

Big Shoal Church

The church was founded May 21, 1823, by Elder William T. Thorp, a pioneer Hardshell Baptist. Big Shoal Church became part of the Fishing River Association on November 8, 1823. "Hardshell Baptists" did not admit children to full church membership, nor did they believe in missions or Sunday School. They held two services a month. They did not believe in "passing the plate," but usually called the preacher to one side and gave their gifts in private.

Services were first held in a rude log school house, which stood near where the first meeting house was constructed in 1827. One acre was set aside for the church. The building was a 20' x 48' log structure hewn from the virgin forest. It had a vestibule in front and an offset in back, each 6' x 8', and hence was called "the church with the twelve corners."

The building was unique in that it had a real board floor, and a lathed and plastered ceiling. The laths were of oak and the plaster made from the sand of nearby Shoal Creek. The lime was burned from nearby rock ledges. Split logs, with the flat sides up, formed the seats, with strong pegs for the legs. One part of the room was set apart for Negro slaves who came with their masters.

Initial services lasted all day, without intermission, but in the years following, the day was broken by a basket dinner. Only two services per month were held. After basket dinners became part of the day, people from four counties (Clay, Ray, Platte, and Clinton) came and lined the fences on both sides with horses, wagons, buggies and ox teams. There were no evening meetings at the church, but some prayer meetings were held in private homes.

John and France Atkins (parents of Jonathan Atkins) and Richard and Mary Barnes (sister to Jonathan Atkins) were one of the first members of Big Shoal Baptist Church. Other first members included: George Burnett and his wife; Peter Burnett (who later became the first governor of California); Elisha Todd and wife; John Crowley; Elizabeth Moore; Christina Moore; Jane Cain; Daniel Hughes (first clerk) and wife; Edward Mails; and Garrett Arnold.

As large as the crowds were during regular meetings, they were nothing compared to the big Association meetings, which were held annually and came to Big Shoal every ten years. The meetings began on Saturday and continued through Monday. The people stayed in private homes, and more than 100 people could be at a single house. The women and older men slept in the house, while the rest slumbered on shakedown in the hemp and tobacco barns.

Pictured below is the last version of the church building and a pew from the church.



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