

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: West Virginia	
COUNTY: Raleigh	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME	
COMMON: "Wildwood"	
AND/OR HISTORIC: General Alfred Beckley Home	

2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: 117 Laurel Terrace			
CITY OR TOWN: Beckley			
STATE West Virginia	CODE 47	COUNTY: Raleigh	CODE 081

3. CLASSIFICATION			
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered
		<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY		
OWNER'S NAME: Lucille C. Ralsten - in process of being deeded to Raleigh County Historical Society, Inc*		
STREET AND NUMBER: 117 Hill Park Drive		
CITY OR TOWN: Beckley	STATE: West Virginia	CODE 47

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION		
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Raleigh County Court House, Book 432, Page 133		
STREET AND NUMBER: Main Street		
CITY OR TOWN: Beckley	STATE: West Virginia	CODE 47

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS			
TITLE OF SURVEY:			
DATE OF SURVEY: <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE	

* This has been accomplished.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

(Description by Mrs. M. M. Ralsten, a graduate from Parsons School of Design, Paris, in Architecture and Design.)

Original Condition

In the beginning the dwelling at "Wildwood" was an unpretentious double log cabin started in the fall of 1835 and finished 1836, having been built by John Lilly, Sr., of Bluestone. The original house consisted of four rooms, two up and two down, with a breezeway or center hall between. More than likely the stairway to the upper rooms went from this hall. Originally there were two windows on the front in each of the four rooms but now there is only one window where there were two. This conclusion was arrived at by examining squares cut out of the original logs. Since no mention was made of an outside kitchen, such as sometimes used in more pretentious homes of this period, I take it that food was prepared in a large fireplace in one of the downstairs rooms.

Period Subsequent to 1874

It was not until 1874 that "Wildwood" was remodeled as one sees it today. The four rooms were kept as they were but two rooms were added to the back - a dining room and kitchen with a loft or attic over these, made accessible by a small stairway going up from the kitchen. A wide stairway with early banister goes up from the front hall. All rooms were covered with pine sheathing; probably this was there from the first.

Recent History of the House

Large beams have been exposed in the two upstairs bedrooms, which give them much charm. The sheathing has been taken off of one bedroom and logs exposed; the other is covered with plaster board. The pine sheathing is still in the halls. There is a fireplace in each of the four rooms but mantels have been removed; three of the originals are on the premises. The floors are in good condition (pine) and all original except in dining room and kitchen. These rooms were turned into a kitchen-family room about ten years ago. The outside of the house was white clapboard and a front porch was added at the time of the remodelling. The house has a gas furnace in the basement but I am sure it is not usable now. There was no basement originally. Aluminum siding now covers the house.

Restoration Plans

The house will be restored to its 1874 (or thereabouts) condition. Aluminum siding will be replaced with white clapboard; the original porch, known from an old photograph, will replace the present one; rooms will be restored as they were in Beckley's time. Cost is estimated at \$34,000.

Note: Mrs. Ralsten has many valuable and interesting family heirlooms to use in the house. These include Alfred Beckley's memo book as he was building "Wildwood"; his diary; a booklet on his trip to West Point; his appointment as 2nd lieutenant signed by Andrew Jackson; another letter signed by John C. Calhoun, then Secretary of War, and one by Robert E. Lee; about 400 pieces of mail to and from him and his family; the first Mrs. Beckley's wedding dress and pearl tiara; General Beckley's favorite chair,

Cont'd.

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7. Description - continued (Alfred Beckley Home)

and other items.* There are plans to add the Lucille Ralsten lot shown on the property map to the complex, and converting the house to a museum.

* According to tradition, several of these treasures were buried by General Beckley under his first wife's crypt - then exhumed by Lieutenant (later President) Rutherford B. Hayes, only to be returned to General Beckley.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian:☐ 16th Century☐ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal☐ Education☒ Political☒ Urban Planning☐ Prehistoric☐ Engineering☐ Religion/Phi-☐ Other (Specify)☐ Historic☐ Industry

losophy

☒ Agriculture☐ Invention☐ Science☒ Architecture☐ Landscape☐ Sculpture☐ Art

Architecture

☐ Social/Human-☐ Commerce☐ Literature

itarian

☐ Communications☒ Military☐ Theater☒ Conservation☐ Music☒ Transportation

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The land on which "Wildwood" was built once was owned by John Beckley, a man prominent in early American history; the house was built for his son, Alfred, as a log structure in 1835-36 by John Lilly, the most typical name in southwestern Virginia history. The house was remodeled by General Alfred Beckley, founder of the City of Beckley, a municipality of 20,000 persons. The house is now owned by the Raleigh County Historical Society, which has plans to restore it to the period of General Beckley's ownership.

John Beckley, from whom the city originally derived its name, possessed vast holdings in what is now southern West Virginia. While a student at William and Mary College, he was one of the original members of Phi Beta Kappa fraternity and later became one of the founders of the Republican Party. He was first clerk of the House of Representatives during the presidencies of Washington, the older Adams, and Jefferson. He was, in 1783, Mayor of Richmond, Virginia, and a member of the Board of Aldermen; clerk of the House of Delegates and Secretary of the Convention of Virginia on the Constitution of 1788; first Librarian of Congress and a warm friend of Jefferson. His only son, Alfred, was born on Capitol Hill May 26, 1802, during Jefferson's first term as President. John Beckley died in 1807.

Subsequently his wife re-moved with Alfred to Philadelphia, that being her former home. In May 1814 they accepted an invitation to live with life-long friends, Captain and Mrs. John Fowler in Frankfort, Kentucky. While there Alfred was a pupil of Kean O'Hara, one of the finest classical teachers in the state. He obtained an excellent background for his future schooling at West Point.

In 1819 James Monroe, then President of the United States and a personal friend of John Beckley, on the application of his mother through General William Henry Harrison, gave him an appointment to West Point. Upon an invitation from General Harrison, who was then a U. S. Senator, Alfred Beckley became a guest of the family at North Bend, Ohio, for six months, studying with the Harrison children under a private instructor. He was then sent to West Point by Senator Harrison and arrived September 25, 1819. He graduated on July 1, 1823, and was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant of the 4th Regiment of the United States Artillery. He served 12 years in the U. S. Army: two in Florida, two at Old Point Comfort, Virginia, six at the Allegany Arsenal, Pittsburgh, and two years in the garrison at Fort Hamilton, New York. In the Civil War he served as Brigadier-General, CSA.

In 1836, having married Amelia Neville Craig several years before, Alfred resigned his Commission as 1st lieutenant and moved from Pittsburgh to

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8. Statement of Significance - continued (Alfred Beckley Home)

Fayette County (now Raleigh County) with the idea of improving his interests in the Moore Beckley Patent, a vast tract of land 170,038 acres in extent, willed to him by his father, John. He brought his wife and three sons, John, Neville, and Henry Martin, to the vast wilderness in 1827. They had six sons and when their only daughter was six weeks old, Mrs. Beckley died of the "ague." In 1850 he was married to Jane Ropp; they were the parents of three more children.

General Beckley gave land to the town for all the streets, the court house square and half the building lots, including a school, church, and jail. His whole life after coming to Beckley was spent unselfishly for the development and betterment of the community. He was instrumental in forming Raleigh County; worked tirelessly to get the Giles-Kanawha Turnpike through Beckley; served in the state legislature. He served as Brigadier-General during the Civil War.

He died May 26, 1888, and was put to rest at his beloved "Wildwood."

The second Mrs. Beckley lived on in the home until she died in 1901; at her death it went out of the hands of the family and was sold to the Lilly Land Company. Until purchased by Dr. and Mrs. M. M. Ralsten (Mrs. Ralsten is a great-granddaughter of General Beckley) six years ago, it had never been unoccupied in the 128 years.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Harlow, Warren. Beckley, U.S.A. Beckley, 1955.

Raleigh County Issue, West Virginia Review, vol. 20 (March, 1943).

Lucille Campbell Ralsten, "History of 'Wildwood.'" reprint of paper given before the Raleigh County Historical Society some years ago. A copy is enclosed as Exhibit 1.

Berkeley, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund. Cf. letter concerning life of John Beckley. Exhibit 2.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "	37 °	46 ' 14.92"	81 ° 10 ' 31.86 "
NE	° ' "	° ' "			
SE	° ' "	° ' "			
SW	° ' "	° ' "			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/2 acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Lucille C. Ralsten, Trustee and direct descendant of General Beckley		
ORGANIZATION Raleigh County Historical Society, Incorporated	DATE June 16, 1969	
STREET AND NUMBER: 117 Hill Park Drive		
CITY OR TOWN: Beckley	STATE West Virginia, 25801	CODE 47

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☐

Name

William M. Lewis, Jr.

Title Acting for the State Liaison Officer

Date July 8, 1970

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



