Thomasville United Methodist Church
Thomasville, Alabama

Thomasville is the northern-most incorporated settlement in Clarke County, Alabama. It is situated on an elevated area of gently rolling hills between the Tombigbee and Alabama rivers at an elevation of 381 feet. Thomasville was founded in 1888. It had its roots in the nearby community of Choctaw Corner which dated back to the antebellum period and was a settlement west of what would become Thomasville. As in many other instances, when the merchants there learned that a railroad was going to bypass their town to the east, they decided to move their stores to be near the railroad whose tracks between Mobile and Selma were completed the same year that Thomasville began.

First referred to as "Choctaw", the town was renamed after railroad financier Samuel Thomas after he donated $500 for the construction of Thomasville's first school. The town had expanded by the end of the 19th century with numerous stores, several hotels and boarding houses, and a depot station. In 1899, what is now downtown was destroyed by a fire that burned several blocks of the wood frame buildings. Thomasville quickly rebuilt, this time in brick, and was once again flourishing by the start of World War I.

Over the next century, Thomasville continued to grow and expand; many businesses came and others left. The railroad discontinued its use of the town's depot by the 1950s, but that time also saw the opening of a nearby Air Force radar base which brought servicemen and their families to the area. The 1960s and 1970s saw the opening of numerous paper mills in the area, an industry that continues to be important to the economy of Thomasville today. This time also saw businesses begin to relocate from downtown to the main highway. In 1999 the Thomasville Historic District was designated and placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Thomasville Methodist Church was the first church of any denomination built in Thomasville. It began in the Mosley School House located one-half mile northeast of downtown. The first service was conducted in the spring of 1888 by Reverend Charles Monroe Martin. Thereafter, the building was known as Martin's Chapel. In the same year a church was formed with ten members.

In 1888 a lot was deeded to B.F. Adams and Reverend Martin on which the first Methodist Church was built. The building, 30' x 30', was located on Alabama Avenue. By 1892 the church membership had increased to 61 and the church status was changed from a station church, attached to the Choctaw Corner Church, to the Thomasville Circuit. The same year, with the increase in membership, a much larger frame church building built on the east side of Front Street facing south onto Wilson Avenue. This building would be used from 1893 to 1953. The first pastor was Reverend G.K. Williams and the church was affiliated with the Methodist Protestants.

In 1950-51, a new brick educational building was erected at the intersection of Safford Avenue and Old Highway 5. With the completion of the (Continued on page 2)
educational building, work on a new sanctuary was begun in the summer of 1952 and completed in the fall of 1953. With the completion of the new sanctuary, the old church, which had served for 61 years, was retired and sold. In 1992, a new parsonage was bought in Country Club Estates and the old parsonage became the church office.

The Thomasville United Methodist Church is a 1-story, 1-by-9 bay, gable front, L-shaped church building with several rear additions. The original portion of the church has a wire-cut brick veneer laid in a 6-course bond. The front facade has concrete steps that access a slightly projecting, gabled bay with shouldered sides. In this bay is a recessed, Gothic-arched opening with a Gibbs surround. In the opening is a recessed, Gothic-arched opening with a Gibbs surround. Modified buttresses flank the gabled bay. On the north and south (side) elevations, Gothic arched, stained glass windows with concrete Gibbs surrounds are interspaced with modified buttresses. On the north elevation in the rear ell is a rectangular, gabled tower with a recessed, single leaf entrance. Sunday school rooms are at the back of the building with metal sash casement windows.

In 1983 a bell tower on the front lawn of the church was erected to house the church bell that was saved from the first church. In 1987-88 a new fellowship hall was added and dedicated on April 23, 1989. In 1993 an amplifying system was installed into the sanctuary. Today the old parsonage (built 1949) is currently being used as a church office & youth center.

From its origin in 1888, the church name has evolved from Methodist Protestant to Methodist (by merger with Methodist Episcopal in 1939) and, through merger with the United Brethren in 1963, into The United Methodist Church.

Thomasville UMC has served this area for 128 years and continues as a vibrant force in the Thomasville community.

Thanks to Rev. Nancy Watson for sharing information about the church’s history, thanks also to the Thomasville UMC web site, to Wikipedia and Google Earth for photos and additional information, and to the National Register of Historic Places.

**Thomasville UMC Pastors**

**As a part of The Choctaw Corner Circuit:**
- Charles Monroe Martin 1886
- Thomas Holloway Jones 1888
- John David Kersh 1889
- William P. H. Connerly 1891

**As The Thomasville Circuit:**
- George Kittrell Williams 1892

**As the Thomasville Station:**
- Leander Cotton Calhoun 1893
- Isaac Franklin Betts 1894
- George Monroe Sellers 1898
- Everett Lee Loveless 1899
- Riley Augustus Moody 1900
- Robert Haynes Lewis 1904
- Byrd Lee Moore 1905
- Joseph Prior Roberts 1906
- James Anderson Seale 1908
- Selman U. Turnipseed 1912
- John Benjamin Tate 1914
- John H. Williams 1917
- Charles Prescott Atkinson 1918
- John Thomas Eckford 1919
- Elza Bland Paul 1920
- James Felix Feagin 1924
- Walker Brancroft 1926
- John Holcomb Holloway 1928
- James Clendinen 1931
- George Glenn Vickers 1934
- O.H. Van Landingham 1937
- Thomas W. Eddins 1939
- Conrad William Myrick 1941
- Charles Anson Corbitt 1943
- Fred L. Davis 1947
- William Matthew Sproles 1948
- William M. Pickard, Jr. 1951
- Haywood Scott 1954
- Edmond O. Bradley 1956
- Lloyd Tub 1958
- Mark Anthony 1962
- William H. Griggs 1963
- John T. Parker 1965
- Thomas Sowell 1969
- Earnest Andress 1974
- Joseph E. Bates 1980
- Malcom L. Roberts 1984
- C. Edward Britton 1986
- E. Bruce Fitzgerald 1989
- Robert C. Warren 1994
- Jesse Shackelford, D. M. 1998
- David E. McVay 2000
- Philip D. Craddock 2003
- George Sedberry 2010
- Nancy Watson 2014
- Mark Dees 2016
Circuit Riders, Brush Arbors, Camp Meetings and Tabernacles

As late as 1790, twenty-nine out of thirty people in even the more settled of the southern American colonies did not belong to any church. There was a need to find a method to reach the people and make them see their need. The Methodist societies of the Church of England already had part of that method: a collection of itinerant preachers. By assigning these preachers to specific circuits, instead of letting them wander, they could spread Christian beliefs to all parts of the frontier. These circuit riding preachers were officially assigned to what was called the traveling connection and would become known as circuit riders.

Methodist circuit riders were also book distributors. Their commission on sales provided some of them with the only cash they ever saw. This helped spread Bibles, hymnbooks, and other religious literature throughout the frontier.

Riding a circuit was demanding on those who undertook this grueling ministry—half died before reaching age 33. Beef or venison jerky was the circuit rider’s staple food because it would not spoil easily. Yet many ministers thrived on the rigors of the circuit. A circuit rider was expected to take good care of his horse. The First Discipline of the Methodist church said, “Be merciful to your Beast. Not only ride moderately, but see with your own eyes that your horse is rubbed and fed.”

Circuit riders had to be young, in good health, and single (since marriage and a family forced preachers to settle in one area and leave the traveling ministry). Unlike their counterparts in other denominations, Methodist circuit riders did not have to have a formal education. Leaders of the new church wanted educated, trained circuit riders, but they wanted even more to spread their ministry to people on the frontier who needed Christian guidance.

Life was not easy for a circuit rider, partly because living conditions on the frontier were harsh. Enoch George, who later became a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, said that serving the North Carolina Pamlico Circuit in 1790 and 1791, he “was chilled by agues [malaria], burned by fevers, and, in sickness or health, beclouded by mosquitoes.”

Circuit riders rarely served longer than one year in a circuit. Each year, they were appointed to a new area. This gave the preachers an opportunity to reuse their sermons and to perfect their delivery. It also kept them from growing too familiar with the local people and wanting to settle down.

Circuit riders had a simple plan of evangelism: they went where the people lived, and they ministered to their needs. Often, one of the first visitors to a family who had just arrived on the frontier was a Methodist circuit rider. During the day, he might help out with chores or assist with teaching the children. In the evening, after dinner, he would offer religious instruction to the family and to any neighbors who wished to join them.

If the preacher had found a warm welcome, he might spend the night with the family. Upon leaving the next day, he would usually promise to return the following month on a certain date to teach, preach, and hold services again. These little pockets of people sometimes became the core of a new Methodist Episcopal congregation.

When America’s War for Independence ended in 1783, many ties with England had been broken. Some Methodist preachers, who were really members of the Church of England, had gone into hiding. The tie between Wesley’s Methodist Society in America and the Church of England was one of those broken ties. The Methodist Episcopal Church in America was born in 1784 with Francis Asbury elected one of its first two bishops. Asbury had come to the colonies in 1771 when there were only 600 American Methodists. When he died 45 years later, there were 200,000 – largely because of camp meetings and circuit riders. The responsibility for assigning preachers to the many circuits fell completely to him and to other bishops who came after him.

The early American Methodists asked four questions about each candidate offering himself for the circuit riding ministry:

Is this man truly converted? Does he know and keep our rules? Can he preach acceptably? Has he a horse?

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**Brush Arbors.** As the community and population grew in size, church members often built a structure called a “brush arbor.” Brush arbors were open shelters that had a flat top covered with brush for the roof which provided shade from the sun but little protection from rain. These temporary shelters often served as a group’s first official place of worship. The host family for these new congregations (or sometimes the family that donated the land or materials for the brush arbor) frequently gave its name to the new place. Even today, many Methodist churches bear a family name.

The movement of thousands of settlers to new territories without permanent villages of the types they knew meant they were without religious communities. Not only were there few authorized houses of worship, there were fewer ordained ministers to fill the pulpits. The "camp meeting" led by itinerant preachers was an innovative response to this situation. Word of mouth told there was to be a religious meeting at a certain location. Due to the primitive means of transportation, if the meeting was to be more than a few miles’ distance from the homes of those attending, they would need to stay at the revival for its entire duration, or as long as they desired to remain.

**Camp Meetings.** The camp meeting is an American frontier phenomenon, but with strong roots in traditional practices of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the United States. Scots and Scots-Irish predominated in many parts of the frontier at this time, and had brought their familiar Presbyterian "communion season" practices with them.

People generally camped out at or near the revival site, as on the frontier there were usually neither adequate accommodations nor the funds for frontier families to use them. People were attracted to large camp meetings from a wide area. Some came out of sincere religious devotion or interest, others out of curiosity and a desire for a break from the arduous frontier routine; the structure of the situation often resulted in new converts.

The circuit rider often oversaw the preparations of the site for the camp meeting. A site previously used could be “reclaimed” in a single day, and he would direct volunteers in clearing away fallen branches and making any needed repairs to the plank seats. Preparing a new site, however, might take three or four days.

Many camp meetings lasted six days or even nine days. Eventually, four days became the fixed number, with meetings beginning on Friday afternoon or evening and continuing until Monday noon. One proverb said, “The good people go to camp meetings Friday, backsliders Saturday, rowdies Saturday night, and gentlemen and lady sinners Sunday.”

**Tabernacles.** Some of these camp meetings became so popular that they were held regularly and the brush arbor or other fairly crude speaker’s platform was replaced by a more permanent structure called a tabernacle. The camp-meeting ground would be centered on the tabernacle, a large open-air building which would be used for religious services during the camp meeting. It typically included rows of pews facing an altar, similar to a traditional church nave. Other buildings where people would stay during the meeting were erected in a large circle around the tabernacle. The central position of the tabernacle signified its symbolic importance as the heart of the camp-meeting ground.

Many people at the early camp meetings displayed unusual physical manifestations: fainting, rolling, laughing, running, singing, dancing, and jerking—a spasmodic twitching of the entire body, where they hopped with head, limbs, and trunk shaking “as if they must ... fly asunder.” At some camp meetings, watchmen carrying long white sticks patrolled the meeting grounds each evening to stop any mischief. Enemies of camp meetings sneered that “more souls were begot than saved.” Drinking was such a problem at camp meetings that some states prohibited sale of intoxicating beverages within a one- or two-mile radius of a meeting.

Experience taught circuit riders that “Christians enjoy those meetings most which cost them the greatest sacrifice.” A fifty-mile journey was “a pretty sure pledge of a profitable meeting.” An observer describing the preaching of James McGready, an early leader of camp meetings, said, “Father McGready would so describe Heaven, that you would almost see its glories ... and he would so array hell and its horrors before the wicked, that they would tremble and quake, imagining a lake of fire and brimstone yawning to overwhelm them.”

**Sources:** “Little Known Facts about Camp Meetings and Circuit Riders, Timothy K. Beougher”; and Wikipedia articles on circuit riders and camp meetings. Circuit Rider image from the October 12, 1867 cover of Harpers Weekly. The Brush Arbor image from the Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church, Dahlonega, GA; and the Indian Fields Methodist Camp-Meeting Ground, Dorchester County, South Carolina image were included in Little Texas Tabernacle: The Tectonics of Timber (Part 2) by Prof. Donald Armstrong.
The Little Texas Tabernacle and Campground

The western state line of Georgia following the Chattahoochee River was on the western boundary of the United States in 1798. The land west of there was the Mississippi Territory. The western part of that territory became the state of Mississippi and the eastern part became, in 1819, the state of Alabama.

This part of the state was Indian Territory until 1832, but was not settled until after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and the Indians were removed in 1836-7. From this time forward, settlers came and were able to stop, obtain property and start plantations, small farms, stores, small towns and build churches.

Before this area was settled here the Old Federal Road was opened just a few miles to the south and came through Indian territory going to the New Louisiana Territory purchase in 1803. Many travelers followed this road to the new land. Included were Federal Postal Carriers, settlers, U. S. soldiers, fugitives including Aaron Burr, and sightseers like Gen. La Fayette from France.

In the early 1800’s an early Methodist preacher came through looking for converts. His name was Lorenzo Dow. He was not responding to his Presiding Elder or Bishop. In 1808 Mathew Sturdivant also came this way with the blessings of Bishop Asbury, from the S.C. Conference. Later the new Federal road was built to follow a better route and came through about where Highway 80 is today. This road was about where the caution light is just a few miles to the north.

In the early 1830’s and 40s this was a good place for an area Methodist meeting place for worship, weddings and social activities. Little Texas campground was started about this time, probably beginning with a clearing in the thicket or grove on top of this hill and later a Brush Arbor about this time, probably beginning with a clearing in the social area. Little Texas cemetery, at the same location was recorded from “The Minutes of the Little Texas Campgrounds 1884 to 1937 Macon Co.” found in Tap Roots Vol.23, No.1. The Little Texas Cemetery, at the same location was recorded in Tap Roots Vol.3 No.2.

Church Opelika with Bro Si, and sons John Ed, and George Mathison. Early lighting was from pine knot fires on wooden stands covered with sand on each side of the Pulpit area for night services.

The platform was called the "Stand" The Presiding Elder (now known as the District Superintendent) held forth from here behind the pulpit or from his chair on the platform. At business meetings or committee meetings either the Preacher or the Layman conducting the meeting was referred to as being "IN THE CHAIR" The minutes always showed that.

The dirt floor was always covered with hay. It was bidded out and the lowest [bidder] won the job. He was allowed to take it home to feed his animals after the meetings. There was a house keeping committee to keep the Shed in order after each meeting.

Methodist Camp Meetings were always run by Committees. They had Methods of Operation for each meeting to provide for the needs of several hundred people. It was like a city council. There was a Police Chief and Policemen. The timekeeper was called the Horn Blower. He sounded at Sunrise and every half hour. The bell was used for mealtime. There was a person in charge of keeping the water barrels full. There was a Preachers Tent, a public tent, a Hotel and a commissary like the one outside the Tabernacle here now. It was for necessary purchases. (Sometimes unnecessary ones!)

Family tents were wooden frames that were covered with canvas for meeting times. There was a committee for everything or if not, [someone] was appointed by the “Chair”. If a need for funds arose there was a collection. As cars came into use, weekly meetings became evening only. No tents were needed. Now day events are the rule. There is now a church on the grounds, Williams Chapel United Methodist.

Camp meetings were composed of preaching, exhorting, praying, singing, praising, and the special events at camp meetings that usually kept them interesting. It was always said about these meetings that “The entertainment was Free”.

Almost all of this information has come from great Methodist Historians, Anson West and M. E. Lazenby, and from “The Minutes of the Little Texas Campgrounds 1884 to1937 Macon Co.” found in Tap Roots Vol.23, No.1. The Little Texas Cemetery, at the same location was recorded in Tap Roots Vol.3 No.2.

We should be thankful for these and other dedicated writers and those who preserve their works for the future.

by Claud Brown, Vice President, Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society (2009)
Tectonics in architecture is defined as "the science or art of construction, both in relation to use and artistic design." It refers not just to the "activity of making the materially requisite construction that answers certain needs, but rather to the activity that raises this construction to an art form."

The Little Texas Tabernacle is located in Little Texas, an unincorporated town near Tuskegee, Alabama. The Tabernacle is part of a United Methodist Church camp-meeting ground which includes the Williams Chapel.

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the “Little Texas” Methodist Tabernacle and Campground has been the site of Camp meetings since the 1850’s. The Tabernacle’s place of worship was built by black and white settlers of the area. Worshipers camped in open air or in temporary wooden barracks called “tents” during long revivals. When revivals were in progress, the campground was governed by camp rules adopted and enforced by religious leaders. This site includes a tabernacle that was constructed by slaves without nails. It is one of the last structures of its type in the state.

A descendent of one of the area’s early settlers wrote:
The Tabernacle was a place of worship for the earlysettlers of that area of Alabama. Camp Meeting Serviceswere held once a year in October after the Fall harvest. The services lasted a week, beginning on Sunday. At that time, small cabins surrounded the Tabernacle and people who lived away stayed in them or in tents they brought. Services are still being held there each year, beginning on the last Sunday in July and lasting through Thursday.

**Building Tectonics**
The Little Texas Tabernacle is a “post and beam” building constructed of heavy timbers. It has a three-aisled frame with a nave center aisle (used for two rows of pews of pews facing an altar). It has a hip roof.

Supports are timber posts which appear to be implanted in the ground. However, some posts stop several feet above the ground, where the post sits on top of a shorter timber post. All posts carry timber roof girders and perpendicular roof beams for lateral stability.

The Tabernacle has a hip roof framed with 2 X wood rafters with cross ties. Purlins of wide boards cross the rafters. Relatively new sheet metal roofing has been installed on top of these.

The building frame is braced throughout to increase lateral strength. This includes corner bracing. The triangular bracing bays are sheathed on their exterior which contributes to their strength.

Bracing also occurs at interior – intermediate – posts. The bracing bays on these is also sheathed with clapboard.

The timber frame members are jointed together with pegged mortise and tenon joints. The pegs are riven and
are tapered. Diagonal timber bracing is used to stiffen the frame.

Most of the timbers appear to be hewn. The timbers’ cross-sections tend to be square. Their surfaces tend to show the types of surface-wear associated with hewn rather than sawn wood. Hewing is a process in which a tree trunk is shaped into lumber using an ax.

Hand Hewn beams have been squared by hand, most often with a broad axe, transforming a round tree trunk to a square beam. To hand hew a beam takes a tremendous amount of work. Before the prevalence of saw mills, craftsmen would have to fell a tree, score the length of the trunk with evenly spaced notches, and, with an axe, knock off the pieces of wood between each notch. This process is what gives hand hewn beams their trademark roughness.

The roof purlins appear to be riven – hand-split radially from a log.

The only exterior wall materials are fence rails along the sides and clapboard at the bracing bays. The roofing is sheet metal panels. The floor is earth covered in sawdust.

Sources Cited

“Little Texas Campgrounds and Tabernacle.”
http://www.preservationnation.org/forum/african-american-historic-places/locations/southern/little-texas-campgrounds.html

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The Little Texas Campground and Cemetery
by Forrest Appleby Shavers, written circa 2004

Let me urge the reader to see the Tabernacle at the Little Texas Camp Grounds near Tuskegee, Alabama.

Tabernacle is the name given to this building by the local people. Take children and young people to see it. It is a bit of early American history that will be gone someday. It stands, now, much like it originally was built. There is another like it near the site of the old Appleby plantation in South Carolina.

The Tabernacle was a place of worship for the early settlers of that area of Alabama. Camp Meeting Services were held once a year in October after the Fall harvest. The services lasted a week, beginning on Sunday. At that time, small cabins surrounded the Tabernacle and people who lived away stayed in them or in tents they brought. Services are still being held there each year, beginning on the last Sunday in July and lasting through Thursday. We visited there in June 1980. When the local people found out who we were, we were given a special invitation to come. They said bring no food, there would be plenty.

The original timbers to build the Tabernacle are still there unpainted. The rafters, beams, and inside posts are still in place, just as solid as the day they were put there. Huge wooden pegs are used to hold the beams and posts together. There are no nails. A tin roof has replaced the original one, but the original decking is there. The decking boards are not uniform in length or width. They are 12 to 18 inches wide. The beams are 18 to 24 inches thick. The marks of the axes that cut them can still be seen. When I first saw it, it was open on all four sides. Recently, someone has nailed a few painted boards around some of the sides.

Inside is a tightly sealed box near the pulpit. It must be a piano. There is no floor, just ground. Some of the benches may be original ones, they are made with square nails. The building measures about 60 by 70 feet. The cemetery where the Applebys, Segos, and Tallys are buried is only a few yards away.

The following gives the directions to The Little Texas Camp Grounds. From the court house at 14th Street and Broad in Phenix City, go west on U.S. Highway 80. Turn left on State Road 69 and go down approximately half-mile. The Tabernacle will be on your right. A small church, Williams Chapel, is across the road.

One more thing. Local people said that this area was named Little Texas because when the young men of that area got into trouble, they went to Texas. When it was alright for them to come back to that area, they would return. There were so many of them, they called this area Little Texas. I wonder how young men of that day could get in trouble?
Robert Richford Roberts (August 2, 1778 – March 26, 1843) was an American Methodist Circuit Rider, Pastor, Presiding Elder, and Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

He was born in Frederick County, Maryland of Welsh and Irish ancestry. His parents were communicants of The Church of England. In 1785 the family moved to Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. Roberts united with the M.E. Church when he was fourteen years old. Until he was twenty-one his was a thoroughly frontier existence, with few books and quite simple habits. Yet early on he began to study, all the while being drawn gradually toward the Ministry.

After much hesitation, owing to his great timidity, Robert preached his first sermon in 1801. He was licensed as a local preacher at the Holmes Meeting-house near Cadiz, Ohio.

In the Spring of 1802 he was received on trial in the Baltimore Annual Conference, and appointed to a circuit including Carlisle, Pennsylvania and twenty-nine other preaching appointments in Western Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio. It took as long as a month to visit the entire circuit. He was ordained, both Deacon and later Elder, by Bishop Francis Asbury.

He was appointed by Bishop Asbury to Baltimore, where he went reluctantly. He doubted that he was suited to city congregations; but subsequently he filled appointments in Baltimore, Alexandria, Georgetown, and Philadelphia. In 1815 he was appointed Presiding Elder of the Schuylkill District of the Philadelphia Annual Conference.

Owing to the death of Bishop Asbury, Rev. Roberts was elected to preside over the Philadelphia Annual Conference in the spring of 1816. On May 14th, at that General Conference, he was elected to the office of Bishop. He was the first married man to serve as a Methodist Bishop, and the financial support for a Bishop was exceedingly small since none of his predecessors had dependents. To support his family, Bishop Roberts moved them to the western part of Pennsylvania to a farm which he owned, and from there he traveled extensively from Maine to the Mississippi Territory.

Bishop Roberts was always shy about proclaiming who he was during his travels and on his arrival at any place. Once, traveling on horseback in Autauga County, Alabama, along a road with which he was not familiar, he asked if there was a quiet house where he could rest and spend the night. One was recommended, and he went to it without knowing anything about the man that kept it. That man was Seaborn Mims, who he subsequently learned was a local preacher of his own denomination. In fact, according to West’s *History of Methodism in Alabama*, Mims was one of the grandest workers who ever lived in Alabama. Roberts arranged to stay all night, and supper was provided for him. As usual, he didn’t mention who he was.

After Roberts had eaten, Mims lit a candle, placed it in a lantern, and he and his wife started to leave the house. As he was leaving, he said to Roberts, ‘If you wish to retire before we return, you can take a bed in the adjoining room; we are going to a meeting.’ Roberts asked, ‘What sort of a meeting is it?’ Mims replied, ‘It is what we Methodists call a class-meeting.’

Roberts said that he should like to go along, if it would not be intruding, and Mims said there would be no intrusion at all. He said that they allowed serious persons to attend class meetings a few times without becoming members, if they wished. So Roberts and Mims proceeded together to the meeting, which was well attended.

The class-leader was a young man of much zeal, and little experience. After speaking to all the members, he came to the bishop, who still had not mentioned who he was, and said, ‘Well, stranger, have you any desire to serve the Lord, and get to heaven?’ Roberts
In 1825, several ministers on their way to Conference, called at Bishop Roberts’ residence. One of them — Mr. Randall — being an Englishman, and recently from that country, had a great desire to see a bishop of the Methodist Church, and also his residence; no doubt expecting to behold some of the splendor attached to the prelacy of England, but he found only a dwelling of the most humble pretensions. The bishop was not in the house when they arrived, but the visitors were told that he was out in the grass lot. The Englishman, impatient to see him, could not wait until he came in, but went out to catch a glimpse of him, if possible. One of the preachers pointed to the bishop in the lot, but the Englishman remarked that he saw no bishop there. “In the grass lot,” said the other. He looked again, and said, “I see a man there, but no bishop.” “But that is certainly the bishop,” replied his companion. “No! no!” rejoined he, “that cannot be, for the man is in his shirt sleeves.” Soon the bishop came up, and the remarks which had been made were related to him, which he seemed to relish with great pleasure.

From the time of his election to the episcopacy, to that of his death, Bishop Roberts made his annual visits to the Conferences with punctuality, and always presided with dignity, and to the entire satisfaction of the preachers. Nor was it alone in the Conferences, and by the preachers, that he was beloved and respected. The people in every place where he appeared, admired the simplicity of his manners, and the humility of his deportment.

During this time severe denunciations of the Bishops were publicly made. They were called ‘popes’ and ‘usurpers’, but the patriarchal appearance and the humble and loving manner of Bishop Roberts disarmed prejudice wherever he went.

In a certain town, a man who was violently opposed to the Methodist Episcopal Church. He thought it his duty to declaim publicly against the Methodist bishops, and claimed that they were going about the country in a style of magnificence and splendor. As his remarks were generally believed, prejudice was created in the minds of the people against the bishops and the Church, and a seceding church was formed at that place, which was likely to eat up the old church.

A few weeks later, Bishop Roberts providentially passed through the place, and when it was announced that he would preach, a general curiosity arose to see and hear the pompous prelate, as they supposed him to be. The house was filled to overflowing, and at the appointed hour, Bishop Roberts appeared, arrayed in an old faded calico robe, or loose gown, and all his other apparel of the coarsest kind; and when the good old bishop preached in his simple, winning way, he won the...
hearts of the entire congregation, so that the current immediately set in, in an opposite direction, and the seceders soon gave up their new Church, and returned in a body to their old home.

Bishop Roberts’ labors during the last years of his life, were arduous and unremitting. In the spring of 1842, he set out to visit the Indian Missions, west of the Arkansas and Missouri, purposing also to visit those on the Upper Mississippi; and this, too, when his health was very feeble.

While in the neighborhood of Fort Leavenworth, the bishop and his companion stopped at an Indian trading house, and requested accommodations for the night. The trader was unwilling to accommodate them, not knowing who they were and all entreaty was unavailing. At last, the bishop’s companion turned to him and said, “Bishop, what is to be done?” “Why, we must get some fire and camp out,” replied the latter. The word “bishop” had a powerful effect on the Frenchman’s ears, for he immediately said, “O, by no means, gentlemen, you shall be very welcome to stay;” and stay they did, and found comfortable quarters for the night. The gentleman who accompanied the bishop, after finding out the value of the title bishop, never failed to use it in every case of subsequent emergency.

Indiana, and on the 26th of March, 1843, he closed his eyes in death. His end was peaceful, and his last breathings were those of prayer.

Thus died Robert R. Roberts, in the sixty-fifth year of his age, the forty-first of his traveling ministry, and the twenty-seventh of his episcopate.

His remains were interred at his own farm, where they remained for several months, but by vote of the Indiana Conference, they were disinterred, and conveyed to Greencastle, Indiana, for final interment, where they were deposited in a beautiful spot near the buildings of the Indiana Asbury University (now United Methodist-affiliated DePauw University) which he helped organize. He and his wife are buried near the center of the University and his grave is marked with a large monument.

Sources and References:
Basic Information

More Detailed Information
http://www.godrules.net/library/gorrie/147gorrie_b17.htm

A History of Methodism in Alabama, Anson West
www.findagrave.com

THE FIRST TWENTY FIVE UNITED METHODIST BISHOPS
A List Compiled for The Book of Discipline by the Council of Bishops

Thomas Coke 1784
Francis Asbury 1784
Richard Whatcoat 1800
Phillip William Otterbein 1800
Martin Boehm 1800
Jacob Albright 1807
William M’Kendree 1808
Christian Newcomer 1813
Enoch George 1816

Robert Richford Roberts 1816
Andrew Zeller 1817
Joseph Hoffman 1821
Joshua Soule 1824
Elijah Hedding 1824
Henry Kumler Sr 1825
John Emory 1832

James Osgood Andrew 1832
Samuel Heistand 1833
William Brown 1833
Beverly Waugh 1836

Thomas Asbury Morris 1836
Jacob Erb 1837
John Seybert 1839
Henry Kumler Jl. 1841
John Coons 1841
Your United Methodist Ancestors
Tips for Finding Them

The United Methodist Church today is the result of denominational splits and mergers over the past 200+ years.

Methodist Episcopal Church (1784-1939)
Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1845-1939)
Methodist Protestant Church (1828-1939)
Methodist Church (1939-1968)
United Brethren in Christ (1800-1946)
Evangelical Association (1803-1922)
United Evangelical Church (1894-1922)
Evangelical Church (1922-1946)
Evangelical United Brethren (1946-1968)
United Methodist Church (1968-present)

Finding Records. You are most likely to find records for Evangelical Association, Evangelical United Brethren, Methodist Episcopal, and the others in the care of United Methodist congregations and Annual Conference Archives in the areas where the people had their membership. When asking for information, it is helpful to provide dates, places and names of your ancestors and why you think they have United Methodist roots. Determine if your ancestor was a lay person within the church, or an ordained member of the clergy. Titles such as 'elder,' 'deacon,' 'deaconess,' or 'reverend' usually indicate ordination or special training for work with the church, while 'exhorter' or 'class leader' usually indicate that the individual is a member of the laity.

Denominational Newspapers. As people moved west to settle the new country, news was sent to various newspapers. For the Methodist Episcopal Church, this weekly paper was the Christian Advocate. Different versions were distributed to various regions of the country, but the news came 'back home' from all over. It's a good clue to finding the home of your migrating ancestors! The David Donahue Memorial Tennessee Records Repository hosts Genealogical Information from the Western Methodist, the Southwestern Christian Advocate, and the Nashville Christian Advocate.

The American Methodism Project. The American Methodism Project is another very useful source of Methodist information. It is a digitized collection of historical materials related to American Methodism. The project focuses on described and published materials of American Methodism that are of value to researchers for access, searching, and analysis. From local churches to global missionaries, the project is attempting to document American Methodism's role and reach within local communities and the broader society by published minutes of meetings, local church histories, magazines, papers and pamphlets, books, reference works, and dissertations.

Once established, Methodism grew with the United States so that it included more than 34 percent of all American church members by 1850. Historians have noted how American Methodism parallels the development of the United States and its culture over time. Methodists established hospitals, orphanages, and colleges (at one point more than one per year), and even today the United Methodist Church claims to be the only Christian body to have established a congregation in every county of the United States.

The project is a partnership between the United Methodist-related seminary libraries, the Internet Archive, the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History, and the Methodist Librarians Fellowship.

The link to the project is:
https://archive.org/details/americanmethodism&tab=collection
In a Town Born of Yellow Fever

Verbena United Methodist Church

Yellow fever, with its high death rate and horrible effects, was one of the worst diseases known in Alabama during the late nineteenth century. No cure was known and everything imaginable was done to prevent the fever. Officials tried to block its approaches by issuing quarantines against persons or goods coming from areas where the fever had been, and all types of cures were sought if the area did become infected. Although many methods were used to try and cure the disease, the most common action was to flee the area when an epidemic was known or during the summer months when the fever was prevalent. People fled to neighboring towns, to mountains, and to resorts.

There had been several serious outbreaks in the Montgomery area, but the epidemic in 1873 was more serious than the previous ones. As a result of fleeing from the fever and the fear of it in the Montgomery area in the late 1870’s and 1880’s, many prominent families from Montgomery came thirty two miles north to build summer homes to escape the heat and the possibility of catching the disease. They stayed there until the frost came back to make it pleasant and safe to return to the capital.

This area, originally called Summerfield, was renamed Verbena, probably after the wild verbena flower which grew in abundance there. Verbena had many things to offer these people seeking refuge from yellow fever. There was plenty of clean, fresh air so important to prevent yellow fever; there was, of course, plenty of virgin forests; there was a relatively high altitude, 450 feet; the beautiful, large Chestnut Creek, and the beauty of its hills and valleys. Many who came for the summer decided to make it their permanent home.

In 1870, the North-South railroad had been built through the area making transportation much easier for the people who later fled from Montgomery.

A hotel was built to accommodate the people who first came up from Montgomery for the summer only. Although this hotel later burned, over 50 historic structures which had been built in the late 1800s still remained as late as 1975. One of these was the Verbena United Methodist Church.

In 1871 a group of the early settlers of Verbena organized the Methodist Church. The first meetings were held in a house which was also used as the school of Miss Betty Bowman. The house was located in front of the John Lett home. The charter members were Mrs. B. J. Baldwin, Miss Clara Barrett, Miss Nellie Barrett, Mr. John Clisby, Miss Lizzie Clisby, Mrs. G.W. Paine, Mrs. Milo Barrett, Miss Kate Barrett, Mrs. J. T. Terry, Mrs. John Clisby, and Miss Bettie Bonham.

The second building to house the Verbena Methodist Church was located on Knight’s Ferry Road. It was known as Cooper’s Chapel, a plantation chapel belonging to Peter Cooper’s family.

A building fund was begun October 11, 1875 for a permanent building and the next move was to the present building which was begun in 1876 on land acquired from John W. and Emily Hughes “consisting of four acres, more or less”. The building committee was Col. B.J. Baldwin, Mr. Kindred Wells and Major J. Carr Gibson. Mrs. G.W. Paine was treasurer.

The new building was in the process of construction for several years. The builder was Ben L. Tarver. According to an old handwritten receipt dated September 11, 1876 the building committee paid Mr. Tarver “fifty dollars. it being the second payment for building church at Verbena”.

The first trustees for the church were Mr. John Clisby, Mr. John J. Bowman and Mr. Henry Ellis.

The church building was originally, as shown, thirty-eight feet wide and sixty feet long with one door on the outside front, five feet by ten feet. There were eight windows.

The bell in the bell tower was donated by two charter members, Mrs. Martha Baldwin and Mrs. G.W. Paine. Throughout two world wars the bell was rung out as an Angelus, calling all within its hearing to stop and pray, for a few minutes, in silent prayer for Peace.

The inside of the building consisted of a vestibule across the front of the church, with entrance into the sanctuary through two single side doors. Much later, the Women’s Missionary Society bought the double swinging doors that are now used. Mr. Sidney Gibson, Sr. partitioned the vestibule for two Sunday School rooms.

Mr. Frank P. O’Brien, builder from Birmingham, Alabama designed and made the twenty-four pews to specifications given, all done “in a neat and workmanlike manner” for $118.00. When the pews were shipped, Mr. O’Brien wrote. “Please accept contribution of five dollars
($5.00) from me on same and when you remit send only $113.00”. Years later, Mr. Oscar Howard made and installed the racks on the backs of the pews.

The beautiful altar rail was designed and ordered from Indiana by Major J.C. Gibson who then presented it to the church. The antique Victorian chairs on each side of the pulpit, and the altar table were given by Mrs. B.J. Baldwin.

Two carved olive wood collection plates brought from Jerusalem were gifts from Dr. and Mrs. B.J. Baldwin. Several years ago John Latimer Howard presented to the church two handsome brass plates in honor of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Howard. The lovely silver communion service now in use was presented by Mr. Sidney Gibson, Sr. in 1930.

In 1959 much needed repairs were made at the church building. Brick steps replaced wooden ones. Ornamental iron rails were added at this time. It was necessary to replace the wooden porch floor with a concrete one in 1963.

New lights were added inside the sanctuary in 1959. That year also saw the purchase of choir seats. In 1960, oak flooring was installed, along with red carpet.

The United States and Christian Flags were donated to the church in 1969, and the same year saw a complete new landscaping of the church and parsonage grounds.

The hot summer of 1969 prompted members to install air conditioners in the sanctuary.

In 1976 The Verbena Methodist Church and Parsonage were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the Verbena Historic District.
As Verbena United Methodist Church celebrated its 140th anniversary, members took time to reflect on the rich history of God’s faithfulness. The church, first organized in 1871 by a charter team consisting of 10 women and one man, began meeting in a small house that also served as a school. Several prominent families from Montgomery moved to the area to avoid the yellow fever outbreak in the 1870s, and as the church grew, they began to meet in Cooper’s Plantation Chapel, offered as a meeting space by the Cooper family.

In the 1950s, the church began to see a decline in membership, along with the deterioration of its building. Thankfully, several lay members had a passion for preserving the church and were successful in their revitalization efforts. Today, the church is a fixture in the community with a rich heritage of family and education.

“We have a very long history of being a teaching church, with strong Sunday School teachers and church members who are well-versed in the Bible,” church historian Ola Taylor said and added that VUMC is a church where loving and supporting one another is greatly valued and families can gather together. “It’s not just that family members worship together here over the years. As in most small towns, children grow up, move away, etc., but all people worshipping here are treated as family. People know and support each other.”

As the congregation of VUMC prepared for their anniversary celebration, Pastor Hunter Pugh reflected on God’s faithfulness. “When you walk in [the church], you’re walking back in time,” Pugh said. “It’s really cool because you are reminded that God was doing work 140 years ago, and God is still doing work today.”

Verbena United Methodist Church held its 140th anniversary celebration on May 15 at 11 a.m. with a special Pentecost service. A luncheon with traditional and delicious ‘dinner-on-the-ground’ dishes followed along with a time of reflection and storytelling from longtime church members.

I visited Verbena UMC on May 15, 2016, to worship with them on the occasion of their 140th anniversary celebration. What a warm and gracious welcome I received! Rev. Hunter Pugh, Church Historian Ola Taylor, and everyone I met were instant old friends. It truly was a family reunion! Thanks to Mrs. Taylor and the others who provided the information on which this article is largely based.

Jim Young, Editor
Annual and General Conference Reports

John Wesley Visits Montgomery

John Wesley was seen several times during the AWF Annual Conference this year. He was there to stimulate interest in the organizations in our conference that are helping to preserve and encourage our shared interest in United Methodist and AWF Conference history and to specifically help interest more people in becoming members of the AWF Historical Society.

“John” was portrayed by Rev. Ed Shirley who is the Conference Historian and also the AWF Historical Society Vice President.

A drawing was held from the membership applications received since the last Annual Conference to determine who would win the beautifully framed print of the real John Wesley donated by Rev. Ed and a member of his congregation.

The winner was Dr. Charles Satterwhite who is serving Irvington UMC and Theodore UMC. Dr. Satterwhite said he was delighted and that the print would have a prominent position in his church office.

Local Church Heritage Award

The AWF Conference Commission on Archives and History (COAH) presents "The Local Church Heritage Award" each year at the Annual Conference to the church most diligent in preserving its heritage during the previous calendar year. The award for calendar year 2015 was presented by Rev. Pam Avery, Chair of the COAH, to Texasville UMC, Clayton, AL.

The Memorial Service

The COAH sponsors and supports the Service of Remembrance and Communion which honors clergy and clergy spouses who have died since the last Annual Conference. Family members of those deceased were met by COAH members in the Frazier Chapel and then escorted to the sanctuary to their reserved seating.

After the service, the COAH provided lunch for the families in a private room.

Report from Dr. Fred Day, General Secretary
General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) on Actions Taken at General Conference

GCAH Members and Friends:

The final gavel has come down on the 2016 General Conference. I am pleased to report GCAH is in great shape for moving forward. All the legislation the Commission put forth or in other petitions which named GCAH came out just as we would have hoped!

1. Plan UMC Revised, the restructure proposal that would have aligned GCAH with the General Commission on Finance and Administration (GCFA) was defeated in committee. Other attempts to structural overhaul, realigning GCAH elsewhere and consolidating GCORR and COSROW, were referred to the Connectional Table, Standing Committee on Central Conferences, and GCFA for report at the 2020 General Conference.

2. GCFA’s attempts to move responsibility for collection of the majority of archive materials now sent to GCAH to individual agencies was defeated in committee.

3. Legislation allowing permissiveness to annual conference Commission on Archives and History (from “shall” to “may”) was defeated in committee.

4. GCAH sponsored legislation adding three new Heritage Landmarks: Gulfside Assembly, Pearl River sites (Mississippi) and The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC was approved on the Consent Calendar.

5. GCAH sponsored legislation insuring the Discipline is in harmony with itself as to Central Conference membership on the Commission was approved on the Consent Calendar.

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Information and Events of Historical Society Interest

2015-2016 Executive Committee and Officers of the AWFC-HS

Jim Young, President
Rev. Ed Shirley, Vice President
Sharon Tucker, Recording Secretary
Mary Ann Pickard, Financial & Membership Secretary
Carolyn Coker, Member at Large
Craig Reynolds, Member at Large
Joyce Stimak, Member at Large
Myrtice Carr, Previous Past President

The Historical Society Website

http://www.awfhistory.com/

Please visit the website for the AWF Conference’s Historical Society. This website was created so that we may be more accessible to everyone with information and offer an avenue of interaction concerning our shared interest in Methodist history. Please browse through the pages to learn more about early Methodism in America, Alabama, and West Florida. We will be adding more to our internet files through the efforts of volunteers (we invite you to be one), members of the Historical Society (you can become one), and our conference archivists (we have some good ones). We regularly plan events where we enrich our knowledge of history, enjoy fellowship, and actually visit a historic location.

We’re Also on Facebook!

Follow us on Facebook. Enter “AWF Historical Society” in the search box at the top of your Facebook page. “Like” us – Follow us! Participate with comments and photos. Invite your friends.

The AWFC Historical Society Newsletter

The newsletter is published quarterly and all comments and suggestions are welcome.

If you would like to submit an article or a notice or an announcement for publication in the AWFC Historical Society Newsletter, please contact the editor, Jim Young, at youngjmy@cox.net or by phone at 850 862-8642.

Ask the former generation and find out what their ancestors learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow.

Job 8

AWFC Historical Society Contact Information

Sharon Tucker, Archivist
Mary Ann Pickard, Administrative Assistant

Methodist Archives Center
1500 East Fairview Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36106

Telephone: 334-833-4413
FAX: 334-263-4465
E-mail: archives@huntingdon.edu

Also

James Young, President
1014 Aspen Court
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547
Telephone: 850 862-8642
E-mail: youngjmy@cox.net

The Historical Society Fiscal Year

The AWFC Historical Society Executive Committee, at their February 2015 meeting, amended the by-laws of the Society to establish the AWFC-HS Fiscal Year as being from AWF Annual Conference to the next AWF Annual Conference.

The Executive Committee members for 2015-2016 were re-elected at the September 24th, 2015 Annual Meeting to continue to serve during the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year.

Your Help Is Needed!

Our Society has a relatively small number of members. We need your help to make everyone in the AWF Conference aware of our group and what we do. We need to educate District Superintendents, Pastors, and Church Councils about the need for an active effort in each church to collect and preserve our history.

We need to recruit new members and to involve more folks in our activities.

We need your suggestions for locations for future AWFC-HS Annual Meetings. Consider your own church or historic churches in your area and let us know.

Articles or suggestions for articles for this newsletter are also needed and will be appreciated. People, places, and events of historical AWFC interest are worthy of being featured here.

APR 2016
The 2016 Annual Meeting of the Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society, A River Runs Through It, will be held on September 15, 2016, at Saint Stephens United Methodist Church, St. Stephens, AL, beginning at 9:30 A.M.

Rev. Ed Shirley, conference historian and vice president of the AWF Historical Society, will portray Bishop Francis Asbury. You will gain insight into the spread of Methodism in early American history. In addition to our own program items, representatives from The Washington County Historical Society are scheduled to share the rich early history of Washington County.

St. Stephens was one of the first places in what is now Alabama where the Gospel was preached. It is believed that Lorenzo Dow, the early itinerant Methodist minister came here around 1803. St. Stephens sat high on a limestone bluff above the river. Once home to members of the Choctaw tribes, and later the Spanish, St. Stephens had become the capital of the Alabama Territory.

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St. Stephens United Methodist Church

It was a bustling place, with mercantile stores, newspaper offices, doctors’ and lawyers’ offices, and more than a few taverns – but not a single church, and Lorenzo Dow intended to change that. The citizens of St. Stephens were not interested his efforts, however, and sent him packing. He is said to have shook his fist at the town and prophesied that within one hundred years, it would be nothing but “a roosting place for bats and owls.”

Not long afterwards Alabama became a state, the capital was moved, and yellow fever ravaged the population. By the mid-1800s, few people remained in what was once the largest town in Alabama.

However, Methodists did become active in the St. Stephens area. The first Methodist Church was built around 1857 and the main sanctuary of the current church building is that original structure, and it will be in it where our Annual Meeting will be held.

Be sure to register by September 8th. The cost is $20 per person which includes a very nice catered lunch at the church. Please send your name, address, telephone number, and check to: Archives Center, 1500 E. Fairview Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36106. Make checks payable to AWFC-HS or Alabama West Florida Conference Historical Society, and in the memo section write “Annual Meeting”. Questions? Please call Rev. Ed Shirley, 334-313-3176.

Everyone is welcome, Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society member or just interested in our history.

Saint Stephens United Methodist Church is located at 31 Saint Stephens Fork Road, Saint Stephens, Alabama 36569.

From Montgomery: Take AL Hwy 80 off I-65. Pass the Montgomery Regional Airport. Take a left onto Hwy 21 go through Hayneville. Turn right onto Hwy 28 to Camden. Take Hwy 10 out of Camden to Pine Hill where you will take a left onto Hwy 5 take a right onto Highway 43 South in Thomasville. In Leroy take a right onto Hwy 34 into Saint Stephens.

From Mobile: Go I-65 North. Exit 19 to Creola Hwy 43 North. Pass through Calvert and McIntosh. Take a left onto Hwy 34 at Leroy.

In Saint Stephens: Once in Saint Stephens entering on Hwy 34 turn right onto Saint Stephens Fork Road veer to your left at the fork in the roads to stay on Saint Stephens Fork Road. You will see the church on the left.

Look for a Bright Orange Sign.

Download the meeting brochure with additional information from http://goo.gl/hf0PNH
Alabama-West Florida Conference Historical Society
Membership Application
Membership is from Annual Conference to Annual Conference
2016/2017

When you join between annual conferences your membership is valid through the remainder of the year plus between the times of the next two annual conferences.

Please Provide Following Information for Individual or Church. Check the one that applies:

___Person ___Church Name: ________________________________

If individual write the name of your church below:

_____________________________________________________

Address: ______________________________________________

City: _________________ State: ________________ Zip: ________

Phone: __________________ E-Mail: _______________________

SELECT MEMBERSHIP TYPE

___ Annual Membership $15
___ Student Membership $8
___ Donation to Society

Total Amount Enclosed: $____.______ Make checks payable to: AWFC
In Memo/For section write “AWFC Historical Society”

Send this Membership Application to:

Methodist Archives Center
1500 E. Fairview Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36106

Are you the historian for your church? ___Yes ___No
Are you interested in being a member of the Commission on Archives and History (COAH)? ___Yes ___No ___Need more information