

VLR-10/16/79 NRHP-12/28/79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Ben Venue

AND/OR COMMON

Ben Venue

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Route 729

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Washington/Massies Corner

X VICINITY OF

Seventh (J. Kenneth Robinson)

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Virginia

51

Rappahannock

157

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

X OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

X BUILDING(S)

X PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

ST-PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

X ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas L. Eastham

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

STATE

Virginia 22747

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Rappahannock County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

Virginia

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (2) (See Continuation Sheet #1)

TITLE

(1) Historic American Buildings Survey

has this property been
determined eligible? X Y N

DATE

1958

X FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Ben Venue, the Fletcher family homestead, is scenically situated on a rolling tract of land off route 729 in Rappahannock County. The house and its collection of outbuildings constitute a well-preserved example of a mid-19th-century farm complex in Virginia's Central Piedmont.

Set on a fieldstone foundation, the front (west) elevation is laid in Flemish bond painted red. The facade is dominated by a one-story porch that covers the central three bays. The porch consists of four Doric columns supporting a bracketed entablature. A cast-iron railing with a lyre motif is found on the first story and roof deck. Two slender pilasters, indicative of an earlier porch, flank the main entrance. The west entrance consists of a four-light transom and sidelights surrounding the original paneled door. The front steps are a mid-20th-century replacement. Fenestration consists of original 9/9 hung-sash windows on the first floor and 6/9 on the second. The windows are framed by architraves and flanked by louvred shutters. A corbeled brick cornice embellishes the eaves course. Two chimneys project between the inside and the end bays.

The ends of the house, also laid in Flemish bond, have two windows on each floor with a lunette in the gable. The gables are treated with sloping parapets and corbeled shoulders. The rear wall of the house is laid in seven-course American bond and is dominated by a two-level wooden gallery with plain square posts and plain railings. Extending from the northern end of the rear is an original two-story ell with gable and cornices similar to those on the main part. On the south side of the ell is a plain one-story porch that connects to the gallery noted above. The windows on the side and rear walls as well as on the ell are treated similarly to those on the facade. Two chimneys on the rear correspond to those on the facade, and the ell has an interior end chimney.

Ben Venue has a central hall plan. Dominating the hall is an open-well stair with a turned newel post, a rounded handrail and two rectangular balusters per tread. Paralleling the stair is knotty pine paneling added in 1953. The doorways in the hall have symmetrical architrave trim with molded corner blocks. The knotty pine paneling is repeated on the remaining walls and is also found in the north parlor.

Other than the knotty pine paneling which runs from floor to ceiling, the north parlor retains its original architectural features. The room contains a simply executed Greek Revival mantel and plain architraves above the windows. The south parlor contains a carved Federal mantel that was removed from the older Fletcher house which is still standing on the property. The original Greek Revival mantel, similar to that found in the north parlor, is stored in the basement of the kitchen. The windows are framed by simple architraves ornamented at the upper corners by Greek frets. The original paneled doors are retained throughout the house.

The dining room also contains a simple Greek Revival mantel with symmetrical architrave trim and finely molded corner blocks. A molded chair rail and baseboard run the room's perimeter.

The second-floor plan corresponded to that below. However, during the present century the south chamber was divided into two rooms, and the north chamber was partitioned for bath and closet space. The rooms' simple Greek Revival mantels remain.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1844

BUILDER/ARCHITECT attributed to James L. Powers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The early 19th-century prosperity of Rappahannock County is symbolized by the large farmhouse and groupings of outbuildings that formed the nuclei of often vast landholdings. The wearing out of the lands in Tidewater in the 18th century made the fertile, rolling hills of Piedmont ideal for resettlement; thus were established many fine farms with architecturally distinctive dwellings and outbuildings. Ben Venue is a conspicuous example of the more prosperous seats. Its focal point is a large brick house distinguished by parapet gables with corbeled shoulders and chimneys oddly placed on the facade rather than on the ends of the house. The parapet gables and corbeled shoulders are repeated on the several outbuildings which include three exceptionally interesting slave houses aligned on a ridge across the road from the main house. Slave houses are rare survivals in Virginia, few having withstood the burden of time. Those at Ben Venue are unusually solid and have the rarity of architectural elaboration. The Ben Venue complex is attributed to James Leake Powers, a local builder, who is credited with a number of buildings in the county. The house was constructed between 1844 and 1846 for William V. Fletcher, a prominent landowner, and has remained in the possession of his descendants.

William Fletcher first appears in the Culpeper County deed books in 1830 when he purchased ten acres of land near the courthouse. Thereafter, Fletcher's name appears regularly in the Rappahannock land books, taxed in 1840 for 1,556½ acres with improvements valued at \$2,800. In 1846 the building value was listed as \$5,912 dating the completion of Ben Venue.

William T. Stevens in his book, Virginia House Tour states, "Commissioned to build the residence (Ben Venue) and three brick slave cabins was my collateral ancestor, James Leake Powers, a native son of Albemarle County who had worked under Mr. Jefferson on the University of Virginia along with Dinsmore and Neilson..."¹ Although there are not, as yet, any known documents to prove that he was a workman at the University or that he was the builder of Ben Venue, the cellar chambers at the Fletcher house are an unusual feature and have been derived from similar examples found at Monticello. In any case, Powers was a property holder in the town of Washington. In 1837 he purchased for \$1,500 "a certain house and lot in the town of Washington known on the plat of said town as No. 21."² Local tradition credits Powers with building the county courthouse, the jail, and the Presbyterian church, along with several residences including Jessamin Hill, a house with chimneys similar to those on Ben Venue.

The buildings at Ben Venue present a picture of rural Virginia farm life in a period of agricultural revival. The layout of the farm is a traditional one not unlike the large plantation complexes that dominated the state's landscape throughout the 18th century. The grouping is complemented by a formal boxwood garden that provides a dramatic contrast to the fields that surround the property. The garden was originally planned and laid out in the 19th century.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Culpeper County Deed Books CC, CG, WW, YY.
 Land Tax Books 1782-1832.
 Will Book B, G, I, K.
 Davis, Dorothy, Mrs. Telephone Interview, August 1973.
 Hite, Mary Elizabeth. My Rappahannock (Va.) Story Book. Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, Inc., 1950.

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

QUADRANGLE NAME Massies Corner, Va.

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 73 acres

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 17 754820 4290010
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 17 755590 4290000
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 17 755620 4289540

D 17 754950 4289580

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point on W side of State Route 729, NW of intersection of said route and US route 211, S of Meetinghouse Mountain; thence extending 2400' directly E across said route 729; thence extending 1550' due S; thence extending 2050' W across said route to 620' contour line; thence extending N following said contour for a distance of approximately 1500' to point of origin.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE

October 1979

STREET & NUMBER

221 Governor Street

TELEPHONE

(804) 786-3144

CITY OR TOWN

Richmond

STATE

Virginia 23219

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Tucker Hill, Executive Director
 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

DATE OCT 16 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Ben Venue, Rappahannock County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #1

ITEM NUMBER 6,7

PAGE 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2). Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1968, 1977, 1979 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

7. DESCRIPTION

Ben Venue contains a distinguished collection of outbuildings. The original Fletcher homestead is a 1½-story wood-frame "saltbox"-roof building. Covered by weather-boarding, the structure contains two stone exterior end chimneys. The multi-paned transom doorway is complemented by 6/6 hung-sash windows. As noted above, one of its mantels was removed and reinstalled in the main house during the present century.

The kitchen is a 2½-story brick building located southeast of the house and is executed in seven-course American bond. Covered by a standing-seam metal roof, the structure sits on a fieldstone basement. Fenestration consists of 6/9 hung-sash windows on the first story and 6/6 hung-sash windows on the second story. A four-pane casement light is found in the attic. A semi-exterior brick chimney is found on the east elevation. The first story contains its original large cooking fireplace fronted by a plain mantel. An enclosed stair leads to the second story. The basement constitutes part of a fieldstone cellar system that extends eastward from the main house. Openings are found under the rear steps, beneath the brick- and stone-paved terrace, and under the kitchen on the north and south elevations. The roof is treated with corbeled brick cornices and parapet gables similar to those on the main house.

The 1½-story brick smokehouse is covered by a standing-seam sheet metal roof and a corbeled brick cornice and parapet gables. A one-story shed, constructed of concrete blocks, was attached to the west wall in the present century.

The privy is a one-story brick building south of the kitchen and is also executed in seven-course American-bond brick. The structure is covered by a standing-seam sheet metal roof. Frame farm buildings include a board-and-batten chicken house, two plank-and-log granaries and a board-and-batten and log garage with an exterior stone and brick chimney.

A formal garden is located to the north of the complex and is composed of rows of boxwood. A boxwood walk is found in the front of the main house and boxwood is used around the privy and smokehouse. An overseer's house was formerly located at the northern end of the garden but burned in the present century.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Ben Venue. Rappahannock County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #2

ITEM NUMBER 7, 8, 9 PAGE 2

7. DESCRIPTION

Across the road and northwest of the main complex stands a row of three small slave cabins. The buildings have exterior end chimneys and are laid in seven-course American-bond brick set on fieldstone foundations. The buildings are also treated with corbeled brick cornices, parapet gables and corbeled shoulders. The interiors contain unbarked log rafters and log joists. An original ladder stair survives in one building.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property consists of approximately 73 acres. In 1844, the year Ben Venue was built, William Fletcher owned 1,556½ acres. The nominated acreage includes the main house, all outbuildings, the family cemetery, and the slave cabins across the road. Most of the nominated property is used for agriculture. The boundaries follow pre-existing contours and fence lines. The land is still owned by Fletcher descendants.

RCC

8. SIGNIFICANCE

¹William T. Stevens, Virginia House Tour (Charlottesville: William T. Stevens, 1962), p. 349.

²Rappahannock County Deed Book C, p. 111.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rappahannock County Deed Books A, B, C, F, D, I, J, K.

Land Tax Books 1833-1849.

Will Book D.

Stevens, William T. Virginia House Tour. Charlottesville, Virginia.: William T. Stevens, publisher, 1962.

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (Scale 1:24,000)
Massies Corner, VA 1971

BEN VENUE, Rappahannock County, VA

UTM References:

A 17/754820/4290010

B 17/755590/4290000

C 17/755620/4289540

D 17/754950/4289580

