

# **Valley Falls Farm: The Red House On The Corner**



## The Red House On The Corner

The Red House on the corner of Bolton Road and Valley Falls Road has long been associated with Valley Falls Farm, however its origin and use have been controversial. Some felt it was built by Anson Lyman as a tenant house after he built the farm house, others that it predates the farm. A second controversy was whether it was Count Munchow's 'Alabama' converted for his wife in 1912.

Recent research on Lyman and Munchow from probate documents and deeds sheds new light on 'The Red House.'

### The Johns Family

The first settler at Valley Falls, and perhaps in today's Vernon, was **Stephen Johns (1655 -1736)** in 1716, a few years before Bolton was incorporated. He was given 100 acres as one of the 50 Bolton proprietors.

Over the years he and his sons purchased additional property along Bolton Road and Box Brook. Stephen had three sons who inherited his property when he died in 1736 selling some for cash and buying other properties as they became available.

What we consider Valley Falls Farm, and today's Valley Falls Park, was inherited and farmed by **Stephen Johns, Jr. (1710-1788)**. In 1777 he passed the 77-acre Valley Falls Farm property to his oldest son **Abijah (1741-1822)**, a Revolutionary War veteran and the last of the Johns men to own property and farm at Valley Falls.



*Eleven members of the Johns family have monuments in the Bolton Road Cemetery.*

Abijah had two known sons - **Stephen (1780-1811)** and **Abijah, Jr (1797-1821)**. Both died before Abijah ending the Johns line at Valley Falls.

In 1815 Abijah gave Stephen's widow, **Mary Johns**, a small lot (22 sq. rods) in his orchard at the corner of Bolton Road and Valley Falls Road. With Mary are Abijah's two granddaughters Lucretia and Rosina.

There Mary built their 'dwelling house' in 1815 or 1816 as indicated in mortgage deeds with local farmers. The 1820 census includes little detail but shows Mary with three girls in the house. The third may have been a helper. Abijah died in 1821 with his granddaughters receiving property as heirs.

What happens at the house the next ten years is unconfirmed. It appears that in 1822, a year after Abijah died, Mary, at age 42, married in Tolland **Ira Wells**. The 1830 census shows Ira, who would have been the head of the house rather than Mary, living in Vernon. Mary is not listed although she owns the house. With him are 18 people including one female 40-50, likely Mary. Most of the men are 20-30 and probably farm or oil mill workers who would have lived in a separate tenant house, perhaps Abijah's house next door.

### **The Lyman Family**

In November 1832 **Samuel Lyman (1772-1854)**, Anson's father, bought the Red House on Bolton Road from **Mary Johns** for \$90. Only the original 22 square rod property was included. Ira is not mentioned in the deed, perhaps because Mary is still the owner. After the sale Mary Johns and Ira Wells disappear from the record.

Samuel Lyman bought the house for his son Anson to whom he sold it a month later in December 1832 for the same \$90. Anson at the time wasn't ready to settle down but after three years in the U. S. Army he returned home in 1836, purchased the neighboring Tarbox farm, married and likely built his farmhouse on Valley Falls Road by 1840. There Anson moved to raise their family. With no adolescent sons he needed help managing his farm and the Red House likely became a tenant house.

After Anson Lyman died in 1855 his property, including the Red House, was sold to **Samuel Bradley (1811-1891)** who owned the farm for about 20 years. He continued to use the Red House as a tenant house as shown on the 1869 town map.



1869 Vernon showing Bradley's Tenant House.

### From Sharps to Munchow

In 1870 **Christian Sharps (1810-1874)** bought the farm and property on Railroad Brook from the Bradleys to build a trout farm. He and his family lived near the depot on Birch Street, not in the Valley Falls farmhouse. He had no interest in farming so either hired people or leased the land. Whoever the farmers were they probably used the farmhouse as well as the Red House.

When Sharps died unexpectedly in 1874 ownerships returned to **Samuel Bradley**, who held the mortgage. The next years saw a number of owners and some speculators, but the Red House always stayed with the farm.

The **Gwynne's** owned the farm from 1875-1897 and lived there at least part time. Then the **Hardy's** owned it from 1903 to 1907. Both families had other interests than farming so likely hired help who may have lived in the Red House, although even after the Cotton Mill burned in 1877 the mill tenant house was still used until about 1820. We don't know how the Red House was maintained or updated over those years.

## Count Hans Munchow

In 1910 **Count Hans Munchow (1883-1939)** bought the property with his new wife's money and converted the farm to a European design building the stable and rebuilding the barn. He was not a farmer as he worked in Hartford, but lived in the farmhouse.

Munchow hired a German family to manage the farm and probably help with barn construction. The 1910 Federal Census lists **Philip Michael's** family with his wife and three children. Philip was the farm foreman and his wife Katherine was servant to Munchow. It is likely they lived in the Red House.

On June 24, 1911 Hans Munchow and Henrietta Cassin were married in Kentucky. Henrietta came from a wealthy Southern family and would not live in the old buildings on the farm staying instead in Hartford.

Six months later a short item in the January 17, 1912 issue of *The Hartford Courant* says that Munchow "has his barns completed and equipped with modern conveniences, running water and steam heat. In the Spring he plans to build a new house and lay out the grounds, including a new road to his buildings from the highway."

Instead of building a new house he gave the Red House new life by updating it for Henrietta and calling it 'The Alabama' after her home state. It was described in later sales literature as a '6-room bungalow with bath, and a large veranda overlooking hillside and lake.'

At this time Munchow's employees living in the Red House may have moved to the nearby Valley Falls Cotton Mill boarding house. A June 19, 1914 article in *The Hartford Courant* notes that "the Cotton Mill boarding house is still standing and some of the workmen at Dr. Beach's place have been living there."

In 1913, deep in debt, Munchow fled the state with his secretary and lover leaving Henrietta to pay his debts and sell the property. He is credited with modernizing the farm and converting it to a 'gentlemen's farm,' building the European style stable on the hill and the red barn.

## Beach's Bungalow

Two years later, in 1915, **Mary Batterson Beach (1856-1951)** and her husband **Charles Beach (1856-1948)** bought the property. The transformed Red House might have been part of the allure as the Beaches used it while their main house was being constructed.

An article in the October 17, 1915 issue of *The Hartford Courant* describes Dr. Charles Beach's purchase of the property and that the building of their new summer home is underway. It mentions that the new house is on the same side of the road as 'The Alabama,' the bungalow built by 'the Count.'

The following photo was in the collection of Beach photos that Carol Burke passed to Ann Letendre for the Heritage Center. It was not labeled, but shows guests visiting a bungalow. The clothing and automobiles are consistent with 1915. The house has a veranda and beyond the automobiles the land seems to drop away into a valley. This is consistent with the 1914 description of a '6-room bungalow, bath, large veranda overlooking hillside and lake.'





Compare the period photo with the corner house as it looks today. The veranda on the left has been enclosed, but the windows, front door and dormers are identical. On the rear is a structure that could have been a wrap around veranda overlooking the lake or enclosed as additional rooms.

After the Beaches moved into their big house the Red House was used for guests and staff. A March 5, 1916 article says that "Erwin Reed and family are occupying the bungalow on the Dr. Beach place at Valley Falls Farm, the former having taken the place of the superintendent of the place." We also know from Darico and Beach grandchildren interviews that the house was used by the Beach's gardener and later his chauffeur.



*From an aerial photo of Beach estate. On display in the Heritage Center.*

In 1945 the Beach's son **Charles (1894-1979)** became the owner of the property and made it his year round home. In the late 1940's he sold the Red House. In 1958 the rest of the 230-acre property with four dwellings was sold to Jones & Lyon developers.

## **After Beach**

Over the next 65 years based on town directories there were just three owners of 479 Bolton Road.

From about 1949 to 1960 **Thomas and Eline Hooker** lived in the Red House.

From 1962 to 1974 **Alan and Marguerite Reinhardt** lived there.

About 1975 the house was sold to **Thomas (1931 - 2009) and Anne Shea (1922 - 2012)**. Anne lived there until her death, although the family didn't sell it until 2015.

## **Summary**

The Red House was built in 1815-16 by Mary Johns, daughter-in-law of Abijah Johns, on a corner of Abijah's orchard. The land had been in the Johns family since 1716.

It was sold to the Lymans in 1832 where it became part of Valley Falls Farm. It was used primarily as a tenant house for families hired to manage and work the farm.

In 1912 the house was updated and remodeled for Hans Munchow's wife.

In 1915 it became part of the Beach estate used primarily by members of the Beaches' staff. Additional buildings are now part of the property, likely added for Beach staff.

In the late 1940's the house and property were sold and no longer was part of Valley Falls Farm. It had been part of the farm for about 120 years.

Jon Roe  
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## Timeline & Deeds

*Much of the information in this article is from deeds. In this Timeline the reference deeds are shown. 'B' for Bolton deeds and 'V' for Vernon deeds.*

1716 - Stephen Johns settles at Valley Falls.

1723 - The new town of Bolton deeds Johns a 100-acre Home Lot. (B1-33)

1736 - Stephen sells to Stephen, Jr the northern valley. (B1-523)

1777 - Stephen, Jr sells 77 acres to his oldest son Abijah. (B5-279)

1815 - Abijah to his daughter-in-law Mary Johns a small lot at the corner of Bolton and Valley Falls Road. (V1-231)

1815-16 - Mary builds her dwelling house on the small lot. (V1-232)

1832 - Mary Johns sells the lot and house to Samuel Lyman. (V4-41)

1832 - Samuel sells the lot and house to his son Anson Lyman. (V4-44)

1836 - Anson Lyman buys the 97-acre Tarbox property. (V4-512)

1837 - Anson marries.

1837-39 - Anson builds the farmhouse, farm labor moves into the Red House.

1860 - Lyman heirs sell to Jane Bradley 170 a. after Anson dies in 1855. (V8-426)

1870 - Christian Sharps buys property. (V17-213)

1910 - Count Munchow buys property. (V41-688)

1915 - Beaches buy property. (V43-588)

1948 - Charles Beach sells house to Thomas & Eline Hooker. (Date needs confirmation)