

"The Old Beersheba Inn"
Beersheba Springs, Tenn.

HABS No. Tenn. 54

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Tennessee

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Frazer Smith, District Officer,
W. Jeter Eason, Deputy District Officer
404 Goodwyn Institute Building,
Memphis, Tennessee.

ADDITIONAL

"THE OLD BEERSHEBA INN"
Beersheba Springs, Grundy County, Tennessee.

Owner. Mr. and Mrs. John Wears, et. al., Beersheba Springs and Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Date of Erection. First section completed 1839. Altered and enlarged 1857.

Architect. None.

Builder. Original section, unknown. Later additions and alterations by Colonel John Armfield.

Present Condition. The group is under intelligent care but replacements needed in the older sections are not receiving attention as they should receive. 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 columned building having porches, first and second floor, across the entire front and extending part of the way back on the "L". This rearrangement formed a large court with one story log and brick row houses and "dog trot" houses completing the rectangular plot of which the major unit is the two story "L" shaped structure. There was up until a few years ago another court to the back of the present court but most of the one story buildings comprising this unit have been destroyed leaving only two which are in use now.

Number of Stories. "L" shaped front building two stories, remaining buildings forming courts one story.

Material of Construction. Foundation: Brick and stone. Floors: Random length and width pine flooring on hand hewn sills and joists. Exterior Walls: Brick, log and clapboard. The brick and logs are used on the one story rows and clapboard on the later two story section. Roofs: Hand made shingles and galvanized iron, the galvanized iron has been applied in places where shingles had become obsolete.

Other Existing Records: So far as is known no drawings have been made or engraved. Written records and stories and photographs are in the files of the "Chattanooga Times" dated July 8th, 1934, June 9th, 1935, "Nashville Tennessean" dated June 9th, 1935, "Nashville Banner"

dated June 2nd, 1935, "Grundy County Herald" dated June 18th, 1935. Descriptions and stories of Beersheba are also contained in the "Heart of Old Hickory" by Miss Will Allen Dromgoole.

Additional Data: The long line of important names closely associated with Beersheba Springs make this one of the most interesting, if not the most interesting, settlements in the State of Tennessee. This is not to be construed as belittling the settlement in the Watauga Section of Tennessee or the Natchez Trace Section, but the difference between Beersheba and the aforementioned sections is that Beersheba is a small community whereas the Watauga Settlement and the Natchez Trace District are so large as to be made up of many group settlements and in that way we are differentiating Beersheba from other important areas. Beersheba also differs in that where the political, religious and social developments were executed or administered or flowered in Watauga and in the Natchez Trace, it was here at Beersheba that many of those people in whose hands the society and culture and politics were placed that these men gathered and where so many of their policies were conceived.

Architecturally the Old Beersheba Inn is unique in that the plan of the building group takes the shape of a large rectangular court which furnished meeting places in the open for the guests of the Inn where religious services, political speeches and open air amusements could be indulged in. This shape also formed a natural protection against the ravages of Indians and animals which were not uncommon at that time. It was in this court that Bishop Otey and Bishop Polk ministered to the Indians and the first Christian Conversion in that district was made here. It will be noted that Bishops Polk and Otey have been referred to elsewhere in this Survey of Tennessee for their activities in the Natchez Trace District south of, and in the vicinity of, Nashville and Columbia, Tennessee.

As Beersheba Inn grew, for it was not all built at once, the methods of construction can be followed inasmuch as the first buildings built were log construction, one story "dog trot" type. The next group built shortly thereafter was built with hand made brick, the third and last development was the two story "L" shaped columned building which now is, of course, the major building of the group, and this building is built using clapboard siding.

Inasmuch as it was customary in those days for a family

to take with them their slaves when making a journey to Beersheba, rooms were provided to accommodate these slaves. This was done in the following manner: No room in the two story building can be rented singly as they are all two room suites, the front room being for the Master and the back room for his personal attendant. Sometimes it was customary where the children were very small for them to sleep in the slave's room in order to be watched during the night by the servant. Although the luxury of having slaves exists no more, the building has not been changed and it is still impossible to rent one room in the main section. This plan does not exist in the one story row buildings but the inconvenience caused by not having slaves' rooms adjoining the Master's space caused the above described system to be employed in the two story building.

The Old Inn is the center of activity around Beersheba, but in addition to the Inn a large number of cottages have been built there for use during the summer months by prominent citizens of Chattanooga, Nashville, Knoxville and Memphis and other small towns. Most of these cottages were built about the same time that the Inn was built, some of which were built prior to the erection of the Inn. Bishops Leonidas Polk and James Hervev Otey both had cottages before the Inn was built. The Bishop Polk cottage is now owned by Judge Howell of Nashville and the Otey cottage is now owned by Mr. Frank D. Marr of Nashville. The Inn itself occupies the most impressive view of the group overlooking a large valley. This site was chosen because of this view and due to this fact Colonel Armfield was so impressed that he moved from Louisiana his slaves and skilled labor to build the main building and rearrange the group. It is said that Colonel Armfield brought the money for this work in the form of silver dollars which he carried in kegs from his plantations in Louisiana. It was here that Bishops Otey and Polk conceived plans for the University of the South commonly known as Sewanee, and had it not been for the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad beginning its first road over the mountains in 1848 the University would have been built at Beersheba, but inasmuch as the road was built through on the other side of the mountain, through what is now Monteagle, it was decided that it was too difficult a journey for purposes of a school.

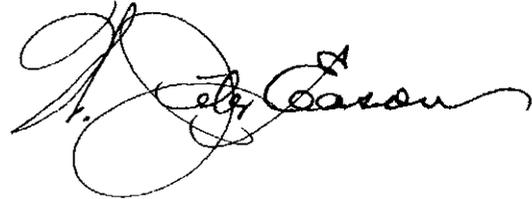
It is said that in the old days in order to make Beersheba guests more comfortable it was the habit of the stage coach drivers to sound their horns one blast for each white traveller when they reached the bottom of the road up to the Inn, on the arrival at the top,

about an hour and a half later, meals were ready for the hungry travellers.

Beersheba was not the outcome of pioneers searching for homesteads, Beersheba was an accident. The accident was the discovery by Mrs. Beersheba Cain, wife of John Cain of McMinnville, of the Chalybeate Springs. She was so sure that these Springs were of health giving qualities and so struck by the natural beauty and the surrounding rock formations and caves that she was able to interest a number of people in building cabins or vacation use. From this beginning Beersheba Springs grew rapidly to where it was the play grounds of society, and for that matter is still a retreat enjoyed by many of Tennessee's prominent families.

Since 1857 the only structural changes that have been made in the buildings that are still standing have been some alterations in the kitchen including changing the floor level and the alteration of two of the small rooms in the main building to provide community bath rooms, there being no private facilities of that nature.

All in all Beersheba is a quaint, unique and interesting group. It has lived over a hundred years and in all probability the sentiment of those who come back from year to year will keep Beersheba as it is, and there is some hope it will be restored and equipped with modern conveniences, but there is no thought of changing the spirit of the place - one of quiet seclusion and healthful rest.

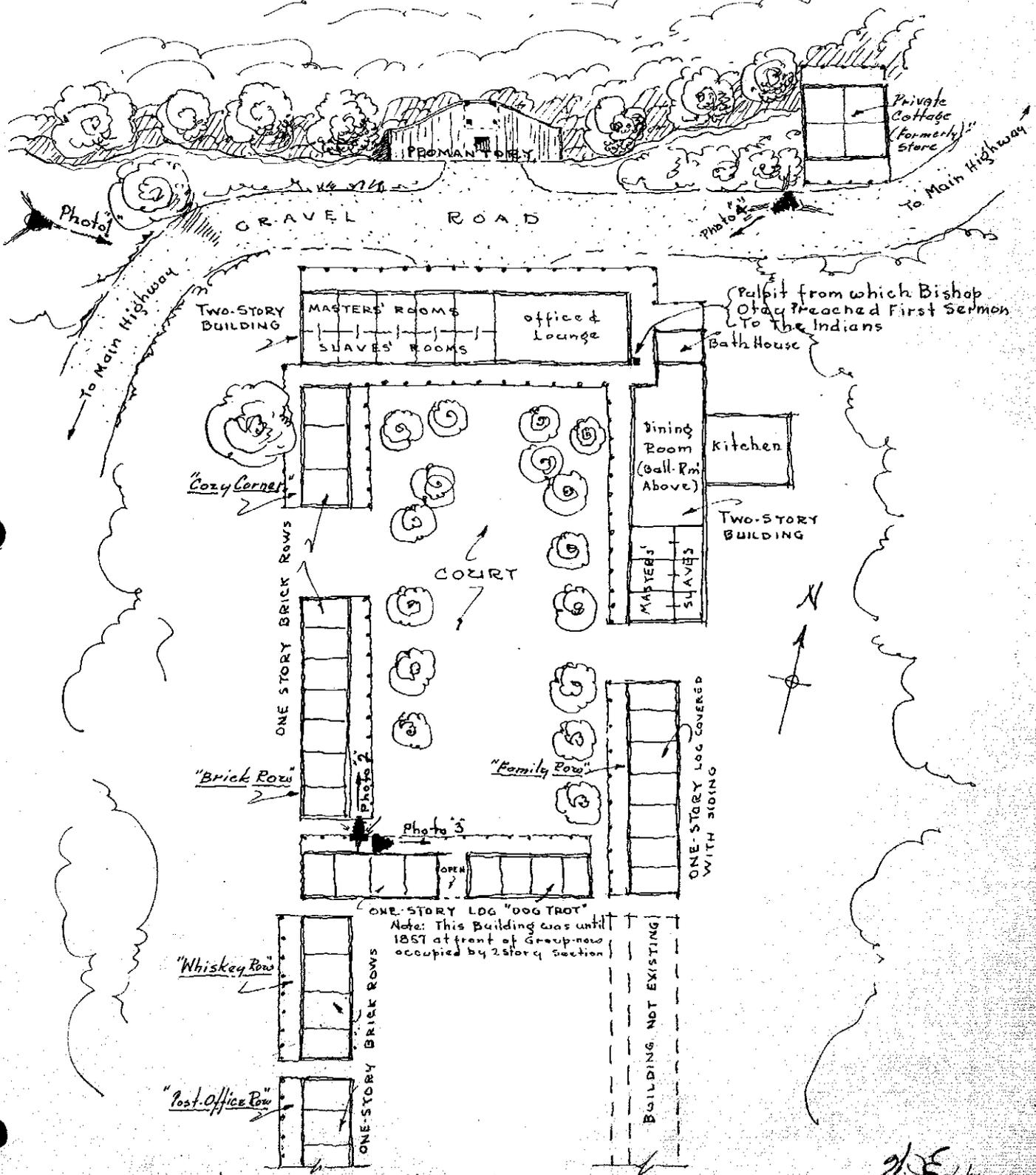


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Beersheba Springs, Tenn.

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The Valley



Historic American Buildings Survey
W. Jeter Eason - Dep. Dist. Officer - Photographer - Author of Data - 6-9-36

PLOT PLAN of GROUP - LOCATION of CAMERA

WJE 1/11/36

Addendum to:

Old Beersheba Inn (Beersheba Springs Hotel)
Armfield Avenue (near St. Rt. 56)
Beersheba Springs
Grundy County
Tennessee

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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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