
Greene County Magazine

The Beadles House



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THE BEADLES HOUSE

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The house that Captain John Beadles built over 200 years ago near the mountains of western Orange County, now Greene County, stands today as a testament to the quality of its construction. The land on which it stands was originally part of the Octonia Grant of 1722. Presently, the house sits just beyond the dam for the lake in the Greene Acres Development and, although altered through the many years, can yet say something about Captain Beadles. Architecture is a form of communication; it can tell tales about how people saw themselves and the world around them.

The 437 acres of the Beadles tract nestles close under the shadow of Turkey Ridge Mountain, not far from the South River. It was purchased in 1788 from Mace Pickett and his wife Sally who had purchased 1027 acres from Thomas Sthreshly (Sthrahly) and his wife Pattey in 1786, who in turn had purchased some 1000 acres from William Stanard in 1779.¹

It is probable that the house itself can be dated not before 1788 because there was no mention of extant dwellings or buildings in the deed. Tradition has it that Captain Beadles built

the house for his bride.² No record of the date of his marriage to Lurania (Lurena) Miller has yet been found, but their first child was born in 1789. These clues, in addition to the methods of construction and decoration being consistent with a house built in Virginia in the late 1700s, would lead us to believe the house was built sometime around 1788-90.

The house is a full two story, hewn log structure with gable ends. It is single pile (one room deep) with three bays (three openings across the front). The present porch was added later. The logs are large, measuring from fourteen to seventeen inches on their exposed face, with what appears to be square notched corners, the commonest form of corner-timbering east of the Blue Ridge.³ The framing of the front door opening is unusual in that the logs are pegged into vertical, squared logs instead of jamb boards. The logs were probably sheathed immediately with weatherboards (fine, beaded weatherboards are in evidence underneath a covered entry to the cellar). The two gable-end chimneys are brick set in both English and Flemish bond (more costly because it requires more skill and more brick) and appear to be original. There is a rectangular transom over the front door with four lights, a Georgian element.

Inside, the first floor design is hall and parlor, with entrance into the hall (this is a large receiving room, not what we think of as a hallway). The hall measures roughly 16 by 16 feet, and has a 9 foot ceiling with exposed, beaded beams. A batten rear door is directly opposite the front door and beside it is another batten door which closes off a boxed stairway. The walls here have been stripped back to expose the logs. The smaller parlor has a six-panel door with the panels raised on the outside. This room measures 14 by 16 and has an elaborate fireplace wall with raised panels and a cornice overmantle. The boxed stairway leading to the second floor protrudes into this room. A four-foot passage was made at a later date between the front and rear doors by

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adding a one-inch board wall which displays circular saw marks). On the second floor, the stairway opens into a small, unheated room above the first floor entry. Off this room, separated by board walls, are two end bedrooms, one heated, one not. Another boxed stair leads to the attic, which is unfinished and measures 103 inches from peak to floor. The common rafters come together in half-lap pegged joints. Additions over the years are a one-story shed- roof room or rooms along the rear elevation and a story and a half kitchen subsequently joined to the main house, but this was likely after John Beadles ownership and does not concern us.

What does the house tell us so far? It says that Captain Beadles was making a statement that he was rising in society, that he was a man worthy of fine things. This was a time when most Virginia houses were simple, one-room designs, with very little furnishings, where all the intricacies of living and working had to take place. This house had a large hall where visitors could be separated from private family affairs. Most chimneys in this area at the time, and long after, were constructed of field stone, yet Beadles' chimneys were brick and set in expensive bond. The transom lights and the fine paneling in the parlor were the distinguishing marks of a gentleman.⁴

Of what out buildings there were and their arrangement around the house, we know little but that there were probably many, such as a kitchen, dairy, smoke-house, barns, store-houses, wash-houses, etc. There was a large ice-house just down the hill to the east of the main house.⁵

Captain Beadles died in 1824 and in his will he referred to his home and acreage as "the plantation on which I live". An inventory of his possessions at that time only verify that his household was one of some wealth and standing. He left 16 slaves, a great amount of furniture

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and farming equipment, including two dining tables and 21 chairs, four feather beds, steeds and furniture, two wagons, 21 hogs, 25 pigs as well as other animals, a still, 250 gallons of cider, and 2700 pounds of tobacco along with wheat, rye, hay, corn, oats, flax, and hemp.⁶

Beadles left the house to his son, William, who sold it in 1839 to James White and went west. It was in the White family until it was sold to James Hensley in 1900. Other owners were N.D. Taylor, 1903, W.J. Shifflet, 1904, A.M. Breeden, 1913, T.J. Sims, 1918, George and Violette Rhodes, 1945, M.H. Harrison, 1957, Dorothy Davis, 1970, Donna Erickson, 1974, and Bill Jobes, 1999.⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Orange County Deed Book 19, pages 199-202, and 281; The Octonia Grant, J. Randolph Grymes, Jr., 1977, Seminole Press, page F-4.
2. An undated newspaper clipping from the 1930s in the possession of Violette Rhodes and her son, Bobby, of Stanardsville which quotes a profile of the Captain read at the unveiling of a D.A.R. memorial at his grave behind the house. It further describes him as being born near Raccoon Ford [border of present Orange and Culpepper], of Scots parentage, and that it was his adventurous nature which caused him to move closer to the mountains where the hunting was good.
3. "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time-Place Perspective" Fred B. Kniffen and Henry Glassie, from *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, Upton and Vlach, 1986, University of Georgia Press, page 173.
4. "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building", Fraser D. Neiman, in *Common Places* (above), p. 311.
5. According to Bobby Rhodes who lived in the house in the 1940's. Rhodes is a descendant of Captain Beadles.
6. Orange County Will Book 6, pp. 183 and 196.
7. House pedigree by Donald Covey.

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Tombstone on John Beadles Grave, not far from the house



The Beadles House as it has looked in recent years