

YATES TAVERN - circa 1750

National Register of Historic Places - 1974

Virginia Historic Register

LOCATED ½ mile South of Gretna, VA., west side of Route 29 Business

The date of Yates Tavern is set at 1750 because of court records. An entry in the 1778 Court Order Book named it as Yates Old House, and an old house in 1778 could easily be about 25 years old in a county formed 1767 from Halifax. Again in 1802 "*On motion of Jesse Robertson leave is granted to him to turn the road from Richard Farthing's along the old road by Yates Old House.*" Robertson and Farthing were neighbors and the Pigg River Road ran from Peytonsborg in the east to Smith Mountain in the west. Records of 1813 include Stephen Yates who paid tax for "an ordinary at his house" on that road.

The jetties, or the approximate 10 inch overhang front and back of the tavern, make it unique. It is the only dwelling in Virginia with jetties known to the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. The purpose of jetties is to give room on the second floor, a device from Elizabethan England which was very popular in early colonial homes. The jetty was first developed in medieval England where space was a premium in the walled cities and towns. NOTE: Under each jetty is a strip of original siding from the Tavern, left its aged color when it was restored 1976 by Pittsylvania County Supervisors, National Park Service, & Dewitt Wallace of *Reader's Digest*. Nannie Bennett Cocke donated this property which is now owned by Pittsylvania County with oversight of the Pittsylvania Historical Society.

The rest of the siding was rotten and had to be replaced with a siding made to match it. However, when the original siding was torn off, the hand wrought nails were saved and used in nailing back the new material. The Tavern is painted white, its original color. NOTE: Sections of siding were again milled and replaced in 2008/09 by Pittsylvania County, repairs due to termite damage.

The strap hinges on outside doors were matched to one remaining original by Charles Dove, forge foreman for H. H. Calvert. The H & L hinges are authentic, as are the H hinges on the under-stair closet, collected from other old places in the County. Notice the door under the North window of the main room. It is a pass-through for wood kept stacked on the other side. The inside door at the stair, with its cat hole, is original.

The gallery was reconstructed by architectural evidence with its shelves and lock room.

The paneling in the main room is all original – beaded pine. The beams are also beaded pine. The handsome mantel was made from an old joist and weighs about 60 pounds. Its twin is in the basement.

The small room adjoining the main room may have been used as a private bedroom for the master and mistress, with the children piled into the loft room above. Notice the trap door as well as the stair closet.

The two-room loft displays collar beams which are possibly the most impressive feat of restoration. Moved from another old jetty building on property of Hugh Davis at Laurel Grove, it was so carefully taken apart that slotted and notched beams were put back in place here with the 200 year-old pegs reinserted. The loft floor and main floor came from the same Davis house and a cabin of Sarah McNeal at Red Oak Hollow. Other old material reused was from Danville's Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Lee Junior School, the Rodenhizer house, and other sites.

The English basement has rock walls two feet thick. A ladder leads to a trap door on the main floor. The outside door is original, as you see it now, from structural evidence. At the time of reconstruction, it had been moved to a new opening on the east end and the trap door had been nailed over. The floor is soapstone, much used in Pittsylvania during this building period. It was hand cut in the county, then cut again to fit. Virtually all early houses had a rock half-basement like this, needed for protection and defense against Indians. Also a string of block houses, or forts,

were built. One was nearby, as were Indian campgrounds and Saponi Town at the Otter River, 12 miles away (near Altavista). The beautiful chimney was completely rebuilt with the same rocks and bricks, for fireplaces six feet wide.

The old family cemetery is located on the South of the circular driveway, also maintained by Pittsylvania County.