

What's in a Name? Early communities, landmarks named for early activities

Note: This article is the second in a series highlighting the history of Limestone County place names.

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Limestone County's natives and earliest settlers built homes, raised farms and families, and sipped whiskey, all of which are reflected in some of the names of places around the county.

Some of the early communities and landmarks named for these activities include:

- **Barksville:** This settlement, near the present-day New Garden Cemetery north of Athens, was named around 1810 for the bark huts the settlers lived in.
- **Bass Corner:** This was the site of the first business in Athens, a tavern previously known as Wilder's Tavern. Located on the southeast corner of the Square, at today's Woodroof Law Firm building, this tavern also became the Athens Post Office in 1840, and the tavern-keeper, Thomas Bass, became the first postmaster.
- **Bell Tavern:** Griffin Lambkin was operating this tavern on the south side of the Square by 1826, he named after its famous bell, which was made partly of silver and was said to have "the ring of precious metal."
- **Cotton Port:** Located about mile south of Mooresville at the junction of Piney, Limestone and Beaver Dam creeks – the nearest highland to the Tennessee River – Cotton Port was a prominent port for the cotton trade of the early 1800s. Cotton en route to New Orleans was stored at Cotton Port during the dry seasons until it could get over the shoals of the Tennessee River once the waters rose during the rainy season. A town of at least 250 residents, including schools, businesses, and churches, was established there, but once cotton began to be primarily shipped by rail, the residents moved away. Today the town is under the waters of the Wheeler Reservoir.
- **Fertilis:** The post office for this settlement near Bell Mina in southeast Limestone County was established in 1856 and discontinued the following year. Thomas H. Hobbs suggested the name because of the fertility of the land, although perhaps it may have been a nod to the large families at the time as well.
- **Gourdsville:** This settlement, which is still on modern day maps near the Tennessee state line in northwest Limestone County, was named for one of Limestone County's first open-air bars. Around 1810-1812, a local man made and sold whiskey there, served in gourds over a bar made of a split log propped on two barrels. It is said that the way to Gourdsville was easy to find by following the trail of broken gourds right up to the bar.
- **Meat House Branch:** This creek near French's Mill was so named because one of the Chickasaws' spring houses used to keep fresh meat cool was still standing when the Chickasaws left the area.
- **Nubbin Ridge:** Maybe the opposite of Fertilis, this community in southeast Limestone County was named because the corn there would not grow past the nubbin stage.
- **Widow's Hole:** This favorite swimming and fishing spot on Piney Creek was named for a widow who regularly fished there.

Note: Information for this article came from A Tentative Survey of Limestone County Place Names by Deborah Ashford.

About the Archives:

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