

Archaeological Testing at the Deaver House (31Tv286):
A National Register Site in Transylvania County,
North Carolina

by

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the Boyleston Road generally follows the route of modern N.C. Highway 280 (McCrary 1984:18; Sondley 1930:457-460).

Historical Background

At the close of the Revolutionary War, nearly all the land in the Southern Appalachian Mountains was claimed by the Cherokee Indians. In a series of treaties between 1777 and 1798, the Cherokee Nation relinquished occupancy of all lands north and east of a line approximating the present western boundaries of Haywood and Transylvania Counties.

Settlement preceded title, however, and Euro-american families were living along the upper French Broad River before boundary disputes between the Cherokee Nation, North and South Carolina and Georgia had been resolved (McCrary 1984). Land grants for the western North Carolina lands were issued to Revolutionary War veterans from 1783 onwards. The first significant settlements in present-day Transylvania County were in the Davidson River and Cherryfield sections of what was first Buncombe County and later a part of Henderson County (King, Turpin & Bacon 1974:66; McCrary 1984).

Hundreds of land grants were made by the state of North Carolina as soon as the area was opened for settlement. Most land grants were of modest size, but some were for thousands of acres. During the 1790's, many individuals speculated heavily in western lands (Lefler and Newsome 1963:291).

N.C. land grant #251, containing 250,240 acres, was issued to one such speculator, David Allison, on November 29, 1796 (Buncombe Co. Register of Deeds, Book 2, p. 458). The grant is believed to have included land on which the Deaver House now stands. Described as "engaging" and "an incurable gambler", David Allison was a lawyer who lived in both North Carolina and Tennessee before moving to Philadelphia as a salesman for western lands (Keith 1965:xii-xiv; Potter 1982:127). Associated with the merchant John Gray Blount, Allison was well on his way to becoming a millionaire, when the financial failures of his purchasers caused his own bankruptcy. David Allison died in debtor's prison in Philadelphia on November 28, 1798, leaving his financial affairs in great disorder (Keith 1959:197 and passim). There is no known relationship between this David Allison and the Benjamin Allison who later lived in this area and sold William Deaver land on Davidson's River.

In 1819, North Carolina land grant #2450 was issued for 50 acres on Boilstons Creek to Benjamin Allison et al. This grant was dated December 12, 1819, but was not recorded until September 27, 1882 (Buncombe Co., N.C. Register of Deeds, Book 13 p. 39).

This may be the same Benjamin Allison who signed an 1813 petition for the formation of Hawkins County (McCrary 1984:129). In 1826, Benjamin Allison sold 40 acres on the Davidson River to John W. Davis (Buncombe Co. Register of Deeds, Book 14, p. 372). In 1830, Benjamin Allison sold three tracts of land to William Deaver. The deed identifies the tracts as containing 270 acres along Davidson River "Including the house where said Allison now lives"; 100 acres on Turkey Creek; and 100 acres on Boilston Creek" (Buncombe County Deed Book 16, p. 150). The first tract is believed to have included the present-day Deaver House.

William Deaver (1794-1865), the eldest son of James Deaver and Mary Miller, was the first family member known to be born in North Carolina. He would have been forty years old when he purchased the tract of land from Allison. Family tradition relates that he made frequent business trips to Kentucky to collect property rents there, and that he knew David Crockett (Atkinson n.d.:2). On May 9, 1833, three years after purchasing the tract of land, William Deaver married Margaret Patton, who also lived in the Davidson River district (McCrary, 1984; Bureau of the Census, 1830, 1840). They became the parents of seven children: Harriet M., Mary Jane, Sarah, Dovie Ann, James Patton, William Erwin, and Robert W. (see Appendix I).

Several spellings of the Deaver family name exist. Family records show that "Dever" appears on deeds dating from the late 1700s. "Deaver" appears on William Deaver's tombstone and is used in the National Register Nomination and this report; and "Deavor" has been used interchangeably with "Deaver" since the early 1800s [Atkinson, n.d.; Wooley 1983:134-135).

Local tradition says that William built a two-story frame house about the time of his marriage (McCrary 1979), and that this house is the original part of the existing Deaver house. This scenario is certainly possible, but it seems to conflict with other historical and architectural data. This problem is discussed below in the architectural history summary.

William Deaver evidently was a prosperous landowner and farmer. He purchased 470 acres from Benjamin Allison in 1830 for \$1,200, and in the same year he acquired an additional 300 acres on Davidson River and Turkey Creek (Buncombe Co. Register of Deeds, Book 16, pp. 150, 174 and 220). Between 1831 and 1836, he added 7,350 more acres to his holdings (Wooley, p. 134). In 1850, he had a large investment in cattle and hogs, and his 300 acres of cultivated land were used to raise corn and rye (Bureau of Census 1850).

By 1860, his real estate was valued at \$18,000 and his personal property at \$10,000. His major field crops were still corn and rye, while the addition of a flock of sheep brought the

value of his livestock to \$2,000 (Bureau of Census 1860a). William Deaver managed his 5,117-acre farm with the assistance of his three sons and seven slaves. The slaves lived in a single slave cabin on the estate (McCrary 1984:36; Bureau of Census, 1860b).

Like most men of property in the antebellum period, William Deaver was active in local politics and community service. He served as a justice of the Henderson County Court, and was one of three men commissioned by the County Court to contract for the building of a courthouse and jail in Hendersonville (McCrary 1984:151; Ray 1970:97).

Except for Sarah, who was married, all of William and Margaret Deaver's children were living at home in 1860 (Bureau of the Census 1860, Population Schedule, 328). In 1861, 17 year-old James Patton Deaver enlisted in the Confederate Army for a year's service in Company E, 25th N.C. Regiment. After serving in Virginia, he was mustered out with the rank of First Lieutenant. Re-enlisting for a 3-year term in September 1862, he was assigned to the Quartermaster Corps, and the following year he was detached for duty in Hendersonville, about 20 miles from his father's home (U.S. National Archives Compiled Service Records).

During the Civil War, bands of deserters and lawless men roamed the countryside and experiences and encounters with outlaws were common to mountain folk. In 1864, Captain James P. Deaver asked the captain of Confederate troops quartered at the Woodfield Inn in Flatrock for help in capturing a band of outlaws. Evidently, the bandits learned of his request, for the next year an outlaw band came looking for James Deaver at his father's house. James was not there, but the bandits shot and killed his 71-year old father, William Deaver, when he opened the door (Patton 1976:127).

William Deaver died intestate, and the court awarded a life estate to his widow and an undivided interest to each of the children (Meyer n.d.). All of the children except Sarah continued to live with their mother in the house, the sons operating the farm in her behalf. Robert Deaver died in 1873, and James Patton Deaver left home some time between 1870 and 1880, probably when he married Emma Combs (Atkinson n.d.; U.S. Bureau of Census 1870 and 1880).

William E. Deaver gradually acquired the properties of his brothers and sisters, and by 1878 had reconsolidated most of the land which his father had owned (Transylvania County Deed Books; Southern, Cross, and Best 1979: fn. 18). William E. Deaver married Susan Porcher about 1874, and three children were born to them: Margaret Matilda (Maggie), Mary L., and W. D. Deaver (Atkinson n.d.).

In 1880, the Deaver House was occupied by members of three families: Margaret Patton Deaver and her daughter Harriet; William E. Deaver, with his wife and daughter Margaret M.; and the widow Myra Smith and her three children (Bureau of Census, 1880). The Smiths may have been a black family taken in as servants to help the aging Margaret P. Deaver and her daughter Harriet (Southern, Cross, and Best 1979).

From April 19, 1878 to June 9, 1890, Hattie M. [Harriet] Deaver was postmaster of the Deavers post office (Post Office Records). A padlock inscribed "U.S. Mails" was recently found in the Deaver house, but it is not known whether the post office business was conducted in the house or in a separate building near the present entrance to the Pisgah National Forest (Betty Sherrill, personal communication 1990).

William E. Deaver died intestate as had his father, and his property was divided among his widow and three children. His estate consisted of the old Deaver House and approximately 245 acres of land. Evidently little had been done to improve production and the value of the property had not increased substantially. William E. Deaver's estate at the time of his death in 1926 had a valuation of \$20,000 (Record of Administrators, Book 3, p. 206).

William E. Deaver's daughters Margaret (Maggie) and Mary continued to live in the Deaver House, while their brother, William David Deaver, lived with his family about half a mile away near Brevard (Meyer n.d.). When Mary died in 1938 (Monteith 1984), Maggie moved to Brevard and apparently lived with her brother (Meyer n.d.). In 1945, Maggie and W. D. Deaver died within a week of one another. Neither left a will, and the property passed to a number of heirs (Record of Administrators, Book 3, p. 206; Meyer n.d.).

For more than a century, between 1830-1938, the Deaver House served as the home place for three generations of Deavers: William, his son William E., and William E's daughters Mary and Maggie. After Maggie moved to Brevard, the house was rented to tenants as a farmhouse. A tenant family named Parris was living in the house when it was sold by the seventeen Deaver heirs to Carl M. Smith in 1952 (Meyer n.d.).

On July 16, 1952, Carl M. Smith bought the property "known as the old William E. Deavor homeplace" when he retired (Transylvania Deed Book 104, p. 445). Mr. Smith was a veteran of World War I and had been a farmer near Cullowhee before he and his wife Mae moved to Transylvania County. Carl Smith died in 1973, and some of the property was sold to meet taxes and expenses. This reduced the once sizeable tract to a small lot of four acres, only two of which were part of the original [1830]

purchase (Meyer n.d.). Mrs. Carl (Mae) Smith continued to live in the house until her death in November, 1984.

The Deaver House remained empty after Mae Smith's death until 1987, when title was obtained from the Smith heirs by the Transylvania County Historical Society. The William E. Deaver House and its 2.3-acre lot--all that remains of the original 300-acre Deaver Estate--was nominated to and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 (Southern, Cross, and Best 1979). (Note: The property acquired by the Transylvania County Historical Society in 1987 was described as "Containing 3.787 acres, more or less" [Transylvania County Deed Book 296, p. 637]).

To summarize, the following families have been associated with the Deaver house or property:

1819 - 1830	Benjamin Allison
1830 - 1865	William Deaver
1865 - 1938	William E. Deaver (and daughters)
1938 - 1952	Tenant families
1952 - 1984	Carl and Mae Smith

Architectural History

When the William Deaver House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, it was considered significant as one of the oldest surviving frame houses west of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina. The house also is notable as an important example of a substantial early western North Carolina farm dwelling and for the quality of its finish and detail (Southern, Cross, and Best 1979).

Recent architectural investigation of the house has produced considerable new evidence for the construction of the house (Koenig, Brandt, and Bull 1990) and the interpretations presented in the National Register Nomination Form are currently being revised (John Horton, personal communication). Architectural studies (Swaim and Reidinger 1989; Koenig, Brandt, and Bull 1990) have identified three distinct stages in the evolution of the Deaver House, based on stylistic and structural evidence. In this report, the date ranges proposed by the architects have been modified to reflect not only architectural evidence but also the additional historical and archaeological information uncovered during this investigation.

Stage I (c.1820-1840s)

The original portion of the Deaver House (the south half of the existing structure) was a two-story timber-frame house