

Montevallo

Historical Society SM

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

540 Shelby Street
Montevallo, AL 35115
www.historicmontevallo.org



Like Us On Facebook



Close to 40 students of all ages were attending Salem School when this photo was taken in the early 1900s.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN SALEM

Submitted by Marty Everse

Just a short piece north of Montevallo, beside the old Elyton Road, there is a place known as Salem, a hamlet noted for its burying, preaching, teaching, and even brick making. What started first will probably never be known though there is an old wives' tale that in the first flush of white settlement, a hog drover died along the road and was unceremoniously planted beside it. Over time others joined him there and a cemetery evolved. However, it is more likely that the cemetery developed near a church. Montevallo historian Marshal Roy Cunningham has determined that many of those who were buried in the earliest days of the cemetery were devout Methodists. The 1857 estate papers of Joseph Cunningham (he and other members of his family are cemetery residents) include a receipt for a contribution to the "Methodist Church at the pond." The earliest marked grave there is of an infant son of Joseph and Elizabeth Cunningham who did not live long enough to be named and died in 1831. When the first owner of the land encompassing Salem, Edmond King, sold it in 1851 to Jacob Perry he reserved "three acres deeded off for the Methodist meeting house where said meeting house now stands." Three years later, when the editor of the *Montevallo Herald* advertised his property for sale 1 ½ miles north of Montevallo, he boasted "the place is unsurpassed by any other for its health and purity of atmosphere" and "the neighborhood is moral, intelligent and agreeable" and just one half mile from Salem Church. Allusion to a church at this location was made as late as July 1894 when the death notice of Samuel F. Bowdon noted, "His remains will be laid to rest at old Salem church about two miles from Montevallo at 1 o'clock p.m."

Often, early church buildings would be used during the week for schools. This may have been the case at Salem. In a series of articles titled, "The Early Days in and Around Montevallo," the Baptist minister E. B. Teague recorded in 1895 that the most famous school in the area was at Salem graveyard often enrolling 75 to 150 students. How long this particular school lasted is unknown but Jacob Perry's son, Sion Jason, taught there from 1856-1859 and after returning from the Civil War for a few years. By the turn of the 20th century, Salem was one of many one room, one teacher schools. In 1927, the Shelby County Supervisor of Schools commended the teacher, Mrs. B. C. Kirkley, on the attractive school building both inside and out. The future of the school appeared bright and when the 28 students and their parents celebrated the close of the term in April of that year, donations were made to buy a globe for 1928. However, the school never reopened and in the 1940s, according to H. G. McGaughy, the building was moved by Herman McGaughy and added to his home but has since been demolished. The Salem Memory Chapel, completed in 1957, eventually replaced the school for the annual cemetery memorial and homecoming day, an event that began about 1902.

Evidence of brick making at Salem is meager and if it wasn't for the 93rd birthday bash of Amanda Celine DeLoach DeShazo that bit of Montevallo history may have hightailed into oblivion. In the 1930 Shelby County Reporter article commemorating Amanda's longevity, the editor remarked that Mrs. DeShazo was the daughter of William DeLoach who operated a brick plant at Salem. The writer went on to claim that the bricks contained in Reynolds Hall were manufactured by Mrs. DeShazo's father there. What lends credence to this bit of information is William DeLoach was enumerated in the 1860 census of Montevallo and his occupation listed as "Master Mason." Living within his household was A. J. Campbell, a brick mason.