Laurel Point

Laurel Point is a Chester family dream come true. Bettie Thomas Chester’s first visit to Beersheba Springs was at the age of two months. There followed many wonderful summers at the Howell Cottage with her grandmother, Mary Toy Howell Weaver (Mrs. Thomas S. Weaver), her mother, Bettie Weaver Thomas (Mrs. Spencer M. Thomas), and later with her husband, Sam Chester, and their daughters, Susan, Caroline and Betsy.

In 1936, Judge R. B. C. Howell and his sisters exchanged property behind the Howell Cottage with Mr. and Mrs. Ben Hill for 17 acres on Grassy Ridge Road which had been the site of Morgan Lodge, later called the Johnson Cottage. This was an elaborate house with a ¼ mile racetrack, but it had burned to the ground. In 1941, 27 adjacent acres were purchased from Mr. and Mrs. B. W. Hillis. The Howell extended family enjoyed many outings on the vacant property, which they called “the Domain”. In 1976, these 44 acres were divided among the four families who owned the Howell Cottage, namely, those of Thomas Weaver, Bettie Orr Franklin, Robert Orr, and Spencer Thomas. Then, in 1996, Mary Toy Thomas Kircher and Bettie Thomas Chester divided their 11 acres into two 5-½ acre tracts, one of which became the site of Laurel Point.

On March 11, 1997, Sam and Bettie Chester purchased a turn-of-the-century barn from Jim Gentry in Jasper, Tennessee. Construction of Laurel Point began the next month. That summer, an additional barn dating back to 1853 in the Tarlton Valley was purchased from David Hillis. It was a barn enclosing the original log home built by the Walker family when they first settled in the valley.

With the help of James Hampton of Tracy City and his crew, the house began to take shape. On the instructions of Sam Chester's four-woman building committee (his wife and daughters), the gray weath- ered barn siding of pine, oak, poplar, walnut, and maple was planed to become beautiful natural wood for trim, walls and flooring of the house. The logs form the walls, held in place by steel reinforcing rods. Three 21-foot cedar trees, former barn posts, each two feet in diameter, hold up the ridge pole of the great room. A log in the wall of the dining area bears initials and the date 1853, the year the Walker home was built. Junior and Jerry Dove of Tracy City did the interior finish and cabinet work, and Renae Hobbs of Beersheba spent countless hours helping in invaluable ways.

The property was named Laurel Point by a granddaughter Caroline Snow, because of the brow point and the mass of laurel bushes along the brow. The home consists of great room, six bedrooms, kitchen, upstairs sitting room, and side and back porch, part screened, part covered, and part open deck.

The house is intensely used year round by Sam and Bettie Chester and the families of their three daughters, Susan and Tom Snow (and Sam, Caroline, Elizabeth and Andrew), Caroline and Nigel Lloyd (and Geroge), and Betsy Chester Guhde (and Isabel and ???).

When Bettie Chester sits on the back porch of Laurel Point and looks up Savage Gulf, she appreciates so much her family's acquisition of the Grassy Ridge Road property and wishes Howell generations long-gone could also enjoy her home. The Chesters hope for many years at Laurel Point enjoying the outstanding Beersheba and Grundy County environs with family and friends.