

The Floyd Press

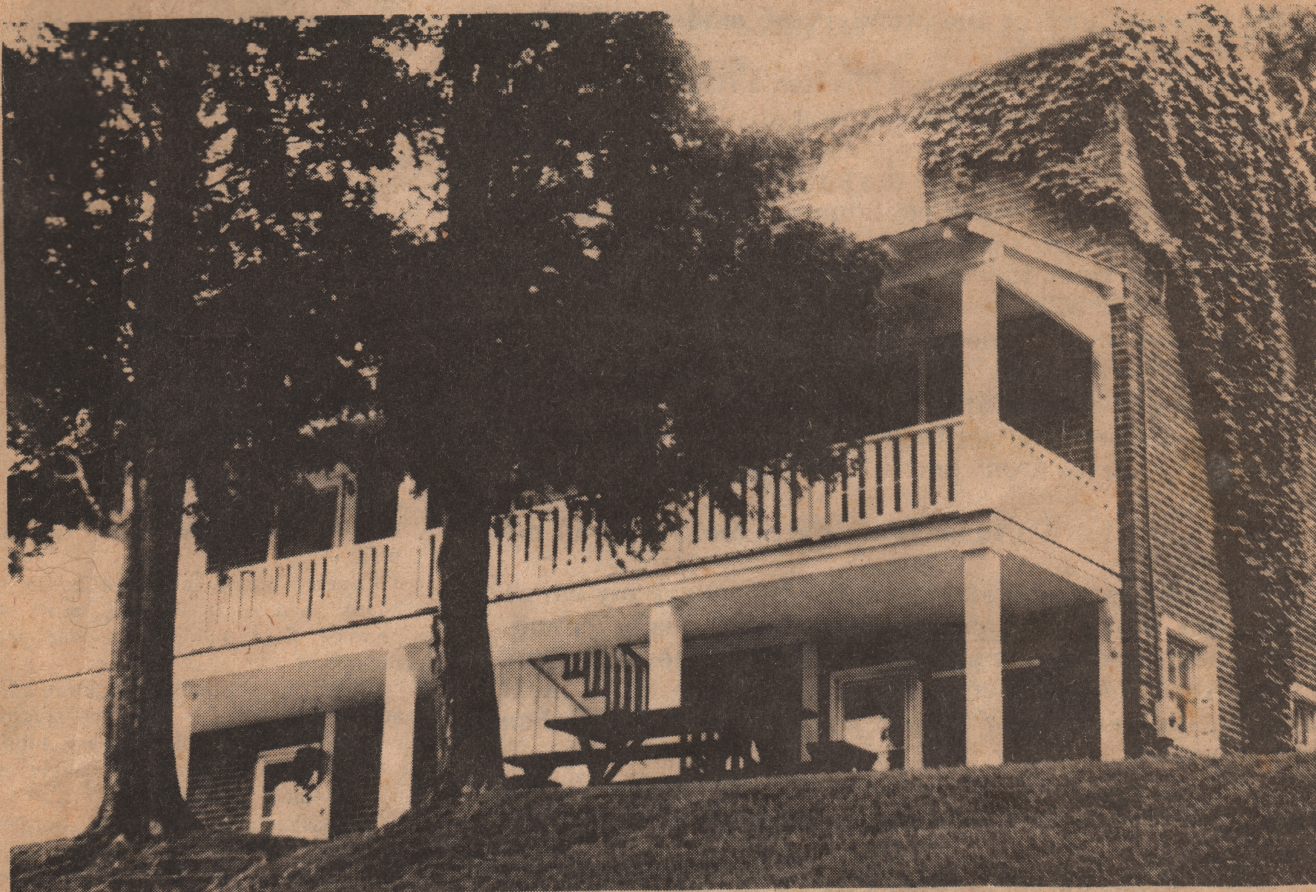
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'Seven Oaks'

The H. G. Thompson home in Copper Hill is complemented by the double porch built before the Civil War and by handmade bricks which frame the house.

Historic House Holds Memories from 1800's

by Wanda Combs

Not many houses in the county can claim a history dating back to the 1800's. One Copper Hill house, however, can make such a claim.

According to a date inscribed on a chimney, the house was built in 1854.

When the current owners, Mr. and Mrs. H.G. Thompson, bought the house in 1971, they were interested in finding out more about its history. They began to read county records and to talk to anyone who might know something about the old plantation. Their investigation turned up some rather interesting facts.

The house apparently was built by Peter Guerrant, who served as the first sheriff of Floyd County.

Guerrant came from Franklin and brought land here in the 1820's before this area became Floyd County. He was a bachelor who evidently had much land and slaves," Thompson stated.

Guerrant died in 1859, only five years after the house had been built, and was buried on his property. Sometime after his death, the house was sold to two people--Reynolds and Aldridge, who later sold it to John O. Jack of Roanoke. An old mill, still standing today, continues to be known as Jack's Mill.

Around the 1890's, Jack sold the house to Augustus Sowder. In 1917 the Charles Janney family bought the house and lived in it until his death. The property was then divided among the Janney children. Cornealis Tarpley later bought the house, and in 1971, the Thompsons purchased the house and became its first occupants since the Janneys died.

The Thompsons discovered that the three-story house itself was constructed of bricks made by the slaves on the property. The house is a solid brick one, consisting of eighteen-inch walls. Wood was used only for the floors and joists.

Thompson added, "The first story was the working floor. It had a big fireplace. The second and third stories were living quarters."

The first story also had another interesting facet--the "dark room."

"I have heard it said that they put unruly slaves in there to punish them. When Guerrant was sheriff, people said he kept prisoners in there overnight on the way to the Floyd jail," Thompson commented.

One room in the house was thought to have been used by the Janneys as a post office.

When the Thompsons bought the house, there was much work to be done. Since the house had been unoccupied for such a long period of

time, repairs were needed. For instance, the double porch on the front of the house had to be restored. Using pictures they had and old banisters they were able to find still intact, the Thompsons restored the porch to what they thought it might have looked like when it was first constructed.

Mrs. Thompson said the upper porch had special significance to Guerrant, who liked to sit there and watch the slaves work.

First story floors that had rotted over the years also had to be built. The six fireplaces had to be opened.

"We have enjoyed the old house and fixing it up," Mrs. Thompson stated.

Thompson added, "We tried to make it comfortable, too, adding in wall-to-wall carpet and other things. We know this was not the way it was back when the house was built, but then comfort was not one of their major concerns."

The Thompson, who have three children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, have added their own personal touches including the name "Seven Oaks," in recognition of the trees surrounding the house.

The house, which has been on the Roanoke Valley Historical Society and the New River Valley Historical Society tours, is now up for sale.

"We want to move to a warmer climate," Mrs. Thompson explained.