

What's in a Name? Early churches derived names from geography, history

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

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

Limestone County's earliest settlers brought with them not only their families and their farming supplies, but perhaps most importantly, their faith. Wherever they put down roots, they also put up steeples, and today Limestone County is dotted from end to end with houses of worship of various faiths.

Two of those earliest churches, and the sources of their names, are:

- **Round Island Baptist Church:** Limestone County's oldest continually-meeting congregation began as a small group of believers meeting for worship in 1816, when this area was still a part of the Mississippi Territory. According to local historian Dr. Thomas Stith Malone, the congregation obtained land from Richard Henderson, Sr. in the fall of 1816, to build its first church house on his plantation. It was probably located just north of the present Ripley Road, less than a mile from Round Island Creek, which apparently got its name from having had a round island at the place where it emptied into the Tennessee River. His purchase of this property was recorded in Huntsville in 1818. He and his descendants seem to have had a residence at this location until late in the 1800s, so this seems to be the most likely place for the church to have been built. Dr. Malone wrote in "Scraps" in 1867, that the church was built near where "Mr. Richard Henderson's house now stands." The church was constituted on June 17, 1817, according to church minutes as the Baptist Church of Christ at Round Island. The church relocated to its present site, on Brownsferry Road a few miles from Round Island Creek, in about 1823, after congregation member John Favour donated the land, but it retains its historic name to this day.
- **Cambridge Methodist Church:** Originally Cambridge Chapel, this church was started in log building before 1832 and was central to the east Limestone town of Cambridge, so named in honor of the first English translation of the Bible, the Cambridge King James Version. By the time Limestone County was established in 1818, the town of Cambridge consisted of several business houses, shops, and a mill. Cambridge owed most of its growth to the "Great Spiritual Revival" of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and camp meetings were held here, sometimes lasting for weeks at a time. Among early Methodists who preached here were, John B. McFerrin who later became a Methodist Bishop and Lorenzo Dow, a man whose presence and message were so powerful that hundreds were converted by him, and children were named for him for generations. Cambridge was one of three locations considered for the county seat, however the choice went to Athens, and Cambridge never grew as hoped. Temperance rallies were held here by the "Sons of Temperance" during the 1840's, drawing large crowds. The campground was also used as a muster and drilling ground by confederate units formed from Limestone County. The eight acres for the meeting house and campground were originally donated by George Malone, an early settler, who came from Sussex Co. Virginia.

Note: Information for this article came from A Tentative Survey of Limestone County Place Names by Deborah Ashford, History of Round Island Baptist Church at www.roundisland.org, and Limestone County's Historical Markers.

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Limestone County Department of History and Archives

Established: 1980

Staff: Archivist Rebekah Davis and Assistant Archivist April Davis

Location: 102 W. Washington St., in the 1905 L&N Passenger Depot

Hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday

Phone: 256-233-6404

E-mail: archives@limestonecounty-al.gov

Web: www.limestonearchives.com

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