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# Greene County Magazine

The Octonia Stone

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## The Octonia Stone

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Stanardsville VA

In August of 1716, the then Lt. Governor of Virginia, Alexander Spotswood, led a party of eleven other gentlemen supported by thirty soldiers, scouts, and baggage handlers across the Blue Ridge Mountains, through Swift Run Gap. They became the first colonists to enter the Shenandoah Valley. This group of gentlemen was named by Governor Spotswood as "The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe." At this time the western most settlement in Virginia was at Fort Germanna, on the Rappahanock River, so named in view of the mostly German population of that community.

In an effort to encourage western movement and development in this new English colony, a land grant system was introduced which provided for the granting of ownership of land based on a ratio of land cleared. Dense forests covered most of the area. The system in effect dictated that to maintain ownership of the land grant, three acres had to be cleared to realize ownership of fifty acres; building of a house also resulted in the title to 50 acres.

James Taylor, one of the Spotswood party and a surveyor, laid out a tract of 24,000 acres. Orange County land records reveal that in 1721, when Spotsylvania County was formed from Essex, seven other gentleman joined James Taylor in applying for and receiving this subject grant of land which, over time has been titled "The Octonian Grant" seemingly in reference to and in association with the eight grant applicants. In 1729, the land was re-granted to Robert Beverly, son of Capt. Harry Beverley, one of the original grantees. At his death in 1732, Robert Beverley left 6000 of the westernmost acres to his nephew, Beverly Stanard. Beverly Stanard's son, William was credited with forming the town of Stanardsville, now the county seat of Greene County, VA.

Descendants of many of the original grantees live in Greene County today. You can find a listing of all the recorded leases and sales of land by the Stanard family up until the time Greene County was formed from Orange in 1838 in the Clerk's office in Orange, VA. including many of the one-half acre lots which comprise Stanardsville.

The four corners of the Octonian Grant were identified, as was the custom of the day, with prominent local features, e.g. large oak tree, bend in river, mark carved in stone, etc. This 24,000-acre tract of land, using today's boundaries would be almost equally divided between Orange and Greene Counties. The only surveyed marker that remains of the Grant is that which marks the northwest corner of the 24,000 acres and is located on the T.M. Shelton farm in Greene County.

This particular marker was unknown, except to the local residents, and the T.M. Shelton's in particular, who called it the "Octoney Stone". After much diligent research, Mr. I Randolph Grymes Jr. in 1962 drew up the Octonian boundaries on a current topographic map and on a sunny Sunday in June 1963 drove to the vicinity of the northwest corner of the surveyed grant. Mr. Grymes was not at all certain of what, with, or how this northwest corner was marked. While trudging through a field he came upon a young man by the name of Shelton washing his truck by the South River. Upon being asked if any of the creeks in the area were called Octonia Creek, Shelton replied he didn't think so, but there was a rock in his grandmother's field called the "Octoney Stone", but he had no idea of its significance. Can you

imagine Mr. Grymes' excitement in finding the Octonia Stone? The Octonia Stone itself is a large granite outcropping with an inscription carved into the rock of two concentric circles, one atop the other, with a cross atop the circles. The marking is 12.25 inches high and 3.5 inches wide.

It was Mr. Grymes' belief that the carving was made in the stone in 1721 when the grant was surveyed. Using current, 1998 land references, the Octonian Grant was roughly eight miles wide and 24 miles long, extending from just west of Stanardsville to Montpelier Station.

James Taylor was President James Madison's great grandfather and a portion of the Madison Estate, Montpelier, in Orange County contains the easternmost portion of the Octonian Grant.

Through the efforts of Mr. Grymes, the Octonia Stone was made a Virginia Historic Landmark. Later, the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission nominated it for the National Register of Historic Places, and it was accepted for that Register.

Tours of the Octonia Stone will be held throughout the year. If you are interested in viewing this unique historical marker, please call Betty Brubach of the Greene County Historical Society at (804) 985-8627 for more information.



\*Above photo of the Octonia Stone is from *A History of Greene County* by T.E. Johnson; Greene County Publishers, Inc. 1967; John W. Dickey, Photographer.