

SAMUEL D. BYRD, SR., HOMESTEAD, POYEN VIC., GRANT COUNTY  
SUMMARY

Constructed in four distinctive phases: 1848, 1850, 1896, and 1930, the Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., Homestead is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with local significance under Criterion C as a wonderful example of a Plain/Traditional dogtrot house in Poyen, Grant County, Arkansas. The house exemplifies the transformation from a one-room log cabin into an L-shaped dogtrot over a period of 82 years. In addition to the house, a nice collection of three contributing ancillary structures and one contributing object has helped create the Byrd Homestead as both the Byrd family and the Poyen area grew. The property evolved during the period directly prior to and after the Civil War, as both labor and land resources became available. These early settlers transformed rude structures into livable homes that served their families' needs, as well as the needs of travelers through the Poyen area. Because of the Byrd Homestead's association with Poyen's early settlement, the property is also eligible for nomination under Criterion A. The property has remained in the ownership of a single family for over 160 years.

ELABORATION

The Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., Homestead was constructed beginning in the late 1840's in the vicinity of Poyen, Arkansas, during the early settlement period of eastern Fenter Township in Hot Spring County. Grant County was not formed until January 4, 1869. The county was named after President U. S. Grant, and the county seat bears the name of one of Grant's Civil War colleagues, Lt. Gen. P. H. Sheridan. Grant County was formed from portions of Jefferson, Saline, and Hot Spring Counties located around Hurricane Creek, where the area was inhabited by roughly 4,000 people.

The house was crafted with both pioneer log construction methods, as well as early state of the art pioneer carpentry. Despite modifications over the years, the structure has maintained its original craftsmanship and appearance. It represents a typical functional home as constructed by immigrants from the south. It was constructed in phases as the growing family necessitated, and funds and materials became available.

Family history supports that the log room and adjoining east room was built by Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., with the help of one or more of his brothers in 1848 and 1850. This house is one of the oldest structures still standing in Grant County as well as being continually occupied as a principal residence until the year 2000. The area where the property is located was between warring factions of the Civil War, surviving the bands that raided, looted and pillaged settlers' homes in this area. It survived as a working family farm from its inception until the late 1980s. The home is an enduring legacy to the central Arkansas settlement process.

In the 1846-1848 era, the area where the Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., home is located was known as Fenter Township, Hot Spring County, Arkansas. Specifically it was located in eastern Fenter Township in a place known as Crossroads about two miles west of Pratt's Ferry on the Saline River. The name Crossroads is attributed to the existence of four wagon roads intersecting at this location. The north road went through a plantation area intersecting with the military road leading from Rockport to Benton. The east road meandered to the Saline River at Pratt's Ferry continuing on through small settlement farms to Pine Bluff. The south road traveled through present day Leola intersecting the military road from Rockport to Camden by way of Tulip. The west road worked its way through the Big Creek settlement into Rockport. The area east of Crossroads was characterized by the Saline River bottom land consisting of large white oak timber resources. The lay of the land east of the Crossroads began to rise in elevation. It was in this area that Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., opted to settle.

Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., migrated west to Arkansas from the area of Pickwick Landing, Hardin County, Tennessee, around 1846-1848. He traveled to the area with other members of his family. Specifically, the other members of his family were brothers Lawrence Cherry Byrd; William Buck Byrd; a sister and brother-in-law, John Barnes and Emmaline Jane Byrd and their families. John and Emmaline settled in the Grapevine area in Grant County south of present day Sheridan. Samuel, Lawrence and William Buck settled in the Poyen and Big Creek areas. There is family lore that Lawrence and his wife, Hannah Delaney Batchelor, operated an inn for travelers, just south of Samuel's homestead, where they provided food, bedding, forage for the animals and libations. They had moved west into the Big Creek community prior to the Civil War; however, they were in residence at Poyen during the time Samuel built the log room in 1848. Samuel was noted on the poll tax rolls for 1848 in Fenter Township, Hot Spring County, Arkansas. It is highly probable that Lawrence and his family shared Samuel's residence at the same time.

In 1850 in Hot Spring County, Arkansas, Samuel was married to Tabitha Jane Reed by Eli Soffield, an ordained minister. There is substantial genealogy tracing Samuel's family, but as of present all is known of Tabitha Jane is that she was from Tennessee. Samuel and Tabitha are listed on the 1850 census in Fenter Township with his age as 36 and hers as 16. After their marriage, the east room was constructed with a dogtrot separating the two rooms. Samuel D. and Tabitha had seven children, including: Lovey A., William S., Mary M., Susan C., Matilda Roxie, James C., and Samuel D, Jr. On July 1, 1857, Samuel Byrd, Sr., was issued a Patent from the United States of America containing 80 acres and purchased same. The 1860 census records Samuel, Sr., as head of household with Jane and three children.

There is no record of Samuel, Sr., serving on either side during the Civil War. The war did have its presence in the vicinity of the homestead with the battle of Jenkins Ferry occurring approximately ten miles south-southeast of their home. Samuel D.'s brother, Lawrence, who resided about five miles west in the

Big Creek community, was hung by Jayhawkers (or Scalawags) when he refused to give them money. Approximately two years after the Civil War ended, the family found a sword in Little Rhinehart Creek which probably belonged to one of Fagan's cavalymen who lost it as they traveled from Pratt's Ferry to Arkadelphia at the time of the Battle of Jenkins Ferry.

The 1870 census lists Samuel, Sr., as head of household and his occupation as farmer along with Jane and six children. His personal worth was \$200 and a real worth of \$240. Four of the children were listed as being in school. They undoubtedly attended the 1855 school located next to School House Ford on Francois Creek, the Batchelor School or the one built in Crossroads after the Civil War. Samuel, Jr., who could neither read nor write, did recall attending school when farming duties did not prevent attendance. He commented many times about the chore of getting to and from school through the woods and trails. When Samuel, Jr., was six years old (somewhere around 1873) his little dog died. His brother, William Smyth, helped him bury it and planted a pine tree at its head. The tree still exists today north of the house and is known today as the Grant County Centennial tree.

The family was utilized in operating the farm. They grew crops to feed the livestock, cotton for a cash crop, and vegetables for their consumption. In 1889, Samuel, Sr., was a charter member of the Poyen Missionary Baptist church. On September 15, 1890, Samuel D. Byrd, Sr., deeded to Tabitha Jane Byrd 40 acres of said property during her lifetime and upon her death to Samuel D. Byrd, Jr. Also on September 15, 1890, Samuel, Sr., and Tabitha Jane deeded the additional 40 acres to Samuel, Jr., and Miranda E. Byrd. On April 18, 1891, Thomas F. Sweeney and Miranda E. Byrd Sweeney by warranty deed sold to Samuel D. Byrd, Jr., her portion of the additional 40 acres. Samuel D., Sr., preceded his wife in death and Tabitha Jane died in 1897. They are both interred in Poyen's Lindsey Cemetery.

Upon the death of Tabitha Jane Byrd in 1897, the ownership of the homestead transferred to Samuel D. Byrd, Jr. Samuel, Jr., married Susan Amanda Ballard in January 1896. With his mother still living, and with a new bride, he added the three north rooms onto the existing structure. Samuel, Jr., and Susan had seven children, including: William Hobart, Samuel Daniel, III, John Wesley, David Hugh, Martin D., Madge Cleo and Arvin Elwood. Samuel pursued a career as a farmer in the same mode as his father. He also worked in the timber industry as it existed in and around Poyen. He was very active in the Woodmen of the World. There is also some documentation that he served as an agent for persons selling or procuring property in the area.

Poyen became a town in 1908 when J. W. Hamlen and Sons built a sawmill at Crossroads. They built a commissary store, plotted off a town site, and sold the lots. The Rock Island, Arkansas, and Louisiana Railroad Company had built a line previous to this in 1905, making the establishment of the town a possibility. Poyen also saw the emergence of a post office and the construction of a two story frame school in 1908. Shortly after Hamlen and Sons built the sawmill

at Crossroads, several other sawmills were constructed in the area, as well as a cotton gin, and a brick plant. The area still maintained its small farm agriculture personality combined with the increasing timber industry. Susan Amanda was active in women's organizations of the period, notably the Poyen Home Demonstration Club. The family worked on their farm, and neighbors' farms, as was the custom at the time. The children attended the Poyen School and received their education to the level offered at the time.

With the advent of World War I, William Hobart enlisted in the army and served as a medic in the Fourth Division in France and later in the occupation of the Rhineland. Upon his return home, he farmed on the family land with his father and those brothers still at home. He attended college and became a school teacher in Poyen, Fenter, and Sheridan. He served two terms as Justice of Peace for Fenter Township. He married Nancy Bertha Sheppard, the daughter of William Sheppard, a former County Judge of Grant County. They resided in Poyen and Prattsville, teaching school and farming on the home place. The Depression forced them to seek employment elsewhere and they moved to Illinois and Texas where he was employed in the oil industry. They returned to Arkansas upon retirement in 1962. He was active with his two brothers and sister who resided on the home place until his death at the age of 83 in 1980.

John Wesley Byrd pursued a career in and around Poyen as a carpenter and a worker in the timber industry. He married Zelma Ashcraft from the Prattsville community. He died at the age of 81 in 1981.

David Hugh married Jamie Hamilton and pursued a career early in the oil field before settling in as a carpenter and general contractor in Malvern and Hot Springs area. David died at the age of 85 in 1986.

Martin Byrd never married and was engaged during his lifetime exclusively in the timber industry where he was a timber scout. He died at the age of 72 in 1977.

Madge Cleo remained unwed taking care of her mother and father. Upon their deaths, she stayed at the home place with her two brothers. She was a talented seamstress specializing in quilts. One of her quilts was accessioned into the Smithsonian Institution's collections. She continued in an active role living in the house until her death at the age of 90 in 2000. She was the last permanent resident of the Samuel Byrd home.

Arvin Elwood was the youngest sibling and in 1943, became the owner of the property when his mother and father deeded the property to him. Arvin served in WW II in the China-Burma theater. Upon being drafted he was stationed at Fort Brown, Texas, with the 124th Mounted Cavalry. They were sent to India and were instrumental in connecting the Burma and Ledo roads which were vital in providing supplies to the Nationalist Chinese Army. After the war he settled onto the farm continuing the activities of prior families. The farm harvested corn, hay, sorghum cane, and various truck crops specializing in sweet

potatoes. He was further engaged in buying and selling timber lands. He died in 1993 at the age of 82.

William Hobart, Jr., the current owner of the homestead, is the great-grandson of Samuel D. Byrd, Sr. He and his wife, Betty Sue Byrd, have lived at the site since 1993.

## SIGNIFICANCE

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