood on the northeast side of the quadrangle. The building contained a dining room and a few sleeping rooms on the lower level, and, on the second level, it had a large

room formerly used as a ballroom and several smaller rooms. Family Row, later renamed East Side, was located on the southeast side of the quad. It was a one-story clapboard structure containing sleeping rooms. Continuing in a clockwise direction, across the southern side of the quad there were two sections of log rooms connected by a covered passageway. Formerly called Cross Row, it was renamed Log Row. Perhaps its two sections had been sometimes called Log Row and Cross Row; the old names were never codified and varied somewhat from one speaker to another. Brick Row was positioned on the southwest side of the quad, toward the north there was an open space in the middle (now occupied by a bathhouse), and on the northwest side next to the Hotel was Cozy Corner, renamed Marvell. (The origins of the name "Marvell" and of

all other dedications are explained in the Dedications boxes below.) Outside the quadrangle, located south of the corner of Cross Row and Brick Row, there was a section of log rooms called Whiskey Row (later removed and replaced with a concrete block structure called Lower Neal). Still farther south was another section of log rooms called Post Office Row, renamed Upper Neal. (More recently it was renamed Marcella V. Smith Row.)

Often the former resort had simply been called Beersheba, and sometimes the name had been spelled "Bersheba." The common pronunciation "BURR-shi-buh" was adopted by the Methodists and has prevailed. (2)

The hotel compound had stood unused for several years. By the time it was purchased in late 1941, the buildings were in a state of disrepair. The courtyard inside the quadrangle and the lawn areas outside were overgrown with weeds and brush. During the ensuing months, Tennessee Conference Methodists came

with their grubbing hoes, hammers, mops and paint brushes. Bishop Paul B. Kern put on his overalls and joined enthusiastic church members in clearing the lawn and repairing, cleaning and painting the buildings as preparations were made to open the facility the summer of 1942. Modern conveniences were limited. Although there were electric lights in the common areas, candles provided the only light in the sleeping rooms. There was one bathroom for women and one for men, each containing cold-water showers. That first season of operation the newly named Beersheba Springs Methodist Assembly Grounds hosted a Youth Assembly, Young Adult Assembly, Pastors' School, Children's Workers' Camp and three weeks of Intermediate Camp. Jane Hopkins Collier, a youth worker the first summer, recalled camp days filled with classes, hikes and good

food, especially the home baked pies and the wonderful homegrown vegetables supplied by the mountain residents. She had recollections of enjoyable evenings singing camp songs and folk dancing to "Oh, Susanna," and "Jolly Miller." She also remembered that at one youth camp two girls had to be sent home because they had placed a sheet over the screen door to their cabin, placed a light behind it, and stood between doing a great shadow dance for the boys in the back part of the quad! A total of 717 persons made their way to the mountaintop that summer of 1942 in spite of the scarcity of gasoline and automobile tires imposed by World War II. The next year the strain of the war continued and, even though gasoline was rationed, still more people came seeking inspiration and Christian fellowship. (3)

Attendance increased steadily at the



METHODIST ASSEMBLY COTTAGES - BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TENN. P-45

Methodist Assembly during the summers of the 1940s and 1950s, and it came to be a noted Christian retreat center. Vesper Point was developed as an outdoor worship area. Built on the mountainside overlooking the valley, it consisted

of rustic benches facing a wooden cross atop a stone altar built by minister Willie B. Nunley. The spot became a sacred site for outdoor services at dusk. The old resort ballroom, renamed the "assembly hall," rollicked once again with activity. Groups gathered there for Bible study, worship services, hymn sings, classes, stunt shows and talent shows. The room was used on rainy evenings during youth camp for folk dances, called folk games because some Methodists frowned upon dancing! Other evenings folk games were played outdoors in the courtyard and, in later years, on the tennis court. (4)

During early Assembly events, mealtimes were announced, just as they had been in former resort days, by the ringing of a large dinner bell suspended from a metal frame standing in the

courtyard just outside the dining room. But youngsters were not able to resist ringing the bell at all hours of the day and night! Camp workers soon replaced the bell with a smaller one mounted on the porch roof of the dining hall. The second bell had a rope hanging down inside the building so only authorized persons could ring it. The new location, however, did not altogether deter the mischievous inventiveness of a few teenagers. Vin Walkup confesses that he, Eddie Denson, David Comperry and others stuffed it with blankets and quilts late one night so it wouldn't ring and wake them up the next morning calling campers to breakfast! As with the larger bell, the peals of the smaller one, when not tampered with, echoed off the walls of the quadrangle, calling ravenous campers to delicious home cooked meals served family-style on long tables in the dining room. (5)

The penetrating sounds in the courtyard have remained embedded in the memories of many who attended events at Beersheba. Ed Blackburn recalls the clangs of horseshoes when, as a young minister, he watched several older ministers participating in horseshoe matches that combined intense competition with laughter and warm friendship. During those early years the clacks of wood croquet mallets and balls, the pings of badminton rackets and shuttlecocks, the cracks of shuffleboard cue sticks and wood discs, and the cadences of ping-pong paddles and balls added to the cacophonies of sound in the quadrangle during recreation periods. The thumps of rackets and balls from the tennis court behind the quad also resounded across the Assembly grounds. Softball games lured players to a nearby field where conference youth director Bob Spain threw a mean fast pitch and spectators cheered lustily for their favorite teams. Hikes to Lover's Leap,



*Brick Row after the renovation of 2008 – 2009.*

Stone Door and Laurel Falls were highlights of camp events. For those who valued quiet time at the hotel, rocking chairs on the front porch were always available. (6)

The Methodists of the Tennessee Conference brought many changes to the resort in the 1940s as they sought to update the facilities. Volunteers did much of the work. Often entire families came and spent several days assisting with building renovations. Minister T. W. Mayhew and his wife Katherine purchased a lot south of the hotel complex and, after building their own cottage, they continued to come to Beersheba on their "days off" each week to work on buildings at the Assembly. In 1943 electricity was extended to remaining unwired buildings. Light for each sleeping room was provided by a single bulb hanging from a cord extended from the center of

the ceiling. In 1944 kitchen equipment was upgraded and electric refrigerators replaced iceboxes. In the early years of the Assembly the water system was dependent upon rainwater drained from the

roofs and stored in cisterns. During periods of little rain the manager had to remind campers not to flush the toilets very often because the water level was low in the cisterns. Youngsters didn't object when baths had to be restricted as well! Occasionally water was hauled from McMinnville to fill the cisterns. Later, wells were dug to provide better sources of water. An improved water system was installed in 1943, additional showers and toilets were provided in 1944, and two years later electric pumps and water heaters were installed. Leonard Gross laughingly relates that while he was doing maintenance work for the Assembly he was instructed to paint over the small windows near the ceiling of the girls' shower room in Marvell because the manager had caught some boys climbing up a nearby tree to

take a peek! By the end of 1945, there were sleeping accommodations available for 300 people, and there were often that many in attendance at youth assemblies. In 1946 an upstairs porch was added to the back of the Hotel, thus increasing accessibility and improving fire safety on the second floor by dividing the two-room suites into separate rooms with each room opening onto a front or back porch. (7)

Other changes took place at the Assembly in the 1940s as the Methodists sought to make the place more functional for worship. In 1944 Grace Chapel, a nearby community church, was deeded to The Methodist Church and it became one of the churches on the Beersheba Springs Circuit. Initially the pastor serving the circuit lived at the Assembly in the southernmost rooms of Post Office Row (later renamed Upper Neal and still later Marcella V. Smith Row). Then a parsonage was constructed on nearby Assembly property. Assembly staff found it helpful to have a minister



*The author, Birdie Ann Hale, and her future husband, L.C. Troutt, dressed for Sunday morning worship in the chapel during a youth retreat at Beersheba in 1953. Note the white gloves and silk necktie.*

available who could conduct communion services and perform other clergy functions when needed during the summer, and they deemed it advantageous to have someone living on the grounds during the winter months when the Assembly was not in operation. Additionally the pastor served as the superintendent of buildings and grounds for several years. In 1945 a stone observatory was built in front of the Hotel to replace a decaying wood structure overlooking the Collins River Valley. During Assembly events, the observatory became a favorite site for morning watch, a brief devotional time for groups to begin their each day's activities. The observatory also served individuals throughout the day as a place of spiritual reflection and nature appreciation. (8)

Fellowship and recreation were enhanced by physical upgrades to the property during the 1940s. In 1945 the front porch of the Hotel was improved with the installation of new flooring over a new foundation and the building of three sets of native stone steps. The porch served as a popular gathering place where people enjoyed rocking chairs, dozing or conversing with friends. The brick sidewalks inside the quadrangle were reworked in 1945, and the sections under roof became favorite spots for adults to sit and enjoy conversation while children played in the courtyard. In 1946 tennis, croquet and shuffleboard courts were constructed on Assembly property.

A few years later the tennis court was enlarged so it could also be used for folk games and other activities and it was usually referred to as "the slab." Phil Mayhew reminisces about the wooded area near the present manager's residence where he spent many contented hours playing, listening to the birds and learning about snakes, insects, trees and the cycles of nature. He points to the area where Jimmy, Ben, and Joe Bass built a tree house that they shared with other children at the Assembly. Phil's happy experiences at Beersheba while growing up brought him back to the mountain in 1985 when he and his wife moved into one of the historic log cabins just south of the Assembly and he set up his potter's wheel. (9)

Construction of the Chapel was begun in 1947. Wayman Curtis supervised the project. Although somewhat usable in 1948, the building was not entirely complete until late 1949. The sanctuary was furnished with a pulpit, lectern, chancel rail and pews built by students at Baxter Seminary, a Methodist school for high school students in Baxter, Tennessee. The Chapel became a hallowed place of indoor worship, and it also served as a site for weddings and funerals. Loudspeakers were mounted on top of the Chapel so that organ music could be broadcast over the grounds. During many Assembly events soft music was played each day during a scheduled quiet time and the worshipful refrains brought an aura of reverence to the entire area. (In 1982 the loudspeakers were replaced with a steeple erected in honor of Jim Bell, past Tennessee Conference Lay Leader.) (10)

Proper dress was important during the early days of Assembly events. Youth campers were permitted to wear shorts during the daytime, but for evening activities they were expected to "dress appropriately." For most evening programs girls wore dresses or skirts and blouses, and boys wore sport shirts and long pants. The young people were allowed to dress more casually, however, when a campfire was held. Leaders often suggested that people coming for a weekend retreat plan to dress for the Sunday service in the chapel as they would dress for church at home. Dresses or suits with high-heeled shoes were usually worn by the ladies, and suits or sport coats and slacks were worn by the men. Men who attended the week-long Pastors' School each summer wore white dress shirts, ties and dress pants, and some wore suits. Although there were few female ministers in the Methodist Church in the 1940s and 1950s, those who attended Pastors' School also wore their Sunday best. As the years went on, many ministers began to wear casual clothes at Pastors' School. It was noted, however, that most of them dressed up on the days the Bishop was expected to attend!

During the 1950s property improvements continued. The wood frame kitchen was dismantled in 1950 and replaced with a more fire-resistant concrete block structure. Dietician

Frances Brown welcomed the installation of an electric stove to replace the wood cook stove. She had been getting up early and going to the kitchen by 4:00 a.m. to build a fire in the stove so it would be hot and ready for the kitchen workers to start frying bacon when they came to work at 5:00! Each day Frances and her staff produced three delectable meals that included such appetizing items as buttermilk-dipped crispy fried chicken, light yeasty rolls and bread pudding covered with rivulets of caramel sauce. By the early 1950s, all buildings at the Assembly had electricity. An electric line running into the hotel almost resulted in a catastrophe, however. During a thunderstorm, Louis Johnson and Durward McCord heard lightning strike outside the hotel and they discovered smoke where the electric line entered the hotel at the west end of the upper story. The two men quickly grabbed buckets of water and put out the smoldering fire, thus saving the Hotel from going up in flames. In 1952 modern telephone service became available in the community, and telephones were installed at the Assembly. By 1953 all buildings had been covered with new roofs, and in 1954 the dining hall was renovated. Frances Brown recalled that, prior to the replacement of the plaster ceiling in the dining room, she and her kitchen staff could not set tables at night for the next morning's breakfast because bits of plaster would fall from the ceiling while the young people used the assembly hall above! (11)

In 1955 the Coffee-Nelson-Hopper Cottage at the southwest corner of the Assembly property was purchased. Called the Hopper House by the Methodists, it was used to accommodate small groups for many years. Minister Tom DeRamus recalls that there was an overflow attendance at Pastors' School one year, so several ministers were assigned sleeping quarters in the Hopper House. Toward the end of the week, one of the men complained that he was not getting enough sleep. He said, "I'm in that house with all those preachers. Some are city preachers and some are country preachers. By the time the city preachers go to bed, the country preachers are getting up. I'm a light sleeper and I'm not getting much sleep at all!" (The Coffee-Nelson-Hopper House was

removed from Assembly property in 2006, and Howell Adams had it placed on his property near Lover's Leap. He and his wife, Madeline, initiated a lengthy renovation and, upon completion, it became their place of residence when they were in Beersheba.) (12)

Major building projects began in 1955. Whiskey Row was torn down and replaced with a row of concrete block rooms named Lower Neal. Then major renovation of the Hotel was undertaken, and it was completed in 1958. The project included constructing a new concrete foundation and installing new floor joists, hardwood flooring and ceilings throughout the first floor. Water pipes were run to five of the first floor bedrooms and washbasins were installed. The plaster walls in the lobby were removed, insulation was inserted and the walls were covered with solid oak paneling. Gas heat was installed in the lobby and office. Maintenance worker Leonard Gross and minister J. D. Spencer worked on the hotel renovation. Both have stated that there were no logs inside the walls of the building, thus ending speculation that the present Hotel was possibly built around an earlier log structure. (13)

Attendance remained high at Assembly events during the summers of the 1960s. Teenagers continued their antics and, most of the time, camp counselors were able to deal with the young people patiently and lovingly, attempting to serve as role models and mentors. Worship services conducted at Vesper Point and the Chapel, discussions held in the assembly hall, stories told around campfires, narratives related on the porches and casual conversations held under the trees left indelible impressions on many youth. Dickie Hinton is one of the many ministers in the Tennessee Conference who has testified that it was at Beersheba where his call to the ministry was first perceived. (14)

During the 1960s several improvements were made to the retreat property. The creation of a water utility district on the mountain brought a dependable source of water in 1964; wells and cisterns became obsolete. (One cistern remains on display between the Hotel and the Chapel.) In

1964 a roof was built over the slab, or tennis court, and the open-air structure became the "pavilion." It was used for basketball, folk games and other types of recreation, and it also was used for outdoor worship services and large classes. With the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 forming a new denomination called the United Methodist Church, there were additional church members to be served at church camps. The seasonal calendar at Beersheba was expanded in 1969 by winterizing classrooms, the chapel, the kitchen, the dining room, rest rooms and 22 sleeping rooms. Groups then began to use the facilities during the early spring and late fall as well as during the summer months. However, all buildings were closed each winter and, prior to closing, water pipes had to be drained to prevent freezing. (15)

Cultural changes in society were reflected in life at Beersheba in the 1970s. Folk music and stringed instruments had become very popular by the beginning of the decade. Ed Blackburn has special memories of Jimmy Bass picking his banjo at Pastors' School. Jimmy confirms that he enjoyed playing after the evening chapel service when many gathered in the hotel lobby for a period of fellowship. Once when Jimmy started playing his banjo, Clint Churchwell, a very quiet reserved person, surprised everyone by getting up and doing a buck dance! Other ministers shared their talents as well; brothers Jeff and Delwyn Fryer, Ike Harris and Paul Ford played guitar, banjo and mandolin, the Fryer brothers sang, and sometimes Delwyn could be persuaded to do his freight train imitation. The jam session usually ended with a hymn sing, and then the bunch quieted down because some were retiring for the evening. At that point the late-nighters would move to the front porch of the hotel for their memorable discussions of theological and social issues. The liberal viewpoints propounded by T. W. Mayhew and the conservative rebuttals presented by Luther Long made lasting impressions on many of the younger ministers. There was little sleep on the part of those who had gone to bed earlier in nearby hotel rooms because the debates always became more and

more heated. Listening to intellectually stimulating discussions, absorbing ideas during morning classes, sharing thoughts over quick rounds of golf at the Sewanee golf course during free afternoon periods and hearing inspiring messages in evening worship services helped mold the beliefs and values of young ministers who were just beginning their professions. Many of them have recalled with appreciation those early days of Pastors' School where bonds of friendship were formed that lasted throughout their careers and on into retirement. (16)

Another facet of cultural change in the 1970s was the increasing popularity of camping and outdoor recreation. In 1974 the State of Tennessee established the Savage Gulf State Natural Area with locations for backpacking, hiking, rock

climbing, rappelling, and picnicking. Beersheba Springs Assembly became a home base for nature lovers who came to access the Gulf using the nearby Stone Door entrance. In 1978 the Assembly completed the development of a campground for tent and trailer camping. It contained 24 campsites, a bathhouse and a picnic shelter. (The bathhouse and picnic shelter remain.) (17)

The last quarter of the twentieth century became a period of assessment and redirection for Beersheba Springs Assembly. Attendance at events began to decline and several previously hosted church groups began holding their retreats at other sites. Common complaints were that buildings were outdated, most of them were not air-conditioned, and bedrooms did not have adjoining baths. Income to the Assembly was decreasing, and the deteriorating buildings were becoming more expensive to maintain. Concerned individuals and various committees began exploring options for the future of the Assembly. A

series of open meetings held across the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church during 1986 resulted in a groundswell of support for retaining the Beersheba property. Church leaders were then faced with the challenge of finding the funds to renovate and modernize the facility so it could be turned into an attractive, comfortable retreat center that was usable year-round. (18)

Hiring a full-time manager to live year-round at the Assembly was the first step undertaken in 1991. Bill Woehler was employed and he initially lived on Assembly property in the former Grace Chapel parsonage (since demolished). Interest in making improvements at Beersheba gained momentum in the community and in the United Methodist churches of Middle Tennessee that



*The Ella Eaton Gill dormitory  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH*

made up the Tennessee Conference. In 1991 the Assembly celebrated 50 years as a retreat center. Artist Dan Rountree created a fiftieth anniversary commemorative sketch of the Hotel and authorized prints to be sold to raise funds for the

restoration of the Assembly. In 1994 a new manager's residence was completed on the south side of the property. (19)

In 1999 the Tennessee Annual Conference approved the Together We Can Campaign to benefit the Assembly at Beersheba as well as other conference institutions. United Methodists made pledges and, as payments designated for Beersheba came in, renovation and construction began to take place. The architect, Brad Martin of Lyle-Cook-Martin Architects, Inc., of Clarksville, Tennessee, worked with the building committee and others as they attempted to retain the historic integrity of the old buildings and blend the designs of the new buildings with the old. (20)

The first new building was a bathhouse

constructed in 2002. Located in the open space of the quadrangle between Marvell and Brick Row, it was a welcome addition and a much needed facility. Next, a large maintenance building was erected that same year.

Then late in 2002, Turner Family Lodge was completed. It consisted of two sections, each containing a lobby with a fireplace, a kitchen and 12 bedrooms with baths. Heated and air-conditioned, it provided the first modern year-round accommodations at the Assembly. (21)

In 2003 sewer service was extended from Altamont to Beersheba Springs allowing connections to be made to new structures at the Assembly as well as to older buildings with their outmoded septic tanks. During 2003 the one-story East Side building was replaced with a larger two-story building that was heated and air-conditioned. It contained 22 bedrooms with baths and two meeting rooms, the Bostick Conference Room and the Banks Conference Room. (22)

Restoration of Upper Neal was completed in 2004 and the building was renamed Marcella V. Smith Row. It consisted of eight bedrooms with baths, heat and ceiling fans. The rooms were cooled by natural mountain air flowing through front and back screen doors, as in the past. (Air conditioning was added later.) First floor sleeping quarters in the Hotel were renovated in 2004 and the section was designated the Bishops' Wing, honoring Bishop Roy H. Short and Bishop William W. Morris. It contained two suites and four bedrooms provided with heat, air conditioning and modern baths. Ella Eaton Gill Dormitory (now Gill Welcome Center) was constructed in 2004. The building contained bunk beds and a large bath in each end, and it had a large meeting room and kitchen in the center. The dormitory provided accommodations for 32 persons and was heated and cooled. (23)

The completion of Phase I of the Beersheba Project was celebrated at the June 2004 meeting of the Tennessee Annual Conference. Beth Morris, Director of Camping and Outdoor Ministries, expressed gratitude to the building committee, and she presented plaques of appreciation to L. C. Troutt for his work as construction consultant and

to George Pope for his service as chair of the building committee. Although Phase I had been accomplished, L. C. and George agreed that much still needed to be done. George expressed a need for a multipurpose building where large groups could assemble. Marvell, Brick Row, Log Row, Lower Neal and the bedrooms on the second floor of the Hotel had not been renovated, and people who stayed in those rooms still had to go outside to a bathhouse or restroom. L. C. stated that a few persons had complained about the modernization of buildings, and he quoted one individual who had said, "When I come to Beersheba, I want to experience it just like it used to be." Alluding to the unimproved rooms, his response was, "We're saving a spot just for you!" (24)

Beersheba was once again the Mecca of Methodism in Middle Tennessee. Church organizations that had abandoned the Assembly during the 1970s and 1980s were returning to the modernized facility. By the end of 2004 attendance had increased dramatically. In fact, the increased sleeping capacity provided by the new buildings presented a dilemma: there was no longer a meeting room that could hold an entire group registered at the facility. United Methodists and other friends of the Assembly raised the funds to erect a large enclosed structure, and in 2006 the Samuel Boyd Smith Multipurpose Building was dedicated. Located in the center of the grounds on the site of the old pavilion, the temperature-controlled building was designed to serve as a 350-seat meeting hall, a large classroom or a gym with half-court basketball. (25)

In 2007, ramps providing handicap accessibility were built into the dining hall and the hotel lobby from the sidewalk around the courtyard. An earlier ramp built around the cistern had provided handicap accessibility between the Hotel and the Chapel since 1989. By 2007 all common areas in all buildings were handicap accessible, six bedrooms in East Side and eight in Turner Family Lodge were equipped for the handicapped, and handicap parking spaces were available in several parking lots. (26)

Renovation of Brick Row was undertaken in

2008 and completed in January 2009. The structure was renamed the Lois Banks Nunley Conference Center on Brick Row. The historic brick exterior remained but the inside was reconfigured. It contained a large conference room that could be divided into two smaller rooms, and there was an adjacent kitchen serving the area. The row also contained three bedrooms with baths, a nursery for use during Assembly events, and a kitchenette to serve the bedroom-nursery area. All rooms were provided with heating and cooling and they were equipped for the handicapped. The level of the courtyard sidewalk in front of Brick Row was raised in order to eliminate steps at the entrance to each room, thus making each entry handicap accessible. Another renovation project undertaken in 2009 was the rebuilding of the first floor front porch of the Hotel. In 2010 the Chapel was closed in order to repair a shifting basement wall and front porch. It was reopened in 2011 and, in succeeding months, stained glass windows, a chancel cross and a baby grand piano were added. A service of dedication was held in the Chapel on October 7, 2012. (27)

In 2015 the unattractive chain-link fence which had long run along the west and south sides the property without, however, keeping out unwanted persons or animals was replaced by an attractive picket fence. When painted white the next year it became the handsomest fence in Beersheba, a town that takes fences seriously. At about the same time, the combination of the original railing and a chain-link fence upper panel on the second-story porch of the hotel – visible in the picture on page 37 – was replaced by a nice-looking wooden railing high enough not to need the fence portion.

The administration of Beersheba Assembly was handled during the early years by staff members at the Tennessee Conference headquarters in Nashville along with volunteer members of the Beersheba Springs Board of Managers. O. B. Johnson, Executive Secretary of the Tennessee Conference Board of Education, served as business manager of the Assembly in 1942 and 1943. Alvis J. Davis succeeded him in the fall of 1943. Both men operated from an office

in Nashville but stayed at the Assembly when an event was taking place. Beginning in 1945, Alvis J. Davis was assisted by the pastor of the Beersheba Springs Circuit who lived on Assembly property and served as superintendent of buildings and grounds. (28)

In 1949 the Beersheba Springs Board decided to employ a manager who could live on site during the summer months. Dennis Brown was hired and he assumed the business management of the Assembly as well. His wife, Frances, supervised meal service and assisted in the daily operation. Succeeding managers, often with the assistance of a spouse, continued to supervise maintenance and operation. Seasonal managers following Dennis Brown were: John N. Balch, James A. Jacobs, Elwood Denson, Herman Buchanan, I. B. Pennington, Robert Cate, Don Clemmons, and Gerald Reid. Full-time managers who lived year-round at the Assembly were: William (Bill) Woehler, Larry Kalas, Irmie Blanton, and Phillip Geissal. In 2006 the position of camp manager was changed to executive director. In addition to supervision of daily operation and maintenance, the director was given the responsibility of administration, facility management and program at Beersheba, jobs previously handled by staff in the Tennessee Conference headquarters in Nashville. In 2007 Richard V. (Dickie) Hinton became the executive director of Beersheba Assembly. Then in 2008 he was also named Director of Camp and Retreat Ministries for the Tennessee Conference, and he continued to fill both positions through 2011. In early 2012 he began to devote full time to directing Camp and Retreat Ministries, and David Johnston was employed as director of the Beersheba Assembly. Hinton returned to the Beersheba position in 2014 and served until 2017. In September of that year, Sarah Ratz (pronounced Rates) will take charge.

Assembly managers or executive directors and the years they served were:

O. B. Johnson, 1942-1943 (29)  
Alvis J. Davis, 1943-1948 (30)  
Dennis Brown, 1949-1966 (31)  
John N. Balch, 1967 (32)

James A. Jacobs, 1968-1970 (33)  
 Elwood Denson, 1971-1973 (34)  
 Herman Buchanan, 1974-1977 (35)  
 I. B. Pennington, 1978-1981 (36)  
 Robert Cate, 1982 (37)  
 Don Clemmons, 1983-1984 (38)  
 Gerald Reid, 1984-1991 (39)  
 William (Bill) Woehler, 1991-1999 (40)  
 Larry Kalas, 1999-2001 (41)  
 Irmie Blanton, 2002-2005 (42)  
 Phillip Geissal, 2005-2006 (43)  
 Richard V. (Dickie) Hinton, 2007-2011 (44)  
 David Johnston, 2012-14 (45)  
 Richard V. (Dickie) Hinton, 2014-2017 (46)  
 Sarah Ratz, 2017 - (47).

Boards or camping committees have determined policy at the Assembly, and Tennessee Conference personnel, assisted by numerous volunteers, have planned and conducted most of the program. When interest in camping increased in the 1970s, the Tennessee Conference created a full-time position of Coordinator of Camping, later termed Director of Camping. Carl Elkins served in this office from 1976 to 1984, dealing with many aspects of property and program at Beersheba and other conference camps. Succeeding directors of camping were: James F. Swiney, Jr., James G. Hughes, Jr., Terry Carty, L. C. Troutt, Beth Morris and Richard V. (Dickie) Hinton. In 2008 Dickie Hinton was named Tennessee Conference Director of Camp and Retreat Ministries in addition to his position as the Executive Director of Beersheba Springs Assembly.

Directors of Camping and the years they served were:

Carl Elkins, 1976-1984 (45)  
 James F. Swiney, Jr., 1984-1987 (46)  
 James G. Hughes, Jr., 1987-1995 (47)  
 Terry Carty, 1995-1997 (48)  
 L. C. Troutt, 1998-2001 (49)  
 Beth Morris, 2002-2008 (50)  
 Richard V. (Dickie) Hinton, 2008- (51)

Facilities and program continue to be a blend of the old and new at Beersheba. The charm of

yesteryear is still available in certain rooms that have not yet been modernized, although efforts are underway to renovate the rooms in the upper story of the Hotel. Worship services are still held at Vesper Point and in the Chapel; worship services are also held in the new Smith Multi-purpose Building and in the meeting rooms of other new buildings. Morning watch is still held on the observatory overlooking the valley; it is also held on the deck of Turner Family Lodge overlooking the wooded area. Classes are still held in the lobby of the Hotel with participants sitting in rocking chairs by the fireplace; classes are also held in the meeting rooms of new buildings with presenters using the latest visual aids and sound systems. Parents still chat on the porches of the quadrangle while their children play in the courtyard; they also leave their infants and toddlers in the attractive nursery provided in Brick Row. Inside the quad, youngsters still enjoy tether ball, volleyball, badminton and playground equipment; they also delight in slip-and-slide mats on the grass. Young people still walk to Lover's Leap; they also travel to nearby rivers for whitewater rafting. They still hike to Stone Door to enjoy the view from the cliff; they also engage in supervised rappelling and rock climbing on the cliff. They still swing to music in the evening; rather than doing folk dances to recorded music they now sway to live band performances. Oldsters still congregate on the front porch of the Hotel to quietly reminisce; others settle on the front porch to use cell phones. Campers still dress casually for campfires; they wear casual clothes for all other activities as well. Meals are still announced by the ringing of the dinner bell; food is now selected from a serving line. Rocking chairs still beckon from the weathered porches; they summon from the new breezeways and decks as well.

In reserving the facilities at the Assembly, the staff gives priority to groups within the United Methodist Church. Others are welcome to use the facilities, however, for day activities and for overnight events. Through the years church members and others have scheduled luncheons, dinners, parties, receptions, weddings, memorial services, reunions, meetings, festivals, and

photography and nature classes. The Assembly has extended hospitality for weekend and week-long retreats, planning meetings and training sessions to church groups of other denominations and to secular organizations as varied as scrap-bookers, ornithological societies and antique car tour groups. Sleeping accommodations are available for up to 400 persons. "Christmas at Beersheba" events held in festively decorated buildings have become popular activities each December. Sipping hot cider and singing Christmas carols in the warmth of the Hotel lobby with its open fire and tall Christmas tree, eating a holiday meal in the dining room and hearing the Christmas message anew have combined to make the luncheons highlights of the holiday season for many. The overnight stays with sumptuous dinners, candlelight services in the Chapel and various Christmas activities are cherished occasions for others. These events serve as reminders that Beersheba is very much alive at Christmas time! (52)

Cooperation with the community of Beersheba Springs has been important. In 1968 the Assembly began hosting the Arts and Crafts Fair, a fund-raiser for various community projects. Held in late August, it has continued to be an annual event. In 1980 residents and friends of Beersheba Springs were successful in an effort to place the hotel complex and other buildings in the community on the National Register of Historic Places. Beginning in 2003, a Christmas party for children in the community has been held each holiday season at the Assembly with the aid of Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville. The Assembly staff participates each year in a community celebration and parade on the Fourth of July. The observatory continues to serve as an overlook for residents of the area and for those traveling through who pause to view the beauty of the valley. The stone inset reminds all to lift up their eyes unto the hills. (53)

Beersheba Springs Assembly has served as a place of inspiration, study and fellowship for generations of people seeking respite and spiritual direction for their lives. Samuel Boyd Smith was once asked, "What is Beersheba?" He replied, "Why, Beersheba is the crown jewel of

Tennessee!" Many agree that it continues to be just that.

Ann Hale Troutt

*The author gratefully acknowledges the help of Frances Brown, Phil Mayhew, Gloria Fults, Leonard Gross, Ralph Thompson and many others who shared in compiling this history of the Assembly.*

## Notes

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## Assembly Dedications

*Many people have used their skills and resources to make Beersheba Springs Assembly what it has become. Building names and plaques throughout the property honor the dedication and generosity of certain individuals or groups of persons who held special appreciation for the Assembly.*

Cozy Corner was renamed Marvell using a combination of Marvin and Dell, the names of Marvin Cook and his wife Iva Dell Cook. Watson Marvin (W. M.) Cook was a minister in the Tennessee Conference (TC) when development of the retreat center began, and he devoted many hours to building and repairing. His handiwork included the stone fireplace in the hotel lobby and the stone inlay with scripture on the observatory. (1)

Upper and Lower Neal were named for Henry J. Neal, a Methodist pastor who lived on Assembly property. He acted as superintendent of buildings and grounds for the Assembly in addition to serving Grace Chapel and other churches on the Beersheba Springs Circuit. (2)

The stone altar at Vesper Point was built by Grace Chapel pastor Willie B. Nunley. It was dedicated "To the Glory of God and in Memory of Brother A. J. Davis by the Wesleyan Service Guild, Tennessee Conference." Alvis J. Davis, a TC minister, served as business manager of the Assembly from 1943 until 1949 while he was Executive Secretary of the Board of Education of the TC. (3)

A ramp for the handicapped was erected in 1989 between the Hotel and the Chapel, and it was dedicated to the memory of William H. (Bill) Moss, a TC minister who was active in the 1980s crusade to keep Beersheba Assembly when there was discussion of selling the property. (4)

Turner Family Lodge, constructed in 2002, named in honor of the family of Cal Turner, member of Brentwood United Methodist Church in Nashville and an avid supporter of a number of United Methodist institutions. (5)

Bequests from two individuals were applied to the reconstruction of East Side in 2003, and the two

conference rooms in the new building were named after those persons. The Bostick Conference Room was named for Jim Bostick, a member of First United Methodist Church in McMinnville who had attended various events at the Assembly through the years. The Banks Conference Room was named for Esther Mary Banks, who had spent many happy hours at Beersheba. She was a member of Ivy Bluff United Methodist Church in Cannon County. (6)

Marcella V. Smith Row was named in 2004 in honor of a member of Forest Hills United Methodist Church in Nashville. Marcella Smith came to Beersheba year after year for events such as Family Fellowship, and each time she came she wanted to stay in the row of log rooms named Upper Neal. After her death, the rooms were renovated and renamed for her. (7)

The family of the late Reverend Roy Wright of Murfreesboro carried out his wishes and funded renovation of the Bishops' Wing on the first floor of the Hotel in 2004. It was dedicated in honor of Bishop William W. Morris. The suite named for Bishop Roy H. Short continued to bear his name and was included in the renovation process. Bishop Morris had been elected to the episcopacy while serving in the TC of the United Methodist Church, and both bishops had presided over the TC. (8)

The construction of Ella Eaton Gill Dormitory in 2004 utilized funds from the sale of property on Black Mountain near Crossville. In 1934 Ella Eaton Gill had donated the mountain acreage to Cumberland Mountain School, an institution of the TC of the Methodist Church. After the school closed, the TC continued to follow her wishes to allow the mountain property to serve as a wildlife preserve and a site for nature appreciation. Then in 2001 the acreage was sold to the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation to become part of the Cumberland Trail State Park. In 2010 Gill Dormitory was converted to Gill Welcome Center. (9)

In 2004 Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church in Coffee County returned to Beersheba nine wood-slat benches first used in the old ballroom that became the assembly hall in 1942. After the Chapel was constructed in the late 1940s, the benches served as pews for a short period of time. Then they were given to the Mt. Carmel congregation after lightning destroyed their church building and it was rebuilt but lacked furnishings. The construction and renovation that began at Beersheba in 2002 inspired Mt. Carmel to have the benches restored and returned to the Assembly. They are dedicated to the memory or honor of Mt. Carmel church members. (10)

In 2006 the Multipurpose Building was named for the late Samuel Boyd Smith, a member of the Tennessee Conference Camping Committee who had devoted many hours of service to Beersheba and other outdoor ministries. He was a member of Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville. (11)

The Lois Banks Nunley Conference Center on Brick Row, completed in 2009, was named for a lifelong member of Ivy Bluff United Methodist Church who had chosen to bequeath her estate to Tennessee Conference institutions including the United Methodist Assembly at Beersheba Springs. The rooms in the renovated Brick Row were named for four bishops who had been serving as ministers in the Tennessee Conference when they were elected to the episcopacy. They were: Bishop Roy C. Clark, Bishop Robert H. Spain, Bishop Joe Pennel and Bishop James R. King. Funding for the furnishings of the four rooms was provided by West End, Belle Meade, Belmont and Brentwood United Methodist Churches, the pastorates of the four men, respectively, when they were elected as bishops. (12)

A portion of the Anna Birdsong Hensley estate provided the means for rebuilding the lower level front porch of the Hotel in 2009. Miss Hensley was the daughter of the Reverend Gilbert Hensley, a Tennessee Conference minister during the first half of the twentieth century. (13)

The Chapel, renovated in 2011-2012, contains a chancel cross given by Reverend Larry and Faye Layne in honor of their children, Mark Layne and Vivian Layne Spencer and their families, and a baby

grand piano given in memory of Robert (Johnny) Daniel and in honor of Lillian Nelms Daniel by Mike, Melody and Daniel Green. Stained glass windows were installed and dedicated as follows: in memory of Rev. and Mrs. William Henry (Bill and Jane) Moss by the Moss Family; in honor of Ben R. Alford, Robert H. Lewis, Jr. and W. Garie Taylor; in memory of Rev. and Mrs. T. W. Mayhew by Gail and Wilbur Cate, Phil and Terri Mayhew and Cathy and Luther McDaniel; in memory of Rev. James L. Beaty by his family; in memory of Rev. Elbert and Faye Walkup by Vin and Ann Walkup and family; in memory of Frances and Dennis Brown by their family; in memory of Rev. and Mrs. Carl L. Elkins by daughter Carol Kraemer and grandchildren Mark Kirby and Karen Goodall; in memory of Rev. Elwood and Grace Denson by Debbie Denson Lloyd; in memory of Orville Bruce (O. B.) and Lorena Groomes Johnson by George and Lorena Johnson Bass; in memory of Rev. Clifford Ingram by his family and friends. Altar paraments were given by Lenoir Culbertson in memory of her parents, Robert and Sarah Hilten. (14)

### Assembly Dedication Notes

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# Shops

## The Cockrill-Mayhew Cottage and Beersheba Porcelain



A visit to Beersheba Porcelain always affords a chance to see a beautiful garden, artistic porcelain, and the inside of a genuine Armfield House. Sometimes, one also sees Phil Mayhew at work at his potter's wheel.

John Armfield sold to Sterling Robertson Cockrill of Nashville a parcel of land for \$5.00 containing 1.16 acres beginning near the carpenter's shop, James H. Wilson's lot, and M. A. Price's livery stable. The deed said Cockrill agreed to improve the lot within a year by erection of a house and kitchen suitable for a private residence, and not to sell it without Armfield's consent during his lifetime. The deed was signed in September 1859 and witnessed by S. W. Carmack, John Waters,

and John M. Bass. The fact that the house was definitely built after Armfield's sawmill at Laurel was in operation but is nevertheless constructed of hand-hewn logs shows that such logs are not a proof that the house was built before 1855 when the sawmill started operation.

The Cockrill family had been prominent in Nashville for many years. The paternal grandmother of Sterling R. Cockrill was Ann Robertson Johnson Cockrill (1757 - 1821), sister of James Robertson, founder of Nashville. In July 1776, when the men were away, Fort Caswell (near Elizabethton) was attacked by American Indians trying to set the stockade afire. It was wash day; and 19-year-old Ann organized the women to

pass buckets of boiling water up to her which she dumped over the stockade onto the attackers. Although wounded, she persisted and saved the fort. After the accidental death of her first husband, she and her three small daughters joined the expedition of John Donelson to bring families to the men who had established the settlement at Nashville. They took a flatboat down the Tennessee; when they started up the Ohio and Cumberland, all the men were needed for poling, so Ann took the tiller and guided the boat in the eddies near the banks up to Nashville. There she met and married John Cockrill II, and they lived on a 640-acre tract granted them by the state of North Carolina. This tract contained a very fine spring known as "Cockrill Spring." Today Centennial Park is located on this land. Ann became the first school teacher in Middle Tennessee, teaching 50 children at a time.

The fifth child of John and Ann was Mark Robertson Cockrill whose sheep won first prize for fine wool at the World's Fair in 1851 in London, England. In 1854 the Tennessee legislature gave him a gold medal for raising the finest wool in the world. In 1850 there were only two millionaires in Tennessee and one of them was Mark Cockrill. The third child of John and Ann was Sterling Robertson Cockrill; but when he died before marrying, his older brother, John, named his firstborn son for his brother. It was this Sterling Robertson Cockrill II (Nashville 1804 - Mt. Nebo, Arkansas 1891) who bought the land from Armfield and built the house in Beersheba. Cockrill must have been temporarily impoverished by the Civil War, for with the Beersheba property attached for \$1,500, the Grundy County sheriff sold it at the September 1865 term of Court. The highest bidder was Sam Henderson, who bought it for \$400. (Armfield, in a letter to Ben Cagle quoted early in this book, tells Cagle to go to Sam Henderson to cash a check.) Henderson must have quickly sold the house for when it next appears in the land records, along with two acres of land and the two adjacent cottages, as sold to Ernest J. Hege in 1874, the seller was not Henderson but J.M. Spurlock, J. F. Morford, and C. Coffee. They must have put properties together to make the sale to Hege. (Coffee owned what

was later called the Nelson-Hopper cottage in the southwest corner of the hotel compound.) Hege never lived in the houses. He and probably the previous owners rented them out, especially during the summers.

One of those renters may have been none other than Sterling R. Cockrill II. On August 3, 1873, the *Nashville American* carried an article beginning as follows:

We print this morning a suggestive communication from Col. Sterling R. Cockrill, formerly of this city, now Vice-President of the Cotton Planters' Association, a cotton planter of 40 years' experience and now planting in [Jefferson County] Arkansas. At present, as is his usual custom, he is spending the Summer at Beersheba Springs in the Cumberland Mountains.

The communication, presumably written at Beersheba, proposed creation by Congress of a cotton bank to finance the building of cotton spinning and weaving plants in the South. The story was reprinted on August 7 by the *New York Times*. The Colonel seems to have made a financial comeback. In 1883, he is mentioned as a major contributor to making possible the Arkansas display at the Industrial Exhibition held in Louisville. His 8th child was Sterling R. Cockrill III. Born in 1847, he served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Arkansas in 1884 - 1893. As a boy, he must have played at Beersheba, but the Cockrills never bought another place here. (Sterling III had a son named Ashley, who had a son named Sterling, who had a son named Sterling. This Sterling Robertson Cockrill - the 7th; there were two on collateral lines - was Speaker of the House in the Arkansas legislature in 1967 and the running mate of Winthrop Rockefeller for governor in 1971. He graciously contributed to this account of the Cockrills, but was previously unaware of the Beersheba connection.)

From 1918 to 1925 all three of the Hege houses and land were leased by Hege to Henry L. Brown. In 1925 the Northcuts took possession of the property and in 1926 sold the Cockrill house to George McGee and his wife, Lela Gross McGee.

Sometime after 1925, three or four rooms in the shape of an L on the back and also the detached kitchen and dining room were torn down. The McGees had two children, Wilda, who married Lyndon Hillis, and G. W., who married Nelma Dean Wannamaker. After the death of Mrs. McGee, the house was sold at public auction in December 1981 to settle the estate. The buyer was Lyndon Hillis, son-in-law of the McGees.

The house was then bought in 1985 by Phil and Terri Mayhew, who moved to Beersheba from Georgia in January, 1986. Phil's father, T.W. Mayhew, a Methodist minister, had participated in the purchase of the hotel by the church in 1941 and had built the house now called the Mayhew-Cate cottage. Methodist ministers moved regularly and generally lived in parsonages supplied by the church, so for Phil the house at Beersheba was the one place he could call home. For him and for Terri, the move to Beersheba was indeed a true coming home, a return to roots.

At the same time, however, they brought new skills, learned elsewhere, with which they created Beersheba Porcelain. This firm, located in the cottage, produces ceramics in the tradition of the fine porcelains going back to 200 B.C. in China and to 1708 in Dresden, where extensive experiments had led to the discovery of the formula. Porcelain is made from a very pure form of clay composed of (1) silica (or flint or quartz) (2) kaolin (a mixture of silica and alumina that adds pliability to the mixture and allows it to be molded by hand), and (3) feldspar (the fluxing or melting agent which causes the mixture to fuse at the right temperatures). The Mayhews use silica and feldspar from the southeastern United States and kaolin from England. In essence, porcelain is a cross between clay and glass with the pliability and formability of clay at normal temperatures but, after firing, the strength, translucence and durability of glass. In the firing, the pieces become completely vitrified. The main difference between porcelain and stoneware is that the porcelain clay is free of the impurities which give the stoneware clays their various colors and textures but also interfere with the formation of tightly interlocking crystals which form as the material cools after being heated to its fusing tem-

perature. It is this uniform crystalline structure, like that of glass, which gives thin porcelain its translucence. The end result is a product that is far harder, more resistant to abrasion and chipping, and thus more long-lasting than a similar product made from stoneware clay.

Each piece of Beersheba "Quartzware" porcelain is completely hand made from the Mayhews' own designs and porcelain recipes, is fired in the kiln they built on the premises to cone 16 (2718° F) and is completely dishwasher proof, oven proof, and absolutely lead-free. Phil makes the large pieces, many turned on the traditional potter's wheel. Terri has specialized in the jewelry, and their son, Brad, in fern imprint pieces with genuine Beersheba ferns making the pattern. They have also trained in the work LeTeasa King and her daughter Tiffany, Lisa Earls (who now runs the Beersheba Post Office), and her niece Brittany McDaniel. Silver work for the jewelry is done by Phil's daughter, Leah, and her husband, John Sullens, presently of Cleveland, Georgia, but with plans to move to Beersheba.

Phil likes to say, "Our primary export is harmony, captured and frozen forever in colorful porcelain of our own design and creation to bring visual music to your life. Only the most pure, positive and powerful of vibrations, thaumaturgical procedures and original harmonic compositions are used in the manufacturing process. Beersheba Porcelain is truly a most judicious and aesthetic blend of Earth, Water, Air and Fire."

Phil may be a bit given to exaggeration of the magical powers of the porcelain, but it is no exaggeration to say that the Mayhew home has been the scene of a modern miracle. In the summer of 2000, Terri was struck by a ruptured aneurysm behind one eye, inoperable by the then standard methods. A few years earlier, it would have meant certain death. A new technique, endovascular coiling, then being developed at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville, brought her through the crisis, but it took years of loving care by Phil and friends to nurse her back to health, to the great joy of everyone connected with Beersheba.

Whether magical or merely beautiful, Beersheba Porcelain is readily found on the Internet or

can be reached by telephone at 931-692-2280 or by mail at P.O. Box 88, Beersheba Springs, TN 37305. Visitors are welcome, but it is a good idea

to call ahead.

Margaret Coppinger, Clopper Almon,  
and Phil Mayhew

## Mountain Home: the Otey-Argo Cottage



The Mountain Home gift shop, on the south side of TN 56 just east of the junction with Dahlgren Avenue, offers a chance to visit one of Armfield's finest houses maintained in perfect condition and beautifully furnished. It was built for James Hervey Otey (1800-1863), first Episcopal Bishop of Tennessee.

Otey, born in Virginia in 1800, graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1820 and was appointed tutor in Greek and Latin there. The next year he married Eliza D. Panhill; over the next 21 years, they had nine children. In 1821, he moved to Maury County Tennessee and took charge of a boys' school in nearby Franklin. He returned to North Carolina to head the academy at Warrenton, where he joined the Episcopal Church. He became a deacon in 1825 and priest in 1827, and then returned to Franklin and organized the state's first Episcopal Church, now St. Paul's, in the Masonic Lodge there. He established several other churches and in 1829, organized the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee. He

was elected the first bishop in 1833. He also took charge of the Diocese of Mississippi and was missionary bishop for Arkansas and the Indian Territory. He established Christ Episcopal church in Nashville; he traveled for months at a time across the extensive region, establishing new churches and preaching the Gospel. Fervently interested in Christian education, he organized schools at Ashwood, Columbia, and Jackson. His hopes for a "Literary and Theological Seminary" were an impetus to the creation of the University of the South at Sewanee in 1857.

After Eliza's death, he married Sally McGavock of Franklin (1805-1872). In 1851, he traveled to Europe with his wife's cousin Randal W. McGavock in search of better health. McGavock noted in his diary on June 9 that "Bishop Otey's health being exceedingly delicate, he remained at Dr. Wilson's (in Malvern) to try more effectually the hydropathic system."

Otey was a friend of John Armfield, an Episcopal convert, and was given the cottage next



*Mountain Home's welcoming living room with postcard-covered walls.*

door to Bishop Leonidas Polk of Louisiana, also Armfield's friend.

Whereas the charismatic Polk was an ardent secessionist and wanted to create a southern alternative to Harvard, the scholarly, thoughtful Otey valued the Union, never took the Tennessee diocese out of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and wanted only to create an institution for Christian education.

Otey published many items now available at [anglicanhistory.org/usa/jhotey/](http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/jhotey/). A classicist and a scholar, he acquired a library considerable for its day. He died in Memphis on April 23, 1863; his grave is in St. John's Churchyard, Ashwood, near Columbia.

During the Civil War, the Otey cottage was not spared. L. Virginia French, a diarist and refugee at Beersheba in 1863, wrote on July 26 about the marauders who broke into and plundered the unoccupied houses: ". . . one woman had a lot of books from Bishop Otey's residence – many were Latin and French books – and there were some of profound theological character, and pamphlets of church proceedings. The woman did not know a letter to save her life, but said she had some children who were just beginning to read. She wanted the books for them. She wanted to encourage them."

The sturdy log structure was eventually extended and covered by clapboard – probably when owned by the Peter Schild family after the Civil War. They lived in the house for many years and taught a school there for the children of Beer-

sheba. In 1898 it was operated as a boarding house for those who wished to stay overnight at the Springs but could not afford the Hotel.

Some years later, the Goulding Marr family of Nashville owned and occupied the house. Thomas Marr of Marr, Holman Architects drew the plans for the Beersheba Library. Further appreciation was shown by the two sisters Cornelia, a schoolteacher, and Kate, the housekeeper for the family. It is recalled that Miss Kate and Miss Cornelia planned a party for the Beersheba children and made up a zinc tub full of lemonade. When Dr. Marr came in and saw what they had done, he poured the lemonade out at once. "Do you want to kill all these children?" he sternly demanded of his two sisters.

In 1946 R. L. Redford and his wife Carrie bought the cottage from the Marr heirs; it was occupied for the next four summers by the Redfords' daughter Lucille, her husband Clifton Johnson, and their daughters Jean and Shirley. Jean remembers playing charades at the end of the wide screened porch and slipping over to the Black Cottage next door to play an ancient Jenny Lind piano. She and Shirley had grown up at Beersheba when their parents rented the Coffee-Nelson-Hopper Cottage for several years and still recall many happy summers at both cottages.

After Clifton Johnson suffered a stroke, the Redfords sold the house to Dennis and Frances Brown of Beersheba on August 23, 1950. The Browns in turn sold the property to the three Argo sisters, Maggie Mae, Flossie, and Sarah Mary.

The three sisters brought their mother, Buena, to live with them and operated a very successful business known as Argo's Guest Home. The four ladies lived in the rear of the home in an area formerly used as servants' quarters. They slept in one room and cooked in another using one wood stove and two electric stoves to serve their many guests. The front of the house was used to house boarders and guests as well as a gathering place for serving meals. Many tempting meals were served at the long dining table.

Flossie Argo Tate furnished visitors to the mountain with homemade T V dinners, cakes,



*Mountain Home dining room*

pies and other foods. Many weekend visitors to the mountain enjoyed home cooked meals without the effort of cooking. Flossie was especially noted for her wonderful chess pies. Maggie was well known for her small handmade baby dolls which had movable arms and legs, embroidered faces, and were dressed in checked dresses. Many still have the dolls made by Maggie.

At some point after their mother passed away, the girls ceased operation of the guest home and moved into the front of the house. When Flossie married Rupert Tate, Maggie and Sarah sold their interests in the house to Flossie, but all three continued to practice excellent needlework, doll making, and home crafts, including basket weaving.

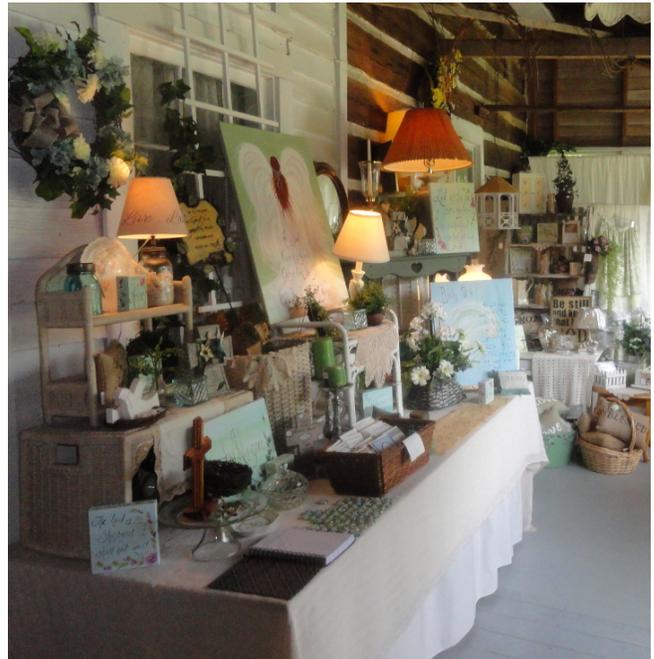
Maggie and Sarah moved to McMinnville for a while. During this time, Sarah passed away. Maggie then returned home to the mountain.

Flossie, the last sister living, continued to live

there until shortly before her death. She named her nephew Thomas Argo and his wife Evelyn as heirs and caretakers of the home. The Argos spent two years lovingly restoring the home. In August of 1999, the family opened a gift shop known as Mountain Home. Thomas left the house to his daughter Tommye and her husband John Sherrill, who have made it their year-round home. The entire beautifully decorated house may be seen while visiting the gift shop located in the rear or enjoying Tommye's annual festive dinner on Craft Fair day.

In keeping with the Argo family tradition, many handmade items are sold. Tommye is an accomplished craftswoman and supplies the shop with numerous handmade and hand-painted items. She says, "We feel that continuing to make and sell hand-crafted items keeps alive an important connection to our family and our heritage. While making a sale is always nice, we want Mountain Home to be a place that people can just enjoy, a place of peace. We want our visitors to come away feeling better just because they stopped by."

Herschel Gower and Tommye Argo Sherrill



*Some of the items available in the Mountain Home gift shop.*

## The Store



Beersheba Springs has long had a store, sometimes more than one, but one business has continued more than 130 years without opening branches and without closing except for a year in the depression and briefly after a fire. Now known as the Beersheba Springs Market and owned and operated by Lonnie (Bud) Whitman, it goes back to a store started in Altamont in or before 1854 by H. G. Northcut. Isabel Howell in *John Armfield of Beersheba Springs* remarks on the large role of powder and shot in its business.

It seems likely that Armfield operated a store for his guests in precisely the building where Northcut later opened a Beersheba branch, namely in the building now known as the Burch-Earthman cottage, to the northeast of the hotel, across the road and extending out over the sloping side of the mountain. Four volumes of accounting records for this business have recently come to light thanks to Dr. Ben Caldwell. The first begins in Altamont in 1870. The other three are from Beersheba for various years between

1879 and 1915. We know, for example, that Morton B. Howell began the summer on July 3 with a purchase of quinine (50¢) and a pair of children's slippers (\$1.50). A selection of his other purchases over the summer is shown in the table on the next page. His purchases totaled \$24.47 for the summer. Other accounts show that the store also carried corn meal, eggs, coffee, canned oysters and oyster crackers, candy, ginger, spice, tobacco, cigars, snuff, pipe stems, lye, candles, hats, coats, pants, boots, shoes, shoe laces, socks, hose, suspenders, ribbon, buttons, thread, yard goods, towels, table cloths, lace (special order), combs, hair pins, plates, mugs, knives and forks, stove blacking and blacking brushes, blank books, pen points, fans, soap, wash pans, starch, powder and shot, horse shoes, nails, lead, white lead, turpentine, axle grease, chairs, lamps, and locust posts. Debits and credits to an account were added up and a balance calculated once a year at the end of September. The store seemed to also serve as a

bank for making payments; one customer directs that another customer be credited some amount and a corresponding debit made to his own account. If balance sheets or profit and loss statements were prepared, they have not come down to us. Settlements seem to be made with currency.

Lard, 10 pounds	\$1.10
Bacon, 5 pounds	.55
Coal oil, 1 gallon	.40
Matches, 3 boxes	.15
Molasses, 1 gallon	.60
Cotton rope	.26
Flour, 100 pounds	3.25
Hatchet	.50
Sugar	1.00
Salt	.10
Soda	.10
Mustard	.10
Cigars, 3	.20
Soap	.10
Starch	.10
Eggs, 4 dozen	.28
Flour, 1 sack	1.65
Bluing, 6 bottles	.20

*From the account of Morton B. Howell with the H. B. Northcut store, summer 1879.*

By 1914, the list of merchandise had expanded considerably. It then included, besides the staples sold in 1879, bread, ham, oatmeal, cream of wheat, grapenuts, pickles, prunes, syrup, olive oil, celery, beets, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, peaches, pepper, feed, hay, wire, paint, sole leather, heating oil, garden seed, melon seed, and slop jars. This list is by no means exhaustive, and there are some items where the handwriting is unclear. Settlement was by then frequently made by check. Sometimes a paycheck was cashed with the balance on account being deducted from the cash

given the customer.

In 1954, Morton B. Howell III, grandson of the man whose account was shown above, recalled the days when the building across from the hotel was still a store.

It was well-built, with a deep stone foundation bringing it up to the level of the road from the sloping mountainside. It was well located, just across the roadway from the main entrance to the Hotel. This main road having just reached the actual, level ground of the mountain top, might well be called Meeting Street. The store was of generous proportions, with a wide central aisle to accommodate 25 or 30 people, sturdy, waist-high counters on each side and plenty of shelves behind to hold the goods. At the back of this room was a big window overlooking the mountainside and giving a view of the Valley below, and beside this window was a table holding a bucket of chalybeate water from the spring – just a hundred yards downhill under the window. The water was usually fresh and I can almost taste its special flavor, even now.

The Store was really the meeting place for everybody, Hotel guests, cottagers, marketers, voyagers and natives from near and far. It was the Club; more frequented than the Hotel office or parlor, and more interesting. It was presided over by the proprietor, Tommy Northcut, a rotund gentleman of genial manner and countenance even ruddier than my own, sandy hair and a flowing sandy mustache. Tommy had bedrooms upstairs where he could stay when he pleased, which was most of the time in summer season. In spite of his large and comfortable home in Altamont, we think that he preferred Beersheba on account of its greater social advantages. Tommy had a strong and very interesting following of young men at Beersheba, some 15 or 20 of them, banded together for the avowed purpose of “the preservation of late hours.”

About 1910, B. Marvin Brown, a Beersheba boy who had been Northcut's clerk in the

Altamont store, returned to Beersheba to run the store for Northcut. Howell continues:

The back room of the Store was the scene of some special ceremonies through the years. On one occasion, ... there was a prominent wholesale merchant of Nashville visiting on the mountain and my father took him to the old store to meet Marvin Brown. Marvin was so much impressed by this opportunity that he invited the Nashville merchant into the back room to have a drink, which was poured from a gallon jug into a dipper. From its clear color the guest was not sure just what he was being offered, though it smelled fine – so Marvin, to reassure him, in his excitement, stuttered, “Please don’t be afraid of it – I made it myself.”

About 1929, Marvin was able to purchase the Northcut’s store in Beersheba and soon moved the business to the present site of the Beersheba Springs Market. The store, renamed B.M. Brown and Sons, like its predecessor sold a wide variety of merchandise and provided various services not exactly mercantile. Among these was a portable dental chair used in the store when the visiting dentist came to Beersheba to care for the local children’s teeth. The chair is now in the Beersheba Museum.

One Saturday morning in those years, Howell Adams (father of the present Howell) went to the store to buy a hammer. Marvin had one for \$5. Howell objected, “Why do I have to pay you \$5 when Sears sells the same hammer for \$3?”

“I’ll sell it to you for \$3,” said Marvin, marked it down on the account, and put the hammer under the counter. “Hey,” said Howell, “what are you doing?”

“Sears delivers on Thursdays,” replied Marvin, “Come by on Thursday and pick up your hammer.” Howell paid the \$5 price and took his hammer home.

The Great Depression was a difficult time for Beersheba, and the store was closed for a year during this period. Marvin had sold most of the groceries on credit to the local customers who

then could find little or no work. During this time the Brown family went to El Paso, Texas to operate a hotel. Eventually they were able to return and reopen the store. In 1933, Marvin became ill and his son Dennis, who had been working in Chattanooga, came home to run the store. After Marvin’s death, Dennis bought out his brothers. He married Frances Hughes of Irving College in the valley between Beersheba and McMinnville. Their daughter, Charlotte Brown Boyd writes:

My memories of growing up next to the store are of a place that was the hub of Beersheba’s social activity. Maggie Argo was my nanny while my parents worked. The store was not then self-service. Late in the afternoon, I was allowed to come to the store and stay until closing time. Daddy taught me to make change at the cash register before I started school, and I stood on soft drink crates in order to reach the counter. Christmas was an exciting time at the store. A live tree was placed in the window, surrounded by artificial snow on which toys were displayed. Customers were allowed to put toys “back” for their children (a precursor to “layaway plans”). The store also sold appliances, and ours was the first household in Beersheba to own a television. My mother popped popcorn for this occasion, as everyone was invited to come and watch.

Having the only telephone in the late 1940s made the store a communication center for Beersheba families. I remember Western Union calling with sad news for a local family. Daddy gathered a box of groceries and headed to the family’s home with the news that the husband had died. The phone in our home was used at night to call a doctor to come from McMinnville to see the sick. If the mountain was icy, Daddy would drive the old WWII ambulance with 4-wheel drive to the foot of the mountain and bring the doctor up to see the patient. The large warming stove was also a gathering place to visit and wait for the mail to arrive.

In 1951 my grandfather Hughes, wid-

owed since my mother was seven years old, had a severe stroke. He came to live with us on the mountain, and Daddy took over the operation of the farm in the valley. Daddy loved the farm and soon decided to build a house and move to the Irving College community, my mother's home. Mother didn't want to go because she loved Beersheba and the store. Waylon Brown, a cousin, and his wife operated the store, and we moved at Thanksgiving when I was seven. My parents continued to care for my grandfather and operated the farm. Daddy had been able to get enough subscribers to get electricity to Beersheba in the early 1940's just before the war. He was later able to do the same for the rural telephone cooperative. Phone service and electricity did much to modernize the communities of Beersheba and Irving College. Even though we lived at Irving College, we returned to Beersheba each summer because my parents were the managers of the Methodist Assembly for seventeen years.

In October of 1957 we received a phone call in the middle of the night. By this time we were living in Irving College, but the news from Beersheba was that the McGee House, the Anna and James Brown house and the store were on fire. As we drove through the valley the view from Tarlton looked as if the whole mountain was aglow. We had to leave the car and walk through Alf Adams field in order to get past the fire trucks from McMinnville and Tracy City. Faye Hill was standing in a chenille bathrobe, wetting down the roof of our cottage with a garden hose because of the intense heat from the blaze. My grandmother, who lived in the cottage at the time, had been awakened by Glenn Killian, who saw the fire as he drove his truck home. Together they were able to awaken James and Anna Brown, but at the time it was not known that Mr. McGee was not at home when the fire started. It was assumed that he perished until the next day. The community had gathered and were rescuing any contents they could carry to the lawn next door, but the building was a total loss. News of the fire made the

Nashville and Chattanooga papers. At first, my father did not plan to rebuild the store. But local as well as summer patrons urged him to do so, and the next summer the store was reopened as a self-service store with shopping carts. My parents continued to own the store, but it was managed first by Waylon Brown and later his brother Joe Brown until it was sold to Mitchell Hobbs.

Mitchell had started his own store, Hobbs Market, about 0.3 miles farther east along TN 56 in 1947. Twenty-nine years later, in 1976, he bought the Brown store and changed the name to the Beersheba Springs Market. Mitchell never married; Beersheba was his family. He loved running the store because it gave him the opportunity to help so many people. He was a staunch supporter of the girls' softball team, and its many trophies are displayed in the store window to this day.

Marshall Whitman, a particular friend, was an expert at rolling an automobile tire. Mitchell offered him \$25 to roll a tire down the mountain and all the way to McMinnville. Marshall took him up on the challenge; Mitchell rode along behind to be sure he made it all the way. He did, and Mitchell paid up at once. In 1988, in his last days, he said that the hardest thing about dying was that he knew he would miss Beersheba. His tombstone reads "a friend to all".

Lonnie (Bud) Whitman went to work for Mitchell part time in 1956 when he was 12 and joined him full time when he finished high school. In 1976, when Mitchell bought the Brown's store from Dennis Brown, he needed a bank loan to pay for it, and told Bud, "When it's paid for, half of it is yours." To all who know Bud it is clear that he was Mitchell's understudy not only in the art and science of running a country store but in caring citizenship as well. After Mitchell's death, Bud acquired full ownership of the business on very reasonable terms from Mitchell's siblings.

In 2017, when you enter the store you will be greeted by Bud or his brother David or Bertha Whitman, a distant relative. On the shelves, you will find some of the same products that the store

was selling 130 years ago: corn meal, flour, baking powder, salt, shortening, bacon, eggs, molasses, candy, nails, rope, cookware, and hand tools. Remember those canned oysters from 1879? You can still pick up a can as a special treat for yourself – and a salt block as a treat for your cow. Of course, you will also find canned goods, pasta, and dried beans. Coolers for milk products and freezers for ice cream and frozen foods have been added. Walking sticks and bird

houses made by Bud are a specialty. You can get potatoes and onions but for most fresh vegetables, you should have your own garden or go to the farmers' market in McMinnville. Perhaps most amazing for today's city dweller is that, just as 130 years ago, most sales to local and summer residents alike are made on credit. A cash register adds up the bill and the total is written by hand on an account page. Once in a while, the customer is expected to pay up.



*The Community Center in 2010, originally built as the school.*



*Ladies sewing on Hotel porch, probably 1870s. Martha Armfield is at right.*