

THE VAN DER VEER HOUSE

When the first lots in Bath were sold, they were not designated by number, and, because the acreage for the town did not divide evenly, each lot contained one-half acre and four poles. Waterfront property was usually considered as an extension of the lots with no additional cost to the purchaser.¹ On October 1, 1706, John Lawson and Joel Martin, Commissioners of Bath, sold the lot on which the Van Der Veer House was later built to Thomas Sparrow. Consideration for the lot and front was one pound.²

Sparrow constructed a dwelling house on his lot even though the earliest deeds for lots in Bath carried no clause for repossession upon failure to improve the property. Less than a year later, he moved to Maryland.³ He retained ownership of the lot but authorized his personal property to be sold at public auction.⁴ An inventory of that sale is appended to this report. Sparrow died in 1717, and his executor, Thomas Harding, transferred the town lot to Edward Moxley of Albemarle County for £30.⁵

While the property was in Sparrow's possession, the 1715 Assembly passed new regulations regarding the sale of lots in Bath. No lot was to be more than one-half acre, and a habitable house had to be constructed within one year or the sale was considered null and void. The lots were to be resurveyed and any person previously granted front property had to pay ten shillings to retain it.⁶

Apparently Sparrow complied with the provisions of the 1715 law. A portion of the deed from Harding to Moxley reads as follows:

. . . all that lot or parcel of land in Bath Town belonging to the said Thomas Sparrow, which the said Thomas Sparrow formerly dwelt on, bounded to the So. ward on the lots where John Porter now dwelleth, to the So. ward on the land belonging to the said John Porter, and to the Mt. ward on the Town creek, together with all right & privileges of front, landing places, ways . . . with all & singular, the houses, edifices, standing & being thereon.

A map of the town plan of Bath, copied from an earlier 1766 plan, clearly

identifies Hoesley's property as Lot 32, even though that numbered designation was not part of the deed description until 1776.⁸

Hoesley probably enjoyed the most prestige of the owners of Lot 32. During his long and often controversial career, he served as a member of the Colonial Council, treasurer of the province, speaker of the Assembly, and surveyor general.⁹ Hoesley was related to the Porter family of Bath and, at some point between 1717 and 1738, he transferred the lot and front, in a deed of gift, to his "kinsman, John Porter."¹⁰ On May 2, 1738, Porter sold a "certain lot of land & front lying in Bath Town at the upper end thereof . . . commonly known by the name of town point" to Simon Alderson. The consideration was £40 current money.¹¹

An examination of the plan of Bath, at this point, would suggest that the property called town point could not be the same as Lot 32 since they are at opposite ends of town. According to the plan, Lot 32 should be called ferry point.¹² There are, however, several factors indicating that someone may have switched the labels on the town plan, perhaps during one of the several copyings of the original drawing. Firstly, the deed from Porter to Alderson refers to a lot at the "upper end" of town.¹³ One generally would consider "upper end" to be that higher ground which extended northward from the confluence of Back and Bath creeks.

Secondly, the Sauthier Map of 1769 reveals that the post road from Edenton to Bath entered town through the town gate at the northeast corner, passed down present Carteret Street, then swung south down Bay (Water) Street towards the southern point, indicating that the ferry may have been located there.¹⁴ The southernmost point certainly would have been a more logical choice for a crossing of old Town Creek because the approach to the ferry would have been on more level ground. The Sauthier Map shows a rather steep embankment on the waterfront section of Lot 32.¹⁵

Thirdly, the northern boundary for Lot 32 was also part of the town's

northern boundary line which extended from King Street west to the point. The designation "town point" in that area would have made far more sense than at the southern end of Bath which was completely surrounded by water.¹⁶ Furthermore, none of the transactions involving Lot 32 and front mention the presence of a ferry or crossing.

The theory that ferry and town points were switched, based on the above reasons, is conjecture and without substantive evidence. Standing alone they can be challenged; however, a page by page check of all deeds conveying property in the town of Bath between 1705 and 1800 supports the conclusion that the lot referred to in the deed from Fortier to Alderson is indeed Lot 32.¹⁷

Alderson owned "town point" for over thirty years, but whether or not he ever lived on the property is uncertain. He was residing in the county when he sold the lot to William Brown on September 2, 1769. Brown paid only \$12 proclamation money for the land, indicating a substantial drop in value from the £40 selling price in 1736.¹⁸ The structures mentioned in earlier deeds must have been destroyed or else deteriorated to the point of little value by 1769. The Santhier Map shows no dwelling house in the vicinity of Lot 32.

William Brown was very prominent in North Carolina though he has not received the recognition afforded other North Carolinians. Brown was a major in the Beaufort County Militia and very active in politics. He represented the borough of Bath in the Assembly in 1774 and 1775 and joined the Whig cause at the onset of the American Revolution. He attended all five provincial congresses as a borough representative from Bath. Afterwards he was among the first representatives in the House of Commons (1777-1780). Brown was elected state senator from Beaufort County in 1781 and held office until 1783.¹⁹ He and his wife Sarah lived in the town of Bath, but probably not on Lot 32.

William and Sarah Brown held the property for only four months before selling it to Major Roger Ormond on January 10, 1770, for £22.06.02.²⁰ Lot 57 was

included in the sale which accounts for the higher selling price. Less than six weeks later Grand conveyed Lot 32 to Phineas Latham for £40 proclamation money.²¹

Little is known about Phineas Latham. He appears to have been married with several children in 1790, and since he had to be twenty-one to purchase property in 1770, he must have been born in 1749 or earlier.²² As late as 1791, he still lived on his plantation in Beaufort County;²³ the records are unclear regarding any possible residency in Bath. He may have died intestate in possession of the property, but this is also uncertain. There is no recorded will for Latham, nor does Lot 32 appear in the deed books for the years 1770-1800. Whether by deed, sheriff's sale, or other means, the lot next appears in the estate of Doctor Ephraim Whitmore in 1802.²⁴

Although the Whitmore family was prominent in Bath before the Revolution, there apparently were no male members left in Beaufort County by 1790.²⁵ Ephraim Whitmore came to Bath sometime between 1790 and 1795 and began the purchase of town lots.²⁶ Since no Whitmore appears in the 1800 Census as a Beaufort County resident, and since his estate was being settled two years later, it must be assumed that Whitmore died before the 1800 Census was taken. At the time of his death, Ephraim Whitmore's property in Bath consisted of four lots which included a "House & Lott lying in the town of Bath No 32."²⁷

Sometime between Latham's purchase of Lot 32 in 1770 and Whitmore's death, a house (later called the Van Der Veer House) was constructed on the lot.²⁸ Several facts, however, possibly help to reduce the time span for construction. A specialist in the restoration of old homes examined the earliest architectural features of the house in 1964 and ascribed a ca. 1790 construction date.²⁹ This would indicate that either Phineas Latham or Ephraim Whitmore were the builder. Latham owned Lot 32 for more than twenty years, yet the tax list and deed records indicate that he remained a county planter, particularly in the years around 1790.³⁰

Since Latham's children in 1790 apparently ^{were} under sixteen years of age, he probably did not build a house for one of them.³¹ It also seems unlikely, though not impossible, that a fine gambrel roof house would have been constructed for lease purposes. The likely responsibility for construction of the house thus falls to Doctor Ephraim Whitmore.

Ephraim Whitmore's name does not appear in the 1790 Census, but he definitely can be placed in the county by 1795.³² As was mentioned earlier, he appears to have died before the 1800 Census was completed for Beaufort County; thus he must have built the house during the mid-to-late 1790s. A safe choice for a probable construction date would be ca. 1795.³³

Lot 32 was inherited by Jonathan Whitmore, obviously a relative of Ephraim Whitmore, who failed to meet his financial obligations. A sheriff's sale on June 12, 1802, transferred Lot 32 and three others to Alderson Ellison for \$250.³⁴ That same day Ellison sold all the property to Jonathan and Daniel March for exactly the same consideration, thus indicating that Ellison probably acted as a March agent in the transaction.³⁵

The March family was a very prominent one in Bath and Beaufort County, but whether any of them ever lived in the house on Lot 32 is uncertain, as is the length of time Jonathan and Daniel March owned the property. Sometime between 1802 and 1824, Thomas and Henry Ormond became the proprietors of Lot 32.³⁶ The Ormond family was also very prominent in Bath, and the property may have changed hands through marriage, but existing records make it very difficult to verify the possibility.³⁷

On October 19, 1824, Thomas and Henry Ormond deeded the property to Joseph Bonner for \$300.³⁸ It was at that time called the "Whitmore Lot," giving further indication that Whitmore may have built the house and lived there. The day after purchase, Bonner sold the house and lot, for the amount of his purchase, to Jacob

Van Der Veer from whom the house took its name.³⁹

Jacob Van Der Veer was born about 1792 and married about 1824.⁴⁰ By 1830 he owned considerable property in and around Bath and counted eight slaves among his possessions. One free Negro between the ages of ten and twenty-four was also attached to his household.⁴¹ Van Der Veer was one of the founders of the Bank of Washington (1831) and obviously an influential man in the community.⁴² He lived in the house for twelve years and made some significant changes, among which were new casings on the first floor doors and windows and new mantles throughout the house.⁴³ Jacob Van Der Veer sold the house and lot to William Harvey for \$1,000 on December 28, 1834.⁴⁴ The high selling price suggested major improvement.

Harvey died in possession of the property. Lot 32 with the Van Der Veer House passed to Mary Ann Harrow, wife of Thomas Harrow and possibly the daughter of William Harvey. Mary Ann Harrow lived on the premises for a short time after her husband's death and then sold it to Benjamin F. Styrone for \$800. About forty acres of land north of town were included in the sale.⁴⁵

The Van Der Veer House changed hands rather rapidly for the quarter century after 1850. During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Lot 32 was owned successively by Benjamin Styrone, William Gaylard, Matilda Robinson, and Martha Hammond.⁴⁶ On November 20, 1874, Martha and G. A. Hammond conveyed Lot 32, the front to Lot 31, and forty-two acres north of Bath to William H. Beasley.⁴⁷

Beasley owned the land for eighteen years before financial difficulties forced him to sell the property to George H. Brown, Jr. For much of that time, he made his home in the Van Der Veer House which, along with his other lands, became known as the W. H. Beasley Plantation.⁴⁸ William H. Beasley's son, John, attempted to return the property to the family through purchase in 1894, but soon found himself in a financial bind that forced him to relinquish the plantation. On September 30, 1901, George H. Brown, Jr., became the owner of Lot 32 for the

second time.⁴⁹ Sometime within the next twenty-one months, Wesley Festles obtained the property and quickly sold it to J. D. Eborn on June 23, 1903. The consideration was \$4,000.⁵⁰ Eborn held the plantation tract for sixteen years before selling to Charles W. Bowen for \$5,000.⁵¹

The 43-acre tract with Lot 32 and the front to Lot 31 had been sold as a unit for more than half a century. The 1863 price of \$4,000 had risen to \$5,000 by 1919 despite intermittent fluctuations caused by unstable economic conditions.⁵² Although the inclusion of other properties make difficult any documentary signs of improvement to the Van Der Veer House and grounds, the increase in value does not appear to reflect any major changes. Perhaps deterioration offset improvements as the house's age passed the century mark, but the only apparent period of major renovation before 1919 seems to have occurred during the years 1834 to 1836.

Charles W. Bowen made the greatest changes in the Van Der Veer House. Extensive carpentry work was done in the mid 1920s. Perhaps at that time, the gambrel roof structure was converted into a full two story dwelling with two additional one story wings. The interior was vastly altered leaving little surface evidence of its original appearance.⁵³ Much renovation was probably necessary since the house was about 100 years old in 1925 and nearly a century had passed since the last major improvement.

Charles Bowen died on February 3, 1960, and his daughter, Ruth Bowen Smith, inherited the house and lot in Bath known as part of the Bowen Farm.⁵⁴ Ruth Smith donated the old Van Der Veer house to the Beaufort County Historical Society on July 15, 1968, with the understanding that it would be removed from the property.⁵⁵ The Van Der Veer House was relocated to its present site within the Historic Bath State Historic Site on December 22, 1970.⁵⁶ The state already had received title to the property on February 2, 1970.⁵⁷ The Office of Archives

and History, with the assistance of the Historic Bath Commission, Inc., began restoration of the exterior in 1972. That phase of the restoration is now complete. The Division [Formerly the Office] of Archives and History and the Historic Bath Commission are working cooperatively to complete the interior so that the structure may be furnished and interpreted as a historic house museum.

FOOTNOTES

1. Beaufort County Deed Books, originals (1-30) now in State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Deed Book 1, pp. 56-63, 66-67, 69, 80, 94, 124, 184, 188, 191-192, 194, 196, 213-221, 223-226, 229-233, 243, 246, 248, 250, 277, and 425, hereinafter cited as Beaufort County Deed Book.
2. Beaufort County Deed Book 1, p. 49.
3. Sparrow had come to North Carolina from Arundel County, Maryland, and established himself as a merchant in Bath. He returned to Maryland in 1704. Beaufort County Deed Book 1, p. 60 (John Lawson and Joel Martin to Thomas Sparrow), p. 64 (Thomas Sparrow to George Birkenhead), and p. 222 (Thomas Harding to Edward Mosley).
4. Beaufort County Deed Book 1, pp. 64-65.
5. Beaufort County Deed Book 1, p. 222.
6. Law of North Carolina, 1713, c. LII, s. III, V, and IX.
7. Beaufort County Deed Book 1, p. 222. See also Deed Book 1, p. 213, Bath Commissioners to Thomas Sparrow, for compliance with law regarding waterfront property.
8. The original town plan of 1717 was apparently lost sometime after the 1766 copy was made. The plan was copied a second time in 1807 from the 1766 version. In May, 1960, another draft, including names of lot owners in 1717, was prepared from the 1807 copy. The names are in accordance with the deed records. "Plan of Bath Town, August 23, 1807, Showing Lot Owners 25 March to 1 October 1717," copied May 1960 from draft dated August 23, 1807, by James E. Mayle who in turn had copies from draft dated February 28, 1766, by John Poston. "Dy. Surv." Draft of 1807 in John Gray Mount Papers, F.C. 193, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Hereinafter cited as Bath Town Plan. The names appearing on the Bath Town Plan were checked against the entries for the town of Bath in Beaufort County Deed Books 1, 2, 3, and 4. See index for Beaufort County Deeds, 1700-1800, for appropriate pages.
9. William L. Saunders (ed.), The Colonial Records of North Carolina (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), IV, vii-viii, hereinafter cited as Saunders, Colonial Records.
10. The original deed of gift was apparently unregistered and subsequently lost by Porter. The transaction is mentioned by Mosley in a statement to the court whereby he acknowledged relinquishment of his rights and title to the property. Beaufort County Deed Book 2, p. 303.
11. Beaufort County Deed Book 2, p. 302.

12. See Bath Town Plan in Appendix D-2.
13. Beaufort County Deed Book 2, p. 302. See also Alderson to Brown in Beaufort County Deed Book 4, p. 238.
14. "Plan of the Town and Port of Bath in Beaufort County North Carolina [Reference omitted] Survey'd and Drawn in May 1769. By C. J. Southier. Original in British Museum, London, King George III Topographical Collection, Table XVII, 33, hereinafter cited as Southier Map. Photostatic copy available in State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
15. Southier Map. See partial copy in Appendix D-1.
16. See Bath Town Plan and Southier Map. See also Appendices D-1, D-2, and D-3.
17. A deed by deed check of entries in Beaufort Deed Books 1-8 leaves no doubt as to the location of the property referred to as "town point." It is possible that a clerical error in naming the point could have been perpetuated in subsequent transactions; however, the records show no signs of the legal complications that would have resulted with the owners of lots 6 and 7. See Bath Town Plan in Appendix D-2.
18. Beaufort County Deed Book 2, p. 302; and Deed Book 4, p. 238.
19. Saunders, *Colonial Records*, IX, 1236, 1237; X, 306, 330; and R. D. W. Connor (comp. and ed.), *A Manual of North Carolina . . . 1733* (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission [Division of Archives and History], 1913), 344, 389, 494, and 861 fn.
20. Beaufort County Deed Book 4, p. 261.
21. Beaufort County Deed Book 4, p. 257.
22. Calculations based on statistics in *First Census of The United States, 1790*, printed in Walter Clark (ed.), *The State Records of North Carolina* (Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 16 volumes, numbered XI-XXVI, 1893-1906), XXVI, 269, hereinafter cited as *First Census, 1790*, with appropriate page.
23. See Phineas Latham to James Daniel, Beaufort County Deed Book 6, p. 450.
24. No record of the transaction was found. All deeds listing Phineas Latham, or other Lathams, as grantor were checked without success. If recorded, the deed apparently has been lost. Verification of Whitmore's ownership appears in the sale of the property by Sheriff Stephen Owens in 1802. The lot was listed as "the property of Ephraim Whitmore, dec'd, now in hands of Jonathan Whitmore, heir of Ephraim Whitmore." Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 146.
25. Apparently the Whitmore family was associated with another well known house in Bath. According to historical facts accumulated by the late Edmund Harding, "The Marsh (Palmer-Marsh) House was built in 1744 for Mr. and Mrs. Whitmore by Monsieur Coutanche." Edmund Harding Scrapbook, E 98.1 F, microfilm copy in State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, pages not numbered, hereinafter cited as Harding Scrapbook; and *First Census, 1790*, pp. 234-269.

26. See Beaufort County Deed Book 7, p. 174, for sale of Lot 46 to Ephraim Whitmore of Beaufort County.
27. Second Census of the United States, 1800; Beaufort County, North Carolina, 1800; Of Houselands, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; and Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 160.
28. See property descriptions for Lot 32 in Beaufort County Deed Book 4, p. 137, and Deed Book 13, p. 160. See also Santhier Map in Appendix B-1. For a probable construction date based on remaining architectural features, see A. L. Honeycutt, Jr., "Vandervier [old spelling] House, Bath, North Carolina, Report 1" (June 10, 1949), 3, hereinafter cited as Honeycutt, "Vandervier House Report." A copy of the report is in Appendix K.
29. Honeycutt, "Vandervier House Report," 3.
30. Beaufort County Tax Lists, 1786, 1789, microfilm of originals in State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; and Beaufort County Deed Book 6, p. 438.
31. First Census, 1790, p. 169.
32. First Census, 1790, pp. 254-269; and Beaufort County Deed Book 7, p. 174.
33. The ca. 1795 date reflects the earliest date that Whitmore can definitely be placed in the county. It is also the midway point for the decade during which Whitmore resided in Beaufort County. See Beaufort Deed Book 7, p. 174; and Deed Book 13, p. 160.

The theory that Ephraim Whitmore built the house is predicated on the assumption that the property passed directly from Latham to Whitmore. If there were intervening owners, they do not appear in the deed records for the years 1770 to 1800. See Beaufort County Deed Books 1-8 in their entirety.
34. Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 160.
35. Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 481.
36. A search for the method of transfer was unsuccessful; however, Thomas and Henry Oswald were in possession of the lot by October 19, 1824. See Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 332.
37. Marriage records for Beaufort County date back only to 1847. The estates records are incomplete, and the St. Thomas Vestry Register begins in 1908. Beaufort County Records, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
38. Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 332.
39. Beaufort County Deed Book 13, p. 349.
40. Calculated from age statistics quoted in the censuses of 1820, 1830, and 1840, and the requirement that a person be twenty-one years of age to purchase property. The Federal Census of 1820 in North Carolina (Tallahassee, Tenn: Dorothy William Fetter, 12 volumes, 1971), I, Beaufort County, 42; Fifth Census of the United States, 1820; Beaufort County, North Carolina,

Heads of Households, 215, hereinafter cited as Fifth Census, 1840; and Sixth Census of the United States, 1840: Beaufort County, North Carolina, Heads of Households, 265.

41. Fifth Census 1840, p. 215.
42. C. Wingate Reed, Beaufort County: Two Centuries of Its History (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1907), 173.
43. Honeycutt, "Yandervier House Report," 1.
44. Beaufort County Deed Book 20, p. 155.
45. Beaufort County Deed Book 20, p. 431; and Deed Book 21, p. 403.
46. Beaufort County Deed Book 21, p. 403; Deed Book 32, p. 305; Deed Book 34, p. 2; and Deed Book 41, p. 62.
47. Beaufort County Deed Book 41, p. 393.
48. Beasley was indebted to the firm of Baugham and Bragan and placed his property in a deed of trust on March 10, 1893. He was unable to pay his debts and George Brown bought the property at public auction for \$3,000 on March 12, 1894. Beaufort County Deed Book 86, p. 289. See also J. E. Beasley to J. E. Small, Beaufort County Deed Book 89, p. 153.
49. Beaufort County Deed Book 89, p. 155; and Deed Book 114, p. 180.
50. No record of the transfer from Brown to Fashien was found, but he obviously received a clear title as indicated by the unencumbered sale to Ehorn. Beaufort County Deed Book 121, p. 535.
51. Beaufort County Deed Book 208, p. 262.
52. The intervening prices fluctuated with the economy of the times, but there were no severe increases or declines. See Beaufort County Deed Book 32, p. 305; Deed Book 34, p. 2; Deed Book 41, pp. 62 and 392; Deed Book 86, p. 289; Deed Book 114, p. 180; Deed Book 121, p. 535; and Deed Book 208, p. 262.
53. Honeycutt, "Yandervier House Report," 1-2.
54. Beaufort County Will Books, Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Beaufort County Courthouse, Washington, North Carolina, Book 8, p. 364.
55. Beaufort County Deed Book 648, p. 636; Harding Scrapbook.
56. Greenville Reflector, December 23, 1970. See also Appendixes D-4 and D-5.
57. Beaufort County Deed Book 651, p. 37.