

## *The Lafayette Hotel*

*By Donald Covey*

Although as we write this, the Lafayette Hotel is once again on the market, the hotel is in the business for which it was intended at its founding over 160 years ago.<sup>1</sup> The present-day hotel entertains tourists and those who are visiting some nearby event for a day or two; and the restaurant serves the entire district. The original tavern served travelers along the Rockingham Turnpike and those who needed to be in Stanardsville for a day or two; and the restaurant served those same people and the local population. The hotel is back in business.

William Stanard succeeded in having the Virginia General Assembly pass an act that declared Stanardsville an unincorporated town in 1794. He proceeded to sell half-acre lots from the 45 acres that he had set aside for his town. He managed to sell only 29 of them during his lifetime. This leaves us with questions. When, and how, were others sold; and how were they numbered? We are fortunate to learn that lot #14, on which the Lafayette Hotel now sits, was probably first sold by William H. Stanard (son of the above William Stanard) to James Blakey in 1834.

Unfortunately we know nothing about the lot to the east except that it was owned by James Blakey in 1834, along with lot #14. These two lots, sometimes sold as 1\_ acres, continued as one parcel through most of their history. They passed through several hands and were finally purchased by Robert Pritchett in 1838. It was he who built the Lafayette Hotel.

We know little about Robert Pritchett as a person. He was, we know, the first Court Clerk in Greene County; and his name is attached to many of those early deeds and trusts. At that time a trust had the same purpose as a mortgage in our day. A trust seems to have been a simple statement in which a debtor placed property in the hands of the County Clerk until the debt was paid. Thus Robert Pritchett knew the financial difficulties of a number of people; and, if property had to be sold to pay a debt, he was at an advantage. Without imputing dishonesty, one notes that he bought a considerable amount of land. Often enough his purchases were relative small; but one can easily find that he purchased over a thousand acres in various transactions.<sup>2</sup>

In the town of Stanardsville he purchased six lots, sometimes including a house, and probably inherited two others.<sup>3</sup> Included in these was the lot on which Pritchett built the Lafayette Hotel; and this enterprise tells us more about the man. In 1835 there were two taverns in Stanardsville<sup>4</sup>, neither of which could have been as imposing as the one that Pritchett was about to build.

At the time Pritchett bought this property, Greene had just been declared a county with Stanardsville as the county seat. The court house would soon be built here. Land purchases would be recorded here. There would be numerous suits between land owners and among family members. Here the sheriff would arrest criminals; they would be imprisoned and tried here. Lawyers would come to accuse or defend. These all would need a place to sleep and eat. Robert Pritchett would provide that accommodation.

The Lafayette Hotel was, and is, a Federal-style brick building three stories in height. Its walls, three layers of brick thick,<sup>5</sup> surround a large central hall and stairway with rooms on either side. On the first floor there was a dining room on the left. Some say that in the earliest days the room to the right was a company store room. A company dealing with merchandise products sent its supply wagons along the road through Stanardsville. Products that the wagons left at the hotel were sold or bartered from that store room. At some later date this became the hotel's room for the sale of alcoholic beverages. On the second floor a ballroom was above the store room or ordinary. A puzzling aspect to this room was a door opening on the west with neither a balcony or an outside stairway (the present second floor balcony was added later.) In its early days the third floor was apparently simply an open sleeping space. Above the three floors a pyramid roof slopes up to a belvedere,<sup>6</sup> which gives a view of the village in all directions. On top of the belvedere is a widow's walk; and extended above it was a bell used to call people to meetings or meals. The hotel was heated by twelve fireplaces, four on each floor. A rather fancy portico was attached to the front of the building facing the road.

The 1\_ acre complex included an annex, built at the southwest corner. This may have been the earliest building on the lot, constructed to house some of those who built on the hotel. The small building now called "*Dacey's Cottage*" and known for years as the "Slave Quarters" still stands to the east; and a small building, probably a tackroom, stands directly behind the hotel. In addition there were a livery stable, a brick office building,<sup>7</sup> and an out-of-door kitchen.<sup>8</sup> At a considerably later date there was a small frame house south of the annex, which housed a meat market at one time.<sup>9</sup>

On September 13, 1855, Robert Pritchett sold the Lafayette Hotel to his son, Robert L. Pritchett.<sup>10</sup> If the record on his tombstone is correct, Robert L. Pritchett died on the following day;<sup>11</sup> but the hotel and the 1\_ acres of land it sat on remained in the Pritchett family. Robert L. Pritchett passed the property on to his three children, Daniel Pritchett, C.C. Pritchett and Lizzie Dora Pritchett, giving one-third to each. (This was subject to the dowry rights of Robert's wife, Laura.) The children were only several years old at the death of their father; and we cannot be absolutely sure when the hotel was turned over to managers.<sup>12</sup> However, James Saunders and his wife, Anamanda, both owned property in Greene County, and James was the Postmaster in Stanardsville from September 23, 1871 until his death in 1880. His wife, "Annie", succeeded him from September 29, 1880 until early 1882<sup>13</sup>. They lived in the hotel where they located the post office; and we can be sure they were managers of the hotel at least during that period.

The hotel played a modest roll in the Civil War. In April of 1862 General Stonewall Jackson ordered General Richard S. Ewell to move his division into Greene County where they would be available to Jackson over in the Shenandoah Valley. The division of 8,500 men was divided in two groups, with about half bivouacked on the eastern edge of Stanardsville. During the short period that they were camped there, Ewell's men contracted some disease (probably typhoid fever). The sick were treated in the basement of the Stanardsville Methodist Church and other available buildings, undoubtedly including the Lafayette Hotel.

There is reason to believe that James Saunders along with Dr. Edwin S. Hunter, who used the "Slave Quarters" as his office for a time and purchased a lot and house in Stanardsville in 1872, attempted to set up a hospital in the hotel.<sup>14</sup> It appears that they were actually trying to create a sort of spa or retreat for people from such places as Charlottesville and Richmond. Perhaps this is what the Saunders were attempting throughout the time they managed the hotel. They made the hotel a small convention center, entertaining groups of presumably learned men: political groups, lodges, and even chess enthusiasts. It is understood that a floor cloth marked as a chess board was placed on the dining room floor enabling every one to follow the moves. (Note the previously mentioned bell at the top of the building which was used to call people together.) The Saunders' daughter, Nettie, celebrated her eleventh birthday at the hotel with all the children of the community. Entertainment included wooden-wheeled skates which were used in the dining room. There was a croquet court approximately where Blakey Street now lies. There were special foods: cheese sticks, a sort of apple dumpling; and it was probably during this time that Friday night oyster dinners became a custom. Within about a year after the death of her husband, Annie Saunders moved to Charlottesville with her mother; and we are left to believe that Magnolia Stephens Blakey became the manager.

In 1887 Francis Marion McMullan began proceedings to gain control of the Lafayette Hotel by purchasing the one-third interest of C.C. Pritchett.<sup>15</sup> In 1888 he purchased the dowry rights of Laura, the widow of Robert Pritchett.<sup>16</sup> In 1889 he purchased the one third interest of Lizzie Dora Kennedy.<sup>17</sup> He was able to obtain only one-half of Daniel Pritchett's one-third interest. Daniel died leaving the remaining one-sixth interest in the Lafayette Hotel to his three children. Perhaps F. M. McMullan became frustrated at not being able to gain control of the hotel, or Magnolia Stephens Blakey knew that she would be the one to get complete control. At any rate, in 1890 McMullan sold his five-sixths interest in the Lafayette Hotel to Magnolia and Robert Blakey for \$1800.<sup>18</sup> In 1891 Magnolia, by means of getting the judge's decision in a suit against the widow of Daniel Pritchett, proceeded to purchase the remaining one sixth interest in the hotel for \$2500. The Lafayette Hotel had been purchased for a total of \$4300<sup>19</sup> and was no longer the property of the Pritchett family.

Magnolia Blakey was an interesting woman. If information coming down to us is correct, she was a dominating personality in the town. George Blakey's name appears on a business card advertising the hotel and on several of the legal documents; but it was almost a necessity in those days to use the husband's name. It was Magnolia who at the trial could show receipts for taxes, insurance, repairs and improvements on the hotel, which she had paid, amounting to nearly \$2,152.80.<sup>20</sup> Considering this rather large amount it is obvious that Magnolia had been managing the hotel for the three owners over a period of some years. She established an apartment for herself and George on the second floor. There is evidence of that apartment to this day.

In 1893 after owning the hotel for little more than 2 years Magnolia Blakey sold it. It subsequently passed through six owners<sup>21</sup> before it once again came into the hands of a single family for a number of years. Perhaps the reason was that the Lafayette Hotel was no longer profitable. This may well have been because the nearby Eagle Hotel was now more up to date and more popular. Magnolia then became manager of that hotel for a number of years.

From 1893 to 1914 the Lafayette Hotel changed hands five times; and when Doctors Davis and Sims purchased it, they apparently had in mind the creation of a hospital.<sup>22</sup> They would scarcely have considered such a change had the hotel been successful at that time. However, their plans for some reason never developed. It was probably during this general period that the hotel or some outbuilding housed a harness and buggy shop.<sup>23</sup>

In a deed from 1913 the hotel was "known as the Lafayette Hotel." In a 1914 deed the hotel was "now known as the Blue Ridge Hotel." It was by this deed that H.W. Moyers became the owner of the hotel and moved his family there. Possibly he instigated the change of name. It is interesting to note that the present Blakey Street was then Blue Ridge Street. Sometime in the 1920s Mr. Moyers built a porch, including a second floor balcony, completely around the hotel. Most of it remains to this day. H.W. Moyers owned the hotel until his death in 1940. We have no knowledge about the profitability of the hotel during this period. There were nine children in the Moyer family and with boys occupying the third floor there could have been only a little room for visitors. However, several elderly ladies later remembered attending parties, square dances, and circle dances at the hotel. One lady even remembered sliding down the long stairway banisters.<sup>24</sup> A view from the belvedere or widows walk was a treat. There does seem to have been plenty of social activity at the hotel. The annex was available and at some time during the 1930s housed the *Greene County Record*. Other businesses may also have been located here during Henry Moyers' time.

Mr. Moyers willed the hotel to his daughters, Ella A. Bickers and Dora Page Yeaman;<sup>25</sup> and it remained in the family until 1989.<sup>26</sup> During this time it continued to have rooms for summer tourists and later apartments for rent. The annex was used for a number of purposes: a post office, the telephone exchange, law offices.<sup>27</sup> The annex was home to the *Greene County Record* in the 1950s.

Very early in the 1930s Lindsay L. Bickers with his wife, Ella, and family moved into the hotel, presumably to help the Moyers.<sup>28</sup> In 1946 Dora Page Yeaman with her husband, Robert, sold Dora's share of the hotel to L.L. Bickers. At that time, and in a deed, the hotel was described as "formerly known as the Blue Ridge Hotel."<sup>29</sup> The hotel may have reverted to its former name, Lafayette, but as late as 1981, when it began to occupy the front two rooms, the *Greene County Record* referred to it as the Blue Ridge Hotel.<sup>30</sup>

In July of 1978 L.L. Bickers, then a widower, passed the hotel on to his children, Sam Bickers and Suzanne Bickers Haney.<sup>31</sup> Later in the same year George Haney and Suzanne Bickers Haney, grand daughter of Henry Moyers, purchased that share of the hotel belonging to her brother, Sam Bickers.<sup>32</sup> The Haney family never lived there; and this made several apartments available. The *Greene County Record* occupied the front rooms of the hotel for several years in the 1980s. Also remembered are a watch repair shop and a solar heat sales room.

In 1989 the hotel was sold to Bob Sowder of the Sentry Realty Company.<sup>33</sup> Mr. Sowder accomplished two noteworthy things. He succeeded in having the Lafayette Hotel placed on the Virginia Landmark Register, making it possible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. This has not yet been accomplished. Through his occupation as a Realtor, he made possible the purchase of the hotel by its present owners, Whitt<sup>34</sup> and Martha Ledford.

Working together, Whitt Ledford and Nick Spencer, his partner, personally worked on the renovation of the hotel. They continue to run the kitchen and dining room, operate the hotel and work on the unfinished renovation (the third floor still requires work), using the abilities and experience that previously served them well at the Boarshead Inn in Charlottesville, Virginia. The evidence of their success is seen by the number of people in the district who know about, and frequent, the restaurant and hotel. The hotel offers regular catering, special occasions such as wedding receptions and Bed and Breakfast accommodations. There are rooms in both the hotel and the "Slave Quarters. The "Slave Quarters" has been renamed "Dicey's Cottage" in memory of a former slave who presumably lived there at one time.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cecil Culander, M.D., deceased, did a fine job in assembling a pedigree of the Lafayette Hotel from its earliest days. We will refer to it occasionally. Dr. Culander was the father-in-law of Mr. Whitt Ledford, co-owner with his wife of the Lafayette Hotel.

<sup>2</sup> Greene County Deed Books (GCDB) 2, 3, & 4.

<sup>3</sup> Covey, Donald, "Lots in Stanardsville" in *Greene County Magazine*, Vol. 10, 1993. pp. 18 -37.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, Joseph, *New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia*, (Charlottesville, VA, Joseph Martin, Moseley & Thompkins, 1835), p. 225.

- <sup>5</sup> While Whitt Ledford's experience in working on the hotel walls indicate that the walls were three bricks thick, other sources say the walls were four bricks thick. Morris, Nancy...Stanardsville Then and Now, p. 12. R.G. Sowder, who owned the hotel just prior to the present owners published a brochure in which he stated that the walls were four bricks thick
- <sup>6</sup> A belvedere is a cupola large enough to be entered by one or more persons.
- <sup>7</sup> GCDB 17, p.353; October, 3, 1914.
- <sup>8</sup> The Greene County Record, May, 13, 1954.  
The Greene County Historical Museum has a number of notebooks filled with clippings on various subjects originally printed in the Greene County Record. Reference will be made to these clippings several times in this article.
- <sup>9</sup> Morris, Nancy H. Ed., Stanardsville...then and Now, p. 47.
- <sup>10</sup> GCDB 5, p. 237; September 13, 1855.
- <sup>11</sup> Greene County, Virginia, Historical Society, Graveyard survey, 1999. Volume 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Interviews with Dr. Richard Hughes Carter, great grandson of James Garland Saunders and his wife, Anamanda G. Jones Saunders, have been most helpful at this point.
- <sup>13</sup> Morris, Nancy H. "Greene County Postmasters, 1832 - 1964", Greene County Magazine, 1997. p. 42.
- <sup>14</sup> This information comes from Dr. Richard Carter. Dr. E.S. Hunter already owned property in the Ruckersville area when he purchased the lot and house. GCDB 6. p. 386; 1872.
- <sup>15</sup> GCDB 7, p. 626; February 15, 1887.
- <sup>16</sup> GCDB 8, p.24; June 6, 1888. Laura Pritchett had remarried and was now the widow of W.S. Beazley.
- <sup>17</sup> GCDB 8. p. 148; May 9, 1889.
- <sup>18</sup> GCDB 8. P 389; September 1, 1890.
- <sup>19</sup> A decision in a lawsuit brought to court in June, 1891 (George and Magnolia Blakey vs Hettie Pritchett & infant children of Daniel Pritchett) allowed Magnolia to buy the Lafayette Hotel (GCDB 9, p. 106; July 11, 1891).
- <sup>20</sup> GCDB 9, p. 106; July 4, 1891.
- <sup>21</sup> These owners were: Sarah Templeton, 1893 – 1899; Mary Morris, 1899 – 1903; Mary Ham, 1903 – 1903; T.C. Eddins, 1903 – 1911; E.D. Davis & T.W. Sims, 1911 – 1913; John Graves, 1913 –1914.
- <sup>22</sup> Greene County Record, April 2, 1987.
- <sup>23</sup> Greene County Record, November, 1981.
- <sup>24</sup> Greene County Record, January 1, 1987.
- <sup>25</sup> Greene County Will Book 3, 298; May 14, 1940.
- <sup>26</sup> GCDB 208, p. 172; February 17, 1989.
- <sup>27</sup> Greene County Record, November, 1891.
- <sup>28</sup> From an interview with Suzanne Bickers Haney
- <sup>29</sup> GCDB 28, p. 199; October 17, 1946.
- <sup>30</sup> Greene County Record, November, 1891.
- <sup>31</sup> GCDB 106, p. 62; July, 28, 1978.
- <sup>32</sup> GCDB 106, p. 722; September 20, 1978.
- <sup>33</sup> GCDB 208, p. 172; February 17, 1989.
- <sup>34</sup> Whitt Ledford has been most helpful in supplying information about the hotel as it was in an earlier period.
- <sup>35</sup> I must thank Woodie Parrott for his help in editing this article.