

## The Thames Family A Family of Baptist Ministers

Five ministers in three generations spreading The Word across the wilderness of four states probably qualifies the Thames family as being devoutly Baptist. The first church in Monroe County was Old Salem Church named for a church by the same name in Cumberland County, North Carolina. The 156 founding members of Old Salem were mostly newly arrived pioneers in the Fall of 1817 from Cumberland and Sampson County, North Carolina. There were 57 white males, 76 white females, 11 black males, and 12 black females. They brought their strong religious beliefs with them, and their first order of business was to form a new church. Their first minister was a member of their wagon train, the Reverend Cornelius Thames.

Cornelius was not the first or last minister of his family, nor was he and his wife, Susannah (Carver) Thames, the only members of the family to settle in Monroe County. The families of at least four of his ten brothers and sisters also came south at the same time. Stephen (1778-1833) and Nancy Ann (Thames) Wiggins (1783-1864), William and Martha (Thames) Cooper, Johnathan and Patty (Thames) Cooper, and James Thames made Monroe County their home for at least a short while. James heeded the call to the ministry and moved on to Mississippi. The two sisters that married the Cooper brothers and their families followed him to Mississippi during the 1820s. Stephen and Nancy Ann Wiggins lived out their lives in Monroe County and are both buried in the Wiggins Cemetery in Mexia. They raised thirteen children.

Their parents were the Reverend William and Lucy Thames of Cumberland County. William was born in Bladen County in 1762 and was the son of Joseph (c1726-1800) and Martha (Newberry) Thames (b.1732). Joseph was Revolutionary Patriot and he and Martha are buried in a family cemetery in Cumberland County. This portion of Bladen County later became part of Cumberland County, North Carolina. William became an ordained Baptist minister and was one of the founders of the Cape Fear Baptist Church. He served as the churches' pastor for over thirty years until his death on January 18, 1813. The Raleigh Newspaper ran his obituary denoting his long service to the community and how well known he and his wife, Lucy, were to the surrounding area. It also stated that he had died in Bladen County while visiting his brother, Joseph Thames, Jr.

William and Lucy had another son, David Thames (1780-1840), that also became a minister. One of David's sons, William (1796-1840), followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and took his ministry to Clayton County, Georgia.

Cornelius Thames served his flock at Old Salem and as other churches emerged he rode a circuit throughout the region. In December of 1820 through March of 1821 the church did not meet for almost four months, because the creeks were so full of water that people could not get to the church. In those early days the church and pastor tended to more than just the spiritual needs of its parishners. They also served to intervene and sanction those that violated both criminal and civil laws.

Cornelius and Susannah raised seven children in Monroe County, and he continued to preach into his eighties outliving his wife and four of his children. He died in 1870 and left a will that was probated in 1877. Their children were Martha who married James Newberry of Monroe County; Jesse Thames some of whose children moved to Brooklyn in Conecuh County, Alabama and some to Mississippi; Sarah (Thames) Hixon that moved to Turner County; Cornelius E. Thames, Jr. that moved to Mobile; Jonathan Thames of Monroe County; William Thames that moved to Louisiana; and Malissa Thames moved to Texas. Sources: *Cumberland County, NC Marriages, Official Records, Old Salem Church Minutes, Obituary of Rev. William Thames. Written and Submitted by: Laura Wiggins, 218 Cunningham Dr., Evergreen, AL. 36401*

### Thames Family

Thames had various spellings and pronunciations over the years. In written records we find Tims, Themes, Thams, Thims and Thames. It is pronounced by some of families to rhyme with "aims" and some call it "tims." The name undoubtedly originated with English ancestors because of a connection with the River Thames which flows under London Bridge and through city of London. The Thames family is found in early 1700's in counties in Virginia and moved on into N. C. and S. C. In the early 1800's Thames families are in South Alabama and several counties in Mississippi and Louisiana.

The ancestry of the Brooklyn Thames family begins with Cornelius

Thames, born 1787 and married July 8, 1805 to Susannah Carver in Cumberland Co., N.C. Cornelius left N. C. after 1810 census and was in S. C. later where his son Jesse was born. Cornelius was in Alabama Territory ca. 1816 and was a Baptist preacher serving the Old Salem Baptist Church, Monroe Co., Al. In the Centennial Edition of the Monroe Journal in 1966 there is a record that states Cornelius Thames was first pastor of Old Salem Church organized in 1817.

Jesse Thames, born Oct. 6, 1810 in S. C. was the son of Cornelius and Susannah (Carver) Thames, both of which are mentioned above. He married Mary E. Broughton, born May 4, 1810 in S. C. and died Oct. 14, 1883. Jesse died Nov. 25, 1872 and both are buried in Mt. Zion Cemetery near Buckatunna, MS. Jesse was a Baptist preacher like his father, Cornelius. Jesse Thames moved from Monroe Co. to Brooklyn, Conecuh Co., and remained here until after 1870 when he moved to Wayne Co., MS. near Buckatunna. His older children remained in Brooklyn and some of the younger children moved on to MS. with him. Most of the Thames family in Brooklyn descend through Jesse and Mary E. (Broughton) Thames son, Cornelius Thames. Cornelius Thames was born Nov. 20, 1830 and died Apr. 29, 1912. He married Dec. 19, 1850 to Mary Elizabeth Brantley, born Oct. 8, 1834 and died Mar. 4, 1915. She was the daughter of Joseph and Emily Katherine (Travis) Brantley. Mary Elizabeth (Travis) Brantley was the grand niece of Alexander Travis the beloved pioneer preacher of Conecuh Co. and the one who organized Brooklyn Baptist Church.

The children of Cornelius and Mary Elizabeth (Brantley) Thames are:

1. Alexander Travis Thames - born Nov. 4, 1851 and died Apr. 26, 1930. He married Lucy E. Coleman, born Oct. 18, 1856 and died Nov. 6, 1932, daughter of James G. and Charlotte Coleman. Both are buried in Brooklyn Baptist Cemetery. Alexander Travis Thames served as Justice of Peace for years in Brooklyn and quite a leader in the Baptist Church. It has often been said that all Thames' were Baptists and Masons.

2. John M. Thames - born July 15, 1854 and died Dec. 25, 1940. He married ca. 1879 to Mary Abbie Turner, born Jan. 4, 1855 and died Sept. 6, 1945. Both are buried in Brooklyn Baptist Cemetery.



John M. Thames-who married Abbie Turner

3. James J. Thames - born ca. 1856 and he married Julia Johnson and lived in Red Level.

4. Adam Thames - born ca. 1859 and he married Alice Bargainer.

5. Mary C. Thames - born ca. 1860 and she married Oct. 7, 1885 to Samuel L. Payne. This family lived in Milton, FL.

6. Jesse E. Thames - born ca. 1867 and died Jan. 7, 1914. He married Mar. 14, 1888 to Mary A. (Mollie) Hart, daughter of Elisha and Julia Annette (Purnell) Hart.

7. William Charles Thames - born Oct. 22, 1868 and died Feb. 16, 1941. He married first, Feb. 13, 1890 to Sarah Annette Hart, she died Apr. 25, 1902 and then he married Ruth Olivia McCarty. This family lived in Nicholson, MS.

8. Elizabeth Thames - born ca. 1871 and married first, Joseph E. Howell, second, William Mason. Lived at Red Level.

9. Stephen Thames - born ca. 1876 - Lived at Red Level.

10. Lucy Thames - born Mar. 22, 1873 and died Mar. 9, 1922. She married Apr. 16, 1902 to Charles McLendon. Lucy is buried in Brooklyn Baptist Cemetery. One of the children of Charles and Lucy (Thames) McLendon was Robert McLendon who married Louise Dean. Robert McLendon first operated an ice sales company beginning in 1927 and opened his first store in 1933 and he remained in the store business until his death. Everyone will remember Brooklyn and McLendon's Store at the intersection in Brooklyn for years to come.

11. Nathaniel Thames born ca. 1879. No information available. Written by: Willene Johnston Whatley

Irene Robbins, Cutie Hood, Bessie Randall, Alice Nicholson, Leslie Crook, Guide Cunningham, Arthur Torrey, and Rozella Hood, Big Baby Nicholson, Fannie Stallworth, Sallie Stallworth, Charlie Torrey, Eddie (Sugar) Randall and Arthur Snowden. The remaining children are not identified except for Rudyard Randall sixth from left on the fifth row, and Dequilla and Zazel Randall on the last row second from left.

In the nineteen twenties, another school building was constructed with funds donated by the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, and with matching funds donated by members of the community. Additional teachers were recruited for the faculty, and eventually a lunch room was built where hot meals were prepared for the students.

The post office was closed before the 1930's. The school closed in the early nineteen eighties, and the students of the community were transferred to the Repton school. And many of the old families have moved away. But Bethesda Baptist Church remains, and on Sundays, the names Nicholson, Stallworth, Johnson and Randall can still be heard. *Submitted by: Mary L. Tucker, 510 Drewry Road, Monroeville, Alabama 36460*

## Owassa Community

Owassa is situated on Conecuh Road 22, just off County Road 29, about four miles northeast of Evergreen. Owassa today consists of a church and a few families who call Owassa home.

Settlers began moving to what is now Owassa in the 1820's, many of them from Edgefield, S. C. About the same time the Olive Branch Baptist Church was formed. The new sanctuary was built in 1970



Owassa Depot and Post Office

and is on the same site as the original 1821 church that was founded by the Rev. Alexander Travis and the Rev. William Jones, Sr. The church remains the center of much of the community activity.

The community was originally known as

Gravella and began to grow in the mid-1800s with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad which came through Owassa on the Montgomery to Mobile line. Around the turn of the century, the town had six general stores, a sawmill and a population of about 80. It had also adopted the name Owassa, which is believed to come from the Indian word "owasse" meaning bear. There was also a post office and a railroad depot. The L & N Depot shipped produce out and was the supply depot for the town of Andalusia until their railroad was built.

The Darby family was one of the first families to settle in Owassa in 1821. This community was well represented in the Civil War, World War I and II. Civil War Veterans James Butler, Henry Beasley, S. M. Beasley, Julius Beasley, John Griffin, Seymore Griffin and Wesley Brown all returned. Julius and Robert Brown died in Virginia.

Owassa is one of the towns that was born, lived and died with the railroad. *Submitted by: Dorothy S. Crook, 249 Newton Parkway, Evergreen, AL 36401*

## Repton, Alabama

The town of Repton was incorporated in the year of 1899. Mr. A. F. Peterman was the first mayor. The councilmen were: Dr. William Watson, C. S. Kelly, C. H. Stallworth, E. L. Martin, and W. S. Wiggins. Repton is located on Highway 84 between Belleville and Monroeville.

The first Post Office was located in a mercantile business owned by Mr. Archie Tucker and a Mr. Ray. The Post Office was later moved into a small wooden building behind Kelly's Store and the original Union Bank. Mr. W. S. Dreaden was the postmaster. At one time the Post Office was in a small wooden building next to the Jim Warr house near where L. A. Roberson built his store. Later Donnie Mae Long was Postmaster and moved it to the Long's tin building on the south side of Belleville Street. The Post Office was later moved to Main Street. Some others serving as Postmasters were: Annie Mae McCaine, Julia Hale, Marcus Straughn, and Frances Davis.

The first public school was taught in the original Union Church Building. Mr. T. F. Royster, Miss Maggie McMillan and Dr. E. L. Kelly were among the first teachers.

The Union Church was dissolved and Baptist built their first church building on the present site on South Martin Street in 1902. The land was deeded to the church by Mr. Calaway H. Stallworth.

The original church was torn down and the new brick sanctuary was built in 1951.

The Methodist moved to the present site just east of the old building. This building was later replaced with the present building.

The railroad which runs down the middle of town, formerly ended at Foshee, Alabama. In 1899, it was extended to Repton where turntable was installed. The railroad was later extended to Selma. The name Repton was the surname of a railroad official. Mr. Kervi was the first Depot Agent, succeeded by Addison Peterman.

The first Masonic Lodge building was built at the intersection of Martin and Jones, Streets in 1907. The present Masonic Lodge located today in the original Town Hall building on Main Street. *Written and submitted by: Dorothy Crook, 249 Newton Parkway, Evergreen, AL 36401*

## Sepulga, Prosperity and Skinnerton

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. A similar statement could be made about the settlement of communities, because of needs and lifestyles of the early pioneers. On September 21, 182 there was already a post office operating at the Sepulga Community in north eastern Conecuh County with a Mr. Everatt serving as Postmaster. The legal description of the post office was on the North west one quarter of the Southeast one quarter of Section 27, Township 8 North, Range 11 East. It is not known how early this settlement evolved, but it was located on the stage coach road that can still be seen in places as a depression as deep as ten feet, and nearby was the Old Federal Road that brought these settlers to south Alabama through Georgia and the Carolinas.

These early residents included the family of Thompson Hamilton Coker and Epsey Ann Grace. The Grace family was the earliest known settlers in northern Conecuh County having arrived from Georgia in 1812. Duncan McCall received his land grant at Sepulga for his service in the Creek Indian War, and Nathan Stucky was paying taxes on 62 acres in 1819. Other families were the Skinners: Johnsons, Cook, and Etheridge. They located on the banks of their water source, Sepulga Creek. It was ultimately Sepulga Creek that proved their undoing. The land was low and swampy and flooded during rainy seasons. This situation led to a series of fever outbreaks over the years, but the residents endured the hardships farming and tending their cattle for over sixty years.

Their burial grounds are almost indistinguishable now. The lack of engraved stones and frequent flooding makes it extremely difficult to document their history. One exception is the Mancill Family Cemetery off of Highway 83 on the Armour Stacey property in the middle of a pasture. The Stacey families are descendants of the Mancills but even this cemetery has not survived untouched. Some of the headstones have been broken and some pushed to the tree line. The Mancills were late comers to the Sepulga area, not arriving until 1869. One branch of the Mancill family moved onto Marion County, and eventually to Itawamba, Mississippi. This branch can claim among its' descendants Elvis Presley.

The last record of the post office at Sepulga was on September 30, 1859 with Waddy T. Means serving as its' postmaster. In 1854 the Sepulga Baptist Church was a member of the Bethlehem Baptist Association with J. T. Thames minister and J. Jones serving as Elder. The church numbered 33 members. Sometime in the early 1880 an epidemic of Typhoid Fever occurred wiping out a significant number of the inhabitants. The surviving families had enough. It was time to seek higher and more healthy ground. They moved almost en masse a few miles north west to higher and fertile ground that was not prone to flood. They were looking for a prosperous new beginning, and they would be competing with the bustling community of Activity a few miles to their north for new settlers moving west. Activity had already been on the map since 1805, and today is known as Midway. These Sepulga refugees chose the name Prosperity for their new home.

Prosperity was located on the north western boundary of Conecuh County and the north eastern boundary of Monroe County. This area was in dispute as to the actual boundary almost from the beginning of the division of Conecuh County from Monroe in 1818. In some censuses the residents were listed in Conecuh and in some they were listed in Monroe. By 1890 the dividing line was the road that transects the middle of Prosperity running east to west.

During the War for Southern Independence, the area that would later be Prosperity sent a number of her sons to fight for the cause. Samuel Brooks, Sr., J. C. Anthony, and William Snowden were among them. Thompson Coker served as a Lieutenant in the home guard of Captain S. H. Dailey's militia unit that was formed in northern Monroe County and listed his peace time occupation as Count

Commissioner. Others serving in this unit were Joel Hardee as a 2nd Lieutenant, A. Ross, M. Holly, William and Samuel Robinson, J. J. Simpkins, James Brooks, D. McKenzie, Thomas Snowden, John Salter, J. M. Langham, and John Pitts. Many of these farmers reported to duty with no gun, but were instrumental in the last desperate days of fighting at Spanish Fort and Blakeley Island in Mobile Bay.

By 1895 area maps showed that Prosperity had been renamed in honor of the Skinner family that lived there and was now called Skinnerton. The residents of the community by this time were Hardee, McPherson, Brown, Griffin, Cole, McClammy, Booker, Pipkins, Williams, Stuckey, Snowden, Anthony, Coker, Brooks, Pitts, Ross, Johnson, Fields, Hawsey, Stacey, McCall, Raines, Tucker, Curtis, and Davis.

The areas' churches include the Skinnerton Baptist Church, which does not have an accompanying cemetery. It was plowed up by Mr. Bart McPherson as it was located next to his general store. The Mt. Pleasant Methodist Church was organized by John Hammer in 1887 on land donated by Martin Shofner. The pews were made of lumber from Mr. Shofner's sawmill. The church is located on Highway 83 approximately eighteen miles north of Evergreen in Tract 8 North, Range 10 East. Many of the founding members had transferred from Asbury Methodist Church.

In addition to the Mt. Pleasant Church Cemetery, the Johnson Cemetery is located off of Conecuh County Road 5, across the road from the old Jim Wiggins place, and was surrounded by a Victorian iron fence. The graves date to the 1840's.

There are two homes in the area that are on the Historic Register. The King-Brooks home was added to the Alabama Historic Register in 1993 by Frank King and was built in the 1880s by Samuel Brooks, Jr., and his wife, Fannie O'Gilvia Coker. Also, the log home of James Sawyer Brooks and Rebecca (Mitchell) Brooks built in 1828 and located in the Lone Star Community was added to the National Historic Register.

Skinnerton once had a tavern located near where Mrs. Ada Williams much later operated a grocery store in the 1960s to the 1980s. Whiskey would be brought in barrels by wagon from Tunnel Springs. The Skinnerton Post Office that operated prior to the 1920s was located in downtown Skinnerton in a wooden building. Miss Inez Howell (later became Mrs. John Ivey Hardee) and Miss Nannie Mae Cotton (later became Mrs. Anthony) worked at this early post office. Later Mr. Roy Evers operated a store in this building. He was succeeded in business by Mrs. Pearlina Booker Evers McClammy at this location before she built her own building.

Over the years several general stores have operated in Skinnerton including those of Bart McPherson, Henry Brown, Biddie Andrews, Mrs. Samuel C. Stacey, and Mrs. Ada Williams. The brothers Sam and John Brooks operated a cotton gin in Skinnerton prior to 1900.

Two schools known to have operated in Skinnerton, but were later combined with other schools. The Robert E. Lee school was in operation until 1935 according to Mr. L. D. Anthony, who attended this school until the fourth grade. It was then consolidated into the Lyeffion School. In 1903 the two story Skinnerton School was in operation with Maud McPherson as the teacher, and about 1915 Miss Eula Bae Brooks (later Mrs. S. C. Stacey) also taught there. *Sources: Oral history of Mr. L. D. Anthony & Mrs. Billie Golson, Church & Cemetery Records, Land Grants, Early Maps, and Tract Book Records, Monroe & Conecuh County Wills & Deeds, & Census Records Civil War Militia Records, 1819 Taxable Property of Conecuh County. Submitted by: Lucy Wiggins Colson, 5020 Littlebury Rd SE, Huntsville, AL 35802. 1-(256)-881-9537. LWC1211@aol.com*

## Sparta in Conecuh County

It is written that no imposing ruins are to be seen at old Sparta in Greece, and, should you travel that way, you will find no ruins of any kind at old Sparta in Alabama.

Sparta, in Conecuh, and one time the seat-of-justice of that county, is no more. This old namesake of the county-town of Hancock County,

Georgia, had an auspicious beginning; it was six miles southwest of Evergreen of today.

## Settlement

Malachi Warren, son of Maj. Richard Warren, entered 80 acres of land in what was then Monroe County, in the fall of 1817, and built a log house on the east side of Murder Creek in what, when afterward surveyed, was the southeast quarter of section 31, township 5, range 11. Here afterward stood the Rankin House, known to older Conecuhans. Near the location was the original tavern run by a man named Gauf, who moved there from North Florida, Hinchie Warren, one Spires, Thomas Watts (uncle of Thomas Hill Watts, later governor), Dr. Jonathan Shaw, John S. Hunter, Eldridge S. Greening, Samuel W. Oliver, John and Reuban Dean, and John McCloud were early settlers.

The town was incorporated by the Legislature Dec. 3, 1821 and the act located it in the southwest quarter of the section. Fifteen days later they discovered that "the permanent seat of-justice of Conecuh County," which up to then had no name, was in the southeast quarter, so they passed an amendatory act and corrected it. They said in the incorporating act that five persons must be elected as commissioners, and among themselves they must choose an intendant whose duty it was to "preside and keep order at the meetings." Thus, the original mayor of Sparta had his duties fixed for him.

## Commissioner to Fix The Seat for County Buildings

By the act of Dec. 13, 1819, the legislature chose Bartley Walker, James Salter, John Spier, Radford L. Cotton, and Robert Smilie to fix the site for the public buildings of the county. By an act of Dec. 7, 1820, one-third of the State tax was levied to build a courthouse and jail, and one section of the act said that "Sparta shall be and remain in the permanent seat of justice."

When they incorporated the town they repealed the 1819 act, which appointed the commissioners to select and build the courthouse, and put this duty on the recently elected county officers, so there is doubt whether Walker and his commission built the courthouse at Sparta. The first court held in the county was on Hampden Ridge, which was a contender with the village promoted by the Warren, Boykin and Hunter families for the honor of the "county town," as the Georgians and South Carolinians called it.


"Big Thomas" Watts, once a young lawyer at Sparta, Ga., and of the Fauquier County (Virginia) family, suggested the name for the newly created county seat. The majority of Conecuh settlers were lately from Georgia, but the history of the county indicates that South Carolina made perhaps the most lasting impression.

The original courthouse was of logs and was 20 by 30 feet in size. The "new" courthouse was erected in 1823. This one had the Masonic Lodge as the second floor. Contractor Simmons was given \$500 additional to fit it for the Masons. The destruction of this building in 1866 was the beginning of the end of Sparta.

## Early Days of The Town

Anderson and Blackshear, brothers-in-law and Dean Brothers, were the two original mercantile houses. Samuel W. Oliver, Eldridge S. Greening and John S. Hunter, "barristers all," came early, and Thomas Watts, "Big Tom" was an original settler. They formed the Bar of Conecuh in its beginning.

Murdock McPherson was an early teacher and he died there before 1825. Mr. Greening, referred to above, is the first postmaster shown in the records. Dr. Riley, in his history of Conecuh County, says Burnt Corn was the first post office which served this neighborhood and that there was a "branch route to Sparta." Burnt Corn was on the Fort Mitchell-to-St. Stephens route in 1818, so Sparta had a "Star Route" in its earliest days. Mr. Greening's 1823-24 salary was \$108.63. *Written by: Peter A. Brannon in 1932*


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John Elizabeth  
 Newberry, Sr = \_\_\_\_\_

CHART #BA

Rev. William Thames was the  
 minister of Cape Fear Baptist  
 Church in Cumberland Co., N.C.

Joseph Martha  
 Thames, Sr. = Newberry  
 B. Abt 1730

Reverend William Thames, Sr. =  
 B. 1760  
 M. Abt 1779  
 D. 18 Jan 1813 in  
 Cumberland Co., NC  
 Died at the home of  
 Joseph Cain of Bladen  
 Co., NC

Lucy  
 B. 1761  
 D. 23 Feb 1812 in  
 Cumberland Co., NC

Martha  
 Thames  
 B. Abt 1780

m.  
 William  
 Cooper  
 Moved to  
 Miss.

NANCY  
 ANN  
 THAMES  
 B. Abt 1783  
 D. 1864 Ala

m.  
 Stephen  
 Wiggins  
 02-14-1803  
 Moved to  
 Ala.

Reverend  
 Cornelius  
 Thames

m.  
 Susannah  
 Carver  
 7-8-1805  
 Moved to  
 Ala.

Patty  
 Thames

m.  
 Johnathan  
 Cooper  
 2-23-1807

Johnathan  
 Thames

m.  
 Sarah  
 Bryant  
 11-2-1807

Thomas  
 Thames

m.  
 Nancy  
 Tolar  
 4-13-1805

David  
 Thames

William  
 Thames  
 Jr.

m.  
 Deborah  
 Newberry  
 11-7-1811

James  
 Thames

Sarah  
 Thames

m.  
 Bryant  
 Wright  
 3-16-1812