



VESTIBULE

A.M.E. ZION

Vestibule is the Mother Church of the A.M.E. Zion denomination in Cleveland County. It was established in 1867 after George Roberts, Caleb Roberts, Peter Forney, and others, who considered themselves Methodists, withdrew from Washington Baptist when the decision was made to make it a Baptist church. These three men, along with Gilbert Ware and Isaac Patterson, were the first trustees.

In his memoirs, Elder John Wesley Roberts stated that as early as 1879, he was teaching Sunday School at Vestibule, using the Sunday School Quarterly. He also stated that for fifteen or more years after Emancipation, Vestibule held a yearly camp meeting - a religious gathering where people would live in tents from three to seven days. They would sing, pray, preach, and shout day and night.

The Freedman school was also located at Vestibule Church. Established in 1867, it was probably the first school for ex-slaves in Cleveland County. There were no free schools then. Education was subsidized by a Bureau Fund contributed by Northerners to help ex-slaves. The school ran successfully for several years.

The old Vestibule church was a weathered frame building with no piano nor organ. A pot-bellied stove provided heat in the winter; screenless windows let in a few cool breezes during the summer. The preacher was paid with fresh eggs, produce, or canned goods instead of money. This was a practice in many churches during that period of time.

Vestibule today can be seen from US #74 between Kings Mountain and Shelby at the end of a long paved road surrounded by oak trees. Rev. Caleb Roberts, wife, Julia Ann, Peter Forney, and Jane Roberts are buried in the church's cemetery, one of the oldest cemeteries in Cleveland County.

Family Reunion

Roberts Borders Mauney Howell Briggs and Related Families