

NORTH BEDFORD COUNTY

GUIDE FOR BUS TOUR

RUCKER REUNION JUNE 10-12, 1994

Text and Photographs by Lewis M. White

Photograph of William Rucker House by Joe Sites

Guide for North Bedford County Tour

The bus tour today will take us through country in which Ruckers and their relations have lived since the 18th century. The guide will comment on various places of interest along the route. The accompanying map shows their locations.

Our first stop will be at **Poplar Forest**, which Thomas Jefferson, who knew the Ruckers, built as a place to get away from the crowds which besieged him at Monticello. He began building Poplar Forest in 1806 when he was serving his second term as president and visited the place three or four times a year. The 4,800 acre plantation, which he inherited from his father-in-law in 1773, was a major source of his income. He wrote his "Notes on the State of Virginia" at Poplar Forest. The house was completed by 1812 when he was 69 years old. He left the property to his grandson Francis Eppes. For many



Poplar Forest

years Poplar Forest was privately owned and altered to some extent. Since 1984 it has been owned by a nonprofit corporation and has been open to the public. Work is in progress to return it to its original state.

After leaving Poplar Forest we will go a short distance on Rt. 221 toward Bedford and then turn right on Rt. 663, the Perrowville Road (once known as the Tabernacle Road). We will pass the new high school on the right and **St. Stephens Episcopal Church**. The church was built about 1825 by the Rev. Nicholas Cobb, later Bishop of Atlanta. The church was not in use for many years; it was revived in the 1930's. There are no Ruckers buried in the cemetery, but there are a number of their friends and relations. James Monroe Rucker (Jonathan⁵, George⁴, John³, John²,) and Marinda McDaniel (Lodowick⁴, George³, George²) were married here in 1836. The wedding of their daughter Mariamna to Daniel Henry Rucker (William B.⁵, George⁴, John³, John²) also took place here. Another marriage here was that of Captain John Turpin of Charlemont

and Mary Mosby Lambert in 1832. Their daughter Lucy Jane married Warren Rucker, the son of James Monroe and Marinda Rucker, whose old home we will visit in the afternoon.



St. Stephens Episcopal Church

In a few miles we will pass the **Ivy Hill Golf Course** on the right. This was formerly the William Radford farm of about 1,000 acres which Herbert Thomson of Cifax (then living in Chicago) bought in the 1930s. He built a wooden lodge as a first residence and then a brick mansion, which is in the grove of trees. It is probably the largest mansion in Bedford County and one of the largest in Virginia. Herbert was born in Cifax and is related to some of the Ruckers through their common descent from Jeremiah Hatcher.



Ivy Hill

The impressive brick mansion a little farther on the left, **Berkeley**, was built around 1840 by Samuel Henry McGhee. Martha McGhee married Jackson Perrow in 1879. His sister Dolly married Thomas Burgess Rucker (Absolem⁴, Anthony³, John²). In



The Old Rectory

the 1940s it was bought and remodeled by Mr. Gleason, a wealthy inventor of the self starter for automobiles. Mr. Gleason first built a mansion further down the road to Perrowville on the left but this cannot be seen from the road. More recently Berkeley has been owned by the Tom Sweeneys from Campbell County, Virginia.



Berkeley

We will next see a white mansion with columns on the right. This is known as the **Old Rectory** and was built by Waddy Cobb in 1788. It was his nephew who built St. Stephens Church and the Cobb home was its rectory. It was bought and restored some years ago by Clarence White of Forest, a relation of some Rucker kinsmen.

The brick house on the hill to the left, **Elk Hill**, was built in 1797 by Waddy Cobb and remained in the family for five generations. It was given by Waddy Cobb to his daughter Sarah Lewis Cobb and her husband John Alexander. Their daughter Sarah



Elk Hill

Alexander married Dr. Thomas Hugh Nelson, a grandson of Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr. It was bought by the Barnett Hodges in 1928 and was restored by them. The Hodges operated large peach and apple orchards. Waddy Cobb married Margaret Gwatkin, the daughter of Col. Charles Gwatkin of Charlemont, an ancestor of some Ruckers. Col. Charles Gwatkin married Mary Callaway, the daughter of Col. Richard Callaway. (Many of the military titles before the Civil War were obtained by election in the militia.) In the Revolution Col. Gwatkin led a company of volunteers west into Kentucky, then still part of Virginia, to defend the settlers against attacks by Indians fighting with the British.



Glen Alpine
Former Home of Balda McDaniel

Mt. Carmel Methodist Church, at the crossroads, was once on a circuit of four Methodist churches. but declining memberships caused most of them to close. The Ruckers were not members here. We turn right at Mt. Carmel Church on Rt. 644 to go to **North Bedford Baptist Church**. After one turns left on 644 to arrive at the church you can see in about a mile the former home of Balda McDaniel (George³, George²), a Rucker kinsman, on the hill to the right. Balda McDaniel's home, a brick mansion which was much larger than the present frame structure built in 1918, burnt down. Some of its brick



Ivy Chapel

dependencies still remain on the grounds. Going further toward the church we will pass a little interdenominational chapel on a hill that was known as the **Ivy Chapel** when it was in use. This quaint little building has been a landmark in the area since 1872. It served Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians.



North Bedford Baptist Church

The North Bedford Baptist Church was established in 1895 and Waller Rucker (James⁶, Jonathan⁵, George⁴, John³, John²) of Elk Creek was one of the founding members and a

lay preacher. He and his wife Russell McDaniel Rucker (John⁶, James⁵, William⁴, John³, George²) and her parents, John and Emily Arthur McDaniel are buried here. We will have lunch at this church.

After lunch we will proceed a little further on Rt. 644 past the former Hermitage High School (now a private home), which the Ruckers of Elk Creek attended. Vixella Rucker White, daughter of Waller and Russell Rucker, who died at the age of 95 in April of this year, said she used to come by horse on a short cut over the mountains to get to the school. We will arrive at the crossroads known as Coffee, turn right on to 621 and proceed to the entrance of the former home of **Joshua Rucker** (Reuben⁴, Isaac³, John²). Joshua Rucker owned much of the land around here at one time. The home is now owned by Howard and Margaret Belcher, who have graciously invited us to visit this old Rucker homeplace.



Glen Oak
Former home of Joshua Rucker

The old cabin behind the house was very likely the original dwelling before the main house was built.



Old Cabin at Glen Oak

If we were to continue on Rt. 644, also known as Coffee Road, we would pass Trinity Episcopal Church on the left where many of Joshua Rucker's descendants are buried.. Turning left and proceeding on 501 we would come to the Boonsboro Country Club on the right, which was formerly Shalto (the Meriwether-Rucker home). Joshua Rucker's son, John Tinsley Rucker, and his wife came here in their old age to live with their son, John Tinsley Rucker, who married Kate Dawson, a Meriwether descendant.. Another son, William Harris Rucker, married Catherine Bernice Meriwether and inherited Fairfield Oaks, originally part of Shalto. It adjoins Shalto and is now a subdivision known as Fairfield Oaks.



Trinity Episcopal Church



Boonsboro Country Club
Former Rucker-Meriwether home, Shalto

A little further on Rt. 501 one comes to Holcomb Rock Road. The Haysom house on this road was the scene of probably the most sensational murder in Bedford County in recent years. A University of Virginia student, Elizabeth Haysom, talked her German boyfriend into killing her wealthy parents, Derek and Nancy Astor Haysom. A prominent

member of Mrs. Haysom's family was Lady Astor (formerly Nancy Langhorne of Virginia), the first female member of the British parliament. Lady Astor is a descendant of Joseph Callaway, who is also an ancestor of a number of Ruckers.

After leaving Joshua Rucker's home we will backtrack to Perrowville on Rt. 644. (Many place names, like Perrowville, were originally given to communities with a post office and a general store. These were usually at crossroads and the stores and post offices have mostly been closed, but the place names have remained. Places like Perrowville, Cifax, Charlemont, Coffee, and Goode also had their churches and schools, but they have also mostly disappeared. Back in the 1930s and 1940s many of these stores, schools, and churches existed. and provided a focus for community life.)

We will turn right on Rt. 665 and go up the Elk Creek Valley. On our left we will soon see No Business Mountain, which reportedly got its name from some child getting lost there and the comment that he had "no business" going up there. John Rucker (John²) of Amherst began to buy land here in the 1760s and two of his sons, George and William, moved over from Amherst and owned adjoining farms. John also deeded 196 acres on Elk Creek to his son James in 1772, but James left for Kentucky in 1790 and we don't know where he lived in Elk Creek Valley. We will first come to a red house on the left, which



Former William Rucker home

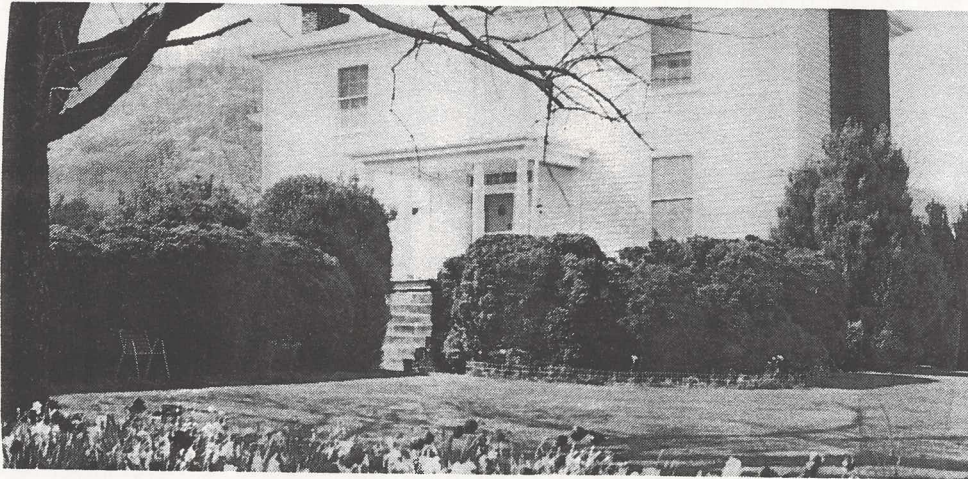
was the **William Rucker** (John³, John²) place. Waller Rucker's sister Marinda married her cousin John Cephas Rucker Jr. (Reuben⁴, Isaac³, John²). His mother was Lucy Rucker (Bernard⁵, William⁴, John³, John²) Marrying cousins was a common practice in those days. John Cephas Rucker, Jr. inherited the place and when Marinda died her three children were taken in by the Waller Ruckers, who owned the old George Rucker place. When John Cephas Rucker, Jr. died in 1914, the farm was bought by William Miller and the Miller family owned it for many years. Close to the road you can see the ruins of an old mill on Elk Creek and a shed which was used as a store as late as the 1930s.

Further up the valley on the left is the George Rucker place, known as **Pleasant Vale**. When owned by his grandson, James Monroe Rucker, it had about 900 acres. James Monroe Rucker, who inherited the place from his father Jonathan Rucker, built the present house in 1856. His wife Marinda McDaniel planted the impressive boxwoods in the yard. The former house, facing Elk Creek, was left standing in the rear for many years and was

called The Office. Their son, Waller Jonathan Rucker, bought out the other heirs. He and his wife Russell McDaniel Rucker spent their entire married life here and raised eight children, four boys and four girls, and the three children of Waller's sister Marinda.

A two-room school, known as the Rucker School, operated for many years opposite the entry to Pleasant Vale. Russell Rucker was the principal. A road ran up into the mountain past the school. In the 1930's the William Spinners lived there, working for the Ruckers. At one time there were farms in these mountains and wagon roads crossed them. A road running past the barns on Pleasant Vale went up to the farm where Miss Betty Leftwich lived. Further up the main road the Ruckers had their apple orchards and a house for the overseer for their farm.

Following the death of Waller, his son Waller James, a widower, continued to live at Pleasant Vale, bringing in the Hatcher family to run the farm and take care of

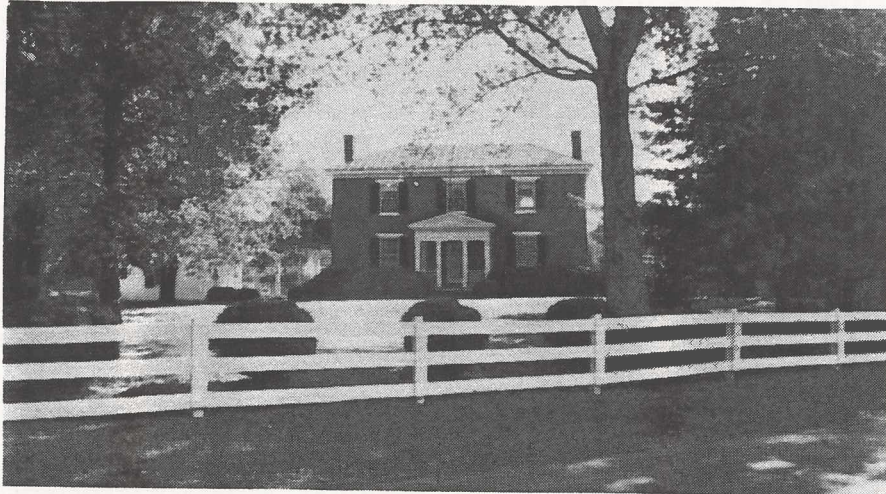


Pleasant Vale
The former George Rucker place

Russell in her old age. Eventually Waller James acquired the farm and sold it to Francis Hatcher in the 1960's. Francis lived most of his life at Pleasant Vale, arriving at an early age with his parents. His widow continues to live there and will be our gracious host during our visit today. Their daughter and her husband live in a modern house they built on the farm.

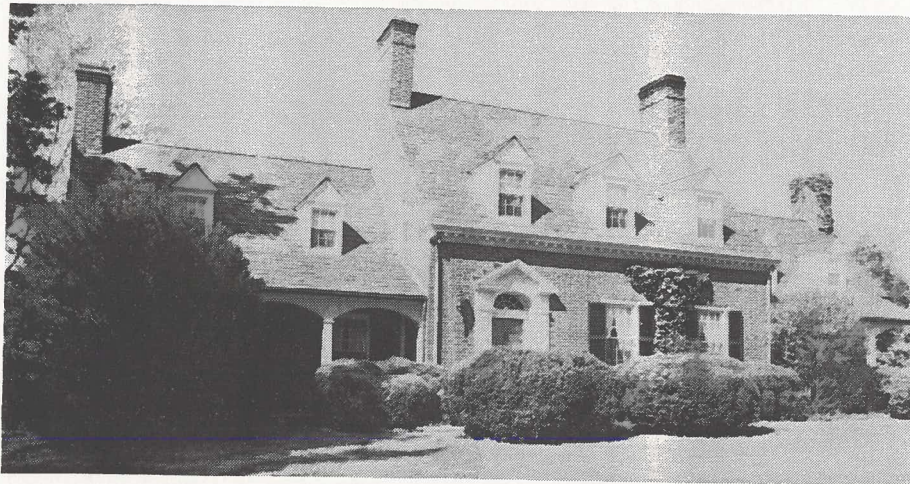
Leaving Pleasant Vale we return to Perrowville, turn right and go about four miles on Rt. 644 to Cifax. After leaving the old abandoned store and crossing the bridge over Elk Creek we will see a house on the right that was formerly the Perrowville Elementary School. In about three miles we will descend a low mountain and round a horseshoe bend coming to what was the Samuel Poindexter plantation, which he bought in 1819. It was about 1300 acres in size and included much of what is now Cifax. Cifax was once known as Sycamore, but there were so many Sycamores that the postal service wanted another name for their post office there. It was named Cifax after one of the horses owned by the Thomsons, who owned the store and ran the post office. As we near the Cifax crossroads we will find a red brick home on the left (**The Cedars**), built in 1855 by Anderson Poindexter, a son of Samuel Poindexter, and inherited by his nephew John Milton White, a veteran of the Confederate Army. His son Edward Henry White and Edward's wife, Laura Turpin White, lived all of their married life here. Their son John Lewis White and his wife

Vixella Rucker, daughter of Waller and Russell Rucker, built the brick house on the right, **Glen Alpine**, in 1937. They had six children. Vixella inherited both of these houses and the farm from Lewis when he died in 1962. Rather than continue to live there alone after his death, she sold both houses and the farm in 1963 and moved to Richmond, where four of her children were living.



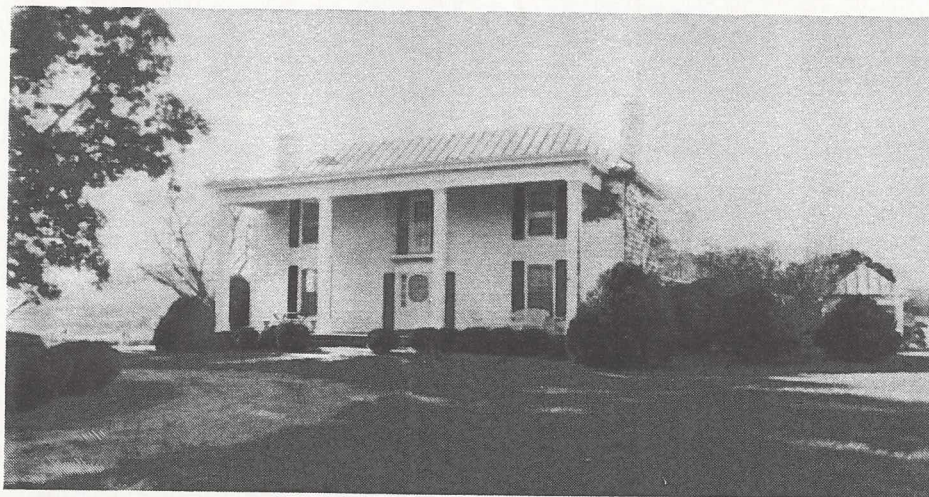
The Cedars
Poindexter/White

Cifax, now just a peaceful crossroads, was once a bustling village with the biggest country store in Bedford County, a blacksmith shop, a sawmill, a patent medicine plant, a tomato cannery, a beef hash cannery, a grist mill, and a barrel stave plant, a school, and a Methodist Church. The general store was owned by Mr. Henry Thomson, who also owned a number of other enterprises in Cifax. It was still operating in the 1930s and 1940s, both buying local products from the farmers and selling. At one time there were three stores at the Cifax crossroads.



Glen Alpine
Lewis and Vixella Rucker White

The houses in Cifax have been researched and the community has been named as Bedford County's first Rural Historic District on the Virginia Landmarks Register. In the 1980s The Cedars was owned by the Raleigh Worshams. Mrs. Bonnie Worsham took an extraordinary interest in the history of the house and the community, and it is primarily due to her efforts that Cifax became a rural historic district on the Virginia Landmarks Register. The Cedars is considered to be the centerpiece of the Historic District. It was used recently to film some of the scenes from the television series "Unsolved Mysteries." This had to do with the Beale Treasure which was buried over a hundred years ago in Bedford County. Treasure hunters have tried to break the code for many years without success. The burial place is believed to be somewhere around Montvale, between Bedford and Roanoke and is believed to be worth about \$21 million. The *Smithsonian Magazine* called the Beale case "one of the largest and most costly treasure hunts in U.S. history."



Former home of Col. William Allen White

The road going to the right at the crossroads leads in about 100 yards to the home of Henry Thomson, the father of Herbert Thomson who built Ivy Hill, which we passed on the Forest-Perrowville Road. He attracted business by staging events such as traveling circuses and shows in the grove of trees opposite his store, which in those days was a beautiful spot. If we continued on this road it would lead to Charlemont and the home of Sallie Spiers White, the mother of the second Mrs. Woodrow Wilson. The house was built around 1806 by her grandfather, Captain Jacob White, who was in the Revolutionary War. Sally Spiers White, a beautiful woman, was the daughter of Col. William Allen White and his second wife Lucy McDaniel Reese. She is a family connection of some Rucker descendants. Jeremiah Hatcher, a Baptist minister, also lived up this road near Mt. Hermon Baptist Church. His daughter Margaret married Jonathan Rucker, the son of George Rucker of Pleasant Vale.

The road to the left, Rt. 643, goes to Goode, the railway depot for Cifax. Leaving the crossroads we continue on 644 for about a quarter of a mile to another crossroads. The road to the right, Rt. 637 goes past the former Cifax School, now a private home, and then the Nazareth Methodist Church, now closed. We will take the left road, Rt. 670, to Big Otter River and then to Bedford on Rt. 221. After about two miles

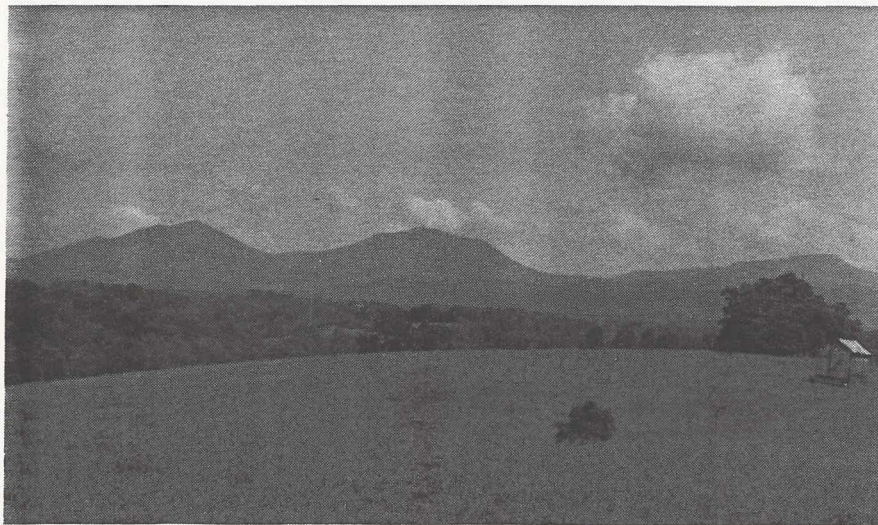
we will pass a white house with columns on the right This was the home of Captain Taylor Fellers, a Bedford County hero who died on the D Day Normandy Beach invasion. Twenty-one Bedford County soldiers died as Company A of the 16th Infantry Regiment led the assault on the beaches of Normandy and two others died with other companies.

A Civil War map by Major General G.F. Gilmer shows a Thompson living in this vicinity. This would be Captain Nelson A. Thompson who married George Rucker's daughter Susan and owned considerable property between Cifax and Big Otter River. We are not sure of the exact location of his property.



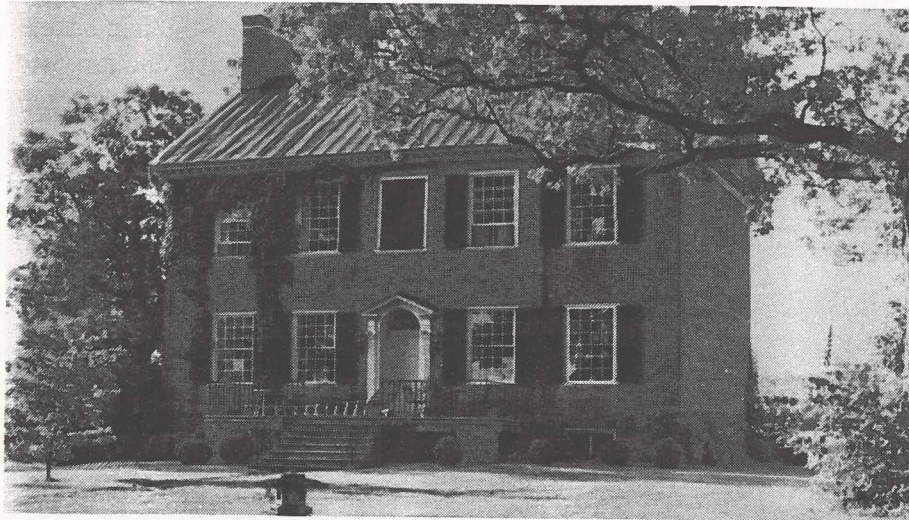
Home of Captain Taylor Fellers

Leaving the Taylor Fellers home we will have a beautiful view of the Peaks of Otter if the weather is clear. It would be worth stopping the buses to allow people to take photos. Jefferson thought the Peaks of Otter were the highest elevation in North America, but in fact they are not even the highest in Virginia. There has been some kind of hotel in



Scenic View of the Peaks of Otter

the pass between Sharp Top and Flat Top for many years. The Peaks of Otter Lodge exists there now on the Blue Ridge Parkway beside a beautiful lake - an excellent place to stay or just to dine if anyone here has the time. One takes the Peaks Road (Rt. 43 North) from Bedford and arrives there in about twenty minutes. Taking this trip one can well appreciate that Bedford County has very beautiful scenery. In about five miles on the left the road passes by a brick home built by Andrew Donald before 1800. This is Fancy Farm, one of the oldest mansions in Bedford County, now owned by a member of the Turpin family from Bedford County



Fancy Farm

We will pass over Big Otter River and go on to Bedford on Rt. 221. Bedford is a beautiful little town of about 6,000. The book "The 100 Best Small Towns in America" by Norman Crampton ranks Bedford as 38th. In 1985 Bedford was designated as one of Virginia's first five Main Street cities. The county seat was first located in New London but moved to Bedford (then named Liberty) in 1782. It is in the heart of the county and has been the home of Ruckers for many years. There have been several generations of Rucker doctors and lawyers in Bedford.



Avenel

We will visit one of the oldest mansions in Bedford, **Avenel**, for some refreshments. The mansion was formerly a plantation house, built in the 1830s by the Burwell family and visited by General Robert E. Lee. It is now in the early stages of restoration and is being used for just such events as our reunion.

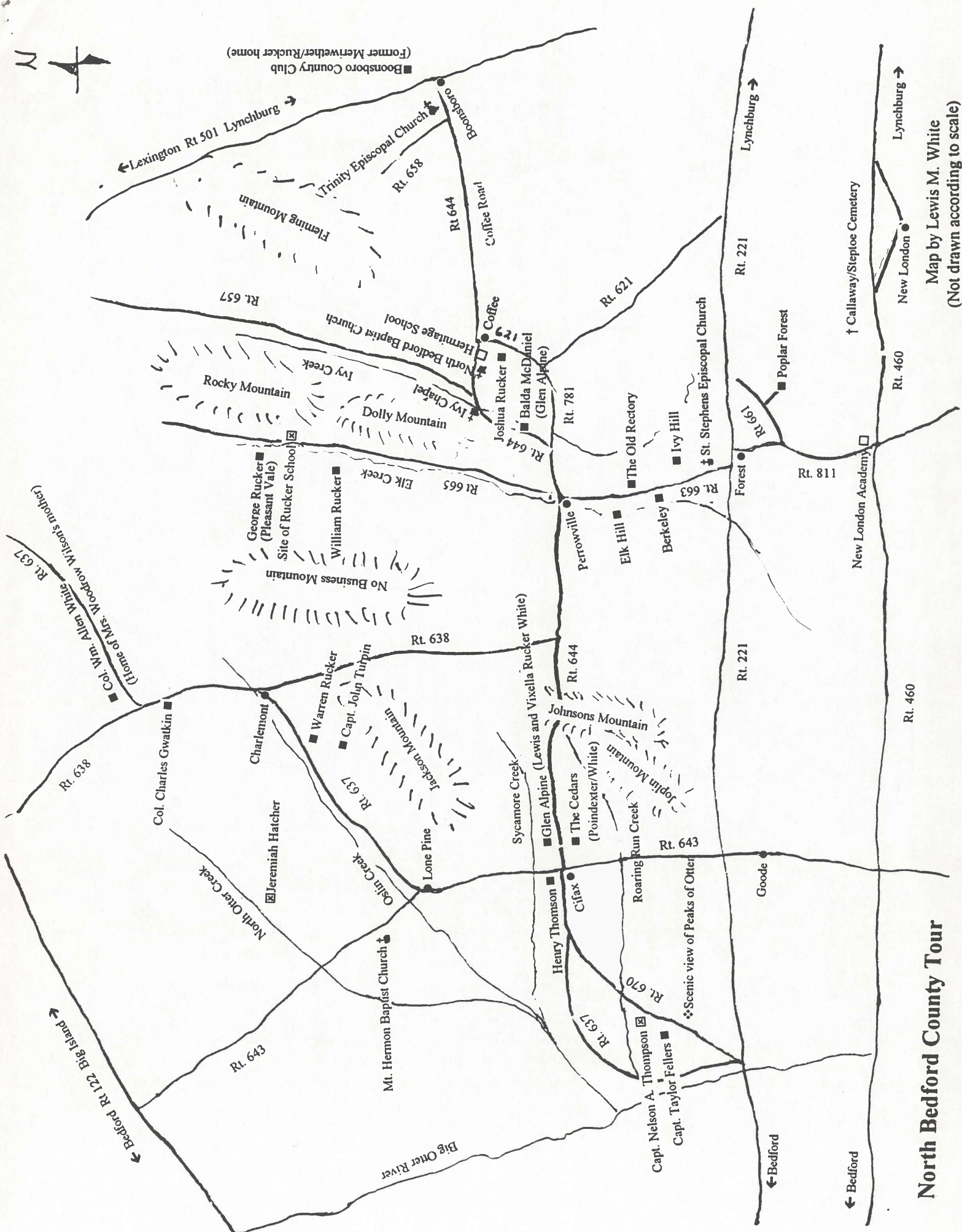
Bedford County did not see very much action in the Civil War. General Hunter led a raid through here coming through the Peaks of Otter gap and going on to Lynchburg. There he was repulsed by General Jubal Early.

Anyone with the time may want to visit on their own the Bedford City/County Museum at 201 East Main Street. The museum "tells the story of the Bedford area in room after room." For those who are interested in genealogy there are records and other materials for research about Bedford and Virginia. They may purchase an historical map of Bedford County, which shows where early settlers, including the Ruckers, lived. They may also be able to purchase here two books by local historian Peter Viemeister: *The Peaks of Otter: Life and Times* and *The Beale Treasure: A History of a Mystery*.

Leaving Bedford on 460 for Lynchburg we will come in about 10 miles on the left to historic New London Academy. It was chartered by the state in 1795. Thomas Jefferson's grandson Francis Eppes attended the school, which was highly regarded by Jefferson. Many Ruckers and their relations attended the school when it was a public high school, the oldest secondary school in Virginia in continuous operation under its own charter. The school is now used as an elementary school with the high school for the area being located on the Perrowville Road, near St. Stephens Church. There is a small museum at the school. The oldest building is the brick building on the right of the modern structure. It is over 150 years old and was used as the home of the principal when it was used as a high school.

The old Callaway/Steptoe cemetery, surrounded by a stone wall, can be seen on the left, about a mile beyond New London Academy. Many of the old families of Bedford County, including some Ruckers, are descended from the Callaways, who were prominent in the Revolutionary War. One of them, Col. Richard Callaway, went west with Daniel Boone and was scalped there by Indians. A county in Kentucky is named after him.

This highway used to pass through the village of New London, an important regional town at the time of the Revolution when it had 70 or 80 houses and Lynchburg was little more than a ferry landing. Thomas Jefferson thought that New London would eventually rival Philadelphia and New York as one of the largest cities in America. It was one of three places he was considering for the University of Virginia. Patrick Henry sometimes argued cases in the courthouse. Only a few houses now remain there, and when Rt. 460 was straightened out a few years ago it bypassed New London.



North Bedford County Tour

Map by Lewis M. White
(Not drawn according to scale)