

## Beersheba Roads 1840 to 1940

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A visitor arriving today for the first time in Beersheba Springs, perhaps to visit the South Cumberland Natural Area or attend a conference at the Methodist Assembly, might easily suppose that the town developed around Highway 56, with the Stone Door Road leading off to the Natural Area and the Grassy Ridge branching off of it to the east. In fact, however, these are three of the most recent roads. The true history of Beersheba's roads reaches back to the earliest days of settlement in this part of Tennessee and, indeed, quite possibly, back into American Indian times. One who knows their story and walks the roads of Beersheba often feels wrapped in history.

It is not always possible to have the specific and definitive documentation one would like for the origin and development of Beersheba roads. However, working from bits and pieces of information that can be gleaned from old deeds, hand drawn maps, and published historical research – and bearing in mind that the trails that evolved into the earliest roads generally followed the path of least resistance – it is possible to arrive at a reasonable estimate of the road system at various times.

I will assume that the reader is familiar with the general history of Beersheba such as may be found in Volume I of *Beersheba Springs, A History*, but to help the reader follow the text I have prepared three maps showing the Beersheba roads circa 1840, 1860, and 1880 respectively and will include some modern names of land owners.

In all three of the maps, an important point is the chalybeate spring. *Chalybeate*, a common word in the heyday of spring resorts, means tasting of iron. It was the discovery of this spring by Beersheba Cain in 1833 which both gave the town its name and led to its development as a spring resort. A second spring – one of good-tasting, “freestone” water – was soon discovered several hundred yards to the west. The ground around the chalybeate spring was leveled, and a substantial two-story frame spring house was built around it. But today's visitor will search for it in vain. Where was it?

We cannot pinpoint its location, though we know where it was to within a few yards. As a result of the blasting for the construction of the Highway 56 in 1927, the spring ceased to flow. The spring house was abandoned and probably washed away. Since there is now no level area anywhere near where the spring once was, probably its dirt also washed away over the nearby bluff that had been created by the blasting. Further erosion has left the mountain side just above the bluff very steep. Some of the spring's water began to come out at the level of the highway where a few years later a sandstone igloo-like structure was built. But this spring never approached in quality or quantity of water the original spring. That original spring was certainly on the mountain side above the bluff the blasting created. But it was probably also very close to that bluff and just above where the igloo now stands.

## **The Road to Altamont, an Indian Trace?**

Probably the oldest road in Beersheba is what is called Dahlgren<sup>1</sup> Avenue on Map 3, Spring Street on Map 2 and left unnamed on Map 1, where it is however shown by double solid lines. It may then have been called "Long's Mill Road" or the "Road to Altamont." Especially the portion now between the intersection with Highway 56 and that with Hege Avenue is of interest. This section is pointing straight to the chalybeate spring.

The map accompanying *Indian Trails of the Southeast, 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnography, 192*, by Wm. E. Myer shows the Chickamauga Trace coming north from Coalmont and Gruetli and going right through Beersheba and on down into the valley of the Collins River. Although this map shows the trail running considerably east of Altamont – and thus down into the Big Creek Gulf and back up again – it seems more likely that it followed an easier route coming just a little east of where Altamont was later located and close to where Long would later build a mill, and then on into Beersheba from the southwest. It is altogether plausible that it was this trace which later became

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1 . *Charles G. Dahlgren of Natchez was the first owner of the house now called Nanhaven. In 1860, a son was born to him in that house and named John Armfield Dahlgren. According to a story passed down in the Nanhaven family, some forty or fifty years later, this Dahlgren returned to Beersheba with signs reading "Dahlgren Ave." which he placed on Spring Street. No one wished to hurt the rather pathetic fellow; the signs were left up and ultimately had their desired effect.*

known as the Long's Mill or Hunter's Mill Road. (Hunter and Long<sup>2</sup> seem to be names of successive owners of one and the same mill, which was on the stream that makes the Blue Hole and Greeter Falls in the Natural Area. We have a stereopticon card labeled "Long's Mill" that shows a mill between the upper and lower falls at Greeter Falls. An 1892 deed<sup>i</sup> mentions the "Hunter now Greeter" property. This same deed provides at least two corners that reference the Hunter Mill Road.)

There remains in Beersheba a short stretch of what must be this road still in a fairly primitive condition. To reach it, one walks south from Highway 56 on Hunter's Mill Road. Past the end of paving, past the last residence, the road veers off about 30 degrees to the right and heads down a ravine to a bridge over the little stream at the bottom and then up the other side. The current bridge is a steel culvert surrounded by stone. The culvert means the structure is of no great antiquity, probably the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but such a structure testifies that this was no common logging road. Here one is undoubtedly on the original Hunter's Mill Road or Long's Mill Road and, in all probability, the Chickamauga Trace.

This short stretch of road is pointing fairly close to the southern end of Dahlgren Avenue (formerly Spring Street). It may be safely presumed that they were once one continuous road. In between the two stretches, however is the Polk-Howell cottage built by Armfield. To make a nice lot for this cottage, Armfield apparently turned and straightened the old road, bringing it in roughly perpendicular to a line of his cottages – but kept the Hunter's Mill name.

Thus, in summary, it is altogether plausible that the southern end of the present Dahlgren Avenue lies right on the Chickamauga Trace.

At its intersection with Hege Avenue, Dahlgren turns a bit to the west, a deviation presumably introduced when construction began at the site of the future hotel to avoid having this road slice through the site.

This road, Hunter's Mill or Long's Mill Road was the primary road to Altamont in the early 1850s. The other road to the west was identified as the Road to Dan.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> . *Court records reference the Hunter Mill Road as early as the 1840s. Arthur Long was a wealthy land owner and farmer in Altamont in the 1850s and 1860s. He had died by 1868, and in 1880 John Greeter acquired the 650 acres known as the Long Mill farm which included the mill and a shop.*

It ran from about where the present Hunter's Mill Road meets Highway 56 to Dan Springs and the Backbone Road. Later it was extended to Altamont and eventually became the route of Tennessee 56. (Like “Beersheba, “Dan” is of Biblical origin. Both are towns in Israel, but Dan is in the extreme north while Beersheba is in the extreme south. Thus the Biblical phrase “From Dan to Beersheba” means the whole of the land of Israel.)

In 1858 the General Assembly chartered the Beersheba Springs & Tracy City Turnpike Company and authorized the company to use the partly completed Altamont to Tracy City Road if it so desired. John Armfield led this company, and the new road followed the general route of Highway 56 between Beersheba and Altamont.<sup>iii</sup> The 1895 Coastal and Geodetic Survey map, however, still shows two roads between Beersheba and Altamont.

## **Roads Down the Mountain to the Collins River Valley**

Prior to the mid-1800s it is believed that there were four established trails, not necessarily roads, between the Beersheba area and the Valley. The westernmost trail descended the mountain at Middle Ridge from what is now known as the Utah Community down to Gross’ Cove. That trail eventually evolved into a wagon road. The next trail coming east was the Backbone Road that descended to the Big Spring in Gross’ Cove. Because it followed the “backbone” spur that descends more gradually than the mountain side generally, this route did not need switchbacks. The next was a trail or crude road – quite possibly formerly the Chickamauga Trace – that descended the mountain from the general area directly in front of the Beersheba Hotel. This trail passed by the chalybeate spring. The fourth and least documented of the routes is a trail that descends the mountain at the end of the Grassy Ridge Road. This trail may not have developed until the Savage Gulf area started to be settled in the valley.

The primary road to Beersheba from the late 1830s until the early 1850s ascended the mountain from William Dugan’s home near the mouth of Dark Hollow – now a few hundred yards to the right as one begins the ascent of the mountain on Tennessee 56. This road had approximately six switchbacks<sup>iv</sup> and was basically bounded by the St. Paul stream on the east and Dark Hollow on the west. It initially reached the top of the mountain by traveling west from the Chalybeate

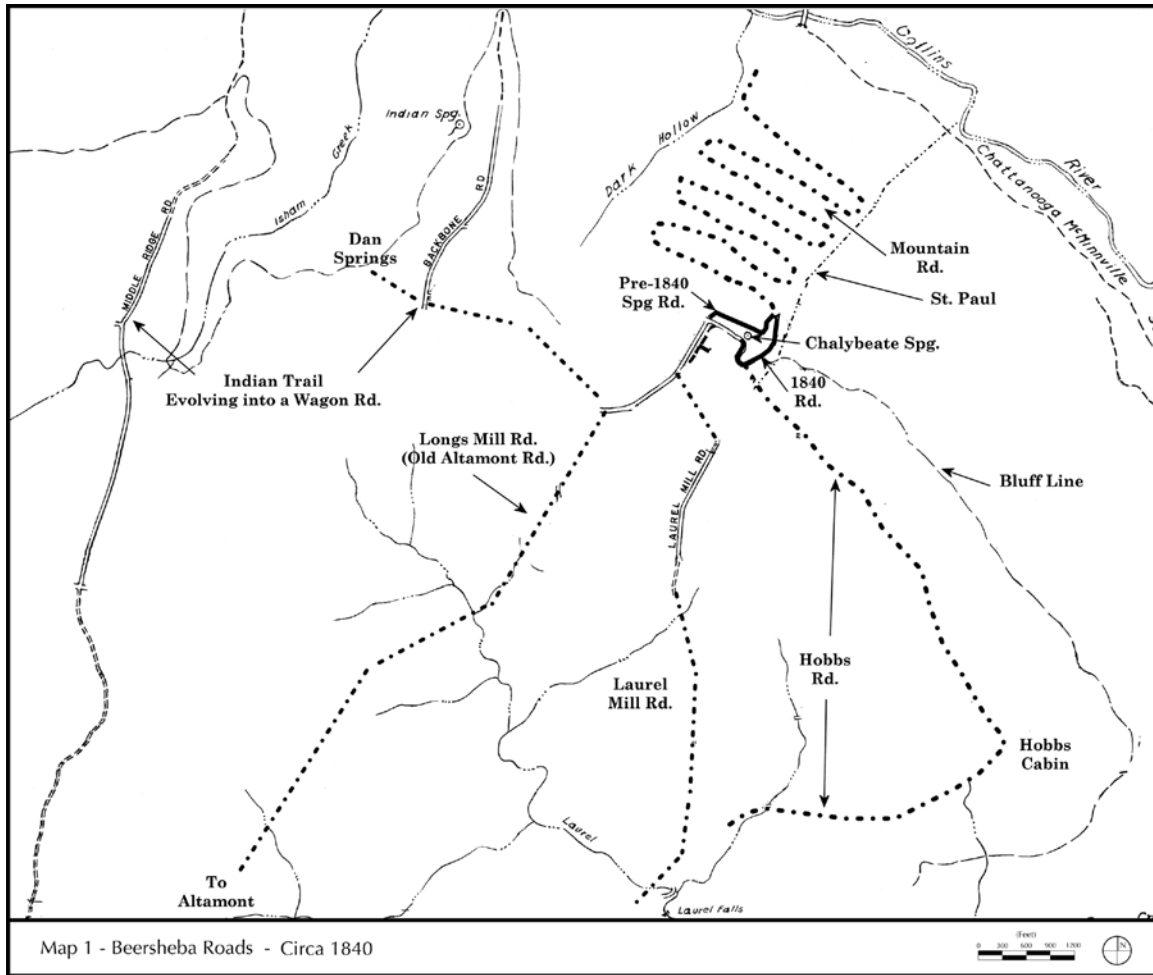
Springs until it reached a point that was approximately where Spring Street (Dahlgren Avenue) intersects Armfield Avenue at the west end of the Hotel.

1850 era deeds show that in this period this road was rerouted at the top of the mountain. Instead of passing close to the chalybeate spring, it stayed well below the spring and then turned sharply right to come up the St. Paul Hollow and then make a backwards curve (as seen from above) to reach the top of the mountain in front of the Hotel. This road now runs past Vesper Point and in front of the 1950-vintage chapel.

In 1839 citizens of Warren, Marion, and Hamilton counties petitioned the State to authorize a road to cross the mountain at Beersheba Springs.<sup>v</sup> In 1840 a charter was granted to Allen White to open a turnpike that would begin at William Dugan's, cross the mountain by way of Beersheba, and connect with Haley's Turnpike in Sequatchie Valley.<sup>vi</sup> Almost nothing is known as to the exact route of this turnpike or if it was ever actually completed.

Certainly by 1830 some type of road existed from McMinnville to the valley below Beersheba. After all, William Dugan had a home at the foot of the mountain when visited by the Cains in 1833. By the early 1840s a turnpike road existed up Peak Mountain obviously implying the existence of a road in the valley as well. In 1846 Grundy County authorized a new road to be built from where the road from McMinnville crossed the county line to the base of Peak Mountain.<sup>vii</sup> No doubt because of the popularity of Beersheba as a resort, in 1858 the General Assembly chartered the McMinnville & Beersheba Springs Turnpike Company with the authority to build a new road or upgrade the existing road.<sup>viii</sup>

The current street layout in Beersheba evolved in essentially three broad phases: the first being 1833 – 1856, the second 1856 – 1860 (Armfield), and the third being 1870 and later. There was a break between 1860 and 1870 due to the Civil War.



## Beersheba Streets and Roads prior to Armfield

In the first phase, prior to John Armfield's arrival, there were four roads leading out of Beersheba on top of the mountain.

- As discussed above, Spring Street (now Dahlgren Avenue) ran from the top of the mountain at the hotel to where it became the Altamont Road running by way of Long's Mill.
- The Laurel Mill Road turned east off Spring Street and ran diagonally across what later became the Cockrill lot and is now Beersheba Porcelain to the point where the current Fahery Road (formerly Laurel Mill Road) makes a sharp turn on the south side of the ice pond that is now in the roadside park.

This early location of this road is only suggested when reviewing early deeds and the topography of the area prior to changes made by Armfield and later by the construction of Highway 56.

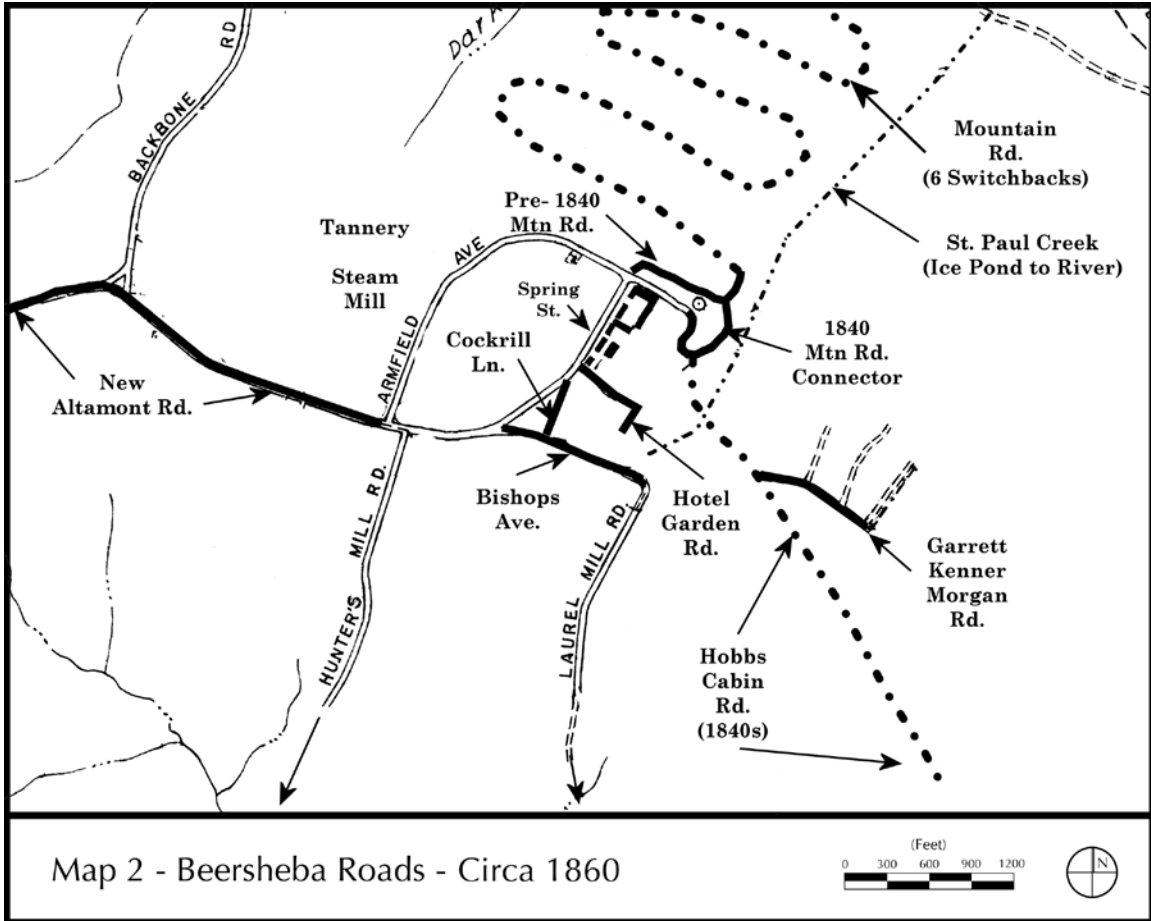
- There was a road that ran east roughly parallel to the current Grassy Ridge Road but to the southwest of it. It appears on Map 1 as “Hobbs Rd” and is referred to in early documentation as the road to the Adrian Hobbs place.<sup>ix</sup> x In 1840 Adrian Hobbs had constructed a two-room cabin at a spring near the end of the present Grassy Ridge Road.<sup>xi</sup> This road appears to have connected with the road up the mountain somewhere between the chalybeate spring and the top of the mountain, most likely in the sharp S curve a bit below where it reaches the current Vesper Point. This road ran through the area that later became the two Phillips lots (now Howell Adams). In the Phillips deed Armfield reserved this right of way.<sup>xii</sup> It continued on out to the Adrian Hobbs cabin and from there it is believed that the road turned south, with the next reference to it being from a deed for a piece of property on the north side of Laurel Falls near the present Gentle River Road. <sup>xiii</sup>

In Armfield’s 1859 deed<sup>xiv</sup> transferring his property to the Beersheba Springs company, he identifies a verbal lease with Adrian Hobbs that had three years remaining. This lease covers not only the cabin on top of the mountain but permits Hobbs to clear whatever land he needs on the side of the mountain. Other sources indicate that Hobbs had a 10-acre field on the side of the mountain.

The final road that existed prior to Armfield’s arrival was the one that went to Dan Springs and the Backbone Road. Beersheba Cain had her second mountain cabin at Dan Springs.

## **Col. Armfield's Roads**

John Armfield made some changes to the roads to make them serve an orderly layout of lots and cottages. It is important to keep in mind that the Armfield era only lasted four years, 1856 to 1860. There was no need for road expansion beyond what was minimally required to create lots and construct cottages. And there were only nine cottages that required new roadways. The other eleven cottages were constructed on existing roads.



- Bishops Avenue was created and was specified to be a 60-foot-wide avenue that began at the Altamont Road, passing in front of what would be Bishop Otey's future lot (now Mountain Home) and continuing in a straight line in front of the next four lots ending at the Laurel Mill Road on the east side of the Mason lot (generally referred to as the Nathan Bracken lot). At the end of the Avenue was the entrance to the Sanders cabin, a log cabin that predates the Armfield era and was later occupied by Fahery.
- When Bishops Avenue was created, the old Laurel Mill Road was altered. A new road was created that passed in front of the Cockrill Cottage (now Beersheba Porcelain) and connected to Bishops Avenue at a right angle. This eliminated the older diagonal route of the Laurel Mill Road that crossed the Cockrill lot. Laurel Mill Road now began at Bishops Avenue on the south side of the ice pond.



- To the east, Armfield utilized the existing Hobbs Road that crossed first the St. Paul branch and then the Phillips lot (later Hunerwadel and currently Howell Adams). The Garrett (later Lovers' Leap) deed specified that the owner would have access to the road that crosses the Phillips lot, in effect ensuring that it remained a quasi-public road.<sup>xv</sup> A local road was then created to serve the three cottages that were built farther out what is now Grassy Ridge Road: Garrett, Kenner, and Morgan. The current Grassy Ridge Road did not come into existence until 50 years later.
- There is some debate as to whether or not Armfield created the loop road that runs between the Armfield Cemetery and the present day Highway 56. The area off Highway 56 was essentially an industrial area during this era. It contained a tannery, a steam sawmill, a flooring mill, and other industrial operations. The section that now connects to Highway 56 was identified as the road to the steam sawmill.<sup>xvi xvii</sup> It may be that Armfield elected not to have a good road from this industrial area to his home and the hotel. The avenue, in that case, ended at the cemetery, and what continued on was at best a wagon road for convenience of access. The loop was almost certainly complete by the time Mary Means built the Indian Rock Cottage in 1911 and for sure when Charles Trabue built Round Top in 1921.

Armfield, it may be noted, appears to have operated more than one steam sawmill. One such mill is noted as having been in the above location near Dark Hollow. A second mill is referenced in Armfield's 1859 deed to the Beersheba Springs company as being located on Laurel Branch.<sup>xviii</sup> Perhaps the mill at Laurel was for logs and dimensional timbers while the mill near Dark Hollow was for finer lumber, flooring, trim work, and the like. (The steam engine of that era now on display at the Heritage Center in Tracy City, though it ended its service in Beersheba, has a different story and was almost certainly not one of these.)

- Either Armfield or someone prior to him constructed the road shown on Map 2 as the Hotel Garden Road. It began on Spring Street at the south end of the hotel property and ran some 500 feet east-southeast along what later became known as Hege Avenue, then turned right, south-southwest, and continued to

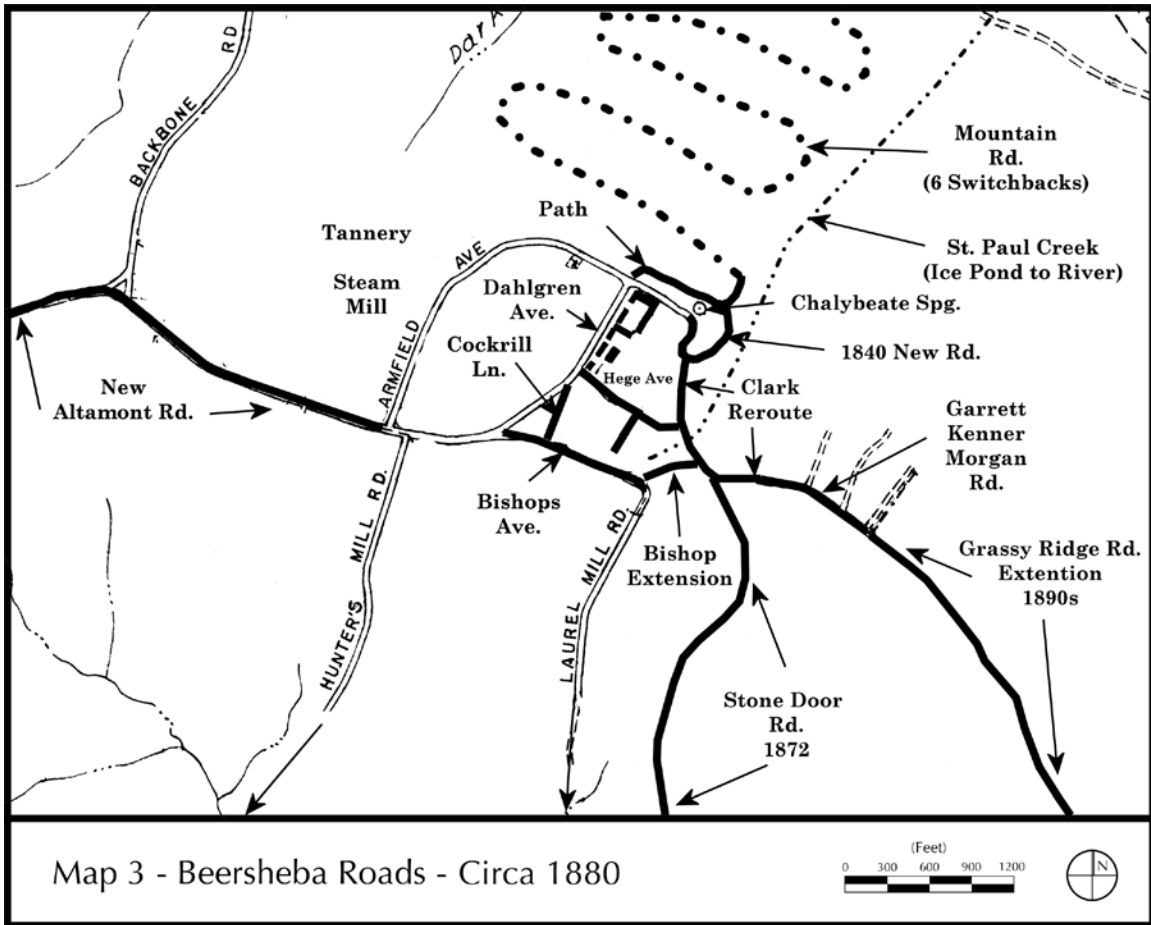
the west side of the Hotel garden plot and ice pond lot. This final section forms the southern boundary of the Cockrill 1860 lot.

It is noteworthy that no Armfield era deed references the ice pond. Was it even constructed by Armfield or was it created at a later date? The 1860 deed for the Graves lot (currently the Eve–Stansbury house) identifies the Hotel gardens as being on the north boundary (across Bishops Avenue) and being the approximate width of the Graves lot.<sup>xix</sup> This would indicate that the Hotel gardens occupied approximately the western one third of what is now considered the ice pond. (There is, by the way, a second ice pond in the lot between Nanhaven and the White House.)

- As mentioned above, Hunter's Mill Road was rerouted to make a nice lot for the Polk-Howell cottage.

It is probably equally important to mention which roads were not in place during the Armfield era.

- The current Grassy Ridge Road did not exist. In fact, due to overlapping land grants there was a question as to whether or not Armfield had owned the land where Morgan Lodge was constructed or anything east of that point.
- The Stone Door Road did not exist. To get to Stone Door, one used the Laurel Mill Road, forded the creek, and continued by a rather straight foot path.
- The short road which now runs from the intersection of the Stone Door Road with the Grassy Ridge Road over to Highway 56 did not exist.
- There is no indication that the road segment from the Bishops Avenue/Laurel Mill Road intersection to the current Stone Door Road/Grassy Ridge Road intersection existed. Considering that there was no Stone Door Road and the road to Grassy Ridge was routed differently, there was simply no need for this road segment.



Map 3 - Beersheba Roads - Circa 1880

### 1870 and Later

Recovery from the Civil War did not begin until 1868 when the Beersheba Company/John M. Bass sold the 1800 acre Beersheba tract to Richard Clark and William Bierce<sup>xx</sup>. At the same time Clark purchased the Phillips, Kenner, and Morgan properties plus some additional acreage at Long's Mill. Clark found Morgan Lodge in disrepair, had it restored and made it his primary residence.<sup>xxi</sup>

Between 1868 and 1900, significant changes were made to the roads on the east side of Beersheba. These changes were made while this area was owned by Richard Clark, James Clark, and Leo Parmly. While there is no specific documentation to

support this position, it is believed that Richard Clark, soon after taking ownership of the Phillips' cottage, began to reroute roads in the immediate area.

- The major change appears to be how the road to the cottages on Grassy Ridge was rerouted around the Phillips/Clark property. The original road, the Hobbs Road, had crossed the Phillips property from the main gate at the St. Paul and exited near the top of that hill west of the entrance to the Garrett Cottage. The Hobbs Road had effectively divided the Phillips lot into two sections. The new route came down the hill from the Garrett Cottage along the southern Phillips/Clark boundary to the foot of the hill. It then turned north following the western boundary of the Phillips/Clark property connecting with the original road from the Hotel. This unified the Phillips/Clark lot. The hill portion of this road is the current route between the Stone Door Road and Lovers Leap.
- Sometime during this period, what is now known as Hege Avenue was extended to connect to the new Clark Reroute.
- At about the same time, the late 1860s – early 1870s, Bishops Avenue was extended to join the Clark Reroute at the base of the Grassy Ridge hill.
- In 1872 Dr. Dudley Winston laid out the Stone Door Road creating the road system that is in use today.<sup>xxiii</sup> The new road joined the old Laurel Mill Road where it began its descent into the Laurel gorge. There was, however, no bridge over Laurel creek. The bridge and the current descent into the gorge came only with development of the Natural Area. The segment of this roadway between Hege Avenue and the Stone Door/Grassy Ridge intersection was a wagon road at best. It did not become a viable roadway until the mid-1950s. Prior to that, it was generally only used by people on foot or horseback. To drive out the Grassy Ridge or Stone Door Roads, one had to use Bishops to get to their common beginning point.

With the Clark reroute, the extension of Hege Avenue, the extension of Bishops Avenue, and the creation of the Stone Door Road, a major intersection was created that the majority of traffic on the East side of Beersheba would use. On the Northeast side of this intersection was the new main gate to the John Hege

property, formerly Phillips/Clark. The sketch map discussed below identifies the road from the Morgan Lodge down the hill to the Bishops-Avenue/Stone-Door-Road intersection, continuing on Bishops Avenue to the Polk-Howell Cottage and then westerly as the Altamont Road indicating that it had become a major thoroughfare.

- A sketch map (not shown) of the area indicates that sometime prior to the 1890s a road was constructed from the general location of the chalybeate spring to the top of the mountain following the current route of Highway 56.<sup>xxiii</sup> This route would have passed to the east of where the Bachelor Quarters stood.

This sketch map is somewhat problematic as it appears to be a composite sketch on which some new information has been added to an older map. Therefore, it does not capture all features at a single point in time. Most likely this is a map created by Clark in 1868 - 69 that was then partially annotated in the 1870s and 1880s. It cannot be considered a comprehensive map of all features.

- Grassy Ridge Road as it exists today was laid out by Leo Parmly<sup>xxiv</sup> sometime after he purchased what remained of the Beersheba Tract from James Clark in 1892.<sup>xxv</sup> This principally involved creation of a new route from the Morgan Lodge to the general vicinity of the Hobbs cabin and then to the top of the mountain connecting with the gulf. The new route most likely was a more direct version of the 1840s Hobbs Road. “Grassy Ridge” is surely a beautiful name for a road, but just what or where the “grassy ridge” – the ridge, not the road – was, no one seems to know for certain.

## **The Impact of Tennessee 56**

1927 brought Beersheba a paved connection to the rest of the country, Tennessee Highway 56. The Highway Department originally planned it to come up the mountain without switchbacks. From where the lower switchback now is, it would have continued on ahead, rising slowly and coming through the natural opening in the bluff near the end of the Grassy Ridge Road. It would then have cut across the mountain top south of the town to join its present route past Dan. The town would then have been little affected and the spring would probably still be flowing. Commercial interests in the town, however, did not want their places of

business by-passed, lobbied in Nashville, and got the route changed to its present one.

The impacts on the existing roads were principally three:

- The “road to the top of mountain” mentioned above was wiped out and replaced by the new highway.
- The “Clark Reroute” was sliced in two and the eastern half totally abandoned. At present, no trace of it has been found.
- Cockrill Lane (running from the Hege/Dahlgren intersection to Bishops Avenue) was trimmed off at the southern end. The northern part became known as Beersheba Lane.

Since the arrival of Tennessee 56, the peripheral part of the Beersheba road network has continued to evolve in ways not recounted here. It should be mentioned, though, that the southern end of the historic Laurel Mill Road, now Fahery, was closed and the Marcus Hill Road created as a shunt over to the Stone Door Road. The one major change in the central part of the system was the opening in the late 1950's of the short paved access from 56 to the Stone-Door/Grassy-Ridge/Bishops intersection. It is now probably Beersheba's most traveled road second only to Tennessee 56 itself.

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- i Clark to Parmly Deed, Book K Page 205.
  - ii Grundy County, Tennessee Deeds, Book C – Page 224, French to Armfield, December 1854.
  - iii *Acts of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Chapter 40, Section 7, 1858, 60-64
  - iv USGS Sewanee, Tennessee Map, 1892
  - v Petition - State of Tennessee, 1839, Number 17
  - vi *Acts of the Tennessee General Assembly*, 1840, Chapter 149, 241
  - vii Beersheba Springs, A History, Volume III, Page 22.
  - viii *Acts of the Tennessee General Assembly*, 1858, Chapter 120, Section 30, 308-309
  - ix Deeds, Book G – Page 275, Clark to Hege, 1872.
  - x Deeds, Book U – Page 414, Creighton.
  - xi Southern Coal Iron & Railroad Company v. F. R. Schwoon, Court Deposition, Virgil Hill.
  - xii Book D – Page 5, Armfield to Phillips, 1857.
  - xiii Deeds, Book U – Page 295, Parmly to Brown.
  - xiv Deeds, Book D – Page 487, Armfield to Beersheba Springs Company, 1859
  - xv Deeds, Book D – Page 293, Garrett
  - xvi Deeds, Book D – Page 553, Pierce 1860
  - xvii Deeds, Book L – Page 460, Cagle to Barnes 1895
  - xviii Deeds, Book D – Page 487, Armfield to Beersheba Springs Company, 1859
  - xix Deeds, Book D – Page 567, 1860, Graves
  - xx Deeds, Book F – Page 128, 1868, Clark and Bierce
  - xxi Court Deposition, James Scruggs.
  - xxii Morton B. Howell, Tennessee Historical Society, 1954
  - xxiii Deeds, Book K – Page 205, 1892, Parmly
  - xxiv Court Deposition, Virgil Hill
  - xxv Deeds, Book K – Page 205, 1892, Parmly