Nanhaven, one of the original Armfield houses, stands on a large, level, wooded lot on the west side of Dahlgren Avenue just opposite the south end of the west wing of the hotel. The hand-hewn logs of its downstairs -- four approximately 14-foot square rooms, two on either side of a dogtrot hall -- may indicate that this part was built before Armfield's sawmill got into operation in the summer of 1855. A two-room cabin, also built of hand-hewn logs with a double fireplace between the rooms, sits about twenty yards behind the main house. The hewn logs have led to the conjecture that, together with the two houses on Beer-sheba Lane, this house was built by Armfield to house his workers. The conjecture is not necessarily correct; as shown by the Mayhew-Beersheba Porcelain house built of hewn logs after 1857. Something had to be done with the logs of the trees cut down to clear the ground. Hand hewing them into usable timbers on the spot may have been cost effective relative to cutting others near Laurel, hauling them to the mill, sawing them, and hauling the sawn timbers to the building site. In any event, Armfield added simple floors of yellow pine, clapboard over the outside of the logs, porches of heart pine around three sides, an upstairs, four free-standing fireplaces, trim on the doors and windows (without counter weights) and closed the ends of the dogtrot with the typical "Beersheba doorway" with two narrow doors, a transom, and side panels with windows. The doorway probably came in a prefabricated kit. He also built a kitchen wing with three rooms and a large fireplace. The high ceilings, large windows, transoms over doors and the funnel-effect of the long hallway, all combine for maximum ventilation on warm nights. The cabin received a plank floor and a window and crude door in each room, but was otherwise left in its original condition.

On July 27, 1859 the house was bought by Charles Gustavus Dahlgren of Natchez for $4000, with Armfield holding Dahlgren's mortgage. Dahlgren, a prosperous planter, was one of three sons of the first Swedish consul to the United States. His first wife had recently died leaving him with four sons and several grown step children. Probably acquaintance with John Armfield led him to Beersheba, where Mary Edgar Vannoy of Nashville caught his eye, and in December they were married. She was 19 and he 49. The next summer, they were back at Beersheba, and Mary was pregnant. Who else was there that summer we know in a remarkable way.

In 1987, Josephine Eubanks was charged with cleaning up the southwest corner of the property along Dahlgren Avenue and south of the driveway to the house. One spot was particularly thickly grown up in poison ivy. As she removed it, she exposed a moss-covered, sandstone boulder rising about two feet above ground level. As she swept it off well and put her grandson, Nicholas King, to sit on it, she noticed
some carving on the boulder but thought nothing of it. About that time Comfort Adams Randolph came walking along the road and paused to speak with Josephine. When she saw a bold, well-carved C.G.D. and the date August 31, 1860, she recognized the initials of Dahlgren. But who were the people behind the other sets of initials? It was not until the summer of 1990 that Josephine told Herschel Gower about the find. He came often to ponder those initials, and Ruth Howell made a stone rubbing for him. Old Dahlgren would not release Herschel until he had learned everything that could be known about the Dahlgrens and put it all (and a little more) into a most readable book, Charles Dahlgren of Natchez (Brassey's, Washington D.C., 2002).

From Herschel's research, we can work back from the initials on the stone to say that at the end of the summer the Dahlgrens had a house party with 12 people present: Charles and Mary Vannoy Dahlgren, the hosts, Mary's parents, Mason and Jane Vannoy of Nashville and Manchester; Mary's brother Robert McEwen Vannoy; her sister Ellen Smith Vannoy Gardner; Ellen's sister-in-law Laura Adelaide Gardner; Charles's four sons by his first wife: Charles Routh Dahlgren, Bernard Dahgren, John Adolph Dahlgren, Austin Mortimer Dahlgren, and Charles's nephew Ulric Dahlgren, son of Admiral John Dahlgren. The house party totaled 12 people; two other sets of initials are identified by Herschel as belonging to people not yet born in 1860.

Mary Dahlgren must have had her hands full with the five boys. Years later in a memoir dictated to her son John Armfield Dahlgren, she told how once the boys shot a fox and, in the middle of the night, dragged it from the pen of the fox hounds into the courtyard of the hotel, around and around and all along the porches before unlatching the pen of the dogs. One can imagine the pandemonium that followed. (A delightful but fictional version of Mary's memoir is on pages 211-216 of Herschel's book. The fox story is true -- see page 38 and footnote 13 -- but the absence of a footnote and the flawless English of Mary's memoir betray its creation by the novelist author, a puckish prank to which he confessed.)

Three weeks after the date on the stone, Mary's baby, Gustavus Vannoy Dahlgren, was born, delivered presumably by Dr. Waters from next door. Soon thereafter the Dahlgrens returned to Dunleith, their home in Natchez. A year later, Charles Dahlgren was a brigadier general in the Army of Mississippi and in command of troops in the lower Mississippi valley. Ulric and Charlie Routh were in opposing armies. Ulric was killed in the war; and Charles, soon relieved of troop command, was financially ruined. There was no chance of his paying off the mortgage on the Beersheba house, which reverted to John Armfield.

Herschel's research also cleared up another minor Nanhaven enigma. Over the door to the north side of the cabin was nailed a weather-beaten board with the words "He who enters here must leave all hope behind." The sign survived into the 1950s; but no one knew who put it there. In Charlie Routh Dahlgren's wartime diary Herschel found, "On entering the Army, one finds a realization of the sentence that Dante found written on the gates of Hell: He who enters here must leave all hope behind."

The house probably stood empty or was occupied by squatters until the hotel reopened in 1870. It may have been used for overflow from the hotel or rented out to various families by Martha Armfield, John's widow.

In 1887, it was bought by Frances Thompson (1852 - 1914) for $2000, half of what Dahlgren had paid. Miss Fan or Nan, as Frances was called, first came to Beersheba in the summer of 1884 as a guest of Sue Howell at the Howell Cottage. She was acting as a stand-in, as was the custom in those high Victorian days, for her younger sister Jane Reynolds (Jennie) Thompson (1862-1941), who was soon to be betrothed to Sue's brother Alfred Elliott Howell (1863-1931), son of Morton B. Howell of the Howell cottage. Miss Fan liked Beersheba so well that the next year she rented the White House. In 1886, she rented the Dahlgren cottage, which she then bought in 1887. The house became the Thompson Cottage, the name still on the brass knocker on the front door. It was the cleanup in preparation for the centennial celebration of this purchase that led to the discovery of the Dahlgren rock.

Miss Fan shared her cottage generously with her sisters Mat (Martha Walker Thompson, 1850-1940) and Jennie. Mat had four wards, orphaned children of her mother's younger brother, George W. Trabue. These boys, Charlie, Tony, George, and Will Trabue were part of the Thompson Cottage family from the outset. Jennie and Alfred Howell were married in 1886 and children began arriving the next year. They were Morton Boyte Howell, III. (1887 - 1963), Martha
Thompson Howell (1889 - 1968), Frances Howell (1891 - 1979), Louise Evans Howell (1899 - 1952), and Isabel Elliott Howell (1900 - 1976). Later in 1886, the year that Alfred and Jennie married, Alfred's sister Sue married Adam G. Adams. The seven Adams boys were born over the same span of years as were the five Howell children. Meanwhile, at the Howell Cottage, Morton B. Howell's second family was overlapping in age with his grandchildren. The childhood summers spent at Beersheba shared by all these cousins formed warm friendships which extend to their descendants to this day.

The chief records of the Thompson-Howell residency of the cottage are a collection of guest books, the first not started till 1914. At the back of the book, Jennie wrote her recollection of "People in the Cottage Since Purchase in 1887. Not a perfect record but the best we have." In 1887, the household consisted of Fan (the owner), her mother, (Martha Anne Trabue Thompson, 1816-1901), her sister Mat and Mat's Trabue wards, Fan's sister Kate (Katherine Thompson Weakley, 1869-1946), and Fan's sister Jennie and her baby son, Morton, and on occasion her husband, Alfred. Coming to Beersheba from Nashville meant packing trunks full of clothes, taking the train headed to Chattanooga as far as Cowan, changing to the Mountain Goat train to come up the mountain and go as far as Coalmont, there to be met by Bill Perry and hauled the remaining 13 miles sitting on trunks in his ox cart. The expedition took all day. The ladies and the children made one round trip per summer. The men, traveling light, could shorten the time somewhat by riding horseback from Coalmont. They might therefore come and go several times in a summer.

Generally the same group came during the next few years, with Jennie adding children as they came along but missing the summers when she was pregnant or had an infant. 1894 was a memorable summer because Sue Adams and her first four sons spent the summer in two rooms of Whiskey Row of the hotel, just across the street, and took their meals with Miss Fan. For 1908, Jennie writes "Mort working on bridges." (She doesn’t mention the summer of 1907, the year her son Morton got his engineering degree from Vanderbilt and went to England and Germany to sing with the University Glee Club and learned the songs of Harry Lauder which he was to make famous again at All-World Quartet gatherings at Beersheba many years later). She notes "1909. Mort in Canada. 1912. Kid Bennie. 1913. Ed Hoyte, Mary Means and Mrs. Merritt."

1911 August 1, "Ode to Beersheba," was written upon his departure to Canada again and sent home by Mort. This youthful piece strikes the dominant theme underlying all the words and music, all the enchantment and wonder of Beersheba, and probably speaks for the whole family.

Ode To Beersheba
Of all the spots beneath the sun,
There seems to me to be just one
Where mortal man may feel so near
To Heaven that he needs must fear
To stay—else he might realize
Too soon the hopes of Paradise!
So when you feel an impulse clear
To travel to some gladder sphere,
Where Life is just a great sweet tune
And souls in harmony commune,
Don't hitch your wagon to a star,
Just journey up to Beersheba!
—Morton B. Howell

1914 Miss Fan died and left the house to her sister Jennie and Jennie's five children. In grateful memory of their aunt, they began to refer to the house as Nanhaven, which, many years later, was adopted as the official name of the corporation that now owns the house. Fan had been the live-in sister for Jennie's family.

1915 Marie Lyle Harwell (1893-1958), who was to marry Morton the next year, made her first visit, accompanied by her 15-year-old brother, Sam Harwell, Jr. Also that year Alfred E. Howell made a rare entry from 1711 Hayes Street, Nashville, and left the cryptic comment "Eggs is Eggs. Egg me and I’ll come back." Frances's future husband, Esmond Ewing calls himself "the Mayor’s son." Later that summer, he remarks: "He’s here again."

August 27-31 was called called by Morton "The Dorris Car Weekend Party." J. P. W. Brown signs describing himself as "Shofar" to the Beersheba car" with "wife Annie and the five chicks." What that means is perhaps best explained by the accompanying picture of a Dorris car of a few years earlier. (John P.W. Brown was a son of Jennie's older sister Elizabeth; he was manager of the Nashville Railway and Light Company.).
Even as early as 1913, Morton had realized that the automobile was not an unmixed blessing and produced a parody on the then-popular song, "Cousin of Mine." In later years, he saw what a crushing weight the automobile is on society. "Yes," he predicted, "the automobile will bury us." But ever humorous, he added. "How else do you think they'll get you out to Mt. Olivet?"

**1916** September, David Adams writes “How they (Martha Weakley and Sis Mat) will miss me, cooking supper before the open fire and bringing in the wood and water.”

**1917** August, Lt. Clopper Almon of Tuscumbia, Alabama appears. Because of the war, he had taken leave from Vanderbilt, gone to Officer Candidate School, and was serving in the Quarter Master Corps. The next year, he came down with the 1918 influenza just before embarking on a troop ship to Europe. When he recovered, the war was over. It would be eight years before he and Louise (third daughter of Jennie and Alfred) married, years in which he returned to Vanderbilt, attended law school there and at Georgetown University, and began the practice of law in Sheffield, Alabama.

Alfred Howell does not appear frequently in the guest books because he was busy working in Nashville, or later, Somerville, New Jersey to support his family. He was an iron foundryman by profession, a manager at Phillips & Buttorf stove works and a pioneer in foundry safety, for which he received a medal from the foundrymen’s association. He was also a first-class violinist and much in demand to play at stylish weddings, funerals and musical soirées. At the beginning of the war, he was pro-German, or at least anti-British. These sentiments may have started as a boy at Beer-sheba with his friendship for Capt. Plumacher, Col. Ritzius, and the families of the Swiss Colony. Doubtless his love of the music from the German-speaking lands played a role also. Before World War I, the Kaiser was widely admired for the way he was turning the Germans into a forward-looking influence in Europe and a challenge to the dominance of the British, who had disappointed Confederate hopes of intervention in 1862 and had won few friends in their conduct of the Boer War. How did Alfred feel at the end of the First War? He is absorbed in other matters. “It is man,” he writes, “that sanctifies the place. Work sanctifies the man.” Elsewhere, the corollary, and a quick word of advice to his four daughters: “Catch your man and work him!”

**1919** Jennie, entertaining the Harwells, the parents of Morton’s bride, is displeased with the weather served up for her guests. “Rain, rain, go away!” But Leila McClure Harwell, so like her daughter, gently rejoins, “Never mind the weather.” Still in August 1919, Esmond and Frances Howell Ewing, newly weds visiting from Little Rock, write “fattening on Mat again.” (Occasionally the young do acknowledge the quantities of food they consume at their elders’ expense.)

**1921** Alfred Howell makes the trip from Nashville in George Mitchell’s car and brings his friend and contemporary H. B. (Doc) Schermerhorn of “New York, Paris and Nashville,” who is later to play a romantic
role in Isabel Howell’s life till his death in 1935. In October, Morton writes, “Happy memories of rare October evenings beside this log fire.”

1922 June. Morton and Marie come with their first-born, Morton B. Howell, VI (1919 - ????) and nurse Dicie Hodge. Marie writes “Have your hair bobbed,” something she had done with good effect. Ten years later she introduced slacks to Beersheba and a daring bandanna blouse, but only briefly. (The Morton B. Howells later renumbered themselves. The son of Alfred and Jennie dropped the number, his son became Jr, and his son, III. We will refer to them as MBH, MBH, Jr. and MBH3)

This was also the year that Paul Bartles (1890-1935) first appears in the book. In an earlier summer, Paul was playing piano in the dance band at the hotel, but he played only by ear and could not read music. One evening someone had sheet music and asked Paul to play it so the band could hear and play it. Martha Howell saw his panic, slipped in beside him on the piano bench and played the piece. It was the beginning of a deep love. Martha's father recognized that Paul did not have the earning capacity he wanted in a son-in-law and opposed the match. Martha would have no one else, and they were finally married in 1929. In this summer of 1922, Paul took on the job of keeping the perpetual calendar on the hall desk up to date. In his first entry he writes:

Went out on the Backbone, couldn't stay late,  
Had to come back and change the date.

Paul had been gassed in WW I and died young, in 1935, leaving his widow Martha and their 5-year-old son, Alfred Howell Bartles (1930 - 20??). Sam served as a fighter pilot in the Air Corps in WWII, studied French in Montreal, worked with a newspaper in Nashville, then with American Express in Paris, married Jean Walker in 1951 and returned to Nashville to gradually take over his father's insurance business. He and Jean had four children: Samuel Jr., (Sammy) Marie Lyle (Molly), Ann, and Walker. Sam made many contributions to Beersheba, most notably as co-editor of the first edition of this book and the sole author of the Nanhaven entry in that edition. After the end of his first marriage, Sam married Virginia Rankin Robinson, whose grace as a hostess is legend.

1924 July. Kate Thompson Hesse, age 4, “Homesick on arrival, howling on departure,” according to her mother Martha. Isabel: “Planning as usual to come back in the fall.” Morton: “The golden haze of these October days will close the season in a blaze of glory we'll long remember.” The year was memorable for a determined effort to have a Christmas-time house party. It began December 26 and endured to January 1, 1925. A covey of cousins, Trabues, Orrs, Weavers and Thomases assembled and fires were kept burning brightly but managed to heat only a few feet in front of the fire place. No doubt the warming effects of Bourbon moved Spencer Thomas of St. Louis to ask “Ain’t Wild Turkey good?” And Ben Johnson of Morgan Lodge responds, “Ain’t life grand.” But the upshot of the effort was that even Herculean efforts on the fires could not make the house comfortable in cold winter weather. The experiment has never been repeated.

1925 August, the wedding of Louise Howell and Clopper Almon. Clopper's father, Edward B. Almon, was the Congressman from north Alabama, and the Almons had many relatives and friends from there and Washington. And of course all Beersheba and many other guests from Nashville were in attendance. Everyone dressed in white. Music was provided by a trio from the Cincinnati Conservatory which was playing at the hotel that summer. Morty Howell and Morty Adams were ribbon bearers; Jane Ewing and Katie Hesse flower girls; all 5 or 6 years old. The wedding procession came down the front steps, proceeded about ten yards down the walk, turned to the right and continued nearly to the driveway, where, under a black locust tree, the couple was married by the Reverend J. Francis McCloud of the Mitchell cottage. A big spread and champagne on tables under the pines followed the service. It had been a very dry summer, and the crashing thunderstorms that preceded and followed the event were welcome and mercifully let it go through as planned.

This must also have been the first summer of Mort and Marie's second son, Samuel Harwell Howell (1925 - 20??). Sam served as a fighter pilot in the Air Corps in WWII, studied French in Montreal, worked with a newspaper in Nashville, then with American Express in Paris, married Jean Walker in 1951 and returned to Nashville to gradually take over his father's insurance business. He and Jean had four children: Samuel Jr., (Sammy) Marie Lyle (Molly), Ann, and Walker. Sam made many contributions to Beersheba, most notably as co-editor of the first edition of this book and the sole author of the Nanhaven entry in that edition. After the end of his first marriage, Sam married Virginia Rankin Robinson, whose grace as a hostess is legend.

1926 August Isabel: “temporarily of 615 W 148th St, New York. My name is in the Directory.” She was getting a degree in library science at Columbia University. Alfred Howell, who had had to take work in Somerville, N.J.: “Mindful that the sweet days die.”
Mary Wallace Kirk, Louise’s artist friend from Tuscumbia: “I am in love with high, far-seeing places.” Josephine and Beverly Douglas: “Places may come and places may go,” she wrote, “but Beersheba lives on forever.”

The 1920’s also saw a major innovation at Nanhaven: running water, well, some running water. Previously there had been a cistern of Armfield construction and a well at the side of the back porch steps. It had a long, cylindrical well bucket lowered and hauled up by a rope around a windlass. There were bowls, pitchers, and chamber pots in the rooms. An outhouse provided the other services now offered in bathrooms. In the 1920’s, Charles C. Trabue gave to his cousin Mat, who had raised him, a gravity water system for Nanhaven. Water from the top half of the roof was conducted by gutters to a large, round wooden tank that sat above a low-ceilinged bathroom. Cousin Charlie had found the tank as post-war surplus in Nashville and bought several of them, one of which he installed in his own Beersheba house, Roundtop. There was screen over the top of the tank and an ingenious float which kept the expansion of ice in the winter from rupturing the tank. The whole structure was built by Arnold Hunnerwadel. Decades later, a plumber from McMinnville had to go under the floor to make repairs. He came out visibly shaken. “Who on earth built this thing?” he asked. “He must have bent galvanized pipe with his bare hands like I would bend copper tubing.”

The supply of water, however, was strictly limited. The bathroom was largely irrelevant to the life of men and boys. There was a hot water system, but it never worked well. Hot water had to be heated on the stove in the kitchen and brought in kettles to the bathroom. Only the cistern provided drinkable water. In the 1950s, an electric pump was installed in the well, but the water became muddy in rainy weather. Once public water supply became available, the tank was dismantled and the well closed. Originally, the production of waste water was limited; and a simple disposal system was adequate. But once the city water was going into it there was trouble. A proper septic tank and field were installed in the late 1960’s in a joint operation by Isabel and Clopper Jr.

1929 Isabel, recalled to Nashville as “lady of the house” at 1904 Division, "made ten trips to Mtn.” That summer. Louise and Clopper brought newborn Edward Clopper Almon. Louise wrote:

What does little Edward say, Early on the closing day? Thank you kindly, Aunt Mat, I must go, I’m getting fat. Edward was never to return. Within a few weeks, on a visit to his Nashville relatives, he suddenly died. Autopsy at Vanderbilt showed that he had had a congenital condition which it was routine to check and correct at Vanderbilt, but had been missed in Sheffield.

1931 First visit by Alfred Howell Bartles, son of Paul and Martha.

1932 and for several years thereafter the young Ewings, Jane, Bob and Harriet came to Beersheba. Jennie, now a widow, was present for the whole summer, June 16 to September 20. She writes, “Fun from start to finish, except for Isa’s absence.” And of Mat, “Bought food, scolded everybody and counted the sheets and towels.”

Isabel’s scholarly and literary friends, Harriet and Frank Owsley and Robert Penn (Red) and Ginina Brescia Warren are recorded. Ginina wrote, “To the Carmel, Calif, of Tennessee, where added to similar splendor, man is not vile.” Andrew Lytle, then of Cornsilk Farm, Guntersville, commented in Greek: “A friend is another self.”

1934 First visit by Louise's newborn son, Clopper Almon, Jr.

1939 July: MBH: “Strange to find the hotel closed. No one there but John Caldwell,” who carved one the two later sets of initials on the Dahlgren rock. .

This summer Louise invited Cren Adams, wife of her cousin Howell E. Adams, to spend several weeks with her and her son Clopper (aged 5) in Nanhaven. Cren came with her sons Howell (8) and Tom (4). It was a summer warmly remembered the rest of their lives by the boys. Activity centered around a sand box under the hemlock on the south side of the house. Little feet must have moved a lot of that sand into the house, for at the end of the summer, Louise said to Cren, "Next summer, let's put the sand pile in the hall and let the boys track it OUT!".

1940 Mat Thompson died in January. Mat was the trouble-shooter, visiting nurse and angel of mercy, for the whole Woods-Trabue-Thompson connection. As already mentioned, she had brought up her four Trabue wards. She had sat with a dear cousin, who had married well and was living on 5th Avenue in New
York, as the cousin died, mainly from drink. Mat had
gone West to be with a brother dying of lockjaw but
arrived only in time to bring the body home. Aged 15
when the Civil War was over, she had many memories
of it, and lived to be 90. Lighting was her specialty at
Beersheba in her declining years. Up at 6 o’clock, she
would have all the kerosene lamps with smoky chim-
neys from the night before assembled on her long, low
table on the back porch. Cleaning the chimneys took
most of the morning, for she was interrupted frequent-
ly at the back steps by peddlers of fruits and vegeta-
bles to sell, and occasionally a sackful of squawking,
terrified chickens. Besides bacon and hog jowl, chick-
en was the only meat served in those days and then
only on Sundays. For a long time the Thompson ladies
kept their own chickens for eggs and meat in a coop
and run in the back. But the fencing rotted and
“varmints” got into the chickens more and more fre-
fently until it was finally decided it was better
economy to buy the chickens and eggs as needed.

1941, Jennie died in April. All of the first generation
of owners were now deceased. For the last ten years,
MBH had gradually assumed responsibility for the
finance, maintenance and operation of the house. The
Ewings had moved to Connecticut and made no use of
the house. Martha and Isabel were not in a position to
help with the finances. The Almons paid for some spe-
cific projects, such as a new roof for the kitchen wing
in the 1940s, but Mort and Marie carried the main bur-
den of the house, insurance, taxes, and maintenance
without any suggestion that his sisters should do more.

The big news of the summer was written large across
the first page of the guest book for the year: “The
Methodists have bought the hotel for $3,000!” The
previous winter the hotel owners had tried to auction
off the property and Mort and Marie came up for the
occasion, he all in yellow corduroy, coat and knickers,
and carrying a walking stick. A large crowd gathered
and milled around in the chill lobby, gossiping and
speculating. After a while a man who had been stand-
ing near Marie and who seemed to be sizing up the
proceedings, spoke to her in a confidential tone: “You
know who’s going to buy it, don’t you?” She shook
her head. “It’s that fellow over there in the yellow out-
fit.” Marie turned and looked him straight in the eye
and after a moment said in her firmest tone: “He’d
better not.”

That summer and for several thereafter the “in-
comparable” Robert Mackey was presiding in the
Nanhaven kitchen when the Morton Howells were
present. He had been S. K. Harwell’s cook for years,
after he had taken him off an N.C. & St. L. dining car.
Now Marie had inherited him. He specialized in fried
chicken, fried green tomatoes, fried eggs, browned
soda-biscuits, lace-edge batter cakes, country ham and
gravy. Mackey performed all these miracles on a big
wood range at Nanhaven (now in the Beersheba
Museum) until the kitchen was remodeled and electrified in the 1950s. Shortly before that, Marie had
noted proudly, “five cords of stove wood safely put in
the shed.”

This was also the summer of an incident etched
on the memory of Alfred Bartles and Clopper Jr.
Those were the days of the open range. Anyone own-
ing cattle or swine could let them roam anywhere. If a
cottage owner wanted to keep them out of his yard, he
had to build the necessary fences and gates.. Many a
misty morning the family was awakened by cow bells
and roused to drive cows out of the yard through a
gate that had been left ajar. Once we returned from
swimming and found two hogs rooting contentedly in
front of the cabin. Mort got his single-shot 410 pistol,
declared, "I'll teach those porkers to root up our flower
bed," loaded, took aim and fired. The hogs yelped and
ran off to the north with Alfred and Clopper in hot
pursuit. They went under the fence through the hole
they had dug to get in. The pursuers were quickly over
the fence, but soon came running back shouting,
"Uncle Mort! That pig is lying down making a funny
noise.” Mort came just in time to see the pig breathe
its last. Amazed, he checked the shell he had used and
saw that it was buckshot, not birdshot as he had
thought. We buried the pig, not knowing how to bleed
and dress it. The pig had every right to be there, so to
head off trouble Mort hunted down the owner and
gave him $5, about what the pig would have eventual-
ly brought on the market.

Electricity came to Beersheba and Nanhaven in
the fall of 1941. Wiring of Nanhaven was very simple
with plugs in the floors only so as not to disturb the
logs. The kitchen was provided with a two-eyed, 110-
volt hotplate which would eventually boil a kettle of
water. For serious cooking, a fire had to be built in the
stove, and refrigeration was still provided by ice deliv-
ered by the Tracy City ice company. But just lights
were wonderful, for they eliminated the continual need
for cleaning lamps.
1943 An early trip. "A beautiful time, as Spring and Summer join hands in the lap of May."

1946 June. Marie's youngest brother, Coleman A. Harwell, back from the war and trying to sort out the civil chaos in Italy, and now reunited with his wife Ann and their two daughters, pays a warm tribute to Nanhaven:

You may like a cottage small,
We like this one with room for all;
Where Howell hospitality
And Robert Mackey's artistry
Combine to make the brief week pass.
So at its end we say alas,
But not alack,
We hope that soon we may come back.
To Long's and to the Collins, too,
To all these mountain charms, adieu.
Nanhaven, you're a cottage rare,
So generously your joys you share.

This summer there was a polio epidemic in the Muscle Shoals area in Alabama, where Louise and Clopper Almon lived. On the day school let out for the summer, the family headed for Nanhaven. Louise and Clopper Jr. stayed until just before school began again. This was a most important summer for twelve-year old Clopper. Not only did he and his mother form the strong bonds of shared adventure and labor, but he learned the use of the scythe and ax from Lafayette (Fate) McCarver, learned to lay fires that would catch from one match, drew and carried all the water used, filled the pitchers for washing in the rooms when there were guests, emptied the slop jars and the chamber pots, learned all the paths of Beersheba, and came to know his relatives young and old at Nanhaven and the other houses. If he wanted a hot meal, he had to split the bark slabs that were used for stove wood, build a fire in the range in the kitchen, and feed it as necessary while his mother cooked. It was not without reason that Louise's brother and sisters called her "The Cap"; for she was an energetic and determined commander in housekeeping. Alfred Bartles was invited to come up by bus from Nashville. He soon wrote home a postcard, "Greetings from the Nanhaven Workhouse for Unsuspecting Relatives." Louise had her two boys down on their hands and knees scrubbing the pine floors of Nanhaven. Clopper wrote to his father, "We have moved all the furniture twice. Today, Mama went to an auction and bought a table. Now we will have to move everything again to fit it in."

The wooden shingle roof of the kitchen wing was leaking worse and worse with each rain, until Louise had it replaced. A year or two later, the kitchen was given natural pine paneling and new equipment by MBH, Jr. and his wife, Nancy.

1947 On July 24, there arrived from Atlanta William A. (Kid) Bennie, an old friend of MBH and a bouncy comic, full of fun and energy. Born too soon to make a paying stage career, he wound up selling insurance. Soon came Dr. Hugh Morgan and his wife Bobby, with their guitar, and then arrived Dr. Beverly Douglas, pioneer plastic surgeon. With MBH and his violin there thus began the "36th non-consecutive season" of the AllWorld Quartet which was to run for three or four days a summer for the next ten years and give great pleasure to the hundreds of cottagers and their guests who were able to find a seat on the porch or a place to stand in the yard.

Besides the Quartet numbers like "Moonbeams" and "Dear Old Girl" there were several comic duets by Bennie and MBH, recalled from their Vanderbilt Glee Club days. There were Bennie comic solos, and Bobby Morgan sang the haunting songs of the North Carolina mountains where she was born. Beverly Douglas contributed his romantic ballad "A Toast to the Harvest Moon" and the then-current "Some Enchanted Evening." Then came MBHl with "Buffalo" (the Pullman porter realizes too late he has put the wrong man off the train in the middle of the night), "Never Had Such a Time in My Life," and "Hustlin' and Bustlin' for Baby" dedicated to Marie; and then in Glengarry bonnet and swinging a grape-vine cane, he sang the Harry Lauder songs "Roamin' in the Gloamin," "The Wedding of Sandy McNabb," and "Just a Wee Doch-an-dorris," still fresh in his memory from that long-ago trip abroad in 1907.

Standing out in the yard or in the deep shadows by the walkway gate, the porch ablaze under the eye of the big spotlight, the familiar music floating on the soft night air, a cluster of stars just visible through the pine boughs high overhead, and a big moon rising in the heavens, it was indeed "Some Enchanted Evening."

Every year the Quartet took its act to a different cottage for an evening and every year the fame and appeal grew. One might have thought it could go on forever, but there were no serious understudies in the wings, and man is not immortal, although his songs and sayings may linger awhile, echoing faintly down
the years. As one of their songs went: “No bird ever flew so high he didn’t have to light.”

1952 Death of Louise while Clopper Jr. was a senior in high school.

In Jennie’s time and as long as Louise had been able to come, the yard was mowed with a hand scythe two or three times a year, in early years by Virgil Brown, later on by Fate McCarver. The period of benign neglect of the yard began under MBH in the 1950s. With no help from his sons, he tried to cut the grass himself. Slowly the yard got away from him. Then one summer our young cousin Ben Adams put a large, neatly lettered sign over the walkway gate for all the world to see: “Ah, Wilderness.” MBH was stung, indignant, outraged. The sign came down; the undergrowth remained. Marie’s philosophy was simple: Nature will always have her way. Man’s efforts to control her, though brutal and harsh at times, will in the end always prove futile. In the 1970s, a more moderate policy was adopted.

1954 Marriage of Alfred Bartles to Martha Jean Smith. They met as music students at the University of Mississippi, then went together to the M.A. program in music at the University of Ohio. Martha was a pianist and Alfred a cellist, jazz pianist, and composer. There followed years of teaching and playing in New York, Stuttgart, Cookeville, then Stuttgart again for many years, and then return to Nashville after retirement in Germany. For many years, they taught at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival and after the festival often brought distinguished European musicians to Nanhaven. Two daughters, Isabel and Julia, both living in Nashville, carry on the musical tradition. Isabel is a violinist with the symphony; Julia, a freelance cellist.

1958 Marriage of Clopper Almon, Jr. to Shirley Montag and Shirley's first visit to Nanhaven. She and Clopper were classmates in graduate school in economics at Harvard, where both received Ph.D. degrees a few years later. Shirley taught at Wellesley and Harvard while Clopper taught at Harvard; when he came to the University of Maryland, she worked at the Council of Economic Advisers in the Johnson administration. In 1967, she was found to have a brain tumor; after a long and heroic struggle to live and be useful, she died in 1975. Shirley was a gracious hostess at Nanhaven and developed a particular friendship for Isabel and MBH.

1963 Death of MBH. His role in the management of the house was assumed by his elder son, MBH, Jr. He had gone to the Yale law school, served as captain of an all-black squadron at Maxwell Field during WW II, married Nancy Watkins of St. Louis in 1943, and then returned to Nashville to practice law. His boys, MBH 3 and William Watkins (Bill) Howell, were born in 1945 and 1947, respectively.

1976 First visit by Joan Wolfsheimer, to be married to Clopper Almon in October. Joan has taken to Beersheba with the zeal of a proselyte, as recounted further below.

Death of Isabel. She had graduated from Vanderbilt, known well the "Fugitives" group of writers, studied library work at Columbia, worked at the New York Public, returned to Nashville, worked in cataloging at the Vanderbilt library, served as librarian of the Methodist Publishing House, then as librarian of the Tennessee State Library, and after retirement, as the first archivist of the University of the South. She also held a M.A. in history from Peabody. Her thesis for that degree on the life of John Armfield was published as two articles in the Tennessee Historical Quarterly and is now republished regularly by the Beersheba historical society. Though there were many men in and out of Isabel's life, she never married. Her astrological sign was Virgo, and she was known to remark on its appropriateness. In the last years of her life, when she was living in Sewanee, she would often come to Nanhaven alone. One Friday evening she slipped into the empty house and, being rather tired, changed immediately into her nightgown, then opened the wardrobe to hang up her clothes. There on the pole of the wardrobe was hanging a snake! Isa flew out the door, down the driveway, along the road to the White House, where hair and night clothes flying behind her, she rushed into the front hall, full of Adamses, and shouted, "I need a man, and I need him quick!"

1980s The decade began with the celebration of the wedding of Marie Lyle (Molly) Howell, daughter of Samuel H. Howell, to Richard Dohrmann in August 1980. The wedding was on the front porch. Molly's sewing of new drapes and pillow covers had made the house look especially fresh and festive. The reception was catered by Dona Gower and was a memorable feast.

A second important social occasion was the celebration of the centennial of the purchase of the house in 1887. All of Beersheba and half of Nashville, it seemed, were invited. It was a special treat to have
Bob Ewing and Jane Ewing Frank and her husband Arthur, Connecticut cousins, come down to celebrate with us.

In the 1980s, if not somewhat earlier, Josephine Eubanks was engaged to provide basic cleaning and maintenance. This has been a most satisfactory arrangement. Josephine, her daughter Jeanette King, and Jeanette's husband Joe King have taken excellent care of the place and had it ready to use and enjoy immediately on arrival.

The passing of the last of the second generation of owners left the younger members of the family concerned about the future decision making and management of the house. At the request of the other owners, MBH, Jr. drew up articles of incorporation and bylaws. After some discussion, we realized that a system of salable shares would not work for us. We needed a corporation in which membership was based on interest and willingness to take on responsibility for contributing to the financial support of the house. The owners at the time of incorporation became members of the corporation, each with equal rights and equal responsibilities. Other descendants of Alfred and Jennie Howell can become members on application and approval by a majority of existing members. Anyone can be made a member by a unanimous vote. Widows and widowers of members automatically become members. In 2009, two of the original five members, Clopper Almon and Bill Howell, are still living and active. Alfred Bartles's widow, Martha, has become a member. Rob and Houston Howell, sons of MBH3, have joined, as has Ruth Howell, daughter of Bill and Margaret. The real work of the corporation has been done by its treasurer, Bill Howell. Bill's training as an architect has also helped the family immensely.

1990s After a lapse of more than 70 years without major new construction, the 1990s saw extensive renovation and construction on the cabin. It had reached the point that it either had to be jacked up and repaired or let go to decompose and be torn down. Joan Almon saw possibilities in the cabin and persuaded the family to share in the cost of jacking and performing basic repairs. Unfortunately, in the jacking up process, done by a specialist in that work, the sides of the fireplace caved in and the chimney collapsed into a pile of friable bricks. The first order of business the next summer was to close up the hole in the floor where the fireplace had been, then to replace a badly decayed log in the south wall. The next summer, Joan and Josephine scrubbed off the white wash from the interior of the hewn logs to expose the natural beauty of the wood. Clopper repaired the daubing between the logs, using genuine sand-lime-cement daubing that Armfield would have approved. Then the windows on the back were enlarged and 15-pane doors installed to let in a maximum of light. At this point, the cabin was quite usable, but Joan kept going. Allan Thompson built a ten-foot wide, screened in porch across the back of the cabin. This made a very pleasant work area, and the Almons began spending longer periods at Beersheba because they could actually get work done. Then the porch was extended to the north and a modern bath built to the east of the northern extension. At the same time, a sink and mini fridge and stove were put into the corner of the north room. Now there could be no excuse for not coming and working hard during a long summer at Nanhaven.

2000s In the 1980s and 1990s, there had seemed to be a lull in sound of children in Nanhaven. Happily, they have returned in the 2000s. The first in the new wave are Nathan and Irene Emahiser, children of Julia Bartles Emahiser and her husband Steve. Then there is Mills Howell, daughter of R.B.C. (Rob) and Katie Shaw Howell and Justus Howell, son of Houston and Jessica Howell. A swing has been put up and a mammoth sand box constructed in the front yard from the trunks of an old cedar that had to come down. Once again sand will be tracked into the house!

In 2009, major repairs are underway on the porches and plans have been approved for complete replacement of the old bath.

Joan Almon, with Susan Snow, took a great interest in rebuilding the collection of the Beersheba museum after Margaret Coppinger's death. Their efforts make it really worth visiting. They were recognized by the Historical Society by making Joan its president, where she has embarked on an ambitious program, including the updating of this book.

* * *

Isabel Howell, by her profession used to working with the personalities of the past, would often remark on how keenly she felt the presence of ghosts at Nanhaven, surely sensed if not clearly seen. They are kindly, soft, gentle spirits whose only wish is that you who now tread the paths of Beersheba should find the peace, tranquility, and loving communion with nature and with one another which they found here. Their
whispering voices are easy to confuse with the sound of the wind sighing through the tall pines on restless nights; their ghostly shapes and shadows appear to drift lightly across the darkened porch on bright nights when the moon moves in and out among the flying clouds. The big house stands aloof and vulnerable but is perhaps guarded by these gentle spirits who must always be counted among its occupants.

Samuel Harwell Howell †
Clopper Almon, Jr.
William Watkins Howell