

Markers tell of early settlers – and soldiers sent to remove them

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 weeks 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](http://www.lat34north.com), or to view additional markers and directions, visit [www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org).

Today's markers are:

- **Fort Hampton:** Approx. ¼ mile North is the site of Ft. Hampton, built in 1810 and named in honor of Brig. General Wade Hampton of Revolutionary War fame. Two Companies of soldiers were stationed here in log buildings. The purpose of the fort and its garrison was to keep settlers, or "Intruders," off Indian land, as the area was not ceded to the United States by the Chickasaw Indians until 1816. This fort was one of few ever built to protect Indian land from white settlers. The soldiers garrisoned here built most of the earliest roads in this area. After 1816 the fort was not needed and was soon abandoned.

Marker is located about 13 miles west of Athens on U.S. Highway 72 at the entrance of Fort Hampton farms. The actual site is about ¼ mile north of the marker.

- **Sims Settlement:** In the fall of 1806 a group of settlers led by William and James Sims traveled from east Tennessee on flatboats and down the Tennessee River and up the Elk River to this area. They landed near Buck Island and spread out into the surrounding countryside, seeking home sites in what they thought was "government" land that would soon be for sale to settlers. The area they settled, covering several square miles, from Elk River to New Garden became known as "Sims Settlement."

The Federal Government had settled the Cherokee claim to the area north of the Tennessee River in 1805, but the Chickasaw Nation maintained a claim to it until 1816.

The settlement by the Sims party and others that continued to come to the area was illegal, and they became squatters or "intruders" on Indian land.

The growing number of white settlers entering the area alarmed the Chickasaws who threatened war if the U.S. Federal Government didn't remove them. To avoid bloodshed and to placate the Chickasaws, the government sent troops into this area to remove the settlers. This first removal was in April and May of 1809. Most of the settlers returned as soon as the soldiers left, and so the problem continued.

In response, the government sent an ultimatum dated August 4, 1810, to the settlers that if they had not left all land west of the Chickasaw boundary by December 15, they would be removed by force. This boundary was surveyed in the fall of 1807, starting at Hobbs Island in Madison County and running diagonally to a point near Maury County in Tennessee. This boundary was the source of all the settlers' problems because they were on the wrong side of it. Faced with the grave threat issued by the military, the settlers took the only action within their means.

On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1810, some 450 of them gathered at Sims Settlement and signed a lengthy letter or petition addressed to President James Madison and Congress. In it they stated the honesty of their intentions, the strength of their character and made passionate pleas that they be allowed to stay. Even though they described the terrible condition they

would be placed in, especially that of the widows and orphans among them, all their pleading fell on deaf ears however. The soldiers who were now stationed at the newly established Fort Hampton set about removing the settlers, burning the cabins and rail fences. This continued until 1817, and in 1818 land in Limestone County was finally offered for sale by the government.

Marker is located about 8 miles north of Athens on Edgewood Road (CR 65). The marker is on the left just before reading Morris Road (CR 49).

**About the Archives:**

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:** [lcarchives@knology.net](mailto:lcarchives@knology.net) or [lcarchives2@knology.net](mailto:lcarchives2@knology.net)

**Web:** [www.limestonearchives.com](http://www.limestonearchives.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives](https://www.facebook.com/limestonecountyarchives)