William Deaver House

North side of NC 280, 0.15 mile east of junction with US 64

Pisgah Forest

Pisgah Forest

Mrs. Carl M. Smith

Route 1, Box 608

Transylvania

Transylvania County Courthouse

Brevard

State
The William Deaver House stands on the northwest side of N.C. Highway 280 near the Transylvania County community of Pisgah Forest. The house is located at the center of a 2.3 acre lot containing a grove of trees to the front of the house and a barn and garden space to the rear. This parcel is surrounded on nearly every side by modern tract house development and is all that remains of the once considerable mountain estate of William Deaver.

The house is noteworthy for its size and the retardataire Georgian style workmanship in what at the time of its construction was a remote and sparsely populated region of mountainous western North Carolina. The dwelling is of heavy timber frame construction covered in weather-beaten clapboards, and rises two stories under a gable roof pierced by a large central brick chimney. It rests on a foundation of fieldstone rubble. The principal exterior feature is the double-gallery engaged porch that extends across the front (southeast) elevation. This porch type is generally associated with the coastal Carolinas, and its appearance in western North Carolina may be due to the early influence in the region of settlement from lower South Carolina. The central chimney, however, is rarely found in the more substantial early houses of the south, as the gable-end chimney was the preferred method of heating a dwelling. Its presence in this house—and the resultant interior plan—may reflect the origins of the Deaver family in Pennsylvania, where the central chimney was a more common practice. The presence of both features in this dwelling might be considered an architectural synthesis of northern and southeastern coastal influences in a structure west of the Blue Ridge.

The porch is supported on both levels by square-in-section posts with simple molded caps. On the second level the posts are connected by a lattice-like balustrade composed of diagonally-set wood slats. A free-standing exterior stair at the center of the porch connects the two levels; this may be a later addition or a replacement of undetermined date.

The placement of door and window openings across the facade is asymmetrical. Entrances are set near both ends of the facade, and each door is of six raised panels. The one on the left is flanked by a pair of six-over-six sash windows, and a single window is placed to the left of the door on the right. The second floor level repeats this arrangement. All other windows, including those on the gable ends of the house and those ranging across the one-story rear shed extension, are also of six-over-six sash set in plain surrounds.

The first floor interior follows a plan of two large rooms arranged in saddlebag fashion around the large central chimney. Two small chambers, original or very nearly so, are partitioned off at the end of the southwest room. Interior woodwork is almost completely original. Walls throughout are of wide sheathing, and a molded chairrail carries along every wall. Interior doors are of six panels, and in most cases retain original strap hinges and early locks. The ceiling in the northeast parlor has exposed beams; the mantel in this room is of simple post-and-lintel configuration with a molded shelf and a raised panel overmantel. The ceiling of the southwest room is sheathed, and the mantel in this room has been removed. The two long, narrow shed rooms across the rear are finished with wide sheathing.
An enclosed stair rises along the northwest side of the chimney. The second floor is not accessible to visitors, though the owner reports that it is nearly identical to the first floor in plan and finish.

A large gambrel roof frame barn stands behind the house to the north. This structure is of turn-of-the century construction, and is the only outbuilding associated with the house that remains standing.
The William Deaver House is among the oldest extant frame houses west of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina. The house was constructed in the early 1830s for William Deaver, a prominent farmer of what was then part of Buncombe County, whose landholdings totaled 300 acres in a region where the average farm measured 50 to 75 acres. The house is notable for its large size and its architectural character, both of which are remarkable for this locality at this early date. The large central chimney and the resultant plan of the house are unusual for any substantial early dwelling in the state and may reflect the Pennsylvania origins of the Deaver family. The engaged double-gallery porch is a feature often associated with the coastal Carolinas and may be evidence of the influences of settlement in this region from lower South Carolina. The interior retains much of its original fabric and hardware and exhibits a quality of construction otherwise almost completely unknown west of Flat Rock at this early date.

Local tradition recounts the Civil War story of a band of brigands coming to the house in search of William Deaver's son, who was a Confederate Officer, and shooting the elder Deaver dead as he opened the door to face them. The house remained in the hands of descendents of William Deaver until the mid-twentieth century, and served for a number of years as the Davidson River Post Office. In 1952, it was acquired by the husband of the present owner from the Deaver heirs, and it remains in use as a private residence.

Criteria Assessment:

A. The house is an important example of a substantial early farm dwelling in western North Carolina.

C. The house represents a synthesis of northern and southeastern coastal building influences in a dwelling west of the Blue Ridge. The quality of its finish and detail is extremely rare for an early house in the western regions of the state.
The William Deaver House near Pisgah Forest in Transylvania County was apparently built in the early 1830s by the man whose name it bears. Its size and architectural form made it a most unusual structure for its time and location. However, though Deavers occupied the home for well over a century, relatively little factual information about the family and the house could be gleaned from the paucity of available records.

William Deaver was born in Buncombe County in 1794. His father, James Deaver, was a pioneer in the region west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and William himself was born when white-Indian relationships were often strained and sometimes hostile. He seems to have been of Scotch-Irish descent, and his ancestors may have traveled the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania before crossing the Blue Ridge into Buncombe County. Almost nothing is known of the first thirty-six years of his life except that he somehow acquired at least a rudimentary education. His ability to read and write is documented in several records.

Sometime between 1830 and 1833, William Deaver married Margaret Patton who also lived in the Davidson River district. About the same time, according to local tradition, Deaver built the large, two-story frame house with an interior chimney. The imposing structure was erected on part of a 470 acre tract which Deaver had purchased from Benjamin Allison on February 6, 1830. A particularly interesting clause in the deed read "... including the house where said Allison now lives." This would appear to be a smaller, less pretentious structure since Deaver only paid $2.85 an acre for reasonably good farm land. The Allison House, however, may have been Deaver's home until his marriage and for some time afterwards while his new home was being constructed. The earlier house may subsequently have been used as a kitchen, slave quarters, or storage facility. Such a practice was common among settlers of the North Carolina mountains.

William Deaver settled into the life of a western North Carolina farmer but became more prosperous than most west of the Blue Ridge. In 1850 the cash value of his 800 acre farm was $10,000 with a considerable investment in livestock, particularly cattle and hogs. Three hundred acres of cultivated land produced substantial grain crops with corn far in the lead and rye a distant second. By 1860 the value of Deaver's real estate had increased to $18,000 with an additional $10,000 in personal property. He had added a flock of sheep to his livestock bringing the total value of farm animals to $2,000. Corn was still the dominant crop with rye and oats also produced in quantity. The farm was run by Deaver, his three sons, and a family of slaves who lived in the only slave cabin on the estate. He also dallied in local politics and community service as did most men of his economic status in antebellum North Carolina.
William and Margaret Deaver had seven children: Harriett, Mary, Sarah, Dovey, James, William, and Robert. In 1860 all were living at home except Sarah who had married. The oldest son, James Patton Deaver, entered Confederate service which, through a fateful turn of events, played a major role in the subsequent history of the Deaver House.

On June 15, 1861, seventeen year old James P. Deaver enlisted for a one year term in Company E, 25th North Carolina Regiment. Through service in the Virginia campaigns, Deaver rose to the rank of first lieutenant before being mustered out near Drewry's Bluff, Virginia, at his own request. In September, 1862, he re-enlisted for a three year term and was assigned to the Quartermaster Corps. He was detached for duty at Hendersonville in October, 1863, about twenty miles from his father's home. Deaver's assignment was to procure food and supplies for Confederate troops; however, his job was made very difficult by bands of marauders and army deserters roaming the mountain counties. Deaver must have routed out and punished a number of the robbers for he seems to have incurred their enmity. According to local tradition, one such band of brigands sought out James Deaver at his father's home in 1865. James was not there at the time, and his father William, then seventy-one years old, opened the door. There he was shot dead by the assassins. While this story itself is not documented, the few documentary records available uphold the tradition.

William Deaver died intestate. The court granted a life estate to his widow, Margaret, and an undivided interest to each of the children. Over the next ten years (1868-1878) William E. Deaver, the second oldest son, acquired the rights of his brothers and sisters. By 1878 he had reconsolidated most of his father's 800 acre tract.

While William E. was acquiring title to the estate, he continued to live in the house with his mother, three older sisters, and his younger brother. Harriett, the oldest daughter, never married and lived with her mother during the remainder of the widow's life. The sons continued to run the farm in her behalf. Sometime between 1870 and 1880, James P. and Robert left home. About 1874, William E. married Susan (Porcher?) and three children were born of the union. To help the aging Margaret and daughter Harriett, a black family was taken in as servants. Thus, in 1880, the Deaver House was occupied by three families: Margaret and Harriett Deaver; William E. and Susan Deaver with their daughter Margaret M. (second daughter Mary and son W. D. were born after 1880); and Myra Smith (widow) and her three children.
Little is known about William E. Deaver. He was apparently content to lead the life of a mountain farmer. He lived his entire eighty years in the Deaver House, but he did little to improve production or increase the value of the property. At his death in 1926, William E. Deaver's estate, virtually the same as his father's, was valued at $20,000, approximately the same as in 1860.22

For many years during W. E.'s life, the Deaver House served as a post office for the Davidson River community. The postmasters were members of the family through marriage to daughters and granddaughters of William Deaver.23

William E. died intestate and his property was divided among his widow and three children. The old Deaver House and approximately 245 acres passed to the daughters, Margaret (Maggie) M. Deaver and Mary L. Deaver. W. D. Deaver lived with his family about one-half mile away, near Brevard, in a hilltop home.24

Maggie and Mary Deaver lived in the old homeplace for some years after the death of their father. Though Mary was the younger, she died before her sister. Maggie then moved to Brevard and apparently lived with her brother, W. D. Deaver.25 Maggie and W. D. both died in 1945 within a week of one another. Neither left a will, and the house and property passed to a multitude of heirs.26

Maggie was the last of the Deavers to reside in the old house. After she moved, the home was rented to tenants as a farmhouse. When Carl M. Smith bought the property from seventeen Deaver heirs, a family named Parris was renting the house. How long they had been tenants is uncertain.27 On July 16, 1952, Smith paid $5,500 for a tract of land "known as the old William E. Deaver homeplace."28

Carl Smith and his wife, Mae, moved to the Deaver House from Cullowhee in Jackson County. He was a veteran of World War I who received a massive does of mustard gas on the battlefields of France. As his health weakened over the years, Smith's doctor advised him to give up the farming life. That is when he purchased the old Deaver House to live in retirement. Carl M. Smith died in 1973 and some of the property was sold to meet taxes and expenses.29 A similar pattern had been followed for some years, reducing the once sizable tract to a small lot. Mae Smith still resides in the Deaver House. She owns four acres of land, but only two of those were part of the original purchase.30

FOOTNOTES


Deaver Family Genealogy.

Deaver Family Genealogy. For Deaver's residence near Davidson's River, see Fifth Census, 1830, p. 208, and Sixth Census, 1840, p. 131. Deaver was unmarried in 1830 but married in 1840 with a daughter (Harriett) six years old (See Seventh Census, 1850, p. 235). The family genealogy says 1853 was marriage date, but this is an obvious typographical error.

Researcher's interview with Mary Jane McCrary of Brevard, N. C., March 22, 1979, hereinafter cited as McCrary interview.

Buncombe County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Buncombe County Courthouse, Asheville, Deed Book 16, p. 150, hereinafter cited as Buncombe County Deed Book.

Total cost was $1,200. Buncombe County Deed Book 16, p. 150.

For description of structure use, see Blackmun, Western North Carolina, 170.

Seventh Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule.

Eighth Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedule.

Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule.

Deaver was appointed by the County Court as one of the commissioners to erect a courthouse and jail in Hendersonville. He also served as a justice of the Henderson County Court. Lenoir Ray, Postmarks: A History of Henderson County, North Carolina 1787-1968 (Chicago: Adams Press, 1970), 97, hereinafter cited as Ray, Postmarks; Sadie Smathers Patton, The Story of Henderson County (Asheville, 1947), 135, hereinafter cited as Patton, Story of Henderson County; and McCrary interview.
Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedule, 328; and Deaver Family Genealogy.

Military history taken from U. S. National Archives, Compiled Service Records, Confederate Service, North Carolina Twenty Fifth Infantry, microfilm copies of originals in State Archives, Raleigh.

For marauding activity in Transylvania County, see Blackmun, Western North Carolina, 347-349; and Patton, Story of Henderson County, 127.

McCrary interview; Patton, Story of Henderson County, 127. The same story is repeated in Blackmun, Western North Carolina, 349.

Conclusion reached from land transactions in Transylvania County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Transylvania County Courthouse, Brevard, Deed Book 1, p. 585 (Margaret Deaver et al to James P. and William E. Deaver, September 29, 1869) and Deed Book 2, pp. 702-703 (Harriett M. Deaver et al to James P. Deaver and William E. Deaver (two sales), hereinafter cited as Transylvania County Deed Book.

Transylvania County Deed Book 1, p. 585; Deed Book 2, pp. 702, 704; and Deed Book 8, p. 480.

Ninth Census, 1870, Population Schedule, Brevard Township, Transylvania County, 16; and Tenth Census, 1880, Population Schedule, Davidson River (later returned to Brevard) Township, 4; and McCrary interview.

Deaver Family Genealogy; and Tenth Census, 1880, Population Schedule, Davidson River Township, 4. See fn. 19.


McCrary interview; Ray, Postmarks, 308, 309; and Deaver Family Genealogy. See also Post Route Map of North Carolina, 1896, Map Collection, State Archives.

Record of Administrators, Book 3, p. 206; and Researcher's interview with Mrs. Carl (Mae) M. Smith, April 2, 1979, hereinafter cited as Smith interview. See also Record of Accounts, Office of the Register of Deeds, Transylvania County Courthouse, Brevard, Book 4, p. 361, microfilm copy in State Archives.
25 Smith interview; and Record of Administrators, Book 4, p. 203.

26 Record of Administrators, Book 4, pp. 203-204.

27 Smith interview. Mrs. Smith did not recall Mr. Parris's first name nor how long they had resided in the house.


29 Smith interview.

30 Smith interview.
The nominated property includes the entire 2.3 acre lot identified in the Transylvania County Tax Office as lot T-41-00-298, and includes the house, an early twentieth century barn, the garden area behind the house, and the grove of trees to front, which is all that remains of the original 300 acre Deaver Estate that has been in continuous association with the house.


Henderson County Records
- Deeds
- Estates Papers
- Wills

Interviews


Transylvania County Records
- Deeds
- Record of Accounts
- Superior Court Records
- Wills

United States Census Records, 1830-1900.

Transylvania County Tax Office
Lot # T-41-00-298
2.3 Acres

Approximate Scale
William Deaver House
Pisgah Forest Community
Transylvania County, N. C.
2.3 acres
Pisgah Forest, N. C., Quadrangle
Scale 1:24000  UTM References: Zone 17,
Easting 345200, Northing 3904690