
6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwellingDOMESTIC: secondary structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwellingDOMESTIC: secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: transitional Greek Revival/Italianate

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestonewalls WOOD: weatherboard

roof Asphalt shinglesother wooden portico, woodencantilevered balcony

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Absalom Lowe Landis House, or Beech Hall, as it is commonly called, located on Thompson's Creek Road in eastern Bedford County, Tennessee is an excellent example of a middle Tennessee transitional Greek Revival/Italianate house. The large frame, L-plan farm house was built about 1866 by carpenters of German descent who had served in Major Landis' Confederate regiment during the Civil War. The Landis House sits atop a prominent ridge commanding a view of the Thompson's Creek valley. The house lot is fronted by a dry laid stone wall built along the Thompson's Creek Road, with stone pillars flanking the entrance of the driveway. Only a few of the great beech trees which gave the house its name, Beech Hall, survive.

The massive two story poplar, frame house rests on a raised cut stone foundation and is topped by a gable roof of composition shingles. The eight-room house has a common central-passage plan in the front, or I-house, portion of the residence with two additional rooms on each floor in the two-story rear ell section. Three tall brick chimneys pierce the roof; two are gable end interior chimneys, the third is located on the ridge of the rear ell. The Landis House exhibits many of the typical features of the middle Tennessee I-house with a center portico. Constructed as the Greek Revival style began to wane in south central Tennessee, the residence is not as rigid in its adherence to the strict classical form that can be found in earlier structures. The house contains elements from the Victorian styles then gaining prominence, primarily the Italianate style. The Landis House differs from many of the two story I-houses that are found in middle Tennessee through the treatment of the rear ell. Although many of the center porticoed I-houses in the area have rear additions, the treatment of the Landis House's ell stands out with a portico over the secondary entrance.

The main facade of the house faces west towards Thompson's Creek. The three-bay front is arranged around a massive central pedimented portico supported by four tall fluted columns with unusual bracketed capitals. The columns rest on a cedar porch supported by a limestone foundation. The weatherboarded pediment is distinguished by raking eaves, dentilled cornice, and delicate sawn wooden vergeboards. Below the portico is a wide cantilevered balcony with a fine sawn wooden balustrade supported by scroll brackets decorated with stylized flowers. The entrances on both stories are similar, with double leaf doors framed by three-light sidelights set over dado panels and surmounted with four-light transoms. To either side

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of the portico are paired double-hung windows with four over four sash topped by simple crown moldings. A dentilled cornice runs across the entire facade.

The south side of the Landis House is a plain weatherboarded gable end with gable returns and a dentilled cornice. The only openings on the south facade are two small fixed four-light attic windows.

The north facade is composed of the gable end of the main block, or I-house portion, of the residence and a two-story, three-bay rear ell. The west end of the north facade features a pedimented gable with dentil trim and paired four over four, double hung windows. The ell contains a small, center pedimented portico supported by two columns. This secondary portico has a cantilevered balcony that is identical to the one on the main, or west facade. The entry doors are single-leaf doors topped by two-light transoms. Paired four over four double hung windows flank the portico on both floors. The rear, or east side of the ell is identical to the south gable end with a plain weatherboarded wall, cornice returns, dentilled trim, and with two small fixed attic windows. Two small one over one light windows were added to the south side of the gable end, one on each floor, during the early 1950s. The interior corner wall, or south side, of the ell has two sets of doors opening onto a screened shed roof porch on the first story and paired four over four double hung windows on the second story. The one-story porch, which wraps around the back, or east side, of the main section of the house, is supported by four massive cut limestone piers. The rear one-story porch on the main block of the house is not screened in, but instead has a railing supported by diagonally-braced sawn wooden balusters. The rear wall contains a center single leaf entry on the first story flanked by paired windows. Paired four over four double hung windows are located on the second story above the porch.

The eight-room interior features flush vertical board walls, decorative millwork, grained doors, and stenciled walls. The entry hall in the main block of the house features a broad, open well, two flight staircase with an octagonal newel post; the railing is supported by tapered round spindles. Floors are chestnut, encircled by a plain wooden baseboard with a molded cap. The double-leaf main entry opens to the west, and on the other three walls are single-leaf two-panel doors; two to the side parlors and one to the rear gallery.

The south parlor has a fireplace on the south end wall with a molded and dentilled shelf supported by triple engaged columns framing the brick-and-stone firebox. A closet has been built beside the fireplace on the west side. A two-panel door on the north wall leads to the central hall, and

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paired windows are located on the east and west walls. This room also retains an original stenciled border of anthemions.

The north parlor was at various times used as a bedroom. Against the south wall, a narrow straight staircase once provided the only access to the room above. On the east wall is a fireplace with a segmental arch firebox and simple mantelpiece, its shelf decorated with carved rope molding and supported by engaged columns. Paired windows are centered on the north and west walls, and a two-panel door leads to the central hall. The room retains an original stenciled border of tulips and leaves.

To the east, or rear, of the north parlor is the rear ell, which contains a two rooms. The first room presently serves as the kitchen and the original dining room is located beyond this room. The room has two-panel doors located on the east and west walls and a wood-and-glass-panel door on the south wall opening onto the rear gallery. On the west wall is a fireplace, its simple molded mantelpiece supported by plain pilasters. Paired windows are located on the north wall. The dining room contains a fireplace centered on the east wall with a plain wooden mantelpiece with molded shelf, paired windows on the north and south walls, a two-panel door south to the rear gallery and a single-leaf, two-panel door on the north wall leading to the secondary portico. In the southeast corner is an original closet built on the north side of the side of the chimney breast, and on the south side of the chimney is a small bathroom installed in the early 1950s.

The second story contains four rooms and a large hall. The central stair hall has double-leaf, vertical-panel doors flanked by sidelights and transom opening west to the balcony under the portico and two-panel, single leaf doors on the east and west walls leading to the bedrooms. The north bedroom has a fireplace on the east wall with simple mantelpiece supported by plain pilasters, and paired windows on the north and west walls. A two-panel, single leaf door on the east wall provides access into the rear ell. The chamber to the south has a fireplace on the south wall similar to the one in the north room. Shallow original closets with vertical-panel doors are located on either side of the fireplace, and paired windows on the east and west walls.

The west room in the rear ell is at the head of the small straight staircase rising from the downstairs north parlor. The room features a large fireplace with a heavy wooden mantelpiece supported by fluted pilasters on the west wall and on the east wall double-bifolding two-panel doors on to the side of the fireplace, a small closet in the chimney breast and another small two-panel door to the unfinished attic. The east room

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has a door opening north onto the balcony under the side portico and paired windows on the north and south walls. Against the east wall is a fireplace with mantelpiece similar to those in the other upstairs bedrooms. In the southeast corner, a small bathroom has been added in the chimney breast.

Beneath the house is a full cellar. Originally used as a service and storage area, the space was deepened in the 1950s by former Tennessee Governor Prentice Cooper, who maintained the Absalom Lowe Landis House (Beech Hall) as a summer home. Cooper replaced the original brick floor with marble tiles and built a large fireplace against the south wall. The original wooden staircase was replaced with a much larger staircase that curved out into the new recreation room. Both the fireplace and new staircase are of Tennessee Crab Orchard sandstone. The changes in the cellar are all interior changes and are not visible from the exterior. The cellar entrance into the central hall on the first floor remains unchanged.

The house is in stable and relatively good condition. In 1986, the southeast corner of the house was damaged by a massive tree which blew down in a storm; a small part of the cornice has been sheared away, the eaves are damaged at this corner, and some weatherboards are broken and missing. Currently the house is undergoing restoration, the bathrooms added in the 1950's are being removed, a new bathroom added, the kitchen replaced, a new roof will replace the deteriorated roof and the damaged weatherboard and cornice repaired.

Two small outbuildings, contemporary with the house, are located on the property. Situated behind the rear ell is a small one-story house possibly built to house servants. The simple weatherboard frame house is laid out on the saddlebag plan, the two rooms clustered around a heavy brick central chimney. The small gabled building copies some of the details from the main house; dentilled cornice, gable returns, and corner pilasters. The two rooms both feature simple wooden mantelpieces, four over four double hung windows, and four-panel doors. This house has not been maintained and is deteriorating. Located off of the southeast corner house is another small weatherboarded frame structure with only one short, four-panel door to the west and a metal gable roof with cornice returns. This structure is in good condition.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1866

Significant Dates

1866

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Absalom Lowe Landis House, or Beech Hall, on Thompson's Creek Road in eastern Bedford County, Tennessee, is nominated under National Register criterion C for its significance to Bedford County in architecture. The large two-story frame house, built in 1866, is an excellent example of the transitional Greek Revival/Italiniate style with center portico in middle Tennessee. The massive structure features two principal facades with monumental pedimented porticoes; raking cornices and gable returns, and sawn vergeboards and console brackets indicative of the Victorian building styles to follow. The house retains its integrity.

The Absalom Lowe Landis House was built on property originally granted to John Landis (1794-1854) of North Carolina, by his son, Absalom Lowe Landis (1823-1896). Absalom Lowe Landis, a Major in the 17th Tennessee Regiment, C. S. A. was a large property owner, state senator, banker, merchant, and manufacturer. The house was built by carpenters of German descent soon after the end of the Civil War. The carpenters were from the neighborhood and had served in Landis' former command.

After Landis' death in 1896, the property went to his daughters, Melissa and Helen Narcissus. The entire parcel was soon purchased by Melissa's husband, J. M. Shoffner (d. 1916). Upon Shoffner's death, the property was divided between the Shoffner's daughters, Argie and Alice. Argie Shoffner married William Prentice Cooper (1870-1961), a prominent local farmer and banker who served as Mayor of Shelbyville (the county seat) and in the Tennessee General Assembly, where he was Speaker of the House in 1915 and 1916. Argie Cooper eventually purchased her sister's half of the farm. The Coopers lived in Nashville, but maintained The Landis House as a summer house. Their son, William Prentice Cooper, Jr. (1895-1969), remodeled the cellar of the house in the 1950s, adding a fireplace of Crab Orchard sandstone at the south end. Like his father, the younger Cooper, an attorney, served in the General Assembly between 1923-25. He was elected to the State Senate in 1937, and in 1938 was elected Governor of Tennessee for the first of three consecutive two-year terms. In 1946, he was appointed United States Ambassador to Peru by President Truman and served two years.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Marsh, Tim. "The Landers Family." Bedford County Historical Quarterly, Vol. 6 Number 3, n.d., pp. 81-84.

Interviews with Mrs. William Prentice Cooper, Jr., Jim and Martha Cooper, Autumn 1986.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of property approximately 9.5 acres

UTM References

A

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3	9	2	2	6	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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Normandy, Tennessee 79NE

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point at Thompson's Creek Road and a fence line approximately 250 feet north of the driveway, thence 700 feet east along said fence line, thence south approximately 600 feet to a fence line, thence west approximately 700 feet to Thompson's Creek Road, thence north approximately 600 feet to the point of beginning.

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Boundary Justification

The boundaries include sufficient property to protect the historic setting and integrity of the residence and two outbuildings.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard Quin, Preservation Planner, and Elizabeth A. Straw, Historic Preser. Spec.

organization SCTDD and TN Historical Commission date April 1987

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The Absalom Lowe Landis House is an excellent example of the classic middle Tennessee transitional Greek Revival/Italininate farm house. The house is similar to several houses in the area with its basic I-house form with center portico and rear ell. Houses of similar form in Bedford County included Palmetto Farm (N.R. 3/28/85), the Farrar House on Glendale Road, the Hart House on Hart Road, and a house on Hawthorne Hill Road. All of these houses are similar in style to the Landis House. However Palmetto Farm built in 1847 is much simpler in detail than the Landis House and shows stronger Greek Revival characteristics. The Hart House, built circa 1855, also has strong Greek Revival characteristics while the Farrar House on Glendale Road built circa 1872 is much simpler in design than the Landis House with the portico having only two plain columns. The house located on Hawthorne Hill Road, built circa 1870, closer resembles the Landis House in form than the other surveyed properties and is the only other identified house to have two porticoes. However, the house differs from the Landis House in the treatment of the rear ell, which is at a different roof height than the main block. The Hawthorne Hill Road house is much more elaborate with Italininate detailing. The Absalom Lowe Landis House is one of the best examples of a middle Tennessee transitional Greek Revival/Italininate houses in Bedford County and stands out from other surveyed properties with its two main facades, elaborately detailed porticoes, cantilevered balconies, and unaltered interior.

