

Namesakes of a county: because 'over yonder' just wouldn't do

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A close look at Williamson County's communities, their history and their names can reveal a classification system that's easy to apply anywhere, according to local historians.

"What defines a community is that it's usually at a crossroads, and it usually had a church, a school and a store," says Rick Warwick, a Williamson County historian. "Those three institutions are found in every community's boundaries."

Accordingly, many of Williamson County's communities take their names from those very institutions. Triune, for example, named for Triune Methodist Church, or College Grove, named for the schools that were built there.

Others are named for people — often early settlers, postmasters and political figures, taking their namesakes from people such as Benjamin Franklin and Nathan Bedford Forrest. Or they're named for the creeks and streams that run through the rolling hills that long ago stood as vast, empty wilderness.

Although it could seem like a simple formula, coming up with original names for those communities can be a difficult process, Warwick says, and many names changed numerous times before they finally stuck.

Here, with the help of local historians, is a roundup of some of Williamson County's communities, and how they evolved into what they are called today.

1. WILLIAMSON COUNTY

The county, established in 1799, was named in honor of Dr. Hugh Williamson, a colonel and surgeon-general of the North Carolina Militia and a member of the Assembly from Edenton, 1782. He was later elected to the Continental Congress, where he served three terms and was a North Carolina signer of the U.S. Constitution.

2. BETHESDA

How it got its name: Bethesda is a biblical name meaning "house of mercy." Other accounts also state the name means "flowing springs."

Interesting fact: Bethesda had the first county school bus. It's said that the community bought an old Cadillac and converted it into a school bus. Harry Grigsby was the first school bus driver, carrying 10–12 children to school from the Arno/Peytonsville area.

3. FLAT CREEK

How it got its name: As you might have guessed, Flat Creek takes its name from an area creek, which flows into the Duck River. Locals say there's a limestone base there that allows people and animals alike to walk up and down the creek on solid rock.

Interesting fact: In early times, there was a racetrack around Flat Creek, and at one point, Flat Creek was also home to a fraternity called Woodsmen of the World, who used a meeting place located above a general store.

4. GRASSLAND

How it got its name: The community is said to have taken its name from the old Jeff Moran house, which was dubbed "Grassland."

Interesting fact: Grassland was at one time home to a school for black children. The school is said to have been built with rocks and, accordingly, called "Old Rocky."

5. ARRINGTON

How it got its name: Early on, it was known as Petersburg, but when the community was granted a post office in 1858, the village's name was changed to Arrington for the nearby creek and because there was already a Petersburg in Bedford County. The name Petersburg was suggested in honor of Peter Walker, an early preacher in the area.

"Arrington" came from the name of the creek, which ran through the Paschall farm (one of the first families in the community).

Interesting fact: William Edmondson, one of the county's earliest settlers and government officials, is buried at King's Chapel, a church that now serves as an entrance to a new subdivision by the same name. Edmondson also served at the Battle of Kings Mountain in the Revolutionary War in 1783.

6. ARNO

How it got its name: An early settler was a postal official from Italy, and he named the community after a river there.

Interesting fact: In 1912, the minister of the community's Cool Springs Primitive Baptist Church died while preaching a sermon from the pulpit.

7. BOSTON

How it got its name: No one quite knows how the Boston community, located off Old Hillsboro Road from Mobleys Cut Road to Davis Hollow Road, got its name. One legend says that early settlers, standing on a ridge, looked down at the low ground and said, "It looks just like Boston" (Massachusetts).

But local historian Rick Warwick said the "Boston" reference could have been made by early settlers here, many of whom came from Halifax County, Va., where South Boston is the county seat.

Interesting fact: There has always been only one store in the community. Although it has been moved and rebuilt several times, the small market is a long-lasting staple of this community, which is situated at a crossroads.

8. BRENTWOOD

How it got its name: Brentwood was first a fort called Mayfield Station, which was east of town. The first white settlers in Brentwood were the Mayfields, who came to the area about 1780 and settled on what is now Old Smyrna Road and Wilson Pike. They

built a fort — what is said to be the first settlement — for their family and other neighbors.

Historians say the origin of the name "Brentwood" came from the home of Horatio McNish, who named his home Brentwood after two ancestral homes in Virginia named Woodstock and Brenton. The McNish family lived in the Brentwood area from 1827 until the 1850s, historians say, and he is said to have built a two-story Colonial home on a hill just off Franklin Road.

Interesting fact: Brentwood didn't get its name until the railroad came through in 1856 and a station was built on Church Street near the old post office building. Historians say the railroad, which came through at the point where the two major roads — the Harpeth Turnpike and the Franklin Pike — converged, was a prime location for a new town.

9. BURWOOD

How it got its name: Burwood, on Carters Creek Pike just west of Franklin, was initially called Williamsburg in honor of the local Williams family. The name was later changed to Shaw, for the postmaster, before James Drake Pope suggested the name Burwood from Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel Robert Elsmore.

Interesting fact: Legend says that Burwood has a resident ghost named "Crazy Mary," who is said to haunt the Leonard Grigsby house, which became known as the House of Lights because lights can be seen when none are on.

10. COLLEGE GROVE

How it got its name: Once called Harpeth, then Poplar Grove, this area was settled about 1800 when James Allison purchased 400 acres of land on Grove Creek in the southeast portion of the county.

Home to Congressman Meredith Gentry and William Demonbreun, the town's name was changed to College Grove when a post office was established in 1861. The government told the settlers there was already a Poplar Grove, so the name was changed to College Grove in honor of the two schools, one for boys and a female

seminary, in the community. The schools aren't there anymore, but College Grove Elementary School sits on the same land.

Interesting fact: The College Grove PTA organized at the boys school was the first parent-teacher organization in the county.

11. FAIRVIEW

How it got its name: This community has had a handful of names over the years. Before the white men came, the Native Americans would burn off large sections of land to allow the deer to have a place to graze, which could have contributed to the first name of Barrens, historians say. It remained Barrens from 1839 to 1870, was briefly called Christiana and was followed by Jingo from 1880 to 1937.

The name "Jingo" comes from accounts that a group of men met at the post office and were arguing over what the community's new name should be. One of the men had enough and said, "By jingo, I'm going home," and it stuck. "Jingo" usually refers to a militaristic enthusiasm — somebody eager to go to war, Warwick said.

In 1937, the name was changed to Fairview, which historians say is the most common community name next to Franklin. By 1937, Fairview had not yet been used in Tennessee. It was a name given to the area by George Lampley, but the community was not named for the home called Fairview on Carters Creek Pike.

Interesting fact: In the 1920s, a typhoid fever epidemic went through the community, and a doctor was brought all the way from White Bluff to treat patients.

12. FOREST HOME

How it got its name: Located off Old Hillsboro Road, Forest Home is thought to have been named for Gen. Nathan B. Forrest, who found it a safe haven after his raid on Brentwood in March 1863.

Interesting fact: A stone bridge in the area once served as a thoroughfare for Andrew Jackson and his wife, Rachel, and also carried Jackson and his men to fight in the Battle of New Orleans.

13. FRANKLIN

How it got its name: Franklin, one of the most common names for a U.S. city, was named after Benjamin Franklin, a close friend of Dr. Hugh Williamson. Franklin is the county seat of Williamson County and was incorporated on Oct. 26, 1799, with the town laid out on land belonging to Abram Maury.

Interesting fact: The oldest religious structure in Franklin is the Masonic hall on Second Avenue, which was also the first three-story building in the state. It's also where President Andrew Jackson, John H. Eaton and John Coffee met with a group of Chickasaw Indian chiefs to discuss the sale of land, a meeting that later led to the Trail of Tears.

14. KIRKLAND

How it got its name: The name for the Kirkland Community, located on Horton Highway between College Grove and Triune, was probably taken from the Scotch word for "church," according to local historians. A church was built at the entrance at the center of the community — a fork in the road — but was torn down about 1900, historians say.

Interesting fact: The Kirkland community is the home place of the first governor of Tennessee to come from Williamson County, Newton Cannon.

15. LEIPER'S FORK

How it got its name: The community was first known as Bentontown, for the Thomas Hart Benton family that resided there. Benton served as a U.S. senator from Missouri. The area was later called Hillsboro. Today, the village is still known as Hillsboro, while the larger community is known as Leiper's Fork, for the creek, Leiper's Creek, that flows through it.

The name Leiper's Fork came about when 40 acres of land was granted to Hugh Leiper in 1785 in what was to become Williamson County.

Interesting fact: In 1826, Leiper's Fork resident Daniel Crenshaw was convicted of stealing a horse. As part of his punishment, the initials H.T. were branded on his hand. During the branding, he bit the still-hot letters out of his hand and spit them on the ground.

16. NOLENSVILLE

How it got its name: This community was named after William Nolen, who purchased the portion of a land grant to Jason Thompson. Nolen came to the area from Virginia around 1797 when his family stopped to repair a broken wagon wheel and found the location ripe with springs, good soil and lots of wild game.

Interesting fact: John Bell, a Nolensville native, was the first native Tennessean to ever strive for the United States presidency. A lawyer and politician, Bell was a candidate for president with the Constitutional Union Party, against Abraham Lincoln for the Republicans and Stephen Douglas for the Democrats. He carried three states — Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia.

17. PEYTONSVILLE

How it got its name: Peytonsville, located southeast of Franklin, has been known by several other names, including Little Texas and Snatchit. In harder times, the name Hungry was given to the community. The name Peytonsville probably came from some Peytons who settled in the area, local historians say.

The name Snatchit came from the story of a \$10 debt. In 1836, a creditor collected his due bill by snatching a \$10 bill from the hand of the debtor.

After the Civil War, the community became known as Little Texas because fugitive ex-Confederate soldiers relocated to Texas, while some remained and hid in the hills around Peytonsville.

Interesting fact: Early settler John Secrest, a Revolutionary War soldier from North Carolina, owned a large amount of land in Peytonsville and is buried there today.

18. SPRING HILL

How it got its name: In 1810, settlers Albert Russell and Abram Hammonds, who had cleared land that is now Spring Hill, petitioned the Maury County Court for a road from Columbia. Settler Henry Wade visualized a town, made a survey and began to sell lots along what was to become Main Street. The little settlement was named in 1825 for the large spring on the hill of the first home of Albert Russell, which today is the Tennessee Children's Home site.

Interesting fact: The Branham and Hughes Military Academy was operated in Spring Hill from 1920 to 1932, where young men from throughout the United States, Canada, Central America and the Caribbean attended the prestigious school.

19. THOMPSON'S STATION

How it got its name: The town began with a train depot, named Thompson's Station, after the man who donated the land for the town, Dr. Elijah Thompson.

Interesting fact: Thompson's Station was known as the German Millet Capital of the World because of the large amount of grain grown in the area.

20. TRIUNE

How it got its name: This village dates from about 1800 and was first called Hardeman Cross Roads. After 1849 it took the name of the Methodist church and became known as Triune, which means "trinity" in Latin. Prior to the Civil War, Triune was a center of commerce and agriculture and the community's four academies attracted students from all over. In fact, at the time, Triune was the richest district in the county.

Interesting fact: It is said that one of the highest spots in Triune is Sumners Knob, where on a clear day and with a pair of binoculars you can see the clock on the Rutherford County courthouse.

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