

Aspen Pool House, built 1827 by John Unseld

Resource History

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The Aspen Pool Farm consists of several tracts of land pieced together through the first half of the 19th century by John Showman and his son Adam Showman. The Aspen Pool House sits on a 75-acre tract that was developed initially by John Unseld, including the construction of the house in 1827, and later sold to Adam Showman in 1852.

1802 – John Unseld first appears in the Jefferson County record with a purchase of 12 acres from Rawleigh Morgan (JC DB 1, p. 132).

John G. Unseld lived in Shepherdstown and operated a tavern there (Bushong, p. 105).

1806 – John Showman of Washington County Maryland made his first and only purchase of land in Jefferson County. The tract was 156 acres purchased from Abraham Morgan for \$5,000 (DB 3, p. 264). The deed notes the adjoining property owners as Keplinger, George Morgan heirs, William Brown, and Jacob Haines.

When William Morgan died in 1788 he devised “to my Son Abraham Morgan One hundred and fifty acres of Land where he now lives to begin at the great road Joining Mrs. Bedinger and run with the road to the Lane that goes to George Morgans then run with that Lane forty poles then leaving the lane and run parallel with the great road so far as to make the one hundred and fifty Acres to run with a Square line across to west line which said Land and improvements I leave to the said Abraham.” (BC WB 2, p. 5)

[Depending on which “Great Road” he’s referring to, this 150 acres adjoining George Morgan could be the 156 acres Abraham sold to John Showman in 1806. The \$5,000 sale price implies improvements.]

1810 – U.S. census record provides clues for who is living where:

In Shepherdstown: John Unseld (Sr.), aged 45+ and wife, and in a separate household, John Unseld (Jr.), aged 26-44, wife and nine children and one free colored.

In Washington Co., MD, Lower-Antietam Hundred (Sharpsburg-Keedysville-Boonsboro area): John Showman, aged 45+, with wife, 4 adult children and one younger child, five slaves.

In Jefferson Co., VA, country outside Shepherdstown (judging by the neighbors): John Hendricks with wife and one small child. John Hendricks was apparently living on the 49-acre parcel he purchased from William Brown that adjoined the former Abraham Morgan-now John Showman farm (see above).

John Hendricks sold the 49-acre parcel to John Unsel in 1810 for \$1,505 (DB 6, p. 176). Again, this price implies improvements.

1811 – The Jefferson County land tax for John Unsel listed his two Shepherdstown lots (John Sr. must have died), the 12-acre parcel (from Rawleigh Morgan), and the 50-acre parcel (from Hendricks).

In 1813 Unsel purchased two more parcels in the country adjoining the two he already owned. One was 2 acres from Jacob Haines for \$60 (DB 8, p. 140) and the other was 8 ½ acres from George Feaman (Fayman) for \$300 (DB 8, p. 146). These purchases are not reflected on the tax record until 1823 for some reason.

1820 – JC land tax listed John Showman, still in Maryland, with 150 acres and no building value. John Unsel was listed with just his 50-acre parcel and no building value.

The 1820 census showed Unsel still living in Shepherdstown, his occupation listed (possibly – it is very blurred) as “blacksmith.” John Showman was still in Washington Co., living in Boonsboro with his wife and two adult children and six slaves. His son Adam Showman was living in a separate household in Boonsboro nearby.

1823 – John Unsel was assessed for a 75-acre parcel (the total of the four parcels purchased from 1802-1813) with a building value of \$150, probably a small log dwelling. The only notation was “Alt’d” meaning the property was altered but with no further explanation.

By this time John Showman was deceased, his property listed under the “John Showman heirs,” but still no building value.

1827 – On the Showman heirs’ property the building value was listed as \$300 with the notation “an unfinished but occupied house by [?] Showman valued at \$300.”

This is likely the dwelling house shown on the 1852 map on the west side of the “Adam Showman” property and labeled “Aspin Pool.”

In 1829 the John Showman heirs’ building value rose again to \$450 with the notation “\$150 added for new log dwelling.” This was likely a house built for Showman’s widow Mary (Polly) located on the northeast side of the Shepherdstown Road on the 1852 map. But it was not until 1841 that the division of this part of the Showman farm was reflected in the tax record. Adam Showman was taxed on 104 acres with a \$300 building value and Mary Showman was taxed on 52 acres with a \$250 building value. This property gets recombined with the Adam Showman property in 1851 after Mary’s death.

[I’m putting all this Showman information here so as not to confuse the Aspen Pool stone house history, which is actually very separate from the Showman “Aspin Pool” farm history until 1852 (see below).]

1828 – On the John Unseld 75-acre farm the building value rose to \$750 with the notation “new stone house added \$600.”

[The NR form (attached) for Aspen Pool Farm, prepared by Paula’s students, dates the stone house to 1826 citing the 1827 tax record – this was in error (Don Wood’s error I’m afraid) as it was in fact the 1828 tax record that had this notation.]

1830 – Census for Jefferson County listed John Unseld aged 50-60, his wife aged 40-50, two adult males and two adult females all aged 20-30, and one female child aged 5-10. The Unseld household also included two slaves. The slaves likely had rooms in the cellar kitchen area.

Neighbors Adam and Mary Showman were listed in separate households, Mary with one adult daughter and three slaves, Adam with his wife and children and one slave.

1850 – John G. Unseld was deceased. His son John C. Unseld sold the small home farm to Thomas Thornburgh for the surprisingly low price of \$556 (DB 31, p. 341). **[it’s possible this was my own transcription error – this could be \$5,560, I did not make a copy of the deed.]**

Thornburgh was listed on the 1850 census (in the subject neighborhood), aged 57, a farmer, with \$5,000 real estate value. Also listed were his wife Maria and six children. All of the children were listed as born in Pennsylvania, from the oldest at 19 years, to the youngest 1-year old child, indicating the Thornburghs moved to the Unseld farm directly from Pennsylvania.

In 1847, just a few years prior to Unseld’s sale of the stone house property, Adam Showman began purchasing his father’s farm (adjoining Unseld) from the other Showman heirs who all still lived in Maryland (DB 29, p. 163). In 1850, Adam Showman purchased the interest in his deceased mother’s parcel of 52 acres from the other heirs, making his “Aspin Pool” farm of 156 acres complete again (DB 31, p. 341; this deed immediately preceded the Unseld to Thornburgh deed).

1852 – Thomas Thornburgh sold 51 acres of the Unseld home farm to Adam Showman for \$3,627 (DB 32, p. 332). This appears on the tax record as the whole Unseld to Thornburgh tract of 79 ½ acres. The building value was \$800.

By this time the former Mary Showman parcel (52 acres) no longer had a building value (formerly \$150 log dwelling) and Adam Showman’s former \$300 house was now valued at \$250. No doubt he was anxious to move into the Unseld stone house.

1860 – There may have been some unhappiness between the Maryland Showman family and the Virginia family as by the 1860 census it appears that Adam Showman had changed his name to Sherman. Adam Sherman was a successful farmer at age 63. The census listed his real estate value at \$14,500, with a personal property value of \$5,500. Living in his household was his wife Ann, aged 61, and son Oliver H.T. Sherman, aged 41. Oliver was also listed as a farmer. Adam Sherman reportedly owned nine slaves by 1860 (see attached NR draft).

1878 – Adam Sherman died in 1873, apparently without a will, and his estate was settled in Chancery Court, the farm apparently going to son Oliver Sherman. In 1875 Oliver Sherman recorded a Deed of Trust for the farm to James Mason on which he apparently defaulted in 1878 (DB C, p. 316).

The court ordered the sale of the real estate, thus the sale of the tract known as “Aspin Pool” or “Home Farm” was advertised in the Shepherdstown Register on August 10, 1878, said to contain 207 acres. The advertisement described the farm, consisting of “very fine limestone and soapstone land part under Timber. The improvements thereon consist of a good Stone Dwelling House, Tenant House, Stabling, Corn Crib &e, good Orchard, Well, Cistern, and also running water on part of land. Fences fair.”

It was Henry F. Neikirk who purchased 180 acres of the farm, including about 128 acres of the old Showman farm “Aspin Pool” (minus the Mary Showman parcel) and a 52-acre parcel, the former Unseld tract including the stone house (DB G, p. 20). The purchase price was \$7,856.

The Neikirk family owned and farmed Aspen Pool, as they called it, until 1909 when it was sold to Rowland Ringold who sold it to the Reinhart family who owned it until 1971. From 1927 to at least 1966 the farm was leased out to the Foutz family (see attached NR draft).