

New Garden community history shared on marker

By Rebekah Davis

Limestone County Archivist

It's time for more stops on the historical marker tour of Limestone County.

I've been spending a few months sharing the information about these markers. To see the list of most of the markers and more information, you can get maps and GPS coordinates to each one by searching for Limestone County's historical markers on www.lat34north.com, or to view additional markers and directions, visit www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org.

Today's marker has the history of the cemetery on one side and the church on the other:

- **Old New Garden Cemetery:** This cemetery is one of the oldest in Limestone County and is listed on the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register. Many of the area's earliest settlers are buried here including Patsy, Elmore, widow of a Rev. War veteran, along with War of 1812 veterans: Thomas Martindale, William Levesque, Andrew McWilliams and William Malone. The headstone of Barbara Fisher, who died in 1831, is the oldest dated stone in the cemetery, but other undated and in some cases unmarked graves are thought to be even older. Most of the dated burials occurred during the 1850-1869 period when outbreaks of influenza or disease may have swept through the area. Union forces occupied North Alabama throughout most of the war and during the tragic "reconstruction" period that followed. The deprivation and hardships suffered by local residents during the period may have contributed to the high death rate. The graves in the lower part of the cemetery are thought to be those of slaves and possible casualties of the nearby battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle Fort. Col. Lathrop, the Union commander of the fort, was killed during the battle and first buried where he fell. His body was later disinterred and re-buried in this cemetery, only to again be removed after the war and taken to the north for final burial, making him a man buried three times. This old section was largely unused after 1870 with only occasional burials after that date, the last being in 1917.
- **New Garden Cumberland Presbyterian Church:** This church was one of the earliest in the area and formed the nucleus of the pioneer community of New Garden. It had its beginning at a camp meeting in 1818. The meeting, held along Muddy Creek, about a mile N.E. of here, was conducted by Rev. Robert Donnell, assisted by Albert Gibson, Robert Steele, Adam Burney and William Levesque. In 1820 the New Garden congregation was organized by Rev. John Comahan at a meeting held in Robert Steele's barn. There were ten people present, several of whom were members of the Steele family. The log church was built here on New Garden Hill in 1823, standing at the north end of this old cemetery. The building is thought to have faced north with a wagon road leading up the hill to it. The current paved road did not exist at the time, although the lower part of it may follow the original wagon road. The land on which the church was built belonged to Jeffery Murrell at the time, and it wasn't until 1834 that Robert Steele, James Grigsby, James Montgomery and T.S. Garrison, the trustees of the "New Garden Society," bought the two acres on which the church and camp ground were situated. Another small parcel joining the first was bought from James Grigsby in 1845.

A school was built there, which was used until marauding Union troops tore it down and used the lumber in the construction of buildings at Sulphur Trestle Fort. The congregation moved to Elkmont after 1878 and later disbanded completely.

Marker is located north of Athens. From Highway 127, turn right on Hayes Mill Road and go about 4 miles and exit to the right onto New Garden Road. The marker and old cemetery are on the left.

About the Archives:

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