

Design of Early Ordinaries and Taverns in Montgomery County, Virginia  
from 1773 to 1823

Edith-Anne P. Duncan

(ABSTRACT)

The Wilderness Road, starting in Big Lick (Roanoke today) was a primary route over the Allegheny mountains for travelers migrating to the Kentucky frontier. Ordinaries and taverns (referred to as public houses) were known to offer food and lodgings to travelers in the state capital city of Richmond, but little is known about what, if any, accommodations were available to these settlers headed westward through southwest Virginia.

With the first stops along the Wilderness Road being in Montgomery County, this study sought to determine if public houses existed in this county between the years 1773-1823, and if so, where were they located and who operated them. Further, what was the typical design or plan of public houses and how would they have been furnished. What comparisons could be made between public houses in Richmond and on in southwest Virginia.

County court records, including wills, appraisals, licensing records, and court order books revealed that public houses not only existed, but also there were often as many as 5 or 6 operating at one. A license had to be purchased each year from the court and names of proprietors were recorded. These listings also helped to identify structures standing today that once served as a public house. On site observations along with WPA (Work Projects Administration) reports and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources surveys documentation of historic houses in the county offered notable similarities in design and plan among five former houses selected for this study. Wills and appraisals provided

some clues about furnishings. The result of this study adds an important chapter to the story of public houses in early Virginia history.